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“Signals of Transcendence”¹

Daniel C. Peterson

Abstract: Hints of a different and better world — sometimes dimly remembered, often intuited, and commonly hoped for — and of a glorious, mighty power behind the world in which we currently live, are all around us. They are not so powerful that they cannot be missed or even ignored, but they have been and remain present for those with eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to feel. As he always does, God has not left us without witnesses but he does not seek to compel. He loves us, but he also respects our agency.

It seems to have been the French Protestant Reformer John Calvin who coined the term sensus divinitatis. By it, he intended an innate sense of the existence of, and to at least some degree, the nature of God.

That there exists in the human mind and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity [sensus divinitatis], we hold to be beyond dispute, since God himself, to prevent any man from pretending ignorance, has endued all men with some idea of his Godhead... this is not a doctrine which is first learned at school, but one as to which every man is, from the womb, his own master; one which nature herself allows no individual to forget.²

This instinctual sense of the divine is not to be confused with explicit revelation, although it might, in a Latter-day Saint view, be regarded as a particular type of revelation given to all. It is certainly distinct from a conclusion that one might reach as the result of an argument or as


a reasoned deduction from a series of propositions. Instead, it is, in a sense, an immediate perception, unreasoned, even pre-rational.\textsuperscript{3}

The English Romantic poet William Wordsworth is an especially good representative of this intuitive sense of the divine, and he often alludes to the theme. In his “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798,” for example, he writes:

The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite: a feeling and a love. . . .
And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.\textsuperscript{4}

Still, although Wordsworth is an eloquent spokesman for a sensus divinitatis, he is far from alone. Consider, for example, these characteristically simple words from the American poet Emily Dickinson:

I never saw a moor,
I never saw the sea;
Yet know I how the heather looks,
And what a wave must be.

I never spoke with God,
Nor visited in heaven;

\textsuperscript{3} By “immediate perception, unreasoned, even pre-rational,” I mean something like this: When I see a mountain, I don’t consult the dictionary definition of mountain and then inventory and analyze the features that I see in order to identify whether what I’m seeing is, indeed, a mountain. Being already familiar with what a mountain is, I instantly know when I’m seeing one.

\textsuperscript{4} William Wordsworth, “Tintern Abbey,” lines 77–81, 94–103.
Yet certain am I of the spot
As if the chart were given.

Or these breathless lines from a very different poet, e. e. cummings:

i thank You God for most this amazing
day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes
(i who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun’s birthday; this is the birth
day of life and of love and wings: and of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any—lifted from the no
of all nothing—human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)⁵

The California poet Robinson Jeffers contended that it is God’s
tendency to go extravagantly beyond the merely functional or the merely
necessary in nature that awakens in us a sense of the divine presence:

Is it not by his high superfluousness we know
Our God? For to be equal a need
Is natural, animal, mineral: but to fling
Rainbows over the rain
And beauty above the moon, and secret rainbows
On the domes of deep sea-shells,
And make the necessary embrace of breeding
Beautiful also as fire,
Not even the weeds to multiply without blossom
Nor the birds without music:
There is the great humaneness at the heart of things,
The extravagant kindness, the fountain
Humanity can understand, and would flow likewise
If power and desire were perch-mates.⁶

⁵. e. e. cummings, “i thank You God for most this amazing day.”
And it’s not only poets. Says Elaine Scarry, “Something beautiful fills the mind yet invites the search for something beyond itself, something larger or something of the same scale with which it needs to be brought into relation.”7 “We are . . . convincingly aware,” wrote the great Harvard philosopher and pioneer psychologist William James,

of the presence of a sphere of life larger and more powerful than our usual consciousness, with which the latter is nevertheless continuous. The impressions and impulsions and emotions and excitements which we thence receive help us to live, they found invincible assurance of a world beyond the sense, they melt our hearts and communicate significance and value to everything and make us happy. They do this for the individual who has them, and other individuals follow him.8

It is perhaps for such reasons that most of humanity, today and historically, has been persuaded of the existence of a divine dimension behind ordinary mundane reality. In fact, so pervasive is religion and religious belief that the anthropologist R. R. Marett once suggested that a more appropriate term for humankind, *homo sapiens*, might be *homo religiosus*.9 Clyde Kluckhohn, another anthropologist, has written that, “Until the emergence of Communist societies we know of no human groups without religion.”10 (For those who traveled in the Soviet Union, of course, it is not altogether clear that Communism can truly be regarded as non-religious—and that is even more obviously so with regard to today’s North Korea under the quasi-deified Kims.) Mircea Eliade, one of the greatest of all scholars of comparative world religions, argued that “the ‘sacred’ is an element in the structure of consciousness and not a

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stage in the history of consciousness.” Rudolf Otto maintained that “the holy” is *a priori*, innate within the human mind.

A passage from Wordsworth’s 1804 “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood” that was once widely known among Latter-day Saints suggests that we actually bear within us dim memories of a pre-mortal childhood in which we lived with God:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting.
The soul that rises with us, our life’s star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting, and cometh from afar.
Not in utter nakedness, and not in entire forgetfulness
Do we come,
But trailing clouds of glory, from God, who is our Home.

Particularly in his later writing, Wordsworth returned again and again to the ability of the natural world to evoke in us an aching sense of longing for something that seems, ultimately, to lie beyond it. “It seemed as if there was an ecstatic desire for union with nature, or some ‘sweet melancholy’ that seems to have no rational cause, yet is saturated with spiritual meaning.”

Longing seems to be an important part of the sense of the divine as many people experience it. Most of us, at one time or another, have felt some sort of yearning for a better world. Perhaps even this is, in some sense, evidence of a kinship with the divine, or of our origin in a better place — that “the soul that rises with us, our life’s star, hath had elsewhere its setting, and cometh from afar,” “from God, who is our home.”

“The visible Universe,” wrote the Spanish essayist and philosopher Miguel de Unamuno,

strikes me as too narrow. It is like an over-small cage against whose bars my soul beats its wings. I need more air to breathe: more, more, always more! I want to be myself and, without ceasing to be myself, to be others as well, to encompass the totality of all things visible and invisible, to extend myself to the limitless in space and prolong myself to the endless in

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time. Not to be everything and not be it forever is the same as not being at all. At least let me be altogether myself and be so forever. And to be altogether myself is to be all others. All or nothing!15

C. S. Lewis is one of the most eloquent of those who have written about this sense of longing or yearning for something beyond our quotidian world. He referred to it using the German word Sehnsucht (“yearning,” “longing,” “desire”). He told, for example, of an experience that he had while reading as a very young man about the death of Balder or Baldur, son of Odin and brother of Thor, in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s Saga of King Olaf:

I knew nothing about Balder; but instantly I was uplifted into huge regions of northern sky, I desired with almost sickening intensity something never to be described (except that it is cold, spacious, severe, pale and remote) and then . . . found myself at the very same moment already falling out of that desire and wishing I were back in it.16

He also describes how, one day in his early childhood, he was standing by a flowering currant bush. Suddenly, for no apparent reason, a memory powerfully came to him:

[T]here suddenly rose in me without warning, as if from a depth not of years but of centuries, the memory of that earlier morning at the Old House when my brother had brought his toy garden into the nursery. It is difficult to find words strong enough for the sensation which came over me; Milton’s “enormous bliss” of Eden . . . comes somewhere near it. It was a sensation, of course, of desire; but desire for what? Not, certainly, for a biscuit tin filled with moss, nor even (though that came into it) for my own past . . . and before I knew what I desired, the desire itself was gone, the whole glimpse withdrawn, the world turned commonplace again, or only stirred by a longing for a longing that had just ceased.

It had only taken a moment of time; and in a certain sense

everything else that had ever happened to me was insignificant in comparison.17

Lewis describes Sehnsucht as “an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction ... anyone who has experienced it will want it again.”18

And, importantly, it seems that no transitory thing can ever really fill the need or still the yearning. Quia fecisti nos ad te, wrote St. Augustine, addressing God, et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te. “You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”19

Yet there is a natural human tendency to try, over and over and over again and quite in vain, to find lasting satisfaction in such things. They cannot and do not satisfy. We are never fully content, and never content for long. There is always a bigger house, greater power to be had, more money, a more desirable mate, some more intense pleasure to be sought, a faster car, more status, more prestige.20

In a very interesting essay or sermon entitled “The Weight of Glory,” Lewis contends that human desires are self-defeating. Whatever we desire, when we achieve it or obtain it, seems to leave the desire unsatisfied, wanting still more:

The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was longing. These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they

17. Ibid., 16.
18. Ibid., 17–18. For me, oddly, one of those moments — one of very, very many — comes quite predictably at a certain moment, and then, again, at another, in J. S. Bach’s Toccata and Fugue in D-minor. I know what can be said musicologically, about the need for, and the satisfaction of, resolution. But I do not believe that the experience can be reduced to mere aesthetics. And what strikes me most about the particular musical passages I’m speaking of here is that my greatest pleasure comes not at the moment of resolution, but just prior to that, at the moment of greatest yearning.
19. Augustine, Confessions, 1.1v.
20. At the risk of offending some of my readers: I think that the monthly Playboy magazine “Playmate” illustrates this very well. The woman in the photograph is perfect. Also air-brushed, posed, and professionally photographed. No real woman — including the one in the photograph — would ever really, lastingly, satisfy. The magazine’s impresario, Hugh Hefner, had hundreds if not thousands of sexual partners.
are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have not visited.  

When I graduate from high school, many of us tell ourselves, I will be satisfied. When I graduate from college. When I secure a full-time job. When I’m married. When we own a house. When I land that promotion. When my income reaches $100,000 a year. When I get that boat. When we have that mountain cabin. Satisfaction is always just beyond the horizon. There’s always another river to cross. We labor long to climb to the peak and, when we arrive, we find that another, taller, mountain lies beyond it.

As we grow older, too, we realize that many of our dreams will remain unfulfilled, many of our ambitions will never be attained. *Orbis non sufficit* (“The world is not enough”) is a line from the *Satires* of the late-first- and early-second-century Roman writer Juvenal (IV.10). It shows up as James Bond’s adopted Latin family motto in the novel *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*. Whatever Mr. Bond (or Ian Fleming) might have meant by it, the point is certainly true in this sense: We yearn for completeness but know that we will never achieve it. “We are doomed to remain incomplete in our present existence. Our hopes and deepest longings will remain nothing but just that: hopes and longings.”  

Even at our peak moments, we are conscious that things are not perfect. During the most exalted measures of Beethoven’s *Emperor Concerto*, we know that the concert hall is hot and stuffy. We’re acutely aware of the ache in our knees, or the overlarge person seated next to us. Long anticipated moments of great solemnity always come associated with flat tires and traffic jams and tears in fabric. Of the important twentieth-century Anglo-American poet W. H. Auden, it has been written that “He may have dreamed in his youth of redeeming the world through his poetic power or being destroyed in the effort, but as

an older man he found himself, as he often remarked, just a ‘martyr to corns,’ which afflicted his feet and made him comfortable only in carpet slippers.”

Even if it’s nothing so definite as knee pain or corns, though, some indefinable something is always missing. In his philosophical dialogue the *Gorgias*, Plato compares humans to leaky jars. We are, he says, always partly empty, and we are therefore always aware, more or less, of a lack of fullness, an only partial and at-risk happiness.

We are perpetually dissatisfied. And sometimes, in view of our continual disappointments, we are tempted to weariness and cynicism. But that is the wrong response. For one thing, this “divine dissatisfaction,” as it has often been called, can be one of the chief wellsprings of human achievement. But it may also be an indicator of something far, far greater. Such human desires, deep and bittersweet, point beyond transitory objects that are incapable of satisfying us. As the French philosopher and mystic Simone Weil expressed it:

> The danger is not lest the soul should doubt whether there is really any bread, but lest, by a lie, it should persuade itself that it is not hungry. It can only persuade itself of this by lying, for the reality of its hunger is not a belief, it is a certainty.

Consider Thomas Carlyle’s translation from the German of E. T. A. Hoffman’s early nineteenth-century novella *The Golden Pot (Der goldne Topf)*:

> Gracious reader, may I venture to ask you a question? Have you ever had hours, perhaps even days or weeks, in which all your customary activities did nothing but cause you vexation and dissatisfaction; when everything that you usually consider worthy and important seemed trivial and worthless? At such a time you did not know what to do or where to turn. A dim feeling pervaded your breast that you had higher desires that must be fulfilled, desires that transcended the pleasures of this world, yet desires which your spirit, like a cowed child,

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29.


did not even dare to utter. In this longing for an unknown Something, which longing hovered above you no matter where you were, like an airy dream with thin transparent forms that melted away each time you tried to examine them, you had no voice for the world about you. You passed to and fro with troubled look, like a hopeless lover, and no matter what you saw being attempted or attained in the bustle of varied existence, it awakened no sorrow or joy in you. It was as if you had no share in this sublunary world.  

Many, if not all of us, have, at one time or another, felt as did Hoffmann’s fictional student, Anselmus, here:

He felt that an unknown Something was awakening in his inmost soul, and calling forth that rapturous pain, which is even the mood of longing that announces a loftier existence to man.

C. S. Lewis used the metaphor of hunger to explain the significance of our unfulfilled yearnings. It is, he maintained, a human sensation that corresponds to a genuine human experience. Our hunger, our need for food, points unmistakably to the existence of food, which will satisfy it. Any individual human may, of course, starve to death. But we would not have the sensation of hunger if food did not exist.

A man’s physical hunger does not prove that man will get any bread; he may die of starvation in a raft in the Atlantic. But surely a man’s hunger does prove that he comes of a race which repairs its body by eating and inhabits a world where eatable substances exist. In the same way, though I do not believe (I wish I did) that my desire for Paradise proves that I shall enjoy it, I think it a pretty good indication that such a thing exists and that some men will. A man may love a woman and not win her; but it would be very odd if the phenomenon called “falling in love” occurred in a sexless world.

I recall reading somewhere that even Jean-Paul Sartre admitted that he experienced a need for God, arguing that humans needed to be cured

28. Ibid., 18.
of their natural inclination to believe in the divine. That there appears to be a widespread—even, perhaps, universal—yearning for God suggests, as C. S. Lewis argues, the likelihood that something exists to satisfy that yearning. If this is so, the burden of proof that no God exists rests with the atheist, not with the theist.

The great thirteenth-century Sufi Muslim mystic Jalal al-Din Rumi is another eloquent articulator of the human yearning for deity:

Where did I come from, and what am I supposed to be doing?
I have no idea.
My soul is from elsewhere, I’m sure of that, and I intend to end up there.

This drunkenness began in some other tavern.
When I get back around to that place, I’ll be completely sober. Meanwhile, I’m like a bird from another continent, sitting in this aviary.
The day is coming when I fly off, but who is it now in my ear who hears my voice?
Who says words with my mouth?

Who looks out with my eyes? What is the soul?
I cannot stop asking.
If I could taste one sip of an answer, I could break out of this prison for drunks.
I didn’t come here of my own accord, and I can’t leave that way. Whoever brought me here will have to take me home.30

In beautiful lines near the beginning of his great poetic work the *Masnavi*, Rumi (as interpreted by the American poet Coleman Barks) uses the plaintive song of the reed flute to represent the human desire for God. And he does so in terms that parallel Wordsworth’s idea that “the soul that rises with us, our life’s star, hath had elsewhere its setting, and cometh from afar,” “from God, who is our home”:

Listen to the story told by the reed, of being separated.

“Since I was cut from the reedbed, I have made this crying sound.

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Anyone apart from someone he loves understands what I say.

Anyone pulled from a source longs to go back.

At any gathering I am there, mingling in the laughing and grieving,

A friend to each, but few will hear the secrets hidden within the notes. . . .”

In another passage, Rumi recounts the story of a man whose momentary doubt is healed by a dream-visit from Khidr, “the green one” or “the verdant one,” a figure in Islamic lore who is often associated with the Prophet Elijah:

One night a man was crying,

Allah! Allah!

His lips grew sweet with the praising, until a cynic said,

“So! I have heard you calling out, but have you ever gotten any response?”

The man had no answer to that. He quit praying and fell into a confused sleep.

He dreamed he saw Khidr, the guide of souls, in a thick, green foliage.

“Why did you stop praising?”

“Because I’ve never heard anything back.”

“This longing you express is the return message.”

Now, obviously, there are and will be those who will say that they feel no such longing. As the Anglo-American philosopher John Hick observed,

Many others must have been where Wordsworth sat, on the bank of the river Wye a few miles above Tintern Abbey, without the scene stirring within them any such sense of transcendence. So we can say that, in itself, the scene on the

31. Ibid., 17–18.
32. Ibid., 155.
Wye is religiously ambiguous – capable of being experienced both religiously and non-religioulsy.33

Is Calvin’s idea of a sensus divinitatis innate to all humans therefore false? Perhaps. Or perhaps those who deny having experienced it are being disingenuous. Or perhaps they feel it, or have felt it, but without recognizing it. There’s no real way of knowing.

Moreover, our attitudes vary with the seasons of our lives. The churches in the former Soviet Union were, notoriously, filled with frail old widows. Observers of the scene wondered what would happen to the Orthodox Church, and to Russian Christianity, when those old widows passed on. But, as it turned out, there were always new generations of old-widows-in-training ready to take their place. Why? Because their approaching deaths, brought acutely to mind by the deaths of their husbands and friends, got them to thinking. At that point, no more evasion was possible. The sight of the hangman’s noose, Samuel Johnson famously observed, concentrates the mind wonderfully.

The wall or veil separating us from God might become thin, or might even be burst, at any moment. In this context, I think of a couple of passages from Das Stundenbuch (“The Book of Hours”) by the brilliant early twentieth-century Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke. They and the verses that surround them have sometimes been called “love poems” to God:

Ich kreise um Gott, um den uralten Turm,
und ich kreise jahrtausendelang;
und ich weiß noch nicht: bin ich ein Falke, ein Sturm
oder ein großer Gesang. …

I circle around God, that primordial tower.
I have been circling for thousands of years,
and I still don’t know: am I a falcon,
a storm, or a great song?34

In another passage from Das Stundenbuch, Rilke suggests that the veil or barrier that prevents him from truly knowing God is made


up of false concepts, mistaken notions that hinder contact even when, inwardly, he is most sure of the presence of the divine:


Nur eine schmale Wand ist zwischen uns, durch Zufall; denn es könnte sein: ein Ruf deines oder meines Munds — und sie bricht ein ganz ohne Lärm und Laut.


You, neighbor God, if sometimes in the night I rouse you with loud knocking, I do so only because I seldom hear you breathe; and I know: you are alone. And should you need a drink, no one is there to reach it to you, groping in the dark. Always I hearken. Give but a small sign. I am quite near.

Between us there is but a narrow wall, and by sheer chance; for it would take merely a call from your lips or from mine to break it down, and that without a sound.

The wall is builded of your images.
They stand before you hiding you like names.
And when the light within me blazes high
that in my inmost soul I know you by,
the radiance is squandered on their frames.
And then my senses, which too soon grow lame,
exiled from you, must go their homeless ways.35

Happily, though, as the apostle Paul promises, the day will come when we shall know the divine even as we are divinely known (1 Corinthians 13:12).

In the meantime, though, what about those who deny an innate sense of divinity? As he often does, William James offers a cogent observation here. He points out that, even for those who insist that they have never felt a sense of the numinous nor ever desired to do so, “nothing can be more stupid than to bar out phenomena from our notice, merely because we are incapable of taking part in anything like them ourselves.”36 Such perceptions of the seeming divine claimed by very many individuals throughout history, both by articulate and prominent members of the elite and by obscure members of the “masses,” need to be taken into account.

Perhaps, as Gerard Manley Hopkins expressed it in his poem “God’s Grandeur,” that grandeur has simply been “bleared, smeared with toil.” Or perhaps the “signals of transcendence” are so common about us that they have become commonplace. The American essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson made this point in his 1836 book Nature:

One might think the atmosphere was made transparent with this design, to give man, in the heavenly bodies, the perpetual presence of the sublime. … If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore; and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God which had been shown! But every night come out these envoys of beauty, and light the universe with their admonishing smile.37

35. Rilke, “You, Neighbor God,” in Rilke’s Books of Hours.
The great Jewish existentialist philosopher Martin Buber, indeed, believed that every true encounter with a “You” – every truly personal relationship that is not merely an instrumental relationship with a person objectified into an “It” – points to the personal “You” of God:

Extended, the lines of relationships intersect in the eternal You. Every single You is a glimpse of that. Through every single You the basic word addresses the eternal You.\(^{38}\)

I close with a passage from the British writer A. N. Wilson:

It is a grand, and a beautiful thing. But is it true? It has sustained thousands and thousands of human lives in the course of its history. It has inspired some of the most heroic acts of virtue, some of the most splendid architecture, some of the most sublime music, some of the most overwhelming paintings. Sometimes, at times of great doubt and confusion, the most I have been able to say as I entered a church was, “I cannot believe this religion. But I wish to be at one with those who have believed it, and who do. My mind cannot grasp what the great Christians of the past were able to proclaim with such confidence. But at least I can use the words that they used, and kneel in the places where they knelt. For I would rather be one with them than with the materialism or atheism of my contemporaries.”\(^{39}\)

We who are affiliated with The Interpreter Foundation committed ourselves long ago to “contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3). I express my gratitude here to the authors, reviewers, designers, source checkers, copy editors, donors, and other volunteers who make possible the Foundation’s work of commending, defending, and elucidating the claims of the Restoration. In connection with this particular volume of the Foundation’s journal, I thank the authors who have contributed their time and effort to their articles, along with those directly responsible for managing and producing the journal as a whole: Allen Wyatt, Jeff Lindsay, and Godfrey Ellis. Like all of the other officers of The Interpreter Foundation, they are volunteers. I’m deeply grateful for their devoted and literally faithful service.

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

Jared Marcum

Abstract: Nothing was more terrifying in the ancient world than a siege. Besiegers disregarded normal conventions of war and either utterly slaughtered or enslaved a city’s residents. Nephi used siege warfare imagery — including fire arrows, blinding, and being led away into captivity — to teach his brothers the importance of holding fast to Christ’s iron rod (see 1 Nephi 15:24). By analyzing this scripture and the vision of the Tree of Life in context of ancient siege warfare, we learn how Satan besieges God’s people, cuts off their access to the Tree of Life, draws them away through scorn, blinds them, and yokes them with a yoke of iron. Christ, in contrast, extends his iron rod through Satan’s siege, inviting us to hold fast to his word, accept him as our covenant family head, and join him in his work by speaking his word. Those who act on Christ’s invitation will find safety and joy in Christ’s kingdom.

Shortly after Nephi received his vision in 1 Nephi 11–14, he taught a vital principle to his brothers — that the word of God provides spiritual protection from Satan’s temptation and power: “Whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness” (1 Nephi 15:24). Since this principle is absent from the King James Version of the Old Testament, one might wonder where Nephi developed this idea. The Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis may indicate that Nephi had access to a similar
teaching on the Brass Plates. However, even if Nephi had read Moses 4:4—or something similar—Nephi’s insights still constitute a significant expansion on the information there. The timing and context in which Nephi states the principle—directly after experiencing his magnificent vision—strongly indicates that angelic instruction, rather than past scripture study, is the likely source of Nephi’s understanding. A close comparative analysis of Nephi’s vision with 1 Nephi 15:24 shows that the angel selectively chose visionary manifestations that helped Nephi clearly understand (a) Satan’s efforts to besiege Zion, its inhabitants, and all who seek refuge there, and (b) that the only way to withstand Satan’s siege is to give heed to God’s true word. The purpose of this paper is to illuminate connections between 1 Nephi 15:24, Nephi’s vision, and the cultural context in which Nephi received that vision, in order to better understand how he hoped that his brothers and all of his readers might endure Satan’s incessant efforts to draw people out and lead them away captive from Christ’s Kingdom.

1 Nephi 15:24 is given amidst a question-and-answer session between Nephi and his older brothers. Directly after experiencing his vision of the Tree of Life, Nephi saw his brothers arguing over the meaning of their father’s dream. Unlike Nephi, they had not “[looked] unto the Lord as they ought” (1 Nephi 15:3), and because Lehi had not explained the symbols of his visionary experience, Nephi’s brothers were left in

1. Moses 4:4 teaches that after his expulsion from God’s presence, Satan became “the father of all lies, to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken unto my voice.” It may be possible that Nephi had exposure to this verse on the brass plates. Robert Millet and several others provide numerous examples that indicate the brass plates more closely aligned with the Joseph Smith Translation—and thus the Book of Moses—than with modern Old Testament translations. For example, Lehi’s account of the Fall of Adam and Eve echoes Adam and Eve’s testimonies found in Moses (see 2 Nephi 2:23; Moses 5:10–11) and Lehi’s inclusion of the Joseph ben-Joseph prophesy in 2 Nephi 3. Robert L. Millet, “The Influence of the Brass Plates on the Teachings of Nephi,” in The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr., (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1989), 207–25. For an extensive analysis of such examples, see Jeff Lindsay and Noel B. Reynolds, “‘Strong Like unto Moses’: The Case for Ancient Roots in the Book of Moses Based on Book of Mormon Usage of Related Content Apparently from the Brass Plates,” Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship 44 (2021): 1–92, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/strong-like-unto-moses-the-case-for-ancient-roots-in-the-book-of-moses-based-on-book-of-mormon-usage-of-related-content-apparently-from-the-brass-plates/.
the dark as to their meaning. After taking some time to recover from his own vision, Nephi directly answered their questions. During this conversation, they asked their younger brother, “What meaneth the rod of iron which our father saw?” (1 Nephi 15:23). Nephi answered 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; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction” (1 Nephi 15:24).

In this conversation, Nephi used fiery darts, blindness, and being led away captive to illustrate the nature of Satan’s attacks. All these images can be references to siege warfare. Why would Nephi use such imagery in communicating with his brothers? Nephi’s family would have been familiar with sieges. Although the absolute dating of Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem is still open to minor adjustments, Lehi’s family may have endured Nebuchadnezzar’s first siege of Jerusalem. Even if they departed before the siege occurred, the sieges of past conquerors — namely the Egyptians and Assyrians — would have been part of their

2. There is ample debate over when Lehi’s family left Jerusalem, with some placing it as early as 605 bc and other placing it as late as 587 bc. See Randall P. Spackman, “The Jewish/Nephite Lunar Calendar,” Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 7, no. 1 (1997): 48–59, 71, https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1190&context=jbms; S. Kent Brown and David Rolph Seely, “Jeremiah’s Imprisonment and the Date of Lehi’s Departure,” Religious Educator 2, no. 1 (2001): 15–32, https://rsc.byu.edu/vol-2-no-1-2001/jeremiahs-imprisonment-date-lehis-departure; and Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “Dating the Departure of Lehi from Jerusalem,” BYU Studies 57, no. 2 (2018): 7–51, https://byustudies.byu.edu/article/dating-the-departure-of-lehi-from-jerusalem/#:~:text=Counting%20back%20600%20real%20years,in%20the%20year%20605%20BC. On pages 24–32. Chadwick notes that the first year of king Zedekiah’s reign mentioned in 1 Nephi 4 and the first year of the Egyptian vassal Jehoiakim could have been the same year, 609 bc. He argues that when the Egyptians displaced the young Zedekiah for his older half-brother, Jehoiakim, that many in Jerusalem may not have recognized the vassal as legitimate, including Lehi and Jeremiah. Chadwick adds that Lehi’s prediction of Jerusalem’s destruction must have occurred before the Babylonians invaded Philistia in 604 bc, as no one would have mocked Lehi for such a prediction when Babylonia was essentially on their doorstep.

3. Jerusalem, like many cities in the levant, experienced its share of sieges and sacking. King David took the city by siege (1 Chronicles 11), and Egypt (2 Chronicles 12), Assyria (2 Kings 18–19), and Babylon (2 Kings 24–25) all besieged and/or sacked Jerusalem.
family history, particularly since Lehi’s near ancestors were likely refugees of Manasseh.4

Sieges were unmatched in their brutality in the ancient world. A successful siege typically ended with the slaughter and/or enslavement of a city’s entire populace. Homer expressed King Priam’s fear of the eventual pillage of Troy in these words: “After I have seen my sons slain and my daughters [hauled] away as captives, my bridal chambers pillaged, little children dashed to earth amid the rage of battle, and my sons’ wives dragged away by the cruel hands of the Achaeans; in the end fierce hounds will tear me in pieces at my own gates after some one has beaten the life out of my body with sword or spear.”5 In siege warfare, conventional battle standards of honor and prowess were completely disregarded. Whereas in the field of battle victors took their enemies prisoner and often freed them after ransom, sieges were usually culminated by conquerors hunting their enemies through the streets, killing without restraint, and enslaving those they spared. Nothing would have inspired a city’s residents to fear like an impending siege.6

Perhaps Nephi desired to inspire the same sort of urgent trepidation in his brothers. Nephi believed his father’s words concerning Jerusalem’s siege and destruction and he was grateful that the Lord had seen fit to spare their family such a fate (see 1 Nephi 7:13–15). However, he also knew that Laman and Lemuel did not believe their father. In addition, Nephi had just heard Lehi state that Laman and Lemuel “partook not of the fruit” (1 Nephi 8:35), a fruit that Nephi now understood represented the Atonement of Jesus Christ.7 Nephi knew what his brother’s potential rejection of the Messiah meant for them. Thus, Nephi used language that would clearly communicate his brothers’ dire circumstances, and nothing would have communicated immediate danger like siege imagery. Such language aptly fits his efforts to “exhort [his brothers] with all the energies of [his] soul” (1 Nephi 15:25). In addition, Nephi’s

7. The tree has also been interpreted to be symbolic of Mary and the fruit a representation of Jesus Christ. See Daniel C. Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah,” Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 9, no. 2 (2000): 14–25.
use of this symbolism may reflect his emotional reaction to much of his
vision. Nephi said that he “considered [his] afflictions were great above
all,” because he had just witnessed the wholesale “destruction of [his]
people” (1 Nephi 15:5). Since sieges also resulted in the utter destruction
of a people, this would have been a logical connection for Nephi to draw.

A final reason why Nephi might use siege symbolism is simply
because his vision resembled an ancient siege. As we analyze the elements
of the vision in the context of siege warfare, we see that Satan and his
forces (represented by the great and spacious building):

1. Besiege Christ’s earthly kingdom (portrayed by the Tree of
   Life).
2. Cut off the path to Christ’s kingdom with temptations (mists
   of darkness).
3. Draw away Christ’s followers through scorn (fiery darts).
4. Spiritually blind Christ’s followers (mists of darkness).
5. Captivate those who fall away (Satan’s yoke of iron).

In 1 Nephi 15:24, Nephi first highlights two tools that Satan uses
to “overpower [God’s children] unto blindness” — namely temptations
and fiery darts. During his vision, the angel explains to Nephi that the
temptations of Satan are like “mists of darkness … which blindeth the
eyes, and hardeneth the hearts of the children of men, and leadeth them
away into broad roads, that they perish and are lost” (1 Nephi 12:17).
The mists of darkness fit well with similar imagery coming from texts
both before and after Nephi’s time. However, Nephi’s use of fiery darts
as imagery for Satan’s efforts seems to be a new idea. As has been argued
by some scholars, fiery darts (perhaps mistranslated as “arrows”) are
mentioned in Psalm 7 as a weapon in the hands of the Lord as he fights
defensively for the faithful. Some have wondered why Nephi reversed
this imagery, using the same object — which had previously been
used to teach about Yahweh’s protection — now as a symbol of Satan’s
offensive attacks. Nephi’s inspired reasoning can be better understood
by studying how fire arrows were used in ancient siege warfare.

8. Daniel Belnap compared the mists of darkness from Lehi and Nephi’s
dreams with other scriptural journeys through darkness, the wilderness, and
chaos. Daniel Belnap, “‘There Arose a Mist of Darkness’: The Narrative of Lehi’s
Dream in Christ’s Theophany,” in Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture, ed.
scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub/4745.
9. Much of the scholarship that deals with Nephi’s “fiery darts” either accuses
Joseph Smith of plagiarizing Paul’s use of a similar idea in Ephesians 6:16 or defends
In the ancient Near East, fire arrows were used in siege warfare on both the defensive and offensive sides. As a defensive weapon, they were an effective weapon against siege engines. At least 100 years before Lehi, Assyrian siege engines were described as wrapped in leather to protect them against flame arrows and other burning projectiles. This defensive use of fire arrows may help illuminate the imagery in Psalm 7, where the psalmist portrayed the Lord as a defender against their enemy’s rage and persecution. On the other side of the battle besiegers used fire arrows as an offensive weapon to terrify, burn out, and overcome their hunkered victims. For example, during a siege of Athens, the Persians shot arrows wrapped with burning hemp fibers into the barricades surrounding the Athenian Acropolis, successfully destroying them. Thus, for the besiegers, fire arrows were particularly useful in rendering their victim’s defenses ineffectual, making it possible for an overpowering assault. This offensive application of fire arrows is likely Nephi’s intent in 1 Nephi 15:24.

Of particular interest is that the metaphorical fire arrows of scoff and scorn are fired from a great and spacious building. When juxtaposed against the great and spacious building, the Tree of Life stands like God’s city with a “terrible gulf [that] divideth” (1 Nephi 12:18) Christ’s followers from their persecutors. This gulf is like the moats that surrounded many ancient cities. However, the gulf in Nephi’s vision has one stark difference from the man-made moats of Nephi’s day. The gulf of Nephi’s vision is unassailable because it represents the “justice of the Eternal God.” This “great and terrible” (1 Nephi 12:18) gulf creates Nephi’s “metaphor … [as fitting] comfortably in an ancient Near Eastern setting.” For example, Stephen Smoot states that while the KJV does not mention fiery darts in Psalm 7:12–13, this omission is clearly a mistranslation. Stephen O. Smoot, “The ‘Fiery Darts of the Adversary’ in 1 Nephi 15: 24,” Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture 18 (2016): 6, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-fiery-darts-of-the-adversary-in-1-nephi-1524/. Unfortunately, since the debate over the “fiery dart” phraseology has focused on the phrase’s historicity, very few have looked into what Nephi may have meant by using such a metaphor.

12. In Hebrews 11:9–10 we learn of Abraham seeking God’s city as he dwelt in tents — an experience to which Lehi and Nephi could relate (see Hebrews 11:9; 1 Nephi 2:15; 1 Nephi 8:8).
13. Jericho — perhaps the most fortified of ancient cities — had a moat ten feet deep and thirty feet wide that lay in front of the city’s immense wall. See Kern, Ancient Siege Warfare, 9.
the only truly safe place from Satan’s control — near the Tree of Life. Thus, Satan’s siege of the Tree of Life may be akin to the doomed siege by Zemnarihah and the Gadianton robbers in 3 Nephi 3–4. Just as Zemnarihah’s men were powerless due to the “scantiness of provisions among the robbers” (3 Nephi 4:19), Satan and his followers are powerless against God’s justice. Perhaps not coincidentally, after defeating the Gadianton robbers, Lachoneus’ people hung Zemnariahah on a tree and then cut down the tree. According to John Welch, the people of Lachoneus may have been following an ancient Israelite practice of cutting down the tree upon which malefactors were hung. Maimonides explained that this was done so that the people can’t say “this is the tree on which so-and-so was hanged,” thus removing the reminder of the malefactor and his crime.14

The language of the prayer in 3 Nephi 4:29 suggests that the people of Lachoneus — in addition to following Israelite capital punishment practice — may have cut down the tree as a symbolic speech-act. After they fell the tree, they prayed that the Lord would “preserve his people in righteousness and in holiness of heart, that they may cause to be felled to the earth all who shall seek to slay them because of power and secret combinations, even as this man hath been felled to the earth” (3 Nephi 4:29). Lachoneus and his people knew that if they stayed faithful to God that the Lord would bring to pass the fall of all secret combinations that sought to destroy them.

Secret combinations are a primary manifestation of the great and spacious building (see 1 Nephi 12:18–13:6; 2 Nephi 26:22). The angel taught Nephi that the great and spacious building included “all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, that shall fight against” God and his people and that eventually these assailants shall fall, and “the fall thereof [would be] exceedingly great” (1 Nephi 11:36). Thus, not only does God’s justice provide protection for God’s people within the environs of the tree, the Lord, in his own time, will cause that the “great pit which hath been dug for the destruction of men shall be filled by those who digged it, unto their utter destruction” (1 Nephi 14:3).

This impassable gulf between the great and spacious building and the Tree of Life does not leave Satan completely powerless, however. Even though Satan’s forces cannot infiltrate God’s city, they use a great and

spacious building to rain down their fiery arrows of mockery, scoff, and scorn. In Lehi’s vision, the constant barrage of scoff and scorn negatively affects many who have partaken of God’s goodness. They become ashamed, leave the safety of Christ’s kingdom, and “[fall] away into forbidden paths” (1 Nephi 8:28). Lehi describes the building as being “in the air, high above the earth” and “filled with people” who mock and point fingers “towards those who … were partaking of the fruit” (1 Nephi 8:26–27).

Typically depicted as a large castle-like structure in artistic depictions, Lehi’s description of the great and spacious building also matches that of ancient siege towers. These towers were powerful tools in overcoming even highly fortified cities that had strong defenses. They towered over most structures of their day, and they were often built to match or exceed the height of the city’s fortification — which was frequently higher than 30 feet. These siege towers were filled with soldiers, just as Lehi described the great and spacious building being filled with people (1 Nephi 8:27). The siege engine — a mobile variety of the siege tower — rolled on wheels that were often hidden underneath the structure. From the defenders raised position on the city walls such a concealment may have made the siege tower look as if it were floating. Attackers would build or roll the siege tower within firing distance of the city wall, where archers could eliminate rampart defenses. (See Figure 1.) Such structures were used in the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem that Lehi’s family fled to avoid.15 One example of these siege towers bears particular similarity to Nephi’s description. In the eighth century BC, the Kushite king Piye attacked lower Egypt. To conquer the city of Ashmunein, he erected a “wooden siege-tower, from which the Kushite archers could fire down into the city” (emphasis added).16 Nephi likely knew something of Piye’s conquest, particularly since Nephi had exposure to Egyptian culture and language.

15. See 2 Kings 25:1. Both Ezekiel and Jeremiah also make mention of forts, mounts, and battering rams when discussing the same siege (see Jeremiah 52:4; Ezekiel 4:2). In the Assyrian siege of the Judaean city of Lachish, siege ramps and battering rams were instrumental in its overthrow. See David Ussishkin, “The ‘Lachish Reliefs’ and the City of Lachish,” Israel Exploration Journal 30, nos. 3/4 (1980): 189–90.

Figure 1. Relief on gypsum wall panel from Ninevah showing the siege of Lachish, in Judea. The siege engine is shown going up man-made ramps toward the wall with archers atop it. Defenders fire arrows and throw torches from defensive towers in efforts to set the engine ablaze. Assyrian soldiers with ladles pour water to stop their efforts. Prisoners are depicted leaving the fortifications as slaves. © The Trustees of the British Museum

Other corroborating reasons for Nephi’s use of fire arrows can be found by textual analysis. In Hebrew the word zîqôṯ can be translated as firebrands or fire arrows, as it is in Proverbs 26:18. Alternatively, in most other places within the Old Testament, zîqôṯ is translated as fetters or chains. This duality of meaning may have been a prime opportunity for a wordplay by Nephi. The ultimate purpose of Satan’s fiery arrows is to bring us into his burning and bonding chains. Given the Book of Mormon’s repeated use of the imagery of chains in discussions about Satan, recognizing such a wordplay may offer another feasible line of interpretation (discussed below). It is also worth noting that Satan is described as an “adversary” in 1 Nephi 15:24, which is different than the devil and Satan titles used in the text of Nephi’s vision. In the King James Bible, several words are translated as adversary. Śāṭān (Satan) is the most common and refers to someone who accuses or withstands. In Exodus 23:22, šûr is the Hebrew word translated as adversary and has more

specific connotations, namely, to be an adversary who confines, binds, or besieges. Thus, in 1 Nephi 15:24, ṣar — the noun form of ṣûr — may be a better word than ᵃᵗᵃⁿ in “fiery darts of the adversary” because it is a natural companion to the siege weapon imagery of fiery darts.¹⁸

In all successful sieges, simply shooting weapons into a city was not enough. The assailants also needed to cut off access both into and out of the city, and in Nephi’s vision Satan does so by enveloping the lone entry point to the Tree of Life with his mists of darkness. As mentioned earlier, the angel explained that the mists of darkness are a representation of Satan’s temptations. Then, the angel showed Nephi a deeply personal example of these temptations among Nephi’s descendants, who give in to pride, are overpowered, and destroyed. In addition, Nephi saw the great and abominable church strip the Jewish record of many parts “which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord” (1 Nephi 13:26). This stripping caused the book to lose some of its essential power and it became a less reliable guide for would-be followers seeking the living Christ, represented by the tree. As a result, the Gentiles are blinded, and their hearts grow hard (see 1 Nephi 13:27). Without an effectual iron rod, “an exceedingly great many do stumble” and “Satan hath great power over them” (1 Nephi 13:29).¹⁹

In addition to cutting off access to the tree of life, the mists of darkness are effective in blinding its victims and may be seen as smoke that stings and blinds the eyes of people looking for a place of refuge. Lehi mentions that those who were blinded by the mists of darkness “wandered off and were lost” (1 Nephi 8:23). Likewise, those that partook of the fruit but were ashamed — due to Satan’s fiery darts of mockery — “fell away into forbidden paths and were lost” (1 Nephi 8:28). These “strange roads” (1 Nephi 8:32) are apparently filled with blind wanderers who are unable to discern their location or direction.

Both the biblical and extrabiblical record show that blinding slaves was a common practice in the ancient near east. The Philistines blinded Samson after his capture (Judges 16:21). Nahash, the Ammonite, besieged Jabesh-gilead and offered to put out only one eye of each inhabitant as a condition of their surrender (1 Samuel 11:2). The Assyrians were particularly famous for blinding their siege victims — along with other countless inhumane punishments — as a warning to others that might

be tempted to resist their conquest. Assyrian kings often took pleasure in personally blinding prisoners. King Shalmaneser I claimed to have put out the eyes of over 14,000 prisoners. Nephi’s own sovereign, Zedekiah, succumbed to a fate that bears interesting similarity to what Nephi describes in 1 Nephi 15:24. Zedekiah’s forces were overpowered by a superior Babylonian army. The king was then blinded, bound in brass chains, and led away captive to Babylon (see 2 Kings 25:7).

In Nephi’s vision, the angel states that the great and abominable church desires to “blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men” (1 Nephi 13:27). Thus, Satan’s forces expend great effort in taking away “from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord” (1 Nephi 13:26). The word of God, then, is always at the center of Satan’s crosshairs in his efforts to cut off access to the tree and blind those he wishes to capture. If he — through his great and abominable network — can in some way “pervert the right ways of the Lord” (1 Nephi 13:27), then spiritual blindness among Christ’s followers is inevitable.

However, simply overpowering and blinding Christ’s followers is not Satan’s ultimate objective. Even after obscuring the entrance to the Tree of Life with sundry temptations, overpowering God’s people with his fiery darts of scorn and mockery, and spiritually blinding those who fall away, Satan’s siege of the Tree of Life is not complete until the residents of the Tree of Life are led away to destruction and into the pit of hell (see 1 Nephi 14:3). Satan’s true desire is to take Christ’s followers captive. The angel teaches Nephi about the strength of Satan’s captivity by showing Nephi “saints of God” who are enslaved by a “yoke of iron” (1 Nephi 13:5). The imagery of an iron yoke had particularly impactful meaning in Nephi’s day and was directly related to siege warfare. In Old Testament times, a yoke was made of two pieces: The ʿōl, which was the part that encompassed the neck, and the môṭâ, which was the stave or rod of the yoke. While yokes for beasts of burden were fashioned of wood, iron yokes were tools of conquest and slavery. Around the time of Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem, Jeremiah dramatically donned a wooden ʿōl and môṭâ to demonstrate Israel’s fate under Nebuchadnezzar. In protest,

the false prophet Hananiah removed the môṭâ from Jeremiah and broke it, professing in the presence of the priests and the people that God had broken Nebuchadnezzar’s hold. Jeremiah responded, “Thus saith the Lord; Thou hast broken the môṭâ of wood; but thou shalt make for them môṭâ of iron…. I have put a ʿōl of iron upon the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon” (Jeremiah 28:13–14). The use of iron in the yoke imagery communicated a sort of long-term permanence to the coming conquest and bondage. Israel would not easily break away from Babylon. The dating of Jeremiah 27–28 to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah (1 Nephi 1:4) makes it likely that Nephi would have been familiar with Jeremiah’s dramatic use of prophetic simile curses and other symbolic speech-acts in general, and his use of the iron yoke imagery in particular.23

This idea of the potential permanence of Satan’s grasp is later and repeatedly taught in the Book of Mormon through the imagery of chains and cords. Lehi warns Laman and Lemuel to shake off “the chains which bind the children of men, that they are carried away captive down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe” (2 Nephi 1:13). Nephi later writes of Satan’s “everlasting chains … from whence there is no deliverance” (2 Nephi 28:19–22). Alma repeatedly warns of Satan’s desire to “encircle you about with his chains, that he might chain you down to everlasting destruction, according to the power of his captivity” (Alma 12:6; see also Alma 5:9–10; 13:30; 26:14; 36:18). Using cords in connection with this metaphor, Nephi teaches that Satan “leadeth them by the neck with a flaxen cord, until he bindeth them with his strong cords forever”.

23. If Chadwick is correct that the first year of the reigns of Zedekiah and the Egyptian vassal Jehoiakim were the same year, 609 BC, then this would help explain the discrepancy between Jeremiah 27 and 28. Jeremiah 27:1 notes that Jeremiah first puts the wooden yoke “in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim,” whereas Jeremiah 28:1 situates the yoke confrontation with Hananiah “in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year, and in the fifth month.” Many have dismissed this discrepancy as a scribal error. See Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers, Jeremiah 26–52, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 27 (Grand Rapids, MI: Word Books, 1995), 41n1.a. However, if Chadwick is correct about some Jews recognizing Zedekiah while Egypt ruled through Jehoiakim, the difference between Jeremiah 27:1 and 28:1 may reflect that conflict. Thus, Jeremiah 28 would have taken place around 605 BC, about the same time of Chadwick’s proposed date for Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem. Chadwick, “Dating the Departure of Lehi from Jerusalem,” 32. On such symbolic prophetic speech-acts, see Donald W. Parry, “Hebraisms and Other Ancient Peculiarities in the Book of Mormon,” in Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 156–59.
Whether by use of chain, rope, or yoke, the Book of Mormon clearly teaches that sin can have long-term negative effects and that, over time, those who become bound find themselves under Satan’s control. This is a fitting emphasis in a book written for the present day, a time when many “call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness” (Isaiah 5:20). If sin is recognized, repentance is often perceived as a quick and easy fix.

The angel’s use of an iron môṭâ (the rod of the yoke) in describing Satan’s way of leading God’s children to destruction stands in stark contrast with God’s method — which is interestingly also represented by an iron rod. In many artistic representations of Nephi’s and Lehi’s visions, Christ’s rod of iron is portrayed as a railing alongside the path leading to the tree. This portrayal is logical and useful, given that the rod appears to be horizontal in nature, it runs along the path, and people must continually hold to the rod to successfully navigate the mists of darkness. However, Nephi may not have interpreted the rod as a hand railing per se since the use of architectural railings were rare in the

Figure 2. Illustration of relief on Balawat gate of Egyptian prisoners being led away in yokes by Assyrian forces. Drawn by Faucher-Gudin.  

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ancient world. Rods were more frequently carried — and while rods could simply be used as walking staffs — they were often used by rulers as scepters (Hebrew: šēḥet), a symbol of authority. Hugh Nibley went so far as to say that Aaron’s rod may have been passed down from one generation to another, “loaned by God to his earthly representative from time to time as a badge of authority, and an instrument of miracles, proving to the world that its holder was God’s messenger.”

Ancient Near Eastern depictions of kings and royal officials often show them holding or wielding their rod of power. Thus, the holder of the rod is seen as a giver of God’s word. Nephi would likely have seen kings in Jerusalem holding such symbols and implements of their power as agents of God and may have also been familiar with the Messiah’s use of an iron rod in scripture. In Psalm 2:9, the Messiah wields his unbreakable iron rod to shepherd Israel to safety and salvation.

26. Even though railings were a rare architectural addition to stairs, Hugh Nibley mentioned in a lecture that there was an iron railing that led along the climb to the temple at Jerusalem. Hugh Nibley, “Lecture 16: Mountain of the Lord’s House” in Ancient Documents and the Pearl of Great Price, ed. Robert Smith and Robert Smythe (Salt Lake City: Desert Book 1980) 3–4.

27. Both maṭṭê and šēḥet are translated as rod in the Old Testament. While they are often used interchangeably, šēḥet is more commonly associated with the scepter of authority. BDB, s.v. “šēḥet,” 986 H7626; s.v. “maṭṭê,” 641 H4294.

28. Hugh W. Nibley, An Approach to the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 319. See also Nelson, “The Rod of Iron in Lehi’s Dream,” 52. The rod was a key symbol of Aaron’s authority as spokesman for Moses, and by extension, the Lord. In fact, Aaron’s staff was called God’s rod. When the children of Israel looked to it and held it up, they were saved and prevailed (see Exodus 17:9–11; Numbers 21:4–9).


30. T.J. Uriona notes that if Nephi did interpret the rod as a scepter, “then it would follow that to see a rod of iron extending … would be to see the anticipated Messiah working as the divine Shepherd-King to gather his flock.” T.J. Uriona, “Rethinking the Rod of Iron,” BYU Studies 61, no. 3 (2022): 147. Margaret Barker points out that “each mention in the King James Version says the Messiah uses the rod to ‘break’ the nations (Psalm 2:9) or to ‘rule’ them (Revelation 2:27; 12:5; 19:15). The ancient Greek translation (the Septuagint) is significantly different; it understood the Hebrew word in Psalm 2:9 to mean ‘shepherd’ and it reads, ‘He will shepherd them with a rod of iron.’ The two Hebrew verbs for ‘break’ and ‘shepherd, pasture, tend, lead’ look very similar and in some forms are identical. The Greek text of the Book of Revelation actually uses the word ‘shepherd,’ poimanei, of the Messiah and his iron rod, so the English versions here are not accurate. The holy child who was taken up to heaven (Revelation 12:5) was to ‘shepherd the nations with a rod.
the entrance of Christ’s domain by obscuring the path with his mists of darkness, Christ divides that darkness by extending his scepter through it to those who will grab it tightly.

Viewing the rod as a scepter may explain why Nephi so quickly comprehended the meaning of the rod without the angel’s assistance. Once the angel had shown him that the Tree of Life represented Jesus Christ’s condescension and atonement, Nephi immediately concluded that the iron rod or scepter — which extends from that tree — represents Christ’s message. Indeed, this scepter symbolism gives the iron rod a personification. Simply thinking of the word of God as words on scriptural pages has the potential of placing them in the abstract and distant past. However, if one sees the living Christ — and his prophetic messengers — as extending Christ’s scepter, one feels invited and in need of not only holding fast to what has been revealed in past scriptural writ, but also to follow the messages coming from God’s living prophets. Laman and Lemuel appeared to understand the importance of keeping the past “statutes and judgments of the Lord, and all his commandments, according to the law of Moses” (1 Nephi 17:22). Yet, they failed to prioritize the words of the living prophets, including Jeremiah and their own father. Thus, they never grabbed Christ’s iron rod and “knew not the dealings of that God who had created them” (1 Nephi 2:12).

After Nephi is shown how Satan obscured the path to the Tree of Life and blinded his victims through the great and abominable church’s efforts to remove many plain and precious parts of the Bible, the angel says that the Lord “will bring forth unto them, in mine own power, much of my gospel, which shall be plain and precious, saith the Lamb” (1 Nephi 13:34). Thus, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon can be interpreted as Christ’s paramount work in cutting through Satan’s attempts to obscure the path to the Tree of Life and blind its travelers (see 1 Nephi 13:34–39). Nephi later speaks at length about the centrality of the Book of Mormon in the Lord’s marvelous latter-day work (see 2 Nephi 25–30). Many Gentiles will “believe the words which are written; and they shall carry them forth” (2 Nephi 30:3) to the Jews — who will

31. Laman and Lemuel’s tendency to shrug off the words of their prophet father may be why Nephi often used the Exodus story to instruct his brothers due to their tendency to reject living oracles. T.J. Uriona points out that the rod of iron, as a symbol of God’s word, “finds its fullest expression in the life of Moses,” and that Nephi drew “on the Exodus tradition when framing his family’s journey out of Jerusalem and the Lord’s shepherding them to the promised land.” Uriona, “Rethinking the Rod of Iron,” 156.

be “[convinced] of the true Messiah” (2 Nephi 25:18) — and Lehi’s
descendants — who “shall be restored unto the knowledge … of Jesus
Christ, which was had among their fathers” (2 Nephi 30:5).

Moreover, there are two other valuable insights found by interpreting
the iron rod as Christ’s scepter. First, In the Old Testament, the Hebrew
word for scepter, šēbet, is sometimes figuratively translated as tribe.
Members of a tribe were under the leadership and authority of their
tribal head, the bearer of the scepter. Thus, holding fast to Christ’s
scepter has a familial connotation. This connotation is emphasized by
Nephi later in his writings when he invites all to “take upon you the
name of Christ, by baptism … then are ye in this strait and narrow path
which leads to eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:13, 18). Nephi understood that
those on the path holding to the iron rod were in a familial covenant
relationship with Christ. They had come far “by the word of Christ with
unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon [his] merits” (2 Nephi 31:19).
However, their work was not done. Being part of Christ’s family means
progression. Everyone holding to Christ’s scepter must continue to
“press forward” through Satan’s deceptions by “feasting upon the words
of Christ” (2 Nephi 31:20).

The second insight is found in the invitation to hold fast to the iron
rod. As mentioned, Hugh Nibley theorized that the holder of Aaron’s
scepter was God’s messenger on earth. By inviting each of us to hold his
scepter, Christ is also obligating us to speak his word with his authority.
Thus, holding fast not only implies studying, believing, and following, it
also means that each of us are to speak the word of God. As Moses said,
“Would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord
would put his spirit upon them!” (Numbers 11:29).

In summary, Nephi’s vision about the meaning of the Tree of Life
effectively represents both Christ’s and Satan’s tactics. As they worship at
the Tree of Life, Satan lays a ferocious siege against Christ’s people who
have partaken of the Savior’s grace. The army in the great and spacious
building — that are “among all the nations of the Gentiles, to fight
against the Lamb of God” (1 Nephi 14:13) — brutally shower down their
fiery darts of persecution and oppression, causing many to fall away.
Satan cuts off the entrance to the tree by obscuring the path through
various temptations, feeding pride, and altering scriptural messages and
meanings, thus effectively blinding the path’s travelers. Finally, he binds
the saints of God with an iron yoke and blinds their eyes, enslaving them
to his will. However, Christ does not abandon his people. Through the

32. BDB, s.v. “šēbet,” 986 H7626.
darkness, he extends his rod and invites everyone to hold fast to that word, accept his covenant rule, and spread his message. As his covenant saints scatter across the earth — though they are few — the Lord arms them “with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory” (1 Nephi 14:12, 14).

By juxtaposing the iron rods of Christ and Satan, we clearly see the character and desire of these two eternal adversaries. On one hand, Satan seeks to destroy agency by making people captive to his will. He wishes to weigh people down with his iron rod of sin, despair, and shame. On the other hand, Christ invites all to him by continually extending his word. All a person needs to do is hold fast and consistently press forward
on the covenant path. On that path, all are under his shepherd ing rule. They are guided to the Tree of Life, where they find joy (see 1 Nephi 8:12). And while Satan will continue to rain down his fiery arrows of scoff and scorn, if Christ’s followers “[heed] them not” (1 Nephi 8:33), Satan cannot overpower them. One of the primary ways in which Christ extends his word is through the Book of Mormon. In a time where Satan’s siege of the Tree of Life is resulting in so many casualties, holding fast to Christ’s word, particularly the Book of Mormon, is more important than ever. Unlike Satan, Christ’s word is offered freely, without compulsion. Christ honors our agency to choose between eternal life and everlasting captivity (see 2 Nephi 2:27). We have the choice to hold to the rod and press forward towards Christ’s promises or to let go and withdraw, thus becoming subject to Satan’s attacks and eventual long-lasting control.

Jared Marcum has a bachelor’s degree in History and an M.Ed. and Ph.D. in Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences. He is an associate professor of Religious Education at BYU–Hawai‘i. He teaches courses on various topics including the Book of Mormon, Church History, and the Doctrine and Covenants. During his time at BYU–Hawai‘i, he has directed the university’s online programs and the Center for Learning and Teaching. Before BYU–Hawai‘i, Jared taught seminary in Utah for eight years. He and his wife Stephanie have four children and are expecting their first grandchild. They currently reside in Hau‘ula, Hawai‘i.
“UPON THE WINGS OF HIS SPIRIT”:
A NOTE ON HEBREW rûaḥ and 2 NEPHI 4:25

Matthew L. Bowen

Abstract: Nephi, in composing his psalm (2 Nephi 4:15–35), incorporates a poetic idiom from Psalm 18:10 (2 Samuel 22:11) and Psalm 104:3 to describe his participation in a form of divine travel. This experience constituted a part of the vision in which he saw “the things which [his] father saw” in the latter’s dream of the tree of life (see 1 Nephi 11:1–3; 14:29–30). Nephi’s use of this idiom becomes readily apparent when the range of meaning for the Hebrew word rûaḥ is considered. Nephi’s experience helps our understanding of other scriptural scenes where similar divine travel is described.

Recent studies have shown that 2 Nephi 4:15–35, what Sidney B. Sperry originally identified as Nephi’s “psalm,” relies heavily on the language of the biblical psalms. In 2 Nephi 4:25, he states, “And upon the wings of his Spirit hath my body been carried away upon exceedingly high mountains.” In making this statement, Nephi poetically referred to the experience he describes in greater depth in 1 Nephi 11:1 (“I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high mountain”)


and 1 Nephi 14:30 (“I was carried away in the Spirit”). Nephi’s use of the phrase “upon the wings of his Spirit” reflects a poetic idiom found in Psalm 18:10/2 Samuel 22:11 and Psalm 104:3, ʿal-kanpê-rûaḥ, usually translated “upon the wings of the wind.”

The textual dependency of 2 Nephi 4:25 on Psalm 18:10/2 Samuel 22:11 and Psalm 104:3 becomes especially clear when the polysemy of Hebrew rûaḥ as both “wind” and “spirit” is considered. Moreover, when Nephi’s use of the phrase “upon the wings of his Spirit” is analyzed in the context of what Nephi experiences with “the Spirit of the Lord” in 1 Nephi 11 and in the broader contexts of theophanies and iconography in ancient Israel, it emerges as something much more than a poetic conceit. Nephi makes a bold declaration regarding his participation in the type of divine travel that few human beings have ever been privileged to experience.

A Methodological Note

John W. Welch has described Nephi’s psalm as a “post-Lehi document” that was “written while Nephi was feeling painfully vulnerable after losing his father.” As such, the actual composition of Nephi’s psalm almost certainly preceded his engraving of the small plates, which he undertook about thirty years after Lehi’s and Ishmael’s families left Jerusalem. In other words, the fact that Nephi’s small plates account was made at that time does not preclude the likelihood that Nephi’s psalm was composed much earlier, shortly after the time of Lehi’s death. It was also very likely composed in Hebrew, Nephi’s native language, rather than Egyptian, even if it was later incorporated into Nephi’s small plates record in Egyptian or using an Egyptian script. For the purposes of my thesis, which includes comparison with the biblical psalms, I will proceed on the assumption that Nephi composed his psalm in Hebrew, whatever its later form in his small plates record.

Wind, Spirit, Breath: The Polysemy of Hebrew rûaḥ

The range of meaning for the Hebrew noun rûaḥ includes “breath,” “wind,” and “spirit,” including “the natural spirit of humanity, as sense,
mind, intellectual frame of mind.” How one best translates this term, however, depends largely upon the context within which it occurs. For example,  rûaḥ in Isaiah’s prophecy of a Davidic messianic figure requires the translation “spirit”: “And the spirit of the Lord [rûaḥ yhwh] shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding [rûaḥ hokmâ ūbînâ], the spirit of counsel and might [rûaḥ ‘ēṣā ūgĕbûrâ], the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord [rûaḥ da’at wēyir’at yhwh]” (Isaiah 11:2). Neither “wind” or “breath” make sense here. Similarly, in the collocation rûaḥ hayyim, “breath of life” (Genesis 6:17; 7:15, 22), rûaḥ makes less sense as “spirit” and no sense as “wind.”

Sometimes the context allows for ambiguity. The King James translators, following Tyndale and other early modern English translators, rendered rûaḥ as “spirit”: “And the Spirit of God [wĕrûaḥ ‘ĕlōhîm] moved upon [mĕraḥepet] the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). Nevertheless, some recent translations have rendered rûaḥ as “wind”: “while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters” (NRSV, Updated Edition); “and a wind of God sweeping over the water” (NJPS). The same ambiguity carries over into Aramaic (rûḥā) and into Greek, as is famously evident in Jesus’s conversation with Nicodemus as preserved in John 3:8: “The wind [to pneuma, or the Spirit] bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit [tou pneumatos, or the wind].”

Whether Hebrew rûaḥ is a “spirit” or “wind,” the surrounding language in the Genesis creation account uses the image of a mother bird hovering over the earth. Many commentators have noted the lexical connection to Deuteronomy 32:11: “As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth (yĕraḥēp, i.e., hovers) over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings.” Michael LeFebvre writes: “The verb hovering (rāḥap) indicates God’s presence and care, like a mother bird that hovers over its young.”

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6. Genesis 1:2 (Tyndale): “The erth was voyde and emptie ad darcknesse was vpon the depe and the spirite of god moved vpon the water.”
7. See, e.g., Genesis 1:2 (Coverdale): “and ye earth was voyde and emptie, and darcknes was vpon the depe, & ye sprete of God moued vpo the water.”
spirit-terms $b\delta$ (“soul”), $k\zeta$ (“soul, spirit; essence”; “personality”), and $\gamma\lambda$ (“spirit,” i.e., glorified spirit) do not possess the range and ambiguity of meaning as Hebrew $r\upsilon\alpha\h$. $b\delta$ and $\gamma\lambda$ are both written with bird-form hieroglyphs, suggesting the cognitive association of the bird with the soul/spirit prevalent in the ancient world.

Whether $r\upsilon\alpha\h$ ᐥlinewidth="1.7" size="6" stretch="true">"elōhîm" denotes “spirit of God,” “wind of God,” or even “mighty wind,” the author of the Genesis creation account conceptualizes that $r\upsilon\alpha\h$ as a birdlike entity or force that can perform the action of $r\cdot h\cdot p$ — i.e., with wings. We might compare this creation image with the descent of the Holy Ghost “in the form of a dove” at Jesus’s baptism as a creation image (1 Nephi 11:27; 2 Nephi 31:8). This point becomes even more germane when we encounter the image of the divine $r\upsilon\alpha\h$ with wings in the psalms in 2 Nephi 4:25.

**“Upon the Wings of the Wind”: A Metaphor for Divine Travel**

Associations of birds and wings with various deities and those deities’ modes of travel were nearly ubiquitous in antiquity. Undertaking even a cursory study of this rich subject will not be possible here. Nevertheless, it should be noted that forms of these associations recur in ancient Israelite tradition.

The phrase ᐥlinewidth="1.7" size="6" stretch="true">“al-kanpê-rūaḥ”, usually translated “upon the wings of the wind,” occurs three times in the Hebrew Bible. Two of these instances are in parallel texts which represent a common original: “And he [Yahweh] rode upon a cherub, and did fly: and he was seen [wayyērā ’] **upon the wings of the wind** [‘al-kanpê-rūaḥ]” (2 Samuel 22:11); “And he [Yahweh] rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly [wayyēde ’] **upon the wings of the wind** [‘al-kanpê-rūaḥ]” (Psalm 18:10). In one of the poetic couplets in this liturgical temple hymn, the psalmist matches (or sets in parallel) the winged $r\upsilon\alpha\h$ with a cherub — a divine being

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seen in vision\(^\text{14}\) and depicted in the temple iconography with wings,\(^\text{15}\) which in this poetic conception serves Yahweh as a kind of steed. In other words, like the winged cherub, the winged \(r\grave{u}a\)\(h\) serves as a mode of divine transportation. The symbolism of the wings in this context would be congruent with Joseph Smith’s explanation that “wings are a representation of power, to move, to act, etc.” in divine visions (D&C 77:4).\(^\text{16}\)

This same phrase occurs again in Psalm 104:3, this time in parallel with “clouds” as Yahweh’s “chariot” or mode of transportation: “Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind [\(\acute{a}l-kanp\acute{e}-\)\(r\grave{u}a\)\(h\): Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire] (Psalm 104:3–4), or as the NRSV (updated edition) renders it: “You set the beams of your chambers on the waters; you make the clouds your chariot; you ride on the wings of the wind; you make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers.”

“Upon the Wings of His Spirit”:
Nephi’s Appropriation of a Hebrew Metaphor

Nephi appropriates the language and imagery of Psalm 18:10 (2 Samuel 22:11) and Psalm 104:3 when he reports, “And upon the wings of his Spirit [cf. Hebrew \(w\grave{e}\acute{a}l-kanp\acute{e}-r\grave{u}\)\(h\)\(ô\):] hath my body been carried away upon exceedingly high mountains. And mine eyes have beheld great things, yea, even too great for man; therefore I was bidden that I should not write them” (2 Nephi 4:25). Nephi modifies the collocation \(\acute{a}l-kanp\acute{e}-\)\(r\grave{u}a\)\(h\) only slightly to reflect his own experience. His use of the psalmic idiom reflects his recognition of the polysemic nature of \(r\grave{u}a\)\(h\) as “wind” and “spirit.” However, his addition of the third-person pronoun “his” ensures that \(r\grave{u}a\)\(h\) is understood more narrowly and translated more personally as “Spirit.” This translation befits the very personal experience that he has with the “Spirit of the Lord” (see further below).

Nephi understood “the things of the Jews” (2 Nephi 25:5) or “the manner of the Jews” (2 Nephi 25:1–2) in the broader context of the ancient Near East and the cultural crosscurrents of symbolism (“I, of myself, have dwelt at Jerusalem, wherefore I know concerning the regions round

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14. See Ezekiel 10:5, 8, 12, 16, 19, 21; cf. the “living ones” in Ezekiel 1:6, 8–9, 11, 23–25.
16. The poetic description of heavenly bodies with “wings” in D&C 88:45 is also interesting in view of the symbolism given in D&C 77:4.
about,” 2 Nephi 25:6). In 2 Nephi 25:13, he gives his understanding of the Egyptian winged sun disk, an image with well-attested use as a royal symbol during the eighth century BCE reign of Hezekiah, as a reference to the Messiah: “he shall rise from the dead, with healing in his wings” (2 Nephi 25:13); “But the Sun of Righteousness shall appear unto them; and he shall heal them” (2 Nephi 26:9), consonant with the later prophecy of Malachi (see Malachi 4:2; 3 Nephi 25:2). Nephi readily identified the meaning of the symbols of his father Lehi’s dream of the tree of life within this context (see, e.g., 1 Nephi 11:25; 15:12–36). Nephi knew — certainly better than we know — the depth and weight of his appropriation of ‘al-kanpê-rûaḥ from the psalms with reference to the Spirit of the Lord.

Nephi’s statement in 2 Nephi 4:25 gives poetic expression to the experience he describes in an inclusio — a bracketing device in which a textual unit is demarcated through the repetition of key phraseology at the beginning and ending of the unit. Nephi’s inclusio brackets his vision of the tree of life — his seeing “the things which [his] father saw” — as a distinct textual unit within the larger structure of his small plates record. Notably, Nephi’s experience with the Lord’s rûaḥ and divine travel constitutes an integral part of this inclusio,

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and closing brackets of which are 1 Nephi 11:1–3 and 1 Nephi 14:29–30 respectively:

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<tr>
<th>1 Nephi 11:1–3</th>
<th>1 Nephi 14:29–30</th>
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<tr>
<td>For it came to pass after I had desired to know the things that my father had seen, and believing that the Lord was able to make them known unto me, as I sat pondering in mine heart I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high mountain, which I never had before seen, and upon which I never had before set my foot. And the Spirit said unto me: Behold, what desirest thou? And I said: I desire to behold the things which my father saw.</td>
<td>And I bear record that I saw the things which my father saw, and the angel of the Lord did make them known unto me. And now I make an end of speaking concerning the things which I saw while I was carried away in the Spirit; and if all the things which I saw are not written, the things which I have written are true. And thus it is. Amen.</td>
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In addition to the phrase “the things which my Father saw,” which occurs verbatim in both 1 Nephi 11:3 and 1 Nephi 14:29 (cf. also “the things which my father had seen” in v. 1), the brackets of the inclusio also use other key matching terminology. For example, the clause “the Lord was able to make them known unto me” (1 Nephi 11:1) is matched by the statement “and the angel of the Lord did make them known unto me” (1 Nephi 14:29). Crucially, both brackets include descriptions of Nephi’s divine travel via ʳᵘᵃʰ: “I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord” (1 Nephi 11:1) is matched by the phrase “while I was carried away in the Spirit” (1 Nephi 14:30). Nephi’s explanation in his psalm, “And upon the wings of his Spirit hath my body been carried away upon exceedingly high mountains” (2 Nephi 4:25) makes clear that his tree-of-life vision was not an out-of-body (ecstatic) experience. In other words, where some visionaries remain undecided on the nature of their visions — “whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell” (2 Corinthians 12:3; 3 Nephi 28:15; D&C 37:1) — Nephi affirms that he experienced this and other visions in the “body.”

Regarding the ʳᵘᵃʰ who transported Nephi to the “exceedingly high mountain” where he had his vision and with whom Nephi conversed, Nephi himself records, “I spake unto him as a man speaketh; for I beheld that he was in the form of a man; yet nevertheless, I knew that it was the Spirit of the Lord; and he spake unto me as a man speaketh with another” (1 Nephi 11:11). The two likeliest identifications for this figure, as Latter-day Saint exegetes have long recognized, are the Holy Ghost

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• Interpreter 58 (2023)

(the third member of the Godhead)\(^{22}\) and Jehovah (the premortal Jesus Christ).\(^{23}\) When taken together with 1 Nephi 11:1–3, 11 and 14:29–30, Nephi’s poetic description in 2 Nephi 4:25, at minimum, constitutes evidence that the “Spirit of the Lord” is to be understood as referring to a personal, divine being and not an abstract force. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, David Larsen, and Stephen Whitlock connect Nephi’s poetic description, “And upon the wings of his Spirit hath my body been carried away upon exceedingly high mountains,” with an imagistic description of divine ascent or divine travel in the Apocalypse of Abraham, “The angel [Yaho'el] took me with his right hand and set me on the right wing of the pigeon and he himself sat on the left wing of the turtledove … and carried me up” (Apocalypse of Abraham 15:2–3).\(^{24}\)

We should additionally note here that Nephi’s statement, “I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high mountain” (1 Nephi 11:1), bears a strong resemblance to the introduction to the Visions of Moses: “The words of God, which he spake unto Moses at a time when Moses was caught up into an exceedingly high mountain, and he saw God face to face, and he talked with him” (Moses 1:1–2). Jeffrey D. Lindsay and Noel B. Reynolds have adduced evidence that the brass plates that Lehi and Nephi used had a version of Genesis similar to what we find in the Joseph Smith Translation.\(^{25}\) If their thesis is correct,


then the language Nephi used to describe his vision was plausibly influenced by language from the fuller brass plates texts.26

“He Was Taken by the Spirit and Conveyed Away”:
Additional Examples of Divine Travel

There are other examples in the Hebrew Bible in which a human being is conceived of as participating in the same type of divine travel that Nephi affirms to have experienced. For instance, Ezekiel, a priest-turned-prophet and a contemporary of Lehi and Nephi, records several instances in which he describes being “taken up” or “lifted up” (nš), “taken” (lqḥ), “brought” (bw), or “carried” (yṣ) to various locales.

“Then the spirit took me up [wattiśśā ēnī rūaḥ], and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of the LORD from his place. … So the spirit lifted me up [wērūaḥ nēšā‘atnī], and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the LORD was strong upon me. Then I came to them of the captivity at Tel-abib” (Ezekiel 3:12, 14–15). Ezekiel describes a vision of Judah, Jerusalem, and the idolatry practiced in the Jerusalem temple also in terms of divine travel: “And he [the Lord] put forth the form of an hand, and took me [wayyiqqāhēnī] by a lock of mine head; and the spirit lifted me up [wattiśśā ‘ōtī rūaḥ] between the earth and the heaven, and brought me [wattēbi ‘ōtī] in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that looketh toward the north…” (Ezekiel 8:3). Elsewhere Ezekiel describes being transported by the Spirit in vision to a community of exiles in Babylon: “Afterwards the spirit took me up [wērūaḥ nēšā‘atnī], and brought me [wattēbi ‘ēnī] in a vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea, to them of the captivity. So the vision that I had seen went up from me” (Ezekiel 11:24–25). Ezekiel’s vision of the bones that were resurrected included divine travel: “The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out [wayyōṣī‘ēnī] in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones” (Ezekiel 37:1). Ezekiel records one of his most vivid examples and one that includes divine travel to “a very high mountain” (har gābōah mē‘ōd, or “an exceedingly high mountain,” as in 1 Nephi 11:1 and Moses 1:1; cf. Ether 3:1):

26. Ibid., 76, 85.
In the five and twentieth year of our captivity, in the beginning of the year, in the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after that the city was smitten, in the selfsame day the hand of the LORD was upon me, and brought me [wayyāḇēʾ ʾōti] thither. In the visions of God brought he me [ḥēḇiʾ anī] into the land of Israel, and set me upon a very high mountain, by which was as the frame of a city on the south. And he brought me [wayyāḇēʾ ʾōti] thither, and, behold, there was a man, whose appearance was like the appearance of brass, with a line of flax in his hand, and a measuring reed; and he stood in the gate. And the man said unto me, Son of man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon all that I shall shew thee; for to the intent that I might shew them unto thee art thou brought [hubāʾ tā] hither: declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel. (Ezekiel 40:1–4)

Much of the remainder of the book of Ezekiel, which records Ezekiel’s vision of the restoration of the temple, includes similar divine travel language (see, e.g., Ezekiel 40:17, 24, 28, 32, 35, 48–49; 41:1; 42:1, 15; 43:1, 5; 44:1, 4, 7; 46:19, 21; 47:1–4, 6, 8). The case of Ezekiel’s vision accounts is particularly interesting and relevant — not because Nephi had any access to Ezekiel’s prophecies and writings, but because Ezekiel was Nephi’s near Judahite contemporary and expressed some revelation-related concepts in similar contemporary language.

But there are further salient examples earlier in ancient Israel’s history. After the translation of Elijah (2 Kings 2:1–11), the “sons of the prophets” (i.e., disciples of the prophets) did not grasp that he had been taken to heaven. Indeed, they believed that the Lord had spirited Elijah away to another earthly location through divine travel. To Elisha, they pled, “Let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master: lest peradventure the Spirit of the Lord hath taken him up [nēšāʾ ʾō], and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley” (2 Kings 2:16). The key point is that the “sons of the prophets” believed that travel by means of “the Spirit of

27. Although the Deuteronomistic History to which Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, and 1–2 Kings putatively belong was edited together during a time probably contemporaneous with Nephi, its sources originate in much earlier time periods. On the basic concept and theory of a Deuteronomistic History, see Martin Noth, The Deuteronomistic History, JSOTSup 15 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981). German original: Martin Noth, Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1943).
the Lord” was possible. Several additional scriptural texts depict divine travel as a mysterious reality.

Later in the Book of Mormon, Nephi the son of Helaman, after receiving the sealing power (like Elijah), 28 participates in this type of divine travel when his life was threatened by those to whom he was “declar[ing] the word of God” (Helaman 10:15). Mormon records, “But behold, the power of God was with him, and they could not take him to cast him into prison, for he was taken by the Spirit and conveyed away out of the midst of them” (Helaman 10:16). In the next verse, Mormon states that Nephi “did go forth in the Spirit, from multitude to multitude, declaring the word of God, even until he had declared it unto them all, or sent it forth among all the people” (Helaman 10:17). It is possible, though not conclusive, that this represents a continuation of this type of travel.

In the New Testament, Luke preserves at least one instance of divine travel through “the Spirit of the Lord” in his account of Philip’s teaching and baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch in the book of Acts. Luke states that after the baptism, Phillip was taken away by the Spirit: “And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord [pneuma kyriou] caught away [hērpasen] Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:39). Paul uses this same Greek term (harpazō) to describe being “caught up” into the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2) and being “caught up” into paradise. Like Nephi’s use of a verb “caught away” in 1 Nephi 11:1, Paul uses this verb in the context of divine travel to receive revelation. These revelations were indescribable or not permissible for Paul to describe.

“Jesus Was in the Spirit, and It Taketh Him Up into an Exceeding High Mountain”: Excursus on Jesus’s Divine Travel in the Wilderness Temptation

All of the foregoing has implications for the Prophet Joseph Smith’s understanding of Jesus’s temptation in the wilderness as recorded in the Synoptic gospels. Following Jesus’s baptism, Mark 1:12 records “And immediately the Spirit driveth [ekballei] him into the wilderness.” JST Mark 1:10 alters this to read, “And immediately the Spirit took him into the wilderness.” While on its face that might not seem to be a description of divine travel, the Joseph Smith translation of the other

Synoptic accounts of the temptation suggest that this is exactly how the prophet understood it.

Matthew’s account begins with the statement, “Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.” The JST changes the entire telos of this experience: “Then Jesus was led up of the Spirit, into the wilderness, to be with God” (JST Matthew 4:1). The statement in the canonical text, “Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,” is emphatically changed to represent the type of divine travel that Nephi and Ezekiel describe and that we have been exploring here: “Then Jesus was taken up into the holy city, and the Spirit setteth him on the pinnacle of the temple” (cf. Ezekiel 37:1; 40:2). “Then the devil came unto him and said, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down, for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone” (JST Matthew 4:5–6). Similarly, the canonical text of Matthew 4:8 reads, “Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain [eis oros hypsēlon], and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.” Again, the JST removes any intimation of the devil having any agency over Jesus beyond being able to tempt him, describing divine travel that is reminiscent of Nephi’s and Moses’s experiences: “And again, Jesus was in the Spirit, and it taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them” (JST Matthew 4:8). JST Luke 4:5 makes a similar adjustment to the narrative there.29

Conclusion

Nephi’s poetic statement that “upon the wings of his Spirit hath my body been carried away upon exceedingly high mountains” incorporates the Hebrew idiom ‘al-kanpê-rûaḥ, usually rendered “upon the wings of the wind,” from Psalm 18:10 (2 Samuel 22:11) and Psalm 104:3. Recognizing the polysemy (or range of meaning) of Hebrew rûaḥ as “wind” and “spirit” makes this borrowing clear.

Nephi’s poetic description of having his body carried “upon the wings of [the Lord’s] Spirit” is quite at home in ancient Israelite psalms, including Nephi’s psalm, and within a corpus of biblical and ancient Near Eastern iconographs and descriptions of divine travel involving divine beings with wings serving as modes of divine transportation.

29. JST Luke 4:5: “And the Spirit taketh him up into a high mountain, and he beheld all the kingdoms …”
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Matthew L. Bowen was raised in Orem, Utah, and graduated from Brigham Young University. He holds a PhD in Biblical Studies from the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, and is currently an associate professor in religious education at Brigham Young University-Hawaii. He is also the author of Name as Key-Word: Collected Essays on Onomastic Wordplay and The Temple in Mormon Scripture (Salt Lake City: Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2018). With Aaron P. Schade, he is the coauthor of The Book of Moses: From the Ancient of Days to the Latter Days (Provo, UT; Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2021), which received the Harvey B. and Susan Easton Black Outstanding Publication Award from Brigham Young University Religious Education. He and his wife (the former Suzanne Blattberg) are the parents of three children: Zachariah, Nathan, and Adele.
Sacred Imaginings: Using AI to Construct Temples

Amanda Colleen Brown-Mather


Abstract: We’re commanded to seek out of the best books words of wisdom, but how exactly do we seek? What are the best books? Temples of the Imagination uses cutting-edge technology to show its readers one futuristic way to incorporate this spiritual practice into their lives.

We are commanded to “seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:118). Jeffrey Thayne and Nathan Richardson have provided a unique way to do just that in their new book, Temples of the Imagination.¹

Growing up, Darth Vader taught me that repentance is always possible;² I learned that “it is our choices … that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities”³ from Albus Dumbledore; and long-lasting friendships were forged when I watched long into the night, with my roommates, the Avatar save the Four Nations from the usurping Fire

These are some of my favorite books and lasting memories, a few touch points I return to again and again. Temples of the Imagination builds on these and other stories, providing visual illustrations and written commentary on the truths they carry and how their narratives can inform our understanding of the temple.

Instead of finding religious principles in a text, Thayne and Richardson asked AI to bridge The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ most sacred structures with the stories so many of us grew up devouring. This is not just a picture book, however. Each chapter contains a devotional reading on the religious principle we can learn from that particular world and how we can tie it to our faith and worship.

The intertwining of technology, culture, and religious principles offers a uniquely meditative text. By reflecting upon the imaginary architecture of worlds wherein we collectively find entertainment and joy, we can strengthen our bond to our covenants by viewing them with new perspectives. When so much in culture and media demands the marginalization of religion, this text asks us to connect the worlds we love to explore with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Imperatively, linking fantasy worlds with religion can help those seeking faith learn how to incorporate belief into other aspects of life.

I don’t think it’s a mistake that after being commanded to seek learning from the best books we are told to “establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:119). The stories I keep returning to are the stories I intend to share with my children. These are the stories that have shaped my life and therefore my approach to faith in Christ, the plan of salvation, and the temple. I am thrilled that Temples of the Imagination shows others what such an integral part of the gospel would look like in the stories and worlds we love.

My only question: Where is the “Dr. Who and Temples” chapter?

Amanda Colleen Brown-Mather holds an MA in Bible and the Ancient Near East from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and a BA in Ancient Near Eastern Studies from Brigham Young University. She currently


spends her time producing university events, running the @comefollowme_women Instagram account, and competing in Scottish Highland Dance competitions.
“A MYSTERY TO THE WORLD”:
A NEW PROPOSAL FOR ISAIAH 22:20-25

Spencer Kraus

Abstract: Isaiah’s oracle in Isaiah 22 regarding a man named Eliakim employs significant and unique language regarding a “nail in a sure place.” This language is accompanied by clear connections to the ancient temple, including the bestowal of sacred clothing and authority, offering additional significant context through which to understand this phrase. Additionally, according to early leaders of the Church, this oracle may not be translated correctly into English, which has caused some confusion regarding the true meaning of the oracle’s conclusion. As such, I offer a new translation of this oracle based on intertextual clues that resolves some of the apparent issues regarding this text and further highlights the temple themes employed by Isaiah.

A unique oracle in Isaiah 22 relates that a court official named Eliakim would be given additional power and responsibility from the Lord. Although not unique in historical content, as other political or ecclesiastical figures are referred to throughout Isaiah’s corpus of prophesies, this oracle is unique in language employed by the prophet Isaiah. Quoting from the King James Version of the Bible, the Bible most familiar to English-speaking Latter-day Saints, we read the following:

And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah: and I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and
he shall be for a glorious throne to his father’s house. And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father’s house, the offspring and the issue, all vessels of small quantity, from the vessels of cups, even to all the vessels of flagons. In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall the nail that is fastened in the sure place be removed, and be cut down, and fall; and the burden that was upon it shall be cut off: for the Lord hath spoken it. (Isaiah 22:20–25)

This oracle contains specific imagery relating to the temple in addition to the referent to “a nail in a sure place.” This language regarding a nail is seldom touched upon in the scriptures, but I will argue that it, too, was understood by ancient authors to be related to the temple and appears to have been understood in a temple context by the prophet Joseph Smith and other leaders of the Church.

For instance, in December 1844, an unsigned editorial was published in the *Times and Seasons* simply entitled “Keys.” This editorial offered commentary on this oracle against Shebna and the prophesied rise of Eliakim to power. The editor of the *Times and Seasons* states that this oracle is “[t]he first important passage in the bible” relating to Priesthood keys and contains “some other very curious knowledge unexplained” by the ancient prophet. The apostle John Taylor was the leading editor for the Church newspaper at this time, and so it is likely that he was the principal author of this editorial.

Regarding the final three verses of this oracle, John Taylor wrote,

“The nail fastened in a sure place,” remains a mystery to the world, and will, but the wise understand. As to the “offspring and issue of his father’s house” being appended to Jesus Christ, the Latter-day Saints believe that — but if any man believes that the 25th verse is a true translation and explanation of the “nail,” he is welcome to his opinion; he knows nothing of the key of David, and little about the keys of the kingdom.

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1. All following verses from the Old Testament will be the author’s own translations. All translations from the New Testament will come from the New Revised Standard Version.
3. Throughout the remainder of this paper, I will presume Taylor to be the primary author of this editorial.
4. “Keys,” 748. It appears that this editorial may have been written partially in response to Sidney Rigdon, as Taylor further elaborates that “the great Anti Christ
The editorial, although authored after Joseph’s death, may reflect teachings originating with Joseph Smith’s instructions. In a sermon recorded by William Clayton in April 1844, Joseph appears to have referred to the oracle in connection with the priesthood keys held by prophets as well as the temple ordinances then being performed in Nauvoo, including baptisms for the dead: “As a last extremity like a nail in a sure place — he [Joseph] says ‘else what shall they do who are bap for the dead &c.’” Due to the sacred nature of the temple ordinances, the statement that the phrase “remains a mystery to the world, and will” may thus be explained.

Given the nature of this editorial, and given the reference to the apparent mistranslation found within this oracle, I would therefore propose an alternative translation that better highlights the nature of the oracle in its temple context:

> And it will come to pass in that day, I will call to my servant, to Eliakim son of Hilkiah, and I will clothe him in your garment, and I will strengthen him with your sash, and your authority will I give into his hand. And he shall be as a father of the last days, who would feign to make the world believe, (the saints know better) that he is ‘my servant’ the branch holding the before mentioned key of David, has gone to Pittsburg to prepare for war.” “Keys,” 749. Other letters and publications in this issue of the *Times and Seasons* deal explicitly with the continuing conflict between Sidney Rigdon (then organizing a church in Pittsburgh) and the Twelve Apostles.

5. The language of the Eliakim oracle may have affected the Prophet Joseph’s previous language and sermons. For example, in “Journal, 1835–1836,” p. 93, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-1835-1836/94, the prophet mentions “the nail in a sure place.”

6. “Minutes and Discourses, 6–8 April 1844, as Reported by William Clayton [37],” p. 7 [37], *The Joseph Smith Papers*, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-and-discourses-6-8-april-1844-as-reported-by-william-clayton/37. Prior to this comment, Joseph commented on the keys of the priesthood that were delivered to Peter and all other prophets (himself included), perhaps deriving the content from Isaiah 22:22.

7. Or, “as Eliakim.” The *lamed* prefix that often is translated as “to” or “for” could also be “as” or “like.” This reading of the prefix may be seen in verse 21, where Eliakim is described “a father,” *l‘āb* (לopez), to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. M. E. J. Richardson, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1:1–2, 507–511, s.vv. “פַּעַם,” “גֵּר”; hereafter cited as HALOT. Reading this phrase “as Eliakim” allows that Eliakim may be symbolic of all temple petitioners before the Lord. This possible symbolism will be further touched upon below.
to the inhabitants\(^8\) of Jerusalem and to the House of Judah, and I will give the key of the house of David upon his shoulder: and he shall open and none shall shut; he shall shut and none shall open. And I will strike him a nail in a sure place, and he shall be a throne of glory to his father’s house. And upon him all the glory of his father’s house will be hung — the offspring and the issue, and all the small instruments from the bowls to all the jars.\(^9\) In that day, declares\(^10\) the Lord of Hosts, should the nail that is struck in the sure place be removed, it will be cut down and it will fall, and the prophecy\(^11\) that is upon it will be cut,\(^12\) for the Lord has spoken. (Isaiah 22:20–25)

My translation of verses 20–22 and 24 is similar to previous translations into English; the following discussion will first focus on the temple themes found in these verses before moving on towards an analysis of verses 23 and 25 regarding the “nail in a sure place.” I will conclude by discussing two possible applications of these verses, highlighting the Messianic nature of this oracle as well as the type that Eliakim becomes for modern temple patrons.

8. The Hebrew word is singular (i.e., “inhabitant”), yet could be understood as a collective.

9. Alternatively, this noun could be understood as “lyres” or “musical instruments,” as will be discussed below.

10. The verb used by Isaiah in this instance, \(n\text{̄}’um\) (נאם), is used in the context of a declaration by an oracle. In other words, an authorized representative of the Lord declares the following covenantal curse should the petitioner/Eliakim prove unfaithful. See HALOT, 1:657–58, s.v. “נאם.”

11. The noun \(ma\text{̄}s\text{̄}’\) (משא) is a prophetic burden or prophecy. In this verse, many English translators will render this as a weight placed upon the nail. See HALOT, 641–42, s.v. “משא.” Although it is a valid translation, this does not capture the full meaning of the word that appears to have been intended. Ancient sources also understood this to refer to a prophecy, as this noun was used elsewhere in prophetic oracles (see Isaiah 19:1; 22:1; Zechariah 12:1). Rashi, for instance, noted that many interpreted verse 25 to mean “the prophecy prophesied about him will be fulfilled.” Shlomo Yitzchaki (“Rashi”), “Rashi on Isaiah 22:25,” Sefaria (website), translation mine.

12. This verb, \(k\text{̄}r\text{̄}t\) (כרת), is used to demonstrate the making of covenants in Hebrew. In this context, it could be understood that a prophecy regarding the nail is covenantally made or fulfilled. See HALOT, 1:500–501, s.v. “כרת.”
Temple Themes in the Eliakim Oracle

Temple themes in this oracle begin with the name of Eliakim (אליקים) — “God will raise up,”\(^\text{13}\) the son of Hilkiah (חלקיהו),\(^\text{14}\) or “the portion/inheritance of the LORD.” Each name draws upon the hoped-for blessings of the temple by being brought up into the Lord’s presence and inheriting all blessings from Him.\(^\text{15}\) Eliakim is promised authority as the Lord employs temple imagery in His calling of Eliakim. A robe and a sash offered to Eliakim evoke the image of the priestly robe and sash worn by the Levites.\(^\text{16}\)

In addition, like temple priests, Eliakim is promised that Isaiah’s authority will be given “to his hand” — much like Israelite priests had their “hands filled” when they were anointed to their temple service, which is a ritual practice often masked in English translations of the Bible. A phrase that is often translated as “consecrate” in the Old Testament is המל’ai יד (מָלֵא יָד), which literally means “fill the hand.”\(^\text{17}\) Because most English translations render this phrase as the priest being “consecrated” or “ordained,” the implicit connection between this ritual action in these verses and the action promised on Eliakim’s behalf is masked in English. The Testament of Levi 8:10 also refers to this practice as Levi is initiated for his priestly role: “The seventh [man/angel] placed the priestly diadem on me and filled my hands with incense, in order that I might serve as priest for the Lord God.”\(^\text{18}\) Other instances in the Bible that may reflect this practice are seen in Exodus 29:23–24 and Leviticus 8:26–28, in which

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\(^\text{13}\) HALOT, 1:56, s.v. “אליקים.”

\(^\text{14}\) HALOT, 1:324; s.v. “חלקיהו.”

\(^\text{15}\) This blessing was prominent in the ancient temple and accounts of heavenly and ritual ascent and can be a hope for modern temple petitioners and disciples of Christ. As Jeffrey M. Bradshaw explains, “In addition to exceptional accounts of heavenly ascent experienced by prophets in mortal life, all disciples of Jesus Christ look forward to an ultimate consummation of their aspirations by coming into the presence of the Father after death, thereafter dwelling in His presence for eternity.” Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, “Heavenly Ascent and Ritual Ascent,” Book of Moses Essay 31, Pearl of Great Price Central (website), November 27, 2020, https://pearlofgreatpricecentral.org/heavenly-ascent-and-ritual-ascent/.

\(^\text{16}\) See Exodus 28 for a detailed account of the clothing worn by the Israelite temple priests.

\(^\text{17}\) HALOT, 1:583–84, s.v. “מלא יד.” See, for example, Exodus 28:41, 29:9, 29, 33, 35 and Leviticus 21:10 in which officiating figures are instructed to “fill the hand” of a new priest.

an offering is placed on the palm (caph, כף) of the priest so that they may offer it to the Lord.\textsuperscript{19} The connections to this practice are further strengthened when Leviticus Rabbah is considered, an early midrash that states that Shebna served as “the anointed priest,” soon thereafter clarified to be referring to the “high priest.”\textsuperscript{20} Eliakim, then, would be anointed to this same office.

A part of that authority regards the “key of the house of David,” allowing Eliakim to open and shut, with none able to reverse his decisions.\textsuperscript{21} These keys are reminiscent of the sealing keys given to Peter by the Lord Jesus Christ: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19). These same keys were given to Nephi, son of Helaman, in the Americas:

\begin{quote}
Be behold, thou art Nephi, and I am God. Behold, I declare it unto thee in the presence of mine angels, that ye shall have power over this people … Behold, I give unto you power, that whatsoever ye shall seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven; and thus shall ye have power among this people. (Helaman 10:6–7)\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

The keys referred to by Isaiah are most explicitly connected to the authority held by the Lord Jesus Christ himself in the Revelation of John, calling Jesus “the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens” (Revelation 3:7).

Early Jewish authorities likewise find references to the Temple in these keys. For instance, Targum Jonathan expands this verse to refer to the keys as “the key of the temple and the government of the house

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} See HALOT 1:491–92, s.v. “כף.”
\item \textsuperscript{20} See Leviticus Rabbah 5:5, translation mine. The Aramaic text for which this translation was based can be found online at https://www.sefaria.org/Vayikra_Rabbah.5. Also known as Vayikrah Rabbah, Leviticus Rabbah is a midrash to the Biblical book of Leviticus (Vayikrah in Hebrew) and is believed to have been composed in the Land of Israel, likely in the 5th century CE.
\item \textsuperscript{21} It is also significant that many aspects in this oracle reflect Isaiah 9:6–7, which promises a Davidic king power, government, and royal investiture, further connecting Eliakim with a divine leadership appointment.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Of note is the Lord’s threefold repetition of the word “power.” Threefold repetitions figured prominently in multiple temple texts, and according to some scholars’ note for 1 Kings 17:21, “Three often figures prominently in rituals.” The Harper Collins Study Bible, ed. Harold W. Attridge, rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2006), 509.
\end{itemize}
of David.” While few details remain extant about Eliakim’s role, whether political or ecclesiastical, in Judah, it is clear that early Jews and Christians in the Old and New Worlds saw in this oracle a reference to keys and authority greater than that held by kings and rulers.

A final reference to the temple appears in Targum Jonathan, which regards verse 24 as alluding to the temple vessels. Jonathan renders the “small instruments from the bowls to all the jars” not as referring to vessels or instruments, but as the temple workers who dealt with and used these vessels: “from the priests clothed in the ephod to the sons of Levi who hold the lyres.” Jonathan’s rendering of “jars” as “lyres” is derived from an alternate translation of the noun nēbel in order to refer to the musical instruments employed by temple priests. Rashi concurs with Jonathan regarding the temple imagery in this verse, stating that it refers to “the ministration vessels with which the priests perform their ministries in the temple.”

The “Mystery” of Isaiah’s Nail in a Sure Place

Having demonstrated how Isaiah draws on the imagery of the temple in his oracle, I will now discuss the image Isaiah offers of the nail in a sure place. Specifically, I will demonstrate that this nail was likewise seen as an item connected to the temple in the Old Testament and will offer an explanation for the variances in my rendition of verses 23 and 25 compared to other English translations of Isaiah 22.

Beginning with verse 23, my translation diverges from virtually all English translations with the exclusion of the word “as.” As is evident in the previously cited King James Version, most English translators


24. Additional references to these keys are found in the Doctrine and Covenants, maintaining the same understanding as was held anciently. See D&C 124:93; 132:46.


26. HALOT, 1:664, s.v. “נבל”

supply a *caph* or *lamed* that is not found in the Masoretic text.\(^{28}\) Rather than being struck or fastened as a nail in a sure place, Eliakim is simply promised that the Lord will strike *him* a nail in a sure place.

The exclusion of this prefix in the Hebrew is significant, though often overlooked. Indeed, the English appears awkward without any preposition. Despite this fact, I have elected not to include a preposition. This allows for a more literal rendition as well as viewing the nail as something given (or fastened) to Eliakim. On a first glance, it might make little sense that the Lord would fasten/strike a nail for anyone, especially given the seemingly sharp turn taken from the previous language meant to draw early readers’ minds to the temple. However, an additional scripture from the Old Testament may support Joseph Smith’s and John Taylor’s temple theology relating to this nail and “mystery to the world.”

During Ezra’s reforms following the reconstruction of the temple under Zerubbabel’s direction, Ezra states that “the Lord our God … has given to us a nail in His holy place. Our God has lighted our eyes and given us a little preservation of life in our service” (Ezra 9:8). As has been noted by Jacob M. Myers, Ezra shifts in his prayer-sermon from Ezekiel to an Isaiah influence.\(^{29}\) Although only two verses are cited by Myers,\(^{30}\) verse 8 has clear linguistic connections to and reliance upon Isaiah 22. Specifically, the words “nail” and “place” are clearly connected to Isaiah 22:23, and in both cases the Lord is described as “giving” or “striking” this nail for the temple petitioners.\(^{31}\)

Ezra also refers to the Israelites’ “service,” a word derived from the root ʿăbad (عبد).\(^{32}\) This word is often understood by commentators to be referring to the Babylonian captivity, but is often also connected with temple service.\(^{33}\) Understanding Ezra as referring to temple service in

\(^{28}\) Either the *caph* or *lamed* prefix may be translated “as.” Without this prefix, however, such a translation is not merited. See *HALOT* 1:453–54, s.v. “כ.” For the *lamed*, see note 7.


\(^{30}\) Specifically, Myers cites Isaiah 6:5 and 53:4.

\(^{31}\) The verb “to give” also appears throughout the Eliakim oracle, though not in the immediate context of the nail.

\(^{32}\) *HALOT*, 1:773–74, s.v. “عبد.”

\(^{33}\) See, for example, Numbers 3:7–8; 4:23–24, 26. This understanding continued among medieval commentators. For example, Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon (alternatively known as Maimonides) wrote a lengthy commentary on the law. His eighth volume titled *Sefer Ha’Avodah*, literally “Book of Service,” contains detailed
this instance may be strengthened by his explicit referral to the Lord’s “holy place.”\textsuperscript{34} Isaiah 22:20 likewise uses this root to refer to Eliakim when the Lord describes him as “my servant,” offering another linguistic connection between these two scriptures.\textsuperscript{35}

Given the connections between Ezra 9:8 and Isaiah 22, the lack of a prefix before the “nail” makes sense given a temple context — indeed, such actions are explicitly connected to the temple by Ezra. Little else, however, can be explicitly ascertained from these verses regarding the bestowal of a nail in the temple, perhaps due to the sacred nature of such a ritual action that Isaiah and Ezra may have been familiar with.

Finally, the symbol of the nail repeats in verse 25. In my translation, I have rendered the verb \textit{tāmûš} (תמש) as a conditional: “should be removed”;\textsuperscript{36} to my knowledge, this is a translation that has not previously been proposed. I have done this for several reasons.

First, when read as a simple future tense verb (“will be removed”), various problems are inserted into the text that may have warranted John Taylor’s observation that the verse in question has been translated erroneously. Immediately after offering an oracle regarding Eliakim’s rise to power and favor shown by the Lord, he is to fall and be cut off from the Lord. This apparent reversal of blessings has led to some scholars to believe verse 25 is a later addition to the initial oracle following Eliakim’s removal from office.\textsuperscript{37} Should this verse be original to Isaiah’s oracle, instructions regarding how temple service was to be performed. As such, many translators of Maimonides’s work translate the title of this volume as “The Book of Temple Service.”

34. Additionally, Ezra’s referral to the Lord “light[ing]” Israel’s eyes and offering “preservation of life” may have implicit connections to rites performed in the ancient temple, specifically the anointing of body parts and a shared, communal meal with the Lord.

35. Of course, \textit{ʿābad} does have a wide array of usages that may mean slavery. Such a translation is merited especially regarding the recent return from Babylonian exile that Ezra’s audience would have been familiar with. This does not, however, negate the possibility that Ezra could still be drawing on Isaiah’s prophecies or using this word in a multi-faceted way — in the following verse, for example, Ezra uses \textit{ʿābad} to refer both to the people’s relationship with the Lord as well as their bondage in Persia.

36. The root of the verb is \textit{mûš} (מש), meaning “to remove.” See \textit{HALOT}, 1:561, s.v. “מש.” I have offered the conjugated verb in the body of the text to better represent how it has been translated by myself and others.

37. J. J. M. Roberts states, “The oracle appears to have a later addendum in v. 25 or perhaps vv. 24–25 in which the prophet or his editor revises the earlier positive evaluation of Eliakim. Apparently Eliakim’s growing nepotistic abuse of his office
however, then the reference to the nail being removed is best understood not as a foreseen definite, but rather as a conditional statement based entirely upon Eliakim’s fulfilment of the office appointed to him.

Second, in support of a conditional reading of the phrase, Isaiah refers to a covenantal curse found elsewhere in the Bible relating to covenantal infidelity. In Amos 3:14, the Lord states:

For in the day I punish the transgressions of Israel,
I will punish the altars of Bethel.
And the horns of the altar shall be cut off
and shall fall to the earth.

Amos was a contemporary of Isaiah, preaching in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. While he and Isaiah may not have had access to one another’s writings, it is significant that both prophets use the same two verbs (i.e., “cut off” and “fall”) in close connection with one another in a similar context. Amos, moreover, specifically refers to the temple altar in Bethel in his prophecy, showing the Lord’s rejection of Israel’s temple worship because they had broken their covenants. The reception of curses as well as blessings was a common feature in Old Testament covenants, and so reading Isaiah 22:25 as a conditional curse evoking the same imagery as Amos strengthens the temple themes found throughout Isaiah’s oracle.

Finally, the conditional phrase included in my translation is often left entirely up to the context of the passage. Hebrew verbs do not always have a clear conditional tense, and translators must carefully consider the context of a given passage in order to fully parse the author’s original intent. While some scholars may yet argue that verse 25 may have been a later addendum to the text, this need not be the case, and contextual evidence can support the verse’s position as original to the oracle,

led to this negative change in appraisal.” First Isaiah: A Commentary, ed. Peter Machinist (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 292. Robert Alter concurs: “This entire verse is a blatant contradiction of the glowing prophecy concerning Eliakim’s displacement of Shebna, and one must conclude that a later editor, aware of a disaster that had befallen Eliakim, added these dire words.” The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary, vol. 2 (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019), 691n25.

38. See Deuteronomy 27:15–16 and Joshua 24:19–20 for some examples of covenantal curses.

39. The verbs translated as “cut off” and “fall” are also found elsewhere in connection to covenantal curses for disobedience, although Amos 3:14 and Isaiah 22:25 are unique in using both in the same curse.
delivered in a conditional context following the reception of blessings offered to Eliakim.

**Conclusion**

Many Latter-day Saint commentators have explored the Eliakim oracle and correctly see in this oracle a type for Jesus Christ. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland called this chapter “a moving Messianic tribute,” and sees in the nail a reference to the crucifixion and atonement of the Savior Jesus Christ. Many of Isaiah’s prophecies, after all, call to mind the atoning work of Jesus Christ, who appears to be envisioned as the High Priest of the Temple.

Jesus Christ was raised up by God and of the inheritance or portion of the Lord. He was given all power and seen as the Great High Priest of the Heavenly Temple by early Christians (see Hebrews 8–10). As the Great High Priest who held the sealing keys and rule over Israel, everyone can be adopted through covenants as His sons and daughters, making Him our “Father.” As the glory of God is the “immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39), Jesus would be the ultimate realization of that glory as the one who made our eternal life possible.

Jesus was also quite literally struck with a nail on the cross for this to happen — and, upon completion of Jesus’s mission, was removed from the cross. Elder Holland and other Latter-day Saint scholars have thus seen verse 25 as referring to the fulfilment of the Atonement and Christ’s body being removed from the cross. It is also significant that

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41. The “nail” referred to in the scriptures cited throughout this paper is the Hebrew word יָתֵד (yātēd). This word refers to large nails or tent pegs, which would be close in size and shape to the nails used in crucifixions. HALOT, 1:450–51, s.v. “יתד.”

early Christian texts often depict Jesus performing sacred rites with His disciples.\(^43\)

Some of these commentators note Eliakim may have failed in his expected role. Such a conclusion, though potentially a valid observation, may be reconciled with the Messianic message regarding Jesus Christ given a conditional understanding of this verse. Eliakim’s own personal decisions (whether for good or for ill) need not affect the Messianic nature of this verse when it is understood that Isaiah used his own immediate context to prophesy of the future Savior.

Viewing verse 25 as a conditional statement also allows for an interpretation of Eliakim’s role to stand as a type for all temple petitioners.\(^44\) Through the ordinances performed in the temple and the covenants made therein, we become more like the Savior Jesus Christ as we are clothed and given sacred promises and authority. Ultimately, the only hindrance to the realization of these promised blessings will be ourselves — our actions will determine if the covenants we make will be broken. Whereas the Lord offers all the nail in a sure place, only we have the power to remove it,\(^45\) and, by extension, ourselves from the Lord’s presence.\(^46\) The Lord’s promise of mercy is eternal, however, and could


\(^{44}\) See note 7 for a possible translation of the oracle to support this conclusion.


\(^{46}\) It is noteworthy that verse 25 does not refer to the Lord as the one who will remove the nail, unlike verse 23’s statement that the Lord will strike the temple petitioner the nail.
be rightfully described as “a nail in a sure place” for all who come to Him and honor the covenants they have entered in His holy temple.

[Author’s Note: I would like to thank Donald W. Parry and Monica H. Richards, with whom I previously discussed many of my findings and who encouraged me to write this paper.]

Spencer Kraus is a student at Brigham Young University majoring in Computer Science and minoring in modern Hebrew and Ancient Near Eastern Studies. He works with Scripture Central as a research associate and also as a research assistant for Lincoln Blumell studying early Christianity and the New Testament.
Abstract: The prophet Joseph Smith was paced through a life steeped in ritual and symbolism. Notable things Joseph did or experienced under angelic guidance may be seen as ritual procedures that may require careful consideration to discern their meaning, what they symbolize, their purpose, and their importance to the restoration of the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Failure to recognize the function of ritual has resulted in much misunderstanding and criticism of Joseph. Many of his early actions and procedures were closely related to the ancient temple. They amount to an anticipation and witness of the temple and its coming restoration through him. This will be illustrated in several ways, including the manner in which Joseph received and translated the plates of the Book of Mormon, a witness of Jesus Christ.

As with many prophets of old, some of the details of sacred events in Joseph Smith’s life can be viewed as richly symbolic. Pondering some of these elements may enhance our appreciation of his calling and ministry. Failure to consider and more fully appreciate the function of symbolic and ritual procedures as guided by revelation and the angels has caused much criticism and lack of understanding about Joseph, his

motivation, and purposes. An underappreciated aspect of the gospel restoration is that he received revelation or direction related to the ancient temple at an early time in his prophetic calling. Some of the sacred or symbolic events in his life involve temple-related motifs that may be seen as anticipating the restoration of the temple concept and underscore its great importance.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also has passed through symbolic happenings that may be seen as a recapitulation of important events in ancient sacred history. Such were experienced by both Joseph Smith and the Church. Prominent for the Church is the occurrence of the visions and revelations received by many at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple in Ohio, where the “saints regarded their experiences as a continuation of the pentecostal experience recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.” Another compelling example is the westward gathering under Brigham Young, with the establishment of the Tabernacle, the temple, and other counterparts reminiscent of the ancient gathering of Israel. These can be recognized as part of a pattern.

This paper reviews experiences in the life of Joseph Smith that helped to prepare him to reveal temple functions and rituals, many of which mirror the lives of ancient prophets — especially Moses. Those parallel experiences provide a witness to the godhood of Jesus Christ and the sacred nature of Joseph’s work and calling. Further, understanding these matters can make a contribution to answering the question of whether Joseph Smith got his temple ritual by revelation or from his environment. Many of the symbolic and ritual matters in Joseph’s life have been discussed in scholarly writings. These are cited throughout


4. Cf. Doctrine and Covenants 103:16, 136:22, and the “Exodus Typology” discussed below. Of persons being guided to enter into the Salt Lake temple for its dedication, the “event has been not inaptly likened to that of Joshua leading Israel into the promised land.” James E. Talmadge, The House of the Lord (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1912), 159.
this paper, which is concerned with bringing multiple elements together to create a more holistic view and understanding. The study also affords the opportunity to consider neglected details, and the insights that result.

Joseph’s actions represented and provided reminders and anticipations of other sacred events in the past and the future. Many of the events that can be seen now as richly symbolic or part of ancient paradigms would not have been apparent to Joseph or those around him at the time, and often were events imposed upon him rather than results of his choice. Some, such as the account of his First Vision, or receipt of the gold plates of the Book of Mormon, brought danger and trouble to his life. However, a watchful God assured that early events were helpful learning experiences for him, and preparatory for later revelations.

Illumination Followed by Temptation

The element of temptation is illustrative as a foundational preparatory element of Joseph’s early life and prophetic calling. It meets us very strongly in his own histories and in the angel Moroni’s instruction as recorded in the published letters of Oliver Cowdery discussed below. Some years ago, while reading Wilhelm Bousset’s noted study of Christ, 

Following the illumination of Joseph’s marvelous First Vision when the heavenly Father and Son appeared, he confesses that he “was left to all kinds of temptations; and, mingling with all kinds of society, I frequently fell into many foolish errors, and displayed the weakness of youth, and the foibles of human nature; which, I am sorry to say, led me into divers temptations, offensive in the sight of God” (Joseph Smith — History 1:28). When the angel Moroni instructed him, Joseph said he “added a caution to me, telling me that Satan would try to tempt me (in consequence of the indigent circumstances of my father’s family) to get the plates for the purpose of getting rich” (Joseph Smith — History 1:46). In his earliest written history (1832), Joseph said that after the First Vision he “fell into transgressions and sinned in many things which brought a wound upon my soul and there were many things which transpired that cannot be written and my Fathers family have suffered many persecutions and afflictions.” Joseph recounted that he had been tempted, and that Moroni had explained to him that he was “left unto temptation that thou mightest be made acquainted with the power of the adversary[,] therefore repent and call on the Lord.” This last point from Moroni — that the process of temptation may be instructive and preparatory — is also given emphasis by that angel as related in Oliver Cowdery’s published letters. Oliver summarized this concept, as it applied to Joseph Smith:

You see the great wisdom in God in leading him thus far, that his mind might begin to be more matured, and thereby be able to judge correctly, the spirits. … God knowing all things from the beginning, began thus to instruct his servant. And in this it is plainly to be seen that the adversary of truth is not sufficient to overthrow the work of God. … In this, then, I discover wisdom in the dealings of the Lord: it was impossible for any man to translate the Book of Mormon by the gift of God, and endure the afflictions, and temptations, and devices of Satan, without being overthrown, unless he had been previously benefitted with a certain round of experience: and had our brother obtained the record … not knowing how

6. The blandishment of offered riches was an important feature in the Devil’s temptation of Christ.
8. Ibid. Spelling regularized in these quotations.
to detect the works of darkness, he might have been deprived of the blessing of sending forth the word of truth to this generation. Therefore, God knowing that Satan would thus lead his mind astray, began at that early hour, that when the full time should arrive, he might have a servant prepared to fulfill his purpose.⁹

**Symbolic Aspects of the Book of Mormon “Coming Forth”**

Joseph Smith’s recovery of the buried Book of Mormon on glorious golden plates is wonderfully symbolic — with a Christian perspective. As I have discussed in another paper, it is even a type of Christ, for the *coming forth* of the plates in brilliance from a rock box that was its hillside tomb at Cumorah, can be interpreted as a type and similitude of the Lord’s resurrection in glory from a rocky hillside tomb.¹⁰ The Book of Mormon title page says it was to “come forth,” a term that may be inspired by 2 Nephi 27:10, which speaks of the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon that will “come forth.” Shortly before the passage in 2 Nephi 27:13 that motivated the Three Witnesses to implore Joseph for the opportunity to see the plates, Nephi used the same phrase earlier to describe how the Book of Mormon, after being hidden for so long, would “come forth unto the Gentiles, by the gift and power of the Lamb,” 1 Nephi 13:35 (see also “came forth” in vv. 38 and 39), and how Nephite records would “come forth in their purity” (1 Nephi 14:26). Earlier still in the translation process came Mormon 8 about the future role of the Book of Mormon, which would “come forth” (v. 34) among the Gentiles. Christ also used “come forth” four times in prophesying of the future Book of Mormon that was to come forth from the Gentiles to descendants of the Lehites (3 Nephi 21:3–6), with the Book of Mormon also “coming forth” to the House of Israel in 3 Nephi 29:4. See related occurrences in Mormon 5:12 and 9:13. This widespread usage of “come forth” in

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prophecies about the emergence of the Book of Mormon, particularly in 2 Nephi 27, may well have influenced the choice of “come forth” on the Title Page, just as 2 Nephi 27 and other passages encountered near the end of the translation of the Book of Mormon appear to have influenced the verbiage in the Testimony of the Three Witnesses. But the phrase “come forth” also refers to resurrection in both the New Testament and latter-day scriptures (John 5:28–29, 11:43–44; Mosiah 26: 24–25; Alma 40:4, 21; Doctrine and Covenants 76:64–65; Moses 7:55–57).

Like Christ at His resurrection, the Book of Mormon has eleven official witnesses called of God to testify of the reality of the sacred plates and what may be considered the “resurrection” of the Book. It was a book “to speak as if it were from the dead” (2 Nephi 27:13; cf. Mormon 8:22–26, Moroni 10:27). Like the Savior, the Book of Mormon had heavenly origins, was rejected of men, was entombed and resurrected, and each apparently returned to heaven with angelic association (Acts 1:11, Joseph Smith — History 1:60). Even as the Lord shall return again, it appears that the Book of Mormon plates are to be restored (2 Nephi 27:11; Doctrine and Covenants 101:32–34, 121:27–28). It is a “heavenly book,” as further discussed below, with teachings from heaven preserved on plates by the Book of Mormon people.

In her discussion of how Joseph Smith and the Church experienced the recapitulation of ancient sacred events, historian Jan Shipps sees the coming forth of the Book of Mormon as the beginning of a recapitulation process by which people coming to America would have the sacred teachings and history of those who came before them. She likens it to “the priests’ discovery in the recesses of the temple of a book said to have been written by Moses [that] told the people in King Josiah’s reign about those who came to Israel before them.” Generally considered to be the book of Deuteronomy, the writings were basic to support Josiah’s claimed reform, and in order to lend credence to his claim were doubtless averred as consistent with an ancient sacred order. Josiah claiming that it


12. Shipps, Mormonism, 58.
came from within the walls of the temple is tantamount to saying that it came from a cosmic sacred mountain, for studies of ancient temples have shown that they were considered to be artificial mountains in imitation of and representing those where prophets received revelation — “the mountain of the Lord’s house” (Isaiah 2:2). In this sense the volume from the temple would be like the two tablets of stone and the law given to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 31:18). Temples can be understood as “the architectural embodiment of the cosmic mountain.” “Cosmic” means that it pertained to both heaven and earth — “in earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

N. T. Wright, well known Protestant scholar, has discussed the wide relevance of the cosmic mountain and temple relationship:

Many have seen the parallel between the Holy of Holies (as a focus of the Tabernacle) and the Sabbath (as a focus of time), the day which the creator ‘blessed’ and ‘made holy’. Sabbath is to time, it seems, what the Holy of Holies is to place. All this makes sense within wider ancient culture, where temples were regularly understood as meeting-points between heaven and earth. Temples were often seen as symbolic mountains, perhaps reflecting ancient beliefs (as with Olympus in Greece, or indeed Sinai) that the mountain-top, swathed in cloud, would be the likely divine dwelling place. Thus Mount Zion, the location of YHWH’s Temple, is spoken of as a high mountain despite being only a small hill, overshadowed by an immediate neighbor. If you didn’t have a mountain, you could substitute pyramids or ziggurats. Noah’s Ark, the Tower of Babel, and Jacob’s Ladder all fit here in different ways.

The Book of Mormon came forth from the Hill Cumorah and provided pure writings from the past to support a gospel restoration and

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15. N. T. Wright, History and Eschatology: Jesus and the Promise of Natural Theology (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 164.
the establishment of a righteous order. The event shows Joseph Smith’s latter-day participation in the primordial sacred pattern of receiving revelation at a sacred cosmic mountain. This may be discerned when comparing the experience of Joseph Smith with Moses in his encounter with the divine on the mount. There, Moses received tablets containing an engraved written law by which the people were to be ordered and governed (Exodus 31:18, Deuteronomy 5). To Joseph Smith the engraved plates of the Book of Mormon provided writings with a similar purpose, and even included the Ten Commandments as revealed to Moses. That they were engraved is significant for both Moses and Joseph Smith because it conveys a sense of permanence or the eternal.

The stone box on a sacred hill as the place from which the Book of Mormon came forth may be associated with even more symbolism than the theme of resurrection. Don Bradley has also pointed out the rich symbolism related to ancient Israel’s ark of the covenant that is found in the Book of Mormon’s association with the stone box. Not only did the stone box hold sacred relics from the Nephites in addition to the gold plates (a breastplate and the interpreters) that were analogous to those held in the ark, but the box was also a repository for sacred scripture, as was the ark (Deuteronomy 31: 23–26). The Book of Mormon coming forth from a sacred ark hidden on a cosmic mountain resembles the book of the law, once stored in the ark, being found in the cosmic mountain of the temple by the priest Hilkiah (2 Kings 22: 8–13). The interpreters taken from the Nephite “ark” were a particularly important symbol of divine authority and seership that linked Joseph to ancient prophets and sacred ritual.


Heavenly Ascent and Ritual Ascent

The concepts of the *heavenly ascent* and its counterpart in *ritual ascent* are instructive in the consideration of Joseph Smith’s actions and the scriptures which were received through him.¹⁸

The *heavenly ascent* refers to revelatory experiences such as those of ancient prophets who experienced tours or visions of the heavens. These experiences generally include a witness of the heavenly temple or court, where blessings were received from above, and are often accompanied by angelic guidance and instruction.¹⁹ In contrast, the *ritual ascent* is related to the temple experience.²⁰ Temple rituals “dramatically depict a figurative journey into the presence of God, [while] the heavenly ascent literature contains stories of exceptional individuals who experienced actual encounters with Deity within the heavenly temple — the ‘completion or fulfillment’ of the ‘types and images’ found in earthly ordinances.”²¹

In considering Joseph’s life, work and heavenly commission, the ascent concept and historical events related to it meet us throughout. Here we will consider a few of many possible examples, with the hope that this topic will be amplified by future scholarship.

Heavenly ascents are recounted in what are known as *apocalyptic* writings, forming a common thread with respect to the calling and authority of the prophets, and the heavenly origin of their teachings and testimony. The ascent experience was not well understood by scholars of religion at the time of Joseph Smith. Since then, however, many informative *apocalyptic* accounts of the ascent of prominent prophets of

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¹⁹. Referred to by scholars as an *angelus interpres*, or *interpreting angel*, accounts of prophetic ascents may show angels as heavenly guides. Moroni surely would qualify as such a guide to Joseph, an angel whose “whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightening” (Joseph Smith — History 1:32).


²¹. Ibid., 189.
the ancient past have been discovered and studied. Especially significant are those regarding Enoch, Abraham, Moses and Isaiah. Insights from such writings serve to help understand many biblical passages and likewise the ascent to heaven matters that pertain to Joseph Smith.

The Book of Mormon offers much on heavenly ascent. Hugh Nibley, seeing that it begins with an apocalyptic account, comments that it “opens with the most perfect model of an ascension. … We find the righteous man [Lehi] in a doomed and wicked world supplicating God, carried aloft in an ascension in which ‘he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne’ (1 Nephi 1:8); he returns to earth and begins to teach the people.” That he was “carried aloft” in his vision is an important consideration, for Lehi observed that God’s “throne is high in the heavens” (1 Nephi 1:14). His son Nephi had a similar revelation when “caught away in the Spirit of the Lord … into an exceedingly high mountain” (1 Nephi 11:1). Compare the ascension of the brother of Jared, who “went forth unto the mount” with its “exceeding height” (Ether 3:1, 4:1). Moses also was “caught up into an exceedingly high mountain” to receive revelation.

In a parallel to Moses, Joseph Smith received the golden plates at a place which he described as “not far from the top” of a “hill of considerable size, and the most elevated of any in the neighborhood” (Joseph Smith — History 1:51). Although Cumorah is a substantial hill, it is, of course, nowhere near the height of Sinai. But there was nothing like Sinai in the area where Joseph lived. He emphasizes a contrast with other elevated points: Cumorah was seen “to rise to a height considerably above any of those surrounding in any direction.” Making the comparison of the greater height, Joseph shows that he deems this fact to be of significance. Oliver Cowdery also saw the need to stress this relationship: “I think I

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am justified in saying that this is the highest hill for some distance.”26 An analogy is Christ giving the Sermon on the Mount, seen by the early Christians as a parallel to Moses teaching from the much greater elevation of Sinai, in spite of the small height of the gentle hill near the shore of Lake Galilee that is commonly believed to be the site of that sermon.27 Elevated sacred sites in the Book of Mormon likewise need not be gargantuan, including the mount where the brother of Jared had his encounter with the Lord (Ether 3), the mount near the place Bountiful where Nephi often went to commune with the Lord (1 Nephi 18:3), the tower from which King Benjamin spoke (Mosiah 2), the tower in his garden where Nephi, prayed (Helaman 7:10–14), the hill Shim where Nephite records were stored (Mormon 1:3), the counterfeit sacred tower of the Zoramites known as the Rameumpton (Alma 31:8–21), or the hill Cumorah to which Mormon transferred all the Nephite records except those that he turned over to Moroni (Mormon 6:6).

Citations to things to or from on high are significant because they allude to heaven, such as when the early Jaredites were “taught from on high” (Ether 6:17), or when being “endowed with power from on high” occurs through temple ritual (Doctrine and Covenants 105:11; cf. Hebrews 1:3, 2 Nephi 4:24, Doctrine and Covenants 20:8). These are symbolic ritual counterparts to actual ascent that nevertheless provide similar or related instruction and blessings, and can give rise to confirming spiritual experiences. References to what was revealed on mountains, or with heaven open, or to elevated places such as the upper room site of the Last Supper, bear relationship to the heavenly ascent (Mark 14:15, Luke 22:12; cf. Acts 1:13).28 Their sacred use makes them temple-like places. Such terms of elevation reflect what scholars have considered a vertical typology in the scriptures, which concept recognizes “that a temple was an earthly replica of the heavenly divine abode.”29

27. The evidence for this belief is presented in John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 17–34.
With experiences of heavenly ascent, it is not always possible to distinguish what type of ascent it is — actual, visionary, ritual, or a combination of these. Even the Apostle Paul, who was “caught up to the third heaven,” said “whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell” (2 Corinthians 12:2–3). The prophet Joseph Smith expressed the same when the “heavens were opened” in connection with the administration of the ritual endowment at the Kirtland Temple: “I beheld the celestial kingdom of God, and the glory thereof, whether in the body or out I cannot tell” (Doctrine and Covenants 137:1).

When Lehi had his ascent experience, the scripture says that “being overcome with the spirit, he was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open, and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God” (1 Nephi 1:8). One concourse or assembly surrounding could have been a large gathering, but to have groups too numerous to be counted, it would have been very grand indeed. As part of his experience, Lehi may have been shown a visionary “flashback” to an important occasion — perhaps to when Christ was called to be the great Creator and Redeemer. The vision was informative and part of a great blessing and calling for Lehi. The Lord also came down and appeared to him, and he greatly rejoiced because of the things he had seen … which the Lord had shown unto him” (1 Nephi 1:11, 15). The entire chapter shows Lehi’s participation in the purposes of the heavenly Divine Council — the source of his instruction and prophetic authority. John W. Welch has carefully studied and outlined the chapter, finding “that by this experience, which compares closely with the so-called council visions of Old Testament prophets, Lehi became a prophet.”

The vision of God on his throne surrounded by the angels, referred to by scholars as a throne theophany, is an important aspect of the prophetic calling. That he had received a commission is evident from how he “went forth among the people, and began to prophesy and to declare

30. And/or a future event, as was shown to John (Revelation 4:1–4, 10–11).
33. For a wide-ranging overview, see Blake Thomas Ostler, “The Throne-Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi: A Form-Critical
unto them concerning the things which he had both seen and heard” (1 Nephi 1:18). The Lord then appeared and “said unto him: Blessed art thou Lehi, … thou hast been faithful and declared unto this people the things which I commanded thee” (1 Nephi 2:1).

Lehi’s ascent experience assists in better understanding similar events in the life of Joseph Smith. The probability should be considered that Joseph Smith’s First Vision of the Father and the Son was a Divine Council vision that included a heavenly ascent or similitude.\(^{34}\) After receiving a vision of God and His glory at an elevated place, Moses was “left unto himself” and “fell unto the earth” losing “his natural strength” (Moses 1:9–10). Similarly, after Joseph’s comparable vision in glory, he said, “When I came to myself again [in the Grove], I found myself lying on my back, looking up into heaven” and “I had no strength” (Joseph Smith — History 1:20). The account of Lehi is similar: “he saw and heard much,” and “cast himself upon his bed, being overcome with the Spirit and the things which he had seen,” and what he witnessed in his ascent vision is summarized (1 Nephi 1:6–8).

In comparing Joseph’s accounts of the First Vision, it is informative that he recalled “my mind was taken away from the objects with which I was surrounded, and I was enwrapped in a heavenly vision and saw two glorious personages,” and that “I saw many angels in this vision.”\(^{35}\) This appears like a Throne Theophany, where, like Lehi, he “saw and heard much.” Anciently, “It was considered the mark of a true prophet that he had seen and heard the proceedings of God’s divine council.”\(^{36}\)


Joseph had a vision of the Father and Son on several occasions, and some of his associates did also — or participated with him to some extent.37 On the third floor of the Kirtland Temple he met with other leaders: “The heavens were opened upon us, and I beheld the celestial kingdom of God, and the glory thereof, … also the blazing throne of God, whereon was seated the Father and the Son” (Doctrine and Covenants 137:1–3). With Sidney Rigdon, he received the great vision of the Degrees of Glory in which

The glory of the Lord shone round about. And we beheld the glory of the Son, on the right hand of the Father, and received of his fulness; And saw the holy angels, and them who are sanctified before his throne, worshiping God, and the Lamb, who worship him forever and ever. (Doctrine and Covenants 76:19–21)

It is noteworthy that this vision of the divine council occurred in the upper room of the historic Johnson Farmhouse in Hiram, Ohio, where many revelations had been received. Several persons were present to see and hear Smith and Rigdon while in their vision, and as the two commented to each other about what they were witnessing. An observer recalled that he “saw the glory and felt the power, but did not see the vision,” for “Joseph sat firmly and calmly all the time in the midst of a magnificent glory.”38 This example shows that a heavenly ascent can sometimes be an inspired vision received while the recipient remains stationery, while the vision is yet completely effective in its divine purpose.

**Joseph Smith, Moses, and the Exodus Typology**

It would be difficult to place too much emphasis on the importance of parallels in the experiences of Joseph Smith and Moses, of which the ascent is a most significant. The Book of Mormon contains an ancient prophecy from Joseph in Egypt, that a seer would come in his posterity that would be “like unto Moses” (2 Nephi 3:9; see also Moses 1:41; journal.interpreterfoundation.org/to-see-and-hear/.


Mitton, Joseph Smith at the Veil • 65

Doctrine and Covenants 28:2–3). The text is clear that Joseph Smith would be that seer. It is a prophecy in form similar to one given later by Moses himself, when he declared that “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet … like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken,” interpreted in the New Testament as Moses referring to the Savior Jesus Christ — an understanding verified also in the Book of Mormon by the Lord when He appeared to the Nephites.\(^39\) It follows that the reverse is also true, that Moses can be seen as a type “in the similitude” of Christ.\(^40\)

Evident here is the importance of Joseph Smith’s responsibility in matters of both the Old and New Testaments as they each relate to the latter-day dispensation. Moses appeared to both the Savior and Joseph Smith in ascent and cosmic mountain settings when keys of authority were being conferred — the Savior at the Mount of Transfiguration, and Joseph Smith at the Kirtland Temple, where, from Moses, he received the keys for the latter-day gathering of Israel (Matthew 16:13–19, 17:1–9; Doctrine and Covenants 110:11). Like ancient temples, the Kirtland Temple was symbolic sacred space and the building can be seen as representing the cosmic mountain of heavenly ascent. It is well documented that at that temple many visions were experienced and power and authority received directly from the Lord Jesus Christ, Moses, and other heavenly beings.\(^41\)

Noted throughout this paper are experiences of Joseph Smith that show he was “like unto Moses.” Doubtless many more will be recognized. This directs attention to the significance of what scholars have been studying as the “Exodus typology” or “Exodus pattern” recognized in the Bible, and recently studied as important in the Book of Mormon.\(^42\)

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The pattern is also worthy to receive recognition and consideration as it applies to Joseph Smith and the results of his revelations and leadership. Exodustypology can sometimes be seen in later biblical leaders and events. In an overview, Prof. David Daube, while giving many examples, writes:

To this day the narrative of the exodus inspires those who recount the disasters and salvations of Israel, ancient or modern, secular or spiritual. … As is well known, this habit of looking on the exodus as a prototype, as a mould in which other stories of rescue from ruin may be cast, goes back to the Bible itself. The account of Joshua’s crossing of the Jordan is full of elements designed to recall the crossing of the red sea under Moses. In the second century B.C. Ben-Sira prays for a repetition of “signs and wonders” — he means final redemption, thought of in terms of the exodus. Exactly that has come to pass, according to Acts, through Jesus — a second Moses, leading forth his people a second time.

Ben-Sira represents the Second Temple era — the temple still existing at the time of Christ. While reinterpreting Exodus, it was still seen as following a precedent. Other New Testament studies have shown many reminders and allusions, and fulfillment through occurrences similar to those in the Mosaic period. The great fulfillment is in Christ, His teachings, law and covenant, and redemption. Recognizing Him

43. For a summary in which many parallels in the lives of Moses, the Savior and Joseph Smith are discussed, see RoseAnn Benson and Joseph Fielding McConkie, “A Prophet … Like unto Thee,” Religious Educator 12, no. 3 (2011): 109–28, https://rsc.byu.edu/vol-12-no-3-2011/prophet-like unto-thee.


as the ruler “Son of Man” as prophesied in Daniel 7:13–14, the gospel of Matthew is especially known for depicting Jesus and many New Testament events as similar to those of Moses and his time.48

The Book of Mormon teaches typology and has considerable examples of it.49 It solemnly declares that it provides “the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given; and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him” (2 Nephi 11:4). Accordingly, the book itself may be seen as a type of Christ, following the pattern of His history — including death, burial and resurrection.50 Prominent prophetic leaders in the Book of Mormon were recognized as repeating, with divine authority, many things recounted in Exodus and the Pentateuch. These relationships were seen as evidence of the authority they possessed, and are clearly expressed in the Book of Mormon.51

Joseph Smith’s reception of the keys of the gathering of Israel, directly from Moses, heralds his participation in the Exodus typology. Parallels to Moses are shown in such themes as the gathering of scattered Israel, the identification of the true God, revelation of God’s law and procedures, and reestablishment of the temple with covenants. The prediction of a prophet to come “like unto Moses” has

a dual fulfillment; it embraces both Christ’s first and second comings. It binds together the testimony of all the ancient holy

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50. Mitton, “Resurrected Book.”

prophets from Moses, who first gathered Israel to the covenant of salvation, to the latter-day prophet Joseph Smith, who was destined to stand at the head of the final great gathering to Christ. It seals the Old Testament to the New Testament and the testimony of the Old World to that of the New World.\footnote{52}{Benson and McConkie, “Prophet,” 109–10, emphasis added. See also David R. Seely, “A Prophet Like Moses’ (Deuteronomy 18:15–18) in the Book of Mormon, the Bible, and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in To Seek the Law of the Lord: Essays in Honor of John W. Welch, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson and Daniel C. Peterson (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation, 2017), 360–74, esp. 372–73.}

The Exodus pattern continued with the Church in the West under Brigham Young. In many ways it continues today, notably in continuing revelation, the latter-day gathering of Israel, the establishment and authoritative operation of temples with covenants, and anticipation of future gathering unto the Millennium — all with the restored fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ.\footnote{53}{President Russell M. Nelson: “These surely are the latter days, and the Lord is hastening His work to gather Israel. That gathering is the most important thing taking place on earth today. … When we speak of the gathering, we are simply saying this fundamental truth: every one of our Heavenly Father’s children, on both sides of the veil, deserves to hear the message of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. … Those whose lineage is from the various tribes of Israel are those whose hearts will most likely be turned to the Lord.” Russell M. Nelson and Wendy W. Nelson, “Hope of Israel,” Worldwide Youth Devotional, June 3, 2018, Conference Center, Salt Lake City, emphasis in original, https://site.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/broadcasts/worldwide-devotional-for-young-adults/2018/06/hope-of-israel?lang=eng.}

\section*{Ascent and Temple in the New Testament}

There is growing recognition that the ancient temple and the concepts and practices related to it were of great significance to the Early Christians.\footnote{54}{For a discussion and a bibliography of relevant studies, see John W. Welch, “The Temple, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Gospel of Matthew,” in Mormonism and the Temple: Examining an Ancient Religious Tradition, ed. Gary N. Anderson (Provo, UT: BYU Studies; Logan, UT: Utah State University Department of Religious Studies; Logan, UT: Academy for Temple Studies, 2013), 61–107.}

This realization is supported by the extensive work of Margaret Barker. Her studies describe a “Temple Theology” which considers Christianity as having brought a restoration of the theology of the First Temple — Solomon’s Temple.\footnote{55}{Margaret Barker, Temple Themes in... (London: T&T Clark, 1995); Margaret Barker, Temple Themes in... (London: SPCK, 2004); Margaret Barker, On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Temple Symbolism in the New Testament (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995); Margaret Barker, Temple Themes in... (London: T&T Clark, 1995).} That was, of course, the temple...
that came in fulfillment of what Moses began — an aspect of the Exodus typology. Barker explains that “the world of the temple was the world of the first Christians, and they expressed their faith in terms drawn almost exclusively from the temple.” 56 Because of this, it is necessary to appreciate the importance of the ancient heavenly ascent concept in the New Testament, especially as it relates to the temple. This is essential to better understand the meaning of Joseph Smith’s experience as he recovered and translated the Book of Mormon. While many apocalyptic writings on the ascent concern Old Testament prophets, such accounts were preserved by early Christians or Jews, and the concept is pertinent in the New Testament as well. There, the book of Revelation, or Revelation of John, is an apocalyptic book, with heavenly ascent and revelation at the throne of God. Prominent is the heavenly book concept where, like Lehi in the Book of Mormon, the prophet is informed by having been given a book to read as part of the ascent experience. 57

Most profound is the actual ascension of Christ to heaven after the Resurrection. 58 Also notable is the Old Testament visionary concept of Jacob’s ladder, “a ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it” (Genesis 28:12). This ladder of heavenly ascent is found also in the New Testament, where Jesus is its fulfillment and personification: “Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of man” (John 1:51). 59 Such references to the open heaven are of importance (for example, Matthew 3:16, Mark 1:8–11, Luke 3:21, Acts 7:56, Revelation 19:11, Ezekiel 1:1); as are the sacred events and revelations on mountain sites that represent the heavenly temple or court above.


56. Barker, Temple Theology, 1.


These would include the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–8, Mark 9:2–8, Luke 9:28–36, 2 Peter 1:16–18) and of particular interest as related to ascent — the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7).

In a perceptive study of the Sermon on the Mount, John W. Welch has summarized the evidence for the first Christians seeing Moses as a type of Christ and the Sermon a revelation delivered from a sacred mount in parallel with that of Moses on Mount Sinai.60 His study also provides a remarkable and detailed analysis of the Sermon, showing its very close relationship to the themes of the ancient temple. Significantly, Welch finds that “temple themes provide an ultimate unity to the Sermon on the Mount by allowing readers to see it as an ascent text. More than ethical wisdom literature, … this text begins by placing its hearers in a lowly state and then, step by step, guides them to its climax at the end, entering the presence of God.”61

The Two Powers and the “Visions of Heaven”

Oliver Cowdery published an informative letter about Joseph Smith’s learning and experience while obtaining the Book of Mormon plates on Hill Cumorah’s heights.62 He presumably received details from Joseph and had his approval to publish them. Oliver describes Joseph’s first revelation from the angel Moroni as the prophet “having been rapt in the visions of heaven during the night, and also seeing and hearing in open day.”63 This shows his understanding that Joseph’s visionary experience was more extensive than only the nighttime visit of the angel from on high. Indeed, it was the beginning of Moroni’s instruction that continued the next day as he served as the angelic guide for Joseph’s heavenly ascent at Cumorah. Note that Oliver uses the term “visions of heaven” in connection with the angelic visitation in the upper room at Joseph’s home. This term is one that Joseph Smith used in regard to the First Vision and other open heaven- or ascent-related experiences. Following him, others of his associates used the term also, sometimes giving accounts of encounters and visions that exposed both the godly

60. Welch, Sermon on the Mount, 15–39.
61. Ibid., 205, emphasis added. In a previous study, Welch considered the counterpart sermon in the Book of Mormon as given by the Lord Jesus Christ to the Nephites in a temple setting, recognizing it as a temple text. See John W. Welch, Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple & the Sermon on the Mount (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 47–114.
and the contrasting evil powers. This gave them more understanding of the opposition arrayed against them.

An example would be the occurrence that Joseph said was “the first miracle which was done in the Church” after its organization. This was his casting out of the Devil that had possessed Newel Knight, followed by Knight’s levitation to the top of the room in apparent similitude of a heavenly ascent. Joseph reported that Knight said he felt “a most pleasing sensation resting on me, and immediately the visions of heaven were opened to my view.”64 In that vision he “beheld the Lord Jesus Christ seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, and had it made plain to his understanding, that the time would come when he would be admitted into his presence, to enjoy his society for ever and ever.”65 It appears to have been a visionary experience, not an actual ascent to heaven.

Another striking experience is that of Wilford Woodruff in the Kirtland Temple in 1837. He explained that he went there with two other brethren “for the purpose of worshiping God. We entered one of the stands within the veils & fell upon our knees & Satan appeared also but not to worship God but to deprive us of the privilege. Satan strove against us with great power … He at one time drove me from my stand while I was striving with my brethren to enter into the visions of heaven.” After earnest prayer “Satan departed. … The power of God rested upon us and … great things were shown unto us.”66

The Kirtland Temple was the scene of many visions, including Joseph Smith’s vision of the Celestial Kingdom in Doctrine and Covenants 137, and of the Lord Jesus Christ declaring His acceptance of the Temple, and ancient prophets, such as Moses conferring keys of authority in Doctrine and Covenants 110. Many others received visions there, as when Joseph brought together the High Councilors of Kirtland who were anointed. He recalled that “The visions of heaven were opened to them also. Some of them saw the face of the Savior, and others were administered to by holy angels … for we all communed with the heavenly host.”67

67. Smith, History of the Church, 2:382, emphasis added.
On Joseph’s ascent of the Hill Cumorah, he said it was to “where the messenger had told me the plates were deposited; and owing to the distinctness of the vision which I had had concerning it, I knew the place the instant I had arrived there.”68 This verifies that the angel Moroni had shown him a vision as part of his instruction. Oliver adds that “two invisible powers were operating on his mind during his walk from his residence to Cumorah, … the one urging the certainty of wealth and ease in this life, had so powerfully wrought upon him, that the great object so carefully and impressively named by the angel, had entirely gone from his recollection, … which occasioned a failure to obtain, at that time, the record.”69 Moroni, the angelic guide, appeared and explained to Joseph that he could not obtain it then, “Because you have not kept the commandments of the Lord.”70 The angel sought Joseph’s repentance because he was being tempted to seek for worldly riches rather than accomplish the purposes of God. Here again is illumination followed by temptation. Oliver Cowdery recounts that then and there on the Hill Joseph sought forgiveness as he looked to the Lord Jesus Christ in prayer and was blessed with another marvelous vision:

As he prayed darkness began to disperse from his mind and his soul lit up as it was the evening before, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit; and again did the Lord manifest his condescension and mercy: the heavens were opened and the glory of the Lord shone round about him and rested upon him. While he thus stood gazing and admiring, the angel said, “Look!” and as he thus spake he beheld the prince of darkness, surrounded by his innumerable train of associates. All this passed before him, and the heavenly messenger said, “All this is shown, the good and the evil, the holy and impure, the glory of God and the power of darkness, that you may know hereafter the two powers and never be influenced or overcome by that wicked one.”71

This vision reveals another similarity between experiences of Joseph Smith and Moses. Cowdery could be recognizing here the likeness to Moses when he used the term “glory of the Lord,” which is used in

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68. Joseph Smith — History 1:50.
70. Ibid., 198.
71. Ibid., emphasis added. The “train of associates” apparently refers to “the devil and his angels” as found in Matthew 25:41; Doctrine and Covenants 29:28, 76:33, 44; 2 Nephi 9:16.
Exodus 24:16–17 in describing the Lord giving revelation to Moses at Mount Sinai. The concept also appears in the Book of Moses, where “the glory of God was upon Moses” after being “caught up into an exceedingly high mountain” (Moses 1:1–2) and “the glory of the Lord was upon Moses, so that Moses stood in the presence of God” (Moses 1:31). The term is commonly used when the presence of the Lord is evident (for example, Exodus 16:10–11, Leviticus 9:4–6, Numbers 14:10, 2 Nephi 1:15; cf. Doctrine and Covenants 76:20, Joseph Smith — History 1:17).

Both Moses and Joseph had revelation upon a cosmic mount where the two powers were both impressively manifested and contrasted. For Moses, this contrast is found in Moses 1:1–16. Joseph also experienced this contrast in his First Vision. He said he was then “seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, … power from an actual being from the unseen world,” an “enemy” that held him bound until the appearance of the Father and Son in their “brightness and glory” (Joseph Smith — History 1:15–17). Such visions helped prepare him for the great opposition he faced after he received the Book of Mormon plates. They provided him a rich understanding of the opposing forces in what can be called the “Doctrine of the Two Ways”: “From its opening pages to the end, the Bible describes a bifurcated world in which God bids, commands, and teaches the people he has created to follow him in the way of righteousness, and in which the devil leads people into wickedness.”

This teaching is also found prominently in the Book of Mormon. There it is held that “it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so … righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad” (2 Nephi 2:11).

Joseph’s first attempt to get the plates occurred September 22, 1823. He said the angel informed him that

The time for bringing them forth had not yet arrived, neither would it, until four years from that time; but he told me that I should come to that place precisely in one year, … and that he would there meet with me, and that I should continue to do so until the time should come for obtaining the plates. Accordingly,... I went at the end of each year, and at each time

I found the same messenger there, and received instruction and intelligence from him at each of our interviews, respecting what the Lord was going to do, and how and in what manner his kingdom was to be conducted in the last days (Joseph Smith — History 1:53–54).

These few words nevertheless summarize a revelatory experience of wide scope and importance. The repetitive nature of Moroni’s appearances, both in his first visits, and in making yearly instructional visits at the richly symbolic time of the autumnal equinox, suggests a ritual procedure with symbolic significance. Joseph’s climb to meet the angel at the elevated site where the plates were buried can surely be understood as a ritual heavenly ascent. It was an ascent that culminated in the actual visit of an angel at a place made sacred by his presence and the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ, and thereby a meeting at the ritual equivalent to the court of heaven above. It is clearly reminiscent of what the ancient High Priest did in making an annual visit to the temple to seek revelation in the sacred space of the Holy of Holies where the revealed and engraved law was kept. Since the temple is “an architectural cosmic mountain, entrance into the holy of holies [by the High Priest] symbolizes ascent to the summit of God’s holy mountain.” Joseph’s experience foreshadowed his receipt and use of the same priesthood authority and was part of his preparation for that service and responsibility.

The annual meetings would have been important for Joseph Smith’s understanding and development. There is an example of the detailed type of instruction Moroni could give in the description of his first meetings with Joseph. The yearly visits probably were likewise detailed, and doubtless included the receipt of visions for his instruction as occurred in the angel’s first visits. Thus, Oliver Cowdery observed in reference to these meetings:

> When God manifests to his servants those things that are to come, or those which have been, he does it by unfolding them by the power of that Spirit which comprehends all things, always; and so much may be shown and made perfectly plain

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to the understanding in a short time, that to the world, who are occupied all their life to learn a little, look at the relation of it, and are disposed to call it false. You will understand then, by this, that while those glorious things were being rehearsed, *the vision was also opened*, so that our brother was permitted to see and understand much more full and perfect than I am able to communicate in writing … [which is] but a shadow, compared to an open vision of seeing, hearing and realizing eternal things.\textsuperscript{77}

Joseph Smith explained that “could you gaze into heaven five minutes, you would know more than you would by reading all that ever was written on the subject.”\textsuperscript{78} His received instructions and visions may include those things which were intended to be taught to others, and other things which were indescribable or that he must keep to himself for his own awareness. The Apostle Paul tells of a man, “How that he was caught up to paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (2 Corinthians 12:2–4). In the Book of Mormon, Nephi said that in a mountain ascent vision, under angelic direction, “mine eyes have beheld great things, yea, even too great for man; therefore I was bidden that I should not write them” (2 Nephi 4:24–25; cf. 3 Nephi 17:17, 19:32–34). In light of such comments, Joseph probably received much reserved instruction and visions that he did not attempt to include in his written history, and understandings he was not allowed to share with others until a later time. This may explain why, in describing what he learned from the Lord in his First Vision, Joseph said, “many other things did he say unto me, which I cannot write at this time” (Joseph Smith — History 1:20). Elsewhere he said, “I could explain a hundred fold more than I ever have of the glories of the kingdoms manifested to me in the vision, were I permitted, and were the people prepared to receive them.”\textsuperscript{79}

Following the four years of preparation, Joseph Smith recalled that it was “after having received many visits from the angels of God unfolding the majesty, and glory of the events that should transpire in the last days, on the morning of 22nd of September A. D. 1827, the angel of the Lord

\textsuperscript{77} Oliver Cowdery, “Letter VI to W. W. Phelps, Esq.,” *Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 7 (April 1835): 112, emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{78} Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:50.
delivered the records into my hands.” Historian Alexander Baugh has emphasized that “these visits occurred before he obtained the plates in September 1827 and thus took place concurrently with his years of instruction by Moroni at Cumorah.” He quotes from close associates of Joseph Smith who stated that he had many angels come to teach him during this period, including leading prophets from dispensations past.

The Ritual Significance of September 22, 1827

Scholars have discussed the importance of the date when Joseph Smith received the plates of the Book of Mormon. “Moroni’s annual visits occurred generally around the time of the Israelite harvest festival season. … In 1827, when Moroni finally delivered the plates to Joseph (Joseph Smith — History 1:59), his timing on September 22 coincided exactly with Rosh Hashanah, also known as the Feast of Trumpets.”

This feast was the beginning of the ancient Israelite autumn festival season as set forth in the 23rd chapter of Leviticus. It was followed each season by the feast “Day of Atonement” (Yom Kippur), and the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) … together called the High Holy Days. These ritual Feasts are richly symbolic, and most meaningful in regard to the coming forth and purposes of the Book of Mormon and the latter-day fulfillment of prophecy. They provided a cosmic ritual procedure that “connects the temporal terrestrial times of temple performances with

80. From Joseph Smith, “Church History,” Times and Seasons 3, no. 9 (March 1842): 707, emphasis added.
82. Ibid., quoting from Orson Pratt, George Q. Cannon, and John Taylor, 288–89.
83. “Why Did Moroni Deliver the Plates” and Bradley, “Israel’s Festivals.”
the eternal celestial cycles, that all may be done on earth as it is in the heavens.”

When the angel Moroni first appeared to Joseph Smith, “he quoted from the eleventh chapter of Isaiah, saying that it was about to be fulfilled” (Joseph Smith — History 1:40). That passage contained a prophecy of the latter-days when God “shall set up an ensign for the nations, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth (Isaiah 11:12).” From the early days of the Church it has been well recognized that the coming forth of the Book of Mormon was an ensign or sacred sign — a herald of the gathering of Israel. Joseph, of course, was soon given authority of the keys of the gathering from Moses in the Kirtland Temple (Doctrine and Covenants 110:11), and it is yet a very important purpose of the Church.

The feasts of the High Holy Days were significant in the New Testament when important events in the life of Christ occurred during such festivals. Also, “The three fall feasts portray events to be associated with His second coming.” The Book of Mormon has much to say about the feasts, notably as discussed in King Benjamin’s speech to a people who were living under the law of Moses and observed that law. In regard

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87. For the emphasis in the Book of Mormon, see 1 Nephi 10:14, 3 Nephi 5:23–26.


89. E.g., John 7:1–2, 37–41. For the feasts as prophetic and doctrinally important to both Jews and Christians, see Kevin Howard and Marvin Rosenthal, *The Feasts of the Lord* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997).


to Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon in the latter days, the feasts in sequence may be seen as having the effect of prophesying of events he and the Church were to experience. Many of these are a repetition of Old Testament events, as well as those in Early Christianity. Here again, Joseph is a prophet like Moses in what he taught and established from on high.

The Feast of Trumpets represented many sacred considerations. The Trumpet sound was a call for Israel to remember origins and covenants from the time when the trumpet sounded to call Moses to receive revelation in his ascent at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:19–20). It was a call to repentance and renewal of covenants, and signified the revelation of the correct law after it had been lost in the Exile. The restoration under Joseph Smith is similar. This festival celebrated the autumn agricultural harvest, and also looked to the great final harvest and gathering of souls in preparation for the Messianic age and the Judgment. The trumpet, harvest and gathering themes appeared in many of Joseph Smith’s early revelations (Doctrine and Covenants 4:4, 12:3, 14:3–4, 29:4, 30:9, 33:2–7, 101:64–65).

The Day of Atonement followed and represented a time when repentance would bring forgiveness and reconciliation with God. It was memorable of the ancient temple and of the High Priest annually on this festival day when he entered the Holy of Holies to seek the presence of God. Jewish “Worshippers on Yom Kippur believe they spiritually enter the Holy of Holies, symbolic of entering God’s presence, and that this sacred time permits them their ‘highest and deepest communion with God.’”

The Feast of Tabernacles represented a time of great fulfillment when God was richly blessing His gathered covenant people, and the many benefits and ritual functions of a temple were available. The tabernacles were the booths or tents of the gathering people who faced and surrounded the Tabernacle prepared by Moses as God directed. It was called the “Tabernacle of the congregation,” a tent that served

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as a temporary or provisional temple that was nonetheless effective as such.\(^\text{94}\) In this case it was portable as needed then, but doubtless in their wanderings the Israelites looked to the time when they would be settled and have a more permanent building. When Solomon's temple was dedicated, this feast was a prominent feature, and *trumpets* and singers were heard “praising and thanking the Lord” (1 Kings 8:1–3; 2 Chronicles 5:2–6, 13). Most important is the trumpet call and the harvest gathering of Israel and the Church, with the return of the temple and its covenant blessings. This is symbolized in the statue of an angel sounding the trump on many Latter-day Saint temples — like the call to repentance by that angel foreseen by John to restore the everlasting gospel and warn of the coming Judgment (Revelation 14:6–7).

**A Sign and Witness in the Heavens**

Another event, which occurred on September 22, 1827, provides striking evidence of the significance of the date when Joseph Smith received the plates. It was a vision in the heavens seen in Mendon, New York, by several persons who lived near each other and who were later prominent converts to the Church after the Book of Mormon was translated and published. The vision was reported by Heber C. Kimball:

I had retired to bed, when John P. Greene, who was living within a hundred steps of my house, came … calling upon me to come out and behold the scenery in the heavens. I woke up and called my wife and Sister Fanny Young (sister to Brigham Young), who was living with us, and we went out-of-doors. … We looked to the eastern horizon, and beheld a white smoke arise toward the heavens; as it ascended it formed itself into a belt, and made a noise like the sound of a mighty wind, and continued southwest, forming a regular bow dipping in the western horizon. … It grew wide enough to contain twelve men abreast. In this bow an army moved, commencing from the east and marching to the west; they continued marching until they reached the western horizon. … The most profound order existed … every man stepped at the same time; I could hear the steps. When the front rank reached the western horizon a battle ensued, as we could

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distinctly hear the report of arms and the rush. No man could judge of my feelings when I beheld that army of men, as plainly as ever I saw armies of men in the flesh. ... This scenery we gazed upon for hours, until it began to disappear. After I became acquainted with Mormonism, I learned that this took place the same evening that Joseph Smith received the records of the Book of Mormon from the angel Moroni, who held those records in his possession. ... The next night similar scenery was beheld in the west by the neighbors, representing armies of men who were engaged in battle.95

Brigham Young also saw the vision, although he was some 45 miles away at his home near Fort Byron. He recalled: “The night the plates were found, there was a great light in the East and it went to the West and it was very bright although there was no moon at the time. I gazed at it in company with my wife. The light was perfectly clear and remained several hours. It formed into men as if there were great armies in the West; and I then saw in the northwest armies of men come up. ... It was a very remarkable occurrence.”96 “John Young, Sen., and John P. Greene’s wife, Rhoda, were also witnesses,” and Young declared, “it’s one of the signs of the coming of the Son of Man.”97 Orson F. Whitney, later to be called as an Apostle, gave his interpretation when he published Kimball’s account of the vision: “The heavens were bestirring themselves. The invisible world was up in arms. Truth and Error were taking the field. The latter-day conflict had begun. The signs of the coming of the Son of Man were showing themselves in the heavens.”98 He saw it as a “wonderful foreshadowing, truly, of the warfare to be waged between the powers of good and evil, from the time Truth sprang from earth and Righteousness looked down from heaven upon the boy Joseph, predestined to bring to light the buried records of the past.”99

98. Ibid., 31.
99. Ibid., 33. An allusion to Psalms 85:11, seen as a prophecy of the Book of Mormon coming forth “out of the earth” under the watchful care of heaven — a common interpretation with the Latter-day Saints.
Triumph Over Ritual Folk Magic

As portended by the heavenly vision, the conflict between good and evil was underway for Joseph Smith as it became known that he had the plates. He related that “no sooner was it known that I had them, than the most strenuous exertions were used to get them from me. Every stratagem that could be invented was resorted to for that purpose” (Joseph Smith — History, 1:60). He added that “persecution … became so intolerable that I was under the necessity of leaving Manchester, and going with my wife to Susquehanna county, in the state of Pennsylvania.” This would place them near his wife Emma’s parents. In his poverty, Joseph was helped by Martin Harris to make the move (Joseph Smith — History, 1:61).  

Much of the opposition that Joseph faced, which forced him to move to a new location, was from those who knew him when he and his family were involved in what has been termed “folk magic” or “folk ritual,” which was very prevalent at the time. It was considered normal by many people at that period. Joseph was known even then for his gift  


102. B. H. Roberts commented: “It is scarcely conceivable how one could live in New England in those years and not have shared in such beliefs. To be credulous in such things was to be normal people.” B. H. Roberts, A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Century I (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1957), 1:26–27.
of seership and the use of seer stones. This resulted in his participation with those who attempted to find and unearth buried treasure by ritual and spiritual procedures, sometimes considered “magical.” Many persons were engaged in this practice. They were often called “money diggers,” especially by those who ridiculed them. Some who had associated with Joseph caused him serious trouble as they sought to find and obtain the plates. They claimed they had as much right to them as Joseph did. Their determination shows they had a strong belief that Joseph could have the plates, and that it was possible to obtain buried treasure by their ritual and spiritual practices. To illustrate, Mother Lucy Smith recalled a significant occurrence when “ten or twelve men were clubbed together, with one Willard Chase, a Methodist class leader at their head; and what was still most ridiculous, they had sent sixty or seventy miles for a certain conjuror to come and divine the place where the plates were secreted, by magic art.”

Four years of instruction and receipt of the plates marked a crucial time for Joseph, as he had to learn to use his spiritual gifts only for the

103. Cf. Richard S. Van Wagoner, Natural Born Seer: Joseph Smith, American Prophet, 1805–1830 (Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2016), 147–91. Clearly, at that period before his calling through Moroni, as well as after as predicted, Joseph was a controversial figure, “both good and evil spoken of.” (Joseph Smith — History 1:33).


purposes of God. Earlier, his father, in a court setting, is reported to have testified of Joseph’s wonderful triumph as a seer. He described very many instances of his finding hidden and stolen goods. He swore that both he and his son were mortified that this wonderful power which God had so miraculously given him should be used only in search of filthy lucre, or its equivalent in earthly treasures, … that his constant prayer to his Heavenly Father was to manifest his will concerning this marvelous power.107

Martin Harris recalled that “Joseph said the angel told him he must quit the company of the money-diggers. That there were wicked men among them. He must have no more to do with them.”108 His was a challenging and difficult transition from a time of temptation, and a great achievement in his life.109

The opposition arrayed against Joseph Smith at this juncture was from persons involved in treasure seeking. It became a contest between good and evil, the results of which were better exposed by the results of the ritual, manifesting which side had the greater power and godliness (cf. Doctrine and Covenants 84:20). These encounters can be seen as a ritual contest, with Joseph bringing forth the greater treasure in the Book of Mormon. It also provides a basis better to compare Joseph’s encounter and contest with that experienced by other prophets anciently, and even identifies another important way Joseph Smith was like Moses. In the case of Moses, he won his contest with the Priests of Pharoah with their counterfeit authority, “beating them at their own game,” so to speak. Elijah, Peter, and Christ triumphed in similar contests — Christ overcoming the greatest ritual contest of all in the crucifixion and resurrection.110

Martin Harris was important in assisting Joseph to move to Pennsylvania. Harris was an “honorable New York farmer,” much respected in his community.¹¹¹ When he learned that Joseph had the plates, he earnestly sought to learn about them, inquired much of the Smith family, and made it a matter of prayer. He said that God “showed me that it was his work … by the still small voice spoken in the soul. Then I was satisfied that it was the Lord’s work, and I was under covenant to bring it forth.”¹¹² Joseph Smith recalled: “we moved to Susquehanna by the assistance of a man by the name of Martin Harris who became convinced of the visions and gave me fifty Dollars to bear my expenses.”¹¹³ Joseph then recorded a matter of great importance, that Martin “because of his faith and this righteous deed the Lord appeared unto him in a vision and showed unto him his marvelous work which he was about to do.”¹¹⁴ This explains his strong motivation, and reveals the close guidance of the Lord in arranging the translation of the Book of Mormon.¹¹⁵ The history continues: Martin then came immediately to Susquehanna and said that the Lord showed him he must go to Eastern cities and show to the learned the characters from the plates.¹¹⁶ What he showed them is now referred to as the “Anthon Transcript,” after Prof. Charles Anthon of Columbia College in New York, who has left his account of meeting with Martin Harris, as discussed below. After his journey, Martin returned to Harmony, Pennsylvania, to serve as a scribe to assist Joseph in the translation.


¹¹² “Mormonism — No. II,” 168.

¹¹³ Quoted from Joseph Smith’s 1832 history, in Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, vol. 1, Autobiographical and Historical Writings (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 9, spelling regularized.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., emphasis added.

¹¹⁵ The same history recounts that Oliver Cowdery had the Lord appear to him also, to tell him the truth of the work and prepare him to serve as scribe for Joseph after Martin Harris. Ibid., 10.

Ritual and Temple Aspects of the Book of Mormon Translation

Since the plates of the Book of Mormon became available and ready for translation by ritual procedures, it is important to recognize how this continued during the translation. These arrangements help establish that what was done was carried out under divine and angelic direction. At the time he began the translation, Joseph Smith was in great poverty, yet under strict warning by the angel not to use the golden plates for gain, nor to show them to unauthorized persons (Joseph Smith — History 1:42–46; cf. Mormon 8:14–16). He had to use what was at hand at the very small house where he stayed. It was reported that in the early period of the translation, Joseph had a blanket or curtain hanging between him and his scribe, “apparently used at an early point to shield the scribe from a view of the plates, spectacles, or breastplate.” These restrictions are reminiscent of those anciently that limited access to the resurrected Christ — restricted to witnesses authorized by the Lord. They are in accord with the concept of seeing the Book of Mormon as a type of Christ.

Martin Harris served as scribe during an early time of the translation. It is notable how the term was used anciently in literature among the Jews, where “there is clearly some significant factor inherent in the standing of ‘scribes’ that marks so many of them out as suitable recipients of direct divine revelation.” Clearly, at important times in his life, Martin Harris was so inspired, and at the time he was scribe he was soon to be one of the official witnesses who were shown the plates by the angel and by the voice of the Lord commanded to bear record of it. Their testimony is printed in editions of the Book of Mormon. Over his lifetime, Martin Harris was many times an informed witness for the Book of Mormon. Virtually all that is known about the setting and arrangement for the translation while he was scribe has come from

him. Interestingly, it is in accounts from critical persons with whom he discussed it that his description has been preserved.\textsuperscript{122} While they gave a negative interpretation, their accounts are in basic agreement, and these persons unintentionally provide a basis for recognizing the reality of an important revelatory activity at the translation.\textsuperscript{123}

Rev. John A. Clark, a minister in Palmyra, New York who had interviewed Harris about his experience, claimed that “Smith concealed behind the blanket, \textit{pretended} to look through his spectacles, or transparent stones, and would then write down or repeat what he saw, which, when repeated aloud, was written down by Harris, who sat on the other side of the suspended blanket.”\textsuperscript{124} This was his negative interpretation and gratuitous assertion to have it appear that in having the blanket, Joseph was deceiving his scribe in what he claimed to have and do. This Clark said, despite what must have been a fervent witness by Harris after the divine revelations he had received.\textsuperscript{125} Apparently Harris witnessed to people wherever he went. Clark said that what Harris communicated to him he also did “subsequently to scores of people in the village.”\textsuperscript{126} This may account for the description in the \textit{Palmyra Reflector}, where the editor, in a series of articles, mocked Joseph Smith

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{123} In this connection, I am intrigued by a comment of Hugh Nibley: “Remember what the Lord told Joseph Smith. He said ‘I will make the Gentiles bring forth the proof.’” Nibley was discussing ancient documents recently discovered and discussed by scholars that he saw as supportive of aspects of the Book of Mormon. See his \textit{The Early Christian Church in the Light of Some Newly Discovered Papyri from Egypt} (Provo, UT: BYU Extension Publications, 1964), 20. I recall hearing a lecture of Nibley in which he made a similar comment that “the Gentiles” would be required to bring forth proof of the Book of Mormon. He attributed the information to his uncle Preston Nibley, author of works on church history and who served as Assistant Church Historian. Cf. 3 Nephi 21:1–7.
\item \textsuperscript{124} John A. Clark, \textit{Gleanings by the Way} (Philadelphia: W.J. & J.K. Simon, 1842), 230, emphasis added.
\item \textsuperscript{125} “This was Harris’s own account of the matter to me.” Ibid., 230–31.
\item \textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 224.
\end{itemize}
and his work. In one derisive article it was said that “Harris declares, that when he acted as *amanuensis*,\textsuperscript{127} and wrote the translation, as Smith dictated, such was his fear of the Divine displeasure that a screen (sheet) was suspended between the prophet and himself.”\textsuperscript{128} This description, in a critical newspaper, is the first mention of how the two men were separated during translation.\textsuperscript{129}

There is a very different way to interpret the arrangement with the blanket or curtain that is enlightening and meaningful in the circumstances. It is clear that God placed his approval on this modest house and arrangement by conducting there a most important, extensive, and sacred activity. To begin the translation with Harris, in his humble situation Joseph could have arranged the space in an intentional pattern to shield the sacred from unauthorized view, but *also* to provide a veil, a curtain which was *the most essential symbol of the temple*.\textsuperscript{130} The temple veil separated “the inner sanctuary or Most Holy Place, the Holy of Holies,” and where “inner surfaces are said to have been gilded,” to represent “heaven on earth.”\textsuperscript{131} With Joseph, the golden plates and other relics provided symbols of celestial light and glory at the heavenly place of God’s throne, for gold often represented heavenly things. The basic symbolism of the temple veil and setting is clear: “Those who passed through the curtain passed from earth to heaven or from heaven to earth.”\textsuperscript{132}

In another report of how Harris described the setting, Prof. Anthon, who was visited by Harris in New York, gave some detail not included in Rev. Clark’s summary. It appears in an 1834 letter to the editor of *Mormonism Unvailed* — in what may have been the first “anti-Mormon” book. Anthon recalled:

\textsuperscript{127.} Defined as “A literary or artistic assistant, in particular one who takes dictation or copies manuscripts.” *New Oxford American Dictionary*, s.v. “amanuensis,” emphasis added.


\textsuperscript{129.} Morris, *Documentary History*, 251.


\textsuperscript{132.} Barker, *On Earth*, 10.
This young man was placed behind a curtain, in the garret of a farm house, and, being thus concealed from view, put on the spectacles occasionally, or rather looked through one of the glasses, deciphered the characters in the book, and, having committed some of them to paper, handed copies from behind the curtain, to those who stood on the outside.\textsuperscript{133}

At the time of meeting with Anthon, only a page of characters had been copied by Joseph. Later the translation was written down by Harris on the other side of the veil. That the translation activity between Joseph Smith and Martin Harris took place in the garret is an important consideration, which I will explain later in this paper. A garret is defined in Webster’s dictionary at the time as “That part of a house which is on the upper floor, immediately under the roof.”\textsuperscript{134} A later resident in the small house described it thus:

The Joseph Smith home was built of lumber having two rooms downstairs. … When entering the house, one came into a hallway and there a stairway led up to an attic or loft. The east end of this loft was boarded off into a room with a window looking toward the east. I was told that Joseph Smith did a lot of writing in this room.\textsuperscript{135}

Even in the great simplicity of Joseph’s arrangement, the vertical typology is notable. As well as the veil, the ladder of heavenly ascent, the upper room and the eastward orientation all may be seen as symbolic of the temple.


\textsuperscript{134} Noah Webster, ed., An American Dictionary of the English Language (New York: S. Converse, 1828), s.v. “garret.”

Joseph Smith’s Provisional Veil and its Ritual Significance

There is impressive evidence that Joseph Smith meant to represent the temple veil in the placement of a curtain between him and his scribe. In addition to the recollections reviewed above, it is indicated by the remarkable number of symbolic features and associations in the arrangement — altogether specialized and most appropriate to his prophetic calling and purposes.\textsuperscript{136} Likely it was done in continuation of the angelic direction he had been receiving. It shows an intense recognition of basic matters related to the temple at an early time in Joseph’s history. How long he had this arrangement is not known, but it appears to have been primarily at the time Martin Harris was scribe. Probably to proceed in a more convenient way, Joseph conducted the translation somewhat differently when Oliver Cowdery became scribe, but he may well have retained the veil at the room to keep temple similarity in the setting. He did do this in later functions described below. With Harris, if even for a brief time, it was a symbol that helped witness the sacred nature of the translation effort and the divine approval of it. In one act it provided a symbolic reminder of sacred events in the past, showed the inspired purpose of what was proceeding at the time, and was an anticipation of things to come concerning the temple.\textsuperscript{137} It appears to have been a rite or ordinance for the prophet to perform, marking his authority and calling to do the work. Important considerations would include:

- The designation and creation of sacred space.\textsuperscript{138} The translation of the Book of Mormon was a most sacred activity, and “it isn’t the temple which makes their rites

\textsuperscript{136} For a considered view of how a single ritual act can represent or symbolize several important things at once, see a discussion of how baptism does this remarkably, thus illustrating that “a token chosen by God would exhibit evidences of the wisdom of God.” Nels L. Nelson, Scientific Aspects of Mormonism: Or, Religion in Terms of Life (New York and London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1904), 178. Joseph’s veil token can also be seen as showing God’s wisdom by representing many important things at once.

\textsuperscript{137} Cf. Doctrine and Covenants 93:24. There is indication the ancient veil in some way “depicted past, present and future.” Barker, Temple Theology, 28.

sacred; it is the rites that make the temple sacred.”

Joseph Smith’s designation of sacred space provided a sanctuary, a holy place of refuge and safety where sacred procedures could be done.

- **The concept of the “Upper Room.”** A term for sacred space where such activity occurred, as at the Last Supper. It was used then and elsewhere by the Early Christians as in the day of Pentecost, and also in Latter-day Saint temples and other sacred places. It may apply here. Usage reflects elevation and the *vertical typology*.

- **A ritual heavenly ascent.** The Psalms offer insight on the practice of heavenly ascent in biblical times. They refer to a complex of very great importance: “LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?” and “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?” In relation to questions such as these, the significance of the basic symbol of the temple veil, as noted above, should receive great appreciation: “Those who passed through the curtain passed from earth to heaven or from heaven to earth.” Mortals can aspire to heavenly ascent, and temples provide inspiration, preparation and a ceremonial anticipation.

The ascent experience of Moses at the Cosmic Mountain of Sinai was followed by his establishment of a Tabernacle, as directed by the Lord (Exodus 25:1–9). It functioned as a

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141. See Psalms 15:1, 24:3.


“portable Sinai” and “the means by which a continued avenue of communication with God could be maintained.” Joseph Smith could maintain such also, for with him the heavens were open and an “open canon” of revelation had begun.

The Tabernacle contained a Holy of Holies, and during Israel’s travels offered the functions and blessings of a temple, looking to the time when a more permanent temple would be available. In another way he was “like unto Moses”: Joseph Smith also had an arrangement that was a temple forerunner. It provided a tabernacle-like function and a portable or remote Cumorah — his Cosmic Mountain of heavenly ascent where revelation was received. Entrance into the sacred space of the Holy of Holies was the ritual equivalent of such an ascent.

- **Similarities to the Holy of Holies.** There was much in both Joseph Smith’s arrangement and his sacred activity that created sacred space like the Holy of Holies. In many respects, there was a recurrence of some of the type of actions done and experienced in the ancient Holy of Holies. The high priest was permitted to enter and to seek the presence of the Lord and to receive revelation for his people. Of Martin Harris it was reported: “He says he wrote a considerable part of the book, as Smith dictated, and at one time the presence of the Lord was so great, that a screen was hung up between him and the Prophet.” Joseph Smith had received with the plates and still possessed them during the translation,

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144. Morales, “Tabernacle Pre-Figured,” 303, emphasis added. Morales says that the Tabernacle as a “portable Sinai” was “so labeled by various scholars.” Morales, “Tabernacle Pre-Figured,” 272.
145. A concept mentioned by Christ when He spoke of heavenly ascent (John 1:51).
146. Or, as related to ascent, the “hill of the Lord” in Psalm 24:3.
147. See Morales, “Tabernacle Pre-Figured,” 208.
149. Howe, Mormonism Unvailed, 14, emphasis added. A spelling of veil at the time (Webster, American Dictionary, s.v. “vail”). This is yet another instance of a detractor who claimed that Harris spoke of the curtain between him and Joseph Smith. It is interesting to speculate whether Howe was perceptive enough to see the similarity to a temple veil. If so, perhaps that caused him to use the term unveiled to mock the idea in the title of his contrary book that opposed Joseph Smith.
important objects associated with the ancient high priest. These included the Urim and Thummim and breastplate (Joseph Smith — History 1:35). At this stage in Joseph’s prophetic calling, he functioned in significant respects like that high priest in a Holy of Holies. Joseph behind the veil betokened the return of divine authority. Nearby, at the hands of heavenly authorities, he was ordained to have the priesthood on a permanent basis (Joseph Smith — History 1:68–72).

- **A representative Ark of the Covenant.** In his holy space beyond the veil, Joseph Smith had the golden plates of the Book of Mormon and other sacred and memorial relics. They were in a wooden chest he obtained to receive the items from the ancient Nephites that were buried at Cumorah. I infer that his attitude and that of Martin Harris toward this chest and its contents show that they regarded it as a sacred counterpart to the wooden chest of the biblical Ark of the Covenant. A symbol of access to God’s presence and revelation, it was not so ornate or covered with gold, but it did have the golden plates and other items helpful to Joseph at the time. Notably, a most prominent thing about the original Ark is that it contained the law and engraved Decalogue, the Ten Commandments essential to the Covenant. The engraved golden plates also contained the Decalogue, and other parts of the law of Moses had by the Nephites. Emphasis on the law marks the plates and the Book of Mormon as a witness of the Covenant being established by the Lord in the new dispensation. “In its unparalleled focus on the Messianic message of the Savior of the world, the Book of Mormon is

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150. For an insightful discussion of parallels between the “Nephite Relics and Ark” from which Joseph received significant things, and original Ark of the Covenant contents, see Bradley, *Lost 116 Pages*, 4–8, 200–208.
151. In Rev. Clark’s interview with Martin Harris, it is twice said that Harris refers to as an “ark” the container in which the golden plates and other objects were found buried at Cumorah. First as a “box or ark,” and then as “a chest, or ark.” See Clark, *Gleanings*, 224, 226. Also, in his book, Clark describes how in the Book of Mormon the Nephites deposited their sacred articles in their “ark of testimony,” clearly an allusion to the analogous Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies of the Mosaic Tabernacle. Clark, *Gleanings*, 269. Cf. Exodus 25:22, 30:6, 40:3–5.
rightly referred to as God’s ‘new covenant’ with the house of Israel.” It underscores the very Christian nature of what Joseph Smith was called to do, and how relationships with the ancient dispensation are interpreted.

- **Reception and reading of a Heavenly Book.** In the first chapter of the Book of Mormon, the prophet Lehi experiences an ascent to the heavenly realm. He is given a book to read, like prophets in apocalyptic accounts, receiving information and teachings needed to enlighten the people when returning to them. Of very important interest for the Book of Mormon is the motif of the “Heavenly Book,” such as Lehi was given to read in connection with his ascent. “The heavenly book motif … appears throughout the Judeo-Christian scriptures, but it truly comes into its own in apocalypses, where it is ubiquitous.” In his classic study of this concept, the Swedish scholar Widengren found that “few religious ideas in the Ancient Near East have played a more important role than the notion of the Heavenly Tablets, or the Heavenly Book, … the oft-recurring thought that the Heavenly Book is handed over at the ascension in an interview with a heavenly being.” Joseph Smith received such from the angel Moroni in his ritual heavenly ascent at Cumorah. While translating, he had an experience similar to that of other prophets as he

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156. 1 Nephi 1:11–14. See Nibley on Lehi’s ascent in “Apocalyptic Warning.”


read from the Book of Mormon while in the ritual equivalent of the heavenly realm. The writings assist him on the other side of the veil as he descends from heaven to earth to teach his followers. That he obtained and possessed writing and teachings from above helps provide evidence of his divine authority and doctrinal truth. Widengren commented that the Heavenly Book is “the external sign of initiation into the heavenly secrets.”

- **The Descent and “Incarnation” of the Lord and the Book.**
In my essay that describes how the Book of Mormon typifies Christ by passing through similar and symbolic events, I discussed how the descent and incarnation of the Lord can be considered as having a counterpart in the Book. When the translated words went from one side of the veil to the other, from a ritual viewpoint the Book descended from heaven to earth. John’s gospel says that “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Following their impression of John’s statement, at times Christians have deemed the Bible to be an incarnation, or an embodiment of the teachings from above in a form compatible on earth. This is an interesting and plausible analogy. Some early Christian writers considered Christ as text. Being closely associated with the Heavenly Book, the Lord can be seen as the personification of it, possessing and expressing the wisdom and teachings from above. As with biblical scriptures, the Book of Mormon, as a Heavenly Book, may...

159. Widengren, *Heavenly Book*, 36. When Joseph refers to his sacred activity as “translate,” it is notable that Webster’s dictionary at the time gives several meanings to the word. Two of them both apply to Joseph’s activity. First, “To bear, carry or remove from one place to another” which relates to the descent; and “To interpret; to render into another language.” See Webster, *American Dictionary*, s.v. “translate.”


be regarded as descended to an “incarnation” parallel to that of the Lord.

- **Protection of the sacred.** Joseph Smith first saw the golden plates where they had been deposited, buried at Cumorah. He tried to take them, but was forbidden by the angel.¹⁶³ “On attempting to take possession of the record a shock was produced upon his system, by an invisible power, which deprived him … of his natural strength.”¹⁶⁴ The angel then began a four-year revelatory teaching procedure to prepare him to be able and worthy to receive the plates and the relics with them. The Book of Mormon contained a warning for the latter-day translator, which stressed that the sacred objects should only be shown as authorized by the Lord.¹⁶⁵ When Joseph received the plates, he was given this charge from the angel: “I should be responsible for them; that if I should let them go carelessly, or through any neglect of mine, I should be cut off; but that if I would use all my endeavors to preserve them, until he, the messenger, should call for them, they should be protected.”¹⁶⁶

Joseph’s protective actions that limited access or view show that he recognized the gravity and seriousness of the matter. He would have been aware that in the strictness of Old Testament times, access to the Tabernacle or to the Ark of the Covenant without permission was punishable by death.¹⁶⁷ The angel had said to him that when he received the plates, “I should not show them to any person; neither the breastplate with the Urim and Thummim; only to those to whom I should be commanded to show them; if I did I should be destroyed.”¹⁶⁸ As scribe, Martin Harris was also sensitive to this. Of the translation Interpreters or Urim and Thummim, he said, “We had a command to let no man look into them, except by the command of God, lest he should ‘look aught and perish,’” adding that the “plates were kept from the sight

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¹⁶⁸. Joseph Smith — History 1:42.
of the world, and no one, save Oliver Cowdery, myself, Joseph Smith, Jr., and David Whitmer, ever saw them.”

Together with Joseph, these became official witnesses who testified that they were shown the plates by the angel, and heard the voice of the Lord commanding them to bear record of the truth of the translation and the work.

- **Evidence of intense spirituality.** Placement of the provisional veil not only looked forward to temple blessings, but also was a witness of spirituality being experienced during the inaugural period of the restoration. This continued when Oliver Cowdery became scribe after Harris. As cited above, as with Harris, the Lord had appeared to him to call him to assist Joseph. The important priesthood restoration occurred to him and Joseph at the hands of heavenly beings, and he served as scribe during the greater part of the translation. Because they became unwelcome in Harmony, Pennsylvania, they desired to move. They sought assistance from David Whitmer, an interested friend of Oliver. He came and helped, and arranged for them to use an *upstairs room* in the Whitmer family home in Fayette, New York. He assisted in many ways while they were there, and was soon to be baptized at that home. There the translation of the Book of Mormon was completed and the Church was organized. Experiences at the Whitmer home show that they were in a room designated as sacred space, as was the one in Harmony. Joseph referred to it as a “chamber” where

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169. “Mormonism — No. II,” 166. In an atlas covering Susquehanna County, a map of the area where Joseph and Martin worked on the translation had a place marked “Foundation of 1st Mormon Temple.” See Frederick W. Beers, *Atlas of Susquehanna Co. Pennsylvania* (New York: A. Pomeroy & Co., 1872), 17, spelling in original. Could this reflect discussion of Martin Harris among the townspeople, as he was wont to do, regarding the limitation of access to the sacred space in which he served?

170. See “The Testimony of the Three Witnesses” in editions of the Book of Mormon, and Ether 5:1–4. Harris is concerned with the time of translation and persons who greatly assisted to help it to be completed. Harris and Cowdery were scribes. Whitmer assisted much with arrangements. Later, there were also eight more official witnesses called to testify of seeing and handling the plates, as shown together by Joseph. A few others were called, in accord with 2 Nephi 27:12–14.

171. In a revelation received in June 1829, David Whitmer was called to assist. (Doctrine and Covenants 14:11).
“the voice of God” was heard.\textsuperscript{172} David Whitmer recalled the reverence: “Each time before resuming the work all present would kneel in prayer and invoke the Divine blessing on the proceeding.”\textsuperscript{173} David’s mother, Mary Musselman Whitmer, was shown the plates by the angel Moroni to assure her that what was being done in her home was true and sacred.\textsuperscript{174} Many things occurred there that show continuation of the very spiritual nature of the work.

**Translation at the Whitmer Home**

Some arrangements for the conduct of the translation differed at the new location.\textsuperscript{175} There was not a curtain between Joseph Smith and scribe. According to an interview with David Whitmer, “In order to give privacy to the proceeding, a blanket, which served as a portière,\textsuperscript{176} was stretched across the family living room to shelter the translators and the plates from the eyes of any who might call at the house while the work was in progress. This … was the only use made of the blanket, and it was not for the purpose of concealing the plates or the translator from the eyes of the amanuensis.”\textsuperscript{177} Nevertheless, in the very small house, it could still be considered as having a temple-like veil function which limited access, observation, or interruption of the sacred activity in the upper room. Some close persons were allowed. David Whitmer’s sister Elizabeth, wife of Oliver Cowdery the scribe, described the translation procedure there:

I cheerfully certify that I was familiar with the manner of Joseph Smith’s translating the Book of Mormon. He translated the most of it at my Father’s house. And I often sat by and saw and heard them translate and write for hours together. Joseph

\textsuperscript{172} Doctrine and Covenants 128:21.

\textsuperscript{173} Welch, “Documents of the Translation,” 172.


\textsuperscript{175} For a description of the setting and summary of occurrences there, see Richard Lloyd Anderson, “The House Where the Church Was Organized,” in *The Improvement Era* 73, no. 4 (April 1970): 16–25.

\textsuperscript{176} Portière is defined as “a curtain hung over a door or doorway.” *New Oxford American Dictionary*, s.v. “portière.”

\textsuperscript{177} Welch, “Documents of the Translation,” 172, emphasis added.
never had a curtain drawn between him and his scribe while he was translating. He would place the director in his hat, and then place his [face in his] hat, so as to exclude the light, and then [read] to his scribe the words as they appeared before him.\textsuperscript{178}

It is important to note that “Elizabeth asserts that the translation at the Whitmer home was performed using the translation instrument in the hat, thus eliminating any need for a curtain to shield the Nephite interpreters and the plates from view.”\textsuperscript{179} Joseph may not even be reading directly from the plates at this time, but received the translation through his seer stone with his face covered. This supports the belief that he was not reading from a manuscript, but receiving revelation. Further, Elizabeth’s mention that there was no curtain between him and scribe applies to the time of her observation: “The fact that Elizabeth felt the need to make such a statement at all strongly implies that there was still a story in circulation among the Latter-day Saints that a curtain was used in the translation process.”\textsuperscript{180} It is not a denial of the veil between Joseph and Martin Harris earlier.

Oliver B. Huntington recorded in his journal his conversation with Sarah Conrad who was a young housekeeper who lived and worked in the Whitmer home. She was there when Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were translating the Book of Mormon in the upper room of the house, and she, only a girl, saw them come down from the translating room several times when they looked so exceedingly white and strange that she inquired of Mrs. Whitmer the cause of their unusual appearance, but Mr. Whitmer was unwilling to tell the hired girl, the true cause as it was a sacred holy event connected with a holy sacred work which was opposed and persecuted by nearly every one who heard of it. The girl felt so strangely at seeing so strange and unusual appearance, she finally told Mrs. Whitmer that she would not stay with her until she knew the cause of the strange looks of these men. Sister Whitmer then told her what the men were doing in the room above and that the power of God was so great in the

\begin{itemize}
  \item Nicholson, “Spectacles,” 186.
  \item Ibid., 174.
  \item Ibid.
\end{itemize}
room that they could hardly endure it; at times angels were in the room in their glory which nearly consumed them.¹⁸¹

Sarah Conrad soon joined the Church and remained faithful; “She would eventually marry in the church, come west with the Saints, and die in Provo, Utah at the age of 92.”¹⁸² Very significant is her account of seeing Joseph and Oliver with shining faces as they came down from the symbolic equivalent of the cosmic mount. It lends credence to her report that it is known that many others saw Joseph’s “radiance of countenance” at times when he was inspired.¹⁸³ It is another evidence of the intense spirituality of the translation effort, and also another way Joseph was like Moses, whose face was shining as he came down from his ascent to Mount Sinai.¹⁸⁴ It provides a reminder that the Savior’s “face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light,” as on the Mount of Transfiguration.¹⁸⁵

**The Symbol of the Garret and Temple Relatedness**

It cannot be determined whether the term *garret* is a description chosen by Martin Harris or by Prof. Anthon, who interviewed him. Anthon used it in his report about the place of translation described to him by Harris. Nevertheless, it is striking how not only its principal meaning, which allows it to be seen as an *upper room*, but also an additional connotation applies to Joseph Smith. At the time, Webster defined *garreteer* as “an inhabitant of a garret; a poor author.”¹⁸⁶ Compare *Collins English Dictionary*: “[A] person who lives in a garret, especially a penniless writer.” Joseph was a *garreteer* indeed, for he began the translation at a time of great poverty in his life.¹⁸⁷ Virtually destitute at times when he

¹⁸¹. The Huntington journal is quoted and discussed in Welch, “Miraculous Timing,” 109, 185, emphasis added. Another source for the text with discussion is Morris, *Documentary History*, 344–45.


¹⁸⁷. On Joseph’s poverty at the time, see Dean C. Jessee, “Joseph Knight’s Recollection of Early Mormon History,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (1977):
produced the translated Book of Mormon, he had to go to great lengths to demonstrate his desire for true riches — the riches of eternity.

It is impressive that the introduction of the term *garret* brings to mind other associations that point to an important aspect of the temple. The word derives from the concept of a *watchtower* and is related to *garrison*, which in turn reflects ideas of safety, defending, guarding and protecting. Margaret Barker has noted that the ancient temple Holy of Holies “was often described in the same way as a tower or a watchtower.”

Hugh Nibley has written of the temple that “in this world it must serve as a fortress, a ‘safe house,’ sheltered place or marshaling area — note the *buttresses and battlements* and the garden walls of all our older temples. The security is guaranteed by God himself, who will both decide and execute whatever smiting and fighting needs to be done.”

A study of the symbolism that can be seen on the exterior of the Salt Lake temple provides a witness of what Nibley affirmed. This is summarized in a section of that study entitled *Symbolism of Guardedness*:

Many symbols relating to the temple, both physical and functional, communicate that the teachings and rituals of the temple are guarded and exclusive. The very architecture and physical orientation of the temple express this aspect. For example, narrow doorways and solid granite walls up to sixteen feet thick crowned with *battlements and crenellated*

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35–36. Knight assisted some, and described Joseph as “poor and [with] no means to live … His wife’s father and family were all against him and would not help him.” Spelling corrected. See Brodie, *No Man Knows*, 53: “Joseph was desperately poor.” Cf. “the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Luke 9:58).

188. See *New Oxford American Dictionary*, s.v. “garret” and “garreteer.”


190. For terms used by Nibley, see the *New Oxford American Dictionary*, s.v. “buttress:” “a projecting support of stone or brick … a source of defense or support”; s.v. “battlement:” “a parapet at the top of a wall … that has regularly spaced squared openings for shooting through”; s.v. “parapet:” “a low protective wall along the edge of a roof.”


... manifest protectiveness toward the sacred functions that take place within the building.

Because of persecution and dangers, Joseph Smith moved from Palmyra to Harmony and later to the Whitmer home, and to the sacred space in which he worked at each place. It provided him the inspiration, guardedness and protection of the temple while he translated the Book of Mormon.

Answers in Joseph Smith’s Ritual Procedures

This review of ritual matters in Joseph Smith’s prophetic life can contribute to answering current questions and ongoing critical accusations, such as

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Critical Accusation</th>
<th>Ritual or Symbolic Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blanket or curtain placed to deceive scribes.</td>
<td>Creation of sacred holy space with a veil. Provisional Holy of Holies restoration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association with folk magic practices.</td>
<td>Prophet’s triumph over a ritual contest: similar to Moses, Elijah, Peter and Christ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One of many visionaries in the time period.</td>
<td>Joseph’s were more complete, ongoing, and consistent with ancient ascent patterns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple rites were copied from Freemasonry.</td>
<td>Early Christian beliefs, covenants restored.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As pertaining to the final item on the above list, a contribution is evident if findings from the study are considered in the question of whether Joseph received his temple rites by revelation or from his environment. Manifestly, a prophet’s mission could include a determination of what is sound in the environment and what is not. Some have thought that he received and conceived much of his temple teachings from Freemasonry. On this, an associate of Joseph quoted him as saying, “He told me Freemasonry, as at present, was the apostate [temple] endowments, as sectarian religion was the apostate religion.” His comparison shows that Joseph saw much good and well-meaning in Freemasonry, but also serious error and incompleteness, especially as related to sacred matters that would require revelation to correct.

193. For a term used by Oman, see the New Oxford American Dictionary, s.v. “crenellate”: to “provide (a wall of a building) with battlements.”
Recently published is an extensive study entitled “Method Infinite,” whose intent is to show influence on Joseph Smith from Freemasonry. Some of it is germane to the themes of this paper, for it includes discussion of allegorical Masonic ritual of heavenly ascent, which has some similarities to the temple endowment ceremony taught by Joseph Smith. A very comprehensive study by Jeffrey Bradshaw appeared about the same time, showing in detail evidence of the great predominance of inspiration and revelation in the teachings and temple rites of Joseph Smith. Bradshaw summarized as follows:

With some important exceptions, the relationship of Masonic rites to temple ordinances is mostly a comparison of contrasts. Freemasonry is not a religion and Masonic rites differ from temple ordinances in that they are not claimed to be essential for salvation, there is no requirement for priesthood authority, they differ in the general sequence of ritual events, they neither promise nor require joint exaltation of men and women, and they cannot be performed by proxy.

Decades earlier, historian Michael Quinn made a similar comment on ascent that well bears reiteration: “Freemasonry did not teach that its ceremonies were necessary to ascend to God or to attain the blessings of heaven. Nor did Freemasons teach that non-Masons were deprived of heavenly blessings for lack of receiving such ceremonies.” Joseph Smith claimed divine authority for his teachings and rituals, and the necessity to participate in them to obtain the blessings. His ritual provided heavenly ordained covenants that required obedience for exaltation. When introducing the newly-revealed temple ordinance of proxy baptism for the dead, he stressed the necessity of “obtaining the powers of the Holy Priesthood. For him to whom these keys are given

197. Ibid., 137, 330–32.
there is no difficulty in obtaining a knowledge of facts in relation to the salvation of the children of men, both as well for the dead as for the living.”

In considering the origin of his temple teachings, it is helpful to see from this review that Joseph had a special prophetic calling from the beginning. He received much heavenly guidance, which continued through all of the many procedures he experienced. These included actions that anticipated the coming temple, even at an early time in his life. He received the power of priesthood authority and frequent revelation. He was called and taught by angels at every turn, and enjoyed the presence of the Lord. Much was verified by witnesses who shared such experiences with him. All of this supports the belief that his temple ritual was from on high.

**Concluding Observations**

From his youth, Joseph Smith was given an extensive preparation to serve as the prophet and leader of the latter-day dispensation of the gospel and Church. Many of these preparatory experiences were ritual in nature. The special circumstances in which he was placed showed a stark contrast between the good and evil powers, and the need for revelation and restoration of the truth. It was a time of great disagreement in religious and spiritual matters, in which Joseph was troubled by a “strife of words and a contest about opinions” (Joseph Smith — History 1:6). The First Vision was a response to his concern, with the appearance of the Father and Christ the Son giving him a powerful reassurance of their reality and care. He was also shown the evil opposition that he would face. Joseph’s vision came when some others were reporting visions of God, but his were of greater scope, with continuation from God and the angels through all his life. Moreover, “Joseph went beyond them all and produced a culture and society that the visionaries around him could not even imagine.”

The great importance of temples and temple ritual enjoyed prominence. Where situations were such that covenant-makers were denied a full temple, the Lord allowed a tabernacle or other temporary place to be recognized as temple-like and equally sacred for the purpose.

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202. It has been thought that a temple could only be in Jerusalem, but it is now understood that even the ancient Israelites had temples in several places, and
This is true of the small upper rooms where Joseph translated the Book of Mormon and revealed other sacred truths and rituals, including his first teaching of the temple endowment ceremony when that was introduced before the completion of the Nauvoo temple. In summary of that event, “On May 4, 1842, Brigham Young, Heber Kimball, and Willard Richards found the upper room of Joseph’s store transformed. On the wall was a newly painted mural. Small trees and plants stood nearby, suggesting a garden setting. Another part of the room was sectioned off with a rug hung up like a curtain.”

Temple symbolism was apparent in the vertical typology, the reminder of the Garden of Eden which scholarship has shown was a model for the ancient temple, and the curtain or veil. Notably, “The Lord had revealed to Joseph Smith that such sacred ordinances must be performed in an upper room, and the Assembly Room in the red brick store was the only such place in Nauvoo at the time where a congregation could assemble in privacy.” Brigham Young recalled that Joseph “hung the veil” and “divided up the room the best that he could” to be like a temple, saying that “we have done the best we could in open sacred sites. See Haran, Temples and Temple-Service, 18–57. With their known interest in the temple, in addition to recognizing to some extent Herod’s temple in Jerusalem, the early Christians could have designated other sacred places needed for ritual purposes, as in upper room settings as described in Acts 1:13. The Latter-day Saints have been authorized such places pending the establishment of a temple. See Doctrine and Covenants 124:28–31. Even the Kirtland temple also had a tabernacle function, preparatory to the Nauvoo temple, where additional ordinances were introduced. In Utah, the Endowment House on Temple Square provided a temporary temple, pending the completion of the Salt Lake temple. An elevated hill was also used: “In the early days of this city, Ensign Peak was resorted to as a place for prayer, and upon its summit religious ceremonies of the most sacred and impressive character took place before there had been erected a building suitable for them.”


under the circumstances in which we are placed.”\textsuperscript{206} After directing the arrangements, Joseph “dedicated the upper story of his brick store before he attended to the ordinances.”\textsuperscript{207}

As pertaining to the placement of a curtain between Joseph and his scribe, some may think the concept of a provisional veil or Holy of Holies is an extravagant interpretation of what Joseph did and symbolized. But it must be remembered that this occurrence was at the birth and modest beginnings of something of uppermost importance that would grow to be of great consequence: “out of small things proceedeth that which is great” (Doctrine and Covenants 63:33).\textsuperscript{208} Joseph, of course, received many revelations on important matters other than ascent and temples emphasized in this paper. While it was not the intent to imply that all of the prophet’s visions or revelations were predicated on figurative or ritual ascent, \textit{most of those associated with the temple restoration were}. The temple provides a ceremonial ascent to the celestial presence of God.

There was simplicity in Joseph Smith’s translation arrangements, yet they represented profound religious matters. The process involved an anticipatory procedure that amounted to a prophecy of what was to come when temples were established. What may be gleaned from the available sources is a mere glimpse of what occurred — but what a marvelous glimpse it is, with many insights and associations. For example, the birth of the Book of Mormon bears comparison with circumstances at the birth of Christ. Each came in fulfillment of earlier messianic prophecy of Isaiah,\textsuperscript{209} and each was anticipated by angelic announcement.\textsuperscript{210} Each occurred in very humble circumstances, with \textit{descent from heaven} and \textit{incarnation}, miraculous elements, and angelic presence at the birth. Each came with strong recognition and representation, as by symbolic veil and otherwise, of cosmic earth/heaven relationships: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14). It

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{206} Andrew F. Ehat, “Joseph Smith’s Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Mormon Succession Question” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1981), 28.
\item \textsuperscript{207} Ibid., 27. See other references there and in Devery S. Anderson and Gary James Bergera, eds., \textit{Joseph Smith’s Quorum of the Anointed, 1842–1845: A Documentary History} (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005), xx-xxi, 2–7, 13. On page 3, Dimick Huntington, who assisted in preparing the room, is quoted that there was “a piece of carpet for a curtain.”
\item \textsuperscript{208} Cf. Alma 37:6–7. When Joseph Smith begins his work, “out of weakness he shall be made strong” (2 Nephi 3:13).
\item \textsuperscript{209} Isaiah 7:14, 29:11–14.
\item \textsuperscript{210} Luke 1:26–33, Joseph Smith — History 1:30–35.
\end{itemize}
is yet another way the revealed Book of Mormon may be recognized as a typification of Christ.

Overall, in this paper, there is a strong witness of the godhood of Jesus Christ. This is evident in Mosaic times, with the early Christians, and among the Latter-day Saints. When Joseph set up a provisional temple veil, it is a veil which in the New Testament may be seen as representing the “flesh” of Jesus, an aspect of its extensive symbolism. It shows that through Him we are to “enter the holy place” (Hebrews 10:19–20). While in form Joseph’s usage appears like an Old Testament activity in the Holy of Holies, it is nonetheless intensely Christian — all the more in translating the Book of Mormon, which testifies of Christ throughout. In the Book of Mormon, the resurrected Jesus declares that He was the God of Israel anciently, saying, when He appeared to the Nephites, “Behold, I am he that gave the law, and I am he that covenanted with my people Israel” (3 Nephi 15:5). Joseph Smith’s contribution makes it possible to enter into such temple covenants with the Lord today, in the “dispensation of the fullness of times,” to “gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him” (Ephesians 1:10).\footnote{Cf. Doctrine and Covenants 27:12–13, 128:21.}

[Author’s Note: I appreciate assistance with this paper from my son John P. Mitton.]

George L. Mitton was raised in Logan, Utah. Following military service, he served in the British Mission (1949–51) and later in many church callings. He received a master’s degree in political science at Utah State University and did additional graduate studies at the University of Utah and Columbia University. He is retired from a career in education and state government in Oregon and now lives in Utah. He assisted for a decade as an associate editor of the FARMS Review and published there, in Dialogue and in BYU Studies Quarterly. He was a founding member and is on the Board of Advisors of The Interpreter Foundation, and has published in its Journal. His marriage was to the late Ewan Harbrecht Mitton. They have four children, twenty grandchildren and thirty-seven great-grandchildren.
Turning Type into Pi:
The Destruction of the Nauvoo Expositor in Historical Context

Craig L. Foster

Abstract: The destruction of the Nauvoo Expositor has been portrayed as an event that stands out as a unique act where Joseph Smith and the Nauvoo City Council suppressed free speech. However, rather than being an anomaly, the destruction of the Nauvoo Expositor was historically and socially reflective of society in a volatile period in American history during which time several presses were destroyed and even editors attacked and killed.

On Monday evening, June 10, 1844, the Nauvoo city marshal and approximately one hundred members of the Nauvoo Legion, acting as a *posse comitatus*, went to the premises of the Nauvoo Expositor where they “removed the press, scattered the type, and burned the remaining copies of the newspaper.” This came after hours of meetings of the Nauvoo City Council on Saturday and Monday, which included intense discussion and reviewing English common law and the United States Constitution. The first and only issue of the Nauvoo Expositor was published on Friday, June 7, 1844. It can be reasonably described as an “opposition newspaper” accusing Joseph Smith and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints of a number of “odious traits” including “false swearing, lying, stealing, robbery, defrauding, polygamy, adultery, fornication, [and] blasphemy.”

that their goal was “the unconditional repeal of the Nauvoo City Charter” and to “place Joseph Smith and his base accomplices in crime, before the world in their true character” as “gross, dark, loathsome, and cruel” people.

This article will demonstrate how the destruction of the Nauvoo Expositor, rather than being an anomaly, was historically and socially reflective of American society during that volatile period of American history. Over a forty-year period of twenty years before and after the destruction of the Nauvoo Expositor, many presses were destroyed and editors attacked or killed. While practically unheard of in the twenty-first century, destruction of presses was much more common in the Jacksonian and Antebellum eras and in the first years of the Civil War.

Returning to that fateful Monday evening in 1844, the City Council declared the Nauvoo Expositor to be a public nuisance for “slander[ing] the Municipality of the city” that would cause increased persecution and mobbing from Nauvoo’s anti-Mormon neighbors. Acting to protect the city and its residents, the City Council ordered the destruction of the press. The order was completed by City Marshal John P. Greene who reported, “The within-named press and type is destroyed and pied according to order, on this 10th of June, 1844, at about 8 o’clock p.m.”

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The reference to type being *pied* meant that the type sorts were mixed and turned into a jumbled and confused mass. This meaning of *pie*, also written as *pye* and *pi*, was common enough to be defined in the 1828 edition of Webster’s dictionary, where *pie* has the entry, “Printers’ types mixed or unsorted,”[7] and *pye* as “A confused mass; the state of printing types when the sorts are mixed.”[8] Like the edible noun *pie*, it may be related to the use of *pie* in describing various birds such as the magpie, where we may see “the various combinations of ingredients [used in making pie] being compared to objects randomly collected by a magpie.”[9]

Charles A. Foster, one of the *Nauvoo Expositor*’s publishers, in a letter to the *Warsaw [Illinois] Signal*, wrote about his press being destroyed and the type pied. He stated that “a company consisting of some 200 men, armed and equipped, with Muskets, Swords, Pistols, Bowie Knives, Sledge-Hammers, &c, assisted by a crowd of several hundred minions, who volunteered their services on the occasion, marching to the building, and breaking open the doors with a Sledge Hammer, commenced the work of destruction and desperation.” He described how “They tumbled the press and materials into the street, and set fire to them, and demolished the machinery with sledge hammer.”[10]
Condemnation of the destruction of the press was swift. Governor Thomas Ford of Illinois wrote Joseph Smith and stated, in part, “I now express to you my opinion that your conduct in the destruction of the press was a very gross outrage upon the laws and the liberties of the people.”\textsuperscript{11} The Quincy [Illinois] Whig called the destruction a “HIGH-HANDED OUTRAGE” and explained that with the “Mormon attitude toward law and rights it is not surprising the Missourians were raised to madness and drove them from the state.”\textsuperscript{12} Thomas C. Sharp in the Warsaw Signal called the City Council’s action an “Unparalleled Outrage” and provocatively announced “war and extermination is inevitable. Citizens ARISE ONE AND ALL.”\textsuperscript{13} The rumor mill appears to have been active during this time of trouble. In an article that appeared in the Niles’ National Register of Baltimore, not only was Joseph Smith arresting everyone who did not agree with him, “threats [had been] made by the Mormons to destroy the press of the Warsaw Signal, and to assassinate the editor.”\textsuperscript{14}

Other newspapers reported the destruction of the press. The New York Herald reported the destruction and then editorialized, “These Nauvoo rulers have doffed their saintly robes, and have come out in their true characters of hellish fiends.”\textsuperscript{15} The Litchfield [Connecticut] Enquirer announced the destruction under the title of “Lynching at Nauvoo”; the National Intelligencer (Washington, D.C.) called the action “lawless” and “reckless”; and the Alexandria [Virginia] Gazette, in an article titled “Outrage at Nauvoo,” stated that the “City Corporation have formally resolved themselves into a mob, and have destroyed the press and materials of the Nauvoo Expositor.”\textsuperscript{16}

The destruction of the Nauvoo Expositor was described at the time as “unparalleled” and an “outrage,” and present-day critics have described

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{11} History of The Church, 6:534, https://byustudies.byu.edu/online-chapters/volume-6-chapter-27/.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} “HIGH-HANDED OUTRAGE,” Quincy Whig, June 19, 1844, as reprinted in Oaks and Hill, Carthage Conspiracy, 15.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} “Mormon War” Niles’ National Register, June 29, 1844, 6.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} “Later from Nauvoo,” New York Herald, June 25, 1844, 1.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} “Lynching at Nauvoo,” Litchfield Enquirer, July 4, 1844, 2; “ Destruction of the ’Nauvoo Expositor’ by Joseph Smith,” National Intelligencer, June 25, 1844, 3; and “Outrage at Nauvoo,” Alexandria Gazette, June 24, 1844, 3.
\end{itemize}
the event with similar outrage such as “the destruction of the Expositor is tantamount to an act of terror that should be denounced in any free society.”

**Extralegal Press Destruction in the Antebellum Era**

Disdainful hyperbole may be understandable, but the destruction of the *Nauvoo Expositor* was actually not an unheard of, unparalleled, outrageous, or illegal act at the time it took place. From roughly twenty years before until twenty years after the destruction of the press, violence was common amid political and social turmoil in the United States. Indeed, this was a time when “print culture [became] the special scapegoat of the decade. … Presses throughout the union were wrecked … as small-town printers were mobbed and their printing offices dismantled.”

Print culture became the scapegoat in large part because of the 1835 American Anti-Slavery Society postal campaign aimed at certain southern civic and political leaders. This campaign met with resistance:

> During the night of July 29, a shipment of mail sent by boat docked at the Charleston, South Carolina harbor. The mail was taken to the local post office and stored over night, before it would be sorted. That night a group named the “Lynch Men” stole the mail from the post office. The next night the “Lynch Men” paraded through the town with 2,000 other people and burned the mail.

Violence spread from there.

In 1836, Abraham Lincoln called mobbings “the every-day news of the times.” Lincoln also said that if “the vicious portion of [our] population shall be permitted to gather in bands of hundreds and

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17. Meatowhirledpeas, “Joseph Smith’s destruction of the Nauvoo Expositor presses was an indefensible, illegal and unconstitutional act — members have been excommunicated for lesser offenses,” Reddit, 2017, https://www.reddit.com/r/exmormon/comments/6slltf/joseph_smiths_destruction_of_the_nauvoo_expositor/.


thousands, and burn churches, ravage and rob provision stores, throw printing-presses into rivers, shoot editors, and hang and burn obnoxious persons at pleasure and with impunity, depend upon it, this government cannot last.”

Myra Glenn observed that: “Anti-abolitionist riots were a regular occurrence in the antebellum United States. So too were riots against prostitution, gambling and drinking. … Partisan politics and theatrical performances also sparked mob violence as did conflicts among different class, ethnic, religious, and racial groups.” Such mobbing and violence was aimed at American newspapers and their editors. In fact, many editors expected violence. Cassius M. Clay, the editor of the emancipationist newspaper, The True American, “mounted two cannons in his newspaper office.”

Ironically, as explained by Professor Richard Kielbowicz at the University of Washington, most mobs believed that rather than ignoring the law with their protests, including violent action against newspapers and newspaper editors, they were exhibiting “a hypersensitivity to the law. Communities pointed to legal principles that supported the suppression of unwanted newspapers in their midst, and they followed a quasi-legislative or judicial process in which lawyers and civil authorities” believed “communities should have some control over ideas disseminated in their midst.”

In nineteenth-century America, justifying the suppression of antislavery and other controversial newspapers, “mobs customarily branded the offending publication a ‘nuisance’ or ‘public nuisance.’” Nuisance law “was one of the most important public legal doctrines of

nineteenth-century regulatory governance.”

Popular concepts of what defined public nuisance were used legally and extralegally to further causes.

**Attacks on Editors**

During the forty-year period under consideration, there were numerous examples of assaults against editors for one reason or another, many simply being that the attacker was insulted or offended by the editor. The following are a few examples.

- In 1828, E. J. Roberts, a New York City publisher, attacked a Mr. Noah, editor of the *Enquirer* with a “cow skin” (a small whip) over an insult.

- Reverend Amos Blanchard, editor of the *Cincinnati Journal*, was attacked by a man with a whip for the reverend’s editorial. A few years later the editor of the *Cincinnati News* announced that he was likely to be “extensively cowhided” in the course of the day.

- The editor of the *Gleaner* was assaulted by a man who believed he had been slandered. He was “considerably hurt” and the *Lowell [Massachusetts] Patriot* editorialized, “Dangerous times these, for newspaper editors and publishers.”

- The editor of a Memphis, Tennessee, newspaper was attacked by a local judge who believed he had been insulted. The fight resulted in canes and pistols on both sides. The editor ended up being shot in the hand.

- In 1848 the editor of the *Vicksburg [Mississippi] Sentinel* was killed in the street during a political quarrel. This was,
according to the *New York Herald*, the third or fourth editor of the *Vicksburg Sentinel* to be killed in a duel or street fight.\(^{31}\)

- In 1851, *The Prairie Chieftain* (Monticello, Indiana) commented, “The average number of editors cowhided, for the last month or so, is about three and three quarters per week.”\(^{32}\)

- Orson Hyde was one of those editors cowhided by an angry reader. In 1852 he was in Weston, Missouri, where he was cowhided by a Robb Wilson of that town who claimed he had been slandered in the *Frontier Guardian*. By this point, Hyde had ceased editing the newspaper, which was published in Kanesville, Iowa.\(^{33}\)

- *New York Herald* editor James Gordon Bennett is said to have been “nine times publicly kicked, cuffed, caned, cowhided, and spit upon.”\(^{34}\)

- As the result of publishing an exposé of a gambling house in a nearby town, the editor and workers of the Scranton, Pennsylvania, *Morning Herald* were attacked and “severely handled” by a mob of men.\(^{35}\)

- In 1859, the editor of the *Nashville News* shot and killed the editor of *The Union and American* (Greeneville, Tennessee) over an editorial quarrel between the two.\(^{36}\)

### Attacks on Printing Presses

Not only editors were attacked by angry people and mobs. In 1842, the printing office of the Lancaster, Ohio, *Eagle* was set on fire in the middle of the night. In reporting the loss, the *Ohio Democrat* described the paper as “a fearless champion of Democracy” that “could only be crushed by the incendiary’s torch.”\(^{37}\) In 1844, the *Stamford [Connecticut] Advocate*

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33. *Northern Islander*, July 1, 1852, 3.
announced it was new and improved after having been destroyed by a mob.\textsuperscript{38}

Reasons for mobbing and destroying presses varied. These reasons ranged from the silly to the serious. In 1856 a Salem, Indiana, editor had his press destroyed by the “liquor men” of the town because he had applauded the women who “had been mobbing the liquor stores there.”\textsuperscript{39} In 1841, the press of the \textit{Rockford [Illinois] Star} was broken with the type scattered and pied “by a portion of the citizens of the vicinity.”\textsuperscript{40} The cause of the attack on the press was “an article condemning the course of the volunteer companies in relation to the horse thieves.” While the newspaper had condemned the murder of the horse thieves by a vigilante posse, the enraged town’s people felt the newspaper had justified the horse thieves.\textsuperscript{41}

This, like a number of other incidents, involved aspects of politics. For example, in 1840 the office of the \textit{True American}, a Democrat paper in Paoli, Indiana, was broken into by unknown persons and the press broken and type scattered. The Whigs, one of the two major American political parties in the 1840s and 1850s, were blamed for the destruction.\textsuperscript{42} In 1846, an ex-Senator of the Ohio Legislature, unhappy with the editorials, entered the office of the \textit{Eaton [Ohio] Democrat} and proceeded to break the press and destroy everything in the office. He then threw the cases and type into the street.\textsuperscript{43} In 1848, the office of the \textit{Louisville [Kentucky] Democrat} was broken into, “the power press broken to pieces, several forms knocked into pi, and a lot of papers set on fire, which would have burnt down the building had it not been immediately discovered.”\textsuperscript{44}

Such attacks also occurred against Republican newspapers. In 1859 the office of the Newport, Kentucky, \textit{Free South Paper} was mobbed, and the type scattered in the street.\textsuperscript{45} And politics extended beyond American political parties. In 1851, a mob in New Orleans destroyed a pro-Spanish press called \textit{La Union}. They destroyed the presses, forms, and type but

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{38} \textit{The Raleigh Register}, October 18, 1844, 3.
\item \textsuperscript{39} “Mob Law in Indiana,” \textit{Richmond Dispatch}, May 3, 1856, 1.
\item \textsuperscript{40} “A Printing Office in Pi,” \textit{The Mississippi Free Trader}, July 26, 1841, 2, and “That is the Way,” \textit{The Times-Picayune}, July 28, 1841, 2. This case is explained in more detail later in the article.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{42} “Desperation of Federal Whiggery,” \textit{The Wabash Enquirer}, July 8, 1840, 3.
\item \textsuperscript{43} “Printing Office Destroyed,” \textit{Easton Star}, March 24, 1846, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{44} “Infamous Outrage,” \textit{New Albany Democrat}, June 29, 1848, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{45} \textit{The Perry County Democrat}, November 3, 1859, 2.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
were careful to not damage the building. They also refused to harm the family of the proprietor, who resided above the printing shop.46

By far, the issue that was the cause of most cases of destruction of presses was slavery, with abolitionists suffering at the hands of pro-slavery mobs. Perhaps one of the best-known examples of anti-abolition violence was the 1837 murder of Elijah Lovejoy in Alton, Illinois. Although Lovejoy and his press were in a free state, his press was destroyed for the fourth time in the span of a year, and he was killed by “a party of citizens” led by men of “property and standing.”47 Lovejoy’s press had been destroyed three times within a year previous to the final deadly attack. The third attack occurred while Lovejoy was trying to leave St. Louis, Missouri, for Alton, Illinois. In the last attack before Lovejoy departed St. Louis, the mob destroyed not only the press and printing materials but also destroyed his family’s belongings which had already been packed for shipping to Alton.48

Another well-known abolitionist who suffered from attacks on his press was Cassius M. Clay, the Kentucky planter, politician, and later Ambassador to Russia who was outspokenly pro-abolition and was known to violently defend himself and his beliefs. In 1845, his True American Press was destroyed in Lexington, Kentucky, by a mob of sixty men. Clay packed up what was left of the press and materials and sent them to Cincinnati where the paper could continue printing in relative peace.49

During this forty-year time-period, presses were regularly attacked, mostly without punishment. In Cincinnati, for example, a large meeting of citizens was convened in 1836 to address “what steps should be taken in reference to the publication of the Philanthropist the organ of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society. … During these proceedings the civil authorities of the city appeared, by their silence, to acquiesce in this subversion of law and order,” the Constantine [Michigan] Republican reported. At the conclusion of the meeting, the press was destroyed by a mob.

In Parkville, Missouri, in 1855, a mob gathered and passed resolutions declaring the Industrial Luminary to be a public nuisance. Approximately two hundred “citizens of Platte county … destroyed the fixtures and threw the printing press into the Missouri river. The editors’ absence alone saved them from being tarred and feathered.” In fact, the mobbers had planned to tar and feather the editors and ride them on a rail. G. S. Park was out of town, but his partner, W. J. Patterson, was present. However, his wife clung to him and implored the mob to leave him alone. They relented.

Among the eight resolutions passed by the Parkville mob, the first was that the Parkville Industrial Liminary was declared a nuisance which should be abated. Also, the editors were declared traitors to the state and county. The editors were ordered not only out of the town and county, but apparently also Missouri and Kansas. The resolution said in part that the editors would be thrown into the Missouri River if found in the county three weeks from that time and, if they moved over to Kansas, “we pledge our honor as men, to follow and hang them wherever we can take them.” They further pledged that “no person belonging to the Northern Methodist Church” would be allowed to preach in Platte County.

During the time of “bleeding Kansas” — a period of violence and guerilla warfare in Kansas between the pro-slavery and anti-slavery settlers and forces that came into Kansas specifically for the purpose of getting control of the territory — several presses were either destroyed or

50. According to Kielbowicz, “The Law and Mob Law,” 569, there were at least twenty examples of mob action against antislavery newspapers. The actual number is probably higher as I found references to destroyed presses not included in the article’s list.
52. “Mob Law in Missouri,” The Hillsborough Recorder, May 9, 1855, 2.
54. Ibid.
their editors threatened. Two newspapers were destroyed in Lawrence, Kansas, where one office was “fired upon by a field piece” by a pro-slavery militia and the other shop was “mobbed, ransacked, and set on fire and burned to the ground.”55 Another paper, as yet unnamed, was destroyed in Osawatomie, Kansas, and it hadn’t even begun publishing. The press and other equipment had just arrived in the town and was destroyed before ever being used. The press was destroyed during the general destruction of the town and the women were robbed of their rings and other jewelry by border ruffians.56

These attacks against abolitionist presses continued up to the Civil War. As late as October 1859 an abolitionist newspaper was destroyed. Newport, Kentucky’s Free South was mobbed by pro-slavery men. The press was “broken, the form knocked into pi, and the type scattered in the street.” The editor’s daughters who were present when the attack was made on the printing shop and who usually set the type for the newspaper, were “grossly insulted” by mob members. It was reported that when mob members approached the printing shop, they told the editor “they considered the community unsafe where such a paper was tolerated, and so forth.” 57 During the war, “more than three dozen editors and publishers discovered that voicing dissenting opinion during wartime had outsized consequences. … Extra-legal violence (or threats of violence) by mobs suppressed speech and often forced editors to take flight when their offices were ransacked and their printing presses were destroyed.”58 In fact, just over a period of weeks in the summer of 1861, eleven newspapers were either suppressed or destroyed. Not only were presses destroyed, some editors, like Ambrose L. Kimball of Haverhill,

55. “Printing Offices Destroyed,” found in “A Record of Kansas Ruffianism,” Weekly Hawkeye and Telegraph, June 25, 1856, 1; also found in an article by the same title, Bradford Reporter, June 21, 1856, 1.
Massachusetts, were punished by being tarred and feathered and ridden on a rail. 59

**Destruction of Presses by Civil, Military, and Political Authorities**

Threats, violence, and destruction were not just the acts of mobs and vigilante forces. It was also the result of acts by civil, military, and political authorities.

**Extralegal Attacks on Presses by Authorities**

Most of the incidents of press destruction were extralegal mob actions, unlike the Nauvoo City Council-ordered destruction of the *Nauvoo Expositor*. Perhaps that’s what differentiated the *Nauvoo Expositor* destruction from the numerous other presses destroyed during this time.

The difference between a government-ordered destruction as opposed to a mob-driven destruction is a significant factor and almost all examples of destruction of newspapers and presses were extralegal. There were, however, examples of public officials who resorted to extralegal destruction of presses. For example, in 1843 the premises of the *Juliet [Illinois] Signal*, a Whig paper, was “violently entered, and several portions of the press taken away and secreted” in an attempt to suppress publication of the paper until after the local election. One of the leaders of the mob was *Chicago Democrat* editor and Democratic candidate for Congress, John A. Wentworth, who was backed by the local Democrat political machine. He is best known among Latter-day Saints as the recipient of the 1842 Wentworth Letter written by Joseph Smith which included what we now know as The Articles of Faith. 60

John Wentworth was not alone as a candidate helping destroy a press. In 1859, Sylvanus B. Lowry was the Democratic candidate for Minnesota Lieutenant-Governor. This was a year after he had headed the mob that had destroyed the press of Mrs. Swisshelm’s St. Paul

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abolitionist newspaper, *The St. Cloud Visitor*. On a more personal level, in 1836 a man who had previously “filled sundry offices of high trust and responsibility” entered the office of the *Ohio Observer* and proceeded to destroy the printing establishment “to prevent the publication of sundry resolutions, adopted at ‘a respectable meeting of citizens’ of Hudson [Ohio], in which he was ‘mentioned [sic] by name as having been guilty of licentious conduct.’”

In Maryland, a Mr. Claggett, Whig delegate to the Maryland House of Representatives and a slave holder, attempted to have the *Saturday Visitor*, a pro-abolition Baltimore newspaper, declared a public nuisance and be abated, removed, or destroyed. In Richmond, a newspaper named *The Hornet* was attacked and the press destroyed. While there appears to have been no official order to have the press attacked, according to one article about the incident, all was done “in the presence of a police officer, who declined interfering.” Despite the political and official influence of the previous examples, these could still be deemed extralegal.

### Legal Attacks on Presses by Authorities

There are examples of civil, military, and political figures and entities officially ordering the silencing, suppression, abatement, or destruction of newspapers. For example, in the first months of the Civil War, five newspapers, four of them in St. Louis, were suppressed by military authorities. These papers were deemed treasonous or a nuisance as a reason for being shut down.

One of the more colorful examples of actions ordered by government officials took place in 1835 during the little-known Toledo War, also known as the Michigan-Ohio War. This was a boundary dispute over a strip of land now known as the Toledo Strip. During Michigan’s petitioning for statehood in 1835, both the Territory of Michigan and the State of Ohio claimed this strip of land. In July 1835, the acting territorial governor, Stevens T. Mason, ordered the Monroe County, Michigan

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64. “Shameful,” *National Advocate*, January 1823, 2, emphasis added. While this incident was just a little out of the forty-year timeframe, I deemed it significant enough to discuss.
Territory, sheriff and a posse of about 250 men to proceed to Toledo to serve warrants on some individuals and take action against the local press which “had become obnoxious to the Michigan authorities” and was thus deemed a nuisance.66

Members of the posse went to the printing office of the Toledo Gazette, split and knocked down the door to the office, and demolished the press and materials. The press equipment was broken and the type was scattered around the premises. After breaking up the press and arresting certain individuals, the posse retreated over the Michigan Territory border, leaving behind an angry Toledo populace.67

Another example that is just a little out of the time being studied occurred in Richmond, Ray County, Missouri in 1866. The Missouri Freeman, “having published an article instigating the people to violence and resistance,” state authorities “sent a squad of militia to arrest the editor and destroy the press, which was done.”68

**Justification of Destroying Presses**

Jacksonian and Antebellum society extralegal punishment of real and perceived threats to the peace of the community was not only allowed, but at times embraced in parts of the United States.

Historian Richard Maxwell Brown estimated that the 1830s and 1840s served as a high point for vigilantism in Illinois. Most Americans saw vigilante movements as essential for law and order in new frontier communities. Driven by the American values of “self-preservation, the right of revolution, and popular sovereignty,” elite citizens took the law into their own hands to restore or create social order.69

The destruction of printing presses and turning type into pi was usually condemned by some editors and lauded by others, depending

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67. Ibid.
68. *The Daily Empire*, December 20, 1866, 2.
upon political and social persuasion. Thus, abolitionists decried the savagery of attacks against fellow abolitionists while slavery-supporting editors in not only the South but also Northern states either applauded such actions or remained conspicuously silent. This also was the pattern of Democrat and Whig publications in what could only be described as condoning such actions if they were on the editor’s side and condemning them if they were not.

Vilifying Joseph Smith and the Latter-day Saints

If the extralegal destruction of annoying and troublesome printing presses was allowed and even lauded by other editors, presses, and communities, then why the overwhelming denunciation of the destruction of the *Nauvoo Expositor*? How was this event different from a number of others throughout the country?

Like other presses at the time that were viewed as public nuisances and dangerous to the community, the *Nauvoo Expositor* was destroyed. Furthermore, while there are fewer examples of official action being taken against presses and their editors, examples nevertheless exist. So even there, Joseph Smith, the Nauvoo City Council, and other officials were not acting without precedent, nor were they the last example of such action. It appears they genuinely believed they were within their legal rights to destroy the press.

On June 27, 1854, John Taylor spoke in the Old Tabernacle in Salt Lake City about the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. In explaining what led to the martyrdom, he recounted a conversation he had with Thomas Ford after the murders. Ford told Taylor he was sorry they had destroyed the press. Taylor responded that “it was legal.” They went back and forth, and Taylor asked, “Were we to be trampled upon? Is there a city in the union that ever did?” “No,” Ford responded. “What were we to do then?” Ford then answered Taylor, “I would have got up a mob to destroy it and that would have cleared the city council.”

Thomas Ford’s comment about having a mob take care of destroying the *Nauvoo Expositor* apparently was based on his own personal experience with vigilante violence. In 1841, Ford was Circuit Judge for the Ogle County, Illinois, Circuit Court. At the time, Ogle County and environs were suffering from the Prairie Bandits, a group of horse thieves and rogues. Ford, frustrated with the horse thieves avoiding

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justice, suggested to Ogle County residents that they form a group of “regulators” to fight the thieves through vigilante action. Ultimately, several thieves were taken prisoner for a murder and an ad hoc trial was held. Two were found guilty of murder and executed with the hundred plus regulators acting as a firing squad.

Philander Knappen, editor of the Rockford [Illinois] Star, printed an editorial condemning lynch law and the actions of the regulators. “A few nights after this editorial appeared, the Star’s offices were sacked and the type broken up and scattered on the floor. Knappen decided that it would be best to exit the newspaper business in Rockford.” 71 The Cincinnati Gazette and the Virginia Free Press both had articles talking about the destruction of the Rockford Star. The Virginia Free Press stated that the mob needed to silence the Rockford Star because it was focusing attention on the murders committed by the vigilantes. 72 Because the Rockford Star had made the murders known, according to Gale, Ford presided over a series of rigged trials exonerating the over one hundred members of the regulators. 73

John Taylor, however, scorned Ford’s suggestion of falling back on extralegal justice rather than legal justice and quietly encouraging a mob to destroy the press. He explained to the listening audience,

We had honest integrity enough to maintain the truthfulness of law but the governor of [the] state [was] so afraid of what the people [would] say but let us get up a mob to destroy the damned thing. We knew we were right and did it. That was the belief we acted upon.74

Although Taylor was sure of their legal authority to abate the newspaper (“abate” is used here in the legal sense of removing a nuisance), Dallin H. Oaks, while serving as a professor at the University of Chicago Law School, published a seminal article titled, “The Suppression of the Nauvoo Expositor,” in which he explained that the Nauvoo City Council did not have the “right to abate the Nauvoo Expositor on the basis of its political and religious allegations, but on the charges of immorality,

73. Gale, “The Regulators and the Prairie Bandits.”
74. Carruth and Staker, “John Taylor’s Account,” 47.
the city could have made a case.”

Oaks further argued that rather than taking the approach they did, Nauvoo authorities could probably have successfully pursued “prosecution for criminal libel for the attacks on the city officials or a prosecution for unlawful assembly for the paper’s efforts to incite violence” and that “both [would] have been feasible under Illinois laws then in effect.”

Furthermore, he explained that while the decision made by the Nauvoo City Council went against accepted law, the laws at the time were in flux in both interpretation and enforcement. Oaks wrote, “the available evidence demonstrates that the 19th-century interpretation of constitutional provisions like that of Illinois laid far more emphasis on the ‘responsibility’ of the press than on its ‘freedom.’” He continued, “The suppressionist attitude made itself felt in numerous criminal prosecutions against newspaper writers, editors, and publishers for various types of newspaper activity like the Expositor’s.”

**Conclusion**

This article does not seek to condone nor condemn the actions of Nauvoo officials in ordering and carrying out the destruction of the *Nauvoo Expositor*. Instead, it details that rather than being an aberration, the destruction of the press fit neatly into this volatile and violent time in American history. The facts demonstrate that the *Nauvoo Expositor* was only one of many newspapers similarly destroyed. Fortunately for them, the publishers and editors of the *Nauvoo Expositor* escaped the violent fate of those operating many other presses in that era.

While the destruction of the *Nauvoo Expositor* fit into the social milieu of the time and Nauvoo officials believed they were acting within their rights, members of the Nauvoo City Council, those who destroyed the press, and Nauvoo citizens suffered the consequences of the City Council’s actions. Right or wrong, Joseph and Hyrum Smith ultimately paid with their lives for destroying the *Nauvoo Expositor*, the Nauvoo City Charter was repealed by the state legislature (as the

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75 Alexander, “The Church and the Law,” 123.


77 Ibid., 895.

78 According to Oaks and Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy*, 201, eleven members of the LDS Church were indicted for riot in the destruction of the press. Of those, two were eventually arrested and brought to trial—Jesse P. Harmon and John Lytle—both Nauvoo law-enforcement officers. Eventually they were found not guilty.
publishers of the *Nauvoo Expositor* had desired), and the Saints were soon driven from Illinois.

**Craig L. Foster** earned an MA and MLIS at Brigham Young University. He is also an accredited genealogist and works as a research consultant at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. He has published articles about different aspects of Latter-day Saint history. He is the author of two books, co-author of another and co-editor of a three-volume series discussing the history and theology of plural marriage. Foster is also on the editorial board of the *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*. 
Witness of the Covenant

Loren Blake Spendlove

Abstract: Although much has been taught about covenants in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, little attention has been given to the witnesses of those covenants. In this paper I focus on the importance of witnessing the covenants that we make with God — especially the gospel covenant — rather than on the process of making them. Instead of emphasizing the teachings of Latter-day Saint leaders and authors, I prioritize the standard works of the Church in my analysis of this topic. I begin with a discussion of covenants and witnesses in the Hebrew Bible, and then proceed with an examination of the same from the Book of Mormon. I identify the ordinances of baptism and the sacrament as witnesses of the gospel covenant and clarify that it is through the blood of Christ that we are cleansed from sin rather than through the waters of baptism. I conclude by observing the importance of faithfully witnessing the gospel covenant to serve God and keep his commandments.

From the earliest of times, God has established a pattern of covenant making with his people. Some Jewish scholars have even postulated that the first use of the word covenant in the Bible occurs in the very first word of the book of Genesis, בְּרֵאשִׁית (bereshit), translated as “In the beginning” in most English Bibles. Following this theory, the word אש (esh), or fire, is sandwiched between the four letters of the word for covenant ברית (brit). The result is בְּרֵ-אשׁ-ית (br-esh-it), which when rendered ברית אש (brit esh) means covenant of fire.

In antiquity, witnesses and testimonies (עדים, edim) or signs and tokens (אתת, otot) always accompanied and served as public evidences

of these divine covenants. In fact, it is interesting that in the Book of Mormon only the secret combinations had secret signs:

And it came to pass that they did have their signs, yea, their secret signs and their secret words — and this that they might distinguish a brother who had entered into the covenant, that whatsoever wickedness his brother should do, he should not be injured by his brother, nor by those who did belong to his band who had taken this covenant. (Helaman 6:22)

For the sake of simplicity, throughout this paper I refer to עדים (edim, witnesses or testimonies) and ת crédit (otot, signs or tokens) using the collective term witnesses of the covenant. These witnesses often served as reminders or as warnings to the people to be faithful to the covenantal agreement. In this paper, I discuss the principal covenants in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Mormon, correlated with their associated witnesses.

While Latter-day Saint authors and Church leaders have written and spoken much about covenants, covenant-making, and covenant-keeping, the topic of covenantal witnesses has been largely overlooked. Hence, this paper will focus mainly on the witnesses of the covenant and will primarily rely on scriptural sources rather than on the sermons or writings of Latter-day Saint Church leaders or authors.

**Old Testament Covenants and Witnesses**

The Old Testament contains accounts of many covenants and witnesses to those covenants. These include Noah, Abraham, Sinai, Moab, the Transjordan witness, Shechem, and Nehemiah. Each of these are discussed in the following sections.

**Noah**

The first time that the word covenant (ברית, brit) is used explicitly in the Bible is when God, speaking to Noah prior to the flood, said, “With thee will I establish my covenant” (Genesis 6:18). However, it is not clear from this verse or the surrounding text what might have been included

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3. All passages are from the King James translation (KJV) unless otherwise stated.
in that covenant. Following the receding of the flood waters, God again spoke of the covenant that had been promised to Noah and seemed to enlarge its terms to include all of Noah’s descendants and “every living creature” on earth (Genesis 9:10). In other words, this covenant was not intended just for Noah but for all of God’s creation, including unborn generations. In this postdiluvian covenant God promised that he would “establish my covenant with you [all]; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth” (Genesis 9:11). This unilateral and unconditional covenant guaranteed that God would never again destroy his earthly creations by flood.

In addition, God provided a sign — or witness — of the covenant: “I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth” (Genesis 9:13 NIV). Interestingly, God clarified the importance of this sign by stating:

> I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.” (Genesis 9:15–16 NIV)

In these verses, God promised to remember the covenant that he had made. The method that he prescribed was the rainbow, the witness of the covenant. The ability to remember something also implies the ability to forget. In Hebrews we read, “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more” (Hebrews 8:12). In the Hebrew Bible the verb remember is זכר (zakhar), and while in humans it can be understood as the ability to recall an idea, memory, or facts that may have been forgotten or that may not always have been at the forefront of one’s mind, with God its meaning is different:

God remembered (zakhar): This does not refer to a jogging of the divine memory, as if God had forgotten promises

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4. Restoration scripture informs us of a covenant that God made with Enoch, the great-grandfather of Noah, that preceded the covenant with Noah. In this earlier covenant God promised that he would “stay the floods” after the earth had been cleansed during the future days of Noah (Moses 7:50–51). See also Genesis 9:15–16 (JST).

5. אתכם (etchem) — with you (plural).

6. אות (ot) — This word is frequently used in the Hebrew bible, and is variously translated as sign, token, mark, symbol, banner, and standard.
made. To remember is to be actively attentive to that which is remembered (6:5; cf. Genesis 8:1); it is a divine sense of obligation to a prior commitment. … God’s remembering always means action that will affect the future.7

So, when God said that seeing the rainbow in the sky would cause him to remember the covenant, we could replace the word “remember” with the words “follow through with” or “act on.” The verse would then read, “Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and follow through with the everlasting covenant between [myself] and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.” This type of remembering, what I refer to as divine remembering, is always attached to action. Without a doubt, the rainbow also served as a reminder to Noah and his family of the covenant that the Lord had made with them.

It is worth noting that the first use of the verb זכר (zakhar, to remember) in the Hebrew Bible occurs in the story of Noah: “But God remembered Noah and all the animals and all the livestock that were with him in the ark; and God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the water subsided” (Genesis 8:1). In fact, God’s remembering of Noah comprises the central element of an extensive chiastic structure (see the Appendix), demonstrating the significance of this act of remembering. Regarding this chiasm, Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg wrote:

Since the central element of the chiasm functions as the focal point of the entire story — the tipping point not to be missed — we must assign it the first importance. Everything else described in the story is also important, but not nearly as important as the message of Genesis 8:1 (God remembering Noah). This “event” marks the triumph of mercy over judgment. God remembered Noah, just as He will later remember Abraham (Gen. 19:29) and other great figures of Israel’s redemptive history — and, perhaps most importantly, the people of Israel during the yet-to-come Passover deliverance from Egypt. At that time, we are told, God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Ex. 2:23–25).8

8. Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg, Becoming Israel (Tel Aviv: Jewish Studies for Christians, 2019), 22.
In the final section of this paper I will return to this concept of *divine remembering* with the idea of covenant witnesses, and with *our* responsibility to *remember* covenants as God does.

**Abraham**

The next biblical mention of a specific covenant between God and his children was when the Lord appeared to Abram, saying:

> “I am God Almighty; *walk before me faithfully and be blameless.* Then I will make my *covenant* between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.” Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, “As for me, this is my *covenant* with you: You will be the *father of many nations*. No longer will you be called *Abram*; your name will be *Abraham*, for I have made you a father of many nations.” (Genesis 17:1–5 NIV)

Unlike the apparently unilateral and unconditional covenant that God made with Noah, this covenant with Abraham was bilateral and conditional. The condition that God placed on Abraham was that he “walk before me faithfully and be blameless.” In other words, the fulfillment of the covenant required Abraham to follow God’s will and keep his commandments. As will be demonstrated throughout this paper, keeping God’s commandments is the *universal condition* of the gospel covenant as described in the scriptural record.

As he did with Noah, God also provided a sign — or witness — of his covenant with Abraham. In fact, two signs were given. The first was a change of names for both Abram and Sarai:

The Lord would then give both Abram and Sarai a *sign of the purposeful nature of his covenant* with Abram. He would change first Abram’s name, then Sarai’s. In Genesis 17:5 God said, “No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I will make you the father of a multitude of nations.”

God changed Abram’s name to Abraham as a witness of the covenant that He had made with him. When God said, “This is my covenant with

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9. As with all translations, no single translation of the biblical text always provides the best interpretation from the original language, whether Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek. When researching and writing, I choose from among the various English translations, or I provide my own rendering of the text.

you: You will be the father of many nations,” it was a type of wordplay on the name Abraham, which itself can be interpreted as “father of a multitude.” In this sense, Abram becoming a “father of many nations” was both the covenant and the witness; the changing of Abram’s name to Abraham paralleled the promised fulfillment of the covenant. Patrick Mead identifies another reason for the change of names:

God’s purpose in changing their names was so that every time Abraham and Sarah said their new names it would remind them that the covenant they entered into with the Lord was a purposeful covenant of hope and a destiny. By changing their names, God gave Abraham and Sarah a permanent sign of his purpose for their lives to be the instruments that brought salvation to the world, to fulfill God’s divine plan of redemption.11

The rainbow, the witness of the covenant with Noah, served as a reminder to God and to Noah of the covenantal promise. With Abram and Sarai, changing their names to Abraham and Sarah fulfilled the same purpose. The rainbow and the changing of Abram’s and Sarai’s names were very public witnesses of the covenant. It would have been difficult to miss a large, colorful rainbow in the sky or to not notice that Abram’s and Sarai’s names had been changed. In addition to changing their names, God established an additional outward sign or witness of the covenant, as is made clear in the New American Standard Bible of 2020 (NASB20) translation:

This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. (Genesis 17:10–11 NASB20)

Unlike the rainbow during the days of Noah, or the changing of Abram’s and Sarai’s names, this second sign of the Abrahamic covenant required human effort in its fulfillment. Abraham and Sarah, along with their descendants, were required to circumcise every male child within the covenantal promise. Fulfilling this commandment signaled, or witnessed, that the parents of the child were faithful adherents to the covenant and that they desired the same for their descendants.

11. Ibid., emphasis added.
Sinai

After leaving Egypt and encamping around mount Sinai/Horeb, Moses was instructed by the Lord to tell the Israelites that if they “will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples” (Exodus 19:5 NASB20). As with the Abrahamic covenant, obedience to the Lord’s voice was the condition that the Lord required. The people’s vocal response witnessed their acceptance: “All that the LORD has spoken we will do!” (Exodus 19:8 NASB20). In addition to this witness, the five books of Moses — also referred to as the Torah or Pentateuch — served as witnesses of this covenant (see Deuteronomy 4:13 and 31:24–26).

Moab

At the end of the 40 years in the wilderness, while the Israelites were in the land of Moab, God made another covenant with them (see Deuteronomy 29:1) that was distinct from the one made on Mount Sinai. Known as the Moab covenant, God conditionally promised the Israelites that he would make them prosperous and numerous in the land of their ancestors, Canaan. Two conditions were placed on the fulfillment of this covenant: 1) hearkening to the voice of the Lord by keeping his commandments and statutes and 2) turning to him with all one’s heart and soul (see Deuteronomy 30:1). In addition, two witnesses were provided with this covenant:

The Moab covenant is sealed with two “witnesses.” The command to Moses that he write down “this song … in order that it may be a witness against the Israelites” (Deuteronomy 31:19, 21) intimates something like a stone or other sign that stands as a witness to the covenant. Further, Moses then writes down the law (Deuteronomy 31:24), and commands that it be a witness against the people, and that it be placed next to the ark of the covenant. He puts it in the care of the Levites who carry the ark. With this comes the command to assemble the people and read the law to them every seven years (Deuteronomy 31:9–13). The Moab covenant is thus tied intimately to the idea of a written law as something that is binding on the Israelites. The written law actually becomes the witness against the people.12

With this covenant, rather than providing affirmative witnesses, God provided two witnesses that the Israelites would reject his covenant as they had in the past: 1) the song of Moses (see Deuteronomy 32:1–43) and 2) the book of the law, which was to accompany the ark of the covenant (Deuteronomy 31:26). The song of Moses is essentially an indictment of Israel’s past and predicted unfaithfulness to the Lord’s commandments. After Moses was given the words of the song, he was commanded to read them aloud to the people, which he did (see Deuteronomy 32:44). Not only were the words of the song to be read to the people, but Moses was also charged to “teach it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths” (Deuteronomy 31:19). Through the learning and reciting of the words of the song, the Israelites, in a sense, became an additional witness of this covenant, and of their own lack of faithfulness to God and to his covenant.

Transjordan Witness

Prior to crossing into the land of Canaan, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh chose to settle in the lands east of the Jordan river, otherwise known as Transjordan. During the rule of Joshua, the tribes in Canaan discovered that these Transjordanian tribes had “built an imposing altar there by the Jordan” (Joshua 22:10 NIV). Fearing that their fellow Israelites in Transjordan were in apostasy and that it would bring the wrath of God upon the other tribes, “the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered themselves together at Shiloh, to go up to war against them” (Joshua 22:12 NIV). The tribes in Canaan sent a delegation to the Transjordanian tribes to discover the reason for their apparent act of apostasy and to warn them that “if you rebel against the LORD today, He will be angry with the entire congregation of Israel tomorrow” (Joshua 22:18 NASB20). The Transjordanian tribes, however, reassured their fellow Israelites that their intentions were righteous; the altar that they had built was not an act of rebellion or apostasy. Rather, it was built to witness their commitment to God and the covenant:

\[\text{ספור התורה (sefer hatorah) is probably best translated as the book of instruction.}\]

\[\text{14. In an apparent reference to the Moab covenant, Isaiah wrote, ‘‘The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,’ declares the LORD. ‘As for me, this is my covenant with them,’ says the LORD. ‘My Spirit, who is on you, will not depart from you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will always be on your lips, on the lips of your children and on the lips of their descendants—from this time on and forever,’ says the LORD’ (Isaiah 59:20–21 NIV).}\]
But that it may be a witness [אֶד אֲד] between us, and you, and our generations after us, that we might do the service of the Lord before him with our burnt offerings, and with our sacrifices, and with our peace offerings; that your children may not say to our children in time to come, Ye have no part in the Lord. … And the children of Reuben and the children of Gad called the altar Ed [אֶד אֲד]: for it shall be a witness between us that the Lord is God. (Joshua 22:27, 34)

Shechem

In the final chapter of Joshua, we are presented with what may be called the Shechem covenant, even though it is actually a renewal of the Sinaitic and Moab covenants. Joshua, toward the end of his life, called the tribes together to the Israelite religious center at that time: “On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he reaffirmed for them decrees and laws” (Joshua 24:25 NIV). As with other covenants, Joshua identified two witnesses to this covenant: the Israelites themselves and a large stone:

So Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen for yourselves the Lord, to serve Him.” And they said, “We are witnesses.” … And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God; and he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the Lord. Then Joshua said to all the people, “Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, because it has heard all the words of the Lord which He spoke to us; so it shall be a witness against you, so that you do not deny your God.” (Joshua 24:22, 26–27 NASB20)

In addition to serving as a witness, the large stone set up by Joshua also served as a constant visual reminder to the people of their covenant promise to the Lord:

Joshua and the people sealed their covenant to serve the Lord by writing these words in the Book of the Law of God and by the erecting a large stone under an oak tree, the same tree

15. The name of the altar is not explicitly identified in the Masoretic text. However, Rashi wrote, “This is one of the shortened verses. One more word should have been added: And the sons of Rueben and sons of Gad called the altar witness [אֶד אֲד].” See “Rashi on Joshua 22:34:1,” Sefaria (website), https://www.sefaria.org/Rashi_on_Joshua.22.34.1?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en.
that Jacob had encountered when he came to Shechem. … The stone under the oak tree functioned as a legal reminder or *witness of the covenant* just entered into by the people. Now the stone and the people were *both witnesses*.16

**Nehemiah**

Following their return from exile in Babylon, and prior to fully rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, “the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads… and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers” (Nehemiah 9:1–2 NIV). That same day, the people entered into “a binding agreement [הָעָמַנָּה *amanah*], putting it in writing,” and their leaders, Levites and priests affixed their seals to it (Nehemiah 9:38 NIV). The rest of the people joined their leaders in this agreement to “bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the Lord our Lord” (Nehemiah 10:29 NIV).

The witness of this renewed covenant was a written document that was signed17 by 89 priests, Levites, and chief leaders of the people, with “Nehemiah the governor” first among the signers. Thomas Blanton compares this covenant renewal found in Nehemiah with a pattern of cyclic covenant renewal outlined in the book of Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy also attests to the observance of a periodic covenant renewal ceremony. According to Deut 31:9–13, every seventh year during the Festival of Booths, all of the people of Israel, including men, women, children, and even resident aliens, were to assemble for a covenant renewal ceremony in which the law was read aloud. In this way the stipulations of the covenant between YHWH and his people could be rehearsed and presumably, the people’s adherence to them reinforced.18

In addition, as an integral part of the covenant renewal process established by Moses, the Levites were instructed to recite to the Israelites

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17. From חָתֵם (*chatham*) meaning to seal or set a seal upon.
a list of curses that would befall them if they were to violate specific clauses of the covenantal agreement. Following each of the declarations, “all the people [were to] answer and say, Amen!” (Deuteronomy 27:15). These declarations of “amen” served as vocalized witnesses of the covenant renewal. The Nehemiah covenant follows this Deuteronomic pattern of covenant renewal.

### Old Testament Covenants and Witnesses Summary

Witnesses represent integral components of every covenantal agreement in the Hebrew Bible (see Table 1). These witnesses were always public, highly visible declarations of God’s, or the people’s, intention to follow through with their covenantal promises.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person/Place</th>
<th>Principal Scriptures</th>
<th>Witnesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noah</td>
<td>Genesis 9</td>
<td>1. Rainbow in the clouds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abraham</td>
<td>Genesis 17</td>
<td>1. Change of names; 2. Circumcision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinai</td>
<td>Exodus 19</td>
<td>1. Heavens; 2. Earth; 3. Torah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transjordan Witness</td>
<td>Joshua 22</td>
<td>1. Altar in Transjordan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shechem</td>
<td>Joshua 24</td>
<td>1. Israelites themselves; 2. Stone pillar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nehemiah</td>
<td>Nehemiah 9–10</td>
<td>1. Written and signed (sealed) document</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19. Deuteronomy 27:15–26. אמן (amen) is is the root of the word אמנה (amanah) as discussed in footnote 41. אמן carries the connotation of faithful or firm in Hebrew.

20. Although it is unknown how public the ceremony of circumcision was in antiquity, according to the Jewish Encyclopedia, “as early as the geonic time [roughly 600 AD to 1000 AD] the ceremony had been transferred from the house of the parents to the synagogue, where it took place after the service in the presence of the whole congregation.” See Jewish Encyclopedia, s.v. “Circumcision,” http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4391-circumcision#anchor11.

21. One reviewer commented that Passover could be considered a witness of the covenant. However, while Passover is called a feast (Luke 2:41), an ordinance (Exodus 12:43), and a memorial (Exodus 12:14, that is, a day to remember their deliverance from Egypt), it is never referred to as a covenant, witness, or sign of the covenant in any of our standard works. Following the biblical text, at the time that the Passover ordinance was instituted, the only covenants that had been recorded were the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants. Passover specifically memorializes the Israelites’ delivery from Egypt and cannot be understood to witness the covenant that the Lord made with the house of Israel on Mount Sinai since it preceded it, and covenantal witnesses always come after, or are coincident with the covenant itself.
Book of Mormon Covenants and Witnesses

A common theme in Biblical covenants is the idea that if the people fulfill their covenantal promises, or keep God’s commandments, he will grant them prosperity in the land (cf. Deuteronomy 29:9, Joshua 1:7, 1 Kings 2:3). On the contrary, breaking the covenant would lead to a cursing on the land:

Israel’s retention of the land was contingent upon her own compliance with the law of Moses. The grounds for the temporal reward was legal obedience. To paraphrase Scripture: “Do this and you, ancient Israel, will live and prosper in the land I have given you. Otherwise, I, the Lord your God, will bring a curse on the land.”

These same covenantal promises found in the Hebrew Bible are referenced directly or indirectly more than 50 times throughout the Book of Mormon, and they can be understood as the following cause and effect relationships:

- **Cause**: Keep the commandments. **Effect**: The people prosper in the land.
- **Cause**: Do not keep the commandments. **Effect**: The land is cursed/people are cut off from God’s presence.

In addition to this generalized prosperity promise in the Book of Mormon, other covenants are mentioned that merit our attention.

Lehi

As with the first covenant in the Bible, the covenant with Noah, the initial covenant discussed in the Book of Mormon also appears to be unilateral and unconditional. After arriving in the promised land Lehi told his family:


23. I was able to identify 27 direct references to this promise of prosperity in the land. For example, “And inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper and shall be led to a land of promise” (1 Nephi 2:20–21). In addition, I identified 28 indirect references. For example, “And insomuch as the children of Lehi have kept his commandments he hath blessed them and prospered them according to his word” (3 Nephi 5:22). On the contrary, “he leadeth away the righteous into precious lands, and the wicked he destroyeth and curseth the land unto them for their sakes” (1 Nephi 17:38).
Notwithstanding our afflictions, we have obtained a land of promise, a land which is choice above all other lands, a land which the Lord God hath covenanted with me should be a land for the inheritance of my seed. Yea, the Lord hath consecrated this land unto me and to my children forever, and also all they which should be led out of other countries by the hand of the Lord. (2 Nephi 1:5)

While there do not appear to be any conditions placed on the fulfillment of this covenant, as previously discussed, prosperity in the land was a separate matter that required obedience to God’s commandments. As a witness to the future fulfillment of this covenant, Nephi saw a vision in which his seed, mixed with the seed of his brothers, would continue to inhabit the land in the future, and that they would not be totally destroyed by the Gentiles:

Thou beholdest that the Gentiles which have gone forth out of captivity and have been lifted up by the power of God above all other nations upon the face of the land which is choice above all other lands, which is the land which the Lord God hath covenanted with thy father that his seed should have for the land of their inheritance, wherefore thou seest that the Lord God will not suffer that the Gentiles will utterly destroy the mixture of thy seed which is among thy brethren. Neither will he suffer that the Gentiles shall destroy the seed of thy brethren. (1 Nephi 13:30–31)

Benjamin

In his old age, King Benjamin preached a stirring sermon to the mixture of his people and the people of Zarahemla. Among other topics, his discourse touched on service to God, the plan of redemption, the atonement of Christ, repentance, and taking care of the poor. After King Benjamin finished speaking, the people responded by saying:

We are willing to enter into a covenant with our God to do his will and to be obedient to his commandments in all things that he shall command us all the remainder of our days, that we may not bring upon ourselves a never-ending torment as

24. While this witness of the covenant with Lehi was given privately to only Nephi, his sharing the vision with us in his record made it a public witness.
has been spoken by the angel, that we may not drink out of the cup of the wrath of God. (Mosiah 5:5)

Paralleling the Nehemiah covenant, the people of King Benjamin promised to do God’s will and to be obedient to his commandments. In addition, one witness of the Benjamin covenant is strikingly similar to that of the Nehemiah covenant. In the latter, the principal leaders of the Israelites attached their names, or seals, to a written document as a witness of their acceptance of and commitment to the covenant. Likewise, with the Benjamin covenant, the king wrote down the names of all those who had entered into the covenant:

And now king Benjamin thought it was expedient, after having finished speaking to the people, that he should take the names of all those who had entered into a covenant with God to keep his commandments. (Mosiah 6:1)

King Benjamin also encouraged the people to take upon them the name of Christ: “Therefore I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ, all you that have entered into the covenant with God that ye should be obedient unto the end of your lives” (Mosiah 5:8). In other words, taking upon us the name of Christ is not an automatic consequence of entering into the gospel covenant, although being willing to take upon us the name of Christ is an integral part of the making the covenantal agreement and of witnessing the covenant.

Anti-Nephi-Lehi

Many of the Lamanites embraced the gospel message and were converted to Christ through the preaching of the sons of Mosiah and their brethren. These converts entered into a unique covenant with God:

They took their swords and all the weapons which were used for the shedding of man’s blood and they did bury them up deep in the earth. And this they did, it being in their view

25. Willingness is a key term in the covenantal agreement. When the people of king Benjamin entered into their covenant, they did so by expressing that they were “willing to enter into a covenant with our God” (Mosiah 5:5). See also Matthew L. Bowen, “‘My People Are Willing’: The Mention of Aminadab in the Narrative Context of Helaman 5–6,” Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship 19 (2016): 83–107, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/my-people-are-willing-the-mention-of-aminadab-in-the-narrative-context-of-helaman-5-6/.
a testimony\(^{26}\) to God and also to men that they never would use weapons again for the shedding of man’s blood. And this they did, vouching and covenanting with God\(^{27}\) that rather than shed the blood of their brethren, they would give up their own lives; and rather than take away from a brother, they would give unto him; and rather than spend their days in idleness, they would labor abundantly with their hands. (Alma 24:17–18)

Burying their swords as a witness of the covenant that they had made, these new converts vouched\(^{28}\) to follow God’s will. In their covenantal agreement, they identified three specific behaviors that they intended to permanently alter in order to realign themselves with the will of God. These behaviors are illustrated in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Behavior</th>
<th>New Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shed the blood of their brethren</td>
<td>Give up their own lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take away from a brother</td>
<td>Give to a brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spend their days in idleness</td>
<td>Labor abundantly with their hands</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the Abrahamic covenant, the names of Abram and Sarai were changed as a witness of the covenant. Likewise, these converted Lamanites changed their communal name to Anti-Nephi-Lehi in order to distinguish themselves from the unconverted Lamanites (Alma 23:17). This change of name served as an additional witness of the covenant.

**Moroni**

When faced with Amalickiah’s scheming to have himself crowned king over the Nephites, Moroni, the commander of the Nephite armies, ripped his clothes in anger. “And he took a piece thereof and wrote upon it: In memory of our God, our religion and freedom, and our peace, our wives and our children. And he fastened it upon the end of a pole,” which

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26. As previously noted, the Hebrew word הָעַד (ed) can be translated as *witness* or *testimony*.

27. “And they would not take up arms; yea, they had entered into a covenant and they would not break it” (Alma 43:11).

he called the title of liberty (Alma 46:12). Moroni waved this ensign for all to see, and cried “with a loud voice”:

Behold, whosoever will maintain this title upon the land, let them come forth in the strength of the Lord and enter into a covenant that they will maintain their rights and their religion, that the Lord God may bless them. And it came to pass that when Moroni had proclaimed these words, behold, the people came running together with their armors girded about their loins, rending their garments in token, or as a covenant, that they would not forsake the Lord their God. Or in other words, if they should transgress the commandments of God — or fall into transgression — and be ashamed to take upon them the name of Christ, the Lord should rend them, even as they had rent their garments. Now this was the covenant which they made; and they cast their garments at the feet of Moroni, saying: We covenant with our God that we shall be destroyed, even as our brethren in the land northward, if we shall fall into transgression. Yea, he may cast us at the feet of our enemies, even as we have cast our garments at thy feet, to be trodden under foot if we should fall into transgression. (Alma 46:19–22)

In this covenant, perhaps better described as a negative covenant, the people swore that if they were to “transgress the commandments of God” or “be ashamed to take upon them the name of Christ” that God could rend them just as they had rent their garments as a token (sign or witness) of the covenant. We also discover that Mormon used two epithets for the banner raised by Moroni:

And it came to pass also that he caused the title of liberty to be hoisted upon every tower which was in all the land which was possessed by the Nephites. And thus Moroni planted the standard of liberty among the Nephites. (Alma 46:36)

29. In this passage, Mormon appears to conflate the token, or sign, of the covenant with the covenant itself: “And it came to pass that when Moroni had proclaimed these words, behold, the people came running together with their armors girded about their loins, rending their garments in token, or as a covenant, that they would not forsake the Lord their God” (Alma 46:21). From this we can ascertain that Mormon closely correlated the witness of the covenant with the covenant itself, showing how closely these are linked with each other.
In addition to its English translation as sign, token, or mark, the Hebrew word אות (ot) can be appropriately translated as standard, ensign, or banner: “Your foes roared in the place where you met with us; they set up their standards [אותם ototam] as signs [אות otot]” (Psalm 74:4 NIV). So, Mormon’s title or standard of liberty serves as an additional witness of the covenant.

**Stripling Soldiers**

Following Amalickiah’s death at the hands of Teancum, Ammoron succeeded him as king of the Lamanites. Under his command, the Lamanite army conquered many Nephite cities and began to pose a serious threat to Nephite liberty. At this critical juncture, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies considered abandoning their covenant to not take up their weapons of war, but “they were overpowered by the persuasions of Helaman and his brethren” (Alma 53:14) to keep their covenant. However, concerning the sons of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies we read:

> But behold, it came to pass they had many sons which had not entered into a covenant that they would not take their weapons of war to defend themselves against their enemies. Therefore they did assemble themselves together at this time, as many as were able to take up arms, and they called themselves Nephites. And they entered into a covenant to fight for the liberty of the Nephites, yea, to protect the land, unto the laying down of their lives; yea, even they covenanted that they never would give up their liberty, but they would fight in all cases to protect the Nephites and themselves from bondage. Now behold, there were two thousand of those young men which entered into this covenant and took their weapons of war to defend their country. (Alma 53:16–18)

It is interesting that the stripling soldier covenant stands in direct opposition to that of their parents, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. While they covenanted to never again take a human life, the stripling soldiers covenanted to fight for the liberty of the Nephites, even to the sacrificing of their own lives. We even find striking parallels between the witnesses of these covenants. The converted Lamanites “called their names Anti-Nephi-Lehies” (Alma 23:17) while their sons “called themselves

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30. Mormon refers to these young men once as stripling soldiers (Alma 53:22) and once as stripling Ammonites (Alma 56:57), but never as stripling warriors. In fact, Mormon never refers to them as warriors at all.
Nephites” (Alma 53:16); each group witnessed the covenant by taking a new name. Also, while the Anti-Nephi-Lehies buried their weapons as a witness of their covenant, their sons took up their weapons to witness their covenant (see Table 3).

Table 3. The Covenant and Witnesses for the Stripling Soldiers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Scriptures</th>
<th>Witnesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stripling Soldier</td>
<td>Alma 53</td>
<td>1. Change of name. 2. Took weapons of war.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Book of Mormon Covenants and Witnesses Summary

As with the Hebrew Bible, the witnesses identified in the Book of Mormon represent public, highly visible declarations of the people’s intention to follow through with their covenantal promises, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Covenants and Witnesses from the Book of Mormon.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Scriptures</th>
<th>Witnesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lehi</td>
<td>1 Nephi 13 and 2</td>
<td>1. Nephi witnessed in vision that his father’s seed were not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nephi 1</td>
<td>completely destroyed by the Gentiles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin</td>
<td>Mosiah 5 and 6</td>
<td>1. Benjamin wrote the names of the people. 2. Gave them the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>name of Christ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroni</td>
<td>Alma 46</td>
<td>1. Tore their clothes. 2. Threw clothes at Moroni’s feet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stripling Soldier</td>
<td>Alma 53</td>
<td>1. Change of name. 2. Took weapons of war.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Baptism as a Witness of the Covenant

Rather than a covenant in its own right, the Book of Mormon repeatedly and clearly teaches that baptism is a witness of the gospel covenant.

Nephi, Son of Lehi

Nephi teaches that baptism by water witnesses that we are willing to take upon us the name of Christ and that we are willing to keep God’s commandments:
Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I know that if ye shall follow
the Son with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and
no deception before God but with real intent, repenting of
your sins, witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take
upon you the name of Christ by baptism, yea, by following
your Lord and Savior down into the water according to his
word, behold, then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost. Yea, then
come the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost, and then
can ye speak with the tongue of angels and shout praises unto
the Holy One of Israel. But behold, my beloved brethren, thus
came the voice of the Son unto me, saying: After that ye have
repented of your sins and witnessed unto the Father that ye are
willing to keep my commandments by the baptism of water
and have received the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost and
can speak with a new tongue — yea, even with the tongue of
angels — and after this should deny me, it would have been
better for you that ye had not known me. (2 Nephi 31:13–14)

In this passage Nephi plainly teaches that baptism is a witness of
the gospel covenant to take upon us the name of Christ and to keep his
commandments.

Waters of Mormon

Alma was converted to the gospel of Christ through the preaching of
Abinadi, and he “repented of his sins and iniquities and went about
privately among the people and began to teach the words of Abinadi”
(Mosiah 18:1). We are told that Alma hid himself near the waters of
Mormon, and that he taught the words of Abinadi to the people who
gathered there to hear his preaching:

And it came to pass after many days there were a goodly
number gathered together to the place of Mormon to hear the
words of Alma; yea, all were gathered together that believed
on his word to hear him. And he did teach them and did
preach unto them repentance and redemption and faith on
the Lord. And it came to pass that he said unto them: Behold,
here is the waters of Mormon, for thus were they called. And
now as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God and to
be called his people and are willing to bear one another’s
burdens, that they may be light, yea, and are willing to mourn
with those that mourn, yea, and comfort those that stand in
need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life — now I say unto you, if this be the desires of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you? (Mosiah 18:7–10)

Two key points arise from Alma’s preaching:

1. As with other covenants, willingness is a key factor at the waters of Mormon (verses 8 and 9).

2. The ordinance of baptism served as a witness of the people’s prior covenantal commitment to serve God and keep his commandments (verses 9 and 10).

When Alma baptized Helam, he restated that his baptism served as a public witness\(^{31}\) of his commitment to serve God: “Helam, I baptize thee, having authority from the Almighty God, as a testimony\(^{32}\) that ye have entered into a covenant to serve him until you are dead as to the mortal body” (Mosiah 18:13).

Speaking of the interplay between repentance and baptism, Noel Reynolds identified repentance as integral to the gospel covenant to obey God’s commandments, and baptism as the witness of that covenant:

> Because repentance includes the covenant to obey the commandments of the Lord, it is tied closely to baptism in water as the public evidence or witness of that covenant. … We have seen that baptism is tightly linked to repentance because it serves as a public witness to the Father of the private, internal covenant the repentant sinner makes to turn from evil and keep all his commandments.\(^{33}\)

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32. Alma referred to baptism as a *witness* (verse 10) and as a *testimony* (verse 13) of the covenant. This is consistent with the Hebrew word יד (yd) meaning both witness and testimony (see Genesis 31:44).

This idea that baptism is a witness that the believer has already accepted the gospel covenant rather than as a marker of entry into that covenant does not diminish the importance of baptism. Baptism is an essential saving ordinance (see 2 Nephi 9:24), and is identified by Nephi, together with repentance, as the gate to the “strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:17). However, it is not scripturally correct to confound entry onto this path — repentance and baptism — with the gospel covenant itself. This point will be further clarified in the next section.

People of Limhi

During the reign of King Benjamin a group headed by Ammon, a native of Zarahemla, was sent to the land of Lehi-Nephi to find the people of Zeniff who had returned to the land of their first inheritance. Sadly, Ammon discovered the people in bondage to the Lamanites. However, this captivity, brought on by the wickedness of the people and their leaders, had also softened their hearts:

> And they did humble themselves even in the depths of humility. And they did cry mightily to God, yea, even all the day long did they cry unto their God that he would deliver them out of their afflictions. (Mosiah 21:14)

When king Limhi, Zeniff’s grandson, learned that Ammon had come from Zarahemla he was overjoyed, seeing Ammon as a deliverer of his people. After Limhi related key parts of the people’s history to Ammon — the teachings of Abinadi, the conversion of Alma, the departure of Alma’s people from the land, and the subsequent bondage of his people — Mormon presents us with the following narrative:

> Yea, [the people of Limhi] did mourn for [the people of Alma’s] departure, for they knew not whither they had fled. Now they would have gladly joined with them, for they themselves had entered into a covenant with God to serve him and keep his commandments. And now since the coming of Ammon, king Limhi had also entered into a covenant with God, and also many of his people, to serve him and keep his commandments. And it came to pass that king Limhi and many of his people was desirous to be baptized, but there was none in the land that had authority from God. And Ammon
declined doing this thing, considering himself an unworthy servant. Therefore they did not at that time form themselves into a church, waiting upon the Spirit of the Lord. Now they were desirous to become even as Alma and his brethren, which had fled into the wilderness. They were desirous to be baptized as a witness and a testimony that they were willing to serve God with all their hearts. Nevertheless they did prolong the time; and an account of their baptism shall be given hereafter. (Mosiah 21:31–35)

As with Alma’s teachings at the waters of Mormon, several important points can be observed from this narrative:

1. Limhi and “many of his people” had already “entered into a covenant with God” without the ordinance of baptism (verses 31 and 32).
2. Identical to the waters of Mormon covenant, this covenant was two-fold in nature: to “serve [God] and keep his commandments” (verse 32).
3. The people of Limhi saw baptism as a necessary ordinance “to form themselves into a church,” but as unnecessary to enter into the gospel covenant (verse 34).
4. The people of Limhi viewed their future baptism “as a witness and a testimony” of the gospel covenant into which they had already entered (verse 35).

Limhi and his people entered into the covenant with God without the ordinance of baptism, and there is no indication in the text that Mormon considered their covenant to be any less valid than the covenant made by the people of Alma. In fact, Mormon’s narrative tone clearly frames their future baptism as a “witness and a testimony” of their prior covenant — their willingness to serve God “with all their hearts.”

Land of Gideon

Alma₂, the son of Alma, succeeded his father as the high priest of the church in Zarahemla, and continued to teach the same doctrinal idea as his father:

Come and fear not, and lay aside every sin which easily doth beset you, which doth bind you down to destruction. Yea, come and go forth, and show unto your God that ye are willing to repent of your sins and enter into a covenant with
him to keep his commandments, and witness it unto him this day by going into the waters of baptism. (Alma 7:15)34

This covenant at Gideon bears impressive parallels with the other covenants that we have discussed from the Book of Mormon:

1. Willingness is a key feature of the covenant.
2. Keeping God’s commandments forms the core of the covenantal agreement.
3. As with Alma and the people of Limhi, the covenant at Gideon clearly identifies baptism as the witness of the covenant and not as the covenant itself.

In his preaching, Alma admonished the people in Gideon to “enter into a covenant,” a clear indication that they had not as yet done so. However, we should avoid confusing the covenant (to keep God’s commandments) with the witness of that covenant (baptism). Even though the making and witnessing of the covenant may take place in close temporal proximity to each other, as probably occurred in Gideon, they are still separate, although interrelated, matters. For example, as a citizen of the United States I possess a passport issued by the US government. This passport serves as a witness, or evidence, of my US citizenship, but it is not synonymous with my citizenship; my citizenship stands independent from my passport, even though the two are closely associated.

Nephi, Son of Nephi

Nephi, the son of Nephi, teaches the same message, that baptism is a witness of the covenant rather than the covenant itself:

And Nephi did cry unto the people in the commencement of the thirty and third year; and he did preach unto them repentance and remission of sins. Now I would have you to remember also that there were none which were brought unto repentance who were not baptized with water. Therefore there were ordained of Nephi men unto this ministry, that all such as should come unto them should be baptized with water

34. “That word ‘willing’ is easy to gloss over, but its importance cannot be overstressed. Willingness to believe and willingness to act on that belief is, in fact, the only thing that we can offer to Christ.” 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, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/experiential-knowledge-and-the-covenantal-relationship-in-alma-7/.
— and this as *a witness and a testimony before God and unto the people that they had repented and received a remission of their sins*. And there were many in the commencement of this year that were baptized unto repentance. (3 Nephi 7:23–26)

Nephi’s teaching — that baptism witnesses that an individual has repented and received a remission of sins — is in harmony with the New Living Translation’s (NLT) rendering of Luke 3:3:

Then John went from place to place on both sides of the Jordan River, preaching that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. (Luke 3:3 NLT)35

According to Nephi, baptism by water witnesses or testifies that individuals have entered into the gospel covenant and have repented of and received a remission of their sins.

**Baptism Summary**

While the gospel covenant to keep God’s commandments, and the witness of that covenant, baptism, can occur in close proximity to each other, as appears to be the case in Gideon, we must ask ourselves why we should wait, or encourage others to wait, until baptism to enter into the gospel covenant. Why not follow the example of the people of Limhi and enter into the covenant well in advance of our baptism? As a Church, this can have a direct application to our missionary efforts throughout the world. It is my belief that we should be encouraging those who are learning about the Church, studying its doctrines, and planning for formal membership within the Church to enter into the gospel covenant well in advance of their baptism, and to view their baptism for what it is — a public witness of entry into that covenant. With this revised mindset about baptism, individuals would be far better prepared to accept the responsibilities of covenant discipleship that are incumbent on all members of the Church of Jesus Christ. Baptism by water, with this understanding, can be seen as a ratification of the covenant into which the follower of Christ has already entered.

35. See also the NLT rendering of Mark 1:4.
Table 5. Baptism as a Witness of the Covenant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person/Place</th>
<th>Scriptures</th>
<th>Witness</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nephi, son of Lehi</td>
<td>2 Nephi 31:13–14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Waters of Mormon</td>
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<td>People of Limhi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nephi, son of Nephi 3</td>
<td>3 Nephi 7:23–26</td>
<td>Baptism</td>
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</tbody>
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Is Baptism a Covenant?

Two principal arguments can be made to assert that baptism is a covenant: 1) verbiage from Doctrine and Covenants section 22 and 2) an alleged quote from Joseph Smith that “BAPTISM is a covenant with God that we will do His will.”36 Both arguments bear consideration.

Doctrine and Covenants section 22 has been interpreted traditionally to teach that baptism is a covenant. In fact, the current section heading, which is not part of the revelation itself, states, “Baptism is a new and everlasting covenant.” This idea is most likely derived from the wording in the first verse: “Behold, I say unto you that all old covenants have I caused to be done away in this thing; and this is a new and an everlasting covenant, even that which was from the beginning” (D&C 22:1). Prior to this revelation, Joseph Smith had asked God if baptism in other churches needed to be performed again if those individuals wanted to unite themselves with the restored church. With this context in mind, many seem to believe that “this thing” and “this” in the verse refer to baptism, or perhaps better, rebaptism. However, issues arise with this traditional interpretation:

1. The terms “this thing” and “this” in the verse are not defined as the ordinance of baptism anywhere within the revelation itself nor in any extra-scriptural sources authored by Joseph Smith. In addition, since there are no identifiable antecedents for these terms their meanings remain ambiguous.
2. If we assume that “this thing” and “this” are metonyms for baptism, then we should be able to replace these terms with the word baptism. The result would be, “Behold, I say unto you that all old covenants have I caused to be done away in baptism; and baptism is a new and an everlasting

covenant, even that which was from the beginning.” This interpretation seems to identify baptism as a replacement for “all old covenants,” which would have included baptism itself, as if baptism were the pinnacle or totality of all other covenants.

A much more plausible interpretation is that “this thing” and “this” are references to the gospel covenant restored in its fullness in the latter days, including but not limited to the ordinance of baptism. With this revised interpretation the verse could read, “Behold, I say unto you that all old covenants have I caused to be done away in this restoration of the gospel covenant; and this restored gospel covenant is a new and an everlasting covenant, even that which was from the beginning.” In other words, the Lord made all things new by restoring the “new and everlasting covenant, even that which was from the beginning” in its fullness in the latter days. Baptism, as part of the restored gospel, would have been included as a witness of this new and everlasting covenant, but it would not have been the covenant itself. Restricting the interpretation of this verse to include only baptism significantly narrows and restricts our understanding of the new and everlasting covenant.

Second, at the very end of Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Alma P. Burton added a section entitled “Answers to Questions and Maxims of the Prophet.” In this section Burton included some sayings of Joseph Smith that he pulled directly from George Q. Cannon’s book The Life of Joseph Smith, the Prophet. I previously cited one of these “sayings”: “Baptism is a covenant with God that we will do his will.”

There are several issues with the attribution of this saying to Joseph Smith:

1. A thorough search of the Joseph Smith Papers (https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/) revealed no citations attributable to Joseph Smith related to the following search terms: baptism is a covenant, baptismal covenant, covenant of baptism, or baptism as a covenant. In fact, nothing available on the website can be reasonably construed to teach that baptism is a covenant.

2. George Q. Cannon arrived in Nauvoo with his father and his siblings38 in the spring of 1843 at the age of 16. As the

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38. His mother died on the voyage from Liverpool.
nephew of John Taylor, Cannon was employed in the printing office of the Times and Seasons. When Joseph Smith died in June 1844, Cannon was 17 years old and had been in Nauvoo for one year. In addition, nothing that was printed during Cannon’s tenure at the Times and Seasons taught that baptism was a covenant.

3. Cannon’s book, The Life of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, was published in 1888, 44 years after the death of the prophet. It was written under adverse conditions while Cannon was imprisoned in the Utah Penitentiary for the practice of polygamy. Of this experience Cannon himself wrote, “In some respects this volume may be imperfect; the circumstances which surrounded its preparation were not favorable to the collection and arrangement of materials, but it is believed to be truthful and just.”

4. Perhaps as an afterthought, sandwiched between the final chapter of his book and the appendix, Cannon included some “Anecdotes and Sayings of the Prophet,” one of which was the claim that baptism is a covenant.

We must keep in mind that Cannon was a teenager when Joseph was martyred in 1844. Forty-four years later, as an inmate of the Utah Penitentiary and with less than adequate resources at his disposal, Cannon completed his book. As a man in his early sixties trying to recall memories from his teenage years, and with only a year’s exposure to the prophet Joseph in Nauvoo, Cannon most certainly conflated and confused many of the teachings and sayings that he attributed to the prophet. How could it be otherwise? I am in my mid-sixties, and my father died suddenly and unexpectedly when I was 18 years old. Even having had the benefit of living with my father for all of those 18 years I can barely remember any specific words that he may have said or taught me, let alone remember any “anecdotes or sayings” that he may have spoken.

It is altogether possible, and even probable, that what Cannon heard Joseph teach is that baptism is a witness of the covenant rather than the covenant itself. The Book of Mormon clearly teaches that we are to covenant with God that we will do his will, and that baptism is a witness of that covenant.

Washed in the Blood of the Lamb

The primary song *When I Am Baptized*, found in the *Children’s Songbook*, includes the following stanza:

> I know when I am baptized my wrongs are washed away,  
> And I can be forgiven and improve myself each day.\(^{40}\)

While the second line of this stanza presents a doctrine taught throughout the scriptures, the same cannot be said of the first line. The Book of Mormon and the New Testament clearly teach that our wrongs are washed clean in the blood of the Lamb rather than in the waters of baptism.

> I say unto you: Ye will know at that day that ye cannot be saved; for there can no man be saved except his garments are washed white; yea, his garments must be purified until it is cleansed from all stain through the blood of him of whom it hath been spoken by our fathers which should come to redeem his people from their sins. (Alma 5:21)

> Therefore they were called after this holy order and were sanctified; and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb. (Alma 13:11)

> Behold, I say unto you: Nay, let us retain our swords that they be not stained with the blood of our brethren. For perhaps if we should stain our swords again, they can no more be washed bright through the blood of the Son of our great God, which shall be shed for the atonement of our sins. (Alma 24:13)

> And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom. Therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood because of their faith and the repentance of all their sins and their faithfulness unto the end. (3 Nephi 27:19)

> And then also cometh the Jerusalem of old; and the inhabitants thereof, blessed are they, for they have been washed in the blood of the Lamb; and they are they which were scattered and gathered in from the four quarters of the earth and from the north countries and are partakers of the fulfilling of the

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covenant which God made with their father Abraham. (Ether 13:11)

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)

And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed⁴¹ us from our sins in his own blood. (Revelation 1:5)

And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Revelation 7:14)

Admittedly, there are a few scriptural passages that can be interpreted to convey the idea that baptism by water conveys a remission of sins. However, careful analysis of these passages reveals that no such doctrine is taught in the scriptures. For example, the KJV translation of Luke 3:3 reads: “And [John] came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.” While it can be inferred from this verse that the baptism of John brought “the remission of sins,” one could also argue from the English language wording of the passage that it is repentance, not baptism, that brings this remission. The NLT — a paraphrase rather than an actual translation — provides a very different nuanced understanding of this passage:

Then John went from place to place on both sides of the Jordan River, preaching that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. (Luke 3:3 NLT)⁴²

According to the NLT’s interpretation, baptism does not wash away sins. Rather, baptism shows or witnesses that the individual has turned from sin and turned to God,⁴³ essential steps in the repentance

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⁴¹. Most modern translations follow different mss and render this phrase as freed us or released us.
⁴². The NLT renders Mark 1:4 as follows: “This messenger was John the Baptist. He was in the wilderness and preached that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven.”
⁴³. This agrees with Christ’s words that the redeemed have “washed their garments in my blood because of their faith and the repentance of all their sins and
process. This interpretation teaches that baptism is a sign of the individual’s repentance and a witness of the covenant with God to keep his commandments.

Likewise, Article of Faith 4 has often been understood to teach that baptism by water brings the remission of sins based on the following clause: “baptism by immersion for the remission of sins.” However, read in context, this clause can be properly understood to teach the same doctrine as Luke 3:3:

> We believe that through the atonement of Christ all mankind may be saved by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel. We believe that these ordinances are 1st, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; 2d, Repentance; 3d, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; 4th, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.

According to this early rendering of Articles of Faith 3 and 4, salvation in the kingdom of God is reliant on the atonement of Christ and on our “obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel,” including the following four “ordinances,” now amended to read “principles and ordinances”: faith, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Based on our discussion up to this point it appears that focusing on only one of those principles and ordinances, baptism for example, as the means by which sin is remitted is shortsighted and lacks a comprehensive understanding of how all of these gospel concepts work in unison with each other. It would be similar to focusing on the latter part of Article of Faith 3 that reads “all mankind may be saved by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.” This narrow reading would lead us to believe in a gospel of works and would ignore the very foundation upon which salvation completely relies, the atonement of Christ.

Adding to our understanding of the process surrounding the remission of sins, Nephi, the son of Lehi, taught:

> Wherefore, do the things which I have told you I have seen that your Lord and your Redeemer should do; for, for this

their faithfulness unto the end” (3 Nephi 27:19).


cause have they been shown unto me, that ye might know the
gate by which ye should enter. For the gate by which ye should
enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a
remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost. (2 Nephi
31:17)

According to Nephi, remission of sins comes not by the baptism of
water, but “by fire and by the Holy Ghost,” or as Nephi taught just prior
to this passage, through the “baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost”
(2 Nephi 31:13). In other words, following our manifestation of faith,
sincere repentance, and baptism by water, the Spirit of God washes us in
the blood of Christ resulting in the remission of sins.

Another verse that could be construed to teach that baptism by water
results in the washing of our sins is Alma 7:14. It reads in part, “Therefore
come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye may be washed from
your sins.” However, as with all scripture, this passage must be studied
in context:

Now I say unto you that ye must repent, and be born again;
for the Spirit saith if ye are not born again ye cannot inherit
the kingdom of heaven; therefore come and be baptized unto
repentance, that ye may be washed from your sins, that ye
may have faith on the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins
of the world, who is mighty to save and to cleanse from all
unrighteousness. Yea, I say unto you come and fear not, and lay
aside every sin, which easily doth beset you, which doth bind
you down to destruction, yea, come and go forth, and show
unto your God that ye are willing to repent of your sins and
enter into a covenant with him to keep his commandments,
and witness it unto him this day by going into the waters of
baptism. (Alma 7:14–15)

In this sermon Alma 2 teaches that it is the Lamb of God who “taketh
away the sins of the world, who is mighty to save and to cleanse from all
unrighteousness.” Alma 2 continues by admonishing us to be baptized
as a witness that we “are willing to repent of [our] sins and enter into a
covenant with [God] to keep his commandments.” From this passage

46. This concept agrees with Jesus’ teaching to Nicodemus that “except a man
be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John
3:5). In other words, baptism by water alone is not sufficient to remit sin. Only when
one is baptized “of fire and of the Holy Ghost” can the cleansing blood of the Lamb
wash us from our sins.
we learn that the cleansing power of the blood of the Lamb is not coincident with the baptism of water but comes only as we demonstrate our willingness to repent and to fulfill the covenant by keeping God’s commandments. In addition, we read:

> And again we bear record — for we saw and heard, and this is the testimony of the gospel of Christ concerning them who shall come forth in the resurrection of the just — They are they who received the testimony of Jesus, and believed on his name and were baptized after the manner of his burial, being buried in the water in his name, and this according to the commandment which he has given — That by keeping the commandments they might be washed and cleansed from all their sins, and receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the hands of him who is ordained and sealed unto this power. (D&C 76:50–52)

As this passage teaches, it is not through the act of baptism by water but “by keeping the commandments” that we are “washed and cleansed” from all our sins. It is by faithfully observing the gospel covenant to keep God’s commandments that we can be washed clean in the blood of the Lamb through the “baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost.”

One additional scriptural passage could also be understood to teach that baptism by water alone washes away sin. Doctrine and Covenants section 39 was received for James Covel, a Methodist minister in western New York. In early 1831, Covel came to the prophet Joseph and declared that he had made a covenant to obey anything that God revealed through the prophet. This revelation reads in part:

> But, behold, the days of thy deliverance are come, if thou wilt hearken to my voice, which saith unto thee: Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on my name, and you shall receive my Spirit, and a blessing so great as you never have known. (D&C 39:10)

As a Methodist minister, Covel would have been very familiar with the conversion of Saul in the book of Acts. Following his miraculous

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vision of the risen Christ, Saul’s sight was restored by “one Ananias, a devout man according to the law” (Acts 22:12). Ananias counseled Saul:

The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. (Acts 22:14–15)

Ananias further admonished Saul: “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). It seems clear that the revelation to Covel was meant to parallel the message and language of this passage from the KJV translation of the book of Acts. However, many modern translations of this verse provide a different understanding of the words of Ananias in Acts 22:16. For example, the NASB20 reads, “Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins by calling on His name.” Likewise, the NLT reads, “What are you waiting for? Get up and be baptized. Have your sins washed away by calling on the name of the Lord.” In both of these modern translations it is not baptism that washes away sins. Rather, both appear to link having one’s sins washed away with calling on the name of Christ. In fact, nearly all modern translations interpret this verse with this refined understanding.

Commenting on the meaning of this verse from the book of Acts, Matthew Poole, a 17th century English theologian, wrote:

Wash away thy sins; as washing causeth the spots to disappear, and to be as if they had not been, Isa 1:18; so does pardoning mercy, or remission of sins, which accompanieth baptism, as in the due receiver, Mt 3:11, 1 Pe 3:21,22. Where true faith is, together with the profession of it by baptism, there is salvation promised, Mr 16:16. In the mean while it is not the water, (for that only signifieth), but it is the blood of Christ, which is thereby signified, that cleanseth us from our sins, as 1 Jo 1:7. Yet sacraments are not empty and deceitful signs; but God accompanieth his own ordinances with his power from on high, and makes them effectual for those great things for which he instituted and appointed them.48

Likewise, John Gill, an 18th century English Baptist pastor, commented:

“And wash away thy sins”; or “be washed from thy sins”; not that it is in the power of man to cleanse himself from his sins… nor is there any such efficacy in baptism as to remove the filth of sin; persons may submit unto it, and yet be as Simon Magus was, in the gall of bitterness, and bond of iniquity; but the ordinance of baptism, may be, and sometimes is, a means of leading the faith of God’s children to the blood of Christ, which cleanses from all sin.\(^49\)

From the various Book of Mormon and New Testament passages that have been cited in this section, it seems clear that it is the blood of the Lamb that washes us from our sins, not baptism by water. Rather than washing us from our sins, a more suitable metaphor for baptism by water was offered by the apostle Paul: “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead” (Colossians 2:12). Paul also wrote: “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). According to Paul, when we are baptized by water it is symbolic of the burial and resurrection of Christ. And just as Christ died and was raised from the tomb, we also “should walk in newness of life” when we follow the example of Christ in being baptized by water.

As previously cited, baptism by water as a symbol of Christ’s death is not only found in the writings of Paul, but is also taught in the Doctrine and Covenants:

They are they who received the testimony of Jesus, and believed on his name and were baptized after the manner of his burial, being buried in the water in his name, and this according to the commandment which he has given. (D&C 76:51)

In this section it has been demonstrated that the remission of sins can described as coming through various means: the blood of the Lamb of God (1 John 1:7), baptism by water (Article of Faith 4), fire and the Holy Ghost (2 Nephi 31:17), keeping the commandments (D&C

76:50–52), and calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16). As one reviewer pointed out, these passages can be seen as *merisms*, figures of speech in which one or more parts of the whole refer to the whole itself. With this improved understanding, it would be profitable to understand the remission of sins in a more holistic way:

- totally reliant on the atonement of Christ;
- following the manifestation of our faith;
- granted after we have sincerely repented of our sins;
- subsequent to, rather than coincident with, baptism by water;
- through the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost; and,
- by enduring to the end through the keeping of the commandments.

**Sacrament as a Witness of the Covenant**

While no new covenants are introduced during the ordinance of the sacrament, it does provide us with a powerful opportunity to publicly witness our willingness to fulfill the gospel covenant into which we have previously entered. The sacramental prayer of the bread, which is the most inclusive in scope, reads:

> O God the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son Jesus Christ to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it, that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son, and witness unto thee, O God the Eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son and always remember him and keep his commandments which he hath given them, that they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen. (Moroni 4:3).

As we join in the sacramental prayers and participate in the ordinance of the sacrament, we do so in remembrance of the Son of God, and witness that we will always remember him. As N. T. Wright observed, “Our remembering often turns into nostalgia or recrimination; God’s remembering turns into action.”

50 As discussed earlier, this practice of divine remembering is not a passive, mental activity. Rather, divine remembering (from the verb זכר, zakhar) requires action. Following God’s example, our remembering needs to align with this pattern of

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50. N. T. Wright, *For All God’s Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 70.
divine remembering.\textsuperscript{51} In that sense, when we partake of the sacrament, we witness our willingness to always remember Christ by taking his name upon us and keeping his commandments, core elements in the gospel covenant. Perhaps this is why the three individual elements that we witness when we partake of the bread — to take upon us the name of Christ, to always remember him, and to keep his commandments — are reduced to just one element when we symbolically drink the blood of Christ: to always remember him (see Moroni 5:2). As we witness our willingness to always remember Christ, we need to keep in mind that this act also includes taking upon us his name and keeping his commandments. This is what is meant by \textit{divine remembering} — active and faithful covenant compliance.

Exodus 20:7 reads in part, “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain.” As a youth, I was taught to believe that this meant that I was not to use God’s name flippantly or with disrespect. Although this meaning is often assigned to this passage, it is not what the Hebrew actually conveys. The Hebrew, and a literal translation for this passage, follow:

\begin{verbatim}
לא תשא את־שם־יהוה אלהיך לשוא
\end{verbatim}

Not carry/bear name of Yahweh your God falsely/deceitfully\textsuperscript{53}

As can be observed from the literal translation, this commandment is not really about speaking the name of God improperly. Rather, it is about carrying or taking his name upon us with false intent, or deceitfully. When we voluntarily take upon us the name of Christ as part of the gospel covenant, we also promise to keep his commandments. When we break those commandments, we also break our commitment to bear the name of Yahweh, or the name of Christ.\textsuperscript{54} Agur, the son of Jakeh, wrote:

Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither

\textsuperscript{51} “This covenant to remember Christ always, to take the name of Christ upon himself, and to keep all of Christ’s commandments, is part of this process of turning and coming — and therefore a crucial element of repentance. This is the covenant that is witnessed to God and all the world by the convert through the baptism of water.” Reynolds, “The True Points of My Doctrine,” 38.

\textsuperscript{52} For the sake of the English translation I have reversed the order of the Hebrew phrase.

\textsuperscript{53} The Hebrew word שוא (shave) carries the connotation of \textit{worthlessness}, \textit{lying}, or \textit{deceitfulness}.

\textsuperscript{54} In Doctrine and Covenants 136:21 we read, “Keep yourselves from evil to take the name of the Lord in vain.”
poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain. (Proverbs 30:7–9)

In this passage we are informed that Agur, the ostensible author of this proverb, desired that the Lord neither bless him with wealth nor suffer him to be poor. He feared that if he were wealthy, he would turn away from God, and he worried that if he were poor, he would rob and that by doing so he would “take the name of [his] God in vain.” While the KJV translations of Exodus 20:7 and Proverbs 30:9 are nearly identical, the Hebrew is quite different in both verses. As previously discussed, Exodus 20:7 teaches that we are not to take upon us the name of God deceitfully. On the other hand, the passage in Proverbs can be understood as teaching that we are not to do violence to God’s name. The Hebrew for the last part of verse 9 reads, “ותפשתי שם אלהי (ve’tafasti shem elohai). The verb used in this phrase (תפש tafas) does not mean just to take, but generally to take violently. As such, the author of this proverb utilizes a verbal pun to express his fear that if is poor he will rob, a violent act, and also “violently take” God’s name. This same verb is used when Potiphar’s wife “caught (ותתפש va’titpesahu)” Joseph by his garment (Genesis 39:12). Likewise, when Moses discovered that the Israelites had made a golden calf, he “took hold (ואתפש va’etpos)” of the two tablets and “smashed them to pieces” in front of the people (Deuteronomy 9:17 NASB20). Finally, following his contest with the priests of Baal, Elijah told the people to “‘seize (תפשו tifshu) the prophets of Baal; do not let one of them escape.’ So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slaughtered them there” (1 Kings 18:40 NASB20).

As Agur, the likely author of this proverb, notes, when we violate the commandments of God, we, in essence, do violence to his name. It is not our name, but his, that we bring into disrepute. As other English translations of this proverb render the phrase, we profane (NASB20), demean (NET), or dishonor (NIV) God’s name. In other words, taking upon us the name of Christ is not a light matter. As we participate in the ordinance of the sacrament and express our willingness to take upon us the name of Christ, it becomes incumbent on all followers of Christ to understand the seriousness of this act. But this willingness must not be expressed only during the sacrament; rather, it needs to be a daily act. We need to renew daily the gospel covenant by actively demonstrating our willingness to “take upon [us] the name of thy Son and always remember him and keep his commandments.”
When Christ appeared to the Nephites, he commanded his disciples, “For whoso eateth and drinketh my flesh and blood unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to his soul. Therefore if ye know that a man is unworthy to eat and drink of my flesh and blood, ye shall forbid him” (3 Nephi 18:29). It is likely that Jesus gave this commandment to his disciples as an act of mercy, as a means of preventing wayward followers from perjuring themselves, to preclude them from becoming false witnesses of the covenant. Likewise, Moroni, wrote:

See that ye are not baptized unworthily. See that ye partake not of the sacrament of Christ unworthily. But see that ye do all things in worthiness and do it in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. And if ye do this and endure to the end, ye will in no wise be cast out. (Mormon 9:29)

Since baptism and participation in the sacrament both serve as witnesses of the covenant, unworthy participation in either turns us into false witnesses. This, of course, violates Jesus’ command: “Thou shalt not bear false witness” (Matthew 19:18).

Conclusion

Israel’s story can be seen as a chronicle of a loving, compassionate father who must constantly work with his children to bring them back to the gospel path:

Yet the LORD testified [ניִעַד ya’ad] against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the LORD their God. And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant [בריתו brito] that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies [עדותיו edotav, perhaps better rendered as his witnesses] which he testified [העיד he’id, or witnessed] against them. (2 Kings 17:13–15)

Not only is Israel guilty of turning away from God, it is also guilty of abandoning the covenant to keep his commandments. In addition, Israel has rejected the many witnesses that God has provided. In essence, Israel is guilty of repeatedly taking upon itself the name of God in vain (cf. Exodus 20:7). Jeremiah, a prophet in Judah during the time of Lehi,
warned the people that unless they repented, they would be destroyed and taken captive, suffering the same fate as the kingdom of Israel. Sadly, the people of Judah did not heed his words:

And though the Lord has sent all his servants the prophets to you again and again, you have not listened or paid any attention. They said, “Turn now, each of you, from your evil ways and your evil practices, and you can stay in the land the Lord gave to you and your ancestors for ever and ever.” (Jeremiah 25:4–5 NIV)

Jeremiah accused his hearers of being repeat covenant breakers, a claim that was all too true. In essence, his message was that if the people would turn from their evil ways and comply with their covenantal agreement to keep God’s commandments they would prosper in the land, a familiar theme in the Book of Mormon as well.

As modern Israel, it is incumbent on all members of the Church to fully live the gospel covenant to keep God’s commandments. And just as important, we need to appropriately witness to God and to others that we are sincere and honest covenant keepers. We witness this when we are baptized, and we renew this witness when we worthily partake of the sacrament. Also, as Alma admonished his flock at the waters of Mormon, we are “to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things and in all places that ye may be in even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God” (Mosiah 18:9). Or, as Jesus taught his disciples, “Therefore let your light so shine before this people, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (3 Nephi 12:16, cf. Matthew 5:16). While covenanting with God is important and necessary for our salvation, consistently and faithfully witnessing the gospel covenant to keep God’s commandments will qualify us to be “washed in the blood of the Lamb” (Ether 13:11).

Loren Spendlove has earned the following degrees: MA, Jewish Studies, PhD, Education, and Master of Business Administration (MBA). He is currently working on a MA in Christian Scripture. He has worked in many professional fields, including academics and corporate financial management. A student of languages, his research interests center on

55. The Hebrew word for keep is שמר (shamar). This verb most accurately carries the connotation of guard, take care of, or watch over as watchmen (שומרים shomrim).
linguistics and etymology. Loren and Tina are the parents of five children and 12 grandchildren.

Appendix: Chiasm of the Story of Noah

A Noah (6:10a)
   B Shem, Ham, and Japheth (6:10b)
   C Ark to be built (6:14–16)
   D Flood announced (6:17)
   E Covenant with Noah (6:18–20)
   F Food in the ark (6:21)
      G Command to enter the ark (7:1–3)
      H 7 days waiting for flood (7:4–5)
      I 7 days waiting for flood (7:7–10)
      J Entry to ark (7:11–15)
      K The Lord (YHWH) shuts Noah in (7:16)
      L 40 days of flood (7:17a)
      M Waters increase (7:17b–18)
      N Mountains covered (7:19–20)
      O 150 days: water prevail (7:21–24)
      P GOD REMEMBERS NOAH (8:1)
         O' 150 days: waters abate (8:3)
         N' Mountain tops visible (8:4–5)
         M' Waters abate (8:5)
         L' 40 days (end of) (8:6a)
         K' Noah opens window of ark (8:6b)
         J' Raven and dove leave ark (8:7–9)
         I' 7 days waiting for waters to subside (8:10–11)
         H' 7 days waiting for waters to subside (8:12–13)
         G' Command to leave ark (8:15–17 [22])
         F' Food outside ark (9:1–4)
         E' Covenant with all flesh (9:8–10)
         D' No flood in the future (9:11–17)
         C' Ark left (9:18a)
         B' Shem, Ham and Japheth (9:18b)
         A' Noah (9:19)\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{56} Lizorkin-Eyzenberg, Becoming Israel, 21–22.
Mormon’s Narrative Strategies to Provide Literary Justice for Gideon

Nathan J. Arp

Abstract: Although unable to write more than a hundredth part of his people’s history, Mormon seemingly found the time and plate-space to deliver literary justice on behalf of Gideon, who suffered a martyr’s death at the hand of the wicked Nehor. This article applies a literary approach buttressed by evidence from the Book of Mormon to suggest that Mormon intentionally supplied tightly-controlled repetitive elements, like the repetition of names, to point the reader to discover multiple literary sub-narratives connected by a carefully crafted network of themes running under the main narratives of the scriptures. The theories espoused in this work may have begun with the recognition of the reader-arresting repetition of Gideon’s name in Alma 6:7-8, but driven by scriptural data points soon connected Gideon with Abinadi, the Ammonites, and others. The repetitive and referential use of the moniker Nehor, Gideon’s murderer, on various peoples by Mormon seemed to connect thematically and organically to a justice prophesied by Abinadi. In parallel with the theme of justice laid upon the Nehor-populations, evidence is marshaled to also suggest that Mormon referenced the place-name of Gideon to intentionally hearken back to the man Gideon. Following the role of Gideon, as a place, we propose Mormon constructed a path for the martyr Gideon via proxy to meet the resurrected Lord in Bountiful. Mormon’s concern for the individual and his technique for rewriting Gideon’s story through proxy ultimately symbolizes the role Christ’s atoning power can take in each of our lives to save us.

Under the hands of its authors, the Book of Mormon creatively blends stringent didacticism and literary artistry into a piercing message of hope in the face of the tragedy of its own narrative. Mormon, the principle of three main authors of the book that bears his name, lived at the end-time of his people, a time of harsh brutality where he was
exposed to “a continual scene of wickedness” (Mormon 2:18) and “blood and carnage” (Mormon 4:11). Somehow, surrounded by a people who “[had] lost their love, one towards another” and were “without mercy” (Moroni 9:5, 18), Mormon, in contrast, was miraculously “filled with charity” (Moroni 8:17). Rising above the cruel injustices of his own time, Mormon was able to revisit the records of his ancestors and pity their comparatively lesser injustices. On at least one occasion, this paper will suggest that Mormon’s sentimentality and compassion may have even moved him to mete out justice through literary means for injustices met on a man named Gideon. It is in this spirit of a narrator-focused approach that I attempt to discover the meaning behind Mormon’s repeated references to Gideon’s martyrdom at the hands of Nehor.

Increased attention to the narrators of the Book of Mormon has been a noteworthy trend in Book of Mormon scholarship since roughly 2010.\(^1\) This paper proposes that Mormon’s repetition of the names of Gideon and Nehor throughout the Book of Mormon are not coincidental, but serve as markers for the reader to discover authorial intent. Therefore, these repetitive and possibly intentional markers are catalogued as part of a methodology to read the Book of Mormon as the narrators intended and to uncover as much meaning as possible. These findings suggest that these narrators, like Mormon, built layers of meaning into their carefully crafted narratives that seem intended to take the reader beyond

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1. In 2010, Oxford Press published Grant Hardy’s book Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), which heralded in a “turning point in the field” of Book of Mormon scholarship, according to Kimberly Matheson. Previous to this tome, a major emphasis of Book of Mormon scholarship was directed at proving links between the Book of Mormon and the ancient world in support of the Book’s own claims or proving connections between the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s language or culture to argue for a 19th century American authorship. Amy Easton-Flake views Hardy’s work as a “jumping-off point” from the previous focus to “a narrative-critical approach to the Book of Mormon.” Hardy’s book applied scholarship on narrative strategy in the Hebrew Bible to focus the attention of Book of Mormon readers on the three main narrators of the Book of Mormon. See Kimberly Matheson, “Emboldened and Embarrassed: The Tenor of Contemporary Book of Mormon Studies and the Role of Grant Hardy,” Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 31 (2022): 75–99, and Amy Easton-Flake, “Beyond Understanding: Narrative Theory as Expansion in Book of Mormon Exegesis,” Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 25, no. 1 (2016): 116, https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol25/iss1/10/.
the assumed surface-level content interrupted with the overt didactic comments preceded by “and thus we see.”

Gideon was a minor character in the Book of Mormon who has generally received little attention apart from the basic description of his role as a faithful man in the Zeniffite colony in the City of Nephi, surrounded by Lamanites. There Gideon opposed Noah and helped the Zeniffites escape their Lamanite captivity. After bringing his people back to the Nephite nation, in his old age, he opposed the wicked power-seeker, Nehor, who slew Gideon with a sword. But Mormon’s treatment of Gideon suggests there is much more we should consider.

After the death of Gideon in Alma 1, Mormon alludes to that event on two more occasions (Alma 2, 6) with an identical frequency of repetitions of the names Gideon and Nehor. These initial and blatant allusions are possible evidence of authorial intent and seem intended to lead the reader to find thematic connections with the later repetitions of those names. Throughout the book of Alma, Mormon’s treatment of Gideon, Nehor, and peoples associated with Nehor may create a subtle message about justice and serve as a personal literary response to the unjust deaths of Gideon and Abinadi, the Ammonites, and others. The narrative-focused approach here is carried out in four sections:

Part 1, “Repetition and Intention,” the repetition of the name Gideon and Nehor in Alma 1, 2, and 6 are explored and proposed to be both significant and intended by Mormon. This is motivated in part by the general brevity of the Book of Mormon and the tendency to follow Hebrew literary norms, suggesting that patterns of repetition should be considered for possible meaning.

Part 2, “Repeating Nehor and Gideon, Messages of Justice and Salvation,” proposes that Mormon’s editorial strategy in using repeated references to Gideon brings out themes of justice as well as a path to salvation in Christ’s appearance to the Nephites. While Gideon is introduced in Mosiah 19 and is killed in Alma 1, in a sense, his life via proxy begins in Alma 2 and doesn’t end at least until 3 Nephi 9. Allusions to Abinadi’s prophecies provide evidence suggesting that Mormon intended to link the four populations that Mormon names “Nehors” to his sub-narrative plot regarding justice. The narratives grouped in the theme of justice are discussed in the section, “Nehor’s Road to Ruin,” while the narratives connected to Gideon-related geography that form

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a path to Christ are discussed in the section, “Geographic Reiteration of Gideon: Gideon’s Path to the Prince of Peace.”

Part 3, “Gideon as a Peacemaker,” explores the narratives in Mosiah 19–21, 25 and Alma 1 to suggest that Mormon presents Gideon as a peacemaker, a potentially ironic touch given Gideon’s initial act of chasing King Noah with his sword. This presentation of Gideon as a peacemaker culminates in Gideon’s tragic death. Though speculative, an objective behind the peacemaker theme may have been to fill the reader with outrage and lead one to wonder if an unjust death really could be the reward for a peaceful life. The tension could then prime the reader to find the proposed sub-narrative plots of justice and salvation.

Part 4, “Mormon’s Preference for Peacemakers,” contextualizes Gideon with how Mormon treated other characters that he labeled as peacemakers. Like Part 3, this section seeks to present further evidence to potentially answer why Mormon may have written this literary second chance for Gideon and others. In other words, this section showcases Mormon’s affection for peacemakers. Mormon knew that in Christ’s post-mortem appearance to the Nephites, Jesus taught:

And blessed are all the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God. And blessed are all they which are persecuted for my name’s sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (3 Nephi 12:9–10)

Mormon’s narrative strategy appears to portray a somber and sensitive editor, who not only learned of and likely mourned the injustices met upon his ancestors, but may have also found an innovative way to teach his future readers about eventual divine justice and salvation. In his role as an editor, he may have channeled a love for peacemakers into a creative literary reproduction using repetitive phraseology to create a sub-narrative to encourage peacemakers and all those believers who are persecuted in this life, showing that they will return to their Heavenly Father and inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.

**Part 1: Repetition and Intention**

In this section, a discussion regarding the glaring and exact repetition of Gideon’s name in the first few chapters of Alma begins our exploration into authorial intent. Here I suggest that Mormon’s repeated allusions to Gideon’s death interrupt his narratives so conspicuously that these interruptions, noted by multiple scholars, are themselves possibly evidence of authorial intent. Authorial intent is important to this study,
because this paper attempts to discover how Mormon may have intended us to read his record. The approach utilized here began by looking for conspicuous repetitions, omissions, and connecting phrases in the text, posit reasons for their existence, and apply these possible reasons towards a greater understanding of this authentic ancient volume of scripture, the Book of Mormon.

**Initial Markers of Authorial Intent in Alma 1, 2, and 6**

A potentially significant pattern occurs in the way the names of Nehor and Gideon are repeated in the Book of Mormon starting with allusions to Gideon’s murder, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Initial repetitions of “Nehor” and “Gideon” in connection with Gideon’s murder in the Book of Mormon.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topical Context</th>
<th>Scripture References</th>
<th>References to Nehor</th>
<th>References to Gideon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gideon martyred</td>
<td>Nehor: Alma 1:15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gideon: Alma 1:8–9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amlici</td>
<td>Nehor: Alma 2:20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gideon: Alma 2:1, 20, 26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma preaches to the city of Gideon</td>
<td>Nehor: Alma 6:7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gideon: Alma 6:7, 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I argue that these repetitions, as shown in Table 1, serve as an initial marker provided by Mormon, presumably the last editorial hand to shape these accounts in question, to focus the reader’s attention on Nehor and Gideon and prepare us to see their repetition throughout the Book of Mormon as an indicator that something beyond a surface-level association with these characters is at play. The very fact that Mormon chose to remind the reader in two later episodes (Alma 2 and 6) is a possible indication of authorial intent. The methodology used here to suggest authorial intent is summarized by Amy Easton-Flake:

> By deciding what to place first and what to place last, what to repeat and what to omit, what to convey rapidly, and what to dwell at length on, the author guides readers’ interpretation of

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3. Authorship in the Book of Mormon, like other books with multiple known authors and editors, is a complex subject, one which one can appreciate more fully with John W. Welch’s discussion in *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: The Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008), 48–51, 140–45.
the text. Thus by making explicit these authorial decisions, we are better able to determine authorial intent.⁴

Although Gideon dies at the hand of Nehor as the first narrated event in the book of Alma, he makes a literary reappearance in the very next episode through a series of references. Mormon introduces the next antagonist, Amlici, with the ominous description of “being after the order of the man that slew Gideon” (Alma 2:1). This comment from Mormon invites the reader to look for possible thematic comparisons between Amlici and Nehor. Although others have attempted to find connections between Nehor and Amlici, Kylie Turley views this commentary as a “baffling” interruption and finds no real connection between Amlici and Nehor apart from this comment that Amlici was “after the order of the man that slew Gideon.”⁵ According to Easton-Flake, commentary such as this slows down a narrative, can evince authorial intent, and even “produce an alternative story line.”⁶ It is proposed that Mormon’s commentaries and repetitions of the name Nehor and Gideon also produce an alternative story line, described here as a sub-narrative.

Amlici attempts to take over the reins of the government from the voice of the people. When the voice of the people denies him of his aspiration, he turns to violence to take Nephite governance by force. Coincidently, Alma₂’s forces at one point pitch their tents in the valley of Gideon. Mormon reminds the reader that the valley was “called after that Gideon which was slain by the hand of Nehor” (Alma 2:20). This is now the second time that Gideon’s death has been referenced. The preponderance of references to the name of Gideon, four in total, and his death seems out of context in a struggle between Amlici and Alma₂, until we realize that Mormon might be reorienting the reader to read Nehor and Gideon into the account of this conflict. As Alma₂ slays Amlici with the sword, Mormon aids the reader to see Gideon slaying Nehor. Thus, through literary means, Mormon could creatively award the victory denied to Gideon in life.

This idea may seem farfetched; however, there is evidence in the text that suggests this scenario. It is significant that Mormon does not just repeat the names of Gideon and Nehor in this narrative to help reorient

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the reader. In the account of Gideon’s tragic death in Alma 1, the name of Nehor appears once and the name of Gideon is mentioned four times, exactly the number appearing in the account of Amlici in Alma 2. Mormon is not finished reminding the reader of Nehor and Gideon. Mormon has dealt the same hand twice (4 Gideons and 1 Nehor) to the reader, and now will deal us the same hand a third time in Alma 6 as Mormon is narrating Alma’s visit to the people of Gideon:

Alma … went over upon the east of the river Sidon into the valley of Gideon, there having been a city built which was called the city of Gideon, which was in the valley that was called Gideon, being called after the man which was slain by the hand of Nehor with the sword. And Alma went and began to declare the word of God unto the church which was established in the valley of Gideon … (Alma 6:7–8)

These verses and the repetitive appearances of the name Gideon in such close proximity sparked the exploration that led to this paper. The repetition of the name Gideon, like that of Nehor, have been observed by others. Grant Hardy noted the repetition of the phrase valley of Gideon in Alma 2 and 6, for example. Biblical scholars leverage these sorts of repetitions, which seem excessive or unnecessary but are sometimes, according to Amy Easton-Flake, markers to discover authorial intent:

“If we follow Elliot’s advice and ‘attend most closely to moments in the text that are not easily assimilated into the coherent and comprehensive (comprehensible story),’ we will further discover issues are significant to the implied author.”

While Mormon does not explicitly state his editorial intentions with respect to Gideon, making the topic inherently speculative and debatable, the evidence presented here is believed to support the hypothesis that some references to Gideon and Nehor, presumably all edited by Mormon, were intentionally crafted and may be used to extract additional meaning from the text. Indications that Mormon was acting intentionally can be

7. All quotes from the Book of Mormon are from Royal Skousen, ed., The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text, 2nd ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2022). I have used this version of the Book of Mormon because it is currently “the definitive scholarly version of the Book of Mormon,” as defined by Grant Hardy in its introduction. Grant Hardy, introduction to The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text, ed. Royal Skousen (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), xvii.

8. Hardy, Understanding the Book of Mormon, 150–51.

found in the meaning that comes through his decisions regarding what is repeated as well as what is omitted.

Repetition itself is a common occurrence in the Book of Mormon and the Hebrew Bible and is frequently meaningful. Alan Goff points out that “Repetitions are not just one element in the biblical writing style, but an essential, foundational building block that makes biblical plot and characterization possible.” Furthermore, the Book of Mormon, like the Bible, follows a “norm of economy” in its descriptions of its settings and characters; therefore, when there is repetition, it is reasonable to assume that it has a purpose, in other words, the author intended it to be there.

Consideration of apparent excess or apparent omission of expected information can be a key for better understanding scripture. For example, in the episode of Gideon’s death (Alma 1), Mormon begins the narrative with a telling omission. He delays naming Nehor, the main antagonist and character in this narrative. He passes up on over 20 occasions where it would be logical to refer to Nehor by his name, but delays naming him until his “ignominious death” (Alma 1:15). This technique of delaying an antagonist’s naming, which Mormon is using in Alma 1, is similar to that used in Egyptian literature. According to James Hoffmeier, the enemy of the Pharaoh was not named in Egyptian records, but in the few times when an enemy is named, “it seems to have been because that chieftain or king was captured and taken prisoner.” This is precisely the case with Nehor, he is not named until after he is captured and sentenced to death.

In addition to this delay, Mormon also slightly delays the re-introduction of a previous character, the hero Gideon. These delays may have been intentional. Mormon may have delayed naming both these characters so that he could control the number of times he used


12. James K. Hoffmeier, Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 110. Although we know that the Nephites had brought records with them as well as created and preserved records, we don’t know all that they had brought from the Old World, so an Egyptian literary influence on this narrative can only be theoretical.
their names in this episode (Alma 1:1–15), which is four times for Gideon and only once for Nehor (v. 15). This is a pattern that occurs in two other occasions as shown in Table 1. Mormon may have both repeated and omitted these names to urge the reader to pay attention to the further use of these names throughout the rest of the narrative.

Literary justice is not foreign to the Bible; in fact, the Biblical Gideon is portrayed as the victim of murder and receives justice posthumously as well. It is possible that the Biblical story of Gideon’s misfortune and the delivery of a postmortem vengeance via proxy inspired Mormon with the idea to provide the Nephite Gideon literary justice and salvation posthumously as well.

The complicated network of associations proposed in the rest of this paper follow from application of literary analysis developed by Biblical scholars in the mid- to late-20th century and only recently introduced into Book of Mormon studies this century through the work of scholars like Grant and Heather Hardy. For this reason, some of these proposed connections, and suggested sub-narrative meaning, may have been overlooked by previous Book of Mormon scholarship.

**Part 2: Repeating Nehor and Gideon, Justice and Salvation**

Here we consider two important meanings that may be behind Mormon’s subtle treatment of Gideon and Nehor. First, we consider the issue of justice for Gideon and others, and then the path to salvation through Christ that can be seen in Mormon’s apparently careful references to Gideon. The suggestion that these themes of justice and salvation were intended for the reader to discover by Mormon was a product of an analysis described in this section.

**Nehor’s Road to Ruin: Justice for Gideon and Others**

References to the name Nehor after his execution and throughout the rest of the Book of Mormon, appear as an introductory epithet

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13. In Judges 9:56, the Biblical narrator connects Abimelech’s death to the injustice done to Gideon (Jerubbaal) by slaying Gideon’s children.


15. A good introduction to this history can be found in Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 1–24.

for antagonists on whom the sword of justice will fall. Subsequently, Mormon marks four different populations as Nehors: Amlicites (already referenced above), Ammonihahites, Amalekites, and Amulonites, as shown in Table 2. All these groups meet divine justice for violent acts against believers and their ends fulfill prophecies from Abinadi. Not only are there textual connections between Abinadi and the Nehors, but there are textual and thematic connections between Abinadi and Gideon, who seems to be the literary sword of justice destined to fall upon these Nehor populations. Such a role may allude to the famous biblical story when Gideon and just 100 men frightened and scattered a large enemy army as they suddenly revealed their torches and shouted, “The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!” (Judges 7: 18, 20). Gideon is introduced in Mosiah 19:4 with a sword raised against wicked King Noah, and when his life ends in Alma 1:9, “he was slain by the sword.”

**Table 2.** Population groups associated with Nehor’s teachings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nehor Populations</th>
<th>Cause for destruction</th>
<th>Justice met</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amlicites</td>
<td>According to Mormon, it was [Amlici’s] intent to destroy the church of God” (Alma 2:4). After failing to win the voice of the people, in an election, his followers proclaim him king and he begins a war in order to “subject [the rest of the Nephites] to him” (Alma 2:10).</td>
<td>The Amlicites are “driven”, “slain”, and then “devoured” by “wild beasts” and “vultures of the air” (Alma 2:37–38), just like Abinadi’s prophecies (see Mosiah 12:2, 17:7).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ammonihahites</td>
<td>The Ammonihahites torture God’s messengers (Alma, and Amulek) and kill their believers through fire (see Alma 14:8–25).</td>
<td>The Lord, through the pronouncement of his prophet Alma, brings down the walls of the prison upon the chief judge and lawyers (see Alma 14:25–28). The Lamanites wipe out the populace of Ammonihah in a single day (see Alma 16:1–3 and Alma 25).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amulonites</td>
<td>slewed the unarmed Ammonites (the new believers) in Alma 24:28 and put believers to death by fire (see Alma 25:3–12).</td>
<td>Killed in battles with the Nephites and burned to death by Lamanites (see Alma 25:3–12) as prophesied by Abinadi. The rest of the Amulonites are destroyed between Alma 43 and 47.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The meaning of Gideon’s name may have prompted Mormon in his narrative strategy involving the use of Gideon and Nehor, and particularly, the justice that would come to the rebellious peoples Mormon associated with the name of Nehor. The name Gideon comes from the Hebrew verb ġêda’ (גֶּדֶע) meaning “hew, hew down or off.” Moshe Garsiel has observed that the Biblical author “makes especial homiletic use of [Gideon]’s name” in the book of Judges. The metaphorical associations of Gideon’s name, as someone who hews, “accord well with Gideon’s activity in smiting the Midianites.” Mormon may also have decided that Gideon’s linguistic association with the action of hewing accorded well with the posthumous use of the name Nehor as a label for those who would be slain by God’s justice. (See Table 2 for further details.) Further, in light of “the sword of the Lord, and of Gideon” from Judges 7, Gideon’s death by being hewn down by the sword of a wicked man is deeply tragic, if not bitterly ironic, and seems to have drawn Mormon’s personal attention. Indeed, this could even be a further example of the subtle irony that Robert Rees has observed in his study of a sophisticated literary tool in the Book of Mormon.

19. Ibid.
Gideon as Abinadi’s Sword of Justice against Noah and the Nehors

A close study of Gideon’s textual association with Nehor reveals an additional association with Abinadi and an association between Abinadi and Nehor. From the moment that Gideon steps onto the stage of the Book of Mormon, Mormon ties him to Abinadi and his prophecies through identical introductions: “There was a man among them whose name was … .” These are the only two people who Mormon introduces this way. This identical introduction leads the reader to find the contextual connection between Gideon and Abinadi’s prophecies starting with Gideon’s first recorded act: he threatens King Noah’s life. Abinadi foresaw that “the life of king Noah [would] be valued even as a garment in a hot furnace” (Mosiah 12:3). It is not surprising, then, that Gideon’s arrival in the narrative comes at a time when an outraged minority “began to breathe out threatenings against the king” (Mosiah 19:3) in accordance with Abinadi’s prediction.

Gideon is part of the angry current against the king, but the reasons for the opposition are not clearly explained by Mormon. The opposition is introduced in Mosiah 19:2 with this terse statement: “And now behold, the forces of the king were small, having been reduced, and there began to be a division among the remainder of the people.” We tend to assume that the opposition was due to Noah’s wickedness, perhaps due to killing Abinadi and seeking to kill Alma and his people, but there may have been many problems brought upon that society through the wickedness and incompetence of their rulers. One hint is the reduction in the size of the king’s forces mentioned immediately before introducing the opposition movement. Was this reduction in the Zeniffite army due to a massive loss of soldiers in a mismanaged battle? This could refer to something like the scene in Mosiah 11:16–17, when Noah failed to send a sufficient number of guards to ward off a Lamanite attack, resulting in heavy casualties.

Another option which fits the context is that King Noah, through his misplaced priorities, directly or indirectly reduced the size of the army in

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21. Compare Mosiah 19:4 and Mosiah 11:20. Gideon and Abinadi are the only characters that share this identical introduction. Alma and Zeezrom share an identical introduction that is similar to Gideon and Abinadi’s (reference Mosiah 17:2 and Alma 10:31), but the subtle difference between these two sets of identical introductions may suggest separate thematic connections. Aminadab also has a similar introduction in Helaman 5:35, which may also suggest that his story is connected to these others somehow.
order to apply resources elsewhere. When Mormon paints his unpleasant portrait of the wicked King Noah, he describes in detail Noah’s taxing investments in massive building projects and in riotous living. To some modern economies, a 20% tax may not seem like much, but according to Mormon this made the people “labor exceedingly to support iniquity” (Mosiah 11:6). These details do not just convince the reader that Noah deserves what is coming to him, but build the rationale for igniting the people’s brewing discontent. After all, it is his own people, who are the arm that throws Noah to the flames (see Mosiah 11:1–15).

Regardless of the reason they are angry at Noah, Gideon is so indignant that he physically threatens Noah’s life in hand-to-hand combat. Gideon does not ultimately kill Noah, but he does eventually ensure that justice comes to Noah, indirectly. Once in a position to end Noah’s life, Gideon ultimately spares him in order to give his people the best chance at surviving a Lamanite surprise-attack, which Noah conveniently spots right before Gideon is ready to strike him down. Instead of helping the people, Noah flees with a small group of men to save their own lives, abandoning their wives and children in the process. However, Noah’s boundless selfishness soon turns his group against him and his priests. In accordance with Abinadi’s prophecy (Mosiah 17:15–19), Noah then suffers his own fiery execution at the hands of the men who had fled with King Noah (Mosiah 19:19–20).

When the Zeniffites surrendered to the Lamanites, with their wives and daughters pleading before the Lamanites for mercy, the Lamanites had compassion and stopped the slaughter, but required that they deliver

22. Alternatively, Daniel Belnap reads against Mormon’s commentary suggesting that Noah’s building projects “would have strengthened the local economy, rewarding skilled artisans and common laborers alike” and that “nothing in the text suggests that the people themselves felt they were under a particularly onerous hardship, Mormon’s comments notwithstanding.” Daniel L. Belnap, “The Abinadi Narrative, Redemption, and the Struggle for Nephite Identity,” in Abinadi: He Came Among Them in Disguise, ed. Shon D. Hopkins (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2018), 37. Also reading against Mormon’s commentary, Brant Gardner hypothesizes that the people may have looked at Noah’s reign as a “golden age.” Gardner applies a presentism lens to this circumstance by commenting that a “20 percent tax, on mostly luxury or trade items, would actually provide a tax relief to many Americans.” Brant Gardner, Second Witness: Analytical & Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon, vol. 3, Enos-Mosiah (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 254.
King Noah to them, as well as pay an ongoing tribute of one half of their possessions (Mosiah 19:15).

Although “not ignorant of his father’s iniquities,” Noah’s successor, his son Limhi, did not want his father to be “destroyed” (Mosiah 19:17). So, in order to appease the Lamanite conditions and perhaps for justice’s sake alone, Gideon “secretly” sends out men to search for King Noah and his men (Mosiah 19:18). This suggests that this search party went out unbeknownst to Limhi. Further, when Gideon’s men meet Noah’s men, the ones who executed Noah, Noah’s demise is reported to Gideon’s men and then reported to Gideon. No report is presented to King Limhi in the Book of Mormon text.

Ultimately, the report of Noah’s death to the Lamanites satisfies their conditions for the surrender, thus preserving the lives of the Zeniffites and administering justice for Abinadi’s martyrdom. In the case of Noah, Gideon acts as the sword of justice on behalf of Abinadi’s prophecies. I am suggesting that literarily, Gideon, via the repeated application of the name Nehor to various people, also plays the role of justice for Abinadi’s prophecies against those who kill believers.

The Nehor-Amlicites

After Nehor’s execution in Alma 1, Alma 2 introduces the first literary “Nehor,” Amlici:

[T]here began to be a contention among the people; for a certain man being called Amlici, he being a very cunning man, yea, a wise man as to the wisdom of the world, he being after the order of the man that slew Gideon by the sword, who was executed according to the law — Now this Amlici had by his cunning drawn away much people after him, even so much that they began to be very powerful; and they began to endeavor to establish Amlici to be a king over the people. (Alma 2:1–2)

Mormon omits the name Nehor, but what will be labeled as “the order of the Nehors” is certainly implied. Nehor may have been a figurehead or the originator of that movement, but thematically, Mormon could

also employ him and his order as symbols to illustrate divine justice falling upon different people. After the encounter with the Amlicites, the next literary Nehors are the wicked people of Ammonihah. After killing or casting out the faithful, the entire population of Ammonihah is slaughtered by a surprise Lamanite attack. The remaining scene of carnage remained uninhabitable for years and was “called Desolation of Nehors; for they were of the profession of Nehor, who were slain; and their lands remained desolate” (Alma 16:11). Then the Amulonites and Amalekites are explicitly said to be of “the order of the Nehors” (Alma 21:4, 24:28).

“Nehors,” at the hands of Mormon, seems to be an ominous label foreshadowing a just end for cruelty and wickedness against believers as well as rebelling against the truth, which they once knew. Kylie Nielson Turley also sees a connection between the tenets and behaviors of these Nehor populations, but ties them to the “unbelievers” described in Mosiah 26 and 27. Alma himself was a part of, or even a leader of, the unbelievers. The repetition of the Nehor label becomes so rampant that in response to the destruction of the city of Ammonihah and its subsequent label as the destruction of the Nehors, Daniel Belnap queried whether “the presence of ‘Nehor’ had become the Nephite explanation behind any and every misfortune, whether historically accurate or not.” Likewise, here we consider the hypothesis that the repeated label of Nehor signified a thematic association rather than an actual religious or political association.

Turley has also observed that “the connection between Nehor and these dissenters is somewhat baffling” and Mormon’s “reasoning for claiming these dissenters are ‘Nehorite’ is unclear.” I argue that these

Scripture 1 (2012): 25–55, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-cultural-context-of-nephite-apostasy/. It is also possible that Nehor and these other groups are related by blood to the actual “seed” of those who killed Abinadi. This seed is referenced by Abinadi in Mosiah 17:15.


odd connections between Nehor and these specific populations are evidence of authorial intent, and as such, were part of Mormon’s strategy to lead the reader to Gideon and Abinadi. In each of these cases, Mormon fashions specific textual clues to signal that the divine justice met on the Nehor populations also symbolizes a recompense for the injustices perpetrated against Abinadi and Gideon.

In the case of the Amlicites and Amalekites, it is possible that Mormon’s methods for connecting these populations thematically may have been so successful that it has blurred any distinctions between them, and may have led some readers to see these two peoples as a single population. Additionally, examination of Book of Mormon manuscripts and consideration of the mysterious origins and ends of the two groups led J. Christopher Conkling to propose that the two peoples are one, with the distinction arising only from Oliver Cowdery’s variable spelling of “Amlicites.” However, Benjamin McMurtry offers a reasonable rebuttal, proposing that they are two different groups. It is revealing to realize that Mormon may have selectively sculpted their narratives so we would see them as the same “type” of people earning the same type of reward for their actions. This could also explain why they came into and out of the narrative without much information about them.

Returning to the Amlicites, Amlici and his dissenting followers inspire the Lamanites to attack the Nephites with the purpose to “subject them” (Alma 2:10) and ultimately “destroy the church” (Alma 2:4). As will be seen with the other Nehor populations, compulsion and violence against believers is a common theme. Mormon ensures that the setting of the valley of Gideon (Alma 2:20) conspicuously contextualizes the battle, so we can see Amlici and his forces as Nehor and Alma’s defenders as a subtle reference to the man Gideon. The label of Nehor

28. J. Christopher Conkling, “Alma’s Enemies: The Case of the Lamanites, Amlicites, and Mysterious Amalekites,” Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 14, no. 1 (2005): 108–17, 130–32, https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1395&context=jbms. Royal Skousen agrees with Conkling’s conclusion and states that “the apostate Amalekites are actually the Amlicites who are mentioned earlier in Alma 2–3, which means that we replace Amalekite(s) with Amlicite(s). The name Amalekite is a biblical name that was accidentally introduced into the text by Oliver Cowdery when he copied from [the original manuscript into the printer’s manuscript].” Skousen, Earliest Text, xiii.


30. Although I agree with McMurtry’s analysis that the Amlicites are a separate people from the Amalekites, the analysis on the use of these Nehor populations as referrers to Gideon is not conditioned upon them being separate peoples.
seems to be a death sentence earned by killing the innocent and forcing one’s ideology on others through violence. This battle marks a symbolic end, if not an actual end, to the Nehor-lead Amlicites. Upon this occasion of their defeat, Mormon signals to the reader that justice has been served to the Amlicites by inserting the detailed afterward about curses and by the insertion of textual ties to Abinadi’s prophecies.

After the sword of justice falls upon the Amlicites, Mormon reminds the reader that the Amlicites unwittingly marked themselves for destruction by alluding to the curses and blessings that Nephi recorded originally (Alma 3:4–19). When the Amlicites chose to separate themselves from the safety of God’s covenants and his covenant people, choosing rather to come out in “open rebellion,” they opened themselves up to elimination. In addition to describing their defeat in battle, Mormon details how the Amlicites are “driven,” “slain,” and then “devoured” by “wild beasts” and “vultures of the air.” These details seem to be lifted directly from Abinadi’s prophecies, but not specifically identified as a fulfillment of the prophecies. The occurrences of some of these phrases, common to Abinadi and the Amlicites, are uncommon elsewhere in the Book of Mormon with the animal “vulture” only appearing in these two accounts. The insertion of these unique phrases strongly suggest that Mormon intended to highlight a connection between Abinadi’s prophecies and the destruction of the Amlicites, a trend we will also see with the other “Nehor” populations.

Mormon also describes in vivid imagery how the dead from the battle with the Amlicites were cast into the waters of Sidon, which carried their bones into “the depths of the sea” (Alma 3:3). Mormon will repeat this same scenario with the defeat of the Nehor-Amalekites in the battle described in Alma 43 and 44 (with Alma 43:6 noting the role of the Amalekites), resulting in “cast[ing] their dead into the waters of Sidon, and they have gone forth and are buried in the depths of the sea” (Alma 44:22), an end nearly unique to the battles of these two “Nehor” populations.

Then, typical of Mormon’s approach to the war chapters, he follows the death of dissenters with the birth of converts, as they are baptized in

31. Compare these terms used to describe the Amlicites in Alma 2:37–38 with the same terms used by Abinadi in Mosiah 12:2 and 17:17.
32. There is only one other battle where the dead are cast into the sea, but this occurrence in Mormon 3:8 does not include the waters of Sidon.
the same waters. Mormon beautifully interlaces war scenes brought about by dissenters with preaching that brings about conversion as a backdrop to his accounts of the “Nehors.” Mormon even extends this weave of contrasting narratives between war and conversion to show how self-destructive dissension from God was. In fact, as we shall see, Mormon reports the destruction of the Ammonihahites twice to make this point (Alma 16:1–3, 25:1–2).

**Nehor-Ammonihahites**

In our next narrative sequence (Alma 14–16), Alma 2, a second-generation disciple of Abinadi, actually performs the part of Abinadi in the condemnation of the “Nehors” in Ammonihah. Grant Hardy has listed various phrases and themes unique to Alma 2 and Amulek’s preaching in Ammonihah and to Abinadi’s preaching to King Noah and his people suggesting that Mormon intended these two narratives to read as parallel accounts. Like Abinadi, Alma 2 has a message of repentance, which incites the people enough to bind him and deliver him and his preaching companion Amulek up to the local leaders for judgement. And also like Abinadi, who saw that future believers would be killed by fire because of their belief (Mosiah 17:15), Alma 2 and Amulek watch as the wicked in Ammonihah throw their believers, their converts, into the fire. It is after the believers are consumed by fire that Mormon describes the chief judge of Ammonihah as someone who “was after the order and faith of Nehor, who slew Gideon” (Alma 14:16).

Applying methodology espoused by Easton-Flake, this break in narrative time to hearken back to Nehor and Gideon presents possible evidence for authorial intent, namely, that Mormon intends for the reader to connect Ammonihah with Nehor and Gideon. This interruptive commentary is conspicuous. Regarding this specific interruption, Turley notes, “Mormon’s decision to label the judge as a Nehorite shifts the focus to Nehor, and the ill-timed intrusion ensures that readers will

33. Compare the baptisms described in Alma 4:4 with the removal of the dead in Alma 3:3 and Alma 2:34.
35. See the discussion in Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 115–19.
36. Ibid., 160–62.
37. For a sensitive analysis of this traumatic event, please see Turley, *Alma 1–29*, 87–94.
This intent is made more pronounced by the interruptive nature of the text’s repeated association between Ammonihahites and Nehor. Turley has observed, “It seems impossible that readers could miss the interruptions and forceful linking of Ammonihah to Nehor.” These repetitive associations seem meant to wrest the reader’s attention from the main narrative to something else. I argue that this “something else” is the sub-narrative plot outlined in this article.

After Alma and Amulek are cast into prison they are visited by “many lawyers and judges and priests and teachers which were of the profession of Nehor” (Alma 14:18). During their incarceration, these Nehors smote Alma and Amulek on their cheeks multiple times (Alma 14:14–27). In Mosiah 12:2, Abinadi included “bondage” and being “smitten on the cheek” as part of his prophecies. Three tortuous days pass for Alma and Amulek in prison before God’s power comes upon them, delivers them from their bonds, and brings down the prison walls upon the “Nehors,” killing the chief judge and many of his lawyers, priests, and teachers. Before Mormon narrates the death of these Nehors, he ties their deaths to this same wording from Abinadi, noting that those “who smote upon Alma and Amulek were slain” (Alma 14:27).

An additional prophecy from Abinadi also comes to life through the suffering of Zeezrom, the adversarial lawyer-turned-believer by the words of Alma and Amulek. As Abinadi was dying by fire, he prophesied that people would “be afflicted with all manner of diseases” and that some believers would suffer the “pains of death by fire” (Mosiah 17:16, 18). After Zeezrom becomes convinced of the truth of the words of Alma and Amulek, he is struck with an unidentified disease that burns him with a fever. The description of Zeezrom’s fever also sounds like he is literally burning, suffering the “pains of death by fire,” just as Abinadi prophesied as well as experienced. Fittingly, Mormon vividly describes Zeezrom’s fever as him being “scorched with a burning heat” (Alma 15:3). This unique verb scorch is only used in two places in the Book of Mormon, here with Zeezrom and in the death of Abinadi (Mosiah 17:13–14). This unique verbal and similar thematic connection between

40. Ibid., 23n50.
Zeezrom and Abinadi suggests that Mormon intended the reader to see Abinadi’s prophecies and experience in Zeezrom’s fever. After exterminating the believers, who were most likely their best chance of surviving the wrath of God to come, the remaining unrepentant Ammonihahites soon came under the crosshairs of two prophetic promises. Abinadi promised that justice would fall upon those who would put believers to death and God promised Nephi, that the Lamanites would destroy the Nephites, if they became wicked. This is exactly what happens. As part of a campaign against the Nephites, the Lamanites invade Ammonihah, completely destroying the city and all its inhabitants in one day. The destruction was so complete that the Nephites at the time referred to this annihilated and uninhabitable land as the “Desolation of the Nehors” (Alma 16:12). This destruction revisited in Alma 25 is almost wholly owed to the Amalekites and Amulonites’ murderous disposition and wrath against the converted Ammonites.

When Mormon first recounts the annihilation of the Ammonihahites in Alma 16, he leaves out the motives behind the Lamanite’s attack. The absence of an explanation incidentally emphasizes the role God plays in using this attack to mete out justice. It also plays into Mormon’s overall rhetoric to convince the reader that the wicked bring the justice of God upon themselves, when they choose to rebel against God.

After this account, Mormon intentionally fractures his narrative chronology to guide the reader back in time to traverse the more complicated background to this destruction. This second version of the destruction of Ammonihah reported in Alma 25:1–2 includes the participation of another population of “Nehors” mingled with the descendants of the priests of Noah. Mormon’s representation of these

42. The Lord forewarned Nephi, that if his descendants “rebel against me, [the descendants of Laman] shall be a scourge unto thy seed, to stir them up in the ways of remembrance” (1 Nephi 2:23–24). This prophecy is rehashed with an emphasis on destruction in 2 Nephi 5:25. Before Abinadi dies by fire, he prophesies that the descendants of Noah, the priests, and/or the Zeniffites in general (it is hard to determine how specific Abinadi intended the phrase “thy seed”) would cause that many believers should be put to death by fire. Abinadi lists a plethora of calamities that would befall them due to their iniquities. He begins with a cursing specifically for a certain “seed” or people, but finishes with “thus God executeth vengeance upon those that destroy [God’s] people” (Mosiah 17:15–19). Abinadi may not have intended this curse specifically for the future Ammonihahites, but I argue here that Mormon interprets the just desserts of the Ammonihahites through the lens of this prophecy.

43. Hardy, Understanding the Book of Mormon, 118–19.
events nuances the previous lesson that the wicked bring their own curses upon themselves by emphasizing the self-destructive nature of the “Nehor” dissenters. In the second account, it is the acts of one “Nehor” population that unwittingly destroys the other.

**Nehor-Amulonites and Amalekites**

These other “Nehors” are the Amalekites and the familiar Amulonites, the descendants and followers of the high priests of Noah. These two groups co-inhabited the city of Jerusalem in the land of the Lamanites and had established churches “after the order of the Nehors” (Alma 21:4). They were aggressively resistant to the preaching from the sons of Mosiah during their watershed mission to the Lamanites. After the great missionary successes with the Lamanites, it is the Amalekites and Amulonites who drive the Lamanites to attack the Lamanite converts. Their unconscionable murder of the innocent unarmed believers qualifies them for Abinadi’s promise of divine justice (Mosiah 17:19) and further promises specially reserved for the Amulonites. This traumatic mass martyrdom of the Lamanite converts (Ammonites) is central to Mormon’s subtextual narrative about Gideon.

As described previously, Mormon may have intended for his portrayal of Gideon’s wrongful death to echo in the similar deaths of the Ammonites, who were struck down as they were defenseless in a prostrated position of prayer (Alma 24:19–26). Mormon labels the Amalekites and Amulonites, who were the motivation behind the ruthless slaughter, as “Nehors” (Alma 24:28–29). This opens the door for the reader to reimagine the Ammonites as “Gideons.” Therefore, Mormon’s suggestions about the Ammonites’ salvation arguably can also be extended to Gideon in the same way that the justified deaths of the Amalekites and Amulonites are extended to Nehor in vindication of Gideon’s death at his hands. When Mormon comments that the recently “slain were righteous people; therefore we have no reason to doubt but what they were saved” (Alma 24:26), we can see this also as a commentary on Gideon, who Alma₂ also called a “righteous man” (Alma 1:14). The intentionality of this connection between the Ammonites and Gideon is suggested by the fact that the designations of a “righteous people” and a “righteous man” are not common in a book that values righteousness.²⁴⁵

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²⁴. In Mosiah 17:15–19 the prophetic cursing Abinadi pronounces on “the seed” of those who killed him certainly included Amulon and the other wicked priests.

²⁵. There are only 12 instances of “righteous people” occurring in the Book of Mormon, 9 of these are from Mormon, and 4 out of these 9 are references to the
Although not suggested in the narrative about Gideon’s death, Mormon’s comment about the Ammonites’ salvation can also be read as a comment about Gideon; the reader should “have no reason to doubt but what [he] was saved.”

Mormon’s account of the traumatic mass martyrdom of the Ammonites not only emphasizes their goodness, but the unrepenting and unrelenting cruelty of the “Nehors.” However, Mormon no longer refers to the Amalekites or Amulonites as “Nehors.” Even so, Mormon’s narration directs us to see the self-destructive nature of the “Nehors” and how they bring upon themselves their own curses, anyway. Mormon seems anxious for us to grasp the consequences for rebellion against God. Through the second narration of the Ammonihah annihilation, Mormon precisely angles the reader to witness how the Amalekites and Amulonites’ use of the Lamanites to target the Ammonites backfires. This results in the complete destruction of the Nehors, first destroying the Ammonihahites in a single day and then the exterminating of all the rest of the Amalekites and Amulonites over the course of time.

After clearly linking the destruction of the Ammonihahites to the actions of the Amalekites and Amulonites (see Alma 24:1–25:2), Mormon turns our attention to the Amulonites. Not only does the aggression against the Ammonites bleed over into the annihilation of Ammonihah and its resident “Nehor” population, it leads to “many battles” where “almost all the seed of Amulon and his brethren, which were the priests of Noah” are slain (Alma 25:3–4). Mormon will return to these glossed-over “many battles” to hint that the destruction of the Amalekites happens in concert with that of the seed of Amulon, but first he summarizes these battles and inserts additional content to emphasize the fulfillment of prophecy in the events leading up to the destruction of the Amulonites.

Mormon further emphasizes his commentary about apostates (see Alma 24:30) by showing the two polarized reactions of the Lamanites and the Amulonites to their successive losses at the hands of the Nephites. Many of the Lamanites become converted by the ordeal, which enrages the still unrepentant Amulonites who begin to put the Lamanite believers to death by fire as prophesied by Abinadi. Accordingly, the descendants of the priests of Noah transform from predator to prey as Ammonites (Alma 19:35, Alma 23:7, Alma 24:26, and Alma 25:14). There are only two actual men labeled as a “righteous man” in the Book of Mormon: Gideon and Alma, (compare Alma 1:14 and Alma 45:19). The only other reference to a “righteous man” occurs in Helaman 13:18, but this does not refer to a specific person.
Abinadi’s prophecy continues to move the narrative. In response to the cruelty of the seed of the priests of Noah, the angered Lamanites begin to hunt down these descendants, a practice Mormon states lasts until his time (some three hundred years later, though this may be a quotation from the primary sources Mormon was using). Mormon’s commentary makes it more difficult for the reader to miss the tie between the doom imposed on the descendants of the wicked priests and Abinadi’s prophecies (Alma 25:3–12). After Mormon has explicitly told us the end of the Amulonites, or at least the beginning of their end, he can now more subtly show the reader how the Amalekites meet the same end with the Amulonites.

In Alma 27, Mormon parallels the activities of the Amulonites, the descendants of the priests of Noah, with those of the Amalekites, who respond to the losses against the Nephites in a very similar fashion as the Amulonites. They persecute the Ammonites, the Lamanite converts of the sons of Mosiah. In response to the violence against the Ammonites, the Nephites adopt their population in its entirety by giving them the city of Jershon and protecting them with Nephite forces. Mormon summarizes what he terms as an unprecedented “tremendous battle” (Alma 28:2) and then interleaves some more stories about spiritual struggles before returning to battles, which included the Amalekites and Amulonites. These numerous battles may have greatly afflicted these populations.

Mormon includes both the Amalekites and the Amulonites as key participants in a battle fought between the Lamanites led by Zerahemnah and the Nephites captained by Moroni, (Alma 43:13). The Amalekites are specifically chosen as chief captains in Zerahemnah’s army, along with another group of dissenters (Zoramites), because of their wickedness and murderous disposition (Alma 43:6). Mormon emphasizes the role of this murderous disposition showing how it inspired the Lamanites to fight with unheard of ferocity (Alma 43:43–44). As the bloody battle comes to its end, there are multiple times where Moroni offers the enemy an opportunity to leave under covenant never to fight the Nephites again. Because of the ferocity and murderous disposition emphasized in the actions of the Amalekites, it is probable that none or few of their numbers belonged to the “many” who opted for peace when it was offered (Alma 44:15) and left the battle. This battle may have been the ending of the Amalekites, because they are never mentioned again.

When a future Lamanite army is mustered to go to battle, Mormon ensures that the reader knows that the Lamanite population includes
“all the dissenters of the Nephites” (Alma 47:35). The new despot, Amalickiah, again appoints Nephite dissenters as chief captains; however, the Amalekites and Amulonites are not mentioned. It appears that the battle with Moroni, in the 18th year of the reign of the Judges might have been their last. Like the previous Nehor population, the Amlicites, the slain Amalekites certainly factored into the total number of the dead who were cast into the waters of Sidon and buried in the depths of the sea (Alma 44:21–22). This nearly identical end shared by the Amlicites and the Amalekites is likely the subtle reminder of the “Nehor” tie between these two peoples.

With the death of the final Nehors, the Amulonites and Amalekites, Gideon’s murder has now found its final justice by proxy. It is curious that Mormon chose not to more heavily mark this ending as an ending of all the Nehors, or he may have realized that the influence of the Nehors lived on among dissenters, king-men, and power seekers in secret combinations, so they were not ever fully exterminated. He could have chosen to add a decisive comment. It seems that he elected silence as his voice of final justice against the Nehors. The Nehors fade away in much the same way that Nehor entered the Book of Mormon, i.e., without a name. Of course, the lack of a final declaration of victory over the Nehors may be missing because it would not be accurate, in spite of the destruction that came to several specific groups. Mormon surely realized that the influence of the Nehors still lived on and that Nehor-like groups persisted, in spite of the justice that is demonstrated in the book of Alma as edited by Mormon.

In the end, Nehor’s story really is not just about Nehor, but his life and death seem to point the reader continually to Gideon and through Gideon to others. This is the magic of Mormon’s possible personal message here. Mormon could be pointing the reader to the existence of final justice by proxy, through literary strategies. His message resonates to all people suffering under injustice; he is telling us there will be an accounting for all who have been wronged. God will make it right.

46. Perhaps Mormon also chose to end this way to show that there are always new “Nehors” to fight by showing subtly how the Zoramites took the place of the Amalekites.

Geographic Reiteration of Gideon:
Gideon’s Path to the Prince of Peace

After presenting evidence for the existence of a sub-narrative connected by repeated references to Nehor, we now investigate the possibility of another related sub-narrative plot line built around repeated references to geographic locations named after Gideon. After Gideon’s death, the majority of references to the name Gideon are references to locations named after the martyred hero. In fact, the narrative seems to suggest that naming a valley and a city after Gideon was wholly caused by an event, the event of Gideon’s murder. Mormon seems to use this event to apply meaning to these Gideon-locations and focus the reader on other events framed by Gideon-related geography. Mormon’s repetition of Gideon, as place names, belongs to a strategy known in biblical scholarship as geographical reiteration.48 A geographical reiteration lens will be applied to the repetition of Gideon-locales in support of a theory that Mormon employs the related geography as a way to endow its namesake, the person Gideon, with literary salvation. As a place name, Gideon frames some key events in the tortuous unwinding of the Book of Mormon’s patchwork of narratives. Gideon as a place and its people seem to symbolize the defense of the faith and freedom from oppression — two things Gideon himself represented by his death. These repeated references also form a possible textual path to Christ for the Gideonites and for Gideon, via proxy.

The most significant aspect of the valley and city of Gideon is the event from which its name is derived. When Mormon introduces the valley of Gideon during the conflicts with Amlici in the fifth year of the reign of the judges (about 87 BC), he specifically associates the valley’s name with the event of Gideon’s murder: “the valley of Gideon, the valley being called after that Gideon which was slain by the hand of Nehor with the sword” (Alma 2:20). Similarly, the introduction of the city of Gideon occurring in Alma₂’s visit to the people of Gideon sometime in the ninth year of the reign of the judges (about 83 BC) is also connected to the event of Gideon’s martyrdom. From an aesthetic perspective, Mormon artfully situates the city textually between two references to the valleys, as if suggesting that it was a city nestled in between two mountain ranges.

[Alma] went over upon the east of the river of Sidon into the valley of Gideon, there having been a city built which was

called the city of Gideon, which was in the valley that was called Gideon, being called after the man which was slain by the hand of Nehor with the sword. (Alma 6:7)

From this introduction to the municipality of Gideon, we learn that this city did not exist before Gideon (it was built in honor of him) and perhaps didn’t exist prior to his martyrdom. Unlike the lands from the Bible, where place names were often changed over the course of history to mark significant events, the city of Gideon seems to have been newly built as a testimony to Gideon’s martyrdom. Thus, according to the narrative, the city may have been built specifically with Gideon’s murder in mind. Whether or not this was actually the case, what matters for this study is the intent of the narrative. What is Mormon trying to communicate to the reader? Mormon’s emphatic commentary and repetitive reminders of Gideon’s murder in these locations help ensure that the reader notices this solemn association and thereby imbues all the repeated references to Gideon-locations in the Book of Mormon with deeper meaning. Accordingly, a new city named for Gideon and recalling his murder may figuratively bring new life to the person Gideon. In other words, Mormon’s geographical reiteration of Gideon allows the reader to see Gideon in geography as proxy for the martyred hero.

Anselm C. Hagedorn observed in his study of Deuteronomy 12 that the landscape is much more than background and therefore it is to be expected “that the description of the sacred landscape in Deuteronomy allows us to interpret the values of the writer(s) of the text.” Similarly, these Gideon-related sites and their association with Gideon’s martyrdom suggests that Mormon does not want the reader to forget about Gideon’s death. This event mattered to Mormon. Through his intentional associations between event and setting in Alma 2 and 6, Mormon endows the people of Gideon and Gideon-related geography

49. After the Zeniffites, recently delivered from bondage by Gideon, return to Zarahemla around 120–121 bc they do not then migrate to a city named Gideon or build a city named Gideon then. When Gideon confronts Nehor and is murdered for it around 91 bc, there is no stated setting for this event; in other words, this event does not seem to occur in the land, valley, or city of Gideon. In the conflicts with Amlici about 87 bc, only a valley of Gideon is mentioned.

50. It is evident from Alma’s remarks to the Gideonites (see Alma 7: 1–2) that the name Gideon referred to a people and place from as early as Alma’s appointment as chief judge in 91 bc, if not earlier. It is quite possible that the city was erected soon after the Zeniffites migrated to Zarahemla, which would have made sense. This is not Mormon’s focus though.

51. Matthews, “Back to Bethel,” 151n8
with the character and roles of a person, fraught with psychological baggage and momentum. Mark Allan Powell has remarked that “some settings … become so clearly entrenched in the mind of the reader that they, like memorable characters, take on a life of their own.”

I don’t know if Mormon achieved this goal with modern readers of the Book of Mormon, but I argue he intended to do this with his treatment of Gideon’s death and his subsequent use of geographical reiteration. Evidence for this claim will be noted through analysis of Gideon-locations in the order defined in Table 3.

Table 3. Gideon's Path to the Prince of Peace.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topical Context</th>
<th>References to Gideon</th>
<th>References to Zarahemla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gideon dies by the hand of Nehor in an unnamed setting; Nehor is brought before Alma in an unnamed setting; Nehor is executed on the hill Manti (around 91–88 BC).</td>
<td>A possible implied setting in the land of Gideon, where Nehor encountered and contended with Gideon (the only location named in this narrative is the site where Nehor is executed, the hill Manti).</td>
<td>An implied setting in Zarahemla, where Nehor is brought before Alma (the only location named in this narrative is the site where Nehor is executed, the hill Manti).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma’s forces leave the valley of Gideon in an effort to repulse Amlici’s forces before they reach the city of Zarahemla (about 87 BC).</td>
<td>Alma 2:1, 20, 26, Mormon mentions Gideon 4 times. Gideon as a location is exclusively, “the valley of Gideon,” the setting where Alma’s forces rest from fighting Amlici’s. Mormon sends spies, who discover that Amlici joined Lamanite forces and was en route to Zarahemla.</td>
<td>Alma 2:15, the battle with Amlici begins at the hill of Amnihu near Zarahemla. Alma 2:26, Alma’s forces go to Zarahemla to defend the city from an Amlicite and Lamanite combined force.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma leaves Zarahemla to preach to the people of Gideon (about 83 BC).</td>
<td>Alma 6:7–8, Mormon mentions Gideon a total of 4 times. See Alma’s sermon to Gideon in Alma 7. Alma also announces the impending birth of the Savior. The people of Gideon are preparing for the coming of Christ.</td>
<td>Alma leaves Zarahemla to go to Gideon (Alma 6:7). Zarahemla was in an “awful dilemma” and Alma “wad[ed] through much affliction and sorrow” for them (Alma 7:3–5). The people in Gideon, in contrast, were “in the paths of righteousness” (Alma 7:18–19). Alma leaves Gideon to return to Zarahemla (Alma 8:1).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<th>Topical Context</th>
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<tr>
<td>Unplanned meeting between Alma₂, coming from Gideon and the sons of Mosiah headed towards Zarahemla (about 77 BC).</td>
<td>Alma₂ is heading from Gideon (Alma 17:1) after a message about Christ’s coming to the Nephites circulates among the people (see Alma 16:20).</td>
<td>The sons of Mosiah are headed to Zarahemla to plead for safe passage for the Ammonites, who are being persecuted by the Amalekites for their beliefs (Alma 26:1–16).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korihor (about 76–74 BC)</td>
<td>Korihor, the anti-Christ attempts to preach in Gideon, but the people of Gideon tie him up and escort him to Alma₂ (see Alma 30:21–30).</td>
<td>The people of Gideon bring an apprehended Korihor to Zarahemla for a showdown with Alma₂ (see Alma 30:30–60).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The king-men take over Zarahemla and the Freemen stage a revolution form Gideon. (About 62–57 BC).</td>
<td>Gideon serves as a refuge for the escaped Chief Judge Parhoron₁ (Alma 61:1–5). It is also the staging ground for Moroni₁’s retaking of the capital Zarahemla (see Alma 62:3–6)</td>
<td>The King-men take over Zarahemla forcing the chief judge to flee. They establish a king and conspire with the Lamanites (see Alma 61:8).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel, the people of Zarahemla and Gideon need to repent (about 6 BC).</td>
<td>Samuel pronounces a woe upon the inhabitants of Gideon for its abominations (Helaman 13:15). Gideon, which has served as a home to the righteous but has succumbed to wickedness.</td>
<td>Samuel warns Zarahemla to repent or it will be destroyed (Helaman 13:12).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of cities destroyed before Christ’s coming (about AD 34).</td>
<td>Gideon is not mentioned as being destroyed (3 Nephi 9: 2–12). It is implied that Gideon survived the destruction and its inhabitants were there to greet the risen Savior at Bountiful.</td>
<td>Zarahemla is destroyed (3 Nephi 9:3).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, an analysis of the Book of Mormon’s Gideon-related passages shows a curious preference for citing Gideon place names in tandem with the city of Zarahemla. These tandem references seem intended to invite a comparison between the lands of Zarahemla and Gideon. Following the noticeable interactions between these two places, chronologically from Gideon’s death to the coming of Christ, the reader moves through multiple and notable events before Zarahemla’s destruction. Ultimately, through the omission of Gideon in the list of places destroyed before Christ’s coming, it is possible that the Gideonites, and through proxy Gideon himself, survive the destructions to see the Savior when he visits the Nephites.

The references to Gideon, presented in Table 3 are not as conspicuously placed as the Nehor references outlined previously, so
their identification as markers of authorial intent is not as strong. Even so, given the connection between Nehor and Gideon emphasized by Mormon through repetition, it is reasonable to suggest that Mormon may have also intended the reader to connect references to Gideon-related geography thematically, with a theme of ultimate salvation for those suffering mortal injustices. This hypothesis regarding Mormon’s use of geographical reiteration is also consistent with the Book of Mormon’s central theme to lead people to Christ; therefore, although speculative, it is not a counter-reading of the Book of Mormon to suggest the following sub-narrative may have been intended by Mormon.

The Omitted Setting to Gideon’s Death

When Mormon introduced Nehor and reintroduced Gideon in Alma 1, as discussed above, Mormon seems to mark his authorial intent by an almost uncomfortable delay in naming these two characters. In terms of the setting, he affects the text in an equally telling way. Mormon omits naming specific locations until the execution of Nehor, the exact moment when he also names Nehor (Alma 1:15). To demonstrate how conspicuous this omission is, we can compare the geographic specificity between the Nehor and Korihor narratives, which Mormon seems to intentionally present as parallel accounts. Joseph Spencer has presented evidence suggesting that “the whole book of Alma is meant to be read as two large parallel halves” and finds that there is an “obvious parallel between the stories of Nehor and Korihor,” where “clear features of the text set the two stories in parallel.”

In contrast to the Nehor narrative, Mormon contextualizes Korihor’s actions with named settings in Alma 30. Korihor came into the land of Zarahemla to preach against the church. He was successful in his preaching until he decided to preach in the land of Jershon and the land of Gideon. He is expelled from Jershon and Gideon, bound and brought to Zarahemla to talk with Alma, and finally killed by the Zoramites. If these two accounts conform to intentional parallel structures, then a comparison like this may be intended as well. Therefore, readers of these accounts aware of their parallel association might more easily notice an intentionality and significance behind the Nehor account’s lack of specificity of setting and Mormon’s delay in naming the characters.

Because of the possible parallel nature of these two accounts, we can hypothesize a different Nehor account. We can imagine that Nehor likely started teaching with some success in Zarahemla, then he went to the land of Gideon where he killed Gideon, was brought to Zarahemla for trial, and executed on the hill Manti. Such a sequence of events makes sense, so why did Mormon not supply this information? These omissions leave gaps that invite the reader to look elsewhere to fill. A viable place is the hypothesized location for Gideon’s confrontation with Nehor and subsequent murder, the geography named after Gideon. As if in answer to our query, Mormon overtly reiterates Gideon’s death twice when he introduces the valley of Gideon in Alma 2 and the valley and city of Gideon in Alma 6.

**Pitching Tents in the Valley of Gideon**

The account of Amlici is the very next focused narrative after the account of Nehor, the intervening verses are limited to summaries of events and narrative commentary (Alma 1:16–33). Even though Gideon’s death was basically the last thing that happened for the reader, Mormon immediately reminds the reader of Gideon’s death in his introduction of Amlici, “he being after the order of the man that slew Gideon by the sword” (Alma 2:1). And if that wasn’t emphasis enough, he reminds the reader again when he uses Gideon as a setting for the first time. Alma₂’s army pitches “their tents in the valley of Gideon, the valley being called after that Gideon which was slain by the hand of Nehor with the sword” (Alma 2:20). It is here that I argue Mormon is preparing the reader to see Gideon in geography as proxy for the person Gideon, who was killed by Nehor.

It is also significant that Alma and his forces depart in haste from Gideon to save Zarahemla, something that will be reiterated in later events. Here in its first iteration, Gideon the setting is already taking on a reputation, much like its namesake, as a defender of freedom. Mormon may be teaching us to read Gideon-related geography as a symbol of something greater than an actual place and likely teaching the reader to see the reputation Gideon-locations held for the Nephites. We might apply Matthews’s insights from the Bible to our study of the Book of Mormon:

When the biblical writers mention a specific geographic site or feature, they are often describing a place that they and their audience are intimately familiar with … and it has become a part of their collective memory of this space. Because of
their shared emic frame of reference as geographic ‘insiders,’ they do not have to go into great detail to conjure up a picture in the minds of their listeners. But these omissions mean that modern readers can often get lost …. This means that close attention to geographic information is necessary in order to catch these nuances and to draw fuller meaning from a story.54

Alma₂ Preaches Christ in Gideon

In this narrative segment, once again Mormon reminds the reader about Gideon, something that should strike the reader as a likely marker for authorial intent. When Alma₂ travels to Gideon, Mormon reintroduces the valley of Gideon and then introduces the city of Gideon with the repeated association with the event of Gideon’s murder, “being called after the man which was slain by the hand of Nehor with the sword” (Alma 6:7). This and the last episode are the only two places where the “valley of Gideon” is mentioned. The conspicuous nature of the single geographic reference to the hill of Manti in Alma 1 and these repetitions of the valley of Gideon suggest a possible geographic relationship. Perhaps, Nehor was executed “upon the top of the hill Manti” because it overlooked the valley of Gideon and therefore was also viewable by the people of Gideon living in the valley (Alma 1:15).

Grant Hardy also noted the importance of this location, “the key connection made by Mormon between Alma₂’s sermon and the grim wartime scenes of four years earlier is the phrase ‘the valley of Gideon,’ an expression that Alma₂ himself never uses.”55 For Hardy this connection was intended to “remind alert readers what was at stake in this delicate visit, fraught with political meaning, to a people still in need of spiritual assurance and healing.”56 In Alma₂’s words of comfort to this people, you can almost hear Isaiah’s words that “every valley shall be exalted” (Isaiah 40:3). The importance of the word “valley” may not have been lost on Mormon or Alma₂. As Alma₂ prepares the Gideonites for Christ’s coming, he invokes related words from Isaiah.

Alma₂ heads to Gideon after some hard-line preaching in Zarahemla, where he “wad[ed] through much affliction and sorrow” before he could experience “joy” (Alma 7:5) with the people there. In conspicuous contrast, the people of Gideon readily receive Alma₂’s preaching, because

55. Hardy, Understanding the Book of Mormon, 151.
56. Ibid.
they were in a higher state of spirituality. These comparisons will mark these two populations throughout their existence, where Gideon is known for its consistent righteousness and Zarahemla will be known for its pendulum-like swings between righteousness and unbelief. There are elements within Alma’s sermon that suggest that Gideon is not only righteous, but has a connection with Christ’s coming.

Pivotal to Mormon’s sub-narrative about Gideon is the coming of Christ as a mortal. Alma announces to the Gideonites that “there be many things to come. And behold, there is one thing which is of more importance than they all: for behold, the time is not far distant that the Redeemer liveth and cometh among his people” (Alma 7:7). As he teaches about Christ’s coming, Alma populates his sermon with references to Isaiah 40: 3–4:

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain.

Alma alludes to Isaiah in the following verses:

But behold, the Spirit hath said this much unto me, saying: Cry unto this people, saying: Repent ye, repent ye, and prepare the way of the Lord and walk in his paths, which are straight; for behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth. (Alma 7:9)

For I perceive that ye are in the paths of righteousness. I perceive that ye are in the path which leads to the kingdom of God. Yea, I perceive that ye are making his paths straight. I perceive that it has been made known unto you by the testimony of his word that he cannot walk in crooked paths, neither doth he vary from that which he hath said, neither hath he a shadow of turning from the right to the left, or from that which is right to that which is wrong. Therefore his course is one eternal round. (Alma 7:19–20)

Alan Goff points out that Alma’s allusions to Isaiah 40 in his sermon to the Gideonites suggests that “these Nephites in Gideon must be those preparing the way for the coming of that redeemer.” Additionally for the Gideonites, Goff notes that “not only are they preparing the way but

are themselves traveling the path.”58 Through the repetition of Gideon-place names throughout the rest of the Book of Mormon, we can see the Gideonites walking this path to Christ and it is the conclusion of this analysis that they make it to Jesus, and by proxy Gideon does too.

It is noteworthy to point out that this sermon from Alma2 and the upcoming sermon from Samuel are the only two places in the Book of Mormon where the “city of Gideon” is mentioned. Both of the sermons, Alma2’s and Samuel’s, similarly focus on the coming of the Christ and are meant to prepare the people for Christ’s coming. Contrastingly, while Alma2 praises the people in the city of Gideon, Samuel calls on them to repent. Even so, Alma2’s characterization of the people of Gideon establishes the importance of Gideon-related geography for the reader.

Missionary Reunion between Gideon and Zarahemla

As Alma2 was journeying from Gideon some years after his preaching there in Alma 7, he came in contact with the sons of Mosiah who were journeying to Zarahemla (Alma 17:1). It is telling that this meeting between Alma2 and his dearest friends happens in an unnamed place. The namelessness of this nexus point emphasizes the importance of the other two named places and leads the reader to wonder about the intent behind the travels of the two groups.

Mormon reveals the reason why the sons of Mosiah are heading to Zarahemla by following this meeting with a chronological flashback to the sons of Mosiah’s fourteen-year-long mission to the Lamanites. After narrating the surprising success of these Nephite missionaries among their kindred enemies, violent persecution from Nehor-like populations against the unarmed Lamanite converts drives the missionary brothers to Zarahemla to plead for protection. A series of battles ensues between the Lamanites and the Nephites in connection with the Nephites’ merciful determination to harbor these Lamanite converts.

Alma2’s journey from Gideon is likely part of the transmission of the specific message that Christ would be coming to the Nephites after his resurrection. On his first visit to Gideon, Alma2 publicly confessed that he did not know if Jesus would come to the Nephites during his experience in a “mortal tabernacle” (Alma 7:8), but he knew that Christ would come to earth. In the three years after the destruction of the Nehors in Ammonihah (discussed earlier), a message emerges about the coming of the Son of God that “he would appear unto them after his resurrection”

58. Ibid.
(Alma 16:20). This may seem like some discontinuity between Alma₂’s time and prophecy’s regarding Christ coming to the Nephites, either a new idea or a rediscovery of something revealed to Nephi₁ hundreds of years earlier (see 2 Nephi 26:9); however, Scott Stenson has persuasively demonstrated that Alma₂ and later Nephite prophets were aware of the teachings and prophecies on the Small Plates regarding the coming of Christ to the Nephites.⁵⁹

Regardless, Alma₂, Amulek, and many others were going about establishing the church “throughout all the land” (Alma 8:4–5) preaching that Christ would come to them. Alma₂’s implied visit to Gideon in Alma 17 is likely part of this movement to spread the revelation that Christ would not only “[live] and [come] among his people” (Alma 7:7), he would come to the Nephites specifically; a message that the Gideonites no doubt received with joy. And as previously established by Alma₂’s praise for Gideon, we might assume that there were Gideonites taking part in establishing the church as well.

Korihor: Defense of the Faith

Korihor successfully preaches his dissenting doctrines to the Nephites, until he preaches in Jershon, the city given to the Ammonites for an inheritance, and in the land of Gideon. Both the Ammonites and the Gideonites adamantly resist Korihor. Godfrey Ellis notes the parallel structure linking these two communities in their resistance.⁶⁰ Ultimately, the people of Gideon bind Korihor and take him to Zarahemla where Alma₂ resides. The land of Gideon, as proxy for the person Gideon, resists Korihor, who Mormon likely equates with Nehor through the probable parallel textual structures identified by Joseph Spencer, discussed above. The land of Gideon shows its reputation as a defender of the faith and, specifically in this instance, as a defender of Christ.


Like Gideon, who withstood the teachings of Nehor, Alma\textsubscript{2} withstands Korihor’s teachings with the word of God. God reveals Korihor to be a pawn in Satan’s campaign against Christ and silences him. There is a possible contrastive connection between Mormon’s prolific use of Alma\textsubscript{2}’s voice to preach the gospel and the absence of Gideon’s voice as a “teacher” in Alma 1:7, when he combats Nehor with the word. When Mormon re-introduces Gideon, he does so through the use of a brief inclusio placing Gideon in the middle of the word of God, presented below in a small chiasmus:

\begin{center}
\begin{enumerate}
\item A \ldots but the man withstood him, admonishing him with the words of God.
\item B Now the name of the man was Gideon,
\item C and it was him that was an instrument in the hands of God in delivering the people of Limhi out of bondage.
\item B’ Now, because Gideon
\item A’ withstood him with the words of God \ldots \ (Alma 1:7–9)
\end{enumerate}
\end{center}

Mormon may be using parallelism to associate Gideon with the words of God. We can imagine that Gideon, like Alma\textsubscript{2}’s later Christ-centered sermon to the people of Gideon, spoke of Christ to withstand Nehor’s doctrine that sought to render a redeemer unnecessary for humans (see Alma 1:2–6). Additionally, the title of “an instrument in the hands of God” given to Gideon connects him to some of the most powerful missionaries in the Book of Mormon. For example, Mormon labels the sons of Mosiah and Alma\textsubscript{2} with the same title.\textsuperscript{61} And just prior to this verbal bout with Korihor, Alma prayed to “be an instrument in the hands of God” (Alma 29:9). This chiasmus and a specific title involving Gideon in Alma 1 guides the reader to this connection, linking Gideon with the missionary work going on in and around the city and land named after him.

Mormon judiciously chooses whose voice enters his record, so an awareness of the voices Mormon repeatedly employed or voices he omits can further illuminate authorial intent. In a similar way to how Mormon judiciously limited the name of Nehor in Alma 1, limiting Gideon’s voice against the dissident Nehor creates a gap. A gap that the reader can fill

\textsuperscript{61.} Mormon labels the sons of Mosiah as instruments in the hand of God in Mosiah 27:36, Alma 17:9, but allows the dialogue to label them in Alma 26:3. Alma\textsubscript{2} pleads to be an instrument in God’s hand in Alma 2:30 and Alma 29:9 and Mormon describes Alma\textsubscript{2}’s group of missionaries as these instruments in Alma 35:14.
with Alma’s voice. Alma is the convincing voice that Mormon uses to express God’s word against the dissidents. Alma’s words against Korihor might help the reader imagine what might have been said when Gideon “withstood [Nehor] with the words of God” (Alma 1:9), a dialog that, if it was recorded, was not repeated by Mormon in his abridgment. However, the parallel structure links the two accounts and may help fill in a gap in the earlier account. This is especially relevant considering the parallel nature of these two accounts (Nehor’s and Korihor’s).

Pachus and Freemen: Freedom from Oppression

The Nephite civilization almost breaks apart from the pressure from without (the Lamanite wars) and the destabilization from within (the temporary overthrow of the Nephite government by dissidents). Pachus’s party, inspired by the king-men movement in Alma 51, take over Zarahemla. The chief judge Parhoron, flees to Gideon where a Nephite army rallies to make the restoration of the rightful government possible. From the perspective of geographical reiteration, it is meaningful that Parhoron went to Gideon. In addition to the land of Gideon being close to Zarahemla, Parhoron must have known that Gideon would be anti-monarchic as well as righteous. A possible memory of king Noah’s tyrannical evil, something the people’s namesake fought against personally, may have ensured this political position.

During Parhoron’s refuge in Gideon, he and Captain Moroni have a dialogue through an exchange of letters that recalls the dialogue between King Limhi and Captain Gideon (compare Alma 61:10–12 and Mosiah 20:22). Captain Moroni assumes incorrectly that Parhoron is at fault for the lack of support to the war front. In Parhoron’s response


63. Spelling of Parhoron instead of Pahoran follows Royal Skousen’s recommended emendation in Skousen, Earliest Text.
to Moroni, to explain the problem, he mentions a willingness to accept bondage if that was what the Lord wanted and an extreme reluctance to shed the blood of his own people, the King-men, who had taken over Zarahemla. However, Parhoron’s hesitancy to counter the King-men’s assault on the capital led to greater problems. Moroni’s divine direction to use force against Pachus’s dissidents allayed Parhoron’s concerns (see Alma 61:19–20) and they ultimately joined forces to reclaim the capital, narrated in both Alma 51 and Alma 62.

Parhoron’s inability to see the dissenters as an enemy is strikingly similar to Limhi’s inability to see the Lamanite king as an enemy. In both cases, the ruler required their respective captains to aid their decision-making with stirring criticism. Fortunately, both Limhi and Parhoron obeyed their captains’ directions and their people were saved. Gideon becomes the staging ground for mustering the scattered Freemen and rocketing the resistance’s successful siege of Zarahemla (Alma 61:5–7, 62:6–7). Gideon, therefore, makes it possible to save Zarahemla and the Nephite system of judges. This political system was cherished by Nephite leaders, not just because it gave people power to elect their representatives, but specifically it protected their freedom of religion. For example, the freemen wished to “maintain their rights and the privileges of their religion by a free government” (Alma 51:6). Additionally, it is hinted at in the records that these would-be-kings wished to take away this religion (see Alma 2:4 and 46:10 as two examples). Therefore, we can also see the role of Gideon-related geography as part of Gideon’s path to Christ.

Zarahemla and Gideon Called to Repentance in Preparation for Christ’s Coming

Around 6 BC, about 50 years after the events narrated in Alma 62, Samuel, the Lamanite prophet, calls upon the Nephites to repent in preparation for the coming of the Savior after his birth, death, and resurrection. Samuel provides the people particular prophecies with signs to announce these events (Helaman 13–15). Imbedded within his announcements is a specific call of repentance to the inhabitants of the cities of Zarahemla and Gideon (Helaman 13:12 and 15, respectively). These are the only two cities Samuel names.

Although Samuel calls the people of Gideon to repentance, there is implied evidence that the people of Gideon repent and finish their travel on the path to Christ, as suggested earlier. Alma saw the Gideonites as those who were both preparing the way for and walking on the path to
Christ. Yet somehow around fifty years after the land of Gideon’s last appearance in Alma 62, they lose their way on this path. According to Samuel, it appears that the children and grandchildren of the Gideonites who were present when freemen forces gathered around the land of Gideon under Captain Moroni, to take back Zarahemla from the king-men (see Alma 62), “[did] not remember the Lord [their] God in the things with which he hath blessed [them]” (Helaman 13:22). These same descendants of the Gideonites, who expelled Korihor from their land (see Alma 30:6–29), sixty years later Samuel is condemning for harboring and supporting the same type of false preachers (see Helaman 13:27–28).

After more than thirty years, as Samuel’s prophecies begin to be fulfilled in preparation for Christ’s coming, the text presents multiple lists of city names that were destroyed because of wickedness. The reader, prepared by Samuel’s previous call to repentance, may search through these lists of named cities for the only two cities Samuel named, Gideon and Zarahemla, to find that only Zarahemla is named. In fact, Mormon first narrates the burning of Zarahemla (3 Nephi 8:8), then he quotes a multitude who mourn the burning of the people in the city of Zarahemla (3 Nephi 8:24), and finally Christ’s own voice relates, “that great city Zarahemla have I burned with fire, and the inhabitants thereof” (3 Nephi 9:3). The destruction of Moroni and Moronihah likewise are referenced repeatedly. Gideon, although a possible casualty included in the phrasing “and many great destructions have I caused to come upon this land, and upon this people, because of their wickedness and their abominations” (3 Nephi 9:12), is more likely one of the spared cities. The conspicuous absence of the city of Gideon in these lists suggests that the people of Gideon likely repented within the intervening thirty years. Mormon explains that “it was the more righteous part of the people who were saved” (3 Nephi 10:12), and by omitting any account of the city of Gideon’s destruction, the righteousness and salvation of some of the Gideonites is implied.

In a creative stroke of narrative poetics, Mormon ends his series of references to Gideon-related geography, in the same way he started them, by subtly referring to Gideon with an expected, but actual absence of a reference to Gideon. It is into this negative space that Mormon possibly intended for the reader to place the person Gideon. If this hypothesis is true, then all the references to Gideon and Nehor point to this moment. This is the centerpiece of the Book of Mormon and may be the happy

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64. For the destruction of the city of Moroni, see 3 Nephi 8:9, 9:4; For Moronihah’s destruction, reference 3 Nephi 8:10, 8:25, and 9:5.
ending Mormon has carefully led the reader to imagine for Gideon. We can imagine Gideon, like the other spared Nephites, witnessing the risen Savior’s visit to the Americas; seeing with his eyes and feeling with his hands the prints of the nails and the wound in his side (3 Nephi 11:14–15). Through subtle means, Mormon can imply that both the people of Gideon who repented, and symbolically Gideon himself, survive to see the risen Lord and were saved, or at least “we have no reason to doubt but what they were saved” (Alma 24:26).

Part 3: Gideon as a Peacemaker

This section is an attempt to answer the question, why? Why would Mormon go through such effort to organize a sub-narrative of post-mortal, literary justice and salvation for a minor character, like Gideon? In order to best answer this question, we will closely review the life of Gideon and especially note the way Mormon handled presenting Gideon’s life. It is through focusing our attention on Mormon’s methods that we might discover Mormon’s authorial intent behind his editorial decisions. Through an analysis focusing on Mormon, with the intent to discover how Mormon viewed Gideon and how he intended for the reader to also view him, I propose that Mormon viewed Gideon as a peacemaker and also hoped that the reader would see Gideon this way.

Unlike the Bible, whose narrators are mostly anonymous, the Book of Mormon’s narrators are known. Mormon himself, the main abridger, is also a character in the Book of Mormon. The reader’s indirect access to Mormon’s mind through his decisions to include or omit various elements in his carefully crafted narrative allows us to theorize reasons why he used certain narrative strategies. My approach is based on the premise that Mormon’s life of war caused him to value not only valor and courage, but peace and peacemakers. Mormon saw in Gideon, a tragedy; a valiant, courageous peacemaker who died a violently unfair death. Through subtle literary means, Mormon may have rewritten the ending to more fully vindicate Gideon.

Mormon’s subtle handling of Gideon’s narrative is a tribute to his literary and literal ancestors who wrote the Hebrew Bible. Mormon’s masterful manicuring of Gideon’s narrated life seems intended to impress upon the reader specific aspects of Gideon’s character, one of which is his determination to save lives. In texts that are so terse, like the Bible and the Book of Mormon, minute choices to exclude, include, or offset material may reveal further insights packed into the text. Scrutinizing the story of Gideon offers a backstage pass to Mormon as he subtly
employs gaps, chronological displacements, structures of repetition, and specific wording that often seems calculated to dramatize Gideon's role as a peacemaker. Mormon's illustration of Gideon as a peacemaker connects Gideon to Captain Moroni, the Ammonites, and Christ.

Mormon's primary messages in the Book of Mormon are overt and punctuated by conspicuous commentary to focus the reader on Christ and his gospel. This article has attempted to highlight Mormon's more subtle narrative tradecraft, which is easily overlooked by his more obvious ideological commentary. In this vein, Turley aptly remarked about Mormon's craft:

Mormon appears not as a moralistic editor of unsophisticated stories and “and thus we see” didactic conclusions, but as a skillful author and editor who can portray himself as inexperienced while simultaneously weaving depth and nuance into his stories, rounding out flat characters, and creating silences that speak louder than words.65

Accordingly, in the overall narrative of the Book of Mormon, Gideon does not play a large role. In contrast, Mormon's more conspicuous treatment of Gideon's post-mortem literary life seems insistent on making Gideon much more than a minor character whose major moments are merely limited to the following five brief episodes:

1. Gideon's attempt on Noah's life (Mosiah 19:1–9);
2. Noah's death is reported to Gideon (Mosiah 19:15–25);
3. Gideon redirects Limhi to save the people (Mosiah 20:12–26);
4. Gideon presents a plan to save the people (Mosiah 22:1–9);
and
5. Gideon is killed (Alma 1:1–15).

Why would Mormon amplify Gideon's story beyond his life? We cannot know for sure. Mormon may have been personally touched by the tragic ending of Gideon. In response, he may have found a way to provide an alternate literary ending for Gideon through sub-narratives expressed through repetitions of the names of Gideon and Nehor. Further, Mormon may have presented Gideon's life in a way that emphasizes his role as a peacemaker while highlighting the injustice of Gideon's death, thereby affecting the reader's experience with the text.

Mormon's ingenuity with Gideon's story can be seen through the title he gives Gideon in episode 3, where he is described as a captain. Unlike

the 37 other times the role of captain is cited in the Book of Mormon, this reference in episode 3 is the only one that does not appear to be part of a military event, mentioned to explain someone’s participation in a war. Instead, the placement of this title appears to define a relationship between Captain Gideon and King Limhi and to explain Gideon’s rough tone in his first dialogue with Limhi. He is not named as the captain of the army or the guard, but “the king’s captain” (Mosiah 20:17); it is that relationship that matters here. Specifically, this relationship matters because it changes. Gideon’s direct, cutting, and near-peer tone in his first dialogue becomes a pleading and subservient one in his second dialogue with Limhi in episode 4. This change suggests that Gideon is no longer the captain by this 4th episode in his life. In this way, Mormon provides evidence in this account to suggest that Gideon stepped down as the captain, perhaps because he did not support the people’s desire to attack the Lamanites in order to free themselves. This may be a technique Mormon employs to reveal Gideon, the peacemaker, but arguably is part of a larger strategy.

Mormon’s placement of Gideon’s title as captain is pivotal to unraveling Mormon’s approach to Gideon’s portraiture as a peacemaker. Mormon’s specific placement of this title both creates gaps and fills others, and seems to suggest an overall strategy to distance Gideon from bloodshed. Mormon’s placement of Gideon’s title in episode 3 is a delayed placement, which makes and fills a gap in episode 2. Gideon’s sudden and inexplicable command authority over men in episode 2, where he sends out men to look for King Noah is a gap (Mosiah 19:18–24). It does not make sense, until Mormon provides Gideon’s title as the captain in episode 3 (i.e., these men are referred to as “the men of Gideon”). This chronologically displaced title occurs right after a victorious battle, in which captain Gideon conspicuously plays no role.

As the king’s captain, Gideon likely participated in this battle; however, his participation appears to be omitted. Withholding Gideon’s participation in this battle and delaying his title as the captain may emphasize a key gap, Mormon may be purposefully distancing captain Gideon from bloodshed. Mormon’s possible downplaying or obscuring of Gideon’s military activities incidentally causes his title to take on an

66. The title captain actually appears 39 times, but I have discounted the reference in 2 Nephi 13:3, because it does not refer to a Nephite captain. I have also discounted the captain reference in 3 Nephi chapter 3, because this reference appears in a chapter heading that was added later and was not part of the original Book of Mormon.
ironic feel. Gideon who is a captain that is never specifically said to be a participant in a single battle and instead encourages non-violence to solve conflicts. (Of course, we have seen him angry enough at King Noah to threaten his life with his sword, so he is not a gentle pacifist, but he still spares Noah’s life.) The apparent incongruence between title and action also allows Mormon to redefine what a military captain can or even should be. Meir Sternberg suggests a similar redefining in the epithets used for Job, which allowed the Biblical narrator to not only “modify our view of a certain righteous man but to redefine the concept of righteousness itself.”

Mormon’s intent to distance Gideon from bloodshed may even extend to the reporting of King Noah’s death to Gideon in episode 2. In this episode, Mormon avails himself of repetitive structures to lessen Gideon’s direct connection to the brutality of King Noah’s murder, but still connect him to the justice required by the Lamanite King. First, Mormon details how Noah’s own men turn on him and destroy him by fire, then the reduced version “that they had slain the king” is reported to the men Gideon sent, and finally the report is generalized into “they told Gideon what they had done to the king” (Mosiah 19:23–24). It is also possible that Mormon additionally softened the report of Noah’s execution by mingling these repeated reports with a cross-report on the safety of the families of Noah’s men and their joyful reaction to this news. By the time Gideon receives the account of Noah’s betrayal and murder, the reader may see it as a mercy done to the people. Gideon escapes direct association with bloodshed, but simultaneously is the vehicle for ensuring that Noah’s death happens.

The possible softening of this report is not for Gideon, per se. Mormon is not suggesting that the men held back any of the details from Gideon, like the Bible’s account of Jezebel’s softened report to Ahab regarding Naboth’s death. In the case of Ahab, Meir Sternberg suggests that his sterilized report reveals a weakness in him, as seen through Jezebel. Instead of making a direct comment about Gideon, Mormon may have manicured the repetitive structure of Gideon’s report to influence the drama of the reading. In other words, Mormon may have wanted the reader to separate Gideon from the bloodshed so we can see Gideon as a different kind of hero. It is only after the report of Noah’s execution reaches Gideon that Mormon reveals that the Lamanite King makes an oath not to slay the Zeniffites. Delivering Noah up to the Lamanites was

68. Ibid., 408–409.
one of the original conditions the king required. Apparently, Noah’s death satisfied this requirement and Gideon is the apparently bloodless deliverer.

On the occasion of Gideon’s soft rebuke to Limhi in episode 3, Gideon is once again portrayed as a bloodless liberator; except this time Mormon uses Gideon’s own words. Up to this episode in Gideon’s life, Mormon has only allowed Gideon acts of speech, where Mormon states that Gideon has said something, but has not quoted his actual words. For example, in episode 1, when Mormon writes that Gideon “swore in his wrath,” he does not quote the actual oath Gideon swore. As Robert Alter points out, “the initial words spoken by a personage will be revelatory … in the exposition of character” and thus worthy of special attention. This is true of Gideon’s first dialogue, as well. Even more powerfully than the narrative strategies Mormon used in episode 2, Gideon’s own words reveal how serious he was about preserving life.

Gideon’s first dialogue comes at the climax of an intense narrative sequence in Mosiah 20. The wicked priests of King Noah, who were in hiding, abduct some Lamanite women. The Lamanites assume it is Limhi’s people who took their daughters and prepared for war. Limhi sees their preparation and readies his people to counter them. Limhi successfully and surprisingly repels the Lamanites and questions their king, who is found among the fallen on the battlefield. After Limhi finds out that the Lamanites suspected Limhi’s people of taking Lamanite daughters, he naively believes his enemy and begins a search among his people to find the culprit or culprits. Mormon privileges the reader with a separate account of the abduction, so that when Gideon boldly objects to Limhi’s response, we already know that Gideon is right to name the priests of Noah as the real culprits. Even if the priests were not the

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69. According to Alter, “In any given narrative event, and especially at the beginning of any new story, the point at which dialogue first emerges will be worthy of special attention, and in most instances, the initial words spoken by a personage will be revelatory, perhaps more in manner than in matter, constituting an important moment in the exposition of character.” Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 93–94.

70. Sternberg calls this the “reader-elevating” position and comments, “Within the reader-elevating configuration, the discrepancies in awareness are so manipulated in our favor, at the expense of the characters, that we observe them and their doings from a vantage point practically omniscient. The narrator’s disclosures put us in a position to fathom their secret thoughts and designs, to trace or even foreknowledge their acts, to jeer or grieve at their misguided attempts at concealment, plotting, interpretation.” Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 164.
actual guilty party, the Zeniffites did not have time for an intrusive investigation into the masses because the Lamanites were already preparing for a second battle.

Faced with such an intense situation, Gideon dispenses with a preamble. He does not address the king with honorifics. He just begins his reprimand with a call for a full stop to Limhi’s activities through a triple-combination of negatives: “I pray thee forbear, and do not search this people, and lay not this thing to their charge” (Mosiah 20:17). Gideon instructs Limhi in what he should have thought in the first place through three rhetorical questions whose criticisms crescendo:

For do ye not remember the priests of thy father, which this people sought to destroy?
And are they not in the wilderness?
And is it not they which have stolen the daughters of the Lamanites? (Mosiah 20:18)

Gideon also moves away from telling Limhi what he should have thought to what he now needs to do with the phrase “and now behold” (Mosiah 20:19). According to Gideon, Limhi needs to convince the Lamanite king that the wicked priests are to blame and the Lamanite king needs to pacify his people before they descend upon the Zeniffites with their innumerable horde and wipe them out.

There is no time for Limhi’s plan for an investigation, trial, and execution. The force of Gideon’s reprimand leaves no room for Limhi to respond; he only acts in obedience to persuade the Lamanite king to pacify his people. Gideon’s rebuke, although cutting, was measured; he did not threaten King Limhi and he did not directly tell him he was wrong, but Limhi got the message anyway. This dialogue shares similarities with a dialogue between the later army captain Moroni, and his ruler Parhoron, that Mormon appears to connect with Gideon through the insertion of his name as a setting to Parhoron, and Captain Moroni’s later dialogue. 71

Gideon’s speech to Limhi moves beyond the pressing needs of the moment, when Gideon appeals to prophecy to suggest that the Zeniffite’s bondage was divinely appointed. In an ironic twist, Captain Gideon suggests that “it is better that [they] should be in bondage than that [they] should lose [their] lives” (Mosiah 20:22). Gideon’s plea, “let us put a stop to the shedding of so much blood” swells with emotional weight,

71. Parhoron and Moroni’s dialogue occurs through an exchange of heated letters in Alma chapters 60–61.
as we consider the scope behind Gideon’s concern (Mosiah 20:22). Gideon does not restrict his concern to his own people by qualifying his statement with whose blood he wishes to spare; rather it seems that Gideon, in the spirit of Zeniff, also cares for the lives of his enemies, the Lamanites. This universal love not only marks Gideon as an odd military captain but marks him as an anticipatory type that the reader will recognize in other peacemakers like Parhoron, Captain Moroni, the Ammonites, and Christ.

Gideon’s dialogue with King Limhi seems prophetic itself, because as soon as the immediate crisis, which Gideon’s words were meant to address, is averted, Lamanite persecution builds, and the people petition the king to go to war. Gideon’s position of accepting bondage as a remedy to stop bloodshed is not maintained as the people take matters into their own hands in a series of costly campaigns to liberate themselves but without success. The only consolation for the terrible toll of unnecessary lives lost in battle is the turning of the people’s hearts to God. The Zeniffite’s repentant hearts prepare the people for deliverance. These battles are the axis point around which Gideon’s two dialogues pivot. Gideon’s first dialogue (Mosiah 20:17–22) anticipates these battles (Mosiah 21:7–12) and his second dialogue readdresses them in hindsight (Mosiah 22:3–8).

Gideon’s second and last dialogue emerges from a narrative backdrop bristling with anticipation. After the harrowing repeated losses on the battlefield bring the people in humility to finally accept their bondage, the people regain hope through the unexpected arrival of a group of men from the main body of the Nephites. These men, led by another Ammon, Ammon, also bring a gospel message by which Limhi and “many of his people” are converted (Mosiah 21:32–33). Gideon is not named specifically in this group as Limhi is, but his participation is assumed. Limhi sees the arrival of Ammon and his men as a sign that deliverance is nigh at hand; however, Limhi mistakenly believes that this deliverance will come through the sword. As the people realize that liberation through the force of arms is impossible, Gideon steps into the discussion with an awkward preamble that epitomizes a complete reverse in tone

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73. In Mosiah 7:18 Limhi shares his belief that “an effectual struggle” still awaited the people. The fact that this was a euphemism for war is borne out by his referencing the failed battles as “strugglings” in the same verse. By Mosiah 22:2 Limhi’s people were still “thinking to deliver themselves out of bondage by the sword.”
from his previous dialogue with King Limhi. Instead of speaking with the authoritative voice of Captain Gideon, Gideon pleads three times to be heard. Gideon’s tone is plaintive but calculated. His repetitive pleas are strategically structured as a reminder to the king and the people. 

Now it came to pass that Gideon went forth and stood before the king and said unto him: Now, O king, thou hast hitherto hearkened unto my words many times when we have been contending with our brethren the Lamanites. And now, O king, if thou hast not found me to be an unprofitable servant, or if thou hast hitherto listened to my words in any degree and they have been of service to thee, even so I desire that thou wouldst listen to my words at this time; and I will be thy servant and deliver this people out of bondage. And the king granted unto him that he might speak … . (Mosiah 22:3–5)

What has changed? Why is Gideon pleading to be heard, when previously he just spoke? Why is he using the rare reverential “O king,” noticeably absent in his first dialogue with Limhi? A quick comparison of the two dialogues show that the motivations are the same; Gideon wants to correct a less-effective and violent approach for delivering the people by suggesting an alternate approach that does not require the shedding of blood. However, the audience has changed: the first dialogue seems to be a more intimate setting versus the gathering of “all the people” (Mosiah 22:1) in this second dialogue. Would this press Gideon to such desperate-sounding measures? Perhaps, but more convincing is the possibility that Gideon’s position has changed, and he is no longer the captain. In similar fashion to how Mormon informed the reader of Gideon’s position as captain to explain Gideon’s tone and relationship with Limhi in his first dialogue, Gideon’s tonal change in his second dialogue may signal the reader to a change in Gideon’s relationship with Limhi.

74. The reverential term “O king” is only used 12 times in the Book of Mormon; 7 of those times occur in the Zeniffite narrative: Ammon, uses it twice to address Limhi, Gideon uses it twice to address Limhi, and King Noah’s people use it three times to address him. In the book of Alma, Aaron uses this reverential title to address the Lamanite king three times and the Lamanite king Lamoni is addressed by his people as “O king” and by Ammon once, respectively. Most of these occurrences (7) are people from a different kingdom addressing a foreign king; only in the cases of Gideon and King Noah’s people are a people addressing their own king as “O king.”
A change in Gideon’s position more fully explains his change of voice; he is no longer a near-peer to the king, so he petitions an audience and he employs honorifics. If this change in status is truly behind the dramatic change in tone, why is he no longer captain? The intervening bloodshed of the three failed campaigns, where Gideon was conspicuously absent provide the start of a workable hypothesis. It is also apparent from Gideon’s tone that he is speaking to the king as someone to whom the people have not listened recently. We better understand to what incident or incidents Gideon may be referencing as we count the number of times he pleads with King Limhi to hearken or listen — three times.

Gideon is completely absent in the preemptive dialogues prior to the three failed campaigns. Mormon paints in the passage of time as the people, in response to affliction, “began to be desirous to go against [the Lamanites] to battle” and then “afflict the king sorely with their complaints” (Mosiah 21:6). This was a sustained and intensifying pressure, under which King Limhi ultimately buckles, “grant[ing] unto them that they should do according to their desires” (Mosiah 21:6). The people acted with tacit approval seen in the phrasing “they gathered themselves together,” which suggests that King Limhi did not march out with them as he had previously (Mosiah 21:7). The next two failed attempts do not even mention Limhi; it is as if the people are just taking war into their own hands. Gideon is reminding the people in attendance to listen to him now, because the people likely did not listen to him on the three failed battles; these were conflicts that shed so much unnecessary Zeniffite blood. Gideon’s repetition has the feel of a subtle, “I told you so.” Three times.

The distinct possibility that Gideon stepped down from military service rather than be a part of the battles he likely opposed finds further support in the details of his plan of liberation, which did not require a single casualty in order to be successful. This possible move to give up military control out of principle certainly would have garnered the attention of a young Captain Mormon, who also stepped down from leading his people because of their wickedness. See Mormon 3:11; Mormon’s people started not only wanting to defend themselves or reclaim lands, but began wanting to attack the Lamanites. Reading Gideon’s account could have been very validating for Mormon. It is also interesting to note that in Mormon’s context, the number three was also significant. In his own words, “thrice have I delivered them out of the hands of their enemies, and they have repented not of their sins” (Mormon 3:13).

75. It is also possible that he was fired by Limhi.
76. See Mormon 3:11; Mormon’s people started not only wanting to defend themselves or reclaim lands, but began wanting to attack the Lamanites. Reading Gideon’s account could have been very validating for Mormon. It is also interesting to note that in Mormon’s context, the number three was also significant. In his own words, “thrice have I delivered them out of the hands of their enemies, and they have repented not of their sins” (Mormon 3:13).
Mormon’s people moved beyond a desire to merely defend themselves or reclaim lands to a desire to attack the Lamanites. Reading Gideon’s account may have validated Mormon’s divine injunction to step down as the captain of the army in his day. It is also interesting to note that in Mormon’s context, the number three was also significant. In his own words, “thrice have I delivered them out of the hands of their enemies, and they have repented not of their sins” (Mormon 3:13).

Gideon’s peaceful plan successfully delivers the people out of Lamanite bondage and Ammon and his men lead the Zeniffites to the main body of the Nephites in Zarahemla. This plan earns Gideon the later descriptor from Mormon, “and it was he who was an instrument in the hands of God in delivering the people of Limhi out of bondage” (Alma 1:9). A city and a valley are also named after Gideon; an honor that likely came as a product of this victory of the people. It may be that the inhabitants of this new city included the Zeniffites he had rescued. Within his own people, Gideon takes on a new and more fitting role as a teacher, when misfortune meets him in the form of an antagonist. Gideon’s reaction to this antagonist further crystallizes his character as a peacemaker. It connects him to the Ammonites and Christ.

Like Sternberg’s assessment of Biblical characterizations, there is a distance between Gideon’s first appearance and his last. Gideon initiates the narrative sequence in which he first appears (episode 1) by drawing a sword and swearing in his wrath to kill the king. At first glance, this seems like the ominous foreshadowing of someone who is going to meet a violent death; however, after Gideon spares Noah’s life and spends the rest of his narrated actions saving people, it is the last thing we expect. The wrathful and militant man the reader first meets contrasts sharply with the peaceful, beloved hero turned religious teacher in his last episode, and a degree of irony may be involved.

Despite Gideon’s peacemaking, he does meet a violent end, but not before Mormon’s artful sculpting makes the injustice of Gideon’s end sting. Portraying Gideon as a peacemaker seems to be another part of Mormon’s calculus to outrage the reader at Gideon’s undeserved end. If this truly was Mormon’s intent, then this outrage may have been part

77. From a personal perspective Gideon is likely one of the teachers mentioned in Mosiah 25:19–24, who were set apart by Alma. If this were true, this would make Gideon the only one of these teachers named in the Book of Mormon.

78. Sternberg, Poetics of Biblical Narrative, 326. Sternberg comments that “there is a distance—and often a clash—between the impression produced on his first appearance and the one left after his last.”
of Mormon’s strategy to lead the reader to Mormon’s literary ending for Gideon, as described above.

To better demonstrate Mormon’s narrative art and intent, we will now review Gideon’s murder again, specifically emphasizing Mormon’s techniques and illustrate how these techniques might reveal his intent. My goals here are to show Mormon’s sensitivities, his personal sympathy for Gideon, and his apparent effort to connect Gideon to the reader.

Mormon’s strategies to characterize Gideon as a peacemaker climax in the representation of his tragic death, which Mormon dramatizes by contrasting the imbalances between the two sides in the conflict. Whereas, Nehor, upon meeting Gideon, immediately “began to contend with him sharply” (Alma 1:7), Gideon answers with a kindness; he admonishes Nehor. The verb admonish is noteworthy because of its specific and uncommon usage in the Book of Mormon.\(^7^9\) In the five times that it is used, the verb admonish always denotes a call to repentance; it is not contentious, but corrective, so that the object can come back to God. John Welch suggests that Gideon’s admonishment “may have served a legal function,” an official warning, like one described in 2 Chronicles 19:5,10, that if left unheeded could have legal repercussions.\(^8^0\) Therefore, as Nehor attacks Gideon with words, Gideon is not trying to argue back per se, but trying to save Nehor by warning him about the path he was on. Gideon’s caring approach may have surprised Nehor enough to allow him an advantage to withstand Nehor verbally (the verb “to withstand” is used twice). Unfortunately, Gideon’s verbal victory does not turn Nehor to repentance but to violence.

Here, Turley’s analysis of Alma\(_2\) in Alma 1–29 may explain the imbalance between Gideon’s verbal approach and Nehor’s violent response, a response not completely explained by the text itself. Turley emphasizes Alma\(_2\)’s wicked past when he led the concerning unbeliever movement described in Mosiah 26 and 27. Turley explains that “the backdrop of Alma’s past clarifies episodes during his reign as chief judge” like the perplexing episode with Nehor’s rash murder of Gideon and subsequent pleas with “much boldness” to Alma\(_2\).\(^8^1\) Turley points out:

> When Nehor “stood before Alma and [plead] for himself with much boldness,” he seems reckless about his very life (Alma 1:11). However, that same attitude may be credulity if Nehor

\(^7^9\) “Admonish” appears in Jacob 2:9; Omni 1:13; Mosiah 26:6, 39; and Alma 1:7.
\(^8^0\) Welch, *Legal Cases*, 221.
\(^8^1\) Turley, *Alma 1–29*, 37.
is a preacher of unbeliever-based doctrine and finds himself being judged by a former unbeliever. Nehor’s boldness may be the brash assumption that Alma has not really changed or that a changed Alma can be bullied and humiliated by the reminder of his past.  

In the same way that Nehor’s boldness before Alma may be explained by Nehor’s connection to Alma’s wicked past, Nehor’s decision to murder Gideon may also be explained by this connection or even an unexplained history with Gideon. Nehor may have sought Gideon out purposefully knowing that success in the renowned faithful population of Gideon would win him even more popularity.

Although Mormon demonstrates Gideon’s advantages in rhetoric and on moral grounds, he also displays Gideon’s disadvantages in a physical struggle. These disadvantages included advanced age (Gideon was “stricken with many years” per Alma 1:9) and the possible absence of a weapon, though the text seems to indicate that it was his age rather than the lack of a weapon that impaired his ability to resist the blows of Nehor’s sword. In any case, Mormon presents the fight as unfair, for Gideon was old and Nehor was large and strong (Alma 1:2).

This account is calculated to arrest the reader, to fill us with outrage, while possibly foreshadowing the innocent slaughter of the Ammonites and reminding us of the righteous martyr, Abinadi. Gideon’s unjust murder has a similar feel to the outrage created in and the motivations behind the unjust killing of the thousand Ammonites slain while on their knees in prayer and the prophet Abinadi, who willingly gave his life to relay the Lord’s message. The murders of Gideon, the Ammonites, and Abinadi and their concern for their attackers also prefigures Christ. This connection to Christ is the capstone to Mormon’s rhetorical attack on Nehor. Mormon may mean to stir the reader. After Gideon dies, Mormon may have wanted the outraged reader to question, “Can this really be it?” so Mormon can tell us, “It isn’t.” Mormon’s literary act of redemption and justice for Gideon and others in the Book of Mormon

82. Ibid., 38.

is a notice to us all that God will prevail. There is such a thing as divine justice and redemption for all.

**Part 4: Mormon’s Preference for Peacekeepers**

According to the analysis presented above, Mormon organized the account of Gideon’s life and death to accentuate Gideon’s struggles to refrain from shedding blood. Gideon appears to be a peacemaker partly because Mormon emphasized this aspect to Gideon’s life. This section presents evidence demonstrating that Mormon had a marked preference for peacemakers generally and suggests that this preference may have prompted him to create the sub-narratives of justice and salvation for Gideon outlined in this article. Mormon’s emphasis in creating happy-endings for peacemakers like Moroni₁ and the Ammonites is suggestive of this very reasoning that he might have wanted to make a literary happy-ending for Gideon, one for which Gideon and others did not experience in mortality. Knowing more about the person Mormon can help us know more about his messaging methods and better interpret his messages.

An impactful aspect to the Book of Mormon is the ready access the reader has to the narrator. This personal connection made possible between reader and the narrators in the Book of Mormon enables the reader to wring out more meaning from the text and allows an aspiring follower of Christ to gain a sense of belonging with the narrators, who devotedly followed Christ. One motivation for Mormon to write in a sub-narrative plot for Gideon and bring post-mortem justice and salvation to him via proxy is Mormon’s preference for peacemakers.

Mormon’s life of war likely caused him to value peace and peacemakers. I propose that Mormon saw in Gideon a heart-rending tragedy; a peacemaker who died a violently unfair death. Mormon had the means to rewrite his ending, so he did in a literary sense. In contrast to his overt messages, Mormon may have preferred to provide more personal messages in a subtle way, as I have previously proposed.⁸⁴

The Nephites chose Mormon to lead the Nephite armies at the age of 15. He spent the majority of his life warring. He witnessed an unceasing spectacle of atrocities. The sorts of horrors Mormon hints at in the record of his own life and what Moroni₂ reveals from Mormon’s life are traumatic to read, they must have been psychologically crippling to have

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⁸⁴. Arp, “Many Mormons.”
lived through.85 Much of what we read in Mormon’s abridgment of the Nephite’s history will unavoidably be colored by Mormon’s experiences leading an army, who should have been, and were at one point, “the good guys” against their kindred, but mortal enemies.

In Mormon’s time, the Nephites had not only rebelled against God, but gluttoned themselves on the blood shed from their brethren. There was no moral high ground for the Nephites any longer and Mormon knew his people’s unceasing wickedness would lead to their ultimate demise. He could not leave them, because he still loved them; and therefore, was trapped in the same vortex pulling all of them down to annihilation together. Isolated in a despairing desert of spirit, Mormon seems to have found relief by turning to a record with stories that must have seemed like fairy tales to a man full of such sorrows and grief.86 His sacred records allowed him to see a different world and to create a different world as he edited this record.

Though he lived in a time of massive war and violence, he rejoiced in the righteousness of great heroes on Nephite history such as Captain Moroni1, who, though a great warrior, did not delight in bloodshed but sought creative ways to avoid it when possible. Consider Mormon’s praise of Moroni1:

And this was the faith of Moroni. And his heart did glory in it—not in the shedding of blood, but in doing good, in preserving his people, yea, in keeping the commandments of God, yea, and resisting iniquity. Yea, verily verily I say unto you: If all men had been and were and ever would be like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever. Yea, the devil would never have no power over the hearts of the children of men. (Alma 48:16–17)

Mormon’s decision to slow down the narrative to deliver praise of this magnitude should alert the reader to the narrator’s presence.

85. Morgan Deane also assumes the presence of “long-term physical and psychological scars” on the survivors from the Book of Mormon of Mormon warfare. Deane, “Experiencing Battle,” 250.

86. The cathartic power of the war-ridden Book of Mormon narrative for those who are seeking refuge from war can be seen through the experience of Hugh Nibley as he found a companion in the Book of Mormon during the horrors of World War II. Boyd Jay Petersen presents Nibley’s use of the Book of Mormon during his landing on Utah Beach in Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2002), 194. Nibley’s subsequent emphasis on peacemaking due to his exposure to war may also be telling as it relates to Mormon; ibid., 208–21.
Mormon introduces his praise for Captain Moroni, with some of the most elevated language possible for him; he uses the phrase “verily, verily I say unto you,” which outside of this reference only occurs in the Book of Mormon as spoken by the resurrected Savior. Mormon intends for us to focus on Moroni’s character, not just for Moroni’s sake alone, but also so that he can lead the reader to see this character in others (see Alma 48:18–19). These comparisons between Moroni, the sons of Mosiah, Alma, Alma’s sons, and Helaman, also invite the reader to see these same character traits in other Book of Mormon characters as well.

Mormon concludes the life of Moroni with this summation: “he retired to his own house, that he might spend the remainder of his days in peace” (Alma 62:43). I imagine that this brought Mormon a sense of satisfaction to pen this happy ending for an obvious hero of his. Similar in quality to Mormon’s respect for Captain Moroni, it is also obvious that Mormon revered the Ammonites. Consider this striking strain of praise for the Ammonites and again note the meaningful role of shedding blood:

And they were also distinguished for their zeal towards God and also towards men, for they were perfectly honest and upright in all things. And they were firm in the faith of Christ, even unto the end. And they did look upon shedding the blood of their brethren with the greatest abhorrence. And they never could be prevailed upon to take up arms against their brethren. And they never did look upon death with any degree of terror for their hope and views of Christ and the resurrection. Therefore, death was swallowed up to them by the victory of Christ over it. (Alma 27:27–28)

At one point in the narrative, the Ammonite’s resolve to refrain from shedding blood is challenged. The Lamanites come down upon them to destroy them, but instead of lifting up weapons to defend themselves, they “prostrated themselves” upon the earth in prayer only to be cut down by the sword (Alma 24:21). Mormon assures the reader that these 1,005 individuals, slain by the sword, were “blessed, for they [had] gone to dwell with their God.” (Alma 24:22). One can only imagine Mormon’s response to reading these stories about the Ammonites, who had previously been wicked but underwent a thorough change because of the word of God.

87. The connection of this phrase with the Savior has been noted by others, including Grant Hardy, Understanding the Book of Mormon, 110, 298n24.
His love for this people, who were once Lamanites, also produced this strong oath, “yeah, I say unto you, as the Lord liveth, as many of the Lamanites as believed in their preaching and were converted unto the Lord, never did fall away” (Alma 23:6). Mormon’s use of the strong oath, “as the Lord liveth” to convey the faithfulness of the Ammonites is emphatic; Mormon employs it twice in Alma 23:6 in reference to the Ammonites. The only other occasions when Mormon employs this oath in doublet is in 3 Nephi 5:24–26, where he promises the restoration of the house of Jacob (Israel). As with Moroni, Mormon is employing the strongest language possible to him in order to arrest the reader’s journey through the text. These are indications of authorial intent. This is not only meant to teach us about the type of character we should develop, but these interruptions of the narrative are points of intersection between the reader and Mormon. We learn about him by learning about what was important to him too.

Mormon likely manifested a clear preference for peacemakers because he knew such little peace in his life. Although a commitment to avoid taking lives was not the only criteria Mormon used to qualify someone for a happy ending in his work, it is the most relevant to Gideon. Gideon also sought to save lives by not taking them. His story has much in common with those of Moroni and the Ammonites. As shown above, Gideon’s post-mortem story connects to both of them. Mormon shows how Gideon sought to save lives, like Captain Moroni, and sacrificed his own, like the Ammonites.

Like the Captain Moroni, he praised, Mormon did not delight in shedding blood, but sought for peace, even while being dragged into an apocalyptic war he could not win. Tragically Mormon did not live to see the Book of Mormon finished nor did he spend the rest of days in peace, but died in the last Nephite battle living just long enough to mourn his people’s annihilation (see Mormon 6). For Mormon’s tragic passing, we could extend the same eulogizing statement Mormon employed for the Ammonites to Mormon himself, that “we have no reason to doubt but what [he was] saved” (see Alma 24:26). Mormon’s narration is a prophetic call echoed by modern-day prophets that “true disciples of Jesus Christ

88. Even without doubling, the use of the oath is rare by Mormon. Moroni includes a letter from his father in Mormon 8:23, in which Mormon uses this oath. Helaman 15:17 could be an additional instance; however, it is not conclusive, because the speaker could be the Lord himself, instead of Mormon.
are peacemakers” and “as we follow the Prince of Peace, we will become His peacemakers.”

**Conclusion**

This article has attempted to highlight Mormon’s more subtle narrative tradecraft, which is easily overlooked by his more obvious ideological commentary. Mormon’s gift for layered story-telling turned towards the minor character Gideon is a reminder of the worth of individuals to God. Even after his death, the name Gideon is used repeatedly to convey messages about justice and the salvation that Christ offers. We find Nehor and those who followed his wicked order being repeatedly contrasted with Gideon and what he stood for.

Mormon’s message of hope and preference for peace is especially poignant given that he emphasizes these points specifically through a narrative teeming with tragedy and doom. Interestingly, this contrast draws out the importance of a Christ even more. Ultimately, it is Christ who is the end-all, be-all of Mormon’s message. It is through Christ, the Prince of Peace, that all wrongs will be made right. He is the one through whom we attain salvation. This was true of Gideon and it is true for us. Mormon’s most important personalized message about Gideon’s narratives, both the main narrative and the sub-narrative proposed in this article, is that tragedy and death are not the end, and do not prevent us from reaching our final destination, to be “clasped in the arms of Jesus” (Mormon 5:11).

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**Nathan J. Arp** graduated from Brigham Young University with a BA in Chinese language and literature. As a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Nathan has been enamored by the Church’s

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scriptures for decades. He has been a longtime consumer of scholarly publications about the scriptures and is grateful for this opportunity to participate in the process of production. When not in an office cubicle, he can be found laughing with his wife, wrestling with their children, or playing with words.
“Behold, He Was a Man Like unto Ammon”: Mormon’s Use of Ṿmn-related Terminology in Praise of Moroni in Alma 48

Matthew L. Bowen

Abstract: This article examines Mormon’s comparison of Moroni, the Nephite military leader, to Ammon, the son of Mosiah, in Alma 48:18 and how Mormon’s use and repetition of Ṿmn-related terminology (“faithful,” “firm,” “faith,” “verily [surely]”) in Alma 48:7–17 lays a foundation for this comparison. Ammon’s name, phonologically and perhaps etymologically, suggests the meaning “faithful.” Mormon goes to extraordinary lengths in the Lamanite conversion narratives to show that Ammon is not only worthy of this name, but that his faithfulness is the catalyst for the transition of many Lamanites from unbelief to covenant faithfulness. Thus, in comparing Moroni directly to Ammon, Mormon makes a most emphatic statement regarding Moroni’s covenant faithfulness. Moreover, this comparison reveals his admiration for both men.

At the conclusion of Mormon’s famed panegyric1 for Moroni (Alma 48:7–18), the first person to whom Mormon favorably compares Moroni is Ammon, the son of Mosiah (see Alma 48:18). Although Mormon’s comparison also includes the other sons of Mosiah, of them he only mentions Ammon by name, suggesting that he is the main focus of the comparison. A close examination of Mormon’s language leading up to this comparison reveals the logic of and the rhetorical preparation for it.

Mormon’s earlier account of Ammon in the Lamanite conversion narratives had emphasized “the faithfulness of Ammon” (e.g.,

Alma 18:2, 10) as a major catalyst in the conversion of numerous Lamanites to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the reversal of generations of unbelief to surpassing “faithfulness.” In Hebrew, concepts of being “faithful,” “believing,” “steadfastness,” “faithfulness” (and “faith”), “trustworthiness,” and “firmness” were expressed with lexical forms of the Hebrew verbal root ʾmn (apparently cognate with Egyptian mn = “be firm, established, enduring”; “be fixed, stick fast ...”; “remain”) which sound like and may even be cognate with the name Ammon. Indeed, the onomastic connection between Ammon and forms of ʾmn — aural or etymological — is evidenced by the profusion of ʾmn-related terminology in the Lamanite conversion narratives (Alma 17–27).

In this study, I will endeavor to show how Mormon carefully lays the foundation for his comparison of Moroni with Ammon in Alma 48:18 through a concentrated use of ʾmn-related terms and concepts in the text preceding the comparison (Alma 48:7–17). The laying of this foundation begins with his contrast of Moroni with Amalickiah (Alma 48:7). He then builds on this foundation with successive descriptions of Moroni’s faith and faithfulness. By directly comparing Moroni with Ammon, whose very name aurally or etymologically suggests the meaning “faithful,” Mormon helps us see just how faithful both men were and how much he revered them.

5. HALOT, 62.
6. Ibid., 62, 64; BDB, 53.
7. See HALOT, 62–65; 52–54.
Some Methodological Considerations

Many Latter-day Saints assume that the Book of Mormon name Ammon is simply the non-Israelite national name ʿammôn, abundantly attested in the Bible. However, there are good reasons not to default to this assumption. Firstly, Ammon (ʿammôn) is a non-Hebrew, non-Israelite national name and is not, as far as I am aware, ever attested as an Israelite personal name in the biblical corpus, external inscriptions, or any other ancient sources. Secondly and perhaps relatedly, the national name “Ammon” is ascribed highly pejorative connotations by the etiological narrative of the national origins of Ammon and Moab in Genesis 19:30–38 (see especially v. 38). This is evident in the Hebraized ancestral name Ben-ammi, “son of my [near] kin,” or much more pejoratively, “son of my grandfather”\(^\text{10}\) (notably, the non-Hebrew, national Ammon is not the name of Lot’s son, Ben-Ammi).

The Book of Mormon personal name Ammon may instead be a derivation from the Hebrew root *ʾmn, perhaps a variation on “Ammon” (“faithful”)\(^\text{11}\) or “Amon” (“faithful”),\(^\text{12}\) a Davidic king who reigned over the kingdom of Judah sometime around the time Lehi was born (see 2 Kings 21:19–26). Both of these ʾmn-names, are attested as Davidic royal names in the Deuteronomistic History. Amnon is the firstborn son (see 1 Samuel 3:2) and heir of David, on whom David’s promised “sure house” (bayit neʾĕmān; 1 Samuel 25:28; 2 Samuel 7:16; see also 1 Samuel 2:35; 1 Kings 11:38) might have been built, but who instead “takes” and rapes his half-sister Tamar (seemingly in imitation of his father’s wanton “taking” of Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah),\(^\text{13}\) setting in motion a disastrous series of events that eventuates in Amnon’s death and David’s near loss of both his kingdom and his life (see 2 Samuel 13–19). The Deuteronomistic historian, who putatively compiled and edited the story from Deuteronomy to 2 Kings,\(^\text{14}\) reports that David’s descendant

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\(^{11}\) Martin Noth, Die israelitischen Personennamen im Rahmen der gemeinsemitischen Namengebung (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1966), 32, 228. See also HALOT, 62.

\(^{12}\) Noth, Personennamen, 228. HALOT, 62.

\(^{13}\) 2 Samuel 13:3–5 indicates that Amnon’s actions are partly instigated (or abetted) by Jonadab, David’s nephew (the son of his brother Shimeah), who may have had monarchical ambitions of his own.

Amon was anything but faithful to the Lord and his covenant as king of Judah (2 Kings 21:18–22) and was assassinated “in his own house” (21:23). While the doubling of the m in the Book of Mormon name Ammon might at first seem a barrier to considering it a form of Amon, it should be remembered that doubled consonants were unwritten and unmarked in ancient Hebrew manuscripts. The Book of Mormon text, in any case, is inconsistent in its use of doubled consonants in transliterated names. Thus, Ammon as the attested personal name Amon (let alone from *ʾmn) cannot be precluded or affirmed on that basis.

Alternatively, the Book of Mormon name Ammon could also be derived from or related to the Akkadian ummānu (“craftsman” or “expert”), which comes into Hebrew as āmmān and āmōn. The potential for word association with Hebrew *ʾmn (“faithful,” “sure”) on the basis of sound similarity (homophony) is clear. Without more information than we how have (e.g., access to the plates of Mormon), the question of the precise etymology of the Book of Mormon personal name Ammon will remain pending. Thus, the etymologies mentioned above all remain possibilities. On that acknowledgement, I proceed, further noting that for ancient writers and audiences, the sounds latent in names were often more important than real (or scientific) etymology.

Whatever its precise etymology, the homophony between the name Ammon and the root *ʾmn (“faith,” “loyalty,” and “faithfulness”) appears to have been the basis for a wordplay throughout the Lamanite conversion narratives of Alma 17–27. Even if the initial consonant in the Book of Mormon name Ammon is the Hebrew pharyngeal fricative ayin (ʿ) — far from a certainty — we find onomastic wordplay involving the name Jacob (yaʿaqōb) a name derived from the ayin-initial root *ʿq̄b, in terms of the aleph-initial root *bq, “wrestle” (“And Jacob [yaʿaqōb] was left alone; and there wrestled [wayyēʾāḇēq] a man with him”; “and the hollow of Jacob’s [yaʿaqōb] thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled [bēḥēʾāḇēqō] with him,” Genesis 32:24–25) and the ḫet-initial root *ḥbq, “embrace” (“And Esau ran to meet [Jacob], and embraced him [wayḥabbēqēḥū],”

15. For example, the ʾamm- names in which we expect a doubled radical, Aminadi (Alma 10:2–3) and Aminadab (Helaman 5:39, 41), lack such in their Book of Mormon renderings. Cf. Amminadab in the KJV in Exodus 6:23; Numbers 1:7; 2:3; 7:12, 17; 10:14; Ruth 4:19–20; 1 Chronicles 2:10, 6:22, 15:10–11. In the KJV New Testament is Matthew 1:4 and Luke 3:33 following the Greek rendering.
17. See HALOT, 64.
18. Or bēḥēʾobq̄.
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Genesis 33:4). Thus, ‘m ʾmwn (“people of Ammon”), a phrase repeated throughout the Book of Mormon (eighteen times in the Book of Alma and once in Helaman), works alliteratively as a wordplay, especially upon the shared m and the n, whether the initial consonant is the pharyngeal ayin (ʿ) or the glottal stop aleph (ʾ). The same is true of the name Ammon and the ‘mn-related terminology in Alma 17–27 (and later in chapter 48) with which it is frequently juxtaposed (at least in twenty instances in Alma 17–18 alone).  

Hebrew onomastic puns, like many wordplays and puns today, often involved roots etymologically unrelated to the name and with greater or lesser degrees of homophony, as illustrated by the foregoing example and many others that could be furnished. It should be further noted that I assume here, for purposes of my thesis, that such wordplays would have been detectable and meaningful in the “reformed Egyptian” script (“characters”) Mormon used to record the Nephite language, which remained Hebrew to a greater or lesser degree throughout its history (see Mormon 9:32–33). Given the fact that we do not have the plates of Mormon available to us to definitively affirm or disavow the findings presented here, they must remain tentative.

Nevertheless, the internal evidence of the Book of Mormon text itself suggests that a replete thematic wordplay on ‘mn-related terminology in Alma 17–27 reinforced the idea that Ammon’s name befitted his character — faithful, loyal, steadfast — a name he proved entirely in the performance of his mission among the Lamanites and the fruit his faithfulness bore in their lives. In terms of earlier Nephite figures, Ammon furnished the ideal model of faithfulness with whom Mormon could compare Moroni.

“Moroni … Had Been Preparing the Minds of the People to Be Faithful”: Moroni as a Teacher of Covenant Faithfulness

A significant feature of Mormon’s narrative in the book of Alma is a thematic paronomasia involving the names of two monarchic aspirants, Amlaci and Amalickiah, in terms of the Hebrew words mālak (“be the king,” “become king, or queen, reign”) and melek (“king”). Flushed with the success of his usurpation of the Lamanite

22. BDB, 573–74.
23. HALOT, 591–92; BDB, 572–73.
kingship, Amalickiah’s initial monarchic ambitions (“And Amalickiah was desirous to be a king [cf. Hebrew melek],” Alma 46:4) had achieved success to the point that he “sought also to reign [cf. Hebrew limlōk] over all the land” (Alma 48:2). Mormon draws an ever-starker contrast between Amalickiah and his egocentric monarchism and Moroni’s selfless, faithful leadership: “Now it came to pass that while Amalickiah had thus been obtaining power by fraud and deceit, Moroni, on the other hand, had been preparing the minds of the people to be faithful unto the Lord their God” (Alma 48:7). In ancient Hebrew, “to be faithful” would be expressed with a passive construction (participial or verbal) involving a form of ʾmn (cf., e.g., the Niphal plural participle neʾēmānim). The Abrahamic covenant significance of this verbal root emerges in Genesis 15:6, where the narrator records Abraham’s response to the Lord’s promise of seed as numerous as the stars of heaven using a third-person masculine hiphil perfect of ʾmn: “And he believed [wēheʾēmin] in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” Abraham’s “believing” or “having faith” in the Lord constituted a key aspect of his covenant relationship with him, as “unshaken faith in him” is for all who enter into the Abrahamic covenant and walk the covenant path anciently and now (see 2 Nephi 31:19).

In terms of a relationship with Yahweh rooted in the Abrahamic covenant, ancient Israel’s “faith” in Yahweh begins with the Exodus event: “Thus the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. And Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the Lord, and believed [wayyaʾēminū] the Lord, and his servant Moses” (Exodus 14:30–31). Just as the Lord’s faithful acts toward Abraham, beginning with “redeem[ing]” him (Isaiah 29:22) off of the altar in Ur of the Chaldees (Abraham 1:15–20), became the basis for his own faith


and faithfulness in Yahweh, the Lord’s acts that culminated in “saving” Israel became the basis for their covenant faithfulness. Brent Schmidt writes, “The covenant relationship is central to understanding the ʾāman lexeme of Hebrew faithfulness. The covenant of the patriarchs and the exodus generation was completed in Leviticus 26 by the commandments revealed at Sinai, accompanied by the conditional promise attached to them. [...] However, if Israel breaks the covenant, God will avenge the quarrel of the covenant. But mutual obligation also characterizes the covenant.”

These aspects of the covenant and the requirements of covenant faithfulness can clearly be seen in the covenant that Moroni concludes with the Nephites in Alma 44:11–23 and the behavior that characterizes his faithfulness throughout his life.

“He Was a Man Who Was Firm in the Faith of Christ”:
Moroni the Covenant Keeper

As Israelites steeped in the ancient Israelite covenant tradition, the Nephites’ concept of “faithfulness” and how it relates to the Abrahamic covenant directly derives from that tradition. When Mormon essays to describe Moroni’s faithfulness, he is describing him as faithful to the divine covenant:

And Moroni was a strong and a mighty man; he was a man of a perfect understanding; yea, a man that did not delight in bloodshed; a man whose soul did joy in the liberty and the freedom of his country, and his brethren from bondage and slavery; yea, a man whose heart did swell with thanksgiving to his God, for the many privileges and blessings which he bestowed upon his people; a man who did labor exceedingly for the welfare and safety of his people. Yea, and he was a man who was firm [cf. Hebrew neʾēmān or yēʾāmēn] in the faith.


[cf. beʾēmûnâ] of Christ, and he had sworn with an oath to defend his people, his rights, and his country, and his religion, even to the loss of his blood. (Alma 48:11–13)

In Classical Hebrew, “faith” and “faithfulness” as a noun is expressed with the term ʾēmûnâ or ʾēmûnât. One of the ways in which the idea of being “firm” could be expressed in Classical Hebrew was through passive (Niphal) forms of the verb Ṿmn: neʾēmān or yēʾāmēn, “to prove to be firm, reliable, faithful” (emphasis added).29

Moreover, Mormon’s description of Moroni as “a man firm in the faith of Christ” recalls three earlier uses of this phrase. Firstly, Mormon recalls his own description of the “people of Ammon” as the people of faithfulness:

[A]nd they were called by the Nephites the people of Ammon [or, people of faithfulness]; therefore they were distinguished by that name ever after. And they were among the people of Nephi, and also numbered among the people who were of the church of God. And they were also distinguished for their zeal towards God, and also towards men; for they were perfectly honest and upright in all things; and they were firm [*wēneʾēmānû or *wayyēʾāmēnû] in the faith [Hebrew beʾēmûnâ] of Christ, even unto the end. (Alma 27:26–27)

In recalling this description and the scenes that led up to it, Mormon associates Moroni’s being “firm in the faith of Christ” with the people of Ammon being “firm in the faith of Christ.” The wordplay — a paronomasia on similar sounds or possibly involving the “repetition of words from the same root”30 — in Alma 48:11–13 recalls the wordplay on Ammon as an onomastic symbol of the Lamanite converts’ “firmness” and “faithfulness.”

An additional detail confirms Mormon’s narratological strategy. Mormon’s characterization of Moroni as “a man that did not delight in bloodshed” finds a precedent in the very same text that describes the faithfulness of Ammon’s Lamanite converts: “And they did look upon

29. HALOT, 63. In the clause “who was firm,” masculine singular perfect or imperfect forms would be likely in Hebrew.

30. Lanham, Rhetorical Terms, 117. Lanham defines polyptoton as “Repetition of words from the same root but with different endings.” The example from Winston Churchill he cites (“So they go on in a strange paradox, decided only to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute ... [etc.]”) suggests that polyptoton more precisely involves the repetition of variations of words from the same root.
shedding the blood of their brethren with the greatest abhorrence” (Alma 27:28). Mormon reiterates this point regarding Moroni in Alma 55:18–19.31

What’s more, Mormon’s description of Moroni as “a man who was firm in the faith of Christ” recalls his earlier statement regarding the “faithful … who were true believers in Christ” in Alma 46:15: “And those who did belong to the church were faithful; yea, all those who were true believers in Christ took upon them, gladly, the name of Christ, or Christians as they were called, because of their belief in Christ who should come.” Mormon detailed how, for Moroni, Nephite covenant faithfulness was deeply rooted in their identity as a “remnant of the seed of Joseph”: “And now who knoweth but what the remnant of the seed of Joseph, which shall perish as his garment, are those who have dissented from us? Yea, and even it shall be ourselves if we do not stand fast in the faith of Christ” (Alma 46:27). “Standing fast” in the covenant as the ’mn-derived concept of Yahweh’s covenant “standing fast” is attested in Psalm 89:28: “My mercy [ḥasdî] will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast [ne’ēmenet] with him” (Psalm 89:28). Isaiah had direct reference to this in Isaiah 7, with its infamous polyptotonic pun on ’mn: “if ye will not believe [‘im lō’ taʾāminû], surely ye shall not be established [kī lō’ tēʾāmēnû]” (Isaiah 7:9, KJV) … “If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all” (Isaiah 7:9, NRSV Updated Edition).

For Mormon and his predecessors, to have “died in the faith of Christ” was to have endured to the end: “But there were many who died with old age; and those who died in the faith of Christ are happy in him, as we must needs suppose” (Alma 46:4). King Benjamin had similarly taught, “And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it” (Mosiah 2:41).

31. In Alma 55:18–19, Mormon records the following regarding Moroni and his forces: “But had they awakened the Lamanites, behold they were drunken and the Nephites could have slain them. But behold, this was not the desire of Moroni; he did not delight in murder or bloodshed, but he delighted in the saving of his people from destruction; and for this cause he might not bring upon him injustice, he would not fall upon the Lamanites and destroy them in their drunkenness.”
“And This Was Their Faith”:
Moroni, the Nephites, and the Lehitic Covenant

Following a vision of divine judgment, the prophet Habakkuk testified that “the just shall live by his faith [beʾēmûnātō]” (Habakkuk 2:4, KJV) or “the righteous live by their faithfulness” (Habakkuk 2:4, NRSV Updated Edition). Psalm 31, one of “the hymns of the [Jerusalem] temple,”32 declares that “the Lord preserveth [nōṣēr] the faithful [ʾēmûnim]” Psalm 31:23 [MT 24]. John Goldingay notes that ʾēmûnim “is a rare form of a common root to refer to people who steadfastly keep their commitments.”33 In this case, it refers to a covenant people who keep covenant commitments, namely divine commandments. Note the specific promised blessing associated with being ʾēmûnim in Psalm 21:23 is the protection and preservation of life.

Schmidt has recently noted that ʾmn-terms “expressed concepts of truth, confidence, relationships, and covenants.”34 It is “faith [that] expresses itself in terms of behaviour, rather than systematic theology.”35 The connection between ʾmn-terms like ʾēmûnā and ʾēmûnim to divine covenant and covenant-guided behavior, including trust in and reliance on God, is key to understanding Mormon’s explanation of Nephite faithfulness and how Moroni’s leadership fits into that framework:

Now the Nephites were taught to defend themselves against their enemies, even to the shedding of blood if it were necessary; yea, and they were also taught never to give an offense, yea, and never to raise the sword except it were against an enemy, except it were to preserve their lives. And this was their faith, that by so doing God would prosper them in the land, or in other words, if they were faithful in keeping the commandments of God that he would prosper them in the land; yea, warn them to flee, or to prepare for war, according to their danger; and also, that God would make it known unto them whither they should go to defend themselves against their enemies, and by so doing, the Lord would deliver them.

(Alma 48:14–16)

34. Schmidt, Relational Faith, 38.
35. Ibid., 37.
Mormon’s explication of Nephite “faith” and “faithfulness” in terms of “defend[ing]” and “preserv[ing]” life specifically recalls Ammon’s martial expertise and the “faithfulness” ascribed to him in Alma 18. Lamoni’s servants marveled at “the faithfulness of Ammon in preserving his [Lamoni’s] flocks” (Alma 18:2). Lamoni averred to his servants his belief that Ammon had “come down at this time to preserve [their] lives” (Alma 18:4–5). Ammon asked Lamoni regarding his astonishment at this “faithfulness”: “Is it because thou hast heard that I defended thy servants and thy flocks, and slew seven of their brethren with the sling and with the sword, and smote off the arms of others, in order to defend thy flocks and thy servants; behold, is it this that causeth thy marvelings?” (Alma 18:16).

The clauses “God would prosper them in the land” and “that he would prosper them in the land” have reference to what Joseph Spencer and Kimberly Matheson have called the “Lehitic covenant” — i.e., the initial covenant made to Lehi and Nephi that finds repeated expression throughout the Book of Mormon: “Blessed art thou and thy children; and they shall be blessed, inasmuch as they shall keep my commandments they shall prosper in the land. But remember, inasmuch as they will not keep my commandments they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord” (Alma 50:20; see also 1 Nephi 2:20; 2 Nephi 1:20).

The covenant nature of “faith” and “faithfulness” as articulated by Mormon here in Alma 48:14–16 directly recalls Moroni’s speech to Zerahemnah as recorded in Alma 44:3–4: “But now, ye behold that the Lord is with us; and ye behold that he has delivered you into our hands. And now I would that ye should understand that this is done unto us because of our religion and our faith in Christ. And now ye see that ye cannot destroy this our faith. Now ye see that this is the true faith of God; yea, ye see that God will support, and keep, and preserve us, so long as we are faithful unto him, and unto our faith, and our religion; and never will the Lord suffer that we shall be destroyed except we should fall into transgression and deny our faith.” In other words, God’s “faithfulness” to the covenant — “the true faith of God” — would

be manifest in his support, protection, and preservation of Nephite lives and the Nephite nation to the degree that they were “faithful” (neʾēmānū) unto God and to their own “faith” (ʾēmūnā).

Mormon’s correlation of covenant “faith” and “faithfulness” with the divine preservation of life in Alma 44:3–4 and 48:14–16 also looks forward to his inclusion of Helaman’s account of the sons of the people of Ammon, where Helaman makes this same correlation:

And now, their [i.e., the Ammonite sons’] preservation was astonishing to our whole army, yea, that they should be spared while there was a thousand of our brethren who were slain. And we do justly ascribe it to the miraculous power of God, because of their exceeding faith in that which they had been taught to believe — that there was a just God, and whosoever did not doubt, that they should be preserved by his marvelous power. Now this was the faith of these of whom I have spoken; they are young, and their minds are firm, and they do put their trust in God continually. (Alma 57:26–27)

Covenant faithfulness in “the sons of the Ammonites” (Alma 57:6) and in their parents, particularly their mothers who had taught them covenant faithfulness (Alma 56:47–48; 57:21), resulted in the divine preservation of every one of these sons in battle. Helaman’s repetition of ʾmn-related terminology (“exceeding faith,” “believe,” “the faith,” “firm”) here serves to reinforce the connection between Helaman’s “stripling Ammonites” (Alma 56:57) and Ammon himself, especially in the face of the traditional Nephite association of Lamanites with “unbelief” (cf. lōʾ ʾēmun [Deuteronomy 32:20], see Alma 56:2–3 in the context of 1 Nephi 12:22–23; Mosiah 1:5–6; Mormon 5:15, etc.). This repetition of ʾmn-terms also helps Mormon’s readers see that the faith of these Ammonite warriors was the match of Moroni, the general’s surpassing faith.

“And This Was the Faith of Moroni”:
Moroni as Covenant Keeper

What Mormon describes as the Nephites’ ʾēmūnā (“faith”) was also Moroni’s ʾēmūnā: “And this was the faith of Moroni. and his heart did glory in it; not in the shedding of blood but in doing good, in preserving his people, yea, in keeping the commandments of God, yea, and resisting iniquity” (Alma 48:16). Again, the preservation of life and keeping the

38. See Bowen, “Not Partaking,” 242–43.
commandments of God are cited as two major elements of “faith.” Moroni embodied both. Moroni’s “doing good” also embodied what it meant — or most often what it should have meant — to be Nephite. 39

This “faith” was far more than an abstract belief or set of beliefs or even intellectual acceptance of certain ideas, it was the consistent, reliable, durative performance of covenant obligations that formed the basis for a relationship of trust. It is Yahweh’s constancy in the performance of covenant promises in the past that formed the basis for Mormon’s point. His point is not simply that Moroni believed “God would make it known unto them whither they should go to defend themselves against their enemies, and by so doing, the Lord would deliver them.” His point is also that in the constancy of “doing good,” “preserving his people,” “keeping the commandments of God,” and “resisting iniquity,” Moroni qualified to receive covenant promises and blessings of divine warning and protection.

Earlier in Nephite history, Omni records that he had actively fought to preserve the lives of his people but had not maintained covenant faithfulness: “Wherefore, in my days, I would that ye should know that I fought much with the sword to preserve my people, the Nephites, from falling into the hands of their enemies, the Lamanites. But behold, I of myself am a wicked man, and I have not kept the statutes and the commandments of the Lord as I ought to have done” (Omni 1:2). Although Omni’s self-confession may be somewhat self-deprecative, 40 Omni’s son Amaron was well aware of the devastating consequences that covenant unfaithfulness had incurred on his people during his father’s and his own lifetimes. Amaron describes these consequences as the realization of divine judgments directly attached to the Lehitic covenant:


Behold, it came to pass that three hundred and twenty years had passed away, and the more wicked part of the Nephites were destroyed. For the Lord would not suffer, after he had led them out of the land of Jerusalem and kept and preserved them from falling into the hands of their enemies, yea, he would not suffer that the words should not be verified [*lō’ yeḥāmēnū*], which he spake unto our fathers, saying that: Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall not prosper in the land. (Omni 1:5–6)

The Lord’s words are faithful, even if his people are not. Mormon, perhaps to a greater degree than all previous Nephite writers, knew personally and deeply the blessings of covenant faithfulness and the consequences of covenant infidelity. Consequently, he prized the legacy of Moroni as a military leader of the Nephite people because he was, above all, a covenant keeper and “faithful” — *neḥmān* — to the covenant. Moroni was as effective at instilling faith and faithfulness in the Nephites in his station, as Ammon was in his station among the Lamanites.

### “Yea, Verily, Verily I Say unto You…”: The Dauntless Faithfulness of Moroni

At the highpoint of his praise of Moroni’s faithfulness, Mormon continues to use *mn*-related terminology: “Yea, *verily, verily* I say unto you, if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men” (Alma 48:17). Although some might see it as a mean or mundane detail, Mormon’s use of the idiom “verily, verily, I say unto you” is significant. The Synoptic Gospels ubiquitously attest Jesus’s use of the expression,

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41. Cf. Genesis 42:20: “But bring your youngest brother unto me; so shall your words be verified [*wēyeḥāmēnū dibrēkem*]; 1 Kings 8:26: “And now, O God of Israel, let thy word [Qere: *dēḇārēkā*; Ketiv: *dbyrk*], I pray thee, be verified [*yēḥāmēn*], which thou spakest unto thy servant David my father.”


43. Mormon as a youth had “tasted and knew of the goodness of Jesus” (Mormon 1:15), and yet, as he records, “a continual scene of wickedness and abominations has been before mine eyes ever since I have been sufficient to behold the ways of man” (Mormon 2:18). Mormon, faithful to the end, witnessed the final annihilation of his own people before being hunted and slaughtered by his enemies, as recorded by his son Moroni (see Mormon 8:2–3).
“verily, I say unto you” (Greek, *amēn legō humin*)⁴⁴ and the Gospel of John attests the doubly affirmative “verily, verily, I say unto you” (*amēn amēn legō humin*)⁴⁵ as a standard feature of Jesus’s vernacular. The Greek texts preserve the adverbial use of the Hebrew term ἀμὴν — “truly, verily”⁴⁶; “surely”⁴⁷ used in both spoken Hebrew and Aramaic as a lucid example of Semitic interference. Mormon’s account of Jesus’s post-resurrection theophanies at the temple in Bountiful (and subsequent events pertaining thereto) records Jesus using both.⁴⁸ Indeed, Mormon’s use of the idiom “verily, verily, I say unto you” in Alma 48:17 almost certainly derives from Jesus’s replete use of it, as preserved in the records he abridged to create what now constitutes 3 Nephi 11–27. The fact that Mormon only uses this idiom once — the only occurrence of this idiom within the Book of Mormon outside 3 Nephi 11–27 — strongly recommends that Mormon intended to make one of his most emphatic points using an idiom that Jesus himself used. To wit, he commends the dauntless faithfulness of Moroni (“the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever”, “the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men”) to his readers as if Jesus were making the point himself.

The repetition of ἀμὴν in averring truth or surety had a venerable history within the ancient Israelite tradition. In some contexts, the use of this word amounted to a “solemn formula” whereby “the hearer accepts … the validity of a curse,”⁴⁹ or accepts “an acceptable order … or announcement.”⁵⁰ In others, it “belong[ed] to doxology.”⁵¹ Jesus’s and Mormon’s use of ἀμὴν echoes other solemn asseverations in the Hebrew Bible. For example, in the trial-by-ordeal Sotah ritual, a woman suspected of adultery was required to affirm the curses upon her with a double ἀμὴν: “And this water that causeth the curse shall go into thy

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⁴⁶. BDB, 53.
⁴⁷. HALOT, 65.
⁴⁹. HALOT, 64.
⁵⁰. Ibid.
⁵¹. Ibid.
bowels, to make thy belly to swell, and thy thigh to rot: And the woman shall say, Amen, amen [ʾāmēn ʾāmēn]” (Numbers 5:22). At Ezra’s reading of the Law during the Feast of the Tabernacles, as recorded in Nehemiah, the people asseverate Ezra’s blessing of the Lord: “And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen [ʾāmēn ʾāmēn], with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground” (Nehemiah 8:6). The similar colocation, ʾāmēn ʾāmēn (“amen and amen”) occurs in several Psalms as temple hymns: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen [ʾāmēn ʾāmēn]” (Psalm 41:13); “And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen [ʾāmēn ʾāmēn]” (Psalm 72:19); “Blessed be the Lord for evermore. Amen, and Amen [ʾāmēn wĕʾāmēn]” (Psalm 89:52).

“A Man Like unto Ammon”:
The Logic of Mormon’s Comparison of Moroni to Ammon

It has been widely observed that Mormon’s admiration for Moroni is amply evident in the fact that he named a son after him.52 Mormon’s similar admiration for Ammon, the son of Mosiah, is demonstrated in his comparison of Moroni to him.

In Alma 48:18, Mormon’s use of ‘mn-related terminology culminates in his comparison of Moroni and Ammon. A comparison of the ‘mn-related language used to emphasize the appropriateness of Ammon’s name in Mormon’s narration of the Lamanite conversion narratives — as in Alma 18:2, 10 — helps us to see Mormon’s rhetorical and narratological strategy in Alma 48:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alma 18:2, 10</th>
<th>Alma 48:7; 13–18</th>
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<td>And when they had all testified to the things which they had seen, and he had learned of the faithfulness [ʾēmînat] of Ammon in preserving his flocks, and also of his great power in contending against those who sought to slay him, he was astonished exceedingly, and said: Surely, this is more than a man. Behold, is not this the Great Spirit who doth send such great punishments upon this people, because of their murders? (Alma 18:2)</td>
<td>Now it came to pass that while Amalickiah had thus been obtaining power by fraud and deceit, Moroni, on the other hand, had been preparing the minds of the people to be faithful unto the Lord their God. (Alma 48:7)</td>
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52. See Words of Mormon 1:1; Mormon 6:6, 11–12; Moroni 8:1.
Now when king Lamoni heard that Ammon was preparing his horses and his chariots he was more astonished, because of the faithfulness [cf. ʾĕmûnat] of Ammon, saying: Surely there has not been any servant among all my servants that has been so faithful [cf. neʾēmān] as this man; for even he doth remember all my commandments to execute them. (Alma 18:10)

Yea, and he [Moroni] was a man who was firm in the faith of Christ, and he had sworn with an oath to defend his people, his rights, and his country, and his religion, even to the loss of his blood. Now the Nephites were taught to defend themselves against their enemies, even to the shedding of blood if it were necessary; yea, and they were also taught never to give an offense, yea, and never to raise the sword except it were against an enemy, except it were to preserve their lives. And this was their faith, that by so doing God would prosper them in the land, or in other words, if they were faithful in keeping the commandments of God that he would prosper them in the land; yea, warn them to flee, or to prepare for war, according to their danger; And also, that God would make it known unto them whither they should go to defend themselves against their enemies, and by so doing, the Lord would deliver them; and this was the faith of Moroni, and his heart did glory in it; not in the shedding of blood but in doing good, in preserving his people, yea, in keeping the commandments of God, yea, and resisting iniquity. Yea, verily, verily I say unto you, if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men. Behold, he was a man like unto Ammon, the son of Mosiah, yea, and even the other sons of Mosiah, yea, and also Alma and his sons, for they were all men of God. (Alma 48:13–18)
honourable in thine house?” (1 Samuel 22:14). Using the *ʾmn concept, the Lamanite conversion narratives favorably compare and contrast Ammon with David, and Lamoni with Saul and Jonathan (Lamoni’s father is also compared and contrasted to Saul). Lamoni perceived in Ammon what Saul was loath to acknowledge in David. Ammon was reliable and loyal to Lamoni as David was to Saul. Both were, at one point, completely loyal to the Lord. After David becomes king, his faithfulness to his covenant obligations fails in 2 Samuel 11–12 in the matter of Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, while the faithfulness of Ammon, who circumspectly eschews any appearance of monarchical ambition (see, e.g., Alma 17:24–25; 20:16-27), never does fail.

In affirming the faithfulness of Ammon, Mormon reports Lamoni twice using an adverbial term rendered “surely” in translation. In Hebrew, this concept could be expressed with the adverb ʾāmēn (as noted above) or with the similarly ʾmn-derived adverbs ʾomnâ (“verily, truly, indeed”; “in truth, indeed”), ʾumnām (“verily, truly, indeed,” “really?”), and ʾomnām (“surely ..., indeed, truly” “verily, truly”). Since ʾumnām is used in interrogative sentences, it is likely not the term Mormon uses here. Nevertheless, ʾomnām, ʾomnâ, and ʾāmēn all fit the context of Mormon’s presentation of Lamoni’s speech. The main point is that the repetition of an ʾmn-derived adverb in Alma 18:2, 10 along with additional ʾmn-related terminology not only emphasizes the connection Ammon with “faithfulness,” but helps us see the nature of the emphasis Mormon attempted to give Moroni’s “faithfulness” by his painstaking association of him with Ammon and the people of Ammon.

The association of Ammon with ʾēmûnâ that helped transform the Lamanites’ unbelief to supreme faith and faithfulness was remembered until the final days of the Nephites: “Behold, it was the faith [cf. ʾēmûnāt] of Ammon and his brethren which wrought so great a miracle among the Lamanites” (Ether 12:15). It was Mormon’s son, Moroni — named for the one Mormon compares to Ammon — who made this paronomastic statement.

54. HALOT, 65, BDB, 53
55. BDB, 53.
56. HALOT, 65.
57. Ibid.
58. BDB, 53–54.
Conclusion

Apart from Jesus Christ himself, the man whom Mormon most admired was Moroni, the famed Nephite military leader. The first person to whom Mormon directly compares Moroni was Ammon, the son of Mosiah. Mormon’s use and repetition of ʾmn-related terminology (“faithful,” “firm,” “faith,” and “verily [surely]”) — terminology he emphatically used to characterize Ammon and the people converted through Ammon’s faith and faithfulness — prepares the reader to appreciate this comparison.

Ammon, whose name, life, and mission Mormon repeatedly associates with “faith” and “faithfulness” — his own and that of his converts — forever changed Lamanite and Nephite history (see Ether 12:15), thus becomes the highwater mark of Nephite faithfulness that Moroni manages to match. The Moroni-Ammon comparison, with its preparatory ʾmn rhetoric, helps us more fully appreciate just how much Mormon loved and lionized both men.

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Matthew L. Bowen was raised in Orem, Utah, and graduated from Brigham Young University. He holds a PhD in Biblical Studies from the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, and is currently an associate professor in religious education at Brigham Young University-Hawaii. He is also the author of Name as Key-Word: Collected Essays on Onomastic Wordplay and The Temple in Mormon Scripture (Salt Lake City: Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2018). With Aaron P. Schade, he is the coauthor of The Book of Moses: From the Ancient of Days to the Latter Days (Provo, UT; Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2021). He and his wife (the former Suzanne Blattberg) are the parents of three children: Zachariah, Nathan, and Adele.
Abstract: The book of Enos is considered to be a short, one-chapter treatise on prayer, yet it is more. Close examination of its text reveals it to be a text structurally centered on Christ and the divine covenant. Enos seeks and obtains from Him a covenant to preserve the records of the Nephites for the salvation of the Lamanites. Enos prays not only for his own remission of sins but also for the salvation both of his own people, the Nephites, and also of the Lamanites. He yearns in faith that the Lord will preserve the records of his people for the benefit of the Lamanites. This article outlines a possible overall chiastic structure of vv. 3–27 as well as a centrally situated smaller chiasm of vv. 15–16a, which focus on Christ and His covenant with Enos. The voice of the Lord speaks to the mind of Enos seven times, and the proposed chiastic structure of the text is meaningfully related to those seven divine communications. We have the Book of Mormon in our day because of the faithful prayers and faithful labors of prophets like Enos and because of the promises they received from Christ, whose covenant to preserve the records is made the focal point at the center of the Enos text.

Enos, like his uncle Nephi, manifestly desired to highlight in his writings his yearning that the written word of the Lord bless God’s children. Nephi earlier had written that he knew that the Lord God would consecrate his own prayers for the gain of his people and that the words which he had written in weakness would be made strong unto them, persuading them to do good (2 Nephi 33:4).

We usually pay due attention to Enos’s description of his struggle in prayer, by which he sought and obtained a remission of his sins (Enos 1:3–8). When we think of the book of Enos, our first impression generally is that it is a treatise on prayer. And in that we are correct. The book is a book about prayer, yes, but prayer that seeks more than Enos’s
own personal redemption. He first writes that he intends to tell of the “wrestle” he had “before God” before he received a remission of his sins (v. 2). But by v. 8 he has received forgiveness. So why vv. 9–27? We should note that the Lord’s statements to him — “Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee; … thou shalt be blessed; … go to, thy faith hath made thee whole” (vv. 5, 8) — constitute the first of seven divine communications from the Lord into his mind. The first communication is a twofold response (in vv. 5 and 8, which answer Enos’s prayer and supplication for his own personal redemption (vv. 3–8). The second responds to his struggle in prayer for the redemption of the Nephites (vv. 9–10). And the third answers his prayer — and responds to his and his own people’s toils — for redemption of the Lamanites and the preservation of the Nephite record for their benefit (vv. 11–14). The central communication from the Lord states the Lord’s covenant with Enos that the Nephite records will be preserved for the benefit of the Lamanites (vv. 15–16a). The book is structured on three prayers uttered by Enos: for his own redemption, for the redemption of the Nephites, and for redemption of the Lamanites. Quoted seven times in the book, the Lord answers Enos’s prayers (vv. 5, 8, 10, 12, 15, 18, 27) and covenants to preserve the Nephite records (v. 16).

After introductory verses 1 and 2, Enos apparently structured vv. 3–27 of his text on the three accounts of the Lord’s voice to his mind: (1) the Lord’s answer to his own struggle in prayer for his own personal redemption (vv. 3–8 and 25–27, respectively, at the beginning and end of the book); (2) the Lord’s answer to his struggle in prayer on behalf of the Nephites (vv. 9–10 and 21–24, found in text just following the beginning and just before the end of the book); (3) the Lord’s promised fulfillment of Enos’s hope for the redemption of the Lamanites by the preservation of the Nephites’ writings (vv. 11–14 and vv. 16b–20, in text found immediately before and after the center of the book); and (4) Enos’s prayer, which secures the Lord’s answering promise that the Nephite record would be preserved (vv. 15–16a, at the center of the book). This seems to represent classic concentric structuring, commonly referred to as chiasmus, a reversal in the sequence of repeated ideas in a text, with a meaningful climactic turning point in the middle, after which the reversed repetition begins. Chiasmus is a term that refers generally both to a chiasm (with two matching words, phrases, or ideas at the central turning point of a text) and to a concentric structure (with one word, phrase, or idea at that central turning point). Either of the two structures can be termed chiasmus, though the distinction is often made. The book of Enos may be concentric in structure, with one central element at the
center of the chapter, an element itself also that forms a central chiasm in the text, a central chiasm focused on Christ.

This present study hypothesizes that Enos composed his text with a chiastic plan in mind. It is considered here that Enos expresses his message by means of a thematic concentric structure, seeking thereby to draw attention to the following central point: knowing that the Lord God was able to preserve his own people’s records for the benefit of the Lamanites, Enos cries unto the Lord God continually, for the Lord has said unto him, “Whatsoever thing ye shall ask in faith, believing that ye shall receive in the name of Christ, ye shall receive it. And [Enos] had faith, and [he] did cry unto God that he would preserve the records” (vv. 15–16a). In this short book Enos prays for his own personal redemption; he prays for the redemption of his own people, the Nephites; he prays for the redemption of the Lamanites; and he prays that the Nephite writings be preserved for the benefit of the Lamanites. And God covenants with him that the records will be preserved, in answer to both his own prayer and the prayers of his forefathers.

As John Welch has emphasized, “a burden of persuasion rests on anyone asserting that a passage is chiastic.”\(^1\) “Anyone who claims that a passage is chiastic should be able to prove it.”\(^2\) This paper represents an attempt to shoulder that burden in the writings of Enos on the small plates of Nephi. The proposed overall structure of the book of Enos will be identified by reference to the concepts and ideas reflected in the complete text of the book. Second, the paired sections so identified will be analyzed, both to note correspondences between sections and to describe repetitions and possible occasional rhetorical structures perceived within sections. Third, the elements that serve to give unity and progression to the paired sections will be analyzed. And fourth, some gleanings will be expressed, based on the proposed presence of chiasmus in the text.

### The Overall Structure of the Book of Enos

No published attempt to illustrate a chiastic structure that covers the entire book of Enos seems yet to have appeared. The only attempts to

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discern one or more chiastic passages within the book appear to be by Donald W. Parry in The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted According to Parallelistic Patterns and by the late H. Clay Gorton in A New Witness for Christ: Chiastic Structures in the Book of Mormon. The proposals advanced by Parry and Gorton at least suggest that the principle of chiasmus apparently was known to Enos. In 1981, referring to the books of Jarom and Omni, Welch observed that they “were composed during a dark age in Nephite history which was marked by political stagnation and little or no literary activity”; and the books of Jacob, Enos, Jarom and Omni, he added, “manifest virtually no chiasmus.”

**Chiasmus and antimetabole generally**

Though they are interrelated, chiasmus and antimetabole are defined differently and manifest themselves differently. Defined broadly and inclusively, chiasmus is the repetition of ideas in inverted order or the repetition of grammatical structures in inverted order. Strictly speaking, antimetabole is the repetition of words in inverted order.

Chiasmus and antimetabole are interrelated, and both chiasmus and antimetabole commonly form part of rhetorical patterns within texts of various lengths. But the distinction between chiasmus, strictly defined (based on a reversal in the sequence of repeated ideas), and antimetabole,
strictly defined (based on a reversal in the sequence of repeated *words* and *phrases*) is an important distinction in analyzing lengthier texts. Some analysts propose chiastic patterns for very large texts by reviewing repeated words and phrases reversed in the sequence of their repetition over the entire lengthy text, without reviewing repeated ideas that are reversed in their repetition over that text. Because the distinction is important to the analysis, I will discuss it. But because a full explanation of it is detailed and would be beyond the aim of this paper and a distraction if presented at this point, it is set forth in an appendix to this paper.

Chiasms are said to be of two types: on the one hand, simple, basic, short, grammatical, or so-called *micro chiasms*, and, on the other hand, complex, lengthier, structural, large-scale, or so-called *macro chiasms*. At its simplest, chiasmus is represented as a reversed repetition of only four elements, A-B-B-A, with each element composed of a word or short phrase, as in each of the following three chiasms in the text of Isaiah 5:20, each showing the reversed repetition of words (referred to as *antimetabole*), the “X” representing the Greek letter chi, from which the word *chiasmus* derives (reading each line from left to right):

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

—Isaiah 5:20

Each of the above three micro chiasms is an A-B-B-A chiasm and each strictly speaking is antimetabole, showing a reversal in the sequence of repeated *words*, such as evil-good-good-evil.

In one study, Kenneth E. Bailey limits the term *chiasmus* to the simple four-element A-B-B-A form, while stating that in his study the term *chiasmus* “will be preserved for precise reference to any occurrence of a true chiasmus of four terms in an A B-B' A' structure,” adding, “obviously, when there are more than four terms the crossed form of the
figure disappears.” Structures beyond what Bailey terms a four-element “true chiasmus” are to be termed “inverted parallelism,” a designation Bailey attributes to John Jebb. The point is that Bailey and some other authors sometimes use the term chiasmus only in a restricted sense, limiting the term to four-element structures, and they refer to longer structures as inverted or introverted parallelism.

Most others use the term chiasmus more broadly to include both the four-element form and all other inverted parallelism forms, including what John Breck refers to as the three-element “chiastically structured tricolon” (A-B-A’), or what Neil R. Laroux refers to as the “strict ABBA chiasmus,” or what Bill Camden refers to as the four-element A B B’ A’ form, and the longer, introverted forms (such as A-B-C-B-A; or such as A-B-C-D-E-F-E-D-C-B-A; and so forth).

8. Kenneth E. Bailey, “Recovering the Poetic Structure of I Cor. 1:17 – 11:2: A Study in Text and Commentary,” Novum Testamentum 17, no. 4 (1975): 266n9. The quoted statement should not be understood to suggest that chiasmus can only be as ancient a device as the Greek word later used to describe it (for without the “X” — the chi — of the Greek word chiasmus, the device would not exist under such an understanding of Bailey’s statement); but the quoted statement also thus should not be understood to suggest that the term chiasmus must be limited to structures with only four elements.

9. Ibid. The term used by Jebb is actually “introverted parallelism.” John Jebb, Sacred Literature (London: T. Cadell, Strand, 1828), 53. Although this is a minor point, Jebb does not use the term “inverted parallelism.”


11. Neil R. Leroux, “Repetition, Progression, and Persuasion in Scripture,” Neotestamentica 29, no. 1 (1995): 19. Leroux explains, “There may or may not be identity between elements on opposite sides of the reversal (strict ABBA chiasmus is fairly rare, ABBA’ seems much more common, so the ‘parallel’ nature of members contains flexibility — they can be identical, synonymous, contrasting, antithetical, etc.); … exactly what constitutes an ‘element’ is not a given (a single word? a phrase?), and the matter of ‘punctuation’ — that is, establishing the boundaries of each element, which will affect how many elements there are (which is not nearly as important as is how each element matches its parallel companion) — is by no means always straightforward.” Ibid.

12. Bill Camden, “Two Instances of Chiasmus Rephrased, From Baebol long Bislama of Vanuatu, South Pacific,” The Bible Translator 46, no. 2 (1995): 240. Camden distinguishes between the form A–B, B’–A’ and the form A, B–B’, A’, while observing that the latter is “the Hebrew chiastic structure” that it is “normally of the form A, B–B’, A’, and many English readers do not grasp the point involved until a person with knowledge of Hebrew points out the significance,” though Camden himself stops short of pointing out the significance.
The chiasm below is a lengthier A-B-C-D-E-D-C-B-A macro chiasm (a concentric structure, with one central element, E), formed by a reversal in the sequence of repeated *ideas* that span the 22 verses of the text of Luke 15:11–32, the parable of the two sons, as examined by John W. Welch.\(^\text{13}\) Because the ideas that form each of the elements of the A-B-C-D-E-D-C-B-A macro chiasm are themselves conveyed by words, the reversed repetition of the ideas is characterized also by the repetition of some words used in conveying those ideas. The ideas are represented by labels, headings, or descriptions, authored by Welch, accurately founded on the underlying text itself. Each statement of an idea is given an alphabetic label, and each statement of an idea in the first half of the text is indented from the left margin the same distance as its corresponding statement in the second half of the text. Thus the idea conveyed in element A is shown to correspond to the idea conveyed in element A’, the idea in B to that in B’, the idea in C to the idea in C’, and the idea in D to that in D’. In examining the parable of the two sons, Welch identifies both a reversal in the sequence of the repeated ideas and also the repetition of some of the words and phrases, including quotations of and citations to the Greek language of the original, as seen in his elements C, D, D’, and C’:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{A } & \text{One son takes his inheritance; conversation between Father and son (11–12)} \\
\text{B } & \text{One son goes out; his conduct [squandering] (13–16)} \\
\text{C } & \text{The well-being of the Father’s servants recalled; “I perish” (apollumai) (17)} \\
\text{D } & \text{I will say “I have sinned” (18–19)} \\
\text{E } & \text{At the point of crisis, the Father runs to meet his son and is compassionate (20)} \\
\text{D’} & \text{The son says “I have sinned” (21)} \\
\text{C’} & \text{The Father instructs the servants to make well; the lost (apolos) is found (22–24)} \\
\text{B’} & \text{One son refuses to go in: his conduct [not forgiving] (25–30)} \\
\text{A’} & \text{One son is promised his inheritance: conversation between Father and son (31–32)} \\
\end{align*}\]

—Luke 15:11–32

Although the definitions of *chiasmus* generally pertain to elements within two *sentences* (in rhetoric, *chiasm* is an inversion of order

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in the symmetrical parts of two sentences, forming an antithesis or constituting a parallel,” the term generally is applied to the balanced inversion of words, sentences, pericopes, passages, and lengthier spans of text. Indeed, prose scriptural texts like Genesis and Samuel, for example, are said to be composed of “a system of systems” that consist of twelve “levels of signification,” the levels being sounds, syllables, words, phrases, clauses, sentences, sequences/speeches, scene-parts, scenes, acts, sections/cycles, and books or compositions; and poetic scriptural texts like Isaiah and Job, for another example, are said to be composed of eleven such “levels,” consisting of sounds, syllables, words, phrases, half-verses/cola, verses, strophes, stanzas, poems, sections/groups of songs, and collections or books.

And while the term antimetabole may be used to refer to the feature as it appears in Greek texts but not the feature as it appears in Hebrew texts, the feature of the reversal in the sequence of repeated words in short texts is in fact manifest in all literatures, occurring even down to the reversed repetition of sounds. Generally, however, antimetabole often is considered a subgroup of chiasmus; and the term chiasmus often is used to refer to both forms of reversed repetition, both of ideas (chiasmus) and of words (antimetabole).

And it is always possible that an analyst’s subjective judgment intervenes when the analyst’s own words are used to describe the


ideas constituting the chiastic elements of a text. Thus the technical distinction between *antimetabole* (reversed repetition of words) and *chiasmus* (reversed repetition of ideas) can be used in evaluating repetitions in texts. Some simple examples of antimetabole are these: “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” This statement represents the reversed repetition of words but not of ideas, for only one idea is conveyed (or technically, only two interrelated ideas). Another example of antimetabole: “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.” This manifests two different ideas, but not a reversed repetition of two ideas; rather, it is only the *words* that are repeated and reversed. Again, therefore, technically, this is only *antimetabole*, albeit considered to be a subset of *chiasmus* (where generally examples of *antimetabole* are also called *chiasmus*). Indeed, the example of chiasmus from Isaiah cited earlier is part of this sub-group of chiasmus known as antimetabole, with three chiasms in that text: “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isaiah 5:20).

Sometimes those who analyze texts cite only to the reversed repetition of *words* to propose that a passage is chiastic. These proposed chiasms are said to manifest *linguistic*, *verbal*, *language*, *grammatical*, *semantic*, *morphological*, *syntactical*, *lexical*, or *phonological* parallelism. For example, the following concentric structure is evident in the text of Jeremiah 2:27–28, showing a reversal in the sequence of repeated words and short phrases:

A But in the *time of their trouble* they will say,
   B Arise, and save us
   C But where are thy gods that thou hast made … ?
   B’ let them arise, if they can save thee
   A’ in the *time of thy trouble*.

Note that the Jeremiah 2:27–28 chiasm (strictly speaking, a *concentric structure*, because it has one middle element rather than two) partakes mostly of antimetabole (the reversed repetition of words or short phrases).

Alternatively, analysts sometimes cite a reversal in the sequence of repeated *ideas*. These proposed chiasms are said to manifest *conceptual*, *structural*, *thematic*, *content*, or *aesthetic* parallelism. One such
conceptual chiasm, for example, is that identified for the 40 verses of Galatians 3:1–4:11:\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{itemize}
\item[a] rebuking questions (3.1–5)
\item[b] bestowal of the Spirit (3.1, 5)
\item[c] faith-sonship (3.6–9)
\item[d] faith-law (3.10–14)
\item[e] promise-law (3.15–18)
\item[e] law-promise (3.19–22)
\item[d] law-faith (3.23–25)
\item[c] sonship-faith (3.26–29)
\item[b] bestowal of the Spirit (4.1–7)
\item[a] rebuking question (4.8–11)
\end{itemize}

Scholars often analyze proposed chiastic patterns of texts in light of both words and ideas. Welch’s analysis of the parable of the two sons, discussed earlier, is an example of that sort of analysis over a text of 22 verses. Other similarly lengthy spans of text may be analyzed in light of both ideas and words, such as with the 22 verses forming the account of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife in Genesis 39:2–23, as proposed by John Breck to be a conceptual chiasm,\textsuperscript{19} quoted and diagrammed below. Breck points to repeated “keywords” and “key phrases” within each of the identified elements of the proposed chiasm, elements identified by reference to the text itself. Analysts will often quote from the text in its original language, if it is available.\textsuperscript{20} As shown below, Breck uses

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{18}] G. Walter Hansen, “Abraham in Galatians: Epistolary and Rhetorical Contexts,” \textit{Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series} 29 (1989): 78, 109. Hansen shows how words and phrases within each of the elements correspond with words and phrases in their counterpart elements in the chiasm. Such proposals of conceptual chiasmus are legion in the literature. See Bullinger, \textit{Figures of Speech}, 379 — Epistle to Philemon, A-B-C-D-E-F-G-H-I-I-H-G-F-E-D-C-B-A “introverted correspondence” over 25 verses, all conceptual elements; and Norbert Lohfink, \textit{Höre Israel: Auslegung von Texten aus dem Buch Deuteronomium} (Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1965), which identifies a conceptual chiasm for the 20 verses of Deuteronomy 8:1–20: A The land which the LORD promised on oath to your fathers (8:1); B Forty years in the wilderness (8:2-4); C you must realize that the LORD (8:5); D “keep the commandments of the LORD your God, by walking in his ways and by fearing him” (8:6); C’ you must bless the LORD, your God (8:10); B’ Exodus (8:11–16); A’ The covenant which he swore to your fathers (8:17-20).
\item[\textsuperscript{19}] Based on John Breck, \textit{The Shape of Biblical Language: Chiasmus in the Scriptures and Beyond} (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1994), 49–52.
\item[\textsuperscript{20}] This type of analysis is performed also by Gary A. Rendsburg, \textit{The Redaction of Genesis} (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1986), while showing keywords and
labels and paraphrases to characterize the textual units of the proposed chiasm. By the use of italic font, Breck also identifies the “keywords” and “key phrases” within each of the textual units. Those words and phrases are, of course, most relevant because the main ideas of each element are based in large part upon those words and phrases:

A **The Lord causes Joseph to prosper in his master’s house** — *The Lord was with Joseph,* and he became a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian, and his master saw that *the Lord was with him,* and that *the Lord caused all that he did to prosper* in his hands. (2–3)

B **Joseph is given all responsibility because he has found favor in Potiphar’s sight** — *So Joseph found favor in his sight,* and attended him, and he *made him overseer* of his house, and put him *in charge of all* that he had. From the time that he had made him overseer in his house and over all that he had the Lord blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake; the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had, in house, and field. So he left *all* that he had in Joseph’s charge; and having him *he had no concern for anything* but the food which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking (4–6)

C **Joseph’s righteous refusal** — And after a time his *master’s wife* cast her eyes upon Joseph and said, “Lie with me.” But he refused and said to his master’s wife, “Lo having me my master has no concern about anything in the house (*beth*), and he has put everything that he has in my hand; he is not greater *in this house* than I am; nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife; *how then can I do this great wickedness,* and sin against God? And although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie with her or to be with her. (7–10)

D **The innocent Joseph flees the seductress** — But one day, when he went into the house to *do his work* and none of the men of the house was there in the house, she
caught him by his garment, saying, “Lie with me.” But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and got out of the house. (11–12)

D' The woman impugns his innocence with her lie — And when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and had fled out of the house, she called to the men of her household and said to them, “See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to insult us; he came in to me to lie with me; and I cried out with a loud voice; and when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment with me, and fled and got out of the house. (13–15)

C' The woman’s self-serving lie leads to Joseph’s imprisonment — Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, and she told him the same story, saying, “The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to insult me; but as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment with me, and fled out of the house. When his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him, “This is the way your servant treated me,” his anger was kindled. And Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison (beth-sohar), the place where the king’s prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. (16–20)

B' Joseph is given all responsibility because the Lord was with him and showed him his steadfast love — But the Lord was with Joseph and shewed him steadfast love, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s care all the prisoners who were in the prison; and whatever was done there, he was the doer of it; the keeper of the prison paid no heed to anything that was in Joseph’s care; (21–23a)

A' Because the Lord was with him, Joseph prospers even in prison — because the Lord was with him, and whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper. (23b)

In assessing the possible presence of what Breck proposes as a conceptual chiasm, I do not suggest that such a large structure is an example of antimetabole (the reversed repetition of words and phrases). To be sure, the text does manifest repeated words and phrases, but not a reversal in the sequence of the repeated words themselves. If the text is chiastic, it is so because of repeated themes and ideas, reversed in the sequence of their repetition; it is not chiastic because of any reversal in
the sequence of the repeated *words* and *phrases* themselves. And whether, for example, the labels for C and C’ correlate to each other is open for analysis, as also whether the appearance of the word *garment* not only in D and D’ but also in C’ but *not* in C works against the proposed chiasm. But generally, and this is the point here: such a text should not be analyzed as if it were antimetabole. If a proposed chiasm exists at all, it is built on *ideas* and must be analyzed as such. I address the details of this distinction in the appendix.

One final preliminary note about the fine distinction between *antimetabole* and *chiasmus*: the distinction is most often ignored when the terms are used to describe chiasms, with little harm done to the discussion; and references to instances of *antimetabole* generally use the word *chiasmus* when discussing such instances. For example, without using the word *antimetabole*, Nils Lund includes a description of *antimetabole* as part of his definition of the term *chiasm*:

> According to its Greek origin the term [chiasm] designates a literary figure, or principle, which consists of “a placing crosswise” of *words* in a sentence. The term is used in rhetoric to designate an inversion of the order of *words* or *phrases* which are repeated or subsequently referred to in the sentence.21

Similarly, referring to the short poems in Jeremiah, Jack R. Lundbom observes that “in Hebrew poetry chiasmus is a syntactic structure at base which inverts normal *word order.*”22 Lundbom thus describes a feature that strictly speaking typifies *antimetabole*, even though he is using the word *chiasmus* — appropriately so, because he and most all others today use *chiasmus* to refer also to *antimetabole*. In using the terms *chiasmus* and *antimetabole* in their strict senses, however (the former referring to the introverted repetition of ideas or grammatical structures and the latter referring to the introverted repetition of words or phrases), one can say that *antimetabole* is manifest *generally* in the simple, basic, short, introverted repetitions and *chiasmus* is manifest both in the simple, short introverted repetitions and in the complex, lengthier, large-scale, complex, structural, or macro forms.

And on this account it is noteworthy to observe that keywords and key phrases that help to define what the ideas are for corresponding

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elements of an overall chiasm in a longer text may or may not themselves be significant to other parallelistic patterns which may appear within those elements. Conversely, some keywords and key phrases that help define some of the proposed chiastic patterns which may appear within any given element of an overall chiasm may possibly not serve as keywords and phrases in the makeup of the larger structure over the lengthy text.

Proposed Overall Structure of the Book of Enos

The following depicts the full text of vv. 3–27 of the book of Enos, proposing a seven-part concentric A-B-C-D-C'-B'-A' conceptual chiasm (see the left column in the table below for the alphabetic characters). If the proposed pattern manifests conceptual chiasmus, at least it can be said it is not antimetabole. It is a reversal in the sequence of repeated ideas or concepts, not repeated words, that forms the proposed concentric structure. Caution is warranted here, of course, as noted by one charitable anonymous reviewer of this present paper: “there is a real risk when assessing conceptual chiasms and other organizing structures for the proposed structure to be as much a ‘projection’ of the discoverer’s proclivities as the actual sources.” The proposal below, based on the very text of the book itself, should be read in light of what the text itself says.

Each element of the proposed conceptual chiasm is founded on the text that describes the efforts or “struggling” of Enos in prayer as he seeks salvation for himself (element A), for the Nephites (element B), and for the Lamanites (element C); the text centers (element D) on his securing the promise of the Lord that He will preserve the records of the Nephites for the benefit of the Lamanites. The first three elements of the proposed conceptual chiasm (A, B, and C) are said here to be based on the three communications by the Lord to the mind of Enos (vv. 5 and 8; v. 10; and v. 12), and the last three conceptual elements of the chiasm (elements C', B', and A') correspond, in reverse sequence, with the earlier three. But as the reviewer notes, “The problem with proposing an ancient A B C D C' B' A' structure is (1) the human propensity to see patterns in everything (including Harry Potter and Star Wars) and (2) the fact that Enos is not available to confirm or deny.” With those cautionary thoughts in mind, the text of Enos himself is presented with only topical guideposts attendant in the left column:
### A: Enos's Personal Redemption

3 Behold, I went to hunt beasts in the forests; and the words which I had often heard my father speak concerning eternal life, and the joy of the saints, sunk deep into my heart.

4 And my soul hungered; and I kneeled down before my Maker, and I cried unto him in mighty prayer and supplication for mine own soul; and all the day long did I cry unto him; yea, and when the night came I did still raise my voice high that it reached the heavens.

5 And there came a voice unto me, saying: Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee, and thou shalt be blessed.

6 And I, Enos, knew that God could not lie; wherefore, my guilt was swept away.

7 And I said: Lord, how is it done?

8 And he said unto me: Because of thy faith in Christ, whom thou hast never before heard nor seen. And many years pass away before he shall manifest himself in the flesh; wherefore, go to, thy faith hath made thee whole.

### B: Redemption of the Nephites

9 Now, it came to pass that when I had heard these words I began to feel a desire for the welfare of my brethren, the Nephites; wherefore, I did pour out my whole soul unto God for them.

10 And while I was thus struggling in the spirit, behold, the voice of the Lord came into my mind again, saying: I will visit thy brethren according to their diligence in keeping my commandments. I have given unto them this land, and it is a holy land; and I curse it not save it be for the cause of iniquity; wherefore, I will visit thy brethren according as I have said; and their transgressions will I bring down with sorrow upon their own heads.

### C: Redemption of the Lamanites

11 And after I, Enos, had heard these words, my faith began to be unshaken in the Lord; and I prayed unto him with many long strugglings for my brethren, the Lamanites.

12 And it came to pass that after I had prayed and labored with all diligence, the Lord said unto me: I will grant unto thee according to thy desires, because of thy faith.

13 And now behold, this was the desire which I desired of him — that if it should so be, that my people, the Nephites, should fall into transgression, and by any means be destroyed, and the Lamanites should not be destroyed, that the Lord God would preserve a record of my people, the Nephites; even if it so be by the power of his holy arm, that it might be brought forth at some future day unto the Lamanites, that, perhaps, they might be brought unto salvation —

14 For at the present our strugglings were vain in restoring them to the true faith. And they swore in their wrath that, if it were possible, they would destroy our records and us, and also all the traditions of our fathers.
| D: Christ-Centered Covenant | 15 Wherefore, I knowing that the Lord God was able to preserve our records,  
|                            | I cried unto him continually, for he had said unto me:  
|                            | *Whatsoever thing ye shall ask in faith, believing*  
|                            | *that ye shall receive*  
|                            | *in the name of Christ,*  
|                            | *ye shall receive it.*  
| 16a                       | And I had faith,  
|                            | and I did cry unto God  
|                            | that he would preserve the records  

| C': Restoration of the Lamanites | 16b and he covenanted with me that he would bring them forth unto the Lamanites in his own due time.  
|                                 | 17 And I, Enos, knew it would be according to the covenant which he had made; wherefore my soul did rest.  
|                                 | 18 And the Lord said unto me: Thy fathers have also required of me this thing; and it shall be done unto them according to their faith; for their faith was like unto thine.  
|                                 | 19 And now it came to pass that I, Enos, went about among the people of Nephi, prophesying of things to come, and testifying of the things which I had heard and seen.  
|                                 | 20 And I bear record that the people of Nephi did seek diligently to restore the Lamanites unto the true faith in God. But our labors were vain; their hatred was fixed, and they were led by their evil nature that they became wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people, full of idolatry and filthiness; feeding upon beasts of prey; dwelling in tents, and wandering about in the wilderness with a short skin girdle about their loins and their heads shaven; and their skill was in the bow, and in the cimeter, and the ax. And many of them did eat nothing save it was raw meat; and they were continually seeking to destroy us.  

| B': Redemption of the Nephites | 21 And it came to pass that the people of Nephi did till the land, and raise all manner of grain, and of fruit, and flocks of herds, and flocks of all manner of cattle of every kind, and goats, and wild goats, and also many horses.  
|                                 | 22 And there were exceedingly many prophets among us. And the people were a stiffnecked people, hard to understand.  
|                                 | 23 And there was nothing save it was exceeding harshness, preaching and prophesying of wars, and contentions, and destructions, and continually reminding them of death, and the duration of eternity, and the judgments and the power of God, and all these things — stirring them up continually to keep them in the fear of the Lord. I say there was nothing short of these things, and exceedingly great plainness of speech, would keep them from going down speedily to destruction. And after this manner do I write concerning them.  
|                                 | 24 And I saw wars between the Nephites and Lamanites in the course of my days. |
25 And it came to pass that I began to be old, and an hundred and seventy and nine years had passed away from the time that our father Lehi left Jerusalem.
26 And I saw that I must soon go down to my grave, having been wrought upon by the power of God that I must preach and prophesy unto this people, and declare the word according to the truth which is in Christ. And I have declared it in all my days, and have rejoiced in it above that of the world.
27 And I soon go to the place of my rest, which is with my Redeemer; for I know that in him I shall rest. And I rejoice in the day when my mortal shall put on immortality, and shall stand before him; then shall I see his face with pleasure, and he will say unto me: Come unto me, ye blessed, there is a place prepared for you in the mansions of my Father. Amen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>A': Enos's Personal Redemption</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following provides an abbreviated conceptual summary of the above proposed full-text, conceptual chiasm:

A Enos speaks of his personal redemption from sin; the first time the voice of the Lord comes into the mind of Enos (vv. 3–8)
B Enos speaks of the blessings and the cursing of the Nephites and his own prayerful struggle for the Nephites; the second time the voice of the Lord comes into the mind of Enos (vv. 9–10)
C Enos speaks of the redemption of the Lamanites by the preserved word of the Nephites; the third time the Lord speaks to Enos (vv. 11–14)
D The words of the Nephites are to be brought to the Lamanites; fulfilling the promise of the third time the voice of the Lord speaks to Enos (vv. 15–16a)
C' Enos speaks of the Nephites’ attempt to redeem the Lamanites (vv. 16b–20)
B' Enos speaks of the blessed and precarious condition of the Nephites and their contentions with the Lamanites (vv. 21–24)
A' Enos speaks of his personal redemption (vv. 25–27)

Verses 1 and 2 serve as a colophon for the text, which I will discuss later.

Regarding intentionality, at this stage in the discussion of the Enos text as a potential thematic chiasm, the proposal perhaps may rightly be viewed as at least important and promising. Say what one will about the overall hypothetical structure, at least the proposed tightly constructed central chiasm (vv. 15–16a) seems clearly to show what may be construed to be a purposeful reversal in the sequence of repeated words and phrases, centering on “the name of Christ.” If perhaps that can
properly be viewed as at least implying recognition by Enos, as author, of chiasmus as a rhetorical tool, then maybe the overall structure of the text might also have been influenced by his possible acquaintance with if not use of that device. Says the anonymous reviewer concerning vv. 15–16a, “this chiasm is nearly flawless … strong enough to make a compelling statistical argument that Enos was at least familiar with the technique.”

The Paired Sections Analyzed

Sections A and A’ both concern Enos’s own personal redemption from sin and the prospects for his own salvation. Whereas in A Enos kneels down before his Maker (v. 4), in A’ he stands before him (v. 27). In A he tells of the words which he had often heard his father speak (v. 3), and in A’ he tells of the word he himself was inspired to declare (v. 26). In A he refers to his own father (v. 3); in A’ he mentions father Lehi (v. 25). In A Enos states that “many years pass away” before Christ should manifest himself in the flesh (v. 8) and in A’ he states that “an hundred and seventy and nine years had passed away” since Lehi left Jerusalem (v. 25). While in A Enos speaks of eternal life and the joy of the saints (v. 3), stating that all the day long he did cry unto the Lord (v. 4), correspondingly, in A’ he tells that he did rejoice in the day when his mortal should put on immortality (v. 27), having declared the word in all his days, having rejoiced in the word above that of the world (v. 26). In A he mentions that his voice reached the heavens (v. 4) and in A’ he is assured there is a place prepared for him in the mansions of the Father (v. 27). In A he continues: “there came a voice unto me, saying … thou shalt be blessed” (v. 5); in A’ he mentions that his Redeemer will “say unto me … ye blessed” (v. 27). In A Enos declares that he knows God could not lie (v. 6), and in A’ he speaks of “the truth which is in Christ” (v. 26). In A the Lord tells Enos he had never before heard nor seen Christ (v. 8) and in A’ Enos confirms that he indeed shall see Christ’s face with pleasure (v. 27). In other words, A and A’ seem intimately related to one another and A’ fully answers what A anticipates. Both A (vv. 3–8) and A’ (vv. 25–27) concern Enos’s efforts to seek and obtain his own personal redemption, both in this life (vv. 3–8) and in the immortal realm (vv. 25–27).

Sections B and B’ concern the potential for destruction faced by the Nephites because of iniquity and Enos’s concern for their redemption. In B Enos mentions twice having “heard these words” (vv. 9 and 11), in B’ he mentions twice “these things” (v. 23). In B Enos quotes the Lord
concerning this land, given unto the Nephites, a holy land not to be cursed save for “iniquity” (vv. 9–10); in B’ he states that the people of Nephi did till the land (v. 21) but otherwise had to be reminded of the judgments of God (v. 23). The Lord’s repeated use of the word land in v. 10 speaks of the land of promise, contrasted with Enos’s single, unique use of the term in v. 21, indicative merely of the ground.²⁴ B and B’ thus correspond to one another; both are concerned with the redemption of the Nephites and the destruction and sorrow that awaits them if they transgress.

Sections C and C’ concern Enos’s hope for the redemption of the Lamanites through preservation of the record of the Nephites. In C Enos speaks, and in C’ the Lord speaks, of Enos’s faith (vv. 11 and 18). In C Enos speaks of the good traditions of the fathers (v. 14) and in C’ he speaks of the faith of the fathers (v. 18). In C Enos tells his concern “if it should so be” that the Nephites should fall into transgression and be “destroyed” (v.13) and tells that the Lamanites had sworn in their wrath that they would destroy the Nephite “records and us” (v. 14); in C’ Enos correspondingly states that the Lamanites’ hatred was fixed, and while prophesying “of things to come” and of things which he “had heard and seen” (v. 19), Enos tells of the Lamanites’ efforts in “continually seeking to destroy” the Nephites (v. 20). In C the Lord states “I will grant unto thee according to thy desires, because of thy faith” (v. 12), while in C’ the Lord states “it shall be done unto them [the fathers] according to their faith” (v. 18). In C Enos speaks of his prayer “with many long strugglings” for the Lamanites, adding that he “prayed and labored” with all diligence (vv. 11, 12), while remarking that at the present our strugglings were vain in restoring them to the true faith (v. 14). Similarly, in C’ he mentions that he and his people did seek diligently to restore the Lamanites unto the true faith in God, adding that their labors were vain (v. 20). The correspondences between C and C’ are evident in the text. Both C and C’ concern Enos’s hope that the Lamanites will be restored to the “true faith” and be redeemed. C and C’ manifestly are a corresponding pair

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Mormon: The FARMS Update (Provo, UT: FARMS, Sept. 1984), 78–79, “There is an interesting confusion between things and words at 2 Nephi 6:8 and 33:4. While the Printer’s Manuscript reads things at both locations, all editions (except the 1830 at 2 Nephi 33:4) have changed this to read words. Either variant is a good reading, and the Hebrew word debarim is accurately translated as either ‘things’ or ‘words.’” See, e.g., Genesis 44:7: “Wherefore saith my lord these words [debarim]? God forbid that thy servants should do according to this thing [dabar].”

and both anticipate the possibility that the Lamanites should not be destroyed (v. 13a), that the Lamanites might be brought unto salvation (v. 13c). Whereas in C, Enos states the Nephite records will be brought forth at some future day unto the Lamanites (v. 13), in C' he states that the Lord covenanted with him that he would bring them forth unto the Lamanites in his own due time (v. 16b).

Section D, the central element of the overall concentric pattern of vv. 3–27, is itself a most appropriate Christ-centered concentric structure composed of the text of vv. 15–16a. Enos first expresses his knowledge that “the Lord God was able to preserve our records” (v. 15). This knowledge had been imparted to him when, after his faith had begun “to be unshaken in the Lord” (v. 11), the Lord God had said to Enos he would “grant unto [him] according to [his] desire” (v. 12), which desire was that “the Lord God would preserve a record” of the Nephites (v. 13). Then, because the Lord God had said unto him that “whatsoever thing ye shall ask in faith, believing that ye shall receive in the name of Christ, ye shall receive it” (v. 15), Enos adds that he “cried unto” the Lord God “continually” and that he “had faith” and “did cry unto God that he would preserve the records” (vv. 15–16a). The Lord God had promised to enter into the covenant with Enos to preserve the records of the Nephites for the benefit of the Lamanites, as Enos had desired (vv. 12–13); and in the centerpiece of the overall chiastic passage Enos cries unto the Lord God that He fulfil that promise (v. 16a).

Elements that Give Unity and Progression to the Paired Sections

Several elements provide a sense of unity and progression. These are discussed in the following sections.

Prayer, Struggling, and Labor

Enos uses the terms “prayer,” “struggling,” and “labor” as complements of one another; “prayer” is equated with “struggling” and “struggling” is equated with “prayer and labor.” Having stated in v. 9 that in prayer he did pour out his whole soul unto God, in v. 10 he equates that prayer with “struggling in the spirit” and in v. 11b he tells how he prayed unto the Lord “with many long strugglings.” Also, in v. 12a he equates those strugglings with having “prayed and labored.” Thus, while in v. 14 Enos states that his and his people’s “strugglings were vain,” in the chiastic counterpart in v. 20 he states that his and his people’s “labors were vain.” Each use of these related terms occurs at or near the beginning of the respective
elements of the chiastic structure; and the relationship among them serves to highlight the shift from one main emphasis in the first half of the book (vv. 2–17) — that of Enos’s *prayer and his stragglings in prayer* to restore the Lamanites to the true faith — to a related main emphasis in the second half of the book (vv. 18–27) — that of the Nephites’ *labors* to restore the Lamanites to the true faith. The latter half of the book lacks mention of the words “prayed,” “prayer,” “struggling,” and “straggling” (the word “pray” is never used); use of the word “labored” in the first half (in v. 12) clearly connotes prayer, whereas use of the word “labors” in the last half of the book (in v. 20) manifestly relates to prophesying and testifying to the Lamanites (see vv. 19–20).

**From Faith and Struggling to Knowledge and Rest**

Subtly, Enos effectuates a transformation in his text from faith and struggling to knowledge and rest. In the first three sections (vv. 2–8, 9–11a, and 11b–14) Enos tells of his “wrestle” (v. 2), in which he “cried” (v. 4) and was “struggling” (v. 10) with “many long strugglings” (v. 11; see also v. 14), having “prayed and labored” (v. 12), all with “faith in Christ” (vv. 8, 11, 12, and 15). However, after the transitional middle section (vv. 15–16a), Enos writes — in the last three sections (vv. 16b and 20b; vv. 19–20a and 21–24; and vv. 25–27) — of what he “knew” (v. 17), of what he could “testify” to (v. 19) and of what he could “bear record” (v. 20), telling both that he did “know” (v. 27) that in Christ eternally he “shall rest” (v. 27) and that because of the covenant of Christ his soul already “did rest” (v. 17).

**Beginnings**

Certain weaving factors also exist. The transition from elements A to B is characterized by the same factors that signal the transition from elements B to C. At the former transition Enos speaks of the fact that when he “had heard these words” he “began” to feel a desire for the welfare of the Nephites (v. 9); similarly, at the latter transition, he speaks of the fact that when he “had heard these words” his faith “began” to be unshaken (v. 11). That latter transition (from elements B to C), concerning Enos’s unshaken faith, later becomes (following the central sections of the book) the subject of the transition back to element C’, where the faith of the fathers is said to be “like unto” Enos’s faith (v. 18).
Internal Patterns at Subordinate Levels of Analysis

Some meaningful internal patterning seems plausible. For example, within B, the phrase “had heard these words” (vv. 9 and 11) appears at the beginning and ending of the element. The phrase “I will visit thy brethren” (v. 10) appears twice, each of the appearances found closer to the center of the element. And surrounding the center are the contrasting ideas of, on the one hand, “keeping my commandments” and, on the other hand, the “iniquity” and “transgressions” of the Nephites (all in v. 10). This latter contrast of ideas seems to provide an appropriate framework for what may be a significant contrast stated in the middle of the element, concerning the “land” — contrasting a “holy” land on the one hand and a “curse[d]” land on the other (v. 10) — all of these correspondences suggesting that an internal structure possibly may exist within element B of the proposed chiasm of the text. The correspondences proposed here may be diagrammed as follows:

Now, it came to pass
1 that when I had heard these words I began to feel a desire for the welfare of my brethren, the Nephites; wherefore, I did pour out my whole soul unto God for them. (v. 9)
2 And while I was thus struggling in the spirit, behold, the voice of the Lord came into my mind again, saying:
3 I will visit thy brethren
4 according to their diligence in keeping my commandments.
5 I have given unto them this land, and it is a holy land, and I curse it not
4a’ save it be for the cause of iniquity;
3’ wherefore, I will visit thy brethren
2’ according as I have said;
4b’ and their transgressions will I bring down with sorrow upon their own heads. (v. 10)
1’ And after I, Enos, had heard these words, …

Similar to the apparent use of reversed repetitions and contrasts within element B earlier in the text (vv. 9–10, above), the Enos text seems possibly to reflect additional repetitions and correspondences within the proposed element B’ later in the text (vv. 21–24. below), which may be diagrammed as follows:

And it came to pass that
1 the people of Nephi did till the land, and raise all manner of grain, and of fruit, and flocks of herds, and flocks of all manner
of cattle of every kind, and goats, and wild goats, and also many horses. (v. 21)

2 And there were exceedingly many prophets among us. And the people were a stiffnecked people, hard to understand. (v. 22) And there was nothing save it was exceeding harshness, preaching and prophesying of wars, and contentions, and destructions,

3 and continually reminding them of death, and the duration of eternity, and the judgments and the power of God,

3’ and all these things — stirring them up continually to keep them in the fear of the Lord.

2’ I say there was nothing short of these things, and exceedingly great plainness of speech, would keep them from going down speedily to destruction.

1’ And after this manner do I write concerning them. (v. 23) And I saw wars between the Nephites and Lamanites in the course of my days. (v. 24)

The proposed chiastic subpattern immediately above for element B’ (vv. 21–24) shows possible contrasting correspondence between elements 1 and 1’, where the seeming prosperity of the people of Nephi (v. 21) contrasts with the wars they endure (v. 24). The phrase “hard to understand” (in element 2 at v. 22) is understood to mean “hard of understanding,” perhaps giving meaningful correspondence to the statement of the need for “exceedingly great plainness of speech” used to warn the Nephites (v. 23).

Regarding such internal patterns, it should be noted that Noel B. Reynolds recently analyzed the proposed chiasm of Alma 36, doing so in light of what has been published by Roland Meynet. Reynolds notes that rhetorical patterns within elements of large-scale or macro

25. See Royal Skousen, Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, 2nd ed., Part Two: 2 Nephi 12–Mosiah 13 (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2017), 1135, “the apparent meaning of ‘hard to understand’ is that it was hard for this stiffnecked people to understand the prophets.”


chiasms often are manifest on subordinate rhetorical levels,\textsuperscript{28} and he says that Meynet gives “the most detailed explanation of rhetorical levels.”\textsuperscript{29} Meynet published his two extensive works concerning “levels analysis” in 1998\textsuperscript{30} and 2012.\textsuperscript{31} In short, in his 1998 \textit{Rhetorical Analysis} text and in his 2012 \textit{Treatise}, Meynet reviews the history of the study of the “arrangement” or “organization” of texts on various “levels.”\textsuperscript{32} Meynet says these prior “studies of a rhetorical nature” all recognize the existence of “micro and macro structures,” noting that “what is most urgently lacking here is a systematic presentation of biblical rhetoric,”

\textsuperscript{28} Reynolds, “Rethinking Alma 36,” 282.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 282n8.
\textsuperscript{30} Roland Meynet, \textit{Rhetorical Analysis: An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric} (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998). Meynet is a Jesuit, Docteur-és-Lettres, and Professor of Biblical Exegesis at the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, who also has taught for twenty years at St. Joseph University in Beirut and the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Jerusalem.
\textsuperscript{31} Meynet, \textit{Treatise on Biblical Rhetoric}.
to which he adds, “symmetries and relationships of all kinds are very numerous in a text,” but “the whole problem resides in knowing at which level of organization of the text they are relevant.”33 Dissatisfied with prior analyses of “levels” of composition, Meynet wrote his *Treatise.*34

An easily understood, simple, and yet elegant example of levels analysis is H. Douglas Buckwalter’s evaluation of the levels of rhetorical structure in Luke’s Travel Narrative.35 As represented below, the entire ten and one-half chapters of text, from Luke 9:51 through Luke 19:27, form one overall A-B-C-D-C-B-A chiasm (a seven-element concentrism). That chiasm is depicted in the first three columns in the following table, reproducing and formatting here for easy viewing Buckwalter’s detailed analysis. The fourth column in the chart below reports Buckwalter’s view of the subordinate-level parallelistic structures which he claims exist within each of the seven elements of the overall chiasm of that extensive narrative text. Some of those subordinate level parallelistic structures are themselves chiasms, and some of them are direct parallelisms. Without commenting on the credibility of Buckwalter’s analysis, it is sufficient to say here that his proposal is easily seen as an example in which within each of the elements of the larger, full-text chiasm (labeled A-B-C-D-C-B-A) there is depicted a smaller feature with a rhetorical structure of some sort. The smaller rhetorical features he identifies consist of four directly parallel structures (two of them being a-b-c-d || a'-b'-c'-d' structures and two of them being a-b || a'-b' structures); one chiastic structure (an a-b-b'-a' chiasm); and two concentric structures (each an a-b-c-d-c'-b'-a' concentrism). The Buckwalter analysis is depicted immediately below:

|   |                                                          |              | b 9:57–62
|   |                                                          |              | c 10:1–12
|   |                                                          |              | d 10:13–16
|   |                                                          |              | c' 10:17–20
|   |                                                          |              | b' 10:21–24
|   |                                                          |              | a' 10:25–37

33. Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis*, 166.
Reynolds likewise depicts numerous similar structures at the subordinate levels of his analysis of Alma 36, accounting as he does for rhetorical features he perceives in *all* of the text of Alma 36. Reynolds disclaims being the first to introduce levels analysis to a study of the chiasm of Alma 36; generally, Reynolds notes that his own levels analysis and his own proposals regarding Alma 36 build upon and expand prior discussions or depictions of this sort of analysis. Numerous other analysts, including

Lowell G. Tensmeyer, John W. Welch, Angela Crowell, Donald R. Parry, David Demke and Scott Leigh Vanatter, D. Lynn Johnson, and Jeff Lindsay, join Reynolds in having conducted some levels analysis of Alma 36.37

Relevant to this present discussion are the following three observations, evident from the earlier suggestion of possible rhetorical patterns within element B (vv. 9–10) and element B' (vv. 21–24) in the A-B-C-D-C-B-A chiasm of Enos 1:3–27, evident from Buckwalter’s levels analysis of Luke’s Travel Narrative shown immediately above, and evident from some but not all of the numerous prior studies of Alma 36. The three observations are these:

1. Rhetorical structures at subordinate levels (such as shown in the fourth column above in the Buckwalter analysis) necessarily are parallelistic structures, covering a shorter amount of text, and as proposed in the case of Enos, such structures are characterized more by antimetabole (based on words and phrases) than by chiasmus strictly defined (based on ideas); in the Buckwalter analysis the ideas are expressed in the second column of the above table;

2. The overall macro chiasm in Buckwalter is manifest in the first three columns; and in the book of Enos the proposed overall macro chiasm of vv. 3–27 consists of the A-B-C-D-C-B-A structure regarding the three prayers and three answers to prayer; and

3. The overall chiasm in each case is not formed by a reversal in the sequence of the repetition of keywords and key phrases in the text (antimetabole) but instead by a reversal in the sequence of the repetition of ideas (chiasmus proper).

The result of the combination of those three observations is this: if an analyst attempts to discern and depict an overall chiastic structure for a lengthy text (such as Alma 36 or Enos 1:3–27) by reference only to words and phrases, such an effort may result in a meaningful and even a beautiful set of correspondences. But it may be incomplete and may leave gaps in the analysis, such that portions of the text under consideration are omitted from the analysis. This is explained well by Reynolds in the context of his discussion of Alma 36 and is touched upon in more detail in the appendix to this present article in the context of the book of Enos. In short, large texts may be analyzed with attention to the repetitions of words and phrases, but when a large text manifests an overall chiastic pattern, it generally reflects a reversal in the sequence of repeated ideas such that any keywords or key phrases in the text may or may not contribute to that overall structure.

**Overall Correspondences**

In addition to the possible correspondences within element B and within element B’, correspondences exist also between the themes of elements B (vv. 9–10) and B’ (vv. 21–24), respectively displaying the relationships between, on the one hand, iniquity (v. 10), transgressions (v. 10) and

39. Ibid., 282 speaks of “repeated words, phrases, or topics.”
stiffneckedness (v. 22), and, on the other, the resulting sorrowful visitations of the Lord upon the heads of the transgressors (v. 10), with their resulting destructions (v. 23). The many internal repetitions within element B (possibly forming a chiastic subsystem) correspond with the apparent internal repetitions within element B’. Central to element B is the holy, blessed nature of the land when the people are not iniquitous (v. 10). Similarly, serving as a transitional idea leading into element B’, Enos reports evidence that the land indeed was blessed (v. 21). Whereas within element B, the Nephites’ land is stated to be blessed because of their diligent obedience (v. 10), also within that same v. 10 of element B that same land is cursed because of their iniquity. Similarly, in B’ the progression of ideas advances from a blessed land (v. 21) to one filled with destructions (v. 23). Whatever the patterns within B alone and B’ alone, the repetitions do exist within each of the elements; and, more importantly, because of the repetitions between B and B’, those two elements appear to be intimately related.

**Christ-Centered Structure**

That Enos apparently used chiasmus as a structural framework for his entire text may be evidenced by the fact that a promise from the Lord — set forth in the central passage of the book (vv. 15–16a) — is preceded by the prayer that leads up to receipt of the promise and followed by the efforts of the promisee to share the blessings of that promise with those who would benefit from it. Another stylistic indication that Enos may have consciously used chiasmus is likewise found in the characteristic presence of a reference to Christ in the central phrase of the book. Christ-centered and Jehovah-centered texts are abundant among scriptural texts analyzed as chiastic within the Judeo-Christian tradition. For one example, Wilfred G. E. Watson says of Psalm 136:10–15 that his elements A and A’ in vv. 12–13 of the chiasm he proposes for the text of vv. 10–15 “form the centre: Yahweh exerting his power over the elements.”

Writers of sacred texts in the Judeo-Christian tradition often place a reference to the Lord at or near the middle or focal point of a chiastic pattern. The following represents only a very small sampling of lengthier texts that place a reference to the Lord at the center, the turning point, or the chiastic center of a text:

---

Genesis 6:9–9:19

Transitional introduction (6:9–10)
1. Violence in God’s creation (6:11–12)
2. First divine address: resolution to destroy (6:13–22)
3. Second divine address: command to enter the ark (7:1–10)
4. Beginning of the flood (7:11–16)
5. The rising flood waters (7:17–24)
6. GOD’S REMEMBRANCE OF NOAH
7. The receding flood waters (8:1–5)
8. Third divine address: command to leave the ark (8:15–19)
9. God’s resolution to preserve order (8:20–22)
10. Fourth divine address: covenant blessing and peace (9:1–17)

Transitional conclusion (9:18–19)

Psalm 58

A Leaders do not judge righteously (v. 1)
B The wicked have violent hands (v. 2)
C Description of the wicked: like a snake (vv. 3–5)
D “Break their teeth, O God” (v. 6a)
D “Break their teeth, O LORD” (v. 6b)
C Curses on the wicked: like a snail (vv. 7–9)
B The righteous wash their feet in the blood of the wicked (v. 10)
A God will judge (v. 11)

Psalm 71

A Prayer for deliverance (vv. 1–4)
B “From my youth you are my God” (vv. 5–7)
C “My mouth shall be filled” (v. 8)
D Prayer against enemies of “my soul” (vv. 9–11)
E “O God, be near” (v. 12a)
E “O God, help” (v. 12b)
D Prayer against adversaries of “my soul” (vv. 13–14)
C “My mouth shall tell” (vv. 15–16)

43. Alden, “Chiastic Psalms (II), 197.
B “From my youth I am yours” (vv. 17–18)
A Praise for deliverance (vv. 19–21)

Similarly, says Meynet, for example, of 1 John 3:4–6, “the segments at the beginning [v. 4] and end [v. 6] concern man, while the central segment [v. 5] speaks of Christ; it can therefore be said that the piece is concentric in construction.”\textsuperscript{44} It is Christ-centered.

Unquestionably the proposed Christ-centered purpose of the Enos text fits well within this tradition. The central turning point (in vv. 15–16a) conveys a crossing effect. Prior to this point in the text, Enos has told his readers of his strugglings in prayer for his people the Nephites and for the Lamanites (vv. 9–12). He has told of hearing the voice of the Lord promising to grant unto him according to his desires (v. 12). And he has stated what his desires are (vv. 13–14). And because the Lord had told him so (v. 12), he states (at the center) that he knew that the Lord God was able to preserve the records of his people, for he had desired it.

The short central passage, with its tightly related elements, manifests a clear turning point from the prayer and struggle of the first half of the book to the actions and labors of the second half. Beginning in v. 19, Enos recounts that he “went about among the people of Nephi” (v. 19) and that his people sought diligently to restore the Lamanites (v. 20). The turning point is emphasized by the juxtaposition of the two phrases “ask in faith” (suggesting prayer and supplication) and “I had faith” (suggesting active exertions). It is also reflected in the comparison between “believing that ye shall receive” and the phrase “ye shall receive” (v. 15). The central element forms a powerful turning point. Whether it should be termed a “chiastic” passage or more appropriately a “concentric” one — the distinction is sometimes made\textsuperscript{45} — it nonetheless speaks volumes concerning why it is we have the Book of Mormon today. And both the language of the text of the book of Enos and its rhetorical structure center on the covenant Christ makes with Enos that He will preserve the writings of the Nephites for the benefit of the Lamanites, truly a Christ-centered composition.

44. Meynet, \textit{Treatise on Biblical Rhetoric}, 100; see also 133–34 (differentiating “mirror” and “concentric” compositions).
External and Internal Boundaries

Unquestionably, the book of Enos is a complete literary unit. It is bounded by Jacob’s command to Enos to take the Small Plates of Nephi (Jacob 7:27) and Enos’s similar command to Jarom (Jarom 1:1, 14–15). It begins with an unmistakable colophon that introduces (and is written by) its author (vv. 1 and 2) and ends with a characteristic final “amen” (v. 27). Indeed, even the internal boundaries structuring the book are clearly delineated by the wording of the text itself. Five of the six pericopes surrounding the central chiasm of the text, reflected in the general outline set forth earlier in this paper, begin with the signaling phrase “and it came to pass” (see vv. 9, 12, 19, 21, and 25), a phrase that appears nowhere else in the book. Each of those phrases serves also as the beginning phrase of the first three and the last three of the seven paragraphs of text of the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, as perceptively paragraphed by the typesetter of that edition, John Gilbert, corresponding with elements I, II, III, III’, II’, and I’ of the following general outline (see the third column where the I, II, III, III’, II’, and I’ elements are enumerated):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gilbert’sParagraphing in 1830 Edition</th>
<th>Versification in 1981 Edition</th>
<th>Chiastic Label for Section and First Phrase of Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Vv. 1–8 (includes vv. 1–2 colophon)</td>
<td>I “Behold, it came to pass” (verse 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Vv. 9–11</td>
<td>II “Now, it came to pass”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Vv. 12–14</td>
<td>III “And it came to pass”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Vv. 15–18</td>
<td>IV “Wherefore”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Vv. 19–20</td>
<td>III’ “And now it came to pass”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Vv. 21–24</td>
<td>II’ “And it came to pass”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Vv. 25–27</td>
<td>I’ “And it came to pass”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the paragraphing by Gilbert for the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon (as depicted in the table set forth earlier), it might be noted here that Sections IV and III’ in that table (representing respectively the text of vv. 15–18 and 19–20) hint that it might be possible that the text of verses 16b to 18 form an element D’ to correspond with element D, in an overall A-B-C-D-D’-C’-B’-A’ chiastic structure, as follows:
12 And it came to pass that after I had prayed and labored with all
diligence, the Lord said unto me: I will grant unto thee according
to thy desires, because of thy faith.
13 And now behold, this was the desire which I desired of him —
that if it should so be, that my people, the Nephites, should fall into
transgression, and by any means be destroyed, and the Lamanites
should not be destroyed, that the Lord God would preserve a
record of my people, the Nephites; even if it so be by the power
of his holy arm, that it might be brought forth at some future day
unto the Lamanites, that, perhaps, they might be brought unto
salvation —
14 For at the present our strugglings were vain in restoring them
to the true faith. And they swore in their wrath that, if it were
possible, they would destroy our records and us, and also all the
traditions of our fathers.

15 Wherefore, I knowing that the Lord God was able to preserve
our records,
I cried unto him continually, for he had said unto me:
Whosoever thing ye shall ask in faith, believing
that ye shall receive
in the name of Christ,
ye shall receive it.
16a And I had faith,
and I did cry unto God
that he would preserve the records;
16b and he covenanted with me that he would bring them forth
unto the Lamanites in his own due time.
17 And I, Enos, knew it would be according to the covenant which
he had made; wherefore my soul did rest.
18 And the Lord said unto me: Thy fathers have also required of
me this thing; and it shall be done unto them according to their
faith; for their faith was like unto thine.

19 And now it came to pass that I, Enos, went about among the
people of Nephi, prophesying of things to come, and testifying of
the things which I had heard and seen.
20 And I bear record that the people of Nephi did seek diligently
to restore the Lamanites unto the true faith in God. But our labors
were vain; their hatred was fixed, and they were led by their evil
nature that they became wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty
people, full of idolatry and filthiness; feeding upon beasts of prey;
dwelling in tents, and wandering about in the wilderness with
a short skin girdle about their loins and their heads shaven; and
their skill was in the bow, and in the cimeter, and the ax. And
many of them did eat nothing save it was raw meat; and they were
continually seeking to destroy us.

Whether any features of the text in the hypothetical element D’ (vv.
16b to 18) would account for rhetorical structures over the text of those
two and one-half verses is not readily apparent.
A Well-Balanced Proposed Chiasm

The book of Enos presents remarkable balance between the two halves of the text that surround the central chiasm of vv. 15–16a. According to the text produced by Royal Skousen, the English-language word counts of the first and last flanks of the chiasm might be similar to the Egyptian or Hebrew word counts in the otherwise unavailable original, and those English-language word counts of the text surrounding the chiastic passage at the center compare as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>vv. 1–14</th>
<th>vv. 16b–27</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total English words:</td>
<td>558</td>
<td>554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total English words:</td>
<td>50.2%</td>
<td>49.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Strong Sense of Completion and Return

The center of the book begs for resolution and return, and indeed because the second half of the text mirrors the first half, the book ends as it begins. The need for the preservation of the Nephite records is manifest in the mention of actual wars and destructions among the Nephites (v. 24). That answers the prediction of destruction set forth in v. 10. The early promise that Enos would be blessed (v. 5) is wholly fulfilled in v. 27, where the Lord refers to him as “ye blessed.” Even the only two time indicators (vv. 8, “many years pass away,” and 25, “seventy and nine years had passed away”) are in the early and late parts of the book. The early references to joy and eternal life (v. 3) are repeated by references to Enos’s rejoicing and immortality in vv. 26–27. Whereas in v. 4 Enos kneels down before his Maker, in v. 27 he stands before Him. And the only three uses of the name of Christ in the entire book are at the very chiastic center point (v. 15), within the first element at the beginning (v. 8), and within the last element at the end (v. 26). This is consistent with the observation made by Nils Lund, who noted that “Identical ideas are often distributed in such a fashion that they occur in the extremes and at the centre of their respective system, and nowhere else in the system.”

Other Important Features of the Proposed Enos Chiasm

There are two other important features to note about the proposed chiasm: an intrinsic economy of style and the use of rare and unique vocabulary.

Enos knew that his people’s record would be preserved. If not at the time of his own writing then surely shortly thereafter, the plates upon which he wrote had already approached the point at which few words could be written on them, they being “small,” according to the statements of his son, Jarom (Jarom 1:2, 14). Enos wrote only about 150 percent more text than his son Jarom. Perhaps aware of the economy of style, the beauty of form, and the depth of meaning available through creating — and the powerful spiritual experience that would be treasured and appreciated by those who would discover and study — a Christ-centered chiastic text, Enos may well have purposefully used this technique in order to open up a fuller appreciation of his life and his message, notwithstanding (and perhaps in part because of) the apparent paucity of writing materials in his time.

Words and phrases sometimes are unique to a chiastic passage and may rarely or never otherwise appear anywhere in the scriptures. Such rare and unique terms occasionally are identified as elements that support the structure of a chiastic pattern. For example, Yehuda T. Radday has identified a chiastic pattern for the entire book of Genesis, while relying in part on the reversed repetition of certain unique words and phrases that either appear only in their respective chiastic elements within Genesis, or appear nowhere else in the Bible, or appear only rarely elsewhere in the Bible. A depiction of Radday’s proposed pattern is set forth below:

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

I — Typological Prologue (1:1–11:32)

Eleven chapters (roughly one-quarter of the book)

A Poetry (ch. 1)

1 “his daughter-in-law” (Tamar) (11:31; the only two “daughters-in-law” mentioned in Genesis are in chs. 11 and 38)

II — Progressively Individualized Main Part (12:1–36:43)

Twenty-five chapters (roughly one-half of the book)

---

B  “Descent” into Egypt (12:10–20)

2  “the land could not support both of them dwelling together” (13:6; in Genesis unique to chs. 13 and 36 and found nowhere else in the Bible)

3  “the Canaanite and the Pherizite” (13:7; mentioned as a pair nowhere in the Bible except in Genesis 13 and 34)

4  “which cannot be numbered for multitude” (16:10)

C  Solemn change of name: “no longer shall your name be … but …” (17:5) — Abram-Abraham

D  Circumcision (17:23)

5  “the firstborn daughter” (19:31; once in Samuel and in Genesis only in chs. 19 and 29)

6  “last night” (19:34; once each in Kings and Job, and in Genesis only in chs. 19 and 31)

7  “seize by force” (21:25; in Genesis only in chs. 21 and 31)

8  “be a witness” (21:30; in Genesis only in chs. 21 and 31)

B’  “Ascent” from Egypt (ch. 22)

9  “the Lord … grant me success” (24:12; unique to Genesis 24 and 26)

9’  “the Lord … grant me success” (26; unique to Genesis 24 and 26)

5’  “the firstborn daughter” (29:26; once in Samuel and in Genesis only in chs. 19 and 29)

6’  “last night” (31:29; once each in Kings and Job, and in Genesis only in chs. 19 and 31)

7’  “seize by force” (31:31; in Genesis only in chs. 21 and 31)

8’  “be a witness” (31:52; in Genesis only in chs. 21 and 31)

4’  “which cannot be numbered for multitude” (32:12)

3’  “the Canaanite and the Pherizite” (34:30; mentioned as a pair nowhere in the Bible except in Genesis 13 and 34)

D’  Circumcision (23:14 ff.)

C’  Solemn change of name: “no longer shall your name be … but …” (35:10) — Jacob-Israel

2’  “the land could not support both of them dwelling together” (36:7 in Genesis unique to chs. 13 and 36 and found nowhere else in the Bible)

B’  “Descent” into Egypt (37:36)

III — Highly Individualized Portrait in Epilogue
Fourteen chapters (roughly one-quarter of the book)

1’ “his daughter-in-law” (Sarah) (38:24; the only two “daughters-in-law” mentioned in Genesis are in chs. 11 and 38)

A’ Poetry (ch. 49:1–27)

For another example, Welch points out that the phrase “left hand of God” appears only twice in the Book of Mormon (Mosiah 5:10 and 5:12), a repeated key phrase that forms two corresponding elements of the first chiastic Book of Mormon passage identified as such by Welch, Mosiah 5:10–12 [A-B-C-D-E-F-F-E-D-C-B-A].

While not at all part of as extensive a formulation as Radday’s Genesis proposal, nor reliant on a unique phrase like Welch’s, a possible instance of what might be termed a chiastic use of a rare term is Enos’s two uses of the rare phrase “true faith” in vv. 14 and 20 (elements C and C’). The rarity of the phrase itself and the relationships of the two words to one another are discussed by Tvedtnes. The two uses of the term in the book of Enos occur in corresponding chiastic elements C and C’, concerning the Nephites’ strugglings to restore the Lamanites to the “true faith” (v. 14) and their efforts to restore the Lamanites unto the “true faith” in God (v. 20). The only other appearances of the phrase “true faith” in all scripture appear in Alma 44:4 and 3 Nephi 6:14, and those two uses both concern themselves also with the relationships among Nephites, Lamanites, and “true faith.” One cannot read Alma’s words to the Lamanite leader Zerahemniah in Alma 44:3–4 (with its reference to the relationships between transgression and destruction and between faith and societal preservation) without harkening back to Enos’s concern with the redemption of his own people and of the Lamanites and of the preservation of his own people’s records and the role that righteousness and wickedness play. And one cannot read what Mormon says in 3 Nephi 6:14 about the faithful Lamanites who in the thirtieth year from the coming of Christ were converted to the “true faith” and who were willing “with all diligence to keep the commandments of the Lord” without recalling Enos’s references to “true faith,” “diligence,” and the need for “keeping the commandments.”

The Tradition of Prophets Who Desire Preservation of the Word of the Lord

Enos (1:3–27) and Nephi (2 Nephi 33:4) were not alone in desiring (Enos 1:12) or requiring (Enos 1:18) that the Lord God “preserve” the word of the Lord for the salvation of mankind. Noting the reason for preserving the records, Nephi explained that he “had obtained the records which the Lord had commanded us, and searched them and found that they were desirable; yea, even of great worth unto us, insomuch that we could preserve the commandments of the Lord unto our children” (1 Nephi 5:21). The Lord commanded other prophets to preserve His word. He commanded the prophet Moses to put into the ark of the covenant “the testimony” (Exodus 25:16), the “book of the law” (Deuteronomy 31:24), “the tables of the covenant” (Hebrews 9:4). The Lord told the prophet Isaiah, “Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever” (Isaiah 30:8). The word of the Lord to the prophet Ezekiel was for him to take the two sticks of Judah and Joseph, written on two separate continents, and join them “one to another into one,” clearly something possible only if both are recorded, protected, and preserved (Ezekiel 37:15–17).

Moroni did “seal up these records” (Moroni 10:2) “and for this very purpose are these plates preserved, which contain these records — that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people; and that the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of their fathers, and that they might know the promises of the Lord, and that they may believe the gospel and rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ, and be glorified through faith in his name, and that through their repentance they might be saved” (Doctrine and Covenants 3:19–20).

Regarding his desire that the records of his fathers be preserved, records that testify of Christ, Mormon states that these things are written unto the remnant of the house of Jacob … and they are to be hid up unto the Lord that they may come forth in his own due time. And this is the commandment which I have received; and behold, they shall come forth according to the commandment of the Lord, when he shall see fit, in his wisdom. And behold, they shall go unto the unbelieving; … and for this intent shall they go — that they may be persuaded that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; that the Father may bring about, through his most Beloved, his great and eternal purpose, in restoring …
all the house of Israel, to the land of their inheritance, which the Lord their God hath given them, unto the fulfilling of his covenant; and also that the seed of this people may more fully believe his gospel, which shall go forth unto them from the Gentiles. …

And also the Lord will remember the prayers of the righteous, which have been put up unto him for them. (Mormon 5:12–15, 21)

Indeed, when the Nephites gathered to the land of Cumorah to prepare for their “last struggle” (Mormon 6:6), Mormon’s concern turned toward protection and preservation of the sacred records:

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

Concerning that which he had written, Mormon wrote that to him those things were “pleasing,” and he took the small plates with their “small account of the prophets” and combined them with “the remainder” of his record written on the plates of Mormon (Words of Mormon 1:3, 4, 6), while explaining that the large and small plates of Nephi were handed down … from generation to generation until they have fallen into my hands. And I, Mormon, pray to God that they may be preserved from this time henceforth. And I know that they will be preserved; for there are great things written upon them, out of which my people and their brethren shall be judged at the great and last day, according to the word of God which is written. (Words of Mormon 1:11)

King Mosiah “kept” the “plates of brass” and “all the records” and “conferred them upon Alma, who was the son of Alma, … and commanded him that he should keep and preserve them, and also keep a record of the people, handing them down from one generation to
another, even as they had been handed down from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem” (Mosiah 28:20, emphasis added).

And Alma urged his son Helaman to

Keep all these things sacred which I have kept, even as I have kept them; for it is for a wise purpose that they are kept. And these plates of brass, which contain these engravings, which have the records of the holy scriptures upon them, which have the genealogy of our forefathers, even from the beginning — behold, it has been prophesied by our fathers, that they should be kept and handed down from one generation to another, and be kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord until they should go forth unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, that they shall know of the mysteries contained thereon. (Alma 37:2–4)

Alma tells Helaman to “keep” the twenty-four plates (Alma 37:21). Shiblon confers the “sacred things” and “engravings” upon Helaman, the son of Helaman (Alma 63:11–13). Nephi, the son of Helaman, gives charge unto his son Nephi, “concerning the plates of brass, and all the records which had been kept, and all those things which had been kept sacred from the departure of Lehi out of Jerusalem (3 Nephi 1:2). Nephi is the “just man who did keep the record” and whom Christ called upon during His visit to the Nephites, asking him to “bring forth the record which ye have kept” (3 Nephi 8:1; 23:7). Those who “kept” the records in the sense of writing upon them also “kept” them in the sense of having “preserved” them.

King Benjamin reminded his three sons Mosiah, Helorum, and Helaman

That were it not for these plates [of brass], which contain these records and these commandments, we must have suffered in ignorance, even at this present time, not knowing the mysteries of God. For it were not possible that our father, Lehi, could have remembered all these things, to have taught them to his children, except it were for the help of these plates; for he having been taught in the language of the Egyptians therefore he could read these engravings, and teach them to his children, that thereby they could teach them to their children, and so fulfilling the commandments of God, even down to this present time.
I say unto you, my sons, were it not for these things, which have been kept and preserved by the hand of God, that we might read and understand of his mysteries, and have his commandments always before our eyes, that even our fathers would have dwindled in unbelief. (Mosiah 1:3–5)

And, as Mormon notes,

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

In short, the message of the book of Enos fits well into this almost universal concern of the prophets of God that the word of the Lord be preserved for the benefit of His children.

**Mosiah 5:10–12 Compared to Enos 1:15–16a**

A beautiful chiasm exists in the text of Mosiah 5:10–12, discovered by Welch in 1976, which has been depicted variously over the years and held out as one of the ten best chiasms in the Book of Mormon, best depicted by Welch as follows (with one small modification here), a chiasm with which the centerpiece pattern in the book of Enos compares favorably. The depiction below seems to be what Welch would likely agree best reflects his discovery. For ease of analysis, prime symbols after capital letters in the second flank of the chiasm are added here, and one minor modification is made by moving the “and also” phrase from the end of B’ to the beginning of A’. Otherwise, Welch’s proposal is left intact:

A  And now it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall not take upon him the name of Christ
B   must be called by some other name;
C  therefore, he findeth himself on the left hand of God.

D And I would that ye should **remember** also, that this is the name that I said I should give unto you

E that never should be **blotted out**,  
F except it be through **transgression**;  
F’ therefore, take heed that ye do not **transgress**,  
E’ that the name be not **blotted out** of your hearts.

D’ I say unto you, I would that ye should **remember** to retain the name written always in your hearts,

C’ that ye are not found on the **left hand of God**,  
B’ but that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be **called**,  
A’ and also, the **name** by which he shall call you.

In all, the number of English words of the text in which the Mosiah 5:10–12 chiasm appears is 139 English words. By contrast, the number of English words of the text in which the Enos 1:15–16a central concentric structure appears is 61 words. Welch’s structure relies on six words and phrases that appear in the first half of the chiasm and are repeated in reverse sequence in the second half of the chiasm (a total of 12 words and phrases overall, which comprise a total of 22 words, accounting for 15.8% of the English-language text in which the chiasm is situated).

The proposed structure for the centerpiece of the book of Enos follows:

F Wherefore, I knowing that the **Lord God** was able to **preserve our records**,  
G I **cried unto him** continually, for he had said unto me:  
H WHATSOEVER thing ye shall ask in **faith**, believing  
I that **ye shall receive**  
J in the name of **Christ**,  
I’ ye shall receive it. (15)  
H’ And I had **faith**, (16a)  
G’ and I did **cry unto God** (16b)  
F’ that he would **preserve the records**;

That proposed structure relies on reference to five words and phrases in the first flank, one word in the middle element, and five words and phrases in the second flank (a total of eleven words and phrases overall, consisting of a total of 24 words within those English words and phrases, accounting for 39% of the English-language text within which the concentric structure is situated).

While the English-language text of Mosiah 5:10–12 accounts for more than two times the amount of text than can be accounted for in
Enos 1:15–16a (139 words compared to 61 words); and while the chiasm found by Welch as calculated in the English-language text of Mosiah 5:10–12 relies on more words and phrases than the concentric structure proposed for the English-language text of Enos 1:15–16a (12 words and phrases and 22 words overall in Welch’s chiasm compared to 11 words and phrases and 24 words overall in the proposed concentric structure in the Enos text), it would appear, at least from this sort of statistical comparison, that the ratio of the number of keywords and key phrases to the overall number of words of text for the proposed concentric structure of Enos 1:15–16a compares favorably with the ratio of keywords and key phrases to the overall number of words of text for the proposed chiasm of Mosiah 5:10–12. In short, it might be said that the proposed concentric structure at the center of the book of Enos is tightly composed within its context, similar to that of the chiasm of Mosiah 5:10–12.

Conclusion

Some concluding gleanings may be proposed, the first perhaps mundane and obscure and the second clearly important. First, though not crucial to the beautiful lessons portrayed in this book, it can legitimately be asked what is meant by the opening colophon to the book (vv. 1–2). Both John A. Tvedtnes and Thomas W. Mackay have previously described the introductory colophon of the book of Enos as composed of both vv. 1 and 2. The statement in v. 2 seems to invite the reader not only to anticipate the recounting of a prayer but to expect devotion of the entire book to an account of that one prayer, for there Enos tells his readers that he will tell of “the wrestle which [he] had before God” (Enos 1:2).

Yet with even a cursory reading of the entire book, the modern reader concludes that the account of Enos’s prayer extends only from v. 3 through v. 18 (the first half of the book, A, B, and C plus the middle section, D). Taken as a whole, the balance of the text of the book, beginning with v. 19, which begins with the phrase “and it came to pass,” represents Enos’s description of activities seemingly beyond the “wrestle which [he] had before God, before [he] received a remission of [his] sins” (Enos 1:2). Those activities include Enos’s having gone about among the


people of Nephi, prophesying of things to come, testifying of the things which he had heard and seen (v. 19), and bearing record (v. 20). This does not, at least at first blush, seem to be a description of a “wrestle before God” for remission of sins, as v. 2 would lead the reader to expect. Indeed, no reference to prayer exists beyond v. 18 of the book.

In v. 2 Enos tells his reader that he will recount the wrestle which he had before God “before” he received a remission of his sins. Yet, it is as early as v. 5 that he recounts that the voice of the Lord has already come to him saying, “Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee,” and as early as v. 6 that his guilt is already spoken of as having been “swept away.” Clearly, Enos desired to give us something more than a mere chronological account of activities that in time preceded his remission of sins. Consistent with Tvedtne’s and Mackay’s identifications of vv. 1 and 2 together as the one colophon for the entire book, I suggest that when the book is viewed in light of that apparent fact, the reader must deal with the significance of it. If v. 2 is part of the colophon and if the colophon is intended to introduce all of Enos’s book, why is the topic promised in v. 2 seemingly exhausted by v. 6 and v. 8?

The activities set forth in vv. 19–27 seem to be prompted by the areas of concern described in the prayer (and God’s answers to that prayer), as recounted in vv. 3–18. And those activities set forth in vv. 19–27 seem to be set forth roughly in an order that is the reverse of the order in which they are recounted in the prayer:

I  personal redemption (vv. 3–8)
   II  concern for the Nephites (vv. 9–11)
       III concern for the Lamanites (vv. 11–14)
           IV the covenant concerning the record (vv. 15–18)
       III‘ concern for the Lamanites (v. 20)
   II‘ concern for the Nephites (vv. 21–24)
   I‘ personal redemption (vv. 25–27)

Enos’s prayer surely did not end with the Lord’s first communication (vv. 5–8) that announced his redemption from sin, but it continued on through the remaining three communications (through v. 18). Enos recounts the essence of his entire life, the main activities of his life (vv. 19–27), in the light of that one prayer and in light of the Lord’s answers to that one prayer (vv. 3–18).

Perhaps all of the activities of his life’s work, all of the labors prompted by the three answers given by the Lord to his prayer, all of the struggles, all of the testifying, and all of the preaching and prophesying did indeed precede his ultimate remission of sins, as predicted in v. 2 and
reported, perhaps only in part, in v. 6. Maybe the truly effectual, eternal “remission of sins” which he predicts in v. 2 is not only the forgiveness of sins and the sweeping away of guilt recounted in vv. 5 and 6, but also the “rest” he anticipates in v. 27 after all his strugglings of a lifetime, after all his rejoicing with having declared the word all his days, and after all his envisioned blessings in the mansions of his Father after having been wrought upon by the power of God that he must preach and prophesy unto the people. Perhaps this reflects one of the lessons taught us by Ezekiel (see 3:17–21 and 33:7–9), concerning the delivery, too, of the soul of the watchman.

From these observations, it would appear that the colophon is rightly identified as comprising both vv. 1 and 2, strengthening the notion that, if the colophon accurately describes the whole book, then Enos perhaps has, in a deeply meaningful way, told his readers — by means of his entire text — of the wrestle which he had before God “before he received a remission of [his] sins”; he then enhances that description with an account of his whole life’s experience, not told merely as a chronological progression of events (notwithstanding his uses of the phrase “it came to pass”) but as a description of all the activities of his life prompted by the Lord’s answers to his prayerful yearnings. Apparently, the progression of Enos’s narrative moves not only chronologically toward but also deeper into his quest for an ultimate and an eternal personal redemption. It seems that the focal point of his own personal immortal redemption hinges on the central role Christ played in satisfying his main stated desire: redemption of the Lamanites through ultimate preservation of the record of the Nephites. His charity for others was the means by which he merited God’s ultimate charity toward him.

It should be noted that within the bounds of his book, Enos quotes the Lord a total of seven times (vv. 5, 8, 10, 12, 15, 18, and 27). The first two quotations (vv. 5 and 8) seem to be grouped into one communication (concerning Enos’s personal redemption), forming a part of vv. 1–8, a span of verses introduced by the phrase “behold, it came to pass” (v. 1). That first quotation (v. 5) balances against the last quotation (v. 27), an anticipated statement which he attributes to the Lord in the future, which correspondingly constitutes a part of Enos’s repeated account concerning his own salvation (vv. 25–27). The final span of verses (vv. 25–27) is also introduced by the phrase “and it came to pass” (v. 25). The next quotation (v. 10), part of the section concerning the Lord’s promised visitation upon Enos’s Nephite brethren balances against a span of verses (vv. 21–24) in which the unfaithful Nephites are indeed visited of the
Lord, a span of verses introduced by “and it came to pass” (v. 21) and lacking a quotation of the Lord, perhaps to highlight the Nephite people’s stiffneckedness. The next quotation (v. 12) forms part of a span of verses (vv. 12–14) introduced by “and it came to pass” (v. 12), which likewise seems to balance against a span of verses (vv. 19–20), which likewise lacks a quotation of the Lord, perhaps likewise to emphasize the result of the Lamanites’ wrath and hatred. And as to the two central quotations (vv. 15 and 18), set forth in a span of verses introduced by “wherefore” (v. 15), the first contains the central phrase of the book (v. 15) and the second serves to conclude the prayer, being set forth at the major division of the book (v. 18), between Enos’s prayer and his life’s labors.

More important, perhaps, is a lesson about the value of the Nephite record and its role in redemption. The lesson concerning Christ’s power to redeem those who obey His teachings as contained in the Nephite record is a lesson not unique to Enos. Nephi knew that the record of the Jews could save a nation from perishing in unbelief. Enos, too, knows that the Nephite record can play such a redemptive role for the Lamanites. True, Enos’s prayer and his efforts are first directed, in each respective half of the book, to the salvation of his own people, the Nephites. (Compare Enos 1:9–10 with 1:11–12 and compare also 1:19–20a with 1:20b.) But element C’ (v. 20) includes the phrase “destroy us” (an indication of the destruction of the Nephites), in stark contrast to the use of the phrase “not be destroyed” in element C (v. 13) (an indication of the survival of the Lamanites). And Enos’s prayerful request at the center of the book centers on preservation of the Nephite record, a request expressed both in anticipation of the possible destruction of the Nephites and in hopes of the eventual survival of the Lamanites. Taking a cue from the centrality of the experience he recounts in vv. 15–16a, it can probably safely be said that Enos’s charitable concern for the spiritual survival of the Lamanites, through preservation of the Nephite record, did indeed rival his concern for the spiritual (and physical) survival of his own people, the Nephites.

Enos sought and obtained his own personal redemption from sin, and from that he developed a desire that both the Nephites and the Lamanites obtain their own redemption. The central role of the Lord Jesus Christ in responding to the strugglings and the labors of this prophet, and those of his people, is reflected in Christ’s own divine desire that God’s children be redeemed. That is characterized by the Lord’s four communications to Enos: (1) “thou shalt be blessed” (vv. 2–8); (2) “I will visit thy brethren” (vv. 9–11); (3) “I will grant unto thee according to thy desires” — which are that the Nephite record be preserved for


the salvation of the Lamanites (vv. 12–14); and (4) “ye shall receive it” — in answer to Enos’s desires (vv. 15–18). Charity is the pure love of Christ (Moroni 7:47), being that same love for God’s children that Christ Himself possesses (see Ether 12:33–34a). Keeping in mind that the central phrase of the book of Enos is the phrase “in the name of Christ,” we can perhaps better appreciate that indeed Enos had first-hand experience with the doctrine that “whatsoever thing ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is good” — and desiring the redemption of God’s children, Enos’s brethren, is indeed a paramount good — “in faith believing that ye shall receive, behold, it shall be done unto you” (Moroni 7:26). Enos shows us clearly that we have the Book of Mormon today in great part because of the unwavering faith in the Lord Jesus Christ manifest by the ancients, including among them Enos. As Lehi had said to his son Joseph, quoting that ancient Joseph, who had been carried captive into Egypt, so can it be said of Enos himself and of all the other prophets like him who are responsible for the preservation of the word of God for our day: “Because of their faith their words shall proceed forth out of my mouth unto their brethren who are the fruit of thy loins; and the weakness of their words will I make strong in their faith, unto the remembering of the covenant which I made unto thy fathers” (2 Nephi 3:21).

The text in one sense seems to reflect the classic Book of Mormon pride cycle (Helaman 12:1–6): The Lord blesses and prospers his people; they become proud and sinful because of their ease; the Lord chastens the people; and they humble themselves, repent, and are blessed. Enos expresses concern more than once not only that his own people might be destroyed if they fall into transgression but also concern that the Lamanites, too, might similarly be destroyed for the same reason. (See vv. 13, 14.) The two peoples are both on the cycle: the Nephites seemingly are at the stage of enjoying blessings, seeking “diligently to restore the Lamanites unto the true faith in God” (vv. 19–20a) and able to “till the land,” enjoy “all manner of grain, and fruit, and flocks of herds” and the like (v. 21), but for some reason they are not successful (v. 20a). The Nephites, so seemingly blessed, have among them prophets (v. 22) whom they do not heed (v. 23), which may be the reason they are not successful in their efforts to redeem the Lamanites (v. 20a). Perhaps the Nephites are in the pride stage of the cycle, between prosperity and wickedness. The Lamanites, on the other hand, are seemingly already at the wickedness stage and are entering into the punishment stage (v. 20b, fixed on “hatred” and being a “wild,” “ferocious,” and “blood-thirsty” people).
“And I saw wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites in the course of my days,” says Enos (v. 24). Perhaps vv. 20 to 24 are structured simply on the themes mentioned here rather than on words and phrases.

The book of Enos is concerned with yearning for potential happiness and joy and for the eternal and temporal welfare and redemption of Enos himself, of his people the Nephites, and of their brethren, the Lamanites. But notwithstanding his prayers and efforts and labors on behalf of the Nephites and his and his people’s struggles on behalf of the Lamanites, Enos alone is left assured of those eternal blessings of joy, confidence before God, and redemption of his soul. He desired eternal life and the joy of the saints (v. 3) and eventually for his prayers and efforts was at least himself assured of eternal rest, eternal blessings, and eternal life (v. 27).

Stephen Kent Ehat has a J.D. degree (1981) and as a California attorney he researches and writes appellate briefs for California attorneys in state and federal matters. He has been a student of chiasmus since 1973. He and his wife Jeanine moved to Utah in 2001 and live in Lindon, Utah. They are the parents of five sons and have twenty-one grandchildren.

Appendix

Observing the distinction between chiasmus proper (a reversal in the sequence of repeated ideas) and antimetabole (a reversal in the sequence of repeated words and phrases) is important in the analysis of large-scale chiasms, those chiasms that constitute the rhetorical structure of lengthier texts, such as Alma 36 and the book of Enos, vv. 3–27. Clearly, ideas are conveyed by words and phrases, and so chiasmus proper and antimetabole are related to one another. And yet as Meynet observes, “symmetries and relationships of all kinds are very numerous in a text” and “the whole problem resides in knowing at which level of organization of the text they are relevant.” Keywords and key phrases that help to define what the ideas are for corresponding elements of an overall chiasm in a longer text may or may not themselves be significant to other parallelistic patterns that may appear within those elements. Conversely, some keywords and key phrases that help define some of the proposed

54. The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon includes the word “the” here in the text.
55. Meynet, Rhetorical Analysis, 166.
chiastic patterns that may appear within any given element of an overall chiasm may possibly not serve as keywords and phrases in the makeup of the larger structure over the lengthy text.

Sometimes a lengthier text, such as Alma 36, may reflect a great amount of reversal in the sequence of repeated words and phrases, as can be seen in Welch’s most recent analysis, depicted below. And yet analysis by that methodology leaves gaps in the text that are not accounted for in the pattern. The appearance of these gaps in the text was noted by Reynolds in his levels analysis of Alma 36 and early on was acknowledged by Welch in his own levels analyses of that chapter.

What is reproduced below is Welch’s most recent analysis, with alphabetic letters added to the left of each element to facilitate seeing the correspondences, with the italic font here replicated from the original 1999 Welch portrayal, which emphasizes the words and phrases that correspond between the first and second flanks (halves) of the pattern; and with left-margin notations added here to show the “gaps,” which represent the places where verses of the text are not accounted for in the proposed word-and-phrase-based chiastic pattern (the gaps consisting of the text of vv. 11–13, 21, and 25):

| A | My son give ear to my words (v. 1) |
| B | Keep the commandments and ye shall prosper in the land (v. 1) |
| C | Do as I have done (v. 2) |
| D | Remember the captivity of our fathers (v. 2) |
| E | They were in bondage (v. 2) |
| F | He surely did deliver them (v. 2) |
| G | Trust in God (v. 3) |
| H | Supported in trials, troubles, and afflictions (v. 3) |
| I | Lifted up at the last day (v. 3) |
| J | I know this not of myself but of God (v. 4) |
| K | Born of God (v. 5) |

56. John W. Welch and J. Greg Welch, Charting the Book of Mormon; Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), chart 132.
58. See Welch, “A Masterpiece: Alma 36,” 116–18. Welch refers to the “main girders” in the “structure or framework” of Alma 36. He then provides a chapter summary in chiastic form that omits reference to the text of Alma 36:11–13, 21, and 25. These omitted verses constitute the gaps which Welch discusses beginning on page 118: “at a more detailed level, we are able to detect panels of text filling in the gaps.”
L  I sought to destroy the church (vv. 6–9)

M  My limbs were paralyzed (v. 10)

[N  Fear of being in the
presence of God (vv. 14–15)]

O  Pains of a damned soul (v. 16)

P  Harrowed up by the memory of sins (v. 17)

Q  I remembered Jesus Christ, a son of God (v. 17)

Q’ I cried, Jesus Christ, son of God (v. 18)

P’ Harrowed by the memory of sins no more (v. 19)

O’ Joy as exceeding as was the pain (v. 20)

[N’ Long to be in the
presence of God (v. 22)]

M’ My limbs received strength again (v. 23)

L’ I labored to bring souls to repentance (v. 24)

[K’ Born of God (v. 26)]

J’ Therefore my knowledge is of God (v. 26)

H’ Supported under trials, troubles, and afflictions (v. 26)

G’ Trust in him (v. 27)

F’ He will deliver me (v. 27)

I’ And raise me up at the last day (v. 28)
E’ As God brought our fathers out of bondage and captivity (vv. 28–29)
D’ Retain a remembrance of their captivity (v. 29)
C’ Know as I do know (v. 30)
B’ Keep the commandments and ye shall prosper in the land (v. 30)
A’ This according to his word (v. 30)

The existence of such “gaps” in the analysis is occasioned by the fact that the entire lengthy text is analyzed in light of antimetabole as the structuring principle that gives the text its chiastic pattern. Of course, Alma did not compose the above word-and-phrase-based chiastic pattern; rather, he composed a text composed of all of the text of the chapter. And Welch, and more recently and completely, Reynolds used “levels analysis” to depict the overall chiasm of the chapter at one level and smaller parallelistic structures at subordinate levels. And doing so accounted for all of the text, including the text where gaps otherwise appear in the proposed word-and-phrase-based chiastic pattern. Reynolds essentially presents the following overall “concentric organization of Alma 36”:59

A “my word”
B “that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land”
C remember “the captivity” of our fathers
D “trust in God” and be “supported in trials, troubles,” and afflictions (faith in Jesus Christ and enduring to the end)
E knowledge “of God”
F “destroy the church of God”
G “fell to the earth”
H “that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God”
I Jesus Christ atoned for the sins of the world
H* “my soul did long to be there”
G* “stood upon my feet”
F* “brings souls unto repentance”
E* “born of God”
D* “trust in God” and be “supported in trials, troubles,” and afflictions (faith in Jesus Christ and enduring to the end)

C* remember “the captivity” of our fathers
B* “that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land”
A* “his word”

Applying “levels analysis,” Reynolds accounts for patterns in the text at the point where the proposed word-and-phrase-based chiastic pattern otherwise results in gaps in the pattern. Note, for example, where the following gap appears at v. 21 in Welch’s 1999 proposed word-and-phrase-based chiastic pattern:

O’ Joy as exceeding as was the pain (v. 20)

[gap: v. 21]

N’ Long to be in the presence of God (v. 22)

The levels analysis by Reynolds, referencing the full text of vv. 20–22, results in what Reynolds perceives to be an a-b-c-b-a concentric structure:  

a And O what joy and what marvelous light I did behold!  
b Yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pains.

c Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there can be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as was my pains.

b* Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy.

a* Yea, and methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne,

i surrounded with numberless concourses of angels

ii in the attitude of singing and praising their God.

If antimetabole plays a part in the Alma 36 chiasm, it is at the subordinate levels, signaling a structure for the shorter amounts of text. The overall chiasm of the full text of the chapter, however, may better be characterized by a reversal in the sequence not of words and phrases alone but of repeated ideas (chiasmus proper), such as the ideas expressed in the following proposal, which accounts for Welch’s elements A–K,

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60. Ibid., 306, formatting is here altered to use the more customary left-indentations of the alphabetic characters attached to the elements.
61. Reynolds uses the wording of Skousen’s Yale text.

1 Alma’s word to his son regarding obedience, prosperity, remembering the captivity of the fathers, support in trials, and knowledge from God — Alma’s word to his son is not only that in keeping the commandments of God he will prosper in the land, and that as he himself has done, his son also should remember the captivity and bondage of their fathers, from which captivity and bondage God did deliver them, but also that anyone who puts their trust in God will be supported in their trials, troubles, and afflictions and be lifted up at the last day, all of which Alma knows by revelation from God (vv. 1–5, elements A–K)

2 Alma and the sons of Mosiah, who seek to destroy of the church of God, are confronted by the angel of God — Only because he has been spiritually born of God does Alma know these things, for with the sons of Mosiah he had sought to destroy the church of God and with them had been confronted by an angel of God, who commanded them to seek no more to destroy the church of God (vv. 6–9, elements L–M)

3 Alma suffers anguish of soul — Alma falls to the earth, loses the use of his limbs, is racked with eternal torment, fears coming into the presence of God, and is racked with the pains of a damned soul (vv. 10–16, elements N–O)

4 Alma’s conversion to Jesus Christ — While Alma is harrowed up by his many sins he remembered his father’s prophecy about Jesus Christ, a Son of God, and crying within his heart, “O Jesus, thou Son of God,” Alma pleaded for mercy and was harrowed up by the memory of his sins no more (vv. 17–19, elements P–P’)

3’ Alma experiences joy in his soul — His soul having been filled with joy as exceeding as had been his pains, Alma stands upon his feet, receives back the use of his limbs, longs to be in the presence of God, and manifests unto the people that he had been born of God (vv. 20–23, elements O’–M’)

2′ Alma builds up the church of God — Alma labors that he might bring souls to repentance that they too might be born of God, and he experiences great joy in the fruit of his labors when many of them are born of God (vv. 24–26a, elements L′–K′)

1′ God’s word regarding obedience, prosperity, remembering the captivity of the fathers, support in trials, and knowledge from God — According to God’s word, Alma emphasizes not only that he knows by revelation from God that he has been supported by God in his trials, troubles, and afflictions, and that God has delivered him as he did deliver their fathers from captivity, which captivity he has retained in remembrance, but also that God still will deliver him, and that in keeping the commandments of God his son will prosper in the land (vv. 26b–30, elements J′–A′)

The question can be posed whether the main elements of an overall chiasm proposed for a lengthy text will always manifest not only repeated words and phrases between them but also rhetorical patterning within them based on those repeated words and phrases. The answer seems to be a simple one, simple because the writers of these ancient texts were free to compose and structure their texts as they desired; and apparently some did craft their texts with various “levels” of rhetorical structure and some did not. Reynolds and Meynet seem to provide ample evidence of the former. And Gary A. Rendsburg, for example, seems to provide ample evidence of the latter. Rendsburg has shown that chiasmus in the Book of Genesis is manifested in a way in which lexical items are shared between matching units of the chiastic pattern without there being any further subordinate level of rhetorical patterning evident in the text. According to Rendsburg,

Large-scale chiasmus may be seen in the three main cycles of the Ancestral Narratives in the book of Genesis: (1) The Abraham Cycle (Gen 11:27–22:24); (2) The Jacob Cycle (Gen 25:19–35:22); and (3) The Joseph Story (Gen 37–50). … In each of these three main sections of the book of Genesis, a series of episodes unfolds, the narrative reaches a focal point or pivot point, and then the parallel episodes unfold in reverse order. Moreover, for each of the matching units, one finds a series of lexical items which serve to solidify the connections inherent in the shared themes.

His analysis of the two cycles and the one story are set forth in the 1986 and 2014 editions of his book *The Redaction of Genesis*, as well as in somewhat abbreviated form in the 2020 *State of the Art* article. One example of his analysis suffices here to support his point. He outlines the Abraham Cycle (Genesis 11:27–22:24) as follows:64

A Genealogy of Terah (11:27–32)
   B Start of Abram's Spiritual Odyssey (12:1–9)
   C Sarai in foreign palace; ordeal ends in peace and success; Abram and Lot part (12:1–13:18)
   D Abram comes to the rescue of Sodom and Lot (14:1–24)
   E Covenant with Abram; Annunciation of Ishmael (15:1–16:16)
      Focal Point: 17:1–5: Abram > Abraham | Elohim introduced | covenant
   E' Covenant with Abraham; Annunciation of Isaac (17:1–18:15)
   D' Abraham comes to the rescue of Sodom and Lot (18:16–19:38)
   C' Sarah in foreign palace; ordeal ends in peace and success; Abraham and Ishmael part (20:1–21:34)
   B' Climax of Abraham's Spiritual Odyssey (22:1–19)
   A' Genealogy of Nahor (22:20–24)

In support of his analysis, Rendburg points both to conceptual and thematic correspondences between the matching units and to lexical correspondences. From among the scores of such correspondences to which he draws attention, reference can be made here to two examples, which suffice to show his methodology in highlighting corresponding words and phrases (in this case in his elements B and B’) and in drawing attention to unique or rare occurrences of words or phrases (much like is done in this present paper in drawing attention to the rare phrase “true faith”):

2. 12:1 לֶךְ־לֶכְ לֶכְ ְלְ ka “go forth”
   22:2 לֶךְ־לֶכְ לֶכְ ka “go forth”

Note: These are the only two places in the entire Bible where this key phrase occurs.

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12. 12:8 וַיַּעְתֵּק wayyaʿeq “and he proceeded”  
22:9 וַיַּעֲקֹד wayyaʿaqod “and he bound”

Note: This pair of words constitutes one of the best examples of long-range alliteration in the Bible. The like-sounding lexemes cannot be present in the story coincidentally, but must have been selected quite purposefully, as one final item to enhance the interrelationship between the two episodes. I make this claim based on the rarity of both vocables. The former verb wayyaʿeq “and he proceeded” occurs only here in Gen 12:8 and (as a clear echo) in Gen 26:22.65

While Rendsburg thus takes advantage of access to the original Hebrew language of the Genesis text (which cannot be done with the Book of Mormon text), the sort of analysis he conducts parallels the type of analysis used in this present paper concerning the chiastic text of Enos 1:3–27. There may be some subordinate-level rhetorical structures in some of the elements of the overall chiasm, based on words and phrases. But the text does not otherwise seem to manifest much, if any, subordinate levels of parallelistic patterning beyond that identified for elements B and B’. But as with Rendsburg’s analysis of the chiastic patterns in Genesis, the overall chiasms are formed by a reversal in the sequence of repeated ideas (chiasmus strictly defined) and not by a reversal in the sequence of repeated words (antimetabole).

A Note on Statistical Analysis

The reader might feel a need for application of some sort of statistical analysis or test to resolve doubts about intentionality (that is, whether Enos himself intentionally created a text with an A-B-C-D-C’-B’-A’ conceptual sequence based on ideas expressed over a span of 25 verses, surrounding a tight a-b-c-d-e-d’-c’-b’-a’ concentric structure based on antimetabole). On this account it should be noted that some scholars have indeed devised and applied some statistical tests or methods to understand some of the characteristics of proposed chiasms. The tests generally seek to answer questions about style and rhetorical structure, as well as questions about probability and intentionality.

For example, concerning style and rhetorical structure, Andrew H. Bartelt analyzes various units of text, such as Isaiah 5:8–25, Isaiah 9:7–10:4, and numerous others, in light of syllable counts, stress counts, and word counts; and in one specific example, he looks at the macrostructure

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of Isaiah 5:1–10:4 in light of such counts (without counting stresses in prose text), all in an effort to reveal the balanced nature of the chasms in those texts.66 Similarly, Loren F. Bliese analyzes the structure of Nahum in light of metrical or rhythmical chiasmus, which he notes is a “counterpart” to semantic chiasmus; he analyzes the numbers of appearances of key words, accents, “word or sound repetitions, poetic word pairs, or metrical, or syntactic uniqueness” in the chasms of Nehum, as well as the numbers of occurrences of repeated “key words” and thematic words in the three “major parts” of Nahum (1:2–2:2; 2:3–2:13; 3:1–19).67 Indeed, chiastic balance, evidenced by word counts, is abundant in numerous studies.68

On the other hand, concerning probability and intentionality, Boyd F. Edwards and W. Farrell Edwards have advanced what they call a “statistical approach” and a “mathematical approach”69 and Yehuda T.


67. Loren F. Bliese, “A Cryptic Chiastic Acrostic: Finding Meaning From Structure in the Poetry of Nahum,” Journal of Translation and Textlinguistics 7, no. 3 (1995): 48–81. The quoted language is from pages 50 and 71. Bliese notes that “macrostructures are influenced by a preference for the following: … Five units in large books (following the Pentateuch — note Psalms and the prophets Hosea and Joel). Song of Songs has seven units. In smaller books such as Nahum and Habakkuk three units are found (the short Obadiah has two units). Key words are repeated once and only once in each unit of several books …”. Also, there are preferences for “numerical balance between parts,” such as the “number of poems, stanzas, strophes, or lines in each unit,” the “number of words in a poem,” or the “number of occurrences of key words in a book or unit.” 74–75.


Radday has offered a “statistical test.” Edwards and Edwards are “word and phrase centric”; they do not apply their approach to any conceptual chiasms. Rather, they focus solely on “repeated literary elements,” on “all significant literary elements,” which they define as “word or word combinations.” They do once mention “an idea” as potentially constituting a “literary element,” but in that case they explain, “then we do not account for extra appearances of individual words used in this phrase or idea but do account for extra appearances of the entire phrase or idea.” They apply their approach to Alma 36 and make recourse to paraphrases and quotations. The targeted language of their approach (namely, paraphrases and quotations) differs from what is targeted in this paper’s analysis of Enos, which targets what are perceived to be the seven major ideas conveyed by Enos; and which, it is suggested, are identified by him in his text in an A-B-C-D-C’-B’-A’ sequence. The “statistical approach” by Edwards and Edwards, focused as it is on the probability of intentional reversal in the sequence of repeated words and phrases, is seemingly not compatible with an analysis of the question of the intentionality of the reversal in the sequence of six ideas in the proposed conceptual macrochiasm of the book of Enos.

And also concerning probability and intentionality, Radday supplied his “statistical test,” which Craig Blomberg characterizes as Radday’s “attempt to give precise statistical quantification to judgments” concerning whether a proposed chiasm results from an author’s intentional act as opposed to “subconscious or accidental processes.” In reviewing Welch’s *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, Stanislav Segert labels Radday’s “statistical test,” published in Welch’s work as “perhaps the most stimulating, and at the same time most controversial, contribution” to Welch’s volume. Segert adds that “the introduction of quantitative approaches to the study of literary features is in principle welcome, as is his attempt to use statistical procedures to evaluate the probability of intentional symmetrical concentric structures against the incidental

73. Ibid., 112.
74. Ibid., 113.
75. Ibid., 121–23.
arrangement of elements.” Says Segert, “Even if concentric symmetry could be proved without any doubt for a given passage of poetry or prose, it does not follow necessarily that the passage shows internal unity and homogeneity against a possibility of multiple authorship and editorial interventions.”

In discussing his “statistical test,” Radday refers an ABC-D-C’B’A’ sequence as “a perfect chiasm” and “the paradigm sequence.” And indeed, Radday focuses on conceptual chiasms almost exclusively, with numerous structures composed exclusively of concepts, with some of the other structures composed of elements identified as a mixture of concepts and of quotations and phrases. Radday’s citation to Lenglet’s view of Daniel 2:1–7:28 notes an A-B-C-D-D’-B’-C’-A’ pattern, which he contrasts to some “elementary features” of chiasmus that remain from earlier now-non-extant “elaborate chiastic construction,” while concluding that Daniel nonetheless retains “certain chiastic tendencies … in its structure.” His depiction of the A-B-C-D-E-D’-C’-B’-A’ chiasm of 1 Samuel 10:5–10 is probably the closest he comes to portraying a chiasm of a length much like that in the chiasm identified by Welch in Mosiah 5:10–12, which, of course, according to what Radday concludes, would be given an r value of -1 (complete inversion).

One chiasm that Radday identifies that also is somewhat close in length to that of Enos 1:3–27 is his proposed chiasm for chapters 3 and 4 of the Book of Jonah (3:2–4:11, 20 verses, compared to 25 verses here analyzed in the book of Enos). There Radday identifies a 15-element A-B-C-D-E-F-G-H-G’-F’-C’-D’-E’-B’-A’ purely conceptual concentric structure, which he explains is “impaired” by the overlapping presence of “extensive directly parallel complements.” And closely akin to the number of elements of the proposed A-B-C-D-C’-B’-A’ conceptual chiasm advanced in my paper for Enos is Radday’s A-B-C-D-E-D’-C’-B’-A’ conceptual chiasm for the 27 verses of Leviticus chapter 19, although his central element D is proposed to extend a full ten verses, from v. 9 through v. 18.

79. Ibid., 53.
80. Ibid., 80.
81. Ibid., 52.
82. Ibid., 60–61.
83. Ibid., 88.
But perhaps closest of all of Radday’s conceptual chiasms is what he proposes for Exodus 2:1–22, which he identifies as a purely conceptual A-B-C-D-C'-B'-A chiasm, perhaps a structure that could be said to be very much like that proposed for Enos, both in length of text involved and in number of chiastic elements. And it so happens that Angelico di Marco cites to Radday’s proposed conceptual chiasm of Exodus 2:1–22 without disagreeing with him concerning it. Indeed, in his analysis of Exodus 2, Radday expounds extensively on the chiasm of that chapter, while asserting that it treats the “salient traits” of Moses’ first 40 years of life, doing so in a seven-part conceptual chiastic text that describes “no more than a few incidents, chiastically paired with the most decisive in the middle,” “five scenes,” forming what Radday indicates is “an elegant chiasm that could not escape the notice of any reader, and should give him the key for understanding the man.”

The proposal analyzed above concerning Enos perhaps suggests what Radday would characterize as a “paradigm sequence” and may well offer somewhat of a key to better understanding Enos, both the man and the book he composed.

I suggest here that the book of Enos was composed solely and simply as an A-B-C-D-C'-B'-A conceptual sequence based on ideas expressed over a span of 25 verses, surrounding a tightly crafted Christocentric a-b-c-d-e-d'-c'-b'-a’ structure that is based on words and phrases, a central structure which one anonymous reviewer of this paper refers to as “nearly flawless.”

**A Note on Blomberg’s Criteria for Extended Chiasmus**

It should be noted that regarding what he refers to as “criteria for detecting extended chiasmus” (so-called macrochiasms or extended chiasmus over lengthier texts), Blomberg set forth nine of his own “criteria which hypotheses of extended chiasmus must meet in order to be credible,” assuming that his nine criteria are “sufficiently restrictive to prevent one from imagining chiasmus where it was never intended.” His first criterion essentially guides analysts to prefer “more

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84. Ibid., 90–96.
85. Angelico Di Marco, “Der Chiasmus in der Bibel 1: Ein Beitrag zur strukturellen Stilistik,” *Linguistica Biblica* 36 (1970): 47, citing it to note that Radday’s reliance on it becomes part of Radday’s analysis that leads to his conclusion that Moses composed the five books of the Torah.
straightforward outlines" and “more conventional outlines” over “less obvious arrangements of the material” if they adequately “resolve” what the “structure of the text in question” is. In Enos, of course, one “straightforward outline” happens to be the perceptive paragraphing that is introduced in the very first printing of the Book of Mormon. The central chiasm of vv. 15 to 16a begins a middle element of a seven-element concentric structure delineated by paragraphs; concepts or ideas characterize the three elements in the first half of the text, corresponding to concepts or ideas that, in reverse sequence, characterize the three matching elements in the second half of the text.

Blomberg’s second criterion: There must be clear examples of parallelism between the two ‘halves’ of the hypothesized chiasmus. ... In other words, the chiasmus must be based on hard data in the text which most readers note irrespective of their overall synthesis.”

Such parallelism in the two halves of Enos is explicated above in my analysis of the “paired sections” from each half.

Blomberg’s third criterion: “Verbal (or grammatical) parallelism as well as conceptual (or structural) parallelism should characterize most if not all of the corresponding pairs of subdivisions.” Such grammatical parallelism is reflected in the identified key words and key phrases in the corresponding elements; such conceptual parallelism is reflected in the overall A-B-C-D-C'-B'-A’ concentric structure proposed.

Blomberg’s fourth criterion: “The verbal parallelism should involve central or dominant imagery or terminology, not peripheral or trivial language.” In Enos, the imagery and terminology concerning the major themes of the fates of the Nephites and of the Lamanites and of Enos himself are rather neatly confined to their own chiatic elements.

Blomberg’s fifth criterion: “Both verbal and conceptual parallelism should involve words and ideas not regularly found elsewhere within the proposed chiasmus.” This is essentially the equivalent of Welch’s criterion of “mavericks.” In Enos, the proposed chiasm is founded on a reversal in the sequence of repeated ideas (A: Enos’s Personal redemption; B: Redemption of the Nephites; C: Redemption of the Lamanites; D: Christ-

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88. Ibid., 5–6.
89. Ibid., 6.
90. Ibid.
centered covenant; C': Restoration of the Lamanites; B': Redemption of the Nephites; A': Enos’s Personal redemption). The matching key words within each of the respective corresponding elements are identified above in the discussion of the “paired sections.”

Blomberg’s sixth criterion: “Multiple sets of correspondences between passages opposite each other in the chiasmus as well as multiple members of the chiasmus itself are desirable. A simple ABA’ or ABB’A’ pattern is so common to so many different forms of rhetoric that it usually yields few startlingly profound insights. Three or four members repeated in inverse sequence may be more significant. Five or more elements paired in sequence usually resist explanations which invoke subconscious or accidental processes.” The proposal of three paired elements and one central element for the structure of the book of Enos falls within Blomberg’s “more significant” category.

Blomberg’s seventh criterion: “The outline should divide the text at natural breaks which would be agreed upon even by those proposing very different structures to account for the whole.” The “natural breaks” identified for Enos are signaled by the first phrases of textual sections: “Behold, it came to pass,” “Behold,” “Now, it came to pass,” “And it came to pass,” “Wherefore,” “And now it came to pass,” “And it came to pass,” and “And it came to pass.”

Blomberg’s eighth criterion: “the center of the chiasmus, which forms its climax, should be a passage worthy of that position in light of its theological or ethical significance.” Enos seems to satisfy this criterion. Blomberg also asserts that if the theme at the center of the chiasmus “were in some way repeated in the first and last passages of the text, as is typical in chiasmus, the proposal would become that much more plausible.” Perhaps this aspect of this criterion is partially satisfied by the fact that the beginning and ending elements of the chiasm address the notion of salvation for Enos, and of course salvation is the transcendent purpose of Christ’s mission and the objective of the Christ-centered covenant of the text.

92. Blomberg, “The Structure of 2 Corinthians,” 6. At this point in this sentence Blomberg adds a footnote which directs reader to his note 51, on page 16, where he indicates that “P. F. Ellis (Seven Pauline Letters [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1982] 140–41) plausibly suggests that all of 2 Corinthians was an original unity, in light of its overall ABA’ pattern (chaps. 1–7, 8–9, 10–13).” Blomberg thus seemingly acknowledges the validity of some macrochiasms of only two repeated elements.
93. Ibid., 6–7.
94. Ibid., 7.
95. Ibid.
And Blomberg’s ninth criterion: “Ruptures in the outline should be avoided, if at all possible. Having to argue that one or more of the members of the reverse part of the structure have been shifted from their corresponding locations in the forward sequence substantially weakens the hypothesis; in postulating chiasmus, exceptions disprove the rule!”96 By “ruptures” in the outline, Blomberg means chiasms that manifest a “skew” or “asymmetry” (such as A-B-C-D-B’-C’-A’). The Enos proposal does not manifest any such “rupture” in the reversal of the sequence of the repeated elements.

96. Ibid.