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Faith and Scholarship**

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“A Voice of Warning”

Daniel C. Peterson

Abstract: *The Restoration of the Gospel began in an atmosphere of ardent and urgent expectations of the Second Coming of Christ. We are, after all, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Those expectations were shared far beyond the ranks of those who eventually joined the Church. But the early nineteenth-century men and women who did become Latter-day Saints were commanded that, having been warned, they should warn their neighbors. However, nearly two full centuries since the founding of the Church, and more than two centuries since Joseph Smith's First Vision, the Lord's Second Advent has still not arrived. Does that mean that this isn't a time for warning? That the time to warn our neighbors hasn't yet come? No, not at all. We remain under the divinely given obligation to spread the word and, yes, to warn. And there are many ways to do so.*

The most important of the Latter-day Saint missionary tracts of the nineteenth century, by a considerable distance, was Parley P. Pratt's *A Voice of Warning*. By that time a member of the still-new Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Elder Pratt wrote the lengthy text over a two-month period while on a mission to New York, and it was published in 1837. Eventually, it appeared in more than thirty English editions and was translated into several other languages. In it, Elder Pratt detailed differences between the still-developing doctrines of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and those of other Christian denominations. He used biblical texts to explain the Restoration, described the recovery of the Book of Mormon, proclaimed the Latter-day Saint belief in modern-day revelation, and outlined some of the events that would precede the Second Coming of Christ.

It's perhaps a little bit difficult for us, now a quarter of the way

through the twenty-first century and drawing ever nearer to the dawn of the Church's third hundred years, to appreciate the significance of *A Voice of Warning*. But Latter-day Saints had created only a small body of writing by 1837, so it loomed large for that reason alone. And, even physically, it wasn't small: Printed editions of it range between 133 and 248 pages in length; the audiobook version of it runs nearly five-and-a-half hours.

The English Book of Mormon was less than a decade old by 1837, the Doctrine and Covenants had only been published in 1835, and the Pearl of Great Price was still decades in the future. However, *A Voice of Warning* was important for far more than its relative literary bulk within the nonscriptural literature of the fledgling Restoration. In it, Parley Pratt set forth an orderly account of Latter-day Saint beliefs as they stood at the time and created many of the scriptural arguments that members of the Church have used ever since to elucidate, justify, and defend their faith. They're familiar to us now, but they were once new.

I'm interested here, though, in the title that he chose for his pioneering work: *A Voice of Warning*. It's fairly clear that the first Latter-day Saints expected the Second Advent of the Savior to come much sooner than it has — every meteor shower seemed to be a sign that the Lord's coming was very near at hand — and I think it safe to say that our sense of the imminence of that event has lessened quite a bit. Perhaps, indeed, a bit too much. For “the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:2). The Second Epistle of Peter exhorts its audience

That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. . . .

But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent

heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation. (2 Peter 3:2–4, 8–15)

As the Lord himself says,

Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. (Revelation 16:15)

But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. (Matthew 24:36–44)

We have been right, though, I think, to settle in for the long haul. (It has, after all, genuinely *been* a long haul since 1830 — both figuratively and, with the long pioneer treks of our history, literally.) We have gathered the Saints from and within all nations, built settlements, and erected temples. We have opened new and previously unimaginable

places to the preaching of the Gospel and the establishment of congregations of the Church.

After all, even in Matthew 24, that powerful chapter about the Last Days, the Lord didn't counsel us to hunker down and simply wait for the Apocalypse, scanning the heavens for signs and counting the minutes until his coming. He advised us, rather, to continue to work and to live as we should be living, however long the time:

Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. . . .

The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of. (Matthew 24:45–47, 50)

I have heard that Elder Bruce R. McConkie, of the Quorum of Twelve, used to say that the Second Coming of Christ was not imminent, not just around the corner. In his opinion, he supposedly said, Jesus would not return within the lifetime of anyone present in his audience. Unfortunately, I've been unable to locate an actual text or quotation to that effect.¹ But this statement of his seems consistent with such a position:

The revelations expressly, specifically, and pointedly say that when the Lord comes the second time to usher in the millennial era, he is going to find, in every nation, kindred, and tongue, and among every people, those who are kings and queens, who will live and reign a thousand years on earth. (Revelation 5:9–10.)

That is a significant statement that puts in perspective the preaching of the gospel to the world. . . . What is involved is that the elders of Israel, holding the priesthood, in person have to tread the soil, eat in the homes of the people, figuratively put their arms around the honest in heart, feed

1. The closest I've come to a definite account is a second-, third-, or even fourth-hand report of his having made such a statement while addressing the assembled presidencies and bishops of the then-fourteen Brigham Young University stakes during a leadership meeting on 31 October 1981. See "A Different Bruce R. McConkie," *Wheat & Tares* (website), 4 February 2024, wheatandtares.org/2024/02/04/a-different-bruce-r-mcconkie/.

them the gospel, and baptize them and confer the Holy Ghost upon them. Then these people have to progress and advance, and grow in the things of the Spirit, until they can go to the house of the Lord, until they can enter a temple of God and receive the blessings of the priesthood, out of which come the rewards of being kings and priests. The way we become kings and priests [and queens and priestesses] is through the ordinances of the house of the Lord.²

I wonder whether, if Elder Pratt were publishing his tract today while knowing how many decades have passed since the re-opening of the heavens in 1820 and the founding of the Church in 1830, he would have titled it *A Voice of Warning*. Might it not have been called something more gentle, a little less breathlessly urgent, like *A Voice of Invitation*?

Perhaps. And yet a voice of warning is still appropriate. The Apocalypse will come. The Savior will return. In such an hour as we think not, an hour of which we are currently unaware. Surely it is closer to us now than it was in 1837.

Moreover, our individual returns to him are never more than a few decades off, no matter how young we are, how closely we watch our nutrition, or how much time we spend in the gym. And some of us will return much sooner than the actuarial tables would suggest.

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. (Ecclesiastes 9:11)

So, there is still a place, even in our time, for the admonitory voice:

For this is a day of warning, and not a day of many words. For I, the Lord, am not to be mocked in the last days. (Doctrine and Covenants 63:58)

Now, obviously, the call to warn applies especially to those who have been especially set apart for such a role—including prophets

2. Bruce R. McConkie, “To the Koreans, and All the People of Asia,” in Spencer J. Palmer, *The Expanding Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 142, archive.org/details/expandingchurch0000palm/page/142/mode/2up. The dramatic recent surge in temple construction takes on special meaning in the light of Elder McConkie’s statement.

and apostles and missionaries. They are called to serve full-time in the assignment. But the call to warn predates the formal ordination of apostles in this modern dispensation, and it applies to every Latter-day Saint. On 30 August 1831, the Prophet Joseph Smith received the revelation that we now know and have canonized as Doctrine and Covenants 88. Included in that wonderful and lengthy section of scripture are the following two verses:

Behold, I sent you out to testify and warn the people, and it becometh every man who hath been warned to warn his neighbor. Therefore, they are left without excuse, and their sins are upon their own heads. (Doctrine and Covenants 88:81–82)

The obligation to warn, to speak up for the claims and the standards of the Restored Gospel, rests upon every member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. And, since that is so, we should give serious consideration to a classic passage in the Hebrew Bible in which the role of a warner is set forth:

Again the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman: If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people; Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning; his blood shall be upon him. But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul. But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand.

So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from

it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. . . . Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? (Ezekiel 33:1–9,11)

There are innumerable places and ways in which we can raise a warning or admonitory voice, or even an inviting voice. One of them, I believe, is through the work of the Interpreter Foundation, through *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*. Parley Pratt clearly saw writing and publishing as an important part of his calling to warn. Why shouldn't we?

This volume of the Journal—its sixty-sixth—provides a varied wealth of insights from a range of Latter-day Saint thinkers. I'm thankful for their offerings. I believe that they provide solid grounds for taking the message of the Restoration seriously, for accepting its invitation to come unto Christ, and for heeding its warnings and admonitions. As I customarily do in every introduction that I write, I also wish to thank the reviewers, source checkers, editors, and donors who have made this volume possible. In particular, I thank Allen Wyatt, Godfrey Ellis, Brant S. Gardner, and Rebecca Reynolds Lambert for their dedicated editorial work on the contents of this volume. It may not be apparent, but it's always there. The Interpreter Foundation as a whole and this journal in particular have been created and are largely sustained by the devoted contributions of volunteers and unpaid authors. I am grateful to them for all that they do for Interpreter and, for that matter and much more fundamentally, toward the building of the Kingdom.



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).

A Combinatorial Approach to Modeling All Possible Golden Plates

Josh Coates

Abstract: *Historical reports containing information about the properties of the golden plates provide upper and lower bounds for calculating possible configurations of their size, weight, and material composition, as well as the possible properties of reformed Egyptian. This study employs a two-part process to analyze these configurations. First, it examines the physical properties of the plates, generating over 4 billion possible combinations. Second, it analyzes the nature of the writing on the plates, assuming the translated English text of the Book of Mormon is directly representative of the reformed Egyptian engravings. This process involves calculating and filtering combinations based on historical accounts, physical constraints, and linguistic considerations. The study demonstrates that while most configurations are unworkable, nearly one million configurations remain both physically possible and consistent with the documentary record. Key findings suggest the plates likely had less than 20% gold content, weighed more than 54 lb., contained between 187 and 259 plates, and had dimensions slightly smaller than, but within 10% of, Joseph Smith's description. The writing on the plates likely averaged less than 5 mm square, with each character representing at least three English characters, similar to Egyptian Demotic. Although there are inherent limitations in historical analysis of this kind, this mathematical approach provides a novel perspective on the physical reality of the plates.*

There are dozens of nineteenth-century reports about the physical properties of the ancient record Joseph Smith recovered from a

hill near his home in Palmyra, New York, in 1827.¹ The reliability of these sources varies widely, ranging from early firsthand accounts to late, unsourced reports, thus presenting a challenge for historical analysis.²

Despite the abundance of reports, the exact physical properties of the plates remain uncertain. While many scholars have made reasonable estimates about the size, weight, number of plates, and their material composition, the current paper takes a novel approach.³ Rather than contributing another estimate, it describes a systematic process for determining all mathematically possible configurations of the plates, given a set of constraints derived from historical accounts. This process not only computes valid configurations of the plates but also demonstrates that numerous physical and writing configurations are plausible, contradicting the claims of critics who have argued otherwise.⁴

This process consists of two parts. Part One determines the physical properties of the plates and involves the following processes:

1. Evaluate the historical record for information on physical properties.
2. Assign reasonable minimums, maximums, and steps for each physical property.
3. Calculate all possible combinations of physical properties.

1. See Appendix G: Historical Record of Plate Descriptions.

2. For example, William Smith is a firsthand witness who stated that he lifted the plates and estimated they weighed 60 lb., but his statement is a fifty-year-old recollection. Compare this with the nearly contemporary 1830 remembrance of C. C. Blatchley who reported the plates as being 30 lb. in weight. Unfortunately, he does not cite a source for this information.
3. Read H. Putnam, "Were the Golden Plates Made of Tumbaga?," *Improvement Era* 69, no. 9 (September 1966); Jerry D. Grover Jr., *Ziff, Magic Goggles, and Golden Plates: Etymology of Zyf and a Metallurgical Analysis of the Book of Mormon Plates* (Provo, UT: Grover Publishing, 2015); Bruce E. Dale, "How Big a Book? Estimating the Total Surface Area of the Book of Mormon Plates," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 25 (2017), scholarsarchive.byu.edu/interpreter/vol25/iss1/14/; Janne M. Sjodahl, "The Book of Mormon Plates," *Improvement Era* 26, no. 6 (1923); Janne M. Sjodahl, *An Introduction to the Study of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1927), archive.org/details/introductiontost0000jmsj.
4. For example, see Trent Horn, "5 Reasons to Doubt the Book of Mormon," 28 August 2024, in *The Counsel of Trent*, podcast, catholic.com/audio/cot/5-reasons-to-doubt-the-book-of-mormon; and Rebecca Bibliotheca and Landon Brophy, "Part 3: Textual Analysis Dismantles Book of Mormon Authenticity w/ Dr. John Lundwall," 17 August 2023, in *Mormon.ish*, podcast, mormonishpodcast.org/episode/text.

4. Apply filters to eliminate physically impossible or historically unsupported configurations.

Part Two analyzes the nature of the writing on the plates. The required analysis, for validating the physical property combinations, assumes that the translated English text of the Book of Mormon is directly representative of the reformed Egyptian engravings on the plates. This analysis includes the following procedures:

1. Evaluate the historical record for information on properties related to writing on the plates.
2. Assign reasonable minimums, maximums, and steps for each writing property.
3. Calculate all possible combinations of writing properties.
4. Apply filters to eliminate implausible configurations.

This two-part process yields a comprehensive set of combinations representing the physical properties of plates that are both consistent with the documentary record and capable of containing the complete text of the Book of Mormon. By employing this mathematical approach, a more objective basis for understanding the possible characteristics of the golden plates can be provided while accounting for the inherent limitations of historical analysis.

Part One

Step 1: Evaluate the Historical Record for Information on Physical Properties

The documentary record attributes firsthand interactions with the plates to at least twenty-four individuals.⁵ These eyewitness accounts vary in their usefulness, with some providing detailed information about the plates' physical properties and others offering little to no relevant data.⁶ Supplementing these primary sources are numerous

5. Sarah Flower Anderick, Alvah Beaman, Harrison Burgess, Oliver Cowdery, Lucy Harris, Martin Harris, Luke Johnson, Joseph McKune Sr., Hiram Page, Catherine Smith Salisbury, Emma Smith, Hyrum Smith, Joseph Smith Jr., Joseph Smith Sr., Lucy Mack Smith, Samuel H. Smith, William Smith, Josiah Stowell, Christian Whitmer, David Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, John Whitmer, Mary Musselman Whitmer, Peter Whitmer Jr. See "Book of Mormon Witnesses" *Mormon*, mormonr.org/qnas/0Eiiyt/book_of_mormon_witnesses.

6. For example, Lucy Harris said she hefted the plates and felt them "under a cover," but there are no quantifiable details from her experience, whereas William Smith reported the dimensions and composition of the plates.

newspaper accounts, both attributed and unattributed, which describe the characteristics of the plates.⁷ It is important to note that the quality and reliability of these reports vary significantly, and their evaluation necessarily involves a degree of subjectivity.⁸ For a comprehensive list and transcriptions of these sources, refer to Appendix H: Historical Record of Plate Descriptions.

Table 1 presents a summary of the ranges of physical properties reported in the historical records. Minimum or maximum values that deviate significantly from typical reports are shown in parentheses.

Table 1. Physical properties of the plates from the documentary record.

Property	Reported Minimum	Reported Maximum
Plate Length	7"	10" (12") ⁹
Plate Width	5"	7" (12")
Plate Thickness	"parchment" ¹⁰	0.0325" (0.125") ¹¹
Stack Height	4" (½") ¹²	8"
Void between Plates ¹³	unspecified	unspecified

7. The earliest description of the plates was published in "Golden Bible," *Palmyra Freeman*, 11 August 1829, contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/BOMP/id/176/. The article, which was unattributed, said the plates were "8 inches long, 6 wide, and one eighth of an inch thick."

8. For example, contemporary firsthand accounts are generally more reliable than late thirdhand accounts but evaluation of sources is inherently subjective.

9. "Mormonism," *New England Christian Herald* 4 (7 November 1832): 22–23, bhroberts.org/records/ayDFqc-S3DeIb/new_england_christian_herald_prints_article_discussing_joseph_smiths_june_1830_trial. The article reports Josiah Stowell's testimony that the plates were "about one foot square and six inches thick." Both the length and the width are larger than other historical accounts.

10. In an 1881 interview, David Whitmer states that the individual plates were as thick as "parchment." See "Mormonism," *Kansas City Journal*, 5 June 1881, catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/daac9a1e-5938-4487-9610-0e4e5b5981ed/0/0.

11. In "Golden Bible," *Palmyra Freeman*, 11 August 1829, it was said that each plate was "one eighth of an inch thick." This figure was also included in "Caution Against the Golden Bible," *New York Telescope*, 20 February 1830.

12. In Fayette Lapham, "The Mormons," *Historical Magazine* 7 (May 1870), Lapham recalled that Joseph Smith Sr. had told him forty years earlier that the plates "were in the form of a book, half an inch thick."

13. This refers to the relatively small space between the individual unsealed plates. The space was due to the irregularities in their flatness and contributed to the overall height of the plates when stacked. There is nothing in the documentary record related to this property.

Property	Reported Minimum	Reported Maximum
Weight of Plates	30 lb. (more than 20 lb.) ¹⁴	60 lb.
Alloy Gold Content	unspecified mix of copper and gold ¹⁵	100% gold ¹⁶
Percent Sealed ¹⁷	33%	66%
Total Number of Plates	unspecified	unspecified

While the text of the Book of Mormon itself does not specify the composition of the plates,¹⁸ nineteenth-century witnesses described them as having the “appearance of gold.”¹⁹ William Smith was the only witness to say that the plates were made of a gold and copper alloy, although it is unclear how or why he came to this conclusion.²⁰ Examples of gold and copper alloys capable of being worked to resemble pure gold have been discovered in both the Old and New Worlds; see figure 1. These findings provide historical context for the possibility that such an alloy was used in the creation of the plates. See Appendix C: Gold and Copper Alloy.

14. Obadiah Dogberry, “Gold Bible, No. 6,” *The Reflector* (Palmyra, NY) 2, no. 16 (19 March 1831), contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/BOMP/id/572/rec/1. Abner Cole, writing under the pen name of Obadiah Dogberry, reported that the plates weighed “something more than 20 lbs.”

15. William B. Smith, “The Old Soldier’s Testimony,” *The Saints Herald*, 4 October 1884, catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/689aca02-8cc3-4037-8922-46601057b099/0/10. In a sermon, William Smith stated that the plates were “a mixture of gold and copper, [so] they were much heavier than stone.”

16. “The Orators of Mormon,” *Catholic Telegraph* (Cincinnati), 14 April 1832, contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/BOMP/id/602/. Orson Pratt was reported as describing the plates as “pure gold.”

17. “The Orators of Mormon,” *The Western Press* (Mercer, PA), April 1832. It was reported that one-third of the plates were sealed, whereas Orson Pratt said in a discourse that “about two-thirds were sealed up.” See Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses*, 3:344–54.

18. Nephi (1 Nephi 19:1) and Moroni (Mormon 8:5) simply indicated that the plates were made from “ore,” however in 1 Nephi 18:25 Nephi states that in the New World they did find “all manner of ore, both of gold, and of silver, and of copper.”

19. Joseph Smith, William Smith, William E. McLellin, and The Testimony of the Eight Witnesses all used the qualifier “having the appearance of gold” when describing the plates.

20. However, in 1832 Josiah Stowell reportedly testified that he saw the corner of the plates and described them as appearing like “stone of a greenish caste” which may indicate some element of oxidized copper. (“Mormonism,” *New England Christian Herald*.)

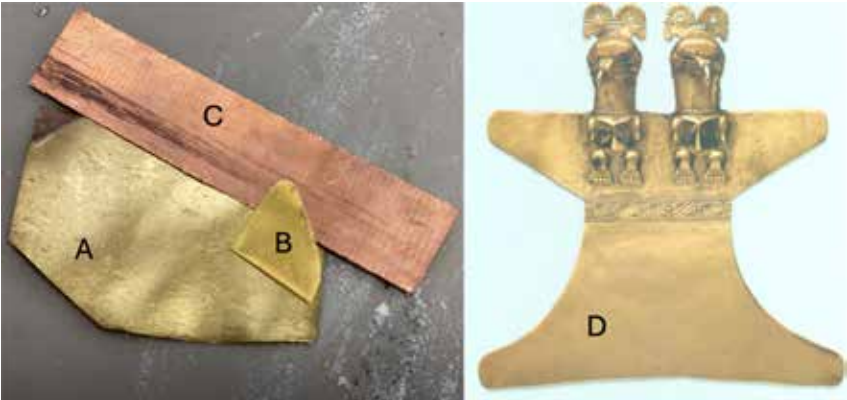


Figure 1. A. Tumbaga composed of 15% gold, 84% copper and 1% silver that has been depletion gilded with oxalic acid. B. 100% gold. C. 100% copper. Photo from the author. D. Columbian (Muisca) lost-wax cast of tumbaga, estimated to contain up to 70% copper. Double Eagle Pendant, Metropolitan Museum of Art (1983.168).

Step 2: Assign Reasonable Minimums, Maximums, and Steps for Each Physical Property

Although there is significant support from the historical records for most of the physical properties of the plates, assigning a minimum and maximum for a given property is somewhat subjective. In addition to minimums and maximums, a step value is assigned to each property. The step value represents the incremental change from the minimum to the maximum of a given property used in calculating all possible combinations. For instance, if assigning a Plate Length of 7" with a step of $\frac{1}{8}$ ", the calculations will include lengths of 7", $7\frac{1}{8}$ ", $7\frac{1}{4}$ ", $7\frac{3}{8}$ ", $7\frac{1}{2}$ ", and so on. While steps could theoretically be infinitesimally small, this would result in an infinite number of calculations, and so step sizes were selected that balance precision with computational practicality.

Table 2 presents all physical properties included in the calculations, along with their assigned minimums, maximums, and step values. Note that two key properties—the height of the plate stack and the total number of plates—are not included in this table. These properties are dependent variables determined by the combination of other properties in each calculated configuration.

Table 2. Minimum, maximum, and step of physical properties of the plates.

Property	Minimum	Maximum	Step
Plate Length	7"	10"	⅛"
Plate Width	5"	7"	⅛"
Plate Thickness ²¹	0.005"	0.0325"	0.001"
Void between Plates ²²	10%	100%	10%
Weight of Plates ²³	40 lb.	60 lb.	¼ lb.
Alloy Gold Content ²⁴	12.5%	100%	2.5%
Percent Sealed	33%	66%	3%

The values in table 2 were selected based on the analysis of historical accounts (see Step 1) and considerations of physical plausibility. For properties where historical records provide a clear range, the reported values have been closely followed. In cases where historical accounts are less definitive, informed decisions were made by considering both the broader context of the accounts and relevant physical constraints.

Note that step sizes vary between properties. Smaller step sizes are used for properties where small variations could significantly impact the overall configuration (such as plate thickness), while larger steps are used for properties where minor variations are less consequential (such as weight).

This approach allows for the systematic exploration of the full range of possible plate configurations while maintaining a manageable computational load. The resulting calculations will provide a comprehensive view of all physically plausible combinations that align with historical accounts.

21. The average thickness of mid-nineteenth-century parchment was about 0.15 mm or 0.005" according to T. Barrett et al., "Plot 7: Thickness one sheet," *Paper through Time: Nondestructive Analysis of 14th- through 19th-Century Papers*, University of Iowa, paper.lib.uiowa.edu/plot7.php.

22. There is nothing in the documentary record relating to the void between plates.

23. Although there is an early unsourced report of the plates weighing thirty pounds, reports within the forty- to sixty-pound range are provided by William Smith, Martin Harris, and Willard Chase.

24. Tumbaga samples have been found with copper content greater than 80% and gold content less than 20%. See Marta Porcaro et al., "Characterization of an Ancient Bimetallic Alloy from Moche Civilization (Peru)," *Materials* 16, no. 22 (2023): 7211.

Step 3: Calculate All Possible Combinations of Physical Properties

Based on the ranges and steps established in Step 2, the initial calculations yielded 4,164,048,000 possible combinations of physical properties for the plates. However, not all these combinations are consistent with historical accounts or physical plausibility. By applying a preliminary filter to remove combinations resulting in a stack height of less than 4" or greater than 8" (the range supported by historical accounts), 86.6% of these combinations can be eliminated. This leaves 559,457,522 potentially valid combinations for further analysis.

Calculating height

The height of the plate stack is the most restrictive property, invalidating most possible combinations. Historical accounts consistently place the height of the plates between 4" and 8", with Joseph Smith specifically stating the height was "near six inches."

Height is calculated by computing the sum of the thickness of plates and the voids between them, then multiplying by the number of plates calculated for that combination. Because absolute flatness in metalworking is unachievable,²⁵ when thin plates are stacked, small voids exist between them due to surface irregularities.

While it is not known exactly how the plates in the sealed portion were sealed,²⁶ it seems reasonable to suppose that the process of sealing would compress the void space between the sealed plates to some degree.²⁷ For a detailed discussion of the experimental

25. For acceptable modern tolerances of flatness, see ASTM A480/A480M-08b, "Standard Specification for General Requirements for Flat-Rolled Stainless and Heat-Resisting Steel Plate, Sheet, and Strip," ASTM International (West Conshohocken, PA, 2008), cdn.standards.iteh.ai/samples/63866/2bb30e5775364344a0e60935d975feb8/ASTM-A480-A480M-08b.pdf.

26. In 1832, Abner Cole reported that the plates were "secured by the seals," perhaps indicating that they were some type of band. (Dogberry, "Gold Bible, No. 6.") However, in an 1878 sermon, John Whitmer said that "part of the book was sealed up solid." See I. C. Funn, "John Whitmer, Discourse," *Sentinel* (Kingston, MO), repr. in *The Saints' Herald* 25, no. 4 (15 February 1878): 57. David Whitmer also said, "there was sealed appeared as solid to my view as wood." ("Mormonism," *Kansas City Journal*.) Josiah Stowell reportedly testified he saw a corner of the plates and described them as appearing like a "stone of a greenish caste" which may indicate some type of oxidized soldering of the plates to seal them. ("Mormonism," *New England Christian Herald*.)

27. The compression factor used in the calculation is set at 23% which was determined through experimentation with 165 copper plates.

approach to estimating void space and compression, see Appendix D: Plate Void Experiment.

Visualizations

Visual representation of the data presents a significant challenge as there are nine dimensions of physical properties (see table 1). To provide some level of visualization, a three-dimensional scatterplot with a color gradient representing a fourth dimension may be utilized. This shows the relationships between plate thickness, alloy gold content, total weight, and total number of plates. In figure 2, each point represents a valid combination of plate properties. The x, y, and z axes show Plate Thickness, Alloy Gold Content, and Total Weight, respectively, while the color gradient indicates the Total Number of Plates. This visualization allows us to observe patterns and relationships between these key properties that would be difficult to discern from raw data alone.

Note that while this visualization is informative, it still represents a

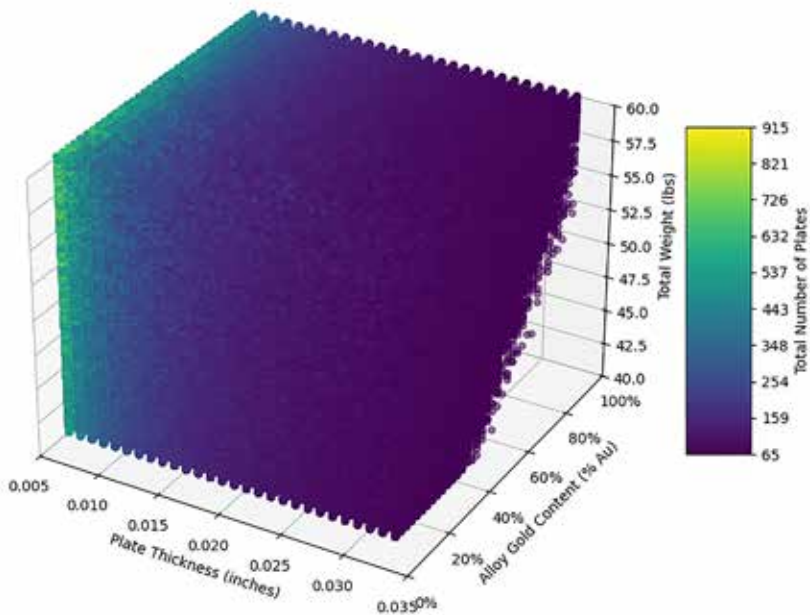


Figure 2. Scatter plot showing a 1% random sample of 559,457,522 valid combinations of plate thickness, alloy gold content, total weight, and total number of plates. Combinations that do not meet the height requirement of 4” to 8” are excluded as invalid. Note that as gold content increases, total weight must also increase.

simplification of the complete dataset. The remaining five dimensions of physical properties, while not visually represented in figure 2, are still utilized in determining the validity of each combination in the analyses.

Step 4: Apply Filters to the Results

The initial calculations yield over four billion possible combinations of physical properties for the plates. Given that these calculations are based on historical reports of varying quality, and the assessment of report quality is somewhat subjective, it is challenging to confidently narrow the results further. What these initial calculations demonstrate is that if only the historical descriptions of the plates are considered, then billions of mathematically valid configurations exist.

Further refinement of the results is possible by privileging the first-hand reports of Joseph Smith, who was most familiar with the plates. Smith reported that the plates were six inches wide, eight inches long, and “somewhat near” six inches in height.²⁸ He also described the thickness of the plates as “not quite so thick as common tin.”

There is no record of Smith measuring the plates, and his use of the phrase “somewhat near” to describe the height suggests he was estimating rather than providing precise measurements. To account for potential errors in these estimates, a margin of error is applied to the dimensions in this filter; see table 3.

Table 3. Joseph Smith description filter,

Property	Minimum	Maximum	Step
Plate Length	7.5"	8.5"	1/16"
Plate Width	5.5"	6.5"	1/16"
Plate Thickness ²⁹	0.015"	0.019"	0.001"
Stack Height	5.5"	6.25"	N/A

Applying this filter reduces the initial four billion combinations to 505,634,400. Of these, 99.6% are invalid due to their calculated

28. Joseph Smith, “Church History,” *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 9 (1 March 1842): 707.

29. Early nineteenth-century tin was primarily imported from England and was available in thicknesses between 0.012" and 0.020". However, in New England tin of thickness 0.019" was most commonly sold. A range of 0.015" to 0.019" is intended to conservatively approximate “not quite so thick as common tin [0.019]”. See Appendix E: Nineteenth-Century Tinplate.

height, leaving 2,266,258 valid combinations that approximate Smith’s dimensional description; see figure 3.

An additional filter can be applied to further refine the number of valid combinations. In Step 3, the void between unsealed plates was set to 10%–100% with a step of 10%. This range can be narrowed based on experimental data.

An experiment was conducted using 165 copper discs, each approximately 4 inches in diameter and averaging 0.020 inches in thickness. These discs were fabricated, stacked, and measured. The void between sheets was calculated to be approximately 53%. After applying compression, this void was reduced to approximately 41%, a 23% reduction. It is expected that larger plates would have less uniformity, suggesting that an average void of 53% may be a lower bound for uncompressed plates. However, this experiment has limitations, including variations in compression, sheet size, and uniformity. See Appendix D: Plate Void Experiment.

Based on this experimental data, a second filter may be applied,

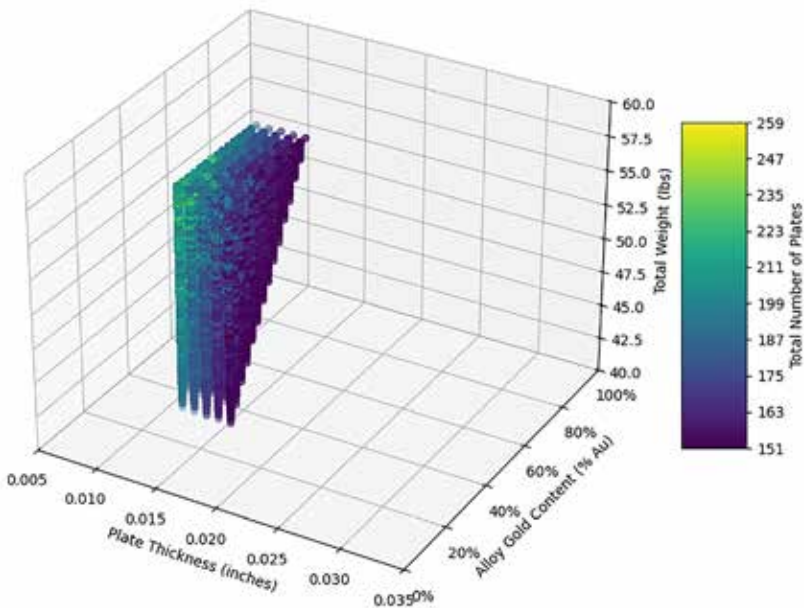


Figure 3. Scatter plot showing 2,266,258 valid combinations of plate thickness, alloy gold content, total weight, and total number of plates. Combinations that do not match the approximate length, width, height, and plate thickness described by Joseph Smith are excluded. The results indicate a minimum weight of about 42 lb., an alloy of less than 48% gold, and a total number of plates between 151 and 259.

calculating the Stack Height property using unsealed voids between 30%–60% with a 23% compression factor on the sealed portion. Increasing the precision of the void from 10% to 2.5% and applying the new void range yields 657,324,720 total combinations to consider. Excluding results that do not meet the height requirement eliminates 99.9% of these combinations, leaving 37,657 combinations that meet both the Joseph Smith description criteria and the void experimental data. See figures 4 and 5.

This refined set of combinations provides a more focused group of physically plausible configurations that align more closely with historical accounts and experimental data.

Part Two

Step 1: Evaluate the Historical Record for Information on Properties Related to Writing on the Plates

Valid configurations of the plates require sufficient surface area to fit the entire text of the Book of Mormon, as well as the text of the lost 116 pages.³⁰ Determining the required surface area involves two primary considerations: the size of the text as it appeared on the plates and the translation density of English text to reformed Egyptian.

Text size

Many historical accounts of the plates reference the engravings.³¹ Descriptions of the engraving size typically use terms such as “fine” and “small.”³² However, these qualitative descriptions lack the specificity needed to assign precise measurements to the engravings.

30. This assertion assumes that the translation of the Book of Mormon is some type of a literal translation of the characters on the plates.

31. The earliest reference to engravings on the plates was reported in 1829. It said the plates had “engraved characters or Hyeroglyphics [sic]” on them. See “Golden Bible,” *Palmyra Freeman* (Palmyra, NY), 11 August 1829.

32. In *Times and Seasons*, 1 March 1842, p. 707, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-1-march-1842/5, it’s reported that the engravings were “small,” and both David Whitmer and Orson Pratt described the engravings as “fine.” The only reference to large characters is from Abner Cole, who reported that “inscribed on the aforesaid plates, divers and wonderful characters; some of them large and some small.” (Dogberry, “Gold Bible, No. 6.”)

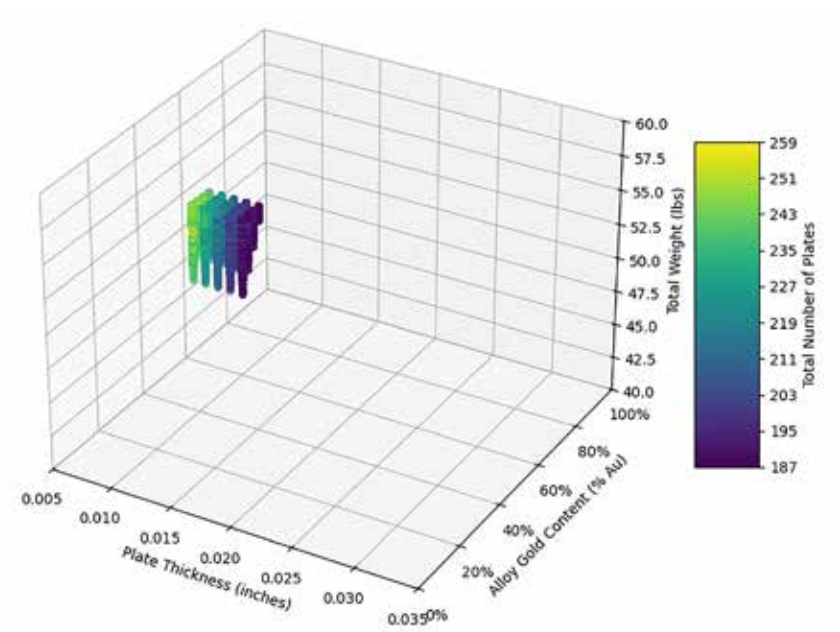


Figure 4. Scatter plot showing 37,657 valid combinations of plate thickness, alloy gold content, total weight, and total number of plates. Combinations that do not match the approximate length, width, height, and plate thickness described by Joseph Smith and are outside of a void range of 40%–60% are excluded. The results indicate a minimum weight of about 55 lb., an alloy with a maximum of 20% gold, and a total number of plates between 187 and 259.

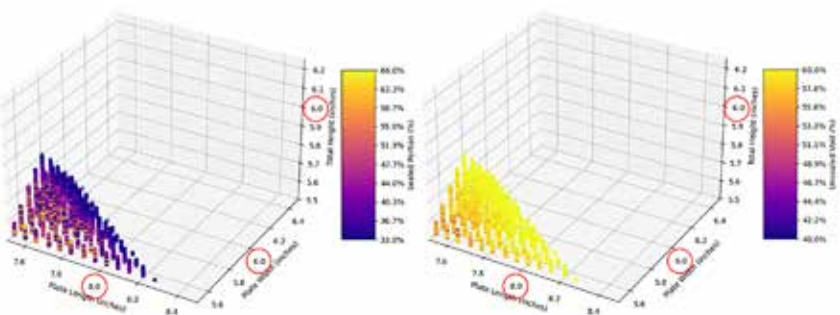


Figure 5. Each of the scatter plots shows 37,657 valid combinations of the plates filtered by the length, width, height, and plate thickness described by Joseph Smith and a void of 40%–60% between unsealed plates. The plot on the left indicates the percentage of the sealed portion, whereas the plot on the right indicates the void of unsealed plates. The red circles indicate the 8” length and 6” width and “somewhat near six inches” in height that Joseph specified. Note that the valid combinations shown are within 10% of his estimates.

There are four extant documents³³ that purportedly contain copies of characters from the plates:

1. The “Caractors” document
2. The “Stick of Joseph” broadside
3. The Oliver Cowdery characters document
4. The Frederick G. Williams characters document

While these documents provide examples of the characters, they offer no indication of scale nor the intent to be facsimiles.³⁴ Consequently, they prove unhelpful in determining the scale of the engravings on the plates.

The most promising source for estimating engraving-scale comes from measurements of ancient metal plates from the Near East. A forthcoming survey by Neal Rappleye provides valuable data on this subject. The draft of this survey indicates that engravings on various metal objects, written in Semitic, Greek, Demotic, and Cuneiform scripts, range from sub-millimeter to over 9 millimeters in height. The most common height observed in the survey is approximately 2 millimeters. See Appendix A: Algorithms for visual examples of texts of various sizes for reference.

Translation density

Translation density is a metric that indicates the difference in space

33. The four documents are Appendix 2, Document 1. Characters Copied by John Whitmer, circa 1829–1831, p. 0, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/appendix-2-document-1-characters-copied-by-john-whitmer-circa-1829-1831/2; Appendix 2, Document 2a. Characters Copied by Oliver Cowdery, circa 1835–1836, p. 0, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/appendix-2-document-2a-characters-copied-by-oliver-cowdery-circa-1835-1836/2; Appendix 2, Document 2b. Writings and Characters Copied by Frederick G. Williams, circa Early to Mid-1830s, p. 2, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/appendix-2-document-2b-writings-and-characters-copied-by-frederick-g-williams-circa-early-to-mid-1830s/2; Appendix 2, Document 3. Stick of Joseph, 1844, p. 1, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/appendix-2-document-3-stick-of-joseph-1844/1.

34. The “Caractors” Document does contain both large and small characters, which may indicate a difference in size taken from the plates. Alternatively, the difference may simply be due to a shift in text size made by John Whitmer when copying the source. Based on the document size of the photograph provided by the Joseph Smith Papers project, the scale of the large characters averages about 8.7 mm square, and the small characters average about 5.5 mm square, including spacing, leading, and kerning.

required between a source language and its translation into a target language. It is particularly relevant in determining the surface area needed for the text on the plates. Languages with high translation densities convey meaning more concisely, requiring significantly fewer characters than their target language translations.

For example, Chinese has a high translation density, with each Chinese character requiring approximately 3.9 English characters to translate. This means an English translation of a Chinese text requires about 3.9 times more space than the original. Conversely, Spanish has a low translation density relative to English, requiring about 1.1 English characters per Spanish character, which means that a Spanish book typically requires a similar number of pages as its English translation. See Appendix B: Translation Density Sources.

In the case of reformed Egyptian, no direct translations to English are available for evaluation. To overcome this limitation, the translation densities of other languages to English must be used as potential analogues. Table 4 presents the translation densities of several relevant ancient languages that have been translated into English, including Demotic, Hieratic, and Hebrew.

Table 4. Translation densities of various languages.

Source Text	Density
Spanish	~1.1
Hebrew	~2.4
Hieratic	~2.6
Demotic	~3.1
Chinese	~3.9

By examining these comparative translation densities, it becomes possible to estimate a plausible range for the translation density of reformed Egyptian. This estimation is required to determine which physical configurations of the plates could feasibly contain the full text of the Book of Mormon and the lost 116 pages.

Step 2: Assign Reasonable Minimums, Maximums, and Steps for Each Writing Property

The process of assigning limits for writing properties parallels that used for physical properties, though it involves even more subjectivity

due to the limited historical data available. Table 5 presents the minimums, maximums, and step values assigned to each writing property.

Table 5. Minimum, maximum, and step of writing properties of the plates.

Property	Minimum	Maximum	Step
Character Size ³⁵	1 mm	9 mm	$\frac{1}{8}$ mm
Translation Density ³⁶	1.5	5	0.125
Lost 116 Pages (characters) ³⁷	180,000	720,000	20,000

The values in table 5 were chosen based on the analysis of historical accounts, comparative linguistic data, and considerations of physical plausibility. For properties where historical accounts or comparative data provide clear guidance, the assigned values closely adhere to these references. In cases where direct evidence is lacking, informed decisions were made based on the broader context of ancient writing systems and the physical constraints of the plates.

Step 3: Calculate All Possible Combinations of Writing Properties

Using the ranges and steps established in Step 2, the calculation yields 1,987,536,460 possible combinations of writing properties for the plates. However, not all combinations are compatible with the physical properties of the plates determined in Part One.

To refine these results, a filter is applied to remove any writing property combinations that lack a corresponding valid physical plate configuration. This filter eliminates combinations that would require more plates than physically possible or would not provide sufficient surface area for the text.

This filtering process removes 99.8% of the initial combinations, leaving 3,493,916 valid writing combinations. These remaining combinations represent writing properties that are both internally consistent and compatible with at least one valid physical configuration of the plates; see figure 6.

35. This is the average character square, including spacing, leading, and kerning.

36. The minimum of 1.5 assumes that reformed Egyptian is at least 50% more dense than English whereas the maximum of 5 assumes that reformed Egyptian is denser than Chinese.

37. Character count includes spaces and punctuation in an English translation of the text. 180,000 is about 50% of the size of the small plates of Nephi (1 Nephi through Jacob) and 720,000 is about twice the size of the small plates of Nephi.

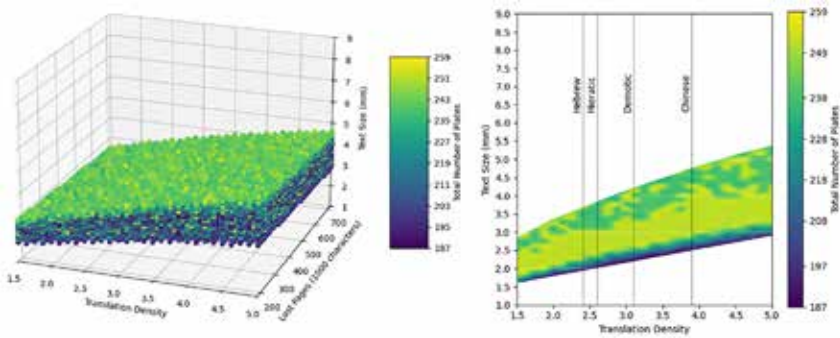


Figure 6. Scatter plot showing 3,493,916 valid combinations of the plates filtered by the length, width, height, and plate thickness described by Joseph Smith, assuming a void of 40%–60% between unsealed plates.

Step 4: Apply Filters to the Results

After calculating all possible combinations of writing properties, further refinement is possible by applying additional filters based on linguistic and historical considerations. Two filters are applied in this step: one related to translation density and another concerning the estimated length of the lost 116 pages.

Translation density

Moroni, who completed the abridged Nephite records, indicated that they were written in reformed Egyptian. He further stated that they would have been written in Hebrew if the plates had sufficient surface area (Mormon 9:32–33). This implies that Hebrew has a lower translation density than reformed Egyptian.

Based on this implication, it is reasonable to exclude all writing combinations that are less dense than Hebrew. Applying this filter reduces the ~3.5 million valid writing combinations to 2,302,902 valid combinations.³⁸ See figure 7.

The lost 116 pages

The initial calculations allowed for a wide range in the estimated length of the lost 116 pages, up to twice the length of the small plates of Nephi. However, a careful examination of the text of the Book of Mormon and of the Doctrine and Covenants seems to indicate that the lost 116

38. Although the type or style of Hebrew writing that Mormon was familiar with is unknown, the translation density of traditional biblical Hebrew is used as a proxy for the calculation.

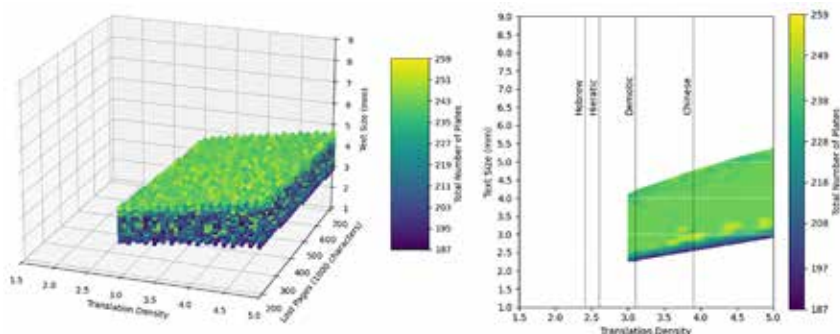


Figure 7. Scatter plot showing 2,302,902 valid combinations of the plates filtered by translation densities near to or less than Hebrew as well as the length, width, height, and plate thickness described by Joseph Smith, assuming a void of 40%–60% between unsealed plates.

pages were a less detailed and shorter summary of the small plates of Nephi.³⁹ See Appendix F: Lost 116 Pages.

Removing all combinations that consider the lost 116 pages to be longer than the plates of Nephi further reduces the number of valid writing combinations from about 2.3 million to 863,830; see figure 8.

Conclusion

This study presents a novel approach to understanding the physical and linguistic properties of the golden plates described in the historical record of the Book of Mormon. By systematically analyzing all mathematically possible configurations consistent with the range of constraints derived from historical accounts, this research yields several significant insights.

First, the study demonstrates that the golden plates, as described in historical accounts, are mathematically possible with over 4 billion possible configurations.⁴⁰ Through the application of various heuristics, linguistic considerations, and experimental data the number of plausible configurations may be narrowed to about 865,000.

Second, the analysis of translation density provides a quantitative

39. For alternative views on the length of the lost pages, see Don Bradley, *The Lost 116 Pages: Reconstructing the Book of Mormon's Missing Stories* (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2019).

40. The over 4 billion computed combinations are a function of the number of steps between minimum and maximums. More or fewer configurations may be computed and tested to be valid by adjusting these variables.

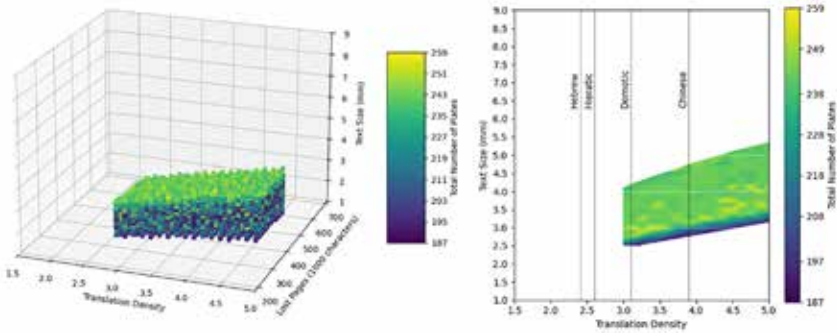


Figure 8. Scatter plot showing 863,830 valid combinations of the plates where the 116 lost pages are smaller than the small plates of Nephi. The plot also excludes translation densities near to or less than Hebrew as well as the length, width, height, and plate thickness described by Joseph Smith, assuming a void of 40%–60% between unsealed plates.

basis for understanding how the text of the Book of Mormon may have been contained within the described physical constraints of the plates.

Third, based on the most plausible configurations, the study suggests the following likely characteristics for the plates:

- The plates likely contained less than 20% gold content.
- The total weight of the plates was at least 54 lb.
- The total number of plates ranged between 187 and 259, including the plates in the sealed portion.
- The dimensions of the plates were slightly smaller than Joseph Smith's description but within 10% of his estimates.
- The engraved characters on the plates averaged less than 5 mm square.
- Each character of reformed Egyptian likely represented at least three English characters, similar to the density of Demotic text.

While these findings provide a more precise understanding of the possible characteristics of the plates, it is important to note that the exact physical and writing properties remain unknown. This study does not prove the existence or authenticity of the plates but, rather, demonstrates their mathematical plausibility within the framework of historical descriptions.

Appendix A: Algorithms

The algorithm for generating combinations of physical properties⁴¹ of the plates is as follows:

```
For each t :
  For each g :
    For each W :
      For each w :
        For each l :
          For each S :
            For each v :
              Calculate the density of the alloy:

               $s\% = \lfloor g\% \cdot 10\% \rfloor$ 
               $c\% = 1 - g\% - s\%$ 
               $D_{\text{alloy}} = g\% \cdot d_{\text{gold}} + s\% \cdot d_{\text{silver}} + c\% \cdot d_{\text{copper}}$ 

              Calculate the total number of plates:

              
$$N = \left\lfloor \frac{W}{t \cdot l \cdot w \cdot D_{\text{alloy}}} \right\rfloor$$


              Calculate the height of the plates:

               $H_{\text{sealed}} = N \cdot t \cdot S \cdot (1 + v) \cdot (1 - 23\%)$ 
               $H_{\text{unsealed}} = N \cdot t \cdot (1 - S) \cdot (1 + v)$ 
               $H = H_{\text{unsealed}} + H_{\text{sealed}}$ 

              If H is too high or too low, discard this combination.
```

Table 6. Variables of physical properties algorithm.

Property	Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Step
Plate Length	l	7"	10"	1/8"
Plate Width	w	5"	7"	1/8"
Plate Thickness	t	0.005"	0.0325"	0.001"
Void between Plates	v	10%	100%	10%
Weight of Plates	W	40 lb.	60 lb.	1/4 lb.

41. The calculation has the amount of silver fixed at 10% of the amount of gold. See Appendix C: Gold and Copper Alloy. The calculation also uses the constant 23% to represent the decrease in void between sealed plates. See Appendix D: Plate Void Experiment.

Property	Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Step
Alloy Gold Content	g	12.5%	100%	2.5%
Percent Sealed	S	33%	66%	3%

The algorithm for generating combinations of writing properties of the plates relies on the results of the physical properties combinations (C_{valid}) and is as follows:

For each C_{valid} :

For each r :

For each S :

For each p :

Calculate the total available space on both sides of a plate:

$$n_{\text{rows}} = \left\lfloor \frac{(l - 0.625 \cdot 2)}{c} \right\rfloor$$

$$n_{\text{cols}} = \left\lfloor \frac{(w - 0.625 \cdot 2)}{c} \cdot 2 \right\rfloor$$

$$n_{\text{chars.per.plate}} = n_{\text{rows}} \cdot n_{\text{cols}}$$

Calculate the total number of plates available for the text:

$$N_{\text{available}} = \lfloor N \cdot (1 - S) \rfloor$$

Calculate the total number of Reformed Egyptian characters:

$$n_{\text{eng.bomchars}} = p + 1,429,319$$

$$n_{\text{re.bomchars}} = \frac{n_{\text{eng.bomchars}}}{r}$$

Calculate the total number of plates required:

$$N_{\text{required}} = \left\lceil \frac{n_{\text{re.bomchars}}}{n_{\text{chars.per.plate}}} \right\rceil$$

If N_{required} is not approximately $N_{\text{available}}$ then discard this combination.

Table 7. Variables of physical writing algorithm.

Property	Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Step
Character Size	c	1 mm	9 mm	1/8 mm
Translation Density	r	1.5	5	0.125
Lost 116 Pages (characters)	p	180,000	720,000	20,000
Total Number of Plates ⁴²	N	187	259	N/A

42. Total Number of Plates (N) is a property of (C_{valid}) which is produced by the algorithm for generating combinations of physical properties.

Table 8. Algorithm constants.

Property	Variable
lb./g	0.00220462
Copper density (g/in ³)	146.5
Gold density (g/in ³)	316.6
Silver density (g/in ³)	171.9
Sealed void compaction factor ⁴³	23%
Number of characters in the Book of Mormon text ⁴⁴	~1,429,319
Text margins on the plates (in.) ⁴⁵	0.0625

Figures 9 and 10 provide visual examples of randomly generated characters that approximate the results of the algorithm to determine the typical space required for text of a specific size.

Appendix B: Translation Density Sources

To determine the approximate translation density of a source language and a target language, an adequate amount of source and target language text must be evaluated. For the purposes of the calculations in this paper, the source text of the fifty chapters in the book of Genesis from the Old Testament (198,948 characters in the English translation) was used to evaluate the densities of Spanish, Chinese, and Hebrew. To evaluate the densities of Demotic, the third century BCE source text of *First Tale of Setne Khaemwas* (figure 11) was used (10,242 characters in the English translation), and for Hieratic, the thirteenth century BCE source text of the *Tale of Two Brothers* (figure 12) was used (22,127 characters in the English translation).

Because the primary motivation for using the Translation Density metric is to compare the approximate space requirements for a particular language, the important unit of measurement is not the number of words but, rather, the number of characters required for a translation; see table 9.

43. See Appendix D: Plate Void Experiment.

44. This is an approximate count of text from the 1830 version of the Book of Mormon and includes punctuation and spaces between words.

45. These margins are for the left, right, top, and bottom of each plate. The margin size of 0.0625" is arbitrary, and there is no justification for it.



Total characters: 1,584
Total rows: 46
Average columns: 35
Page width: 6"
Page height: 8"
Avg. character width: 4.4 mm
Avg. character height: 4.4 mm

Figure 9. Single side plate example (Hieratic)



Total characters: 1,881
Total rows: 50
Average columns: 38
Page width: 6"
Page height: 8"
Avg. character width: 4.1 mm
Avg. character height: 4.1 mm

Figure 10. Single side plate example (Caractor's Document)



Figure 11. A portion of the third column of the Demotic text of the *First Tale of Setne Khaemwas*, including restoration text. Steve Vinson, *The Craft of a Good Scribe: History, Narrative and Meaning in the First Tale of Setne Khaemwas* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2017).



Figure 12. A portion of the first column from the thirteenth century BCE Hieratic text of the *Tale of Two Brothers*. Papyrus D’Orbiney; sheet 1: Hieratic text verso and recto—Tale of the Two Brothers, British Museum, Asset 438103001, britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA10183-1.

Table 9. Translation density calculations for various texts.

Source Text	Source Characters	English Translation Characters	Translation Density
Genesis 1–50 (Hebrew) ⁴⁶	83,168	198,948	~2.4
Genesis 1–50 (Spanish) ⁴⁷	184,501	198,948	~1.1
Genesis 1–50 (Simplified Chinese) ⁴⁸	50,612	198,948	~3.9

46. Hebrew text is Masoretic, sourced from Sefaria (sefaria.org), an online open-source digital library of Jewish texts. Spaces were removed from the text to follow the common ancient convention in Hebrew writing.

47. Spanish text is the King James Version of the Bible, sourced from ChurchofJesusChrist.org. Chapter headings and verse numbers were removed from the text.

48. Chinese text is the King James Version of the Bible, sourced from ChurchofJesusChrist.org. Spaces were removed from the text to follow the common convention in Chinese writing.

Source Text	Source Characters	English Translation Characters	Translation Density
Column three of <i>First Tale of Setne Khaemwas</i> (Demotic) ⁴⁹	~3,320	10,242	~3.1
<i>Tale of Two Brothers</i> (Hieratic) ⁵⁰	~8,634	22,127	~2.6

Below are excerpts used for the evaluations.

English (196 characters)

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

Spanish (195 characters)

En el principio creó Dios los cielos y la tierra. Y la tierra estaba desordenada y vacía, y las tinieblas estaban sobre la faz del abismo, y el Espíritu de Dios se movía sobre la faz de las aguas.

Chinese (Simplified; 30 characters)

起初，神创造天地。地是空虚混沌，渊面黑暗；神的灵运行在水面上

Biblical Hebrew (Masoretic text; 82 characters)

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ
וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תוֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ וְחָשְׁךָ עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹמוֹ וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת
עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם

Appendix C: Gold and Copper Alloy

Artifacts of gold and copper alloy have been found in the New World dating as far back as the second millennium and in the Old World dating to the third millennium BCE.⁵¹ Artifacts made from this alloy were

49. Vinson, *Craft of a Good Scribe*.
50. William Kelly Simpson et al., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, Stelae, Autobiographies, and Poetry* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).
51. Heather Lechtman, “Pre-Columbian Surface Metallurgy,” *Scientific American* 250, no. 6 (1984): 56–63, and Richard Zettler et al., “The Ur Digitization Project: examination of the metals from an Akkadian tomb at Ur” in *Engaging Conservation: Collaboration Across Disciplines*, ed. Nina Owczarek, Molly Gleeson, and Lynn Grant (London: Archetype Publications, 2017).

typically treated to make the surface of the object have the “appearance of gold” through various methods of depletion gilding.

Depletion gilding is the process of exposing the surface to some form of corrosive material that attacks the surface level of copper and leaves the gold, which is then burnished and made to have the appearance of pure gold.⁵² See figures 13, 14, and 15. Gold and copper alloys appear similar in color to copper, but after depletion gilding, the surface appears similar to pure gold. See figure 16.

The Spaniards who colonized the New World referred to Mesoamerican gold-copper or gold-copper-silver alloys as *tumbaga*.⁵³ The process of depletion gilding of tumbaga was noted by Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo (1535–1548), who wrote that the indigenous people of Mexico

know very well how to gild the objects and items they make from copper and low grade gold. And they have such ability and excellence in this, and give such a high lustre to what they gild, that it looks like good gold of 23 carats or more. . . . They do this with a certain herb, and it is such a secret that any goldsmith in Europe or in any other part of Christendom, would soon become a rich man from this manner of gilding.⁵⁴

After the depletion gilding process, the color of the surface of the object is determined by the remaining elements, which are primarily gold and silver, with some copper remaining in tumbaga if it is copper-rich. See figure 17. Depending on the concentrations of gold, silver, and copper that the depletion gilding leaves on the surface, the gold color of the tumbaga may be whitish, yellowish, reddish, or even greenish in appearance. See figure 18.

In considering the elemental makeup of the plates, the calculation includes the copper, gold, and silver, but the ratio of silver is fixed to be 10% of the gold. For example, if a valid combination of the physical properties of the plates has Gold Alloy Content at 65%, then the

52. Corrosive material such as various mixtures of oxalic acid, citric acid, ferric or cupric sulphate, alum, urine, salt, etc. Warwick Bray, “Techniques of gilding and surface-enrichment in pre-Hispanic American metallurgy,” *Metal Plating and Patination* (1993): 182–92.

53. The word *tumbaga* may derive from the Malay word for *copper*. See Robert Blust, “*Tumbaga* in Southeast Asia and South America,” *Anthropos* 87 (1992), 443–57.

54. “The Gold of El Dorado,” Catalogue of Exhibition held at the Royal Academy, London, 1979.



Figure 13. Cross section of a gold-copper-silver alloy (15%, 84%, and 1% respectively) plate after depletion gilding revealing outer layers of gold and an inner layer of alloy. Photo from author.



Figure 14. Dagger #30-12-550, PG 1054 from the Royal Cemetery of Ur, 2500–2000 BCE. The dagger has been depletion gilded and is made of a gold, copper, and silver alloy. Metallurgic analysis was performed in 2009 at the Penn Museum (Zettler et al., 2017).

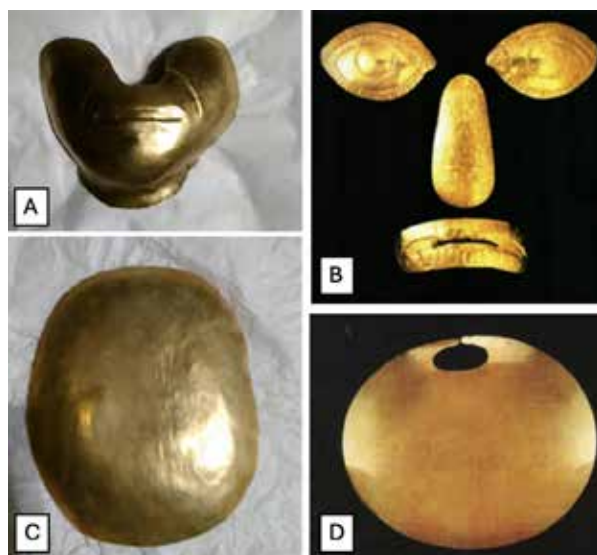


Figure 15. Examples of tumbaga artifacts housed in the Museum Royal Tombs of Sipan, Lambayeque, Peru. A. Chin protector. B. Right and left eye protectors, nose protection, and tooth protection. C. Brain container. D. Convex nose protector. Antonio Brunetti et al., "Combining X-ray Fluorescence and Monte Carlo Simulation Methods to Differentiate between Tumbaga and Gold-Alloy or Gildings," *Materials* 15, no 13 (2022): 4452, doi.org/10.3390/ma15134452.

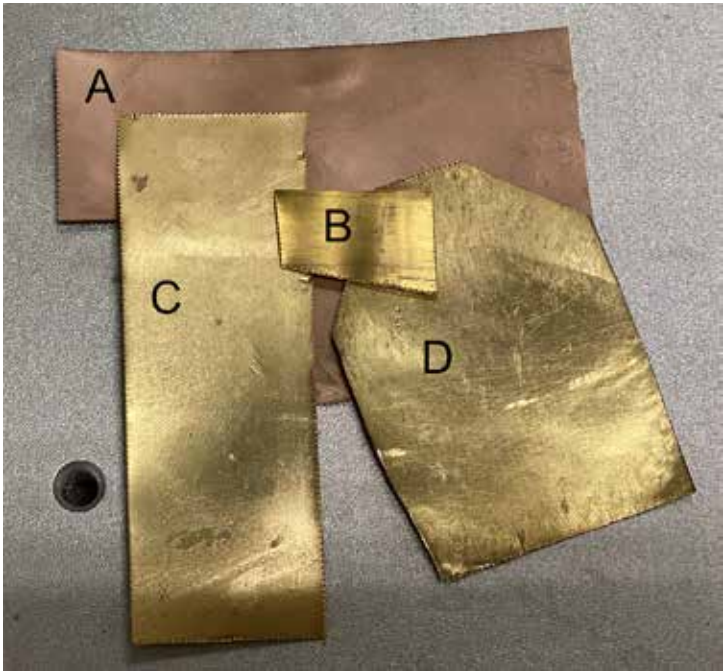


Figure 16. A. Tumbaga composed of 15% gold, 84% copper, and 1% silver. B. 100% gold. C. Tumbaga after depletion gilding with sodium bisulfate. D. Tumbaga after depletion gilding with oxalic acid. Photo from the author.

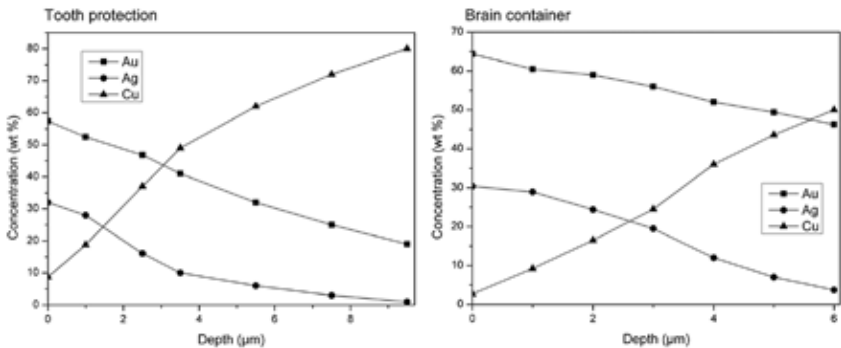


Figure 17. X-ray Fluorescence (XRF) analysis of two tumbaga artifacts showing surface concentrations of gold, silver, and copper. As the depth from the surface increases, the effect of depletion gilding diminishes, and the base alloy is shown. For example, the *Tooth protection* artifact (left graph) alloy has trace amounts of silver, but the depletion gilded surface shows a silver concentration of over 30%.

See figure 15 for images of these items.

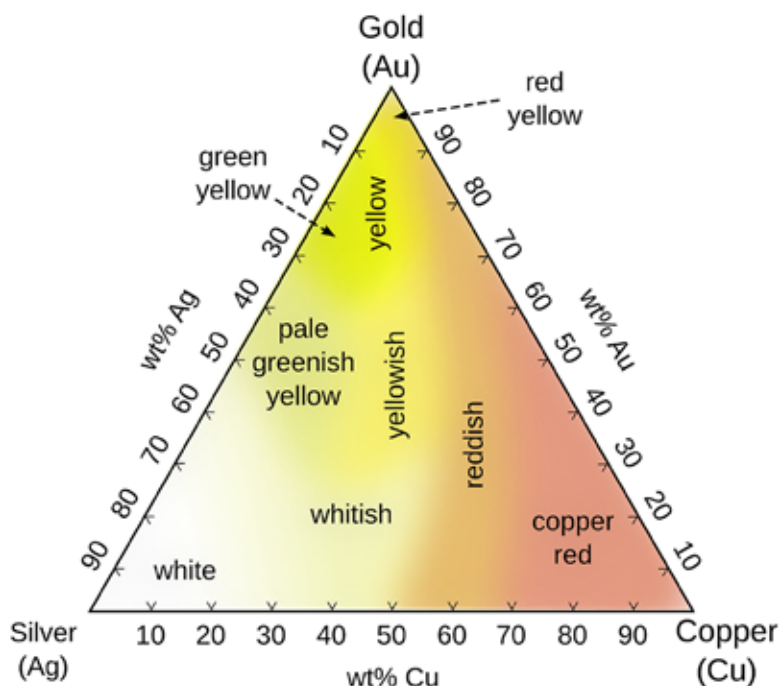


Figure 18. A ternary plot illustrating colors of gold alloys determined by concentrations of gold, silver, and copper. *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Ag-Au-Cu-colours-english," en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ag-Au-Cu-colours-english.svg. See also Cristian Cretu and Elma Van der Lingen, "Coloured gold alloys," *Gold Bulletin* 32 (1999): 115–26.

silver content will be set to 6.5%. The rationale for this constraint is twofold. The first consideration is that ancient depletion gilding was only able to remove copper⁵⁵ and not silver, and when high concentrations of silver are present in a tumbaga alloy, the color no longer has "the appearance of gold" but tends to appear greenish or white (see figure 18). The second consideration is that, while there are many examples of ternary alloys of tumbaga artifacts of varying concentrations of gold, silver, and copper, many tumbaga artifacts are essentially binary alloys with just trace amounts of silver.⁵⁶

55. Removing silver requires strong acids such as *aqua fortis* (nitric acid) which was not developed in the Old World until the fourteenth century and was not known in the pre-Columbian New World. See Vladimir Karpenko, "Some notes on the early history of nitric acid: 1300–1700," *Bulletin for the History of Chemistry* 34, no. 2 (2009): 105–16.

56. For example, the artifacts shown in figure 14 are essentially binary in nature, each having less than 5% silver. See Brunetti et al., "Combining X-ray

Silver is marginally denser than copper (per cubic inch, silver is 171.9 grams, copper is 146.5 grams, and gold is 316.6 grams), so minimizing the amount of silver in calculations will not have a significant impact on the overall results compared with variations in gold content. However, more precision may be gained in calculations that include a greater variation in silver content.⁵⁷

Appendix D: Plate Void Experiment

As a proxy for the plates, 165 copper discs were formed, stacked, and measured. The copper discs were formed from 1 troy oz. 99.9% pure copper rounds by a process that included machine rolling, hammering, annealing, stress relieving, and descaling.

The discs were flattened to an irregular oval shape with an approximate average thickness of 0.020". A hole was drilled into the center of each disc to facilitate stacking onto an aluminum rod. See figure 19.

The resting height of the stack is approximately 5.1". The calculated resting void is approximately 55%, which is to say that due to the irregularities in the flatness of the discs, the stack of discs is 55% higher than a theoretical stack of 165 discs of 0.020" thickness. Manual compression was applied, resulting in a measured height of 4.7", resulting in a calculated void of approximately 42%.

Appendix E: Nineteenth-Century Tinplate

Many early descriptions of the golden plates state that the individual plates were about the thickness of "common tin."⁵⁸ The following is a brief explanation of what the documentary record tells us about the thickness of early nineteenth-century tinplate.

Tinplate is thin sheet metal coated in tin. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it was used to manufacture items such as

Fluorescence and Monte Carlo Simulation Methods." For examples of binary and ternary tumbaga, see H. Lechtman, "Andean Value Systems and the Development of Prehistoric Metallurgy," *Technology and Culture* 25, no. 1 (1984): 1.

57. Increasing the precision of an unknown silver contribution to the alloy calculation may illustrate the wisdom of Hungarian computer scientist John von Neumann, who said, "There's no sense in being precise when you don't even know what you're talking about."

58. The phrase *common tin* was used in to describe the thickness of the plates by Joseph Smith, David Whitmer, William Appleby, Orson Pratt, and Parley P. Pratt. See Appendix H: Historical Record of Plate Descriptions.



Figure 19. 165 copper discs stacked. Photo from the author.

household utensils, food cans, lanterns, buckets, and toys. It was valuable because unlike sheet metal, tinplate was resistant to rust. Up until the late 1800s the import of tinplate to America primarily came from Wales.

Standard units of measurement of tinplate thickness are expressed in somewhat cryptic terms, starting with "1C" or "one common," which is about 0.012" in thickness.⁵⁹ The next standard thickness is "1X" or "one cross," which is about 0.013" in thickness. The next standard thicknesses is "2X" or "two cross," and so on. Tinplate is also measured using the Birmingham Wire Gauge (BWG) scale. References and tables of units of tinplate measurements can be found in various records from the late eighteenth century through the early twentieth century.⁶⁰ See table 10 and figures 20, 21, 22 and 23 for examples.

59. It is unlikely that the tinplate industry term *one common* was related to the laymen term *common tin* tinplate, as even industry documentation used designations like 1C, 1X, 1XX, etc., rather than *one common*.

60. For an eighteenth-century reference see the *Gazette of the United States and Philadelphia Daily Advertiser*, 29 October 1798, panewsarchive.k8s.

Table 10. Units of measurement of tinplate.

Thickness Label	Approximate Thickness	BWG Scale
1C (one common)	0.012"	29.9
1X (one cross)	0.013"	28
1XX (double cross)	0.016"	26.8
1XXX (three cross)	0.019"	25.8
1XXXX (four cross)	0.020"	24.8

Archives of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century American newspapers contain only a few advertisements selling tinplate, but they are primarily of type 1XXX which is approximately 0.019" in thickness. Although this is not definitive, it supports the idea that "common tin" in early nineteenth-century America was likely to be of type 1XXX tinplate. See figures 24, 25 and 26 for examples.

There is one important source in the documentary record related to the thickness of tinplate which seems to contain an error. The Encyclopædia Britannica⁶¹ has a footnote which states that the "The tin-sheet used in various arts, is commonly about 1/600th part of an inch." (See figure 27). 1/600th of an inch is approximately 0.0017" which is smaller than the minimum size on the BWG scale⁶² and is a thickness designation not found in tinplate catalogues in the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries.⁶³ It is reasonable to assume that the 1/600th entry was intended to be 1/60th of an inch (0.017") which approximates the 1XX or 1XXX standard tinplate thicknesses.

libraries.psu.edu/lccn/sn83025881/1798-10-29/ed-1/seq-1/. For a nineteenth-century reference see I. R. Butts, *Tinman's Manual and Builder's and Mechanic's Handbook* (Boston: I. R. Butts & Co, 1860), 39, archive.org/details/tinmansmanualbui02butt/page/38/mode/2up. For an early twentieth-century reference see The Welsh Plate & Sheet Manufacturers, *Welsh Tinplate, Its History, Manufacture, Application & Use* (London: Gale & Polden, 1928).

61. *Encyclopædia Britannica, or A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Miscellaneous Literature* 12 (1797): 118.

62. The smallest thickness in the Birmingham Wire Gauge is 36 which is 0.004". See *Journal of the Franklin Institute of the State of Pennsylvania, devoted to the Mechanical Arts, Manufactures, General Science, and the Recording of American and other Patented Inventions* 14 (third series), vol 44 overall, July–December 1847.

63. For comparison, 0.0017" is similar in thickness to modern extra-heavy-duty aluminum foil. Tinplate of this thickness would be unsuitable for manufacturing durable goods.

TIN PLATES.—QUANTITY OF TIN FOR CANS.

39

TIN PLATES.

Size, Length, Breadth, and Weight.

BRAND-MARK.	No. of Sheets in Box.	Length and Breadth.	Weight per Box.		
		Inches. Inches.	Cwt. qr. lbs.		
1 C	225	14 by 10	1 0 0	Each 1x advances \$1.75 to \$2.00	
1 x	225	14 by 10	1 1 0		
1 xx	225	14 by 10	1 1 21		
1 xxx	225	14 by 10	1 2 14		
1 xxxx	225	14 by 10	1 3 7		
1 xxxxx	225	14 by 10	2 0 0		
1 xxxxxx	225	14 by 10	2 0 21	In addition, a great variety of sizes are imported for special purposes, usually costing a little more in pro- portion than those which are es- teemed regular sizes.	
D C	100	17 by 12 ³ / ₄	0 3 14		
D x	100	17 by 12 ³ / ₄	1 0 14		
D xx	100	17 by 12 ³ / ₄	1 1 7		
D xxx	100	17 by 12 ³ / ₄	1 2 0		
D xxxx	100	17 by 12 ³ / ₄	1 2 21		
D xxxxx	100	17 by 12 ³ / ₄	1 3 14		
D xxxxxx	100	17 by 12 ³ / ₄	2 0 7		
S D C	200	15 by 11	1 1 27		
S D x	200	15 by 11	1 2 20		
S D xx	200	15 by 11	1 3 13	About the same weight per Box, as the plates above of similar brand, 14 by 10.	
S D xxx	200	15 by 11	2 0 6		
S D xxxx	200	15 by 11	2 0 27		
S D xxxxx	200	15 by 11	2 1 20		
S D xxxxxx	200	15 by 11	2 2 13		
			about		
TTT Taggers,	225	14 by 10	1 0 0		
1 C	225	12 by 12			
1 x	225	12 by 12			
1 xx	225	12 by 12			
1 xxx	225	12 by 12			
1 xxxx	225	12 by 12			
1 C	112	14 by 20		For Roofing.	
1 x	112	14 by 20			
1 xx	112	14 by 20			
1 xxx	112	14 by 20			
1 xxxx	112	14 by 20			
1 C	112	14 by 20	1 0 0		
TTT Taggers,	112	14 by 20	1 1 0		
1 C	112	14 by 20	1 0 0		
1 x	112	14 by 20	1 1 0		
1 xx	112	14 by 20	1 1 0		
1 xxx	112	14 by 20	1 1 0		
1 xxxx	112	14 by 20	1 1 0		

Figure 20. Table of tinplate size, length, breadth and weight from the 1860 reference “Tinman’s Manual and Builder’s and Mechanic’s Handbook,” by I. R. Butts.

Thickness in Inches.	B. W. G.	Strength of Tinned Steel (Approximate).	Weight in lbs. per sq. ft.			
			Tinned Steel.	Copper.	Brass.	Zinc.
.012	30	1C	.48	.55	.52	.42
.014	28	1x	.56	.69	.65	.56
.016	27	DC	.64	.83	.79	.62
.018	26	1x x	.72	.92	.87	.63
.020	25	1x x x x	.80	.97	.92	.71
.025	23	D x x x	1.0	1.29	1.22	.93
.028	22	D x x x x	1.13	1.34	1.27	1.06
.032	21	D x x x x x	1.29	1.52	1.44	1.12

Figure 21. Table of thickness, BWG and tinplate designation. Paul N. Hasluck, ed., *Tinplate Work* (London: Cassell & Co., 1907), 20, archive.org/details/tinplaworkwith00hasl.

Names	Sizes	No. in a Box	Weight of each Box	Marks put on the Boxes
	Inch			
Common.....No. 1.	13½ by 10	225	1 0 0	CI
Do..... 2.	13½ by 9½		3 21	CII
Do..... 3.	12½ by 9½		3 16	CIII
CrossNo. 1.	13½ by 10		1 1 0	XI
Two Cross..... 1.			1 1 21	XXI
Three Cross..... 1.			1 2 14	XXXI
Four Cross..... 1.			1 3 7	XXXXI
Common Doubles..	16½ by 12½	100	3 21	CD
Cross Doubles			1 0 14	XD
Two Cross do.....			1 1 7	XXD
Three Cross do.....			1 2 0	XXXD
Four Cross do.....			1 2 21	XXXXD
Com. small Doubles	15 by 11	200	1 2 0	CSD
Cross do....do....			1 2 21	XSD
Two Cross ...do....			1 3 14	XXSD
Three do.do....			2 0 7	XXXSD
Four do.do....			2 1 0	XXXXSD
Wasters Com.No. 1.	13½ by 10	225	1 0 0	WCI
Do. Cross.... 1.	13½ by 10		1 1 0	WXI

Figure 22. Table of tinsplate name, size, length, breadth, weight, and label. Samuel Parkes, *A Descriptive Account of the Several Processes Which Are Usually Pursued in the Manufacture of the Article Known in Commerce by the Name of Tin-Plate* (London: R. Bickerstaff, 1818).

BASIS BOX. —The equivalent to 20" × 14", 112 sheets, weighing 108 lbs. (or I.C.) or 31,360 square inches of area, which is the standard for measuring Tinplates, and calculating prices.	B.G. —Birmingham Gauge.			
	I.X. 20" × 14", 112 sheets	136 lbs.	...	B.G. 28.0
I.C. —Definition of thickness —31,360 square inches, weighing 108 lbs., 0.0123 of an inch and 0.315 millimetre.	I.C.	108	...	B.G. 29.9
	"	100	...	B.G. 30.6
	"	95	...	B.G. 31.1
	"	90	...	B.G. 31.6
I.X. —Definition of thickness —31,360 square inches, weighing 136 lbs., 0.0155 of an inch and 0.394 millimetre.	"	85	...	B.G. 32.0
	"	80	...	B.G. 32.5
	I.C. 28" × 20"	216	...	B.G. 29.9
	"	200	...	B.G. 30.6
CROSSES. —Each additional X after the first X (which indicates 28 lbs.) indicates an increased thickness corresponding to 20 lbs. for 31,360 square inches of area.	"	190	...	B.G. 31.1
	"	180	...	B.G. 31.6
	"	170	...	B.G. 32.0
	"	160	...	B.G. 32.5

Figure 23. Glossary of tinsplate trade terms. "Glossary of Trade Terms and Hints to Purchasers of Tinplates," in *Welsh Tinplate, Its History, Manufacture, Application & Use*.

LONDON MUSTARD.—Twenty-three boxes first quality for Sale by
ARMITAGE & EASTMOND,
48 Pine-Street.

ALSO,

160 Boxes Tinplates one third X.

Aug. 13 dtw & co. & th. &.

Figure 24. Tinplate advertisement, *New York Evening Post*, 15 August 1807. The entry for "160 boxes Tinplates one third X," is circled in red.

THE subscribers will be receiving by first boats from Albany, a large stock of goods in their line, consisting in part of
 4000 lbs Braziers' Copper, 30x60 from 12 to 200 lb sheets
 10 cases Sheathing Copper, 14 to 22 oz.
 200 boxes Tin-Plate, 1-3X and other extra brands,
 75 bundles Sheet Iron, No. 12 to 26,
 10 packages Russia Iron,
 2000 lbs Rod's Sheet Lead,
 2 hbls Japanned and Britannia Ware.
 They are also receiving a large assortment of Cooking Stoves, of the latest improvement.
 The above goods will be sold at a very small advance from New York prices.
 ap29my29 CAMERON & ADAMS, 127 Main st.

Figure 25. Tinplate advertisement, *Commercial Advertiser and Journal* (Buffalo, NY), 10 May 1841. The entry for "200 boxes Tin-Plate, 1-3X," is circled in red.

POTT & M'KINNE, 36 South street, offer for sale—
 350 bales Upland Cotton
 800 boxes of Tinplates, Pont-pool brand 1-3X
 19 roles sheathing Copper, ass'd from 18 a 26 oz.
 5 bales Deer skins
 60 pipes Catalonia Wine
 10 do of O. L. P. Madeira Wine
 20 tons Russia Hemp, 1st quality
 150 dozen Spades and Shovels
 10 casks Carolina and West India Hoes
 56 do Rice
 170 hbls. Copperas, &c.
 A quantity of English Anchors. Je 26

Figure 26. Tinplate advertisement, *New York Evening Post*, 27 June 1818. The entry for "800 boxes Tinplates, Pont-pool brand 1-3X," is circled in red.

(x) Tin is sufficiently ductile to be beaten into very thin leaves. But ductility and extensibility are two different properties, less connected with one another than is generally imagined. Iron and steel are drawn into exquisite fine wire, but cannot be beat into very thin leaves. Tin, on the other hand, is beat into fine leaves, and may be extended between rollers to a considerable surface. The tin-sheet used in various arts, is commonly about $\frac{1}{32}$ th part of an inch, but may be extended twice as much in its dimensions without difficulty. Notwithstanding this extensibility, tin cannot be drawn into wire, on account of the weak cohesion of its particles. A tin wire, however, of one-tenth of an inch diameter, is able to support a weight of 49½ pounds, according to Fourcroy. Gold and silver possess both properties of ductility and extensibility the most eminently of all metallic bodies; whilst lead, notwithstanding its flexibility and softness, cannot be made either into leaves or wire of any fineness.

Figure 27. Footnote x of page 118 from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 1/600th is circled in red.

Appendix F: Lost 116 Pages

The lost manuscript of the initial translation of the Book of Mormon is referred to as the “lost 116 pages,” but the specific amount of text from the plates that this represents is unknown. Examining the references made to this lost text in the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants seem to indicate that the lost 116 pages were less detailed, implying they had less characters than the small plates of Nephi. The following is an exposition starting with Doctrine and Covenants 10, which references the lost 116 pages:

And now, verily I say unto you, that an *account* of those things that you have written, which have gone out of your hands, is engraven upon the *plates of Nephi*. (Doctrine and Covenants 10:38)

Thus, an “account” of the 116 pages is on the “plates of Nephi.” The next verse characterizes this “account”:

Yea, and you remember it was said in those writings that a more *particular* account was given of these things upon the plates of Nephi. (Doctrine and Covenants 10:39)

Thus, a “more particular” account of the lost 116 pages is on the “plates of Nephi.” The Book of Mormon appears to use the term *particular* to mean *larger* or *more detailed*. For instance, Nephi indicated that the large plates of Nephi are a more particular version of the small plates:

And I knew not at the time when I made them that I should be commanded of the Lord to make these plates; wherefore, the record of my father, and the genealogy of his fathers, and the more part of all our proceedings in the wilderness are engraven upon those first plates of which I have spoken; wherefore, the things which transpired before I made these plates are, of a truth, more *particularly* made mention upon the first plates. (1 Nephi 19:2)

Later, Nephi indicated that if people want to know more “particular” history, they should refer to the large plates:

And if my people desire to know the more *particular* part of the history of my people they must search mine other plates. (2 Nephi 5:33)

Mormon commented that there are many records among the people that are "particular and very large":

And now there are many records kept of the proceedings of this people, by many of this people, which are *particular* and very large, concerning them. But behold, a hundredth part of the proceedings of this people . . . cannot be contained in this work. (Helaman 3:13–14)

So, a "more particular" account, or a more detailed account, or an account with more information, is on the "plates of Nephi." In other words, the "plates of Nephi" has more information than the lost 116 pages.

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord gives more detail about what is meant by the "plates of Nephi":

Therefore, you shall translate the engravings which are on the *plates of Nephi*, down even till you come to the *reign of king Benjamin*, or until you come to that which you have translated, which you have retained. (Doctrine and Covenants 10:41)

Thus, Joseph Smith is told that he shall translate the "plates of Nephi" which include the reign of King Benjamin. Words of Mormon indicates that plates that contain the reign of King Benjamin are the ones that Mormon is adding to record:

I searched among the records which had been delivered into my hands, and I found *these plates*, which *contained this small account of the prophets*, from *Jacob* down to the *reign of this king Benjamin*, and also many of the words of *Nephi*. And the things which are upon these plates pleasing me, because of the prophecies of the coming of Christ; (Words of Mormon 1:3–4)

In other words, Mormon found "these plates" that are a "small account" of Nephi and Jacob down to King Benjamin. Mormon indicates they he would "take *these plates* . . . and put them with the remainder of [his] record" (Words of Mormon 1:6). In other words, the "plates of Nephi" were the small plates of Nephi.

Based on the references to the lost text in Doctrine and Covenants 10 and Words of Mormon, it seems reasonable to conclude that the lost 116 pages are a less detailed, smaller account of the small plates of Nephi.

Appendix G: Examples of Valid Configurations

The following plate configurations are examples from the 863,830 valid combinations of writing and physical properties of the plates. Note that there are many variations of *Most Plates*, *Least Plates*, etc., and the table indicates one of many possible examples.

Table 11. Examples of most and least plates configurations.

Property	Most Plates	Least Plates
Plate Dimensions (L x W x H)	7.5" x 5.6" x 5.5"	7.9" x 5.7" x 5.5"
Plate Thickness	0.015"	0.019"
Void between Plates	45%	60%
Weight of Plates	60 lb.	59.2 lb.
Alloy Gold Content	12.5%	12.5%
Percent Sealed	33%	33%
Size of Characters	4.0 mm	3.6 mm
Translation Density	3.0	3.0
Lost 116 Pages (Characters)	280,000	180,000
Total Number of Plates	259	187

Table 12. Examples of largest and smallest characters configurations.

Property	Largest Characters	Smallest Characters
Plate Dimensions (L x W x H)	7.8" x 5.8" x 5.5"	7.5" x 5.6" x 5.5"
Plate Thickness	0.015"	0.018"
Void between Plates	58%	60%
Weight of Plates	60 lb.	58.8 lb.
Alloy Gold Content	12.5%	12.5%
Percent Sealed	33%	66%
Size of Characters	5.4 mm	2.5 mm
Translation Density	5.0	3.0
Lost 116 Pages (Characters)	180,000	320,000
Total Number of Plates	241	206

Table 13. Average properties of plate configurations.⁶⁴

Property	Average Plates	Standard Deviation
Plate Dimensions (L x W x H)	7.6" x 5.7" x 5.6"	0.13" x 0.1" x 0.1"
Plate Thickness	0.017"	0.001"
Void between Plates	58%	2.6%
Weight of Plates	59.0 lb.	0.9 lb.
Alloy Gold Content	13.4%	2%
Percent Sealed	47%	10%
Size of Characters	3.9 mm	0.5 mm
Translation Density	4.1	0.6
Lost 116 Pages (Characters)	269,000	58,000
Total Number of Plates	216	19

Appendix H: Historical Record of Plate Descriptions

This appendix includes all the historical records that make reference to the physical properties of the plates. The records are organized in chronological order. If only an approximate date is known for a source, then the record is ordered according to the earliest possible date.

Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon (August 1829)⁶⁵

And also the testimony of eight witnesses
Be it known unto all Nations kindreds tongues & people unto whom this work shall come that Joseph Smith jun. the author & proprietor of this work has shewn unto us the plates of which hath been spoken which have the appearance of gold & as many of the ~~leave~~ <leaves> as the said Smith has translated ~~wit~~ <we> did handle with our hands & we also saw the engravings thereon all of which has the appearance of ancient work & of curious workmanship & this ~~we~~ <we> bear record with words of soberness that the said Smith has shewn unto us for we have seen & hefted & know of a surety that the said Smith has got the plates of

64. This is the average of the 863,830 combinations from Step Four of Part Two.

65. Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, circa August 1829–circa January 1830, p. i, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, josephsmithpapers.org /paper-summary/printers-manuscript-of-the-book-of-mormon-circa-august-1829-circa-january-1830/1.

which we have spoken & we give our names unto the world
to witness unto the world that which we have seen & we lie
not God bearing witness of it

Christian Whitmer)

Jacob Whitmer)

Peter Whitmer Jun —)

John Whitmer)

Hiram Page)

Joseph Smith sen —)

Hyrum Smith)

Samuel H Smith)

***The Wayne Sentinel* (June 1829)⁶⁶**

Just about in this particular region, for some time past, much speculation has existed, concerning a protended discovery, through superhuman means, of an ancient record of a religious and divine nature and origin, written in ancient characters, impossible to be interpreted by any to whom the special gift has not been imparted by inspiration. It is generally known and spoken of as the “Golden Bible.”

Jonathan A. Hadley, *Palmyra Freeman* (August 1829)⁶⁷

It was said that the leaves of the Bible were plates of gold, about 8 inches long, 6 wide, and one eighth of an inch thick, on which were engraved characters or Hyeroglyphics. By placing the spectacles in a hat, and looking into it, Smith could (he said so, at least) interpret these characters.

Oliver Cowdery, *Gospel Luminary* (November 1829)⁶⁸

“Palmyra, Wayne, co., N. Y., Nov. 9th, 1829.

66. *The Wayne Sentinel* (Palmyra, NY), 26 June 1829, contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/BOMP/id/4374/.

67. Jonathan A. Hadley, “Golden Bible,” *Palmyra Freeman* (NY), 11 August 1829, in *Rochester Advertiser and Daily Telegraph* (NY), 31 August 1829, bhroberts.org/records/uthtQb-cpZOoc/hadley_describes_dimensions_of_plates.

68. Oliver Cowdery letter to Cornelius C. Blatchly, 9 November 1829, in Cornelius C. Blatchly, “The New Bible,” *Gospel Luminary* 2, no. 49 (10 December 1829):194, bhroberts.org/records/nvGFqb-0QrU5M/oliver_cowdery_in_a_letter_to_c_c_blatchley_reports_that_the_plates_were_laid_before_the_witnesses_by_an_angel.

Sir;-You wrote to Mr. Harris, some time since, respecting the book of Mormon, of which he was concerned in the publication.”-

“Your first inquiry was, whether it was proper to say, that Joseph Smith Jr., was the author? If I rightly understand the meaning of the word author, it is, the first beginner, or mover of any thing, or a writer. Now Joseph Smith Jr., certainly was the writer of the work, called the book of Mormon, which was written in ancient *Egyptian characters*,—which was a dead record to us until translated. And he, by a gift from God, has translated it into our language. Certainly he was the writer of it, and could be no less than the author.”

C. C. Blatchley, *New-York Telescope* (February 1830)⁶⁹

The editor of the Palmyra Freeman, their neighbor, adds to the above, that “in the fall of 1827, Joseph Smith, of Manchester, Ontario county, reported that he had been visited in a dream by the spirit of the Almighty, and informed, that in a certain hill, in that town, was deposited this Golden Bible, containing an ancient record of a divine nature and origin. After being thrice visited thus, as he states, he proceeded to the spot, and found the bible, with a huge pair of spectacles. He has been directed, however, not to let any mortal being examine them [i.e., the plates and the stone-eyed spectacles] under no less penalty than instant death! It was said that the leaves of the bible were plates of gold, about eight inches long, six inches wide, and one-eighth of an inch thick [i.e. 8 plates are one inch thick, 8 long and 6 wide.] On these plates were characters, or hieroglyphics, engraved.” The whole of the plates are said to weigh about thirty pounds; which would be in gold near eight thousand dollars, beside the value of the engraving. . . .

A. S., *Observer and Telegraph* (November 1830)⁷⁰

According to the narrative given by one of these

69. C. C. Blatchley, “Caution Against the Golden Bible,” *New-York Telescope* 6, no. 38 (20 February 1830): 150, contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/BOMP/id/4208/.

70. A. S., “The Golden Bible, or, Campbellism Improved,” *Observer and*

disciples—Oliver Cowdery—at their late exhibition in Kirtland, this pretended Revelation was written on golden plates, or something resembling golden plates, of the thickness of tin—7 inches in length, 6 inches in breadth, and a pile about 6 inches deep. None among the most learned in the United States could read, and interpret the hand-writing, (save one, and he could decipher but a few lines correctly,) excepting this ignoramus, Joseph Smith, Jr. To him, they say, was given the spirit of interpretation; but he was ignorant of the art of writing, he employed this Oliver Cowdery and others to write, while he read, interpreted, and translated this mighty Revelation.

The Philadelphia Album (December 1830)⁷¹

Upon opening this, he found enclosed a bundle of plates similar to gold, about 7 inches long, 6 broad, and in all about 6 inches deep, each sheet being of about the thickness of tin. They were united, at one edge with 3 silver wires, so that they opened in a manner similar to a book. “ They were engraven in a character unintelligible to the learned men of the United States, to many of whom it is said to have been presented. . . .

Abner Cole (as Obadiah Dogberry), *The Reflector* (March 1831)⁷²

There appears to be a great discrepancy, in the stories told by the famous three witnesses to the Gold Bible; and these pious reprobates, individually, frequently give different versions of the same transaction. In the first place, it was roundly asserted that the plates on which Mormon wrote his history, (in the reformed Egyptian language) were

Telegraph (Hudson, OH), 18 November 1830, [bhroberts.org/records/HcTowb-KL5WGb/observer_and_telegraph_reporter_mentions_the_three_witnesses_and_reports_on_lds_missionary_activity_in_ohio](https://www.bhroberts.org/records/HcTowb-KL5WGb/observer_and_telegraph_reporter_mentions_the_three_witnesses_and_reports_on_lds_missionary_activity_in_ohio).

71. “The Book of Gold,” *The Philadelphia Album*, 18 December 1830, 405 in “The Book of Mormon,” *Auburn Free Press* 7, no. 29 (18 December 1830): 2, [bhroberts.org/records/uthtQb-05INab/the_philadelphia_album_reports_that_the_plates_were_7x6x6_and_the_sheets_were_the_thickness_of_tin](https://www.bhroberts.org/records/uthtQb-05INab/the_philadelphia_album_reports_that_the_plates_were_7x6x6_and_the_sheets_were_the_thickness_of_tin).
72. Obadiah Dogberry [Abner Cole], “Gold Bible, No. 6,” *The Reflector* (Palmyra, NY) 2, no. 16 (19 March 1831): 126–27, [bhroberts.org/records/nvGFqb-0jU199/obadiah_dogberry_reports_that_david_whitmer_physically_held_and_examined_the_plates](https://www.bhroberts.org/records/nvGFqb-0jU199/obadiah_dogberry_reports_that_david_whitmer_physically_held_and_examined_the_plates).

of gold, and hence its name; gentlemen in this vicinity were called on to estimate its value from its weight, (something more than 20 lbs) Smith and Harris gave out that no mortal save Jo could look upon it and live; and Harris declares, that when he acted as amanuenes, 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.

Whitmar's description of the Book of Mormon, differs entirely from that given by Harris; both of whom it would seem have been of late permitted, not only to see and handle it, but to examine its contents. Whitmar relates that he was led by Smith into an open field, on his father's farm near Waterloo, when they found the book lying on the ground; Smith took it up and requested him to examine it, which he did for the space of half an hour or more, when he returned it to Smith who placed it in its former position, alledging that the book was in the custody of another, intimating that some Divine agent would have it in safe keeping.

This witness describes the book as being something like 8 inches square; (our informant did not recollect precisely,) the leaves were plates of metal of a whitish yellow color, and of the thickness of tin plate; the back was secured with three small rings of the same metal, passing through each leaf in succession;—that the leaves were divided equi-distant, between the back & edge, by cutting the plates in two parts, and united again with solder, so that the front might be opened, as it were on a hinge, while the back part remained stationary and immovable and in this manner remained to him and the other witnesses a sealed book, which would not as yet be revealed for ages to come, and that event the prophet himself was not as yet permitted to understand. On opening that portion of the book which was not secured by the seals, he discovered inscribed on the aforesaid plates, divers and wonderful characters; some of them large and some small, but beyond the wisdom of man to understand without supernatural aid.

Some of the other apostles give somewhat similar accounts, but varying in many particulars, according to their various powers of description.—Harris, however, gives

the lie to a very important part of Whitmar's relation, and declares that the leaves or pages of the book are not cut, and a part of them sealed, but that it opens like any other book, from the edge to the back, the rings operating in the place of common binding.

***Illinois Patriot* (September 1831)⁷³**

At the place appointed he found in the earth a box which contained a set of thin plates resembling gold, with Arabic characters inscribed on them. The plates were minutely described as being connected with rings in the shape of the letter D, which facilitated the opening and shutting of the book. The preacher said he found in the same place two stones, with which he was enabled by placing them over his eyes and putting his head in a dark corner, to decypher the hieroglyphics on the plates!

***Franklin Democrat* (March 1832)⁷⁴**

We of this place were visited on Saturday last by a couple of young men styling themselves Mormonites. They explained their doctrine to a large part of the citizens in the court house that evening. They commenced by reading the first chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Galatians; also by giving an account of their founder, Joseph Smith, then an inhabitant of the state of New-York, county of Ontario, and town of Manchester. Having repented of his sins, but not attached himself to any party of Christians, owing to the numerous divisions among them, and being in doubt what his duty was, he had recourse prayer. After retiring to bed one night, he was visited by an Angel and directed to proceed to a hill in the neighborhood where he would find a stone box containing a quantity of Gold plates. The plates were six or eight

73. "The Mormonites," *Illinois Patriot*, 16 September 1831, in *Christian Intelligencer and Eastern Chronicle* 5, no. 46 (18 November 1831): 184, [bhroberts.org/records/OiSghu-n6bXob/unknown_author_described_joseph_finding_two_stones_and_plates_connected_with_rings_in_the_shape_of_d_in_the_same_place](https://www.bhroberts.org/records/OiSghu-n6bXob/unknown_author_described_joseph_finding_two_stones_and_plates_connected_with_rings_in_the_shape_of_d_in_the_same_place).

74. "Mormonism," *Franklin Democrat* (Franklin, PA), March 1832, repr. *Fredonia Censor* (Fredonia, NY), 7 March 1832, contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/BOMP/id/1358/.

inches square, and as many of them as would make them six or eight inches thick, each as thick as a pane of glass. They were filled with characters which the learned of that state were not able to translate.

B. Stokley, *Mercer Press* (April 1832)⁷⁵

On Wednesday, the 8th of this month, two strangers called at my house and stated that they were sent by God to preach the gospel to every creature and said if a number should be convened they would deliver a discourse. . . . he went into the township of Manchester, and there, on the side of a hill, found in a stone box, or a square space enclosed by stone on every side, the plates on which the revelation was inscribed. The box in thickness was about 6 inches, and about 7 by 5 otherwise; the plates themselves were about as thick as window glass, or common tin, pure gold, and well secured by silver rings or loops in the box as an effectual defence against all weather. Smith, being entirely ignorant of any language but the English, and knowing that itself in a very imperfect manner, was unable to read or decypher a single word — he therefore sent the plates to the city of New York to be translated by Professor Anthony, who could make nothing of them; — here seemed to be an insurmountable difficulty.

It was supposed that the language of the plates was Arabic, Chaldean, and Egyptian; but God by his goodness inspired Smith himself to translate the whole. — Smith, however, not being qualified to write, employed an amanuensis, who wrote for him — they thus translated about two thirds of what the plates contained, reserving the residue for a future day as the Lord might hereafter direct.

Joseph Smith, *History* (Summer 1832)⁷⁶

An angel of the Lord came and stood before me and it was

75. B. Stokley, "The Orators of Mormon," *Mercer Press* (Mercer, PA), April 1832, repr. *Catholic Telegraph* (Cincinnati), 14 April 1832, 204, contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/BOMP/id/602.

76. Joseph Smith, *History*, circa Summer 1832, p. 4, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-summer-1832/4.

by night and he called me by name and he said the Lord had forgiven me my sins and he revealed unto me that in the Town of Manchester Ontario County N.Y. there was plates of gold upon which there was engravings which was engraven by Maroni & his fathers the servants of the living God in ancient days and deposited by th[e] commandments of God and kept by the power thereof.

William E. McLellin (August 1832)⁷⁷

Some time in July 1831, Two men [Elders Samuel H. Smith and Reynolds Cahoon] came to Paris & held an evening meeting. . . . They said that in September 1827 an Angel appeared to Joseph Smith (in Ontario Co. New York) and showed to him the confusion on the earth respecting true religion. It also told him to go a few miles distant to a certain hill and there he should find some plates with engravings, which (if he was faithful) he should be enabled to translate. He went as directed and found plates (which had the appearance of fine Gold) about 8 inches long 5 or 6 wide and altogether about 6 inches thick; each one about as thick as thin paste board fastened together and opened in the form of a book containing engravings of reformed Egyptian Hieroglyphical characters: which he was inspired to translate and the record was published in 1830 and is called the book of Mormon.

Josiah Stowell, *New England Christian Herald* (November 1832)⁷⁸

Josiah Stowel, being by me sworn, saith, he has been acquainted with Smith, the prisoner, for quite a number of years . . . that prisoner told witnesses, that the Lord had told prisoner that a golden Bible was in a certain hill; that Smith, the prisoner, went in the night, and brought the Bible, (as Smith said;) witness saw a corner of it; it resembled a stone of a greenish caste; should judge it to have been about

77. William E. McLellin letter to Samuel McLelin, 4 August 1832, [bhroberts.org/records/K1ao2b-j5LQvc/william_mclellin_joseph_published_the_bom_in_1830](https://www.bhroberts.org/records/K1ao2b-j5LQvc/william_mclellin_joseph_published_the_bom_in_1830).

78. Josiah Stowell, "Mormonism," *New England Christian Herald*, 7 November 1832.

one foot square and six inches thick; he would not let it be seen by any one; the Lord had commanded him not; it was unknown to Smith, that witness saw a corner of the Bible, so called by Smith; told the witness the leaves were of gold; there were written characters on the leaves . . .

The Evening and Morning Star (January 1833)⁷⁹

These plates were generally made from the sixteenth to the thirty second part of an inch thick (of metal) and something like six by eight inches square, and fastened at the back with three rings through which a rod was put to carry them, or hang them.

Willard Chase, *Mormonism Unveiled* (1833)⁸⁰

After about ten days, it having been suggested that some one had got his book, his wife went after him; he [Joseph Smith] hired a horse, and went home in the afternoon, staid long enough to drink one cup of tea, and then went for his book, found it safe, took off his frock, wrapt it round it, put it under his arm and run all the way home, a distance of about two miles. He said he should think it would weigh sixty pounds, and was sure it would weigh forty.

Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (1833)⁸¹

[David Whitmer] describes the plates as being about eight inches square, the leaves being metal of a whitish yellow color, and of the thickness of tin plates. The back was secured with three small rings of the same metal, passing through each leaf in succession; that the leaves were divided equidistant between the back and the edge, by cutting the

79. "The Book of Mormon," *The Evening and The Morning Star* 1, no. 8 (January 1833): 57, archive.org/details/EveningAndMorningStar18321834/page/n57/mode/2up. See also bhroberts.org/records/0iSghu-044ZEi/the_evening_and_the_morning_star_recorded_that_joseph_translated_using_the_urim_and_thummim.

80. Willard Chase, Statement, quoted in Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville, OH: printed by the author, 1833), 246, archive.org/details/MormonismUnveiled1834/page/n261/mode/2up.

81. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 16, archive.org/details/MormonismUnveiled1834/page/n29/mode/2up.

plates in two parts, and again united with solder, so that the front might be opened, while the back part remained stationary and immovable, and was consequently a sealed book, which would not be revealed for ages to come, and which Smith himself was not permitted to understand. On opening that part of the book which was not secured by seals, he discovered inscribed on the aforesaid plates, divers and wonderful characters, some large and some small, but beyond the wisdom of man to understand without supernatural aid this account is sometimes partly contradicted by Harris.

William Burnett, *New York Weekly Messenger and Young Men's Advocate* (April 1835)⁸²

Smith pretended that he had found some golden or brass plates, like the leaves of a book, hid in a box in the earth, to which he was directed by an Angel, in 1827,—that the writing on them was in the “Reformed Egyptian language,”—that he was inspired to interpret the writing, or engraving, by putting a plate in his hat, putting two smooth flat stones, which he found in the box, in the hat, and putting his face therein—that he could not write, but as he translated, one Oliver Cowdery wrote it down.

Joseph Smith, *Journal* (1835–1836)⁸³

He said unto me I am a messenger sent from God, be faithful and keep his commandments in all things, he told me of a sacred record which was written on plates of gold, I saw in the vision the place where they were deposited, he said the indians, were the literal descendants of Abraham.

82. William Burnett, “Mormonism,” *New York Weekly Messenger and Young Men's Advocate* (29 April 1835) from *The Pioneer* (Rock Springs, IL) 4, no. 41 (March 1835): 1, bhrberts.org/records/0iSghu-0zvs1E/william_burnett_states_that_joseph_pretended_that_he_was_inspired_to_translate_through_either_a_stone_in_a_hat_or_two_flat_smooth_stones.

83. Joseph Smith, *Journal*, 1835–1836, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, 24, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-1835-1836/25.

Orson Pratt, *A Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions, and of the Late Discovery of Ancient American Records* (1840)⁸⁴

These records were engraved on plates, which had the appearance of gold. Each plate was not far from seven by eight inches in width and length, being not quite as thick as common tin. They were filled on both sides with engravings, in Egyptian characters, and bound together in a volume, as the leaves of a book, and fastened at one edge with three rings running through the whole. This volume was something near six inches in thickness, a part of which was sealed. The characters or letters upon the unsealed part were small, and beautifully engraved. The whole book exhibited many marks of antiquity in its construction, as well as much skill in the art of engraving. With the records was found "a curious instrument, called by the ancients the Urim and Thummim, which consisted of two transparent stones, clear as crystal, set in the two rims of a bow. This was in use, in ancient times, by persons called seers. It was an instrument, by the use of which, they received revelation of things distant, or of things past or future."

Parley P. Pratt, *Millennial Star* (June 1840)⁸⁵

The record consisted of a large volume, in the Egyptian language, engraven on plates of gold. The plates were each about 7 by 8 inches in width and length, being about the thickness of common tin. These were engravings on both sides, and a volume of them were bound together like the leaves of a book, and fastened at one edge with three rings running through the whole. The volume was something near six inches in thickness.

84. Orson Pratt, *A Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions, and of the Late Discovery of Ancient American Records* (Edinburgh: Ballantyne and Hughes, 1840), 12–13, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/appendix-orson-pratt-an-interesting-account-of-several-remarkable-visions-1840/12.

85. Parley P. Pratt, "Discovery of an Ancient Record in America," *Millennial Star* 1, no. 2 (June 1840): 30, archive.org/details/MStarVol01/page/n31/mode/2up.

Sally Bradford Parker (August 1838)⁸⁶

[Original]

I have not heard but one sermon sence wee have bin in the place and that by hyrem Smith as he wass mooving to mesur<ia> he taried with us a litle while his dissorse wass butifull wee wass talking about th Book of mormon which he is ons of the witnesses he said he had but too hands and too eyes he said he had seene the plates with his eyes and handeled them with his hands and he saw a brest plate and he told how it wass maid it wass fixed for the brest of a man with a hollen stomak and too pieces upon eatch side with a hole throu them to put in a string to tye <it> on but that wass mot so good gold as the plates for that was pure why I write this is because thay dispute the Book so muc[h.]

[Edited]

For I have not heard but one sermon since we have been in the place and that by Hyrum Smith. As he was moving to Missouri he tarried with us a little while. His discourse was beautiful. We were talking about the Book of Mormon, [of] which he is one of the witnesses. He said he had but two hands and two eyes. He said he had seen the plates with his eyes and handled them with his hands and he saw a breast plate and he told how it was made. It was fixed for the breast of a man with a hole in [the] stomach and two pieces upon each side with a hole through them to put in a string to tie it on, but that was not so good gold as the plates for that was pure. Why I write this is because they dispute the book so much.

John Corrill, *A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints* (1839)⁸⁷

The simple story as related by others was this. Sometime in

86. Sally Bradford Parker, Letter, 26 August 1838; repr. Janiece L. Johnson, "'The Scriptures Is a Fulfilling': Sally Parker's Weave," *BYU Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005): 115–16, [website-files-bucket.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/articles/article_pdfs/The_Scriptures_Is_a_Fulfilling.pdf](https://www.byu.edu/files/website-files-bucket.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/articles/article_pdfs/The_Scriptures_Is_a_Fulfilling.pdf).

87. John Corrill, *A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints* (St. Louis: printed for the author, 1839), 12, [josephsmithpapers.org/paper](https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper)

A. D. 1825, as nearly as I can recollect, Smith was informed by an angel, that there was a valuable record concealed in the earth, and the time had now arrived for it to be brought forth and published to the world. After being warned several times, he went to the spot and found the record engraved on leaves or plates of gold, fastened together by rings passing through one edge of all the leaves, on which they would turn as you opened them. The plates, as near as I can remember, were said to be about six by eight inches square, and very thin. This Book was carefully enclosed in a stone box, provided for that purpose, which Smith broke open.

Theodore Turley, *History* (April 1839)⁸⁸

Turley said, Gentlemen, "I presume there are men here who have heard Corrill say, Mormonism was true, Joseph Smith was a Prophet, and inspired of God &c I now call upon you, John Whitmer, you say Corrill is a moral and good man, do you believe him, when he says the Book of Mormon is true, or when it is not true, there are ... many things published that they say is true, and again turn round and say it is false" Whitmer asked do you hint at me? Turley replied "if the cap fits you, wear it, all I know, you have published to the world that an angel did present those plates to Joseph Smith" Whitmer replied "I now say, I handled those plates, there was fine engravings on both sides — I handled them," and he described how they were hung, and "they were shewn to me by a supernatural power" he acknowledged all — Turley asked him "why the translation is not now true," he said "I cannot read it, and I do not know whether it is true or not"

Joseph Smith, *History* (March 1842)⁸⁹

He said there was a book deposited written upon gold plates,

-summary/john-corrill-a-brief-history-of-the-church-of-christ-of-latter-day-saints-1839/10.

88. "History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842]," p. 913, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/95.

89. Joseph Smith, History, circa June 1839–circa 1841 [Draft 2], p. 5, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-june-1839-circa-1841-draft-2/5.

giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent and the source from whence they sprang. He also said that the fullness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants.

William Smith, *Congregational Observer* (July 1841)⁹⁰

The next day he [Joseph Smith] went alone to the spot, and by digging discovered the plates in a sort of rude stone box. They were eight or ten inches long, less in width, about the thickness of panes of glass; and together, made a pile about five or six inches high. They were in a good state of preservation, had the appearance of gold, and bore inscriptions in strange characters on both sides.

Orson Hyde, *Ein Ruf aus der Wüste* (1842)⁹¹

These were engraved on uniform plates which had the appearance of gold. Each plate was almost 7 inches wide and almost 8 inches long and in thickness somewhat less than common tin. They were engraved with a fine script similar to Egyptian hieroglyphs and fastened together in the form of a book by three rings, which were drawn through the whole by means of small holes on the ends. The entire book was approximately 8 inches thick and one part of it was sealed. The characters or letters of the unsealed part were small and artistically beautifully engraved (according to the words of Mr. [Orson] Pratt, from whose writings I have taken the foregoing account).

90. William Smith, Interview with James Murdock, 18 April 1841, "The Mormons and Their Prophet," *Congregational Observer* (Hartford and New Haven, CT), 2 July 1841, 1, quoted in Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 479, [bhroberts.org/records/uthtQb-LbW7cc/smith_reports_dimensions_of_the_plates_to_murdock](https://www.bhroberts.org/records/uthtQb-LbW7cc/smith_reports_dimensions_of_the_plates_to_murdock).

91. Orson Hyde, *Ein Ruf aus der Wüste* (A Cry out of the Wilderness) (Frankfurt: Im Selbstverlage des Verfassers, 1842), 25–26, [josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/orson-hyde-ein-ruf-aus-der-wuste-a-cry-out-of-the-wilderness-1842-extract-english-translation/1](https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/orson-hyde-ein-ruf-aus-der-wuste-a-cry-out-of-the-wilderness-1842-extract-english-translation/1).

Lucy Mack Smith, *The City of the Mormons; or, Three Days at Nauvoo* (1842)⁹²

The angel of the Lord appeared to him fifteen years since, and shewed him the cave where the original golden plates of the book of Mormon were deposited. He shewed him also the Urim and Thummim, by which he might understand the meaning of the inscriptions on the plates, and he shewed him the golden breastplate of the high priesthood. My son received these precious gifts, he interpreted the holy record, and now the believers in that revelation are more than a hundred thousand in number. I have myself seen and handled the golden plates; they are about eight inches long, and six wide; some of them are sealed together and are not to be opened, and some of them are loose. They are all connected by a ring which passes through a hole at the end of each plate, and are covered with letters beautifully engraved. I have seen and felt also the Urim and Thummim. They resemble two large bright diamonds set in a bow like a pair of spectacles. My son puts these over his eyes when he reads unknown languages, and they enable him to interpret them in English. I have likewise carried in my hands the sacred breastplate. It is composed of pure gold, and is made to fit the breast very exactly.

Joseph Smith, *Times and Seasons* (March 1842)⁹³

These records were engraven on plates which had the appearance of gold. Each plate was six inches wide and eight inches long and not quite so thick as common tin. They were filled with engravings in Egyptian characters and bound together in a volume, as the leaves of a book with three rings running through the whole. The volume was something near six inches in thickness, a part of which was sealed. The characters on the unsealed part were small, and beautifully engraved. The whole book exhibited many

92. Henry Caswall, *The City of the Mormons; or, Three Days at Nauvoo* (London: J. G. F. & J. Rivington, 1842), 26–27, archive.org/details/cityofmormonsort01casw/page/26/mode/2up.

93. Joseph Smith, "Church History," *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 9 (1 March 1842): 707, archive.org/details/TimesAndSeasonsVol3/page/n201/mode/2up.

marks of antiquity in its construction and much skill in the art of engraving.

W. I. Appleby, *A Dissertation of Nebuchadnezzar's Dream* (1844)⁹⁴

Mr. Smith having been shown in the Vision the place where the Record was deposited; accordingly the next morning, 23d day of September, A. D. 1823, visited the place, and from that time he received more and more information concerning what he had to do until the year 1827, when he obtained the Recods [sic]. A hole of sufficient depth had been dug, and a flat stone laid in the bottom; then there were four set erect at the outer edges of the bottom stone, joined together with some kind of cement, so as to form a Box. On the bottom stone was laid a Shield or Breastplate, from that arose three pillars made of cement. On the top of these pillars laid the Record, together with the "Urim and Thummim," the whole not to extend quite even with the top of the side stones. Over the whole was placed a crowning stone, a small part of which was visible, when he first visited the spot. Each plate was about six by eight inches, and as thick as common tin, and on each side beautifully engraved, and filled with black cement, the whole being about six inches in thickness, and put together with three rings, running through the whole, a part of which was sealed. The unsealed part has been translated; and contains the Book of Mormon; and living witnesses, who saw the plates and hefted them have borne testimony to the same. In the year 1830, after the Book was translated and published, the Angel of God according to promise conferred the Holy Priesthood upon Mr. Smith, and gave unto him commandments to Baptize with water in the name of Jesus, and build up the Church of Christ; which accordingly was organized April 6th, A. D. 1830, with six members.

Reuben Miller, *Journal* (October 1848)⁹⁵

Friends and brethren my name is Cowdrey, Oliver Cowdrey,

94. W. I. Appleby, *A Dissertation of Nebuchadnezzar's Dream* (Philadelphia: Brown, Bicking & Guilbert, 1844), 23,

95. Reuben Miller, *Journal*, 21 October 1848, bhiroberts.org/records/nvGFqb

In the early history of this church I stood Identified with her. And [was] one in her councils. . . . I wrote with my own pen the intire book of mormon (Save a few pages) as it fell from the Lips of the prophet [Joseph Smith]. As he translated <it> by the gift and power of god, By [the] means of the urum and thummim, or as it is called by that book holy Interpreters. I beheld with my eyes. And handled with my hands the gold plates from which it was translated. I also beheld the Interpreters. That book is true. Sidney Rigdon did not write it. Mr [Solomon] Spaulding did not write it. I wrote it myself as it fell from the Lips of the prophet.

Orson Pratt, *Deseret News* (July 1856)⁹⁶

About two-thirds were sealed up, and Joseph was commanded not to break the seal; that part of the record was hid up. The plates which were sealed contained an account of those things shewn unto the brother of Jared.

Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses* (January 1859)⁹⁷

Eight other witnesses testify that Joseph Smith showed them the plates, and that they saw the engravings upon them, and that they had the appearance of ancient work and curious workmanship. They describe these plates as being about the thickness of common tin, about eight inches in length, and from six to seven in breadth. Upon each side of the leaves of these plates there were fine engravings, which were stained with a black, hard stain, so as to make the letters more legible and easier to be read. Through the back of the plates were three rings, which held them together, and through which a rod might easily be passed, serving as a greater convenience for carrying them; the construction and form of the plates being similar to the gold, brass, and lead plates of the ancient Jews in Palestine.

-0jnX7U/cowdery_reaffirms_his_testimony_at_council_meeting_saw_and_handed_the_plates.

96. Orson Pratt, *Deseret News*, 23 July 1856, 154, contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/desnews1/id/4761.

97. Orson Pratt, "Evidences of the Bible and Book of Mormon Compared," 2 January 1859, *Journal of Discourses*, 7: 30–31, archive.org/details/JoDV07/page/n37/mode/2up.

Martin Harris, *Tiffany's Monthly* (August 1859)⁹⁸

“Joseph did not dig for these plates. They were placed in this way: four stones were set up and covered with a flat stone, oval on the upper side and flat on the bottom. Beneath this was a little platform upon which the plates were laid; and the two stones set in a bow of silver by means of which the plates were translated were found underneath the plates.

“These were seven inches wide by eight inches in length, and were of the thickness of plates of tin; and when piled one above the other, they were altogether about four inches thick; and they were put together on the back by three silver rings, so that they would open like a book.

“The two stones set in a bow of silver were about two inches in diameter, perfectly round, and about five-eighths of an inch thick at the centre; but not so thick at the edges where they came into the bow. They were joined by a round bar of silver, about three-eighths of an inch in diameter, and about four inches long, which, with the two stones, would make eight inches.

“The stones were white, like polished marble, with a few gray streaks. I never dared to look into them by placing them in the hat, because Moses said that ‘no man could see God and live,’ and we could see anything we wished by looking into them; and I could not keep the desire to see God out of my mind. And beside, we had a command to let no man look into them, except by the command of God, lest he should ‘look aught and perish.’

“These plates were usually kept in a cherry box made for that purpose, in the possession of Joseph and myself. The plates were kept from the sight of the world, and no one, save Oliver Cowdrey, myself, Joseph Smith, jr., and David Whitmer, ever saw them. Before the Lord showed the plates to me, Joseph wished me to see them. But I refused, unless the Lord should do it. At one time, before the Lord showed them to me, Joseph said I should see them. I asked him, why he would break the commands of the Lord! He said, you

98. Joel Tiffany, “Mormonism—No II,” *Tiffany's Monthly* 5, no. 4, August 1859, 165–66, [bhroberts.org/records/uthtQb-0tRGmL/harris_says_the_plates_were_7x8_inches](https://www.bhroberts.org/records/uthtQb-0tRGmL/harris_says_the_plates_were_7x8_inches).

have done so much I am afraid you will not believe unless you see them. I replied, 'Joseph, I know all about it. The Lord has showed to me ten times more about it than you know.' "— Here we inquired of Mr. Harris— How did the Lord show you these things! He replied, "I am forbidden to say anything how the Lord showed them to me, except that by the power of God I have seen them."

Mr. Harris continues: "I hefted the plates many times, and should think they weighed forty or fifty pounds.

Martin Harris, *Tiffany's Monthly* (August 1859)⁹⁹

"While at Mr. Smith's I hefted the plates, and I knew from the heft that they were lead or gold, and I knew that Joseph had not credit enough to buy so much lead. I left Mr. Smith's about eleven o'clock and went home. I retired to my bedroom and prayed God to show me concerning these things, and I covenanted that if it was his work and he would show me so, I would put forth my best ability to bring it before the world. He then showed me that it was his work, and that it was designed to bring in the fullness of his gospel to the gentiles to fulfill his word, that the first shall be last and the last first. He showed this to me by the still small voice spoken in the soul. Then I was satisfied that it was the Lord's work, and I was under a covenant to bring it forth.

David B. Dille, *Millennial Star* (August 1859)¹⁰⁰

I then addressed Mr. Harris relative to his once high and exalted station in the Church, and his then fallen and afflicted condition. I afterwards put the following question to Mr. Harris, to which he severally replied with the greatest cheerfulness: — 'What do you think of the Book of Mormon? Is it a divine record?'

Mr. Harris replied and said—'I was the right-hand man of Joseph Smith, and I know that he was a Prophet of God.

99. Tiffany, "Mormonism—No II," 169–70, bhiroberts.org/records/aqkRxb-0tRGmL/harris_says_the_plates_weighed_40_50_pounds.

100. David B. Dille, 15 September 1853 statement, "Additional Testimony of Martin Harris (One of the Three Witnesses) to the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon," *Millennial Star* 21, no. 34 (20 August 1859), 545, archive.org/details/MStarVol21/page/n559/mode/2up.

I know the Book of Mormon is true.’ Then smiting his fist on the table, he said — ‘And you know that I know that it is true. I know that the plates have been translated by the gift and power of God, for his voice declared it unto us; therefore I know of a surety that the work is true. For,’ continued Mr. Harris, ‘did I not at one time hold the plates on my knee an hour-and-a-half, whilst in conversation with Joseph, when we went to bury them in the woods, that the enemy might not obtain them? Yes, I did. And as many of the plates as Joseph Smith translated I handled with my hands, plate after plate.’ Then describing their dimensions, he pointed with one of the fingers of his left hand to the back of his right hand and said, ‘I should think they were so long, or about eight inches, and about so thick, or about four inches; and each of the plates was thicker than the thickest tin.’

Fayette Lapham, *Report of an Interview with Joseph Smith Sr.* (1870)¹⁰¹

In answer to our question, as to what it was that Joseph had thus obtained, [Joseph Smith Sr.] said it consisted of a set of gold plates, about six inches wide, and nine or ten inches long. They were in the form of a book, half an inch thick, but were not bound at the back, like our books, but were held together by several gold rings, in such a way that the plates could be opened similar to a book.

Martin Harris, *Daily Iowa State Register* (August 1870)¹⁰²

A few days since we acknowledged a call at our sanctum, from Martin Harris, who was on his way from Ohio to take up

101. Fayette Lapham, “Report of an Interview with Joseph Smith Sr.,” 1870; repr. Larry E. Morris, ed., *A Documentary History of the Book of Mormon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 439, bhr.org/records/uthtQb-q4wDCc/lapham_reports_that_smith_sr_gave_dimensions_of_plates_at_6x9_10_inches.

102. Martin Harris “A Witness to the Book of Mormon,” *Daily Iowa State Register* (Des Moines), 28 August 1870, 1, bhr.org/records/HcTowb-hNauCc/newspaper_report_of_a_public_discourse_by_martin_harris_who_is_reported_to_have_publicly_reaffirmed_his_testimony_in_the_book_of_mormon.

his residence at Salt lake City, to spend the remainder of his days with the "chosen people." . . .

In September, 1828, as the story goes, Joseph Smith, directed by an angel, proceeded to a spot about 4 miles from Palmyra, New York, and upon the point of a hill, extending northward, dug up a very solid stone chest within which were the tablets of gold, inscribed with the characters which no man could read. Joseph Smith was the first to handle the tablets, and Martin Harris, one of the appointed witnesses, the second. Mr. Harris describes the plates as being of thin leaves of gold, measuring seven by eight inches, and weighing altogether, from forty to sixty lbs. There was also found in the chest, the urim and thummim, by means of which the writing upon the plates was translated, but not until after the most learned men had exhausted their knowledge of letters in the vain effort to decipher the characters.

Ole A. Jensen, *Testimony of Martin Harris* (July 1875)¹⁰³

The Prophet and Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer and myself went into a little grove to pray, to obtain a promise that we should behold it with our own eyes. That we could testify to the world We prayed two or three times, and at length the angel stood befor Oliver and David, and showed them the plates, But, Behold I had gone myself to pray and in my desperation I asked the Prophet to kneel down with me, and pray for me, that I may see the plates. and we did so and immediately the angel stood before me and said 'look' and when I glanced at him I fell, But I stood on my feet and saw the angel turn the golden leaves over, and I said "it is enough, my Lord and my God! Then I heard the voice of God say the book is true, and translated correctly. He then turned himself as though he had no more to say; and we made ready to go.

***Chenango Union* (April 1877)¹⁰⁴**

The Binghamton Republican publishes some personal

103. Ole A. Jensen, "Testimony of Martin Harris," 2, bhiroberts.org/records/HcTowb-DOSXlb/ole_a_jensen_interviews_martin_harris_who_reaffirms_his_experience_as_a_bom_witness.

104. "Early Days of Mormonism," *Chenango Union* (Norwich, NY), 12 April 1877,

recollections of Mrs. Doolittle, a lady seventy-five years old, who is now visiting with her son-in-law, Chief of Police Johnson of that city. She was personally acquainted with the first wife of Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet, Miss Emma Hale, whom he married near Susquehanna, Pa.

From her statement it appears that Joe came to the neighborhood of Susquehanna to dig for gold, and made several excavations for that purpose, but it never was known that his labors in that direction were rewarded. While thus employed he became acquainted with Miss Hale, whose parents opposed the proposed marriage, and the young people eloped to Windsor, where they were married.

They returned and settled down upon a farm adjoining the lands of Mr. Hale and Mr. McKune. There was already a small house upon the farm, a story and a half frame building, and Joe put on a small addition. The farm and the house is now the property of Benjamin McKune, a grand-son of Joseph McKune. This same McKune farm is again becoming somewhat famous in consequence of preparations to bore into it for oil a short distance from the prophet's first domicile.

While Joe was upon his farm he had the Mormon Bible. Whether he professed to find it before or after marriage Mrs. Doolittle does not remember. Her grandfather was once privileged to take in his hands a pillowcase in which the supposed saintly treasure was wrapped, and to feel through the cloth that it had leaves. From the size and the weight of the book, Mr. McKune supposed that in dimensions it closely resembled an ordinary Bible in the print of those days.

Edward Stevenson, *Journal* (December 1877)¹⁰⁵

The next Morning Davids Mother Saw the Person at the Shed and he took the Plates from A Box & Showed them to her She Said that they Were fastened with Rings thus D he

quoted in Morris, *Documentary History of the Book of Mormon*, 265–66, bhroberts.org/records/uthtQb-oNKbxb/bm_gives_dimensions_of_plates_as_that_of_an_ordinary_bible.

105. Edward Stevenson, *Journal*, 23 December 1877, bhroberts.org/records/HcTowb-sZm3cb/edward_stevenson_records_meeting_with_david_whitmer_who_reaffirmed_his_testimony_of_the_book_of_mormon.

turned the leaves over this was a Satisfaction to her. She Died in the room ware Wee visited Sitting up in her chair without a Struggle.

John Whitmer, *The Saints' Herald* (February 1878)¹⁰⁶

Mr. Whitmer is considered a truthful, honest and law abiding citizen by this community, and consequently, his appointment [to preach] drew out a large audience. Mr. Whitmer stated that he had often handled the identical golden plates which Mr. Smith received from the angel, he said it was of pure gold, part of the book was sealed up solid, the other part was open and it was this part which was translated, and is termed to-day the Mormon Bible.

John Whitmer, *Deseret News* (August 1878)¹⁰⁷

The following letter contains several items that will prove interesting to the Latter-day Saints. We publish it without knowing anything personally of the incidents related by the writer. The testimony of John Whitmer, however, is prefixed to the Book of Mormon in connection with that of the other witnesses, and remains unimpeached and unimpeachable.

Ovid City, Idaho,

July 31, 1878

Editors of the Deseret News:

I received, to-day, a letter from Miss Sarah Whitmer, at Far West, Missouri, in which she informs me about the death of her father, John Whitmer, Esq., one of the eight witnesses to the plates from which the Book of Mormon is translated. She writes:

. . . So far from Sarah Whitmer's letter. I visited this last one of the eight witnesses in April this year, at his fine residence at Far West. On John's farm is located the foundation of Far West Temple, and the cornerstone is laid of gray sandstone. A short distance from John Whitmer's residence

106. Funn, "John Whitmer, Discourse," 57.

107. P. Wilhelm Poulson, Letter, 31 July 1878; repr. "Correspondence. Death of John Whitmer. Testimony to the Book of Mormon," *Deseret News*, 14 August 1878, 2, bhiroberts.org/records/uthtQb-0Echl1/poulson_reports_john_whitmiers_final_testimony_of_the_bom.

we discover the house in which the Prophet Joseph Smith dwelt with his family, and in the adjoining county is the beautiful valley, Adam-ondi-Ahman. John Whitmer received me as a dear father would receive a son, and answered readily all my questions. I said: I am aware that your name is affixed to the testimony in the Book of Mormon, that you saw the plates? He — It is so, and that testimony is true. I — did you handle the plates with your hands? He — I did so! I — Then they were a material substance? He — Yes, as material as anything can be. I — Were they heavy to lift? He — Yes, and as you know gold is a heavy metal, they were very heavy. I — How big were the leaves? He — So far as I recollect, 8 by 6 or 7 inches. I — Were the leaves thick? He — Yes, just so thick, that characters could be engraven on both sides. I — How were the leaves joined together? He — In three rings, each one in the shape of a D with the straight line towards the center. I — In what place did you see the plates? He — In Joseph Smith's house; he had them there. I — Did you see them covered with a cloth? He — No. He handed them uncovered into our hands, and we turned the leaves sufficient to satisfy us. I — Were you all eight witnesses present at the same time? He — No. At that time Joseph showed the plates to us, we were four persons, present in the room, and at another time he showed them to four persons more.

David Whitmer, *Deseret Evening News* (August 1878)¹⁰⁸

I — Did the angel turn all the leaves before you as you looked on it?

He — No, not all, only that part of the book which was not sealed, and what there was sealed appeared as solid to my view as wood.

I — How many of the plates were sealed?

He — About half of the book was sealed. Those leaves which were not sealed, about the half of the first part of the book,

108. P. Wilhelm Poulson to Editor, 13 August 1878, *Deseret Evening News* (Salt Lake City), 16 August 1878, repr. "David Whitmer Interview with P. Wilhelm Poulson, circa April 1878," quoted in Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, vol. 5 (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2003), 38, archive.org/details/volume-5_202011/page/37/mode/2up.

were numerous, and the angel turned them over before our eyes. There is yet to be given a translation about Jared's people's doings and of Nephi, and many other records and books, which all has to be done, when the time comes.

I – How large were the plates?

He – About eight inches wide and six or seven inches long, as they appeared a little wider than long, and three rings kept the plates together; one above, one in the middle, and one below, so the angel could turn every leaf entirely over. The thickness was about of a common sheet of tin used by tinsmiths.

I – How did the engravings look?

He – There were characters. We copied some, and if you visit my brother John, one of the Eight Witnesses, who wrote for Joseph, John can show you some of the old manuscript which he borrowed from me. I must have it returned to me again, as it belongs to the Church, in connection with other records.

Emma Smith, *The Saints' Herald* (October 1879)¹⁰⁹

Q. Are you sure that he had the plates at the time you were writing for him?

A. The plates often lay on the table without any attempt at concealment, wrapped in a small linen table cloth, which I had given him to fold them in. I once felt of the plates, as they thus lay on the table, tracing their outline and shape. They seemed to be pliable like thick paper, and would rustle with a metallic sound when the edges were moved by the thumb, as one does sometimes thumb the edges of a book.

David Whitmer, *Kansas City Journal* (July 1881)¹¹⁰

"Did you see the angel?"

109. "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *The Saints' Herald* 26, no. 19 (1 October 1879), 290, bproberts.org/records/OiSghu-Ay1Gqc/emma_in_the_saint_herald_rlds_joseph_translated_the_book_of_mormon_with_his_head_in_a_hat.

110. David Whitmer, Interview, *Kansas City Journal*, 5 June 1881; repr.

“Yes, he stood before us. Our testimony as recorded in the Book of Mormon is absolutely true, just as it is written there.”

“Can you describe the plates?”

“They appeared to be of gold, about six by nine inches in size, about as thick as parchment, a great many in number, and bound together like the leaves of a book by massive rings passing through the back edges. The engravings upon them were very plain and of very curious appearance. Smith made fac similes of some of the plates and sent them by Martin Harris to Professors Anthon and Mitchell, of New York City, for examination. They pronounced the characters reformed Egyptian, but were unable to read them.”

William Smith, *William Smith on Mormonism* (1883)¹¹¹

In consequence of [Joseph Smith's] vision, and his having the golden plates and refusing to show them, a great persecution arose against the whole family, and he was compelled to remove into Pennsylvania with the plates, where he translated them by means of the Urim and Thummim, (which he obtained with the plates), and the power of God. The manner in which this was done was by looking into the Urim and Thummim, which was placed in a hat to exclude the light, (the plates lying near by covered up), and reading off the translation, which appeared in the stone by the power of God. He was engaged in this business as he had opportunity for about two years and a half. In the winter of 1829 and thirty, the Book of Mormon, which is the translation of part of the plates he obtained, was published. He then showed the plates to my father and my brothers Hyrum and Samuel, who were witnesses to the truth of the book which was translated from them. I was permitted to lift them as they laid in a pillow-case; but not to see them, as it was contrary to the commands he had received. They weighed about sixty pounds according to the best of my judgment.

“Mormonism,” *Millennial Star* 43, no. 28 (11 July 1881), 437, catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/a862fa98-d1ed-4687-bb6b-bd6da3ebf9d0/0/4.

111. William Smith, *William Smith on Mormonism* (Lamoni, IA: Herald House, 1883), 11–12, archive.org/details/williamsmithonmo00smi/page/10/mode/2up.

William Smith, *The Saints' Herald* (October 1884)¹¹²

The time to receive the plates came at last. When Joseph received them, he came in and said: "Father, I have got the plates." All believed it was true, father, mother, brothers and sisters. You can tell what a child is. Parents know whether their children are truthful or not. The proof of the pudding is not in chewing the string, but in eating the pudding. Father knew his child was telling the truth. When the plates were brought in they were wrapped up in a tow frock. My father then put them into a pillow case. Father said, "What, Joseph, can we not see them?" "No. I was disobedient the first time, but I intend to be faithful this time; for I was forbidden to show them until they are translated, but you can feel them." We handled them and could tell what they were. They were not quite as large as this Bible. Could tell whether they were round or square. Could raise the leaves this way (raising a few leaves of the Bible before him). One could easily tell that they were not a stone, hewn out to deceive, or even a block of wood. Being a mixture of gold and copper, they were much heavier than stone, and very much heavier than wood.

. . . When Joseph received the plates he also received the Urim and Thummim, which he would place in a hat to exclude all light, and with the plates by his side he translated the characters, which were cut into the plates with some sharp instrument, into English. . . .

A gentleman in the congregation asked,
"Where are these plates?"

Ans. — "They were delivered to the angel again."

Ques. — "How much did they weigh?"

Ans. — "As near as I could tell, about sixty pounds."

Lorenzo Saunders, *The True Origin of the Book of Mormon* (January 1885)¹¹³

Mister Gregg

112. William B. Smith, "Old Soldier's Testimony," 643–44.

113. Lorenzo Saunders, Letter to Thomas Gregg, 28 January 1885, repr. Charles Augustus Shook, *The True Origin of the Book of Mormon* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1914), 134–35, archive.org/details/thetrueoriginoft00shoouoft/page/134/mode/2up.

Dear Sir. I received your note ready at hand and will try (to) answer the best I can and give all the information I can as respecting Mormonism and the first origin. As respecting Oliver Cowdery, he came from Kirtland in the summer of 1826 and was about there until fall and took a school in the district where the Smiths lived and the next summer he was missing and I didn't see him until fall and he came back and took our school in the district where we lived and taught about a week and went to the schoolboard and wanted the board to let him off and they did and he went to Smith and went to writing the Book of Mormon and wrote all winter. . . .

He had an old glass box with a tile (spelling doubtful, C. A. S.) in it, about 7x8 inches, and that was the gold plates and Martin Harris didn't know a gold plate from a brick at this time.

***Chicago Tribune* (January 1888)¹¹⁴**

It was during the early part of June, 1829, that David [Whitmer] first heard that a young man named Joseph Smith had found an exceedingly valuable golden treasure in the northern part of the county. In company with his brother-in-law, Oliver Cowdery, young Whitmer set out to ascertain the truth or falsity of the story. Smith, who was at that time living with his father on a farm near Manchester, was indisposed at first to exhibit his treasure, but was finally persuaded to do so. The treasure consisted of a number of golden plates about eight inches long, seven inches wide, and of the thickness of ordinary sheet tin. They were bound together in the shape of a book by three gold rings. A large portion of the leaves were so securely bound together that it was impossible to separate them, but upon the loose leaves were engraved hieroglyphics which were unintelligible to any person who had seen them. With the tablets was an immense pair of spectacles set in a silver bow. Smith announced that he had been commanded to translate the characters upon the plates as soon as possible, and stated further that the work

114. "An Old Mormon's Closing Hours," *Chicago Tribune* (24 January 1888), repr. "David Whitmer Dead," *The Saints' Herald* 35, no. 5 (4 February 1888), 67, catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/4ab60421-c712-469b-8c98-a765d4db4600/0/2.

must be done in the presence of three witnesses, Smith, his wife, Cowdery, and Whitmer then proceeded to the house of Whitmer's father, where the work of translation was carried out, Smith reading the characters by means of the magic spectacles, Cowdery, Christian Whitmer, a brother of David, and Smith's wife acting as amanuenses.

J. W. Peterson, *Zion's Ensign* (January 1894)¹¹⁵

Bro. Briggs then handed me a pencil and asked Bro. Smith if he ever saw the plates his brother had had, from which the Book of Mormon was translated.

He replied, "I did not see them uncovered but I handled them and hefted them while wrapped in a tow frock and judged them to have weighed about sixty pounds. I could tell they were plates of some kind and that they were fastened together by rings running through the back. Their size was as described in mother's history."

Herbert. S. Salisbury (June 1945)¹¹⁶

Catherine Smith Salisbury, told me she was present at home when her brother, Joseph Smith, came in near exhausted, carrying the package of gold plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated. He was carrying the package clasped to his side with his left hand and arm, and his right hand was badly bruised from knocking down at least three men who had leaped at him from behind bushes or fences as he ran until out of breath. She said he entered the house running and threw himself on a couch panting from his extraordinary exertion.

She told me Joseph allowed her to "heft" the package but not to see the gold plates, as the angel had forbidden him to show at that period. She said they were very heavy.

115. J. W. Peterson, "Wm. B. Smith's Last Statement," *Zion's Ensign* 5, no. 3 (13 January 1894), 6, catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/b1ab0810-4723-4d54-ac00-2f95725217af/0/5.

116. Herbert. S. Salisbury, "Things the Prophet's Sister Told me," 30 June 1945, p. [1]; typescript, bhroberts.org/records/aqkRxb-Uzba7b/salisbury_describes_the_plates_as_very_heavy.

Herbert S. Salisbury, *The Messenger* (October 1954)¹¹⁷

Catherine Smith Salisbury then told me that while dusting up the room where the Prophet had his study she saw a package on the table containing the gold plates on which was engraved the story of the Book of Mormon. She said she hefted those plates and found them very heavy like gold and also rippled her fingers up the edge of the plates and felt that they were separate metal plates and heard the tinkle of sound that they made.

Appendix I: Study Limitations

While this paper presents a comprehensive mathematical model for analyzing the possible configurations of the golden plates, there are, at least, the following limitations of the analysis to be considered:

- **Character Count Approximation:** The character count of the Book of Mormon used in calculations is only approximate. A more precise count could potentially affect the results, particularly in cases where the calculated configurations are near the boundaries of validity.
- **Translation Density Variability:** The translation densities for Spanish and Chinese were calculated using only the King James Version of Genesis, relying on the Latter-day Saint translation. Similarly, the translation density for Hebrew was based on the Masoretic text and the Latter-day Saint King James Version. Other source texts and translations may yield slightly different densities for these languages, which could impact the overall results.
- **Limited Hieratic and Demotic Samples:** The Hieratic text used to calculate the translation density is from the nineteenth dynasty, approximately 600 years before Nephi began to engrave the plates. Additionally, the sample size is relatively small. Other forms of Hieratic from different dynasties may yield different results. Similarly, the Demotic text used for calculation is from the Ptolemaic era and is a relatively small sample, and the character count is an approximation based on sampling. A more precise character count

117. Herbert S. Salisbury, "The Prophet's Sister Testifies She Lifted the B. of M. Plates," *The Messenger* (Berkeley, CA), October 1954; cited in Morris, *Documentary History of the Book of Mormon*, 526.

and/or a larger body of Demotic source texts may yield different results.

- **Numerical Precision:** The calculations rely on code with varying levels of numerical precision depending on the specific calculation. Rounding errors may lead to slightly different results, particularly in edge cases.
- **Subjectivity in Historical Interpretation:** Interpreting historical statements about the plates is inherently subjective, and different interpretations may lead to different constraints, which would, in turn, lead to different results. The model's outcomes are sensitive to these interpretations.
- **Simplification of Character Size:** The calculation averages the square size of reformed Egyptian characters, which is a simplification of what is normally a complicated function of spacing, leading, and kerning. In hand-written (or engraved) text, these factors are scribe-dependent and may vary considerably.
- **Exclusion of Ring Bindings:** The calculations of weight and surface area available to text excludes the consideration of the three binding rings, which are fastened through holes in the plates, that are described in the documentary record. This exclusion will result in a slight overestimation of surface area and a slight underestimation of weight.
- **Arbitrary Margin Constant:** The margin of 0.0625" used in calculations is an arbitrary constant. Applying different margins to the calculation will lead to different results, potentially affecting the number of valid configurations.
- **Fixed Silver Content:** The calculation fixes the amount of silver at 10% of the amount of gold in the alloy. While this simplification assumes the coloring of the plates, it does not represent all possible alloy compositions.
- **Limited Consideration of Plate Surface Irregularities:** The void between plates is modeled using experimental data from copper discs, which may differ from the surface characteristics of the actual plates.

These limitations suggest that while the model provides valuable insights into the possible configurations of the golden plates, the results should be interpreted with caution. Future research could address these limitations by refining the input data, improving the

precision of calculations, and considering a wider range of historical interpretations.



Josh Coates is the full-time Executive Director of the B. H. Roberts Foundation, a 501c3 non-profit that is dedicated to education and research related to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Previously Josh was the founder and/or CEO of several tech companies related to data storage and education technology. He has also restored old military vehicles, built combat robots, and is an amateur astronomer, welder, and machinist. Coates was educated in Computer Science at Berkeley and served a mission in Boston. He is married and has two children.

Expanding the Descriptive Vocabulary for the Translation of the Book of Mormon

Brant A. Gardner

Abstract: *There are many questions that can be asked about the translation of the Book of Mormon. This paper focuses on a single question: What was the relationship between the English translation and the Nephite text? Of course, without the original, we must speculate, but it is suggested that there are two concepts used in modern translation theories that can help us understand why certain elements appear in the English translation that might appear to have a questionable relationship to an ancient Nephite text.*

Questions about the translation of the Book of Mormon are as old as the first day Joseph Smith acquired the plates and the interpreters. Joseph Knight Sr. reminisced:

He went on to tell the Length and width and thickness of the plates and said he they appear to be Gold But he seemed to think more of the glasses or the urim and thummim then he Did of the Plates for says he I can see anything they are Marvelus. Now they are written in Characters and I want them translated.¹

Knight's memory reveals several important facts related to the translation of the Book of Mormon:

- There were non-English characters on the plates.
- The interpreters were immediately recognizable as a type of seerstone, an instrument with which Joseph was already

1. Joseph Knight Sr., "Reminiscence, Circa 1835–1847," *Early Mormon Documents*, ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 4:15.

familiar. Therefore, he knew immediately how to use the interpreters and he initially used them to “see.”

- Although he could immediately see “anything” with the interpreters, he did not immediately see the translation of the writings on the plates. Evidently, Joseph did not initially understand that he would be the translator.

After Joseph and Emma relocated to Harmony, Joseph copied some of the characters and gave them to Martin Harris to “see if he Could git them Translated.”² It was understood that whatever language the characters on the plates represented, they were of a text that could be translated into English. That much is clear and obvious. To this day, less clear and certainly not obvious is how the translation was accomplished and what the relationship between the printed English text and the plate language was.

The Impenetrability of the Translation Method

Besides Joseph Smith, the only other person with experience in attempting to translate the Book of Mormon was Oliver Cowdery. The Lord declared to Oliver: “And, behold, I grant unto you a gift, if you desire of me, to translate, even as my servant Joseph” (Doctrine and Covenants 6:25). Oliver did make an attempt, but was unable to successfully translate (see Doctrine and Covenants 9:5–12).³ That leaves us with Joseph as the only successful translator, and he simply indicated that it was done by the gift and power of God. As far as we know, Joseph never reflectively analyzed to others how he was able to translate. Sufficient for him was that he did translate, and that he could not have done it through his own intellect. It was, in Knight’s spelling, “marvelus.” Knight very clearly used that word with the 1828 meaning:

2. Knight, “Reminiscence,” 4:17. See also the retelling of this information in Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith’s Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 34–35.

3. See also Brant A. Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 310–15 for a discussion of why Oliver was unable to translate. An alternate proposal is Stan Spencer, “The Faith to See: Burning in the Bosom and Translating the Book of Mormon in Doctrine and Covenants 9,” *Interpreter: a Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 219–32, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-faith-to-see-burning-in-the-bosom-and-translating-the-book-of-mormon-in-doctrine-and-covenants-9/.

“The *marvelous* in writings, is that which exceeds natural power, or is preternatural” (from Webster’s 1828 dictionary).⁴

It is possible that Joseph, despite being closely involved in the translation process, did not fully understand the method any better than those who have since attempted to explain it. Without expert testimony from the only person who had firsthand experience with the translation method, we are left struggling to discover a plausible method based on peripheral information. We have witnesses who described what they observed and heard, but none of them had the experience of using the interpreters or the seerstone to translate. Their descriptions have been used in arguments of how the translation related to the Nephite text, but the fact remains that all discussions of the process of translation are based on speculation, which in turn is based upon the thin available evidence.⁵

What Kind of Translation is the Book of Mormon?

The first premise we must establish is that the English translation is not a perfect or immutable representation of the underlying text. David Bellos, a professor at Princeton University, noted:

Give a hundred competent translators a page to translate, and the chances of any two versions being identical are close to zero. This fact about interlingual communication has persuaded many people that translation is not an interesting topic — because it is always approximate, it is just a second-rate kind of thing. That’s why “translation” isn’t the name of a long-established academic discipline, even though its practitioners have often been academics in some

4. Noah Webster, ed., *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1828), s.v. “marvelous,” webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/Marvelous.

5. The discussion of the presence of Early Modern English in the Book of Mormon describes the grammar of the text. It has been used to suggest that someone other than Joseph Smith accomplished the translation. The issue of who translated the Book of Mormon is not relevant to this paper. Regardless of who translated, the issue of how the English text represented the Nephite text remains the same. A good overview of the arguments for Early Modern English in the Book of Mormon is found in the chapter “The Original Text: Its Language and Issues,” in Royal Skousen with Stanford Carmack, *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon, Part Three, The Nature of the Original Language* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University [BYU], 2018), 37–89.

other field. How can you have theories and principles about a process that comes up with no determinate results?⁶

Even without Bellos's expertise, Brigham Young implicitly understood this problem, stating: "Should the Lord Almighty send an angel to re-write the Bible, it would in many places be very different from what it now is. And I will even venture to say that if the Book of Mormon were now to be re-written, in many instances it would materially differ from the present translation."⁷ Just as one hundred modern competent translators with all the modern tools and dictionaries would produce different translations, an individual and perhaps idiosyncratic translator would produce different translations of the Book of Mormon.

If we take the Book of Mormon seriously as a translated text, we must therefore expect that the current English text may have introduced some elements that might not precisely represent the original Nephite text. This is a problem that can be easily demonstrated when a translation can be compared to the original.

There has been considerable debate concerning the concept of gods and divinity in ancient Mesoamerica. The 16th c. Spanish chronicles make frequent and direct references to *dioses*, or "gods." However, it has been justly noted that European terminology may have grossly simplified complex concepts of sacredness and divinity. Among the 16th c. Zapotecs, the term *pee*, signifying "breath, spirit, or wind," expressed the concept of divinity. This animist force caused movement—all phenomena or maternal [sic, material?] things that expressed motion were attributed a certain degree of sacredness. Among the Aztecs, the term for sacredness was *teotl* which, like the Zapotec *pee*, referred to an immaterial energy or force similar to the Polynesian concept of *mana*.⁸

In terms of translation, representing *teotl* as *dios* does have a connection to the original concept. However, once it becomes "dios," some concepts from the original are lost due to the more familiar

6. David Bellos, *Is That a Fish in Your Ear?: Translation and the Meaning of Everything* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 8–9.

7. Brigham Young, "The Kingdom of God," *Journal of Discourses* 9 (13 July 1862): 311.

8. Mary Miller and Karl Taube, *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 89.

semantic range of "god." With the benefit of knowledge of the original, scholars can understand the subtleties of the original. In the case of the Book of Mormon, we do not have the original, thus readers of the Book of Mormon simply assume the semantic range of the English word or phrase, without the understanding that there might not be an exact overlap with the semantic range of the word in the Nephite text.

One potential place where this disjunction in the semantic overlap can be discerned in the Book of Mormon is in the use of, and emphasis on, the *name* Jesus Christ: "For according to the words of the prophets, the Messiah cometh in six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem; and according to the words of the prophets, and also the word of the angel of God, his name shall be Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (2 Nephi 25:19). The problem here is not a question of anachronism, but of translation. *Jesus* is the name; *Christ* is the title. The name could be the result of a revelation to Nephi, but the title *Christ* would be more accurately translated as *Messiah*. Both *Christ* and *Messiah* translate the same concept, but one transliterates from Greek and the other from Hebrew. Given the declared nature of the Book of Mormon, *Messiah* would be the better translation. Indeed, *Messiah* appears at the beginning of the very same verse that uses *Jesus Christ* as a name. In terms of translation, it can be considered "correct" that there is a connection between *Jesus Christ* and *Messiah*. However, once the New Testament term is applied, the connotations shift from the Hebrew religion to the Christian religion. This additional connotation makes the Book of Mormon appear more Christian than the original might have indicated.

The second possibility is that when the Nephite text spoke of the name, it may have had a different connotation than the one we expect. For many ancient cultures, there was a very real connection between the name and the person. It was not simply a label, but an intimate part of the person.⁹ In Isaiah, we have an example of this ancient use of the concept of the name: "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). The name *Immanuel* is given for its linguistic meaning of "God with us." The Hebrew name had a meaning that was more important as a *meaning* than as a designation. The message is that God would be with them, not that a person would have a label his friends would call him. It is likely that given Nephi's

9. Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1972), 284–305.

declared origin, he would have used names much more as Isaiah did, than as we do. Thus, the meaning of *Jesus* (Yahweh saves) was more important for the message than it was as a prophetic declaration of a personal name.

Understanding the Relationship of the Translation to the Original

The best way to understand the relationship between an original text and its translation is to have both the original and the translation available for study. We do not have that luxury for the Book of Mormon; we have only the translation. Thus, anything we posit about the relationship between the Nephite text and the English translation is based on secondary evidence. One of the ways to put controls on speculation is to ground our investigation on what has been learned about translations where both the original and translation can be examined.

Not only was “Nephite” a different language, but it also came from a very different culture. Translating between two similar languages is complicated enough, but when translating between languages *and* cultures, the translation issues are compounded. Just as it is easier to translate between languages in the same linguistic family (such as from French to Spanish), it is also easier to translate between languages rooted in shared or overlapping cultures. Greater skill, and perhaps even a measure of artistry, are required to translate well when the two languages are quite different *and* they represent very different cultures and mentalities.¹⁰

The problem of translating flora and fauna

One of the best-known criticisms of the Book of Mormon comes from the recognition that the English translation of the Book of Mormon contains names for plants and animals that do not represent flora and fauna that were unique to the Nephite era. Additionally, known New World flora and fauna that were culturally important do not appear in the Book of Mormon.

Criticisms based on vocabulary possibly make one of two implicit assumptions about the Book of Mormon. The first would be that the book is not a translation at all and therefore these vocabulary items are the original English words in which the book was written. The second

10. Said M. Shiyab, *A Textbook of Translation: Theoretical and Practical Implications* (Chicago: Garant Publishers, 2006), 19.

assumption allows it to be a translation, but assumes that there is a direct connection between the source word and its English translation. The first assumption must be combatted with evidence of historicity, not the nature of translation. The second assumption clearly rests upon a particular understanding of translation. Given what we know about how translation works when the source text and the target text are very different both linguistically and culturally, this assumption of a close word-for-word, meaning-for-meaning translation is too simplistic. The very fact that there can be multiple translations of the same text declares that translation need not be a word-for-word, exact meaning-to-exact meaning representation of the original text.

Bellos discussed the nature of translation between two languages representing very different cultures. He suggested that there is a translation "up" or a translation "down," based upon which language is presumed to be the more dominant. He explained:

What distinguishes translating up from translating down is this: translations toward the more general and more prestigious tongue are characteristically highly adaptive, erasing most of the traces of the text's foreign origin; whereas translations down tend to leave a visible residue of the source, because in those circumstances foreignness itself carries prestige.¹¹

And he provided an explanatory example:

Imagine: Sir Walter Raleigh presents Queen Elizabeth I with an amazing root vegetable he's brought back from the New World and beseeches Her Majesty to reward him for the discovery of . . . the turnip. It wouldn't have worked because it was not a turnip. When you have a potato in your hand, you can't call it by the name of anything that you could be holding in your other hand. "Cultural substitution" is a naming and translation device that is suited exclusively to things that aren't there. You can't just expand the meaning of *turnip* by using it to name things that aren't turnips. Similarly, when Ruyl [a seventeenth-century translator] wrote *pisang* [banana] for "fig," he did not expand the meaning of the Malay term. No new class of tree suddenly arose that included both bananas and figs. What this kind of cultural substitution

11. Bellos, *Fish in Your Ear*, 169.

really says is that you can't really understand, and we're not going to try to explain. Have a banana instead.¹²

Without access to the original Nephite text, English becomes the default “more prestigious” language. Thus, according to normal translation processes used by modern translators, we would expect the vocabulary items to be aligned to English, rather than Nephite.

The concept that the Book of Mormon in English is a translation “up” explains why words for flora and fauna are taken from the prevalent English cultural tradition, rather than the less available Native American one. This English dominance creates an issue, even when an apparently apt translation like the word *corn* appears in the Book of Mormon (see Mosiah 7:22; 9:9, 14). It is obviously tempting to see *corn* as an accurate translation of *maize*. However, Webster's 1828 dictionary primarily defines *corn* as a generic seed, even though it does list *maize* as one of those seeds.¹³ Although it is plausible that the translated word *corn* represents *maize*, it cannot be conclusive, because the rest of the translations of flora and fauna do not have such a precise connection to the source language.

Evidence that the Book of Mormon is a cultural translation

Royal Skousen has suggested that the Book of Mormon is “a creative and cultural translation of what was on the plates, not a literal one.”¹⁴ Without imagining what Skousen might have meant when he used the word *creative* in his description, the evidence for what a cultural translation means can be more clearly defined.

“The Church's only position is that the events the Book of Mormon describes took place in the ancient Americas.”¹⁵ Without a specific location, there are many aspects of possible cultural divergences between source and translation that cannot be addressed. However, there are some cultural divergences that can be addressed. For example, the Book of Mosiah mentions “a dumb ass” twice:

12. Bellos, *Fish in Your Ear*, 175–76.

13. Webster, *American Dictionary*, s.v. “corn,” webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/Corn.

14. Skousen and Carmack, *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon*, Part Five, *The King James Quotations in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU, 2019), 6.

15. “Book of Mormon Geography,” Topics and Questions, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/book-of-mormon-geography.

Yea, and I will cause that they shall have burdens lashed upon their backs; and they shall be driven before like **a dumb ass**. (Mosiah 12:5)

Now they durst not slay them, because of the oath which their king had made unto Limhi; but they would smite them on their cheeks, and exercise authority over them; and began to put heavy burdens upon their backs, and drive them as they **would a dumb ass** — (Mosiah 21:3)

In both cases, although there is a reference to an ass, the main focus is not on the animal but on the relationship between two sets of human beings. The use of the animal is a simile for the human beings who are treated as if they were an animal of burden. Perhaps, if the Book of Mormon had originally been translated among cultures which used alpacas and llamas as pack animals, the simile would have referred to an alpaca or a llama. However apt that simile might have been in some New World locations, in other locations, even in the New World, the meaning of the simile might have been missed. But if the intended audience was more familiar with donkeys, the “dumb ass” would be a better translation.

Some examples from French can demonstrate how the meaning can be translated into an acceptable phrase, even though it does not faithfully reproduce the words of the original.¹⁶

Table 1.

French	Literal Translation	English Idiom/Concept
Quand on parle du loup, on en voit la queue.	When you talk about the wolf, you see its tail.	Speak of the devil.
C'est le serpent qui mord la queue.	It's the snake that bites its own tail.	It's a vicious cycle.
Quelle mouche t'a piqué?	What fly bit you?	What's gotten into you?
Donner sa langue au chat..	To give one's tongue to the cat.	To be out of ideas.

For each example, the English translation provides the correct meaning and does so with a familiar phrasing. However, there is no

16. These examples come from Jamie Edwards, “50 French Idioms That Wow Native Speakers,” *Rosetta Stone*, 10 July 2024, blog.rosettastone.com/french-idioms/.

literal tie to the vocabulary of the original. The “correct” translation is connected to meaning, not to vocabulary.

A different category of cultural accommodation in translation lies in the way the King James Version of the Bible appears to be a model for many Book of Mormon passages. For example, the Book of Mormon replicates a number of chapters of Isaiah. There are some interesting deviations, but the translation clearly relies upon the way that text appears in the King James Version.

Additionally, the near-quotations of Paul’s discourse on hope and charity found in Moroni 7:44–47 are another potential anachronism. However, if the Book of Mormon is a cross-language, cross-culture translation, the translator has a reason to use Pauline language rather than reproducing the literal text from the plates. The quotation from Paul is an example of translating up. As with the manner in which French idioms above are translated, using Pauline language translates the meaning rather than the vocabulary. The translation appears in form that is normal for the dominant language.

A new concept that may explain nineteenth-century cultural material in the Book of Mormon

There is a relatively new concept in translation, known as *localization*. This provides another way to understand the relationship between the language and culture of the Nephite plates and their English translation. The growing world of software applications has given rise to a desire to more easily use the same code in multiple languages and cultures.¹⁷ However, what the programmers soon discovered was that the translation of words was insufficient. Gita Timofejeva provided an example:

People might define localization examples as something that would have been traditionally called “adaptation” in the professional translation world.

Let’s use this sentence in American English as a simple example:

Two pounds of strawberries cost \$10 and will be delivered to you on 04/05/2020.

Here’s the translation of this sentence in Spanish without any adaptation:

17. Miguel A. Jimenez-Crespo, *Localization in Translation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2024), 2.

Dos libras de fresas cuestan \$10 y se le entregarán el 04.05.2020.

But would this translation work for Spanish-speaking Mexico?

The above sentence has to be properly translated for Spanish-speaking Mexico, where:

- People use the metric system for weight, as opposed to the imperial system used in the USA
- The currency is the Mexican peso, not US dollars
- The date format used is day-month-year, not month-day-year as it is in the USA¹⁸

Localization suggests that there must also be a translation of the original language and culture into a form more available in the target language and culture. Aspects of the English translation of the Book of Mormon may be explained by understanding that it is a translation *up* as well as a *localized* translation.

There is no way Joseph Smith could have understood that he was creating a localized translation, but localization is a reasonable explanation for the several nineteenth-century environmental elements found in the English translation. Texts replicating the familiar King James Version of the Bible localized the vocabulary and meaning to match the expected context of accepted scriptural language and texts.

When the Book of Mormon's English is examined for how it might represent the original Nephite text, there are three general categories of representation:

- **Literalist:** An attempt to preserve the original (Nephite plates) as much as possible. Bellos might classify this as a translation "down," where the original is the most important text and as much of that text is preserved as possible.
- **Functional:** The idea that a single text may be translated in different ways highlights the nature of functional translations. In this case, the dominant language (English) is the one into which the original is translated, or a translation "up." In

18. Gita Timofejeva, "Translation and Localization: What's the Difference," *Localise*, 4 September 2024 lokalise.com/blog/translation-and-localization-difference/#:~:text=Localization%20goes%20beyond%20translation%20to,%2C%20social%2C%20and%20linguistic%20nuances.&text=With%20translation%2C%20you're%20adapting%20a%20message.

a functional translation, there is a connection to the original text, but the way it is represented depends upon the art and perhaps the goal of the translator.

- **Conceptual:** This would be a translation that communicates something about the original, but which does not have direct connections to the vocabulary or structure of the original. This might be the kind of translation Blake Ostler argued for when he suggested that Joseph Smith “provided unrestricted and authoritative commentary, interpretation, explanation, and clarifications based on insights from the ancient Book of Mormon text and the King James Bible.”¹⁹

Summary and Conclusions

The addition of the idea of a localized translation is a layer of explanation added on to the functional relationship. A localized translation is a functional translation, but it adds the specific intent to cross the cultural bridge to make the final translation better understood by the target audience.

The Book of Mormon was printed in 1830 and presented to a nineteenth-century audience. The omnipresence of a King James Version-like style in the translation localized the new book as scripture for the reception audience. In the case of Pauline language, the underlying meaning was probably similar to that communicated by Paul, but the actual language derives from the King James Version of Paul. Translating idioms demonstrates that meaning can be represented without replicating specific vocabulary. Localization explains why the KJV Pauline language appears in the translation.²⁰

Positing the Book of Mormon as a translation requires that we define the nature of the translation, if we are to understand it. Rather than criticize the text for what we might perceive as translation errors,

19. Blake T. Ostler, “The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 66.

20. Nicholas J. Frederick notes that the most plausible explanation for New Testament language in the Book of Mormon is to sound more like the KJV, an accepted scriptural style. That concept is essentially the same as the proposed idea of localization, which simply describes the reason for that language in terms of the reception audience. It should be noted that Frederick deals with the ways the texts are used. That is important information, but separate from this paper’s concerns, which are solely in expanding our vocabulary of translation. Nicholas J. Frederick, “Finding Meaning(s) in How the Book of Mormon Uses the New Testament,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 30 (2021): 2.

we should understand that a good translation becomes “enriched by the new meanings that are engendered as it enters new contexts—that is, as it remains alive and is read anew.”²¹

Although the original Nephite text may have had connotations that did not make it into our English translation, it is nevertheless true that the Book of Mormon can be inspiring scripture *even in translation*. Those who read the Book of Mormon—in any language—are potentially able to receive the full spiritual benefit of the text. The English text accomplishes its religious goals. Perhaps it is comforting to all who read the Book of Mormon—in any language—to understand that they are reading a translation, and that the translation is sufficient for the religious function of the text.



Brant A. Gardner *did his undergraduate work at Brigham Young University. He received a Master’s in Anthropology from the State University of New York at Albany, specializing in Mesoamerican ethnohistory. He is an executive editor for Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship. He is the author of the six-volume Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon, as well as Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History and The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon. His most recent books are Engraven Upon Plates, Printed Upon Paper: Textual and Narrative Structures of the Book of Mormon and The Plates of Mormon: A Book of Mormon Study Edition Based on Textual and Narrative Structures in the English Translation, each published by Kofford Books. Gardner has also contributed a Book of Mormon Minute to the ScripturePlus app, a condensed commentary on two or three verses at a time from the Book of Mormon.*

21. Esther Allen and Susan Bernofsky, “Introduction: A Culture of Translation,” in *In Translation: Translators on Their Work and What It Means*, ed. Esther Allen and Susan Bernofsky (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), xviii.

Reconciling Evolution by Faith or Framing?

Jacob Billings

Review of Jamie L. Jensen, Steven L. Peck, Ugo A. Perego, and T. Benjamin Spackman, eds. The Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ and Evolution. Provo, UT: College of Life Sciences, Brigham Young University, 2025. 272 pgs.

Abstract: *This review critically evaluates The Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ and Evolution, a multi-author volume that seeks to harmonize evolutionary science with the doctrines and theological framework of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. While the book offers valuable pedagogical models, personal narratives, and historical context for addressing faith-science tensions, it exhibits notable limitations. Chief among these is an oversimplified distinction between belief and acceptance in scientific discourse, a lack of engagement with legitimate critiques of evolutionary theory, and insufficient resolution of scriptural and theological tensions. Although the collection succeeds in promoting dialogue and reducing conflict among religious students and educators, its rhetorical bias toward scientific consensus and avoidance of unresolved doctrinal issues ultimately weakens its reconciliatory potential. The volume is a meaningful step forward but leaves substantial theological and epistemological work unfinished. The volume's most commendable aspiration lies in its effort to model epistemological reconciliation—not merely tolerance—between scientific and religious modes of knowing, a theme that could benefit from further theological exploration.*

The *Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ and Evolution*¹ is a timely and ambitious collection that confronts one of the most persistent points of tension within Latter-day Saint discourse: the perceived conflict between evolutionary science and the doctrines of divine creation as taught in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Edited by Jamie L. Jensen, Steven L. Peck, Ugo A. Perego, and T. Benjamin Spackman, this volume brings together scholars from diverse academic and spiritual backgrounds — biologists, theologians, historians, and educators — all of whom are committed to both scientific integrity and religious faith.

The book is structured thematically, beginning with foundational essays on the epistemologies of science and religion followed by detailed explorations of scriptural interpretation, scientific evidence for evolution, and pedagogical approaches for reconciling faith and science. Produced under the auspices of Brigham Young University's College of Life Sciences, the collection is clearly directed toward a Latter-day Saint audience, particularly students grappling with the challenges of integrating secular scientific education with religious conviction. In doing so, it positions itself not only as a scholarly resource, but also as a pastoral and pedagogical tool that is grounded in the belief that truth can be found "by study and also by faith" (Doctrine and Covenants 88:118).

Despite the volume's many strengths, several recurring issues weaken its overall coherence and philosophical rigor. Chief among them is the repeated insistence that science is fundamentally belief-free. The rhetoric surrounding the terms "belief" versus "acceptance" is presented in overly stark terms. The claim that scientists accept but do not believe in theories such as evolution, while perhaps intending to signal empirical objectivity, is itself an epistemologically naïve position. Scientific frameworks — especially those not yet empirically testable, such as string theory or aspects of theoretical cosmology — are often provisionally believed in precisely because of their internal coherence, explanatory power, or mathematical elegance. Dismissing the notion of belief entirely overlooks the trust and philosophical assumptions that underpin even the most rigorous scientific inquiry. This rhetorical oversimplification, while common in science education, undermines

1. Jamie L. Jensen et al., eds., *The Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ and Evolution* (Provo, UT: College of Life Sciences, Brigham Young University, 2025), lifesciences.byu.edu/00000196-3fde-d175-add6-bfdf50c80001/gospel-evolution-pdf.

the book's broader goal of fostering epistemological humility and integration.

A second weakness is the book's limited engagement with substantive critiques of evolutionary theory. While the volume excels in making evolution accessible to a lay religious audience, it avoids discussing any of the more contested areas within evolutionary science. Two examples of this are the rapid diversification of life during the Cambrian explosion and unresolved questions in macroevolutionary mechanisms. The result is a presentation of evolution that feels overly settled and even dogmatic at times, rather than reflective of the vibrant, ongoing debates that characterize real scientific discourse. For a book so focused on reconciling science and faith, the lack of critical engagement with science itself risks alienating readers who are looking for a more balanced and open dialogue.

Jamie L. Jensen's essay, "Accepting Evolution: Why Does It Matter?," typifies both the strengths and limitations of the collection. Her writing is clear, compassionate, and well-structured. Drawing on personal and pedagogical experience, she persuasively argues that accepting evolution can deepen both scientific understanding and spiritual resilience. However, some of her rhetorical choices undermine the nuance of her argument. Her analogy comparing evolution denial to someone refusing to believe in gravity while standing on a ledge is philosophically problematic. It conflates directly observable phenomena (like gravitational acceleration) with complex theoretical frameworks (like evolution), which are inferential, subject to revision, and understood through indirect evidence across diverse scientific disciplines.

More significantly, her treatment of Intelligent Design (ID) reflects a serious mischaracterization. Jensen reduces ID to a simplistic argument from irreducible complexity, which fails to acknowledge its more central philosophical claim: that certain aspects of the natural world may be more plausibly explained by intelligence than by unguided processes alone. She dismisses ID as unscientific while conceding Theistic Evolution—a view that also invokes divine guidance in natural processes. This inconsistency is never addressed. If God-guided evolution is admissible within a scientific-theological synthesis, it is inconsistent to reject other frameworks involving purposeful causation without serious engagement. By neglecting to grapple with the epistemological and philosophical underpinnings of ID while accepting

Theistic Evolution, Jensen weakens the critical depth of her otherwise well-intentioned essay.

The book's first section, "What Do We Know from a Religious Epistemology?," is a welcome effort to examine scriptural texts in their historical and literary contexts. Kyle R. Greenwood and Avram R. Shannon both provide insightful contributions that challenge literalist readings of Genesis, emphasizing the theological and cosmological assumptions embedded in ancient Near Eastern literature. Nicholas J. Frederick adds an important reminder about continuing revelation in Latter-day Saint theology, which allows room for expanding doctrinal understanding over time. While these essays raise good questions and offer promising frameworks, they often leave reconciliation at the level of possibility rather than resolution. T. Benjamin Spackman's essay on death before the Fall is especially bold, challenging a deeply ingrained belief in Latter-day Saint culture. Yet even here, the lack of a fully worked-out theological alternative may leave readers intellectually intrigued but theologically unsettled.

The second section, "What Do We Know from a Scientific Epistemology?," is pedagogically strong but philosophically narrow. Steven L. Peck's essay offers a robust and user-friendly description of how science operates as a communal, corrective, and value-laden enterprise. His effort to align scientific inquiry with scriptural principles, such as truth and order, is compelling. Heath Ogden and Seth M. Bybee provide personal and empirical perspectives that make evolutionary biology accessible and relevant. Yet, as in Jensen's essay, there is a recurring tone of advocacy rather than inquiry. Bybee's evidence for human evolution is persuasive but offered without acknowledgment of ongoing questions in the field. The effect is that the book often sounds less like a dialogue and more like a position paper, undermining its stated goal of fostering mutual understanding.

The third section, "Thoughts on Reconciliation," is perhaps the book's most emotionally resonant. It offers deeply human and hopeful accounts of BYU students grappling with evolution in faith-affirming environments. Among the highlights is the ReCCEE (Religious Cultural Competence in Evolution Education) model, developed by Jensen and colleagues—a practical and compassionate blueprint designed to help students navigate the perceived conflict between science and faith. Emphasizing empathy, epistemological clarity, and emotional sensitivity, the ReCCEE model represents a major contribution to faith-based science education. Jared Lee's essay further enriches

the section with a philosophically grounded reflection on embracing uncertainty as a shared virtue of both science and religion. His appropriately humble approach invites readers into a mindset of intellectual openness rather than dogmatic resolution.

Still, the section occasionally veers into optimistic generalities. While the emotional catharsis of personal reconciliation is valuable, it may fall short for readers seeking doctrinal specificity or institutional clarity. Moreover, while the review rightly commends the ReCCEE model's practical utility, its broader transformative potential deserves more emphasis. If adopted in seminaries, institutes, and other Church-sponsored educational programs beyond BYU, ReCCEE could serve as a paradigm for addressing other doctrinally sensitive scientific topics such as climate change or bioethics—areas where cultural friction remains pronounced. A deeper engagement with the model's theoretical underpinnings in sociocultural theory and educational psychology would further reinforce its scholarly legitimacy and institutional relevance.

The final section, which examines the official position of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on evolution, is arguably the strongest in terms of historical and institutional analysis. T. Benjamin Spackman's treatment of the 1909 and 1925 First Presidency statements is careful and nuanced, showing that the Church has long maintained a position of non-committal neutrality on evolutionary theory. Supporting materials from official Church sources reinforce this theme: evolution is not doctrinally prescribed or proscribed. This doctrinal flexibility is both a strength and a challenge. It creates space for personal exploration, but it also shifts the burden of reconciliation onto individual members without offering clear theological guardrails.

The book's treatment of official Church statements on evolution is particularly illuminating. The 1909 and 1925 First Presidency declarations are often misunderstood or selectively quoted in intra-Church debates. Spackman's contribution clarifies the Church's consistent emphasis on doctrinal neutrality, which contrasts with the more assertive positions taken by other Christian denominations during the twentieth century. Yet the review would benefit from a deeper discussion of how these statements have functioned in practice—often as rhetorical tools wielded to bolster either side of internal debates, particularly within Church educational systems. A more comprehensive examination of how General Authorities have navigated evolution in General Conference or Church curricula would help readers grasp

the sociological forces shaping contemporary attitudes toward the topic.

Epistemologically, the book touches on, but does not fully unpack, the methodological pluralism that underlies a faith-science synthesis. Many essays distinguish between scientific and religious epistemologies, but fewer examine the possible interplay or convergence of these domains. For example, the idea that faith may yield non-empirical, but no less valid, truths resonate with Latter-day Saint teachings on continuing revelation and personal spiritual experience. This concept could be further developed to explore how different “ways of knowing” might be reconciled not only pragmatically, but philosophically. What counts as evidence in a theological context? Can religious experience be systematized in ways analogous to empirical method? These questions remain largely unanswered but are vital for any durable synthesis of science and faith.

A comparative perspective would also have enhanced the book’s analytical depth. For instance, some Protestant denominations have developed robust frameworks for theistic evolution, often integrating insights from historical theology, philosophy of science, and biblical hermeneutics. How does the Latter-day Saint approach compare with efforts like BioLogos or the Thomistic Evolution project? While Latter-day Saint theology possesses unique features—such as eternal progression and a doctrine that rejects creation *ex nihilo*—highlighting points of convergence or divergence could have clarified what is distinctive and what is broadly applicable in Latter-day Saint reconciliatory efforts. Comparative engagement might also prompt reflection on institutional, not just doctrinal, strategies for managing science-religion tensions.

In sum, *The Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ and Evolution* is an important and largely successful attempt to bridge faith and science within the Latter-day Saint tradition. It shines as a pedagogical resource and offers much-needed guidance to students and educators navigating this complex terrain. However, its rhetorical overconfidence in science, simplistic treatment of alternative viewpoints, and reluctance to engage deeply with scriptural reconciliation diminish its overall impact. For readers seeking to understand the compatibility of evolution with Latter-day Saint theology, this book offers many valuable tools. But it also leaves much of the hardest work—the theological synthesis, the epistemological clarification, and the honest reckoning with unresolved tensions—still to be done. A more robust

engagement with the prophetic tradition and its openness to “continuing revelation” (Articles of Faith 1:9) could have greatly enriched the discussion, providing firmer theological ground for readers navigating the uncertainty that both faith and science entail.



Jacob Billings is a software engineer and linguist whose interdisciplinary research bridges computational methods and historical language studies. He holds a bachelor's degree in Middle Eastern Studies from the University of Utah and a master's degree in linguistics from Francisco Marroquín University in Guatemala City. He is currently a PhD candidate in the Department of Complex Systems at the Polytechnic University in Madrid, Spain. His research focuses on four primary areas: the application of artificial intelligence algorithms to historical linguistics and epigraphy; morphosyntactic structures in Mesoamerican and Mesopotamian languages; linguistic patterns in the Book of Mormon and among early members of the Latter-day Saint movement; and the intersection of linguistics and political philosophy, particularly how language shapes perceptions of liberty. His broader work includes tracing the evolution of languages over time, with a focus on how linguistic structures emerge, diverge, and interact across cultural and historical contexts.

Smooth Words and Slippery Things: Samuel the Lamanite's Prophetic Use of Hebrew *ḥlq*

Matthew L. Bowen

Abstract: *Samuel the Lamanite expressly drew on the words of Isaiah (Isaiah 30:10) and possibly Jeremiah (Jeremiah 23:12) with a clever, powerful wordplay on forms of the Hebrew verbal root ḥlq: ḥālāqôt (“flattering words,” literally “smooth things”) and ḥālaqlaqqôt (“slippery [things]”) in Helaman 13:28–36. This wordplay established a genetic relationship between yielding oneself to those who “speak flattering words unto [us]” (Helaman 13:28) and material riches and treasures becoming “slippery that [we] cannot hold them” (Helaman 13:31, 36). This use of smooth/slippery, closely tied to the discussion in the Hebrew Bible of giving heed to false prophets over true prophets, is thus an apt marker of Samuel’s meaning, and perhaps also of his training. Samuel’s pronouncement of this unique curse, linguistically correlated with rejecting prophetic words, described a loss of worldly wealth and vividly depicted the accompanying spiritual desolation of slippery ways and dark places. Mormon and Moroni offered their latter-day readers a way out of the cycle of “slippery” possessions and destruction that befell the Jaredites and the Nephites: Jesus Christ, who showed us how to lay up treasures in heaven. Mormon’s preservation of Samuel’s prophetic wordplay stands as a significant, additional confirmation of the ancient provenance of the text.*

Unlike the antichrists, false prophets, and other deceivers who came from outside the Nephite community to destroy faith (see Helaman 13:37–38), Samuel the Lamanite spoke from the walls of Zarahemla as a witness of Jesus Christ, the God of Israel from whom

the Nephites were apostatizing and whom they were actively betraying. Politically a stranger, he stood at the edge of the city against the armed assaults of the enraged Nephites within. Yet, he was no stranger to their history, their scripture, and their supposedly identity-defining relationship with the Lord. He, himself, embodied it. From the walls of Zarahemla, Samuel delivered a sermon that is a masterclass in the use of prophetic rhetoric,¹ including the use of a Hebraistic wordplay that giving heed to “flattering words”/“smooth things” (*ḥălāqôṭ*) would bring the spiritual loss and ruin evoked by the image of *ḥălaqlaqqôṭ* (“slippery [things],” Helaman 13:28–36).

In this study I argue that Samuel the Lamanite quoted Isaiah 30:10, and possibly also alluded to Jeremiah 23:9–12 and the Psalms, in a marvelous wordplay on forms of the root *ḥlq* (hereafter noted with √): *ḥălāqôṭ* (“flattering words,” literally “smooth things”) and *ḥălaqlaqqôṭ* (“slippery [things],” sometimes also spelled *ḥălāqôṭ*). This wordplay is strongly associated with the context of responding to the prophetic word. It establishes a genetic relationship between the love of and hearkening to those who “speak flattering words unto [us]” (Helaman 13:28) and the strikingly unique curse of riches and treasures (material possessions) becoming “slippery that [we] cannot hold them” (Helaman 13:31, 36; see also Helaman 13:33; Mormon 1:18–19; 2:10; Ether 14:1).

A Methodological Note

For the purposes of my thesis, I assume that the language or dialect in which Samuel the Lamanite delivered his speech in Zarahemla was a Nephite variant of Hebrew. As preserved in Mormon’s record, Samuel demonstrates a deft command of the various biblical Hebrew prophetic conventions.² Samuel hints at his consciousness of his Semitic/Hebrew personal name (*šěmû’ēl* = “His name is El/God,” *šěmô/û + ’ēl*)³ in Helaman 14:2, 12–13 (“believe on his name”).⁴ He also displays his thorough awareness of the doctrine of Christ as taught by Nephi,⁵ and thus perhaps also Nephite prophecy and scripture. I also assume that the Hebraisms (like Semitisms and Semitic interference in the text of the Greek New Testament) remain detectable, whatever language or script Mormon used to compile his abridged record.⁶

The Polysemy of Hebrew *√h̄lq*

As a verb, Hebrew *h̄ālāq* (ל) in its base stem⁷ denotes "to be smooth, slippery."⁸ In its causative stem, this verb denotes "to make smooth" or "to use a smooth tongue, to flatter."⁹

As an adjective, *h̄ālāq* has the basic meaning of "smooth" or "smooth and insinuating."¹⁰ As a substantive noun, *h̄ālāq* denotes "smoothness, falsehood," including "smooth words" or "smoothness, flattery"¹¹ (as in Daniel 11:32 and Isaiah 30:10).¹² However, *h̄ālāq* as an adjective can also denote "slippery."¹³ The reduplicated substantivized form as plural feminine abstract noun denotes "smoothness, slipperiness, flattery, fine promises"¹⁴ or "slippery places."¹⁵ All of these senses of *√h̄lq* suggest important implications for the meaning of Samuel's speech in Helaman 13:28–35.

"Because He Speaketh Flattering Words unto You": The Nephites' Desire for "Smooth Things"

From atop the walls in Zarahemla, Samuel the Lamanite pointedly critiqued the Nephites' diminishing ability to distinguish between the true prophets the Lord had sent among them and the crass manipulators who made their living off them. The Nephites essentially "buil[t] the tombs of the prophets" (Matthew 23:29) who were dead and "stoned" the living ones:

And now when ye talk, ye say: If our days had been in the days of our fathers of old, we would not have slain the prophets; we would not have stoned them, and cast them out. Behold ye are worse than they; for as the Lord liveth, if a prophet come among you and declareth unto you the word of the Lord, which testifieth of your sins and iniquities, ye are angry with him, and cast him out and seek all manner of ways to destroy him; yea, you will say that he is a false prophet, and that he is a sinner, and of the devil, because he testifieth that your deeds are evil. But behold, if a man shall come among you and shall say: Do this, and there is no iniquity; do that and ye shall not suffer; yea, he will say: Walk after the pride of your own hearts; yea, walk after the pride of your eyes, and do whatsoever your heart desireth — and if a man shall come among you and say this, ye will receive him, and say that he is a prophet. (Helaman 13:25–27)

The Nephites gave clear preference to public figures who came proclaiming messages that validated and encouraged their immoral and apostate behavior vis-à-vis messengers, like Nephi and Lehi (the sons of Helaman) and like Samuel himself, who came proclaiming messages of repentance and reform. The Nephites not only preferred crass manipulators and false prophets, they confirmed their preference by financially supporting them:

Yea, ye will lift him up, and ye will give unto him of your substance; ye will give unto him of your gold, and of your silver, and ye will clothe him with costly apparel; and because he *speakeeth flattering words unto you*, and he saith that all is well, then ye will not find fault with him. (Helaman 13:28)

As noted above, the Hebrew root most often translated “flatter,” “flattering,” or “flattery” is $\sqrt{h}lq$. The language and context of Helaman 13:28 thus strongly suggests that Samuel quoted from, paraphrased, or otherwise alluded to the words of the prophet Isaiah, who characterized the inhabitants of Jerusalem during his time as “a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord” and who “say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, *smooth things* [*ḥālāqôt*] prophecy deceits” (Isaiah 30:10). The strength of Isaiah’s critique and choice of words were so evocative that the Qumran community designated their opponents, particularly the institutional Zadokite priesthood at Jerusalem who evidently became the Sadducees, as “the Seekers of Smooth Things” (*dwršy ḥḥlqwt*), a direct coinage from Isaiah 30:10.¹⁶ With his call to repentance and testimony of a coming Messiah (see 1 Nephi 1:19–20), Lehi almost certainly enraged the institutional religious authorities of his time, “the brethren of the church” (1 Nephi 4:26), of whom Laban seems to have been a member, or “the elders of the Jews” (1 Nephi 4:22, 27).¹⁷ Jacob, led on by the Spirit and perhaps also by his father’s and Jeremiah’s experiences with the institutional religious elite, prophesied that the Messiah would be put to death because of “priestcrafts” at Jerusalem: “But because of priestcrafts and iniquities, they at Jerusalem will stiffen their necks against him, that he be crucified” (2 Nephi 10:5).

The Nephites of Samuel’s time — like the Jerusalemites of Isaiah’s time, Lehi’s time, and later — wanted prophets who would tell them what they *wanted* to hear, rather than what they *needed* to hear. They wanted “smooth things” or “flattering words” (*ḥālāqôt*) rather than

what Nephi's brothers described as "hard things" (1 Nephi 16:1–3) or uncomfortable words that require attention and motivate action, like sharp gravel in a running shoe. Brant Gardner links the false prophets speaking "flattering words" in Helaman 13:28 with "Nehor [who] is the very model of the flattering priest who receives wealth and status from the people."¹⁸ Gardner further notes that "the order of the Nehors had flourished briefly in the days of Alma₂ but was rejected. Now, less than a hundred years later, Nehorism is being embraced."¹⁹

An examination of some of the Hebrew Bible passages that use the terms "flatter" and "flattery" helps us see more clearly that Samuel was quoting from or paraphrasing Isaiah 30:10. It also illustrates how "smooth things" are indeed "flattering words." In Psalm 5, a psalm attributed to David, the psalmist lists speaking flattery as one of the distinguishing characteristics of the covenant infidelity and wickedness of his enemies: "For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre; **they flatter** [*yaḥălîqûn*; literally, **make smooth**] with their tongue" (Psalm 5:9 [MT 10]). In Psalm 36:2 [MT 3], the psalmist states that the wicked "**flattereth himself** [*heḥēlîq*] in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful." Other relevant examples come from the Proverbs:

For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life: to keep thee from the evil woman, **from the flattery** [*mēḥelqat*; literally, **from the smoothness**] of the tongue of a strange woman [NRSVUE: from **the smooth tongue** of the adulteress]. (Proverbs 6:23–24)

Compare this to Job 17:5, "He that speaketh **flattery** [*lēḥēleq*] to his friends [or, he that tells on his friends for the sake of **flattery**], even the eyes of his children shall fail." From these examples it should be abundantly clear how "flattering words" are the equivalent of the "smooth things" mentioned in Isaiah 30:10. It also prepares us to understand Samuel's rhetorical shift from "flattering words" or "smooth things" (*ḥălāqôt*) to material riches and treasures as "slippery" things.

"He Curseth Your Riches That They Become Slippery": The Love of Flattering Words Leads to Slippery Riches and Treasures

Samuel's prophecy welds a causative link between the Nephites' love of "flattering words" (or "smooth things") in Helaman 13:28 and their

riches and treasures “becoming slippery” in Helaman 13:31–36. As Kevin Barney demonstrated more than two decades ago, the concept of “slippery treasures” belonged to the ancient Near East of Lehi’s time.²⁰ Citing the *Instruction of Amenemope*, a text familiar to ancient Israelites and Judahites and with clear parallels to Proverbs (e.g., Proverbs 23:4–5), Barney concludes:

It seems more than coincidental — yet not surprising — that the concept of slippery, disappearing treasures is found both in an Egyptian text known to the ancient Israelites and in the Book of Mormon, a record with cultural, linguistic, and literary roots in the ancient Near East.²¹

In Samuel’s evident use of forms of Hebrew $\sqrt{h}lq$, we have a firm linguistic basis for his transition from “flattering words” or “smooth things” (*hălāqôt*) to “slippery” treasures. Indeed, Samuel the Lamanite deliberately builds on the seme of *hălāqôt* in prophesying that the Nephites’ riches and treasures would become “slippery.” Samuel declared:

And behold, the time cometh that he curseth your riches, **that they become slippery, that ye cannot hold them**; and in the days of your poverty ye cannot retain them. And in the days of your poverty ye shall cry unto the Lord; and in vain shall ye cry, for your desolation is already come upon you, and your destruction is made sure; and then shall ye weep and howl in that day, saith the Lord of Hosts. And then shall ye lament, and say: O that I had repented, and had not killed the prophets, and stoned them, and cast them out. Yea, in that day ye shall say: O that we had remembered the Lord our God in the day that he gave us our riches, **and then they would not have become slippery** that we should lose them; for behold, our riches are gone from us. Behold, we lay a tool here and on the morrow it is gone; and behold, our swords are taken from us in the day we have sought them for battle. (Helaman 13:31–34)

We also begin to grasp the full spiritual curse implicit in Samuel’s prophecy when we recognize that the Hebrew adjective for “slippery” derives from the same Hebrew word for “smooth,” “flattery,” or “flattering.” In Psalm 35 (attributed to David), the Psalmist prays concerning his enemies, “Let their way be dark **and slippery** [*wahălaqlaqqôt*; literally, darkness **and slippery things**]: and let the angel of the Lord persecute [pursue] them” (Psalm 35:6). The term translated “and

slippery" is Hebrew *waḥālaqlaqqôt*, "slippery things."²² The timbre of Psalm 73:18 is like Psalm 35:6. In the temple, the psalmist learns the fate of the wicked: "Surely thou didst set them **in slippery places** [*baḥālāqôt*]: thou castedst them down into destruction" (Psalm 73:18). This term also literally means "slippery things."²³ To lose treasures can be dismaying, but to lose one's way is devastating—to the potential loss of physical life or even eternal life. Samuel's wordplay points beyond the curse on the wealth of the wicked to the real tragedy of their choices. Would they trade Jesus Christ and his doctrine as the "sure foundation"²⁴ for the slippery place?

Jeremiah also used a reduplicated form of *ḥālāq* almost identical to *waḥālaqlaqqôt* in Psalm 35:6. The context for Jeremiah's prophecy, as in Isaiah 30:10, is giving heed to false or corrupt prophets and priests in Judah: "Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets" (Jeremiah 23:9); "both prophet and priest are profane; yea, in my house have I found their wickedness" (Jeremiah 23:11). Jeremiah then declares:

Wherefore their way shall be unto them **as slippery ways** [*kaḥālaqlaqqôt*, literally **slippery things**] in the darkness: they shall be driven on, and fall therein: for I will bring evil upon them, even the year of their visitation, saith the Lord. (Jeremiah 23:12)

The KJV translators' addition of "way" as an italicized word underscores the fact that *kaḥālaqlaqqôt* means "as slippery things." Its form is very similar to *waḥālaqlaqqôt* in Psalm 35:6.

Thus, in juxtaposing *ḥālāqôt* ("flattering words," "smooth things") with *ḥālaqlaqqôt* or *ḥālāqôt* ("slippery [things]"), Samuel establishes a cause-and-effect relationship between the former and the latter. Samuel's point is that the Nephites' desire for false prophets who would "speak flattering words unto [them]" (*ḥālāqôt*, Helaman 13:28) and validate their wicked behavior would result in the Nephite riches becoming "slippery things" (*ḥālaqlaqqôt*). Indeed, Samuel's cursing the wealth and riches of the Nephites to become "slippery" things appears to be specifically aimed at those who did not want to hear his words ("O ye people of the land, that ye would hear my words! And I pray that the anger of the Lord be turned away from you, and that ye would repent and be saved" [Helaman 13:39]). Thus, the force of Samuel's curse is like Isaiah 1:19–20 with its wordplay on *ākal* ("eat"): "If ye be willing and obedient [*ûšēma'tem*, and hear], **ye shall eat** [*tō'kēlû*]

the good of the land: but if ye refuse and rebel, **ye shall be devoured** [*tě'ukkēlū*] with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Jesus uses a similar ancient Israelite and Judahite prophecy-rooted concept when emphasizing the importance of self-denial and "following" him:

For whosoever will **save** his life shall **lose** it: but whosoever will **lose** his life for my sake, the same shall **save** it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and **lose himself**, or be cast away? For **whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed**, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels. (Luke 9:24–26)

Those who refuse to "hear" and simultaneously grasp onto their wealth and life shall find those very things slipping from them.

"All Things Are Become Slippery, and We Cannot Hold Them": Gadianon Redivivus

Samuel prophesies that the very words they refuse to hear from him—"he curseth your riches, that they become slippery, that ye cannot hold them" (Helaman 13:31)—will eventually be found on the Nephites' own lips:

- A Yea, we have hid up our treasures and **they have slipped away from us,**
- B because of the curse of the land.
- C O that we had repented in the day that the word of the Lord came unto us;
- B' for behold the land is cursed,
- A' **and all things are become slippery, and we cannot hold them.**

This short chiasmic structure (Helaman 13:35–36) doubly emphasizes the "slipperiness" or illusiveness of the Nephites' treasures and other material wealth (A/A'). Indeed, the very nature of the wickedness that they practice ultimately corrupts their peace, removes the protection of their laws, and dilutes the prosperity they would otherwise enjoy in the chosen land. As Samuel the Lamanite states in Helaman 13:38, "Ye have sought for happiness in doing iniquity, which thing is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and Eternal Head."

The chiasmic structure of Helaman 13:35–36 also underscores the "curse" on the land that would make these riches "slippery" (B/B'). In

the focal center of the chiasmus stands the true "word of the Lord," spoken by Samuel, the sons of Helaman (Nephi and Lehi), and others, vis-à-vis the "flattering words" mentioned earlier that were relished by the Nephites.

Gardner notes that Samuel is, in a literal sense, "describing rampant theft."²⁵ In other words, Samuel is describing a time in which Gadianton lawlessness, which had been temporarily subdued during Samuel's time, would again run amok. The Gadianton robbers would again become a major problem just years after Samuel's prophecy. Samuel's prophecy would be fulfilled a final time during Mormon's lifetime when Gadiantonism would constitute a major factor in the Nephites' final destruction. This squares nicely with what Mormon had stated at the end of Helaman 2:

And behold, in the end of this book ye shall see that this Gadianton did prove the overthrow, yea, almost the entire destruction of the people of Nephi. Behold I do not mean the end of the book of Helaman, but I mean the end of the book of Nephi, from which I have taken all the account which I have written. (Helaman 2:13–14)

"And They Became Slippery": The Fulfillment of Samuel's Prophecy in Mormon 1:18–19 and 2:10

Mormon reports the fulfillment of Samuel the Lamanite's prophecy during his own time. He records the fulfillment in language that nearly matches Samuel's prophecy, which, as Gardner notes, "prophesies about a period when the Gadiantons, or secret combinations, are at their most destructive stage."²⁶ Mormon lived to see the Gadianton robbers reach that stage:

And these Gadianton robbers, who were among the Lamanites, did infest the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof began to hide up their treasures in the earth; **and they became slippery** [cf. *ḥālaqlaqqôṭ*] because the Lord had cursed the land, **that they could not hold them, nor retain them again**. And it came to pass that there were sorceries, and witchcrafts, and magics; and the power of the evil one was wrought upon all the face of the land, even unto the fulfilling of all the words of Abinadi, and also Samuel the Lamanite. (Mormon 1:18–19)

More than simply citing Samuel by name, Mormon unmistakably also recalls the language of Samuel's prophecy. The use of "slippery" in reference to plural objects — probably *hălaqlaqqôt* — as well as the phrase "they could not hold them, nor retain them" makes the identification easy.

Mormon subsequently reports, again using language from Samuel's prophecy and mentioning Samuel himself, that the people even "began to repent" as prophesied:

And it came to pass that the Nephites **began to repent** of their iniquity, and began to cry even as had been prophesied by Samuel the prophet; **for behold no man could keep that which was his own**, for the thieves, and the robbers, and the murderers, and the magic art, and the witchcraft which was in the land. (Mormon 2:10)

The center of the chiasmus in Helaman 13:35–36 emphasized the repentant Nephite recognition that the word of the Lord had been spoken to them: "O that we had repented in the day that the word of the Lord came unto us." When the prophecy was first given, the prophets through whom the word of the Lord "came unto" them were Samuel and the sons of Helaman (Nephi and Lehi), among others. During Mormon's time, the prophet through whom the word of the Lord came was Mormon himself (Mormon 3:2–3), to the degree that he was allowed to preach unto them (cf. Mormon 1:16–17). Mormon must have keenly felt the poignancy of that prophecy and he duly records its exact fulfillment.

When the Nephites during this later time "began to repent" (Mormon 2:10), Mormon began to feel a renewed hope:

And it came to pass that when I, Mormon, saw their lamentation and their mourning and their sorrow before the Lord, my heart did begin to rejoice within me, knowing the mercies and the long-suffering of the Lord, therefore supposing that he would be merciful unto them that **they would again** [cf. *wayyôšîpû*] **become a righteous people**. (Mormon 2:12)

Just as Mormon prayed that "his brethren," the Lamanites, "**may once again** [cf. *wayyôšîpû* ('ôd)] come to the knowledge of God, yea, the redemption of Christ; that **they may once again** [cf. *wayyôšîpû* ('ôd)] be a delightful people" (Words of Mormon 1:8–9) — meaning they would regain their identity as the seed of "Joseph" (and as

Israel) — he hoped his people would become a righteous remnant of Joseph.

Painfully for Mormon, their repentance was abortive. They had no desire to complete the circuit of repentance and follow the word of God: "But behold this my joy was vain, for their sorrowing was not unto repentance, because of the goodness of God; but it was rather the sorrowing of the damned, because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin" (Mormon 2:13; paraphrasing Samuel's words in Helaman 13:38). Even then, the Lord gave them one more chance to hear his prophet:

And it came to pass that the Lord did say unto me: Cry unto this people — Repent ye, and come unto me, and be ye baptized, **and build up again my church**, and ye shall be spared. And I did cry unto this people, but it was in vain; and they did not realize that it was the Lord that had spared them, and granted unto them a chance for repentance. And behold they did harden their hearts against the Lord their God. (Mormon 3:2–3)

The Lord gave the Nephites the remedy to their desperate situation: reject the "smooth things" and hear the Lord's "hard things" (cf. 1 Nephi 16:1–3; 2 Nephi 9:40) — that is, his rough words — so that their possessions would not remain slippery, and the situation of their entire society would not remain precarious. Sadly, the Nephites at this stage wanted nothing to do with the doctrine of Christ or his Church.

"If a Man Should Lay His Tool": Moroni's Use of Samuel's Prophecy in Telling Jaredite History

In writing the conclusion of the history of the Jaredites, Moroni turned back to Samuel's prophecy and his father's reported fulfillment of that prophecy. Moroni had set the stage with "And there were robbers, and in fine, all manner of wickedness upon all the face of the land" (Ether 13:26). Following the mutual *crushing* of the armies of Coriantumr and Shamed on the plains of Heshlon ("the place of crushing"),²⁷ there was no governing power with enough controlling force to "constrain"²⁸ or restrain these pre-Gadianton Jaredite robbers.

Gardner notes Moroni's keen interest in the curse on the land: "Moroni patterns the history of the Jaredites to emphasize the covenant of the land."²⁹ Moroni records:

And now there began to be a great curse upon all the land because of the iniquity of the people, in which, if a man should lay his tool or his sword upon his shelf, or upon the place whither he would keep it, behold, upon the morrow, he could not find it, so great was the curse upon the land. (Ether 14:1)

Gardner draws a distinct parallel between Ether 14:1–2 and Mormon 1:18,³⁰ noting that “it is no coincidence that the slippery possessions and presence of robbers occur in both Mormon’s and Moroni’s narrative.”³¹ Moroni, however, also seems to have gone back directly to Samuel’s prophecy in composing the language for what now constitutes Ether 14:1 (see table 1).

Table 1. Moroni cites Samuel’s “curse of the land.”

Helaman 13:34–35	Ether 14:1
Behold, we lay a tool here and on the morrow it is gone ; and behold, our swords are taken from us in the day we have sought them for battle. Yea, we have hid up our treasures and they have slipped away from us, because of the curse of the land.	And now there began to be a great curse upon all the land because of the iniquity of the people, in which, if a man should lay his tool or his sword upon his shelf, or upon the place whither he would keep it, behold, upon the morrow, he could not find it, so great was the curse upon the land.

For Moroni, as for Mormon and their predecessors all the way to Nephi, history and prophecy was cyclical. What Samuel prophesied happened to the Nephites, but it had happened long before to the Jaredites. Moroni prophesied that it would all happen again to the latter-day inhabitants of the land, who like the Jaredites, were Gentiles. In a Hebraistic wordplay on “Jaredites” in terms of the causative form of *√yrd* (“come down,” “descend”; “bring down”)³² imitative of his father’s method (compare Helaman 6:25, 38), Moroni warned, “And this cometh unto you, O ye Gentiles, that ye may know the decrees of God — that ye may repent, and not continue in your iniquities until the fulness come, that ye may not **bring down** the fulness of the wrath of God upon you as the inhabitants of the land have hitherto done” (Ether 2:11). “All things ha[d] become slippery” for the Jaredites and the Nephites (cf. Helaman 13:36), which stands as a terrifying possibility for those who occupy their former and adjacent lands.

Nevertheless, Moroni also provided a way of breaking this cycle: “Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess

it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ, who hath been manifested by the things which we have written" (Ether 2:12). The answer for every human being, then and now, is Jesus Christ.

Samuel's *hlq*-Wordplay and the Rod of Iron: The Context of Nephite Cultural Narrative

Daniel L. Belnap has conclusively shown that Lehi's dream of the tree of life (1 Nephi 8) and Nephi's vision of "the things which [his] father saw" (1 Nephi 11–14) became a dominant cultural narrative among the Nephites.³³ Evidently on the basis of the polysemy of Egyptian *mdw* as both "rod" and "word" (and perhaps too on homonymy of the cognate *md.t/mt.t*, "word," with Hebrew *maṭṭeh*, "rod"), Nephi identified the "rod of iron" as "the word of God" (1 Nephi 11:25; 15:23–25).³⁴ Lehi and Nephi both emphasize that the divine "word" as a "rod" was something that one could "ca[tch] hold of" (1 Nephi 8:24, 30) "cling to" (1 Nephi 8:24); and "[continually] hold fast [un]to" (1 Nephi 8:30; 15:24). Nephi further explained that Moses's rod-word that divided the sea and struck the rock in the wilderness and brought forth water ("and ye know that by his word the waters of the Red Sea were divided hither and thither"; "and ye also know that Moses, by his word according to the power of God which was in him, smote the rock, and there came forth water" [1 Nephi 17:26, 29]).³⁵

Belnap points out that Alma the Younger invokes Lehi's dream as cultural narrative when he describes having "remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world" and that "as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God" (Alma 36:17–18).³⁶ Here the concept of the divine word is clearly Christological as it is in John 1:1; 1 John 1:1; Revelation 19:13; and Moses 1:32; 2:5, which helps us to see the Christological dimension in 1 Nephi 8 and 11 and elsewhere. As part of his abridged book of Helaman, Mormon also appeals to Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision as cultural narrative:

Yea, we see that whosoever will [may] **lay hold upon the word of God**, which is quick and powerful, which shall divide asunder all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil, and lead the man of Christ in a strait and narrow course

across that everlasting gulf of misery which is prepared to engulf the wicked — And land their souls, yea, their immortal souls, at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven, to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and with Jacob, and with all our holy fathers, to go no more out. (Helaman 3:29–30)

Thus, firmly entrenched in Nephite cultural memory and reemphasized in the book of Helaman is the concept that the “word of God,” like a rod, is tangible — something that one can “lay hold upon.” The contrast between the “word of God,” which one can “lay hold upon,” “catch hold of,” and “hold fast to,” and “flattering words”/“smooth things” or “slippery things” which lead to “all things . . . becom[ing] slippery, and we cannot hold them” (Helaman 13:36; see also Mormon 1:18) could hardly be more striking. Moreover, the function of the “rod of iron” or “word of God” in Lehi’s dream and Nephi’s vision and the function of the “word of God” in Helaman 3:29 was to provide surety in an ascent through mists of darkness in the types of “slippery” places mentioned in Psalm 35:6; 73:18; and Jeremiah 23:12.

In the context of Lehi’s dream and Nephi’s vision of the tree of life and the rod of iron, it is also worth considering the relationship between the “plain and precious things” that were “taken away” (1 Nephi 13:28–29, 40) through the agency of “the great and abominable church” (the “great and spacious building”)³⁷ and the “smooth things” or “flattering things” of which Isaiah and Samuel spoke.³⁸ We can almost certainly equate the “rod of iron” or “word of God” that leads to the “the tree which is precious above all” (1 Nephi 11:9) with those “plain and precious things” that Nephi mentions later in the account of his vision. The individuals in Lehi’s dream who ceased to grasp or “hold fast” to the rod of iron, or who left the tree and ceased partaking of its fruit, lost the “plain and precious things” of the gospel of Jesus Christ and became susceptible to the “mocking” and “scorn” coming from the denizens of the great and spacious building (1 Nephi 8:27, 33), who were seekers and speakers of “smooth” and “flattering things” rather than the words or things of God. Thus, these individuals who heeded them ceased to have surety in “slippery” places, but “wandered off and were lost,” “fell away into forbidden paths and were lost,” or “were lost . . . wandering in strange roads” (1 Nephi 8:23, 28, 32). This happened in large measure to the first century CE church established in Jerusalem and throughout the Greco-Roman world. When it happened to the Nephites as a society, everything became “slippery” and unsure until they too “were

lost" and perished (compare 1 Nephi 12:14–19 and Helaman 13:31, 36; Mormon 1:18).

Undoubtedly, Samuel's prophecy of slippery riches could have been—and seemingly was—understood merely as a curse on wealth. The Nephites' laments revolve closely around the loss of wealth and riches. Samuel prophesied that the Nephites would recognize that "we are surrounded by demons, yea, we are encircled about by the angels of him who hath sought to destroy our souls" (Helaman 13:37). The fulfillment of Samuel's prophecy is captured in Mormon's own recognition: "There were sorceries, and witchcrafts, and magics; and the power of the evil one was wrought upon all the face of the land, even unto the fulfilling of all the words of Abinadi, and also Samuel the Lamanite." The broader context of ancient Israelite history and prophecy, as well as Mormon's own narrative, underscore the spiritual truth: we lose what Jesus described as "the true riches" (*vis-à-vis* mammon, Luke 16:11) when we do not "hearken to the word of God" through his prophets and "hold fast to it" (1 Nephi 15:24). The words they deliver are "the plain and precious things" and the rod (or divine word) along the sure path that leads us to "the tree of life, whose fruit is most precious and most desirable above all other fruits" (1 Nephi 15:36) and "sweet above all that is sweet" (Alma 32:42; cf. 1 Nephi 8:11): the personal knowledge of God's love and Jesus's Christ's atoning grace. To lose hold of these "plain and precious things" through neglect or rejection means the further fulfillment of Samuel's words: "And in the days of your poverty ye shall cry unto the Lord; and in vain shall ye cry, for your desolation is already come upon you, and your destruction is made sure" (Helaman 13:32; cf. Amos 8:11–12).

Conclusion and Praxis

Samuel the Lamanite knew the scriptures and he knew the doctrine of Christ. He was not only well-versed in ancient Israelite prophetic conventions—what Nephi described as "the manner of the prophesying among the Jews"—but also Hebrew (or the Nephite form of it). He expressly drew on the prophetic words of Isaiah and possibly also Jeremiah and the Psalms in constructing and deploying a marvelous wordplay on forms of *ḥlq*: *ḥălāqôt* ("flattering words," literally "smooth things") and *ḥălaqlaqqôt* or *ḥălāqôt* ("slippery [things]"). This wordplay establishes a genetic relationship between rejecting the prophets and instead loving and hearkening to those who "speak flattering words unto [us]" (Helaman 13:28) and the consequent curse of losing riches

and treasures (material possessions) as they become “slippery that [we] cannot hold them” (Helaman 13:31, 36; see also Helaman 13:33; Mormon 1:18–19; 2:10; Ether 14:1).

Samuel seems to have been well-aware of the frequent Nephite rejection of Nephi₂, the son of Helaman who declared and warned, “But behold, ye have rejected the truth, and rebelled against your holy God; and even at this time, instead of laying up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where nothing doth corrupt, and where nothing can come which is unclean, ye are heaping up for yourselves wrath against the day of judgment” (Helaman 8:5). Nephi₂ was one of the prophets who had been rejected in favor of conmen speaking “flattering words.” The deep irony was that in rejecting the prophets to secure the treasures of the world, those very treasures were thus destined to become “slippery.”

Jesus, of whom Samuel prophesied, was not speaking “flattering words” or “smooth things” when he told his disciples:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. (Matthew 6:19–20; 3 Nephi 13:19–20)

Perhaps no group of people had a greater need to internalize these words than the Nephites with their “slippery treasures.”

Jesus spoke neither “flattering words” or “smooth things” when he told the rich young man (sometimes called Dives [Latin “riches”]), “If thou wilt be perfect [Greek *teleios*], go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me” (Matthew 19:21; cf. Mark 10:21; Luke 18:22). He was telling him—and all of us—how we can hold on to or “retain” what really matters. Helaman, the son of Helaman and father of Nephi and Lehi, desired his sons to “lay up for yourselves a treasure in heaven, yea, which is eternal, and which fadeth not away; yea, that ye may have that precious gift of eternal life, which we have reason to suppose hath been given to our fathers” (Helaman 5:8). Through his atonement Jesus Christ wants to secure (or make “sure”)³⁹ for us what is described in modern revelation as “the riches of eternity” (Doctrine and Covenants 38:39; 67:2; 68:31; 78:18). For those who heed his word, who hold fast to the iron rod, the way and the treasures of eternity are sure. Those

"true riches" (cf. Luke 16:11) are found in exaltation, in our transformative relationship with our Heavenly Parents and our Savior, our eternal relationships with our families, and a Christlike character. Ultimately, what else matters?



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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 a 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* (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2018) and *Ancient Names in the Book of Mormon: Toward a Deeper Understanding of a Witness of Christ* (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2023). With Aaron P. Schade, he is the coauthor of *The Book of Moses: From the Ancient of Days to the Latter Days* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2021). He and his wife, Suzanne (formerly Blattberg), are the parents of three children: Zachariah, Nathan, and Adele.

Notes

1. Donald W. Parry has convincingly shown that Samuel the Lamanite was well-versed in Hebrew prophetic conventions, or what Nephi called "the manner of prophesying among the Jews" (2 Nephi 25:1). See Donald W. Parry, "'Thus Saith the Lord': Prophetic Language in Samuel's Speech," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (1992): 181–83, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1009&context=jbms. I have previously suggested that Samuel skillfully used Hebraistic wordplay on his own name in his speech. See Matthew L. Bowen, "'If Ye Believe on His Name': Wordplay on the Name Samuel in Helaman 14:2, 12–13 and 3 Nephi 23:9 and the Doctrine of Christ in Samuel's Speech," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 46 (2021): 49–76, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/if-ye-believe-on-his-name-wordplay-on-the-name-samuel-in-helaman-142-12-13-and-3-nephi-239-and-the-doctrine-of-christ-in-samuels-speech/.

2. Parry, "Thus Saith the Lord," 181–83.
3. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2001), 1554–55. Hereafter cited as *HALOT*. Other proposed meanings for Samuel—e.g., "one who hears God," as Samuel does in 1 Samuel 3:9–11, or "heard of God," are based on the aural similarity of *šēmū'ēl* to the Hebrew verb *šāma'*, "to hear." Bowen, "If Ye Believe on His Name," 51–56, 63.
4. Bowen, "If Ye Believe on His Name," 49–76.
5. Noel B. Reynolds, "Biblical Merismus in Book of Mormon Gospel References," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 26 (2017): 128. See also Bowen, "If Ye Believe on His Name," 57–67.
6. Semitisms and Semitic interference—Hebraisms and Aramaisms—abound throughout the New Testament text, just as Hebraisms and some Egyptianisms abound in the Book of Mormon text. By "Semitisms" I mean features of a text that are best explained as reflecting Semitic thought or language in a text or in the underlying text from which the said text was translated (*Vorlage*). For example, the Gospel of Matthew, a work almost-universally recognized as having been written to a Jewish audience, explains the meaning of the name Jesus (*yěhōšūa'* or *yěšūa'*, "Jehovah saves" or "Jehovah is salvation") thusly: "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name **Jesus** [Greek: *lēsou*n; Hebrew *yěhōšūa'/yěšūa'*]: for **he shall save** [Greek *sōsei*; Hebrew *yōšīa'*] his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). This Semitism can be detected both at the secondary Greek level and even at the tertiary translation level.
7. In linguistics, the word "root" describes the most basic level or form of a word or a cluster of derived words. In Hebrew, as in all Semitic languages, roots are overwhelmingly three-consonant (or triliteral) roots, from which verbal stems and their associated nouns and adjectives are built. Stems can have active, passive, durative, and causative meaning (and more). An example in English is the verb "learn." The basic meaning of "learn" is to acquire knowledge about something. As a passive verb, "to be learned" has come to denote being highly educated. This may be related to an archaic form of "learn" which has the causative sense of "teach" (i.e., to cause to learn.) As a substantive, "learning" has the sense of acquired knowledge. The noun "lore" is built from the underlying root (cf. Old English *leornian*).
8. *HALOT*, 322. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 325. Hereafter cited as *BDB*.
9. *HALOT*, 322.
10. *HALOT*, 323.
11. *BDB*, 325.
12. *HALOT*, 323.
13. *HALOT*, 323.
14. *BDB*, 325. In its reduplicated stem, a basic stem-form like the adjective *hālāq* or

its plural (feminine) form *ḥālāqōt* becomes *ḥālaqlaqqōt*, which intensifies the meaning of "smooth" and "slippery."

15. HALOT, 324.
16. See Reinhard G. Kratz, "Riddles and Revelation: The Re-use of Isaianic Prophecies Within and Outside the Book of Isaiah," in *Texts as Revelation*, ed. Hanna Tervanotko and Jonathan Stökl (London: Bloombury/T&T Clark, 2023), 19–20. On the use of the "Seekers of Smooth Things" and other pejoratives derived from the Isaianic writings, see Matthew A. Collins, "Text, Intertext, and Conceptual Identity: The Case of Ephraim and the Seekers of Smooth Things," in *Is There a Text in This Cave? Studies in the Textuality of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of George J. Brooke*, ed. Ariel Feldman, Maria Cioata, and Charlotte Hempel (Leiden, ND: Brill, 2017), 209–25.
17. On the identity of "the Elders of the Jews," see Scripture Central Staff, "Who Were 'the Elders of the Jews' Mentioned by Zoram?" KnoWhy 464, 21 August 2019, scripturecentral.org/knowwhy/who-were-the-elders-of-the-jews-mentioned-by-zoram.
18. Brant Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Volume Five: Helaman–3 Nephi* (Salt Lake City: Kofford, 2007), 184.
19. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 5:184.
20. Kevin L. Barney, "'Slippery Treasures' in the Book of Mormon: A Concept from the Ancient World," *Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship* 20, no. 6 (June 2000): 2.
21. Barney, "Slippery Treasures," 2.
22. Hebrew *waḥālāqlaqqōt* is a feminine plural adjectival form of *ḥālāq* from a reduplicated stem (a stem in which part of the word's form is repeated) that has been substantivized—that is, made into an abstract noun.
23. Here a substantivized feminine plural adjectival form of *ḥālāq* is again used, but in this instance the stem is not reduplicated.
24. On Jesus Christ, the doctrine of Christ, the revealed testimony that Jesus as the Christ, and revelation (more generally), as the "rock" and a "sure foundation," see Matthew L. Bowen, "Founded Upon a Rock: Doctrinal and Temple Implications of Peter's Surnaming," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 9 (2014): 1–28, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/founded-upon-a-rock-doctrinal-and-temple-implications-of-peters-surnaming/.
25. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 5:188.
26. Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Volume Six: Fourth Nephi–Moroni* (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2007), 55.
27. Matthew L. Bowen and Pedro Olavarria, "Place of Crushing: The Literary Function of Heshlon in Ether 13:25–31," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 14 (2015): 227–39, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/place-of-crushing-the-literary-function-of-heshlon-in-ether-1325-31/.

28. See Royal Skousen, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 788; see also Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Six: 3 Nephi 19–Moroni 10, Addenda* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS], 2009), 3822, 3858; Royal Skousen, *Analysis of the Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part One: Title Page, Witness Statements, 1 Nephi 1–2 Nephi 10* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 490–91.
29. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:313.
30. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:313.
31. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:313.
32. Matthew L. Bowen, “Coming Down and Bringing Down: Pejorative Onomastic Allusions to the Jaredites in Helaman 6:25, 38; Ether 2:11,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 42 (2021): 397–410, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/coming-down-and-bringing-down-pejorative-onomastic-allusions-to-the-jaredites-in-helaman-625-638-and-ether-211/.
33. Daniel L. Belnap, “Even as Our Father Lehi Saw’: Lehi’s Dream as Nephite Cultural Narrative,” in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi’s Dream and Nephi’s Vision* (2011 Sperry Symposium), ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 214–39; Daniel L. Belnap, “There Arose a Mist of Darkness’: The Narrative of Lehi’s Dream in Christ’s Theophany,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 92–93.
34. Matthew L. Bowen, “‘What Meaneth the Rod of Iron?,”’ *Insights: A Window on the Ancient World* 25, no. 5 (2005): 2–3.
35. Bowen, “What Meaneth the Rod?” 2–3.
36. Belnap, “There Arose a Mist of Darkness,” 92–102.
37. See Matthew L. Bowen, “‘Unto the Taking Away of Their Stumbling Blocks’: The Taking Away and Keeping Back of Plain and Precious Things and Their Restoration in 1 Nephi 13–14,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Faith and Scholarship* 53 (2022): 145–70, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/unto-the-taking-away-of-their-stumbling-blocks-the-taking-away-and-keeping-back-of-plain-and-precious-things-and-their-restoration-in-1-nephi-13-15/.
38. I thank Rebecca Reynolds Lambert (personal communication) for inviting me to consider this relationship.
39. Compare the use of *ne’ēmān(im)* in Isaiah 55:3 (“sure mercies of David”) and Isaiah 22:23–24 (“nail in a sure place”).

The Plates of Gardner

Kimberley Heuston

Review of Brant A. Gardner, The Plates of Mormon: A Book of Mormon Study Edition, and its companion volume, Engraven Upon Plates, Printed Upon Paper: Textual and Narrative Structures of the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2023). Study edition 598 pp.; \$34.95 (paperback). Commentary 485 pp.; \$24.95 (paperback).

Abstract: *This paper addresses the reasons for a recent spurt in Book of Mormon study editions and contextualizes the unique contributions of Brant Gardner's The Plates of Mormon: A Book of Mormon Study Edition. Unlike other study editions, which cater to the needs of believing Church members, prospective missionaries, or the (secular) scholarly community, Gardner writes that The Plates of Mormon is an attempt to understand the book in terms of the ancient Mesoamerican culture that produced it, something for which he, a trained Mesoamericanist, is uniquely qualified. To do so, he must first peel away the layers superimposed upon its current version by Joseph Smith's translation for his Early American frontier community. That complicated process is detailed in a companion volume, Engraven Upon Plates, Printed Upon Paper: Textual and Narrative Structures of the Book of Mormon, which receives the bulk of this review's attention. Gardner's discoveries and conclusions are briefly rather than comprehensively summarized in this review.*

"Keep an open mind — but not so open that your brains fall out."

—Alan Garner

Thanks to Royal Skousen as well as the Joseph Smith Papers (JSP), interested readers now have ready access to high-resolution facsimiles of the original dictated manuscripts of the Book of Mormon.¹ Those facsimiles, in concert with the thorough and historically sensitive editorial notes of Skousen and the JSP, would seem to provide definitive answers about the provenance of the Book of Mormon.² However, neither the 25% that remains of the original manuscript nor the virtually complete printer's manuscript, which was copied for use by John Gilbert, the Book of Mormon's typesetter, include modern-day conventions like punctuation and line and paragraph breaks. Although Gilbert did a fine job of creating order out of the string of text he was given, in recent years several editors have used the newly available facsimiles and Skousen's research to inform new study versions of the Book of Mormon. Brant Gardner's *The Plates of Mormon* takes its place next to Grant Hardy's *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition*;³ Lynn and David Rosenvall's *A New Approach to Studying the*

1. Unfortunately, more than 75% of the original manuscript, which is to say the original longhand transcription of Joseph's dictated translation, was lost to water damage and dispersal in the years after Joseph Smith deposited it in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House. Fortunately, all but three lines of the printers manuscript, a copy of the original made for John Gilbert, the Book of Mormon's first printer, have survived. High-definition facsimiles of both may be found online at the "Book of Mormon Manuscripts," *The Joseph Smith Papers*, josephsmithpapers.org/the-papers/revelations-and-translations/jsppr3. The commentaries on that website as well as Royal Skousen's *The Earliest Text of the Book of Mormon*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022) are products of The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project, which Royal Skousen oversaw for nearly forty years. The Interpreter Foundation hosts the online version of Skousen's six volume *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, the predecessor to *The Earliest Text*, at interpreterfoundation.org/books/atv/.

2. These include the first edition published in Palmyra in 1830; the 1837 Kirtland Edition, which included approximately 1,000 editorial corrections authorized by Joseph Smith, most of which were grammatical; the 1840 Nauvoo Edition, which included a few more corrections authorized by Joseph Smith and restored a few verses inadvertently omitted in earlier editions; the 1879 edition, which broke longer chapters and verses into shorter, narratively cohesive passages; the 1920 edition, which broke the text into two columns and introduced chapter summaries; and the currently used 1981 edition, which includes revised indexes and a Topical Guide. Because the Church prefers to be the sole provider of the current edition, all of the study versions are based on the 1920 edition.

3. Grant Hardy, *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

Book of Mormon;⁴ Hardy's Maxwell Institute study edition;⁵ and his more comprehensive *Annotated Book of Mormon*.⁶

Each of these study versions is well-suited to a particular audience. Hardy's *Study Edition* was designed to prepare prospective missionaries seeking a deeper understanding of the Church of Jesus Christ's foundational book of scripture. The Rosenvalls' version uses formatting and speaker attributions to clarify the immediate context of passages for readers overwhelmed by the Book of Mormon's sometimes dense text, varied narratives, and frequent flashbacks. Hardy's *Annotated Book of Mormon* is designed for an academic audience both in and out of the LDS community, as its publication by Oxford suggests.

Gardner's *Plates of Mormon* differs from the others in that it, like the book it reveals, is unabashedly *sui generis*. As he wrote in the introduction to his *Second Witness* commentary on the Book of Mormon, Gardner is interested in constructing "a cohesive picture of the Book of Mormon text and peoples" based on the text itself and its archaeological and cultural contexts:

I inquire into the process of Joseph Smith's translation or how the text fits into the ancient Old and New Worlds. *I do not attempt to prove or disprove it but to understand it.* Regardless of the value for our day and the obvious fact that it came forth in our day, it was not written in our day, nor in our language, nor in our culture. . . . This commentary attempts to read the text in the light of that ancient production culture and mentality.⁷

Because Gardner's emphasis is on understanding the text on its own terms rather than categorizing or shaping it to the needs of a particular audience, his *Plates of Mormon* is, insofar as is possible for

4. Lynn and David Rosenvall, *A New Approach to Studying the Book of Mormon* (n.p.: Olive Leaf Foundation, 2017).

5. Grant Hardy, *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ*, Maxwell Institute Study Edition (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, BYU Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2018).

6. Grant Hardy, *The Annotated Book of Mormon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

7. Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon: Volume 1: First Nephi* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 7, emphasis added.

complex and carefully reasoned argument, an open book, the functional equivalent of a WYSIWYG software interface.⁸

Nevertheless, transparency is not the same thing as simplicity. Consider the complexities at work in excavating the “true message” of a collection of histories, letters, and sermons created millennia ago by a series of cultures that today are incompletely understood; edited in the fourth century by a soldier named Mormon and his son and successor, Moroni, in the midst of the utter destruction of their culture and people; and then shorn of the first half of Mormon’s abridgement in the early nineteenth century.⁹ And that is *without* addressing the thorny questions of the divine provenance the plates claim for themselves or the mechanism by which their uneducated and unlikely caretaker rendered an English translation of the same, complete with quotations of biblical texts that had not yet been composed in their original Greek or Hebrew.¹⁰

That’s a lot of moving parts for anyone to keep track of, and it explains why Gardner required a companion volume and commentary—*Engraven Upon Plates, Printed Upon Paper*—to elucidate, as completely as possible, the “textual and narrative strategies” at work in the Book of Mormon as it was originally written and edited, independent of Joseph Smith’s later translation.

Gardner is uniquely positioned to offer such an analysis. While there is no dearth of excellent recent scholarship on the Book of Mormon, most of it has come from scholars whose professional training took place in adjacent fields.¹¹ Gardner is one of the only gospel-facing

8. WYSIWYG stands for “What you see is what you get.” It refers to a computer interface where output matches input. In other words, what you see as you input information matches what you will see when it is published.

9. Don Bradley, *The Lost 116 Pages: Reconstructing the Book of Mormon’s Missing Stories* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2019), 83.

10. Joseph Smith’s only explanation of the process was that the Book of Mormon was “translated by the power of God.” Kent P. Jackson and Peter M. Jasinski, “The Process of Inspired Translation: Two Passages Translated Twice in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (2003): 61, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol42/iss2/3.

11. Hugh Nibley studied the classics at Berkeley, while *Interpreter*’s own Dan Peterson pursued Arabic studies at UCLA. Richard Bushman and Noel Reynolds earned PhDs from Harvard, where Bushman studied colonial America and Reynolds studied political science. Grant Hardy studied Chinese history at Yale and John Welch is an attorney. Adam Miller, Joseph Spencer, and Mark Wrathall are philosophers by training, while Terry Givens’s graduate work emphasized literature.

scholars who is also a trained Mesoamericanist.¹² From the beginning, that training and the career that followed was laser-focused on the intersection of Mesoamerican language, environment, and culture with the received text of the Book of Mormon. His first publications explored the language, linguistics, and ethno-history of the Book of Mormon's Mesoamerican setting.¹³ In 2007 he turned his attention to the Book of Mormon itself with the publication of his six-volume *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, published by Greg Kofford Books, as were *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon* (2011) and *Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History* (2015). Though many scholars and other Saints have devoted a significant portion of long and productive personal and professional lives to the Book of Mormon, few, if any, have focused so unrelentingly on the context of its original composition and translation.

Like most commentaries, *The Plates of Mormon* and *Engraven upon Plates* offer an exegesis of the Book of Mormon. In other words, they seek to elucidate the meaning of scripture through a careful examination of its written context. The special contribution of Gardner's exegeses is that his two books are informed by literary, cultural, and historical contexts that have been inaccessible to most Book of Mormon scholars. What follows attempts to summarize Gardner's major contributions as outlined in *Engraven upon Plates*.

The World of Joseph Smith

One early spring morning in 1820, an obscure and mostly unlettered fourteen-year-old farm boy went into the woods of upstate New York to pray for spiritual direction and to ascertain his personal standing before the Lord. When he emerged sometime later, young Joseph

12. Others include archaeologist John E. Clark, one of the world's foremost experts on the Olmecs, and Allen J. Christenson, whose brilliant 2008 translation and analysis of the *Popul Vuh* now informs nearly every discussion of pre-Columbian Maya culture.

13. These include Brant A. Gardner, "Mecayotl and Mexicayotl: The role of kinships in Nahua Society," (thesis, Brigham Young University, 1975); Gardner et al., *Bibliography of Mayan Languages and Linguistics* (Albany, NY: State University of New York at Albany, 1978); Gardner, "A Structural and Semantic Analysis of Classical Nahuatl Kinship Terminology," *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* 15 (1982); and Gardner, Lyle Campbell, and Walter Randolph Adams, *The Linguistics of Southeast Chiapas, Mexico* (Provo, UT: New World Archaeological Foundation, BYU, 1988).

Smith reported an experience so audacious that it broke and reformed the pattern and meaning of his life as well as those of millions of followers yet to come. He said that God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ appeared to him, called him by name, forgave his sins, prophesied the return of the resurrected Christ, warned that none of the churches then on the earth were true, and promised that Joseph would receive the fullness of the gospel at some future date.

As Richard Bushman and others have shown, such experiences were readily comprehensible to early nineteenth-century Americans inhabiting the “burned over” district of upstate New York.¹⁴ For Joseph and his neighbors, the reality of God and the granting of divine manifestations were commonplace. Joseph never doubted the reality of his extraordinary experience and was surprised by the “persecution and reviling” that ensued, declaring that “I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it” (Joseph Smith — History 1:23, 25). Bushman succinctly concludes that “the First Vision fits comfortably into Joseph Smith’s time and place.”¹⁵

It fit so comfortably that when Joseph felt himself in need of additional divine instruction two and a half years later, he made his request with “full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation, as I previously had one” (Joseph Smith — History 1:29). His confidence paid off on 21 September 1823. This time the divine visitor was Moroni, the son of General Mormon and the final editor of the Book of Mormon. Moroni told Joseph that a sacred record kept by his Nephite forefathers lay buried in one of the region’s drumlin hills, a mile or so from the Smith family homestead.¹⁶ Joseph had no trouble accepting this additional

14. This was a major theme of “The Worlds of Joseph Smith,” a symposium at the Library of Congress in honor of the bicentennial of Smith’s birth. See John W. Welch, *The Worlds of Joseph Smith: A Bicentennial Conference at the Library of Congress* (Provo, UT: BYU, 2006).

15. The culture that I swam in as a fourteen-year-old lay 300 miles to the southwest and 150 years in the future. As a participant in the world of New York City’s secular elite, the crux of my faith was learning to accept just those possibilities. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith’s Gold Plates: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 8. See also Bushman, “The Visionary World of Joseph Smith,” *BYU Studies* 37, no. 1 (1997–98): 183–204, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol37/iss1/10/; and Bruce W. Northen, “How the Erie Canal Corridor Became the Burned-over District: Rochester and the Advent of Mormonism,” *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 40, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2020), 48–64.

16. It is not known how the records were transported from the Nephite lands to

information, in part because seer stones that revealed buried treasure were very much a part of his and his community's lived tradition. As historians like Mackay and Dirkmaat have noted:

Those who were most acquainted with Joseph Smith in Palmyra did not doubt he had received the plates but instead took steps to obtain them for themselves or at the very least find remnants of the buried treasure possibly still lying in the hill.¹⁷

In sum, Joseph Smith's culture prepared him to not only receive the plates of Mormon as the Word of God but also to confidently interact with them by means of a sacred object in ways that ours does not. One of the things it did not prepare him for, as Gardner makes clear, was to confidently and independently translate the Nephite characters into a narrative that early Americans could both comprehend and accept as "a volume of holy scripture comparable to the Bible."¹⁸

The body of *Engraven Upon Plates* attempts to recover, as nearly as possible, the text of the Book of Mormon as it was originally written, prior to any artifacts introduced by Joseph's translation for the people of his own time and ours. This is a delicate enterprise since the only explicit reference Joseph made to the translation process is simply that "The interpretation thereof [came by] the gift of God."¹⁹ Gardner's analysis establishes that in this case, as in so many others, the divine gift assumed strenuous exertions on the part of its intended recipient.

the drumlin in Palmyra, New York, that later became known as the Hill Cumorah. It seems reasonable to assume that Moroni himself made the long overland journey and buried them in a stone box that he likely made on site. See Benjamin R. Jordan and Warren P. Aston, "The Geology of Moroni's Stone Box: Examining the Setting and Resources of Palmyra," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 30 (2018): 233–52, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-geology-of-moronis-stone-box-examining-the-setting-and-resources-of-palmyra/. For the later disposition of the stone box, see Michael Hubbard Mackay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith's Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 9–10.

17. Mackay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 10. The first section of Gardner's earlier work *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 3–134; offers the most complete discussion of Joseph's translation of the golden plates in the context of his place and time.

18. From the first sentence of the Introduction to the 2013 authorized version of the Book of Mormon.

19. Title page, *The Book of Mormon*.

Joseph required four additional visions over the course of the next four years before he was fully prepared to receive the physical plates. Even then, Joseph's closest associates—including his wife Emma, his father, and Martin Harris—were dubious about his capability to translate them himself, as he had been commanded.²⁰ Joseph seems to have agreed with them. According to John Whitmer, Joseph's host during the most concentrated phase of the translation, Joseph originally believed that experts in ancient languages could help get him started:

He now Began to be anxious to git them translated. He therefore with his wife Drew off[f] the Caricters exactly like the ancient and sent Martin Harris to see if he Could git them Translated. He went to Albeny and to Philadelpha and to new york and he found men that Could Translate some of the Carictors in all those places.²¹

But urban intellectuals like Charles Anthon and Samuel Mitchill were not part of the credulous world of the burned over district and proved unwilling or unable to take seriously a faithful enterprise like the translation of a miraculous book. Only after the disappointment of being rejected by intellectuals could Joseph surrender himself to a private partnership with God that an independent translation would require.

Interpreting the Plates

In the absence of accessible and strenuously argued critiques of Joseph's putative translation process along with resources like the Joseph Smith Papers, earlier generations of Latter-day Saints could afford to elide the nature of the Book of Mormon's translation. Most probably assumed, without much thought, that the Book of Mormon was the product of what Gardner calls "divinely infallible translation." More recently, awareness of textual variants and mistakes (including misspellings and infelicitous syntax) as well as Joseph's pragmatic correction of earlier printed passages in the 1837 edition of the Book of Mormon has been growing—all suggesting that the manuscript sent to the printer was not infallible. That was little surprise when it passed

20. See Gardner, *The Gift and the Power*, 3–5.

21. Quoted in Dean C. Jessee, "Joseph Knight's Recollection of Early Mormon History," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 17 (1977): 34, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol17/iss1/4/.

through the mortal hands of secretaries, an unbelieving printer, and Joseph himself.

In an 1843 letter to the editor of the *Times and Seasons*, Joseph reminded his audience that:

There was no Greek or Latin upon the plates from which I, through the grace of God translated the Book of Mormon. Let the language of that book speak for itself. . . . It reads: "And now behold we have written this record according to our knowledge in the characters, which are called among us the Reformed Egyptian, being handed down and altered by us, according to our manner of speech; and . . . the Hebrew hath been altered by us, also; . . . but the Lord knoweth the things which we have written, and also, that none other people knoweth our language; therefore he hath prepared means for the interpretation thereof."

Here then the subject is put to silence, for "none other people knoweth our language," [Morm. 9:34], therefore the Lord, and not man, had to interpret the Nephite record.²²

Clearly, then, Joseph did not translate the plates in the way that intermediate students of Hebrew or Greek labor to translate a short homework passage into their native languages. His translation was initiated by divine transmission of the meaning assigned to the characters on the plates by their original writers. At first, Joseph found it easiest to receive this transmission by means of the interpreters, a large spectacle-like device that was buried with the plates, or with one of the two seer stones that he had found and used during his adolescence, as many in his neighborhood did.

(Parenthetically, "dowsers" and other adepts were — and probably still are — routinely consulted in the northern Vermont farming community where I spent my summers as a girl. As a constant witness of the cruel unpredictability of our neighbors' harvests, I could easily understand the comfort that extra-rational talismans and beliefs offered.)

Joseph placed the seer stone in a hat to block out the light and used it to focus on the interpretation he was receiving, though by the time Joseph moved on to later translation projects he had no need of those physical aids.

22. "Correspondence [Joseph Smith to Editor of the *Times and Seasons*]," *Times and Seasons* 4 (15 May 1843): 194.

Some interested parties have argued that these aids provided a text that Joseph merely needed to read aloud. This is bolstered by several first-person narratives recalling Joseph's careful and specific spelling of unfamiliar names, which were apparently given to him letter-by-letter. However, Gardner's analysis of such recollections establishes that such care was only taken the first time an unfamiliar name appeared.²³

Instead, Gardner is among a growing number of Book of Mormon scholars who argue that Joseph's mind received revelation as blocks of pre-verbal knowledge — what Gardner refers to as “mentalese.”²⁴ Joseph then projected or imagined these impressions into being in the form of visions, which he then attempted to describe verbally. Gardner quotes Kathleen Flake's study of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible:

It appears that when he read he saw events, not words. What he saw, he verbalized to a scribe. . . . Arguably, then, ‘translate’ expressed Smith's experience of ‘study[ing] it out in [his mind]’ or his sense of agency in front of the text. Smith did not think of himself as God's stenographer. Rather, he was an interpreting reader, and God the confirming authority.²⁵

Translating for Early American Readers

The Lord began the translation process by transmitting a correct interpretation of the text composed by the original authors to Joseph through revelation. But more work had to be done before the interpretation could become a translation fully comprehensible to its target readers. As Gardner explains,

because the translation's original 1830 audience had virtually nothing in common with the purported original language and culture recorded on the golden plates, what might have been effective communication when the Nephite text was finalized around AD 400 would be less effective with its primary audience fourteen centuries later. . . . [It] required

23. Gardner, *Engraven Upon Plates*, 7.

24. Gardner, *Engraven Upon Plates*, 62–67. The term *mentalese* was originally coined by Steven Pinker in *How the Mind Works* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009).

25. Kathleen Flake, “Translating Time: The Nature and Function of Joseph Smith's Narrative Canon,” *The Journal of Religion* 87 (October 2007), 506–7.

modifications of some sort for the translation to be comprehensible to its first readers.²⁶

Joseph's part in the project of translation was to act as an "inter-cultural mediator," framing the divine interpretation of the plates with forms that would signal that the Book of Mormon was indeed a second witness of God to the people of his time and place. To do so, Joseph used the pseudo-biblical language conditioned by the King James version of the Bible that signaled authoritative public discourse in both religious and secular contexts to early nineteenth-century Americans. He also took care to publish the Book of Mormon in volumes that were the same size and binding of the most commonly used Bibles in America and Britain.²⁷

An effective translation can't help but generate its own artifacts, which is to say expressions or images meaningful to the target audience that are not part of the original text. Examples of such artifacts are easily found in the King James translation of the Bible. Neither St. Matthew nor his audience knew of candles or candlesticks, yet we accept the translation "Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick" (Matthew 5:15) without quibbling about small oil lamps. So, when Joseph, who presumably knew nothing about the animals of pre-conquest Mesoamerica, writes about "flocks" and "other sheep," those who are more knowledgeable can recognize the misattributions as artifacts produced by a translator describing unfamiliar realities to the nineteenth-century farmers that made up his audience.²⁸

Gardner argues that Joseph's dictation of his translation to a scribe leaves its own trail of artifacts. One of his examples points to the incomplete and run-on sentences in the Book of Mormon. Across cultures, the mind can hold on to about thirty seconds of speech before needing to be refreshed. Gardner found that:

The difference between the typical completed sentences

26. Gardner, *Engraven Upon Plates*, 18–19.

27. Gardner, *Engraven Upon Plates*, 39–43.

28. Sheep, goats, chickens and other animals capable of being domesticated did not appear in Mesoamerica until the Spanish conquest in the early sixteenth century (i.e. 1500s). This begs the question of what animals exactly were being dispersed by King Lamoni's enemies in Alma 23. Gardner believes that the likeliest candidate are herds of semi-domesticated sacred deer, which were an important part of Mesoamerican religious beliefs. Personal conversation with Brant Gardner, 25 October 2024.

and the various examples of incomplete sentences lies in the combination of a dangling verb and a quantity of intervening clauses. When at least three clauses followed the initial hanging verb, Joseph typically lost track of the hanging verbal clause and did not resolve it. That is consistent with the capacity of short-term memory list items. The interrupted nature of the translation added time to the dictation and thus increased the memory load. In these cases, the memory tax was so high that the sentences were left without resolution.²⁹

You will have to read the book to discover Gardner's other, equally fascinating, insights into the evidence that Joseph's translation left of itself.

A Carefully Structured, Written Text

Once Gardner has cleared away the traces that Joseph's means of translation for an early American audience left on the Book of Mormon, it becomes easier to discern aspects of the original, pre-translation manuscript. Its most obvious attribute is that it appears to have been a written text that was carefully structured. Despite the breathtaking feats of memory that anthropologists and literary scholars routinely ascribe to pre-literate cultures, none of the epics or lengthy genealogies to which they point reveal anything close to the Book of Mormon's complexity. The narrative complexities woven through the Book of Mormon include:

- extended quotations from biblical narratives with commentaries perfectly pitched to the circumstances of a Mesoamerican audience
- parallel narratives
- complex flashbacks across books and narrators
- rapid shifts in point of view and assumed audience that maintain coherence and integrity
- genealogies that unerringly follow distinctive characters who share the same names forward and backward through time

William L. Davis, a historian skeptical of the Book of Mormon's antiquity, argues in his book, *Visions in a Seer Stone*, that Joseph Smith

29. *Engraven Upon Plates*, 59.

must have been a genius who devoted many years to organizing the framework of the Book of Mormon before his first scribe put pen to paper:

The evidence reveals that behind the project lay a systematic approach of careful planning and preparation, which, in turn, suggests that Smith spent a significant amount of time in the creation of the work. In addition, the content of the stories also suggests a process of elaborate preparatory construction. Grant Hardy, for example, records a litany of textual features that reveal such a process, including, among many others, the presence of flashbacks, parallel narratives, a hundred-year chronicle of Nephite leaders and judges, as well as several genealogies and successions of rulers. When combined together, all of these factors suggests that Smith began his work on the Book of Mormon long before he actually started to dictate the text.³⁰

As he read that final sentence, Gardner likely muttered to himself that someone—or rather *someones*—certainly *did* begin to work on the Book of Mormon long before Joseph started to dictate. It was not just Joseph himself; it included people like Nephi, Jacob, Mosiah, Mormon, Moroni, and others.

Other evidence of a written text, as opposed to an oral one, includes Mormon's frequent use of "repetitive resumption," which bookends editorial interruptions with parallel statements that help the reader return to the original story. This was a practice that dates from the earliest known religious texts from Mesopotamia. Mormon uses the technique in Alma 30:56–58, when he writes that Korihor "was cast out, and went about from house to house begging for his food." He interrupts the scene with a report of the effect of Korihor's downfall on "all the land" before returning focus to Korihor himself by repeating, "And Korihor did go about from house to house, begging food for his support."

Gardner's knowledge of inscriptions both from Mesoamerica and

30. *Engraven Upon Plates*, 71, quoting William L. Davis, *Visions in a Seer Stone: Joseph Smith and the Making of the Book of Mormon* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 163. For a review of the volume, see Brian C. Hales, "Theories and Assumptions: A Review of William L. Davis's *Visions in a Seer Stone*," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 39 (2020): 151–90, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/theories-and-assumptions-a-review-of-william-l-daviss-visions-in-a-seer-stone/.

Ancient Near East cultures informs additional discoveries. He points out that the difficulty and expense of writing led scribes to conserve precious writing surfaces, be they parchment, stone, or metal. The spatial cues that we use today mark word, sentence, and paragraph breaks, but in ancient times almost all punctuation marks were simply too costly to consider.

As a result, Gardner has identified a series of conventions that the original writers used to communicate the narrative structure of their texts. These include:

- strategies for signaling the beginnings and ends of sentences, thematic units like paragraphs, and entire narrative arcs
- mechanisms for linking disparate episodes into a thematic unit
- the use of paratextual expressions that simultaneously convey meaning and structure

Gardner provides an example of these conventions:

Both “and now” and “and it came to pass” are textual markers that move the reader through a narrative, with the difference between the two being the location of the story on a conceptual temporal timeline. “And now” marks new information that is associated within the same timeframe as the previous information. “And it came to pass” moves the narrative through time. In [Royal] Skousen’s terminology, they are a narrative connector. The latter still bridges the subsequent narrative to the previous, but it shifts the timeframe to a later event. In modern English the two might be alternatively rendered as “at the same time” and “later.”³¹

These are only three of Gardner’s conclusions about the original text that are discussed in *Engraven Upon Plates*.

A Text with Roots in an Oral Culture

Though Joseph’s translation is based on a thoughtfully written and edited narrative engraved on plates, that narrative’s reliance on sermons, dialogues, recitals of memorized texts, and poetic forms like chiasmus, parallelism, *leitwörter*, and other forms of stylized repetition all signal its beginnings in a predominantly oral culture. These speech

31. *Engraven Upon Plates*, 91–92.

acts reflect the spontaneous interplay between speaker and audience that is the hallmark of authentic dialogue. The same is true of the narrators' frequent insertion of off-the-cuff commentaries on the actors and actions they are describing.

Indeed, Book of Mormon narrators often insist on the perceived superiority of oral performance. Not only can speakers tailor their messages to audience cues, but they are aided in this endeavor by the influence of the Holy Ghost.³²

One of the most fascinating chapters in *Engraven Upon Plates* details artifacts left by Mesoamerican numbering and calendrical systems on the Book of Mormon, and why that may have all changed during the reign of the judges. Another contrasts evidence of Mormon's sources and editorial hand in the Large Plates with the holographic style of the Small Plates, which were written by single individuals for more limited audiences. Gardner also provides a fascinating excursus on Mormon's use of names and their meanings. For these delights, and many more, you will need to read *Engraven Upon Plates* for yourself, then trace the unfolding of these principles through the footnotes of *The Plates of Mormon*.

Conclusions

I am obviously a fan of Gardner's meticulous and understated scholarship. Notwithstanding the occasional flash of irrepressible, incisive wit, Gardner's writing works hard to avoid drawing attention to itself. His tone is more reminiscent of a deliberate and judicious Atticus Finch than the exclamatory and undemanding popular authors so beloved by focus groups. Nevertheless, his content is fresh, well-sourced, and on point. His footnotes — unfailingly thorough, gracious, and penetrating with just enough snark to keep things interesting — are an ideal tutor for those wishing to go further.

Which brings me to my only significant criticism. In an earlier work, Gardner compares Joseph's translation of Mosiah 20:10–20 to his reconstruction of a possible Mesoamerican original. Joseph's authorized translation of this passage begins this way:

32. See chapter nine, "Preserved Orality in Nephite Culture," in *Engraven Upon Plates*. Gardner points out that Nephi's insistence that Joseph Smith's spiritual influence will be in the form of written texts is a bold reversal of Nephi's cultural expectations (2 Nephi 3:17).

And it came to pass that the battle became exceedingly sore, for they fought like lions for their prey.

And it came to pass that the people of Limhi began to drive the Lamanites before them, yet they were not half so numerous as the Lamanites. But they fought for their lives, and for their wives, and for their children; therefore they exerted themselves and like dragons did they fight. (Mosiah 20:10–11)

This vivid, well-written scene is a good example of the way Joseph's early American audience influenced his translation, and there's nothing wrong with that. What transfixed me about the passage, though, was Gardner's provisionally Mesoamericanized revision:

And it came to pass:
The battle became violent and noisy
They fought [for their families]
Like God's jaguars for their prey.

And it came to pass
The Limhites began to drive away the Lamanites
Though they were not half so many.
They fought for their lives, wives, and children.
They fought mightily.
They fought like God's feared war serpent.³³

Notice Gardner's substitution of jaguars and divine war serpents — Mesoamerican symbols of terrible divine power — for lions, which were not known to Mesoamericans. Notice also the resonant power created by structural parallels and contrasts common to oral cultures rather than the self-consciously literary or elevated language of the account in Mosiah. I am not suggesting that Gardner's translation be substituted for Joseph's in future Book of Mormon editions. But a couple of well-chosen alternative translations could have lent more life to *Engraven Upon Plates'* sound and worthy text.

In 2016, psychologist Angela Duckworth published her findings on the psychology of human achievement. The title of her book is as good a way as any to explain her thesis: *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*. Clearly *The Plates of Mormon* and its accompanying

33. Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon: Volume 3: Enos–Mosiah* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 361–62.

commentary, *Engraven Upon Plates, Printed Upon Paper*, are the beneficiaries of that same power of passion and perseverance. I hope that readers will become a witness of that power at work in these two marvelous volumes, as I have.



Kimberley Heuston *is an independent writer and historian. Mother of four and grandmother of nine, she serves as Primary president in her West York, Pennsylvania, ward.*

Adam Clarke and Isaiah in the Book of Mormon

Kent P. Jackson

Abstract: *A recent article alleges that in creating the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith copied Isaiah passages out of the Bible commentary of Scottish theologian Adam Clarke. The author of the article alleges that while doing so, the Prophet edited those passages based on suggestions from Clarke's cross references and commentary. This explains the differences between Isaiah in the King James translation and the corresponding Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon. A careful analysis of the Isaiah verses in the Book of Mormon and Clarke's commentary shows that this claim is not true.*

A recent article, “Early Nineteenth-Century Biblical Scholarship and the Production of *The Book of Mormon*,” written by Colby Townsend, deals with the origin of some of the material in the Book of Mormon. The article’s stated thesis is that Joseph Smith was among other lay people in early U.S. history who used biblical scholarship that was then available in print.¹ Townsend sets out to prove his thesis by examining the Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon. He believes that those passages show evidence that when Joseph Smith included them in his book, he edited them based on the scholarship

1. Colby Townsend, “Early Nineteenth-Century Biblical Scholarship and the Production of *The Book of Mormon*,” *Journal of the Bible and its Reception* 12, no. 1 (2025): 57–84, doi.org/10.1515/jbr-2024-0001. Townsend notes that he prefers to italicize the title of the Book of Mormon (p. 58n2). In academic and nonacademic writing, the titles of sacred religious books are not italicized. The choice to use italics for the Book of Mormon shows that he chooses not to afford the Book of Mormon the respect traditionally given to a religious text like the Bible, a title he does not italicize.

of Scottish theologian Adam Clarke (1762–1832). Clarke’s Bible commentary was available in Joseph Smith’s day, and Townsend believes that the Prophet had access to a copy and drew ideas and words from it to shape the Isaiah quotations to meet his interests.

It can be stated at the outset that Townsend rejects the truth claims of the Book of Mormon. That is not particularly problematic because many others do the same. However, this article hints that there is more involved in his study than merely a dispassionate examination of one nineteenth-century man’s effort to engage with biblical scholarship. I ask myself whether others, dispassionately looking at the same material, could possibly have come to the same conclusions that Townsend reaches. More to the point, I do not know if others looking at the same material would even have pursued the study—there is nothing there. In my view, all of Townsend’s conclusions are the result of wishful thinking, an effort to see in the data what the author wants to see.²

Book of Mormon writers and speakers quote about four hundred verses of Isaiah. About half of those verses are identical to the corresponding verses in the King James translation (KJV), and about half read differently. With that in mind, the words of an angel in 1 Nephi 13 play an important role in Townsend’s thinking. The angel told Nephi of “the many plain and precious things which have been taken out of the book” (v. 29) and foretold a restoration: “I will bring forth unto them, in mine own power, much of my gospel, which shall be plain and precious, saith the Lamb” (v. 34).

Townsend places Joseph Smith inside an American Protestant conversation that included “belief in a corrupted Bible” as well as a “general anti-Catholic sentiment.” “To many Protestants,” he writes, “the corruption of the Bible occurred while the Catholic church handled the texts in late antiquity” (p. 59). Townsend then takes for granted the idea that in revising the Isaiah texts as he placed them in the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith was correcting those texts and restoring lost words: “*The Book of Mormon* attempts to offer a revised version of much of the book of Isaiah as one sample of what was thought to be lost through the Catholic corruption of scripture” (p. 61).

2. The article was greeted with celebration by people critical of the Latter-day Saint faith. See “Did Joseph Smith Use 19th-Century Bible Scholarship to produce the Book of Mormon?” Mormon Stories, episode 2002, March 18, 2025, youtube.com/watch?v=Vbt5bPaPiQg&t=4389s; “Cracking The Code: Tracing Book of Mormon Origins,” Mormonism Live, Mormon Discussion Inc. YouTube channel, April 2, 2025, youtube.com/watch?v=Eg1nNmXpRzA.

We have no record of Joseph Smith's blaming the Catholic church for the removal of plain and precious things from the Bible; this is Townsend putting words in Joseph Smith's mouth.³ The angel told Nephi that those corruptions would take place before the Bible would go to the world, which was centuries before there was a Roman Catholic church. Nor does the angel tell Nephi that lost *words* would be restored; *truths* would be restored (1 Nephi 13:40), and the Book of Mormon and other latter-day revelations would restore those lost truths.

Townsend claims repeatedly that the variant readings in Book of Mormon Isaiah were Joseph Smith's effort to create a fulfillment of the angel's prophecy (pp. 57, 61–64, 76, 82). We have no record of the Prophet ever claiming that Isaiah in the Book of Mormon restores lost truths, nor does the Book of Mormon ever make such a claim. If that were the case, Joseph Smith could have done a much better job than he did. The variants are typically small wording alterations that have no doctrinal content and do not make much difference in the meaning of the text. I believe that some of them restore original wording, but rarely are the verses of major consequence. Those in the Book of Mormon who quote Isaiah — Nephi, Jacob, Abinadi, and Jesus — do not even mention the differences in the words they quote. Those differences are not what Isaiah in the Book of Mormon is about.

Clarke's commentary is over 5,000 pages long.⁴ On each page, the text of the King James translation is at the top, followed by a horizontal band of cross references, followed by commentary. About two-thirds to three-fourths of each page consist of commentary. Clarke knew Hebrew and Greek well and engaged frequently in textual criticism. By today's standards, he was far too prone to put faith in dubious Old Testament manuscripts as can be seen in his suggested readings.

3. Townsend, of course, was not the inventor of this idea, which is still common among Latter-day Saints.

4. There were printings both in Europe and in the United States. The following American printings are representative: Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments*, vol. 1 [Genesis to Joshua] (New York: J. Emory and B. Waugh, 1832); vol. 2 [Judges to Job] (New York: N. Bangs and J. Emory, 1828); vol. 3 [Psalms to Isaiah] (New York: N. Bangs and J. Emory, 1826); vol. 4 [Jeremiah to Malachi] (New York: J. Emory and B. Waugh, 1832); *The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, vol. 1 [Matthew to Acts], vol. 2 [Romans to Revelation] (New York: J. Emory and B. Waugh, 1832). The volume that includes Isaiah can be accessed conveniently in the Hathi Trust Digital Library: babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uva.x004508074.

Nonetheless, his volumes are an impressive piece of scholarship for his time.

Townsend believes that in writing the Book of Mormon, the Prophet had Clarke's Isaiah volume in front of him. He copied the Isaiah text out of that but edited it based on what he read in Clarke's cross references and commentary on the page.

In his article, Townsend identifies several Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon that he believes contain words influenced by Clarke's commentary. In this review, I will examine them all.

King James Bible in the Book of Mormon

As noted, of the four hundred or so verses of Isaiah quoted in the Book of Mormon, about half have differences in wording from their counterparts in the King James translation. In those verses that are not identical to the KJV, most of the differences are in only a few words, but the rest of the words are the same. Thus, clearly Isaiah in the Book of Mormon *comes from* the King James Bible. It does not just *look like* the King James Bible, and it does not just use King James English. It comes from the King James Bible, with some modifications.

This cannot be accidental. If Nephi transcribed Isaiah passages from the plates of brass onto his own record, and if Joseph Smith then translated them directly from Nephi's transcription, they would read more like they do in Hebrew and less like they do in the King James translation. Instead, the Book of Mormon Isaiah passages reproduce the majority of the King James wording intact, word for word, and include its formalized structure and vocabulary instead of the "plain" writing that is more characteristic of the English of the Book of Mormon.

None of this is new to Latter-day Saint scholars. Some have proposed that during the translation process, the Prophet and his scribe simply transcribed the Isaiah text out of a printed copy of the King James Bible, making changes only when necessary. The idea behind this theory is that because there was already a usable translation available in English, there was no need to make a new one of the same material, and the necessary modifications could be made to that text.⁵

5. See Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* (Deseret Book, 1976), 141–42; B. H. Roberts, "Bible Quotations in the Book of Mormon; and Reasonableness of Nephi's Prophecies," *Improvement Era*, January 1904, 183–84, 191, catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/6c8c6c4b-ad14-4442-a81a-9e56d1a62faf/0/0; Sidney B. Sperry, *Our Book of Mormon*

Our best evidence about the translation process makes that explanation difficult to sustain. None of those who witnessed the translation mentioned a Bible being used. One of the scribes, Emma Smith, stated that the Prophet “had neither manuscript nor book to read from. . . . If he had had anything of the kind, he could not have concealed it from me.”⁶ Others who were familiar with the process said the same thing.⁷ This conclusion from witnesses is important for the present article because it contradicts the narrative that Joseph Smith was working out of a biblical text while producing the Book of Mormon.

The reports of the earliest witnesses indicate that the words of the translation were *shown* to Joseph Smith visually by revelation. The Prophet saw English words in the devices he used for the translation—the Nephite interpreters and a seer stone—and he dictated to his scribes the words he *saw*. If the scribes were telling the truth in this, then the English translation had to be in existence and visible “by the gift and power of God” before Joseph Smith saw it. And if this is the case, then the Isaiah passages were shown to the Prophet already in their KJV words, with only the variations that exist.⁸

Why would God want the Isaiah passages to follow the King James translation? We can speculate that because it was the common Bible in the English language in Joseph Smith’s generation and was used by almost all English-speaking Christians, having the Book of Mormon’s Isaiah passages match the words of the King James translation would

(Salt Lake City: Stevens & Wallis, 1947), 172, archive.org/details/ourbookofmormon0000sidn/page/n5/mode/2up.

6. Joseph Smith III, “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saints’ Herald*, vol. 26, no. 19 (October 1, 1879): 289–90, archive.org/details/TheSaintsHerald_Volume_26_1879/page/n287/mode/2up.

7. See Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, “Firsthand Witness Accounts of the Translation Process,” in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, ed., Dennis L. Largey, et al. (Provo UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University [BYU]; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 61–79, and sources cited there.

8. See Royal Skousen, “Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations in the Book of Mormon,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS], 1998), 369–90, scripturecentral.org/archive/books/book-chapter/textual-variants-isaiah-quotations-book-mormon; Skousen, “How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7, no. 1 (1998): 22–31, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol7/iss1/4/; Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness into Light: Joseph Smith’s Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU, 2015), 79–104, 119–39.

make sense. If the translation had been different, it might have drawn attention to unimportant wording matters, rather than to the text's message. Indeed, the differences in the wording in the Book of Mormon are not why the Isaiah passages are in the book. They are in the book because of their powerful teachings about the house of Israel, which is central to the Book of Mormon's own message.

Why are there differences between KJV Isaiah and Book of Mormon Isaiah? Some differences may result from scribal errors, ancient or modern. It is likely that most times an ancient text was copied, the copyist introduced errors into it by skipping material, inadvertently adding to the text, or making accidental or deliberate edits. In addition, the original documents may have sustained physical damage and decay over time, and as scribes made copies, they may have inserted the wrong words to make corrections. That was certainly the case with the book of Isaiah, where some lines make little sense in Hebrew, suggesting that original letters, words, or lines are missing.⁹ In a few cases, the Book of Mormon adds lines that appear to be original to Isaiah; in other places the biblical text has lines that are not found in the Book of Mormon. Differences like these suggest that the copy of Isaiah on the plates of brass may not have been perfect in every place, that the Nephite writers or scribes made copy mistakes, that Joseph Smith's eyes may have skipped material, or that his scribes may have misheard what he dictated. We do not know.

Many of the differences between Old Testament Isaiah and Book of Mormon Isaiah are certainly deliberate. In my study of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible (JST), I have identified several instincts that guided the Prophet in the revisions he made. Those same instincts may have guided the Book of Mormon's writers and speakers when they used Isaiah anciently, and they may have played a role in the modern translation process as the KJV text was used and adapted for the purposes of the Book of Mormon. Among those instincts are a desire to remove ambiguity and to provide more clarity, to refine and

9. Among many other examples, Isaiah 3:11; 5:17; and 52:13–15 are generally recognized as having textual problems. See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39* (Anchor Bible, 2000), 211; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 134, 162; Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 373–74; John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, vol. 24, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 40; Watts, *Isaiah 34–66*, vol. 25, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 225.

fill in wording, to make metaphor clearer, and to restore missing text.¹⁰ In addition, Book of Mormon Isaiah shows evidence of mistrust of the italicized words in the King James translation, just as the JST does. I believe that the Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon likely include some places where the corresponding KJV text was not well translated and thus was not well understood during its modern translation.

Because the evidence shows that the English words of the Book of Mormon were made visible to Joseph Smith, there must necessarily have been a translation process beforehand. My assumption (shared by some others) is that someone in the world of spirits, a faithful but imperfect human like the rest of us, was tasked with translating the words of the ancient Nephites into English. Perhaps it was a group of people. As Joseph Smith taught about the Restoration,

All things whether in heaven or on earth will be in one, even in Christ. The heavenly priesthood will unite with the earthly, to bring about those great purposes; and whilst we are thus united in the one common cause to roll forth the kingdom of God, the heavenly priesthood are not idle spectators.¹¹

Whatever the process of translation was, one thing is made clear by the Isaiah passages: the translator or translators who prepared the English text of the Book of Mormon prior to Joseph Smith used the words of the King James Bible.

Examining the Evidence

The following is my analysis of the passages Townsend believes show evidence of Joseph Smith borrowing ideas or words from Adam Clarke.¹² A question that comes to mind at the outset is: If Joseph Smith really did turn to Clarke's commentary for insights while placing Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon, could Townsend not have come up with better examples than these?

10. Kent P. Jackson, *Understanding Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2022), 101–39.

11. "The Temple," *Times and Seasons*, 2 May 1842, 776, capitalization standardized, archive.org/details/GR_4156-1/page/776/mode/2up.

12. These are presented in this section in the order in which they appear in Townsend's article.

Isaiah 11:6**KJV:** The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb**Clarke:** Then shall the wolf [dwell with the lamb]**2 Nephi 30:12:** And then shall the wolf dwell with the lamb

In Isaiah 11:6, Adam Clarke suggests adding the word “then” at the beginning of the sentence. The Book of Mormon does the same thing when Nephi quotes the verse in 2 Nephi 30:12. Following the “then,” Clarke reverses the order of the subject and verb, placing “shall” ahead of “the wolf.” The Book of Mormon does the same.

Townsend (pp. 66–68) attributes the Book of Mormon wording to Joseph Smith’s “consulting Clarke’s notations” (p. 67). He calls the reordering of the words “verbatim borrowing” (p. 66), even though there are only four words involved. Moreover, the Book of Mormon adds another word not found in Clarke (the “and” at the beginning of the sentence) making the passage not as “verbatim” as Townsend believes. Perhaps because of that, Townsend concludes that Joseph Smith, “rather than slavishly following his source text [Adam Clarke], . . . reveals a dynamic process of ongoing evaluation, selection, and modification in the way that he articulates his choices” (p. 67). This faint praise is not needed, nor is it accurate.

The only thing of substance that Clarke and the Book of Mormon have in common is the addition of the word “then.” That insertion is not particularly remarkable because the verse introduces a new thought that seems to follow in sequence what precedes it. With that in mind, some modern translations add “then” at the same place.¹³

The speakers and writers in the Book of Mormon frequently emphasized sequence in events by using “then.” The insertion at Isaiah 11:6 is not alone. The Book of Mormon adds “then” to four other Isaiah passages as well, none of which were revised with any reference to anything Adam Clarke wrote.

- 1 Nephi 21:12 adds “And then, O house of Israel” to Isaiah 49:12.
- 2 Nephi 15:1 adds “And then will I” to Isaiah 5:1.
- 3 Nephi 20:32 adds “then” to Isaiah 52:8.
- 3 Nephi 20:34 adds “Then shall they” to Isaiah 52:9.

13. New American Bible (rev. ed.; NABRE), New Catholic Bible (NCB), New Century Version (NCV), New English Bible (NEB). Different versions of the Bible can easily be found online at sites such as biblegateway.com and others.

Thus, adding the temporal modifier "then" to an Isaiah passage can be recognized as an observable pattern in the Book of Mormon. Because none of those four other additions are suggested in Adam Clarke's commentary, there is no reason to argue that the Book of Mormon obtains the "then" in 2 Nephi 30:12 from Clarke.

The change in word order following "then" — from "the wolf shall" (subject first) to "shall the wolf" (verb first) — is not remarkable in the least. It is almost predictable. Three of the examples in the list above have the verb-first construction. Verb-first is the most common English usage in the scriptures following "then." In the book of Isaiah in the KJV, for example, verb-first construction is two-and-a-half times as common as subject-first following "then." In the Book of Mormon itself, "then" is followed by the verb in 70 percent of the cases. Thus, the wording of 2 Nephi 30:12 is not, as Townsend would have it, an indicator that Joseph Smith used Clarke's commentary in creating the Book of Mormon. It simply reflects standard English usage.

2 Nephi 30:10

For the time speedily cometh that the Lord God shall cause a great division among the people, and the wicked will he destroy; and he will spare his people, yea, even if it so be that he must destroy the wicked by fire.

Townsend understands 2 Nephi 30:10 to be Joseph Smith's addition to Isaiah 11:4 (p. 67), but that is not correct. It is part of Nephi's ongoing discussion in the chapter, placed between verses of Isaiah.

In the early verses of Isaiah 11, Clarke provides two dozen or so cross references. In them, Townsend finds what he feels are correspondences with Nephi's words, and, thus, he concludes that Joseph Smith not only followed Clarke's commentary but also examined Clarke's cross references. Because both Nephi and Adam Clarke were commenting on the same passages of Isaiah, we should not find it noteworthy if there is overlap in the subject matter. But Townsend goes beyond that to look for word connections. What he finds is not impressive. He notes that both 2 Nephi 30:10 and Malachi 4:1 use the word "cometh" (even though Clarke cites Malachi 4:6 and not Malachi 4:1). He suggests that Nephi's phrase "destroy the wicked" somehow "connects" with "break in pieces the oppressor" in Psalm 72:4. And he finds that Nephi's words "destroy . . . by fire" are somehow dependent on Clarke's cross reference to "By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed" in Job 4:9. None of

this free association of random dissimilar vocabulary is to be taken seriously.¹⁴

Isaiah 50:2

KJV: I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness: their fish stinketh, because *there is* no water, and dieth for thirst.

Clarke: . . . their fish is dried up . . . [*in place of “their fish stinketh”*]

2 Nephi 7:2: I dry up the sea, I make their rivers a wilderness and their fish to stink because the waters are dried up, and they die because of thirst.

Most translators and commentators today reject the alternative reading espoused by Adam Clarke, in which he proposed changing “stinketh” to “dried up.”¹⁵ Even a cursory glance at Clarke’s reading and 2 Nephi 7:2 does not suggest that Joseph Smith invented the wording by reading Clarke (pp. 68–69). Townsend claims that the different reading in the Book of Mormon “all begins with Smith trying to incorporate Clarke’s ‘dried up’ into the text” (p. 69). This is hardly a reasonable explanation for the verse. Clarke’s revisions and the Book of Mormon do not resemble each other at all. In the Book of Mormon, the fish still stink, and they are not “dried up,” as Clarke proposes. And in Clarke the words “dried up” refer to the fish while in the Book of Mormon it is God who dries up the waters. Also, the passage begins with God’s saying he would “dry up” the sea. This revision has no need for Adam Clarke.

Townsend provides a lengthy explanation for why the reading in

14. Townsend cites Seth Perry, *Bible Culture and Authority in the Early United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 54, who also concludes that the Book of Mormon can only be explained with the claim that Joseph Smith drew information from contemporary biblical scholarship. It seems inevitable that one must draw such conclusions if one rejects a supernatural origin for the book. I find Perry’s argument unconvincing, in part because we know the timeline of the Book of Mormon’s translation, and the book could not have been produced that quickly using the method Perry proposes. See Kent P. Jackson, “Review of Seth Perry, *Bible Culture and Authority in the Early United States*,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2019): 169–72, scripture central.org/archive/periodicals/journal-article/bible-culture-and-authority-early-united-states.

15. See Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, 316; and English Standard Version (ESV), New International Version (NIV), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), and others.

the Book of Mormon is so different from the Clarke proposal. He tries to explain how Joseph Smith could take his ideas for this verse from Adam Clarke yet produce something so utterly unlike it. The attempt is not successful.

Isaiah 2:10

KJV: Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty.

Clarke: . . . when he ariseth to strike the earth with terror.
[Added at the end of the verse.]

2 Nephi 12:10: O ye wicked ones, enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for the fear of the Lord and the glory of his majesty shall smite thee.

Adam Clarke believed that the phrase “when he ariseth to strike the earth with terror,” which is found in verses 19 and 21, belongs in verse 10 as well, so he reconstructed it there. Townsend believes that Joseph Smith changed the verse as he did based on his reading of Clarke’s commentary (pp. 69–73). This is even though the two revisions are not at all alike. They share no words in common; moreover, the subjects, the verbs, and the direct objects of the two revisions are different. Then, however, because the Book of Mormon does not do as Clarke recommended, Townsend claims that Joseph Smith “seems to have misunderstood” (p. 70) what Clarke wrote. Below is a better translation of the Hebrew verse (author’s translation):

Enter into a rock,
hide in the ground
from before the terror of the Lord
and from the splendor of his majesty.

The verse is not well translated in the KJV, and the variant reading in the Book of Mormon perhaps resulted from its awkward wording. In modern English, including elsewhere in the KJV, we hide *from* things, but in this verse the KJV uses hide *for*.¹⁶ Because of that, the Book of Mormon’s English translator(s) may have understood the first *for* not as a preposition but as the conjunction *for*, meaning “because.” If “for” means “because” here, something must be missing in the text. “The fear of the Lord” becomes the subject of the clause, and the clause

16. Example of “hide from” in the KJV are numerous, for example, Genesis 18:17; Psalm 55:1.

needs a verb to accompany the subject. Hence the addition of words at the end of the verse. Revisions based on misleading KJV translations like this are not uncommon in the JST, and there are similar cases in Isaiah in the Book of Mormon.¹⁷

Townsend does not mention the Book of Mormon's addition of the words at the beginning of the verse, which have no counterpart in Clarke's commentary.

Isaiah 2:13–16

Yea and the day of the Lord shall come
 upon all the cedars of Lebanon,
 for they are high and lifted up;
 and upon all the oaks of Bashan;
 and upon all the high mountains,
 and upon all the hills,
and upon all the nations which are lifted up,
and upon every people;
 and upon every high tower,
 and upon every fenced wall;
 and upon all the ships of the sea,
 and upon all the ships of Tarshish,
 and upon all pleasant pictures.

Above we see 2 Nephi 12:13–16 in its poetic lines. Townsend notes that the Book of Mormon fleshes out the metaphor in this passage, which foretells the bringing low of things that represent the pride and the proud works of humankind. The Book of Mormon strengthens the passage by adding an impressive parallel couplet in verse 14: “upon all the nations” and “upon every people.” These words may be original to Isaiah, or they may be an inspired English addition to make the metaphor more concrete. But Townsend thinks they are dependent on Clarke. The reason? Clarke's discussion includes the words “kings, princes, potentates of the highest rank” and “kingdoms, republics, states, cities.” To Townsend, the Book of Mormon's words “upon all the nations” and “upon every people” could not have come without the influence of those words of Adam Clarke. This conclusion is incomprehensible.

17. For example, 1 Nephi 21:8 (Isaiah 49:8); 2 Nephi 12:19, 21 (Isaiah 2:19, 21).

Isaiah 9:3

KJV: Thou hast multiplied the nation, *and* not increased the joy

Clarke: [Thou hast multiplied the nation, *and*] increased their joy

2 Nephi 19:3: Thou hast multiplied the nation, and increased the joy

In his analysis of Isaiah 9:3, Townsend misses Clarke's point entirely and misrepresents what Clarke wrote (pp. 73–74). He states, "Citing the work of biblical scholars, Clarke argues 'not' is a mistranslation of 'lo' and provides his translation that removes 'not' from the verse" (p. 73). This is not true. Clarke is not citing biblical scholars; he is referencing Hebrew manuscripts, some of which have *lô* ("to it") instead of *lô'* ("not"). Nor does Clarke think there is a mistranslation involved, nor does he remove the word from the verse. Instead, Clarke selects the alternative reading and chooses *lô* instead of *lô'*; he prefers "to it" over "not." Many modern translations do the same.¹⁸ Clarke thus reconstructs the Hebrew to, literally, "Thou hast increased the joy to it," which he translates as "Thou has increased their joy." The *lô* formation represents ownership, hence, "its joy." He changes the wording from the singular to the plural, presumably because all the surrounding subjects and verbs are plurals. Doing so is unnecessary, but other translations do the same.¹⁹ A better translation would be (author's translation):

You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy.

The *lô'* ("not"), as in the King James translation, is widely recognized as a scribal error.²⁰ The word negates the meaning of Isaiah's verse and makes no sense in its context. It is thus significant that the Book of Mormon does not have it. I suspect that the *lô'* was not present on the plates of brass, or that in the translation process into English, it

18. English Standard Version (ESV), Jewish Publication Society Bible (JSP), and many others.

19. Such as the New American Standard Bible (NASB), New English Translation (NET), and New International Version (NIV).

20. If it is a scribal error, it is a very ancient one, as it is present in the Isaiah Scroll from Qumran, which dates to four centuries after the time of Lehi. For different approaches to how some scholars have dealt with it, see Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah* 1–39, 246; Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39*, 240; Watts, *Isaiah* 1–33, 129–31.

was recognized as an error and simply removed, without any effort to emend the text to an alternative reading, such as Clarke did. Thus, whatever the source of that change is, in taking it out without replacing it, the Book of Mormon is clearly *not* following the lead of Adam Clarke.

A pattern is evident in Townsend's examples so far. In seeking evidence for his thesis that Joseph Smith authored the Book of Mormon with Adam Clarke's commentary in hand, Townsend comes upon instances in which a word from one source vaguely resembles a word or two in the other. Then he invents an explanation for how and why Joseph Smith copied the words or the ideas from Clarke. The problem is that none of them work. So far, none that we have examined are convincing, nor are the ones yet to be examined convincing. I suspect that using the same methodology, one could argue relationships between any two texts on a common topic, no matter what their origins. Moreover, with all the impressive things that Clarke wrote, and with all the thousands of recommendations he made for revising the text, why would Joseph Smith choose such unimportant material to draw from? Why would he copy Clarke's least interesting and least important textual recommendations to put into the Book of Mormon? None of that makes sense.

Isaiah 14:3–4

KJV: And it shall come to pass in the day that the Lord shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve, that thou shalt . . .²¹

Clarke: [And it shall come to pass] in that day [that the Lord shall . . .]

2 Nephi 24:3–4: And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall give thee rest, from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve. And it shall come to pass in that day, that thou shalt . . .

Adam Clarke argued that a Hebrew word is missing in the first line of Isaiah 14:3 and recommended changing “in the day” to “in that day.” Even though Clarke called the matter “of no great consequence,”

21. Townsend transcribes this KJV verse inaccurately, placing an extra “that” before “in the day.” He also transcribes Clarke's Hebrew quotation incorrectly (75).

Townsend believes that Joseph Smith thought it was important enough that he was influenced by Clarke to revise the passage *twice*.

Although we cannot say with confidence why the 2 Nephi passage is different, there is no reason to think of Clarke as its source. Townsend reliably ignores the broader contexts in which Book of Mormon variants appear, but the context here is important. When referring abstractly to the future day of God's great work, KJV Isaiah uses "in that day" over forty times. My guess is that the familiarity of that wording may have caused the variant, or it may be the restoration of a better Hebrew original.

Nothing in Clarke suggests doing what the Book of Mormon does. It divides the sentence in two and inserts a whole additional clause. Townsend believes that Joseph Smith added "And it shall come to pass in that day" at the beginning of verse 4 to "ensure" that Clarke's word change was instituted. Clarke, a knowledgeable text critic, would not have been pleased with the extra clause added in the Book of Mormon. Yet the added clause is, in fact, consistent with words added in several other Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon that emphasize sequence (like the "then" in 2 Nephi 30:12), that keep the readers connected to the subject matter, or that move the message along.²²

Isaiah 14:32

KJV: the messengers of the nation

Clarke: the ambassadors of the nations

2 Nephi 24:32: the messengers of the nations

The Masoretic Text (the traditional Hebrew Bible) has "nation" (singular) in Isaiah 14:32, as does the earliest Hebrew Isaiah text in existence, the Isaiah Scroll from Qumran. Some other ancient sources, including the Greek Septuagint, have the plural, "nations." All the English precursors to the KJV have the plural, but the KJV translators opted for the singular.²³ Modern translations are divided between the two options.

Clarke's commentary prefers the plural although he views the singular to be a viable option. The words of 2 Nephi 24:32 from the dictated Book of Mormon manuscript are no longer extant, but the

22. See, for example, 1 Nephi 20:15 (Isaiah 48:15); 21:1, 12 (Isaiah 49:1, 12); 2 Nephi 12:10, 11, 13 (Isaiah 2:10, 11, 13); 2 Nephi 15:1 (Isaiah 5:1); etc.

23. Coverdale Bible (1535), Matthew's Bible (1537), Great Bible (1539), Geneva Bible (1560), Bishops Bible (1568), and various editions and printings.

manuscript taken to the printer clearly has the plural.²⁴ No explanation for the Book of Mormon word seems apparent. The words “the nation” appear twelve times throughout the KJV Old Testament, whereas “the nations” appears 165 times. The variant may have resulted during the translation or dictation process simply because of the familiarity of the words, or it may have resulted from Oliver Cowdery’s mishearing or transcribing incorrectly. It also may represent what was written on the plates of brass.

This wording is obviously of minor importance, not affecting Isaiah’s message in any way. Townsend’s conclusion that Joseph Smith “made the change because it restores part of the text lost to history, again reversing the adverse effects of time on the Bible described in 1 Ne. 13:29” (p. 76) is forced and overly dramatic.

Isaiah 48:11

KJV: for how should *my name* be polluted?

Clarke: for how would my name be blasphemed?

1 Nephi 20:11: for I will not suffer my name to be polluted

It is obvious that there is no connection between Clarke’s small word choices and the reading in the Book of Mormon. The words “my name,” italicized in the KJV, are not in the Masoretic Text but are in the Greek Septuagint. This is considered a legitimate reconstruction and is included in many responsible translations.²⁵ Seemingly in search of a connection between the Book of Mormon and Adam Clarke, Townsend turns to a comment Clarke made that the Syriac and Vulgate translations have “that I may not be blasphemed.” Townsend’s argument, surprisingly enough, is that because the Syriac/Vulgate reading and the Book of Mormon both share the word “I,” that is “strong evidence that Clarke’s notes in the commentary were [Joseph Smith’s] steppingstones” for making the revision (p. 77). It is difficult to know how to respond to this kind of thought process. How can this be considered “evidence” at all, let alone “strong evidence?”

24. “Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, circa August 1829–circa January 1830,” p. 80, *Joseph Smith Papers*, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/printers-manuscript-of-the-book-of-mormon-circa-august-1829-circa-january-1830/2#facts.

25. For example, English Standard Version (ESV), New American Standard Version (NASB), New English Translation (NET), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), Einheitsübersetzung, and others.

Isaiah 49:1

KJV: Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far

Clarke: Hearken unto me, O ye distant lands [and hearken, ye people, from far]

1 Nephi 21:1: Listen, O isles, unto me, and hearken ye people from far

As can be seen, the reading in 1 Nephi is identical to that in the KJV Bible, aside from the modern punctuation. The Book of Mormon does not change these words. Townsend begins his discussion of Isaiah 49:1, like I do, by showing the three passages together—the KJV, Clarke’s suggested revision, and the Book of Mormon. But instead of showing the equivalent 1 Nephi phrase (as I have above), Townsend substitutes for it different words: “And again, Hearken, O ye house of Israel.” It is an erroneous and misleading comparison.

Nephi adds forty-eight words at the beginning of Isaiah 49:1 but leaves the rest of Isaiah’s words untouched. In his discussion, Townsend (pp. 77–79) does not deal with the equivalent lines of Isaiah 49:1–2 and 1 Nephi 21:1–2, which are the same, but compares those lines of Isaiah with words in the new lines of text that Nephi added before the verse, words that have no biblical counterpart. Thus, his comparison has no real meaning. Townsend writes that Joseph Smith, “analyzing the content” of Clarke’s commentary, was “making continuous adjustments” (p. 78) to Isaiah. No, Joseph Smith did not change a single word of Isaiah in this instance. Townsend claims that the Prophet substituted “distant lands” for “house of Israel,” an “alteration” that “can be further explained by Clarke’s notes.” No, “distant lands” is still there in the verse, untouched and unaltered.

This is not careful scholarship.²⁶

Isaiah 29:11

KJV: And he saith, I cannot; for it *is* sealed.

Clarke: [And he saith,] I cannot read it; for it is sealed up

26. At the very end of his analysis of this verse, Townsend adds two final sentences: “However, [Joseph Smith] does not replace the original text. Instead, he adds his interpretation and retains the original text so that they both appear together.” This, along with the misleading line at the top of his discussion and his analysis of the wrong words, convinces me that Townsend did not know he was dealing with the wrong text until after he had written his analysis.

2 Nephi 27:15–18: And the learned shall say: Bring hither the book, and I will read them.²⁷ And now, because of the glory of the world and to get gain will they say this, and not for the glory of God. And the man shall say: I cannot bring the book, for it is sealed. Then shall the learned say: I cannot read it.

In 2 Nephi 27 Nephi quotes, paraphrases, and weaves vocabulary from Isaiah 29 into his revelatory sermon of over 1,400 words about the future of his people's sacred record. In all its many words, Townsend can only find two tiny items that he believes show that Joseph Smith was dependent on the commentary of Adam Clarke (pp. 79–81). He fails with both.

First, based on a Hebrew manuscript and the Septuagint, Clarke believed that “read it” needed to be inserted after “I cannot.” But at the location where Clarke wanted those words inserted, the Book of Mormon inserts “Bring hither the book, and I will read them,” followed by several lines of new text anticipated neither by the KJV nor by Clarke. Then, after the next “I cannot,” Nephi inserts “bring the book, for it is sealed.” At the end of the new text, we finally see the words “read it.” Based on that, and despite the lengthy insertion and the changes in speakers, Townsend believes that the “read it” was influenced by Joseph Smith's following Adam Clarke (pp. 79–80).

Next, Townsend notes that Clarke used the words “sealed up” in his suggested revision. The Book of Mormon, however, follows the KJV here with “sealed” and does not follow Clarke. There is no change there. That does not deter Townsend. Because elsewhere in this chapter the Book of Mormon has “seal/sealed up” (2 Nephi 27:8, 22), Townsend believes Joseph Smith must have been influenced by Adam Clarke.

I suspect that Clarke wrote “sealed up” instinctively because it was the idiom of the day, and it was probably the idiom in Joseph Smith's world as well. The Prophet used “seal/sealed up” in his sermons and writings; it is also found elsewhere in the King James Bible and in the Book of Mormon, including in passages translated before 2 Nephi 27.²⁸

27. The “them” refers to “these words,” mentioned earlier in the verse.

28. For example, Deuteronomy 32:34; Job 14:17; Revelation 10:4; 2 Nephi 26:17; Ether 3:28; 4:5; Moroni 10:2; “Discourse, 11 June 1843–A, reported by Willard Richards,” p. 243, *Joseph Smith Papers*, [josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-11-june-1843-a-as-reported-by-willard-richards/4](https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-11-june-1843-a-as-reported-by-willard-richards/4).

We need not conclude that this is something Joseph Smith learned from Adam Clarke.

Conclusions

We have seen Adam Clarke's name cited before as a source for Latter-day Saint sacred writings. In two articles published in 2020, a proposal was set forth that Joseph Smith used ideas and language from Clarke's commentary in his translation of the Bible.²⁹ My own investigation of the matter and my analysis of every JST passage proposed as being influenced by Clarke led me to the conclusion that not a single bit of evidence exists that Joseph Smith used Adam Clarke as a source.³⁰ Nor is there any real evidence that he ever saw Clarke's commentary.³¹

The same is true regarding Townsend's effort to find Clarke's ideas in the Book of Mormon. None of his proposed borrowings from Clarke can be sustained. My arguments against Clarke's influence in the JST apply to Townsend's Book of Mormon theory as well. Rather than

29. Thomas A. Wayment and Haley Wilson-Lemmon, "A Recovered Resource: The Use of Adam Clarke's Bible Commentary in Joseph Smith's Bible Translation," in *Producing Ancient Scripture: Joseph Smith's Translation Projects in the Development of Mormon Christianity*, ed. Michael Hubbard Mackay, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Brian M. Hauglid (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2020), 262–84; Wayment, "Joseph Smith, Adam Clarke, and the Making of a Bible Revision," *Journal of Mormon History* 46, no. 3 (July 2020): 1–22.

30. Kent P. Jackson, "Some Notes on Joseph Smith and Adam Clarke," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 40 (2020): 15–60; journal.interpreterfoundation.org/some-notes-on-joseph-smith-and-adam-clarke/. See also Kurt Manwaring and Kent P. Jackson, "The Joseph Smith Translation: An Inspired Version of the Bible," *From the Desk* (website), 23 November 2020, fromthedesk.org/10-questions-kent-jackson/. As I noted in my analysis, it would not be problematic had Joseph Smith turned to Clarke or to any other informed source while working on the JST. But no evidence exists that he ever turned to Adam Clarke.

31. See Jackson, "Some Notes on Joseph Smith and Adam Clarke," 55–57. Clarke was a Methodist. As a reason for why Joseph Smith would turn to Methodist Bible scholarship, Townsend states that Joseph Smith "was first attracted, through his wife Emma's family, to Methodism." He cites as a source Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 69–70. Bushman, however, does not suggest at all that the Prophet was "attracted" to Methodism while living in Harmony; his interaction with the Methodists there was largely hostile. Joseph Smith was already familiar with Methodism before the First Vision (Joseph Smith—History 1:8).

repeating the discussion here, I refer readers to selected pages in my response to the previous Adam Clarke attempt.³²

I ask, if Joseph Smith did obtain ideas from Adam Clarke, what could explain why he would overlook the many meaningful comments Clarke made while fixating on small, unimportant word changes like the ones Townsend proposes? Further, because taking ideas from Clarke cannot explain the scores of other ways Isaiah in the Book of Mormon differs from Isaiah in the Bible, why would we believe Townsend's examples? Also, if Joseph Smith had been pretending to restore "plain and precious things" by means of editing Isaiah, why did he turn to small word changes like these instead of passages that could be categorized as "plain and precious?" The explanations provided by Townsend to bolster his claim show to what lengths he is willing to go to look for evidence for his idea. I suspect that he checked every Book of Mormon Isaiah variant against Clarke's commentary, and this was the best he could do. None of his examples work; all can be explained in better ways. This is not an academic project but a search for ways to justify a predetermined conclusion. It is not serious scholarship.



Kent P. Jackson retired in June 2017 as a professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University, where he had taught since 1980. He has a BA in ancient studies from BYU and MA and PhD degrees in Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern studies from the University of Michigan. His research interests include the Near East and the intersection of the Latter-day Saint faith and the Bible. He has authored or edited *From Apostasy to Restoration*; *The Restored Gospel and the Book of Genesis*; *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible: The Joseph Smith Translation and the King James Translation in Parallel Columns*; and *Understanding Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible*. Jackson is a former associate dean of religion and former associate director of the Brigham Young University Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies.

32. "Some Notes on Joseph Smith and Adam Clarke," especially pages 15–17, 23–28, 53–58. My judgment was that Wayment's analysis was a good-faith effort to understand how Joseph Smith's translation of the Bible was made. I cannot say the same about Townsend's project.

Why was the Liahona a Sphere? A New Perspective on Its Form and Function

J. Wanless Southwick and Kyle Kinghorn

Abstract: *A new, simpler design for the Liahona is proposed, which, if correct, makes the reason for two spindles and a hollow-ball shape perfectly obvious. Previous proposed models of the Liahona usually show horizontal, compass-like pointers inside an open-top ball, but our model has vertical spindles protected inside a hollow ball with viewing ports to allow the aligned spindles to be superimposed on a view of the horizon, precisely marking the direction of travel. Lehi's first use of the Liahona is discussed. Book of Mormon descriptions of the Liahona and how it was used are compared with modern attempts to visualize its design and function. A greater understanding of the Liahona's two spindles and its surface text may yet be discovered from experimentation with physical models.*

The Liahona was a ball-like instrument made of brass and specifically prepared by the hand of the Lord to direct the travel of Lehi's extended family through the wilderness and across the ocean to a promised land. It acted somewhat like a compass. In fact, Alma explains that the word *Liahona* means *compass*:

And now, my son, I have somewhat to say concerning the thing which our fathers call a ball, or director—or our fathers called it *Liahona*, which is, being interpreted, a compass. (Alma 37:38)

Why, then, wasn't the Liahona just a flat, compass-like disk with one rotating pointer to show the way? Instead, it was spherical with two internal spindles. What was the significance of having two spindles inside of a ball?

Book of Mormon Descriptions of the Liahona and its Function

Nephi provides a basic description of the Liahona, which was discovered by his father, Lehi, while in the valley of Lemuel. He states that it was “a round ball of curious workmanship; and it was of fine brass. And within the ball were two spindles; and the one pointed the way whither we should go into the wilderness” (1 Nephi 16:10).

The Liahona led them into the more fertile parts of the wilderness so they could hunt animals for food:

And we did follow the directions of the ball, which led us in the more fertile parts of the wilderness. And after we had traveled for the space of many days, we did pitch our tents for the space of a time, that we might again rest ourselves and obtain food for our families. And it came to pass that as I, Nephi, went forth to slay food, behold, I did break my bow, which was made of fine steel; and after I did break my bow, behold, my brethren were angry with me because of the loss of my bow, for we did obtain no food. (1 Nephi 16:16–18)

After the loss of their best hunting bow and subsequent hunting failures, which caused murmuring throughout the camp, they were startled to read messages written to them upon the surface of the Liahona. The text was written plainly for everyone to read.

And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord said unto him [Lehi]: Look upon the ball, and behold the things which are written. And it came to pass that when my father beheld the *things which were written upon the ball*, he did fear and tremble exceedingly, and also my brethren and the sons of Ishmael and our wives. And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the pointers which were in the ball, that they did work according to the faith and diligence and heed which we did give unto them. And there was also written upon them a *new writing*, which was plain to be read, which did give us understanding concerning the ways of the Lord; and it was *written and changed from time to time*, according to the faith and diligence which we gave unto it. And thus we see that by small means the Lord can bring about great things. And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did go forth up into the top of the mountain, *according to the directions which were given upon the ball*. And it came to pass that I did slay wild beasts,

insomuch that I did obtain food for our families. (1 Nephi 16:26–31)

When there was contention among them, the Liahona ceased to work:

And it came to pass that after they had bound me insomuch that I could not move, the *compass, which had been prepared of the Lord, did cease to work*. Wherefore, they knew not whither they should steer the ship, insomuch that there arose a great storm, yea, a great and terrible tempest, and we were driven back upon the waters for the space of three days; and they began to be frightened exceedingly lest they should be drowned in the sea; nevertheless they did not loose me. . . . And it came to pass after they had loosed me, behold, *I took the compass, and it did work* whither I desired it. And it came to pass that I prayed unto the Lord; and after I had prayed the winds did cease, and the storm did cease, and there was a great calm. And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did guide the ship, that we sailed again towards the promised land. (1 Nephi 18:12–13, 21–22)

After arriving in the promised land, and after Lehi's death, Nephi's older brothers became so jealous and angry with him that they wanted to kill him. Being forewarned, Nephi took all who would follow him and escaped into the wilderness. He had previously used the Liahona to guide his wilderness travel, so he likely used it again to lead his people through the wilderness of the promised land because he had the Liahona with him: "And I, Nephi, had also brought the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass; and also the ball, or compass, which was prepared for my father by the hand of the Lord" (2 Nephi 5:12). The place where they settled became known as the Land of Nephi.

During the centuries that followed, the Liahona, together with sacred records, was transferred from generation to generation of leaders. When wickedness among the Nephites in the Land of Nephi became intense, King Mosiah₁ may have used the Liahona to guide his followers from the Land of Nephi to discover the land of Zarahemla. During their trek through the wilderness, "they were admonished continually by the word of God; and they were led by the power of his arm, through the wilderness until they came down into the land which is called the land of Zarahemla" (Omni 1:13). That description of their

travel sounds much like the way the Liahona pointed the way and displayed sacred texts on its surfaces.

King Mosiah₁'s son, King Benjamin, transferred the sacred records and the Liahona to his son, King Mosiah₂:

And it came to pass that after king Benjamin had made an end of these sayings to his son [Mosiah₂], that he . . . gave him . . . the plates of Nephi; and also, the sword of Laban, *and the ball or director, which led our fathers through the wilderness, which was prepared by the hand of the Lord that thereby they might be led, every one according to the heed and diligence which they gave unto him.* Therefore, as they were *unfaithful they did not prosper nor progress* in their journey, but were driven back. (Mosiah 1:15–17)

King Mosiah₂ turned his kingdom over to the rule of judges and transferred the records and other sacred items to the first chief judge, Alma the younger:

And now, as I said unto you, that after king Mosiah had done these things, he 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. (Mosiah 28:20)

Later, the Liahona was transferred from prophet to prophet and was considered to be a representation of the saving words of Christ, which, like the Liahona, can point to a far better land of promise:

And now, my son [Helaman], I [Alma the younger] have somewhat to say concerning the thing which our fathers call a ball, or director. . . . For just as surely as this director did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promised land, shall the words of Christ, if we follow their course, carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise. . . . The way is prepared, and if we will look we may live forever. And now, my son, see that ye take care of these sacred things, yea, see that ye look to God and live. (Alma 37:38, 45–47)

Moroni, the last of the Nephite prophets, received those sacred things, including the Liahona. In 1829, when he appeared as a heavenly messenger to Joseph Smith and the three witnesses of the Book

of Mormon, the Liahona was among the ancient Nephite relics that he showed them.¹

Eyewitnesses to the Liahona

In addition to Book of Mormon descriptions of the Liahona, four people were eyewitnesses of its existence. In June 1829, Joseph Smith, Martin Harris, David Whitmer, and Oliver Cowdery experienced a divine presentation of Nephite relics in fulfillment of a promise:

Behold, I say unto you, that you must rely upon my word, which if you do with full purpose of heart, you shall have a view of the plates, and also of the breastplate, the sword of Laban, the Urim and Thummim, which were given to the brother of Jared upon the mount, when he talked with the Lord face to face, and *the miraculous directors* which were given to Lehi while in the wilderness, on the borders of the Red Sea. (Doctrine and Covenants 17:1)

Of the four men, David Whitmer was the one most interviewed about what they experienced on that occasion. He consistently described the Liahona’s shape as a “ball,” but sometimes he identified it by the internal, functioning parts, such as “director,” “directors,” “ball of directors,” or “compass.”

- Interviewed by Edward Stevenson in 1877: “An angel stood before us and on the appearance of a table was laid the plates, Urim & Thummim, *ball or director*, sword of Laban.”²
- Interviewed by Orson Pratt in 1878: “There appeared as it were, a table with many records or plates upon it, besides the plates of the Book of Mormon, also the sword of Laban, *the directors*—*i.e., the ball which Lehi had*, and the interpreters. I saw them just as plain as I see this bed (striking the bed beside him with his hand).”³

1. Scripture Central Staff, “Book of Mormon Evidence: Accounts of the Liahona,” Evidence 416, 15 August 2023, scripturecentral.org/evidence/accounts-of-the-liahona.

2. “David Whitmer Interview with Edward Stevenson, 22–23 December 1877,” in Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2003), 5:29. Spelling and punctuation silently standardized.

3. “David Whitmer Interview with Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith, 7–8 September 1878,” in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:50–51. Spelling and punctuation silently standardized.

- Interviewed by William H. Kelley in 1881: “A table was set before us and on it the records were placed. The records of the Nephites, from which the Book of Mormon was translated, the brass plates, *the ball of directors*, the sword of Laban and other plates.”⁴
- Interviewed by E. C. Briggs in 1884: “The angel appeared in the light, as near as that young man. [Within five or six feet.] Between us and the angel there appeared a table, and there lay upon it the sword of Laban, *the ball of directors*, the record, and interpreters.”⁵
- Interviewed by Edward Stevenson in 1886: “I . . . did see the angel standing before us, and on a table were the plates, the sword of Laban, and *the ball or compass*.”⁶

Names Given to the Liahona

Once Lehi finds the brass ball on the ground in front of his tent door, it is referred to by various descriptive names in the Book of Mormon. These names include *ball*, *compass*, *Liahona*, *director*, *pointers*, and *those spindles*. Soon after publication of the Book of Mormon, plural names such as *directors*, *miraculous directors*, and *ball of directors* were commonly used. Given that those names are plural, the implication is a focus on the pointing mechanism (two spindles) rather than on the ball (singular) in which they were housed. Perhaps those *directors*, because they were the functional part of the Liahona, became the identity of the device for some people. If so, the directors must have been easily seen inside the ball.

Speculation about the Design of the Liahona

The ancient Book of Mormon people who possessed the Liahona believed “there [could] not any man work after the manner of so curious a workmanship” when they saw the craftsmanship and functions

4. “David Whitmer Interview with William H. Kelley and George A. Blakeslee, 15 December 1881,” in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:91. Spelling and punctuation silently standardized.

5. “David Whitmer Interview with E. C. Briggs and R. Etzenhouser, 25 April 1884,” in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:121. Spelling and punctuation silently standardized; brackets in original.

6. “David Whitmer Interview with Edward Stevenson, 9 February 1886,” in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:162. Spelling and punctuation silently standardized.

of the Liahona (Alma 37:39). Nevertheless, many modern people have tried to reproduce how the Liahona worked and what it looked like. Speculative models of the Liahona commonly put horizontal compass-like pointers inside an open-top ball, but they struggle to find a way to represent the function of “two spindles.” Figure 1 shows two examples, out of many, that use horizontal pointers like a modern compass.



Figure 1. Left: Liahona model with ball that opens to view two horizontal pointers (Deseret Book); right: model with open top to view a horizontal pointer and a compass within (Latter Day Designs).

In 1961, Hugh Nibley acknowledged the wonderful workmanship of the Liahona’s brass ball, but he suggested that the operation of the pointers was ordinary and simple:

Moreover, while both men [Nephi and Alma] marvel at the wonderful workmanship of the brass ball in which the pointers were mounted, they refer to the operation of those pointers as “a very small thing,” so familiar to Lehi’s people that they hardly give it a second glance. So contemptuous were they of the “small means” by which “those miracles were worked” for their guidance and preservation that they

constantly “forgot to exercise their faith” so that the compass would work. This suggests that aside from the workmanship of the mounting, *there was nothing particularly strange or mystifying about the apparatus* which Alma specifies as a “temporal” thing.⁷

In 1994, Robert Bunker observed that a single pointer or spindle would be an unreliable way of indicating direction, since it always pointed somewhere. He then innovatively suggests that two horizontal spindles could work together by both aligning in the same direction, one on top of the other, as shown in figure 2. When unified in that way it meant that the director was providing correct information. He adds that such a process would be using an engineering principle called “voting of redundant strings.” If the two spindles did not share the same alignment, it meant that the Liahona was not functioning. In his words:

This is how it would have worked: if an observer viewed the pointers and saw only a single pointer, as seen in [figure 2, left], then they were both aligned in the same direction, one on top of the other, and the director was providing correct information. Lehi’s party could then follow the indicated direction with confidence that it was the Lord’s instruction. If, on the other hand, the two pointers were cross-ways to each other—forming an “x” as shown in [figure 2, right]—then the device was not functioning, and the pointing information was not reliable. No other information was required of the Liahona, so no more than two pointers were needed. But the requirements demand a minimum of two.⁸

After discussing how the two spindles could have worked together, Bunker admits that “there is *no engineering requirement driving the design to a sphere* — a short cylinder would have been sufficient.” He surmised that the Liahona’s spherical shape “must have had additional

7. Hugh Nibley, “The Liahona’s Cousins,” *Improvement Era* 64, no. 2 (February 1961): 108, emphasis added, archive.dev-bookofmormoncentral.org/sites/default/files/archive-files/pdf/nibley/2020-03-26/hugh_w._nibley_ie_64.02_the_liahonas_cousins_february_1961.pdf.

8. Robert L. Bunker, “The Design of the Liahona and the Purpose of the Second Spindle,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3 no. 2 (July 1994): 6–7, scholars archive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1061&context=jbms.

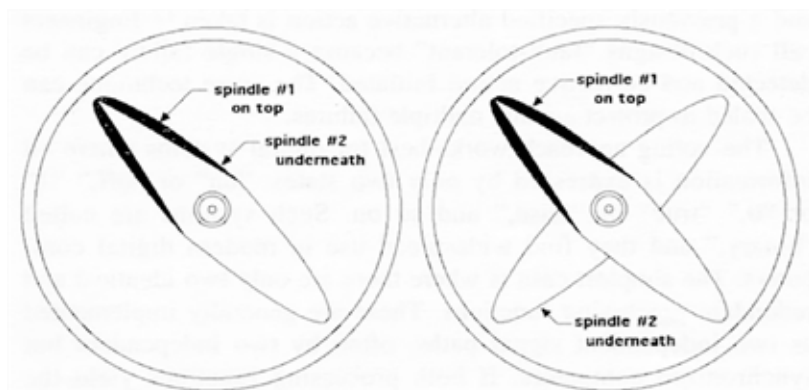


Figure 2. Bunker's 1994 illustration of horizontal Liahona spindles. Left: "proceed as indicated"; right: "not in service."

symbolic meaning. Perhaps it represented the earth, more than half of whose circumference Lehi and his family would be traversing.⁹

In 2013, Del DowDell blogged that "the *second spindle* on the instrument *pointed to north*, so that a directional finding could be determined, just as it is obvious that the first spindle pointed in the direction the Lord wanted the colony to travel." He suggests that the north-pointing second spindle allowed Nephi to know they were traveling in a south-southeast direction.¹⁰

In 2018, Timothy Gervais and John Joyce argued that the Liahona might have been a *spherical astrolabe* (see an example in figure 3). Moreover, they suggest that "the Liahona may have been a wedding dowry Ishmael provided to Lehi's family."¹¹ They speculate that "if the Liahona was indeed a gift from Ishmael, Ishmael would have been the primary navigator for the party until his death."¹² They reason that Ishmael was the one who knew how to use the complicated astrolabe to locate known fertile places in the Arabian wilderness, which were identified in writing on the astrolabe's surface. The authors, therefore, tried to reconcile the Liahona to scientific law rather than to faith-based functionality. Their astrolabe proposal does not account for

9. Bunker, "Design of the Liahona," 6.

10. Del DowDell, "The Working of the Liahona," NephiCode.com, 4 April 2013, nephicode.blogspot.com/2013/04/the-working-of-liahona.html.

11. Timothy Gervais and John L. Joyce, "By Small Means: Rethinking the Liahona," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 30 (2018), 207, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/by-small-means-rethinking-the-liahona.

12. Gervais and Joyce, "By Small Means," 219.



Figure 3. Spherical astrolabe from medieval Islamic astronomy, c. 1480. From the Museum of the History of Science, Oxford, UK. (Signed by Musa [CC BY 2.0], via Wikimedia Commons.)

there being two spindles. Further, it is inconsistent with Nibley's assertion that "there was nothing particularly strange or mystifying about the apparatus."¹³

In 2019, Don Bradley briefly explored descriptions of the Liahona given by contemporaries of Joseph Smith:

1. Fayette Lapham allegedly had an interview with Joseph Smith Sr. whereby he learned about the Liahona and its function.
2. Gladden Bishop allegedly received his information about the Liahona from Martin Harris (one of the three witnesses).¹⁴

13. Nibley, "Liahona's Cousins," 108.

14. Gladden Bishop's membership in the young Church was troublesome. At

Although Bradley does not establish the veracity of the claims made by each man, he uses their descriptions to conclude that:

While it is difficult to visualize the device precisely as Bishop intended, it is clear that on his model there were pictures around the spindles. So, while one spindle pointed a *direction*, the other spindle could point to a *picture*. . . the first spindle mandated the *direction* of travel; the *second spindle*, by pointing to one of the picture symbols around it, identified the *purpose* of travel. Together, the two spindles could show the Liahona's users where to go and what they would find when they got there.¹⁵

Bradley also speculates that the Liahona was replaced by the Urim and Thummim. He writes:

While Nephi implies that he also utilized the compass . . . and handed it on to be used by his successors, by the time of Mosiah₂'s reign it seems that it was no longer functioning. . . . After Mosiah₁ acquired the interpreters [the Urim and Thummim]—presented as a superior instrument . . . the inferior Liahona was no longer needed and was, for the lack of better term, retired by God . . . to stand as a "token of the covenant" handed down among the Nephite kings and high priests.¹⁶

In 2021, Loren Spendlove conducted a detailed analysis of possible words and phrases in the Book of Mormon that describe the Liahona. He also provided an extensive investigation of Bradley's sources of Lapham and Bishop. Spendlove rejected the idea that the second spindle might identify the purpose of a destination. Instead, he liked Bunker's suggestion of two small spindles uniting to point in a single direction, especially because of the spiritual symbolism of oneness. He writes:

The Liahona, with its two spindles, presents us with an

his excommunication trial, Joseph Smith commented that Bishop "was a fool and had not sens [sic] sufficient for the Holy Ghost to enlighten him." Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, vol. 2, *Journal, 1832–1842* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 369n1.

15. Don Bradley, *The Lost 116 Pages: Reconstructing the Book of Mormon's Missing Stories* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2019), 149–50, emphasis added.

16. Bradley, *Lost 116 Pages*, 254.

excellent *type* of this oneness and unity. If we are willing to unite, or reconcile, our will with that of God, he can lead and guide us through our spiritual wilderness (cf. 2 Nephi 10:24; 2 Nephi 33:9). Alma told us that the members of Lehi's party "were slothful and forgot to *exercise their faith and diligence*. And then those *marvelous works* ceased, and *they did not progress* in their journey. Therefore they tarried in the wilderness, or did not travel a direct course" (Alma 37:41–42).¹⁷

Spendlove also notes that Alma said *both spindles* were needed to "point the way" (Alma 37:40). He concludes, "The two pointers, or spindles, of the Liahona were *not designed to function independently*."¹⁸

In 2025, JeaNette Goates Smith wrote about the two spindles of the Liahona and how they may have worked to show Lehi's people the correct direction for travel. In her words:

Because it had two spindles, it's tempting to imagine the Liahona functioned like an old-fashioned watch. Like an hour hand and a second hand which, one pointed the direction generally, and the other specifically. . . . In contrast, even though the Liahona had two spindles it probably functioned more like a compass. One of the spindles always pointed the way Nephi and his family should travel. The second spindle, in my mind, could represent how close the travelers were to going in the correct direction. Their job was to align the second spindle with the first, in other words to align their direction, with the direction the Lord was pointing.¹⁹

Smith's insight that the one [horizontal] spindle always pointed the correct way for travel and the second spindle showed "how close the travelers were to going in the correct direction" is in harmony with Bunker's idea that both spindles needed to be "aligned in the same direction" to have confidence that the pointers showed the correct direction for travel. Smith's concept is also in harmony with

17. Loren Blake Spendlove, "And the One Pointed the Way: Issues of Interpretation and Translation Involving the Liahona," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 45 (2021): 14, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/and-the-one-pointed-the-way-issues-of-interpretation-and-translation-involving-the-liahona.

18. Spendlove, "One Pointed the Way," 28.

19. JeaNette Goates Smith, "How Did Faith Make the Liahona Work?," *Meridian Magazine*, 9 April 2025, latterdaysaintmag.com/how-did-faith-make-the-liahona-work/.

Spendlove's comparison of the Liahona's function with the need to unite our will with the will of God to receive divine guidance.

Definition of Terms

When Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon in 1829, Webster's 1828 dictionary described the word "compass" as a "box" with a horizontal "needle" that pointed north.²⁰ Two of Webster's definitions of the word *compass* seem particularly significant for this discussion. Definition five reads:

An instrument for directing or ascertaining the course of ships at sea, consisting of a *circular box*, containing a paper card marked with the thirty two points of direction, fixed on a *magnetic needle*, that always points to the north, the variation excepted. The needle with the card turns on a pin in the center of the box. In the center of the needle is fixed a brass conical socket or cap, by which the card hanging on the pin turns freely round the center. The box is covered with glass, to prevent the motion of the card from being disturbed by the wind.

Figure 4 shows an example of a compass consistent with definition seven, which reads:

An instrument used in surveying land, constructed in the main like the mariners compass; but with this difference, that the needle is not fitted into the card, moving with it, but plays alone; the card being drawn on the bottom of the box, and a circle divided into 360 degrees on the limb. This instrument is used in surveying land, and in directing travelers in a desert or forest, miners, etc.



Figure 4. An example modern compass. (Microsoft Stock Image Library.)

In contrast to a *compass*, the Liahona was ball-shaped with *two internal spindles* that worked together to point at the direction of

20. Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828), s.v. "compass."

travel. Webster's 1828 dictionary described meanings of the word *spindle* in Joseph Smith's day as "the pin used in spinning wheels for twisting the thread, and on which the thread when twisted, is wound"; "a slender pointed rod or pin on which any thing turn[s]; as the spindle of a vane"; or "a long slender stalk."²¹ (See figure 5.)

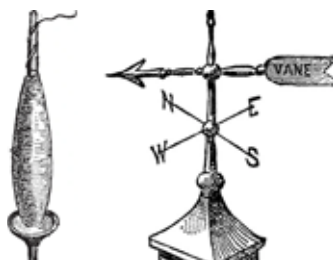


Figure 5. Left: A drop spindle for spinning thread; right: a spindle supporting a weathervane. (Shutterstock.)

Our Design Concept

We agree with Hugh Nibley that there was nothing particularly strange or mystifying about the Liahona's apparatus. We concur with Robert Bunker's and Jeanette Smith's idea that the two spindles needed to align with each other. We also agree with Loren Spendlove that the two spindles inside the ball did not function independently. However, we suggest that the two internal spindles were *vertical*, not horizontal. Using Bunker's engineering logic, those upright spindles would drive the Liahona's design to be a sphere instead of a short cylinder. As shown in figure 6, large openings in the ball's shell let the user look inside the sphere to see the spindles, which were also called "pointers" or "miraculous directors." The distant landscape could be viewed through smaller viewing ports to see where the directors pointed.²²

We propose that the pointers or miraculous directors, which were protected inside the Liahona, had an axle spindle that was shaped much like the drop spindle in figure 5. One difference would be that the whorl (the disk) would have to be wider so a pointer spindle could be attached to its outer edge. The pointer spindle probably had a thicker spot on its shaft to help discern its position behind the axle spindle during the visual alignment process (see figures 7, 9, and 10). Both spindles would have been firmly attached to the whorl, which could rotate around the axle spindle. The whorl and spindles would have worked together as a unit called the *pointers* or the *miraculous directors*.

21. Webster, *American Dictionary*, s.v. "spindle."

22. J. Wanless Southwick, "Liahona," in *Arabia's Mountain of God where Moses, Elijah, and Lehi met with God* (Rexburg, ID: Southwick Research, 2024), 31–32.



Figure 6. SolidWorks rendering of our Liahona design showing side openings used to view the “miraculous directors” (the pointers or spindles) inside the ball and smaller viewing ports in the sphere’s shell used to sight on the landscape ahead. Patterns on the ball’s surface are artistic speculation. (Image by Kyle Kinghorn.)

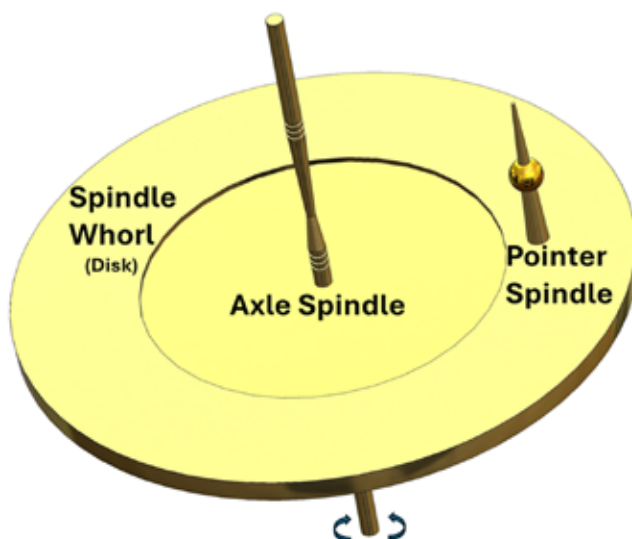


Figure 7. The “pointers” inside the Liahona. This whole pointing mechanism was sometimes called the “miraculous directors,” which consisted of an axle spindle fixed in the center of a wide whorl (disk) and a distinctive pointer spindle attached to the outer edge of the whorl. The spindle whorl and pointer spindle could rotate around the axle spindle. (Image by Kyle Kinghorn.)

How Did the Liahona Work?

In our proposed Liahona design, the hollow ball protects the internal pointers or miraculous directors, which consist of two vertical spindles fixed into a rotating disk (the whorl). Viewing ports in the shell of the ball let the user superimpose the aligned spindle shafts on the landscape ahead.

Although the miraculous directors behaved something like a compass needle, the Liahona was not self-operating like a magnetic compass. Nibley said the Book of Mormon makes it perfectly clear that the Liahona was also “not a magic thing, but [it] worked only by the power of God and only for appointed persons who had faith in that power.”²³ Alma explained that if its authorized users “had faith to believe that *God could cause that those spindles should point the way they should go*, behold, it was done” (Alma 37:40).

When God set the orientation of the directors, they would not rotate around the axle spindle anymore, but remain fixed in space, pointing in the direction God wanted Lehi to travel, much like a magnetic compass needle stays in line with earth’s magnetic field to point north. We propose that the outer shell of the Liahona and its viewing ports could freely rotate around the stationary directors much like a compass case can freely rotate around a magnetic compass needle. The user could then hold the ball up to an eye, peer through the viewing-port holes, and turn the shell of the ball and himself about until the opposite viewing port was near the pointer spindle. Then, when the pointer spindle was perfectly aligned behind the axle spindle, the two vertical spindles would be superimposed on the view of the landscape ahead, pointing like gunsights at the direction they should travel (see figure 10).

Lehi and his caravan obviously did not travel in a perfectly straight line, but they followed the most prudent path toward the spot in the landscape ahead to which the directors in the Liahona had aimed them. When the next segment of their travel required a change in direction, God would move the pointer spindle to lock onto the new direction for travel, which would cause the spindle alignment to be superimposed on a new spot in the landscape ahead.

But the Liahona worked only when its users were worthy of God’s intercession, and it stopped working at times of turmoil and contention. This is pointed out in two scriptural passages:

23. Nibley, “Liahona’s Cousins,” 108.

- And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the pointers which were in the ball, that they did work according to the faith and diligence and heed which we did give unto them. (1 Nephi 16:28)
- And it came to pass that after they had bound me insomuch that I could not move, the compass, which had been prepared of the Lord, did cease to work. (1 Nephi 18:12)

When the Liahona stopped working, the pointer spindle could have circled aimlessly without stopping to mark a directional orientation. Functional failure could also have been indicated if the pointer spindle became locked in place inside the ball, so it turned wherever the ball turned.

Lehi's First Use of the Liahona

Lehi was surprised to see the Liahona resting on the ground in front of his tent door in the morning after being commanded to break camp and begin his family's trek toward the promised land. His tent was on the north side of the valley (1 Nephi 16:12–13), so the tent door probably faced south. Before him there would have been a green oasis, irrigated by the River Laman, with the valley of Lemuel mountains on the other side of the oasis (see figure 8).

The most plausible place in Arabia for Lehi's ancient encampment in the "valley of Lemuel" is at a small oasis of date palms in a valley known today as Wadi Tayyib al-Isim. It has a deep canyon with perennial flowing water that empties into the Red Sea, which is to the west about two miles away. Because of the uniqueness of the circumstances, the actual location of Lehi's campground has been proposed by onsite explorers and from Google Earth satellite images.²⁴

We can imagine Lehi picking up the Liahona for the first time. He would have noticed the two vertical spindles inside the hollow ball and how they *remained fixed in their orientation whether he turned the Liahona left or right*. When looking directly across the valley through the viewing ports of the Liahona, the two vertical spindles were not aligned (see figure 9), but when he turned the view to the right, the spindles came into alignment, pointing at a hidden southward exit from the valley (see figure 10).

24. Warren P. Aston, Godfrey J. Ellis, and Neal Rappleye, *Into Arabia: Anchoring Nephi's Account in the Real World* (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2024), 114–16.



Figure 8. Valley of Lemuel, looking south from Lehi's tent site, across the oasis of Tayyib al-Ism, with an arrow pointing toward the only southward exit from the valley. (Image courtesy of Warren P. Aston.)

The aligned spindles “pointed the way whither [Lehi’s caravan] should go into the wilderness” (1 Nephi 16:10). It directed them toward an inconspicuous passageway in the mountains south of the valley of Lemuel. When Lehi’s family left their oasis campground, they said, “We did take our tents and depart into the wilderness, across the river Laman” (1 Nephi 16:12). At first glance, that wilderness exit appeared to go just a short distance up into the mountains, but it turned out to be a hidden wadi (dry riverbed), which turned eastward behind the valley mountains before continuing upward through the mountains toward the southeast (see figure 11). That easy-to-overlook mountain pass was discovered by Warren Aston during his visit to Wadi Tayyib al-Ism in 2019.²⁵

Whenever the traveling group encountered a fork in the trail, the directors inside the Liahona could be consulted to decide which way to go. As long as they gave faithful heed to the Liahona, that kind of divine guidance continued to direct their travel through the wilderness of Arabia and eventually across the ocean to a promised land in the Americas. At sea, it could have been attached to the ship so that the viewing ports were aligned with the keel, which would be the direction

25. Warren P. Aston, “Nephi’s ‘Shazer’: The Fourth Arabian Pillar of the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 39 (2020): 53–72, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/nephis-shazer-the-fourth-arabian-pillar-of-the-book-of-mormon/.



Figure 9. View through the Liahona from Lehi's tent site looking straight across the valley of Lemuel. Because the pointer spindle is off to the right, the viewing ports are not in alignment with the two spindles, so straight ahead is not the proper direction for travel. (Image by Wanless Southwick.)



Figure 10. View through the Liahona from Lehi's tent site after turning the Liahona's outer shell to the right until the two spindles align like gunsights in the viewing port. The aligned spindles are superimposed on an inconspicuous southward exit from the valley of Lemuel, marking the direction for travel. (Image by Wanless Southwick.)

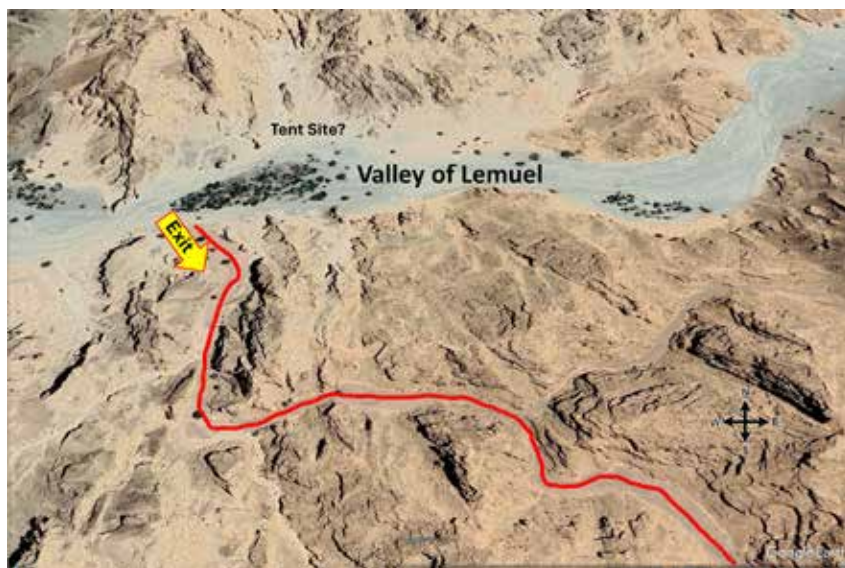


Figure 11. Lehi likely exited the valley of Lemuel by following the Liahona's directions into an inconspicuous mountain pass. (Google Earth.)

of travel. Steering to keep the two vertical spindles aligned would keep the ship moving on its proper course toward the Promised Land.

Text on the Liahona's Surfaces

In addition to pointing out the direction they should travel, the Liahona also displayed text on its surfaces. For example, at the time of the broken bow crisis, words appeared on the Liahona:

And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord said unto him [Lehi]: Look upon the ball, and behold the things which are written. And it came to pass that when my father beheld the things which were *written upon the ball*, he did fear and tremble exceedingly, and also my brethren and the sons of Ishmael and our wives. And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld *the pointers* which were in the ball, that they did work according to the faith and diligence and heed which we did give unto them. And there was also written upon them a *new writing*, which was plain to be read, which did give us understanding concerning the ways of the Lord; *and it was written and changed from time to time*, according to the faith and diligence which we gave unto it. And thus we see that by

small means the Lord can bring about great things. (1 Nephi 16:26–29)

It is easy to visualize text being written on the ball's outer surface because there is plenty of space there. It would be something like God writing on tablets of stone for Moses (Exodus 31:18) or God writing a message to King Belshazzar on the palace wall (Daniel 5:22–28). However, 1 Nephi 16:28–29 implies that writing also appeared on the pointers. That is how Nibley interpreted those verses when he said, "The working parts of the device were two spindles or pointers. On these a special writing would appear from time to time, clarifying and amplifying the message of the pointers."²⁶

Bunker struggled to explain how two horizontal pointers could have had writing upon them:

The amount of text inscribed on the pointers cannot be ascertained from Nephi's description, but the physical size of the writing must have been small; otherwise, the observation that it "was plain to be read" (1 Nephi 16:29) would have been unnecessary. Assuming the Liahona was about five inches in diameter, then the [horizontal] pointers were about the size of a finger in length and width, thus providing a modest area for text of a few square inches.²⁷

By contrast, the working parts in our design for the Liahona were the whorl and its vertical spindles. Together *they were the pointers* or miraculous directors, which both guided the travel direction of Lehi's caravan and gave them written details to enhance understanding. The circular whorl would have provided plenty of space for the "plain-to-be-read" text. The text could have been written on the outside surface of the ball,²⁸ on the internal pointing mechanism,²⁹ or in both places. In figure 12, we used modern Hebrew to simulate writing that Lehi and his extended family may have seen on the Liahona (1 Nephi 16:27).

26. Nibley, "Liahona's Cousins," 89.

27. Bunker, "Design of the Liahona," 5.

28. The surface text on this model is the Hebrew version of 1 Nephi 17:13: ". . . wherefore, inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall be led towards the promised land; and ye shall know that it is by me that ye are led." Tom Irvine, "Book of Mormon, Hebrew & English," archive.org/details/the-book-of-mormon-hebrew-english/page/174/mode/1up.

29. Text on the whorl of the pointers is the Hebrew version of 1 Nephi 16:29: "And thus we see that by small means the Lord can bring about great things." From Google Translate.



Figure 12. Model of Liahona showing how text could be written on both the outer surface of the ball and on the whorl of the pointers, also known as the miraculous directors. (Image by Kyle Kinghorn.)

Summary and Conclusions

The reason that the Liahona was a sphere and not a flat compass-like instrument was possibly because it had two *vertical spindles*. Those upright spindles would have needed vertical space inside the Liahona plus protection against physical damage. Sometimes the Liahona's pointing mechanism was called the "miraculous directors," which we suggest consisted of the two vertical spindles attached to a circular whorl. Under divine influence, the two vertical spindles ("pointers" or "directors") aligned themselves with the direction Lehi should travel. They would have remained fixed in that alignment whether the user turned the outer shell of the Liahona to the left or to the right. When the Liahona's viewing ports were aligned with the two vertical spindles, the spindle shafts would be superimposed, one behind the other, on a view of the landscape ahead, thus pointing like gunsights at the proper direction for travel. Further experimentation with physical models of this proposal may yet teach us more about the Liahona's functions.

Appendix

If the original Liahona were available for us to inspect, we wouldn't need to speculate about what the two spindles looked like or guess where writing would appear on the ball; we would be able to observe it for ourselves. Book of Mormon descriptions of the Liahona would then make perfect sense and our misconceptions would evaporate. There are two additional ways to gain insight into the form and function of the ancient Liahona — working models and artwork.

Possible working model

Research for this paper proved the value of having a 3-D printed, physical model to experience how the internal miraculous directors (Doctrine and Covenants 17:1) worked independently within the outer shell of the Liahona (see figure 13). Functional educational models of this vertical-spindle Liahona could be manufactured. The circular orientation of the miraculous directors could be controlled by electronic components in the bottom hemisphere, including a small stepping motor geared to the axle spindle, which would respond to the horizontal rotation of the hollow ball as detected by electronic gyroscopes.



Figure 13. 3-D printed model of the Liahona used during research for this paper.
(printed by Kyle Kinghorn)

Instead of having the aimed-direction be under divine control, the angular setting of the pointer spindle could be determined by a button-push to retrieve a random number (1–360 degrees) from an electronic table.

It would also be possible to simulate the writing that appeared on the Liahona's surface by placing a small LCD display on the surface of the Liahona model to display pre-recorded messages.

We envision Lehi trek-simulation games designed to use this Liahona model. The player pushes the button, follows the pointed direction for a certain distance, responds to LCD instructions, pushes the button to change directions, followed by more travel and subsequent LCD instructions, etc.

Liahona in artwork

The Liahona is usually portrayed in artwork as a hand-held ball without showing details of the internal working mechanism — also called the *miraculous directors*. Perhaps my favorite came to me from my son, Christopher Southwick, who served as a missionary in Guatemala from 1988 to 1990. He was attracted to a display of wooden plaques being sold at a local market to tourists. He bought a plaque that reminded him of the glorious quetzal bird he had seen in the jungles of Peten (see figure 14).

The quetzal bird, with its long snake-like tail feathers, represented the feathered serpent deity of ancient Mesoamerica. “The Feathered Serpent is a prominent supernatural entity or deity found in many Mesoamerican religions. It is called Quetzalcoatl among the Aztecs; Kukulcan among the Yucatec Maya; and Q’uq’umatz and Tohil among the K’iche’ Maya.”³⁰

Although my son didn’t associate the wall plaque with the Liahona, I did. The Quetzal bird, which rests upon the head of a man, could represent divine influence as the man seeks guidance and direction from a sacred ball (Liahona?), which he holds in his hands in front of him.

Whether the plaque represents a story from ancient Mesoamerican folk lore or is the creation of a modern native craftsman to depict a Book of Mormon scene, the true meaning of the wall plaque is unknown to us. Nonetheless, it reminds me of the Liahona.



30. Wikipedia, s.v. “Feathered Serpent,” en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feathered_Serpent.



Figure 14. Wooden wall plaque purchased about 1990 from a local market in Guatemala that catered to tourists. (Photo by Wanless Southwick.)

[Wanless Southwick's Note: *When my son, John Southwick, saw me experimenting with vertical spindles in a crude Liahona model, he commented that one of the vertical spindles could have been stationary. His idea contributed to the final design of the model. Thanks also to my wife, Jerrie, who showed interest and loving patience during the long hours her husband was fully distracted by this project. Special thanks to Warren Aston for his encouragement and to Godfrey Ellis for his suggestions and editorial counsel.*]

Wanless Southwick (PhD BYU) retired after careers in the US Army Medical Service Corps, environmental epidemiology, and education, all of which included research and study. He served as president of the Intermountain Society of Inventors and Designers in the 1970s. Among books he authored are *Arabia's Mountain of God* where Moses, Elijah, and Lehi met with God (2024) and *The Reason for Everything in the Grand Framework of Existence* (2017). He and his wife, Jerrie, are the parents of eight children, and have thirty-five grandchildren and twenty-three great grandchildren at last count.

Kyle Kinghorn (MS BYU) holds degrees in Chemical and Manufacturing Engineering and currently teaches at BYU-Idaho in the department of Engineering Technology. Courses that he teaches include plastics, composites, tool design, prototyping, and CNC programming. He is also the president of Citius Composites, LLC, a company that specializes in the design and creation of products made from carbon fiber and other advanced materials. He has a passion for creating new products and the processes needed to make them. He and his wife, Malia, are the parents of three children.

Evidence for Well-Structured Persuasive and Argumentative Essays in the Book of Mormon

Jeffrey D. Lindsay

Review of Edward K. Watson, Verifiable Evidence for the Book of Mormon: Proof of a Deliberate Design Within a Dictated-from-Imagination Book (Springville, UT: Brainy Press, 2022). 252 pp.; \$32.95 (hardcover).

Abstract: *Edward K. Watson provides a new twist in the textual evidence for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Drawing upon his expertise in working with argumentative and persuasive essays (collectively known as “structured essays”) and applying modern scholarship to the requirements for sound argumentation in such essays, Watson seeks to apply objective criteria and scoring methods to evaluate several of the many structured essays in the Book of Mormon. Watson argues that because such essays generally require considerable planning and revision, it would be very unlikely for them to have been created, rather than translated, by Joseph Smith dictating at high speed and without major revisions. While his analysis adds new dimensions to the complexity and depth of the Book of Mormon, I believe that his claims are overstated and not adequately supported, especially when he says that dictating structured essays would be “impossible” for any mortal. Nevertheless, Watson does provide interesting evidence on a long-overlooked aspect of the Book of Mormon that merits consideration.*

Not being familiar with Edward K. Watson and his background, I was skeptical when I picked up his *Verifiable Evidence for the*

Book of Mormon: Proof of a Deliberate Design Within a Dictated-from-Imagination Book.¹ Watson's thesis is that the Book of Mormon contains a significant number of formal "structured essays," such as argumentative or persuasive essays, and that such essays are extremely difficult to compose without significant planning and rewriting. Examples include 2 Nephi 2, where Lehi takes a deep dive into logical corollaries involving the Atonement, agency, and the Creation, and Alma 32, where Alma₂ explores faith in terms of logical experiments that can lead one to greater knowledge and growing faith.

Dictating such structured essays on the fly, over and over, without notes and without revision in content or structure, certainly seems like it would be outside the skills of Joseph Smith or anyone else. Watson explains that objective criteria or rubrics exist to identify a structured essay and to evaluate its quality. Based on applying such criteria in a detailed examination of five of the Book of Mormon's many such essays (pp. 10–11), Watson concludes that the writing of these structured essays shows that they were deliberately and artfully crafted, and that they could not have been created using the oral dictation process that Joseph used in the translation of the Book of Mormon. These essays, according to Watson, thus constitute evidence for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

Overview of Watson's Approach and Conclusions

Watson's background includes three decades of experience in analyzing, creating, and organizing complex documents, such as proposals for projects, project execution plans, and user manuals and procedures, thus making him sensitive to the challenges of making arguments and explanations in texts. He has skills to recognize that structured essays naturally are written with multiple revisions, otherwise a poorly organized essay would result with significant gaps in the structure and logic. Given this useful background, the question is whether his methodology supports the conclusions.

The book's title signals strong conclusions will be drawn. I generally dislike the noun *proof* or the verb *prove* when it comes to broad claims regarding Book of Mormon evidence, even though Nephi_i did not share my caution (see 2 Nephi 11:3), nor does the Lord (see 2 Nephi

1. Edward K. Watson, *Verifiable Evidence for the Book of Mormon: Proof of a Deliberate Design Within a Dictated-from-Imagination Book* (Springville, UT: Brainy Press, 2022).

29:9). The Lord can certainly refer to His works as divine proof to any degree he sees fit. But for the works, logic, and publications of men, I prefer softer language, such as speaking of evidence for authenticity or plausibility.

Watson's title does not directly claim that he has "proven" the Book of Mormon to be true. Rather, it speaks of "verifiable evidence" that offers "proof of deliberate design." This is not a modest claim. By "deliberate design," Watson is arguing that the structured essays in the Book of Mormon are crafted following rigorous logical requirements that simply would not be possible for a human being to create while dictating a text on-the-fly, as Joseph Smith did.

Watson's argument is ultimately extended to argue that the Book of Mormon necessarily is a miraculous work and that its structures offer proof for the divinity of the text. This may be too strong a conclusion, based on Watson's assumption that structured essays cannot be dictated extemporaneously. He does not support this assumption or consider potential counterexamples. By way of illustration, long ago when I was on a high school debate team competing against other schools, there were rounds in which my partner and I would listen to a speech from an opposing team offering a proposal related to a specific topic. We would take notes, have a few minutes to think of a rebuttal, and look for evidence in our boxes of note cards. Then, one of us would stand and give an extemporaneous speech with a thesis statement, a series of arguments supported by evidence, a consideration of counterarguments, and a summary and call to action. The opposing team would then do the same in response. This was not as brilliant as 2 Nephi 2, but I believe that we and dozens of other debaters were almost always within the bounds of Watson's requirements for a sound argumentative essay. Based on my experience in high school debate, which pales in comparison with collegiate debate, I cannot accept Watson's undemonstrated claim of "impossibility" for human orators to provide a meaningful structured essay. I consider this to be a serious flaw in the book, but I believe that the book still has valuable content and insights.

Despite my objections to some of the claims Watson makes, his analysis helps us further appreciate the value of the structured essays in the Book of Mormon. Some of these are truly remarkable, such as 2 Nephi 2 and Alma 36. Once attentively analyzed, most people should recognize that these essays appear to be carefully composed.

While translation with divine power could be and was done

spontaneously, the composition of the text in the first place, with detailed logic and rhetorical tools, defies explanation as Joseph Smith's production. By showing how much detail and structure there is in some of the many structured essays of the Book of Mormon, Watson adds a new understanding of the complexity and sophistication of the Book of Mormon. His claims ring true — but do not rise to the level of “proof,” although it is meaningful evidence for readers to consider.

Watson's argument could have been strengthened by considering what skillful orators or debaters can achieve. Perhaps Watson in future work might consider great speeches from Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr., Frederick Douglass, Winston Churchill, or Cicero, analyzing them as he does Book of Mormon essays. How do such famous speeches compare to the inspired essays in the Book of Mormon? Even if they all fell far short of the Book of Mormon, I would still hesitate to claim that he had proven it was impossible for a human to extemporaneously craft a properly structured essay. In that hypothetical case, I would prefer to say that what Joseph Smith achieved might have been difficult for a well-educated scholar, and even more unlikely for Joseph.

Watson's Methodology and Contributions

In *Verifiable Evidence for the Book of Mormon*, Watson only examines the Book of Mormon in light of his core competency in analyzing documents, including the Formalism-Structuralism approach for looking at internal structure (how units of a text are connected to support a thesis) and concept development (the phrasing, expansion, and support for concepts) (p. 2). He goes beyond merely pointing out how complex and coherent the Book of Mormon text is. Rather, he performs detailed analyses of passages that meet criteria for structured essays and then illustrates that the Book of Mormon shows internal evidence of “deliberate design,” with well-coordinated thought modules that must have been carefully constructed, showing examples of them having been rewritten multiple times (as does Alma₂'s accounts of his conversion), in contrast to the disorganized arguments that one might expect from dictated text.

In addition to his introduction and conclusion, Watson's book has two parts, originally written as separate papers (pp. 10–11). Part One explores the use of argumentative and persuasive essays in the Book of Mormon by examining in detail four of the forty-six examples of such

essays among the seventy-five structured essays Watson identifies in the Book of Mormon. These four essays are contained in 2 Nephi 2 and in three contiguous chapters, Alma 32–34. Part Two of the book looks specifically at Alma 36, considering three facets of this famous discourse of Alma₂ to his son, Helaman₁. These aspects are 1) Alma 36 as a persuasive essay, 2) Alma 36 as a modified public speech, and 3) Alma 36 as a thematic chiasm.

Watson notes that argumentative and persuasive essays are subsets of the more general category of structured essays. Argumentative essays are defined as “a composition containing a thesis statement with at least one argument-evidence pair or counterargument and conclusion that support the thesis,” while a persuasive essay is “a composition containing a thesis statement with at least one argument-evidence pair in a non-counterargument form and conclusion that support the thesis” (p. 23).

Argumentative and persuasive essays collectively form one type or category of structured essays. There are three other types of structured essays, as follows:

- Exposition—a composition structured as an instruction or lesson.
- Narration—a composition that conveys a story without attempting to justify the essay’s credibility.
- Description—a composition that primarily uses language that allows the audience to envision or relate to the subject while not attempting to justify the essay’s credibility. (p. 23)

Watson’s analysis of the Book of Mormon finds twenty-nine argumentative essays, seventeen persuasive essays, and sixteen expository essays. All told, he finds seventy-five structured essays, but only a handful are explored. For example, Lehi’s Tree of Life dream (1 Nephi 8:4–35) and Nephi₁’s prayer (2 Nephi 4:16–35) are classified as narrative essays, and while they are impressive texts, they are not relevant to Watson’s thesis. He recognizes that “it is possible for a highly imaginative, experienced, and disciplined person to dictate Nephi’s Prayer and even Lehi’s Dream, given their small word count and not needing a logical structure” (pp. 24–25). It is the logical structure required in a structured essay that makes it so difficult to create without rewriting and careful planning.

The challenging aspect for readers might be grasping Watson’s extensive analysis in Part One, with carefully constructed scoring

mechanisms to provide numerical scores for the quality of the essay, based on modern scholarship regarding the argumentation and structure of such essays. Watson utilizes questionnaires that draw upon relevant publications on structured essays from several universities. These provide criteria to identify a structured essay and then to evaluate it. Watson applies these to create what seem to be thorough and objective “rubrics” (forms akin to a formatted spreadsheet) that can be used to consider the arguments, the argumentative strategy, the use of evidence, and so forth, then giving scores to each essay considered. These appear to be thoughtful, careful tools, and if objectively applied, could yield useful data. There is definitely valuable content in this aspect of the work, but some readers may simply choose to flip through or overlook it. Watson deserves credit for going beyond hand-waving arguments and instead seeking objective data that credibly demonstrate the strength of the essays he explores in depth.

His rubrics are used to determine if a passage is a legitimate argumentative essay. After clearing that hurdle, an essay can be evaluated for quality with the “Argumentative Essay Assessment Rubric” (pp. 119–29).

After examining the rubrics and the criteria considered, it became clear to me that a plausible, good-faith mechanism had been created for adjudicating essays and that the approach made sense. There is still the possibility that the scoring was not as objective as intended, but the results do seem to capture a genuine feature in the essays considered, including a well-developed logic, thorough development of arguments, and carefully crafted rhetoric and reasoning. All this makes it extremely difficult to see how these essays could have been created on the fly by dictation. Yet I am still uncomfortable with the strong wording of the claims, even though what is demonstrated seems impressive.

In a sense, Watson’s work is closely related to Brian Hales’s explorations of organization and design in the Book of Mormon. In one study, Hales explores and dismantles the hypothesis that Joseph Smith was just a great storyteller drawing on highly developed skills of professional storytellers to create Book of Mormon scenes.² Even if Joseph had been trained in storytelling techniques, this would hardly account for the logical development of numerous arguments Watson

2. Brian C. Hales, “Joseph Smith as a Book of Mormon Storyteller,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 46 (2021): 253–90, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/joseph-smith-as-a-book-of-mormon-storyteller/.

identifies and explores. In a recent study published after Watson's work, Hales employs Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to evaluate the skills Joseph would need to dictate a text with the complexity of the Book of Mormon.³ He then evaluates the fifteen key skills that AI tools identified, and demonstrated that eyewitness reports and other sources confirmed that Joseph did not have the skills or experience required. One factor Hales considered is the sixty sermons contained in the Book of Mormon, comprising 87,000 words (about one-third of the text),⁴ but he did not consider the development of persuasive arguments as Watson does.

Watson stresses that writing style or aesthetic values are largely irrelevant when it comes to the function of a structured essay, an important issue that distinguishes Watson's work from others that focus on poetic value or elements such as chiasmus. He asserts that for argumentative or persuasive essays (the two dominant types of essays considered), what matters is the argumentation, including its structure and logic:

An argumentative or persuasive essay's stylistic quality is generally irrelevant. These essays effectively convince their audience when their argument-evidence pairs and conclusion support the thesis statement using a sound warrant. Conversely, they fail when the thesis collapses from a lack of viable support. Legal briefs, patent applications, scientific papers, critical reviews, hermeneutics, apologetics, and structured debates are examples of argumentative or persuasive essays. (pp. 17–18)

Here and elsewhere, Watson discusses concepts from a widely influential and scholarly work on the nature of arguments, S. E. Toulmin's *The Uses of Argument*.⁵ Toulmin used the term *warrant* to describe the reasoning that connects the evidence or data used to support a claim to the claim itself. In other words, the warrant is an explanation of why or how the evidence supports the conclusion.

3. Brian C. Hales, "What Can Artificial Intelligence Tell Us About the Literary Skills Needed to Dictate a Text Like the Book of Mormon?," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 63 (2025): 257–96, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/what-can-artificial-intelligence-tell-us-about-the-literary-skills-needed-to-dictate-a-text-like-the-book-of-mormon/.

4. Hales, "What Can Artificial Intelligence Tell Us?," 264.

5. S. E. Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Watson's book would be somewhat easier for many readers if this and other specialized terms were explained as they are introduced.

When details of persuasion strategy come into play, it seems clear to me that Watson is not following Toulmin so much as he is following Aristotle's categories of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*, combined with the potential methodology of timing (*kairos*). This comes after Watson emphasizes his application of Toulmin, who does not rely on Aristotle and (as far as I can tell) does not mention these persuasion categories in his book. It would have been helpful to prepare the reader for this blending of Toulmin and Aristotle.

Further, it is unclear how knowledge of Toulmin's complex work would have helped Joseph or any other author in producing sound argumentative essays. Toulmin digs into the hidden assumptions and sometimes tangential implications of human reasoning in seemingly simple arguments, identifying the "warrants," "bridges," and other logical elements that may be at play. But knowing that terminology and mapping out the implicit reasoning process seems completely unnecessary to make well-structured persuasive or argumentative essays. Though likely due to my inadequate reading, it was unclear to me why Toulmin is important for Watson's work, especially since Toulmin is mentioned very little after the introduction.

Watson recognizes his bias, and to counter that has created and applied objective criteria for high-quality persuasive essays, and a scoring and analysis method for evaluating them. I was skeptical about the approach until I examined the details and concluded that a genuine effort was underway to accurately and objectively depict the quality of the essays considered.

Watson recognizes that the logical framework used in a structured essay will vary between cultures having different worldviews, which may affect what would be considered as evidence. But the logical structure of arguments need not vary dramatically, particularly in the West, where arguments tend to follow a three-part structure:

1. A thesis statement (the main idea, argument, or position that the author wants the audience to accept or believe),
2. the frame of argument (the body of the essay which comprises at least one argument and one piece of evidence that supports the thesis), and
3. a conclusion (the close of the essay which contains a restatement of the thesis, a call to action, or makes the

audience think or look at the world or themselves differently). (p. 20)

The concept is that the Book of Mormon has numerous passages where a genuine argumentative or persuasive essay is offered. Argumentative essays are similar to the more general "persuasive essays," but are distinguished in that an argumentative essay also recognizes and rebuts one or more counterarguments. The persuasive essay need not do so, thus giving formal argumentative essays greater convincing power (p. 21). Watson writes, "The specific logical structure of these essays can only be made from deliberate design. What are they doing in a known dictated book?" (p. 28). Watson later suggests that:

If just one argumentative or persuasive essay is valid within the Book of Mormon, then verifiable evidence exists that an apparent impossibility occurs within a dictated book. But, as this [book] will show with four examples, there is more than one instance of apparent impossibilities within the book—and they are not confirmation bias fallacies.

And the reason why this can be asserted with confidence is that we know how to create argumentative and persuasive essays—millions of people produce them every year. And each one knows from firsthand experience that it is highly implausible that they can make them by merely dictating them. (p. 30)

Again, such language diminishes the impact of Watson's discoveries, but Watson's findings are still important. What makes the presence of structured essays surprising is that they are essentially in the same wording as what Joseph Smith dictated to his scribes in a rapid process, without notes and without major revisions of content. While there were some clarifying edits and many corrections of awkward grammar, the flow of concepts and the arrangement of the text is essentially what was dictated from the mouth of Joseph without referring to a previously edited draft. It is a unique book:

No paragraphs were inserted or moved elsewhere. No sentences were reworded or had their primary thought changed. . . .

This feat may not seem like much to the non-writer, but to those with a lot of experience in structured non-prose and non-poetry writing, this "*dictated first draft is the final draft*"

is an accomplishment none of us can equal. We all need to revise our first draft to correct errors and omissions and improve it. And for an uneducated 23-year-old man in 1829 to produce a 269,318-[word] work that did not need structural and layout enhancement on his *first* attempt at writing is something none of us can comprehend. (pp. 5–6)

Watson takes what he calls a “Formalism-Structuralism approach” to analyzing the Book of Mormon. He finds its internal structure and concept development as evidence of intentional design and great skill (p. 2). Such coordination is not unusual in textbooks and other carefully written and edited books produced through many iterative stages with heavy rewriting. However, intricate coordination is surprising from a secular perspective that rejects the ancient origins and crafting of the Book of Mormon text, when one considers its dictated nature. Given the unusual means by which Joseph Smith produced the text, one might expect it to be inconsistent, crudely shaped, and in need of massive revision in order for it to be cohesive and intelligible. Instead, we have many elements suggesting a carefully devised structure. Watson reasonably maintains that those who have written carefully structured essays know that oral dictation off the top of one’s head simply cannot achieve the structure evidenced in the Book of Mormon. Novelists and non-fiction writers generally don’t just start dictating and then send off their dictation to the printer.

Watson considers many aspects of formal texts and the layers of organization and structure they demand, showing that the Book of Mormon is incompatible with such patterns. Even if one assumes that Joseph Smith dictated from memorized or hidden manuscripts that he had spent years preparing, the intricacy of the structure in the Book of Mormon still doesn’t make sense as a product of his day. This is most easily demonstrated with archaic rhetorical tools known in the Hebrew Bible and other documents from the Ancient Near East. For example, I was profoundly touched when I read modern scholars describing discoveries made after Joseph Smith’s day about ancient covenant patterns that we see in the Book of Mormon. I was further touched upon learning of the political and covenant-oriented meanings of motifs associated with the theme of “arising from the dust” and associated passages in Isaiah (especially Isaiah 52:1–2), based on twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholarship that adds numerous

insights and much unity to the Book of Mormon.⁶ Aside from divine creation and intervention, such features cannot be explained in an early nineteenth-century document, even if Joseph Smith had access to the finest scholars of his day.

Watson's Approach to Alma 36

Part Two of Watson's book is a lengthy essay that explores some of the marvels of Alma 36. Watson identifies the chapter as a persuasive essay (pp. 153–66), but also as a modified public speech (pp. 167–79), and later as a thematic chiasm (pp. 180–215). The persuasive essay aspect is most relevant to his overall thesis, and he makes a strong case that the chapter is a solid example of a structured essay. The issue of Alma 36 as a chiasm may be best known to Latter-day Saints and will be my focus.

Watson observes that a variety of chiastic structures have been proposed for Alma 36, with not all in agreement. The number of elements in the proposed structures range from eight to seventeen. Watson critiques them, pointing out that they sometimes break up clauses and have out-of-sequence elements that must be ignored (p. 181). He resolves this problem by condensing the many elements of the chiasm into seven broad thematic groups, asserting that:

Alma 36 is definitely a chiasm but not one driven by key-words or phrases. It is actually a thematic chiasm that encompasses every single word of the chapter, making it immune to the cherry-picking charge. And the matching words and phrases, while important, are secondary to the partnered themes. (p. 183)

The thematic elements begin with "keep the commandments of

6. Jeff Lindsay, "'Arise from the Dust': Insights from Dust-Related Themes in the Book of Mormon (Part 1: Tracks from the Book of Moses)," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 22 (2016): 179–232, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/arise-from-the-dust-insights-from-dust-related-themes-in-the-book-of-mormon-part-1-tracks-from-the-book-of-moses/; and Jeff Lindsay, "'Arise from the Dust: Insights from Dust-Related Themes in the Book of Mormon (Part 2: Enthronement, Resurrection, and Other Ancient Motifs from the 'Voice from the Dust')," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 22 (2016): 233–77, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/arise-from-the-dust-insights-from-dust-related-themes-in-the-book-of-mormon-part-2-enthronement-resurrection-and-other-ancient-motifs-from-the-voice-from-the-dust/.

God and you will prosper in the land” and reach a climax with element seven, “Jesus Christ, the Son of God, saves from sins.” Some of these elements cover a single verse or two, while others cover as many as six verses. These broad groupings are reasonable, but obscure significant parallels that suggest there is more than just a broad thematic outline in the composition. Taking those details into consideration inevitably results in struggling with apparent out-of-place elements. One wonders if the broader brush used by Watson is necessarily an improvement.

Here it would have been helpful to consider more of the many scholarly works that have addressed such issues in Alma 36. Stephen Ehat, for example, considers the challenge of asymmetrical chiasmus with occasional “skews” (out of place items) as a known feature in studies of chiasmus, and he proposes that the skew is not necessarily a flaw, but rather a feature that should be considered.⁷ While Ehat’s work was published after Watson’s, it conveniently brings together a large body of earlier relevant works. His examination of Alma 36 considers nearly a dozen other works that discuss various aspects of the structure, including the skews. Ehat also notes that Noel Reynolds has discussed the different “levels” of the chiasm,⁸ including very broad thematic levels with a small number of elements, in contrast to more detailed structures wherein the broad levels may be broken up into more detailed internal structures that contribute to the complexity and subtlety of the structure.

Ehat attributes “levels analysis” in chiasmus originally to the work of David L. Clark, who wrote, “multiple levels of patterning may coexist, superimposed and interpenetrating. The recognition of one of them does not necessarily involve the repudiation of others.”⁹

Watson’s broad seven-step chiasm seems closely related to

7. Stephen Kent Ehat, “Asymmetry in Chiasms, With a Note About Deuteronomy 8 and Alma 36,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 59 (2023): 191–280, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/asymmetry-in-chiasms-with-a-note-about-deuteronomy-8-and-alma-36/.

8. Noel B. Reynolds, “Rethinking Alma 36,” in *Give Ear to My Words: Text and Context of Alma 36–42*, ed. Kerry M. Hull, Nicholas J. Frederick, and Hank R. Smith (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2019), 451–72, rsc.byu.edu/give-ear-my-words/rethinking-alma-36/; and Noel B. Reynolds, “Rethinking Alma 36,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 34 (2020): 279–312, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/rethinking-alma-36/. See discussion in Ehat, “Asymmetry in Chiasms.”

9. David J. Clark, “Criteria for Identifying Chiasm,” *Linguistica Biblica* 5 (1975): 63–71, as cited by Ehat, “Asymmetry in Chiasms,” 208.

previous structures at a broad level and is reasonable, but it seems premature to stop there and declare that Alma 36 is only a thematic chiasm with those broad levels, discounting the internal intricacies that also call for attention. Overall, while Watson's approach provides a useful perspective which is somewhat related to the earlier work of Noel Reynolds, it is not a complete or broadly satisfying approach, in light of the evidence that a more intricate structure has been provided. But Watson's broad level analysis is certainly a useful perspective and may suffice for the purpose of illustrating aspects of a deliberately structured text. In any case, Watson's treatment of Alma 36 gives the reader much to consider and makes it unmistakably clear that Alma 36 is a complex, well-structured text that does seem extremely unlikely to have been authored by Joseph Smith, and certainly not authored on the fly while dictating text at high speed without notes and revisions. Alma 36 is a majestic chapter.

Impossible vs. Improbable? A Brief Query with AI

I mentioned that I would prefer more modest claims for Watson's important work, and more thorough consideration of the possibility that talented orators can at least occasionally produce equally sound structured essays. Watson repeatedly suggests that dictating an argumentative essay is beyond human ability because it requires rewriting and revision to draft. That is certainly the way that skilled writers tend to approach such essays. But what are the bounds to human capability? Has nobody ever written a convincing blog post in one rapid session without revising the structure? Has no spontaneous sermon ever included all the elements of a persuasive or argumentative essay? And don't the extemporaneous rebuttals of debaters in formal competition sometimes qualify as argumentative essays?

Perhaps the issue to consider is not how difficult it is for millions of college students to craft a structured essay, but whether such a thing is possible for an unusual talent or for a well-trained, disciplined speaker.

As I considered Watson's arguments, it occurred to me that someone only needs to turn to some leading AI tool and ask for a counterexample to undermine Watson's most strongly worded claims, and then claim victory.

Not wishing to play the devil's advocate, I still felt it would be helpful to be able to fairly understand the strengths and weaknesses of Watson's work, by at least posing the key concern that might be on the

minds of readers — is extemporaneous dictation of a well-structured essay really impossible? Here's the query I provided to ChatGPT 4o (a leading Large Language Model [LLM] or "chatbot" of OpenAI.com) and also to Grok 3, the highly-praised LLM of X.ai that has the tremendous advantage of access to the billions of pages of textual input in X (formerly known as Twitter). This query could have been much more complex, but since I assumed that the LLMs would be familiar with the details of structured essays, I proceeded with a simple form. Here is my query:

In light of the criteria for a structured essay such as an argumentative essay, is it possible for oral diction by an orator to generate a structured essay on the fly without rewriting? Can you give an example of an extemporaneous oration from Cicero or some other major figure, and show that it has the elements of an argumentative essay?

Here was the response of ChatGPT (5 April 2025):

The idea of generating a structured argumentative essay through extemporaneous speech is indeed intriguing and quite possible, especially for skilled orators. Great speakers like Cicero were renowned for their ability to structure their thoughts on the fly in a manner that closely mirrors the structure of a written argumentative essay, which typically includes an introduction, a thesis statement, supporting arguments, counterarguments, and a conclusion.

Cicero as an Example: Cicero, a master of rhetoric in ancient Rome, often spoke in a manner that included all these elements, reflecting the techniques and structures taught in his time for persuasive speech. His orations, such as those in the "Catilinarian Orations" against the conspiracy of Catiline, demonstrate this well.

Example Analysis of Cicero's First Catilinarian Oration:

1. **Introduction:** Cicero begins with a powerful hook that immediately addresses the urgency of the situation, asking Catiline, "How long, O Catiline, will you abuse our patience?"
2. **Thesis Statement:** He states his main argument

clearly—that Catiline’s conspiracy is a danger to the Roman state and must be confronted.

3. **Supporting Arguments:** Cicero details the evidence of Catiline’s treachery, recounting past conspiracies, the gathering of forces, and the seditious plans Catiline has made.
4. **Counterarguments:** Implicitly, Cicero addresses potential objections—why Catiline has been allowed to act this way for so long without being stopped, suggesting the patience of the Senate and his own clemency.
5. **Conclusion:** Cicero concludes with a call to action, urging the Senate to act against Catiline and calling for the defense of the republic.

Extemporaneous Nature of Cicero’s Orations: While Cicero likely prepared extensively for his speeches, the orations he delivered were adapted to the mood and reactions of his audience, demonstrating his skill in extemporaneous speech. The way Cicero structured his arguments would have required a deep understanding of both the topic at hand and rhetorical techniques, allowing him to construct what can essentially be seen as a structured argumentative essay orally.

Modern Implications: Today, similar skills are used by debaters and public speakers who must organize their thoughts quickly and present them persuasively in real-time discussions and debates. While it’s challenging, training in debate and public speaking often focuses on this ability to think and organize one’s thoughts swiftly and coherently.

Thus, Cicero’s example shows that it’s indeed possible for an orator to deliver a speech that has all the hallmarks of a structured argumentative essay. This ability reflects both a mastery of subject matter and rhetorical skill.

Grok 3 seemed more thorough but gave a similar answer (5 April 2025):

Yes, it’s entirely possible for a skilled orator to deliver an extemporaneous speech that aligns with the structure of an argumentative essay—complete with an introduction, thesis, supporting arguments, counterarguments, and

a conclusion—without needing to rewrite or script it in advance. This ability hinges on the orator’s mastery of rhetoric, logical organization, and spontaneous eloquence, qualities often honed through practice and training, as seen in classical traditions like those of ancient Greece and Rome. The extemporaneous nature doesn’t preclude structure; rather, it showcases how a well-trained mind can impose order on ideas in real time.

A prime example of this is Cicero’s *First Catilinarian Oration* (*In Catilinam I*), delivered on November 7, 63 BCE, in the Roman Senate. While Cicero likely prepared his main points beforehand, the speech was an immediate response to the unfolding Catiline Conspiracy, a plot to overthrow the Roman Republic. Its delivery was urgent and situational, yet it exhibits the hallmarks of a structured argumentative essay. Let’s break it down to demonstrate this:

1. Introduction (Exordium)

Cicero opens with a striking rhetorical question: “*Quo usque tandem abutere, Catilina, patientia nostra?*” (“How long, Catiline, will you abuse our patience?”). This serves as the hook, grabbing the audience’s attention while establishing the exigency of the situation. He sets the stage by painting Catiline as a brazen threat, present in the Senate despite his alleged crimes, thus justifying the need for immediate discourse.

2. Thesis (Narratio and Propositio)

Cicero quickly states his central claim: Catiline is a danger to the Republic, and his conspiracy must be exposed and stopped. He transitions from the dramatic opening to a clear assertion: “*Nihilne te nocturnum praesidium Palati, nihil urbis vigiliae, nihil timor populi, nihil concursus bonorum omnium, nihil hic munitissimus habendi senatus locus, nihil horum ora voltusque moverunt?*” (“Does the night guard of the Palatine, the city’s watch, the people’s fear, the gathering of all good men, this fortified Senate meeting place — do none of these move you?”). This establishes the problem (Catiline’s conspiracy) and Cicero’s position (it must be confronted), laying out the stakes for the argument.

3. Supporting Arguments (Confirmatio)

Cicero builds his case with evidence and reasoning:

- **Fact-based Accusations:** He cites specific actions, like Catiline's alleged plans to murder senators, claiming, "*Omnia haec iam pridem, Catilina, sic a te comparata esse scimus*" ("We know all this has long been orchestrated by you, Catiline").
- **Appeals to Ethos and Pathos:** He invokes his own credibility as consul and stirs the senators' emotions by emphasizing the Republic's peril.
- **Logical Progression:** He details how Catiline's brazenness—remaining in Rome despite his known guilt—proves his audacity and the conspiracy's reality. Each point reinforces his thesis systematically.

4. Counterarguments and Refutation (Refutatio)

Cicero anticipates Catiline's potential defenses. For instance, Catiline might claim innocence or argue that no overt act has been committed. Cicero preempts this: "*Tu ne id, quod iam pridem factum esse oportebat, te ipsum tua manu necatrix?*" ("Will you not, then, by your own hand, do what should have been done long ago?"). He refutes the idea of inaction by asserting that Catiline's presence and past behavior are damning enough, turning the lack of a "caught-in-the-act" moment into evidence of his cunning.

5. Conclusion (Peroratio)

Cicero closes with a call to action and a rhetorical flourish: "*In te conferri pestem quam tu in nos omnes iam diu machinaris*" ("Let the plague you have long plotted against us all be turned upon you"). He urges the Senate to recognize the threat and implicitly supports decisive measures (like exile or execution), while appealing to divine protection for Rome. This ties the speech together, reinforcing his thesis and leaving a lasting impression.

Analysis

This oration mirrors an argumentative essay's structure: it introduces a problem, states a clear position, supports it with evidence and reasoning, addresses opposition, and concludes with a persuasive summation. Cicero's extemporaneous delivery—driven by the moment's urgency—didn't

sacrifice coherence. His training in rhetoric, as outlined in works like *De Oratore*, equipped him to organize thoughts on the fly, using techniques like the five canons of rhetoric (invention, arrangement, style, memory, delivery). The speech's polish comes not from rewriting but from Cicero's ability to think in a structured way under pressure.

Other figures, like Demosthenes with his *Philippics* or even modern orators like Martin Luther King Jr. in his improvised moments (e.g., parts of "I Have a Dream"), show similar feats. Cicero's *First Catilinarian* stands out, though, for its blend of spontaneity and forensic precision, proving that oral diction can indeed produce a structured argumentative essay in real time.

It is possible that both LLMs have improperly analyzed Cicero's essay and rashly proposed that skilled orators can create argumentative essays during dictation. For the moment, though, there seems to be reasonable but rebuttable evidence to question Watson's claims of impossibility. Nevertheless, his observations and findings still merit attention.

While I believe that there are orators, story tellers, debaters, politicians, and scholars who may be able to occasionally give oral lectures that seem to carefully integrate and structure the material to meet the requirements of a structured essay, and an argumentative essay in particular, doing this—in the case of the Book of Mormon—numerous times across a 500-page book dictated orally does *seem* like a nearly impossible achievement, but I still suggest that more modest wording would strengthen Watson's argument.

Is it really impossible to make an argument on the fly, supported with evidence, perhaps coupled with consideration of a counterargument, and then backed with a conclusion and a call to action? Watson does not provide a reasonable basis for this assumption. The finding of one extemporaneous oration that meets the criteria for an argumentative or persuasive essay strikes at the heart of Watson's claim. It will only be a matter of time, requiring perhaps just a single query of an AI tool, to show multiple examples of such well-structured essays. Treating the achievement as one that requires great skill and would be difficult (albeit not impossible) to do during dictation may give the reader a healthier appreciation of how difficult the Book of Mormon would have been to create by human skill, during dictation, as opposed to dictating a miraculous translation given by the power of God.

Conclusion

Edward Watson has taken a valuable new approach in analyzing the text of the Book of Mormon, showing that its numerous structured essays meet demanding criteria and show the kind of logical development that normally requires extensive planning and rewriting. However, he does not appear to meet the burden of proof for the strongly worded claims he makes.

Watson does give the reader a new approach for appreciating the complexity and authenticity of the text of the Book of Mormon, as the product of ancient authors who did indeed take the time and thought, perhaps with careful planning and multiple revisions, to create beautiful and powerful structured essays. While Watson is too aggressive in his claims, the essence of his work is worthy of consideration. The Book of Mormon is not just a majestic history and literary marvel, rich in Ancient Near Eastern rhetorical and poetical elements; it is also densely packed with carefully drafted persuasive and argumentative essays that are unlikely to have been created during extemporaneous dictation. I hesitate to say that any or all of these evidences constitute true "proof" of the divinity of the text, but they certainly strengthen the case for plausibility. These factors can serve as evidence to help those who stumble at the denouncements of the world, helping them instead to step over such hurdles and, with an eye of faith, see the Book of Mormon as the miraculous gift from God that it is.



Jeffrey D. Lindsay *has been providing online materials defending the Church for more than twenty years, primarily at JeffLindsay.com. His Mormonity blog on Church topics began in 2004 and was recently converted to ArisefromtheDust.com. He is currently on the Board of Directors for The Interpreter Foundation. Jeff has a PhD in chemical engineering from BYU and is a US patent agent. Jeff has been a Fellow of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers since 2014. Every year since 2015 he has been named as one of the world's leading intellectual property strategists on the IAM 300 Strategy List by IAM Media Group in the UK. He is currently president of Planet Lindsay, LLC, assisting a variety of clients with intellectual property and innovation. From 2011 to 2019 he was the head of Intellectual Property for Asia Pulp and Paper in Shanghai, China, one of the*

world's largest forest product companies. Formerly, he was associate professor at the Institute of Paper Science and Technology (now the Renewable Bioproducts Institute) at Georgia Tech, then went into R&D at Kimberly-Clark Corporation, eventually becoming corporate patent strategist and senior research fellow. Jeff served a mission in the German-speaking Switzerland Zurich Mission. He and his wife Kendra are the parents of four boys and have fifteen grandchildren. They are both serving as ministering specialists for African immigrants in their community and are learning Swahili. Jeff also serves as a board member for Hope and Help Together, a community organization in Appleton, Wisconsin, which works to assist refugees and immigrants in the Fox Cities region.

Nameless to New Name: Namelessness in the Narrative of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, or the People of Ammon

Nathan J. Arp

Abstract: *A narrator may choose to provide or withhold the name of a character for many reasons. This article hypothesizes that Mormon intentionally omitted the name of two key characters, a Lamanite king and queen. Both feature in his narration of the mission to the Lamanites and the miraculous conversion it inspires, as recounted in the book of Alma. While it is not possible to know exactly what information Mormon and other record keepers of the Book of Mormon had or preserved, it is at least plausible that Mormon might have intentionally omitted the name of these two Lamanites. Namelessness invites the reader to encounter and re-encounter the gospel in a story simultaneously historic and symbolic, at once particular and universal. The intentional absence of these names emphasizes, instead, the new name the converted Lamanites would take upon themselves and points the reader to the name of Jesus Christ.*

It is, perhaps, an intuitive modern assumption that unnamed characters are less important, and yet, there are several memorable unnamed characters in the Book of Mormon. While it is possible that their names were unavailable in an editor's records, there are significant literary reasons why an editor or author might intentionally withhold a character's name. This paper explores the possibility that the namelessness of a Lamanite king and the Lamanite queen depicted in Alma 19–24 contributes to the theological messages in those chapters. After a theoretical discussion on the use of namelessness in the Book of Mormon and a historical sketch of the likely names

of a brief succession of Lamanite kings, this paper will propose that Mormon may have left the high king over all the Lamanites unnamed to better create a symbolic model for readers to follow and provide an extra emphasis on the new name, Anti-Nephi-Lehi, that the people would take upon themselves. This name, I propose, ties these converts to the past colony of the people of Zeniff. The Lamanite converts chose a new name for their people and their king in response to experiencing Christ's atoning power. This paper similarly postulates that Mormon may have intentionally left King Lamoni's wife, the queen, nameless to model how we should respond with faith to experiences we do not understand and to emphasize the name of the Savior through her visionary experience. Both of these accounts powerfully testify of Christ's mercy and his power to save.¹

A Literary Reason: Structure and Significance

Although the first Lamanite king mentioned during the watershed Nephite mission to the Lamanites² is named early in the narrative, very few other Lamanites during this timeframe are mentioned by name. The missing names are curious in a text that highlights personal aspects of Lamanite culture and demonstrates the deep personal relationships between Mosiah's missionary sons and the Lamanite people. In fact, before the nameless king conceives of the new name Anti-Nephi-Lehi, there are only three named Lamanites in these accounts: King Lamoni, Abish a "Lamanitish woman" (Alma 19:16), and Antiomno (Alma 20:4). Of these, only Lamoni and Abish participate in the storyline.³

1. In addition to the works cited specifically throughout this paper, this literary study on names and namelessness builds upon the works of Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon: Course of Study for the Melchizedek Priesthood Quorums of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1957); Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns* (Jerusalem, Israel: Bar-Ilan University, 1991); Meier Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 2011); and Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

2. These events occurred in 90–77 BC, approximately, in Alma 21–27.

3. Lamoni only mentions the name of Antiomno in a digressive remark. There may be a distinction of significance between the information Mormon provides the reader directly and what he conveys indirectly in a quotation from a character.

The lack of personal names in this part of Mormon's account does not, by itself, necessarily indicate authorial intention. Book of Mormon editors routinely do not provide names for all the characters they could have named. Neither does namelessness correspond to insignificance. Ancient authors sometimes pointedly seem to leave characters unnamed. Walker Wright has recently proposed that Moroni may have withheld the name of the brother of Jared in the book of Ether as a polemic against the civilization of Babel, who in contrast, sought a name.⁴

The New Testament, a work from a similar Jewish literary tradition to the Book of Mormon, exemplifies purposeful namelessness in its cast of key, but nevertheless still unnamed, characters. Strikingly, Mary, the mother of Jesus, one of the most important figures in the Bible, remains nameless throughout the Gospel According to John, as does John himself.⁵ The absence of Mary's name in the fourth gospel does not suggest that John or Jesus did not care for her or for women in general. The narratives in John demonstrate just the opposite. In fact, the important roles that women play in the New Testament testify that these records reliably convey history. Daniel C. Peterson has noted that the Bible's use of women as witnesses of Christ's resurrection, despite a legal culture that would have rejected their witnesses, rings with authenticity.⁶ Namelessness in female or male characters need not necessarily reveal an author's value judgment on those same characters. It might even allow deeper symbolic interpretations.

Indeed, R. Alan Culpepper observes that the general "paucity of description has not hindered, and indeed probably has stimulated, a variety of symbolic interpretations" for Mary.⁷ Culpepper further

4. Walker Wright, "The Man with No Name: The Story of the Brother of Jared as an Anti-Babel Polemic," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 62 (2024): 319–33, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-man-with-no-name-the-story-of-the-brother-of-jared-as-an-anti-babel-polemic. For another example of another possible withheld name in the Book of Mormon, consider Nathan J. Arp, "Nameless: Mormon's Dramatic Use of Omission in Helaman 2," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 62 (2024): 39–64, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/nameless-mormons-dramatic-use-of-omission-in-helaman-2.

5. "John never calls her Mary." Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 98.

6. Daniel C. Peterson, "Christ is Risen! Truly, He is Risen!," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 61 (2024): 45–56, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/christ-is-risen-truly-he-is-risen/.

7. R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*

points out that “John’s . . . characters are individualized by their position in society and their interaction with Jesus. This means that they may easily become types.”⁸ This is seen in the nameless disciple who the gospel of John refers to only by noting Jesus’ affection towards him. In a work like the fourth gospel that defines its characters by their response or closeness to Jesus, a mere name may not be as powerful a descriptor as the character’s actions or relationship to Christ.⁹ Of course unnamed key characters interact with Jesus throughout all the gospel accounts. Key characters, male and female, in the Hebrew Bible act namelessly as well. For example, Tracy Browning has noted the important role played by Naaman’s nameless maid in 2 Kings 5.¹⁰ And from the other end of the social hierarchy, who can overlook the pivotal role of Pharaoh’s daughter who rescued and raised the baby Moses (Exodus 2)?

A similar approach to the nameless characters in the Book of Mormon may also lead to new insights into the characters’ relationships to the narrative and, more importantly, to Christ. In general, character names in the Book of Mormon seem to follow or promote plot or ideological exigencies in the narratives where they appear. That is not to say that Book of Mormon editors necessarily make up names¹¹ to fit with plots, just that they seem to be judicious about providing names and intentional about when and with what frequency they name characters.¹² Matthew L. Bowen, specifically, has submitted a large and

(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 133.

8. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 145.

9. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 104.

10. Tracy Y. Browning, “Seeking Answers to Spiritual Questions,” *Liahona*, November 2024, 80–83, [churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2024/10/42browning](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2024/10/42browning).

11. Brant Gardner has brought up the possibility that Mormon may, at times, invent names for characters to support his narratives’ meanings. Brant A. Gardner, “Labor Diligently to Write: The Ancient Making of a Modern Scripture Chapters 4 and 5,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 35 (2020): 95–98. journal.interpreterfoundation.org/labor-diligently-to-write-the-ancient-making-of-a-modern-scripture-2. Alternatively, it may be just as likely that Book of Mormon writers crafted plots and messages to resonate with the names featured in their stories.

12. I have attempted to show possible ways Mormon used names in his narrative in previous publications. For example, I proposed that Mormon deliberately delayed naming Nehor in Alma 1 and then used his name thematically throughout the rest of the Book of Mormon. Nathan J. Arp, “Mormon’s Narrative Strategies to Provide Literary Justice for Gideon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 58 (2023): 167–222, journal.interpreter

still growing body of work on the narrative utility of Book of Mormon and Bible names.¹³ So there is good reason to suppose that Book of Mormon authors and editors use both names and namelessness rhetorically, to develop plots or underscore ideology.

A Limited Lamanite History from 200–77 BC

A brief look at Lamanite history of the period helps contextualize the nameless nature of the Lamanite king and queen this paper highlights. Various factors vex any sincere attempt at piecing together a Lamanite history from the Book of Mormon text. First, although Lamanites figure as primary characters in many of the Book of Mormon narratives, Nephite editors portray these characters primarily from Nephite perspectives. Secondly, the Book of Mormon focuses on theological narratives; therefore, the editors only scantily refer to subjects like politics, culture, art, linguistics, economics, ecology, etc. Finally, the Book of Mormon text suggests that the Nephites themselves may not have known or cared to know a lot about Lamanite culture or history.¹⁴ These three reasons, and likely many more, mean we cannot find in the Book of Mormon all the elements one would encounter in a comprehensive history.

Nevertheless, this paper will highlight two aspects of Lamanite culture that are discoverable in the Book of Mormon text from the time period relevant to this paper and that can inform the ideas presented. First, it is possible to piece together a partial list of Lamanite kings between 200–77 BC. Second, the Book of Mormon indicates there was an innovation in record keeping that the Lamanites instituted around the time they subjugated Alma's people (Mosiah 24:4, 6). This

foundation.org/mormons-narrative-strategies-to-provide-literary-justice-for-gideon. I also hypothesized a possible reason for Mormon repeating his own name in Alma 18. Nathan J. Arp, "Count Your Many Mormons: Mormon's Personalized and Personal Messages in Mosiah 18 and 3 Nephi 5," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 41 (2020): 75–86, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/count-your-many-mormons-mormons-personalized-and-personal-messages-in-mosiah-18-and-3-nephi-5.

13. A large collection of Dr. Bowen's work can be found at journal.interpreterfoundation.org/author/matthewb/?journal.

14. As an example, Brant Gardner points out in his commentary of Alma 25:2–3 that "Mormon does not mention the Lamanites' political motivation because he never displays interest in Lamanite politics." Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon: Volume Four, Alma* (Draper, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 367.

seems to play a large role in the expansion of Lamanite power and will be discussed further below.

When Zeniff, in approximately 200 BC, led a group back into Nephite ancestral lands that had subsequently been inhabited by Lamanites,¹⁵ he met a Lamanite king named Laman₂ (Mosiah 9:10). The narrative does not specify when the reign of king Laman₂ began, but he may have been in power when the Nephites, following Mosiah₁, fled the land of Nephi, around 220 BC. According to the chronology provided by Zeniff, King Laman₂ died sometime around 178 BC (Mosiah 10:6), whereupon his unnamed son became king. His son is likely the same Laman₃ mentioned later in Mosiah 24:3, as having been named after his father. The occurrence of two successive Lamanite kings with the name Laman may indicate a Lamanite practice of naming their kings Laman, a convention similar to the Nephite practice referenced by Jacob (see Jacob 1:9–11). Although possible, it seems more likely that Laman was the actual name these two specific Lamanite kings shared and it had become more than a reign name, if it had ever been a reign name to begin with.¹⁶

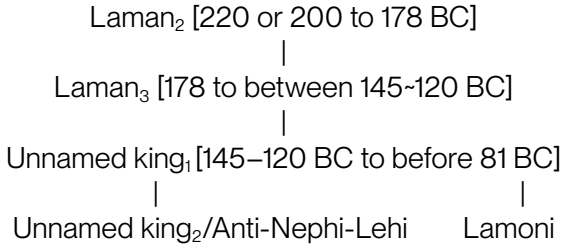
The reference to king Laman₃ occurs between 145 and 120 BC, a period of thirty-three to fifty-eight years from the approximate start to the reign of the son of Laman₂ (approximately 178 BC). Reigns lasting thirty-three to fifty-eight years match with known reign periods in

15. Multiple scholars view Zeniff's departure as an act of disobedience, a willful rebellion against Mosiah₁; however, I hold that the text does not support their stance. Some of these works include Val Larsen, "Prophet or Loss: Mosiah₁/Zeniff, Benjamin/Noah, Mosiah₂/Limhi and the Emergence of the Almas," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 60 (2024): 367–408, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/prophet-or-loss-mosiah1-zeniff-benjamin-noah-mosiah2-limhi-and-the-emergence-of-the-almas; Shon D. Hopkin, ed., *Abinadi: He Came Among Them in Disguise* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University [BYU]; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2018); and Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, BYU, 2016). My alternative perspective on Zeniff is included in Nathan J. Arp, "An Analysis of Mormon's Narrative Strategies Employed on the Zeniffite Narrative and Their Effect on Limhi," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 59 (2023): 159–90, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/an-analysis-of-mormons-narrative-strategies-employed-on-the-zeniffite-narrative-and-their-effect-on-limhi.

16. Brant Gardner has also noted this in *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Enos through Mosiah* (Draper, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 3:406–7.

the Nephite monarchic system.¹⁷ Such long possible reign times may represent a multi-generational time of peace and prosperity for the Lamanites, the very scenario suggested by the text. Alternatively, there may be another king Laman between Laman₃ and Laman₂.

A conjectural king list might look something like this:



By the time the unnamed king transferred the kingdom to his nameless son, later named Anti-Nephi-Lehi, the Lamanites had grown powerful. The Book of Mormon authors also suggest that this line of Lamanite kings expanded the scope of their rule over surrounding lands and cultures. The narrator remarks that Laman₂ was king over “numerous people” (Mosiah 24:3) and had increased his landholding (Mosiah 24:1–2). And by the time of Lamoni’s father, this king was “king over all the land” (Alma 20:8). So, over a period of fifty-five years (145–90 BC), this line of kings successfully expanded their kingdom such that it included a greater number of subjects and lands. Book of Mormon authors include information that may explain this success.

Beginning with the reign of Limhi, the people of Zeniff paid tribute to the Lamanites for about twenty-five years (145–120 BC). This tribute, no doubt a boon to Lamanite coffers, may have only been one of many tributes supporting the Lamanite king and enabling him to solidify his reign and increase the size of his kingdom. After the escape of the people of Zeniff, the Lamanites integrated the priests of Noah into their

17. For example, Mosiah₂ reigned thirty-three years, which corresponded to his documented ages between thirty to sixty-three years (Mosiah 29:46). According to Grant Hardy’s chronology, King Benjamin reigned for at least forty years. If Mosiah₁ reigned from 220 to 170 BC, then he would have ruled for fifty years. Fifty-eight years does not exceed the realm of possibility. But if our unnamed king began his reign in 120 BC and ruled until 81 BC, then he would have reigned for thirty-nine years. See Grant Hardy, *The Annotated Book of Mormon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 846. It’s hard to know when Mosiah₁ became king because in the book of Omni, Amaleki does not specify that Mosiah₁ was king in the land of Nephi but rather refers to him as one “who was made king over the land of Zarahemla” (Omni 1:12, 19). It’s possible then that Mosiah did not become king until closer to 200 BC.

populace as teachers. The integration of these Nephites may have further empowered the kings. These priests taught the Lamanites the importance of records and taught them “the language of the Nephites” to keep their records and taught them how to write to one another (see Mosiah 24:4, 6). This new technology may have helped the Lamanites communicate more broadly and administer a larger territory.¹⁸ According to Mormon,¹⁹ this scribal technology allowed the Lamanites to “increase in riches” and “wax great” (Mosiah 24:7). The seemingly peaceful transition of power between four or more generations of Lamanite kings likely nourished the increased prosperity and power Mormon referenced.

The Unnamed Lamanite King (Alma 20, 22–24)

Our discussion of the namelessness of the powerful king over all the Lamanites focuses on Mormon’s retelling of the mission of Ammon₂ and his companions. The namelessness of the great king in this story is all the more noteworthy because the story deliberately draws attention to names. This account has been studied for its likely onomastic word plays with names. Bowen has noted that Book of Mormon authors possibly drew a distinction between the Nephites and Lamanites with pejorative word plays on the name Laman and the Hebrew word for *unbelief* or *unfaithfulness*.

The phrase *lō’-ēmūn* (unvowelled *l’ ’mn*) may have been the basis of, or catalyzed the formation of, a negative pun on the name “Laman” among the early Nephites. If so, this pun may have imbued the term “Lamanites” with the meaning of “unfaithful” or “unbelieving ones.”²⁰

18. It may have been efforts like this, teaching language and writing to American populations, that left Afro-Asiatic linguistic fossils in Uto-Aztecan languages as discovered by Brian D. Stubbs. See Brian D. Stubbs, *Changes in Language: from Nephi to Now*, 2nd ed. (Blanding, UT: Brian Darrel Stubbs, 2020).

19. Alternatively, according to Brant Gardner, Mormon’s comment about the benefit the Lamanites gained from Nephite recording keeping stemmed rather from a cultural bias and not from historical accuracy. Brant Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Volume Three, Enos through Mosiah* (Draper, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 403–8.

20. Matthew L. Bowen, “Not Partaking of the Fruit: Its Generational Consequences and Its Remedy,” in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi’s Dream and Nephi’s Vision*, ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City:

Bowen has demonstrated the various ways Book of Mormon authors and editors perpetuated this possible play on the name of Laman/Lamanites with the Hebrew word for *unbelief* and *belief* throughout the Book of Mormon, and this account of Ammon₂ and his brothers' mission to the Lamanites seems to orbit around an interaction between belief and unbelief. For example, Bowen observed that "the verb believe occurs no less than thirteen times throughout Alma 18–19, together with other potentially related words faith (used at least four times) and true (used once)."²¹

This play on unbelief may extend to the name of Lamoni, himself a king and the son of the nameless king. According to the *Dictionary of Proper Names and Foreign Words in the Book of Mormon*, "the Lehiite personal name Lamoni may be related to the personal name Laman, but with the name modified by the 'Canaanite shift' plus the gentilic ending -i."²² If correct, Lamoni's name might have meant something like *Lamanite*, a name meant to tie Lamoni to his Lamanite heritage and further connect him to this onomastic background of unbelief. Mormon possibly plays on this meaning of Lamoni's name and this Lamanite heritage of unbelief when he describes Lamoni's sanctification process²³ in his visionary experience as "the dark veil of *unbelief* was being cast away from [Lamoni's] mind" (Alma 19:6).

The literary use of the name Ammon may stand in contrast to this pejorative literary meaning of the name Laman and Lamoni, regardless of the literal meaning these names conveyed. In the same way that Nephite authors may have linked the name Laman to the word unbelief, they may have also linked the name Ammon to the similar Hebrew word for faith, belief, and truth. Both literarily and linguistically, Ammon symbolizes the truth that will convert Lamanite unbelief into belief. Bowen has explained this possible linguistic association in the following manner:

Deseret Book, 2011), 242–43, [rsc.byu.edu/things-which-my-father-saw/not-partaking-fruit-its-generational-consequences-its-remedy](https://www.rsc.byu.edu/things-which-my-father-saw/not-partaking-fruit-its-generational-consequences-its-remedy).

21. Bowen, "Not Partaking of the Fruit," 248.

22. Stephen D. Ricks et al., *Dictionary of Proper Names and Foreign Words in the Book of Mormon* (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation, 2022), 197.

23. Val Larsen and Newell D. Wright refer to this same process as *theosis* or *deification* in "Theosis in the Book of Mormon: The Work and Glory of the Father, Mother and Son, and Holy Ghost," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 56 (2023): 309–19, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/theosis-in-the-book-of-mormon-the-work-and-glory-of-the-father-mother-and-son-and-holy-ghost/.

In Hebrew, concepts of being “faithful,” “believ[ing],” “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 sounds 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).²⁴

A careful editor, like Mormon, may have used the names Lamoni and Ammon to dramatize the narrative tension between belief and disbelief. Furthermore, Val Larsen and Newell D. Wright have pointed out that Mormon may have played on the association of the name Ammon with the Egyptian god, Amun.²⁵ For example, after Ammon’s miraculous defense of Lamoni’s flocks, Lamoni identifies Ammon as the Great Spirit, the Lamanite equivalent of God, a possible aural play with the name Ammon and its association with the king of the Egyptian gods, Amun. In Lamoni’s first direct speech in the narrative, he wonders whether Ammon is the Great Spirit (see Alma 18:2).

Up until this point in the narrative, Mormon has reported Lamoni’s speech only indirectly. For example, when Lamoni first meets Ammon, Mormon states that “the king inquired of Ammon if it were his desire to dwell in the land among the Lamanites.” Mormon then reports Ammon’s speech directly, prefaced by “and Ammon said. . .” (Alma 17:22–23). The Biblical scholar Robert Alter has pointed out that “the initial words spoken by a personage will be revelatory . . . in the exposition of character.”²⁶ So, according to Alter, Lamoni’s first dialogue with actual speech may merit “special attention.”

24. Matthew L. Bowen, “‘Behold, He Was a Man Like unto Ammon’: Mormon’s Use of *ʾmn*-related Terminology in Praise of Moroni in Alma 48,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 58 (2023): 224, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/behold-he-was-a-man-like-unto-ammon-mormons-use-of-%ca%bemn-related-terminology-in-praise-of-moroni-in-alma-48/.

25. Larsen and Wright, “Theosis in the Book of Mormon,” 309. See also Val Larsen, “In His Footsteps: Ammon₁ and Ammon₂,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 3 (2013): 99n17, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/in-his-footsteps-ammon-and-ammon/.

26. 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

Lamoni's first direct words form a question regarding Ammon: "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?" We should not overlook King Lamoni's willingness to entertain the thought that he and his people had done something wrong. It was normal for powerful Lamanites to claim that "whatsoever they did was right" (Alma 18:5). In this moment, Mormon markedly destabilizes that view with a contrast between knowledge and astonishment. God, through his servant Ammon, repeatedly upends what the Lamanites think they know. In Book of Mormon language, Ammon continually astonishes them.²⁷ God's astonishing power leads Lamoni to question his traditions. He begins to wonder, contrary to his traditions, if he has done wrong (Alma 18:5).

The Lamanites' astonishment came by no accident. The small group of Nephite missionaries prayed for the upheaval of Lamanite beliefs, when they "prayed much that the Lord would grant unto them . . . to bring . . . the Lamanites, to the knowledge of the truth, to the knowledge of the baseness of the traditions of their fathers, which were not correct" (Alma 17:9). Despite his assertions that Lamoni "know[s]" and "surely know[s]" that Ammon is the Great Spirit or a god (Alma 18:4, 11), Lamoni learns that Ammon is just "a man" (Alma 18:17). Subsequently, Lamoni's continued astonishment with Ammon's acts and words prepares Lamoni to experience belief and faith. This same process of astonishment leading to belief and faith repeats with Lamoni's nameless father. Namelessness is a particularly powerful narrative device for emphasizing the complete astonishment and upending of tradition. The erasure of the high king's name strikes at the core of Lamanite identity, especially since the king bears the name of the people, and prepares the way for a new name, and a new identity.

When the nameless king over all the Lamanites first meets Ammon, he is already angered by Lamoni's absence at the king's feast. Seeing Lamoni with a Nephite further enrages him, and the nameless king

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.

27. In Alma 17, for example, the Lamanite marauders think that they could easily defeat one man, but Mormon makes sure we know that "that they knew not that the Lord had promised Mosiah that he would deliver his sons out of their hands" (Alma 17:35). Therefore, when Ammon begins to slay them, "they began to be astonished" (Alma 17:36).

affirms the Lamanites' false traditions, saying to Lamoni, "Thou art going to deliver these Nephites, who are sons of a liar. Behold, he robbed our fathers; and now his children are also come amongst us that they may, by their cunning and their lyings, deceive us, that they again may rob us of our property" (Alma 20:13). The king attacks his son, but just as Ammon astonished the herdsmen and King Lamoni, Ammon will now displace the traditions and beliefs of the nameless king in his defense of Lamoni. He renders the king unable to continue fighting and will uproot the king's certainty about the Lamanite traditions.

Although the king offers Ammon what he thinks a Nephite might want, his possessions and even up to "half his kingdom," this does not interest Ammon. Even more than his prowess, it is Ammon's demands to protect Lamoni that astonish the nameless king. Ammon does not desire Lamanite possessions, but "when [the nameless king] also saw the great love [Ammon] had for his son Lamoni, he was astonished exceedingly" (Alma 20:13). Ammon's actions give the king pause and lead him to consider the words his son and the Nephite missionary speak. Astonishment, as it had with Lamoni, prepares the king for belief. This nameless king's ensuing conversion allows the rest of the Lamanite population the freedom to accept or reject the gospel of Christ. Regarding the king's conversion, literary scholar Marilyn Arnold has noted that "in one of the sweetest moments in all of scripture, this once proud and mighty king falls to his knees and offers a prayer, wrenched in tremulous words and from his humbled heart."²⁸ Rather than defining the king with his name, Mormon may have chosen to honor and define this nameless king by his humble and zealous response to the message of salvation. The king's namelessness invites the reader to consider the universal and symbolic aspect of his story. This king demonstrates that we must all let go of our false traditions and surrender everything to Christ. Perhaps, ultimately, Mormon felt that keeping this king nameless could better emphasize his humility and self-sacrifice. Although nameless, this king is significant.

His importance in Lamanite society is unquestionable. His importance in the salvific narrative is also clear. The opposing possibility, that Mormon withheld the name of this king because the king was not important is implausible. This is apparent if we compare the unnamed

28. Marilyn Arnold, *Sweet Is the Word: Reflections on the Book of Mormon—Its Narrative, Teachings, and People* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 1996), 150.

king with his named son Lamoni. Alter has observed that "a general trait of biblical narrative" is "the primacy of dialogue."²⁹ If we apply this insight to the Book of Mormon, we can assess the importance of the two kings by comparing the amount of dialogue Mormon reports for each man. Mormon reports for Lamoni's father and Lamoni similar amounts of dialogue; both father and son speak more than 500 words. Mormon also reports on the importance of both characters in the overall Lamanite conversion. It would be strange then to suggest that Mormon provided a name for Lamoni because he was more important to the narrative than his father was. And because of the importance of the Lamanite king in the overall mission of Mosiah's sons, Alma probably recorded his name. Although we cannot be sure what information made it to Mormon, it is probable that the king's namelessness is intentional and artful rather than accidental.

Along with its other symbolic meanings, Mormon's masking of this king's name highlighted the change this king would bring about for his people, a change marked by their own adoption of a new name. Casting aside unbelief, they mark themselves as good and faithful. Ironically, or maybe pointedly, it is the nameless king who sees the need for his people to have a new name.

And now it came to pass that the king and those who were converted were desirous that they might have a name, that thereby they might be distinguished from their brethren; therefore the king consulted with Aaron and many of their priests, concerning the name that they should take upon them, that they might be distinguished. And it came to pass that they called their names Anti-Nephi-Lehies; and they were called by this name and were no more called Lamanites. (Alma 23:16–17)

According to the *Dictionary of Proper Names and Foreign Words in the Book of Mormon*, the name of Anti-Nephi-Lehi "may be based on Egyptian and Hebrew elements meaning 'he/adherent/partisan of Nephi and Lehi.'"³⁰ Bowen has explained this name in the following manner:

The name *Anti-Nephi-Lehi* at a minimum, like the city name *Lehi-Nephi*, appears to at once honor Lamanite

29. Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 81–82.

30. Ricks et al., *Dictionary of Proper Names and Foreign Words*, 48.

ancestry from Lehi and the spiritual legacy of Nephi, whose visions and teachings they now embraced. In other words, Mormon's preservation and use of the names *Anti-Nephi-Lehi* and *Anti-Nephi-Lehies* constitutes a powerful statement that the Lamanites who converted to the "Nephite" religion had become every whit as "good" as the Nephites, their erstwhile enemies."³¹

In addition to the meanings proposed by Bowen, I propose that the name *Anti-Nephi-Lehi* may have designated that the king and his people belonged to the place "Nephi-Lehi." The Nephites originally occupied Nephi-Lehi before a group of them fled with Mosiah₁ and the Lamanites assimilated it. Approximately twenty years later, the Lamanites ostensibly returned this city and others to Zeniff and his party of returning Nephite colonists, with the intent to bring them into servitude. Ultimately, the Lamanites subjugated the people of Zeniff in Nephi-Lehi, exacted tribute for approximately twenty-five years, and killed many Nephites during their vain attempts to free themselves from bondage.

Renaming this people and their king with reference to this place name reimagines their Lamanite identity and kingdom as Nephite — as direct heirs of Lehi and Nephi in a Nephite colony. It is, thus, no surprise that they became "industrious," that they "open a correspondence" with the Nephites, and that "the curse of God did no more follow them" (Alma 23:18). Having been converted and having tasted of redemption, they reject their false traditions and choose to identify themselves once again with God's chosen people. In essence, they take on the characteristics of stereotypical Nephites, as the narrators predominantly portray Nephites in the Book of Mormon. This name may also have served as a reminder of "the many murders which [they had] committed" (Alma 24:11), a reminder that they chose the wrong side when the people of Zeniff immigrated into Lamanite lands. The Lamanite kings should have aligned themselves with the Zeniffites when that group immigrated into Lamanite lands. Accordingly, one can imagine that for the Amulonites and Amalekites, the memory

31. Matthew L. Bowen, "'Our Great God Has in Goodness Sent These': Notes on the Goodness of God, the Didactic Good of Nephi's Small Plates, and Anti-Nephi-Lehi's Renaming," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 61(2024):97–134, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/our-great-god-has-in-goodness-sent-these-notes-on-the-goodness-of-god-the-didactic-good-of-nephis-small-plates-and-anti-nephi-lehis-renaming/.

of this colony, retained through taking this name upon them, would have been especially galling. This particular naming situation allows Mormon to emphasize a complete reversal of identities where the Nephite and Zeniffite priests lose their inheritance and become the most implacable of Lamanites, but the Lamanites, previously enemies, take up the identity, mission, and blessings of the Nephites. The Lamanites are adopting a name that the Nephites had rejected. It is not surprising then that they who "had not taken upon them the name of Anti-Nephi-Lehi" (Alma 24:1) incited other Lamanites to anger against the new converts.

Not long after the people and their new king changed their names, the record itself changes yet again the way it refers to these people, calling them the people of Ammon, or Ammonites. This final change does not seem motivated by the Anti-Nephi-Lehies themselves. It is a name the Nephites gave them (see Alma 27:26). Perhaps, this final name for this people reflected the fact that Ammon became "a high priest over [this] people" (Alma 30:20). Regardless, for the Lehites, names mattered. They mattered enough to fight over, and they mattered enough to change when the names no longer defined a people.

In the Book of Mosiah, Mormon details King Benjamin's sermon on kingship, which concludes by encouraging his people to take upon themselves the name of the true king, Jesus Christ. King Benjamin's memorable sermon and covenant are inextricably intertwined, historically, genetically, and thematically, with the stories of his grandsons' mission to the nameless Lamanite king. Underlying the entire Book of Mormon is the critical theme of individuals and peoples choosing to take on themselves the name of Jesus Christ. After all, it is his name that saves. Namelessness is a powerful tool for highlighting that necessity.

The Nameless Queen (Alma 19)

Lamoni's father is not the only nameless major character in this important Book of Mormon story. Mormon also leaves Lamoni's wife nameless. With so few women named in the Book of Mormon, we may regret her anonymity. As I will show, Mormon's choice here is neither by chance, nor a slight to her significance or to her gender. Mormon names the serving girl, Abish, but not the queen. And yet, the queen is clearly important. She saves Lamoni's life, directs her people, and serves in Mormon's narrative as an invitation for all to follow her example. It is through the queen's selective namelessness that Mormon's

rhetorical strategy may artfully reveal the name of Christ and his saving power.

After Lamoni falls into a death-like trance, his wife, the nameless queen, manifests an uncommon faith during an interaction with Ammon, who seems, by virtue of his name, to represent faith itself. Ammon states that her husband is not dead and asks her, “believest thou this?” (Alma 19:9). Against all the evidence before her and the influence of everyone else in her life, she testifies that she believes. To which Ammon responds, “Blessed art thou because of thy exceeding faith; I say unto thee, woman, there has not been such great faith among all the people of the Nephites” (Alma 19:10). This statement is powerful. It was Lamoni who said of Ammon, “Surely there has not been any servant among all my servants that has been so faithful as this man; for even he doth remember all my commandments to execute them.” (Alma 18:10). The astonishment of the Lamanite king before Ammon is remembered now in the astonishment of Ammon before the queen. The praise of Ammon’s faithfulness among the group of his servants is matched and raised by Ammon’s praise for the faith of the queen, above that of *all* the Nephites. Mormon proves the subtlety of his rhetorical skill here in this beautiful reversal. Indeed, he continues to weave this story into the larger narrative when he repeats this same praise of faithfulness, in speaking of the hero Captain Moroni, in Alma 48. Bowen has shown how Mormon’s praise of Moroni harkens back to Ammon,³² which connection, if intentional by Mormon, would further evince the esteem this nameless queen enjoyed among the Nephite record keepers. Ammon’s comment about the queen could also potentially recall the Hebrew Bible’s praise of Hezekiah and Josiah.³³ During his mortal ministry, Jesus also made a similar comment about a nameless centurion after his faithful request for Jesus to heal his servant.³⁴ These connections place her in an elite pantheon

32. Bowen, “Behold, He Was a Man Like unto Ammon,” 223–42.

33. 2 Kings 18:5–6 (NIV) says the following about Hezekiah: “Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the Lord and did not stop following him; he kept the commands the Lord had given Moses.” 2 Kings 23:25 (NIV) describes Josiah in the following manner: “Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses.”

34. In response to the nameless centurion’s faithful request, the writer of Luke narrates, “When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned

of believers. Her namelessness also links her to the many nameless characters in the New Testament and other scriptures as this queen symbolically represents how to faithfully respond to situations of which we do not have "a perfect knowledge" (Alma 32:21).

Given her station and narrative importance, his intimate interactions with her and her husband, and his obvious respect for her, Ammon clearly knew this faithful queen's name. Moreover, she probably remained a prominent follower of Christ among the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, known to Alma directly if not through the report of Ammon. Of course, it may have been Alma who decided not to include this queen's name in his record and thus her name may have never been available to Mormon. But if Alma and Mormon knew Abish, they likely knew the queen.

The rhetorical effectiveness of her namelessness argues strongly for the presumption of intentionality. Most importantly, namelessness could have included adding symbolic power to the queen's experience and placing greater emphasis on the name of Christ, whose name had been oddly absent in a narrative inextricably connected to him. This absence of Christ's name should also alert the reader to authorial intent in the use of namelessness. It is to this nameless queen that Mormon bestows the privilege of being the first to name Jesus in this narrative. Although her husband, Lamoni, encounters Christ first, it is she, not he, who first pronounces Christ's name.

After Lamoni witnesses God's miracles through the words and actions of Ammon, the Spirit envelopes Lamoni in an unconscious, visionary state. When he comes back from this visionary experience, he declares to his wife,

Blessed be the name of God, and blessed art thou. For as sure as thou livest, behold, I have seen my Redeemer; and he shall come forth, and be born of a woman, and he shall redeem all mankind who believe on his name. (Alma 19:12–13)

Interestingly, Lamoni's focus rests not on Ammon or any of the servants in the room; he is speaking directly and likely only to his wife, the unnamed queen. He states that she is "blessed," he makes this oath with her life, "as sure as thou liveth," and declares that the Redeemer will "be born of a woman." Something happened in Lamoni's vision

him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (Luke 7:9).

that made him keenly aware of the importance of his wife. His words imply that he sees in her a kinship with the mother of God,³⁵ who would similarly be praised by an angel, “Blessed art thou among women” (Luke 1:28).

Additionally, when Lamoni says, “Blessed be the name of God,” and states that the Redeemer “shall redeem all mankind who believe on his name,” he twice alludes to God and the importance of his name but does not say God’s name. If redemption rests on believing on Christ’s name, why does Lamoni not say it? This seems like an intentional gap. In his vision, Lamoni saw that “[his] Redeemer” would be born of a woman.” The story structurally replicates that fact. Christ’s personal name, Jesus, is subsequently brought forth in the narrative by a woman. In response to Lamoni’s words, the spirit also leads the queen into a similar unconscious vision. When she wakes, she praises the Lord by name:

O blessed Jesus, who has saved me from an awful hell!
O blessed God, have mercy on this people! (Alma 19:29)

This is the first time Christ’s personal name, Jesus, has been uttered in direct speech in the entire narrative of the Nephite mission to the Lamanites. The queen brings him forth in her plea. Previously, Mormon summarized in indirect speech the fact that Ammon taught Lamoni about “Christ” (see Alma 18:39). While pronouncing the name Jesus, the queen also fittingly puns on the etymology of the name Jesus in almost the exact way the gospel according to Matthew does: “thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). The “name Jesus is a translated form of the Hebrew [Yehoshua], meaning ‘Jehovah is salvation.’”³⁶ The meaning of Jesus’ name then is tied up with his mission to save. Here, whether she knows this etymology or not, the queen pronounces his name and his mission, as if she were the angel who first announced it.

Although the queen proclaims the name of Jesus, no one else ever speaks the name of Jesus or Christ during the Nephite mission to the Lamanites. In addition to Lamoni’s comment about God’s name in Alma 19:13, Aaron teaches the nameless king about Christ and the importance of his name, even telling the king to call upon his name in Alma 22:13 and 16, but neither Aaron nor the king say his name in the text. The king Anti-Nephi-Lehi references “the blood of the Son

35. Larsen and Wright, “Theosis in the Book of Mormon,” 309–19.

36. Ricks et al., *Dictionary of Proper Names and Foreign Words*, 171n23.

of our great God, which shall be shed for the atonement of our sins" as he speaks to his people about their covenant to never shed blood in Alma 24. He does not mention the son of God by name, Jesus, or by the title of Christ. As Ammon glorifies God in Alma 26, he speaks repeatedly of "his name": "blessed be the name of our God," "let us give thanks to his holy name," "we will praise his name forever," and "he is a merciful Being, even unto salvation, to those who will repent and believe on his name." In all this talk about God's name, Ammon does not actually say the name "Jesus Christ." The nameless queen's voice is the first, the last, and the only voice that actually speaks Jesus's name and then articulates its importance to salvation. This seems intentional.

John W. Welch has noted that the specific names for Christ that each individual chooses to use in the narrative also characterize that person.³⁷ For the nameless queen, her cry to Jesus manifests a personal and familiar relationship with him. Her intimate and desperate plea characterizes her as sincere, penitent, and humble. Alma will later teach his son that "none but the truly penitent are saved" (Alma 42:24). The queen's namelessness highlights her humility before the Lord and attests to her preparation to someday receive the salvation she so desperately pled for.

The queen's words are also the final words spoken in direct discourse in this vignette in Alma 19. When Lamoni and Ammon regain consciousness, their words are summarized. They are not spoken in the text. These details matter. If we do not focus on what is left unsaid, we can miss one of the many rhetorical tools Book of Mormon narrators have used to reach us, their audience. Mormon's art of reticence,³⁸ his emphasis through absence, cleverly captured in this narrative, points indirectly, but forcefully, to this queen's witness. Mormon reverences the faithful but nameless queen by allowing us to hear her intimate and personal cry, naming the author of salvation, "O blessed Jesus!" Our stories may be different than hers, but Mormon invites us to step into the opportunity provided by namelessness. Nameless, she stands in

37. Scripture Central Staff, "Why Does an Angel Reveal the Name of Christ to Jacob?," KnoWhy 36, 12 February 2024, scripturecentral.org/knowwhy/why-does-an-angel-reveal-the-name-of-christ-to-jacob.

38. For a better explanation of Mormon's art of reticence, please read Charles Swift, "When Less is More: The Reticent Narrator in the Story of Alma and Amulek," *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 13, no. 1 (2012), scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1524&context=re.

the place of every reader of the Book of Mormon who, likewise, must sincerely call upon the name of “blessed Jesus” to be saved.

Nothing in this text supports the theory that Mormon did not name this queen because he thought her unimportant. Instead, he used her namelessness to reverence her and reverence the Savior’s sacred name by clearly connecting them. We can learn from this powerful queen how to take upon us the name of Christ so thoroughly that we lose our own names by declaring his. With the nameless queen’s words being the final direct speech in this episode, with the nameless queen, stripped of her particularity, functioning as an individual but also as an archetype for all human beings, Mormon can appropriately summarize the import of this event as follows: “And thus the work of the Lord did commence among the Lamanites; thus the Lord did begin to pour out his Spirit upon them; and we see that his arm is extended to all people who will repent and believe on his name” (Alma 19:36).

Conclusion

Namelessness in the Book of Mormon does not necessarily equate to insignificance. The stories of the king over all the Lamanites and the queen of the land of Ishmael, as narrated in Alma 17–24, demonstrate that their very namelessness added to their importance in the Book of Mormon narrative.

Mormon, whose message consistently returns to names and the importance of taking upon ourselves the name of Christ, may have withheld these specific names to help the reader see the queen and the king as exemplars and symbols for how we all should respond to the message of our Savior. The nameless king models how we should be willing to give up everything for Christ—all our sins, our false traditions, and our possessions. The nameless queen symbolizes the same repentance, but additionally teaches us how to respond with faith in the face of doubt. Together these characters point us to Christ, with the queen uniquely pronouncing the name *Jesus*, on which our salvation depends. Mormon’s careful account ensured that this queen, and this queen only, would actually articulate the Savior’s name.

Ultimately, this analysis of these characters highlights the Book of Mormon’s narrative art, which points the reader to Christ in creative and compelling ways.



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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 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.

Death by Chocolate: Considering the Wine Imbibed by the Lamanite Guards

Noel Hudson

Abstract: *This article examines two instances in the Book of Mormon in which captives escape through the negligence of drunken and sleeping guards. It suggests that details about the wine used to intoxicate the Lamanite guards in the city of Gid provide support for a candidate consumable, which, despite the impression the title may give, is not a piece of triple-chocolate cake, but is in fact an alcoholic drink brewed using cacao. The article briefly reviews the history of chocolate/cacao as it touches upon liberating captives from bondage and the use of deceptive practices in times of warfare. It briefly discusses the possibility of a Lamanite intelligence network driving some of the political events during the Lamanite wars narrated in the book of Alma.*

Stories of jailbreaks tend to capture the imagination. Such accounts have become, for example, part of the lore of the American Wild West. The stereotype of the sleeping and drunk guard is only slightly more commonplace in film and literature than the even less likely tale in which a dog, monkey, or other animal companion steals the keys from the unwary and sleeping jailer. In such cases, as many as ten men escape at one time. However, absconding with hundreds or even thousands of men, women, and children, to say nothing of their flocks and herds, such as we find described in the Book of Mormon, would require a level of planning and execution much higher than the opportunistic snatching of keys from a sleeping jailer, even if the animals in question had been trained in such tactics.

This article will focus on two different stories in the Book of Mormon involving the escape of large groups of Nephite captives by way of

their Lamanite guards falling asleep. There is also a third episode of the freeing of captives while the guards sleep: the story of Alma and his small flock of converts (Mosiah 24:18–21). The focus of this story is on the faith of the people and the miraculous nature of their release. Though the other two stories also recount the actions of faithful people, and though divine inspiration may well have been involved in the development of the plans that resulted in the freedom of the captives, this article will focus on natural explanations rather than inexplicable miraculous interventions. As the story of Alma and the people of Helam gives almost no detail on the circumstances surrounding the release of the people and the failure of the Lamanites to be able to follow the trail of the hundreds of escapees and their flocks, it is not examined in this paper.

The two main accounts of Nephites escaping from their Lamanite guards record the Nephites getting their Lamanite guards drunk enough to all fall asleep—apparently every single guard—after indulging in an excess of Nephite wine. However, some details are difficult to understand with these accounts, and these details present challenging questions that beg for explanation. To do so, this paper will necessarily indulge in speculation: a proposal that the wine imbibed by the Lamanite guards of the city of Gid was a cacao-based drink and not a fruit-based wine, *per se*. This proposal, if correct, solves several of the difficulties of the narrative, including the volume of liquor required to incapacitate an entire garrison, the fact that the Lamanites were given wine as part of their military rations, and the indication that the wine used was usually intended to prepare the Lamanites for battle.

Sweet Deception

Perhaps the most dramatic of the two narratives discussed in this paper—narratives in which captives are delivered from the clutches of their sleeping guards—is the one that takes place in the city of Gid. In this story, found in Alma 55, while negotiating a prisoner exchange, Captain Moroni grew angry and broke off diplomatic negotiations with Ammoron, the king of the Lamanites. He then devised a risky plan to free the Nephite prisoners. His plan, perhaps divinely inspired, was to release the captured soldiers by getting the Lamanite guards in the city of Gid so drunk that they were incapacitated and could no longer contain their prisoners.

He [Moroni] caused that a search should be made among his men, that perhaps he might find a man who was a descendant of Laman among them. . . . [W]hen it was evening Laman went to the guards who were over the Nephites, and behold, they saw him coming and they hailed him; but he saith unto them: Fear not; behold, I am a Lamanite. Behold, we have escaped from the Nephites, and they sleep; and behold we have taken of their wine and brought with us. (Alma 55:4, 8)

As Hugh Nibley describes the account:

The trick exploited the well-known psychology of troops on permanent guard duty. Such troops must always be on the alert for what they never expect to happen and what, if they do their duty, never *will* happen. Their way of life becomes a stultifying bore, with the same dull routines from day to day and from week to week. Nothing offers a more welcome release to such misery than a little nip now and then, or, better still, a party. . . . It was a typical "G.I." binge with everybody getting happily drunk at the guard house.¹

Predictably:

And it came to pass that they did take of the wine freely; and it was pleasant to their taste, therefore they took of it more freely; and it was strong, having been *prepared in its strength*. And it came to pass they did drink and were merry, and by and by they were all drunken. (Alma 55:13–14)

Moroni and his men then entered the city "in profound silence" (v. 17). They armed the prisoners, and could have killed the sleeping guards but, instead, took them prisoners and later engaged them in labor to fortify the Nephites' new tactical position in Gid (v. 25).

Several points in this account seem to require an explanation. The narrative itself provides the answer to the most basic concerns, such as how the wine used in the plan was to be delivered to the guards without raising their suspicions. This problem was addressed by making a search throughout the army to find native Lamanites who would pose as fugitive prisoners (Alma 55:5).

The fortuitous presence in the Nephite army of a former servant of the Lamanite king, a man named Laman, and other Lamanites who

1. Hugh W. Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 316.

followed him, is explained as a result of Amalickiah's lying and murderous plots against Laman's patron, the former Lamanite king. Laman, the key player in Moroni's plan, and his fellow Lamanites, became available to Captain Moroni because of Amalickiah's attempt to frame them for the murder of the king (Alma 55:5).

The first step in Captain Moroni's inspired plan was executed successfully as Laman put the fears of the soldiers of Gid to rest, telling them, "Fear not; behold, I am a Lamanite." But no sooner was that issue resolved than another difficulty arose. Laman says, "Behold, we have escaped from the Nephites, and they sleep; and behold we have taken of their wine and brought with us" (Alma 55:8). Since Laman had only "a small number of men with him" (v. 7), we may well wonder: How could they have brought enough wine to carry out the next phase of the plan: getting an entire garrison drunk?

To answer this question, let us start by establishing the parameters of the problem. How many men could Laman have credibly brought with him? A "small number" could be as few as two on the low end. On the high end, it would need to be few enough that the Lamanite guards would admit them into the city. That number in turn depends on the credibility of the escapees and how many guards were holding the city. Can the number of guards be guessed at?

In Helaman's report to Captain Moroni in Alma 57, the maximum number of Nephite soldiers involved in any given battle is 10,000, and the number of prisoners captured in a series of battles seems to be on the order of a few thousand. The captain of the men sent to guard the prisoners taken by Helaman had enough men under his command that he turned the tide of one important battle when he and his men returned in the nick of time (Alma 57:22). Additionally, Helaman notes that captured Lamanite soldiers would break out in great numbers and fight with clubs or stones so that two thousand prisoners were killed after their surrender (Alma 57:14). Thus, we may estimate that the Nephite captain would have needed to command at the very least several hundred men to guard the Lamanite prisoners.

The circumstances were somewhat different with the Nephites held by the Lamanites because there were many women and children who were prisoners as well. In this case, the Nephite men may have been less inclined to riot or escape. Nonetheless, if Captain Moroni's plan for the exchange of prisoners (Alma 54:11) that he counted on to relieve him of the burden of Lamanite prisoners was to be effective, the Lamanites had to have held thousands of Nephites in the city of

Gid. This supposition is based on the fact that Helaman and Moroni both took many prisoners on multiple occasions (Alma 56:56; 57:13; 62:15–17, 25), sometimes taking several thousand in a single action. The Lamanites, on the other hand, captured entire cities full of people (Alma 51:26–27), which explains why there were so many women and children among the captives. If the Lamanites did not put the majority of these captives to death, they likely held many times more prisoners than the Nephites did.

Supposing that a single Lamanite guard could keep fifty Nephite men, women, and children in line, at a minimum there must have been forty guards to watch over two thousand prisoners. Likely, the number of guards would have been much greater, because if the number was only forty, then Moroni and his thousands of soldiers could easily have taken the city without resorting to stratagem, despite the fortifications. For purposes of my analysis, I will double the lowest number of guards to eighty. The number was likely even greater, but using the conservative lower bound allows for a starting point.

Supposing eighty guards held the city, if Laman had more than a handful of men with him, the guards would likely have been uneasy in admitting people they didn't know into the city, so Laman's party couldn't have contained more than five to ten men. For the purpose of these calculations eight men will be used. With these bounds in place, a calculation can be made to guess how much wine each man would be required to carry.

Archaeology in Peru shows that pottery jars that held about two gallons of wine were in common use in the sixteenth century.² Though jars in Mesoamerica may have been larger or smaller, two gallons seems to set a reasonable upper limit for a man to carry while escaping, since anything much larger would be unwieldy. As the current state of archaeology suggests that wheeled conveyances such as wagons were not in common use in ancient Mesoamerica,³ and no conveyances are mentioned in the account, the wine brought by Laman and his men would have been carried by hand.

It seems reasonable that Laman and his men could have carried a couple of gallons of wine each. With eight men each carrying two

2. James Wiseman, "Insight: In Vino Veritas," *Archaeology* 50, no. 5 (September/October 1997): 12, 14, 16–17, 98, [jstor.org/stable/41771295](https://www.jstor.org/stable/41771295).

3. Scripture Central Staff, "What is the Nature and Use of Chariots in the Book of Mormon?" *KnoWhy* 126, 20 August 2020, scripturecentral.org/knowwhy/what-is-the-nature-and-use-of-chariots-in-the-book-of-mormon.

gallons, sixteen gallons of wine would be available for consumption by the guards. Would this be enough to get eighty guards drunk? With 128 fluid ounces in a gallon, sixteen gallons would provide just under twenty-six ounces per man. This amount is very close to the size of a bottle of table wine, which contains five “standard drinks,” an amount that the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism defines as “heavy drinking.”⁴ Whether or not this is enough to get a man drunk depends heavily on the alcohol content of the wine and the individual level of response. If the men involved had a high tolerance to alcohol, or if the alcohol content was low, this amount would be insufficient to get them drunk. It would be even less likely to cause them to fall into a “deep sleep” (Alma 57:15) *en masse*.

Various types of alcoholic drinks were known in ancient Mesoamerica. These drinks are assumed to be relevant here, as most Book of Mormon scholars have converged upon ancient Mesoamerica as the most likely setting for the Book of Mormon.⁵ Allen Christenson describes a few of these: *ki'y* is a word that may refer to things as diverse as an alcoholic beverage, snake venom, and insect venom. The usage indicates that both drunkenness and poisoning in the Mayan usage is like the English word intoxication, which has similar shades of meaning. *Ki'y* includes the concepts of both poison and medicine, suggesting that, for the Maya, the two were closely related.⁶ Regarding toxicity, Christian Lasso Garcia et al. note that careful preparation is a major concern when brewing traditional Latin American alcoholic beverages. While proper preparation can result in medicinal properties, improper preparation can result in toxic effects.⁷ This fine

4. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, “The Basics: Defining How Much Alcohol is Too Much,” National Institutes of Health, 2025, niaaa.nih.gov/health-professionals-communities/core-resource-on-alcohol/basics-defining-how-much-alcohol-too-much#:~:text=Heavy%20drinking%20includes%20binge%20drinking,15%20or%20more%20per%20week.

5. John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company and Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1996), 28–38.

6. Allen J. Christenson, *Popol Vuh: Sacred Book of the Quiché Maya People* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 90, mesoweb.com/publications/Christenson/PopolVuh.pdf

7. Christian Lasso García et al., “Fermented Beverages among Indigenous Latin American Societies,” *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems* 8 (June 2024), doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2024.1390162.

line in the results due to preparation is a key attribute of the cacao wine proposed here, as explored in greater detail below.⁸

Pulque is a type of *ki'y* that is viscous, milky-white, and slightly foamy. Pulque is made from the fermented sap of the agave plant.⁹ It ferments very quickly and has an alcohol content of 6 percent.¹⁰ Chicha is a general term for a fermented drink popular in the Guatemalan highlands made from various fruits, berries, cane, or maize with an alcohol content of 1–3 percent.¹¹ Balche is made from fermented honey and the bark of the balche tree and has an alcohol content of 1–5 percent by volume.¹² To these, Garcia et al. add the fermented drinks tepache, atole agrio, and tuba, all of which have low alcohol content. Though the documentation of these drinks comes from a time period much later than the setting in question, it is assumed that these drinks have historical roots going back much further than the documented time period. Therefore, they may be used as an analog for alcoholic drinks that were available during the time period and location in question. Garcia et al. note that "the production of chicha by indigenous societies in Latin America is of utmost importance due to its central role in preserving cultural identity, community cohesion, and expressing ancestral traditions."¹³ The cultural role of these types of beverages reinforces the idea that documented usages from a later period may be safely projected to earlier periods.

None of the traditional fermented drinks mentioned above has an alcohol content approaching the 12 percent of table wine used as a metric for the "standard drink" (discussed above), and 26 ounces of pulque, chicha, or balche would not have been sufficient to make the guards very drunk. The upper limit for alcohol content of fermented fruit products is 15 percent. To achieve greater alcohol content, distillation is required. Though there is some evidence that distillation

8. Garcia et al., "Fermented Beverages."

9. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 187–88.

10. Allen J. Christenson, *Popol Vuh: Sacred Book of the Quiché Maya People*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 90, mesoweb.com/publications/Christenson/PopolVuh.pdf.

11. Nicholas Gill, "A Guide to Chichas & Other Fermented Beverages in the Americas," *New Worlder*, 15 July 2025, newworlder.substack.com/p/a-guide-to-chichas-and-other-fermented.

12. F. J. Carod-Artal, "Hallucinogenic Drugs in Pre-Columbian Mesoamerican Cultures," *Neurología* (English Edition) 30, no. 1 (January–February 2015): 42–49.

13. Garcia et al., "Fermented Beverages," 11.

may have been used in specific locations of ancient Mesoamerica, the location and time periods involved do not match up with the likely locations and dates for Nephite culture.¹⁴ With distillation unlikely and purely fermented drinks too weak to get an entire garrison drunk, how might the drunkenness be explained?

Before presenting a possible candidate for the wine used, additional considerations presented in the narrative should be taken into account. Recall that Laman, making use of a bit of reverse psychology, “said unto them: Let us keep of our wine till we go against the Nephites to battle. But this saying only made them more desirous to drink of the wine” (Alma 55:10). Then, as now, drinking while on duty would likely have been a serious offense that any dutiful soldier would avoid. Doing so today carries serious consequences,¹⁵ and even more stringent penalties, such as execution, were often enacted for such conduct anciently.¹⁶ Even if these soldiers, tasked with prison duty, were among the least reliable men in the army, it is unlikely that Laman and his men could have convinced all of them to get drunk in clear dereliction of their duty.

There is yet another detail that complicates the narrative. The guards of the city of Gid said to Laman, “We are weary, therefore let us take of the wine, and by and by we shall receive wine for our rations, which will *strengthen us* to go against the Nephites” (Alma 55:11). This is an odd and easily missed detail that might strike the modern reader as incongruous. If this were wine of the sort common in nineteenth-century Europe or America, it might properly be used to celebrate a military victory. Perhaps that wine would be drunk by a few unreliable soldiers willing to indulge in what they might consider an unexpected windfall. It certainly would not be regarded as a cure for weariness. Similarly, it would not be regarded as something that would strengthen them for battle. Yet, they said it would “strengthen them” (v. 11). This statement seems to preclude the possibility of common fruit wine, and especially a distilled spirit of any sort, since none of these could be considered as strengthening a soldier for battle.

No military commander would ever have been pleased to go to

14. Daniel Zizumbo-Villarreal et al., “Distillation in Western Mesoamerica before European Contact,” *Economic Botany* 63, no. 4 (2009): 414, doi.org/10.1007/s12231-009-9103-6.

15. Military Law Center, Article 112, “Drunkenness and Other Incapacity Offenses,” militarylawcenter.com/article-112-defense-attorneys/.

16. Charles Goldberg, “Decimation in the Roman Republic,” *The Classical Journal* 111, no. 2 (2016): 141–64, doi.org/10.5184/classicalj.111.2.0141.

battle with drunken soldiers. Modern wines of the sort readers are familiar with, like the vast majority of alcoholic drinks, are *depressants* and not *stimulants*.¹⁷ It is likely that whenever the word *wine* is encountered in the Book of Mormon, something like the grape-based Madeira wine, which was the preferred drink of the upper classes in colonial America, comes to mind.¹⁸ While it is possible that some form of grape-based wine was known in the Americas during Book of Mormon times,¹⁹ it is unlikely to be the beverage the Lamanites imbibe here. Their "wine" sounds much more like an *energy* drink than like a modern wine. The problems with something like a Madeira grape-based wine include issues of portability, strength, desirability, and effect. All of these issues may be resolved by a cacao beverage used commonly in ancient Mesoamerica.

Bittersweet Rations

As seen above, there are clearly several different types of alcoholic drinks that might reasonably be rendered *wine* in translation. However, none of those wines fit the scenario well. But one drink may fit all contextual details found here: an alcoholic beverage made from the cacao fruit.

Each of the following sources supports a different aspect of the plausibility of a cacao-based drink, including the fact that it was a fermented rather than a distilled beverage, that it was culturally desirable, and that various preparations and admixtures were possible. Note that much of what is known about cacao drinks in Mesoamerica comes from the colonial period, a time much later than the period for the Book of Mormon. The assumption made here is that these insights apply equally well to a much earlier time period. John Henderson et al. say that "the earliest use of cacao in Mesoamerica is likely to have been for a fermented drink made from the pulp surrounding the seeds."²⁰

17. Andrea C. King et al., "Rewarding, Stimulant, and Sedative Alcohol Responses and Relationship to Future Binge Drinking," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 68, no. 4 (2011): 389–99, doi.org/10.1001/archgenpsychiatry.2011.26.

18. Mary V. Thompson, "Madeira," *The Digital Encyclopedia of George Washington*, mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/madeira.

19. Scripture Central Staff, "Why Does the Book of Mormon Mention Wine, Vineyards, and Wine-Presses?" *KnoWhy* 88, 20 April 2017, scripturecentral.org/knowhy/why-does-the-book-of-mormon-mention-wine-vineyards-and-wine-presses.

20. John S. Henderson et al., "Chemical and Archaeological Evidence for

Cameron McNeil notes that in later Mesoamerican history, it was “probable that the Aztecs were mixing cacao with alcoholic substances.”²¹ Marcy Norton reports, “When the Spanish and Portuguese arrived in the Americas, the inhabitants there made a cacao liquor which was diluted in hot water seasoned with pepper and other spices” such as vanilla. This could be the drink that “was pleasant to their taste, therefore they took of it more freely” (Alma 55:13).

Cacao is a fruit native to the Americas that is the primary ingredient in chocolate. The cacao bean can be fermented, dried, roasted, and ground to create a cocoa liquor, which is then processed into a chocolate-based drink.²² Norton says that “chemical and neurophysiological studies that have isolated and identified powerful psychoactive compounds that provide support for chocolate’s inherent attractiveness . . . [demonstrate that] one cannot ignore the powerful psychoactive properties of cacao and its role in human history.”²³

The Book of Mormon states that the drink given to the Lamanite guards “was strong, having been prepared in its strength.” This suggests that a small amount of this “wine” might induce drunkenness (Alma 55:13). As the analysis above shows, it seems unlikely that a quantity of other common “wines” produced in Mesoamerica at the time would be sufficiently portable and sufficiently likely to be consumed by the guards for Laman and a handful of men to use it to incapacitate an entire garrison.

An interesting property of alcoholic cacao could account for the apparent discrepancy. Normally, the effect of the cacao drink is described by its imbibers as “very substantial, very cooling, tasty, and agreeable.”²⁴ What is more, the low alcohol content meant that it was not intoxicating. However, this same cacao drink prepared among the Aztecs could have its properties altered in such a way as to change

the Earliest Cacao Beverages,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 104, no. 48 (2007): 18939, [jstor.org/stable/25450535](https://www.jstor.org/stable/25450535).

21. Cameron L. McNeil, ed., *Chocolate in Mesoamerica: A Cultural History of Cacao* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 275.
22. Elizabeth Chin et al., “Comparison of Antioxidant Activity and Flavanol Content of Cacao Beans Processed by Modern and Traditional Mesoamerican Methods,” *Heritage Science* 1, no. 9 (2013): 1–7, doi.org/10.1186/2050-7445-1-9.
23. Marcy Norton, “Tasting Empire: Chocolate and the European Internalization of Mesoamerican Aesthetics,” *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (2006): 667–68, doi.org/10.1086/ahr.111.3.660.
24. McNeil, *Chocolate in Mesoamerica*, 275.

it from a pleasant stimulant to a powerful intoxicant. McNeil, citing Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagun, notes that a particular formulation of the cacao drink could render it close to toxic:

This cacao, when much is drunk, when much is consumed, especially that which is green, which is tender, makes one drunk, takes effect on one, makes one dizzy, confuses one, makes one sick, deranges one.²⁵

Unlike the invigorating and stimulating drink made from *mature* cacao, the drink made from *green* cacao tended to "intoxicate, derange, and disturb."²⁶ That may be why this drink, though not a depressant, nonetheless put them into a deep sleep (Alma 55:15). The different potencies of the mature versus the green cacao drinks make cacao an ideal candidate for the "wine" used to inebriate the guards at Gid. The Nephites could have prepared green cacao with the specific goal of incapacitating the guards, accounting for the comment that it was "prepared in its strength" (Alma 55:13). Garcia et al. point out the toxic effects of certain biogenic amines that are produced as part of the cacao fermentation process. These biogenic amines can cause a host of unpleasant effects, such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal pain, each of which could contribute to the incapacitation of a garrison.²⁷ Extant, more modern accounts of the effects of the cacao drink made from green fruit do not mention a soporific (sleep-inducing) effect per se, but it may be supposed that, after drinking a sufficient amount to leave them reeling, sick, and suffering from dizziness and confusion, the Lamanite guards may have resorted to sleeping off these negative effects.

An additional property of mature or green cacao, as it was used in Mesoamerica in ancient times, makes the story that Laman and his men presented to the guards at Gid even more credible. Sophie and Michael Coe explain that cacao was included among the war rations of the Aztec army. He cites Juan de Torquemada, who reports that a cacao-based drink left him "blazing with spirit and courage."²⁸

If the Nephites used cacao similarly to the Aztecs, then it would be natural for Nephite soldiers to have cacao on hand as part of their war

25. McNeil, *Chocolate in Mesoamerica*, 275.

26. McNeil, *Chocolate in Mesoamerica*, 275.

27. Garcia et al., "Fermented Beverages," 5.

28. Sophie D. Coe and Michael D. Coe, *The True History of Chocolate*, 3rd ed., (London: Thames & Hudson, 2013): 104.

rations. This usage would also explain to the suspicious guards why Laman and his men might have been willing to ostensibly risk whatever additional time and effort would be required to steal the cacao beverage when fleeing from their putative Nephite captors, since it could have been used as a stimulant to aid them in their flight. The statement of the Lamanite guards at Gid—that “by and by we shall receive wine for our rations” (Alma 55:11)—fits well with the possibility that they may have been referring to a ration of a cacao-based drink such as that used by Aztec warriors as a stimulant to prepare them to fight. Such a possibility seems to fit the statement that the wine would “strengthen [them] to go against the Nephites” (v. 11). A cacao-based stimulant seems to fit the situation much better than a purely recreational alcoholic beverage such as *chicha*.

McNeil says that numerous sources indicate that the drinking of chocolate was a privilege restricted to the Aztec elite, such as the warriors. “The only commoners who were privileged to consume this luxurious commodity were soldiers in battle, because cacao was considered to be a stimulant.”²⁹ If cacao was available to commoners only as part of their war rations, and assuming that the taste, effects, and cultural usage of cacao among the Nephites and Lamanites was similar to its usage among the Aztecs, then the cacao wine brought by Laman would have been viewed as very desirable, indeed. Therefore, an unexpected windfall of cacao wine would have been seen as very desirable by the Lamanite guards. Even the most dutiful soldier would likely not have been afraid to partake since the usual effect was one of pleasant refreshment, and they would expect to feel energized by the drink.

It would be natural to expect that Lamanite quartermasters would likewise maintain tight control of a beverage that was highly regarded and difficult to obtain under normal circumstances. A sudden unexpected supply of a highly desirable wine would have meant that the guards could indulge freely without facing any penalty from their superiors for misusing their rations. All members of the garrison could partake without fear of impairing their abilities. Partaking would, these verses suggest, enhance their abilities. This would, then, be a more plausible scenario than one in which all the soldiers of the garrison drank a strong, soporific alcohol.

That the wine given to the Lamanites may have been a cacao-based

29. McNeil, *Chocolate in Mesoamerica*, 274.

drink is speculation, of course, but it is speculation that appears to fit very well the facts reported in the text. The appeal of this proposal is that it resolves the conundrum of an otherwise difficult-to-explain scenario in which Lamanite fugitives fleeing military captivity pause in their flight to acquire, then transport a large quantity of merely celebratory wine. The eagerness of the soldiers of Gid to consume the unexpected windfall of a normally upper-class product and their receipt of wine as a ration to be consumed before battle make sense if this is cacao wine. The deep sleep experienced by the guards after indulging in the specially prepared wine makes sense if the wine was made from green cacao. Added spices such as vanilla and pepper could disguise the fact that it had been prepared from green cacao.

The strongest aspects of this proposal include the use of a cacao-based drink for wartime rations in ancient Mesoamerica, the stimulatory effect of cacao, the cultural desirability of cacao, and the variations in preparation and admixtures that allow for the sort of flexibility that the narrative seems to suggest. Somewhat more speculative are the notions that near-toxic green cacao would have been used and that the guards would be likely to sleep off the negative effects of the drink.

Buying Liberty with Chocolate

The second Book of Mormon story that involves drunken guards who slumber while their captives are freed is found earlier—in the book of Mosiah. There are some possible interesting associations with cacao in this narrative as well. In this case, the people of Limhi are kept as captives while the Lamanites have been glutting themselves on the economic output of the prisoners. As with the prisoners in the city of Gid, a plan is formulated to get the guards drunk and then for the people to flee and take their flocks and herds with them. To be successful, the guards needed to be made drunk enough to incapacitate them for quite a long time. The plan was simple:

King Limhi began to consult with the people how they should deliver themselves out of bondage. . . . And Gideon said unto him: . . . The guards of the Lamanites by night are drunken; therefore let us send a proclamation among all this people that they gather together their flocks and herds, that they may drive them into the wilderness by night. And I will go according to thy command and pay the last tribute of wine to the Lamanites, and they will be drunken; . . . Thus we will

depart with our women and our children, our flocks, and our herds into the wilderness. . . . And king Limhi caused that his people should gather their flocks together; and he sent the tribute of wine to the Lamanites; and he also sent more wine, as a present unto them; and they did drink freely of the wine which king Limhi did send unto them. And it came to pass that the people of king Limhi did depart by night into the wilderness with their flocks and their herds. (Mosiah 22:1, 5–8, 10–11)

The narrative does not contain any specific details that limit the quantity of wine used nor suggest a specifically military milieu. In this story, there is no issue with the carrying capacity or number of conspirators because proximity to the city allows for any quantity of wine to be delivered to the guards.

Despite these significant differences, there is another correlation with later usages of cacao in ancient Mesoamerica. This association relates to a completely different documented usage of cacao. In Aztec times, throughout Mesoamerica, cacao beans were widely used to pay both taxes and tribute.³⁰ Cacao was used, specifically, to buy one's way out of forced labor.³¹

After the disastrous battle with the Lamanites in which king Noah led a hasty retreat and was put to death for inducing his men to abandon their wives and children and ordering them not to return (Mosiah 19:20), Noah's son, Limhi, became king. Limhi "made an oath unto the king of the Lamanites that his people should pay tribute unto him, even one half of all they possessed" (Mosiah 19:26). In addition to imposing this onerous tribute, the Lamanites "would smite them on their cheeks, and exercise authority over them; and began to put heavy burdens upon their backs and drive them as they would a dumb ass" (Mosiah 21:3). Unsurprisingly, Limhi and his people considered themselves to be slaves. All of their efforts became focused on discovering a way to deliver themselves out of bondage (Mosiah 21:36).

Once Ammon arrived and could lead them back to Zarahemla, the people of Limhi decided to implement a plan proposed by Gideon to get the Lamanites drunk and flee with their flocks and herds to the land of Zarahemla. To this end, they "sent the tribute of wine to the Lamanites; and he also sent more wine, as a present unto them; and

30. McNeil, *Chocolate in Mesoamerica*, 23.

31. McNeil, *Chocolate in Mesoamerica*, 220.

they did drink freely of the wine which king Limhi did send unto them" (Mosiah 22:10).

As with the story of freedom through chocolate in the city of Gid, the story of the escape of the people of Limhi may strike some as difficult to explain. In fact, Grant Hardy, who has written the highly influential treatise *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide*, finds the account at least surprising. He writes, "Somewhat amazingly, this strategy proved successful."³² In both accounts, the specific formulation of the wine used by Limhi and his people is unstated and, thus, unknown. However, it is possible that the same considerations that applied in the case of the city of Gid apply here: convincing every soldier of a garrison to partake of a drink designed to incapacitate them could be problematic, but the use of green cacao could potentially overcome that difficulty.

The wine Limhi and his people delivered to the soldiers was specifically paid as tribute, which fits the usage of cacao in Mesoamerica centuries later. Of course, the Lamanites did not intend that the tribute delivered to them by Limhi and his people would buy their freedom from bondage. However, perhaps Limhi and his people set the precedent for cacao being used to pay tribute and, thereby, purchase limited freedom, a practice that later became widespread throughout Mesoamerica.

Sweet Dreams

The Nephite's successful use of wine in freeing their people swiftly led the Lamanites to attempt to emulate the approach and turn the tables on the Nephites. With amazing gall and chutzpa, "many times did they attempt to administer of their wine *to the Nephites*, that they might destroy them with poison or with drunkenness" (Alma 55:30). This use of *poison* and *drunkenness* is interesting in that both words in Mayan are related to the term *ki'y* (as mentioned above). The effect of the drinks formulated by the Lamanites, whether poison or drunkenness, could be merely a question of the strength of the wine, since green cacao wine has effects that are nearly toxic. The fine distinctions of *ki'y* would be much appreciated by the poor Lamanite prisoners selected

32. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 167.

to serve as the “canaries in the coal mine”³³ to try out any suspicious liquors before they were given to a Nephite to drink:

They could not be taken in their snares; yea, they would not partake of their wine, save they had first given to some of the Lamanite prisoners. And they were thus cautious that no poison should be administered among them; for if their wine would poison a Lamanite it would also poison a Nephite; and thus they did try all their liquors. (Alma 55:31–32)

The rapid adoption of the tactical use of liquors by the Lamanites so soon after Moroni used it to good effect suggests that the Lamanites must have become aware of how Moroni took Gid, despite the fact that the entire garrison of Gid was captured (Alma 55:23).

How did the Lamanites learn how Gid was taken? Certainly, at some point Captain Moroni must have publicized the strategy throughout his forces. Though the effect of making this strategy widely known would certainly have meant that it could not be used effectively again, he must have chosen to do so in order to warn his own men to avoid the Lamanites’ use of the tactic (Alma 55:31). If Moroni had been certain that his strategy would remain a secret, he likely would have chosen not to publicize it so that he could employ it again to take another Lamanite stronghold. That he chose to reveal the strategy may indicate the effectiveness of the Lamanite intelligence network. The Book of Mormon discusses spies only in terms of performing reconnaissance (for example, Alma 43:28). However, there are hints that the Lamanite intelligence service was sophisticated and had more resources than just a few army scouts.

The first hint we have of the extent of the Lamanite intelligence service is a brief comment related to the fall of the western cities while Moroni was engaged in a campaign in the east:

And now it came to pass that the armies of the Lamanites, on the west sea, south, while in the absence of Moroni on account of some intrigue amongst the Nephites, which caused dissensions amongst them, had gained some ground over the Nephites, yea, insomuch that they had obtained possession of a number of their cities in that part of the land. (Alma 53:8)

33. Amelie Bonney, “Canaries in the Coal Mine,” *The Gale Review* (blog), 8 September 2020, review.gale.com/2020/09/08/canaries-in-the-coal-mine/.

There are no details about the intrigues among the Nephites, but the fact that these intrigues led directly to the fall of several different cities at the same time that Ammoron was there to take advantage of the situation is noteworthy. It strongly hints that the intrigues were provoked by agents employed by Ammoron. The fact that Ammoron's brother had inspired the loyalty of a large portion of the Nephite polity only a few years earlier suggests that Ammoron would have found it relatively easy to recruit agents among the Nephite populace. Those agents could have been employed to provide intelligence, sabotage Nephite war efforts, coordinate with the Lamanite army, sap Nephite morale, and perform many other activities that would prove useful to Ammoron.

A second hint that suggests an extensive and active Lamanite intelligence service is the agreement between Pachus and Ammoron, mentioned by Pahoran:

They have got possession of the land, or the city, of Zarahemla; they have appointed a king over them, and he hath written unto the king of the Lamanites, in the which he hath joined an alliance with him; in the which alliance he hath agreed to maintain the city of Zarahemla, which maintenance he supposeth will enable the Lamanites to conquer the remainder of the land, and he shall be placed king over this people when they shall be conquered under the Lamanites. (Alma 61:8)

The fact that Ammoron was in communication with the insurgents in Zarahemla strongly suggests that Ammoron's agents were instrumental in planning and carrying out the coup that resulted in the successful overthrow of the Nephite government, especially in light of the fact that two previous rebellions were unsuccessful (Alma 2, 46). Indeed, the appearance of a Lamanite army shortly after the battle with Amlicites at the hill Amnihu in the earlier rebellion hints at a history of collaboration between the Mulekite dissidents and the Lamanites. This may reflect a longer-standing pattern. The poor coordination between the Amlicites and Lamanites indicates that the two communities were not well-integrated, a shortcoming that Ammoron seems to have remedied by the time that intrigues were being provoked in the cities of the coast.

Whether the Lamanites had developed an effective intelligence service, they certainly had hit upon a strategy that closely mirrored

that of Captain Moroni. If the Lamanites had a highly functional intelligence gathering service, Moroni probably was aware of that fact. He might have decided that it was more worthwhile to warn his people of possible intrigues than it was to try his ploy a second time, hoping that the Lamanites had not yet discovered how Gid was taken. Therefore, he put the Nephites on their guard against both enemy infiltration and the possibility that their food and drink would be drugged or poisoned. Tellingly, and according to the record, the very best method for countering Lamanite intrigue was “remember[ing] the Lord their God” (Alma 55:31). This statement supports the philosophy that permeates the Book of Mormon: God will protect his people as long as they are faithful to him (see, for example, Alma 48:15).

Summary and Conclusions

This article focuses on two stories about how large groups of captives were liberated by putting their guards to sleep. It speculates about what wine was used to induce sleep. It attempts to provide a logical foundation for events that are in some respects unexplained. The cacao wine discussed in this article has several characteristics that make it a viable candidate for the wine used in freeing the captives in the city of Gid. Cacao is not a depressant like fruit-based wine. It is a stimulant, a chocolate drink likely used by soldiers preparing for battle. But it can be prepared in such a way that it becomes a nearly toxic inebriant.

Cacao was used to pay tribute and to buy the freedom of slaves, usages that correspond with the way in which Limhi and his people obtained their freedom. The possibility of the involvement of a Lamanite intelligence network in a few of the political developments during the Lamanite wars was also briefly examined. This article reasserts the literary value of reading Book of Mormon war narratives with attention to cultural and material possibilities, as a comparison with ancient Mesoamerican artifacts and behaviors can bring both richness and insight to the reading experience.

The possibility that the Lamanites made use of stimulants to prepare their soldiers for battle as suggested in Alma 55:11 fits the putative Mesoamerican context for the Book of Mormon nicely. It dovetails well with the constant search for any substance that can provide soldiers with a military edge. The use of chocolate, specifically, as a wartime stimulant is particularly interesting. Its use was not restricted to the Aztecs. German troops in World War II were issued chocolate

bars laced with methamphetamines.³⁴ American troops were issued D-rations, chocolate bars that were an emergency substitute for daily meals.³⁵ British secret service agents were given chocolate impregnated with garlic so that they would smell more like the French civilians they were impersonating. The Nazis attempted to assassinate Winston Churchill with a thin explosive encased in chocolate.³⁶

The lengths to which enemy combatants were willing to go, and the ingenuity employed in the constant deadly contests where success meant life and failure death, is also clearly visible in the accounts in Alma. Captain Moroni's need to constantly innovate during a long, destructive war is one more point of verisimilitude for the Book of Mormon account. It matches closely what happened in more recent wars.

Perhaps the most important message of the war chapters in the Book of Mormon is the philosophy that drove so many of the decisions of Captain Moroni and his generals: As long as they and their people were diligent in their faith, the Lord would protect them. This truth is illustrated many times in the Book of Mormon. It is the reason why Moroni and his people were able to avoid becoming ensnared by the intrigues of the Lamanites (Alma 55:30). Similar diligent faith will no doubt protect us today just as it did the Nephites two millennia ago.

As so many scholars and General Conference speakers have stressed, the Book of Mormon was written for our time. In McConkie and Millet's words,

Given that the Book of Mormon has been written for our day, that Mormon and the other prophet-writers saw our day and prepared this sacred volume in a way that would help us address the problems and challenges of the last days, what lessons do we learn from the twenty chapters on warfare?³⁷

They suggest five excellent lessons, acknowledging that their list "is by no means exhaustive."³⁸ To their list, I might add one more important

34. Lukasz Kamienski, *Shooting Up: A History of Drugs in Warfare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

35. Judith Sumner, *Plants Go to War: A Botanical History of World War II* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2019), 119.

36. Sumner, *Plants Go to War*, 120.

37. Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. 3, *Alma through Helaman* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 321.

38. McConkie and Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary*, 3:321.

takeaway message of the war chapters in the Book of Mormon. The philosophy that drove so many of the decisions of Captain Moroni and his generals was this: As long as they and their people were diligent in their faith, the Lord would protect them. This trust is illustrated many times throughout numerous accounts within the Book of Mormon. It is given as the reason why Moroni and his people were able to avoid becoming ensnared in the intrigues of the Lamanites (Alma 55:30). The development of a similar faith in those who follow Christ in the current day will no doubt serve to protect and guide them, just as it did the Nephites of two millennia ago.

That is something to ponder the next time you sit down to read the Book of Mormon while you enjoy your favorite chocolate beverage. I suggest that a Guatemalan hot chocolate, known as *Xocolatl*, with a bit of cinnamon, pepper, and vanilla might be particularly appropriate.



Noel Hudson was born in Idaho Falls, Idaho, and raised in Provo, Utah. He earned a BS in Zoology from BYU, an MS in Engineering Technology from BYU, and an MBA in marketing from BYU. While working as an electrical engineer for a company that manufactures communications equipment, he published eight books of historical and science fiction and has written articles on the Book of Mormon. He and his wife, Luciana, are the parents of three children.

Why God Placed Adam and Eve Under Paradoxical Injunctions: A View of the Garden Scene through the Optics of Communication Theory

Jared Balmer

Abstract: *This paper investigates the pragmatic aspect of communication between God and our first parents while in the Garden of Eden—the psychological impact of placing them under contradictory injunctions that result in a situation of “damned if you do and damned if you don’t.” God could not introduce knowledge that, by definition, also involves introducing evil, which is a prerequisite for choice. Instead he issued a paradoxical injunction that placed Adam and Eve in an influence-free decision-making environment with the implied message of “make a decision!” The beguiling influence of Satan provided additional information, a way to escape the paradox. Hence, the paradoxical injunction became an instrument to influence a decision-making process without God having to introduce evil and without having to make an argument in one direction over another.*

The study of human communication can be subdivided into three areas: syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics. Syntactics is the grammatical arrangement and order of words in a sentence that add up to a valid thought or idea. Semantics is the analysis of those words and how they relate to each other. Pragmatics, by way of context or situational interaction, uses both verbal and nonverbal communication to clarify a message. For example, picture a father and son standing in the kitchen. In an angry voice, the father states that the garbage is piling up. A completely different message is sent if the father and the son are standing at the city dump, and the father casually makes the same

statement. The words are exactly the same, though the intention of the message has completely changed based on the context and non-verbal communication. It is the pragmatic aspect of communication that drives home the meaning and interpretation between sender and recipient. In short, while syntax is mathematical logic and semantics is philosophy, pragmatics is psychology.¹

The pragmatic aspects of the communication between God, Adam, Eve, and Satan are complex. Far from being based on clear, precise, unidirectional, and congruent messages between the actors in the Garden of Eden, God's intent is to stay clear of influencing our first parents in a given direction. Instead, His objective is for the couple to arrive at a decision by themselves. The tools employed for such interactions involve verbal and non-verbal behavior, contextual meaning, implied messages, and paradoxical injunction. To examine such communication tools, it is helpful to consider the building blocks of pragmatic communication theory.

Axioms of Pragmatic Communication

Fundamental to the premise of this paper is a basic understanding of the pragmatics of communication theory—the building blocks of how people influence each other, employing verbal and non-verbal messages within the context where exchanges take place. The building blocks of how people relate to each other are found in the axioms of communication theory.

The inability not to communicate

Behavior has no opposite. One cannot not behave. Therefore, all behavior is a form of communication. Human communication is defined by exchanging messages between individuals. Such messages may consist of words—the spoken language—but *always* include non-verbal language.² All non-verbal messages fall into one of six categories. Those are:

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1. Charles W. Morris, "Foundations of the Theory of Signs," in *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science* 1, no. 2, ed. Otto Neurath, Rudolf Carnap, and Charles W. Morris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938): 77–137.
 2. Julian Hochberg, "Review of Birdwhistell's *Kinesics and Context: Essay on Body Motion Communication*," *The American Journal of Psychology* (1972): 441–55, [researchgate.net/profile/Adam-Kendon/publication/308054625_Review_of_birdwhistell's_'kinesics_and_context'/links/5a990603aca27214056d9d3d/Review-of-birdwhistells-kinesics-and-context.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Adam-Kendon/publication/308054625_Review_of_birdwhistell's_'kinesics_and_context'/links/5a990603aca27214056d9d3d/Review-of-birdwhistells-kinesics-and-context.pdf).

- Kinesics—all body movement (facial expressions, eye movement, etc.).
- Voice quality—the inflection, cadence, and volume of speech.
- Proxemics—the relative distance between people.
- Olfactory—the smell of an individual (deodorant, perfume, sweat, etc.).
- Clothing—the type of clothing one wears (or does not wear).
- Artifacts—bracelets, necklaces, earrings, tattoos, etc.

Even a mute response is a behavior and falls into the category of kinesics. The individual who is asked to answer a question, yet only responds with silence, is communicating at the non-verbal level. In some cases, non-verbal messages may be difficult to interpret. Consider the following example. A mother asks her son to take out the garbage. He remains sitting with a “neutral” facial expression and does not speak. He is behaving. He is communicating. However, the mother may be puzzled with what her son is “saying.” Such interpretation is dependent on a large number of variables. In sum, the son cannot not communicate, even though the communication may be confusing.

The command aspect of non-verbal communication

When individuals communicate with each other, the non-verbal portion of each exchanged message clarifies (or obstructs) what is being said at the verbal level. Moreover, the verbal part of the message conveys the content, and the non-verbal part tells the recipient how to interpret the content. Therefore, the non-verbal part of the message is referred to as the command aspect of the message.³ Smiling, voice tone, and touching behavior that may accompany the words “I like you” signal to the recipient how to interpret the words. Conversely, if “I like you” is accompanied with a frown and lack of eye contact, the interpretation of the message will be different—the definition of an incongruent message.

The inability not to influence

As soon as two or more people meet, they immediately begin

3. Paul Watzlawick and Don D. Jackson, “On Human Communication,” *Journal of Systemic Therapies* 29, no. 2 (2010): 53–68, guilfordjournals.com/doi/10.1521/jsyt.2010.29.2.53.

exchanging behaviors (verbal and/or non-verbal messages) in an attempt to define the nature of their relationship.⁴ This is to say that what is exchanged between individuals is not simply information, but it imposes thoughts, reactions, responses, or behavior. Therefore, the exchange of messages with each other is more than exchanging information; it is always, under all circumstances, a way to *relate* to each other. For that reason, it is impossible not to influence each other. Hence, when people interact with each other, there is an ongoing way of defining the relationship: “This is how I see myself . . . this is how I see you . . . this is how I see you seeing me.” Such exchanges could potentially go on endlessly.⁵

Influence in the absence of non-verbal behavior

Since one cannot not influence, in every message exchanged, the individuals direct each other as to what to do. Therefore, the sender of a message cannot escape influencing the recipient. A claim that “I have no intention to influence you” is incorrect. In the absence of non-verbal behavior, any message that is directive in nature — such as “Get up!,” “Sit down!,” “Come in!,” “I invite you to my house” — is inevitably an attempt to influence. Likewise, non-directive messages — such as “The sky is blue” or “I met your brother” — have influencing properties as well. At a minimum, they elicit a thought and direct or persuade the receiver to respond cognitively and/or behaviorally in a given direction. An example of a cognitive response could be a thought or agreement with the message. A behavioral response could be a verbal response to the sender’s message. Even ignoring the message is a response — as one cannot not communicate. This begs the question whether there is a form of communication that is not explicitly or implicitly prescriptive in nature — directing a person what to do and *not* influencing a person in a given direction.

Paradoxical Communication

A paradox may be defined as a contradiction that follows correct deductions from consistent premises.⁶ Although there are three classes of paradoxes, this paper focuses only on pragmatic

4. Jay Haley, *Strategy of Psychotherapy* (New York: Grune & Stratton, 1963), 6–7.

5. Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin-Bavelas, and Donald Jackson, *Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), 32–33.

6. Christopher Cowie, “What are Paradoxes?,” *Journal of the American Philosophical*

paradoxes — paradoxical injunctions in human communication. Examples are "You must ignore me!" or "Be spontaneous!" Within the frame of these relationships, an injunction is given that must be obeyed, but it must be disobeyed to be obeyed. The respondent of the injunction is placed in a bind, as the injunction can never be obeyed and can only be obeyed with disobedience — a paradox.⁷

Paradoxical injunctions in human interaction

Paradoxical interaction was first described by Bertrand Russell in 1901.⁸ Subsequently, behavioral scientists have varied in providing a precise definition of how paradoxical interactions are manifest in human interaction but have converged on the central elements of its effect. In this paper, I accept the definition of a situation in which a person is confronted with irreconcilable injunctions or a choice between two conflictual courses of action.

The garden scene

I now turn to the interaction between God and Adam and Eve, examining their behavioral and verbal interaction viewed through the optics of the paradoxical injunction.

So, God created man in his own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, *Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth*, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (Genesis 1:27–28, emphasis added)

And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: *But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die*. (Genesis 2:15–17, emphasis added)

Association 9, no 1 (2023): 154–71, durham-repository.worktribe.com/output/1208267/what-are-paradoxes.

7. Watzlawick, Beavin-Bavelas, and Jackson, *Pragmatics*, 180–81.

8. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Russell's Paradox," plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/russell-paradox/.

The Hypothesis

The sacred text describes the circumstance under which our first parents are presented with two directives. To obey one, they would have to disobey the other. To ensure that their decision is operational under their own agency—without persuasion toward one choice or the other—God places them under paradoxical injunctions. Since God could not introduce knowledge—the difference between good and evil—he allowed Satan to introduce this binary concept, thereby allowing Adam and Eve to choose for themselves, without any “interference” from the divine.

Fundamental to the paradoxical injunction hypothesis presented here is that Adam and Eve violated a prohibition. Their response to the dilemma is more complex than a simple choice between right and wrong. Prior to partaking of the fruit, they are innocent, not familiar with the binary concept of right or wrong. Consequently, their decision would have been between wrong and wrong or right and right. Not knowing the difference from right and wrong, only responding to conflicting messages, they find themselves in a conflicted situation. Neither of their choices is right or wrong. Yet, in their minds, each choice is associated with a transgression of the directives.⁹

The biblical text provides no information about God’s non-verbal message in connection with the injunction to procreate. Eliminating the possibility of incongruent communication on God’s part, the directive to procreate is a clear message given to Adam and Eve by God—a commandment to be obeyed.

The subsequent message directs them not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and adds that if they do eat, they will “surely die.” It is a commandment with a grave consequence if ignored. The text is silent on whether Adam and Eve were schooled by God (explicitly or implicitly, verbally or non-verbally) in the knowledge of the implications of dying or the meaning of death. Rejecting the partaking of the fruit places Adam and Eve under a paradoxical injunction: multiply, but don’t eat. Operationally speaking, God places them in a binary environment of choosing between two options but stays clear of asserting explicit or implicit influence for the decision making. That is the unique feature of a paradoxical directive. Given that they acted with knowledge of the consequences of the Fall, it is

9. Terryl Givens and Fiona Givens, *The God Who Weeps* (Salt Lake City: Ensign Peak, 2012), 57.

reasonable to assume that Adam would have partaken of the fruit and thus fulfilled the first directive to procreate. Yet, he rejected Lucifer's offer to partake.

If the great plan of happiness is contingent on the Fall (Alma 42:8), why not simply ask them to partake of the fruit? Why place them under a paradoxical injunction? There are two possible considerations. First, after the second directive (not to eat), God could not direct them to transgress a law. Why? It would be contrary to the nature of God to provide a law and subsequently ask that it be broken. Second, directing them to eat without referring to the consequence of dying, independent decision making on the part of Adam and Eve would have been impossible. Why? God would have given them a directive, thereby influencing them in a given direction.

Except for the initial interaction between God and our first parents, all holy writ articulates the benefits of making a choice in one direction—the *good* in comparison to the *bad*. However, the communication between deity and our first parents is more complex.

The paradoxical injunction is a pragmatic communication tool whereby a message is devoid of any explicit or implicit intent to influence a person in a given direction. It bypasses the command aspect present in all other forms of communication. In the absence of such influencing property, God's implied message is simple: "Make a decision!" It is a prompt to act, shy of providing a rationale in favor of one or the other direction.

Eventually, sorting through all the information presented to them in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve arrive at a decision. That decision is independent of God's persuasion. He wants to be certain that it is their decision alone. Hence, he employs the paradoxical injunction. Joseph Smith reminds us that "by providing contraries, truth is manifest."¹⁰ In this case, by providing contraries, an influence-free decision is manifest.



Jared Balmer completed a MEd in Educational Psychology and a PhD in Psychotherapy, both from Brigham Young University. As an adjunct faculty member, he taught at BYU, St. Louis University, and the University of Missouri at St. Louis (UMSL). He is the co-owner/

10. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:428.

founder or CEO of several psychiatric hospitals and residential treatment programs. Jared has published a number of professional books and articles and lectured to professional and lay audiences throughout the U.S. He is currently serving as an area mental health advisor for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The Islamic Jesus

Dennis Newton

Review of Mustafa Akyol, The Islamic Jesus: How the King of the Jews Became a Prophet of the Muslims (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017). 288 pp., \$17.99 (paperback).

Abstract: *In his book, The Islamic Jesus, Muslim author Mustafa Akyol paints a portrait of the Qur'an's Isa (Jesus) and attempts to locate this picture within the landscape of Judeo-Christian biblical scholarship. He is excited to find Islamic Jesus parallels within the Gospels, the Epistle of James, and early non-canonical Christian writings such as the Didache and the Gospel of Thomas. Akyol follows the path of these discoveries to so-called "Jewish Christianity" and postulates that remnants of this Christian movement might have been active in seventh-century Arabia. Ultimately, he writes to encourage Muslims to embrace Jesus as a focal point of much-needed reform within the Islamic world. In my review, I highlight three major themes in Akyol's book. Each theme represents a topic over which I believe Latter-day Saints can ally with our Muslim neighbors theologically or at least glean helpful learnings from Akyol's journey of discovery.*

On 8 September 2010, Elder Russell M. Nelson dedicated the country of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the preaching of the gospel. Two years later, the government officially recognized the Church, and the first proselyting missionaries were assigned there. Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of a handful of majority-Muslim countries where Latter-day Saints actively proselyte to Muslims without reservation. In 2016 my wife and I served as missionaries in Sarajevo, the country's capital, and we became better acquainted with Islam and the beliefs of

our many Muslim friends in Bosnia.¹ I was first intrigued to learn more about *Isa* — the name for Jesus in Arabic — during a Christmas sacrament meeting where speakers recounted Jesus’s birth narrative as found in the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, and the Qur’an.²

Upon returning home, Mustafa Akyol’s book, *The Islamic Jesus*, caught my eye.³ Intended as a discussion about the Islamic view of Jesus, Akyol summarizes the plentiful teachings about Jesus in the Qur’an, attempts to place these teachings within the context of ancient Judaism and emergent Christianity, proposes an Islamic Christology, and concludes that embracing the teachings of Jesus could provide a solution to the crisis of a fractured modern Islamic world. He states:

We Muslims are not living in the context of seventh-century Mecca and Medina. We are rather living in the context of first-century Nazareth and Jerusalem. Therefore, we need a “prophetic example” fit for the first-century drama. We need the method, and the message, of Jesus. Isn’t it none other than Jesus, after all, whose very “return” is promised in our tradition? (p. 203)

This review essay discusses Akyol’s book from a Latter-day Saint perspective, abstaining from traditional apologetics, and focusing instead on what Akyol can teach Latter-day Saints about less familiar Jesus traditions and the possible paths of future scholarship Akyol illuminates for us.

Like most Latter-day Saints, I was unaware of the quantity and depth of Jesus material found in the Qur’an. British scholar and Methodist minister Geoffrey Parrinder provides a helpful summary of the portrait of Jesus in the Qur’an:

The Qur’an gives a greater number of honourable titles to Jesus than to any other figure of the past. He is a “sign,” a

1. *Bosnia* is the shorter way of referring to the more formal country name, *Bosnia and Herzegovina*. Also, it is important to understand that *Islam* is the religion, and a *Muslim* is a follower of that religion.

2. The Muslim speaker on this particular Sunday, Emir Kaknjašević, is employed by the Church as a lawyer. He assisted the Church in gaining official status in Bosnia in 2012. He often attends Church worship meetings in Sarajevo and is familiar with the New Testament narratives about Jesus’s birth. He expertly wove together the details from the Bible and the Qur’an into one familiar nativity tapestry.

3. Mustafa Akyol, *The Islamic Jesus: How the King of the Jews Became a Prophet of the Muslims* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2017).

"mercy," a "witness" and an "example." He is called by his proper name Jesus, by the titles Messiah (Christ) and Son of Mary, and by the names Messenger, Prophet, Servant, Word and Spirit of God. The Qur'an gives two accounts of the annunciation and birth of Jesus, and refers to his teachings and healings, and his death and exaltation. . . . Jesus is always spoken of in the Qur'an with reverence; there is no breath of criticism, for he is the Christ of God.⁴

According to Muslim tradition, up to 24,000 prophets have been sent to mankind. While all of these messengers are important, the Qur'an suggests that God has elevated the status of some: "We favoured some of these messengers above others. God spoke to some; others He raised in rank. We gave Jesus, son of Mary, our clear signs and strengthened him with the holy spirit" (Qur'an 2:253). While not the most frequently mentioned prophet in the Qur'an, a distinction that goes to Moses, Jesus is celebrated as the Messiah who worked miracles and is uniquely hailed as the Word of God. "Jesus appears in some ninety-three verses of the Qur'an in fifteen different chapters" (p. 78). Muslims also anticipate his second coming. His mother, Mary, is the only woman named in the Qur'an where she is mentioned thirty-four times compared to nineteen in the New Testament (p. 104).

Despite Jesus's stature in the Qur'an, "reference to the example of Jesus . . . is relatively rare in Muslim culture" (p. 203). Akyol acknowledges that this is due, in part, to a political reaction to the "Christian West." He quotes Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who claims that Muslims have an aversion "not only to Christianity . . . but even to the Islamic conception of Christ and Mary."⁵ Fortunately, Akyol sees this as "a problem to be corrected, not a normality to be accepted" (p. 203).

Another possible reason for the lack of Muslim cultural discussion about the Islamic Jesus is the Qur'an's lack of specificity about his teachings and mission. Muslims actively discuss other prophets, such as Moses, Job, and Elijah, whose stories are conveyed in the Qur'an with additional details. While early Muslim scholars and teachers supplemented their Qur'an reading with study of "Jewish and Christian texts" (p. 204), later "Islamic thought turned insular and self-referential.

4. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2013), 16, quoted in Akyol, *Islamic Jesus*, 134.

5. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. Oddbjorn Leirvik (London: A. and C. Black, 2010) 2–3, quoted in Akyol, *Islamic Jesus*, 203.

Inevitably, it stagnated” (p. 205). Akyol advocates for Muslims to return to studying both the Torah and the New Testament Gospels, with a particular focus on the sayings of Jesus. His proposed goal of this study: “A Jesus-centered renewal of Islamic law and Muslims’ behaviors.”⁶ He adds:

I believe that the teachings of Jesus to his fellow Jews can today give us Muslims reformist guidance especially in two key matters. The first is the Kingdom of God, which Muslims would call the Caliphate. The second is religious law, which Muslims would call the Shariah. (p. 206)

Mustafa Akyol is a writer, a New York Times journalist, and author of several books on contemporary issues within Islam. He is also a believer in the Qur’an. He is not, however, a scholar of the New Testament nor of the Qur’an. Thus, many of his historical arguments rely on the scholarship of others. In his book, he skillfully weaves together his narrative by surveying the findings of largely secular scholars and comes to conclusions that are uniquely his own. His is a Muslim voice advocating that the Islamic world should seek out the words of Jesus. As a Latter-day Saint, I am excited to applaud Akyol’s admonition to the Muslim community, as well as to glean insights from his summary of the Islamic view of Jesus. While I understand that my beliefs about Jesus will not fully align with those found in the Qur’an, the commonalities are enlivening. I am hopeful that both sides can benefit from meaningful conversation.

James and Jewish Christianity

Akyol’s first experience with the New Testament occurred in graduate school. Walking the streets of Istanbul, a Christian missionary handed him a Turkish copy of the New Testament and asked if he had heard “the good news.” Akyol had seen Turkish newspaper stories warning of strangers who were trying to convert Muslims and even recalled a rumor that the U.S. CIA was funding this missionary effort and had secretly placed \$100 bills inside “free” copies of the New Testament to encourage readership. He accepted the missionary’s gift, noted the lack of money as he leafed through the pages, and began reading it that evening. He was intrigued enough to finish the book of Matthew

6. Zeki Saritoprak, *Islam’s Jesus* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 117, quoted in Akyol, *Islamic Jesus*, 206.

before retiring that night. As he worked his way through the New Testament—admittedly through the lens of the Qur'an—he read much that he admired but also found some passages troubling:

At some point during my reading, I decided to use a method: I began underlining the passages in the New Testament that I liked the most with a blue pen while underlining the passages that I found objectionable with a red pen. It soon turned out that I had more blue lines in the gospels, especially in the first three, whereas the epistles of Paul got filled with many red lines. Paul's "christology"—a term I would learn later—was just not working for me. Then, toward the end of the New Testament, I came to an epistle that rekindled my ambiguous affection for this book. This particular document was both full of teachings that deeply resonated with my faith and, more importantly, contained nothing that contradicted my faith. My underlining turned out to be all blue, in other words, no red. (pp. 2–3)

The book that so excited Akyol was the Epistle of James. In it he found a spirit and tone kindred to his beloved Qur'an and its portrayal of Jesus. As an example, Akyol marveled that James 4:14–15 seemed very similar to Qur'an 18:23–24, because both thematically compel the reader to not take any action "tomorrow" without properly acknowledging that the Lord "wills" the action.⁷ Another example is the side-by-side comparison of Qur'an 2:177 and James 1:27 (see table 1) which teach that true righteousness requires service to the poor and needy.

Table 1. Comparing James 1:27 and Qur'an 2:177.

James 1:27	Qur'an 2:177
Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.	Righteousness is not in turning your faces towards the east or west. Rather, the righteous are those who believe in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Books, and the prophets; who give their cherished wealth to relatives, orphans, the poor, needy travelers, beggars, and for freeing captives . . . It is they who are true in faith, and it is they who are mindful of God.

7. James 4:14–15 states, "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." Qur'an 18:23–24 states "Never say about anything, 'I am doing that tomorrow,' without adding 'If God wills.'"

Later, as Akyol conducted a much more detailed study of the New Testament, he concluded that the Islamic Jesus found in the Qur'an was consistent with the Jesus portrayed in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and the Epistle of James, but that the Qur'an seemed somewhat in conflict with the vernacular and terminology found in John's Gospel and in the Pauline epistles. This conclusion prompted Akyol to take on an in-depth and critical study of the scholarship relating to the early Christian movement. His discoveries about early Christianity comprise the first part of his book's narrative.

It is not an exaggeration to state that every "known fact" about Jesus's death and the earliest beliefs of Christianity are disputed by one scholar or another. So it is remarkable that New Testament archaeologist and scholar James D. Tabor makes the following definitive statement about the known facts concerning Jesus's death:

Three facts appear to be indisputable: first, Jesus was truly dead; second, that he was hastily and temporarily buried in an unknown tomb; and third, that the movement Jesus began did not end with his death but revived and found new life under the leadership of Jesus' brother James.⁸

Most Latter-day Saint readers would quickly acknowledge the first two "facts." Yes, Jesus died, and yes, he was buried in a temporary tomb. But Latter-day Saints might appear slightly quizzical when told the third "fact." Wasn't Peter the first successor to Jesus as the earthly leader of the Church? Did not Paul later become the de facto head of the Church? Did Jesus have brothers and sisters? As theological heirs

8. James D. Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty: The Hidden History of Jesus, His Royal Family, and the Birth of Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 228. Tabor also argues that following James's death in AD 62, another of Jesus's brothers, Simon, was elected as the church leader. Simon held this position until his death around AD 106. See Tabor, *Jesus Dynasty*, 289–90. John Dominic Crossan has this to say about the prominence of James during the early Christian movement: "If you read only Paul's letters you would know—from Galatians 1:18–19 or 2:11–12, for example—that both Simon 'the Rock' . . . and James 'the Lord's brother' were important figures in early Christianity. If you read only the canonical gospels you would know that Peter was very important but you would know James only as one among the siblings of Jesus named in passing in Mark 6:3. If you read a non-Christian source such as Josephus, however, you would know only two individuals in earliest Christianity: one is Jesus himself and the other his brother James. You would not know, for example, that Peter or Paul had ever existed." John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 463.

of the Western Protestant Christian tradition, Latter-day Saints often assume a direct lineage from Peter to the early Church Fathers to the creeds of the Roman Empire to Roman Catholicism and then to its Protestant offshoots.⁹ So why does Tabor assert that James's leadership of Jesus's religious movement is indisputable?

Akyol asked many of these same questions as he began to read "dozens of academic books on early Christianity and the historical Jesus" (p. 5). However, his reading of the passage below from the aforementioned James D. Tabor produced what Akyol calls his "aha moment," personal "proof" that his red and blue underlining experience was not simply schizophrenic proof-texting inspired by an Islamic worldview, but rather possible evidence of two different faith traditions in early Christianity. Tabor wrote:

There are two completely separate and distinct "Christianities" embedded in the New Testament. One is quite familiar and became the version of the Christian faith known to billions over the past two millennia. Its main proponent was the apostle Paul. The other has been largely forgotten and by the turn of the 1st century A.D. had been effectively marginalized and suppressed by the other. Even within the documents of the New Testament itself, one has to look carefully to detect its presence. Its champion was none other than James the brother of Jesus, leader of the Jesus movement from A.D. 30 until his violent death in the year A.D. 62. (p. 261)

Akyol fully acknowledges that some New Testament scholars resist Tabor's views.¹⁰ First-century Judaism was not monolithic, and neither

9. Noel B. Reynolds notes the following about Latter-day Saint's efforts, historically, to characterize the concept of apostasy: "In the 1960s, LDS historian Richard L. Bushman observed that LDS students of the apostasy had become too dependent on Protestant and often anti-Catholic writers and challenged us to look at the apostasy afresh." Noel B. Reynolds, "Introduction: What Went Wrong for the Early Christians," in *Early Christians in Disarray: Contemporary LDS Perspectives on the Christian Apostasy* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS], 2005), 3. I agree with Bushman's sentiment and feel that it could be applied with much broader strokes. Latter-day Saints inherited and, therefore, often presume a Protestant bias with regard to many topics such as theology, the biblical canon, attitudes towards Paul, early Christianity, the Hebrew Bible, and social issues. One has only to look at which version of the Exodus Decalogue that Latter-day Saints have adopted to see evidence of this bias.

10. In a discussion about what he calls a "divided tradition" in earliest Christianity,

was early Christianity.¹¹ Still, he is grateful to Tabor for placing him on the path to investigate early Christianity, James, and what Akyol calls “Jewish Christianity.” It is along this path, which diverges significantly from the traditional path assumed by adherents to the Christianity of ancient Rome, where Akyol discovers echoes of the historical and theological groundwork that he argues are supportive of the Qur’an’s views on Jesus. Ultimately, Akyol believes it is possible to trace some of the sources of the Qur’an’s description of Jesus to Christian communities that survived in Arabia as late as the seventh century AD.

Akyol quotes religious historian Hans-Joachim Schoeps with regard to the historical dilemma faced by those trying to track the sources of the Qur’anic teachings about Jesus:

Here is a paradox of world-historical proportions: Jewish Christianity indeed disappeared within the Christian church, but was preserved in Islam.¹²

The first Western scholar to point out the parallels between the Qur’an and Jewish Christianity was John Toland in the 1700s. A century later, Adolf von Harnack claimed, “Islam is a transformation of the Jewish religion already transformed by the gnostic Jewish-Christians on Arabic soil.”¹³ More recently, Islamic studies scholar Patricia

John Dominic Crossan acknowledges a division which he attributes to factors such as urban versus rural, different points of emphasis, models of salvation, north versus south, and so forth. He asserted, “It is necessary, then, to distinguish two traditions in earliest Christianity, one emphasizing the sayings of Jesus and the other emphasizing the death and resurrection of Jesus. We should not privilege one over the other, as I have said—not the death and resurrection over the sayings, as in past theology, nor the sayings over the death resurrection, as in present reaction.” Crossan, *Birth of Christianity*, 415. However, Crossan believes that the earliest differences do not represent different traditions: “In my own understanding, I rephrase those twin traditions of the sayings and of the passion-resurrection as the twin traditions of Jesus’s life and of Jesus’s death. They are, for me, two sides of a single coin” (p. 408).

11. “The phenomenon known as Jewish Christianity is complex. One should not think of it as a unity but as a variety of religious developments.” Glenn A. Koch, “Jewish Christianity,” in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson, 2nd ed. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 613.
12. Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity: Factional Disputes in the Early Church*, trans. Douglas R. A. Hare (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 140, quoted in Akyol, *Islamic Jesus*, 81.
13. Adolf von Harnack, “Islam,” from an excerpt translated by Markus Gross from *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (Tubingen, Germany: 1909), published in *Christmas in the Koran*, ed. Ibn Warraq (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2014), 246, quoted in Akyol, *Islamic Jesus*, 83.

Crane published a comprehensive two-part article entitled "Jewish Christianity and the Qur'an." Despite the work of these scholars and the obvious connections between the Qur'an and Jewish Christianity, only a handful of additional scholars have taken up the investigation.¹⁴

Nonetheless, the parallels between Islam and what has been called "Jewish Christianity" are startling. The Encyclopedia of Islam's entry on "Jewish Christians" concludes, "Jewish Christians represented the real message of Jesus, and their image of Jesus is the same with that of Islam" (p. 88). Here are just five of many examples of parallels:

- Both Islam and Jewish Christianity insist that neither is a "new" religion . . . both seek to call people back to the "Abrahamic faith."¹⁵
- "Like Islam, The Book of James, and the teachings of Jesus in Q, emphasize *doing* the will of God as a demonstration of one's faith."¹⁶
- The dietary laws of Islam to avoid "what dies of itself, and blood, and the flesh of swine" (Qur'an 2:173) and the food sacrificed to idols seem to match the admonition given by James in Acts 15.¹⁷ Abstaining from wine, another primary Islamic dietary prohibition, is a personal characteristic for which James was well known.¹⁸
- "Both the Qur'an and the *Didache* speak of Two Ways, of good and evil, teaching that men are called upon to choose

14. Akyol quotes Hans Kung to argue that a significant reason for the lack of scholarly interest is because "not only Muslim theologians but also Christian dogmatic theologians of all confessions often simply ignore inconvenient results of exegetical and historical research." Hans Kung, *Islam: Past, Present, and Future* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld Publications, 2007), 496, quoted in Akyol, *Islamic Jesus*, 84.

15. Tabor, *Jesus Dynasty*, 315.

16. Tabor, *Jesus Dynasty*, 315.

17. Acts 15:29 reads, "that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled."

18. "We infer the Jewish Christian position on wine from the writings of church father Irenaeus. In his famous book, *Adversus Haereses*, or *Against Heresies* (c. AD 180), he wrote that the Ebionites 'reject the commixture of the heavenly wine and wish it to be water of the world only. We also know from Hegesippus, the Christian chronicler of the second century, that James the Just, the brother of Jesus and the pioneer of all Jewish Christians, 'drank no wine or other intoxicating liquor,'" quoted in Akyol, *Islamic Jesus*, 87. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.1.3, earlychristianwritings.com/text/irenaeus-book5.html; Hegesippus, *Fragments from His Five Books of Commentaries on the Acts of the Church*, earlychristianwritings.com/text/hegesippus.html.

between them, to be either rewarded or punished by God.” (p. 85).

- Both the Qur'an and the Jewish Christianity teach a form of “low Christology” that only differs slightly. Strictly monotheistic, Jewish Christians would never elevate Jesus to the status of “Most High God,” and Muslims worship only Allah or “The God.” Both agree that Jesus is the Messiah.

To explain these similarities, Akyol postulates that an alternative form of Christianity must have survived in Arabia. He asks: “Is there a chance that Jewish Christianity, which seems to have vanished in history by the end of the fifth century, might have survived to have an impact in early seventh-century Arabia, to have influenced the ‘historical Muhammad?’” (pp. 88–89).¹⁹ Scholars most commonly track Jewish Christianity through the Jerusalem church and its continuous leadership by James and Simon, as well as through the New Testament texts attributed to James and Jude, the late first century AD apocryphal texts *Didache* and *The Gospel of Thomas*, the third-century pseudo-Clementine writings, and the reports of the existence of “heretical” groups such as Ebionites and Elchasaites.²⁰ Each of these sources describe a version of early Christianity that appears different from the Pauline Christianity of Protestant reformers Calvin and Luther.

Authorship of the New Testament books of James and Jude are both attributed to brothers of Jesus.²¹ The Book of Jude assumes

19. While his initial study of this question led to a negative answer, the Qur'an and its witness of a non-traditional version of Christianity served as such a glaring exception that it forced Akyol to keep investigating. “That is why various scholars have been tempted to hypothesize the existence of Jewish Christianity in the time and milieu of the Prophet Muhammad, by simply looking at the doctrinal connection between Jewish Christianity and Islam and then assuming that there must be a historical connection behind it” (p. 89).

20. The writings of these later groups have not survived but we know of their existence from writings of the Church Fathers, such as Irenaeus. According to the twelfth saying in the *Gospel of Thomas*, the disciples asked Jesus who would lead them after his death. “The disciples said to Jesus, ‘We know that you are going to leave us. Who will be our leader?’ Jesus said to them, ‘No matter where you have come from, you are to go to James the Just.’” Marvin Meyer, *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, int'l ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 141.

21. Most scholars are skeptical that James or Jude actually authored the letters that carry their names. The primary argument is that neither James nor Jude had the scribal training to compose a sophisticated Greek letter (both

a first-century Jewish audience because it quotes, without attribution, two non-canonical Jewish texts (the Assumption of Moses and 1 Enoch) with which only a Jewish audience would be familiar. The Book of James is lauded as the epistle most closely aligned with Jesus's sayings in the Gospels. "What is most amazing about the letter of James, is that the ethical content of its teaching is directly parallel to the teachings of Jesus that we know from the Q source."²² Because many of Jesus's teachings are based on the Torah and the teachings of the prophets, James's message would universally appeal to his Jewish audience (the letter is addressed to the "twelve tribes which are scattered abroad," James 1:1).²³

Sociologist Rodney Stark has challenged many of the long-held assumptions about the rise of "Gentile" Christianity. Traditionally, historians assume that "Jewish Christianity" flourished until the Jewish revolt of AD 66–74, when it began to give way to growth among the Gentiles. However, Stark argues that Jews were formidable in the Christian movement for much longer than is traditionally presumed:

Perhaps only a sociologist would be foolish enough to suggest that, contrary to the received wisdom, Jewish Christianity played a central role until much later in the rise of Christianity—that not only was it the Jews of the diaspora who provided the initial basis for church growth during the first and early second centuries, but that Jews continued as a significant source of Christian converts until at least as late as the fourth century and that Jewish Christianity was still significant in the fifth century.²⁴

spoke Aramaic). I suspect that James, as a high-priest leader ("Nazarite") who was well-known in Jerusalem, and as leader of the Christian church for nearly thirty years, would likely have developed either the literary skills to compose such a letter or would have employed scribes.

22. Tabor, *Jesus Dynasty*, 274.

23. The original Christian movement was a Jewish movement: "Even the term 'Jewish-Christianity,' though perhaps useful as a description of the original followers of Jesus, is really a misnomer since they never considered themselves anything but faithful Jews. In that sense early Christianity *is* Jewish. Gentiles had been welcomed into the movement on the basis of Judaism's universal ethical message to all humankind, but no one remotely imagined that John the Baptizer or Jesus had annulled God's covenant with the people of Israel or the eternal Torah upon which it was based." Tabor, *Jesus Dynasty*, 266.

24. Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (Princeton, NJ: HarperCollins, 1997), 49. Because I have been

With a teaching pool of nearly 1 million Palestine Jews and 4 million Diaspora Jews, it is easy to imagine that a significant number of Stark's estimated 40,000 Christians in AD 150 were Jewish. The same was true in AD 200 when slightly more than 200,000 Christians existed. But, just 150 years later, in AD 350 when there were 33 million Christians, the voice of Jewish converts had clearly faded and likely had been minimized.²⁵ Islam was born in an age when the Jewish voice of Christianity had effectively disappeared due to the overwhelming tsunami of Gentile conversions and the beginning of institutional Christian practices as the official religion of the Roman Empire.

According to Akyol, the Qur'an speaks of two different types of Christians: one that Muhammed seemed intimately familiar with and another much larger category of Christians. The first type, called "*al-Nasara*," is warmly, even affectionately, described by the Qur'an. "*Nasara*" can either imply location — "from Nazareth," — as in Nazarene Christians, or be viewed as a label — "to help" — since that is what the root N-S-R denotes. Thus, according to the Qur'an, Jesus asks his disciples "Who will be my helpers to God?" And the disciples reply, "We will be the helpers of God." (Qur'an 61:14). Whenever the descriptor *al-Nasara* is used for a Christian, the portrait is always positive.

On the other hand, there are other types of unnamed Christians who are routinely criticized in the Qur'an. Consider Qur'an 5:72 as an example:

Those who say that the Messiah, son of Mary, is God are unbelievers. The Messiah said, "Children of Israel! Worship God, my Lord and your Lord. If anyone associates anything with God, God has forbidden him the Garden and his refuge will be the Fire." The wrongdoers will have no helpers.

The chief characteristic of this type of Christian, whom the Qur'an consistently describes negatively, is that they have elevated Jesus to a status equal to the "One True God" or Islam's Allah. They represent the antithesis of *al-Nasara* (helpers) and thus will have "no helpers." The Qur'an also identifies this type of Christian as those "who say that

impressed by Stark's body of work, I have often wondered how traditional biblical scholars and historians react to Stark. I was pleased to find that John Dominic Crossan, in his book *The Birth of Christianity*, called out and praised Stark's *The Rise of Christianity*. He introduces Stark's book as a "very, very good book" (p. 16).

25. Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, 7.

God is the third of three," classifying this type of Christian as "unbelievers." According to Akyol, the two types of Christians in the Qur'an can be summarized as 1) "helpers" or 2) "unbelievers." For Akyol, the whispers of authentic Jewish Christianity that he is tracking represent the helpers described by the Qur'an, and the creedal Christianity of the Western world represent the unbelievers.

Did *al-Nasara* Christians exist at the right time and place to possibly influence this dichotomous portrayal of Christian believers found in the Qur'an? Akyol argues that the most substantial evidence for the existence of a late Arabia Jewish Christian sect—the helpers—is found in excavations first reported by Israeli archaeologist Yehuda Nevo in 1993. Nevo's primary focus was rock inscriptions found in the Negev Desert in southern Israel. Many of these inscriptions date to the seventh and eighth centuries, near the period of the founding of Islam.²⁶ One pre-Islamic inscription has garnered attention because it appears to be evidence of Akyol's community of Christians living at a time and locale about to give birth to Islam:

Among the pre-Muhammadan texts, one was exceptionally remarkable. Discovered on a rock near Sde Boker, this was a short prayer for forgiveness. And it ended with this line:

Amin rabb-l-amin rabb Musa was 'Isa.

Or, "Amen, the Lord of Worlds, the Lord of Moses and Jesus."

Muslims who just read the Arabic line above might experience a moment of awe, as I personally did the first time I read it. Because the term here, *rabb-l-amin*, "the Lord of the Worlds," is very familiar to almost every Muslim on the face of the earth. It is in the very first line of the very first chapter of the Qur'an, the "*Fatiha*," or the "*Opening*," which reads: "Praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds." It is a line repeated over and over every single day around the globe, in every single Muslim prayer. (p. 98)

In the beginning, a phrase associated worldwide with the Torah, is the biblical equivalent of the Qur'an's *rabb-l-amin*. Thus, to find the

26. While some of the inscriptions have no discernible reference to Islam, Akyol points out that several clearly do, saying, "Later inscriptions, however, were unmistakably Islamic: 'There is no God but Allah alone,' one of them read, 'and Muhammad is His servant and messenger'" (pp. 97–98).

phrase *the Lord of the Worlds* in a pre-Islamic inscription is a remarkable discovery. This phrase appears to link the beginnings of Islam to a pre-existing Christian group that had continued to stress Jesus's subordination to God, the Father.²⁷ "The Lord of the Worlds" could not possibly have come from the creedal Christianity of Rome or the Eastern Orthodox traditions.

Akyol is convinced that a Jewish Christian community remained relevant in Arabia and that its teachings inspired many of the Jesus passages in the Qur'an. However, he recognizes that the core argument—"certain teachings in the Qur'an resemble those of Jewish Christians therefore Jewish Christians must have directly influenced the making of the Qur'an"—is a circular one (p. 100).²⁸

For Latter-day Saints readers, the attention that Akyol brings to James is exciting, especially because historic Christianity purposely ignores the Book of James. Marcus J. Borg, commenting on the Book of James, claims that there is a unified effort within traditional Christian churches to suppress discussion about James:

Most American Christians will never hear these passages read or preached in church. They do not appear in *The Revised Common Lectionary*, the set of biblical texts designated for mainline Protestant and Catholic worship services.²⁹

In contrast, Latter-day Saints have embraced the Epistle of James. It may be asserted that James 1:5—"If any of you lack wisdom..."—is the first scripture of the Restoration because of its inspirational and

27. Nevo stresses that the inscription "makes Allah's supreme position, and Jesus' subordination, quite clear." Yejuda D. Nevo, "Towards a Prehistory of the Qur'an," in *What the Koran Really Says*, ed. Ibn Warraq (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002), 148, quoted in Akyol, *Islamic Jesus*, 99.

28. Akyol adds: "In fact, with such reasoning, Western researchers have found many other 'heresies' that must have been present in or nearby seventh-century Arabia. A short list includes Nestorianism, Monophysitism, Tritheism, Antideco-Marcianites, Manichaeism, and Gnosticism. And this is a bit too much, unless one is ready to imagine Arabia 'as a kind of Jurassic Park for ancient 'heresies.' This is why we should perhaps entertain the possibility that such a Jurassic Park never existed, and the doctrinal connection between Jewish Christianity and Islam is *not* based on a historical connection."

29. Marcus J. Borg, *Evolution of the Word: The New Testament in the Order the Books Were Written* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 195. Likewise, Tabor claims, "the most neglected document in the entire New Testament is the letter written by James. It has become so marginalized that many Christians are not even aware of its existence." Tabor, *Jesus Dynasty*, 273.

motivational effect on a young Joseph Smith. Latter-day Saints read and cite James regularly. An analysis of scriptural citations in General Conferences from 1942 to the present reveals that the Book of James is mentioned more often than other New Testament epistles of about the same length (see table 2).³⁰ While nearly a quarter of these mentions are to the "Restoration scripture" (James 1:5–6), other often-quoted scriptures include "pure religion and undefiled" (James 1:27), "doers of the word" (James 1:22), "love thy neighbor as thyself" (James 2:8), and "confess your faults one to another" (James 5:16). Certainly, Latter-day Saints have embraced James and his message to a degree unique within the Christian community.

Table 2. Scriptural mentions in General Conference (1942–2024).

New Testament Book	Mentions
James	373
1 John	187
Galatians	168
1 Thessalonians	58

One of traditional Christianity's issues with the Book of James is soteriological in nature (its salvation doctrine). The Protestant exclamation of *sola fide* (faith alone) is difficult to reconcile with passages in James that appear to teach an alternative and contrarian doctrine of salvation. In his textbook on the New Testament, Bart Ehrman states:

It is possible that some Christians had taken Paul's doctrine of justification by faith apart from the works of the Law to mean something that Paul himself did not, namely, that it only mattered what a person believed, not how he or she lived. James stakes out the opposing position, arguing that true faith will always be manifest in one's life, especially in the ways one treats the poor and the oppressed. To put it in his own words, "a person is justified by works and not by faith alone" (James 2:24) because "faith without works is dead." (James 2:26)³¹

The soteriological vision portrayed in James is similar to that presented in the Qur'an. According to Akyol, both texts present the same

30. This analysis used the Scripture Citation Index, scriptures.byu.edu/.

31. Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 475.

salvific formula — “man can be saved only by two things: faith in God *and* good deeds” (p. 6).³² While this formula is not identical to present-day Latter-day Saint soteriological teachings, it is closer in context and tone than the Protestant doctrine of faith alone. Latter-day Saints embrace the salvific messages found in the Book of James. Familiar passages include the definition of pure religion (James 1:27), the admonition to be doers of the word (James 1:22), the teaching that faith without works is dead (James 2:17), and the call to submit ourselves to God (James 4:7).

Remarkably, despite the importance of the Epistle of James, Latter-day Saints remain relatively uninformed about James and his life. Scholar Robert Eisenman says, “the known details regarding James’ life and position are not inconsiderable. In many ways we have more independent documentation concerning him than any other New Testament character, except perhaps Paul.”³³ While most Latter-day Saints could recount the missionary travels of Paul, the martyrdom of Stephen, or the stories of Mary, most are unaware that James led the church for thirty years, as well as the unique circumstances of his death, his impeccable character, and, importantly, his history of service in the temple.³⁴ One of Akyol’s insights that Latter-day Saints should take to heart is that the study of the person James, the earliest Christian movement, and the writings attributed to the “Jewish Christians” could better illuminate our understanding of the earliest Christian church.

32. Akyol also states, “this emphasis on faith and works is so powerful in the Qur’an that it defines its believers as ‘those who have faith and do right actions.’ This expression is used in some forty-five different verses and often as the definition of the very formula of salvation” (p. 66).

33. Robert Eisenman, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the First Christians* (Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 2004), 116.

34. “Hegesippus also reported that James wore the linen of priest and constantly prayed in the Temple, kneeling so much of the time that his knees grew hard like camel’s. According to Hegesippus, James was continually praying for the forgiveness of the people. Epiphanius, a 4th-century Christian writer, asserted that James, as a descendant of David, also exercised the ‘priesthood’ on behalf of his community, entering into the holy areas of the Temple where only priests could go and functioning as a ‘high priest’ to his followers.” Tabor, *Jesus Dynasty*, 286.

An Islamic Christology and the Trinity

There is a certain harshness found within the Savior's declaration to Joseph Smith that "all their creeds were an *abomination* in his sight" (Joseph Smith — History 1:19). As I have studied this statement and the forcefulness of it, I have concluded that perhaps Christ is primarily expressing his frustration over the creedal statements that declare Jesus to be the same person (the same essence or "*homooousios*") as the Father. For Jesus, who worships and adores his Father, this may be a high level of blasphemy. (This is simply a conclusion or conjecture I gained through my study of Joseph Smith — History.) So, I was surprised to discover these verses from the Qur'an and found myself nodding in agreement (my own equivalent of Akyol's blue underlining):

And on Judgement Day God will say, "O Jesus, son of Mary! Did you ever ask the people to worship you and your mother as gods beside God?" He will answer, "Glory be to You! How could I ever say what I had no right to say? If I had said such a thing, you would have certainly known it. You know what is hidden within me, but I do not know what is hidden within You. Indeed, You alone are the Knower of all unseen. I never told them anything except what You ordered me to say: 'Worship God — my Lord and your Lord!'" (Qur'an 5:116–117)

The Qur'an describes Jesus as the Messiah (Qur'an 4:171), the son of the Virgin Mary (Qur'an 3:47), a healer (Qur'an 3:49), a miracle worker (Qur'an 3:49), a prophet (Qur'an 19:30), a witness (Qur'an 5:117), an example (Qur'an 43:57), a sign for all people (Qur'an 19:21), a Messenger (Qur'an 4:171), a servant (Qur'an 19:30), the Spirit of God (Qur'an 4:171), the Word (Qur'an 4:171), and one of those nearest to God (Qur'an 3:45). There are two accounts of Jesus's birth, plus references to his teachings, a short mention of his death — or at least the illusion of his death, and also his exaltation.³⁵ Although not specifically stated

35. There is considerable debate whether or not the Islamic Jesus died on the cross or ascended directly to Heaven. The only mention in the Qur'an suggests that Jesus was not crucified but that it was made to appear that he was: "And for boasting, 'We killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the messenger of God.' But they neither killed nor crucified him—it was only made to appear so" (Qur'an 4:157). "The popular belief among Muslims is that a conspiracy was made to kill Jesus, God made the main culprit who betrayed Jesus [Judas] look exactly like Jesus, then he was crucified in Jesus' place. Jesus was raised safe and sound to the heavens." *The Clear Quran*, trans. Mustafa Khattab (Lombard, IL: Book of Signs Foundation, 2016), 54n230.

in the Qur'an, most Muslims anticipate Jesus's second coming. The Qur'an does not teach, however, that Jesus is God or even the "Son of God" — in fact, far from it.

A claim found repeatedly in the Qur'an is that the mainline Christian community has incorrectly elevated Jesus to the status of Allah or "The God." The first pillar of Muslim belief is the *shahada* — there is no God but God. Akyol summarizes the historical context of this belief:

There was one specific god that both the pagan Arabs and the Qur'an honored: *Allah*. The term was a contraction of the article *al*, corresponding to the English word *the*, and the word *ilah*, corresponding to the English word *god*. Therefore, Allah was not just any god, but "*the* God." . . . From this, there emerged the basic credo of Islam, which is still recited every day across the globe, from the lips of believers to the minarets of mosques: "*La ilahe illallah*," or "There is no god, but The God." This bold, forceful, uncompromising monotheism was the very core of the new faith. That is why it would call itself "Islam," implying "submission" to that one true God — and to no one else. Yet who exactly was this one true God? The Qur'an's answer is straightforward: the God of Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, and Jacob. (p. 62)

Based on their interpretation of the Qur'an, Muslims seem uncomfortable when Christians speak of Jesus's divinity. The Qur'an speaks of Jesus as *Son of Mary* and uses other titles such as *Messiah* and the *Word*, but Jesus is never spoken of as the *Son of God*. Much of their discomfort comes from their aversion to the notion that someone could mistakenly worship a being other than God or Allah. This includes the manner in which many Christians worship Jesus Christ; Muslims view them as substituting Jesus worship with that of the One True God. Consider Akyol's discussion about the seminal passage found in John 1:1 and note where he claims Muslims draw the proverbial Christological line in the sand in reaction to this famous text:

Muslims may agree with the opening statement of the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." But they cannot agree with what follows next: "And the Word was God." (p. 165)

Some Latter-day Saints also have had difficulty with the final declaration from this verse, especially when Christian commentators suggest that Jesus is "The God" rather than "a God" or a member of

the "Godhead."³⁶ Latter-day Saints draw a sharp distinction between Jesus as Lord or God and Jesus as the "Most High God" or "God the Father."³⁷ Therefore, we are in a good position to understand the trepidation Muslims have towards those who have declared Jesus as "of the same substance" as the Most High God. Both Muslims and Latter-day Saints reject the triune (three-in-one) formula for God as proclaimed in the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds. Akyol explicitly summarizes Muslim beliefs when he declares:

If there is one single concept in Christian theology that will never be accepted by Muslims, it is the doctrine of the Trinity—that God consists of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. . . . Hence the Qur'an explicitly condemns the Trinity in two explicit passages. (p. 170)

Repeatedly the Qur'an teaches that those who profess the trinity are in error—in a passage that was previously quoted, they are labeled as "unbelievers" (Qur'an 5:72). The Qur'an also states:

Indeed, those who say, "God is the Messiah, son of Mary," have fallen into disbelief. (Qur'an 5:17)

Those who say, "God is one in a Trinity," have certainly fallen into disbelief, There is only One God. (Qur'an 5:73)

The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was no more than a messenger of God and the fulfillment of His Word through Mary and a spirit created by a command from Him. So believe in God and His messengers and not say "Trinity." Stop!—for your own good. (Qur'an 4:171)

Within the Latter-day Saint canon, Jesus never claims to be the "Most High God." Consistently, Latter-day Saints are instructed to pray

36. Blake Ostler provides a robust analysis of Greek terminology. He suggests that the Greek term for "God" in the phrase "the Word was with God" should be rendered "The God," but that the term for "God" in the phrase "the Word was God" should be translated just "God." Thus, John is making a distinction between the Most High God and Jesus's role as a God. See Blake T. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: Of God and Gods*, vol. 3 (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2008), 167–70.

37. Early Latter-day Saints had some confusion over the question of whether or not Christ and the Father are the same, due to Book of Mormon passages from Abinadi (Mosiah 15:1–5) and Amulek (Alma 11:44). Now these passages are routinely interpreted as meaning that Christ is a representative of the Father but is not the same person as the Father.

to “Our Heavenly Father” and not to Jesus or another divine being, such as Heavenly Mother. The temple endowment presentation also exemplifies Jesus’s important yet subservient role to his God, the Father. Latter-day Saint doctrine and the Qur’an are generally aligned in opposition to this central tenet of trinitarianism.

In fact, Muslims are generally uncomfortable with any suggestion that Jesus was divine. They are particularly averse to using the title “Son of God” for Jesus because the Qur’an criticizes this specific term: “The Jews say, ‘Ezra is the son of God,’ while the Christians say, ‘The Messiah is the son of God’” (Qur’an 9:30).³⁸ Akyol explains why Muslims are so wary of the phrase *Son of God*:

But what does it mean exactly to be a Son of God? Since the Qur’an finds it so scandalous, it must have a very scandalous meaning. No wonder, when we look at the Arabic word the Qur’an uses for sonship: we see that it is, with one exception, *walad*, which means “son” in the physical sense. In other words, a god with a *walad* can only be understood as a deity who had sexual intercourse with a female counterpart. This was, of course, utterly disrespectful to, and absolutely incompatible with, the Abrahamic conceptualization of God. It was, on the other hand, the typical way gods were envisioned in many pagan societies, including Greeks, Romans, and, most importantly, pre-Islamic Arabs. . . . This suggests that the Qur’an’s very strong condemnation of the idea of divine sonship might have something to do with the pagan Arab context—the very “ignorance” Islam was determined to wipe out. . . . In contrast, however, sonship to God in the monotheist Hebrew context—in the Old Testament sense of being chosen and beloved by God—would not be offensive to Islam. (pp. 167–68)

Based on his understanding of the earliest strains of Christianity, Akyol argues that James and other Jewish Christians likely did not view

38. The Qur’an continues “They have taken their rabbis and monks as well as the Messiah, son of Mary, as lords besides God, even though they were commanded to worship none but One God. There is no god worthy or worship except Him” (Qur’an 9:31). The Qur’an also states: “They say, ‘The Most Compassionate has offspring.’ You have certainly made an outrageous claim, by which the heavens are about to burst, the earth to split apart, and the mountains to crumble to pieces in protest of attributing children to the Most Compassionate” (Qur’an 19:88–91).

Christ as divine or as "Son of God." He argues that Jewish Christians must have accepted Jesus's role as "son" in the light of the cultural understanding of the time. My position is that Akyol's understanding about first-century Judaism is likely tainted by his desire to defend the Qur'an and that, contrary to Akyol's assertions, the earliest Christians consistently attested Jesus's divinity and employed the phrase "Son of God."

Arguably, the earliest recorded chronological mention of Jesus as "Son of God" in the New Testament is found in Paul's letter to the Romans.³⁹ In his opening, Paul restates a pre-existing creed that extols the "definition of the gospel."⁴⁰ Importantly, scholar Bart D. Ehrman notes that "this creed contains a clear Semitism, which makes it highly likely that it was originally formulated among Aramaic-speaking followers of Jesus in Palestine" — in other words, the followers of James.⁴¹ This may be one of the oldest sayings available to us from James's Jewish Christian community — the group whose beliefs Akyol feels are parallel to those found in the Qur'an. This creed states that:

Who was descended
from the seed of David
according to the flesh,
who was appointed
Son of God in power
According to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from
the dead.⁴²

Therefore, this pre-existing creed used by Paul in Romans is strong evidence that James and the original Jewish Christians used the phrase "Son of God" to describe Jesus, only a few years after his death. Note that the view of this creed is that Jesus was *appointed* the *Son of God* at the point in time when he was raised from the dead. In this sense, Jesus "obtained" the title *Son of God*, rather than being born with it, an important distinction.

So why should Jesus's assumption of the title *Son of God* not

39. According to Marcus Borg's chronology, the book of Romans was the last of Paul's seven authentic letters written between AD 50 and AD 60. Borg, *Evolution of the Word*, 31.

40. James E. Faulconer, *Romans 1: Notes and Reflections* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 18.

41. Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (New York: HarperOne, 2014), 223.

42. Ehrman's translation, *How Jesus Became God*, 220–21.

matter, ultimately, to Akyol and other Muslims? Since the Qur'an acknowledges other supernatural heavenly beings such as angels, Akyol concludes that the term *Son of God*, in this context, could be viewed as acceptable to Muslims with the appropriate qualifiers:

Take a look at the key term, "Son of God." In Jewish texts, "Son of God" was merely "any one whose piety has placed him in a filial relation to God." So the term could be used for angels, Israel itself as a nation, or the King of Israel. In Psalms, for example, we read that God would make David his "first born and highest king of the earth," and, in return, David would cry, "You are my Father." In this Jewish context, sonship to God implied "divine favour rather than the sharing of the divine nature." In Greek culture, however, the term "Son of God" would imply nothing but God-the-Son — in the sense that Apollo was the son of Zeus. (p. 44)

This is an important distinction. The relationship between the mythical Greek gods Zeus and Leto that produced Apollo was clearly sexual in nature and Zeus and Apollo's familial relationship is best understood via the benchmark of human biology. It is not clear, however, how familial the relationship is between God the Father and Jesus or how familial our own relationship is with God the Father. The scriptures routinely refer to mankind as children of God — "ye are all children of God by faith" (Galatians 3:26). However, what this specifically means is undefined and up for interpretation. As Akyol mentions, Psalm 89 calls David the "firstborn" and David cries out "thou art my Father, my God." Does this mean that we, Jesus, and David share God's DNA? It is likely that we do not, at least in a physically human sense, yet we must acknowledge that we were created in his image.

Regarding Christology, I think that Latter-day Saints and Muslims, once we account for definitional differences, are more closely aligned than may be expected. Our beliefs are not the same, but both Latter-day Saints and Muslims find it somewhat blasphemous to claim that Jesus is the same as God the Father or the Most High God. Both would agree that Jesus and "The God" are the same in purpose, but definitely not the same in "substance," as the Nicene Creed declares. And most Latter-day Saints would agree with Akyol that Jesus's sonship does not necessitate or even imply a sexual relationship between the Father and Mary like that of Zeus and Leto.

Latter-day Saints maintain that there is one God with supreme authority—The Most High God. As Blake Ostler explains:

The Mormon scriptures make clear that there is a “God of all other gods” (D&C 121:32). It is implicit in this scriptural assertion that, although there is more than one individual of the kind “God,” there is only one who is preeminent and the God of all. Such language is similar to the New Testament language that the Father is “the God and Father of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 1:3), even though it calls Christ “God.” The book of Abraham says that this God of all other gods “is more intelligent than they all” (3:19). In any event, it is clear that the “one God” of the Old Testament is identified with the God and Father of Jesus Christ in the New Testament (1 Cor. 8:6, 1 Tim. 2:5). The Father is “*the* God” (John 1:1; emphasis mine) and “the only true God” (John 17:3). Such expressions entail that the Father is in some sense unique and superlative.⁴³

How can Ostler say that there are more than one of the “kind ‘God?’” In the ancient world, “some humans were actually called God. This is true not only in documents from outside the Bible, but also—even more surprising—in documents within it.”⁴⁴ While the Qur’an reserves the title of God solely for Allah or “The God,” this was not common in the ancient world. As Rodney Stark points out, true monotheism is very uncommon:

Absolute monotheism is very rare. . . . In none of the great monotheisms—Judaism, Christianity, Islam—is there only one supernatural entity. In each, God is surrounded with “a cloud of beings.”⁴⁵

Neither the Bible nor the Qur’an teach “absolute monotheism.”

43. Ostler, *Of God and Gods*, 257–58.

44. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, 5.

45. Rodney Stark, *One True God: Historical Consequences of Monotheism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 24. Later, Stark notes that “Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are dualistic monotheisms—each teaches that, in addition to the existence of a supreme being, *there also exists at least one evil, if less powerful, supernatural being*” (p. 25). He also states “the evolution of Yahweh, as revealed in the Ugaritic texts as well as the Old Testament, seems to have begun with a four-tiered pantheon. ‘Yahweh’ emerged as the supreme God from among the Gods on the highest tier, ‘Satan’ from the disobedient Gods of the third level, and the ‘angels’ from the servant Gods or messengers of the lowest tier” (p. 26).

For example, Margaret Barker points out that “the psalmist depicts heaven as a place of many holy ones.” There are “angel figures who appear in texts from all periods in the Old Testament.”⁴⁶ Therefore, substituting the phrase “angel” for “god” when discussing Christology with Muslims is probably a more accurate way of portraying Jesus’s role. This view aligns with another of the earliest known teachings of Christians, as recorded by Paul in Philippians 2:6–11, which is widely acknowledged as another early pre-existing Christian creed or hymn that Paul is quoting (often called the “Philippians Hymn” or the “Christ Hymn of Philippians”).⁴⁷ Scholars estimate it may have been composed around AD 40, or about ten years after Jesus’s death. One translation of Philippians 2:6-11 is rendered thus:

Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.⁴⁸

Along with the Romans passage discussed earlier, this is one of the most definitive declarations of what the earliest Christians taught about Jesus’s divinity. Ehrman’s commentary about this passage is particularly relevant:

I want to stress that Christ appears to be portrayed here, in his preexistent state, as a divine being, an angel—but not as God Almighty. He is not the Father himself, since it is the Father who exalts him. And he is not—most definitely not—“equal” with God before he becomes human.⁴⁹

46. Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel’s Second God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 29.

47. “Most scholars see this passage as containing an early Christian hymn that Paul either wrote or is quoting. If it is a hymn that Paul knew his hearers would recognize, it provides a glimpse into how early Christian communities celebrated and remembered Jesus and the significance of his life and death.” Borg, *Evolution of the Word*, 93.

48. Borg’s translation, *Evolution of the Word*, 96.

49. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, 263.

Thus, the Philippians Hymn teaches that Jesus was a preexistent angel whom God exalted after completing his life mission and dying upon the cross. He is not God the Father, "The God," or Allah. But he is a preexistent supernatural being — perhaps the most supreme — equivalent to the angels found in the Qur'an. Margaret Barker paints a similar picture of the milieu of pre-Christian Palestine:

The roots of Christian trinitarian theology lie in pre-Christian Palestinian beliefs about the angels. There were many in first-century Palestine who still retained a world-view derived from the more ancient religion of Israel in which there was a High God and several Sons of God, one of whom was Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel. Yahweh, the Lord, could be manifested on earth in human form, as an angel or in the Davidic king. *It was as a manifestation of Yahweh, the Son of God, that Jesus was acknowledged as Son of God, Messiah and Lord.*⁵⁰

Barker's argument is that the concept of being a Son of God was common in first-century Palestine and that this would have made perfect sense to the earliest Christians, who were exclusively Jewish. All of these themes and the two early Christian creeds from Paul's letters seem consistent with the Christology taught in Doctrine and Covenants 93, wherein the Lord revealed truths related to certain passages from the Gospel of John:

And I, John, bear record that I beheld his glory, as the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, even the Spirit of truth, which came and dwelt in the flesh, and dwelt among us. And I, John, saw that he received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace; and he received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness. And thus he was called the Son of God, because he received not of the fulness at first. (Doctrine and Covenants 93:11–14)

Note that Jesus is called Son of God ("and thus he was called the Son of God") as the result of his reaction to the grace offered by God. This is a view more harmonious with the portrait of Jesus in the Qur'an ("I never told them anything except what You ordered me to say"; Qur'an 5:117), the aforementioned creed in Romans 1, and the hymn

50. Margaret Barker, *Great Angel*, 3.

found in Philippians.⁵¹ Protestant John Hick teaches something similar about Christ's divinity, a sentiment which Akyol applauds:

"Jesus was so open to divine inspiration, so responsive to the divine spirit, so obedient to God's will, that God was able to act on earth in and through him," he wrote. "This, I believe, is the true Christian doctrine of incarnation." And *that*, I believe, is a doctrine of incarnation that Islam can wholeheartedly accept.⁵²

Jesus as Savior and Atonement Theories

As Latter-day Saint missionaries began to actively proselyte to Bosnian Muslims in the 2010s, they enjoyed some limited successes. Though there was some confusion over terminology, there was general agreement around the definition of the Most High God. There was also a singular question that they regularly encountered when they taught the Atonement of Jesus Christ and the Plan of Salvation. In the Christian world, the need for a "savior" is almost taken for granted; it is a concept celebrated every Christmas and Easter. Culturally no one in the Western tradition seems to seriously question, *a priori*, the inherent necessity of the Atonement. But Muslims, when taught about the Atonement, would ask the simple question, "Why can't God just forgive us?"

The Qur'an does not teach of Christ's atoning sacrifice, nor does it teach of the crucifixion of Christ as the pivotal event of all human history. The Qur'an does not mention Gethsemane. The Qur'an does not discuss sin and justice in the context of an inherent debt that must be paid. Instead, one of the essential messages of the Qur'an is that all should worship God and ask for his forgiveness. Thus, Akyol points

51. Ostler, commenting on Doctrine and Covenants 93, says "I interpret it to mean that Christ had a fulness of divinity of which he emptied himself when he became mortal (though still possessing the divine nature in potentiality) and that he regained a fulness when he again entered into an intimate unity of indwelling love with the Father. I see the same view expressed in John 17:5 and Philippians 2:6–9." Ostler and I see a Christological connection between these two (Doctrine and Covenants 93 and Philippians), although we arrived at the conclusion independently. Ostler, *Of God and Gods*, 269–70.

52. Akyol, *Islamic Jesus*, 166, quoting John Hick, "A Pluralistic View," in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Books, 2010), 58.

out that the doctrine of an infinite and necessary atonement is foreign to Muslims:

Neither Judaism nor Islam recognizes any "saints," who are, in Catholicism, intermediaries between God and men. Similarly, neither Judaism nor Islam accepts the doctrine of original sin and the related notion of redemption. In both religions, humans just have to ask forgiveness from God for their individual sins — not seek atonement for some inherent guilt that they carry as Adam's children. (p. 75)

As our missionaries in Bosnia discovered, it can be theologically difficult to counter the simple notion that God can and will forgive those who repent and believe in him. The point can be made that if God is omnipotent, then why can he not do something that he asks — even requires — us to do?

Akyol clarifies why the idea of atonement, particularly as it is predominantly taught in the Western Christian world, seems contradictory to the Qur'an's teachings of self-determination:

The crucifixion was a cosmic event in which Jesus suffered as an atonement for the sins of all humankind. This theology not only has no trace in the whole Qur'an, it also goes against some of its core doctrines — such as that sin is strictly personal, and "no-burden bearer can bear another's burden." It also is theologically unnecessary, for the Qur'an does not share the theology of the Fall as well, which according to Christianity made every human being inherently sinful and thus in need of a savior. (pp. 154–55)⁵³

All of this returns to the simple question that missionaries in Bosnia are routinely asked: Why can't God forgive me? Or, in other words, why do I need a mediator between me and God? Muslims argue that they do not need a mediator and that God can forgive them on the condition of repentance. On this topic, the theology of Latter-day Saints and other Christians may benefit as they engage Muslim and Jewish thought. It may be said that too many Latter-day Saint and other Christian theologians have written about the Atonement and yet

53. There are parallels between this verse and Alma 34:11, which states, "Now there is not any man that can sacrifice his own blood which will atone for the sins of another. Now, if a man murdereth, behold will our law, which is just, take the life of his brother? I say unto you, Nay." In the following verse, Alma concludes that an infinite atonement will suffice to atone for the sins of the world.

not adequately addressed this fundamental question.⁵⁴ According to Blake Ostler, many writers have written about the Atonement, yet carefully avoided this basic question:

The Christian doctrine of atonement teaches that it is because of Christ's life, suffering, death, and resurrection that forgiveness of sins is possible. . . . Why is it that healing, reconciliation, and unity are not possible without Christ? The traditional answers have focused on various metaphors and images that do not seem to answer this question. They instead seem to imply that Christ must overcome the anger of an unjust and unloving father, make a deal with the devil, or appease some realm of cosmic absolutes. Further, they don't really explain why simply forgiving and being forgiven are impossible without these punishments, dealings, and cosmic contraptions.⁵⁵

According to Ostler, this question raised by Muslims — “Why can we not just be forgiven without someone suffering?” — is so vital that he lists it as one of the few questions that any valid atonement theory must address.⁵⁶

Christian thinkers have long puzzled about how to make theological sense of the Atonement. Protestant scholar John Driver has noted at

54. Tad Callister dances around this question but never fully addresses it head-on. For example, he writes, “the Savior observed every spiritual law with undeviating exactness. Apparently because of his compliance with each one, he received power upon power until he acquired the attributes of God, even in premortal times. . . . Evidently these immutable spiritual laws offer no leniency or mercy or second chances. If we do not comply, we have lost forever that opportunity for increased power that naturally flows from compliance. . . . Why does it work this way? There is no answer to that question. It is like asking, ‘Why does matter exist?’ or ‘Why is the sky endless?’” Callister implies that God cannot forgive us because of an “immutable spiritual law” without addressing the ramifications regarding the inevitable follow-up question about God’s omnipotence. Tad R. Callister, *The Infinite Atonement* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 301–2. Elsewhere, Callister speculates about the necessity of the Atonement and suggests five possible reasons: 1) “comply with some immutable law,” 2) “dictated by God’s perfect attributes,” 3) “kindred spirits” . . . sanctioned “the necessity of the Atonement,” 4) “only event in the universe that had the motivational power to draw men to godhood,” and 5) “appeal on a universal basis to the instinctual sense of fairness in God’s children” (pp. 324–25). These reasons do not address the “why can’t God just forgive us” question.

55. Blake T. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: God’s Plan to Heal Evil*, vol. 4 (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2020) 185–86.

56. Ostler, *God’s Plan to Heal Evil*, 188.

least "ten motifs" in the New Testament into which types of atonement narratives can be "clustered." Thus, there are many ideas — some of them complementary and some in competition — about the purpose of the Atonement found within the scriptural canon. Driver's source list does not include the Latter-day Saint canon, the Hebrew Bible, nor other non-canonical writings.⁵⁷ As Christians have tried to make sense of the Atonement, their attempts to create "theories of the Atonement" have been classified into three basic categories, organized by a determination of whose particular needs or demands the Atonement is meant to satisfy (see table 3).⁵⁸

Table 3. Three paradigms (categories) of atonement theories in Christianity.

Paradigm	Focus	Description	Theories	Proponents
Christus Victor	Satan	Atonement as a divine conflict and victory over evil.	Christus Victor Ransom Classic View	Origen Gregory of Nyssa Martin Luther Gregory Boyd
Objective	God	Atonement understands the work of Christ as primarily addressing a necessary demand of God.	Satisfaction Penal Substitution Moral Government	Anselm John Calvin Hugo Grotius Charles Hodge
Subjective	Man	Atoning work of Christ is designed to effect a change in human beings.	Moral Influence Healing Moral Example	Peter Abelard Faustus Socinus Horace Bushnell Thomas Schreiner

Latter-day Saint atonement theories generally fall within the Objective (typically Penal Substitution) or Subjective categories. The most prominent recent atonement theory, proposed by Ostler, is called the Compassion Theory. The uniqueness of this theory is that the focus of the Atonement is on a combination of Jesus Christ and mankind. Ostler states:

The compassion theory sees atonement as a reciprocal reconciliation of our alienation. . . . The suffering that Christ

57. Driver's categories are "conflict/victory/liberation; vicarious suffering; archetypal (i.e., representative man, pioneer, forerunner, firstborn); martyr; sacrifice; expiation/wrath of God; redemption; reconciliation, justification; and adoption-family," as discussed in Paul R. Eddy and James Beilby, eds., "The Atonement: An Introduction," in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 11.

58. See Eddy and Beilby, "The Atonement," 9–21.

experienced not only moves us with compassion for him, but it also moves him with compassion for us. In the Atonement he not only becomes what we are, but he also brings us to be what he is. Atonement thus unites us and reconciles our alienation that we have freely chosen.⁵⁹

Importantly, Ostler argues, “with the Compassion Theory God can forgive us without requiring someone to suffer.”⁶⁰

Ostler’s Compassion Theory and other Subjective paradigm theories generally appeal to Latter-day Saint scholars. Recent writings by Val Larsen and Newell D. Wright adopt a Subjective paradigm as evidenced by their conclusion: “the necessity for atonement is located in self-existent human beings, not in God, though it falls to God graciously to provide it and thus make exaltation possible.”⁶¹ There appears to be an internal logical consistency among such atonement theories that appeals to philosophers and theologians. Consider, for example, how Peter Abelard’s subjective theory of atonement is described by Christian theologians and how it solves the question posed by some in the Islamic world:

The atonement was directed primarily at humanity, not God. There is nothing inherent in God that must be appeased before he is willing to forgive sinful humanity. The problem rather lies in the sinful, hardened human heart, with its fear and ignorance of God. Humanity refuses to turn to God and be reconciled. Through the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ, the love of God shines like a beacon, beckoning humanity to come and fellowship.⁶²

What is Jesus’s mission according to the Qur’an? The answer is complicated. Jesus is the Messiah, yet the Qur’an never defines what that means. But from a salvation perspective, the Islamic Jesus is

59. Blake T. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Problems of Theism and the Love of God*, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2006) 238.

60. Ostler, *God’s Plan to Heal Evil*, 207.

61. Val Larsen and Newell D. Wright, “Latter-day Saint Theology and the Problem of Evil,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 64 (2025), 423, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/latter-day-saint-theology-and-the-problem-of-evil/.

62. Eddy and Beilby, “The Atonement,” 19. Based on reactions to and criticisms of his views by his contemporaries, Peter Abelard was ultimately excommunicated by Pope Innocent II in the year 1141.

consistently described as a messenger, an example, and a "sign for humanity." For example:

She (Mary) wondered, "How can I have a son when no man has ever touched me, nor am I unchaste?" He replied, "So will it be! Your Lord says, 'It is easy for Me. And so will We make him a sign for humanity and a mercy from Us.' It is a matter already decreed." (Qur'an 19:20–21)

While Muslims are likely unwilling to accept either the Christus Victor or Objective atonement paradigms, the Qur'an allows that Jesus's mission was to serve as an example and a sign for human beings. Therefore, the Subjective atonement paradigm, wherein man is the focus of Christ's sacrifice, would seem to be a meeting place with Muslims — as would Ostler's Compassion Theory.

But even more important, the Muslim objection to traditional atonement theories ("Why can't God simply forgive me?") should perhaps become a more active part of the Christian vernacular whenever the Atonement is discussed. This question should always be considered, especially when Evangelicals and Latter-day Saints set forth Penal Substitution theories.

Conclusions

In his essay "Understanding Islam," Daniel C. Peterson argues that while Latter-day Saints should appreciate and understand the teachings of Islam, we also cannot fully embrace Islam and the Qur'an because of its teachings about Jesus:

What should Latter-day Saints make of Muhammad and Islam? If Qur'anic statements against the divinity of Christ accurately represent the teachings of Muhammad—and there is no evidence that they do not—then we cannot accept him [Muhammad] as a true prophet in the full sense of the word. We have little choice in this matter because, as Revelation 19:10 explains, "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."⁶³

While Latter-day Saints will likely never accept Muhammad as a prophet, and Muslims will likely never accept the Church's prophets,

63. Daniel C. Peterson, "Understanding Islam," in *Mormons & Muslims: Spiritual Foundations and Modern Manifestations*, ed. Spencer J. Palmer, rev. ed. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2002), 22.

Akyol's *The Islamic Jesus* softens some of the barriers between Muslim and Latter-day Saint theologies. Clearly, the beliefs of Latter-day Saints and Muslims are different, with considerable theological disagreements on diverse topics, including deification, creation *ex nihilo*, pre-mortal existence, the divine feminine, revelation, anthropomorphism, pneumatology, and priesthood authority. These differences will not quickly disappear, but Akyol's book suggests that we have one important and pivotal commonality that can bring us together. To my great surprise, that one significant commonality is Jesus Christ. And if Akyol's portrait of the Islamic Jesus is to be trusted — and specifically if Jesus's divinity is akin to the “son of God” of historic Judaism — then the Jesus gulf between the Muslim and the Latter-day Restoration is significantly lessened.

Latter-day Saints should, in my estimation, adopt a conciliatory approach when talking to Muslims about Jesus. Our traditional messaging, that He is the Lord of Lords, our Creator, our Savior, and so forth, is a message that is battle-tested in the world of Western Christianity, is overtly Pauline in nature, and is likely to engender resistance and defensiveness among Muslims. Instead, a message focused *on the teachings of Jesus* (as opposed to *teachings about Jesus*) might encourage a positive response and a more open dialogue about Jesus in our respective faith traditions. While the Qur'an does not include the Savior's Sermon on the Mount, its spirit can be viewed harmoniously with Christ's famous manifesto. These were some of the passages that Akyol underlined in blue pen when he first opened his New Testament, so this is potentially fertile ecumenical ground. The spirit of both Islam and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the love of God and service to our fellowmen.

Regarding the Jesus of the Qur'an, Akyol quotes the words of the Sunni Muslim scholar Khalid Muhammad Khalid from 1958:

He is the love which knows no hatred, he is the peace that knows no disquiet, and he is the salvation that does not perish. And when all this is realized on earth, then at the same time, the return of Christ is realized. This is the Christ who will return, and whose return the Messenger prophesied: peace, love, truth, the good and beauty. With the truthful Messenger, we declare: “Christ, not Barabbas, the true not the false, love not hatred, peace not war, life not destruction.” (p. 215)

Mustafa Akyol believes that the Muslim world needs the words of Jesus. He has seen Muslims embrace the words of Moses and Job as they learn from these prophets. His testimony is that the Jesus of Islam is the one that Muslims must embrace to mend the fissures found in today's Islam. I close with Akyol's final words in *The Islamic Jesus*:

As Muslims, who are latecomers to this scene, we have disagreements with both Jews and Christians. But we have major agreements as well. With Jews, we agree a lot on God. With Christians, we agree that Jesus was born of a virgin, that he was the Messiah, and that he is the Word of God. Surely, we do not worship Jesus, like Christians do. Yet still, we can follow him. In fact, given our grim malaise and his shining wisdom, we need to follow him. (p. 215)



[Author's Note: *I acknowledge the instructive example of two Bosnian Muslims, Emin and Senada Muratovic, who survived the siege of Sarajevo as children, returned, dedicated their lives to service, and named their oldest child Isa.*]

Dennis Newton is a retired tech industry market research executive. As a marketing executive for several Fortune 200 wireless companies, he managed multiple functions including customer insights, public relations, marketing communications, database marketing, statistical analytics, marketing strategy, competitive intelligence, and big data. His current focus includes qualitative and quantitative research methods, statistical modeling, digital humanities, and text mining. He has a BA in English and an MBA from the University of Wyoming.

Possible Remembrance and Re-enactment of Old World's *Hieros Gamos* in the Book of Ether

Michaël Ulrich

Abstract: *This paper explores the conclusions that can be drawn from a Mesopotamian origin theory for the Jaredites. The goal is to show that the story of Jared's daughter in Ether 8 could be a ritual similar to hieros gamos, or sacred marriage, from Mesopotamia. To achieve this, etymologies are given for three names (Jared, Ether, and Akish). These interesting etymologies help substantiate the sacred marriage theory for Ether 8. Finally, a comparison between Ether 3 and Ether 8 show that both illustrate an initiation into the divine. In the former case, it is a righteous initiation into the divine; in the latter, it is an initiation into an idolatrous imitation of the divine.*

The book of Ether introduces the story of an ancient people, the Jaredites, who are said to have come to the Americas not long after the episode of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). The book of Ether is a condensed and edited version of the original Jaredite record (see Alma 37:21–31), with Moroni serving as the abridger around the beginning of the fifth century AD (Ether 1).¹ It thus tells us about a much older people than all the other peoples of the Book of Mormon. We know very little of this people, not only because of the scarcity of the material

1. Mosiah 28:11–19 describes how King Mosiah translated the Jaredite record. However, it is unclear from Ether 1 whether Moroni made the book of Ether from King Mosiah's written translation (Mosiah 28:11) or whether he directly used the Jaredite record. The answer to this question might imply one more editorial stratum, namely King Mosiah's translation.

(fifteen chapters), but also because we are reading this history through an edited restatement by Moroni.

This paper aims to compare Ether 3 and 8, demonstrating how both can be seen as an initiation into the divine. Ether 3 is a righteous initiation into a closer proximity with God, whereas Ether 8 is an evil initiation ritual, probably inspired by an idolatrous goddess and aimed at usurping political power. To compare these two chapters as initiations, I will demonstrate that Ether 8 is akin to an initiation ritual that entails a sacred marriage or *hieros gamos*. I will also explore the etymologies of three names—Akish, Ether, and Jared—to further support these arguments. Indeed, I'll show that Akish and Jared could be titles rather than proper names, which is an argument in favor of a ritual context. Moreover, Ether will be seen as related to the idea of the rising star, which is linked to the sacred marriage pattern.

The comparison between the two initiation courses carries theological significance and also contributes to the ongoing conversation about the origin of the Jaredites. Though nothing definite can be stated due to the limited material, demonstrating cultural links between the world of the book of Ether and Mesopotamian contexts—along with providing etymologies rooted in Akkadian and Sumerian languages—supports a possible Mesopotamian origin. This argument is even stronger because the etymologies and the sacred marriage element are coherent with each other in the text.

On Some Etymologies from Ether 3 and 8

This section is dedicated to examining the etymologies of Jared, Ether, and Akish in the context of a possible Sumero-Akkadian origin. These etymologies will then be used to study how Ether 3 and 8 may represent two contrasting initiation rituals.

The name *Jared* from Ether 3 and 8

A notable and intriguing aspect of both chapters is the presence of someone named Jared. In both cases, the person named Jared is not directly involved in the initiation, but someone whose real name we don't know is directly related to it. In Ether 3, this is the brother of Jared, and in Ether 8, it is the daughter of Jared.² This seems to be more than

2. The similarity between the phrases “daughter of Jared” and “brother of Jared” has already been noted by Joseph M. Spencer, “Jared’s Two Daughters,” in *Illuminating the Jaredite Records*, ed. Daniel L. Belnap (Provo, UT: Religious

coincidence. Names reported in the scriptures are not always birth names but are sometimes given later. Is there any possible interpretation of the name *Jared*? It is often seen as linked to Hebrew ירד (*yrd*, "to go down").³ This could make sense in a Mesopotamian context, as the root also exists in Akkadian as (*w*)*arādum*. Such a meaning could refer to the fact that Jared left the land of his residence, thus "going down" from this land in a figurative sense.

Another possible etymology is to compare *Jared* with Sumerian *arad*. From a phonetic point of view, the comparison could make sense, as the /y/ sound is not always indicated in cuneiform script. I provide another example of this, below, when examining the name *Akish* and the Sumerian term *aya*. The word *arad* means "slave, servant."⁴ It seems very unlikely that Jared would have been a slave, as he and his family seem to have had no difficulties in starting their journey and because his brother obviously knows how to write. Writing was an uncommon skill in Mesopotamia, or at least one that would probably not have been part of the life of a slave.

It is possible that the word *arad* was used in a broader sense. For instance, Enkidu, the friend of Gilgamesh in the famous epic, is called his "*arad*,"⁵ even though he obviously was not a slave in the usual sense. Could it be that *arad* designated an assistant, or even a class of functionaries of the palace or of the temple having the role to assist in certain duties? In this case, it would explain why it occurs in both Ether 3 and 8—in both cases the name would designate a ritual or official function related to the initiation.

Ether and the rising star motif

Exploring the etymology of the name Ether raises interesting questions. The Deseret alphabet transcription of it yields the pronunciation /eɪθɛr/ or /i:θɛr/. The sound /θ/ is not found in Sumerian, so we have to rule out an etymology in this language. This sound can be found, though, in Semitic. Akkadian, the main Semitic language of the region,

Studies Center, Brigham Young University [BYU]; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book), 211. Note that, interestingly, Herodias' daughter remains unnamed, too.

3. See Paul Y. Hoskisson et al., "Jared," in *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, onoma.lib.byu.edu/.

4. *Electronic Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary (ePSD)*, ed. Steve Tinney, University of Pennsylvania Museum (2016), oracc.museum.upenn.edu/epsd2/index.html.

5. See Samuel Noah Kramer, "Death and Nether World According to the Sumerian Literary Texts," *Iraq* 22 (1960): 67n15, doi.org/10.2307/4199669.

had this sound only in its earliest phase. Hasselbach states that “the Proto-Semitic interdental *θ was still partly distinct from *s and *ś in Sargonic Akkadian.”⁶ The presence of this sound in the Jaredite language, as suggested by the name *Ether*, may mean, in the context of a Mesopotamian origin theory, that the Jaredites originated quite early. It is possible they originated during the earliest phases of Akkadian, or even earlier, when the proto-Semitic ʔ (usual notation for the sound /θ/ in Semitic studies) was still in use. We need to rely on a dictionary of proto-Semitic roots to find an equivalent, as this sound, even if present in the earliest stages of Akkadian, was never distinctly written.

It might be possible to relate the name *Ether* to the Semitic root ʔ.t.t.r, referring to the “gods representing the evening and morning stars.”⁷ The name *Ištar*, the Akkadian equivalent of *Inana*, is probably related to this root, an association that fits well, given that *Ištar/Inana* is often related to the rising star Venus.⁸ To interpret *Ether* as coming from the root ʔ.t.t.r would mean that the third consonant of the root, t, was dropped. This would not be surprising, as the Canaanite equivalent of *Ištar/Inana* — *Athirat* — probably stems from the same root and similarly dropped the /t/. Given that the final t is the feminine marker in Semitic languages and that vowels are much less significant than consonants, *Ether* would be the masculine version of the name *Athirat*.⁹ Interestingly, the biblical *Esther* could have the same etymology — a point worth noting because, as discussed shortly, the book of *Esther*

6. Rebecca Hasselbach, *Sargonic Akkadian: a historical and comparative study of the syllabic texts* (Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005), 136.

7. John Huehnergard, “ʔ.t.t.r” in Appendix of Semitic Roots, *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 5th ed., ahdictionary.com/word/semitic.html.

8. See, for instance, G. E. Kurtik, “The Identification of Inanna with the Planet Venus: A Criterion for the Time Determination of the Recognition of Constellations in Ancient Mesopotamia,” *Astronomical & Astrophysical Transactions* 17, no. 6 (June 1999): 501–13, doi.org/10.1080/10556799908244112; Jeffrey Cooley, “Early Mesopotamian Astral Science and Divination in the Myth of Inana And Šukaletuda,” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 8, no.1 (January 2008): 75–98, doi.org/10.1163/156921208786182446.

9. Eiko Matsushima mentions the possibility that there was originally a masculine Semitic deity *Athtar* that would have been identified with the morning star. Eiko Matsushima, “*Ištar and Other Goddesses of the So-Called ‘Sacred Marriage’ in Ancient Mesopotamia*,” *Transformation of a Goddess: Ishtar – Astarte – Aphrodite*, ed. David T. Sugimoto (Fribourg, CH: Academic Press Fribourg, 2014), 3n.

may reflect influences from the *hieros gamos* ritual, parallels that are also evident in the book of Ether.¹⁰

It would be surprising, though, that Ether would bear the name of a pagan god, seeing that he was a righteous man. It is true that we know nothing of his father, Coriantor, and of his relationship with God. Coriantor, if he were not a follower of the Lord, could have given to his son the name of a pagan deity. Even so, it would be surprising that Ether would not have changed his name later in his life and that this name would have been remembered in the record.

Notably, the rising star motif has sometimes been associated with Christ. Revelation 2:28 mentions the "morning star" that shall be given to "him that overcometh." The identification between Jesus and the "bright and morning star" is even clearer in Revelation 22:16. In the same way, 2 Peter 1:19 mentions "the day star" that shall "arise in your hearts." These references are quite late, however, as they date from New Testament times—long after Jaredite exodus. One might also consider Numbers 24:17, which speaks of a "Star out of Jacob" and has been interpreted as a Messianic prophecy.¹¹ Even if these elements do not come from the same time or cultural context as the Jaredite record, they show that the identification of Christ with the rising star is a motif that should not come as a surprise.

The title *Akish*

Ether 8 tells of the story of Akish, who, being seduced by the daughter of Jared, creates at her request a secret combination in order to kill the king, Omer, and give the kingdom to Jared. Assuming the name is Sumerian, it would be divided into *a-kish*. The Sumerian *kiš*

10. The link can be made further: Esther could be related to Ishtar, while Mardochoi would be related to the Babylonian god Marduk. For example, see Harald Wahl, "Esther-Forschung," *Theologische Rundschau* 66, no. 1 (2001): 103–30. [jstor.org/stable/26149437](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26149437) or Abraham Winitzer, "The Reversal of Fortune Theme in Esther: Israelite Historiography in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 11, no. 2 (2011): 170–218, doi.org/10.1163/156921211X603940, among others.

11. In a Christian setting, it has been seen as a prophecy about the star of Bethlehem, but Jewish groups also interpreted it messianically. Robert Eisenman argues that "this was the prophecy that was of such importance to resistance groups in this period, including those responsible for the documents at Qumran and the revolutionaries who triggered the war against Rome, not to mention the early Christians." Robert Eisenman, *James the Brother of Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls I: The Historical James, Paul the Enemy, and Jesus' Brothers as Apostles* (Nashville: Grave Distractions Publications, 2012), 10.

has the meaning of “totality, world,” but it might be more interesting to look at the variation *kiš_{i12}*. This has the meaning of “secret,” thus granting an obvious relationship with the Ether 8 story. It can be easily understood how the final “i” could have been dropped over the years in the Jaredite language. Sumerian already had a tendency of dropping some sounds to simplify pronunciation. Thus, for instance, the Sumerian genitive marker “-ak” is reduced to “a” when it is not followed by a vowel, to “k” when it is not preceded by a consonant, and disappears entirely when it is in a “vowel-ak-consonant” environment.

As to the “a” preface in *a-kish*, several words in Sumerian can be pronounced with this form. One meaning is “water, semen, progeny, power, strength, son, etc.”¹² This could give the name an interpretation along the lines of either *a-kiš-(ak)* (power of the world), *a-kiš_{i12}-(ak)* (power of the secret), or *a-kiš_{i12}-(ak)* (progeny/son of the secret). All these meanings could fit within the story. For instance, Akish was indeed a “progeny of the secret,” because the kind of being he became was a result of the secret combinations he established — acts that ultimately corrupted his soul.

However, I suggest a different Sumerian etymology for Akish. The Sumerian language has multiple words for “father,” one of which is *aya*. It could be written in different ways, like *a-a* (with the “y” sound mentally replaced) or *a-ia*, but also sometimes just *a*.¹³ Thus, the name *Akish* could be interpreted as *a-kiš_{i12}*, with the “a” standing for *aya*. The full form would therefore be *aya-kiš_{i12}-(ak)*, or “father of the secret.” This interpretation is particularly fitting, as Akish truly was the father, the initiator, of secret combinations among his people.

It is interesting to note that Akish was written in the Deseret alphabet as $\text{EQ}+\text{D}$ (eɪɪɪ). The fact that the “a” is rendered as /eɪ/ seems to indicate that the “a” corresponded either to a diphthong or at least to a long vowel (long vowel that could result from an assimilation of the “y”). This is consistent with a reading of Akish as *aya-kiš_{i12}-(ak)*.

This possibility is compelling, as there seems to have been at least one precedent for such a name construction in the Old World. Akurgal was a king of Lagaš during the Early Dynasty period. The phrase *kur-gal* literally means “great mountain,” and so the name could be read as *a-kur-gal-[ak]*, meaning “progeny of the great mountain.” But it seems

12. *ePSD*, s.v. “kiš_i.”

13. See *ePSD*, s.v. “aya,” but one of the listed ways to write it is the same Sumerogram as just “a.” To be consistent with the *ePSD*, I will always subsequently designate it as “aya.”

more probable that it should be read as *aya-kur-gal*, meaning "Father Great Mountain."¹⁴ Indeed, Enlil, who was considered at least from the second half of the third millennium BC as the king of the gods,¹⁵ was sometimes mentioned in literary texts with the epithets "*kur-gal aya en-lil₂*,"¹⁶ i.e., "the Great Mountain, Father Enlil." The name of this early Lagaš king seems therefore to be a theophoric reference to Enlil, even though the order of the sequence was reversed.

The case of Akurgal not only indicates that the Sumerogram *a* was likely used in a kingly name to mean *aya*, "the father," but it also indicates that Akish could actually be read as a juxtaposition, not as a genitive construction, such as *aya-kiš_il₂* "Father Secret" instead of *aya-kiš_il₂-(ak)* "father of the secret." Indeed, in the case of Akurgal, if our reading as a reference to Enlil is correct, it would be a juxtaposition. It is "Father Great Mountain," that is Enlil, and not "father of the great mountain." If we retain this reading, *Akish* would be a title, "Father Secret."

It is noteworthy that the devil is called "the father of all lies" (Ether 8:25) — an epithet that seems to echo to the title *Akish*. The phrase "father of all lies" occurs only twice in the Book of Mormon, in 2 Nephi 2:18 and Ether 8:25. If we include the variant "father of lies," a third instance is at 2 Nephi 9:9. Three mentions is sparse for a book of the length of the Book of Mormon. Even more interesting is that two of the three mentions appear in Nephi's record. The phrase is never used by Mormon and only once by Moroni, indicating that "father of (all) lies" was likely not a common expression in the literary repertoire of the final two editors of the Book of Mormon.

14. The *ePSD* lists the sign /*a*/ as also /*aya₂*/ ("father"). One could argue that maybe this sign was read "a" to designate "father," but we decide to stick with the notation used by the *ePSD*.

15. Kramer states that "in our available sources reaching to about 2500 B.C. it is the air-god, Enlil, who seems to have taken his place as the leader of the pantheon." Samuel Noah Kramer, "Sumerian Theology and Ethics," *Harvard Theological Review* 49, no. 1 (January 1956): 51, doi.org/10.1017/S001781600002808X.

16. A search for "kur gal a-a" in the *Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*, University of Oxford, yields fifteen results. For instance, line 200 of "Enki and the world order," etcs1.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcs1.cgi?text=c.1.1.3&display=Crit&charenc=gcirc&lineid=c113.200#c113.200. It must be noted that "a-a," that is the reduplication of the signe "a," which is denoted by "aya" in the *ePSD*, (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/epsd2/sux/o0024686) also means father. The *ePSD* denotes by "aya₂" the single sign "a" when used to mean "father," and this is the same meaning as "aya₂" or "a."

Given that *Akish* seems to have been a title meaning something like “Father Secret,” the phrase “father of (all) lies” likewise seems to be a title. In some ways, it appears that the phrase *aya-kiši₁₂* was the title given to the high priest of the “Father of Lies.” If this interpretation is correct, we could conjecture that the original Jaredite plates contained the titles “Father of (all) Lies” and “Father Secret” in deliberate parallel, each echoing the other. Later, Moroni either began with King Mosiah’s translation of the Jaredite record or translated from the Jaredite plates directly as he composed his account. Either way, Moroni would not have had knowledge of Jaredite language and culture and, thus, would not have understood that *Akish* was a title echoing the phrase “father of all lies.” Either King Mosiah or Moroni would, however, have been impressed by the occurrence of this phrase in connection with *Akish*’s story and would thus have decided to use it in the translation. The fact that he did not understand the wordplay between *Akish* and “father of all lies” means that he would have used this latter phrase in his text without including it into a literary structure that would emphasize the proximity of both titles.

The main problem of the thesis is that the word *kiši₁₂* appears only in a single lexical tablet,¹⁷ dated from the Neo-Assyrian period between 911 and 612 BC¹⁸ — significantly later than the Jaredite exodus. While its presence in the lexical tablet confirms that the word existed at least by that period, and possibly earlier, it does not appear to have been widely used. Consequently, I acknowledge this as the weakest point of the argument, as we have no way to verify that this word was known or in use before the time of the Jaredite exodus, though nothing makes it impossible either.

The Mesopotamian Sacred Marriage

The term “sacred marriage,” or *hieros gamos* in Greek, refers in the Mesopotamian context to a practice that is described or hinted at in several ancient texts. According to these texts, the love story of some specific deities — most notably the goddess Inana and her lover the god Dumuzi — were re-enacted ritually in the world of humans. During these re-enactments, the king would play the part of the god.¹⁹ It is still

17. ePSD, s.v. “kiši12.”

18. Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (CDLI), *Artifact P240227*, cdli.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/artifacts/240227.

19. See the very good discussion in Stéphane Beaulieu, “Eve’s Ritual: The Judahite Sacred Marriage Rite” (Ottawa, Library and Archives Canada =

very much disputed whether the re-enactment implied actual sexual intercourse or if such texts are only "intellectual constructs"²⁰ without referring to anything that was ever practiced. It has also been suggested that the practice existed but only in a symbolical way.²¹ If the re-enactments involved actual intercourse, it is also unclear who stood in for the goddess, though several classes of priestesses have been suggested, such as the *nu-gig*.²² It has also been suggested that the queen herself took up Inana's part. Maybe the ritual was literally enacted when first introduced and, in process of time, became replaced with a symbolic ceremony, to be finally dropped and recorded only in literary texts.

However it was re-enacted, it seems that the ritual served several purposes:

- Renewing the fertility of the land.
- Uniting the worlds of humans and of gods.
- Legitimizing the king by imbuing him with a divine nature as he stood in for Dumuzi and became the husband of the goddess Inana.²³

Finally, though very much debated, it is possible that the ritual served to provide for an heir, the crown prince, at least during certain periods of Mesopotamian history.

Texts describing a *hieros gamos* are not consistent in the ritual elements implied, but the following elements are usually included: the presentation of gifts to the goddess, special garments for either the king or the goddess, erotic poetry in which the goddess expresses her desire for her husband-to-be, bathing and special preparation of

Bibliothèque et Archives Canada, 2009) about the Mesopotamian sacred marriage ritual.

20. Philip Jones, "Embracing Inana: Legitimation and Mediation in the Ancient Mesopotamian Sacred Marriage Hymn Iddin-Dagan A," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 123, no. 2 (April 2003): 291, doi.org/10.2307/3217685.

21. For different possibilities, see Kathleen McCaffrey, "The Sumerian Sacred Marriage: Texts and Images," *The Sumerian World*, ed. Harriet Crawford (London: Routledge, 2013), or Matsushima, "Ištar and Other Goddesses."

22. For an examination of this question, see Rudolf Römer, "Einige Überlegungen zur 'heiligen Hochzeit' nach altorientalischen Texten," in *Von Kanaan bis Kerala*, AOAT 211 (Münster, DE: Ugarit-Verlag, 1982). See also Yitzhak Sefati, *Love Songs in Sumerian Literature: Critical Edition of the Dumuzi-Inanna Songs*, Bar-Ilan Studies in Near Eastern Languages and Culture (Ramat Gan, IL: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1998).

23. Matsushima, "Ištar and Other Goddesses"

the goddess, the preparation of the nuptial bed with aromatic herbs, a procession featuring dance,²⁴ the consummation of the marriage, and a banquet. The description of the consummation of the marriage is often accompanied with the metaphor of gardening: the king-Dumuzi is the gardener of his wife, and their sexual encounter produces flowering and fruitfulness, which probably points to the role of the ceremony as bringing about fertility in the land. Usually, after the union, Inanna provides a blessing for the king in terms of a long life, fertility, and so forth.

If the ceremony was practiced, its frequency remains uncertain. Was it performed annually or just once, maybe at the beginning of the reign of a new king?²⁵

Let us also say a word about the goddess associated with this ceremony. Inanna is the goddess of love, specifically embodying its sensual and erotic aspects. E. Matsushima sums it up saying that “she is the goddess of sexual love and behavior, connected with extramarital sex.”²⁶ She is not, therefore, a mother figure. Though Dumuzi is a well-known lover of Inanna and the figure whose role the king played in the *hieros gamos* ceremony, he is by no means exclusive, and his relationship to her is somewhat ambiguous.

A sacred marriage in Ether 8

In Ether 8, Jared succeeds in a first attempt to dethrone his father, but he is eventually overcome by his brothers after several years and must relinquish his usurped power. Being “exceedingly sorrowful because of the loss of the kingdom” (Ether 8:7), his daughter suggests a course of action: acting like “them of old” (v. 9), Jared’s daughter will dance for Akish and, when he will desire her for wife, the price will be the head of Omer the king. The plan works almost as intended, though Omer is warned “in a dream” to escape (Ether 9:3) and thus is not killed. The result, however, is the same — Jared regains the kingdom. This episode also introduces a system of secret combinations among the Jaredites.

Earlier I suggested that *Akish* might come from the Sumerian *aya-kiši₁₂* (“Father Secret”) and might be a title used by the head of a secret combination. The use of a title validates the study of the whole chapter in a ritual context.

24. Beaulieu, “Eve’s Ritual,” has a good discussion on these points.

25. See Sefati, *Love Songs*, 47–48.

26. See Matsushima, “Ištar and Other Goddesses,” 3.

Several aspects can lead us to draw a parallel with the Mesopotamian *hieros gamos* rituals. First and foremost, the context is the same. Whereas the *hieros gamos* drama focuses on the love story and marriage of Inana and Dumuzi, relying heavily on an erotic focus, Ether 8 narrates the infatuation of Akish with Jared's daughter and what seems to be his erotic lust for her. The erotic aspect of the Akish story is amply proven by the phrase "he will desire me to wife" which occurs three times in the short space of verses 10 and 11. In the same idea of eroticism, we have the phrases "she pleased him" and "I am fair," all present in these two verses. As for the *hieros gamos* ritual, physical desire seems more important than love. Moreover, the sacred marriage was preoccupied with the legitimacy claims of the king, whereas Ether 8 presents the narration as aiming to put Jared back on the throne.

Certain details in the Ether account may also evoke parallels with Mesopotamian traditions, though these links are somewhat more tenuous. It is worth recalling, as previously noted, that the Book of Ether is a summary of Jaredite history compiled by Mormon. This summary—and the fact that Mormon probably was no expert on Jaredite culture—means that parallels that may have been obvious in the original record are only vague in Mormon's summary. But the insistence on Jared's daughter being "fair" (vv. 9 and 10) might echo the preparation—such as bathing and other makeup—that Inana accomplished before the ritual. Her dancing might reflect the procession, including songs and dances, that happened in the Old-World ceremony. Finally, asking for the head of Jared's father might be a parallel to the bringing of gifts in the *hieros gamos*, though here it certainly is a very morbid one.²⁷

Another important element is that, in Mesopotamia, it was not unusual for a king's daughter to be consecrated as a priestess.²⁸ Thus,

27. The banquet element is not explicitly present in Ether 8. Nevertheless, it is difficult not to think about the parallel episode of Salome in the New Testament, which, indeed, happened during a meal.

28. Hugh Nibley, *The World of the Jaredites* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 1988). Nibley argues that the episode of the daughter of Jared, as well as the episode of Salome dancing, is related to a so-called "*salme*" priestess in Babylonia. He gives as reference for this a talk he gave at the Pacific Coast Meeting of the American Historical Association (AHA) in 1940. Unfortunately, no transcript of this talk exists. I could only find the name of the talk (*The Origin of the Roman Dole*) in the 1940 AHA report. I want to thank Matthew T. Keough, from the AHA, for helping me in my attempts

for instance, Enheduanna, daughter of king Sargon of Akkad, was a priestess and known for the religious poetry she composed. She is the earliest named writer in the history of mankind. Jared had been king for a short time before his father Omer was restored to his legitimate position. May it be that he consecrated his daughter during his short term as a priestess to some Jaredite equivalent of Inanna? We could then imagine that when King Omer came back to power he would have done away with the worship of this Jaredite goddess because the text seems to imply that he was a just man—at least, righteous enough to have been warned by the Lord in a dream to “depart out of the land”—and thus he probably would not have indulged in the worship of a goddess. The probability decreases even further if the worship implied sexual promiscuity.

Thus, the daughter of Jared would have introduced this scheme to her father both out of concern for him and to restore the authority of her cult. This episode may contain not only a struggle for power but also the struggle between two religious conceptions—one promoted by King Omer based on the revelations of the Lord to his ancestors and another advocated by Jared’s daughter, of which we know virtually nothing but that probably would have been closer to Mesopotamian religious conceptions.

At this point, it is worth considering the literary analysis of Ether 8 made by Joseph Spencer.²⁹ He makes a compelling argument for two different sources in Ether 8, one called DW and one called SC. If this is the case, it seems that it could put into question my analysis, especially since I see the different names (Akish and Jared) combining in a united ritual context. In Spencer’s view, the names come in two literary strands. Indeed, the problem is that the name *Akish* does not appear in DW and the dancing of Jared’s daughter appears only in DW. So, it seems that the ritual that we thought to identify is actually split over the two sources.

Assuming Spencer is correct, DW and SC were most probably combined by Ether, which in turn was edited in summary by Moroni. This means that Ether’s edition formed a literary text with its own coherence and just minor incoherences that allow us to assume the

to locate a transcript of the talk. Concerning the high priestess question, see Lloyd Graham, “King’s Daughter, God’s Wife: The Princess as High Priestess in Mesopotamia (Ur, ca. 2300–1100 BCE) and Egypt (Thebes, ca. 1550–525 BCE),” *Academia* (website), academia.edu/34248896.

29. Spencer, “Jared’s Two Daughters.”

existence of DW and SC. Moreover, it seems that SC and DW had differing literary concerns. The source SC could be seen as the political source, focusing on the creation of secret combinations and maybe the legitimization concern of Jared, whereas source DW could be seen as religious, focusing on the sacred marriage ritual and maybe the concern of reinstating the cult of which Jared's daughter was a priestess. The two sources could then have been two reports of the same event, with two different lenses. In other words, the same event would have been reported in two different sources (SC and DW) for two different audiences with two different concerns. The sources would have been combined by Ether, and this combination would then have served as the source that was summarized by Moroni. As can be seen, the possible existence of two sources does not necessarily call into question the analysis presented in this paper.

Finally, given the role that the *hieros gamos* played in legitimizing a king, introducing Akish into this ceremony would have meant implicitly recognizing him as the king. This seems at odds with Jared's desire for power, but the sacred marriage ceremony was practiced by the designated heir to confer legitimacy. Thus, Jared's goal with this ceremony could have been both to secure power and to recognize Akish as his successor. However, the plan backfired when Akish proved impatient and did not wait for Jared's natural demise.

Comparison with other sacred marriage texts in the scriptures

I've made a point of comparing the story of Jared's daughter and Akish to the sacred marriage motif. Additionally, several other scriptural passages bear resemblance to this motif, particularly those in Ether 8. For example, compare Ether 8 with the story of the daughter of Herodias in Matthew and Mark,³⁰ the story of Esther, and the story of Judith.³¹ It is important to make these comparisons because, although not the primary focus of this article, the similarity between the so-called Salomé episode and the story of Jared's daughter has long been recognized.

I summarize the common elements of these stories in table 1. Boxes are colored in blue when the item does not appear in the story and are highlighted in light yellow when a similar—but not identical—element

30. See Matthew 14; Mark 6:17–28. The name *Salome* is not biblical but comes from Josephus.

31. Judith 9–12 (New Catholic Bible), biblegateway.com. The book of Judith is part of the Apocrypha, recognized as canonical by the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Oriental Orthodox churches.

is present. Thus, for instance, one could identify a pseudo-erotic dimension in the fact that King Ahasuerus thinks that Haman is trying to rape Esther, even though he is only trying to supplicate her. In the same vein, Esther’s story displays the killing of someone, even though the act of killing happens by hanging instead of beheading.

One could take also the Song of Solomon as a possible example of a literary text akin to the *hieros gamos*.³² This book is much farther removed from Ether 8, though, so I did not include it in table 1.

Table 1. Comparison between different scriptural texts having a possible link with *hieros gamos*.

	Jared's daughter (Ether 8–9)	Daughter of Herodias (Mark 6:17–28; Matthew 14)	Esther (Esther 4–5, 7–9)	Judith (Judith 9–12, translation <i>New Catholic Bible</i>)
Getting acquainted with the divine	Possibly with a goddess's priestess			
Unnamed female protagonist	Jared's daughter	Herodias' daughter		
Power	Akish gains political power (9:1, 5)	Herodias gains revenge against her critic, John the Baptist	The Jews gain power over their adversaries (9)	The Jews gain the power of deliverance from Holofernes' army
Setting			The palace	Holofernes' tent
Prayer before acting			Esther fasts with all the Jewish people (4:16)	Judith 9

32. For an analysis of the relationship between the Song of Solomon and Sacred Marriage, see Martti Nissinen, “Song of Songs and Sacred Marriage,” in *Sacred Marriages: The Divine-Human Sexual Metaphor from Sumer to Early Christianity*, ed. Martti Nissinen and Uro Risto (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2008), 173–218.

	Jared's daughter (Ether 8–9)	Daughter of Herodias (Mark 6:17–28; Matthew 14)	Esther (Esther 4–5, 7–9)	Judith (Judith 9–12, translation <i>New Catholic Bible</i>)
Erotic dimension	"he will desire me to wife"; "she pleased him"; "I am fair" (8:10–11)	"pleased Herod" (Mark 6:22; Matthew 14:6)	Haman falls on Esther's bed to supplicate her (7:8)	<i>"We would be disgraced if we let such a woman go without enjoying her favors. If we do not seduce her, she will laugh us to scorn."</i> (12:12, also 12:16)
Dancing	"I will dance before him" (8:10)	"And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced" (Mark 6:22; Matthew 14:6)		
Banquet		"Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords" (Mark 6:21; Matthew 14:6)	The scene takes place at a banquet prepared by Esther	Holofernes holds a banquet (12:10–11)
Offer to ask what is wanted without any limit	"if he shall desire of thee that ye shall give unto him me to wife" (8; 10)	"Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee." (Mark 6:22; Matthew 14:7)	"what is thy request? even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed." (5:6, also 7:2)	
Oaths	Jared's friends swear to him not to divulge anything (8:13–15)	"And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom." (Mark 6:23; Matthew 14:7)		

	Jared's daughter (Ether 8–9)	Daughter of Herodias (Mark 6:17–28; Matthew 14)	Esther (Esther 4–5, 7–9)	Judith (Judith 9–12, translation New Catholic Bible)
Beheading	Failed beheading of Omer; beheading of Jared (9:1–3 and 9:5)	John's beheading (Mark 6:27–28; Matthew 14:10–11)	Attempted hanging of Mordecai; hanging of Haman (7:9)	Beheading of Holofernes (13:9)

What can be made of this comparison? First, the *hieros gamos* motif seems to appear several times in the scriptures, and in very different fashion. One of the ways in which it appears seems to be in the recounting of a woman seducing a man in order to incite the killing of someone.

One can ask whether it is truly justified to link all of these passages to a sacred marriage pattern. I believe this topic deserves far more attention than can be provided here, especially since these other texts are not the main interest of this paper. Nevertheless, a couple of elements seem to make credible the fact of seeing in all four passages an influence of the *hieros gamos*, albeit in an adapted fashion. First, they all have an erotic dimension, even though the one in Esther appears in an unusual way. They also all speak about a banquet, except for Ether 8. Moreover, as we have already seen, the name *Esther* might be of the root signifying “evening or morning star,” thus possibly playing with Inanna as the Venus goddess and justifying a possible proximity between Esther’s story and the *hieros gamos* ritual.

Of course, the similarities listed in table 1 should not hide the real differences. For instance, as Frederick points out, the daughter of Jared is active in her story whereas Herodias’ daughter is passive in hers, merely obeying her mother’s voice.³³ This is emphasized by the use of the Greek word *korasion*, “little girl,” to designate Herodias’ daughter.³⁴

33. Nicholas J. Frederick, “Whence the Daughter of Jared? Text and Context,” in *Illuminating the Jaredite Records*, ed. Daniel L. Belnap (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2020), 235–52.

34. For additional examples of such stories from antiquity, see Alan Goff, “The Dance of Reader and Text: Salomé, the Daughter of Jared, and the Regal Dance of Death,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-Day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 57 (2023), journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-dance-of-reader-and-text-salome-the-daughter-of-jared-and-the-regal-dance-of-death/ and Frederick, “Whence the Daughter of Jared.”

Also, two of the stories feature a wicked woman, whereas the other two feature a woman trying to liberate her people.

Nevertheless, the comparison between these four scriptural stories helps clarify what might have happened in Ether 8. Table 1 shows enough similarity between the stories to allow us to read them together. As for the setting, Esther acts in the royal palace, while Judith kills her enemy in his tent — a space that similarly serves as a form of residence for royalty or nobility. Nothing is explicitly stated about the place where Herodias' daughter danced, but it seems very plausible to be the palace of Herod, as he was celebrating his birthday. The comparison might mean that there is a fair chance that Jared's daughter also acted in a palace, maybe that of her father. This is coherent with the fact that Jared "sen[t] for Akish" (Ether 8:10), conveying the idea that Akish had to come to the place where Jared lived.

Of course, it is not possible to assume a direct connection between the texts. After all, the stories of Esther, Judith, and Salomé are all post-exilic productions, whereas the Jaredites left the Old World pre-exile. We can safely assume, however, that the stories are representative of an ancient textual motif.³⁵ It is difficult to know how early the motif first appeared, but it could have been used by the Jaredite writers to cast the story of Akish and Jared's daughter.

Evil and righteous initiation rituals in Ether 3 and 8

The *hieros gamos* can be understood as a ritual of initiation into greater knowledge and power.³⁶ This can be seen, for instance, in the fact that the king joins the divine world and thereby receives his legitimacy to rule. Thus, Ether 8 could be read as an initiation ritual, if we accept that it is an instance of sacred marriage.

We can notice that Ether 3 also seems to describe an initiation experience. There, the brother of another Jared comes to the Lord to ask for directions towards the promised land preparatory to the crossing of the deep sea. While he seeks knowledge from the Lord, his faith leads him to a personal encounter, first seeing the "finger of the Lord" (v. 8) and then seeing him entirely.

Ether 3 and 8 are the only chapters that can convincingly be seen as initiation experiences in the book of Ether. It is therefore legitimate to ask if these chapters are supposed to echo each other: the righteous initiation into a closer experience with God opposed to the evil initiation

35. Goff, "The Dance of Reader and Text."

36. Beaulieu, "Eve's Ritual."

into the mysteries of the “father of all lies” (Ether 8:25). While comparing these two chapters (see table 2), it is helpful to remember that we are reading the Jaredite record through the lens of Moroni, who probably was not acquainted with that civilization. Some parallels, word plays, or cultural references, which might have been clear and understandable to a Jaredite composing the original twenty-four plates may have come to us in Moroni’s record only as vestiges of the original. To have more material for comparison, we will therefore assume that Ether 8 is related to a Mesopotamian sacred marriage ceremony. We can thus accept parallels between the brother of Jared’s experience in Ether 3 and known elements of the *hieros gamos*.

Table 2. Comparison between Ether 3 and Ether 8.

	Ether 3	Ether 8:7–9:5
Getting acquainted with the divine	With God	With a goddess’s priestess
Power and knowledge	Cannot be kept outside of the veil; is shown inhabitants of the earth (3:6, 13, 17, 19–20)	Gains political power (9:1, 5)
Setting	A mountain, with a name suggesting wholeness (3:1)	Possibly palace or the temple (8:10)
Writing	The brother of Jared is commanded to write what happened (3:22)	The secret combinations are taken out of the records transmitted down (8:9)
Someone unknown related to a certain Jared	The brother of Jared	The daughter of Jared

The first parallel is structural: in both cases, as previously noted, we have a process of getting acquainted with the divine. The brother of Jared approaches God with a question and, through faith, has an encounter with the Lord. This progression is linked with acquisition of knowledge and power: he was shown “all the inhabitants of the earth” (Ether 3:25) and “he could not be kept from beholding within the veil” (v. 19). Moreover, there is a mention of “two stones” (v. 23), probably similar to the Nephite interpreters, that give knowledge about languages that have been forgotten. On the other hand, Akish is clearly in a search for power—of a political nature this time. Moreover, if we accept the Sumerian parallel of the story, Akish has a personal encounter with Inana—or her Jaredite counterpart—through her

earthly representative, Jared's daughter, with this encounter likely being of a sexual nature.

We are thus presented with two trajectories: one ascending toward sanctification, God, and divine power; the other, descending toward political power and selfish ambition — illustrated by Akish ultimately murdering his father-in-law to seize the kingdom. In both cases there is a direct encounter, either with the Lord (Jared's brother) or with an idolatrous goddess through her representative (Akish).

The settings of the "initiation ritual" can also be compared. Sumerian *hieros gamos* usually took place in the palace or in a temple dedicated to the goddess.³⁷ Though we have no indication as to where Jared's daughter danced for Akish, we are told that Jared "sen[t] for Akish" (Ether 8:10), therefore giving the idea that Akish had to go to a specific location, maybe the palace of Jared or a temple. This possibility is reinforced, as was seen in the previous section, by comparing the stories of Esther and Judith. Ether 3 takes place on a "mount" (v. 1) of "exceeding height." Mountains have often been symbols of the temple — one needs only to think about Mount Zion or Mount Horeb. Moreover, the name of the mountain, Shelem, could be related to the Proto-Semitic³⁸ root š.l.m meaning "to be whole, sound." This root is found in Hebrew שָׁלוֹם (*shalom*, peace) and שָׁלֵם (*shalem*, perfect), in Arabic سَلام (*salām*, peace), and in Akkadian *šalāmu* ("to be(come) healthy, intact"³⁹). The meanings of *peace*, *completeness*, *health*, and *perfection* are very fitting to a temple setting.⁴⁰ Besides this semitic meaning, the Book of

37. Pirjo Lapinkivi, "The Sumerian Sacred Marriage and its Aftermath in Later Sources," in *Sacred Marriages: The Divine-Human Sexual Metaphor from Sumer to Early Christianity* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 22.

38. The American Heritage Dictionary Semitic Roots Appendix, ahdictionary.com/word/semitic.html.

39. Translation given according to Jeremy Black, Andrew George, and J.N. Postgate, *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*, 2nd corrected printing (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2000).

40. Interestingly, the Song of Solomon features a female character named Shulamit, a name that appears to share the same etymological roots as those we have discussed. As previously noted, the Song of Solomon seems to be part of the *hieros gamos* type of literature, and Shulamit could be a vestige of the fertility goddess found in Mesopotamian sacred marriage rituals. This connection is particularly significant within our context. For more about Shulamit, *hieros gamos* and the Song of Songs, see Edwin Yamauchi, "Cultic Clues in Canticles," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society (JETS)* 4, no. 3 (November 1961): 80–88, etsjets.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/files_JETS-PDFs_4_4-3_BETS_4-3_80-88_Yamauchi.pdf; and G. Lloyd

Mormon Onomasticon also proposes the Akkadian *simmiltu* meaning “ladder (of heaven).” This meaning also fits a temple setting.

Both Ether 3 and 8 demonstrate an interest in records. Jared’s daughter refers to “the record which our fathers brought across the great deep” (Ether 8:9), and the Lord commands Jared’s brother to “write these things” so that he can “show them in [his] own due time” (Ether 3:27). The records are different—one has been handed down the ages, whereas the other is to be created—but in both cases these records relate the initiation experience: the initiation into “secret plans” to “obtain kingdoms” (Ether 8:9) or the initiation into divine knowledge.

To finish, note that the etymology of Ether is interesting in the context of the two courses—the one going towards God and the one going to power lust and idolatry. Indeed, the etymology of the name associated with the rising star is associated in the Old World with Inana, the goddess of sacred marriage. In addition, this motif has been used at times in the Bible as a symbol for the Son of God.

We can assume that the symbol of the rising star continued throughout the whole of Jaredite history, interpreted in two opposing ways according to the religious affiliation of the person. On one side were those who followed in the footsteps of the old Mesopotamian religion—or, at least, of the Jaredite version of it—and saw the rising star as a symbol for the goddess of love and war who conferred legitimacy upon kings. On the other side were those who followed Christ and saw the rising star as a symbol for the coming Messiah.

Two things, then, need to be noted. First, it should not be surprising that such a cultural motif could permeate a long history, though with some changes in its details. The idea of sacred marriage itself can also be found in very different places and times.⁴¹ It seems that certain ideas are particularly compelling to the human mind and thus have a greater tendency to cultural stability.

Second, the rising star motif does not appear in Ether 3, so the argument that I just mentioned cannot be used in the comparison between chapters 3 and 8. But, if we are right to identify Ether 8 with a sacred marriage ritual, then it would seem odd to have both a

Carr, “Is The Song Of Songs A ‘Sacred Marriage’ Drama?,” *JETS* 22, no. 2 (June 1979):103–14, etsjets.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/files_JETS-PDFs_22_22-2_22-2-pp103-114_JETS.pdf.

41. Martti Nissinen and Uro Risto, *Sacred Marriages: The Divine-Human Sexual Metaphor from Sumer to Early Christianity* (University Park, P: Penn State University Press, 2008).

reference to the rising star in Ether 8 via the *hieros gamos* and later on via the name Ether. Could it be that Ether's record showed in a much more explicit way the contrast between the righteous and the evil use of this motif, but that it does not appear as such in our current book of Ether because Moroni did not understand the cultural reference? This is, then, pure speculation and it is likely that we will never have the answer.

Conclusion

In this paper I have presented the conjecture that a *hieros gamos* type of ritual is presented in Ether 8 and put in opposition to the spiritual course of the righteous brother of Jared introduced in Ether 3. Further, I suggest the name *Ether* is a reference to the rising star, which would have been seen either as a symbol of Christ or as a symbol of a pagan deity, according to the religious conviction of the person.

It is almost impossible to come to a certain conclusion regarding the origin of the Jaredites, given the scarcity of the material and that we have access to it only through the editing work of Moroni. All we can do is work towards conjectures with more or less plausibility. The difficulty of the task should not, however, prevent us from trying to see what can be found. Indeed, it is only by making attempts that we can hope to discover some traces of what once was. Moreover, it is my hope that this paper will trigger more research in this direction and give way to more articles on possible rituals and other cultural elements of a Mesopotamian origin in the book of Ether.

Besides the historical question, I also believe that this paper has another interest. It is possible to study a text in a diachronic or in a synchronic way. While the diachronic approach focuses on the textual history and tries to uncover the various stages and sources, the synchronic viewpoint takes the text as it is and tries to draw conclusions as to literary and theological questions. Though I believe that study provides valuable insights into the textual history of the Book of Ether, I also believe that, seen from a synchronic perspective, it offers meaningful theological insights. The contrast between Jared's brother and Jared's daughter underscores the choices available to all of us: to follow a godly, upward path leading to communion with God, or a selfish, worldly downward path marked by violence and strife. The use of the rising star motif in both paths highlights that the difference between these two courses is often small.

Appendix: What Would We Need to Be Able to Assert Anything about the Jaredites?

Several natural questions arise about the Jaredites: Where did they come from? Which language(s) did they speak? What were their practices? When did they live? We will define a “theory” as any coherent attempt to answer these questions. For instance, positing a Mesopotamian origin with a Sumerian-Akkadian linguistic background is one such theory.

One method to test whether a theory rises above mere conjecture has been proposed by K. Lawson Younger Jr.⁴² According to Younger, a theory connecting a text to influences from a proposed culture and people would need to fulfill the criteria described in the following sections.

Linguistic criterion

A theory would need to give a plausible linguistic setting connecting the text to the proposed culture. The book of Ether has sixty or so proper names, and these would need to be checked against the suggested origin language. When doing that, we should keep in mind several things.

First, the proper names found in Ether not only need to have a plausible etymological link to the suggested origin language, but they should also be in conformity with known name-giving practices in the suggested language and in the suggested origin culture. If a link to the name-giving practices can be established, the theory is much stronger than if there are only plausible etymologies.

Second, it must be remembered that the Jaredite civilization spanned at least 750 years, and languages evolve over time. A modern American would have a hard time understanding someone speaking English from 750 years ago in the thirteenth century. Thus, we would expect that more proper names could find an etymology in the theory for the earliest names of the book of Ether rather than for the latest. The same holds true for name-giving practices. A theory that fits this condition would be given greater weight. In the ideal condition (but probably unrealistic given the material we have), the theory would

42. K. Lawson Younger, “The ‘Contextual Method’: Some West Semitic Reflections,” in *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 3, ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger Jr. (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2002), xxxv–xlII.

even be able to explain some of the evolution of the language over time, such as phonetic rules.

We can also note that rituals often use more ancient speech forms. Thus, if we identify a ritual context, it can be expected to have names whose etymologies are closer to the origin language.

Chronological criterion

The proposed cultural connection needs to be chronologically coherent with what the book of Ether has to say. Even if the book does not have many chronological details, it nonetheless contains a genealogical list in its first chapter that mentions 30 names, beginning with Ether and going back from father to son. Among these 30 names, three are not the sons of someone else, but their descendants. It is therefore difficult to know how many generations separate them. Thus, setting a time for the migration of Jared would be a very difficult undertaking.

Even dating the demise of the Jaredites is difficult. We only know that the last Jaredite, Coriantumr, "dwelt with [the people of Zarahemla] for the space of nine moons" (Omni 1:21). However, it's unclear how long this occurred before the arrival of King Mosiah. It appears to have been a considerable time earlier, as Mosiah seems to have learned about Coriantumr not through the living memory of the people of Zarahemla, but from the discovery of a "large stone" (Omni 1:20).

So, it remains difficult to have an end date or a beginning date for the Jaredite civilization. But we can at least have a date *ante quem*. Indeed, if we consider that everyone in the genealogical table of Ether 1 was only a "son" in the proper sense and if we count twenty-five years for a generation, we come to $25 \times 30 = 750$ years of history. If we omit any time between the discovery of Coriantumr by the people of Zarahemla and the discovery of the latter by Mosiah's people, this means that the beginning of the Jaredites cannot have been later than 750 years before the coming of Mosiah in the land of Zarahemla. Mosiah's arrival is also somewhat difficult to date, but there are some constraints on it in the chronological indications given elsewhere in the Book of Mormon. All of this means that a theory cannot suggest a linguistic origin with a language that is more recent than that.

The implication of all of this for a Mesopotamian origin theory is that the chronology cannot exclude the possibility of this theory being true, as Akkadian (or its variants Babylonian and Assyrian) began to

be replaced by Aramaic probably in the mid-first millennium BC.⁴³ If we look at the chronological indication given in the current standard edition of the Book of Mormon, King Benjamin would have made his famous speech around 130 BC. Mosiah was his father. So, the travels of the first Jaredites and their entry into the New World must have occurred much before $750 + 130 = 880$ BC. Let us note that this is probably too recent a date, as it considers neither the time separating Mosiah and Benjamin, nor the time between the demise of the Jaredites and the coming of Mosiah into the land of Zarahemla, nor the difference between “son” and “descendant” in the genealogical tables of the book of Ether. But it indicates that the Jaredites must have come much before the mid-first millennium BC, when Akkadian was still spoken.

As for Sumerian, it is one of the most ancient languages that we know of, with the earliest unearthed documents dating to the end of the fourth millennium BC. It is unclear when it ceased to be a spoken language. Scholarly opinions range from 2350 BC with the rise of Sargon’s kingdom to 1800 BC with the Old Babylonian era.⁴⁴ However, it continued to be a cultural and liturgical language used in written form until 300 BC, even though the literary production is much less fruitful during the so-called Post-Sumerian period, from 1600 BC to 300 BC. In other words, it might or might not have been spoken at the time of the Jaredite exodus, but it will probably still have had at least a cultural influence, and especially so in ritual contexts.

Geographical criterion

A theory that can explain how some people from the suggested origin civilization came to the New World, in a way coherent with what is being told in the book of Ether, of course gains weight.

Cultural criterion

A theory that can discern cultural practices in the book of Ether akin to those of the suggested origin civilization gains in weight. In this paper, I show that there might have been ritual practices similar to the *hieros*

43. See, John Huehnergard, *A Grammar of Akkadian*, 3rd ed. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011) xxiii–xxiv.

44. See e.g. Abraham Hendrik Jagersma, “The death of Sumerian,” in *A Descriptive Grammar of Sumerian* (PhD diss. (Leiden, NL: Universiteit Leiden, 2010), 9, theswissbay.ch/pdf/Books/Linguistics/A%20descriptive%20grammar%20of%20Sumerian%20-%20Abraham%20Hendrik%20Jagersma.pdf.

gamos. Again, it must be considered that the book of Ether was written by Moroni who had access to original Jaredite material but who most probably was not an insider of Jaredite culture. This means that possible cultural arguments are probably buried under Moroni's redaction.

Literary criterion

This criterion is similar to the cultural criterion. A theory that can discern under Moroni's redaction some of the original Jaredite material will have more weight. In this paper I suggest that the phrase "father of (all) lies" used in the book of Ether might be of Jaredite origin.

To be considered as interesting or having a non-zero degree of plausibility a theory does not need to fulfill all the criteria mentioned in this appendix. But the more it fulfills the more it gains in credibility. By studying the two personages of Jared we give linguistic (some new etymologies) and cultural (relations to Mesopotamian practices and literary patterns) arguments consistent with a Mesopotamian origin theory.



[Author's Note: *I want to give special thanks to Joshua Matson for his suggestions, as well as to the Interpreter team for their support. Nevertheless, any mistakes are solely my responsibility.*]

Michaël Ulrich *is a mathematics teacher in the French system of "classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles" in eastern France. Besides mathematics, his interests include history and theology. He has a PhD in mathematics, a Master's degree in history and philosophy of sciences (with a Master's thesis about Babylonian medicine) and is currently finishing a Bachelor in Theology.*

Learning Political Civility from Pahoran to Lincoln

Brian Warby

Review of RodneyDieser, Cease to Contend: Healing a Nation Through Christlike Civility in Politics (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2025). 136 pp., \$16.99 (paperback).

Abstract: *In Cease to Contend: Healing a Nation Through Christlike Civility in Politics, RodneyDieser offers a timely and faith-centered response to the growing crisis of political polarization and incivility. Grounded in the Savior’s admonition to avoid contention, Dieser draws from scripture, Church teachings, historical examples, and cognitive behavioral therapy to help readers recognize and overcome thought patterns that fuel division. This review explores the book’s integration of gospel principles with therapeutic tools, highlighting the power of humility, empathy, and reframing as antidotes to anger and dehumanization in public discourse. By invoking figures such as Pahoran and Abraham Lincoln, the book provides both spiritual and practical models for engaging in political conversations with grace and restraint.*

A new book by RodneyDieser, *Cease to Contend*, provides a much needed practical and insightful guide to the Lord’s admonition in Doctrine and Covenants 136:23, from which the book is titled.¹ Dieser is an expert in the history of community service as well as a practicing licensed mental-health counselor. With seven previous books and more than 150 academic articles, he capably turns his expertise to the issue of political divisions in the United States.

1. RodneyDieser, *Cease to Contend: Healing a Nation Through Christlike Civility in Politics* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2025).

In an October 2024 General Conference address, President Dallin Oaks asked, “What should followers of Christ teach and do in this time of toxic communication?”² The problem is familiar and obvious; anger and a level of dehumanization have come to dominate political discourse in the United States and many other countries around the world.

To put some hard evidence to the phenomenon we all see so clearly, Dieder’s book cites that a 2021 Pew Research study found, “59% of Americans find political conversations with people they disagree with as ‘stressful and frustrating’” (p. 11). More worryingly, the figure increased 9% from just two years earlier. Pew Research also found that large majorities of both Republicans (69%) and Democrats (83%) believe that members of the other party are closed-minded.³

The current political animosity leads to a degree of dehumanization of opposing political parties. Virtually all Americans object to unethical behaviors such as tax fraud and child exploitation, and there is no difference between parties on such matters. However, when surveyed, both Democrats and Republicans thought that about 23% of their political opponents would approve of such acts.⁴

President Oaks points out that when Jesus appeared to the Nephites, one of the first principles he taught was to avoid contention. “Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away” (3 Nephi 11:30). The challenge is that othering, aversion, and moralization create a powerful psychological and emotional cocktail that drives political engagement, and modern politicians and pundits employ it extensively for their personal political interests.⁵

Readers are familiar with the story of Judge Pahoran, in Alma 60, who was severely reprimanded by Captain Moroni for failing to send reinforcements and supplies to Moroni’s army. Moroni accuses

2. Dallin H. Oaks, “Following Christ,” *Liahona*, November 2024, 25, churchofjesuschrist.org/study/liahona/2024/11/18oaks.

3. “As Partisan Hostility Grows, Signs of Frustration with the Two-Party System,” *Pew Research Center*, 9 August 2022, [pewresearch.org/politics/2022/08/09/as-partisan-hostility-grows-signs-of-frustration-with-the-two-party-system/](https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/08/09/as-partisan-hostility-grows-signs-of-frustration-with-the-two-party-system/).

4. Curtis Puryear, Emily Kubin, and Kurt Gray, “How Immoral are Our Political Opponents?: To heal political division, start with common moral ground, a study suggests,” *Scientific American* 332, no. 3 (March 2025): 82, doi.org/10.1038/scientificamerican032025-0updky6bj1ntzfixpg7kj.

5. Eli J. Finkel et al., “Political Sectarianism in America,” *Science* 370, no. 6516 (October 2020): 533–36, doi.org/10.1126/science.abe1715.

Pahoran of withholding provisions that might have saved thousands of lives and a great deal of suffering. He accuses Pahoran of negligence, sitting on his throne in a thoughtless stupor, and slothfulness.

Many of us have marveled at Pahoran's civil, patient, even loving response to Moroni. We might have asked ourselves in a moment of contemplation or during a Sunday School lesson whether we would be as humble as Pahoran if we found ourselves in a similar situation. Pahoran's calm response is remarkable and worthy of emulation by all.

In more modern times, Abraham Lincoln is one of our greatest and most celebrated presidents in American history. Indeed, more has been written about Lincoln than any other figure in history except Jesus Christ himself.⁶ One of the things that made Abraham Lincoln such a remarkable figure was his ability to listen to and reason with people with whom he disagreed.

Lincoln met Edwin Stanton in 1855. Both had been hired to work on the same legal case—Stanton for his reputation and Lincoln for his knowledge of Illinois law. The case was eventually moved to Cincinnati and Lincoln was dismissed from the case. Never having received this message, Lincoln travelled to Cincinnati to help try the case. When he arrived and met Stanton, Stanton "reportedly called him a 'long-armed ape' and said, 'he does not know anything and can do . . . no good'" (p. 127). Nevertheless, and despite the insults, since Lincoln was already there and invested in the case, and seeing that Stanton had such a strong reputation, Lincoln stayed and watched the trial. Lincoln was so impressed by Stanton that, when elected president, he called on Stanton to overhaul the War Department, which was instrumental in the Union winning the Civil War.

Judge Pahoran's and President Lincoln's ability to calmly respond in the face of such political hostility are remarkable and desirable. Few of us are likely as cool under fire as either of these men, but it is a trait for which we can strive. Without it, democracy withers. Though not explicitly listed among the gifts of the Spirit by Paul, Moroni, or Joseph Smith, I suspect that this trait is something that, like other gifts of the Spirit, can be developed through study, prayer, and effort.

In *Cease to Contend*, Dieser comes to the issue of political divisions from three perspectives: historical, gospel, and academic. Dieser pulls together quotes and anecdotes from important historical figures,

6. "Forget Lincoln Logs: A Tower of Books to Honor Abe." *National Public Radio*, 20 February 2012, npr.org/2012/02/20/147061209/forget-lincoln-logs-a-tower-of-books-to-honor-abe.

scripture verses, quotes from modern Church leaders, as well as academic references and ideas. He weaves them together to create a depth of perspective that is both engaging and thought-provoking.

Using a conversational tone that makes the book easily readable by a general audience, Dieser offers tools to help readers identify and rectify problematic patterns in their own thinking. He uses personal stories, humor, scripture, and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) to help the reader understand and recognize the pitfalls he identifies. He also explains the therapy, or treatment, to overcome problematic thoughts and behaviors.

Professor Dieser explains in *Cease to Contend* the cognitive traps that lead us into contention, and the therapeutic practices that can help readers adopt thought patterns more like those of Pahoran and Lincoln. They are familiar ideas to faithful disciples of Christ, but explained in a way that is relatable and tied to modern concepts of mental health. He talks about reframing your mindset to understand people with different perspectives, listening to understand instead of to argue, and consuming reliable, non-inflammatory information.

Cease to Contend is not likely to be a best-seller. It seems that outrage and hostility sell books, get clicks, and draw people to the polls. However, outrage and hostility also feed contention and dehumanization. Dieser's book is a Christ-centered attempt to counter the contention that has become so prevalent in society today.



Brian Warby earned a BA from Brigham Young University (2007) and a PhD from the University of South Carolina (2014), both in political science. After teaching at the University of Northern Iowa for over a decade he left academia to work for non-profits in international development. He recently worked for the US Overseas Cooperative Development Council and now operates as an independent research consultant.

A Textual Comparison of Masonic Rites and the LDS Temple Endowment

David Eddington

Abstract: Numerous discussions of the similarities between the LDS temple endowment and Masonic rites exist, which give the impression that the two overlap considerably. Rather than focus on the similarities themselves, this paper seeks to quantify how much the two rites overlap by performing a textual analysis. In the first section, the named entities, clothing, props, and participants in the ceremonies are compared. In the second section a line-by-line comparison identifies similar wording, structure, and meaning in the text, which results in a 10% to 17% overlap between the texts. The third section involves comparing sequences of one to five words in the text. For this task, three additional texts were included for comparison: portions of the Pearl of Great Price, the Odd Fellows rite, and the mystagogical catechesis (an initiation into mysteries). In some instances, comparisons indicate more similarity between the Masonic and Odd Fellows ceremonies than between the LDS endowment and the Masonic rite.

The relationship between Masonry and the Latter-day Saint temple endowment has generated a great deal of interest in the LDS community, among friends of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and in anti-LDS circles. Numerous publications discuss the similarities between the endowment ceremony and Masonry.¹ The

1. For example, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and the Origins of Latter-day Saint Temple Ordinances* (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation, 2022); Cheryl L. Bruno, Joe Steve Swick III, and Nicholas S. Literski, *Method Infinite: Freemasonry and the Mormon Restoration* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2022); Hugh Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond This Ignorant*

extant similarities were explained by early members of the Church as evidence of an early ceremony that arrived in a corrupted form in Masonry, then restored by revelation to Joseph Smith.² Yet others explain many of the similarities by pointing to their existence in sources that predate both the Masonic rite and the endowment.³

I recognize that the similarities are undeniable, and my purpose is not to further nor to dispute any of those arguments. One way to approach the two rites and their similarities is to acknowledge that they employ similar frameworks, but for very different purposes. Kearney describes it this way: “the temple ritual teaches us about our relationship to deity the Masonic Lodge is teaching us about our relationship to our fellowmen.”⁴ As useful as this explanation may be, it still leaves the question regarding how similar the two ceremonies truly are. Seaich asserts, “It is particularly noteworthy that of all the extensive Masonic ritual, which occupies more than two-hundred double-columned pages in Richardson’s *Monitor of Freemasonry*, the Prophet accepted as genuine only that which might fill a single page in the same format, even correcting it in major points.”⁵ While this provides a rough estimate of overlap, Buerger notes that the only way to accurately quantify the degree of similarity would be to closely compare the documents on a passage-by-passage basis, which can be difficult because “both ceremonies are open only to members in good standing who have made personal covenants not to divulge the proceedings.”⁶ In this paper I attempt to take up the challenge laid

Present, ed. Don Norton (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992); Eugene Seaich, *Ancient Texts and Mormonism* (Sandy, UT: Mormon Miscellaneous, 1983).

2. Bradshaw, *Freemasonry*; Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos*; Seaich, *Ancient Texts*.
3. Bradshaw, *Freemasonry*; Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos*; Seaich, *Ancient Texts*; Matthew B. Brown, *Exploring the Connection Between Mormons and Masons* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2009.)
4. Greg Kearney, “The Message and the Messenger: Latter-day Saints and Freemasonry,” (presentation, 2005 FAIR Conference, South Towne Exposition Center, Sandy, Utah, 5–6 August 2005), fairlatterdaysaints.org/conference/august-2005/the-message-and-the-messenger-latter-day-saints-and-freemasonry. See also Steven C. Harper, “Freemasonry and the Latter-day Saint Temple Endowment Ceremony,” in *A Reason for Faith: Navigating LDS Doctrine and Church History*, ed. Laura Harris Hales (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2016), 143–57.
5. John Eugene Seaich, “Was Freemasonry Derived from Mormonism?,” *SHIELDS: Scholarly and Historical Information Exchange for Latter-day Saints*, shields-research.org/General/Masonry.html.
6. David John Buerger, “The Development of the Mormon Temple Endowment Ceremony,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20, no. 4 (1987): 44,

down by Buerger, and to do so in a manner that is respectful of both parties' confidentiality. I will quantify the similarities of the two rites by comparing them textually.

From the onset, comparing the texts of the temple endowment and the Masonic rite presents a number of challenges. As noted above, they both contain elements that participants promise not to share with others. In order to respect those instructions, I will not discuss these elements directly, and I will not provide details of all of the data used to examine the similarities. Secondly, both ceremonies have evolved and exist in different versions, and need to be placed on the most equal footing possible. This is why I have chosen versions that come from similar places and time periods; more specifically the Masonic rite as practiced in the late nineteenth century in the United States (as described by Duncan), and the early twentieth century temple endowment described by Paden.⁷

This approach may cause some confusion to modern members of the Church, because elements are mentioned in this paper that do not match the current version of the endowment ceremony. But comparing both rites in their versions closer to the time and place of Joseph Smith supports one of my purposes — demonstrating the unlikelihood of Joseph Smith having appropriated wholesale from Masonic rites.

Paden's version of the LDS endowment lacks some elements related to the Creation, therefore I filled in by using other online sources, thus allowing me to more faithfully compare the rites. Also, Duncan's description of the Masonic rites required some adjustment, because he not only included the three degrees of masonry, but the higher degrees as well (such as Mark Master, Past Master, Most Excellent Master, and Royal Arch). Because Joseph Smith had only been initiated into the first three degrees of Masonry before the endowment was created,⁸ I have excluded the higher degrees in this comparative study.

Of course, one could argue that other versions of the rites would be better suited to the task of comparison. However, one crucial aspect

dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue_V34N0102_87.pdf.

7. Malcolm C. Duncan, *Duncan's Masonic Ritual and Monitor: Guide to the Three Symbolic Degrees of the Ancient York Rite and to the Degrees of Mark Master, Past Master, Most Excellent Master, and the Royal Arch* (New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1866); William W. Paden, *Temple Mormonism: Its Evolution, Ritual, and Meaning* (New York: A. J. Montgomery, 1931).

8. Buerger, "Development," 43.

of the texts selected is that they are available in electronic form, which is particularly important for carrying out the textual analyses.

Named Entities, Clothing, and Props

One way in which the two rites may be compared is by examining the named entities in the ceremonies, the props that are used, and the clothing that is worn. In each ceremony more than one role may be assumed by a single person, but all roles are given individually. I will do this three-fold examination before moving on to the more quantitative parts of the analysis. The examination is best visualized through a series of two-column tables, with the Masonic rite in the left column and the LDS endowment in the right. In each column, information is arranged in alphabetic order; there is no correlation between left and right items on each row.

Table 1 lays out all of the roles and participants. In each ceremony there is a candidate who goes through an allegorical journey. In the Masonic tradition the candidate takes on the role of Hiram Abiff, while endowment participants take on the role of Adam or Eve. The Worshipful Master, Senior Warden, and Junior Warden preside over the Masonic rite, while in part of the endowment the roles of God’s messengers are portrayed by characters who represent the New Testament apostles Peter, James, and John. Beyond this, one is hard pressed to find potential parallels, unless we consider the present-day temples in which the person who serves at the recommend desk (the entrance into the temple) finds his counterpart in the Tyler (the lodge’s outer guard, who prevents entry by unauthorized individuals).

In the endowment, references to people are strictly limited to deity and the participants in the ceremony (table 2). This contrasts starkly with the Masonic rite, which includes many mentions of biblical people(s) as well as generic references to a number of others. A similar state-of-affairs occurs with the places mentioned. The endowment discusses the heavenly bodies formed during the Creation, the Garden of Eden, and the kingdoms in the world to come. In contrast, the Masonic rite references rooms in the Temple of King Solomon and in Masonic Lodges, along with several biblical places (table 3).

Perhaps the most apparent similarities between the two rites are the use of ceremonial clothing (table 4). A prominent difference is that the Masonic ceremony uses quite a few props, including a number of tools that are absent in the endowment, with the exception of the compass and square that in the endowment appear only symbolically,

not as actual props. Endowment props include oil and water, which are used in the washing and anointing portion of the endowment. At a time, there was also a sword in the endowment, which no longer plays a role. Missing from Paden’s description of the endowment in the early twentieth century is the Bible or other scriptures on the temple altar. Whether this is due to oversight or changes in the ceremony is not known.

Overall, what should stand out from this comparison is the different focus of each rite. The endowment deals with the creation of the earth, the earth as a proving ground for God’s children, and the kingdoms that will exist in the post-mortal existence. On the other hand, Masonry began as a trade guild, and their rite emphasizes the purported history of their craft in the building of the temple of King Solomon, as well as the relationship of the members of the guild to each other. For this reason, the tools of the mason trade comprise the principal symbolic elements of their ceremony.

Table 1. Participants in the rites.

Masonic Participants	Endowment Participants
Candidate	Adam or Eve
Captain	Officiator
Conductor	Brother/brethren (men in attendance)
Fellow Crafts	Candidate
Grand Secretary	Elohim (Father)
High Priest	Eve
Hiram Abiff	James
Jubela	Jehovah (Jesus, Lord, Master, Savior, Son)
Jubelo	John
Jubelum	Lucifer (Devil, Tempter)
Junior Deacon	Michael
Junior Grand Warden	Peter
King Solomon	Preacher
Masons	Sisters (women in attendance)
Secretary	This people
Senior Deacon	
Treasurer	
Tyler	
Worshipful Master	

Table 2. References to people(s) in the rites.

Masonic References	Endowment References
Biblical People(s)	
Aaron	Adam
Children of Israel	Christ
God (known by many names, such as Deity, Grand Warden of Heaven)	Devil
Hiram King of Tyre	Elohim
Jephthah	Eve
Jeremiah	God
King Solomon	Holy Ghost
Men of Gilead	James
Moses	Jehovah
Saint John the Baptist	Jesus
Saint John the Evangelist	John
Tribe of Judah	Lucifer
	Michael
	Peter
Generic People	
Atheist	This people
Brother	
Cowans	
Eavesdroppers	
Fool	
Friend	
Impostors	
Madman	
Neighbor	
Old man	
Orphans	
Widows	
Woman	
Young man	

Table 3. References to places in the rites.

Masonic References	Endowment References
Places	
Holy of Holies/Sanctum Sanctorum	Celestial world
King Solomon's Temple	Earth
Lodge of Fellow Crafts	Garden of Eden
Lodge of the Saints John of Jerusalem	Heaven
Middle chamber	Hell
	Lone and desolate world
	Terrestrial kingdom
Biblical Places	
Ethiopia	
Hermon	
Israel	
Jerusalem	
Joppa	
Lebanon	
Mount Moriah	
Red Sea	
River Jordan	
Succoth	
Valley of Jehoshaphat	
Zeredatha	
Zion	
New World Places	
State (within the US)	This nation (USA)
United States of America	
Celestial Bodies	
Celestial Lodge	Earth
Earth	Heavens
Heavens	Moon
Moon	Stars
Stars	Sun
Sun	World
World	

Table 4. Clothing and props used in the rites.

Masonic Rite	Endowment
Clothing	
Apron	Apron
Blindfold	Cap
Hat	Garment
Sash	Robe
Slipper	Sash
White gloves	Slippers (moccasins, sandals)
Yoke	Veil
Props	
Cable-tow	Hymn book
Candles	Mallet
Canvas	Oil
Coin	Sword
Compass	Water
Gavel	
Holy Bible ⁹	
Level	
Mallet	
Plant	
Plumb	
Rod	
Rope	
Setting-maul	
Square	
Stairs (actual or symbolic)	
Sword	
Trowel	
Twenty-four-inch gauge	

9. Duncan’s manuscript describes the rite in the nineteenth-century United States. A canonical book of any religion is used throughout the modern world.

Conceptual Comparison

I now move on to the principal goal of quantifying the degree of similarity. The first comparison below is conceptual, by parsing out each sentence of the endowment. I have added some instructions that are not spoken during the endowment, when relevant to the comparison. This yielded 448 sentences, each of which was compared to the Masonic rites by searching for similarities in wording, structure, or meaning.

In making the comparisons, I tried to be as liberal as possible. For example, there is no direct correlation between the washings and anointings in the endowment and the Masonic rites. However, the latter cites Psalm 23:5, "Thou anointest my head with oil." Therefore the sentence in the endowment regarding anointing was marked as having a similarity with the Masonic rite. A second example of liberality in comparisons has to do with the fact that in each ceremony there are three principal characters: Elohim, Jehovah, and Michael (or Peter, James and John) in the endowment, and Worshipful Master, Senior Warden, and Junior Warden in the Masonic rite. A third example involves the different positioning of clothing, wherein the different ways of folding the Masonic apron has its parallel in the different ways the robe is worn in the early twentieth-century endowment. Also, every reference to a single concept—such as *new name*—is counted according to the number of times it appears. Table 5 provides additional examples of contextual similarities.

Table 5. Examples of conceptual and textual similarities.

Masonic Rite	Endowment
And God said, Let there be light, and there was light.	Call the light "day," and the darkness "night."
Has it a name?	Has it a name?
(Three taps with the gavel)	(Three taps with the mallet)
The sign of ____ of a Master Mason, which is done by ____.	The sign is made by ____.
Will you give it me?	Will you give it to me?
The five points of fellowship are ____.	These are ____.
(Many references to Masonic apron.)	What apron is that you're wearing?

As stated above, these "conceptual" comparisons are designed to quantify the similarity between the two rites. Of the 448 sentences in the endowment, seventy-seven have correlates in the Masonic rite,

according to this liberal interpretation of similarity. That is to say, there is a 17.2% overlap in the conceptual content of the two ceremonies. Of course, this percentage is based on making all comparisons, even when the similarity is somewhat tenuous, such as making the parallel between Jehovah, Elohim, and Michael in the endowment and Worshipful Master, Senior Warden, and Junior Warden in the Masonic ceremony. The number also includes counting multiple instances of the same point of similarity.

A different measure of conceptual similarity can be calculated by being less generous in determining what counts as “similar.” To do this, the twenty-five lines that had duplicate entries were deleted (for example, four of the five instances of *it has*, and five of the six cases of *What is that?*). Also deleted were what I considered the most tenuous similarities. The result is that only forty-one of the concepts in the remaining 423 lines of the endowment, that is to say 9.7%, have correlates in the Masonic rite. The present version of the temple ceremony (2023) has been modified in a way that six of the forty-one similar concepts no longer exist, thus lowering the conceptual similarity to 8.3%.

Textual Comparison

Another way of gauging similarity is by direct textual comparison, that is, by examining the words and sequences of words in the texts. However, if we find, for example, a 20% similarity between the texts, what does that really indicate? Any two randomly chosen documents will likely have a certain degree of overlap. For this reason, a more fruitful approach is to examine other related documents in order to have a more significant point of comparison. To this end, I chose three additional texts.

The first text, one that is very similar to the endowment, is found in the creation accounts in the Pearl of Great Price consisting of chapters 1–5 of the Book of Moses and chapters 4–5 of the Book of Abraham. The second document is an excerpt of lectures written by Cyril of Jerusalem¹⁰ in about 350 A.D. It comprises lectures 19–23 known as

10. Cyril of Jerusalem, “Catechetical Lectures of Cyril of Jerusalem,” trans. Edwin Hamilton Gifford, From *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series*, Vol. 7, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1994.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight, newadvent.org/fathers/310123.htm.

the mystagogical catechesis. Nibley points out that these lectures to new initiates have a great deal in common with the endowment.¹¹

The LDS endowment and Masonic rites are both initiation ceremonies and need a point of comparison with another initiation ceremony, especially one that like the endowment, has noted similarities to the Masonic rite. I selected the 1909 Odd Fellows rite from the United States.¹² Included in the Odd Fellows rite are the texts from the lodge degrees and the first to third encampment degrees.

Textual Preparation

As with the previous comparisons, only the first three degrees of Masonry were included, and the orders of business and names of candidates in Duncan's account of the Masonic rite were also eliminated. All of the texts were prepared for comparison by removing headers, verse numbers, footnotes, bibliographic material, and so forth. In the rites, only text that is meant to be spoken was included, thus deleting descriptions and non-verbal instructions.

Also, the words in the documents were converted to lower-case, and punctuation was eliminated. One version of the texts was created by removing all "stop words," which are function words such as *the, an, yet, for, to, and, are, is, that, why, it*, and so forth. This is important when comparing the vocabularies used in each document, because these words are of little relevance. Another version of each text was created that retained the stop words. From these versions, each of the four documents were divided into various N-grams (sequences of the same contiguous words) — in this case, sequences of two to five words. For example, the sequence of words *the name of the Lord* contains the bigrams (two same contiguous words) *the name, name of, of the, and the Lord*. Plus, it contains the trigrams *the name of, name of the, of the Lord*, the 4-grams *the name of the, name of the Lord*, and the 5-gram *the name of the Lord*.

11. Hugh Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975).

12. Argus Foundation, Independent Order of Odd Fellows (Utrecht: Argus Foundation, no date) stichtingargus.nl/vrijmetselarij/frame_en.html. The texts are located at stichtingargus.nl/vrijmetselarij/ioof_r4.html, stichtingargus.nl/vrijmetselarij/ioof_r5.html, and stichtingargus.nl/vrijmetselarij/ioof_r6.html.

Vocabulary Comparisons

The lists of individual words (minus the stop words) were compared across the four documents, calculating the percent of vocabulary each text shares with the other three texts. In figure 1, the four bars on the left indicate how much vocabulary the endowment shares with the other four texts. The order that each set of four bars appears in the graph is identical, but gaps appear because texts are not compared to themselves.

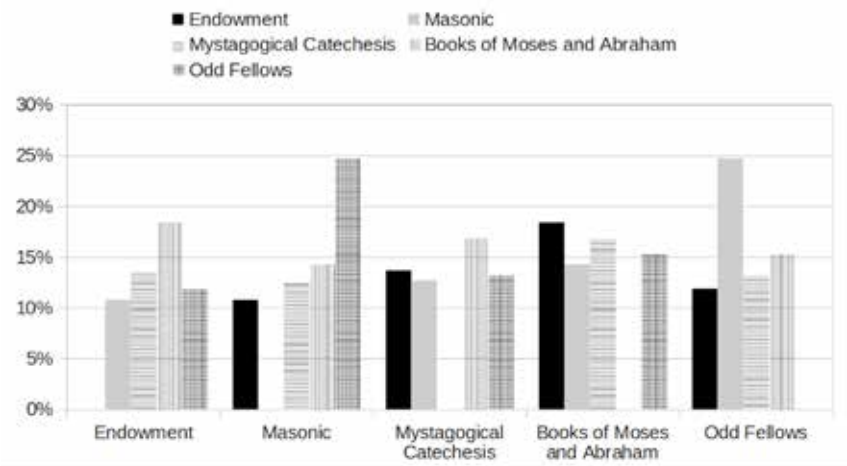


Figure 1. Percent of common vocabulary.

In the case of the endowment, it has more words in common with the books of Moses and Abraham (18.4%) than it does with the other three documents. Also, the endowment shares 10.8% of its vocabulary with the Masonic text, and so forth. The next set of four bars show that the Masonic text overlaps most with the Odd Fellows text (24.7%). And the mystagogical catechesis shares the highest percent of its vocabulary with the books of Moses and Abraham (16.9%).

N-Gram Comparisons

For the N-gram comparisons, the stop words were included, meaning that sequences such as *to the*, *what does it*, and *to make use of it*, were counted. As figure 2 indicates, the endowment and the books of Moses and Abraham have the most bigrams in common, while the Masonic and Odd Fellows texts are more similar in this regard. The

mystagogical catechesis has more bigrams in common with the text from the books of Moses and Abraham.

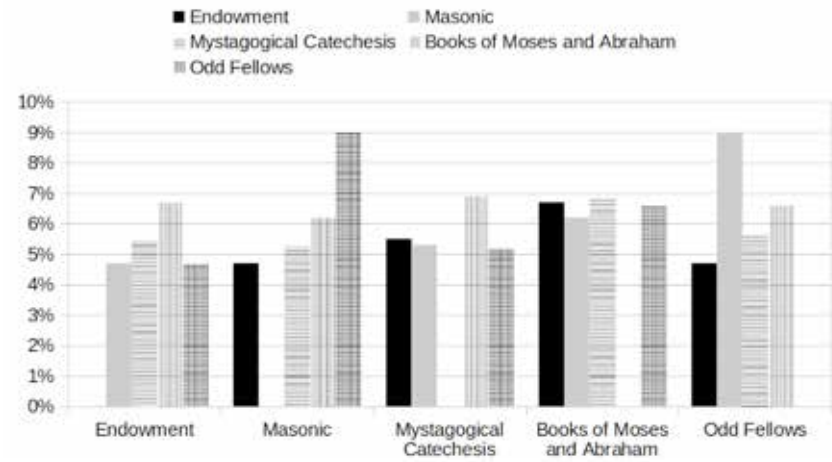


Figure 2. Percent of bigram overlap.

The percentage of words in common decreases drastically as the number of words in the N-gram increases (figures 3–5), and the general trend is apparent in the figures. The endowment shares more N-grams with the books of Moses and Abraham, the Masonic and Odd Fellows rites are most similar to each other, while the mystagogical catechesis is most similar to the books of Moses and Abraham.

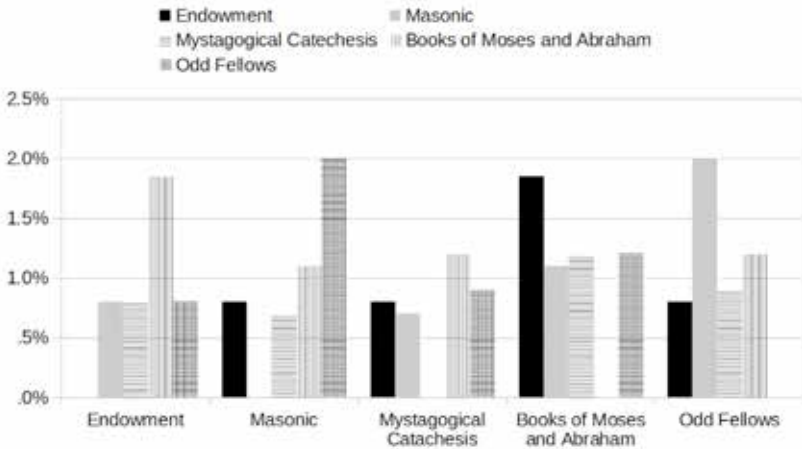


Figure 3. Percent of trigram overlap.

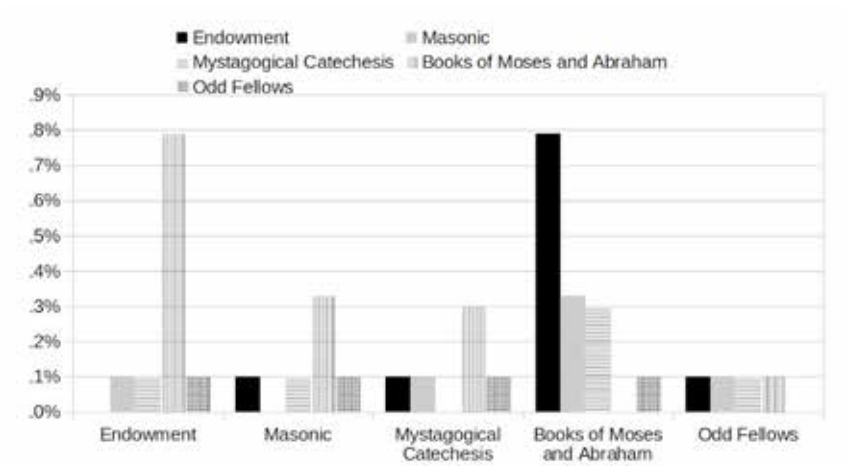


Figure 4. Percent of 4-gram overlap.

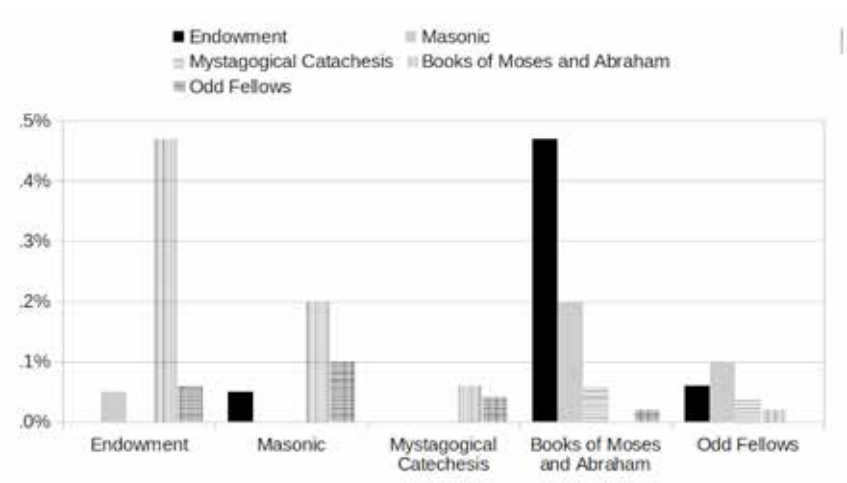


Figure 5. Percent of 5-gram overlap.

Conclusions

Most of the literature that compares the temple endowment and Masonic rites tends to emphasize their similarities. Without a more thorough comparison, such discussions may give the false impression of massive plagiarism on the part of Joseph Smith. Having quantified the degree of similarity by examining early versions of the two rites — in terms of the people, places, participants, and objects — clearly

indicate that different narratives are utilized in the Masonic lodge and the LDS temple endowment.

The commonalities in tables 1–4 are primarily limited to some items of clothing, references to heavenly bodies, and the existence of the square and compass.

Some similarities are evident in the texts themselves, as shown in the line-by-line comparisons of the two ceremonies in terms of structure, wording, and meaning. This approach allows us to quantify the degree of similarity, yielding a potentially more accurate measure. The overlap between an early version of the endowment and a nineteenth century version of the Masonic rite reaches about 10% to 17% (depending on how liberal or restrictive the definition of similarity). It is worth noting that many of the common aspects between the two ceremonies no longer exist in the present version of the LDS endowment.

A comparison of vocabulary and N-grams between two documents is not particularly revealing by itself, because any two texts will demonstrate some degree of similarity. Therefore, in the N-gram portion of comparison, three additional texts were included that have a similar scope to the Masonic and temple ceremonies: the creation account in the books of Moses and Abraham, the lectures of Cyril of Jerusalem (known as the lectures to the newly initiated or the mystical catechesis), and the Odd Fellows rite.

In the vocabulary comparison and in the comparisons of N-grams, the endowment matches most closely with the books of Moses and Abraham, as one may expect. The second most similar text to the endowment is the mystagogical catechesis, as measured by vocabularies and bigrams.

Identifying the two most similar texts according to 3- to 5-grams, the Masonic text aligns most closely with the Odd Fellows rite in three of the five analyses and with the books of Moses and Abraham in the remaining two. All five of the second-place comparisons with the Masonic text are with the books of Moses and Abraham.

While most analyses focus exclusively on the handful of similarities between the LDS endowment and the Masonic rite, they do not compare the entirety of those ceremonies. A more complete comparison, on the other hand, highlights the fact that the commonalities comprise a very small proportion of the rites. The purposes of the two ceremonies are different, and the story told in each is unique. The small

portion that they do share involves the symbolic way in which certain elements of the two rites are presented.



David Eddington is a retired professor of linguistics at Brigham Young University. His research focuses on quantitative and experimental approaches to the phonology and morphology of Spanish and English, as well as on Utah dialect. He presently lives on the Mediterranean coast of Spain with his wife, Silvia.

Some Good Questions, but Large Inferences from Tidbits

David M. Belnap

Review of R. Kent Crookston, *Book of Mormon Ecology: What the Text Reveals about the Land and Lives of the Record Keepers* (Provo, UT: Village Lane, 2020). 267 pages. \$12.95 (paperback).

Abstract: As is well known, the *Book of Mormon* is a brief spiritual account from many centuries of Lehi and Jaredite peoples. Some of its authors mentioned that the book contains very little (not even 1%) of what happened, especially of non-spiritual matters. Nevertheless, from the tidbits of information found in the book, many have deduced or speculated on aspects of Nephite, Lamanite, and Jaredite life, including where the events took place. In *Book of Mormon Ecology*, R. Kent Crookston analyzes agricultural, ecological, and physical information in the *Book of Mormon* and proposes that its peoples lived in a Mediterranean climate, not in Mesoamerica. Seeds from Jerusalem growing well in America, seasons of grain and fruit, and east winds have good connections to Mediterranean climates. His analysis raises pertinent questions about Mesoamerican models. However, many conclusions have a weak basis or do not consider other evidence strongly correlated to a Mesoamerican setting, including ecological factors. For other details, reasonable explanations also fit a Mesoamerican model. A definitive post-oceanic locale of *Book of Mormon* peoples remains elusive and controversial because of meager non-spiritual information in the book, multiple plausible interpretations of non-spiritual words, and insufficient archaeological data throughout the Americas.

The location of Book of Mormon events has been of wide interest for many years. The locations of pre-oceanic-voyage events of the Lehite party are relatively uncontroversial. The general trip from Jerusalem to the Red Sea, along the eastern side of the Red Sea, inland across the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula, and then to the shore of the Arabian Sea, is well correlated with the Book of Mormon text.¹ However, the American location of Book of Mormon events remains unknown.²

The post-voyage setting of the Book of Mormon, once thought settled as occurring in Mesoamerica, has now become hotly debated, as people parse the text, modern maps, Joseph Smith's words, historical documents, and archaeological data for clues. Hindering the effort, ancient Book of Mormon place names were not retained into modern times (as occurred with many biblical locations), and the dearth of details in the book impedes a clear understanding of most aspects of the ancient people's lives.³ The morsels of geographic information have enabled people to propose multiple locations. Mesoamerica has the most developed models, but locations in North America, South America, and even Asia and Africa have been proposed.

Into the debate over the post-voyage location comes a book by R. Kent Crookston, *Book of Mormon Ecology*.⁴ According to biographies available on the internet⁵ and comments made in his book

1. See, for example, the following articles and references therein: Godfrey J. Ellis, "Nephi's Eight Years in the 'Wilderness': Reconsidering Definitions and Details," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 57 (2023): 281–356, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/nephis-eight-years-in-the-wilderness-reconsidering-definitions-and-details; Neal Rappleye, "The Nahom Convergence Reexamined: The Eastward Trail, Burial of the Dead, and the Ancient Borders of Nihm," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 60 (2024): 1–86, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-nahom-convergence-reexamined-the-eastward-trail-burial-of-the-dead-and-the-ancient-borders-of-nihm.

2. Except where noted, the edition of the Book of Mormon used here is *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981, 2013).

3. Book of Mormon authors state the book is an extreme abridgment (1 Nephi 14:28; Jacob 3:13; Words of Mormon 1:5; Helaman 3:14–15; 3 Nephi 5:8, 26:6; Ether 1:5, 15:33).

4. R. Kent Crookston, *Book of Mormon Ecology: What the Text Reveals about the Land and Lives of the Record Keepers* (Provo, UT: Village Lane, 2020).

5. "R. Kent Crookston," BYU Speeches, speeches.byu.edu/speakers/r-kent-crookston/. "R. Kent Crookston," FAIR Latter-Day Saints, November 2010, fairlatterdaysaints.org/testimonies/scholars/r-kent-crookston.

(p. xi), Crookston was educated in agronomy (bachelor's degree) and plant physiology (PhD). He worked in academia where he researched physiology of photosynthesis; photosynthate partitioning and grain growth; and corn, soybean, wheat, and barley management. He did agricultural work in Morocco for many years. He consulted on agriculture in many places around the world. Therefore, he is well qualified to address agricultural and related topics. He notes that although the Book of Mormon authors did not provide detailed physical descriptions, "reading between the lines" and analyzing words give clues to physical aspects of the Book of Mormon peoples' lives (p. xii). Based on his expertise and his analysis of the Book of Mormon text, Crookston argues for a setting in a Mediterranean climate.⁶

Having someone look at the Book of Mormon from a different perspective is a wonderful thing, and Crookston raises some important questions and highlights some valuable nature-spiritual insights. These points are beneficial. However, I find the Book of Mormon's ecological, agricultural, physical, and related words too meager and ambiguous to suggest that Mediterranean-America was a more likely home of the Jaredites, Mulekites, Nephites, and Lamanites than Mesoamerica.

A Bounty of Natural and Agricultural Terms

As a person who loves gardening and nature, I value Crookston's documentation of natural, agricultural, and physical terms in the Book of Mormon and how those relate to spiritual matters (for example, pp. 106, 120, 121, 127, 129). He notes that the people must have been familiar with agriculture and nature because these terms are used throughout the record to teach spiritual lessons. This familiarity allowed Book of Mormon prophets to effectively use these as metaphors in their spiritual messages. He separated terms used in spiritual ways from those used temporally or physically. For example, "a large and spacious field" in Lehi's dream (1 Nephi 8:9, 20) served as a spiritual metaphor, and "many . . . fields of grain were destroyed" after a battle (Alma 3:2) describes a physical event (pp. 154–55). He documents dozens

6. In the book, Crookston hints that he thinks Book of Mormon events occurred in Baja California and southern California, not the part of South America that also has a Mediterranean climate. He is more specific in a lecture he gave at Brigham Young University four years earlier (R. Kent Crookston, BYU Library Lectures, "The Ecology and Agriculture of the Book of Mormon," YouTube, 1:03:37, 7 October 2015, youtu.be/x5iuG7yTfpw).

of terms that are used many times. Notably, this tally of terms excludes all those in the Isaiah chapters. He tallied Isaiah's terms in an appendix.

Three general observations regarding the nature-spiritual connection were made (pp. 253, 259–61):

1. "Although few of the natural world terms would be considered inherently spiritual," 42% of uses of these terms were used in a spiritual context. (This is non-Isaiah usage.)
2. Isaiah "drew almost completely from nature to enrich his writing."
3. "The Book of Mormon record keepers were interwoven with the natural world and called upon it repeatedly to strengthen their spiritual speaking and writing."

These insights are helpful and edifying.

Crookston deduced an insightful example involving the descriptive term "wild flock." Speaking of people who reject the Lord's ways, two verses use this term:

Yea, they are as a wild flock which fleeth from the shepherd, and scattereth, and are driven, and are devoured by the beasts of the forest (Mosiah 8:21).

Yea, and ye shall be smitten on every hand, and shall be driven and scattered to and fro, even as a wild flock is driven by wild and ferocious beasts (Mosiah 17:17).

Normal Book of Mormon usage was just "flock" or "flocks," but the Nephites apparently also had wild flocks. Crookston notes,

We're left to wonder what [the wild flocks] might have been. Did the Nephites *tend* some of the undomesticated creatures of the country, perhaps deer, or ... *wild goats* ...? These creatures can be tamed, but still retain their feral impulses and can be most unpredictable when startled. In [Mosiah 8:21] the wild flock, for some reason, fled from the shepherd, who would probably have wanted to be their protector. In [Mosiah 17:17] the wild flock was scattered by wild and ferocious beasts. What excellent imagery to convey the status of people who, without any apparent provocation, fled from the good shepherd, or in the other case, were goaded from the paths of righteousness by the evil one himself, only to be overtaken by sin. (p. 106)

This is a beautiful example of how someone with a different perspective can help all of us gain more from the scriptures.

Nevertheless, the emphasis of *Book of Mormon Ecology* is not on spiritual messages from nature. The book's focus lies on where Book of Mormon people lived—the geography of the Book of Mormon. In the next two sections, I present arguments Crookston gives in favor of his Mediterranean-American hypothesis. Next, I list important questions raised by Crookston. After these three sections, I present counterarguments.

Evidence for a Mediterranean-American Location for the Book of Mormon

Crookston's thesis is that references to the agricultural, biological, and physical world in the Book of Mormon strongly suggest that the people lived in a Mediterranean climate. Crookston proposes that these natural-world and related terms do not justify a Mesoamerican location.

As he defined them, Mediterranean ecosystems are located on western coasts adjacent to cold ocean currents about 30° to 40° north or south of the equator. These ecosystems exist in the Mediterranean-Sea Basin, California, northwestern Mexico, central Chile, the Cape region in South Africa, southwestern Australia, and southern Australia. These ecosystems are pleasant areas for human occupation. Mediterranean climates typically have cool, moist winters and warm, dry summers (p. 4).

In great detail, Crookston lists and analyzes 108 agricultural, biological, and physical terms and their context and usage in the Book of Mormon.⁷ Thirty-five words show a significantly better match to Mediterranean-America than Mesoamerica: abundance, barley, bones, cement, dry, earth, famine, forests, fruit, grafted, grain, grapes, hill, horses, land, place, plains, plant (used as a verb), rain, river, seasons, seeds, sheaves, thirst, timber, trees, vine, vineyard, water, wheat, wilderness, wind, wine, wolves, and wood. Three words have moderate connection to Mediterranean-America and not to Mesoamerica: bread, serpents, and stone. Eighty words are neutral as to a location: animals, apparel, ass, beasts, bees, branch, calves, cattle, chaff, chickens, cloth, clothing, corn, cows, crops, cumoms, cureloms, dig,

7. The terms are found throughout *Book of Mormon Ecology*.

dirt, dogs, dragons, drink, dust, eat, elephants, fatlings, fevers,⁸ field, figs, firstlings, fish, flocks, fold, food, fowl, game, garden, goats, grass, ground, hail, harvest, heat, herds, honey, insects, lamb, linen, lion, meat, mist, mountains, neas, olives, oxen, pasture, pearls, plants (used as a noun), plow, prune, rock, roots, sand, sea, seashore, sheep, shepherd, sheum, silk, sow, storm, swine, tents, thistles, thorns, till, valley, vultures, waves, and wool.⁹ Crookston argues that no words are a weak fit for Mediterranean-America and eleven words — barley, bones, cement, dry, grapes, place, plant (verb), seeds, water, wheat, and wolf — do not fit Mesoamerica (p. 254).

From this analysis, I find the strongest arguments are in seeds brought from Jerusalem, interpretation of words, grains, aridity of the land, fruits, chaparral landscape, characteristics of the land northward, the east wind, tracking people, seasons, and wolves. These eleven items, addressed in the following sections, are relatively straightforward arguments from the Book of Mormon's ecological, agricultural, and physical words.

Seeds from Jerusalem

Crookston's analysis of the Book of Mormon began with an insight he had after completing his PhD in plant physiology. While reading the Book of Mormon, he noticed a potent agricultural message in events that occurred just after the Lehites arrived in the promised land. Nephi wrote,

And it came to pass that we did begin to till the earth, and we began to plant seeds; yea, we did put all our seeds into the earth, which we had brought from the land of Jerusalem. And it came to pass that they did grow exceedingly; wherefore, we were blessed in abundance (1 Nephi 18:24).

These seeds included grain and fruit “of every kind” (1 Nephi 8:1). Not only did the Lehites gather these seeds in Jerusalem, but Nephi also mentions four times that they took seeds with them (1 Nephi 8:1, 16:11, 18:6, and 18:24). So those seeds were important. Those seeds produced abundance after their arrival in the new land. With his agricultural and graduate-school background, Crookston deduced that wherever the Lehites landed in the New World, their landing site was a good fit for the Jerusalem seeds. Seeds grow best in a climate

8. Included with “seasons” (pp. 205–6).

9. Crookston notes that “wool” is inferred but not directly mentioned (p. 130).

and latitude where the plant is acclimated. Therefore, he reasoned, Jerusalem-adapted seeds would grow best in a New World climate that was similar. Crookston explains well the reasoning behind this conclusion. Plants need the right soil and the right amount of cold and heat and light and darkness. Corn plants from Texas will not produce well if planted in Wisconsin and vice versa. Thus, he reasons, seeds from Jerusalem would grow best in the New World Mediterranean climates of southern California and Baja California or in coastal regions of central Chile (near Valparaíso). He states that Jerusalem-adapted seeds would not only fail or grow poorly in the acidic soils of tropical America but would also be susceptible to the alien plant blights and alien pests found there (pp. vii–viii, 3–8, 12–14, 60, 62–65, 147–51, 173).

Words as described

Crookston proposes that Book of Mormon ecological and related words mean exactly as we interpret those words today. Barley, wheat, oxen, cows, asses, horses, goats, and others were the same as we know those plants and animals today — like those from the Old World. Nephi distinguished domestic old-world animals from wild animals, suggesting he recognized the old-world animals and simply grouped all wild animals together: “we did find upon the land of promise . . . both the cow and the ox, and the ass and the horse, and the goat and the wild goat, and all manner of wild animals (1 Nephi 18:25). Crookston disagrees with those who propose that Book of Mormon people gave familiar names like cow and goat to animals that had some resemblance to what they remembered of those animals in their previous home. So few new-world animals were domesticated that the proposed substitute animals are unlikely to be in the herds and flocks of the Book of Mormon people. The difficulty in domesticating animals suggests, according to Crookston, that calling native American animals by Old World names may be inaccurate. He states, “an acceptance of *all* the text’s ecological words and descriptions, just as they appear, is much easier if we don’t attempt to force fit them into a Mesoamerican location but allow for the consideration of a Mediterranean eco-setting instead.” Although he acknowledges the possibility of mistakes and imperfect translations, Crookston states “we need not question whether those voices from the dust can be reliably understood by the modern reader” (pp. xiii–xiv, 20–25, 138).

Barley and wheat

Crookston says wheat and barley would grow readily in Mediterranean-America but not in Mesoamerica. Barley and wheat were important grains to the Book of Mormon people. Barley was used in Nephite commerce (Alma 11:7, 15). Barley and wheat were grown by Nephites who returned to the land of Nephi (Mosiah 7:22, 9:9). Barley may have been the most common grain because it was mentioned as part of their monetary system and “was a valued and sustainable commodity.” Barley is hardy and can grow in dry areas, cool or cold places, and in salty soils. It grows well in Mediterranean climates, “where it outperforms other cereals in the drier areas.” Barley is ill-suited to wet, tropical climates. It is usually not grown for food unless people must (when the environment is dry and the soil is salty). Crookston concludes that the presence of barley is incompatible with life in a moist tropical area such as in Mesoamerica (pp. 5, 31–37, 42, 52, 64–65, 78–79).

Dryness, droughts, and thirst

Characteristic of Mediterranean regions and uncharacteristic of Mesoamerica, Crookston argues that the Book of Mormon land was dry; water sources were limited. The place where Ammon and the servants of King Lamoni watered the king’s flock was called Sebus (Alma 17:26–39; 18:1–7). The king’s servants would have gone to a different watering place if they could, so they would not risk their lives having to confront plunderers who would steal their flocks. The land northward was remarkable for its plentiful water. Because the land northward was described as having “many rivers” and “many waters” (Helaman 3:3–4; Mosiah 8:8; Mormon 6:4) and no rivers are mentioned for the land of Nephi, the land of Nephi was likely relatively dry. Otherwise, why would the many waters be noted? Two major droughts are described in the Book of Mormon: one for the Jaredites (Ether 9:28–35) and one for the Nephites and Lamanites (Helaman 11:2–18). The latter drought lasted three years. Droughts are common in Mediterranean climates, but “severe drought is comparatively uncommon in Mesoamerican lands, and a relentless drought lasting three years would be very unlikely.” In the Book of Mormon, Nephites who went to the Lamanites (Mosiah 7:16; Alma 17:5), who were needy (Alma 4:12), who were in prison (Alma 14:22; 20:28–29), and who were at war (Alma 60:3) experienced thirst. Thirst would be more likely in an arid, Mediterranean climate than in Mesoamerica, where “streams and rivers were readily available.” Thirst would be especially common

during the Mediterranean dry season (pp. 142–44, 149–51, 152–54, 174, 191, 193, 220–23, 225–33).

Fruits

Fruit-growing in the Book of Mormon strongly suggests a Mediterranean region, according to Crookston. Only three fruits are mentioned by name in the text: figs, grapes, and olives. These are important fruits in lands around the Mediterranean Sea. "The frequent mention of wine in the text clearly suggests grapes," which "are seldom grown in the tropics," he notes. Fruit, and grain, "of every kind" is typical of the great diversity of plants in Mediterranean regions of the world. He notes that today the Mediterranean regions of California, Chile, and Peru provide United States markets with abundant "fruit of every kind." Fruit grew again after the Jaredite and LeHITE droughts. "Renewal of fruit growth" at the end of a great famine "matches what one would expect in a Mediterranean climate." Grafting of olives, grapes, and figs was, and still is, common in the Mediterranean Sea region (pp. 43, 46–48, 49–50, 52–53, 58–59, 60, 75–78, 79–81, 173).

Sporadic trees and chaparral

Crookston finds several Book of Mormon statements compatible with a chaparral landscape:

- The Place of Mormon had a fountain of pure water near a thicket of small trees, and wild animals frequented the area at times (Mosiah 18:4–5). Regions where "sporadic thickets of small trees flourish is shrubland" or chaparral, distinctive of Mediterranean landscapes. The seasons when the Place of Mormon was infested by wild beasts likely would be dry times when animals would come to a spring for water. Mediterranean-America has such seasons.
- On their journey through the New World wilderness, the LeHites noted "beasts in the forests of every kind"—including cows, oxen, horses, asses, goats, wild goats, and "all manner of animals" (1 Nephi 18:25). The mentioned creatures would need grass, which would be allowed by a landscape with intermittent forests or shrubland.
- Enos went to hunt beasts in the "forests" (Enos 1:3). King Limhi's army hid in "the forests", not "the forest." These forests were "separated or sporadic areas of trees" or "more than one forest."

- Kings Noah and Limhi could look out from a tower and see the approaching Lamanite army because their surroundings were not a dense subtropical jungle. (Mosiah 11:12; 19:5–6; 20:7–8). If the region were dense forest, Noah and Limhi would not have been able to see the Lamanite army.
- Plains were mentioned during four battles in Nephite or Jaredite territory (Alma 52:20, 62:18–19; Ether 13:28–29, 14:15–16). Plains are more likely to have been found in Mediterranean-America than in jungle-prone Mesoamerica. Another battle likely occurred in an open area (Alma 43:31–52). When Helaman and his 2,000 warriors were being chased by a Lamanite army (Alma 56:30–44), the chase most likely took place in an open area where the armies could see each other, not heavy forest.

Therefore, Crookston deduces the descriptions are a better fit with chaparral or sporadic, patchy Mediterranean forests than dense-jungle Mesoamerican forests (pp. xv–xvi, 43–46, 70–73, 75, 164, 173, 186–90, 205).

Bones and trees in the Land Northward

A search party sent by King Limhi found a previously populated land covered with human and animal bones and ruins of buildings; the land also had many waters (Mosiah 8:8; see also Omni 1:22, Mosiah 21:26, Alma 22:30). Later, people migrated to this northward land, which “was covered with large bodies of water.” A significant part of the land had little timber (Alma 50:29, 63:4–9; Helaman 3:3–11). The bones discovered in the land northward were hundreds of years old. Finding bones this old is more congruent with a dry climate than the much wetter Mesoamerican climate where bones as well as flesh disintegrate quickly, Crookston notes. This northern land was very dry, “and there must have been very little vegetation.” The lack of trees provides further evidence, Crookston argues. “The disappearance of trees, followed by their extended absence, with a struggle to reestablish them, is characteristic of a Mediterranean-desert ecology.” Trees are difficult to reestablish in Mediterranean eco-zones. For example, in the Mediterranean Sea Basin, efforts to restore cedars of Lebanon and Atlas cedars in Morocco “have proven very challenging” (pp. 94–95, 134–40, 166–72, 180–81, 232–33).

East wind

Abinadi and Limhi mentioned reaping the east wind because of wickedness (Mosiah 7:31, 12:6). "Destructive east winds are common in Mediterranean climates," Crookston states. For example, blowing from deserts to the east, east winds plague Jerusalem, Egypt, Morocco, southern California, and northern Baja California. Thus, these winds are a good fit for a Mediterranean-American homeland for Book of Mormon people (pp. 172–73, 246–48).

Tracking people and getting lost

In the wilderness, some people became lost, could not follow the tracks of others, or both.¹⁰ Tracking animals and people through a thick jungle is easier than tracking in an arid chaparral region. In the jungle, broken foliage makes tracking easy. For instance, how could escaping Nephites lose the people following them if travel was through a jungle, and especially with Nephite flocks and herds?¹¹ Crookston proposes that an arid Mediterranean climate can be a place where people become easily lost and where tracking can be difficult (pp. 240–43).

Separate seasons of grain and fruit

Crookston notes that distinct seasons for grain and fruit are suggested in Helaman. At the end of a drought, the book reports that after the Lord sent rain, the earth "did bring forth her fruit in the season of her fruit. And it came to pass that it did bring forth her grain in the season of her grain" (Helaman 11:17).¹² Mediterranean regions have distinct seasons of grain and fruit — one of each per year. These seasons may overlap but are at different times of the year. In Guatemala, representing Mesoamerica, corn (maize) has three seasons per year; "thus, *the season of grain* . . . is not a good way to describe a Guatemalan

10. Within each semi-colon are verses discussing the same event: Mosiah 9:3–4; 7:4; 8:7–8, 21:25; 19:1, 23:1–4; 22:11–13, 15–16; 23:30–37.

11. Interpreting Mosiah 22:15–16, Brant Gardner asks a similar question: "Why did the tracks of so large a people become untraceable after two days? They passed through a mountainous forest, and the broken vegetation, animal dung, and footprints of so many people would have surely left their mark. It would seem nearly impossible for a following army to 'lose' the trail." Brant Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Volume 3 Enos–Mosiah* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 385–86.

12. See also Helaman 11:6, 13.

cropping system. . . . In the tropics . . . fruits are harvested at different times throughout the year, depending on the species” (pp. 51–52, 204–9).

Wolves

Wolves are mentioned twice in the Book of Mormon text (Alma 5:59–60, 3 Nephi 14:15). Crookston mentions that wolves are not known to have lived in Mesoamerica but were found from present-day Mexico City north, including all present-day California and northern Baja California (pp. 129–30).

Countering Strong Mesoamerican Arguments

The Mesoamerican model is supported by convincing evidence. Evidence of large ancient cities is found in Mesoamerica but not in California. Cement structures appeared in the proposed land northward consistent with the Book of Mormon record.¹³ The land northward’s many waters (Helaman 3:3–4, Mosiah 8:8, Mormon 6:4) are a good fit for southern Mexico but not for the dry deserts in northern regions of southern California (figures 1 and 2). Mesoamerican volcanic eruptions are plausible explanations for the great destruction mentioned in the Book of Mormon before Christ’s appearance (3 Nephi 8:5–25, 9:1–12) and have been dated to that period.¹⁴ Crookston provides explanations for these four points that, he argues, make his Mediterranean-American model plausible.

The lack of archaeological ruins in American Mediterranean regions should not be taken as evidence that people did not live there. Crookston notes that the Book of Mormon does not mention that buildings were made of stone—the common building material found in ruins of Mesoamerican civilizations. The only mention of stone is that it was used for defensive fortifications (Alma 48:8). He asks, when the Lord caused fire to be in the prison where Nephi and Lehi were

13. John L. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex: An Ancient American Book* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013), 321–22, 632.

14. Several sources are listed in a review by Neal Rappleye, “‘The Great and Terrible Judgments of the Lord’: Destruction and Disaster in 3 Nephi and the Geology of Mesoamerica,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 15 (2015): 143–57, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-great-and-terrible-judgments-of-the-lord-destruction-and-disaster-in-3-nephi-and-the-geology-of-mesoamerica/.

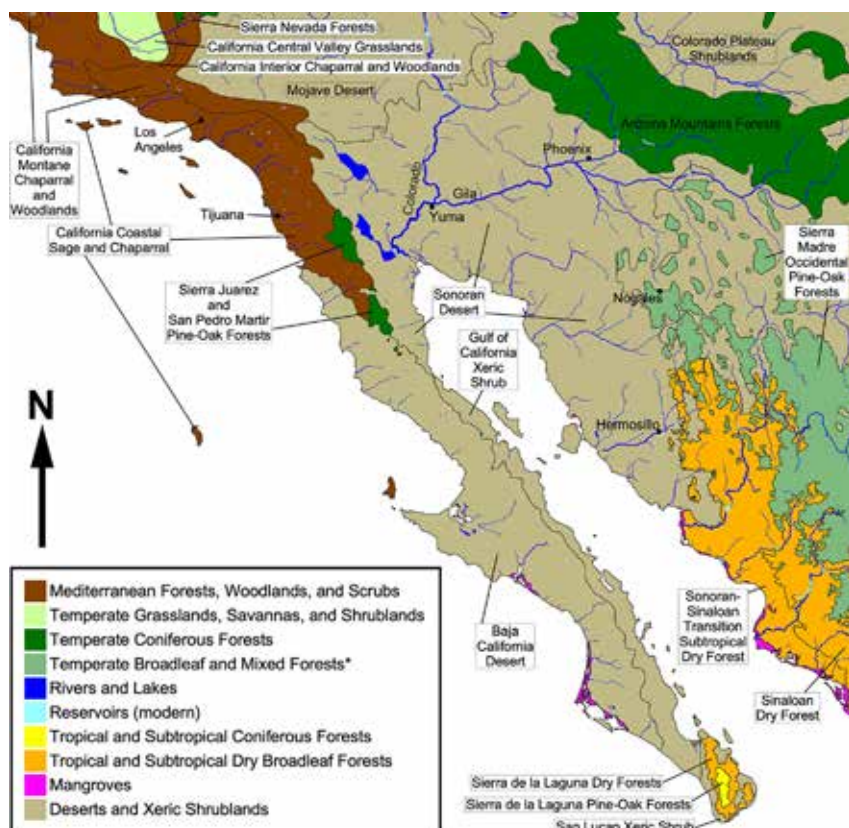


Figure 1. Biomes in the Baja California Region. Eight defined biomes (major habitat types) in Baja California and surrounding regions are represented by color (inset large box). Within each biome, black lines separate ecoregions, which are designated by individually boxed names. Rivers and lakes are shown in dark blue and reservoirs in light cyan (inset large box). The Gila and Colorado Rivers are labeled. Also labeled are six modern cities (Tijuana, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Yuma, Nogales, and Hermosillo). *The Sierra Madre Occidental Pine-Oak Forests have also been classified as Tropical and Subtropical Coniferous Forest. See appendix B for definitions of the biomes. **Sources:** *Biomes and ecoregions:* see appendix B. *Rivers:* Bernhard Lehner and Günther Grill, "Global River Hydrography and Network Routing: Baseline Data and New Approaches to Study the World's Large River Systems," *Hydrological Processes* 27 (2013): 2171–86, hydrosheds.org/products/hydrorivers. *Lakes and reservoirs:* Mathis Loïc Messager et al., "Estimating the Volume and Age of Water Stored in Global Lakes Using a Geo-Statistical Approach," *Nature Communications* 7 (2016): 13603, hydrosheds.org/products/hydrolakes.

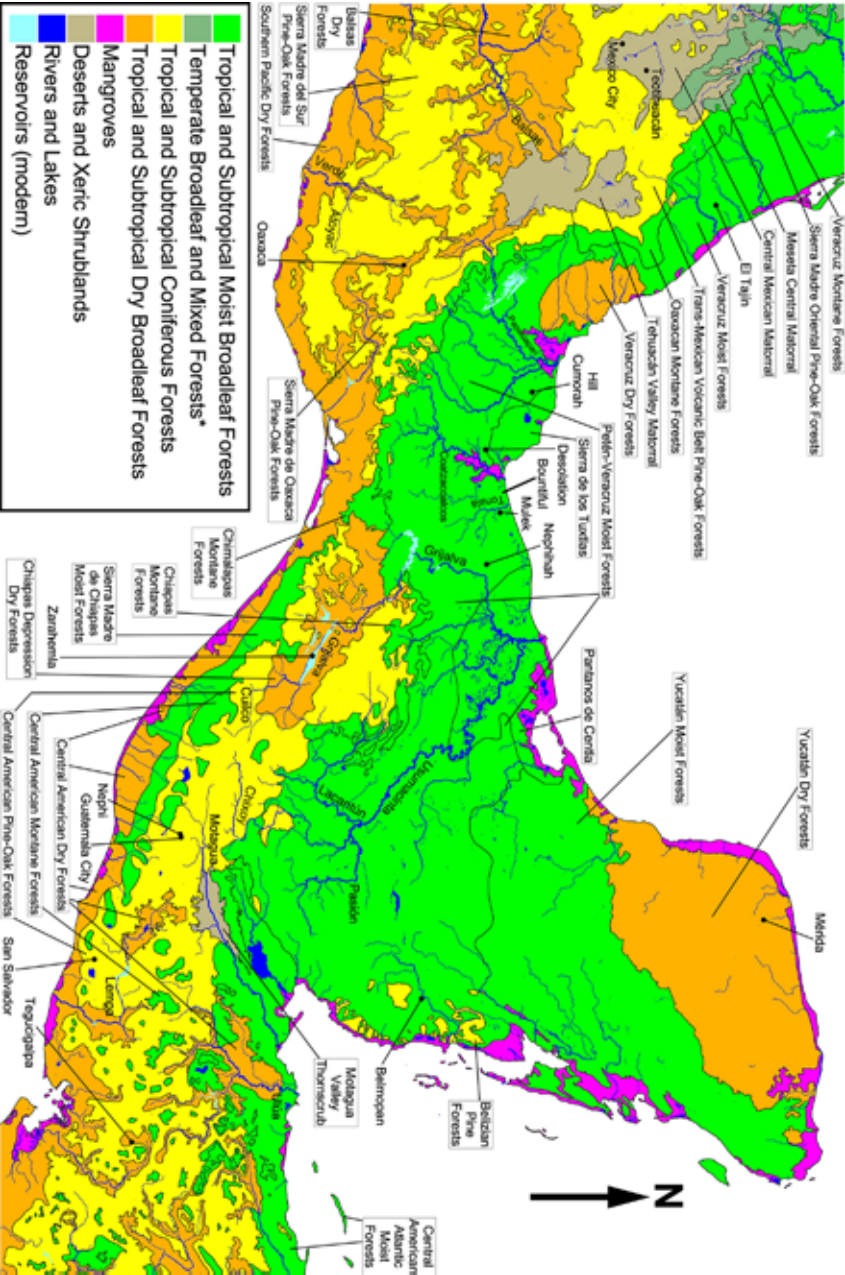


Figure 2 (opposite page). Mesoamerican Biomes. Six defined biomes (major habitat types) in Mesoamerica are represented by color (inset large box). Within each biome, black lines separate ecoregions, which are designated by individually boxed names. Rivers and lakes are shown in dark blue and reservoirs in light cyan (inset large box). Some rivers are labeled. Also labeled are seven modern cities (Mexico City, Oaxaca, Mérida, Guatemala City, Belmopan, Tegucigalpa, San Salvador), two archeological sites (Teotihuacán and El Tajín), and six proposed Book of Mormon locations (Zarahemla, Nephi, Nephiah, Mulek, Desolation, Bountiful, and Hill Cumorah). Bountiful is predicted to be near the coast and between the Coatzacoalcos and Tonalá Rivers or near one of these rivers. Teotihuacán and El Tajín are archaeological sites where ancient cement structures were discovered and date to Book of Mormon times. Mulek, Nephi, and Zarahemla correspond to archaeological sites known as La Venta, Kaminaljuyu, and Santa Rosa, respectively. *The Sierra Madre Oriental Pine-Oak Forests have also been classified as Tropical and Subtropical Coniferous Forest. **Sources:** *Biomes and ecoregions:* see appendix B. *Rivers:* Lehner and Grill, "Global River Hydrography and Network Routing," 2171–86. *Lakes and reservoirs:* Messager et al., "Estimating the Volume and Age of Water Stored in Global Lakes," 13603. *Book of Mormon locations:* Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex* 22, 131–32, 142–43, 322, 538–39, 614–15, 632, 688, and maps 4, 8, 9, 10; John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 241; Ethan Lloyd, email correspondence with author, Spring 2025.

held (Helaman 5:20–44), why does the record mention that the walls did not burn (verse 44) if the walls were made of stone? If buildings were not made of stone or only had stone foundations, the principal building material was wood, he argues. Wood, of course, eventually decays and disappears. We should not expect to find today much from ancient wooden structures. In Greece today, Sparta has very little remaining that testifies it was a great city—more powerful than Athens after Sparta defeated Athens in the Peloponnesian War. Yet, Athens retains many more ancient remains than Sparta does (pp. 81–86, 193–94, 209–16).¹⁵

Book of Mormon cement was not concrete. The Book of Mormon mentions that cement was used for buildings because wood was scarce (Helaman 3:7, 9, 11), but the scarcity of timber suggests the people did not have enough wood to calcine lime, necessary to

15. Crookston did not mention any archaeological evidence from Mediterranean-America in his book. However, in a lecture at Brigham Young University given four years before *Book of Mormon Ecology* was published, he briefly mentioned some possibilities he had observed in trips to Baja California (Crookston, "The Ecology and Agriculture of the Book of Mormon").

make concrete-like cement (a pasty substance that can be easily molded and then hardens into a stone-like mass). Therefore, cement, Crookston argues, could refer not to concrete-like construction but to rammed earth or compressed dirt. This is used in Morocco and elsewhere and is called *cement*. Subsoils containing clay along with sand and perhaps small stones are placed in forms and aggressively compressed in layers. The mixture is moist when rammed. The same method is used to place additional layers on top of earlier ones. After the rammed earth dries, the result is like sandstone and has a durability much like concrete. Morocco contains hundreds of centuries-old, rammed-earth buildings. Similar construction has been made from cob or adobe, such as the adobe Taos Pueblo in the southwestern United States (pp. 134–40).

As for “many waters” in the land northward, Crookston notes (1) that plentiful water does exist in some dry climates and (2) the possibilities of lakes in California that are no longer present. The Colorado, Nile, and Euphrates Rivers all end in Mediterranean-climate regions and provide plentiful water in these dry places. Ancient Lake Cahuilla, formed by the Colorado River in southern California’s Salton basin area, “apparently persisted until about A.D. 1600.” He suggests this lake and perhaps others may have been present in Book of Mormon times (p. 169).

As a possible cause of the “mists of darkness,” storms, and so forth linked to volcanic activity by geologists, Crookston notes evidence that the Salton Buttes volcano cluster in the Imperial Valley in southern California erupted 2,000 years ago. This is approximately the same time as mentioned in the Book of Mormon and when volcanic activity also was found in Mesoamerica. He also suggests the mixture of fog and dust that occurs in Arabia might also be like what occurred in Book of Mormon times (pp. 181–84).

Based on the physical, agricultural, and ecological data, Crookston argues that Mesoamerica should be reassessed and that Mediterranean-America should be investigated further (p. 256).

As a fellow scientist, I appreciate that Crookston described his idea as a hypothesis. That is the correct word. *Model* is also a good word. As Crookston demonstrated, the word *theory* should not be used. In scientific terminology, *theory* means a well-established idea, but in common parlance, *theory* is often used as a synonym for *hypothesis*.

Important Questions

With respect to Book of Mormon peoples living in Mesoamerica, Crookston's thesis stimulates several important questions:

- If the Lehtes landed in Mesoamerica, what could account for their Mediterranean-Jerusalem seeds growing well (1 Nephi 18:24)?
- Do the words barley and wheat (Mosiah 7:22, 9:9; Alma 11:7, 15; 3 Nephi 18:18) refer to Old World or New World grains?
- Clearly, barley and wheat grow well in Mediterranean climates, but can these grains be grown in Mesoamerica?
- Were any native American animals domesticated or semi-domesticated by ancient people?¹⁶
- What do we make of the fact that stone is not mentioned as a building material in the Book of Mormon, except for a fortification wall? (See pp. 81–86, 136, 193–94, 209–16.)
- If the Jaredites lived in Mesoamerica, which is damp and humid, how could their bones still be present presumably hundreds of years (>400 years) after the Jaredite civilization destroyed itself? (See pp. 94–95, 166–68.)
- Given that unexcavated Mayan ruins today are engulfed by jungle, why would trees still be scarce in the "land northward" (Helaman 3:3–11) if Mesoamerica was the location and hundreds of years had passed?
- If trees were scarce and wood was needed to fire kilns to make cement, where did Book of Mormon people get the wood? (See pp. 134–40.)
- What was the land of Mesoamerica like when ancient people (Olmec, Maya, and so forth) lived there?

Answers to these questions should be answered or sought by those proposing Book of Mormon people lived in Mesoamerica.

Counterarguments

I agree with Crookston that many of his reasonings fit a Mediterranean-American location for the Book of Mormon, but I disagree that Mediterranean-America is the only likely or the best overall interpretation. Other interpretations also can be made that are consistent with

16. John Sorenson suggests some animals were domesticated, semi-domesticated, tamed, or captive. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 310–13.

a Mesoamerican location. And, he also interpreted words differently from common, modern definitions and ignored ecological evidence not in favor of Mediterranean-America. Other arguments are weak, confusing, inconsistent, or unjustified. The following counterarguments answer some of the noteworthy questions Crookston's thesis raised and prompt significant questions that should be answered for the Mediterranean-American model. The lack of ecological detail in the Book of Mormon prompts many other questions and prevents making strong correlations between the book and particular ecosystems.

Word definitions

An important part of Crookston's thesis is that Book of Mormon words should be defined with common, standard English definitions. For example, a cow is the old-world domesticated animal raised for milk and meat (*Bos taurus*). But a principal reason for defining words this way has an incorrect basis, and he did not use standard definitions consistently.

In large part, Crookston bases his assertion—that we can define words literally—on a statement he mistakenly attributes to Joseph Smith. The statement, as quoted by Crookston, reads, “The ancient record . . . brought forth from the earth as the voice of a people speaking from the dust, [was] translated into modern speech by the gift and power of God *as attested by Divine affirmation.*” Because the Book of Mormon was “translated into modern speech,” Crookston concludes that Book of Mormon word meanings are as a modern person, or a person in the 1800s, would understand them (pp. xii–xiv). The statement, though, is not a quote from Joseph Smith. The statement was written by the author or authors of “Origin of the Book of Mormon” in the introductory pages of the 1920 edition of the Book of Mormon.¹⁷ The statement was reprinted in the 1981 and 2013 editions of the Book of Mormon.¹⁸ The confusion appears to be because the statement follows a long quote of Joseph Smith's account of the Book of Mormon origin. However, Joseph Smith's words are in quotation marks. Editorial comments precede and follow the Joseph Smith quotation.

Crookston asserts fidelity to standard definitions but then does not with the word *cement*. He says compressed dirt “is often referred to

17. *The Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1920), vi. However, the introductory pages are unnumbered, and this quote is located at the end of the section titled, “Origin of the Book of Mormon.”

18. *The Book of Mormon* (1981, 2013), xi.

as *cement*" (p. 139), but this is not a standard definition. The *Oxford English Dictionary* does not include *rammed earth* or *compressed soil* in its ten definitions.¹⁹ Therefore, if one can call compressed dirt *cement*, one could also call a deer a *cow* or a *horse*, as suggested by those who think the Book of Mormon immigrants attached names of familiar animals from the Old World to those they now saw in their new home in the New World.²⁰

Likewise, one definition of the land also is not consistent with modern language. Crookston described the land of Nephi as chaparral or shrubland, a common feature in Mediterranean climes. Chaparral may have intermittent stands of trees, but the dominant plants are shrubs, not tall trees (pp. 70–72). Yet, the Book of Mormon says *forest*. Nephi said, "as we journeyed in the wilderness, that there were beasts in the forests of every kind" (1 Nephi 18:25). The Jaredite record says, "the land [southward] was covered with animals of the forest" (Ether 10:19). If it were Mediterranean chaparral, why was *forest* used to describe the wild landscape and not something more fitting to a chaparral ecosystem? If *forest* is a substitute for chaparral or shrubland, then Crookston

19. Definitions of the word *cement* (noun):

1. A substance used to bind the stones or bricks of a building firmly together, to cover floors, to form walls, terraces, etc., which being applied in a soft and pasty state, afterwards hardens into a stony consistency; *esp.* a strong mortar, produced by the calcination of a natural or artificial mixture of calcareous and argillaceous matter.
2. *gen.* 2.a. Any substance applied in a soft or glutinous state to the surfaces of solid bodies to make them cohere firmly. 2.b. Any uniting medium or substance. *rare.* 2.c. *figurative.* A principle of union.
3. *transferred.* A substance resembling cement, used for some other purpose; e.g. for stopping teeth.
4. *Physiology.* The bony tissue forming the outer crust of the fang of the tooth.
- 5.a. *Mining.* "gravel firmly held in a silicious matrix, or the matrix itself."
- 5.b. "a. The brown deposit in the precipitation tank, wherein the soluble chloride of gold, obtained by the chlorination process, is deposited by the addition of sulphate of iron to the solution. b. The material in which the metal is imbedded in the cementing-furnace." [c.] "This is known as the 'converting' or 'cementation' process, and the charcoal employed as the recarbonizing agent is termed 'cement'."

Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "cement (n.)," December 2024, doi.org/10.1093/OED/2599977905.

20. On pp. 20–21, Crookston lists multiple references for the idea of "creatures by another name."

is guilty of the same thing he accuses advocates of a Mesoamerican geography of doing.

One cannot assume Book of Mormon words have the common definition of today or even of Joseph Smith's day. Defining many of these words requires work. Some meanings will change as new knowledge is obtained. For example, older English, not Joseph Smith's native 1800s usage, was often found in his original translation. The work of Royal Skousen and Stanford Carmack has shown that much of the language of the translated text follows Early Modern English usage (late 1400s to 1700) and not 1800s English usage.²¹

River Sidon

Crookston proposes that the River Sidon was a small river. He says it likely originated as a spring, rather than tributaries because the text mentions its head. "Spring-fed rivers are usually relatively small, and the Sidon could not have been a very large river" because, he said, a Lamanite army was "able to quickly cross it" during a battle (pp. 192–93).

These reasons are weak for suggesting the River Sidon was a small river. Could not a river start small with a spring and then be fed by tributaries or other springs to make the river large? The Book of Mormon text does not say crossing the Sidon was easy or difficult, fast or slow. In the account of the battle cited by Crookston, one crossing was started before the battle (Alma 43:35) and a second crossing was done during the battle as Nephites drove the Lamanites into the river (Alma 43:40). The first crossing may have been done at a relatively shallow place, but the second could have been at a deep or shallow place. When under attack, with the river being the only potential place of safety, soldiers would swim if necessary to escape!

Crookston did not mention one aspect in the text that indicates the River Sidon was large enough to carry many human bodies. The Book of Mormon records,

And now as many of the Lamanites and the Amlicites who had been slain upon the bank of the river Sidon were cast into the waters of Sidon; and behold their bones are in the

21. Stanford Carmack, "A Look at Some 'Nonstandard' Book of Mormon Grammar," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 11 (2014): 209–62, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/a-look-at-some-nonstandard-book-of-mormon-grammar; Royal Skousen, "The Language of the Original Text of the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 57, no. 3 (2018): 81–110.

depths of the sea, and they are many. (Alma 3:3, see also Alma 2:34)

And it came to pass that they did cast their dead into the waters of Sidon, and they have gone forth and are buried in the depths of the sea. (Alma 44:22)

These verses come after two battles that occurred along the River Sidon. In both cases, bodies were "cast into the waters of Sidon" and the bodies ended up in the sea. Bodies were not cast into a small river or dry riverbed where they could clog the channel and wait to be washed out to sea with the next massive rainstorm (and where the bodies would stink horribly in the meantime). Clogging the channel could create flooding when the river backed up and when rain came. The text says bodies were cast into water and were carried out to sea. This indicates a much larger river than that suggested in *Book of Mormon Ecology*. This aspect of the River Sidon should have been addressed.²²

Large population

The Book of Mormon suggests large human populations (appendix A). Multiple verses mention people multiplying, people spreading over all the face of the land, thousands of converts, Lamanites more numerous than Nephites, land covered with buildings and cities, and people too numerous to count or as numerous as the sands of the sea.

Perhaps most telling are war reports. For example, a group of 2,000 soldiers is called a "little force" or a "small force" (Alma 56:17; 58:8, 12). Accounts of battles mention thousands of dead and "great slaughters." In a Nephite civil conflict where many Nephites died and Amlicites were slain "with great slaughter," the total dead were 19,094 (Alma 2:16–19). Immediately after this conflict, the Amlicites joined the Lamanites and both attacked the Nephites. After counting the dead in the previous conflict, now the record states the number of Nephite dead was uncounted "because of the greatness of their number" and states many Lamanites and Amlicites also died (Alma 3:1–3). This suggests significantly more than 19,000 total deaths. "Not many

22. Another aspect that could have been mentioned was that the River Sidon flowed in a northerly direction. Kirk Magelby uses the following verses to suggest the River Sidon headwaters were south of Zarahemla: Alma 2:15; 17:1; 22:27; 43:22; and 50:7, 11 (see The Stick of Joseph, "Kirk Magleby's Declassified Book of Mormon Geography Guide," YouTube video, 1:22:19, 12 October 2023, [youtube/9q-f5UC4BHA](https://youtube.com/watch?v=9q-f5UC4BHA)).

days” later, the Lamanites come again, and still the Nephites send “a numerous army against them” (Alma 3:20–23). Similarly, within short times after other heavy losses (one year and six years, for example),²³ the Lamanite army returned to fight the Nephites with another massive army, and the Nephites could still defend themselves. In the final Nephite-Lamanite battle at Cumorah, the record mentions 230,000 dead (Mormon 6:10–15), and immense casualties were found in earlier battles during the last Lamanite-Nephite war. For the Nephites to have lost so many in the final battle, the opposing (Lamanite) army must have been at least twice that size.²⁴ That is a massive army suggesting that the overall pre-war population of Nephites and Lamanites was in the millions. Before the final Jaredite battle, the Jaredite record mentions that the “whole face of the land was covered with the bodies of the dead” (Ether 14:21) and that two million men (of Coriantumr’s people) had been killed, plus “their wives and their children” (Ether 15:2). The final battle likely also must have resulted in many deaths because each army took four years to gather all the people to the battle site (Ether 15:12–15).

Anciently, could Mediterranean areas in North or South America have supported such a large population? Would not the area be decimated, especially when the people became extremely wicked, when, as in modern times, short-term gains would outweigh long-term sustainability? Crookston mentions the devastation that occurred anciently to stands of Atlas cedars (in Morocco) and cedars of Lebanon (pp. 171–72). Would not Mediterranean-America suffer the same devastation and more with the high population that the Book of Mormon record indicates was present? Baja California is primarily desert (figure 1); only a small part has a Mediterranean climate. Desert lands would be even more sensitive to abuse by large populations. Although some have questioned the accuracy of Book of Mormon population numbers, archeological data from Mesoamerica is consistent with a large ancient population.²⁵ For example, recent LiDAR (light

23. See entries for Alma 44, 48, and 51 in appendix A.

24. Although men, women, and children were present, the record suggests the 230,000 were all soldiers. Mormon 6:7 says “my people, with their wives and their children.” The casualty report (Mormon 6:10–15) says “my men” (verse 10) or “my people” (verses 11–12) consistent with “my people” in verse 7. This suggests the number of total dead was significantly higher than 230,000.

25. For example, see John E. Clark, “Archaeological Trends and Book of Mormon Origins,” *BYU Studies* 44, no. 4 (2005): 93; also, Brant Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of*

detection and ranging or laser imaging, detection, and ranging) studies show large cities underneath much of the current Mesoamerican forest. Archaeological evidence of large, ancient populations has not been found in Baja or Southern California.

Jungle, biomes, and forests

One of Crookston's most forceful arguments is that many situations and wordings do not make sense for a jungle (pp. xv–xvi, 43–46, 70–73, 75, 164, 173, 186–90, 205, 240–43). Because having to cut paths through thick undergrowth makes tracking easy, could a group being chased in ancient Mesoamerica lose their pursuers, as occurred for Limhi's people (Mosiah 22:15–16)?²⁶ Did ancient Mesoamerica contain land that would be considered plains (Alma 52:20, 62:18–19; Ether 13:28–29, 14:15–16)? Was water always plentiful wherever people were, so that thirst was rare?²⁷ Known biomes (major habitat types) and ecological regions also suggest questions about Mediterranean-American and desert regions of Baja California (see figure 1 and appendix B).

Mesoamerica has a varied landscape. Characteristics include coastal plains, lush vegetation, mountainous terrain, volcanic highlands, cenotes, arid regions, and rivers.²⁸ A view of ecological regions

Mormon, Volume 6 Fourth Nephi–Moroni (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 102.

26. Crookston quotes Hugh Nibley about the ease of tracking gorillas and elephants in the jungle, and Nibley implied that people with flocks and herds would be even easier (pp. 242–43). Also, Brant Gardner pointed out similar issues (Gardner, *Second Witness*, 3:385–86). But these were human beings who knew they were being chased. They could be cleverer than elephants and gorillas. We also do not know the weather that was present. Rain could have washed tracks away. We do not know the exact terrain, which could have given the escaping people advantage. Losing pursuers appears to be one way the escapees were divinely helped (Mosiah 23:27, 24:16–25, 25:10, 16, 27:16; Alma 5:5–6, 29:11–12, 36:29).

27. See Crookston's arguments about thirst (pp. 220–23).

28. Charles C. Mann wrote,

The isthmus [of Tehuantepec] is a medley of mountains, beaches, wet tropical forests, and dry savannas, and is the most ecologically diverse area in Mesoamerica. "Some parts of Oaxaca go up nine thousand feet," T. Boone Hallberg, a botanist at the Oaxaca Institute of Technology, told me. "Other parts are at sea level. Sometimes the soil is very acid, sometimes it's quite basic—all within a few hundred feet. You can go on either side of a highway, and the climate will be different on the east side than on the west side."

and biomes in Mesoamerica (figure 2) shows that much of the Mesoamerican region is not thick jungle. Besides mangrove regions along the coasts, Mesoamerica contains four biomes ranging from wet to dry: tropical and subtropical moist broadleaf forests, tropical and subtropical dry broadleaf forests, tropical and subtropical coniferous forests, and deserts and xeric shrublands (figure 2). The designations of ecoregions and biomes do not mean all natural land is that designated type. “Ecoregions reflect the best compromise for as many taxa as possible. . . . Most ecoregions contain habitats that differ from their assigned biome.”²⁹ In addition, much land has been converted into agricultural, residential, and other human uses.

In addition to variations within an ecoregion, the *general* definitions of these four biomes (appendix B) suggest that people being chased through Mesoamerican wilderness could indeed lose their pursuers. Thick underbrush is stated only for tropical and subtropical dry broadleaf forests where bare trees in the dry season facilitate growth on the forest floor by allowing sunlight to reach the floor. In the moist broadleaf and coniferous forest biomes, the canopy shields sunlight from the forest floor. John Sorenson’s model of Book of Mormon lands puts the Lamanite city of Nephi near present-day Guatemala City and the Nephite city of Zarahemla along the Grijalva River (figure 2). Between the two cities, the predominant biome is tropical and subtropical coniferous forest, which generally has “little underbrush.” Only around Zarahemla do we find a biome that typically has thick underbrush (tropical and subtropical dry broadleaf forests). Therefore, people could escape Lamanite lands without creating obvious trails through thick underbrush. Other Mesoamerican models have different placements of settlements, but according to the general definitions of the biomes (appendix B), thick underbrush would not be found throughout Mesoamerica.

Mesoamerican areas with coastal plains and *sabana* grasslands have been correlated to Book of Mormon settlements. A Nephite-Lamanite battle mentions plains between the cities of Bountiful and Mulek and a Nephite army marching “near the seashore” (Alma 52:18–22). Extensive plains lie between John Sorenson’s proposed sites of Mulek and Bountiful, near the Bay of Campeche (figure 2). Sorenson

Charles C. Mann, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 218.

29. David M. Olson et al., “Terrestrial Ecoregions of the World: A New Map of Life on Earth,” *BioScience* 51 (2001): 935.

proposed "dry *sabana* grasslands of interior Tabasco" for the plains of Nephihah (Alma 62:18–19; figure 2). Plains mentioned in the Jaredite record (Ether 13:28–29; 14:16) could be in south-central Veracruz.³⁰

Regardless of the nature of the native forests near ancient American settlements, the following eight reasons suggest dense forests were not necessarily everywhere if Book of Mormon people lived in Mesoamerica and suggest Mesoamerican forests could be a better fit to the Book of Mormon text than Mediterranean forests:

- Like today, trees would be cut down for timber to build houses and buildings and to clear land for cities, homes, and agriculture.
- Like today, perhaps large areas of forest were cleared for agriculture because the soil's fertility was exhausted rapidly, as occurs with slash-and-burn agriculture.
- As stated previously, populations of Book of Mormon peoples were large. Large numbers of people would require large areas of land to live and grow food. Therefore, large numbers of trees and large areas of forest would have been cut down.
- A large population would require lots of trees for wood. After many people moved north where trees were scarce, timber was shipped to the land northward, indicating that wood was not scarce in the south (Helaman 3:10). Only relatively small areas are designated as forest biomes in Baja California (Sierra Juarez and San Pedro Martir Pine-Oak Forests, figure 1). Could these forests or other trees in the Mediterranean Forests, Woodlands, and Scrubs biome and Deserts and Xeric Shrublands biome support a massive population and allow exports to the north? Certainly, trees in Mesoamerica would grow back faster than Mediterranean-area trees and would avoid the problems with replenishing Mediterranean trees identified by Crookston (pp. 170–72). Therefore, Mesoamerican forests enable a more sustainable place for large wood-consuming populations than Mediterranean-America.
- In the land of Nephi, kings Noah and Limhi used a tower to view approaching Lamanite armies (Mosiah 11:12; 19:5–6; 20:7–8). If natural clearings were absent, artificial clearing

30. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 538–539, 610, 614, 712, and maps 2, 4, 9, 11.

of forests for agriculture, housing, and timber would have allowed these two kings to see the approaching army.

- The Book of Mormon uses the word *forests* three times and the word *forest* six times. Crookston argues the use of *forests* is more congruent with patchy groups of trees as are found in the chaparral landscapes of Mediterranean climates (pp. 43–46). However, perhaps, the forest in an area was fragmented naturally or artificially. Even if continuous, the forest on one side of a settlement could have been known by one name and the forest on the opposite side by another name. Perhaps a geologic feature such as a ridge or river denoted a separation of two named forests.
- The Book of Mormon does not say that thickets of small trees were common.
- Except for extensive stands of trees that exist or have existed in Mediterranean climates, *forests* are better correlated with Mesoamerica than a Mediterranean climate (pp. 43–46, 66–75). Natural Mesoamerica has more trees than natural Mediterranean-America.

Perhaps Book of Mormon language is consistent with large stands of trees in Mediterranean-America, but the words are also compatible with Mesoamerican forests, especially if, as today, a large human population is present and much of the forest has been cut down.

A look at the ecosystems of the Baja California region (figure 1) and the Book of Mormon text stimulates questions about the “land northward.” The Book of Mormon says this land had “large bodies of water and many rivers,” and “many waters, rivers, and fountains” were present (Mosiah 8:8, Alma 50:29, Helaman 3:4, Mormon 6:4). The record also says some trees were in this land and others had been cut down (Helaman 3:5–6). Where would the many rivers and fountains be in Mediterranean-America? Did the Lake Cahuilla area also have many rivers and fountains? According to Crookston, the lake was formed by meanderings of the Colorado River (p. 169). What other rivers were part of this land? Would one need to look farther north? Anciently, were any trees present in the proposed Mediterranean land-northward?

Alternative interpretations

The lack of detail for many passages in the Book of Mormon means that these words can be interpreted more than one way. The interpretations consistent with Mediterranean-America are one

possibility, but none of the following seven examples definitively rule in Mediterranean-America and rule out Mesoamerica. This is true for even some of Crookston's strongest points.

Although droughts are common in Mediterranean climates and uncommon in Mesoamerica (pp. 142–44, 149–51, 152–54, 174, 191, 232–33), the Book of Mormon's explanation of the Jaredite (Ether 9:28–35) and Nephite-Lamanite (Helaman 11:2–18) droughts *could* be taken to favor Mesoamerica. As described, the Book of Mormon droughts seem to be rare events. (Of course, if droughts were common, other ones not tied to heavenly censure may have been left out.) Jim Hawker's intriguing analysis of stalagmites in three Mesoamerican caves, noted by Crookston (pp. 143–44), showed that a multiyear drought did occur there consistent with the time of Helaman 11.³¹ Yes, famine is more common in Mediterranean-America, but that does not rule it out in Mesoamerica.

"All the Lamanites" took flocks to drink from "the water of Sebus" or "the waters of Sebus" and some Lamanites plundered other Lamanite flocks from this place (Alma 17:26, 18:7). Certainly, this could describe a watering place in a Mediterranean climate (pp. 225–33). But is this clime the only possibility? Was Sebus a small watering place like a pond or spring? Was Sebus a larger body of water, such as a river, stream, or lake? Definitions of *water* or *waters* are consistent with either small or large.³² The text does not define the waters.

31. Jim Hawker, "Let There Be a Famine in the Land," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 30 (2018): 305–30, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/let-there-be-a-famine-in-the-land.

32. Relevant extracts from the entry for "water" (which includes "waters") in the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

I. Water as a substance.

I.i. In literal use.

I.i.1. The substance (most commonly encountered as a liquid) which is the principal constituent of seas, lakes, and rivers, and which falls as rain and other forms of precipitation.

I.i.5.a. In *plural*. Water from a mineral spring, or a collection of such springs, considered as having therapeutic, curative, or health-giving properties when used for bathing or drinking. Often preceded by *the*.

II. Liquid water considered as a body or mass, or as a medium for movement or other activity.

II.10.a. The water of a sea, lake, river, pond, stream, etc. Also: the portion of the earth's surface covered with water, as a region inhabited by

Elsewhere, the “waters of Mormon” (Mosiah 18:5, 8) are defined as a fountain, which suggests a spring (p. 231), and the “waters of Sidon” are defined as a river (Alma 2:34; 3:3; 43:40, 50; 44:22; Mormon 1:10). If the waters of Sebus were large, the plundering gang could be spying on the group and may have confronted them wherever they went to give the animals water (Alma 18:7). If the incident occurred during the Mesoamerican dry season or other watering places were far away (as the text strongly suggests), then, indeed, regardless of climate, King Lamoni’s servants would likely be required to go to Sebus, regardless of its size. Both Mediterranean-American and Mesoamerican interpretations are possible. Indeed, this could fit other climates, too.

Crookston’s interpretation of separate seasons of fruit and grain fits nicely with a Mediterranean-American model (pp. 51–52, 204–9), but is that interpretation the only possible one? Why are we limited to one season per year for each crop? Yes, in Mesoamerica fruits ripen at different times of the year, but even in Mediterranean climates, fruits ripen at different times throughout its “season of fruit,” depending on the type of fruit. Could the *season of fruit* and *season of grain* simply be figures of speech, a form of parallelism, used for emphasis? Could the two seasons refer to individual types of fruits and grains growing whenever it was their time?

The assumed open landscape is not necessary for a multiple-day chase and battle involving Helaman and 2,000 sons of converted Lamanites, another part of the Nephite army, and a Lamanite army sandwiched between the two Nephite armies (Alma 56:30–54). Crookston states, “plains are not specified,” nevertheless, the long chase “was obviously [in] an expansive open area, not forest or jungle.” Also, “the country was open enough for the armies to see each other” (pp. 189–90). However, Helaman’s group could not see that the Lamanite army was fighting the other Nephite army. Helaman’s army only returned when they realized they were no longer being pursued

its own characteristic forms of life, in contradistinction to the land and the air.

11.10.a.ii. In *plural*. Chiefly somewhat *literary*. The contexts in which the plural, rather than the singular, is used are difficult to characterize; a sea, river, etc., is perhaps more likely to be referred to as consisting of *waters* when these are conceived as constituting a collective body, or as acting as an agency, than as a simple substance or medium.

Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “water (n.),” September 2025, doi.org/10.1093/OED/1136754417.

and feared the Lamanites would overpower the other Nephites. How could they have not seen the two armies fighting if they were in open country? Why could not the chase and battle have been in a forest?

The connection of wickedness to common and destructive east winds (Mosiah 7:31, 12:6) of Mediterranean climates is intriguing (pp. 172–73, 246–48), but is it definitive enough to place Book of Mormon people there? Does the east wind prophecy suggest a common or uncommon event? Does the prophecy mean an east wind as in Mediterranean climates or any windstorm from the east? Crookston noted that less common “east” winds do occur in Mesoamerica (pp. 247–48).³³ In addition, could *east wind* refer to hurricanes, which would generally come from an easterly direction on the Atlantic side or would come from the east as the counterclockwise winds at the leading edge made landfall on the Pacific side? Hurricanes do occasionally strike Mesoamerica. Again, either location fits the scriptural record.

In terms of people being lost, both Mediterranean shrubland (pp. 240–43) and Mesoamerican forest are good candidates. Dense forest, where one can only see a few trees ahead and trees often look the same from any viewpoint, is a place where people can easily lose their bearings and become lost. Indeed, people may get lost almost anywhere—especially without landmarks or trails.

Population growth statements have ambiguity. Crookston suggests that Book of Mormon recordkeepers lived in a Mediterranean climate but that descendants, relatives, or friends moved elsewhere, such as to Mesoamerica. “The friends of Jared and his brother . . . began to spread upon the face of the land, and to multiply” (Ether 6:16, 18). Crookston argues that the friends separated from Jared and his brother, we have no record of them, and “we can only imagine to where they might have journeyed and settled” (pp. ix–x). Yes, that is one possible interpretation. Another interpretation of those verses and others (Ether 6:16–21) is consistent with the twenty-two friends and their families remaining part of the Jaredite nation with some Jaredites moving out to an unpopulated, but nearby, land as the population grew.³⁴ The

33. See Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 557.

34. One source of confusion is the antecedent for “they” in verses 16–18. In verse 16, the first *they* clearly refers to twenty-two friends of Jared and his brother. However, the second *they* in verse 16 and four instances of *they* in verses 17–18 may refer to all the Jaredites (Jared, his brother, their friends, and all descendants) not just the friends and their children. Unclear antecedents are not unusual in the Book of Mormon and Bible.

latter interpretation is more consistent with other verses in the Book of Mormon that mention Nephites and others spreading out over the land, with no indication that the people became a new nation or went far away (Jarom 1:5–6, Mosiah 27:6–7, see also appendix A, cf. Alma 63:4–8, Helaman 3:3–4).

Alternative interpretations from the Book of Mormon's meager non-spiritual details mean a person must be careful with his or her assertions and patient with those of others. A single description may fit multiple locations or situations.

Seeds from Jerusalem growing well in the New World

The abundant growth of seeds from Jerusalem (1 Nephi 18:24) is the strongest evidence that the Lehighites landed in a similar American climate, but does this rule out any other location? If they settled in Mesoamerica, did the seeds grow well because of the tilling and aeration of undisturbed soil, which, as Crookston explained, causes an explosion of nutrients (p. 150)? Did the Middle Eastern plants continue to grow abundantly in America? Did the Lehighites grow the Jerusalem plants until they could find other food sources, as Brant Gardner suggested?³⁵ John Sorenson noted, "the historical experience of other colonizing parties around the world shows that although imported species may grow well to begin with, they frequently do not do so in the long run."³⁶ Was the Lehighite experience similar to that of millet planted in Yucatan in the 1500s? Millet grew "marvelously well" but then disappeared by the 1900s.³⁷ Or, did the plants from Jerusalem persist for hundreds of years, as Crookston argues? When Europeans settled the Americas, they successfully grew many old-world crops that have persisted until the present day.³⁸ Was the abundant growth of the Jerusalem-adapted plants a miracle?

35. Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Volume 1 First Nephi* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 323–24.

36. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 35.

37. "Historical cases of plant transfers do not give us confidence that imported seeds would prove viable in a new environment in the long run. In *An Ancient American Setting*, I documented how millet, introduced by the Spaniards in Yucatan and said in the sixteenth century to grow "marvelously well," could not be located at all in the Carnegie Institution's botanical inventory of the area early this century. The same might have been the case with the seeds brought with Lehi's party and planted." John L. Sorenson, "Viva Zapato! Hurray for the Shoe!," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6 (1994): 337.

38. Alfred W. Crosby Jr., *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural*

Plant and animal names

Barley, wheat, and grapes in the Book of Mormon may indeed refer to plants from the Old World growing in Mesoamerica. Wheat and barley, of course, grow well in Mediterranean climates. That climate is obviously a productive area for growing grapes, as well. Crookston asserts that Mesoamerica is a poor place for these plants (pp. 5, 31–37, 42, 50–53, 78–79). Yet, simple internet searches for “does wheat grow in Guatemala?,” “does barley grow in Guatemala?,” and “do grapes grow in Guatemala?” show that all three are grown there today. Presumably they could grow there anciently, too. Sorenson noted that “a substantial number” of pre-Columbian crops from the Old World “have been identified in America,” therefore, the Lehitites could have brought such crops to the New World.³⁹ Old-world chickens also are known to have been present, at least in post-Book of Mormon but pre-Columbian times.⁴⁰ Evidence of other old-world animals in ancient times, such as horses, cows, and goats, has been found.⁴¹

Nevertheless, one cannot rule out that an old-world name was given to a new-world plant. An old definition of “grape” is “the berry or fruit of other plants,” with “other plants” referring to non-grape

Consequences of 1492 (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 47–51, 65–68; Nathan Nunn and Nancy Qian, “The Columbian Exchange: A History of Disease, Food, and Ideas,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 24 (Spring 2010): 163–88. One noteworthy statement from Nunn and Qian (pp. 177–78):

The fact that Old World crops flourished in the New World, and New World crops flourished in the Old, is not just coincidence. It is, in part, the result of two aspects of the Columbian Exchange. First, both the New World and the Old World contain continents that lie on a North–South orientation and span nearly all degrees of latitude. Because climates change most drastically as one moves North–South, rather than East–West, this helped to ensure that New World plants could find an Old World climate similar to their native climate and vice versa. Second, a benefit also arose from the two regions being isolated for thousands of years. The isolation caused separate evolutions of plants, parasites, and pests. Therefore, transplanted crops often flourished because they were able to escape the pests and parasites that had coevolved with them in their native habitat. Because of the greater prevalence of pests and parasites in tropical regions, tropical plants benefited most from being transplanted.

39. Sorenson, “Viva Zapato!,” 342.

40. In addition, two insect species have been found in both Egyptian and Peruvian mummies. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 154–56.

41. Wade E. Miller and Matthew Roper, “Animals in the Book of Mormon: Challenges and Perspectives,” *BYU Studies* 56, no. 4 (2017): 133–75.

plants.⁴² This definition may be significant for another reason — it was used between ca. 1400 and 1601, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*.⁴³ This is the time of Early Modern English, which has been shown to be the language style of much of the original translated English Book of Mormon.⁴⁴ Therefore, the one mention of “grape,” by Christ (3 Nephi 14:16),⁴⁵ could very well have meant the berry or fruit of a Mesoamerican plant and not a reference to Mediterranean grapes. As Spaniards called maize *trigo* (wheat), prickly-pear cactus fruit *fig*, and Spondias *ciruelo* (plum), could the Lehighites have named other grains cultivated anciently in Mesoamerica barley and wheat? Example grains that could have received these names are amaranth, huauzontle, chia, setaria (fox-tail millet), and three types of teosinte.⁴⁶ The same has happened for animals.⁴⁷ Could barley, wheat, and other old-world ecological and agricultural words have been translated into something English-speaking people in the 1400–1800s would recognize rather than more accurate, but unknown or uncommon, words?⁴⁸

Stone, cement, and houses

Crookston makes an intriguing point that the Book of Mormon does not mention stone buildings, but, in a book where the emphasis is not history nor how the people lived, is the absence of evidence evidence of absence? Is the absence of a direct discussion of using stone in buildings and homes evidence that the people did not have stone buildings? Sewage and bathing also are not mentioned, but presumably

42. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “grape (n. 1),” definition 2, September 2025, doi.org/10.1093/OED/4036495304.

43. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “grape.”

44. Carmack, “‘Nonstandard’ Book of Mormon Grammar,” 209–62.

45. Crookston noted this is the only mention of the word *grape*. See Crookston, *Book of Mormon Ecology*, 52–53.

46. Sorenson, “Viva Zapato!” 337–39. “Corn” mentioned in Mosiah 7:22, 9:9, and 9:14 may refer to maize as suggested by Kent Crookston (*Book of Mormon Ecology*, 41–42).

47. Miller and Roper, “Animals in the Book of Mormon,” 133–75; Sorenson, “Viva Zapato!,” 345–47.

48. Brant Gardner suggests this for Old World animals listed in 1 Nephi 18:25 and plants in Mosiah 9:9. See *Second Witness*, 1:324–26. For another example, sheep and wolves in Alma 5:59, see *Second Witness*, 4:114–15. For a further explanation, see Brant A. Gardner, “Expanding the Descriptive Vocabulary for the Translation of the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 66 (2025): 71–83, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/expanding-the-descriptive-vocabulary-for-the-translation-of-the-book-of-mormon.

the people had some way to clean themselves and to dispose cleanly of human waste. Many other common human endeavors are also not mentioned. This spurs other questions:

- Was stone not mentioned because it was so common? How often do we modern people leave details out of our diaries and journals because these aspects of our lives are so ordinary?
- Nephi taught his people "to build buildings, and to work in all manner of wood, and of iron," and other metals (2 Nephi 5:15). Jarom says the people "became exceedingly rich in gold, . . . silver, . . . precious things, and in fine workmanship of wood, in buildings, . . . machinery, . . . iron," and other metals (Jarom 1:8). If workmanship in wood was separated from buildings, what does that mean? Does working in wood just mean furniture or things that would be inside a home or building, or does it mean making homes of wood? (Or perhaps both?) What does the separate phrase "in buildings" mean? Could that mean buildings made of stone?
- At least some Book of Mormon cities had stone walls. Moroni built walls of stone around cities and elsewhere (Alma 48:8).⁴⁹ If walls of stone were built, could that also mean buildings were made of stone?
- Although three passages indicate (Mosiah 11:8–10) or may suggest (2 Nephi 5:15, Jarom 1:8) the use of furniture or decorative wood within buildings, only one passage indicates wood was used for constructing buildings (Helaman 3:5–7, 9–11). Two passages indicate wood was used for fortifications (Alma 50:2–3, 53:4). If wood for buildings is only mentioned clearly once, should we make any significance of the fact that stone in buildings is unmentioned?

The Book of Mormon text is not detailed enough to answer these questions. Multiple interpretations are possible, including those Crookston made in *Book of Mormon Ecology*.

Generally, Mesoamerican cities had stone public buildings and

49. Although the walls' components are not stated, elsewhere in the Book of Mormon, one group of Nephites repaired walls of two cities (Mosiah 9:8), and other cities are described with walls (Mosiah 7:10; 21:19; Alma 52:61; 55:20; 62:20–24, 36; Helaman 14:11; 16:1–2, 7). The wording of some passages suggests or explicitly says walls of dirt (Alma 50:1–5; 53:4–5).

residences built from perishable materials; the public buildings lie in the center surrounded by homes.⁵⁰ Houses in ancient Mesoamerica were often built from mud materials, namely adobe bricks and wattle and daub construction. Archaeologically, wattle and daub homes are often associated with post molds, remnants of once-buried posts. Adobe construction often lacks post molds. The lighter wattle and daub construction required additional posts to support the roof. Heavier adobe homes did not but required a solid foundation, and foundations of stone, compacted earth, and pottery sherds have been observed.⁵¹

Cement construction requires kilns to produce calcining lime, and kilns would need fuel, presumably wood; where did people get wood if trees were scarce? Brant Gardner suggests that Mormon, writing much later and describing his own day, assumed cement was used because of the lack of trees but cement construction caused the deforestation.⁵² Perhaps other explanations are possible that are consistent with Mormon's interpretation. Could the people have used another fuel source, such as dried peat? The record says some trees were in the land northward because it says people "spread forth into all parts of the land, into whatsoever parts it had not been rendered desolate and without timber" (Helaman 3:5). Therefore, timber was sparse but not absent (cf. Helaman 3:6–7, 10). Were enough trees there to provide wood for cement production but not enough to build residential and public buildings?

Conversely, the idea that rammed-earth construction was "cement" and found in Mediterranean-America prompts questions. In addition to adobe and wattle and daub, did ancient Americans also use cob or rammed-earth construction? According to Crookston, rammed-earth and cob buildings supposedly can last centuries (p. 139). The Mediterranean-climate regions of North and South America are prone to earthquakes. Is rammed-earth construction safe in such zones? Would rammed-earth buildings survive the frequent earthquakes there?

50. For example, J. Alden Mason, "The Maya: American Collections The Ancient Civilizations of Middle America," *Museum Bulletin* 10, no. 1–2 (1943): 32, penn.museum/sites/bulletin/2485.

51. Els Barnard, "Living in Mud Houses: Exploring the Materiality of Formative Mesoamerican Domestic Structures," *Mexicon* 38 (April 2016): 39–45.

52. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 5:64. This is mentioned in *Book of Mormon Ecology*, 137–38.

Exposed bones

One of Crookston’s best questions is how exposed bones could still be around after hundreds of years in a moist environment, but this prompts further questions. Do exposed bones last 400–500 years in Mediterranean climates? Do not exposed bones, at least from individual people or animals, disappear after many years in dry deserts, too? Good preservation seems dependent on rapid burial in peat bogs, dry desert, mud, ice, or other oxygen-deficient environments where decay is slowed. Regardless of climate, what could account for the many exposed bones mentioned in the Book of Mormon? Could piles of bones account for the presence of bones after hundreds of years?⁵³

Wolves

If Alma’s and Jesus Christ’s references to wolves (Alma 5:59–60, 3 Nephi 14:15) referred to an animal the Lehites knew (pp. 27–28, 129–30), evidence suggests the animal was the coyote and not the canine known as a wolf today. Three species of wolf live in North America: the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), American red wolf (*Canis rufus*), and Eastern wolf (*Canis lycaon*). Subspecies of the gray wolf are known, including the Mexican wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*). One species, the maned wolf (*Chrysocyon brachyurus*), lives in South America. Historical ranges of these four species do not include Mediterranean southern California, Baja California, or Mesoamerica east of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. The range of the gray wolf extended throughout much of North America from the Arctic to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.⁵⁴ However, the

53. See Ether 11:6, “[Jaredite] bones should become as heaps of earth.”

54. Crookston cites a website from Defenders of Wildlife that shows gray wolves living in southern California to the top of Baja California, but the website does not give its sources. The following sources exclude those areas:

Gray and eastern wolves: Ronald M. Nowak, “The original status of wolves in eastern North America,” *Southeastern Naturalist* 1 (2002): 95–130; Linda Y. Rutledge et al., “Genetic and morphometric analysis of sixteenth century *Canis* skull fragments: implications for historic eastern and gray wolf distribution in North America,” *Conservation Genetics* 11 (2010): 1273–81.

Mexican wolf (subspecies of gray wolf): James R. Heffelfinger et al., “Clarifying Historical Range to Aid Recovery of the Mexican Wolf,” *The Journal of Wildlife Management* 81 (2017): 766–77; Eric A. Odell et al., “Perils of recovering the Mexican wolf outside of its historical range,” *Biological Conservation* 220 (2018): 290–98.

historical range of coyotes (*Canis latrans*) does include Mesoamerica and North American Mediterranean regions.⁵⁵ Perhaps the coyote was termed “wolf” by ancient Americans. The coyote is sometimes called the “prairie wolf” or “brush wolf” today, and people often mistake coyotes for wolves. Feral dogs could be another possibility.⁵⁶

Inconsistent, confusing, weak, and unjustified arguments

The detailed analysis of physical, ecological, and agricultural terms in *Book of Mormon Ecology* contains many statements that weaken the Mediterranean-American hypothesis. Perhaps oversights in editing, some statements are unclear or are inconsistent with arguments made elsewhere. The relevance of some statements is unclear. Some interpretations are unjustifiably oriented towards Mediterranean-America.

These points should be strengthened or discarded. Without further substantiation, these points add evidence that the sparse ecological words in the Book of Mormon do not allow us to clearly deduce where the people lived. The following sections provide sixteen examples.

The hill north of Shilom

The surroundings of the “hill north of Shilom” are presented inconsistently, and the relevance is unclear. In a discussion about large and small trees near the waters of Mormon, the argument is made that “there were mountains and valleys in the land” (p. 73). The Book of Mormon mentions a “hill north of the land Shilom” (Mosiah 7:5, 16; 11:13) but nothing is said about other hills or mountains. The presence of mountains and valleys near Shilom is certainly possible, but the surroundings could also be flat. Later, Crookston says just that. From the description of the hill north of Shilom, he suggests “the land of Nephi was relatively flat” (p. 164).

Sweet corn

Crookston notes that sweet corn can be grown almost anywhere in

Maned wolf: Diego Queirolo et al., “Historical and current range of the Near Threatened maned wolf *Chrysocyon brachyurus* in South America,” *Oryx* 45 (2011): 296–303.

55. James W. Hody and Roland Kays, “Mapping the expansion of coyotes (*Canis latrans*) across North and Central America,” *ZooKeys* 759 (2018): 81–97; Nowak, “Original status of wolves,” 95–130; Rutledge et al., “Genetic and morphometric analysis,” 1273–81.

56. Crookston mentions dogs but not in the context that feral dogs might be considered wolves (pp. 101–2).

the United States, but seeds for sweet corn are grown almost exclusively in Idaho (p. 13). He does not explain how seed produced in Idaho can then, for example, grow well in the different latitude and climate of Florida or the different climate of New York. This seems counter to his assertion that Jerusalem seeds would "grow exceedingly" (1 Nephi 18:24) only in Mediterranean-America—that Wisconsin corn would grow poorly in Texas, and vice versa (p. 6). If the point of growing exceedingly is to "set viable seed" (p. 14) and viable Idaho seeds grow well anywhere in the United States, even in places (Idaho and Florida) with as much or more latitude difference as Wisconsin and Texas and in places with different climates and conditions from Idaho (Florida, New York, Minnesota, and Wisconsin), why could Jerusalem-adapted seeds not grow well in Mesoamerica? Idaho is more Jerusalem-like and Florida more like Mesoamerica.

Pure water

The Land of Helam and Place of Mormon have pure water (Mosiah 18:5; 23:4, 19), and this is implied to be consistent with a Mediterranean location because "pure water was evidently uncommon." The "fountain of pure water" in Mormon suggests a spring (p. 173, 228, 230–31). The connection to a Mediterranean climate and the importance of "pure water" are unclear.

Wine from grapes

Crookston insists that wine mentioned in the Book of Mormon—at least by Jesus during his visit—must have come from grapes and not another source. "That Jesus used the word *wine*, just as he had done in Jerusalem, is a persuasive indication that he was speaking about actual wine, and that there was no New World substitute drink involved," Crookston argues (pp. 79–81). In his discussion of grapes, Crookston states, "the frequent mention of wine in the text clearly suggests grapes" (pp. 52, 60). Crookston acknowledges that pre-Columbian wines in America were made from non-grape plants but then rejects that Jesus would have used such wines for the sacrament. What justification exists that wine for religious events must come from grapes? What justification exists that the mere mention of *wine* only can mean the drink that comes from grapes?

Vineyards and vines

Related to the argument that sacramental wine must originate with

grapes, vineyards and vines are presented as strong evidence for Mediterranean-America and weak for Mesoamerica. Crookston cites scriptural statements “grafted into the true vine” (Alma 16:17), “do men gather grapes of thorns?” (3 Nephi 14:16), and others (pp. 52–53, 60, 75–78, 79–81, 173). No evidence is given why grapes must be the Book of Mormon component of vines and vineyards. No evidence is given why vineyards could not contain or vines be another edible vine plant that is better suited to Mesoamerica than grapes.⁵⁷

Grapes, olives, and figs

Although Crookston notes that (1) grapes were not documented as being grown by Book of Mormon people (pp. 52, 80), (2) olives are not likely to have been cultivated by Book of Mormon people (pp. 58–59),⁵⁸ and (3) edible figs are found in subtropical and tropical regions (p. 43), he still argues that the mentions of these fruits mean a strong connection to Mediterranean-America and a weak fit to Mesoamerica (pp. 48, 75–78). Are Old World grapes, olives, and figs the only plants that could be vines or be grown in vineyards in the Book of Mormon? As stated previously, Mesoamerica does have other edible vine plants.

Mesoamerican grapes

Nevertheless, Old World grapes were likely present in ancient Mesoamerica. John Sorenson noted that seeds of European wine grapes (*Vitus vinifera*) were found in an ancient site in Chiapas.⁵⁹ In Sorenson’s book, this evidence comes immediately after the evidence of pre-Columbian wines cited by Crookston (p. 80).⁶⁰ Why the *V. vinifera* finding was not included in *Book of Mormon Ecology* is perplexing.

Bread

Bread is unjustifiably labeled a weak fit for Mesoamerica, even though bread made from corn or the word *bread* referring to “sustenance” is acknowledged to have been possible. Reasons given are that “bread

57. Crookston does acknowledge grafting has occurred and does occur in Mesoamerica: “Some tropical fruit trees are grafted in Central America today, and there is documentation dated at 1540 of the grafting of fruit trees by the Aztecs of central Mexico although of course not with the Mediterranean species noted in the Book of Mormon” (p. 50).

58. All references to olives in the Book of Mormon have old-world contexts.

59. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 307–8.

60. On this page, pre-Columbian wines were cited (Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 307).

is closely tied to Mediterranean regions because of the prevalence of small grains (wheat and barley)" and because barley was mentioned in the Book of Mormon. Leavened bread is favored by Crookston (pp. 38–41). But, from the Book of Mormon text, we have no idea what kind of bread people ate or used in remembrance of Christ. Certainly, many types are possible.

Beans and squash

Another unjustified and unclear argument concerned beans and squash. Crookston asked why beans or squash was unmentioned in the Book of Mormon if the people lived in Mesoamerica (p. 56). On the other hand, why were beans and squash left out if the people lived in Mediterranean-America? Beans and squash also grow there!

Agricultural claims

Claims about agriculture after the Book of Mormon period are perplexing. Crookston claims that after the Nephites were destroyed at the end of the Book of Mormon that agriculture disappeared (pp. 17–20, 41). This is one argument he makes for the observation that barley, wheat, and old-world domestic animals were not found in America when Europeans first encountered the New World. However, he says, these domesticated animals and plants were found in Book of Mormon times. Conversely, in the same pages, he argues that corn (maize) cannot grow without human intervention. Maize and other crops were grown by indigenous peoples when Europeans arrived in America. Evidence of pre-Columbian agriculture throughout the Americas after the Book of Mormon period is well established, including the growing of a type of barley (little barley) and other plants by the Hohokam in the area where the city of Phoenix is now located.⁶¹ As in Book of Mormon times, the indigenous population was large when Europeans arrived. As noted for the Book of Mormon Lamanites, who repeatedly could mount large armies, "only an agricultural base could have supported the extensive population."⁶² Hunting and gathering cannot support a large human population. If the people could grow maize, why not wheat and barley, especially if it grew so readily? Put another way, if the Lehiite Jerusalem-adapted seeds grew so well in the new land and these crops were grown by the Lehiites throughout their recorded

61. Vorsila L. Bohrer, "Recently Recognized Cultivated and Encouraged Plants among the Hohokam," *Kiva* 56 (1991): 227–35.

62. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 302–3.

Book of Mormon history, why were none of those crops found when Europeans encountered the native American peoples?

Fruit of every kind

The claim of “fruit of every kind” as favoring Mediterranean-America over Mesoamerica is puzzling. Yes, Mediterranean climates are known as biodiversity hotspots, and today plentiful fruits come from Mediterranean regions. Thus, the Book of Mormon statement about “fruit of every kind” fits well there (pp. 47–48). However, subtropical and tropical forests are even greater havens of biodiversity. Fruits also grow well in Mesoamerica. The Book of Mormon statements on fruit does not exclude or favor either region.

Dirt for defense

An argument that “cast up dirt, and the digging of ditches, for defensive purposes, tends not to support the Mesoamerican model” gives no basis for why dirt fortifications could not have been made in Mesoamerica. A reference to another section of the book implies that dirt fortifications were used instead of stone (pp. 140–41). However, one Book of Mormon verse mentions both were used (Alma 48:8). Indeed, ancient Mesoamerican cities are known to have dirt and other fortifications just as the Book of Mormon describes.⁶³

Treeless hills

A weak assertion is that the text is more consistent with a Mediterranean climate because three prominent hills were treeless, and a group of men was thirsty on one of them (pp. 162–66):

1. A tower was built on the hill north of Shilom in Lamanite territory, where a group of Nephites had also traveled, made camp, and waited while four of their party went to meet people who lived nearby; the waiting group was hungry, tired, and thirsty (Mosiah 7:5–6, 16; 11:13).

63. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 85, 98, 385–86, 407–10, 554, 611–13. Also, a review of Mayan war discussed fortifications “at large Maya centers dating from Preclassic through Postclassic times. These typically consist of one or multiple lines of barriers created by ditches, earthworks, and stone walls, often originally strengthened with parapets and palisades of timber or other perishable materials.” David Webster, “The Not So Peaceful Civilization: A Review of Maya War,” *Journal of World Prehistory* 14 (2000): 73.

2. Part of the Nephite army hid on two sides of the hill Riplah to surprise a Lamanite army (Alma 43:31–35).
3. The hill Cumorah (where the Nephites were destroyed) enabled Mormon to see the thousands of dead Nephites after they battled the Lamanites; this hill had to be treeless — otherwise Mormon could not have seen the vast numbers of dead from the hill (Mormon 6:2–15).

However, none of these verses specify that the hills were treeless. If forested, Cumorah and the surrounding area could have been cleared of trees, enabling long views from the hill. Whether or not Riplah was covered with trees is irrelevant. An army could hide with or without trees, and trees would conceal people even better. The hill north of Shilom could also have been cleared of trees, but having trees on that hill would make sense for two reasons. First, the text suggests the hill was prominent and perhaps the only one in the region (Mosiah 7:5–6, 11:13). If so and the hill was treeless, why build a tower if the vantage enabled one to see far? If trees were present on the hill, a tower would enable one to see above the trees. Second, trees would enable the Nephite party to be more easily concealed. If the party stayed on the hill for fear of being discovered by Lamanites, and no water or food sources were on the hill, that could also explain their hunger, thirst, and fatigue (Mosiah 7:16). The text says they did have to wait at least two days (Mosiah 7:5–16). Crookston's interpretation may be correct, but it is not the only valid one and is not confirmed by the text.

Poisonous serpents

An additional weak argument is that the plague of poisonous serpents in Jaredite times (Ether 9:31–33, 10:19) is a weak fit for Mesoamerica. Two justifications were given:

- The incident was imagined to have occurred in Mediterranean-like open country where snakes are more visible than in forests.
- Hugh Nibley noted three similar incidents that occurred anciently in the Middle East.

Therefore, Crookston reasoned that the serpent incident is a weak fit for Mesoamerica and a better fit for Mediterranean-America (pp. 122–23). However, venomous snakes live in both places. Why is visibility of snakes in dry, open country more favorable than snakes that may be harder to see in a forest? Less visible snakes would probably

be more frightening to the Jaredites. Again, both Mesoamerica and Mediterranean-America fit the Book of Mormon text.

Hiding among small trees

To justify calling “a thicket of small trees” a forest, the argument was made that the thicket of small trees at the waters of Mormon could hide 450 people (p. 71). The text says that only Alma hid in the thicket of small trees (Mosiah 18:5). We do not know if the entire group could hide there. The text suggests they could not because the group fled into the wilderness after being discovered (Mosiah 18:32–35).

Renewal of fruit growth

Renewal of fruit growth is unjustifiably stated to favor Mediterranean-America. What makes the renewal of fruit growth so specific to Mediterranean climates (p. 48)? Would not Mesoamerican fruits also return, as described in the Book of Mormon, after a famine?

Conclusion

At the beginning of his book, Crookston discussed how the round-earth, heliocentric, and rotating-galaxy models of the universe developed from the “flat earth” model. His presentation contains the implication that he is fighting a “Mesoamerican” establishment that is, like “flat earth” adherents of times past, entrenched in old ideas. People “have virtually ignored” abundant ecological and agricultural data (pp. viii–xi). As an interested observer who has no interest in developing my own Book of Mormon geographic hypothesis, I tire of the use of the flat earth argument or statements in Thomas Kuhn’s book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* to insist that someone’s “revolutionary” ideas are being put down by a cabal. Crookston is not alone in using such arguments. Book of Mormon geography is not the only subject where such arguments have been used.

Of course, a human tendency is to shun new, improved ideas, but I find unwarranted and unchristian the default argument that Mesoamericanists are closed-minded. The onus is on the person developing a new idea to show how it expands understanding and is a better explanation than the previous one for old and new data. This did not happen in *Book of Mormon Ecology*, and I feel the same about all other non-Mesoamerican hypotheses I have heard. Hundreds of connections between ancient Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon

have been made.⁶⁴ Those of us who currently favor Mesoamerica are not closed-minded. We are not ignorant people clinging to an old model and ignoring new data. We do need compelling data, however, if we are to favor another model. Of course, new — even incomplete — models are fine, and so are unanswered questions. Incomplete models and unanswered questions just mean more data is needed, textual interpretation is incorrect, or the model needs revising. All Book of Mormon geography models, including Mesoamerican ones, have unanswered questions.

New models should provide a better explanation for all the data. New models should fill in knowledge “holes,” not transfer them from one “place” to another or make holes where none existed in the old model. Humankind’s knowledge of the universe expanded from the flat-earth model to understanding of the spherical earth, to the knowledge that the earth rotated around the sun, and to the understanding that the sun rotates around our galaxy. In each of these cases, the newer model explained *everything* better or at least did not raise questions about old observations. As Crookston himself states, scientific, historical, or geographical models must fit all the data available, not just the data that fits the model or data from one field (p. x). His Mediterranean hypothesis does not do that. It may be, for example, a better explanation for seeds from Jerusalem and east winds, but his hypothesis is not a better explanation for the River Sidon, large populations, forests, or wolves.

The problem is not that Mesoamericanists ignore data or that they ignore prophets (as one proponent of an alternative model argues). The problem is multi-faceted:

- the paucity of the Book of Mormon text on non-spiritual matters
- these words can be interpreted in more than one way
- interpretations may change when new information comes to light

64. For example, Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex* (summarized on pp. 3–4); Gardner, *Second Witness*; Brant A. Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books); Bruce E. Dale and Brian M. Dale, “Joseph Smith: The World’s Greatest Guesser (A Bayesian Statistical Analysis of Positive and Negative Correspondences between the Book of Mormon and The Maya),” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-Day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 32 (2019): 77–185, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/joseph-smith-the-worlds-greatest-guesser.

- statements from 1800s Church leaders are, or seem, incongruent with other statements or with the Book of Mormon text
- the Book of Mormon mentions a highly sophisticated society in a simple manner
- ancient Americans had a very different culture from ours
- Mesoamerica contains the most advanced ancient American civilization discovered to date
- hundreds of correlations of the Book of Mormon text have been made with known ancient Mesoamerican characteristics⁶⁵
- ancient Mesoamerica had a human population in the millions and was the most densely populated region in the Americas⁶⁶
- archeological data from ancient America is extremely limited
- as of yet, no single model clearly fits all the Book of Mormon text

Nevertheless, this is an exciting time as we seek new understanding and seek to solve a difficult puzzle.

Proponents of various models often press one or a few key points that favor their model, but what revelatory utterance or Book of Mormon verse is the “golden key?” Is it seeds from Jerusalem planted and growing well in the New World? Is it bodies being thrown into the River Sidon and being carried out to sea? Is it that the Hill Cumorah is alleged to be only in Palmyra, New York? The correct answer is that all data must be satisfied. Just because one verse, a few verses, or a church leader’s statement makes sense with one model and one interpretation does not make that the “golden test” and one’s favorite model the best answer! Regardless of which geographic model one prefers, some Book of Mormon words are not clear fits — at least as those words are commonly interpreted today. Some proponents may try to claim superiority for their model based on their interpretations, but the truth is that the text of the Book of Mormon is not always clear. The location of Book of Mormon peoples obviously needs much more research or revelation before a definitive resolution can be reached.

In a work that emphasizes spirituality and de-emphasizes

65. For example, Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*; Gardner, *Second Witness*; Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers*; Dale and Dale, “Joseph Smith: The World’s Greatest Guesser.”

66. For example, Clark, “Archaeological Trends,” 93.

everything else, we should not be surprised that the book is unclear about the latter. Book of Mormon authors repeatedly stated that they described not even one percent of the people's lives in the abridged account (1 Nephi 14:28, Jacob 3:13, Words of Mormon 1:5, Helaman 3:14–15, 3 Nephi 5:8, 3 Nephi 26:6, Ether 15:33). This dearth of information included spiritual matters: prophecies, preaching, wickedness, righteousness, and so forth (Helaman 3:14). Jacob said that even on other records not everything was recorded.⁶⁷

Book of Mormon Ecology failed to convince me that Mediterranean-America was the best interpretation of Book of Mormon references to plants, animals, and the land. Nevertheless, Crookston did give us a valuable contribution by noting agricultural and ecological terms in the Book of Mormon. Also, by raising important questions, he has helped move forward the effort to find the American location of Book of Mormon people. I would love to see more examples and analysis of how knowledge of agriculture, biology, ecology, and other sciences could help our understanding of the book's spiritual teachings, as Crookston beautifully did for the scattering of "wild flocks" (mentioned above).⁶⁸

After acknowledging John Sorenson and B. H. Roberts for setting the stage for his hypothesis of a Mediterranean-American setting for the Book of Mormon, to his credit, Crookston ended his main text with the following statement: "which hypothesis, as I have *conceived it to be*, is surely fraught with its own *misconceptions* and *wrong deductions*, the identification of which is not only fully expected, but most welcome" (p. 257). Following his good example, I offer the same for this review.

67. "Many of their proceedings are written upon the larger plates, and their wars, and their contentions, and the reigns of their kings" (Jacob 3:13). Note that Jacob says "many," indicating that even that larger record was incomplete. See also 3 Nephi 26:6–7. 3 Nephi 5:8–9 suggests that at least one part of that larger record is more complete than at other times. The more than one hundred pages of translated manuscript lost by Joseph Smith and Martin Harris in 1828 might have had additional snippets of information that would help locate American events.

68. Another nice example by Crookston: Berbers of the Moroccan desert put rocks under the poles of their tents to keep the poles from sinking into the sand and collapsing the tent, especially when windy. He deduced that this is another example showing how building one's house upon a rock is important (p. 194).

Appendix A
Human Populations in the Book of Mormon

The table in this appendix compiles Book of Mormon references relative to population.

Reference	Population Message	Year ⁶⁹
1 Nephi 12:1–3	In vision, Nephi sees his and his brethren’s seed in “the land of promise.” He “beheld multitudes of people, yea, even as it were in number as many as the sand of the sea.” He also sees “great slaughters” and “many cities, yea, even that I did not number them.”	0–8 ⁷⁰
2 Nephi 5:11, 13	Nephites “began to prosper exceedingly, and to multiply in the land.”	8–30 ⁷¹
Jacob 3:13	Nephites “began to be numerous.”	55–179
Jarom 1:5–6	Nephites and Lamanites “were scattered upon much of the face of the land.” Lamanites “were exceedingly more numerous than were they of the Nephites.”	200–238
Jarom 1:8	Nephites “multiplied exceedingly, and spread upon the face of the land.”	200–238
Omni 1:14–17	People of Zarahemla “had become exceedingly numerous.”	320–476
Omni 1:24	“A serious war and much bloodshed between the Nephites and the Lamanites.”	320–476
Words of Mormon 1:13–14	King Benjamin and his people battle the Lamanites, and “many thousands of the Lamanites” are killed.	320–476

69. Cumulative years from the time Lehi left Jerusalem. Internally, 1 Nephi through Mosiah gives time in terms of years since Lehi left Jerusalem. Alma through 3 Nephi 2 gives time in terms of years “of the reign of the judges.” Third Nephi 2 through Mormon gives time in terms of years since the sign was given of Christ’s birth. Mosiah 29:46 and Alma 1:1 calibrate the reign of the judges with years since Lehi left Jerusalem. Third Nephi 2:4–8 calibrates years since the sign of Christ’s birth with years since Lehi left Jerusalem. This tabulation is based on statements within the Book of Mormon text where a reference is given to years since Lehi left Jerusalem, to the reign of judges, or to time since the sign of Christ. I did not rely on BC or AD notations in the 1981 (footnotes) or 2013 (chapter headings) editions.

70. Godfrey J. Ellis wrote a persuasive essay arguing that the Lehiters were only in Arabia for a total of eight years, not that their journey took eight years before they came to Bountiful (see Ellis, “Nephi’s Eight Years in the ‘Wilderness,’” 281–356). I used his suggested timeline.

71. Ellis, “Nephi’s Eight Years in the ‘Wilderness.’”

Reference	Population Message	Year ⁶⁹
Mosiah 2:1–2	"A great number" from "throughout all the land" gathered at the temple, "even so many that they did not number them; for they had multiplied exceedingly and waxed great in the land."	320–476
Mosiah 8:7–8	Forty-three Nephites found a land covered with bones and ruins of buildings. The land "had been peopled with a people who were as numerous as the hosts of Israel."	320–479
Mosiah 9:13–19	"A numerous host of Lamanites" attacks a remnant group of Nephites. 3,043 Lamanites and 279 Nephites died in a battle lasting "one day and a night."	320–479
Mosiah 10:8–10, 18–20	Lamanites again come to fight remnant Nephites "with their numerous hosts." Nephites "slew them with a great slaughter, even so many that we did not number them."	320–479
Mosiah 11:19	Remnant Nephites boast that their 50 could withstand thousands of Lamanites.	320–479
Mosiah 20:10–11, 19–20, 22	People of Limhi (remnant Nephites) "were not half so numerous as the Lamanites." An "exceedingly sore" battle was fought, "shedding of so much blood."	320–479
Mosiah 22:2	Lamanites were "so numerous" that remnant Nephites could not win in battle.	479–509
Mosiah 24:3	The Lamanite king, Laman, "was king over a numerous people."	479–509
Mosiah 25:2–3	Fewer people of Nephi than people of Zarahemla. People of Nephi and Zarahemla "were not half so numerous" as the Lamanites.	479–509
Mosiah 27:6–7	"People began to be very numerous" and scattered "abroad upon the face of the earth" north, south, east and west, "building large cities and villages in all quarters of the land. . . . They became a large and wealthy people."	479–509
Alma 2:16–19	In an intra-Nephite conflict, 12,532 Amlicites and 6,562 Nephites were killed. Before listing these numbers, the record states "many of the Nephites did fall before the Amlicites," and the Nephites "slew the Amlicites with great slaughter" and "with much slaughter."	513
Alma 2:24–27, 35	Amlicites (Nephite dissenters) join forces with Lamanites. They were "as numerous almost, as it were, as the sands of the sea." "They were so numerous that they could not be numbered."	513

Reference	Population Message	Year ⁶⁹
Alma 3:1–3	Nephites slain in battle with Amlicites and Lamanites “were not numbered, because of the greatness of their number.” “Many women and children had been slain by the sword.” Many Lamanites and Amlicites were also killed.	513
Alma 3:20–26	Again, Lamanites come to battle. “Numerous army” sent “against them.” Many Lamanites slain. “In one year were thousands and tens of thousands of souls sent to the eternal world.”	513
Alma 4:4–5	“Many were baptized.” About 3,500 people joined the church and were baptized.	514–515
Alma 22:28–29	Some Lamanites “were spread through the wilderness on the west.” Also, “many Lamanites” were “on the east by the seashore.”	509–523
Alma 23:5	Thousands of Lamanites converted to the Lord.	509–523
Alma 24:20–27	Unconverted Lamanites kill 1,005 converted Lamanites. Feeling remorse, more than 1,005 murderers converted.	509–523
Alma 26:4, 13	Another mention that thousands of Lamanites were converted.	509–523
Alma 28:2–5, 10–12	“Tens of thousands” of Lamanites were killed in “a tremendous battle,” and “a tremendous slaughter among the people of Nephi.” Great mourning heard throughout the land. In 14 years, many thousands have died. “Many thousands are laid low in the earth.” “Many thousands are moldering in heaps upon the face of the earth.” Many thousands mourn.	509–523
Alma 37:9–10, 19	The scriptural records enabled “many thousands of the Lamanites” to be converted to the Lord and may enable “many thousands” to be converted, too.	526
Alma 43:5	“The Lamanites came with their thousands.”	526
Alma 43:13–14	Descendents of Nephite dissenters nearly as numerous as the rest of the Nephites.	526
Alma 43:21	Lamanite soldiers were “exceedingly afraid” of the Nephite army even though number of Lamanites was “so much greater than the Nephites.”	526
Alma 43:51	“The Lamanites were more numerous . . . by more than double the number of Nephites.” This refers to the size of their armies.	526
Alma 44:21	“Now the number of their dead was not numbered because of the greatness of the number; yea, the number of their dead was exceedingly great, both on the Nephites and on the Lamanites.”	526

Reference	Population Message	Year ⁶⁹
Alma 48:1–4	Amalickiah "gathered together a numerous host to go to battle against the Nephites" thinking that "because of the greatness of the number of his people, to overpower the Nephites."	527
Alma 49:1–7, 18–24	"Because of the greatness of their numbers" and their armor, Lamanites think they will easily beat the Nephites. But fortified Nephite cities prevent Lamanite victory and "more than a thousand of the Lamanites are killed without a single Nephite death."	527
Alma 50:17–18	Nephites "prosper exceedingly" and "did multiply and wax strong in the land."	529
Alma 50:22	Thousands of wicked Nephites had felt the effects of their wickedness.	529
Alma 51:9–11, 30	Despite "many thousands who had been slain" previously, the Lamanites still did come against the Nephites with "a wonderfully great," "numerous army."	533
Alma 51:19	Four thousand dissenters killed in a Nephite civil war.	533
Alma 52:4	Lamanites lost "much blood" to take Nephite cities.	534
Alma 52:11–12	Lamanites raise a second army and come "in the borders of the land by the west sea."	534
Alma 55:24	Liberated prisoners "were a great strength to [Moroni's] army."	537
Alma 55:26	City of Bountiful guarded "with an exceedingly strong force."	537
Alma 55:29	Lamanites attempt to encircle Nephites, "but in these attempts they did lose many prisoners."	537
Alma 55:34	Lamanites "were continually bringing new forces into" Morianton.	537
Alma 56:1–3, 10, 13, 17, 27–29, 34–36, 52	After losing "a vast number" of men, Nephite military leaders in one "quarter of the land" ⁷² have an army of 10,000 soldiers, plus wives and children. This army included a "little force" of 2,000 sons of former Lamanites. The Nephite force increased daily. "Most numerous" army of Lamanites chases the 2,000. The 2,000 "began to slay [Lamanites] exceedingly."	534–535
Alma 57:6	6,060 soldiers added to a Nephite army.	537

72. "In the borders of the land on the south by the west sea" (Alma 53:22).

Reference	Population Message	Year ⁶⁹
Alma 57:13–14, 17, 23, 26, 28, 31–33	Numerous prisoners of war. Despite “the enormity of our numbers,” Nephites needed “all our force” to keep the prisoners. “Upwards of two thousand” Lamanite prisoners of war killed fighting their Nephite guards. “Greater number” of the rest are killed in a second revolt. Lamanites send “a numerous army of men” which nearly defeats an army of the Nephites. “A thousand” Nephites and many Lamanites were killed.	537
Alma 58:1–9, 12, 15, 18, 30, 34–35	2,000 soldiers (a “small force”) with supplies reinforce a Nephite army fighting an “innumerable” or “much more numerous” foe, which received “great strength from day to day.” Helaman wonders why more Nephite soldiers have not been sent, “for we know they are more numerous than that which they have sent.” Lamanites carry away “many women and children.”	537
Alma 59:5–8	An “exceedingly numerous” Lamanite army slew Nephites “with an exceedingly great slaughter.”	538
Alma 60:5, 7–10, 12, 16, 22	“Great has been the slaughter among our people.” “Thousands have fallen by the sword.”	538
Alma 61:3, 5–7	Nephite rebels were “exceedingly numerous” but Nephite force grows daily.	538
Alma 62:4–5	Despite a war involving thousands of Nephites, thousands more joined the army.	538
Alma 62:12–19, 25–31, 38	Two groups of 6,000 sent to bolster armies in two parts of the land. Another “large body” of soldiers guards Zarahemla, and another “large body of men” go to fight Lamanites. First, the latter group fights a “large body of men of the Lamanites, and slew many of them.” Four thousand Lamanite survivors covenant to eschew war and are sent to dwell with converted Lamanites. Second, “greatness of their numbers” is used to describe this fraction of the Nephite army. They then kill many Lamanites and take many prisoners. Many or all prisoners join the other converted Lamanites. In final battle, Lamanites killed in “a great slaughter.”	539
Alma 62:48	Nephites “began to multiply and to wax exceedingly strong again in the land.”	540–543
Alma 63:4	A large company of men (5,400) with wives and children migrated northward.	545
Alma 63:6–8	Many people board ships to sail to the land northward or use other means to go to that land.	545–546

Reference	Population Message	Year ⁶⁹
Alma 63:14–15	"A numerous army" of Lamanites came to war against the Nephites. The Lamanites were defeated, "suffering great loss."	547
Helaman 1:14–20, 25, 27,	An "innumerable army" of Lamanites captured Zarahemla, "a great slaughter, both men, women, and children." "Many cities" captured.	549
Helaman 1:30	"An exceedingly bloody battle" between Lamanites and Nephites occurs.	549
Helaman 3:3, 5, 8, 12	"An exceedingly great many" move from Zarahemla to "the land northward." "They did spread forth into all parts of the land." "They did multiply . . . and did spread insomuch that they began to cover the face of the whole earth."	554
Helaman 3:24–26	Thousands and tens of thousands of Nephites join the church.	557
Helaman 4:1–2	"Much bloodshed" because of an intra-Nephite contention.	562
Helaman 4:5, 8, 11, 19–20, 25	"Numerous army of the Lamanites" defeats Nephites. A "great slaughter" occurred. "Because of the greatness of the number of the Lamanites the Nephites were in great fear." Lamanites "exceedingly more numerous."	565–570
Helaman 5:19	Eight thousand Lamanites in Zarahemla were baptized.	570
Helman 6:9–12	Both Lamanites and Nephites "did multiply and wax exceedingly strong in the land."	572
Helaman 11:6	People "did perish by thousands" in drought.	583
Helaman 11:20	Prosperous Nephites "began to multiply and spread, even until they did cover the whole face of the land, both on the northward and on the southward."	584
Helaman 11:26–33	"Exceedingly great band of robbers" infests the land and "did make great havoc, yea, even great destruction among" the Nephites and Lamanites and "did kill many."	588–589
3 Nephi 2:11	Gadianon Robbers "had become so numerous" and killed many "and did lay waste so many cities" and "spread so much death and carnage throughout the land" that Nephites and Lamanites needed to fight the robbers.	612
3 Nephi 3:22–24	Thousands and tens of thousands of people gather for safety and "to defend themselves against their enemies."	616

Reference	Population Message	Year ⁶⁹
3 Nephi 4:11	"Great and terrible" battle and slaughter, greatest slaughter among Lehites.	618
3 Nephi 4:21, 27	Thousands and tens of thousands of Nephite enemies were "cut off." Many thousands of prisoners taken.	620–621
3 Nephi 6:7	"Many cities [were] built anew." "Many old cities [were] repaired."	627
3 Nephi 7:4	"Their tribes became exceedingly great."	629
3 Nephi 8:14–15	"Many great and notable cities" were destroyed. "Damage . . . was exceedingly great." Many slain.	633
3 Nephi 17:25	About 2,500 people saw Jesus Christ on the first day of his visit.	633
3 Nephi 19:3	"An exceedingly great number" of people labor through the night to come see Jesus.	633
4 Nephi 1:7, 10	Cities rebuilt. People prospered exceedingly. People "did multiply exceedingly fast."	659
4 Nephi 1:23	"The people had multiplied ... they were spread upon all the face of the land."	799
Mormon 1:7	"The whole face of the land had become covered with buildings, and the people were as numerous almost, as it were the sand of the sea."	919
Mormon 1:11	"A great number of [Nephites]" (more than 30,000) fought Lamanites.	919
Mormon 2:8	"Blood and carnage [was] spread throughout all the face of the land, both on the part of the Nephites and also on the part of the Lamanites."	926–930
Mormon 2:9	44,000 Lamanites fought against 42,000 Nephites in a battle.	926–930
Mormon 2:15	Thousands "hewn down" and "heaped up as dung."	931–944
Mormon 2:25	Thirty thousand Nephites fought against 50,000 Lamanites in a battle.	945
Mormon 3:8	Nephite army slew "a great number of [Lamanites]" and cast the dead into the sea.	961
Mormon 4:9	"Thousands" of Lamanites and Nephites had been slain.	963–965
Mormon 4:17–21	Lamanites ("not numbered because of the greatness of their number") beat Nephites twice, "exceedingly sore battle" and "exceedingly great slaughter."	974
Mormon 5:6	"So great were the [Lamanite's] numbers that they did tread . . . Nephites under their feet."	979

Reference	Population Message	Year ⁶⁹
Mormon 6:6–15	All Nephites gathered. Mormon lists 230,000 Nephites killed in their final battle.	984
Ether 6:18	Jaredites "began to spread upon the face of the land, and to multiply." "They did wax strong in the land."	–
Ether 7:11	Kingdom spread "upon all the face of the land, for the people had become exceedingly numerous."	–
Ether 9:12	A Jaredite civil war lasts "many years," and destroyed "nearly all the people of the kingdom."	–
Ether 9:23, 26	"Many mighty cities" built. The people had spread again over all the face of the land."	–
Ether 9:30–32	"A great dearth" and "poisonous serpents" destroy and poison many people.	–
Ether 10:4, 12	Many cities built, "people began again to spread over all the face of the land"	–
Ether 11:1, 4, 6–7, 10, 12, 20	Prophecy of "destruction of that great people" and "such an one as never had been upon the face of the earth, and their bones should become as heaps of earth upon the face of the land" unless people repented. "An exceedingly great war" begins that occurs "in all the land." Great destruction came to pass.	–
Ether 13:15, 20–22, 25, 27, 31	"A great war" begins. Another prophecy of people's destruction. "All the people upon the face of the land were shedding blood."	–
Ether 14:4	"Many thousands [of Jaredites] fell by the sword."	–
Ether 14:7–8, 16–31	"Exceedingly sore" battles, cities burned, "whole face of the land was covered with the bodies of the dead." "The loss of men, women, and children on both sides was so great."	–
Ether 15:2	"Two millions of mighty men" had been slain, "and also their wives and their children."	–
Ether 15:12–15	All Jaredite people gathered for a battle. This effort took four years, ⁷³ "that they might get all who were upon the face of the land, and that they might receive all the strength which it was possible that they could receive."	–

73. Suggesting large numbers of people were gathering together during this time.

Appendix B

Biomes in the Baja California and Mesoamerican Regions

A biome is “a broad community of plants and animals adapted to specific climatic conditions found across a range of continents.” A biome is also known as a major habitat type. Nine biomes are identified in the Baja California and Mesoamerican regions.

Compare the information in this appendix to figures 1 and 2. A total of fourteen biomes have been identified for the terrestrial earth. In addition to the nine biomes described here, the additional five are boreal forests/taiga; flooded grasslands and savannas; montane grasslands and shrublands; tropical and subtropical grasslands, savannas, and shrublands; and tundra.⁷⁴

Deserts and xeric shrublands

Generally, evaporation exceeds rainfall, which usually is less than 25.4 cm (10 in.) yearly. Temperature variability is extremely diverse in this biome. Temperature extremes (hot days and cold nights) are characteristics of most deserts. Diverse climatic conditions, though harsh, support a rich range of habitats. Many habitats are ephemeral in nature. Woody-stemmed shrubs and plants are characteristic vegetation.

Mangroves

Found in waterlogged, salty, soft, and oxygen-poor soils of sheltered tropical and subtropical shores, subject to twice-daily ebb and flow of tides as well as spring and neap tides, found in intertidal zone up to the high-tide mark, mangroves have distinctive stilt and prop-like roots and are associated with other aquatic and salt-tolerant plants, they provide nursery habitats for a vast array of aquatic animal species.

74. Information in this appendix is drawn from David M. Olson et al., “Terrestrial Ecoregions of the World: A New Map of Life on Earth,” *BioScience* 51 (2001): 933–38; “Terrestrial Ecoregions,” World Wild Life (website), worldwildlife.org/biome-categories/terrestrial-ecoregions; “Ecoregions,” World Wild Life (website), worldwildlife.org/biomes; Karl Burkart, “One Earth Bioregions Framework,” One Earth (website), oneearth.org/bioregions-2023. The World Wildlife Fund websites note that information may be out-of-date. However, updated work published in 2017 states that the updated map is unchanged except in four regions, which did not include Baja California or Mesoamerica. Eric Dinerstein et al., “An Ecoregion-Based Approach to Protecting Half the Terrestrial Realm,” *BioScience* 67 (2017): 535.

Mediterranean forests, woodlands, and scrubs

This biome has hot and dry summers and cool and moist winters (when most precipitation occurs); the habitat is globally rare but contains extraordinary biodiversity (10% of known plant species). Animals and plants are adapted to long, hot summers with little rain; most plants are fire-adapted and even dependent on fire for their persistence. This biome is found in five regions: around the Mediterranean Sea, south-central and southwestern Australia, the fynbos of southern Africa, the Chilean matorral, and the Mediterranean ecoregions of California.

Temperate broadleaf and mixed forests

These forests have a wide range of variability in precipitation and temperature. In regions where rainfall is broadly distributed throughout the year, deciduous trees mix with species of evergreens. Species such as oak, beech, birch, and maple are typical. These forests have a four-layer structure: a canopy of full-sized dominant trees, a slightly lower layer of mature trees, a shrub layer, and an understory layer of grasses and other herbaceous plants; most diversity is concentrated closer to the forest floor than in tropical rain forests.

Temperate coniferous forest

Found primarily in regions with warm summers and cool winters and primarily comprised of needleleaf trees, broadleaf evergreen trees, or a mixture of both. These evergreen forests are common along the coast of places with mild winters and heavy rainfall, in drier inland climates, or in montane regions. These forests are simply constructed with an overstory and an understory, though some forests have a layer of shrubs. The floor of pine forests may be dominated by grasses and forbs. Some forests are moist rain forests and have ferns and forbs. Some forests contain huge trees.

Temperate grasslands, savannas, and shrublands

Generally devoid of trees, except those associated with rivers and streams; some savannas with interspersed individual or clumps of trees. Animals present include large grazing mammals and associated predators, burrowing mammals, numerous bird species, and diverse insects.

Tropical and subtropical coniferous forests

Low levels of precipitation and moderate variability in temperature.

These forests have diverse species of conifers. The forests have a thick, closed canopy which blocks light to the floor and allows little underbrush. Ground is often covered with fungi and ferns. Shrubs and small trees may also be found in the understory. Many migratory birds and butterflies winter here.

Tropical and subtropical dry broadleaf forests

Warm year-round, may receive several hundred centimeters of rain per year but have long dry seasons which last several months (varies with geographic location). Forests are dominated by deciduous trees which lose leaves in the dry season; the bare trees open sunlight to the ground facilitating growth of thick underbrush. This biome is home to a wide variety of wild animals.

Tropical and subtropical moist broadleaf forests

Generally found in large, discontinuous patches around the equator and between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. These regions have low temperature variability and high rainfall, greater than 200 cm (79 inches) per year. Forests are dominated by evergreen and semi-evergreen deciduous tree species. This biome has the highest level of species diversity of the major terrestrial habitat types. Biodiversity is highest (generally) in the forest canopy, which has five layers: over-story canopy (with emergent crowns), medium layer of canopy, lower canopy, shrub level, and understory. The forest floor is relatively clear of undergrowth because of the thick canopy above. Here, a tree may grow over 75 feet (22.9 meters) in only five years.



[Author's Note: *I thank the reviewers for their helpful suggestions. I thank Ethan Lloyd for some of the coordinates of proposed Meso-american Book of Mormon settlements used in figure 2 and for helpful discussions. Figures were made with QGIS software and labeled in Canvas Draw.*]

David M. Belnap received a BS degree in biochemistry from Brigham Young University in 1989 and a PhD in biology from Purdue University in 1995. Since his days at Purdue University, he has studied the structure of viruses primarily by three-dimensional electron microscopy.

He has also studied other biological macromolecules and helped develop 3DEM methods. Following graduate studies, he worked at the National Institutes of Health (1995 to 2004) and Brigham Young University (2004 to 2012). He is a research faculty member in the Departments of Biochemistry and Biology at the University of Utah, where he also directs the Electron Microscopy Core Laboratory. David enjoys serving in the Church and especially enjoys being outdoors with his wife, Julie, and family.

Reading *Disciple* Consistently As *New-world Apostle* in the Book of Mormon

Carl J. Cranney

Abstract: *In the Book of Mormon, the term disciple occurs fifty-five times. Of those, forty-eight are unambiguous references to the Twelve called by the risen Christ to preside over his new-world Church. The remaining six instances could plausibly be read either as references to more generic followers of Jesus or as references to the Nephite Twelve. If they are read as references to the Nephite Twelve, subtle themes emerge, generating insights into Mormon's life, the apostasy in 4 Nephi, Mormon's letters to his son, and the translation process of the Book of Mormon.*

If one reads the Book of Mormon in translation order,¹ Mormon first introduces himself to the readers in 3 Nephi:

And behold, I am called Mormon . . . Behold, I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I have been called of him to declare his word among his people, that they might have everlasting life. (3 Nephi 5:12–13)

Mormon's pulling back of the editorial curtain seems to come rather suddenly and with little foreshadowing. In his self-introduction, Mormon declares, "I am a disciple of Jesus Christ." At a surface reading, Mormon appears to be self-identifying as one who follows the teachings of Jesus Christ. However, as we continue to read the

1. The translation order is generally thought to be the lost 116 pages, then Mosiah to Moroni, then 1 Nephi through the Words of Mormon, then what is now the title page. However, there are some who suggest a slightly different translation order. A thorough discussion of translation-order theories is beyond the scope of this paper.

Book of Mormon, it becomes clear that the term *disciple* has a much narrower use in Mormon's narrative. It next occurs in 3 Nephi 15:12, when Jesus is addressing the twelve men he has set apart to lead his Church in the New World. From then on, in every other instance in 3 Nephi (twenty-nine more occurrences) the term unambiguously refers to this group of twelve men whom, for my purposes, I will label *new-world apostles*.²

Disciples Versus Apostles

The Book of Mormon writers, as a whole, are aware of the term *apostle*, but it appears only sixteen times. Thirteen of the occurrences are in 1 Nephi 11–14 as references to the old-world apostles.³ They are deliberately differentiated from the Nephite Twelve in 1 Nephi 12:8–10. This is when the angel tells Nephi that the Twelve Disciples “chosen to minister unto thy seed” will themselves be judged by the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb in the Old World. This is a point reiterated hundreds of years later by Mormon (Mormon 3:19). The remaining occurrences of *apostle* are Mormon 9:18, where Moroni states that apostles perform miracles; Ether 12:41, where Moroni says that prophets and apostles have written of Jesus; and Moroni 2:2, which records some of Christ's instructions to the Nephite Twelve that end with “for thus do mine apostles.” These twelve Nephite men are never formally labeled *apostles* in the Book of Mormon, but they are clearly called as the leaders of the new-world Church and in Moroni 2:2 their office is analogous to that of apostle. While some commentators read the Nephite Twelve as identical in apostolic office to the old-world Twelve,⁴ the Book of Mormon takes deliberate steps to both differentiate the Nephite Twelve from the old-world Twelve and to subordinate the former to the latter. The preferred term for these new-world apostles in the Book of Mormon is *disciple*. It appears to be the designated title for members of that quorum of twelve new-world apostles.

2. Joseph Smith asserts that the Book of Mormon peoples had apostles in his letter to John Wentworth. “‘Church History,’ 1 March 1842,” p. 707, Joseph Smith Papers, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/church-history-1-march-1842/2.

3. The phrase *apostle(s) of the Lamb* is used in 1 Nephi 11:34, 35, 36; 12:9; 13:39, 40, 41; 14:20, 24, 25, 27. The term *apostles* is used in 1 Nephi 13:24, 26.

4. See Kenneth W. Anderson, “The Twelve: A Light unto This People,” in *3 Nephi 9–30, This is My Gospel*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1993), 149; Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent L. Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. 4 (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992), 63.

Table 1 details every instance of the term *disciple* in the Book of Mormon, with the reference, quotation (*disciple(s)* in bold), and my designation of whom the term is referring to—new-world apostles, old-world apostles, the Three Nephites (who were new-world apostles), and (perhaps) ambiguous references.

Table 1. *Disciple* in the Book of Mormon.

Reference	Quotation	Referent
1 Nephi 12:8	And the angel spake unto me, saying: Behold the twelve disciples of the Lamb, who are chosen to minister unto thy seed.	New-world apostles
1 Nephi 12:9–10 ⁵	And he said unto me: Thou rememberest the twelve apostles of the Lamb? Behold they are they who shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel; wherefore, the twelve ministers of thy seed shall be judged of them; for ye are of the house of Israel. And these twelve ministers whom thou beholdest shall judge thy seed. And, behold, they are righteous forever; for because of their faith in the Lamb of God their garments are made white in his blood.	New-world apostles
2 Nephi 18:16 (Isaiah 8:16)	Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples .	Borrowed KJV language
Alma 45:14	But whosoever remaineth, and is not destroyed in that great and dreadful day, shall be numbered among the Lamanites, and shall become like unto them, all, save it be a few who shall be called the disciples of the Lord; and them shall the Lamanites pursue even until they shall become extinct. And now, because of iniquity, this prophecy shall be fulfilled.	Ambiguous
3 Nephi 5:13	Behold, I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I have been called of him to declare his word among his people, that they might have everlasting life.	Ambiguous
3 Nephi 15:12	Ye are my disciples ; and ye are a light unto this people, who are a remnant of the house of Joseph.	New-world apostles

5. I have included these two verses and their references to the twelve *ministers* since, contextually, they are clearly referring to the new-world apostles. These are the only such instances in the Book of Mormon.

Reference	Quotation	Referent
3 Nephi 18:1	And it came to pass that Jesus commanded his disciples that they should bring forth some bread and wine unto him.	New-world apostles
3 Nephi 18:3	And when the disciples had come with bread and wine, he took of the bread and brake and blessed it; and he gave unto the disciples and commanded that they should eat.	New-world apostles
3 Nephi 18:5	And when the multitude had eaten and were filled, he said unto the disciples : Behold there shall one be ordained among you, and to him will I give power that he shall break bread and bless it	New-world apostles
3 Nephi 18:8	And it came to pass that when he said these words, he commanded his disciples that they should take of the wine of the cup and drink of it.	New-world apostles
3 Nephi 18:10	And when the disciples had done this, Jesus said unto them: Blessed are ye for this thing which ye have done	New-world apostles
3 Nephi 18:17	And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words unto his disciples , he turned again unto the multitude	New-world apostles
3 Nephi 18:26	And now it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words, he turned his eyes again upon the disciples whom he had chosen	New-world apostles
3 Nephi 18:36	And it came to pass that when Jesus had made an end of these sayings, he touched with his hand the disciples whom he had chosen	New-world apostles
3 Nephi 18:37	And the multitude heard not the words which he spake, therefore they did not bear record; but the disciples bare record	New-world apostles
3 Nephi 18:39	And while they were overshadowed he departed from them, and ascended into heaven. And the disciples saw and did bear record	New-world apostles
3 Nephi 19:4	Now these were the names of the disciples whom Jesus had chosen — and it came to pass that they went forth and stood in the midst of the multitude.	New-world apostles
3 Nephi 19:7	And the disciples did pray unto the Father also in the name of Jesus.	New-world apostles
3 Nephi 19:15	And it came to pass that while the angels were ministering unto the disciples , behold, Jesus came and stood in the midst and ministered unto them.	New-world apostles

Reference	Quotation	Referent
3 Nephi 19:16	And it came to pass that he spake unto the multitude, and commanded them that they should kneel down again upon the earth, and also that his disciples should kneel down	New-world apostles
3 Nephi 19:17	And it came to pass that when they had all knelt down upon the earth, he commanded his disciples that they should pray.	New-world apostles
3 Nephi 19:24	And it came to pass that when Jesus had thus prayed unto the Father, he came unto his disciples , and behold, they did still continue . . . to pray	New-world apostles
3 Nephi 19:30	And when Jesus had spoken these words he came again unto his disciples ; and behold they did pray steadfastly	New-world apostles
3 Nephi 19:35	And it came to pass that when Jesus had made an end of praying he came again to the disciples , and said unto them: So great faith have I never seen among all the Jews	New-world apostles
3 Nephi 20:1	And it came to pass that he commanded the multitude that they should cease to pray, and also his disciples .	New-world apostles
3 Nephi 20:3	And it came to pass that he brake bread again and blessed it, and gave to the disciples to eat.	New-world apostles
3 Nephi 20:6	Now, there had been no bread, neither wine, brought by the disciples , neither by the multitude	New-world apostles
3 Nephi 23:10	And his disciples answered him and said: Yea, Lord, Samuel did prophesy according to thy words	New-world apostles
3 Nephi 26:17	And it came to pass that the disciples whom Jesus had chosen began from that time forth to baptize and to teach	New-world apostles
3 Nephi 27:1	And it came to pass that as the disciples of Jesus were journeying and were preaching . . . it came to pass that the disciples were gathered together and were united in mighty prayer	New-world apostles
3 Nephi 27:33	And it came to pass that when Jesus had ended these sayings he said unto his disciples : Enter ye in at the strait gate	New-world apostles
3 Nephi 28:1	And it came to pass when Jesus had said these words, he spake unto his disciples , one by one, saying unto them: What is it that ye desire of me?	New-world apostles

Reference	Quotation	Referent
4 Nephi heading ⁶	Who is the son of Nephi— one of the disciples of Jesus Christ	New-world apostles
4 Nephi 1:1	And it came to pass that the thirty and fourth year passed away, and also the thirty and fifth, and behold, the disciples of Jesus had formed a church of Christ in all the lands round about.	New-world apostles
4 Nephi 1:5	And there were great and marvelous works wrought by the disciples of Jesus.	New-world apostles
4 Nephi 1:13	But there were mighty miracles wrought among the disciples of Jesus.	Ambiguous
4 Nephi 1:14	And it came to pass that the seventy and first year passed away, and also the seventy and second year, yea, and in fine, till the seventy and ninth year had passed away; yea, even an hundred years had passed away, and the disciples of Jesus, whom he had chosen, had all gone to the paradise of God, save it were the three who should tarry; and there were other disciples ordained in their stead; and also many of that generation had passed away.	New-world apostles
4 Nephi 1:30	Therefore they did exercise power and authority over the disciples of Jesus who did tarry with them	Three Nephites
4 Nephi 1:37	Therefore the true believers in Christ, and the true worshipers of Christ, (among whom were the three disciples of Jesus who should tarry)	Three Nephites
4 Nephi 1:44	And from this time the disciples began to sorrow for the sins of the world.	Ambiguous
4 Nephi 1:46	And there were none that were righteous save it were the disciples of Jesus.	Ambiguous
Mormon 1:13	But wickedness did prevail upon the face of the whole land, insomuch that the Lord did take away his beloved disciples	Three Nephites
Mormon 1:16	And I did endeavor to preach unto this people, but my mouth was shut, and I was forbidden that I should preach unto them; for behold, they had wilfully rebelled against their God; and the beloved disciples were taken away out of the land	Three Nephites

6. Although this instance of *disciple* occurs in the heading to 4 Nephi, it was part of the original text of the Book of Mormon.

Reference	Quotation	Referent
Mormon 3:18	Yea, behold, I write unto all the ends of the earth; yea, unto you, twelve tribes of Israel, who shall be judged according to your works by the twelve whom Jesus chose to be his disciples in the land of Jerusalem.	Old-world apostles
Mormon 8:10	And there are none that do know the true God save it be the disciples of Jesus, who did tarry in the land until the wickedness of the people was so great that the Lord would not suffer them to remain with the people	Three Nephites
Mormon 9:22	For behold, thus said Jesus Christ, the Son of God, unto his disciples who should tarry, yea, and also to all his disciples , in the hearing of the multitude	New-world apostles
Ether 4:10	And he that believeth not my words believeth not my disciples	Ambiguous
Ether 12:17	And it was by faith that the three disciples obtained a promise that they should not taste of death	Three Nephites
Ether 12:31	For thus didst thou manifest thyself unto thy disciples , for after they had faith, and did speak in thy name, thou didst show thyself unto them in great power.	New-world apostles
Moroni 2:1	The words of Christ, which he spake unto his disciples , the twelve whom he had chosen	New-world apostles
Moroni 2:3	Now Christ spake these words unto them at the time of his first appearing; and the multitude heard it not, but the disciples heard it; and on as many as they laid their hands, fell the Holy Ghost.	New-world apostles
Moroni 3:1	The manner which the disciples , who were called the elders of the church, ordained priests and teachers	New-world apostles

As shown in table 1, the term *disciple* is used most of the time to reference the new-world apostles. But there are a few instances where the term could plausibly be read as either a reference to new-world apostles or the more generic definition of a follower of Jesus. The ambiguous references from table 1 and the reasoning as to why they are ambiguous are as follows:

- **2 Nephi 18:16.** The passage is a word-for-word quotation of Isaiah 8:16.
- **Alma 45:14.** Are only the members of the new-world

Quorum of Apostles remaining in the Church? Or is this a reference to all Christians in the Lehite society?

- **3 Nephi 5:13.** Is Mormon self-identifying as a follower of Jesus, or as a new-world apostle?
- **4 Nephi 1:13.** The word *among* implies that the miracles only occur within the circle of the Twelve, which is contradicted by 4 Nephi 1:5.
- **4 Nephi 1:44.** This could be read to mean the followers of Jesus in general, not just the new-world apostles.
- **4 Nephi 1:46.** This could be read to mean the followers of Jesus in general, not just the new-world apostles.
- **Ether 4:10.** This could be read to mean the followers of Jesus in general, not just the new-world apostles.

In short, of the fifty-five times the term *disciple* is used in the entire Book of Mormon, only six of them could responsibly be read as referring to any generic follower of Jesus. (I am excluding 2 Nephi 8:16 in this count because of its borrowed language from Isaiah.) The remaining uses are all explicit references to the new-world apostles. Thus, 87 percent of the uses of the term *disciple* in the Book of Mormon are explicit references to either new-world apostles or old-world apostles (the latter only occurs in one instance: Mormon 3:18). There are two that are references to the three new-world apostles who are granted immortality by Christ. Both of those are the only instances in the Book of Mormon of the term *beloved disciples* (Mormon 1:13, 16). This is an intriguing parallel to the old-world Apostle, John the Beloved, who was similarly granted immortality by the risen Christ (John 21:20–23).

Given that most of the uses of the term *disciple* are to designate new-world apostles, and given that the remaining instances are ambiguous, these ambiguous references could also be references to the new-world apostles. (An exception to this would be 2 Nephi 18:16 where the term originates from the King James Bible.)

Insights from Reading *Disciples as Apostles*

What if one read the ambiguous uses of the term the same way the others are used—as references to new-world apostles? If all instances of the term *disciple* were read in this way, what might be gained from such a reading of the entire Book of Mormon? In doing so, a few consistent insights emerge from the text. For convenience and

where appropriate, I will repeat the full text of the relevant passages at the beginning of each of the following sections.

Mormon as a new-world Apostle

Behold, I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I have been called of him to declare his word among his people, that they might have everlasting life. (3 Nephi 5:13)

If we read all of the occasions of *disciple* as references to new-world apostles, we have a strong indication that Mormon is not self-identifying as a mere follower of Jesus Christ but is also declaring himself a new-world Apostle.⁷ There is no indication of his ordination as such in the record, though we do know that other disciples were ordained to replace those who passed on (4 Nephi 1:14). The rest of his self-introduction would then be his description of the responsibilities of new-world apostles. As Mormon expresses it, "I have been called of him to declare his word among his people, that they might have everlasting life."

It would also color our understanding of what Mormon means when he says that he had been ministered to by the three Nephites (3 Nephi 28:26) who had disappeared during his youth (Mormon 1:13–14). It would have been a meeting of ecclesiastical equals, even if the three Nephites had some kind of seniority, and, certainly, legendary cultural status.⁸

7. Millet, McConkie, and Top assert that Mormon is using the term in its generic sense here. McConkie, Millet, and Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4:23. Sidney B. Sperry is one commentator that says Mormon was an Apostle but gives no explanation why he makes this connection in this singular sentence: "He also says that he was a disciple of Jesus Christ, meaning an apostle, called to declare his word among the people." Sidney B. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 396. Brant Gardner says that Mormon was an Apostle, a witness of Christ, by virtue of his production of the Book of Mormon. Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 5:273. The *Book of Mormon Reference Companion* discusses the Nephite Twelve and Mormon as disciples but also asserts that the Nephite Twelve were called as apostles. ("Disciple, discipleship" and "Disciples, twelve Nephite," in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 232–34. None make the argument that this use of the term *disciple* is a deliberate self-identification as a new-world apostle.

8. The record of how the twelve new-world apostles were organized is sparse, but *if* they followed some kind of seniority principle as does The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, that would lead to a very unusual scenario

Mormon's speech at the synagogue

If the term *disciple* only means *new-world apostle*, it is plausible to understand Moroni 7 as not only a sermon at a synagogue by some Church leader, but as a sermon by a new-world apostle. Moroni deliberately specifies that it was “the synagogue,” not “the synagogues” or even “a synagogue.” The term is decidedly singular.

It is of note that every other major recorded sermon in a formal worship setting in the Book of Mormon is either by a political leader (such as King Benjamin in his sermon in Mosiah 3–5), by the high priest (such as Alma in his preaching tour in Alma 5–7), or by someone designated by the clear religious leader (such as Jacob in his sermon on assignment from Nephi, in 2 Nephi 6–10). This pattern bolsters the argument that Mormon's talk in the synagogue may well be a formal sermon by a new-world apostle to the then-sparse membership of Christ's Church.

A sobering and lonely picture for new-world apostles

And from this time the disciples began to sorrow for the sins of the world . . . And it came to pass that the robbers of Gadianton did spread over all the face of the land; and there were none that were righteous save it were the disciples of Jesus. (4 Nephi 1:44, 46)

If the term *disciple* refers to *new-world apostle*, it appears that as the Nephites fell into apostasy in 4 Nephi, there was a point when the only remnants of the true Church were new-world apostles. The progression seems to be thus: Around the year 200 AD, the people divided into classes and created “many” new churches (4 Nephi 1:27). The true Church of Christ still existed but was heavily persecuted (v. 29). The text reports that this included “the disciples of Jesus who did tarry with them” (vv. 30–33), a seeming reference to the three immortal Nephite disciples.

The Church still existed in 230 AD when the Nephite/Lamanite designation began again (vv. 36–38). By 244 AD, “the people of God” (Nephites) were severely outnumbered (v. 40). Around 260 AD, the Gadianton robbers reappear (v. 42), and the Nephites themselves fall (v. 43). It is then that the disciples begin to “sorrow for the sins of the world” (v. 44), and by 300 AD, “there were none that were righteous

where eventually the three senior apostles would all be the same—and eternally locked into their positions in the seniority, given their immortal state.

save it were the disciples of Jesus" (v. 46). Some commentaries assume that these last two references are to more generic followers of Jesus, but there are some differences even between these commentaries as to whom this is referring.⁹

Reading all instances of *disciple* as referring to *new-world apostles* helps us to understand 4 Nephi 1:25–46 with a slight nuance. These verses record a dwindling Church of Christ, to the point where the only righteous that are left are new-world apostles presiding over an apostate Church and a wicked nation. This is a sobering and lonely picture. Alma prophesied the conclusion of this dire situation:

But whosoever remaineth, and is not destroyed in that great and dreadful day, shall be numbered among the Lamanites, and shall become like unto them, all, save it be a few who shall be called the disciples of the Lord; and them shall the Lamanites pursue even until they shall become extinct. And now, because of iniquity, this prophecy shall be fulfilled. (Alma 45:14)

Indeed, Joseph Spencer's discussion of Mormon's life indicates that, "Mormon's autobiographical writings give the impression that Nephite Christianity did not exist for most of his lifetime."¹⁰ This situation Mormon foreshadows with great specificity in his history of Lehiite civilization in 4 Nephi.

Of the six ambiguous instances of *disciple* across the entire Book of Mormon, three are references to new-world apostles in these circumstances.

9. See Monte Nyman, *I, Mormon, Make a Record: A Teaching Commentary on 4 Nephi through Moroni* (2004), 24–25. Nyman speculates that the disciples spoken of in verses 44 and 46 includes both the Nephite Twelve as well as other faithful members. McConkie, Millet, and Top make the same inference. McConkie, Millet, and Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4:206. David Ridges says that the reference in verse 44 is just to the three immortal Nephite disciples. David Ridges, *Your Study of the Book of Mormon Made Easier* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2004), 3:235. Reynolds and Sjodahl assert the almost tautological statement, "there were none that were righteous, save it were the followers of Christ." George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Philip C. Reynolds (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 7:252.

10. Joseph M. Spencer, "On the Dating of Moroni 8–9," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 22 (2016): 145, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/on-the-dating-of-moroni-8-9/.

Moroni as a possible new-world Apostle

If the term *disciple* only means *new-world apostle*, then Moroni 8 gains new context. Mormon is overjoyed that his son has been called to “[Christ’s] ministry, and to his holy work” (Moroni 8:2). The rest of the letter is a dense theological rejection of the practice of infant baptism—this does not seem to be just a letter from a proud father to a son on a momentous personal occasion. If we assume that Mormon is a new-world Apostle based on his self-identification as such in 3 Nephi 5:13, we could plausibly read Moroni’s call to the ministry as a similar call to new-world apostleship. This letter would then be not just one from a father to a son but from a senior new-world Apostle to a newly called junior one addressing a serious issue to be dealt with in the Church.

In the canon of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints there are many examples of general letters from apostles to specific churches (such as Romans and 1 and 2 Corinthians), to other members in the Church but likely not members of the Twelve (1 and 2 Timothy, for example), and general letters to the entire Church (such as 1 Peter and Doctrine and Covenants 127). However, there are no instances of letters from apostles to apostles anciently in either the New or Old Worlds or in the current dispensation. That would make this chapter the only instance of a senior Apostle giving instructions to a junior Apostle in the entire canon. It appears to be the result of a confluence of two facts. First, both Mormon and Moroni were new-world apostles. Second, Moroni had preserved this letter from his father and included it in his record along with other meaningful items he kept during his years of wandering.¹¹

Two further insights emerge from the idea that Moroni was a new-world Apostle. When Moroni begins his own portion of the Book of Mormon, having completed his father’s record and abridging the Book of Ether, he says that the Lamanites of his day “put to death every Nephite that will not deny the Christ. And I, Moroni, will not deny the

11. Wright and Larsen’s analysis of the organization and themes from the book of Moroni is compelling. They assert that the entire book is a “set of documents handed down to [Moroni] from his father, Mormon, that were especially meaningful to him as he wandered alone,” and a letter from his father on Moroni’s call as a new-world Apostle would certainly fit that description. Newell D. Wright and Val Larsen, “The Holy Ghost in the Book of Mormon: Possessed of Charity,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-Day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 57 (2023): 54, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-holy-ghost-in-the-book-of-moroni-possessed-of-charity/.

Christ" (Moroni 1:2–3). To deny the Christ would be to not only deny his testimony of him but to do the opposite of the command to testify of Christ—his primary role as a new-world Apostle.

And finally, if Moroni were the last living new-world Apostle, this lends a poignancy to Moroni 1–6 as he writes a handbook of instructions for future leaders of the Church of Christ, though they live centuries in the future in a new dispensation. Moroni does his best to train them in ecclesiastical policy and procedure even with his limited means to do so.¹²

This reading does require leaps, namely that Mormon was a new-world Apostle (likely) and then that Moroni was called as such before the occasion of the letter in Moroni 8 (possible).¹³ Certainly members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints call them both *prophets*, but the relationship between that title and the office of Apostle, whether old-world, new-world, or modern, is beyond the scope of this paper. At the very least, if Moroni's ministry, mentioned in Moroni 8:2, were to some other office—maybe elder, teacher, or priest, all of which are well attested in the Book of Mormon record both before and after Christ's appearance (e.g., Alma 4:7, Moroni 3:1)—then we ought to consider Moroni 8 as from a new-world Apostle to a Church officer lower in the hierarchy. This would make this letter more analogous to Paul's letters to Timothy than, say, a letter from Peter to Paul. Either way, it is more an ecclesiastical letter than a personal one, even if it begins and ends with affectionate words from father to son. (Moroni 9 is the reverse—more a personal letter than an ecclesiastical one.) Either way, Moroni's statement that he will not deny the Christ as well as recording basic ecclesiological instructions is colored by the

12. It should also be pointed out that Moroni might have been ordained as a new-world Apostle after his call to the ministry mentioned in Moroni 8, perhaps even after the final apocalyptic battle that resulted in the extermination of the Nephite nation but before Mormon was killed. (Mormon had time to inscribe at least Mormon 6–7 on the plates after this battle. What else might he have accomplished in the time it took to do so?) This is admittedly a speculation unsupported by any part of the text.

13. Joseph Spencer argues that Moroni might have been called to the ministry *before* Mormon was. With such a paucity of data to reconstruct the timeline, Spencer may be correct, but it may be possible for Mormon to have been ordained as a new-world Apostle and then commanded by God to not proselytize, which would resolve some of the discrepancies Spencer points out in his reconstruction of Mormon's timeline. Spencer, "On the Dating of Moroni 8–9," 145.

understanding that he was a member of the Church hierarchy, whatever his office.

Miracles *among* or *by* the disciples?

And it came to pass that there was no contention among all the people, in all the land; but there were mighty miracles wrought among the disciples of Jesus. (4 Nephi 1:13)

If we take the use of the term *disciples* in 4 Nephi 1:13 to mean *new-world apostles*, there is a slight hiccup in the grammar. It would be unusual for the mighty miracles to be confined solely to the Twelve, but that is what is implied by the phrase “among the disciples of Jesus.”¹⁴ Such a reading is contradicted by the wording just a few verses earlier when it is said “there were great and marvelous works wrought *by* the disciples of Jesus . . . and all manner of miracles did they work *among* the children of men” (4 Nephi 1:5). Perhaps the preposition in verse 13 should have been translated as *by* so that the grammar could account for miracles involving people outside of the Twelve and to harmonize the wording with that of 4 Nephi 1:5. This slight change to a single preposition would maintain the use of *disciple* to only mean *new-world apostle*.

It is a bold course to suggest a change to the translation of the Book of Mormon, even in so small a matter as a single preposition. I wish to be clear that I am not advocating such an alteration. However, as I understand this verse, such a change would be the only way the grammar could make sense if we were to read the term *disciple* to mean only *new-world apostle*. Perhaps this is an instance where *disciple* means *follower of Jesus Christ*, despite its being surrounded contextually by instances of the word’s meaning *new-world apostle*. If this is the case, the phrase “among the children of men” in verse 5 and “among the disciples” in verse 13 could be a subtle way Mormon indicates the spread of the Nephite Church.

“He that believeth not my words believeth not my disciples”

And he that believeth not my words believeth not my disciples; and if it so be that I do not speak, judge ye; for ye shall know that it is I that speaketh, at the last day. (Ether 4:10)

14. The entry in Webster’s 1828 dictionary for *among/amongst* and the entry for *among* in the Oxford English Dictionary show that the word’s meaning has not significantly changed since Joseph Smith’s day.

The wording from Ether 4:10 about not believing the words of Christ and thus not believing his disciples does occur elsewhere. It is a type. The risen Christ speaks of blessings to those who follow his new-world apostles (3 Nephi 12:1).¹⁵ The idea that receiving or believing Christ's authorized servants is as if receiving or believing Christ himself has parallels in the New Testament. Matthew 10:40 reads "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me." John 5:46–47 reads "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?"

This idea also occurs in the Doctrine and Covenants predating the translation of the Book of Mormon: "Behold, if they will not believe my words, they would not believe you, my servant Joseph" (Doctrine and Covenants 5:7). It also occurs multiple times after the translation. Doctrine and Covenants 21:5, for example, also refers to Joseph Smith: "his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth." Doctrine and Covenants 1:38 is quite well known and refers not just to Joseph Smith but to the Lord's servants in general: "whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same" (see also Doctrine and Covenants 84:36: "For he that receiveth my servants receiveth me"). One section is a direct reference to John Murdock, who was a high priest at the time: "Behold, thus saith the Lord unto my servant John Murdock . . . Who receiveth you receiveth me" (Doctrine and Covenants 99:1–2; see also 112:19–21).¹⁶

Perhaps the occurrence of the idea in Ether 4:10 that "he that believeth not my words believeth not my disciples" had influence on the prophet Joseph Smith's revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants.

15. Robert Millet draws together several of these scriptures and themes when he concludes that "certainly no one could accept the Father while rejecting the Son, and no one could accept the Son while rejecting those he had commissioned to act in his name. A rejection of Peter, James, Nephi, or any of his apostolic ministers was at the same time a rejection of Jesus." Robert L. Millet, "The Only Sure Foundation: Building on the Rock of Our Redeemer," in *The Book of Mormon: Helaman Through 3 Nephi 8, According to Thy Word, Papers from the 7th Annual Book of Mormon Symposium* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1992), 30–31.

16. John Murdock was ordained a high priest on 4 June 1831, by Joseph Smith, and Doctrine and Covenants 99 was received on 29 August 1832. Minutes, circa 3–4 June 1831, p. 4, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-circa-3-4-june-1831/2.

Possible influence on the translation

And the angel spake unto me, saying: Behold the twelve disciples of the Lamb, who are chosen to minister unto thy seed. And he said unto me: Thou rememberest the twelve apostles of the Lamb? Behold they are they who shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel; wherefore, the twelve ministers of thy seed shall be judged of them; for ye are of the house of Israel. And these twelve ministers whom thou beholdest shall judge thy seed. And, behold, they are righteous forever; for because of their faith in the Lamb of God their garments are made white in his blood. (1 Nephi 12:8–10)

Finally, the use of the term *disciple* (and *minister*) in 1 Nephi 12:8–10 may have been informed by the fact that 3 Nephi was completed earlier in the translation process. By the time Joseph encountered these verses, he had already been steeped in the use of *disciple* almost exclusively to refer to new-world apostles through his earlier translation of 3 Nephi.

There is much debate on exactly how the translation process of the Book of Mormon occurred. One of the main questions is to what extent, if any, Joseph contributed to the translation. The “tight control” theory advocates for a position that the actual translation was completely in God’s control, with Joseph serving as more of an oral stenographer. Royal Skousen is the chief advocate of this position.¹⁷ Others argue that Joseph contributed in some way to the process. Even this latter hypothesis has different scholars advocating along a spectrum, such as Brant Gardner’s “functional equivalence” translation¹⁸ or Blake Ostler’s expansion theory.¹⁹

If one believes in a more tightly controlled, strict, word-specific translation, then the occurrence of *disciple* in 1 Nephi 12 is a deliberate choice by God himself to maintain continuity with the rest of the book. If, however, one believes in a looser translation process, then perhaps Joseph Smith provided some contribution to the wording. The occurrence could be explained by Joseph Smith’s intuiting that *disciple* and

17. Royal Skousen, “How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7, no. 1 (1998): 22–31.

18. Brant A. Gardner, *Translating the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 247.

19. Blake Ostler, “The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20, no. 1 (1987): 66–123.

minister are more appropriate terms than *apostle* given his previous exposure to *disciple*'s being almost exclusively used to reference new-world apostles in the previously translated material.

Summary and Conclusions

Given that most of the uses of the term *disciple* in the Book of Mormon are unambiguously used to designate the twelve new-world apostles and their successors, we might profit by reading the six ambiguous instances of that term in the same way. If we do so, we can glean additional insights into various passages across the Book of Mormon. Mormon self-identifies as a new-world Apostle when he first introduces himself in 3 Nephi 5. This subtly changes the readers' understanding of Mormon's life by seeing him as a member of the Nephite Twelve of his day, with all the attendant weight that comes with such an ordination. His sermon in Moroni 7 can be seen not just as preaching in the synagogue by a member of the Church but as a sermon by a new-world Apostle, the only such sermon of which we have a detailed record.

Even the letter to his son, Moroni, in Moroni 8, can be seen through Mormon's lens as a new-world Apostle. It may very well be that Moroni was called as a new-world Apostle on the occasion of, or just before, this letter. Even if Moroni had been called to some other position — teacher, priest, or elder, perhaps — we can read this not as a personal letter from father to son, but as an ecclesiastical letter from a new-world Apostle to a Church officer with less seniority. If Moroni were called to some office lower than a new-world Apostle, then Moroni 8 might be analogous to the Pauline epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. If Moroni had been called as a new-world Apostle, then Moroni 8 would be the only communication between apostles in the entire Church canon.

If we read all instances of *disciple* as reference to new-world apostles, 4 Nephi takes on subtle new meaning. Concluding with the Church itself in disarray, the only righteous members remaining were those who also held the office of new-world apostle. This sobering and lonely picture accords with much of Mormon's record of his own day where the Christian church seems almost entirely absent, perhaps limited to a single synagogue where he would have delivered the sermon in Moroni 7.

Finally, the considerations laid out in this paper might color one's understanding of the terminology in 1 Nephi 12:8–10, as these verses

use the same convention of having *disciple* (and *minister*²⁰) to designate new-world apostles. Given that Nephi and Mormon are separated by nearly a millennium of linguistic evolution, the question must be asked if Joseph Smith contributed to this consistent terminology in the translation. Different theories of Joseph's contribution to the wording in the Book of Mormon might thus impact how one understands the phraseology of these verses. Reading *disciple* as *new-world apostle* in Ether 4:10 may also have set a precedent that emerges in certain phrases in various sections of the Doctrine and Covenants.

Reading *disciple* as always meaning *new-world apostle* throughout the Book of Mormon only requires us to re-interpret our understanding of a mere six words across the entire record. If we do so, the transition yields consistent insights and gives new meaning and color to various passages of the Book of Mormon. Particularly seeing Mormon and possibly Moroni as having been ordained as new-world apostles gives new gravitas and insight into their lives, ministries, and writings.



Carl J. Cranney has a PhD in systematic theology from the Catholic University of America, having completed an MAR in philosophical theology and the philosophy of religion at the Yale Divinity School, and an undergraduate in philosophy from BYU. In the broader sphere of Latter-day Saint studies, he has published in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, *Mormon Historical Studies* (now *Latter-day Saint Historical Studies*), and *SquareTwo*. He is a co-host of the “Pop Culture on the Apricot Tree” podcast, which discusses various movies and TV shows through the lens of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

20. As a noun, the term *minister* only occurs one additional time in the Book of Mormon (Mosiah 23:14).

The Literary Structure of Alma 21–22

Derek Squire

Abstract: *This article is part two of an analysis of the literary structure of Alma 17–27. The current article analyzes the literary structure of Alma 21–22, which is “an account of the preaching of Aaron and Muloki and their brethren to the Lamanites” as noted in the heading before Alma 21. These two chapters were originally a single chapter in the first edition of the Book of Mormon. When Alma 21–22 is treated as a single chapter, it appears to have been organized into an extended parallel structure (A-B-C-A'-B'-C') in which matching elements share many strong links and parallels. This literary structure highlights the extraordinary range of missionary experiences that can occur while preaching the gospel. There also appears to be an eight-element chiasm that consists of Alma 21–22 and the conclusion to the preaching efforts of the sons of Mosiah in the first fifteen verses of Alma 23. This is the second of three macro-chiasms characterizing the overall structure of Alma 17–27.*

As a follow-up to a previous article, “The Literary Structure of Alma 17–20,”¹ this article is a literary analysis of the next original chapter of the Book of Mormon, Alma 13, which comprises Alma 21–22 in the 2013 edition of the Book of Mormon.² The same methodology

1. Derek Squire, “The Literary Structure of Alma 17–20: A 14-unit Chiasm,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 60 (2023) 87–136, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-literary-structure-of-alma-17-20-a-14-unit-chiasm/.

2. When I use *original* in this article to describe chapters of the Book of Mormon, I mean the chapters or sections as broken out and clearly delineated on the Original and Printer Manuscripts of the Book of Mormon. Any mention of *chapter* in this article is in reference to Alma 21–22 unless otherwise stated. However, for referencing in this article, I will use the Book of Mormon’s current

used in that article to identify and analyze literary units is used here as well.³ As recorded in the heading before Alma 21, the narrative shifts from an account of Ammon's activities among the Lamanites to "the preaching of Aaron and Muloki and their brethren to the Lamanites." This chapter includes Aaron's preaching to the king over all the land (Lamoni's father) in the land of Nephi and his subsequent conversion unto the Lord.

Much like Ammon's preaching to the Lamanites in the land of Ishmael and Lamoni's conversion unto the Lord, events from Alma 21–22 had lasting ramifications for both the Lamanites and the Nephites. In Alma 17–20, the literary structure is highly detailed and carefully crafted. It is, therefore, not surprising to find tight literary structure and careful attention to detail in this chapter as well. The six major literary units in this chapter form an extended parallel structure (A-B-C-A'-B'-C') in which the matching units share significant keywords, phrases, and themes.

In addition to this overall structure for Alma 21–22, the first fifteen verses of Alma 23 are analyzed in this article. A previous article, "The Literary Structure of Alma 23–27,"⁴ includes a proposal for a macro-chiasm that begins with Alma 23:16. The outer boundaries of the macro-chiasm are effectively framed by the double-mention of the word *distinguished* in Alma 23:16 and Alma 27:26–27. This frames the complete narrative account of the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi from inception of calling themselves by that name to their name change to the people of Ammon in the land of Jershon. This leaves the necessary treatment of the first fifteen verses of Alma 23. These verses perform important structural and hermeneutical functions in relation to Alma 21–22 which I examine in depth.

In this article, I will do the following:

- Provide a summary of the account of Aaron and his brethren's preaching in Alma 21–22.
- Present the six-element extended parallel structure in Alma

chapters and verses. For wording and grammar of scriptures in this paper, unless noted otherwise, I will use Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022).

3. Squire, "Literary Structure of Alma 17–20," 3–6.

4. Derek Squire, "The Literary Structure of Alma 23–27," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 64 (2025) 1–24, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-literary-structure-of-alma-23-27/.

21–22 and provide evidence showing why such a structure could have been intentionally employed by the author.

- Analyze the paired elements from this extended parallel structure.
- Examine Alma 23:1–15 for structural and interpretive purposes in relation to Alma 21–22.
- Present the eight-element chiasm for Alma 21:1–23:15.
- Analyze the paired elements from the macro-chiasm in Alma 21:1–23:15 and explain why this structure may have been intentionally crafted by Mormon or Alma.⁵
- Summarize the key findings and insights gleaned from the literary analysis of Alma 21:1–23:15.

In addition to these seven objectives, an appendix is included that provides the analysis behind delimiting the major literary units in Alma 21–22. The appendix is provided for the benefit of those wishing to dig deeper into the six elements of the extended parallel structure. However, the main thesis of this article can still be understood by accepting the major literary units that I will define.

The Preaching of Aaron and His Brethren in Alma 21–22

The heading before Alma 21 explicitly marks a shift from the previous chapter. Alma 17–20 focused on Ammon's preaching among the Lamanites. In Alma 21–22, the narrative shifts to the preaching of Ammon's brother, Aaron. The narrative goes all the way back to when the sons of Mosiah first separated themselves from each other in the borders of the land of the Lamanites (Alma 21:1; cf. Alma 17:13, 17). Aaron decides to first go to the city of Jerusalem, a city built and inhabited by Lamanites, Amalekites,⁶ and Amulonites. He does not have any success preaching there, so he departs and goes next to the village of

5. I use Mormon's name throughout this article as the main contributor to the structural design of this chapter, but it could also be the work of Alma. This authorial question will not be addressed here.

6. I use *Amalekites* throughout this article instead of *Amlicites*, as shown in *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*. I agree with Skousen's opinion that the Amlicites and Amalekites are one and the same people, at Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part 4: Alma 21–55* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2014), 1605–6. Even so, most people are more familiar with the term *Amalekites* for this portion of the text. Hopefully, such treatment will avoid unnecessary confusion that might occur if the term *Amlicites* were instead used throughout this article.

Ani-Anti, where he finds Muloki, Ammah, and some of his other brethren preaching the word (Alma 21:11). The people contend with them about the word, so they all depart Ani-Anti and come over into the land of Middoni. Aaron is cast into prison in Middoni along with some of his brethren (Alma 21:12–13). They are eventually delivered out of prison by Lamoni and Ammon as the reader previously learned in Alma 20:28–30. As Alma 22 opens, Aaron is led by the Spirit to the land of Nephi, even to the house of the king over all the land, Lamoni's father. In a scene that parallels Ammon's experience preaching to King Lamoni in several striking ways (while also displaying some distinct differences), Aaron preaches to Lamoni's father who believes, cries unto the Lord for salvation, and is struck as if he were dead. Aaron raises him from the earth. The king then ministers to his household, who all become converted unto the Lord.

At first glance, the conclusion to this chapter comes unexpectedly and appears to serve no literary purpose. The king requests Aaron and his brethren to stand before the multitude gathered at the king's palace and preach the word to them. The king then sends a proclamation to all his people throughout the land, but instead of learning the contents of this proclamation and its impact on the people, there is a detailed and somewhat lengthy digression concerning Lamanite and Nephite geography, and then the chapter abruptly ends. In the last verse of the chapter, Mormon writes that he will now "return again to the account of Ammon, and Aaron, Omner and Himni, and their brethren" (Alma 22:35). In both the delimitation of major literary units and in the analysis of the structures identified in this chapter, explanations will be given as to why the chapter perhaps ends at this juncture.

The Extended Parallel Structure (A-B-C-A'-B'-C') in Alma 21–22

The six major literary units in this chapter form an extended parallel structure with corresponding elements⁷ as shown here:

- A** *Aaron preaches in Jerusalem; an Amalekite asks Aaron seven questions; Aaron, in turn, asks the Amalekite, "Believest thou that the Son of God shall come?" The Amalekite says four times*

7. I use the word *unit* in reference to the six major literary sections of Alma 21–22. When referencing the specific parts of the extended parallel and chiasmic structures, the term *element(s)* will be used to differentiate from these six major literary units.

that his people *do not believe*; Aaron opens the scriptures to him and teaches about the death, sufferings, Atonement, and Resurrection of Christ; due to rejection, Aaron leaves Jerusalem for Ani-Anti (21:1–11)

B Aaron and certain of his brethren are cast into prison in Middoni; they are delivered from prison by the hand of Lamoni and Ammon; they again go forth to declare the word, bringing many to the knowledge of the truth (21:12–17)

C *Literary aside* on Ammon and Lamoni in the land of Ishmael; they return to the land of Ishmael and teach the people; Lamoni declares unto his people that they are free and have the liberty to worship God according to their desires; the land under Lamoni's reign is highlighted (21:18–23)

A' Aaron preaches to the king over all the land in Nephi; the king and Aaron ask seven questions of each other including Aaron twice asking the king, "Believest thou?" The king says he will believe; Aaron reads the scriptures to the king and teaches him about the sufferings, death, Atonement, and Resurrection of Christ (22:1–16)

B' The king over all the land cries to the Lord and is struck as if dead; Aaron puts forth his hand and raises the king from the earth; the king ministers unto the people, and his whole household is converted unto the Lord (22:17–26)

C' *Literary aside* on the geography of Lamanite and Nephite lands; the king sends a proclamation to his people concerning the sons of Mosiah and their brethren; the land under the king's reign is detailed (22:27–35)

It may be easier to see the correspondences between matching units in table form, so a table is provided below.

Alma 21:1–11 (A)	Alma 22:1–16 (A')
1. Questions are prevalent in this unit. The Amalekite asks seven questions (21:5–6) and Aaron asks the Amalekite one question (21:7).	1. Questions are prevalent in this unit. The king asks three questions (22:5, 6, 9) and Aaron asks two questions (22:7, 10).
2. The Amalekite says they have "built sanctuaries" (21:6).	2. The king says he "granted unto [the Amalekites] that they should build sanctuaries" (22:7).
3. "Aaron began to open the scriptures unto them" (21:9).	3. "Aaron did expound unto him the scriptures" (22:13).
4. Aaron teaches about the resurrection of the dead (21:9).	4. Aaron teaches that Christ "breaketh the bands of death" (22:14).

5. Aaron teaches about the “death and sufferings of Christ and the atonement of his blood” (21:9).	5. Aaron teaches that “the sufferings and death of Christ atone for their sins” (22:14), with “sufferings and death” in inverted order.
6. Aaron asks, “Believest thou?” (21:7). The Amalekite says four times that they do not believe (22:8).	6. Aaron asks, “Believest thou?” twice in 22:7, 10. The king says he believes or will believe three times (22:7, 11).
Alma 21:12–17 (B)	Alma 22:17–26 (B')
1. Aaron and his brethren are taken and cast into prison (21:13).	1. The queen twice commands that Aaron and his brethren be slain (22:19, 21).
2. Aaron and his brethren are “delivered by the hand of Lamoni and Ammon” (21:14).	2. Aaron “put forth his hand and raised the king from the earth” (22:22).
3. The people “harden their hearts” (21:12).	3. Aaron knew of “the hardness of the hearts of the people” (22:22).
4. Thematic Parallels:	4. Thematic Parallels:
A. Aaron and his brethren are “taken and cast into prison” (21:13) and “suffered many things” (21:14).	A. The king prays and then is “struck as if he were dead” (22:18).
B. Aaron and his brethren are “delivered . . . fed and clothed” (21:14).	B. The king is raised from the earth and stood upon his feet (22:22).
C. Aaron and his brethren “went forth again to declare the word” (21:15), and “they brought many to the knowledge of the truth” (21:17).	C. “The king stood forth and began to minister unto [his household] and . . . his whole household were converted unto the Lord” (22:23).
Alma 21:18–23 (C)	Alma 22:27–35 (C')
1. This is a literary aside that is clearly bracketed off by the statement, “Now . . . we will return to the account of Aaron and his other brethren” (22:1).	1. This is a literary aside that is clearly delimited by the concluding statement, “And now I . . . return again to the account of Ammon and Aaron, Omner and Himni, and their brethren” (22:35).
2. King Lamoni’s father “granted unto [Lamoni] that he might reign over the people which were in the land of Ishmael and in all the land round about” (21:21).	2. “The king sent a proclamation throughout all the land amongst all his people which was in all his land, which was in all the regions round about” (22:27).
3. The theme of “the liberty of worshipping the Lord their God according to their desires” is explicitly highlighted (21:22).	3. The theme of freedom in worshipping God is implied by the king’s action to send “a proclamation throughout all the land” (22:27). The proclamation allows the sons of Mosiah to freely preach the word without harm, “that the word of God might have no obstruction” (23:3).

Why Use an Extended Parallel Structure?

Why would Mormon put this account into the form of an extended parallel structure? This literary form is typically used to reinforce concepts and principles that may be difficult or complex. It is also used to aid in memorization.⁸ In this case, the author gives readers the opportunity to appreciate and understand the text at a different level. The structure of the chapter invites certain comparisons that lead to increased understanding and clarification of difficult portions of the text. A reader's study of the Book of Mormon is also enriched by the generation of new questions that arise from such a reading of the text.

By analyzing the structure of this chapter specifically, the reader is invited to compare Aaron's preaching efforts in the city of Jerusalem to his preaching efforts in the land of Nephi. Numerous questions develop from such comparative analysis. Why was Aaron successful in one location and not the other? Did Aaron teach the same principles of the gospel in the same manner in both instances? How did those to whom Aaron preached respond differently? The structure of this chapter also invites the reader to compare Aaron and his brethren's imprisonment in Middoni with the king being struck as if he were dead and falling to the earth in parallel sections of the text. What similarities are there between Aaron and his brethren's imprisonment and the king's impairment? Why did these things happen before both Aaron and the king were successful in converting others unto the Lord? Finally, the two literary digressions are to be compared. Are these two asides only parallel to each other due to their equivalent literary form and function? Or is there more to the comparison of these two sections that helps the reader better understand their meaning and purpose? Analyzing the structure of this chapter not only prompts the reader to ask additional questions about the text, but also leads to some valuable insights in attempting to answer many of these questions.

Correlations between Matching Elements

Six major literary units of Alma 21–22 have been identified and delimited in the appendix. Analysis can then be performed to see if these

8. Hugh W. Pinnock, "Forms of Parallelism," in *Finding Biblical Hebrew and Other Ancient Literary Forms in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS]; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999), <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?filename=3&article=1034&context=mi&type=additional>.

units exhibit an underlying structure by the means of links, patterns, and parallels found between them. As proposed at the beginning of this article, these units form an extended parallel pattern (A-B-C-A'-B'-C') in which the first and fourth elements (A and A') are parallel to each other, as are the second and fifth elements (B and B'), and the third and sixth elements (C and C'). There are meaningful correlations between the parallel elements in this chapter that will be detailed in the following sections.

A and A' correspondences (Alma 21:1–11 and 22:1–16)

Elements A and A' describe two of Aaron's preaching episodes amongst the Lamanites — the first in Jerusalem, Ani-Anti, and Middoni, and the second in the land of Nephi. In both elements, questions are a significant literary device used to shape the dialogue and flow of Aaron's preaching. In A, Aaron preaches in the city of Jerusalem. An Amalekite contends with him in a synagogue there and asks him seven questions in rapid succession in 21:5–6.⁹ Aaron responds to this barrage of questions by asking this unnamed Amalekite just one key question in verse 7. In A', Aaron preaches to the king over all the land in the city of Nephi. Questions are again a dominant feature of the dialogue. Seven more questions are asked in this element, five by the king and two by Aaron.

In both elements, Aaron uses the scriptures to preach the word. In A, "Aaron began to open the scriptures unto them" (21:9). In A', Aaron began "reading the scriptures unto the king" (22:12) and "did expound unto him the scriptures" (22:13). These are the only references to scriptures in this chapter. In both elements, Aaron teaches about the sufferings and death of Christ (21:9; 22:14). In A, Aaron teaches about the "death and sufferings of Christ" (21:9). In A', Aaron testifies of "the sufferings and death of Christ" (22:14). The ordering of the terms *death* and *sufferings* is inverted in A'. Again, these terms are unique to these two locations in the chapter. Aaron also teaches about the Atonement of Christ in these two elements and nowhere else in the chapter, using the word *atonement* in 21:9 and *atoneth* in 22:14. Aaron also teaches

9. The Amalekite's seven questions are: 1) "What is that that thou hast testified?"; 2) "Hast thou seen an angel?"; 3) "Why do not angels appear unto us?"; 4) "Behold, are not this people as good as thy people?"; 5) "How knowest thou the thought and intent of our heart?"; 6) "How knowest thou that we have cause to repent?"; and 7) "How knowest thou that we are not a righteous people?" (Alma 21:5–6).

about the Resurrection in both elements but using different terminology. In A, Aaron teaches the Amalekite "concerning the resurrection of the dead" (21:9). In A', Aaron teaches the king that Christ "breaketh the bands of death, that the grave shall have no victory and that the sting of death should be swallowed up in the hopes of glory" (22:14). Although the word *resurrection* does not appear in A', these are the only two occurrences in this chapter which cover the theme of the Resurrection.

The theme of belief is particularly prominent in both elements. Aaron asks, "Believest thou?" to both the Amalekite and the king over all the land, but he asks the king twice (21:7; 22:7, 10). In A, the Amalekite says four times in just one verse that his people do not believe (21:8). Six total instances of the word *believe* are found in A. In A', in contrast to the Amalekite's response, the king responds that he does believe or will believe Aaron's words on three separate occasions (22:7, 11). The word *believe* occurs seven times, and the word *believing* is used once in this element. The only occurrence of the word *believe* in this chapter outside of these two elements is used in 21:12 to succinctly state that few in the land of Middoni believed on the words that Aaron and his brethren taught.

Repentance is another shared motif between these two elements. Repentance is mentioned twice in A and four times in A' (21:6; 22:6, 14, 16). Nowhere else is repentance mentioned in this chapter. Building sanctuaries is also mentioned only twice in this chapter with both references coming in these paired elements (21:6; 22:7). Such numerous and strong parallels between these two elements provides evidence that Mormon may have aligned these two sections intentionally to draw out comparisons between the two.

B and B' correspondences (Alma 21:12–17 and 22:17–26)

The parallels in elements B and B' are more conceptual and involve fewer keyword parallels than are found in elements A and A'. Thematically, the two storylines match up quite well. In B, Aaron and his brethren are cast into prison in the land of Middoni after preaching to the people with little success. After being "delivered by the hand of Lamoni and Ammon . . . they went forth again to declare the word" (21:14–15) and eventually bring many to the knowledge of the truth. In B', the king was "struck as if he were dead" (22:18). The queen and the multitude that gathers initially do not believe Aaron and his brethren. Aaron "put forth his hand and raised the king from the earth,"

attempting to keep a great contention and a disturbance from developing among the people (22:22). Once raised from the earth, the king ministers unto his household, and they are all converted unto the Lord.

In each element, a party is either imprisoned or otherwise impaired, the party is delivered from the situation, and the party then preaches the word to others and successfully brings many unto the Lord. In each element, most people do not believe in the words of Aaron and his brethren initially; however, success eventually comes. Aaron and his brethren experience opposition in both units. In B, they were taken and cast into prison and suffered many things there (21:13–14). In B', the queen twice commands that Aaron and his brethren be taken and slain (22:19, 21).

In both elements, the “hand” is specifically mentioned as the agent used to help deliver the subject — Aaron and his brethren in B and the king over all the land in B' (21:14; 22:22). These are the only two mentions of the singular noun *hand* used in this way in this chapter.¹⁰ Other key terms and themes that link these two elements include the following: the hard hearts of the people (21:12; 22:22);¹¹ the phrase *preach the word* (21:12, 16; 22:26); and the phrase *Aaron and his brethren*, which is only used once outside of these two elements, in 22:1, in which Mormon returns to writing the account of their doings (21:13; 22:19–21).

C and C' correspondences (Alma 21:18–23 and 22:27–35)

Perhaps the strongest link between these two units is the fact that they are both asides, or digressions, from the main narrative account of Aaron and his brethren. Mormon clearly defines the nature of these sections of text by ending each unit in the same manner: “Now . . . we will return to the account of . . .” (22:1) and “Now I . . . return again to the account of . . .” (22:35). By using such phrasing, the preceding text is clearly indicated as not a part of the main narrative and should be treated differently. The use of two such phrases in the same chapter also provides the reader a clue that the sections of text preceding each of these statements are meant to be compared.

10. There are two other uses of the words *hand* or *hands* in this chapter. In 22:20, the servants “durst not lay their hands on Aaron and his brethren.” In 22:34, the phrase *on every hand* occurs, clearly being used differently from the usage in 21:14 and 22:22.

11. There is one other reference to hardened hearts in this chapter—the Amalekites and the Amulonites “did cause the Lamanites that they should harden their hearts” (21:3). This description foreshadows the reactions to Aaron and his brethren’s preaching in elements B and B’.

In C, Mormon wraps up the narrative of Lamoni's people in the land of Ishmael by describing their positive response to Ammon and Lamoni's preaching after they deliver Aaron and his brethren from prison in Middoni. Mormon does not conclude their story in the previous chapter, so this is a welcome addition for the reader to learn of the fruits of Ammon and Lamoni's labors in the land of Ishmael after Lamoni's conversion to the Lord. In C', Mormon gives a somewhat lengthy description of Lamanite and Nephite geography. Mormon details how the land is divided up between the Lamanites and the Nephites and notes the Nephites' wisdom in hemming in the Lamanites on the south with their possession and defense of the land Bountiful.

These elements are united by the theme of freedom and liberty in worshipping God. In C, King Lamoni grants his people "the liberty of worshipping the Lord their God according to their desires" (21:22). In C', the king over all the land "sent a proclamation throughout all the land amongst all his people which was in all his land" (22:27). The contents of this proclamation are not shared until the next chapter, in 23:1–3, but the main topic of the proclamation can be inferred from the context given before the king sends the proclamation. In 22:26, the king causes Aaron and his brethren to "stand forth in the midst of the multitude and that they should preach the word unto them." The king's proclamation allows Aaron, Ammon, and their brethren to preach the word among all his people without fear of harm coming upon them for doing so. They were to have "free access to their houses and also their temples and their sanctuaries" (23:2).

Both elements include a declaration or proclamation from the king. Lamoni "did also declare unto them . . . that they were a free people, that they were free from the oppressions of the king . . . and he also declared unto them that they might have the liberty of worshipping the Lord their God according to their desires" (21:21–22). In C', "the king sent a proclamation throughout all the land" (22:27), as already noted.

Both elements also highlight the kings' respective lands. These lands are described in similar language in each element. In C, Lamoni reigns "over the people which were in the land of Ishmael and in all the land round about" (21:21). In C', the king sent a proclamation "amongst all his people which was in all his land, which was in all the regions round about" (22:27).

In the appendix, an explanation is given as to why the chapter ends where it does. A second possibility involves the extended parallel structure of this chapter. The fact that there are two well-defined

literary asides in matching elements of a precise extended parallel structure provides a valid structural reason to intentionally end the chapter after 22:35. A third reason why the chapter ends where it does will be given in the analysis of matching elements C and C' of the chiasm below.

Analysis of Alma 23:1–15 in Relation to Alma 21–22

While Alma 21–22 is its own original chapter in the Book of Mormon, analysis of the first fifteen verses of Alma 23 appears to show that they join with Alma 21–22 to form a distinct major literary unit. This leads to a few questions. Why doesn't the original chapter of the Book of Mormon include all of Alma 21:1–23:15 instead of ending with Alma 22:35? Is there strong enough evidence to show that Alma 23:15 could serve as the conclusion to a major literary unit even though it is in the middle of another chapter and not at an explicit breaking point in the text? If Alma 23:15 is indeed the end of a major literary unit, what additional insights can be gleaned by analyzing Alma 21:1–23:15 as a distinct literary unit? The following sections attempt to answer these questions.

Why did the original chapter end with Alma 22:35 instead of Alma 23:15?

The heading before Alma 21 describes what is to follow: “An account of the preaching of Aaron and Muloki and their brethren to the Lamanites.” However, to what block of text does this heading relate? In the 1920 edition of the Book of Mormon, “comprising chapters 21 to 26 inclusive” was added to the end of this heading.¹² This statement was not originally on the plates; rather, it was added by the committee of Apostles that worked on producing this edition.¹³ In the 2013 printing of the Book of Mormon, it was updated to the following: “comprising chapters 21 through 25.”

Alternatively, it is possible that the original heading relates only to present-day Alma 21–22. The two verses that signal the return to the main narrative after brief asides in Alma 22 provide further light on this

12. The heading before Alma 21 can be viewed in the 1920 edition of the Book of Mormon at archive.org/details/bookofmormonacco00bookuoft/page/248/mode/2up.

13. “1920 Book of Mormon, Apostles Revision,” *History of the Scriptures*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (website), churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/about-the-scriptures/history?lang=eng#title21.

issue. Alma 22:1 begins, "Now . . . we will return to the account of Aaron and his other brethren." Alma 22:35 begins, "And now I . . . return again to the account of Ammon, and Aaron, Omner, and Himni, and their brethren." Earlier I mentioned that these verses ended sections of text in the same manner, but a careful reading of them reveals significant differences. Alma 22:1 returns to the account of Aaron and his other brethren which is in harmony with the heading before Alma 21. While Ammon is, of course, one of Aaron's brethren, Ammon's name always appears first when both brothers are listed together. Thus, "Aaron and his other brethren" appears to refer to Aaron, Muloki, and their brethren from the heading. Alma 22:35, on the other hand, also lists Ammon, Omner, and Himni. Apparently, adding all of Aaron's brothers back into the narrative at this point was significant enough to justify a chapter break in the original Book of Mormon. Also, the heading before Alma 21 does not include Ammon, Omner, and Himni, so the heading more suitably fits with only Alma 21–22 instead of chapters 21–25 or chapters 21–26.

Is there strong enough evidence to support Alma 23:15 as the conclusion to a major literary unit?

In two previous articles, analysis was presented showing Alma 17–20¹⁴ and Alma 23:16–27:30¹⁵ to be distinct literary units, both of which could be structured as macro-chiasms. Both units exhibit strong literary framing marking their respective outer boundaries. This leaves the block of text from Alma 21:1–23:15 in between. Does this block of text serve as a major literary unit on its own? Thematically, Alma 17–20 consists of Ammon's teachings to King Lamoni in the land of Ishmael and Alma 23:16–27:30 consists of the history of the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi. Alma 21–22 consists of Aaron's preaching to the Lamanites, but this could be expanded to include the remainder of the preaching of the sons of Mosiah to the Lamanites. Somewhat surprisingly, no active preaching to the Lamanites is mentioned in the narrative after Alma 23:6 through the end of Alma 27. The only other references to preaching in these chapters are looking back to when the sons of Mosiah had preached to their Lamanite brethren (see Alma 24:7, 25:6, and 26:23). The fruits from their preaching are detailed in Alma 23:4–15. The list of converted Lamanite cities, as well as the explicit exclusion

14. Squire, "Literary Structure of Alma 17–20."

15. Squire, "Literary Structure of Alma 23–27."

of Amalekites and Amulonites from this list, brings a sense of finality to the preaching narrative.

An *inclusio* neatly frames Alma 21:1–23:15 together as a distinct literary unit. Only at the beginning and end of this unit are three groups mentioned together whom Aaron and his brethren encountered in Lamanite lands; namely, Lamanites, Amalekites, and Amulonites (21:2; 23:14). The influence of the Amalekites and Amulonites on the Lamanites is also highlighted here and nowhere else within the unit. In 21:3, the Amalekites and Amulonites are described as being “still harder [than the Lamanites]. Therefore they did cause the Lamanites that they should harden their hearts.” In 23:14, the Amalekites and Amulonites are described in similar terms, having a similar influence on the Lamanites. They “did harden their hearts and also the hearts of the Lamanites in that part of the land whithersoever they dwelt.”

What additional insights can be gleaned by analyzing this text as a distinct literary unit?

Unique insights into the text can be obtained through a chiasmic reading of Alma 21:1–23:15 as I will detail in the next section. One intriguing possibility comes from a parallel between Alma 21:5 and 23:14. Alma 21:5 mentions “an Amalekite” that arose to contend with Aaron. Then, at the end of the summary given of those who were converted unto the Lord, the reader learns that “the Amalekites were not converted, save only one” (23:14). This could be just one more point of framing to identify Alma 21:1–23:15 as a literary unit. However, Mormon may have wanted readers to ponder the possible connection between the only two instances of a single Amalekite being mentioned in the text. Perhaps the contentious Amalekite became the one Amalekite convert akin to other unlikely converts in the Book of Mormon such as Alma; Alma, son of Alma; the sons of Mosiah; and Zeezrom, to name a few.

The central units of the macro-chiasm focus on Aaron’s preaching to the king and the king’s conversion, an appropriate climax to the story. The king’s conversion is a huge turning point in the preaching efforts of the sons of Mosiah. The king’s subsequent proclamation allowing them to preach freely among the Lamanites, along with the king’s endorsement of their message, leads to the conversion of thousands of Lamanites in seven cities or lands. The central location of these units within the macro-chiasm mirrors the central location of Ammon’s preaching to King Lamoni and Lamoni’s conversion within

the macro-chiasm in Alma 17–20. There are many significant parallels between the central units of these two respective macro-chiasms that will be delineated in the section "D and D' correspondences (Alma 22:1–16 and 22:17–26): The turning point."

The Eight-Element Chiasm in Alma 21:1–23:15

The unusual *inclusio* and the subtle references to the single Amalekite highlight the possibility of a second striking literary structure that spills over into the subsequent chapter of Alma. This is an eight-element chiasm as shown below:

- A** Aaron preaches to *an Amalekite* in Jerusalem; the Amalekite asks *seven questions*; *a righteous people*; *the Amalekites and Amulonites harden the hearts of the Lamanites* (21:1–11)
- B** Aaron and some of his brethren are *cast into prison*; they are delivered by Lamoni and Ammon; they *preach the word in every assembly they could be admitted*; *many brought to the knowledge of the truth*; *convinced many of traditions of their fathers which were not correct* (21:12–17)
- C** *Literary aside* on Ammon and Lamoni in the land of Ishmael; they return to the land of Ishmael and teach the people; *Lamoni declares unto his people* that they are free and have the liberty to worship God according to their desires; *the land under Lamoni's reign is highlighted* (21:18–23)
- D** Aaron teaches the king the plan of redemption (22:1–16)
- D'** The king responds to Aaron's teaching and is converted unto the Lord (22:17–26)
- C'** *Literary aside* on the geography of Lamanite and Nephite lands; *the king sends a proclamation to his people* concerning the sons of Mosiah and their brethren; *the land under the king's reign is specified* (22:27–35)
- B'** The king decrees that the sons of Mosiah and their brethren *not be cast into prison*; they have *free access to preach to the Lamanites*; the king desires that his people might be *convinced concerning the wicked traditions of their fathers*; *thousands brought to the knowledge of the Lord/truth* (23:1–6)
- A'** *One Amalekite* is converted; *seven Lamanite cities* are converted unto the Lord; *a righteous people*; *the Amalekites and Amulonites harden the hearts of the Lamanites* (23:7–15)

As with the extended parallel structure, a table is also provided below to aid in identifying key correspondences between paired units in this chiasm.

Alma 21:1–11 (A)	Alma 23:7–15 (A')
1. Three groups are mentioned together—the Lamanites, Amalekites, and Amulonites (21:3).	1. Three groups are mentioned together—the Lamanites, Amalekites, and Amulonites (23:14).
2. The Amalekites and Amulonites “did cause the Lamanites that they should harden their hearts” (21:3).	2. The Amalekites and Amulonites “did harden their hearts and also the hearts of the Lamanites” (23:14).
3. Aaron preaches in the “city” of Jerusalem, then goes to the “village” of Ani-Anti, and then departs for the “land” of Middoni (21:4, 11, 12).	3. Lamanite hearts were hardened in the “land,” “villages,” and “cities” in which they dwelt (23:14). These appear in inverted order from their ordering in element A.
4. “An Amalekite” arose and began to contend with Aaron (21:5). This is the only instance of the word <i>Amalekite</i> in the singular in the Book of Mormon.	4. “The Amalekites were not converted, save only one” (23:14).
5. The Amalekite asks Aaron seven questions (21:5–6).	5. Seven Lamanite cities are converted (23:9–12).
Alma 21:12–17 (B)	Alma 23:1–6 (B')
1. Aaron and his brethren “did convince many . . . of the tradition of their fathers, which were not correct” (21:17).	1. The word was to go forth “that his people might be convinced concerning the wicked traditions of their fathers” (23:3).
2. They went forth “preaching the word of God” (21:16).	2. They should go forth “preaching the word of God” (23:1).
3. They preach “in every synagogue . . . or in every assembly . . . where they could be admitted” (21:16).	3. The king sent a decree that the sons of Mosiah and their brethren should have “free access to their houses and also their temples and their sanctuaries” (23:2) and “that the word of God might have no obstruction” (23:3).
4. “They brought many to the knowledge of the truth” (21:17).	4. “As many as were brought to the knowledge of the truth . . . never did fall away” (23:6).
5. Aaron and some of his brethren “were taken and cast into prison” (21:13).	5. The king sent a decree “that they should not lay their hands on them . . . to cast them into prison” (23:2).
Alma 21:18–23 (C)	Alma 22:27–35 (C')
1. This is a literary aside that is clearly bracketed off by the statement, “Now . . . we will return to the account of Aaron and his other brethren” (22:1).	1. This is a literary aside that is clearly delimited by the concluding statement, “And now I . . . return again to the account of Ammon, and Aaron, Omner, and Himni, and their brethren” (22:35).

2. King Lamoni's father "granted unto [Lamoni] that he might reign over the people which were in the land of Ishmael and in all the land round about" (21:21).	2. "The king sent a proclamation throughout all the land amongst all his people which was in all his land, which was in all the regions round about" (22:27).
3. The theme of "the liberty of worshipping the Lord their God according to their desires" is explicitly highlighted (21:22).	3. The theme of freedom in worshipping God is implied by the king's action to send "a proclamation throughout all the land amongst all his people" (22:27). The proclamation allows the sons of Mosiah to freely preach the word to the people without harm and "that the word of God might have no obstruction" (23:3).
Alma 22:1–16 (D)	Alma 22:17–26 (D')
1. Aaron "bowed himself before the king" (22:2) and twice instructs the king to "bow down before God" (22:16).	1. The king "did bow down before the Lord . . . yea, even he did prostrate himself upon the earth" (22:17).
2. The king asks about what Ammon said — "If ye will repent, ye shall be saved, and if ye will not repent, ye shall be cast off at the last day" (22:6). Aaron also asks the king to "repent of all [his] sins" (22:16).	2. The king prays to God and declares that he "will give away all [his] sins to . . . be saved at the last day" (22:18).
3. Aaron asks if the king believes there is a God and then testifies to the king that "there is a God" (22:7–8).	3. The king cries unto God, "O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God" (22:18).
4. Aaron teaches the king that Christ "breaketh the bands of death, that the grave shall have no victory" (22:14).	4. The king prays that he could be "raised from the dead" (22:18).
5. The king insists that Aaron and his brethren "administer unto" him (22:3).	5. The king began to "minister unto [his whole household]. And he did minister unto them" (22:23). The king also stood before the multitude and "administered unto them" (22:25).
6. The king had Aaron and his brethren arise after they bowed before him (22:3).	6. Aaron "raised the king from the earth" (22:22).
7. The king grants unto Aaron and his brethren their lives (22:3).	7. The queen commands her servants to slay Aaron and his brethren (22:19).
8. The king mentions Ammon's generosity and the greatness of his words (22:3).	8. The servants of the queen declare that one of Aaron or his brethren is mightier than them all (22:20).

Correlation between Matching Elements

As previously noted, the chiasm in Alma 21:1–23:15 is one of three large chiasmic structures used to highlight the three main story arcs within Alma 17–27. The chiasm tells the story of Aaron’s preaching to the Lamanites and summarizes the fruits of the labors of the sons of Mosiah and their brethren from their fourteen-year journey among the Lamanites.

The chapter breaks that Mormon establishes throughout the Book of Mormon are a great tool in helping the reader consider and analyze portions of the text as individual literary units. There is also strong evidence that Mormon formed other literary structures that span multiple chapters and even entire books.¹⁶ There are sound reasons for Mormon to have purposefully structured this portion of the text as a chiasm, as discussed in the following sections.

A and A' correspondences (Alma 21:1–11 and 23:7–15)

The outer framing for this chiasm is evident on multiple fronts, consisting of several parallels and shared keywords between these two elements. An *inclusio* frames Alma 21:1–23:15 together as a distinct literary unit. Only at the beginning and end of this unit (in these two elements) are three groups mentioned together whom Aaron and his brethren encountered in Lamanite lands—Lamanites, Amalekites, and Amulonites (21:2; 23:14). The influence of the Amalekites and Amulonites on the Lamanites is also highlighted here and nowhere else within the unit. In 21:3, the Amalekites and Amulonites are described as being “still harder [than the Lamanites]. Therefore they did cause the Lamanites that they should harden their hearts.” In 23:14, the Amalekites and Amulonites again are described in similar terms and having similar effect upon the Lamanites. They “did harden their hearts and also the hearts of the Lamanites in that part of the land whithersoever they dwelt.”

16. See, for example, John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 10, no. 1 (1969): 69–84, byustudies.byu.edu/article/chiasmus-in-the-book-of-mormon; Grant Hardy, “Nurturing Faith: Literary Patterning in the Book of Alma,” in *Give Ear to My Words: Text and context of Alma 36–42*, ed. Kerry Hull, Nicholas J. Frederick, and Hank R. Smith (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2019), 369–88, rsc.byu.edu/give-ear-my-words/nurturing-faith; Joseph M. Spencer, “The Structure of the Book of Alma,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 26, no. 1 (2017): 273–83, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1609&context=jbms.

There is also a link between the different locations where Aaron preaches. The first three places where Aaron preaches are the *city* of Jerusalem, the *village* of Ani-Anti, and the *land* of Middoni. These three specific types of areas — land, villages, and cities — appear in inverted order in 23:14.

In A, Aaron began his preaching in the city of Jerusalem wherein many Amalekites and Lamanites dwelt, but they would not hear his words (21:4, 10). At the conclusion of Aaron and his brethren's preaching to the Lamanites, it is noted that lands in which both Amalekites and Lamanites dwelt were not converted unto the Lord (23:14).

Another correspondence between these two elements is the mention of a single Amalekite in each. In A, "an Amalekite" contends with Aaron (21:5). This is the only instance of the word *Amalekite* in the singular in the Book of Mormon. In A', the summary in 23:14 informs readers that "the Amalekites were not converted, save only one." This is not a definitive declaration that the Amalekite who first confronted Aaron in Jerusalem later became the sole Amalekite convert, but the chiasmic structure invites us to consider the possibility, or at the very least, compare these two Amalekites.

B and B' correspondences (Alma 21:12–17 and 23:1–6)

Elements B and B' share the theme of preaching to the people throughout the land. In B, Aaron and his brethren go forth "preaching the word of God in every synagogue of the Amalekites, or in every assembly of the Lamanites where they could be admitted" (21:16). In B', the king's proclamation allows Aaron and his brethren to go forth "preaching the word of God, in whatsoever place they should be in, in any part of their land . . . that they should have free access to their houses and also their temples and their sanctuaries" (23:1–2). The phrase *preaching the word of God* is unique to these two verses in this section of the text (21:16; 23:1) and is found in only one other verse in the Book of Mormon (Mosiah 27:32).

The traditions of the Lamanites' fathers are only referenced in these two elements, and people are convinced that these traditions are wrong in both cases. In B, Aaron and his brethren did "convince many . . . of the tradition of their fathers, which were not correct" (21:17). In B', the preaching of the word was to go forth throughout all the land, that the "people might be convinced concerning the wicked traditions of their fathers" (23:3). Nowhere else in this chiasm is the word *convinced* used other than in these two elements. In both elements,

many people are brought to the knowledge of the truth or to the Lord. In B, Aaron and his brethren “brought many to the knowledge of the truth” (21:17). In B', “thousands were brought to the knowledge of the Lord . . . As many as were brought to the knowledge of the truth . . . and were converted unto the Lord never did fall away” (23:5–6). The phrase *brought to the knowledge of* is unique to these two elements within the chiasm.

In B, Aaron and some of his brethren are taken and cast into prison and suffered many things there (21:13–14). Some of these sufferings are described in Alma 20:29–30: “Their skins were worn exceedingly because of being bound with strong cords . . . [The people] had cast them out and had smote them.” In B', the king decrees specifically that the sons of Mosiah and their brethren should not be bound, nor cast into prison, nor smitten, nor cast out of their synagogues (23:2).

C and C' correspondences (Alma 21:18–23 and 22:27–35)

Elements C and C' are matching elements in the chiasm just as they are matching elements in the extended parallel structure discussed earlier. The parallels identified between these elements can be found in the earlier section “C and C' correspondences (Alma 21:18–23 and 22:27–35).” However, the juxtaposition of these two elements within the chiasm provides another reason for the original chapter of Alma 21–22 ending where it does. Again, these two literary asides serve as parallels to each other within the chiasm just as they do in the extended parallel. In the chiasm, however, they also serve as a precise and effective frame of the central elements of the chiasm (D and D').

D and D' correspondences (Alma 22:1–16 and 22:17–26): The turning point

The central elements of this chiasm, D and D', highlight the turning point of the narrative of this second half of the Lamanite conversion story. The king over all the land is taught the plan of redemption, believes what he is taught, responds positively to this teaching by crying unto the Lord, and is converted. Both the teaching of the plan of redemption and a person's response to this teaching are critical. As King Benjamin taught, “And now, if you believe all these things, see that ye do them” (Mosiah 4:10).

The theme of bowing is shared by these two central elements. Aaron “bowed himself before the king” (22:2) and twice tells the king to “bow down before God” (22:16). In D', “the king did bow down before

the Lord upon his knees — yea, even he did prostrate himself upon the earth" (22:17). In D, the king remembers Ammon's words exhorting him to repent. Ammon said, "if ye will repent, ye shall be saved; and if ye will not repent, ye shall be cast off at the last day" (22:6). In D', the king prays using shared language, even that he might "be saved at the last day" (22:18). The king's willingness to give away everything is common to both elements. In D, the king declares, "I will give up all that I possess . . . that I may receive this great joy" (22:15). In D', the king prays to God, "I will give away all my sins to know thee" (22:18). In D, Aaron testifies to the king, "Behold, assuredly as thou livest, O king, there is a God" (22:8). In D', the king begins his prayer to God by recalling Aaron's testimony: "O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God" (22:18).

The resurrection of the dead is another shared theme, although neither element uses the actual word *resurrection*. In D, Aaron teaches that Christ "breaketh the bands of death, that the grave shall have no victory and that the sting of death should be swallowed up in the hopes of glory" (22:14). In D', the king prays that he "may be raised from the dead" (22:18). There is also a verbal link with the word *administered*. In D, the king insists that Aaron and his brethren should "administer" unto him (22:3). In D', the king "administered" unto his own people (22:25). These are the only two instances of the word *administer* in this chapter.¹⁷

The central elements of this chiasm closely parallel the central elements of the chiasm in Alma 17–20.¹⁸ Lamoni's father, the king over all the land, is taught the plan of redemption in the first central element just as Lamoni is taught the plan in the first central element of the chiasm in Alma 17–20. The second central element of each chiasm are comprised of the respective king's response to this teaching.

The parallels between these matching central elements are plentiful and powerful. Parallels between the first pair of central elements of these two chiasms include the following:¹⁹

17. There are two instances of the word *ministered* in this chapter, both occurring in element D'. It is twice mentioned that the king "ministered" unto his household in Alma 22:23.

18. Squire, "Literary Structure of Alma 17–20," 10–12.

19. There are many other parallels between Alma 18:22–35 and 22:1–16 not listed above. The heart of Aaron's teaching to the king is found in Alma 22:12–14 which closely parallels Alma 18:36–39. However, Alma 22:1–11, 15–16 is also included in the central element of this chiasm, whereas Alma 18:22–35 is in a separate element in the chiasm for Alma 17–20. These additional parallels

- Both kings are taught about “the creation of Adam” (18:36; 22:12).
- Ammon and Aaron both taught the kings using the “scriptures,” mentioned twice in each element (18:36, 38; 22:12–13).
- Both kings are taught about “the fall of man” (18:36; 22:13).
- Both kings are taught about “the plan of redemption which was prepared from the foundation of the world” (18:39; 22:13).
- Both kings are taught specifically about “Christ” (18:39; 22:13–14).

Parallels between the second pair of central elements of these two chiasms include the following:²⁰

- Both kings “cry” unto the Lord (18:41; 22:17).
- After crying unto the Lord, each king falls to the earth “as if he were dead” (18:42; 22:18).
- The servants of both kings witness what happens and inform their respective queens (18:43; 22:19).

Analyzing the Chiasticity of the Proposed Chiasm

The same six criteria identified by Neal Rappleye to evaluate proposed chiasms which were used for the chiasm in Alma 17–20 are used here.²¹ These six criteria are:

- Chiasms should conform to natural literary boundaries.
- A climax or turning point should be found at the center.
- Chiasms should display a relatively well-balanced symmetry.

include the following: each king is asked, “Believest thou that there is a God?” (18:24; 22:7); God is said to be the Great Spirit that each king initially believed in (18:26–28; 22:9–10); and each king is asked if they believe that God “created all things in heaven and in earth” (18:28; 22:10).

20. There are many other parallels between Alma 19:2–36 and 22:17–26 not listed here. Alma 19:2–36 consists of three additional elements in the chiasm for Alma 17–20, whereas Alma 22:17–26 is a single condensed element. These additional parallels include the following: Abish/the queen caused the people to gather at the king’s house (19:17; 22:21); there is an exceedingly sharp contention in 19:28 while a great contention is feared to occur in 22:22; the queen/Aaron takes the king’s hand and he arises (19:30; 22:22); and each king teaches or ministers to his respective people, resulting in people converting unto the Lord (19:31; 22:23).

21. Neal Rappleye, “Chiasmus Criteria in Review,” *Chiasmus: The State of the Art*, eds. John W. Welch and Donald W. Parry (Provo, UT: BYU Studies and Book of Mormon Central, 2020): 296, 301–2, scripturecentral.org/archive/books/book-chapter/chiasmus-criteria-review.

- The structure of chiasms should be based on major key-words, phrases, or themes.
- Chiasms should manifest little, if any, extraneous repetition or divergent materials.
- Chiastic order should typically not compete with other strong literary forms.

In the following sections, the apparent strengths of the macro chiasm in Alma 21:1–23:15 will be examined, followed by a study of its potential weaknesses.

Strengths of the proposed chiasm

The macro chiasm in Alma 21:1–23:15 effectively meets the middle four criteria of the six listed by Rappleye. Regarding the second criterion, the chiasm has a significant turning point, or hinge point, at its center—the king is taught the plan of redemption by Aaron, and he responds positively to this preaching by crying unto the Lord for salvation. The central elements of this chiasm share numerous parallels with the central elements of the chiasm in Alma 17–20 as noted above, further strengthening the case that this chiasm is an intentional structure. Concerning the third criterion, the chiasm exhibits good balance overall. There are seventy-three total verses within it; twenty-three before the first of the two central elements and twenty-four after the second central element. The central elements themselves consist of sixteen and ten verses, respectively. The chiasm also effectively meets the fourth criterion as its structure is based on keywords, phrases, and themes found within Alma 21:1–23:15. Throughout the analysis on the matching elements above, extraneous repetition has been identified and considered. However, most of the keywords and phrases included in the chiasm are unique to their matching elements, thus satisfying the fifth criterion.

Potential weaknesses of the proposed chiasm

There are two potential weaknesses relative to the six criteria noted by Rappleye. These weaknesses are relative to the first and sixth criteria. This chiasm initially appears not to meet the first criterion regarding natural literary boundaries because it includes fifteen verses from Alma 23, part of a different original chapter in the Book of Mormon. Since the chiasm uses only a portion of a chapter, the boundaries must be identifiable in a different manner. Are these proposed boundaries

sufficiently well-defined to overcome this apparent weakness in meeting this criterion?

Natural literary boundaries may present themselves in a text in ways other than by a chapter break. First, strong framing may be exhibited via keyword links or other parallels between matching elements. Such framing can effectively define the parameters of a text. In the above analysis of corresponding elements in the chiasm, framing is demonstrated in multiple instances by matching keywords and parallels in elements A and A'. An example of this is the somewhat odd mention of a single unnamed Amalekite converting to the Lord in 23:14 which is paired with a single unnamed Amalekite who questions Aaron in 21:5–6. Phrases or details that stand out as being uncommon or especially noteworthy often end up playing a structural role in the text, much like the mention of one Amalekite does here. Other unique keywords and parallels framing the outer boundaries of the chiasm are referenced in the section “A and A' correspondences (Alma 21:1–11 and 23:7–15).”

A second way that the literary boundaries of a text may be revealed comes simply by analyzing the context of the narrative. In this proposed chiasm, there is a clear ending to the story arc in 23:7–15. Mormon lists the seven cities or lands in which Lamanites were all converted unto the Lord, thus effectively wrapping up the preaching narrative of the sons of Mosiah to the Lamanites. The remainder of the text through Alma 27 does not involve any direct preaching efforts of the sons of Mosiah but is rather a history of events of the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi.

There is one additional factor to consider regarding the boundaries of this chiasm—it is sandwiched tightly between two other macro-chiasms. The starting point of this chiasm is dictated by the ending of the previous chiasm for Alma 17–20. The endpoint of this chiasm is dictated by the beginning of the subsequent chiasm for 23:16–27:30. These statements operate on the assumption that the other two chiasms are properly framed. The conclusion to the chiasm in Alma 17–20 comes at the conclusion of Alma 20. This is evident from previous analysis done on that chiasm. Without going into too much detail here, the subsequent chiasm in 23:16–27:30 is also distinctly framed by keywords and thematically by the composition of a complete story arc. The king and those converted to the Lord distinguish themselves with a new name, being called the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi (23:16–17). Once this people arrive in Zarahemla and are given the land of Jershon, they are called the people of Ammon and are “distinguished

by that name ever after" (27:26). The word *distinguished* is used twice in 23:16 and then twice more in 27:26–27, but nowhere else within these chapters, forming an effective frame for this portion of the text. The entire narrative of the people while they are called the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi is thus contained within the verses of the chiasm.

The second potential weakness is the question of whether the chiasm meets Rappleye's sixth criterion. As detailed in this paper, there are two literary structures that use Alma 21–22. However, the order of chiastic elements does not compete with or disrupt the order of elements in the extended parallel structure. Rather, the two structures complement each other well. For example, the first major literary unit in 21:1–11 parallels the fourth major literary unit in 22:1–16 in the extended parallel structure, whereas in the chiasm, the first major literary unit in 21:1–11 instead parallels the last literary unit in 23:7–15. Despite this dual function of the first literary unit in 21:1–11, meaningful parallels are masterfully created corresponding to each respective paired unit which bring added meaning to the text.

The Possibility of Overlapping Literary Structures

The critical issue of overlapping literary structures needs to be addressed in further detail. As stated above, the sixth criterion identified by Rappleye to evaluate the strength of proposed chiasms states that chiastic forms should not typically compete with other strong literary forms. The two structures proposed in this article may constitute an exception. The extended parallel structure is found within one original chapter in the Book of Mormon consisting of Alma 21–22. With such clear boundaries, the chiasm for Alma 21:1–23:15 carries the burden of showing that it, too, is a valid and likely intended literary structure.

Do two proposed literary structures covering portions of the same text merely prove that neither of the two should be considered valid? It is up to readers to decide if they prefer one structure over another, agree with both structures, or conclude that neither structure is acceptable based on the evidence presented.

It is important to note that the same literary units delimited in Alma 21–22 are used in each structure. If the structures had different literary units, there would need to be proper justification for any adjustments. Delimiting literary units is the first step of literary analysis. The parameters of a literary unit normally should not change based on the type of structure identified. The question then becomes the following: Can

a literary unit be a part of two different intended literary structures? If readers concludes that both structures are valid and intended by the author, the answer must be yes. As mentioned above, in this article it is proposed that the literary unit consisting of Alma 21:1–11 parallels the literary unit of Alma 22:1–16 in the extended parallel structure. This same unit, Alma 21:1–11, is also considered parallel to Alma 23:7–15 in the chiasmic structure. Can this first unit have such a dual function?

There are many examples of structures in the Old Testament that serve as exceptions to this general rule. David Dorsey, a non-LDS Old Testament scholar, includes many such examples from the books of Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.²² For example, Dorsey has Genesis 1:1–6:8 consisting of a seven-element chiasmic structure.²³ He then shows that Genesis 1–11 can be arranged as an extended parallel structure with seven parallel paired elements.²⁴ The seven elements from the chiasm in Genesis 1:1–6:8 are the same seven elements that then have parallel elements in Genesis 6:9–11:26. Hence, the first element of the chiasm spanning Genesis 1:1–2:3 matches both Genesis 6:5–8 in the chiasmic structure and Genesis 6:9–9:19 in the extended parallel structure.

Another example of overlapping structures, specifically involving macro-structures, comes from analyzing the structure of the book of Alma. Joseph Spencer divides the book of Alma into four quarters.²⁵ The first quarter (Alma 1–16) parallels the third quarter (Alma 30–44), and the second quarter (Alma 17–29) parallels the fourth quarter (Alma 45–63). Drilling down further into this proposed structure, he pairs the account of Nehor and the Amalekites in Alma 1–3 with the account of Koriher and the Zoramites in Alma 30–35.

Grant Hardy provides an alternative structure for Alma 1–44 in which these chapters form a chiasm consisting of seven elements.²⁶ In this structure, the account of Nehor and the Amalekites in Alma 1–3 parallels the Zoramite war in Alma 43–44.

Spencer and Hardy both provide substantial evidence for their respective structures. The two structures feature some of the same paired elements, such as Alma's preaching journeys in Alma 4–16

22. David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis–Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 48–71, 90–95, 158–64, archive.org/details/literarystructur0000dors.

23. Dorsey, *Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, 51.

24. Dorsey, *Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, 55.

25. Spencer, "Structure of the Book of Alma," 282–83.

26. Hardy, "Nurturing Faith," 370.

paralleling Alma's testimony to his sons in Alma 36–42. Other elements from the two structures are paired with different elements such as the example provided above. If both structures were intended by Mormon, then some elements in macro-structures can indeed function as parallels with multiple elements.

Paired elements in overlapping structures carry the burden of exhibiting significant distinct parallels in multiple structures. Each proposed structure must undergo the same analysis and evaluation and should stand on its own merit. It is possible that Mormon could have given the original chapter its own unique structure while also wanting to highlight this second major division of the account of the sons of Mosiah in a similar structure to the proposed macro-chiasms in Alma 17–20²⁷ and Alma 23:16–27:30.²⁸ If so, his skill as an author and redactor are even more impressive and noteworthy.

Conclusions

Many insights have been identified throughout this article that come from evaluating two possible literary structures from Alma 21:1–23:15. In summary, here are the main takeaways from each structure.

Additional meaning derived from the extended parallel structure

The six major literary units of Alma 21–22 can be clearly delimited and exhibit an extended parallel structure in the form of A-B-C-A'-B'-C'. This structure helps draw out additional meaning in the text by inviting the reader to closely compare the parallel units. Much like the structure in Alma 17–20, this chapter's underlying structure appears to be deliberately and thoughtfully crafted by Mormon. Aaron and his brethren's preaching in the land of Nephi comprises the second half of the Lamanite conversion story. It serves as a worthy complement to Ammon's preaching in the land of Ishmael which comprises the first half of the Lamanite conversion story.

The comparisons between elements A and A' in the extended parallel structure lead to many compelling and insightful questions about the effectiveness of those who teach the plan of redemption and how people become converted to the Lord. Aaron preaches the word of God in both episodes. In each, he uses the scriptures to teach concerning the death, suffering, Atonement, and Resurrection

27. Squire, "Literary Structure of Alma 17–20," 87–136.

28. Squire, "Literary Structure of Alma 23–27," 1–24.

of Christ. The messages he shares with the people are the same, and yet the outcomes from these two teaching occasions could not be any more different. Aaron asks both the Amalekite and the king if they believe in what he is teaching (21:7; 22:7, 10). The Amalekite does not believe Aaron's teaching, whereas the king believes Aaron's words. The king was in a better position to accept the word after his earlier dramatic experience with Ammon (20:8–27). Aaron departs the city of Jerusalem because the people there would not even hear his words, whereas the king and eventually all the people in the city of Nephi are converted unto the Lord (21:11; 23:11).

The structure also highlights what appears to be two dissimilar literary asides in 21:18–23 and 22:27–35 as matching elements. The purpose behind the second aside becomes clearer when it is compared to the first one. In the first aside, the land specifically under Lamoni's reign is highlighted on two different occasions (21:21, 22). In the second aside, "The king sent a proclamation throughout all the land amongst all his people" (22:27). While what follows this statement proves to be invaluable to readers' understanding of Nephite and Lamanite geography in the Book of Mormon, such geographical knowledge does not appear to be the primary purpose of this section of the text. In parallel with the first aside, the lands under the king's reign in the land of Nephi are featured—the lands in which the king sent his proclamation, the lands in which his people dwelt. Without doing careful structural analysis of the text, this insight could be missed.

Additional meaning derived from the chiasmic structure

The paramount event from Alma 21–22 is the preaching of the gospel to, and the subsequent conversion of, the king over all the land in Alma 22:1–26. This account, consisting of two literary units, is nicely framed between the two literary asides mentioned above and constitutes the center of the chiasm. These two literary units parallel the two central literary units of the chiasm identified in Alma 17–20. Each center constitutes the turning point in its respective narrative. The shared keywords, phrases, and actions in these two conversion stories of the two kings further solidifies the significance of these events and the impact they had on Nephite and Lamanite history for hundreds of years. These two central episodes both concern a king of the Lamanites who is taught about the Creation, the Fall, Christ, and the plan of redemption, which was prepared from the foundation of the world (18:36–39; 22:12–14). Each king is taught by one of the sons

of Mosiah expounding unto him the scriptures, and each respective king is called to respond to the Savior (18:36–40; 22:12–16). Both kings respond positively to this call by crying unto the Lord (18:41; 22:17). They both fall to the earth as if they were dead (18:42; 22:18). Both are eventually raised from the earth, teach the gospel to those around them, and many are converted unto the Lord (19:12, 30–31; 22:22–23).

The kings' responses to the preaching of the sons of Mosiah by crying unto the Lord for mercy is a prominent theme that shows up in significant structural positions elsewhere in the Book of Mormon. For example, a cry for mercy is duly highlighted at the center of the macro-chiasm in Alma 36.²⁹ Alma "cried within [his] heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me" (Alma 36:18). This theme also figures prominently in another possible macro-chiasm for Alma 1–4 in which Alma is fighting with Amlici and cries out, "O Lord, have mercy and spare my life" (Alma 2:30). This becomes a turning point in the Nephites' battle with the Amalekites and Lamanites in these chapters.

The reader will almost certainly have an increased appreciation for Mormon's literary genius after identifying and studying these multiple interwoven structures. It is evident that Mormon carefully and deliberately structured both chapters and narrative episodes to add greater depth and meaning to the text.

Appendix: Identifying Individual Units in Alma 21–22

There are six major literary units for Alma 21–22. Delimiting these units is quite straightforward. After first paying particular attention to the chapter breaks in the text, this process of delimiting the literary units the second step in the methodology used to identify literary structures in this chapter.³⁰ The third and final step is to analyze these major literary units for patterns, parallels, and other links. That step is completed in the main body of this paper, in the sections "The Extended Parallel Structure (A-B-C-A'-B'-C' Pattern) in Alma 21–22" and "The Eight-Element Chiasm in Alma 21:1–23:15."

The following sections provide details as to how the six major literary units are identified.

29. John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, "Chiasmus in Alma 36," in *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), chart 132, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1019&context=mi.

30. Squire, "Literary Structure of Alma 17–20," 3–6.

Unit A (Alma 21:1–11)

The first unit of this chapter begins with verse 1 after the heading marks a clear shift in the narrative, transitioning from Ammon's preaching in the land of Ishmael to Aaron, Muloki, and their brethren's preaching to the Lamanites. The beginning of the unit mentions the dynamics found in the Lamanite city of Jerusalem. This city is inhabited by Lamanites, Amalekites, and Amulonites. The Amalekites and Amulonites are said to have a strong negative influence on the Lamanites which hints at the response Aaron is likely to receive in their shared lands. Aaron arrives in the city of Jerusalem to preach. The entire episode of Aaron's preaching in Jerusalem is contained in this first unit, ending with verse 11, "when [Aaron] saw that they would not hear his words, he departed out of the synagogue" and went to a village called Ani-Anti to preach.

In addition to this shift in location, there is a shift in characters in verse 11 as Aaron finds Muloki, Ammah, and some of his brethren preaching the word in Ani-Anti. Such shifts are generally good indicators of the beginning of a new literary unit. However, in this case, there are only two sentences concerning the village of Ani-Anti before the group travels to the land of Middoni in verse 12. The setting for subsequent verses is clearly the land of Middoni, the land in which Aaron and some of his brethren are cast into prison and are afterwards delivered by Ammon and Lamoni. The mention of the village of Ani-Anti thus functions mainly to bring Muloki and Ammah together with Aaron since the reader is already told in Alma 20:2 that these three individuals were in prison together in Middoni. The narrative then quickly moves on to what happens in the land of Middoni. As such, verse 11 remains a part of the current unit.

The theme of this unit is Aaron's initial unsuccessful missionary efforts among the Lamanites. He goes to the city of Jerusalem and first begins preaching to the Amalekites in their synagogues. One Amalekite contend with Aaron. This unnamed Amalekite asks Aaron seven questions in rapid succession. Aaron opens the scriptures unto him and the other people there and preaches about Christ's coming, death, sufferings, Atonement, and Resurrection. The people are angry with Aaron and mock him, so he leaves the synagogue and the city. Aaron next goes to Ani-Anti where he finds Muloki, Ammah, and others. The people in this village also do not believe in their preaching. Instead, the people there contend with Aaron and his brethren about the word.

Unit B (Alma 21:12–17)

The second unit begins in verse 12 with a shift in location as Aaron and his brethren go to the land of Middoni. Few there believe in what they are taught, and the people cast Aaron and some of his brethren into prison (vv. 12–13). They suffer many things and are then delivered by Lamoni and Ammon as recounted in the preceding chapter (Alma 20:28). These brethren again go forth to preach the word of God wherever they can be admitted. This unit ends with a summary of the first taste of success Aaron and his brethren experience. There is a clear shift in characters and location in verse 18 to mark the beginning of the next unit.

Unit C (Alma 21:18–23)

This unit begins with Ammon and Lamoni returning to the land of Ishmael after they delivered Aaron and his brethren from prison in Middoni. This unit is a narrative summary of the further work that Ammon and Lamoni conduct in the land of Ishmael. Synagogues are built. Lamoni grants his people liberty to worship God according to their desires. Ammon and Lamoni continue to teach the people things pertaining to righteousness.

This unit ends with a brief description of King Lamoni's people (v. 23). They give heed to Ammon's word and "were zealous for keeping the commandments of God." Another clear indication that this marks the end of this unit comes in the subsequent verse in 22:1: "Now as Ammon was thus teaching the people of Lamoni continually, we will return to the account of Aaron and his other brethren." The nature of this unit is made clearer by this verse. The preceding six verses which comprise the unit function as a literary aside, or digression, from the main narrative of the chapter. Mormon knows he has drifted somewhat from the main topic and overtly returns to the account of Aaron and his brethren's preaching to the Lamanites.

Unit A' (Alma 22:1–16)

This unit begins in 22:1 as Mormon returns to the account of Aaron and his brethren. This unit is linked with the previous unit by Mormon repeating the fact that Ammon was teaching the people of King Lamoni, but he does so using slightly different wording. Instead of preaching and exhorting Lamoni's people daily (21:23), Mormon uses the word *continually* here to describe Ammon's teaching.

Aaron and his brethren are led by the Spirit to the land of Nephi,

even to the house of the king over all the land, Lamoni's father. Aaron tells the king they are the brethren of Ammon whom he delivered out of prison. He asks the king to spare their lives and allow them to be his servants. The king does not suffer them to become his servants. Instead, he asks them to teach him about the Spirit of the Lord and the words of Ammon that had been troubling his mind. Aaron proceeds to teach the king the plan of redemption. The king asks what he can do to have eternal life. Aaron tells him that he must bow down before God, repent of all his sins, and call on God's name in faith, believing that he shall receive, and then he would receive the hope he desires. Aaron's dialog with the king concludes in verse 16, bringing an end to this literary unit.

Unit B' (Alma 22:17–26)

This unit consists of a single scene involving the king's response to Aaron's preaching. He cries unto the Lord for forgiveness and salvation, falls to the earth as if he were dead, and is then raised from the earth by Aaron after a time. This scene also includes the queen and her servants, the king's servants, and a multitude of people who gather at the king's palace. Each of these parties responds to Aaron and his brethren. The king ends up ministering to all of them. This scene shares many parallels with the episode of Lamoni's conversion to the Lord in Alma 18–19, but in a condensed form.

This scene, and thus this literary unit, ends in verse 26 with the king causing Aaron and his brethren to stand forth to preach the word unto the multitude that had gathered.

Unit C' (Alma 22:27–35)

There is a clear shift in time and setting in verse 27. The unit begins with the statement that "the king sent a proclamation throughout all the land" (22:27). We do not learn the contents of this proclamation until the next chapter (23:1–3). In between, Mormon gives another aside which details the geography of the land in greater depth than we are given in any other place in the Book of Mormon. John Sorenson stated the following:

The nearest thing to a systematic explanation of Mormon's geographical picture is given in Alma 22:27–34. In the course of relating an incident involving Nephite missionaries and the great king over the Lamanites, Mormon inserted a 570-word aside that summarized major features of the land

southward. He must have considered that treatment full and clear enough for his purposes, because he never returned to the topic.³¹

This begs the question, though: Why did Mormon insert this geographical information at this point in his account? John Welch provides a great explanation:

While people studying the geography of the lands of the Book of Mormon rightly see this geographical aside as the best roadmap we have been given for the lands around Zarahemla, it is clear that its purpose here is to explain just one thing, namely the extent of the territory covered by the royal edict of Lamoni's father, who controlled only "the land of Nephi and the wilderness round about" (22:34).³²

To keep this geographical information in proper context, Mormon first mentions the king's land and proceeds to define the boundaries of his territory. Like the aside in unit C, the end of this unit is delimited by Mormon's statement that he is returning to the main narrative, "the account of Ammon, and Aaron, Omner, and Himni, and their brethren" (22:35). There is then a section break after this verse, signifying the beginning of a new chapter.

The phrase Mormon uses at the end of this unit to return to the account at hand is not identical to the one in Alma 22:1. In verse 1, Mormon returns to "the account of Aaron and his other brethren," which is consistent with the heading before Alma 21. This heading states that what follows is "an account of the preaching of Aaron and Muloki and their brethren to the Lamanites." In 22:35, Mormon writes that he is returning "to the account of Ammon, and Aaron, Omner, and Himni, and their brethren." Ammon, Omner, and Himni are reintroduced to the account so Mormon can wrap up the narrative of all the sons of Mosiah's fourteen-year journey among the Lamanites. This shift in characters is another potential motivating factor behind Mormon's decision to begin a new chapter. There are also structural considerations that strengthen the argument for the chapter break coming at

31. John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Map* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 9, archive bookofmormoncentral.org/sites/default/files/archive-files/pdf/sorenson/2024-04-18/john_l_sorenson_mormons_map_2000.pdf.

32. John W. Welch, "Alma 23–29" in *John W. Welch Notes: Verse by Verse Thoughts on The Book of Mormon* (Springville, UT: Book of Mormon Central, 2020), 640, archive bookofmormoncentral.org/content/alma-23-29.

this point. These structural considerations are detailed above in the comparisons between matching elements for both the extended parallel and chiasmic structures.



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Derek Squire was born and raised in Orem, Utah. President Ezra Taft Benson's call to make the study of the Book of Mormon a lifetime pursuit changed his life when Derek was a teenager. Derek graduated from BYU with a master's degree in accounting and has been a CPA, nursing home administrator, and business owner of a home health and hospice company with his brother. He is currently a real estate investor. He and his brother, Ryan, are the authors of the book *A Christlike Heart: A Study of the Heart in the Book of Mormon* (CFI, 2019). Derek served a mission in the Russia Rostov-na-Donu Mission. He and his wife, Elizabeth, are the parents of three girls and a boy. They currently reside in Bountiful, Utah.

“His Secret is with the Righteous”: Instructional Wisdom in the Book of Mormon

Alyson Skabelund Von Feldt

Abstract: *This study argues that the Book of Mormon both adopts and develops the instructional wisdom tradition found in Proverbs 1–9 and other pre-exilic Near-Eastern texts. After outlining the structure, rhetoric, and themes of Hebrew instructional wisdom, it tracks those features through major Book of Mormon discourses. Particular attention is given to the personification of Wisdom, the tree-of-life and great-whore polarity, temple motifs, and the democratic invitation to pursue the “mysteries of God” through personal revelation. The analysis suggests that Book of Mormon authors preserve a strand of Israelite temple wisdom largely suppressed in the post-exilic biblical record. By reading restored scripture back into its ancient literary context, the paper offers fresh insight into both corpora: Proverbs’ “enigmas” become transparently eschatological, while the Book of Mormon’s doctrinal core takes on new depth as a deliberate wisdom inheritance. The study concludes that recognizing this shared sapiential framework clarifies the Book of Mormon’s purpose as a covenant guide and underscores its claim to recover “plain and most precious” truths lost from the biblical canon.*

[Editor’s Note: *This article originally appeared as Alyson Skabelund Von Feldt, “His Secret Is with the Righteous: Instructional Wisdom in the Book of Mormon,” FARMS Occasional Papers 5 (2007): 49–83. As this important paper is not currently available online, it is reprinted here for the benefit of our readers. It has been updated and edited by the author.]*

While studying the topic of personal revelation a number of years ago, a furious cross-referencing of Doctrine and Covenants 76 landed me in the Old Testament book of Proverbs, and I stopped to explore the territory. I turned to chapter 1 and read straight through until the wonder wore off somewhere after chapter 8. I first understood the dominant message to be an impassioned invitation to search for the knowledge of the mysteries of God, to seek personal revelation. But a note fell out of my Bible that I must have made some time before when preparing a Gospel Doctrine lesson or studying for a BYU religion test. It characterized Proverbs as “a collection of folk sayings; hard to see as scripture.” This did not seem an apt description of the passages I had just breathlessly encountered.

Over the years, I have learned that my reading of Proverbs 1–9 that night was unusual. Though scholars recognize that the author beseeches the reader to find wisdom, they almost always take this to be practical knowledge about how to live life richly, rather than how to obtain the riches of eternal life.¹

What has also surprised me is that many of the writers of the Book of Mormon were familiar with the literary forms, themes, and vocabulary of Hebrew wisdom literature, of which Proverbs 1–9 is an example, and made them part of their own sacred recordkeeping. What’s more, Book of Mormon authors clearly understood the search for wisdom to be a quest for eternal life and the mysteries of God.

This paper begins with a short introduction to Hebrew wisdom literature. I will then turn to an exploration of similarities between selected Old Testament wisdom texts, primarily Proverbs 1–9, and passages in the Book of Mormon, and I will investigate how the two sources elucidate each other.

Instructional Wisdom in Ancient Israel and the Near East

Scholars believe that wisdom sayings develop naturally in families and villages because of the human need to capture and distill the lessons of life and make them memorable. A literary wisdom tradition emerged anciently throughout the Near East, particularly in Egypt and Mesopotamia.² Similar individual proverbs, coined originally by ordi-

1. Compare Doctrine and Covenants 6:7.

2. For a survey and brief analysis of Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom documents, see James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 205–26, archive.org/details/oldtestamentwisd0000cren/mode/2up; or Roland E. Murphy, *The*

nary people, found their way into writing independently in these and other cultures, but at some point the Near Eastern traditions certainly came into contact with and borrowed from each other.

After many centuries of relative neglect, the study of the Hebrew wisdom tradition, sometimes simply called Hebrew wisdom, was reborn in the past century after the 1923 publication of *The Instructions of Amenemopet*, an Egyptian wisdom document from approximately 1186 to 1069 BC. A renewed and unprecedented surge in Old Testament wisdom scholarship began about 1970.³ Joseph Smith and his contemporaries could have known very little about the wisdom tradition, as its study was not pursued in modern times with any vigor until over a hundred years after the publication of the Book of Mormon.

The corpus of wisdom is defined by similarities of intent, form, terminology, content, and even setting. Hebrew wisdom literature includes Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes from the canonical Old Testament, and the Wisdom of Solomon (often simply called Wisdom) and Ecclesiasticus (also known as Sirach or ben Sira) from the Apocrypha. Wisdom texts are also found among the Pseudepigrapha and in other ancient Near Eastern writings.

Wisdom is sometimes classified broadly into two main genres known as *sentence wisdom* (or *experiential wisdom*) and *instructional wisdom* (or *theoretical wisdom*).⁴ Sentence wisdom passages are comprised of short, pithy sayings, usually couplets, that express an observation or suggestion memorably. An example is this couplet about the benefits of being generous with one's possessions: “There is

Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 151–79.

3. Old Testament wisdom studies surged after the publication of Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), archive.org/details/wisdominisrael0000radg_z3b7/page/n7/mode/2up. Other major studies during this time include William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), archive.org/details/proverbsnewappro0000mcka_w3i6/page/n7/mode/2up; William McKane, *Prophets and Wise Men* (London: SCM Press, 1965), archive.org/details/prophets-wisemen0000mcka; and R. N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), archive.org/details/bookofproverbs0000unse. For more recent analyses of Old Testament wisdom, superb sources are Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom* (which includes a concise survey of recent wisdom scholarship in the introduction); Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 2000); and Murphy, *Tree of Life*.
4. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 5, 64.

that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty” (Proverbs 11:24). The bulk of Proverbs 10–31, as well as Ecclesiastes, reflects the sentence genre.

The instructional genre is characterized by longer poems with a clearly didactic intent—that is, they are meant to teach—usually in the form of a father offering counsel to his son or a wisdom sage offering counsel to his pupils. Proverbs 1–9, 22:17–24:22, and 31:1–9 belong to the genre of instructional wisdom, as do the speeches in Job and the apocryphal books Wisdom and Sirach.

Modern analysis reveals that Hebrew writers were influenced at times by Egyptian wisdom but that they did not incorporate it wholesale. Even in the case of Proverbs 22:17–24:22, which clearly resembles *The Instruction of Amenemopet*, the author freely adapts the Egyptian material in order to express his own unique beliefs.⁵

Turning to a comparison of Old Testament wisdom and the Book of Mormon, the most obvious similarities between the two involve the instructional writings of Proverbs, comprising chapters 1–9. For this paper, I will for the most part limit my comparison of Book of Mormon passages to biblical instructional wisdom as expressed in Proverbs 1–9.

A quick note about the dating of Proverbs: to the extent that Proverbs 10–31 is a set of collections of folk wisdom, the origins of some of the individual sayings could be very ancient, at least as old as the time of Solomon (mid-tenth century BC) and probably older.⁶ Some of the collections seem to have been made during the period of the monarchy, in preexilic times (see Proverbs 25:1). Scholars do not agree on the dating of Proverbs 1–9. Since it appears to be an introduction to the sentence proverbs of chapters 10–31 and, for other reasons, many postulate that it was written at a later date, after the exile and possibly after the Macedonian conquest.⁷ As we shall see, the earliest Book of Mormon prophets were clearly familiar with motifs more fully developed in Proverbs 1–9 than in the earlier collections of 10–31. We are justified in postulating that Proverbs 1–9 or an earlier version of the literary/rhetorical tradition which it expresses did, in fact, exist before the exile, during the time Lehi lived in Jerusalem. Since the first version of this paper, Noel B. Reynolds has persuasively

5. Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 24.

6. 1 Kings 4:29–34; Proverbs 1:1; 10:1; 25:1.

7. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 48–49. Fox’s possible Hellenistic dating derives from Greek influences that he finds in Proverbs 8.

argued that Lehi and Nephi were highly trained scribes who wrote in the rhetorical patterns of a Josephite scribal school and taught those patterns to their posterity. This paper focuses on the wisdom strand of that scribal curriculum.⁸ Reynolds quotes André Lemaire: “The weight of evidence suggests that schools were the setting of the wisdom texts and more precisely of the wisdom books in the Bible.”⁹

Characteristics of Hebrew Instructional Wisdom: Structure, Content, Literary Forms, and Terminology

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

Proverbs 1–9 is composed of ten *instructions*, also known as *lectures*, *discourses*, or *admonitions*, which are interspersed with five *interludes* or *hymns* (table 1). The interludes, with the exception of C, elaborate a similar theme: the persistence and excellence of wisdom. The whole collection is introduced by a prologue.¹⁰

8. Noel B. Reynolds, “Lehi and Nephi as Trained Manassite Scribes,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 50 (2022): 161–215, interpreterfoundation.org/lehi-and-nephi-as-trained-manassite-scribes/; and Noel B. Reynolds, “The Last Nephite Scribes” (2021), Faculty Publications 5590, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub/5590. See also Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Robert L. Maxwell, “Karel van der Toorn. *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2012): 181–85, byustudies.byu.edu/article/scribal-culture-and-the-making-of-the-hebrew-bible; and Brant A. Gardner, “Nephi as Scribe,” *Mormon Studies Review* 23, no. 1 (2011): 45–55, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1831&context=msr.

9. André Lemaire, “The Sage in School and Temple,” *The Sage in Israel*, 180–81, as quoted in Reynolds, “Lehi and Nephi,” 171. Reynolds notes, as I did in the original version of this paper, that Stuart Weeks contends the wisdom books were not written for these schools, only preserved by them. Reynolds, “Lehi and Nephi,” 171n25; Alyson Skabelund Von Feldt, “His Secret Is with the Righteous: Instructional Wisdom in the Book of Mormon,” *FARMS Occasional Papers* 5 (2007): 80n109.

10. The composition given here is from Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 44–47, although he uses the term *lecture* for the main discourses. I prefer the term *instruction* because *lecture* connotes a one-way discourse, whereas similar Book of Mormon texts, to which I will be applying the term, sometimes involve interaction between the teacher (father, king, priest, or angel) and those being taught.

Table 1. Composition of Proverbs 1–9.

Element	Verses	Purpose
Prologue	1:1–7	
Instruction I	1:8–19	Avoid gangs (“secret combinations” in Book of Mormon terms)
<i>Interlude A</i>	1:20–33	<i>Wisdom’s warning</i>
Instruction II	2:1–22	The path to wisdom
Instruction III	3:1–12	The wisdom of piety
<i>Interlude B</i>	3:13–20	<i>In praise of Wisdom</i>
Instruction IV	3:21–35	The wisdom of honesty
Instruction V	4:1–9	Loving wisdom, hating evil
Instruction VI	4:10–19	The right path
Instruction VII	4:20–27	The straight path
Instruction VIII	5:1–23	Another man’s wife and one’s own
<i>Interlude C</i>	6:1–19	<i>Four epigrams on folly and evil</i>
Instruction IX	6:20–35	Adultery kills
Instruction X	7:1–27	Beware the seductress
<i>Interlude D</i>	8:1–36	<i>Wisdom’s self-praise</i>
<i>Interlude E</i>	9:1–18	<i>Two banquets</i>

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

In almost all cases of both Hebrew and Near Eastern instructional wisdom where the teacher’s gender can be identified, it is male—a father or wise man.¹¹ In some cases, such as instructions I and IX of Proverbs, the mother who stands behind the teachings is also mentioned. We have no sure indication that the voice is even hers, but we might imagine that the parents take turns offering counsel—the father giving the instruction, with the mother speaking the interludes or dramatizing the voice of the wisdom woman.¹² Proverbs 31:1–9 is the only instance in extant wisdom documents where the lesson is clearly taught by a woman, in this case the queen mother of the Old

11. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 258.

12. Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 16.

Testament king Lemuel. Instructional lectures are sometimes called *patriarchal admonitions* when the setting is that of a Hebrew patriarch/prophet addressing his sons at the end of his life.

Wisdom speech in the Bible, the Apocrypha, and the Pseudepigrapha, because of its didactic intent, employs frequent use of words and concepts such as *wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, discipline, instruction, and learning*. These concepts are not always clearly distinct. Another hallmark of wisdom teaching is the use of contrasts: most characteristically wisdom versus folly, but also life versus death, righteous versus wicked, happiness versus cursedness, rich versus poor, industrious versus idle, safety versus destruction, light versus dark, pride or vanity versus humility, sight versus blindness, awake versus asleep, remembrance versus forgetfulness, and so on. The tree of life and fountains of water are important motifs, as are other images from nature. Wisdom teaching contrives analogies and parables about plants and animals, farming and husbandry. Indeed, the wise men appeal frequently to empirical experience and to the natural order of the world to elucidate their case.

Instructional Wisdom in the Book of Mormon

With this overview of the defining characteristics of Hebrew instructional wisdom, we can search for Book of Mormon passages with similar characteristics. Most of those I have identified are listed in table 2. Many of the texts can be classified as patriarchal or final admonitions.¹³ Other examples of passages with wisdom overtones include the Beatitudes of 3 Nephi 12; the sacrament prayers of 3 Nephi 18:7, 11, and Moroni 4:3, 5:2; and the related administration of the sacrament of 3 Nephi 20:7–9. I will omit a discussion of these and other short pieces. So, the list in table 2 does not exhaust every wisdom affinity in the Book of Mormon, but it certainly suffices for an initial study.

Table 2. Instructional wisdom in the Book of Mormon.

Nephi	1 Nephi 1:1–4; 10:17–15:36; 19–22, 2 Nephi 25–33 (final admonition)
Lehi	2 Nephi 1–4 (patriarchal admonition)

13. Also, John Tvedtnes identifies the patriarchal admonitions in the Book of Mormon and compared them with *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* and other wisdom passages in pseudepigraphical texts in an unpublished paper, “Patriarchal Admonitions.”

Jacob	2 Nephi 6–10, Jacob 2–6 (patriarchal admonition)
Joseph of Egypt, as excerpted by Lehi	2 Nephi 3:4–22 (short excerpt of patriarchal admonition)
King Benjamin	Mosiah 1–5 (final admonition with tripartite structure commencing in 2:9)
Ammon	Alma 26
Alma	Alma 32, 36–42 (patriarchal admonition)
Helaman	Helaman 5:5–13 (short excerpt of patriarchal admonition)
Mormon	Helaman 12
Samuel	Helaman 13–15

Of the passages listed in table 2, 2 Nephi 25–33,¹⁴ 2 Nephi 6–10, Mosiah, Alma 36–42, and Helaman 13–15 all evidence the classic tripartite structure of a wisdom instruction. Nephi’s instructions in 1 Nephi are not tripartite. Lehi’s testament (2 Nephi 1–4) does not have the usual tripartite structure either, and this may be because Nephi is clearly abridging his father’s full admonition. Likewise, Joseph of Egypt’s admonition (2 Nephi 3:4–22) and Helaman’s admonition (Helaman 5:5–13) are also excerpts and are not tripartite. Ammon’s extended reflection on “boasting” (Alma 26) is properly neither a patriarchal admonition nor an instruction — we might call it an exultation — but it has strong wisdom affinities nevertheless. Mormon’s editorial comment in Helaman 12 as such lacks tripartite structure as well.

14. Beginning at 2 Nephi 25:4, Nephi’s admonition starts with an *exordium* and continues with an extended lesson and testament. It ends first with a false conclusion (2 Nephi 31:21) but then is followed by an addendum (2 Nephi 32) and a final conclusion (2 Nephi 33:10–15).

Although Jacob’s discourse in 2 Nephi 6–10 is recognizably divisible into at least three parts, John S. Thompson has shown in finer detail that it follows the basic six-part covenant/treaty pattern of the ancient Near East. He also suggests that it represents “a prophetic imitation” of the liturgy associated with preexilic autumn festivals. See John S. Thompson, “Isaiah 50–51, the Israelite Autumn Festivals, and the Covenant Speech of Jacob in 2 Nephi 6–10,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS], 1998), 123–50, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?filename=7&article=1042&context=mi&type=additional. This understanding of the setting for Jacob’s sermon, joined with a similar understanding of King Benjamin’s sermon—which we will explore below—and an observation of the sapiential elements in both, might lead us to the conclusion that wisdom speech was a form of expression deriving from the ancient temple cult. I will explore a related argument in greater detail below.

All of these passages use terms, motifs, and other devices familiar from the Hebrew wisdom corpus. The admonitions of Nephi (2 Nephi 25–33), Lehi, Joseph, Benjamin, and Alma (Alma 36–42) all show strong internal consistency as well. The authors seem to be following a model for passing knowledge between generations that we see only partially in Proverbs 1–9¹⁵ but more completely in the Pseudepigraphal patriarchal admonitions.¹⁶

Elements of the pattern include a father—who is often also a prophet, high priest and teacher, or king—

- providing instruction or counsel near his death or at the end of his ministry
- advising sons, other descendants, or the people in general, sometimes at the temple in association with a ritual festival (Jacob, Benjamin, and arguably portions of Proverbs 1–9)
- promoting the keeping or transmission of a written record (and sometimes other artifacts)
- expressing joy
- giving promises about the blessings of keeping the commandments (especially the promise of prosperity/fertility in the land)
- advocating the search for the mysteries of God and prayer in general
- administering temple ordinances
- giving warnings about the consequences of rejecting temple or sacred knowledge
- recounting instruction by an angel and other mystical experiences (“example stories”)
- reviewing the Lord’s work in history, or even rehearsing the creation account
- teaching of Christ and the plan of redemption (in the Book of Mormon)
- using wisdom vocabulary and themes to teach about living

15. That Proverbs 1–9 partially expressed this formula first occurred to me after reading John Tvedtnes’s comparison of 1 Nephi 1:1–4 and Mosiah 1:2–6. See John A. Tvedtnes, “A Note on Benjamin and Lehi,” *Insights* 22, no. 11 (2002): 3, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1371&context=insights.

16. See the pseudepigraphal *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, chapter 4 of Tobit, and *Sentences of the Syriac Menander* for other patriarchal admonitions. Tvedtnes’s “Patriarchal Admonitions” includes a study of these texts as well as a discussion of patriarchal admonitions in the Bible and the Book of Mormon.

an upright daily life, such as avoiding pride or vanity, caring for the poor, and recognizing the dangers of sexual transgression

I will now take a closer look at how each of the Book of Mormon passages identified above (omitting treatment of the short excerpt of Joseph's blessing in 2 Nephi 3:4–22) compares to Proverbs 1–9, highlighting formal, thematic, and linguistic similarities.

Wisdom in the Small Plates of Nephi

Prologue to Nephi's Record

The correspondences start at the very beginning of the Book of Mormon. Nephi's prologue to his writings (1 Nephi 1:1–3) has much in common with the prologue of Proverbs (Proverbs 1:1–7), as well as with wisdom texts from other cultures. The purpose is to introduce the work, convey the qualifications of its author, and commend it to the recipient.

Often, prologues to wisdom texts “detail the titles, posts, ancestry, and position of the teacher” to demonstrate his qualifications.¹⁷ The author of Proverbs 1–9 is said to be “Solomon the son of David, king of Israel” (Proverbs 1:1). Scholars doubt that Solomon wrote Proverbs itself or even sponsored it, but his reputation as a great sage lends credibility to the collection.¹⁸

The prologue to Proverbs then immediately introduces some of the language characteristic of wisdom texts: *wisdom*, *instruction*, *understanding*, *knowledge*, and *learning* (Proverbs 1:2–5). It also hints that there is a riddle to be solved:

A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; The words of the wise, and their dark sayings. (Proverbs 1:5–6)

“Words of the wise,” *ḥakamīm*, seems to indicate the teachings of a specific group, and “dark sayings,” *ḥidāh*, is sometimes translated as “enigmas” or “riddles.”¹⁹ So, the promise seems to be that those who

17. Fox, *Proverbs* 1–9, 55.

18. For a discussion of Solomon as a sage, see Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 35–44.

19. Fox, *Proverbs* 1–9, 64.

listen carefully will be able to discern and interpret an enigma in the text.²⁰ Michael V. Fox tells what characterizes an enigma:

The outstanding figure of an enigma is its immediate obscurity. . . . Words and images must be read as tokens of entities and events in another domain. An enigma deliberately blocks immediate understanding by ambiguities and obscurities before allowing the audience to push through to a deeper understanding.²¹

Jesus used another wisdom rhetorical form, the parable, to accomplish much the same function: to hide "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 13:10–17).

The problem is that scholars do not see much that is hidden or cryptic in Proverbs. As Fox jokes, "Having been informed in the Prologue that the wise will understand the enigmas to follow, one hesitates to volunteer for the other category by failing even to detect them."²² He suggests that the sage who wrote Proverbs is making an exaggerated claim to esoteric knowledge in order to give the book greater prestige.²³

However, read in light of Book of Mormon passages in 1 and 2 Nephi, Mosiah, and elsewhere, the riddle, as well as its solution, becomes clear: the knowledge discussed in Proverbs 1–9 about the path to a good, long life can be understood at a deeper level to represent knowledge about the path to *eternal* life.

There is even a clue in Proverbs 1:5–6: "a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels" can be understood as the wise counsels of Yahweh's heavenly assembly, the *sod*, which mortals are occasionally permitted to observe in vision.²⁴ The Hebrew words used

20. The later wisdom text Sirach understood that proverbs and parables hid divine mysteries. See Sirach 39:2–3, and, for a discussion, Raymond E. Brown, *The Semitic Background of the Term "Mystery" in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 9–10.

21. Fox, *Proverbs* 1–9, 65.

22. Fox, *Proverbs* 1–9, 66.

23. Fox, *Proverbs* 1–9, 66–67.

24. Daniel C. Peterson has written at length about the divine assembly in "'Ye Are Gods': Psalm 82 and John 10 as Witnesses to the Divine Nature of Humankind," in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 471–594. John Welch has shown that Lehi's admission to this council in 1 Nephi 1 (his vision of God sitting upon his throne) would have given him all the qualifications

here are not the same words used in classic Old Testament passages about the assembly or *sod*,²⁵ but there would not be much of a riddle if they were. The actual word *sod* is used in Proverbs 3:32: “For the froward²⁶ is abomination to the Lord: but his *secret* is with the righteous” (emphasis here and in all subsequent scriptural quotations is added).²⁷ As Daniel Peterson notes, *sod* is never used to mean only “secrets,” but rather, it always refers to the intimate group that counseled together, as well as to the decision upon which they agreed.²⁸ John Welch also notes that “mysteries” can be a translation of the word.²⁹ In Job 15:8, another passage from the wisdom genre, *sod* is parallel to wisdom: “Hast thou heard the secret of God? and dost thou restrain wisdom to thyself?” Allusions in the text push us toward elucidation of the enigmas, and our first clue is that the kind of wisdom discussed in Proverbs 1–9 has to do with the council of heaven and the mysteries of God.

Now, let’s compare the Proverbs prologue to Nephi’s prologue in 1 Nephi 1:1–3. Nephi identifies himself as the author of the record and then invokes his pedigree by simply noting that he was “born of goodly parents” (1 Nephi 1:1). Nephi’s credit to his parents is similar, incidentally, to Proverbs 4:3–4, where the writer also reflects on the teachings of parents who loved him.

Nephi then gives his qualifications. Aside from being “taught somewhat in all the learning of [his] father,” which included “the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians,”³⁰ he has obtained

that would have been expected in the ancient world for an authentic claim to authority. See John W. Welch, “The Calling of Lehi as a Prophet in the World of Jerusalem,” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 427–29.

25. 1 Kings 22:19–22; Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1–3; Daniel 7; Amos 3:7; Job 15:8. See Peterson, “Ye Are Gods,” 500.

26. *Froward* is the translation of the root *lwz*, which can mean “to depart, to go crooked, or to be lost from view.” This is an image that also appears in Nephi’s dream; see below.

27. *Sod* is also used in Proverbs 11:13.

28. Peterson, “Ye Are Gods,” 507.

29. Welch, “Calling of Lehi as a Prophet,” 435. See Brown, *Semitic Background of the Term “Mystery.”*

30. Reynolds argues Nephi is announcing that he is a scribe trained at the highest level, probably by his father, Lehi. See Reynolds, “Lehi and Nephi,” 171. Reynolds shows that there’s evidence of this throughout the small plates.

a "knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God" (1 Nephi 1:1–2). (Remember that "mysteries" is a possible translation for *sod*.) This knowledge authorizes him as a source of wisdom more than any other sort of education, occupation, or title could, because, as Nephi will proceed to recount, he has effectively solved the riddle hinted at in the prologue to Proverbs. By seeking diligently, he has seen and felt, through transcendent visionary experiences, the unfolding of God's loving plan for the world, including Christ's redemption and the joys of eternal life. He has been taught by angels and lifted upon the wings of the Spirit to mountaintops for instruction. He himself has found wisdom.

However, unlike the author of Proverbs, Nephi does not attempt to disguise any teachings. Although he admits that his father's teachings are "hard to be understood, save a man should inquire of the Lord," yet he insists that the meaning will be made known if one asks "in faith . . . with diligence in keeping [the] commandments" (1 Nephi 15:3, 11). Having done so himself, he is eager to lay out Lehi's teachings as they have been explained to him in vision. He does the same with passages from Isaiah. Thereafter, he repeatedly emphasizes the "plainness" of his teachings: "I have spoken plainly . . . that ye cannot misunderstand" (2 Nephi 25:28; see also 2 Nephi 25:20; 32:7); in fact, he "glor[ies] in plainness" (2 Nephi 33:6).

Wisdom personified and the tree of life

One of the most remarkable features of Proverbs 1–9 is the personification of wisdom. This figure is first introduced in Proverbs 1:20–33. She is pictured here as a herald, crying out to get the attention of the masses "in the streets," "in the chief place of concourse," and at "the gates" of the city from where all the roads of the city fan out (Proverbs 1:20–21). These are all crowded, bustling places. Her message is directed to the general public. In Proverbs 8, she herself says that she calls to "the sons of man" (v. 4). In Proverbs 9, she sends forth "maidens" (v. 3) to help get the word out, much like the king in the parable of the marriage of the king's son sends servants to the highways to extend the invitation to as many as can be found (Matthew 22:1–14). What Wisdom has to offer is not reserved for a cadre of claimants privileged by status or inheritance, and she goes to great lengths to make sure her call is heard by all.

Likewise, Nephi teaches that Jesus "manifesteth himself unto all those who believe in him, by the power of the Holy Ghost; yea, unto

every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, working mighty miracles, signs, and wonders, among the children of men according to their faith" (2 Nephi 26:13). He goes on to elaborate. Beginning with "I say unto you that the Lord God worketh not in darkness," Nephi emphasizes that the Lord God "layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him" and that "he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile" (2 Nephi 26:23–33).

The father in Proverbs 2:1–22 explains that wisdom is more precious than silver (v. 4), and Proverbs 3:13–20 teaches that Wisdom's merchandise is better than gold or rubies. "All the things thou canst *desire* are not to be compared unto her" (Proverbs 3:15; see also Proverbs 8:10–11, 18–19). What does she offer that is so precious and important? "She is a *tree of life* to them that lay hold upon her: and *happy* is every one that retaineth her" (Proverbs 3:18).

This calls to mind the visions of Lehi and Nephi in the Book of Mormon. When Lehi sees the *tree of life*, he knows that the "fruit [is] *desirable* to make one *happy*." He tastes it himself, and it fills his soul with "exceedingly great *joy*," and he finds that it is "*desirable* above all other fruit" (1 Nephi 8:10–12). Later, Nephi explains that the tree (and the fountain of living waters, an image that appears several times in Proverbs 10–31) represents "the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of . . . men; wherefore, it is the most *desirable* above all things . . . and the most *joyous* to the soul" (1 Nephi 11:21–23).

Peterson argues that given the iconography and religious practices of Nephi's Jerusalem, Nephi would have instantly recognized the tree of life as a symbol for the goddess Asherah. Her image stood in the temple on and off until the time of Josiah, where she may have been worshipped alongside Yahweh, apparently as his consort or wife, although not without controversy.³¹ Her image was finally removed from the temple by Josiah during his reform, which extended into Lehi's lifetime, and from the canon after the Babylonian exile by a group of editors known as the Deuteronomists. Knowledge of this goddess was lost from the dominant religion for two and a half millennia. But in the last century, archaeological finds have confirmed her place in

31. Daniel C. Peterson, "Nephi and His Asherah: A Note on 1 Nephi 11:8–23," in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 194–200.

the preexilic Hebrew tradition, and scholars have pieced together her ancient history and traced her memory in Judaism, Jewish mysticism, and Christianity down to the present.³²

Mainstream modern wisdom scholars remain reluctant to interpret the wisdom woman as a version of the Hebrew goddess, mostly because they date Proverbs 1–9 after the exile when Israel had become very strictly monotheistic.³³ At best, they describe her as an *emanation* of God or a *hypostasis*,³⁴ but more often just as an ordinary if vivid literary personification of an important virtue of either God or man.³⁵ Sometimes scholars suggest that she was an image borrowed from the Egyptian, Canaanite, or Greek pantheon (Ma’at, Ishtar, or Isis, respectively).³⁶

For his part, Nephi in interpreting his and his father’s visions never overtly describes the tree of life as a woman or a goddess. He never personifies wisdom at all. However, wisdom does receive an “inchoate personification”³⁷ later in the Book of Mormon. The first instance occurs when King Benjamin warns that having been taught the prophecies contained in the scriptures,

32. See generally Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, 3rd ed. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990); Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 229–61, archive.org/details/margaret-barker-the-great-high-priest-the-temple-roots-of-christian-liturgy-2003_202409/page/229/mode/2up; Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah”; Margaret Barker, *The Mother of the Lord: Volume 1: The Lady in the Temple* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012); and William G. Dever, *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), archive.org/details/DidGodHaveAWife.

33. Alternatively, her appearance in a postexilic text could be evidence that monotheism was not universally accepted. Or it could be evidence that the text is not postexilic.

34. These are technical terms. An *emanation* is very broadly a manifestation of (otherwise transcendent) God in the world in such a way as to be apprehended by mankind. The spirit, the word, and the Shechinah are examples that non-Latter-day Saint scholars might give. A *hypostasis* is a concept or abstract quality that has developed into a deity; for example, in the Egyptian religion, the god Sia is a hypostasis of perception.

35. For example, Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 133.

36. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 334–38. Fox refutes the possibility that she was modeled on Ishtar or Ma’at but is tempted by comparisons to Isis in her late, Greek form. But the Hellenistic Isis religion did not spread abroad until the late third century BC, so Fox points out that dating presents an impediment to this hypothesis.

37. The term is Fox’s, *Proverbs 1–9*, 331. An *inchoate personification* is “where person-metaphors are used in passing but not developed as figures.”

if ye should transgress and go contrary to that which has been spoken, that ye do withdraw yourselves from the Spirit of the Lord, that it may have no place in you to guide you in wisdom's paths that ye may be blessed, prospered, and preserved — I say unto you, that the man that doeth this, the same cometh out in open rebellion against God; therefore he listeth to obey the evil spirit. (Mosiah 2:36–37)

The second instance of the personification of wisdom is when King Limhi, after receiving assurance from Ammon that the king of Zarahemla, as a seer, would be able to translate the Jaredite plates, exclaims:

O how marvelous are the works of the Lord, and how long doth he suffer with his people; yea, and how blind and impenetrable are the understandings of the children of men; for they will not seek wisdom, neither do they desire that she should rule over them! (Mosiah 8:20)

The third and final example of wisdom's personification in the Book of Mormon is in what appears to be an editorial remark by Mormon. Commenting on the descent of the Nephites into wickedness shortly before the birth of Christ, he appropriates wisdom vocabulary to lament their foolishness, vanity, and pride:

How slow are they to remember the Lord their God, and to give ear unto his counsels, yea, how slow to walk in wisdom's paths! (Helaman 12:5)

These three Book of Mormon personifications are all consistent with the personification of wisdom in Proverbs 1–9. In King Benjamin's warning, submission to the Spirit for guidance on wisdom's paths is contrasted with submission to the evil spirit, which results in psychological pain described in terms of hell: "guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever" (Mosiah 2:38). This is like the contrast in Proverbs between wisdom's shining path and folly's dark path toward Sheol, which we will discuss in greater detail below.

King Limhi's exclamation recalls the fools of Proverbs 1:20–33, who refuse the counsel and reproof of wisdom. Moreover, the translation preserves the *feminine* personification of wisdom, using *she* rather than the neuter pronoun *it* to refer to the antecedent *wisdom*.³⁸

38. *îokmāh*, the Hebrew word most often behind the English translation

The translation as well as the literary image both nod toward Hebrew wisdom materials.

But all of these Book of Mormon personifications occur hundreds of years after Nephi recorded his vision of the tree of life. His interpretation of the tree is that it (and the fountain of waters) represents the love of God.³⁹ He also interprets for his brothers the other symbols related to the tree, introducing terminology and concepts that are shared with Proverbs 1–9. He explains, for example, that those who hold fast to the word of God (the iron rod) that leads to the tree will “never perish; neither [will] the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary . . . lead them away to destruction” (1 Nephi 15:22–24). He tells them that the tree’s fruit “is most precious and most desirable above all other fruits . . . and it is the greatest of all the gifts of God” (1 Nephi 15:36). The evil power of flattery, paths toward destruction or happiness, and joy itself are three themes from Proverbs 1–9.

Eternal life

As the similarities between Nephi’s writings and Proverbs 1–9 begin to mount, it is worth turning aside from our comparison momentarily to use Nephi’s plainness to help clarify the message of Proverbs. Most commentators on Proverbs understand that the *happiness*⁴⁰ derived from finding wisdom means a pleasant or successful earthly existence, and that the *length of days* that wisdom promises (Proverbs 3:2, 16; see 8:34–35 and 9:11) refers to a long mortal life. Nephi’s teachings, though, make it clear that on a deeper level, what is promised is *eternal life*. Most explicitly, Nephi in his final testament says that the “straight and narrow path . . . leads to eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:18; see 1 Nephi 14:7; 2 Nephi 31:19–21; 2:27–29). “The wise shall inherit glory,” reads Proverbs 3:35; and the verses in Proverbs 4:6, 9 promise that

wisdom, is a feminine noun and thus requires feminine pronouns in Hebrew. The English noun, however, is neuter, and usually takes the genderless pronoun *it*.

39. “The love of God” in English can be a double entendre. In this context, it could mean a feeling of love from or about God. It could also refer to the person whom God loves, in the same way that I might say that my husband is “my love.” My thanks to Kevin Christensen for making this observation.
40. There seems to be wordplay in Proverbs 3:18, where the promise is made that those who find the tree of life will be happy. The word *ašrē*, here translated as “happy” and elsewhere as “blessed,” comes from the root *šr* and underlies the word *asherah* as well. Peterson, “Nephi and his Asherah,” 212. See also Proverbs 8:32, 34. Bliss formulas (happy is the man . . . blessed is he . . .) are sometimes called *’ashrē* sayings.

wisdom will “preserve thee” and “keep thee,” delivering “a crown of glory.” In view of instructional wisdom from the Book of Mormon, we can be sure that these Old Testament passages are promising *eternal* glory to those who love and follow wisdom. It is increasingly clear that Proverbs 1–9 is hardly mundane, practical advice but rather counsel of eternal import.

The strange woman and the great whore

We return to our search for motifs common to both the small plates and Proverbs 1–9. In Proverbs, a significant figure known as the “strange woman” is contrasted with Wisdom. Lectures on the strange woman include Proverbs 2:16–22, 5:1–13, 6:20–35, and 7:1–27. The figure is most fully developed in Proverbs 9:13–18, and is sometimes referred to here as “Lady Folly” or “Dame Folly.” In Proverbs 2:1–22, the strange woman has a wicked male counterpart, the “evil man” (v. 12). The strange woman is a seducing adulteress, and illicit relations with her are contrasted with legitimate relations with one’s wife.

The strange woman is characterized primarily by her smooth, flattering tongue and her disloyalty to her husband. She ventures forth from her house to entice her victims, calling them “in the high places of the city” (Proverbs 9:14), not unlike Wisdom. Her words “drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil” (Proverbs 5:3). But like the evil man (Proverbs 2:12–15), she dupes the fools she hunts into leaving the path of life and following her downward on paths of death, resulting in the destruction of their souls. The father in Proverbs 7:1–27 elaborates the seduction, vividly describing the scene and the strange woman’s flattering words in order to imprint the danger—and the allure—of sexual transgression on the mind of his offspring. “Her house is the *way to hell*, going down to the chambers of *death*” (Proverbs 7:27). “Her guests are in the *depths of hell*” (Proverbs 9:18). Instead of veering off on this perilous path, the youth in Proverbs 5:15–19 is encouraged to “drink waters out of thine own cistern,” meaning that he should find sexual pleasure with his own wife, and to be “ravished always with her love.”

Protection from the seductive dangers of the strange woman comes by “attend[ing] to wisdom” (Proverbs 5:1), by keeping the commandments and embracing Wisdom as one’s friend and intimate. “Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister; and call understanding thy kinswoman,” teaches Proverbs 7:4. Where the strange woman’s way leads downward to Sheol, Wisdom’s followers stay on the “*the paths of life*”

(Proverbs 2:19). She leads "in *the way of righteousness*" (Proverbs 8:20). Her path is pleasant (Proverbs 3:17) and bright, shining "more and more unto the perfect day" (Proverbs 4:18).

Now we turn to the Book of Mormon for a comparison. Admonitions about sexual behavior are infrequent in biblical wisdom literature outside of Proverbs 1–9,⁴¹ though they do occur in extrabiblical wisdom sources such as *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. Extended warnings about sexual sin occur twice in the Book of Mormon. Jacob, taking note of a declining family structure among his people, gathers them in the temple and delivers an admonishment from the Lord:

There shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none; For I, the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women. And whoredoms are an abomination before me. (Jacob 2:27–28)

The husbands are not to "*lead away captive* the daughters of my people because of their tenderness, save I shall visit them with a sore curse, even unto *destruction*" (Jacob 2:33). Though Jacob delivers this warning to the people as the Lord's mouthpiece rather than as a patriarch admonishing his children, the themes of fidelity and captivity are straight from the wisdom tradition of Proverbs 1–9.

In Alma the Younger's patriarchal admonition to Corianton, he chastises him for boasting in his own strength and wisdom and taking up with the harlot Isabel. Like the strange woman of Proverbs, she "*did steal away* the hearts of many," but this is no excuse. Alma teaches that sexual sin is "an abomination in the sight of the Lord," almost as serious as murder or denying the Holy Ghost (Alma 39:3–6). He warns Corianton not "to be *led away* by any *vain* or *foolish* thing; suffer not the devil to *lead away* your heart again after those wicked harlots" (Alma 39:11). The image is comparable to the flattering strange woman or evil man of Proverbs.

But the most striking comparison in the Book of Mormon to the strange woman in Proverbs is Nephi's image of a seductive evil woman. He calls her the "great whore" or the "whore of all the earth." The image appears first in Nephi's tree-of-life vision as the "large and spacious building," which the angel says is "the world and the *wisdom* thereof" (1 Nephi 11:35). As the vision is extended and applied to the history of the world, the image becomes "the great and abominable church," founded by the devil and preoccupied with earthly treasures,

41. Fox, *Proverbs* 1–9, 260n177.

sexual sin, and the praise of the world (1 Nephi 13:4–9). For these idols the church “destroy[s] the saints of God, and bring[s] them down into *captivity*” (1 Nephi 13:9). In 1 Nephi 13:26–27, this church is guilty of “tak[ing] away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord” in order to “pervert the right *ways of the Lord*.”

It is in 1 Nephi 14:10 that this evil church is first personified as “the mother of abominations” and “the whore of all the earth.” Nephi tells later of the church’s great fall into the very pit it had “dugged to ensnare the people of the Lord” (1 Nephi 22:13–14). He associates her again with Satan (1 Nephi 22:15) and subtly contrasts her with Isaiah’s image of the grieving mother Zion (1 Nephi 21:14–25; 22:25).

The motif returns for a last time in 2 Nephi 26–28. Nephi describes the Gentiles of the last days as building up many churches that minimize “the power and miracles of God.” Rather, they “preach up unto themselves their own *wisdom* and their own *learning*, that they may get gain and grind upon the face of the poor” (2 Nephi 26:20). Nephi introduces “secret combinations” here, which he says are founded by the devil (2 Nephi 26:22). They bring to mind the gangs of Proverbs 1:8–19, established to kill the innocent in order to acquire their “precious substance” (Proverbs 1:13). Nephi also speaks of “priestcrafts,” which are organized to “get gain and praise of the world” (2 Nephi 26:29). He teaches that those who belong to the great and abominable church must repent or be grasped by the chains of the devil and perish.

Nephi warns of the seductive powers of the devil, who, like the evil man of Proverbs 2:12–15, uses his power of speech to deceive and ensnare. He will stir some up to anger, while pacifying others, lulling them into a feeling of security, flattering them, whispering in their ears “until he grasps them with his awful *chains*” (2 Nephi 28:19–23). Like the strange woman whose paths are “unto the dead” (Proverbs 2:18) and the evil man whose paths are dark and crooked (Proverbs 2:15), the devil “cheateth their souls, and *leadeth them away* carefully down to *hell*” (2 Nephi 28:21).

The wicked of the last days will hearken “unto the precepts of men, and den[y] the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost” (2 Nephi 28:26). They will refuse the word of God, believing that they have enough, and will consequently lose that which they already have (2 Nephi 28:29–30). “Cursed is he that putteth his trust in . . . the precepts of men, save their precepts shall be given by the power of

the Holy Ghost" (2 Nephi 28:31). This is like those in Proverbs who adhere to the teachings of the strange woman, forsaking the "*guide* of [their] youth" — wisdom — and forgetting "the covenant of [their] God" (Proverbs 2:17), in favor of the flattering words of the evil woman. The risk is to "die without instruction," having by a rejection of the knowledge of God become "holden with the *CORDS* of . . . sin" (Proverbs 5:22–23; compare Satan's *CORDS* in 2 Nephi 26:22 and the "*CORDS* of vanity" and *ROPE* of sin in 2 Nephi 15:18, parallel to Isaiah 5:18).

In Proverbs, Wisdom is not sympathetic:

Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. (Proverbs 1:24–31)

Nephi, however, offers hope even at the very last:

Wo be unto the Gentiles, saith the Lord God of Hosts! For notwithstanding I shall lengthen out mine arm unto them from day to day, they will deny me; nevertheless, I will be merciful unto them, saith the Lord God, if they will repent and come unto me; for mine arm is lengthened out all the day long, saith the Lord God of Hosts. (2 Nephi 28:32)

Paths toward hell and paths toward life

Another particularly significant metaphor in instructional proverbs is the two-paths dichotomy. Wisdom calls men to follow her on the *shining* path of the righteous (Proverbs 2:20; 4:18), while the strange woman leads on the *dark* path of the wicked (e.g., Proverbs 4:14, 19). Fox explains that as "the ground metaphor of Prov 1–9," this image "organizes other perceptions and images and conveys a way of perceiving the world."⁴² He notes that another scholar proposes that the

42. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 128–29.

two-paths metaphor does not stand by itself as the ground metaphor, but is closely coordinated with a second ground metaphor—the two women.⁴³ Fox also shows that while a path metaphor likewise permeates Egyptian wisdom literature, instructions in these sources are about the “way of life” and do not include the notion of an opposing path. According to Fox, “the polarity of the [two paths] is a deliberate development in Proverbs.”⁴⁴

As is apparent from our earlier discussion of the great whore, the two-paths metaphor is also manifested in the Book of Mormon. In fact, Mack C. Stirling has argued that the portrayal of two diverging and opposing paths, one leading toward life and one toward death, is “the fundamental conceptual substrate for the view of reality held by the Book of Mormon prophets.”⁴⁵ Stirling shows that the Book of Mormon presents a unified message that during probation, “men either hearken to the voice of Christ and progressively acquire spiritual life or they hearken to the voice of the devil and progressively descend into spiritual death.”⁴⁶ He explains that “those in the way of life become progressively *sanctified* by the Holy Ghost.”⁴⁷ More recently, Noel B. Reynolds has explored how the two ways doctrine is taught in the Book of Mormon, concluding that it expands on the Biblical usage with distinctly Christ-centered explanations that integrate repentance, covenant, and the life-vs-death path.⁴⁸ It is significant indeed to recognize that both Proverbs 1–9 and the Book of Mormon are internally unified around the same metaphor.

But we have gotten ahead of ourselves and have yet to explore specific examples of the two-paths metaphor in the Book of Mormon—limiting ourselves in this section to examples from Nephi’s books. Leading to the tree of life is a strait and narrow path; one stays on this path, even when darkness moves in, by clinging to the rod of

43. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, as noted by Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 129n115.

44. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 130.

45. Mack C. Stirling, “The Way of Life and the Way of Death in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2 (1997): 153, scholar-sarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol6/iss2/20/. Stirling notes a similar dualism in certain Dead Sea Scroll texts and in the writings of John but does not mention earlier wisdom texts (p. 194). He believes that this dualistic perception of reality was revealed to the prophets by God (p. 193).

46. Stirling, “Way of Life,” 152.

47. Stirling, “Way of Life,” 188, emphasis in original.

48. Noel B. Reynolds, “The Ancient Doctrine of the Two Ways and the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2017): 49–78, byustudies.byu.edu/article/the-ancient-doctrine-of-the-two-ways-and-the-book-of-mormon

iron, which stands for the word of God (1 Nephi 8:19–25; 11:25; 15:24). “Forbidden paths” and “strange roads” also figure into Lehi’s vision (1 Nephi 8:28, 32), and the angel explains to Nephi that “mists of *darkness* are the temptations of the devil, which . . . leadeth them away into broad roads, that they perish and are lost” (1 Nephi 12:17; see also 2 Nephi 28:21).

Jacob teaches that the Holy One is the “keeper of the gate” of the strait and narrow path (2 Nephi 9:41; compare 2 Nephi 31:17–18). He will not open the gate for the wise, vain, or proud, but only for those who “consider themselves fools before God” (2 Nephi 9:42; note the counterintuitive wisdom reversal of “wise” and “foolish”). Nephi engages in an unusual depiction of the interplay between Christ and the Holy Ghost as guides to and on the righteous path. He says that Jesus’s example leads the children of men to the gate—to repentance and baptism (2 Nephi 31:9, 13)⁴⁹—where they then experience “a remission of . . . sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost” (2 Nephi 31:17). Then, once they have thereby entered “the strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:18), the *Holy Ghost* becomes their life-long guide, showing them “all things what [they] should do” (2 Nephi 32:5) by giving them the “words of Christ” (2 Nephi 32:3).

This is similar to the counsel about the guidance of wisdom in Proverbs: “I will pour out my *spirit* unto you. I will make known my *words* unto you” (Proverbs 1:23). “For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. . . . When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee: to deliver thee from the way of the evil man” (Proverbs 2:6, 10–12). “Keep sound wisdom and discretion. . . . Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble” (Proverbs 3:21, 23). “My son, keep thy father’s commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother. . . . When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee” (Proverbs 6:20, 22). Clearly, whereas in Proverbs the guide that opposes the strange woman is the wisdom figure, for Nephi, the guide on the strait and narrow path that is rejected by the great and abominable church is the Holy Ghost.

49. For a nuanced explanation of the Holy Ghost’s role before baptism, see Dallin H. Oaks, “Always Have His Spirit,” *Ensign*, November 1996, 59–61, especially p. 60, where he says that “manifestations of the Holy Ghost are given to lead sincere seekers to gospel truths that will persuade them to repentance and baptism,” after which they receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Nephi closely associates the Holy Ghost with the word of God, just as Wisdom is linked to the law and the commandments in Proverbs 1–9.⁵⁰

Reflections on the Holy Ghost, Wisdom, and the mysteries of God

Nephi explains that “angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost” and that they speak the “words of Christ” (2 Nephi 32:3). The role of angels in the Old Testament is to serve as messengers from the divine assembly of Yahweh. The English word *angel* is from the Greek *angelos* and means “messenger.” As messengers from the *sod*, their function is to deliver the counsels of Yahweh. They bring “the words of Christ” exactly as that word is decreed in heaven and according to the instructions of the God they serve.⁵¹ By relating the Holy Ghost with angels because the Holy Ghost gives them the power to speak the words of Christ, Nephi establishes that the Holy Ghost gives angels the authority or capability to act as agents of Yahweh.

Moreover, angels and prophets are most effective when they deliver their instructions by the power of the Holy Ghost. Nephi implies this in 2 Nephi 33:1. In fact, he himself as a scribe worries that his words will not carry the power that they do when spoken, “for when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men” (2 Nephi 33:1).

Much as the Holy Ghost makes angels and prophets capable of teaching with power, the Holy Ghost grants mankind the capability of experiencing the transcendent visionary or auditory experiences of learning from heavenly beings or of standing in the presence of God. It is “upon the wings of his Spirit” that Nephi is carried “upon exceedingly high mountains” to behold things too great to be written (2 Nephi 4:25). It is by the power of the Holy Ghost that Christ “manifesteth himself unto all those who believe in him” (2 Nephi 26:13). “Overcome with the Spirit,” Lehi “was carried away” in vision to the heavenly assembly, where he saw God on his throne surrounded by angels (1 Nephi 1:8). Nephi was so taken with his father’s dreams and teachings which he spoke “by the power of the Holy Ghost,” that he too “was desirous also

50. Wisdom is associated with the word of God in other texts as well. See, for example, Sirach 19:20. In medieval Jewish kabbalistic lore, the feminine presence of God, the Shechinah/Matronit, was also linked with the Torah. She was said to dwell with those who studied the Law. See, for example, Patai, *Hebrew Goddess*, 145.

51. Peterson, “‘Ye Are Gods,’” 499–504.

that [he] might see, and hear, and know of these things, by the power of the Holy Ghost" (1 Nephi 10:17).

So, to have the companionship of the Holy Ghost is to be privy to the plans of Yahweh's heavenly council—to the mysteries of God—or to receive personal testimony of these mysteries when they are delivered by angels or prophets.

This lends weight to the earlier contention that Proverbs' promise that those who really hear and understand the teachings of Proverbs "shall attain unto wise counsels" (Proverbs 1:5) means learning the mysteries of God as Nephi did. In fact, Nephi's exuberance to learn ("I, Nephi, was desirous also that I might see, and hear, and know of these things" [1 Nephi 10:17]) and his insistence that such learning is accessible to the faithful ("he that diligently seeketh shall find; and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost" [1 Nephi 10:19]) is an apt demonstration of the persistent searching advocated in Proverbs 1–9. "If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding . . . then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God" is the promise of Proverbs 2:3. Likewise, the father in Proverbs 4:7 exhorts his children: "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding."

More Wisdom speech in Nephi's record

Before leaving our exploration of wisdom affinities in the small plates of Nephi, we should draw our attention to several more obvious parallels with Hebrew wisdom.

The first is in connection with the prosperity promise first recorded by Lehi: "Inasmuch as [they] shall keep his commandments, they shall prosper upon the face of this land . . . and they shall dwell *safely* forever" (2 Nephi 1:9). Notably, Lehi precedes this promise with the explanation that "it is *wisdom* that this land should be kept as yet from the knowledge of other nations" (2 Nephi 1:8). When his descendants dwindle in unbelief, having once had great knowledge and power, the Lord will "take away from them the lands of their possessions, and he will cause them to be scattered and smitten" (2 Nephi 1:11). Proverbs includes a very similar promise and warning in Proverbs 1:24–33, concluding with the reassurance that "whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell *safely*."

Another parallel is that the classic wisdom motifs of remembering, hearkening, waking, seeing, or hearing are repeated throughout

1 and 2 Nephi and Jacob (and indeed later in the Book of Mormon). In Proverbs, we see it in exhortations such as “*forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments*” (Proverbs 3:1) and “*keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee. . . . Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart*” (Proverbs 7:1, 3). The parents urge their son or children to “*hear*” (e.g., Proverbs 1:5, 8; 4:1), “*hearken*” (Proverbs 1:33), “*receive*” (Proverbs 2:1), “*incline thine ear*” (Proverbs 2:2), “*apply thine heart*” (Proverbs 2:2), “*attend*,” and “*bow thine ear*” (Proverbs 5:1).⁵² They are prodding their children to hear and see in a different way, with new insight. The speaker of interlude C exclaims, “How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou *arise out of thy sleep?*” (Proverbs 6:9; compare Proverbs 6:4 and 20:12–13).

In the Book of Mormon, Lehi makes frequent use of this call in his testament (2 Nephi 1–4). He begs his sons to “*remember*,” “*hearken* unto [his] words,” and “*awake from a deep sleep*, yea, even from the *sleep of hell*” (2 Nephi 1:12–13). Nephi pleads with his own soul to “*awake . . . ! No longer droop in sin*” (2 Nephi 4:28). Jacob renews the call in Jacob 3:11: “O my brethren, *hearken unto my words; arouse the faculties of your souls; shake yourselves that ye may awake from the slumber of death*.”⁵³ King Benjamin uses similar language in his temple speech, and remembering becomes part of the sacrament prayers. Indeed, Louis Midgley has shown that remembrance is a pervasive theme throughout the Book of Mormon, noting that remembrance in the Book of Mormon is not just the recall of information but “*results in action*.”⁵⁴

Yet another connection in Nephi’s record to the wisdom tradition is admiration of Isaiah, who is often quoted and interpreted by Nephi and Jacob, and later on by other Book of Mormon figures. Isaiah’s writings are certainly not classified as wisdom texts, but William J. Whedbee

52. These injunctions often occur in the exordia as calls to attention.

53. For a discussion about how Lehi’s admonitions impact the teachings of his son Jacob, including use of the call to awake, see John A. Tvedtnes, “The Influence of Lehi’s Admonitions on the Teachings of His Son Jacob,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no. 2 (1994): 34–48, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1063&context=jbms.

54. Louis Midgley, “The Ways of Remembrance,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991), 169. See also Midgley, “‘To Remember and Keep’: On the Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book,” in *Disciple as Scholar*, 95–137.

has made a persuasive case that Isaiah drew extensively on wisdom forms and vocabulary and adapted them for his own teachings.⁵⁵ He argues that Isaiah's use of parables and proverbs from nature and empirical experience, his woe oracles, and his use of the term *counsel* are evidence of wisdom influence. To be sure, Isaiah seems to denounce the "wise men" of his day, but Whedbee claims that "Isaiah . . . borrowed the vocabulary and traditions of wisdom in order to combat the apostasy engendered in part by the royal wise men." He uses the wisdom tradition to "condemn the ostensibly wise and to defend the true Yahwistic wisdom,"⁵⁶ which is that "Yahweh was a master counsellor, who always executed his plan with the right method for the right time (Isa. 28:23ff.)."⁵⁷ Many of the passages Whedbee refers to in Isaiah to prove his points are also quoted in the Book of Mormon.

Nephi and Jacob follow Isaiah's practice of using wisdom speech to craft a message for their particular problems in their particular setting. It is striking to discover that in connection with his interpretation of Isaiah, Jacob delivers a remarkable wisdom discourse in 2 Nephi 9:28–43, 50–53, which actually helps bolster some of Whedbee's arguments. Jacob teaches explicitly that the so-called wise who "hearken not unto the *counsel* of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves" are the real fools (2 Nephi 9:28). He teaches clearly that "to be learned is good if they hearken unto the *counsels* of God" (2 Nephi 9:29). It is also worth noting that Whedbee links the terms *counsel* or *plan* used by Isaiah to a very early wisdom tradition regarding the heavenly assembly.⁵⁸

Jacob launches next into a series of woe indictments (2 Nephi 9:27–38). Whedbee points out that "Isaiah has far and away the greatest concentration of woes of any book in the Old Testament."⁵⁹ Though he admits to a "paucity of woe forms in the extant wisdom literature,"⁶⁰ yet he argues that the woe formula originated in the wisdom tradition and stood as a contrast to the bliss formulas or *'ashrê* sayings ("blessed is

55. See generally J. William Whedbee, *Isaiah and Wisdom* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), archive.org/details/isaiahwisdom0000whed.

56. Whedbee, *Isaiah and Wisdom*, 147.

57. Whedbee, *Isaiah and Wisdom*, 145.

58. Whedbee, *Isaiah and Wisdom*, 112–13, citing Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 2, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 162, and others.

59. Whedbee, *Isaiah and Wisdom*, 80.

60. Whedbee, *Isaiah and Wisdom*, 85.

he . . .” or “happy is he . . .”) seen in the Psalms and in Proverbs.⁶¹ We cannot know if Jacob used his woe statements because he was following the practice of Isaiah or the wisdom tradition in general, but it is remarkable that his list of woes includes warnings to the *wise*, the *rich*, the *deaf* that will not *hear*, the *blind* that will not see, the uncircumcised of *heart*, and others who are blatantly *rebellious* — all categories of the *foolish* in the wisdom tradition.⁶² He follows his indictments with a warning that only those who “consider themselves *fools* before God” will be admitted through the gate kept by the Holy One (2 Nephi 9:41–42). In an invitation much like Wisdom’s in Proverbs 9:5, which we will return to later, Jacob says: “Come, my brethren, every one that *thirsteth*, come ye to the *waters*; and he that hath no money, come buy and eat” (2 Nephi 9:50; compare Isaiah 55:1 and 2 Nephi 26:25).

Finally, before leaving our study of wisdom in the small plates, we should highlight some of the wisdom influences in Jacob’s admonition in Jacob 2–6. I have already indicated that his message is structured in the usual three parts of a classic passage of instructional wisdom: *exordium*, lesson, and conclusion. After giving advice about the conditions that make seeking *riches* appropriate and counsel about how to treat the *poor* (Jacob 2:12–22) — wisdom topics, to be sure — Jacob leaves pride and turns to sexual sin, which is another wisdom theme particularly manifest in Proverbs 1–9, as we discussed earlier. Jacob 4 contains elements reminiscent of Job 28:

How unsearchable are the *depths* of the mysteries of him;
and it is impossible that man should find out all his *ways*. And
no man *knoweth* of his *ways* save it be revealed unto him;
wherefore, brethren, despise not the revelations of God.
(Jacob 4:8)

Where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of
understanding? . . . The *depth* saith, It is not in me: and the
sea saith, It is not with me. . . . *Seeing* it is hid from the eyes
of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. . . . God
understandeth the way thereof, and he *knoweth* the place
thereof. (Job 28:12, 14, 21, 23)

61. For example, Psalms 106:3; 41:1; Proverbs 3:13; 8:34. See also Isaiah 3:10–11 and Ecclesiastes 10:16–17. See Whedbee, *Isaiah and Wisdom*, 87–90.

62. John W. Welch has compared Jacob’s ten woes with the Ten Commandments. See Welch, “Counting to Ten,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 2 (2003): 49, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1325&context=jbms.

The Jews . . . sought for things that they could not understand. Wherefore, because of their *blindness*, which *blindness* came by looking beyond the mark, they must needs fall; for God hath taken away his plainness from them, and delivered unto them many things which they cannot *understand*. (Jacob 4:14)

Finally, Jacob recounts Zenos’s extensive allegory of the tame and wild olive trees. Use of such an allegory from the natural world — especially one with female tree imagery — is a hallmark of the wisdom tradition. Jacob’s last injunction is wisdom language at its simplest: “O be wise; what can I say more?” (Jacob 6:12).

King Benjamin and Temple Wisdom

It should be clear by now that shared motifs and vocabulary between the small plates and Proverbs 1–9 are numerous and significant. As we move on to Mosiah 1–5, the comparison is only intensified. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks have called this the most eloquent, insightful, and profound speech in sacred literature, aside from the words of Christ himself.⁶³ So genuine similarities between Mosiah 1–5 and Proverbs 1–9 will enrich our understanding of the Book of Mormon, as well as in the other direction, our understanding of Proverbs and its enigmas.

We can begin the comparison by recognizing that King Benjamin’s speech is structured similarly to Proverbs: it is composed of several sections separated by ceremonial breaks or interludes (see table 3).⁶⁴

Table 3. Composition of Mosiah 1–6:3.

Preparation	1:1–2:8	Successor named and new name to be given; people gathered; tower constructed
Instruction I		
Section 1	2:9–28	All are indebted to God
Break A	2:29–30	<i>Coronation announcement</i>

63. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom”* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), ix, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/45/.

64. John W. Welch, “Parallelism and Chiasmus in Benjamin’s Speech,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech*, 326–27. Welch thoroughly analyzes the chiasmus that characterizes the composition of the speech. The composition given here is Welch’s, with the exception of the groupings into instructions, which is mine.

Instruction II		
Section 2	3:31–41	Consequences of obedience of disobedience
Break B	2:41–3:1	<i>Exhortation to remember and renewal of call to attention</i>
Instruction III		
Section 3	3:2–10	The angel's testimony of Christ's deeds
Section 4	3:11–27	Sanctification by the Atonement of Christ
Break C	3:27–4:4	<i>The people fall to the ground and request application of atoning blood of Christ; the Spirit of the Lord comes; they receive remission and feel joy and peace</i>
Instruction IV		
Section 5	4:4–12	Benjamin's testimony of God's goodness
Section 6	4:13–30	Righteous behavior of the redeemed
Break D	4:30–5:6	<i>Exhortation to remember: covenant response of the people; Benjamin accepts their covenant</i>
Instruction V		
Section 7	5:6–15	The sons and daughters of God
Final acts	6:1–3	Names recorded of all who accepted the name; Mosiah consecrated; priests appointed; people dismissed

Similar to the prologues of Proverbs and Nephi's record, the preparation section recounts King Benjamin's endeavors to teach his sons the mysteries and commandments of God. In both 1 Nephi 1 and Mosiah 1, emphasis is placed on the importance of records to facilitate instruction.

Welch has argued that the number of sections — seven — is significant and has shown how they relate to each other in a chiasmatic pattern.⁶⁵ However, in comparing King Benjamin's speech to instructional wisdom, it is useful to adjust the groupings of the sections in order to see that the king's speech is made up of five instructions, and like the proverbial instructions, all but the last one are tripartite in structure.

In the preparation section, like in Proverbs, Benjamin explicitly addresses his "sons" (Mosiah 1:3, for example). But in the *exordia* of the following sections, in contrast to Proverbs, King Benjamin addresses his audience not as "sons" but rather as his "brethren" (instructions I, II — Mosiah 2:9, for example), then as his "friends," "brethren," "kindred," and "people" (instruction IV — Mosiah 4:4).⁶⁶ And though the last

65. Welch, "Parallelism and Chiasmus," 373–76.
66. The angel's exordium, instruction III, does not include a direct address, but

section (instruction V) does not include an *exordium*, the very topic under consideration is the name by which the people shall be called:

Ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters. . . . Whosoever shall not take upon him the name of Christ must be called by some other name; therefore, he findeth himself on the left hand of God. (Mosiah 5:7, 10)

This is one of many clues that we shall find in King Benjamin’s speech that helps us understand that the instructions of Proverbs 1–9 may have a ritual significance. The “sons” who are urged repeatedly to seek for wisdom may be understood to be the potential “sons of God,” and the father behind the proverbial instructions may be Christ himself or a high priest or king standing in his stead.

Of all the sections of King Benjamin’s speech, the two most readily comparable to Proverbs 1–9 are the parallel sections 2 (of instruction II; Mosiah 2:31–41) and 6 (of instruction IV; Mosiah 4:13–30). But throughout his speech, King Benjamin invokes themes familiar from Proverbs. Table 4 samples the similarities.

Table 4. Thematic similarities between King Benjamin’s speech and Proverbs 1–9.

Theme	King Benjamin	Proverbs
Hearken/Hear/See	“Hearken unto me, and open your ears that ye may hear, and your hearts that ye may understand, and your minds that the mysteries of God may be unfolded to your view” (Mosiah 2:9)	“Incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding” (Proverbs 2:2)
Remember	“O remember, remember that these things are true” (Mosiah 2:41)	“My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments” (Proverbs 3:1)
Awake	“If the knowledge of the goodness of God at this time has awakened you” (Mosiah 4:5)	“How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?” (Proverbs 6:4, 9–11; compare Proverbs 20:12–13)
Pour out Spirit	“He has poured out his Spirit upon you” (Mosiah 4:20)	“I will pour out my spirit unto you” (Proverbs 1:23)

does include a call to attention (“awake, and hear”) and a motivation (“that [thy people] may also be filled with joy”). See Mosiah 3:2–4.

Theme	King Benjamin	Proverbs
Seek not riches/ Gold and silver	I “have not sought gold nor silver nor any manner of riches of you” (Mosiah 2:12)	“Riches and honour are with me. . . . My fruit is better than gold . . . and my revenue than choice silver” (Proverbs 8:13–19)
Prosperity/Safety	“If ye shall keep the commandments . . . of God . . . ye shall prosper in the land” (Mosiah 2:31)	“The upright shall dwell in the land” (Proverbs 2:21)
Evil spirit/ Contention/ Rebellion	If “ye do withdraw yourselves from the Spirit of the Lord . . . the same cometh out in open rebellion against God; therefore he listeth to obey the evil spirit” (Mosiah 2:36–37)	“When wisdom entereth into thine heart . . . to deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things . . . who rejoice to do evil” (Proverbs 2:10, 12, 14)
Guide on right paths	“That ye do withdraw yourselves from the Spirit of the Lord, that it may have no place in you to guide you in wisdom’s paths” (Mosiah 2:36)	“I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths” (Proverbs 4:11); the strange woman “forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God” (Proverbs 2:17)
Happiness/ Blessedness/Joy	“The Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience” (Mosiah 4:3)	“Happy is the man that findeth wisdom. . . . Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace” (Proverbs 3:13, 17)
Seek knowledge of God	If ye “humble yourselves . . . calling on the name of the Lord daily. . . . Ye shall grow in the knowledge of the glory of him that created you, or in the knowledge of that which is just and true” (Mosiah 4:11–12)	“If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding . . . then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God” (Proverbs 2:3, 5)
Impart substance to your neighbor	“Ye ought to impart of the substance that ye have one to another” (Mosiah 4:21)	“Withhold not good from them to whom it is due” (Proverbs 3:27)

The similarities are so marked that it is not unreasonable to explore a new interpretation of the setting for Proverbs 1–9. Much has been written by Latter-day Saint scholars arguing that the context for King Benjamin’s speech was very likely an ancient Israelite festival or

coronation ceremony.⁶⁷ As Benjamin addresses his people from the temple on the occasion of a festival prescribed by Mosaic law, perhaps we may set the exhortations of Proverbs 1–9 at a similarly solemn place and occasion. The father and at times the mother delivering the instructions could be figurative for the Heavenly King and Queen, or at least for the earthly high priest and priestess, or king (and queen?), standing ceremonially in the place of Yahweh.⁶⁸ King Benjamin explicitly teaches that those who have been born of Christ are called his sons and daughters (Mosiah 5:7). When the Lord accepts David's offer to build a temple, the Lord says, "I will be his father, and he shall be my son" (2 Samuel 7:14), another indication that the Lord (or his high priest or priestly king) might address his people as "sons" when speaking to them in or from the temple.⁶⁹ In such a scenario, the father's commandment and the mother's law (Proverbs 6:20) are not just the practical advice of earthly parents but the word of the Lord.

Proverbs 9:1–5 elucidated by King Benjamin's speech

With a ritual context in mind, Proverbs 9:1–5 becomes a particularly fascinating passage. The house of Proverbs 9:1 is the temple: "Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars." The pillars could be part of the temple structure.⁷⁰ They could also be associated with the altar platforms at the temple from which the law was

67. For example, Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, "King Benjamin's Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals," in *King Benjamin's Speech*, 147–223; Stephen D. Ricks, "Kingship, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6," in *King Benjamin's Speech*, 233–75; and John A. Tvedtnes, "King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, 2 vols., ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1990), 2:197–237.

68. Kevin Christensen describes research finding that during certain periods of the monarchy, the king was also the high priest in the temple and as such represented Yahweh himself. See "The Deuteronomist De-Christianizing of the Old Testament," *FARMS Review* 16, no. 2 (2004), 59–90. scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1621&context=msr. On another note, I think it is significant that in modern Latter-day Saint tradition, the wife of the temple president is known as the temple *matron*. In Jewish mysticism (Kabbalah), the feminine counterpart of God, the King, is the *Matronit*. This pair is delegated the task of caring for mankind by their supernal parents (Patai, *Hebrew Goddess*, 128–30). The *Matronit*, also known as the Shechinah, is surely a memory of the ancient Hebrew Goddess (Patai, *Hebrew Goddess*, 135–54).

69. For more on divine adoption, see Ricks, "Kingship," 253–54.

70. The two pillars of Solomon's temple had seven meshwork decorations (1

read to the people by the king or another leader on solemn occasions, from which covenants were renewed, and from which dedicatory prayers for the temple were offered (e.g., Exodus 24:4; 1 Kings 8:22; 2 Chronicles 6:13).⁷¹ In all cases, the pillars point to the temple and to ritual. These possibilities are bolstered by what follows in Proverbs 9:2–5:

[Wisdom] hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled.

The killed beasts refer to cultic sacrifice, and the table, bread, and wine allude to the table of the shewbread and to ritual libations.⁷² These are temple images. Wisdom is depicted here as a high priestess preparing for ritual and enticing⁷³ all who are spiritually hungry and thirsty to participate.⁷⁴ She boldly issues her call from the hills or the natural high grounds of the city, which is of course where the temple was located.⁷⁵ From there she would have given herself great visibility.

Wisdom in Proverbs 9:1–5 is like Moses in Exodus 24:4–12. Moses builds an altar and twelve pillars, offers sacrifice, reads the book of

Kings 7:17). Two pillars found in the temple at Arad may have stood for Yahweh and Asherah. Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah,” 197.

71. Ricks explains that pillars are associated with the coronation of new kings and served as a place by or from which the king or another leader on solemn occasions would read the law to the people. Ricks, “Kingship,” 244–47; see also Tvedtnes, “King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles,” 205–7. Tvedtnes shows how pillars are often erected as tokens of a covenant in the Old Testament. Tvedtnes, “King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles,” 200, 231n26.

72. Since King Benjamin’s instruction seems to have been associated with the harvest festival, these sacrifices and drink offerings may even be connected with the special sacrifices associated with the feast of the harvest as well. See Numbers 29:12–39.

73. Compare Mosiah 3:19.

74. Perhaps there is some connection to the cakes for the queen of heaven and the drink offerings of Jeremiah 7:18.

75. Jeremiah also delivered his message from the temple court (Jeremiah 7:2). See John W. Welch, “The Trial of Jeremiah: A Legal Legacy from Lehi’s Jerusalem,” in *Glimpses*, 339–41. If Proverbs 1–9 or its textual/rhetorical antecedents are dated from before the exile, as I am suggesting, they may have had influence on Jeremiah, or vice versa. Samuel the Lamanite also spoke from high places—the city walls (Helaman 13:4).

the covenant to the people, sprinkles the blood of the sacrifices on the people as a token of the covenant the Lord has made with them, and then journeys up the mount with the elders of Israel, where they see God and eat and drink. Wisdom’s invitation in Proverbs 9:5 has overtones of the Lord’s invitation to Moses in Exodus 24:12, “Come up to me in the mount,” which precedes the Lord’s command to build a sanctuary.

Wisdom has enlisted “her maidens” to help get the message out. The maidens are messengers, like the servants who are sent to the highways to gather all into the marriage feast in the parable of the wedding of the king’s son (Matthew 22:2–14), or like the servants in Zenos’s vineyard who labor with the Lord to bring forth the most good and precious fruit (Jacob 5:61, 72). More plainly, these messengers are angels and prophets, “the wise” of Proverbs 1:6, sent forth from the heavenly assembly to deliver the words of Christ to all nations.⁷⁶

The Book of Mormon passages that show the strongest similarities to Proverbs 1–9 in terms of form and content (1 and 2 Nephi, Jacob 2–6, Mosiah 1–5, Alma 36–42) all include an account of the author’s instruction by an angel. The Book of Mormon formula for a wisdom instruction seems to include a description of the personal mystical experience that led to the author’s firm testimony of the material that he is teaching. He never claims himself as the source of knowledge, but always credits his heavenly source.⁷⁷ In other words, Book of Mormon wisdom teachers claim to have acquired wisdom only as a result of being taught by the Spirit or by the Lord through an angel.

In Proverbs 9:1–5, the theme of finding the mysteries is renewed as Wisdom makes a very public invitation to come feast at her table—a table in the temple. John must have remembered her words in recording Revelation 22:17: “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

The Spirit and feasting are also paired in 3 Nephi 12:6 and 3 Nephi 20:8–9.⁷⁸ The tree of life and the bread and waters of life are matched in Alma 5:34: “Yea, [the Lord God] saith: Come unto me and ye shall

76. Also compare 2 Nephi 32:3; Alma 12:29; 13:22–27; 32:23; Moroni 7:2–23; and Moses 5:58. Accordingly, the seven pillars of Proverbs 9:1 could also represent the seven dispensations, signifying Wisdom’s invitation to all nations in all dispensations.

77. See, for example, Alma 5:46; 38:6; Helaman 7:29.

78. Also compare Isaiah 55:1, 10–11.

partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely.”

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

Ornament motif

When we understand Wisdom as a holy woman at the temple, it becomes clear that the ornament motif of Proverbs 1–9 may be understood to have ritual significance as well. To explore this possibility, let us first review the proverbial passages that refer to ornamentation:

My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck. (Proverbs 1:8–9)

Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: so shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man. (Proverbs 3:3–4)

My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion: so shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck. (Proverbs 3:21–22)

[Wisdom] shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee. (Proverbs 4:9)

My son, keep thy father’s commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. (Proverbs 6:20–21)

My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee. Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye. Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart. (Proverbs 7:1–3; compare Deuteronomy 6:8 and 11:18 among Moses’s admonitions to Israel.)

Fox points out that “ornaments and amulets in Deuteronomy signify remembering and treasuring God’s law” and that they can signify not

only learning but also its rewards.⁷⁹ The word *ornaments* in Proverbs 1:9 and 4:9 is sometimes translated "garland," *chains* from Proverbs 1:9 can also be "necklace" or "pendant," and the *crown* of Proverbs 4:9 is also "diadem." They are symbols of favor, honor, and nobility.⁸⁰ They can be understood to shield the wearer, to provide protection.⁸¹ Archaeologists have discovered silver foil amulets inscribed with scripture that may have been worn around the neck, a literal fulfillment of these proverbial injunctions.⁸²

But we have yet to explore the cultic significance of these ornaments taking our cue from King Benjamin's speech that Proverbs 1–9 may be set at the temple or derived from liturgic material. In a temple context, the chains about the neck might compare to the wraethen chains that fastened the high priest's breastplate to the ephod. Aaron was commanded to "bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually" (Exodus 28:29). The head ornament would be the turban or mitre worn by the high priest, which had the name of the Lord inscribed upon a golden plate attached to the front upon the forehead (Exodus 28:36–37).⁸³ Isaiah associates a "crown of glory"—the same Hebrew phrase as in Proverbs 4:9—with the receipt of a "new name." Speaking of the gathering of Israel in the last days, he says:

And the Gentiles shall see thy [Zion's] righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. (Isaiah 62:2–3)

In Proverbs 8:15–16, Wisdom declares that "by me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth." A plausible interpretation is that earthly potentates can access wisdom and use it to rule justly.⁸⁴ But we are unwinding the riddles of Proverbs and can find hidden meaning here, which is that Wisdom elevates righteous souls to receive temple ordinances,

79. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 84.

80. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 84, 176.

81. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 176.

82. Dana M. Pike, "Israelite Inscriptions from the Time of Jeremiah and Lehi," in *Glimpses*, 213–15.

83. See also Barker, *Great High Priest*, 138–39.

84. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 274.

to stand as *heavenly* kings and judges.⁸⁵ She is an agent of coronation and adoption, bringing righteous souls to stand before God and to be named his sons and daughters, just as King Benjamin did in Mosiah 5:6–12.⁸⁶ Stephen D. Ricks has shown that the conferral of a new name and divine adoption are two elements of ancient coronation ceremonies.⁸⁷ He observes that under King Benjamin, “what was once reserved for kings at coronation has now been extended in Nephite culture to the people generally.”⁸⁸ What is also remarkable is that in Proverbs 1–9, we see long-forgotten evidence *in the Old Testament* of this more democratic extension of the blessings of the higher priesthood.

Ammon’s Wisdom Boast

We move now to a comparison of Proverbs 1–9 with later Book of Mormon passages.

Ammon’s psalmlike rejoicing in Alma 26⁸⁹ employs the wisdom device of an agricultural metaphor: his brothers have been like field workers in delivering converts (sheaves) to the Lord of the Harvest (Alma 26:5–7). Scolded by Aaron for boasting, Ammon defends himself, turning the usual wisdom caution against boasting on its head. “I do not *boast* in my own strength, nor in my own *wisdom*,” he says, but in his God, “for in his strength I can do all things” (Alma 26:11–12). “He has all power, all *wisdom*, and all understanding; he comprehendeth all things, and he is a merciful Being, even unto salvation, to those who will repent and believe on his name” (Alma 26:35).

Ammon describes his and his brothers’ missionary efforts in much the same terms as Wisdom’s. Even as Wisdom cries “in the *streets*,” “in the chief places of concourse,” “in the openings of the gates,”

85. Compare Doctrine and Covenants 76:52–59.

86. Note that King Benjamin urged his people to “retain the name written always in your hearts” (Mosiah 5:12), much like Proverbs 3:3 and 6:21. Compare Jeremiah 31:31–34, “I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah . . . I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.”

87. The conferral of a new name and divine adoption are still part of modern coronation ceremonies for monarchs and popes.

88. Ricks, “Kingship,” 254.

89. My thanks to S. Kent Brown for drawing my attention to this passage; he treats it in greater detail in S. Kent Brown, *Voices from the Dust: Book of Mormon Insights* (American Fork, UT: Covenant, 2004), 119–20, archive.org/details/voicesfromdustbo0000brow/page/118/mode/2up.

and “upon the *highest places* of the city” (Proverbs 1:20–21; 9:3), so Mosiah’s sons have “taught [the people] in their *streets*,” “upon their *hills*,” and in their house, their temples, and their synagogues (Alma 26:29). Their invitation, like Wisdom’s, has been extended democratically to all:

He that repenteth and exerciseth faith, and bringeth forth good words, and *prayeth* continually without ceasing—unto such it is given to know the *mysteries* of God; yea, unto such it shall be given to reveal things which never have been revealed; yea, and it shall be given unto such to bring thousands of souls to repentance, even as it has been given unto us to bring these our brethren to repentance. (Alma 26:22)

Alma’s Wisdom Blessings and Instructions

Alma 32–33

Alma also draws from the wisdom tradition in his instructions to the poor among the Zoramites. He begins his discourse with a conditional *’ashrê* saying which we saw earlier is a device used in the wisdom literature: “I behold that ye are lowly in heart; and if so, blessed are ye” (Alma 32:8). Because of their *humility* and *poverty* (two wisdom virtues), they “may learn *wisdom*” (v. 12). Much of the rest of Alma’s instruction regards why they and others who humble themselves are thus blessed, and he repeats the *’ashrê* sayings with various modifications (vv. 13–16). His lecture on faith begins in verse 21, where he contrasts faith with “perfect *knowledge*”—a familiar wisdom term. A search for knowledge begins by believing on God’s word, which—of particular importance in light of our earlier discussions—comes from angels: “He imparteth his word by *angels* unto men, yea, not only men but women also. Now this is not all; little children do have words given unto them many times, which confound the *wise* and the *learned*” (Alma 32:23).

One begins to experiment upon the word by *awaking* and *arousing* one’s faculties (v. 27). Then Alma launches into his famous seed analogy. As we have said, use of analogies from nature is a tactic often used in wisdom teachings, and the comparison of the acquisition of knowledge to the ingestion of precious *fruit* from a tree that springs up unto everlasting life is most clearly a reference to the *tree of life* (Alma 32:28–43). Interestingly, shortly afterward, Alma quotes from Zenos,

the source of another of the Book of Mormon's extended tree metaphors in Jacob 5 (Alma 33:3–11).

Alma 36–42

Alma's counsel to his sons is not set at his death, yet this text can surely be classified as a patriarchal admonition. Not surprisingly, it is filled with wisdom elements.

He first directs his instructions to his son Helaman in Alma 36–37.⁹⁰ Alma reiterates the *prosperity promise* that was given originally by Lehi in his testament (2 Nephi 1:9). He asserts that none of his knowledge came by his own faculties, but rather from God as a result of his rebirth. He recounts his own life-changing mystical experience, telling the story of his conversion by the *angel* who began his rebuke with the word *arise* (Alma 36:8). He describes the horror he felt because of his iniquities and the terror of being “encircled” by the “*chains of death*” (Alma 36:11–18), then contrasts this with the *joy* that came to him when he appealed to Jesus for mercy (Alma 36:20–21). His experience culminates in a throne vision much like Lehi's (v. 22).

Alma's account is an *example story*—its retelling offers a vicarious experience of the horrors and joys known personally to Alma and thus a visceral imprint of his testimony. He expresses his gratitude that his people were brought out of Jerusalem and captivity and reiterates the *prosperity promise* before turning over the *records* to Helaman. Alma says that they are sacred and are being preserved for a *wise* purpose (Alma 37:2). He contrasts *foolishness* with *wisdom*, mentions *mysteries* and the *knowledge* of Jesus Christ, invokes the path motif, and enjoins Helaman to *remember* (Alma 37:6–13). “Learn *wisdom* in thy youth,” he says, “yea, learn in thy youth to *keep the commandments* of God” (37:35), reminding us of Wisdom's promise in Proverbs 8:17 that “those that seek me early shall find me.” As Nephi did in his final admonition (“pray always,” 2 Nephi 32:9), Alma exhorts Helaman to “counsel with the Lord in all thy doings” (Alma 37:37).

Then come instructions for Alma's next son, Shiblon, in Alma 38. Alma formulaically reiterates the *prosperity promise* (v. 1) and then makes mention of the *joy* that Shiblon has brought Alma because of his steadiness (vv. 2–4). He recaps the *angel's* visit (vv. 7–8). “See that

90. John W. Welch discovered a beautiful chiasm in Alma 36 that helps emphasize the contrasts of Alma's condition before and after he cries to Jesus for mercy. See John W. Welch, “A Masterpiece: Alma 36,” in *Rediscovering*, 114–31.

ye do not boast in your own *wisdom*," says Alma in 38:11. He then offers typical wisdom advice of a more practical nature: "Use boldness, but not overbearance; and also see that ye bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled with love; see that ye refrain from *idleness*" (Alma 38:12).

Last comes Corianton in Alma 39–42, who has *boasted* of his own *wisdom* (39:2; compare Proverbs 3:5: "Lean not unto thine own understanding"). Alma teaches that denying the Holy Ghost is unpardonable and that it is difficult to be forgiven of murdering "against the light and *knowledge* of God" (Alma 39:6). Corianton has allowed himself to be distracted from the ministry by a prostitute. Like the parent in Proverbs, Alma takes up the wisdom warning against sexual sin. He sternly rebukes his son for allowing "the *devil to lead away [his] heart* after harlots" (39:11; compare Proverbs 7:6–27, especially v. 25: "Let not thine *heart* decline to her *ways*, go not astray in her *paths*"). "Seek not after riches" (Alma 39:14), adds Alma, which we can compare to Proverbs 2:4–5: "If thou *seekest* [knowledge] as silver, and *searchest* for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the *knowledge* of God." Alma gives Corianton further instruction that he received himself from an *angel* (Alma 40:11) about the resurrection and the plan of mercy.

Helaman's Wisdom Exhortation

The patriarchal admonition of Helaman, Alma the Younger's grandson, is recorded in part in Helaman 5:5–13. He exhorts his sons to "remember to keep the commandments," using the word *remember* six times in verse 6 alone. He wants them to "lay up for [them]selves a *treasure* in heaven," even "that precious gift of *eternal life*" (Helaman 5:8). He wants them to remember that there is "no other *way*" besides "the atoning blood of Jesus *Christ*" (Helaman 5:9).

Mormon's Wisdom Lament

Mormon uses wisdom speech in an extended editorial in Helaman 12. The Nephites have sunk into wickedness after a period of prosperity. He laments:

O how *foolish*, and how *vain*, and how *evil*, and how devilish, and how quick to do iniquity, and how slow to do good, are the children of men; yea, how quick to *hearken* unto the words of the *evil one*, and to set their *hearts* upon the *vain* things of the world! Yea, how quick to be lifted up in *pride*;

yea, how quick to *boast*, and do all manner of that which is iniquity; and how slow are they to *remember* the Lord their God, and to give ear unto his *counsels*, yea, how slow to walk in *wisdom's paths*! Behold, they do not desire that the Lord their God, who hath *created* them, should rule and reign over them; notwithstanding his great goodness and his mercy towards them, they do set at naught his *counsels*, and they will not that he should be their *guide*. (Helaman 12: 4–6)

Notice that the personification of wisdom, discussed earlier, is still in use as a device nearly a millennium after Lehi's family left Jerusalem and their immersion in preexilic Hebrew wisdom conventions. This is strong evidence for Reynolds's claim that a scribal education continued in Nephite society until its end.⁹¹

Mormon then dwells on the power of God in the natural world and in judgment, which is strikingly like the wisdom passage in Job 28. He ends with an *'ashrê* saying ("*blessed* are they who will repent and *hearken* unto the voice of the Lord their God; for these are they that shall be saved," Helaman 12:23), contrasting *eternal life* with *everlasting damnation*.

Samuel's Wisdom Rebuke

Samuel the Lamanite draws from the wisdom tradition as well. He appeals to the authority of an *angelic* declaration (Helaman 13:7). Preaching from the high walls of the city, he presents an image of Wisdom herself, rebuking the people from the high places for not remembering the Lord, but rather for remembering their riches with "great *pride*, unto *boasting*" (Helaman 13:22), "walk[ing] after the *pride* of [their] own *hearts*" (Helaman 13:27; compare Proverbs 1:20–33; 9:3). They have chosen to follow "*foolish* and *blind guides*" (Helaman 13:29) rather than true prophets (13:24, 26, 33). Samuel alternates woe invectives with bliss promises (Helaman 13:11–16). The primary curse he delivers is that the wicked who "shall hide up *treasures* in the earth shall find them again no more" (Helaman 13:18). Compare Wisdom's curse that "the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them" (Proverbs 1:32).

Samuel preaches of Christ's coming, and his list of natural disasters at the time of Jesus's death once again is reminiscent of Job 28.

91. Reynolds, "Lehi and Nephi."

Though he pronounces a woe upon the people of Nephi (Helaman 14:3), yet the "more part" of the Lamanites are in the "*path of their duty*" and "do observe to *keep his commandments*" (Helaman 15:5). Samuel promises that "in the day of [the Lord's] *wisdom*," the Lamanites "shall again be brought to the true *knowledge*, which is the *knowledge* of their Redeemer, and their great and true shepherd, and be numbered among his sheep" (Helaman 15:16, 13).

The Book of Mormon and the Lost Wisdom Theology

Turning from an analysis of individual passages within the Book of Mormon to a reflection on the Book of Mormon as a whole, it becomes apparent that the record represents a strand of Hebrew religious thought that is underplayed in the Old Testament.

There has been a persistent trend, until recently, to dismiss the biblical wisdom literature (temporarily broadening our discussion from only Proverbs 1–9) as theologically illegitimate. Murphy discusses this trend in detail.⁹² The embarrassment of the wisdom texts for many scholars is that they stand at odds with the more predominate model of faith in the rest of the Old Testament—that is, that God's character and will is revealed through the series of events that is Israel's history and through his interactions with prophets acting as national leaders. The wisdom literature, on the other hand, is concerned with mundane, everyday human experience, such as the correct attitude toward mealtime (Ecclesiastes 2:24), drunkenness and gluttony (Proverbs 23:20–21), and discretion in speech (Proverbs 21:23), just to give a few examples. These scholars see the wisdom literature as, at worst, "secular or profane,"⁹³ or at best, an unusual form of mainstream Israelite belief created in order to "discuss both the multiplicity of trivial, daily occurrences as well as basic theological principles."⁹⁴

Murphy, for his part, points out that the wisdom experience itself was historical, even as it describes Israel encountering her creator in everyday events:

In the smaller concrete details of life one found innumerable situations that called for attitudes, actions, and decisions that ultimately had a profound effect on the individual. This sphere was not felt to be withdrawn from the Lord and

92. Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 121–26.

93. C. Westermann, as quoted in Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 122.

94. Von Rad, as quoted in Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 122.

his activity; God was as much at work here as in the heady experiences of Israel's history and liturgical worship.⁹⁵

The [wisdom] sages penetrated into the divine mystery in a manner that even the prophets never equaled. God drew the people, through their daily experience of themselves and creation, into the mystery of God's dealings with each individual human being.⁹⁶

For Murphy, "wisdom literature provides a biblical model for understanding divine revelation apart from the historical mode (salvation history) in which it is usually cast. . . . [In the wisdom literature], it is the dialogical relationship with God in which a faith response occurs, through God's free and gracious communication."⁹⁷

Democratic dialogic revelation in Hebrew wisdom literature and the Book of Mormon

Such a dialogic relationship of each individual with God concerning all aspects of life—which is, for many, an unnoticed or unwelcome stepchild in the Old Testament canon—is adopted by the Book of Mormon, where it flourishes. Terryl Givens suggested that it "may well be the Book of Mormon's most significant and revolutionary—as well as controversial—contribution to religious thinking."⁹⁸

Givens shows that the Book of Mormon, "through chiasmic form, thematic structure, numerous textual examples, and a final, concluding instance of readerly invitation . . . hammers home the insistent message that revelation is the province of everyman."⁹⁹ The individual's dialogic relationship with God, I would point out, is vastly more explicit—more "plain"—in the Book of Mormon than it is in the wisdom literature. Of particular note for our discussion is Givens's review of 1 Nephi, where Nephi repeatedly seeks knowledge from God "for personal, rather than public, edification," is "commended, not reproved" for doing so, and where he and his family receive knowledge from the voice of the Lord, or the Spirit, or angels, often in a personal appearance.¹⁰⁰ Givens

95. Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 124.

96. Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 125.

97. Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 126.

98. Terryl L. Givens, "The Book of Mormon and Dialogic Revelation," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no. 2 (2001): 21–22, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1284&context=jbms.

99. Givens, "Dialogic Revelation," 21.

100. Givens, "Dialogic Revelation," 23.

says that the Book of Mormon depicts "a kind of egalitarian access to truths that range from the sublime to the mundane, from principles of salvation to advice on prime hunting grounds,"¹⁰¹ not unlike the truths we find cherished in the wisdom literature. In summary, Givens claims that the Book of Mormon's moral "seems to be the indispensability of personal revelation as a key to spiritual survival."¹⁰² While this may not be obvious in all the wisdom literature, it is precisely and explicitly the point of Proverbs 1–9.

I have made the case that Wisdom's very public beckoning is not only to urge individuals to obtain personal revelation, but also to seek the higher priesthood blessings of cosmic coronation or apotheosis. There is no other instance in the Old Testament of such an invitation. On the contrary, searching for knowledge is censured (Deuteronomy 29:29: "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God"), and the priesthood is restricted to Levites. But Wisdom's democratic invitation is entirely consistent with the doctrine of Alma 13, where a call to be ordained a high priest "after the order of his Son" (v. 2) like Melchizedek (v. 14), is extended not on the basis of lineage or social status (or even gender, possibly), but only on terms of faith, repentance, and good works (vv. 3, 10). Qualified initiates are "sanctified by the Holy Ghost," are made "pure," and "[enter] into the rest of the Lord their God" (v. 12).¹⁰³

The lost wisdom tradition in the Book of Mormon

I have shown that scholars such as Whedbee and Murphy see a theology inherent in the wisdom tradition that is every bit as valid as the salvation history apparent in other Old Testament books and that is consistent with it. God is found in the everyday as well as in the epic events of Israel's past. While there may have been tension at times between the wise man and the prophet, the prophet felt at home with

101. Givens, "Dialogic Revelation," 24.

102. Givens, "Dialogic Revelation," 24.

103. For a lengthy discussion of this passage, see John W. Welch, "The Melchizedek Material in Alma 13:13–19," in *By Study and Also by Faith*, 2:238–72. He says, "For Alma, Melchizedek is . . . an example of the fact that all men can receive the same knowledge and authority that made Melchizedek great" (p. 263). See also Daniel Peterson's discussion of New Testament instances of promises of exaltation for the righteous in Peterson, "'Ye Are Gods,'" 516–28. See especially pages 524–25, where Peterson quotes one scholar as saying, "Paul's understanding of salvation involves a rather astounding (at least to modern ears) scheme of 'mass apotheosis.'"

wisdom and was quick to appropriate wisdom speech, borrowing its devices and concepts to reprove the learned from straying from their own tradition.

Margaret Barker makes a different argument about the validity of extant wisdom texts. Reviewing McKane, Whybray, and von Rad, she argues that the apparent secularism of much of the wisdom literature is imposed on it by later redactors. The prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah at times attack the wise men as a secular force opposed to divine rule, yet given what is extant of the wisdom texts, Barker wonders why anyone would want “to fulminate against the purveyors of the harmless platitudes which now form the Book of Proverbs.”¹⁰⁴ Something is missing, and the words of the sages cannot be trusted, nor can the attitude of the prophets toward them be fully understood.¹⁰⁵ Instead, using the pseudepigraphal books of Enoch and careful textual analysis of the Old Testament’s inconsistencies and silences, Barker reconstructs the wisdom theology of the preexilic period.

According to Barker, wisdom was an “all-encompassing knowledge of all things such that they could be controlled, or even created.”¹⁰⁶ Revelation of such knowledge was given in a mystical experience to a chosen person by an angel. The fundamental aspect of the experience was “the vision of God and the heavenly court.”¹⁰⁷ The chosen one was transformed into a divine being and received eternal life and power, even power over creation. Wisdom was closely associated with the temple, the monarchy, and the ancient Melchizedek priesthood. Knowledge itself was never condemned, but only its misuse. The wisdom tradition included an angel mythology of righteous and fallen angels. The Most High God was El, father of the host (the angels), and the greatest angel was Yahweh.¹⁰⁸ There was a divine woman as well, Wisdom, “the archetypal angel high priest.”¹⁰⁹

Barker argues that evidence of this tradition was deliberately suppressed from much of the Old Testament by a group of reformers

104. Margaret Barker, *The Older Testament: The Survival of Themes from the Ancient Royal Cult of Sectarian Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1987), 90.

105. Barker, *Older Testament*, 81–103.

106. Barker, *Older Testament*, 279.

107. Barker, *Older Testament*, 148.

108. Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 4–7; 71–72.

109. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 238.

known as the Deuteronomists.¹¹⁰ Although they acquired the dominant influence over the canonical texts, the older cult lived on as an extrabiblical tradition and provided a foundation for the emergence of Christianity.

The suppression of the ancient wisdom tradition had its roots in the late seventh century BC during the reform of Josiah.¹¹¹ Lehi lived during part of this reform and in the short period before the exile when it partially unraveled.¹¹² Kevin Christensen has comprehensively reviewed Barker's reconstruction of the lost wisdom mythos and compared it with Book of Mormon theology. He has found numerous and pervasive correspondences.¹¹³ Indeed, Book of Mormon prophets seem to have been clearly aware of the tension Isaiah and Jeremiah felt toward

110. Barker, *Older Testament*, 142–60. For discussions of the Deuteronomists, see William J. Doorly, *Obsession with Justice: The Story of the Deuteronomists* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), archive.org/details/obsessionwithjus0000door/mode/2up; and Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (San Francisco: Harper, 1997), archive.org/details/who-wrote-the-bible-2nd-edition-richard-elliott-friedman-1997. For a Latter-day Saint application, see Christensen, "The Deuteronomist De-Christianizing of the Old Testament"; or Kevin Christensen, "The Temple, the Monarchy, and Wisdom: Lehi's World and the Scholarship of Margaret Barker," in *Glimpses*, 449–522. Perhaps this de-Christianizing accompanied the seventh-century BCE effort to harmonize Israel's competing literary streams. Reynolds proposes that Josephite scribes may have resisted aspects of the movement. See Reynolds, "Lehi and Nephi," 206.

111. Margaret Barker, "What Did King Josiah Reform?" in *Glimpses*, 523–42.

112. Christensen, "The Temple," 450.

113. See generally Kevin Christensen, "Paradigms Regained: A Survey of Margaret Barker's Scholarship and Its Significance for Mormon Studies," *FARMS Occasional Papers* 2 (2001), archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/paradigms-regained-survey-margaret-barkers-scholarship-and-its-significance-mormon-studies; and Christensen, "The Temple." See also Kevin Christensen, "Twenty Years After 'Paradigms Regained,' Part 1: The Ongoing, Plain, and Precious Significance of Margaret Barker's Scholarship for Latter-day Saint Studies," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 54 (2022): 1–64, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/twenty-years-after-paradigms-regained-part-1-the-ongoing-plain-and-precious-significance-of-margaret-barkers-scholarship-for-latter-day-saint-studies/; and Kevin Christensen, "Twenty Years After 'Paradigms Regained,' Part 2: Responding to Margaret Barker's Critics and Why Her Work Should Matter to Latter-day Saints," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 55 (2023): 31–106, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/twenty-years-after-paradigms-regained-part-2-responding-to-margaret-barkers-critics-and-why-her-work-should-matter-to-latter-day-saints/.

the so-called wise.¹¹⁴ Like the Old Testament prophets, Nephi and Lehi warned that the Lord would take away knowledge if it was rejected. Christensen shows that Jacob, in particular, seems to have known what would be lost, and therefore he testified specifically of these things in his temple admonition.¹¹⁵

Christensen's analyses confirm that the influence of the lost wisdom tradition as reconstructed by Barker on Book of Mormon writers extends far beyond literary similarities. It is evident in fundamental Book of Mormon theology, with its testimonies of angel instruction, throne theophanies, claims of power over creation (for instance, Jacob 4:6: "We truly can command in the name of Jesus and the very trees obey us, or the mountains, or the waves of the sea"), temple themes and practices, prophecies of things to come, and teachings about Christ and the plan of redemption. I urge the reader to review my study alongside Christensen's analyses for the fullest picture of wisdom in the Book of Mormon.

Conclusion

Both the Book of Mormon and Proverbs 1–9 were hidden from the world for centuries — Proverbs 1–9 because of its enigmatic disguise, the world's eyes open to its deciphering only after the discovery of the Book of Mormon from its literal hiding place in the earth and the restoration of the ancient gospel that followed.

The Latter-day Saint temple liturgy, a fundamental aspect of the restoration, represents our journey back into God's presence. To be with him and feel his love, to stand confidently before him with our earthly families, is the greatest joy we could feel and the sweetest fruit of which we could ever partake. In Proverbs, Wisdom begs for us to promptly seek this blessing — to seek the mysteries of God and eternal life. In turn, the authors of the Book of Mormon face our way, telling their stories, adding their witnesses, teaching us wisdom, coaxing us onto the shining path. From the Book of Mormon, Wisdom calls to us in the voices of ancient American prophets.



114. Book of Mormon prophets never speak of a class of wise men, but rather, they speak generally of "those wise in their own eyes" (2 Nephi 15:21, cf. Isaiah 5:21).

115. Christensen, "The Temple," 502–4.

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Alyson Skabelund Von Feldt is a consultant, instructional designer, and author who helps leaders navigate transformation. She also pursues an interest in religious studies, Hebrew wisdom literature, and Restoration scripture. In addition to the original edition of the paper reprinted here, she authored “Does God Have a Wife?” (FARMS Review, 2007). She holds a BA in Philosophy and an MS in Organizational Behavior, both from Brigham Young University. Alyson and her husband, Doug, live in Lawrence, Kansas. They are parents of four children and grandparents of two.

