Willes Describes Lofty Goals at Fourth Annual Neal A. Maxwell Lecture


When Willes was asked by the Maxwell Institute to present this prestigious lecture, his first reaction was “Why me?” Seeking an answer to this question led him to think about what Elder Neal A. Maxwell said to him whenever they met: “Tell me what you are doing.” Willes said it was remarkable to him that Elder Maxwell was so interested in him. To Willes, telling what he was doing seemed the right approach for his topic for this lecture.

According to Willes, Deseret Management Corporation (DMC) used to be the company that was responsible for all the for-profit businesses owned by the church. Today, it is primarily a media company, encompassing Deseret News, Deseret Book, KSL TV and radio, Bonneville International, and Deseret Digital Media. Willes noted that anyone listening to that list would realize most of them are considered old media; newspapers, broadcast television, and printed books are predicted to become obsolete. Willes anticipates many exciting things ahead by combining old media with new media and by doing things in a different way.

Because of a value-based mission statement that the corporation has internalized—“We are a trusted voice of light and knowledge reaching hundreds of millions of people worldwide”—those companies are different from what they were a year ago, and Willes expects they will continue to evolve.

Willes concluded his lecture with examples from recent news articles that indicate an effort by DMC to provide more emotional journalism. He said, “In today’s world, if you aren’t touched by what we do, you get bored and go someplace else. And therefore, we have to find a way to reach you in such a way that you are so moved you can hardly wait to read us or watch us or listen to us again.” Willes contended that DMC will grow by providing relevant, compelling, emotional content in print as well as on the radio, TV, and the Internet. “If you ask interesting, compelling, powerful questions, you can do interesting, compelling, powerful journalism.”
Early Book of Mormon Writings Now Online

The most extensive collection of writings about the Book of Mormon published between 1829 and 1844 has been made available as an online database. The collection, 19th-Century Publications about the Book of Mormon (1829–1844), includes nearly 600 publications and close to one million words of text. It is intended to comprise, insofar as possible, everything published during Joseph Smith’s lifetime relating to the Book of Mormon. Under the auspices of Digital Collections at Brigham Young University’s Harold B. Lee Library, this ambitious project can be accessed at lib.byu.edu/dlib/bompublications.

For more than 10 years Matthew Roper, research scholar at the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship and head of the project, has been collecting this literature. The collection builds upon the early efforts of Francis W. Kirkham, an educator for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. According to Roper, during the 1930s Kirkham began collecting rare newspapers relating to early Latter-day Saint history. Subsequent researchers and historians have discovered many additional items, all of which are included in this new collection.

This valuable resource includes works by detractors as well as defenders and contains references to the Book of Mormon published in newspapers, books, pamphlets, hymns, broadsides, and early reference works, much of it formerly inaccessible to the public.

“We've done several things to make this collection valuable and easy to use,” says Roper. “First, we gathered all of the publications relating specifically to the Book of Mormon into one collection, saving researchers the considerable time involved in identifying articles, tracking them down, and obtaining microfilm of rare books. Second, the database includes transcripts as well as images of these publications. The collection is also fully searchable, allowing scholars to more easily identify and access those publications relating to their area of interest.” The electronic database will also be updated as more sources come to light.

“He Shall Add”: Wordplay on the Name Joseph and an Early Instance of Gezera Shawa in the Book of Mormon

In explaining the prophecies of Isaiah in which his soul delighted, Nephi sets up an intriguing wordplay on the name Joseph. On several occasions he combines segments of Isaiah 11:11 and Isaiah 29:14 to foretell the gathering and restoration of Israel at the time of the coming forth of additional scripture. The most discernible reason for Nephi’s interpretation of these two specific texts in the light of each other is their shared use of the Hebrew verb yāsip, which literally means “to add” but can have the more developed senses to “continue” or “proceed to do” something and “to do again.” This verb is also the source of the name Joseph, which means “may He [the Lord] add,” “He shall add,” or “He has added.” Rachel, the mother of the patriarch Joseph, is said to have explained the giving of this name to her son with that basic sense in mind: “And she called his name Joseph [yōsēp], and said, The Lord shall add [yōsēp] to me another son” (Genesis 30:24; emphasis in all scriptural citations is mine). Thus when Nephi combined these two prophecies together through their common use of yāsap, he was also using a wordplay on the name Joseph both to remind us that it was the seed of Joseph that would be gathered and to foretell the involvement of another Joseph, Joseph Smith, in the gathering and in the coming forth of scripture.

Isaiah 11:11 states: “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again [yôsîp] the second time to recover the remnant of his people,” while Isaiah 29:14 declares: “Therefore, behold, I will proceed [yōsîp] to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder.” Nephi’s joining of these two passages is most noticeable in 2 Nephi 25:17, where he foretells the latter-day gathering of Judah: “And the Lord will set his hand again [yōsîp] the second time to restore his people from their lost and fallen state. Wherefore, he will proceed [yōsîp] to do a marvelous work and a wonder among the children of men.” Here Nephi states that the Lord “shall bring forth his words unto [his people]” words they have not previously had, “for the purpose of convincing them of the true Messiah” (25:18) and “that the promise may be fulfilled unto Joseph [yōsēp]” (25:21).
Those who remember Lehi’s prophecy earlier in the same book of 2 Nephi will see the subtle connection Nephi may have been making between the Lord setting his hand again (yōsīp) and proceeding (yōsīp) to do a marvelous work and the name Joseph (yōsēp), both Joseph of old and his descendant Joseph Smith. Lehi cites prophecies of the patriarch Joseph to his youngest son Joseph, in which the patriarch foretells that a “Joseph” would bring about the gathering and restoration of Israel (see 2 Nephi 3:13–16). This “Joseph” would be raised up “in that day when my work shall commence among all my people unto the restoring thee, O house of Israel” (2 Nephi 3:13). Joseph said he was “sure of the fulfilling of this promise” (3:14), the “promise” that Nephi said would “be fulfilled unto Joseph [yōsēp]” (2 Nephi 25:21) when the Lord would “set his hand again [yōsīp] the second time” and “proceed [yōsīp] to do a marvelous work and a wonder” (2 Nephi 25:17).

Nephi prefaces another treatise on the coming forth of additional scripture with an oracle that joins the same two Isaiah passages together but reverses the order of their quotation: “But behold, there shall be many—at that day when I shall proceed [yōsīp] to do a marvelous work among them [Isaiah 29:14], that I may remember my covenants which I have made unto the children of men, that I may set my hand again [*wṓsíp yādî] the second time to recover my people, which are of the house of Israel [Isaiah 11:11]” (2 Nephi 29:1). This joining together of biblical texts from isolated passages on the basis of a shared word was an interpretive technique known in later rabbinic times as Gezera Shawa.

Jesus uses Gezera Shawa in Matthew 22:36–40, joining the commandment “And thou shalt love [wṓrāhabtā] the Lord thy God with all thy heart” (Deuteronomy 6:5) to the lesser-quoted commandment “but thou shalt love [wṓrāhabtā] thy neighbour as thyself” (Leviticus 19:18), declaring that “on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” Jesus’s Gezera Shawa makes one commandment of two. Nephi’s technique similarly makes one prophecy from two separate prophecies. For Nephi, the coming forth of the sealed book (Isaiah 29) meant the gathering of Israel (Isaiah 11).

Nephi explains additional prophecies of Isaiah to his brothers using the verb yāsap in 1 Nephi 22: “And after our seed is scattered the Lord God will proceed [yōsīp] to do a marvelous work among the Gentiles” (22:8); “Wherefore, the Lord God will proceed [yōsīp] to make bare his arm in the eyes of all nations” (22:11; citing Isaiah 29:14 and 52:10); “Wherefore, he will bring them again [yōsīp] out of captivity, and they shall be gathered together [*wayyḗ’ásāpî] to the lands of their inheritance” (1 Nephi 22:12; compare Isaiah 11:11–12). Nephi envisaged the Lord’s “adding” to do a marvelous work as a summation of Isaiah’s prophecies regarding the gathering and restoration of Israel, including his brothers’ and his own posterity as descendants of Joseph.

Mormon, perhaps drawing on the words of Lehi, Nephi, and Isaiah, creates the clearest name play on Joseph in this vein: “Yea, and surely shall he again [yōsīp] bring a remnant of the seed of Joseph [yōsēp] to the knowledge of the Lord their God” (3 Nephi 5:23).

A recognition of Nephi’s repeated combination of Isaiah 11:11 and 29:14 as Gezera Shawa helps us to appreciate how “after the manner of the things of the Jews” (2 Nephi 25:5) two disparate prophecies can be seen as fulfilled in a single divine act, or rather, in a single person—a “Joseph.” It also helps us to appreciate how Jacob—Nephi’s brother and protégé—applied this technique to two other prophecies of Isaiah (Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16) together with Psalm 118:22, based on shared words like ‘eben (Heb. “stone”), to create a single prophecy about Jesus Christ (see Jacob 4:15–17). All of this suggests that...
we too can increase our understanding and appreciation of the words of Isaiah and other scriptures by adding to our scripture study tools the juxtaposing of different passages sharing the same word(s) and integrating them for our “profit and learning” (see 1 Nephi 13:23; 2 Nephi 4:15).

By Matthew L. Bowen
Nibl ey Fellow and PhD student in Biblical Studies at the Catholic University of America

Notes

1. For the purposes of my thesis I assume that the small plates of Nephi, when not quoting from the Old Testament, were written in the Hebrew language, whatever script may have been used. I also assume that the quoted and paraphrased Old Testament passages would have retained their Hebrew character.


3. HALOT, 403.

4. Another explanation offered for the origin of the name Joseph a verse earlier associates the name Joseph with “gathering” (Genesis 30:23), where Rachel says, “God hath taken away [yôsîp, lit., gathered up] my reproach.” Cf. Isaiah 11:12, “[He] shall assemble [weʾāsap, gather up] the outcasts of Israel.”

5. The morphological difference between the Hiphil (causative) imperfect (yôsîp) and the Qal participle (yôsîp) is slight (vowel quantity i vs. i). The difference in pronunciation would also have been slight.


7. Luke 10:27 tells this story differently, attributing the joining of the two Torah passages to the “lawyer” testing Jesus. Luke’s account would suggest that this Gezerah Shawah was a commonplace in the discourse of the religious leaders in Jesus’s time. Matthew’s account, on the other hand, seems to attribute the genius of this Gezerah Shawah to Jesus himself.

8. This commandment is attached directly to the so-called Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4 (“Hear [šônica], O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one”), which constitutes Judaism’s most important creedal formulation (translation mine).

9. Jesus’s citation of Leviticus 19:18 here—as a commandment summarizing the whole law (Torah)—may originate with Hillel the Elder, a noted rabbi who lived during the time of Jesus’s adolescence [ca. AD 10]. Hillel is reported to have said, “Whatsoever is distasteful to you, do not do to your neighbor: this is the whole Law [dlik sny lîbrik P tḥydy zw ḫy kl ḥtwr hkwlt],” Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 31a (translation mine). This statement may also be the basis of the Savior’s Golden Rule: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law [Torah] and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12; cf. Luke 6:31). Jesus’s use of Gezera Shawah adds a vertical dimension (“Love the Lord thy God”) to the horizontal obligation (“Love thy neighbor”) stipulated by Hillel. Notably, Hillel is sometimes wrongly said to be the originator of Gezera Shawah. Strack and Hemberger note that Gezera Shawah was “not invented by Hillel” but constituted one of “the main types of argument in use at that time.” See Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash, 17. Jesus was employing a technique used before his (and Hillel’s) time.

10. “And they shall be gathered”: possibly a Niphal form of ʾāsap. See HALOT, 1:74.

11. 3 Nephi 5:24 continues: “And as surely as the Lord liveth, will he gather in [cf. (w̜-̜)ʾāsap, “assemble,” Isaiah 11:12] from the four quarters of the earth all the remnant of the seed of Jacob, who are scattered abroad upon all the face of the earth.” If the underlying verb is ʾāsap/yēʾāsēp (rather than qibbēṣ/yēqabbēṣ, the name play on Joseph is even richer. Either way, Mormon alludes to Isaiah 11:11–12 (cf. 1 Nephi 22:12).