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Two New Book of Mormon Hymns

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When I offered in 1998 to take up editorship of the *Journal*, it was with two provisos. First, that a very different approach be taken to the format and contents of the valuable but underused and under-appreciated journal as it had been built up by Stephen Ricks and associates. And second, that I would serve for a limited number of years—and only if I could have the help of two proven friends and scholars, Kent Brown and Jerry Bradford, to hold up my hands when I tired.

Now the time has come to turn the responsibility over to new people. All of us at FARMS feel fortunate that Kent Brown has agreed to don the mantle of editor. He has chosen a new set of associate editors who promise to assist him as Kent himself has aided me. On the next two pages he introduces his new helpers.

We feel we have made a good start on our objectives, although, of course, we have not accomplished all that we hoped for. We especially wanted to publish articles that would continue to give readers real substance about current scholarly research concerning the Book of Mormon. At the same time, we wished to make the material understandable for those who do not think of themselves as researchers. In order to issue the *Journal* semiannually, we also felt we needed to involve more scholarly writers than in the past. We were able to report in 2000 that some 30 authors had been published in our first four issues in the new format. Now that number has grown to 38. Many topics have been addressed that span a wide range of useful approaches to the embryonic field of Book of Mormon studies. Meanwhile, comments received from readers tell us that some have benefited a great deal from the labors of willing authors and editors to see that the writing, even on technical matters, is lucid and interesting.

But we are still not satisfied with the scope of the topics addressed so far. We have sought writers to prepare articles on a large number of additional subjects. The new editors will undoubtedly encourage further writing that has not yet germinated from the seeds we have planted. Yet some of the material already appearing in the *Journal* has been of great significance for the study of the Book of Mormon and might not have been made public had we not pressed forward.

Special thanks go to our designer, Bjorn Pendleton. He has made silk purses from the sows’ ears we have sometimes given him. Without his inspired creativity, our hopes of appealing to lay readers would have been frustrated. Michael Lyon has also been valuable in helping identify appropriate visual materials.

We thank the members of the Editorial Advisory Board as well as our technical supervisors, especially Mel Thorne, Alison Coutts, and Don Brugger, and their staff for their efforts to make up for our deficiencies. The FARMS officers and board have supported us at every point, and we thank them.

Looking back over our combined effort, we take considerable satisfaction in the fact that such a minuscule staff and limited budget have been able to do so much. While we have fallen behind our optimal publication schedule (not particularly due to our failures), the lessons we have learned may aid the incoming editors in doing better in the future.

Has it been worth doing? Yes indeed. The *Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ* is of such great importance to humanity that all of us with capabilities to more fully elucidate it, teach it, and live its teachings do a good thing by holding up its light to a world still largely ignorant of its power.

—John L. Sorenson, Editor

## Submitting Articles to the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*

Guidelines for preparing and submitting articles for publication in the *Journal* are available on the FARMS Web site (farms.byu.edu), by e-mail request to jbms@byu.edu, or by mail from FARMS. In general, authors should submit a detailed outline or abstract to the editors for approval before submitting a completed manuscript.
A New Editorial Team

Times of transition are both cheery and sad. But to see John L. Sorenson step aside as editor of the Journal brings a feeling of loss. It was tough enough when Stephen D. Ricks, the founding editor, finally turned his attention to other demands. With the retirement of John (if one can really speak of his retiring), the new group of editors collectively sense a yawning chasm between ourselves and the terrain on which he always stood so surefootedly and on which he always demanded that authors stand. One of our deepest hopes is that John will permit us in the future to feature him and his work in the pages of the Journal.

In this transition we also lose the reasoning voice of a friend and colleague in M. Gerald Bradford, who has served as an associate editor during the past four-plus years. Jerry has always stood for taking another look at an item or rethinking an issue. It is one of our fond hopes that he will bring the written results of his considerable skills and defined interests to these pages.

Gratefully, I am not alone. Four outstanding individuals have graciously consented to assist in the responsibilities associated with producing a quality journal that seeks to bring readers to a clearer understanding of the Book of Mormon. All four are members of the BYU faculty, and all four were students at BYU at one point or another. Each of these new associate editors brings a set of skills that, after working with John and Jerry, I thought essential for continuing their work at any competent level. Let me introduce the new associate editors in alphabetical order of last names.

Richard E. Bennett is the Canadian in the group. He joined the faculty of Church History and Doctrine in 1997 after distinguishing himself as the head archivist at the University of Manitoba, a position that he held for almost 20 years. Before that assignment, for three years he worked 2,000 feet underground for the International Nickel Company (INCO) in Sudbury, Ontario, Canada. One can understand Richard’s importance to the Journal as a church historian when one looks back at the articles appearing therein during the past four years. It becomes quickly apparent that, in the minds of the editors, Book of Mormon studies embrace the story of the Book of Mormon in the modern era. Richard’s abiding interest in the Book of Mormon becomes visible in his rather recent study titled “The Book of Mosiah: A Primer for the Restoration,” which appeared in the volume of essays from the 28th annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium.

Donald W. Forsyth completed his graduate work at the University of Pennsylvania in 1979 and joined BYU’s Department of Anthropology that same year as John Sorenson’s first hire during his term as chair. His skills in the archaeological study of ancient America place him in a key position to assist with the Journal, for his archaeological interests center on the Mesoamerican region, particularly the Maya area. He revealed how serious he is about archaeology when he took his diving skills to Guatemala and helped recover artifacts from the bottom of a lake. He also carries an abiding interest in the origin of complex societies in that region and has focused his energies on the analysis of pottery, the one solid basis for determining the dates of various archaic civilizations. In addition, he maintains a research interest in the ethnohistory of the native Americans of Brazil in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Cynthia L. Hallen is an associate professor of linguistics who joined the BYU faculty in 1991 after completing her graduate work at the University of Arizona. Her background reveals a long acquaintance with Emily Dickinson and her works. She also possesses a superb grasp of the meanings and nuances
of English words. As witness, she is the contributing author of the department in this journal titled “What’s in a Word?” She first heard about Joseph Smith when she was a fifth-grader living on the island of Okinawa. She joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at the end of her high school years after ditching chemistry class and happening into an LDS church building to pray, whereupon she met the custodian and the first counselor in the local bishopric. It is her fondness for the Book of Mormon, her literary skills, and her willingness to pay close attention to good writing that made her an attractive candidate to serve as an associate editor for the Journal.

Dana M. Pike grew up in New England and dreamed of settling there, but in 1992 BYU hired him in the Department of Ancient Scripture. Like Don Forsyth, he completed graduate work at the University of Pennsylvania before joining the BYU faculty. During his graduate school days, he worked at the blood bank and in the hematology department of the oldest hospital in the United States, the Pennsylvania Hospital, which was founded by Benjamin Franklin. Along the way, Dana taught for a year at the University of North Carolina as a visiting faculty member. His specialty is Israelite history and religion, with a focus on the period of the Israelite monarchies, before the people of Judah were exiled in Babylonia. That interest by itself positions Dana to serve the Journal, for it was at the end of that historical period that Lehi and Sariah left Jerusalem, taking with them the lore, culture, and religion of their people into the New World.

In my view, we shall all benefit from the combined wisdom that these associate editors will bring to the Journal’s tasks.
Brigham Young, by Enoch W. Pen, Oil on canvas, 1866. Photograph by Ron Reed. Courtesy Museum of Church History and Art, Salt Lake City, Utah. From the Salt Lake City and County Collection. Used by permission.
Brigham Young
and the

BOOK OF MORMON

W. JEFFREY MARSH
As president and prophet of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for three decades, President Young was also a deeply spiritual man. Indeed, “much more than being a colonizer and a governor, [he] was a seer and a profound teacher of gospel doctrines and principles. The more one encounters his key teachings, the larger he looms.” Curiously, however, his published sermons as a whole contain relatively few citations from the Book of Mormon—the marvelous scriptural record that had come to light in his day and led him into the church he would embrace for the rest of his life. Yet Brigham’s acquaintance with that book was such that it formed one of the pillars on which he rested some of his most important teachings. How important was the Book of Mormon to Brigham Young? What impact did it have on his life and teachings? And what impact did he, in turn, have on the printing and dissemination of the Book of Mormon?

An Early Love for God’s Word

Brigham Young was the ninth of eleven children born to John and Abigail Nabby Howe Young. Despite failing health that cut her life short, Abigail instilled in her family great faith in God to the extent that each of her children, “on hearing the Gospel, accepted it with whole heart.” She taught her children to love the Bible. Brigham said, “Of my mother—she that bore me—I can say, no better woman ever lived in the world than she was. . . . My mother, while she lived, taught her children all the time to honour the name of the Father and Son, and to reverence the holy Book. She said, ‘Read it, observe its precepts, and apply them to your lives as far as you can.’”

From early youth, Brigham yearned for spiritual enlightenment. He found life less than satisfying, was pessimistic about the future, and took no comfort in the philosophies espoused in his day. He often prayed, “If there is a God in heaven save me, that I may know all and not be fooled. I saw them get religion all around me—men were rolling and hollering and bawling and thumping but [it] had no effect on me. I wanted to know the truth that I might not be fooled.”

He desired to possess the same spiritual gifts and spiritual understanding described in the New Testament. “The secret feeling of my heart,” he wrote, “was that I would be willing to crawl around the earth on my hands and knees, to see such a man as was Peter, Jeremiah, Moses, or any man that could tell me anything about God and heaven.” When it came to teaching the things of God, Brigham felt that the religious philosophies of his day were “as dark as midnight.”

Although Brigham was very discouraged about the general condition of mankind, his brother Phineas has recalled giving him this choice counsel in 1829: “Hang on, [Brigham], for I know the Lord is going to do something for us.”

Brigham became even more determined to find the truth. A hunger and thirst for the things of the Spirit were an intrinsic part of his nature. He had unwavering faith in a living God, and as a seeker, he soon discovered in the restoration of the gospel and in the Book of Mormon what his heart longed to know.

A Remarkable Sign in Heaven

Brigham married Miriam Angeline Works on 5 October 1824. They mutually agreed to attend the Methodist church. The Youngs settled first in Haydenville and later moved to Port Byron, New York (both homes are still standing).

On the night of 21 September 1827—when Joseph Smith received the Book of Mormon record from the angel Moroni at the hill Cumorah—Brigham and Miriam witnessed a remarkable heavenly manifestation in Port Byron, 55 miles east of Cumorah. Simultaneously, the same heavenly display was seen...
Conversion through the Book of Mormon

Brigham was first introduced to the Book of Mormon while in Mendon in the spring of 1830. Samuel Smith, brother to the Prophet Joseph, tracted through the area with a knapsack of the newly printed scripture. Two of these copies made their way into the hands of Brigham’s siblings and began to circulate through the family. The first copy was presented to his brother Phinehas at the Tomlinson Inn in Mendon. Samuel entered the tavern, where hotel guests and stagecoach travelers were dining, and approached Phinehas, who had stopped there for supper. While holding out a copy of the Book of Mormon, Samuel simply said, “There’s a book, sir, I wish you to read.” He described its contents and said, “I know the book is a revelation from God, translated by the power of the Holy Ghost, and that my brother, Joseph Smith, Jr., is a Prophet, Seer, and Revelator.”

That single, quiet conversation initiated a chain reaction of events leading to the conversion of several future leaders of the church. The Youngs had heard rumors about Joseph Smith’s golden Bible and knew something about it, but this was the first time any of them had actually seen the book. Phinehas said, “I commenced and read every word in the book the same week. The week following I did the same, but to my surprise, I could not find the errors I anticipated, but felt a conviction that the book was true.”

Phinehas loaned the book to his father and to his sister Fanny. She declared the book to be “a revelation.” After father Young read the book, he said it was “the greatest work... he had ever seen, the Bible not excepted.” Apparently, Brigham also read from the book but wanted more time to study the matter.

A few months later, in June 1830, Samuel Smith returned to the Mendon area and loaned a second copy of the Book of Mormon to Brigham’s brother-in-law John P. Greene, a Methodist preacher. This second copy also circulated among family members.

In August 1830 Phinehas and his brother Joseph were on their way to preach Reformed Methodism in Canada. At one point in their journey, they were entertained in the home of Solomon Chamberlain, a former Reformed Methodist who had been baptized a Latter-day Saint in Seneca Lake by the Prophet Joseph Smith in April. Solomon preached to Joseph and Phinehas from the Book of Mormon for almost two hours. Overwhelmed by Solomon’s enthusiasm for the book, Phinehas protested, saying it was “not good to give a colt a bushel of oats at a time,” but Solomon did not desist. Phinehas was moved by Solomon’s sincere declaration that “everyone must believe in the Book of Mormon or be lost.” He later wrote: “This was the first I had heard of the necessity of another church, or of the importance of rebaptism; but after hearing the old gentleman’s arguments, I began to inquire seriously into the matter, and soon became convinced that such an order of things was necessary for the salvation of the world.” Naturally, Brigham heard reports of his brothers’ experience. He remarked to Phinehas that he was convinced there was something to Mormonism. Phinehas replied that he “had long been satisfied of that.”

Brigham later accompanied Phinehas to a conference of the Reformed Methodists at Manlius Center in Onondaga County, New York. There they listened to Solomon Chamberlain preach about the Book of Mormon. Although Solomon’s message was not well received by those at the conference, Brigham’s soul was stirred. Yet he proceeded cautiously. “When the [B]ook of Mormon was first printed, it came to my hands in two or three weeks afterwards. Did I believe, on the first intimation of it?... ‘Hold on,’ says I... ’Wait a little while; what is the doctrine of the book, and of the revelations the Lord has given? Let me apply my heart to them... I considered it to be my right to know for myself, as much as any man on earth. I examined the matter studiously for two years.
before I made up my mind to receive that book. . . . I wished time sufficient to prove all things for myself.”

He later recalled, “I was not baptized on hearing the first sermon, nor the second, nor during the first year of my acquaintance with this work.”

Besides studying the Book of Mormon, Brigham wanted to learn the character of those who professed to believe in it: “I watched to see whether good common sense was manifest; and if they had that, I wanted them to present it in accordance with the Scriptures. . . . [W]hen I had ripened everything in my mind, I drank it in, and not till then.”

For the next 18 months he pondered the Book of Mormon and its message. In the fall of 1831, Elders Alpheus Gifford and Eleazer Miller, along with other missionaries, came from Pennsylvania through Mendon to preach the Book of Mormon. Upon hearing them, Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball were, in Heber’s words, “constrained by the Spirit to bear testimony of the truth which we had heard, and when we did this, the power of God rested upon us and we had a testimony that the work was true.” Brigham simply noted that they were taught “the everlasting Gospel as revealed to Joseph Smith,” which gospel, he said, “I heard and believed.”

The missionaries returned to the area in 1832, and Brigham’s extended family made two visits to hear them at the Columbia Branch in Pennsylvania. Brigham described the impact of Elder Miller’s humble manner and firm testimony of the Book of Mormon: “If all the talent, tact, wisdom, and refinement of the world had been sent to me with the Book of Mormon, and had declared, in the most exalted of earthly eloquence, the truth of it, undertaking to prove it by learning and worldly wisdom, they would have been to me like the smoke which arises only to vanish away. But when I saw a man without eloquence, or talents for public speaking, who could only say, ‘I know, by the power of the Holy Ghost, that the Book of Mormon is true, that Joseph Smith is a Prophet of the Lord,’ the Holy Ghost proceeding from that individual illuminated my understanding, and light, glory, and immortality were before me. I was encircled by them, filled with them, and I knew for myself that the testimony of the man was true. . . . My own judgment, natural endowments, and education bowed to this simple, but mighty testimony.”

On Sunday, 15 April 1832, after two years of intensive investigation, Brigham was baptized in his own millstream at Mendon and confirmed at the water’s edge by Elder Eleazar Miller. All of his immediate family—father, brothers, and sisters—were also baptized. “It is a remarkable fact,” historian Leonard J. Arrington noted, “that . . . all [of the Young family members baptized that day] remained loyal, practicing Mormons throughout their lives.”

Brigham said that on that occasion he felt a humble, childlike spirit witness to him that his sins were forgiven. He was filled with enthusiasm and a sincere desire to share what he now possessed. In the week following his baptism, he delivered his first sermon. He later said, “I wanted to thunder and roar out the Gospel to the nations. It burned in my bones like fire pent up, so I commenced to preach. . . . Nothing would satisfy me but to cry abroad in the world, what the Lord was doing in the latter days.” Although he would be driven from five homes because of his testimony (homes in which he barely had time to settle before being forced to leave—losing “everything [he] had” each time), he spent the remainder of his life declaring what he knew to be true.

Unswayed by Opposition to the Book of Mormon

On one occasion before they joined the church, Heber, Brigham, and Brigham’s brother Joseph were discussing what they had learned from the elders and their own reading of the Book of Mormon. As they were talking, they suddenly “felt the glory of God around them and saw in vision ‘the gathering of the Saints to Zion, and the glory that would rest upon them; and many more things connected with that great event, such as the sufferings and persecutions which would come upon the people of God, and the calamities and judgments which would come upon the world.’”

Reflecting on this experience years later, Brigham observed that the source of the opposition leveled against the Book of Mormon was from the adversary. A great many false stories and reports were circulated “as quick as the Book of Mormon was printed, and began to be scattered abroad,” he said. “Then the spirit of persecution, the spirit of death, the spirit of destruction immediately seemed to enter the hearts of various individuals, more particularly in ‘the hearts of the pious priests . . . than any other portion of the people [because] they could not bear it.”

Despite the opposition and rising resistance to the Book of Mormon, Brigham was deeply impressed with the biblical style of the book and the answers
it gave to the questions of life and the afterlife—questions that had vexed him from his youth. He viewed its teachings to be of “priceless value.”

Declaring the Word

Once converted to Mormonism, Brigham proclaimed and defended the Book of Mormon. On his first mission to the Eastern states, he experienced a hostile encounter with a Boston minister. Brigham found the best solution to the problem was to share his testimony of the Book of Mormon. He wrote, “We bore testimony of the Book of Mormon and drowned him in his own words and let him go.”

Brigham was fearless in his declaration of the Book of Mormon as the word of God. He occasionally referred to the large number of witnesses it had: “How many witnesses has the Book of Mormon? Hundreds and thousands are now living upon the earth, who testify to its truth.” On one of his missionary travels, he listened to several religious leaders attempt to prove that everyone ought to believe in the reality of the Lord Jesus Christ because of the miracles he performed that were recorded in the New Testament. Using their same logic, Brigham observed that if eight New Testament authors, “who have been dead for about seventeen hundred years,” were enough to establish the divinity of the Savior, then the twelve living witnesses who testified that they saw and handled the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated should be enough to convince the world that the Book of Mormon is true.

Brigham further testified that every person could become a personal witness of the Book of Mormon by receiving his or her own spiritual confirmation of the truth: “Here is the Book of Mormon. . . . In that book we learn that Jesus visited this continent, delivered his Gospel and ordained Twelve Apostles. We believe all this, but we do not ask you to believe it. What we do ask is that you will believe what is recorded in the Holy Bible concerning God and His revelations to the children of men. Do this in all honesty and sincerity, then you will know that the Book of Mormon is true. Your minds will be opened and you will know by . . . the Spirit of God that we teach the truth.”

Reliance on the Bible and on the Living Prophet

As noted earlier, although the Book of Mormon played a pivotal role in Brigham Young’s conversion and testimony, it was never a focus of his published sermons. This fact may puzzle modern readers familiar with the book’s prominent role in the church today and with Brigham’s conversion by the Spirit. Two observations help shed light on this question.

First, Brigham was not alone in basing his doctrinal teachings more on the Bible than on the Book of Mormon. His generation grew up in a culture that highly valued the Bible and looked to it for doctrinal standards and solutions to problems. Brigham himself once remarked: “In all my teachings, I have taught the Gospel from the Old and New Testaments. I found therein every doctrine, and the proof of every doctrine, the Latter-day Saints believe in, as far as I know, therefore I do not refer to the Book of Mormon as often as I otherwise should. There may be some doctrines about which little is said in the Bible, but they are all couched therein, and I believe the doctrines because they are true, and I have taught them because they are calculated to save the children of men.”

In general, that statement reflected the mindset of probably all church members in Brigham’s generation. This underutilization of the Book of Mormon brought a rebuke from the Lord: “Your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received—which vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation. And this condemnation resteth upon the children of Zion, even all. And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to say, but to do according to that which I have written—that they may bring forth fruit meet for their Father’s kingdom; otherwise there remaineth a scourge and judgment to be poured out upon the children of Zion” (D&C 84:54–58; emphasis added).

As several Book of Mormon scholars have noted, “Early LDS converts were students of the Bible, and with no traditions concerning the Book of Mormon, they did not readily incorporate the new scripture into their devotions.” The Book of Mormon was valued as a conversion tool and as evidence of the restoration of the gospel, yet “writings in the early years of the Church contain remarkably few references to the Book of Mormon. . . . Many early Mormon converts were steeped in the study of the Bible but had not ‘opportunity for formal instruction or catechization in the Book of Mormon.’ Although the existence and truthfulness of the Book of Mormon
were crucial points of faith and touchstones of conversion for the early Saints, it would take time and effort for the contents of that distinctive volume to come into widespread use.”36 It was primarily during the latter part of President Young’s administration, when Elder Orson Pratt was called to prepare a new edition of the scriptures, that more careful attention was given to the Book of Mormon.37

Another possible reason why Brigham Young cited the Book of Mormon infrequently in his sermons was that he patterned his teachings after those of the Prophet Joseph Smith.38 “An angel never watched him closer than I did,” Brigham declared, “and that is what has given me the knowledge I have today.”39 “From the first time I saw the Prophet Joseph I never lost a word that came from him concerning the kingdom. And this is the key of knowledge that I have.” As Joseph Smith rarely cited the Book of Mormon in his own sermons,40 it would seem natural that Brigham would teach the way he was mentored.

A Source of Inspiration and Ideas

Although in the early days of the restored church the Book of Mormon was not utilized in sermonizing as fully as it might have been, it remained a key scriptural witness in matters of faith, conversion, and theology, as it is today. In fact, Brigham Young declared it to be one of four main anchors to his faith—alongside the Bible, the teachings of Joseph Smith, and revelation to the living oracles.41 It seems reasonable to surmise, then, that the Book of Mormon influenced his doctrinal understanding and overall thought and action to a greater extent than can be discovered by scanning his sermons for direct quotations or other overt indicators of his reliance on that scripture.

Yet careful examination of those teachings does yield a delicate but discernible picture of his dependence on the Book of Mormon for certain of his ideas. To be sure, the Book of Mormon was not his only or, at times, even his main source of inspiration for his teachings, for he considered “living” inspiration to be preeminently important. That said, the Book of Mormon still offers a fruitful avenue for gaining access to the man and his thought, as the following sampling of insightful comments illustrates.

Establishment of America essential to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. Having been among those driven from one state to another and eventually exiled from the country,43 President Young knew firsthand the ill treatment the Latter-day Saints had received in the United States. But he also knew that America’s government had been inspired of God in preparation for the restoration and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon: “Could that book [the Book of Mormon] have been brought forth and published to the world under any other government but the Government of the United States? No.”44 Brigham understood that, as prophesied, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon was a signal to the world that the restoration of Israel had begun (see 3 Nephi 21:1–7): “The Lord has been operating for centuries to prepare the way for the coming forth of the contents of that book [the Book of Mormon] from the bowels of the earth, to be published to the world, to show to the inhabitants thereof that he still lives, and that he will, in the latter days, gather his elect from the four corners of the earth. . . . The Lord has dictated and directed the whole of this, for the bringing forth, and establishing of his Kingdom in the last days.”45

The Book of Mormon testifies of the divinity of the Son of God. Brigham knew that the greatest worth of the scriptures, including the Book of Mormon,
their power to lead souls to Christ. He observed that the books “Joseph has given us... are of great worth to a person wandering in darkness. They are like a lighthouse in the ocean, or a finger-post which points out the road we should travel. Where do they point? To the Fountain of light... By them we can establish the doctrine of Christ.”

Losing the light. The Book of Mormon teaches that the hearts and minds of people once enlightened by the Spirit of God can become hardened and darkened through transgression (see Mosiah 2:36–37; Alma 9:23, 30). Brigham fully understood that a spiritual witness of the Book of Mormon could be lost in this way, leading one to doubt the book’s divine authenticity: “When men lose the spirit of the work in which we are engaged, they become infidel in their feelings. They say that they do not know whether the Bible is true, whether the Book of Mormon is true, nor about new revelations, nor whether there is a God or not. When they lose the spirit of this work, they lose the knowledge of the things of God in time and in eternity.”[46] “[T]hey have become contracted in their understandings, they have become darkened in their minds, and everything has become a mystery to them, and in regard to the things of God.”[48]

Brigham once related the example of Oliver Cowdery, one of the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon: “What did Oliver... say, after he had been away from the Church years and years? He saw and conversed with the angels, who showed him the plates, and he handled them. He left the Church because he lost the love of truth; and after he had traveled alone for years, a gentleman walked into his law office and said to him, ‘Mr. Cowdery, what do you think of the Book of Mormon now? Do you believe that it is true?’ He replied, ‘No, sir, I do not!’ Well, said the gentleman, ‘I thought as much; for I concluded that you had seen the folly of your ways and had resolved to renounce what you once declared to be true.’ Sir, you mistake me; I do not believe that the Book of Mormon is true; I am past belief on that point, for I know that it is true, as well as I know that you now sit before me.’ ‘Do you still testify that you saw an angel?’ ‘Yes, as much as I see you now; and I know the Book of Mormon to be true.’ Yet he forsook it. Every honest person who has fairly heard it knows that ‘Mormonism’ is true, if they have had the testimony of it; but to practise it in our lives is another thing.”[49]

The Book of Mormon bears witness of the Bible. Brigham Young had a firm testimony of the Bible,[50] but he did not believe that the Bible contained all of God’s words to all people of all times.[51] He testified that the restored scriptures were in complete harmony with the Bible: “There is no clash in the principles revealed in the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants.”[52] He also declared that the Book of Mormon bears witness of the Bible: “It proves that the Bible is true. What does the infidel world say about the Bible? They say that the Bible is nothing better than last year’s almanac; it is nothing but a fable and priesthood, and it is good for nothing. The Book of Mormon, however, declares that the Bible is true, and it proves it; and the two prove each other true.”[53]

Brigham taught that these two records were divinely intertwined: “No man can say that this book (laying his hand on the Bible) is true, is the word of the Lord, is the way, is the guide-board in the path, and a charter by which we may learn the will of God; and at the same time say, that the Book of Mormon is untrue... If one be true, both are; and if one be false, both are false. If Jesus lives, and is the Saviour of the world, Joseph Smith is a Prophet of God... This is my testimony, and it is strong.”[54]

Native Americans are of the house of Israel. President Young’s understanding of the Book of Mormon had an immense impact on his dealings with Native Americans, for it teaches that some Native Americans, whose ancestors’ history is outlined in that record, are a fallen race, a remnant of scattered Israel. Perhaps no one else believed as strongly as Brigham Young that Native American descendants of Israel had a glorious future according to prophecy. He called them “a people of destiny” and charged the Saints to treat them accordingly in all their dealings. To be certain, this belief fueled Latter-day Saint missionary work among Native Americans as well as efforts to assist them.

The state of Deseret. Just two years after arriving in the Salt Lake Valley, President Young organized a political convention on 4 March 1849, at which time a committee was appointed to draft a constitution for a new provisional state government. Brigham named the new territory “Deseret,” a Book of Mormon term for honeybee, signifying unity, industry, and cooperation (see Ether 2:3). He used the beehive motif extensively during his presidency (e.g., it appears on the capstone of the “Beehive House,” his official residence and office in Salt Lake City).
Sermons Drawn from the Book of Mormon

Brigham Young not only discussed the Book of Mormon in general terms, but he also drew on its teachings to deliver powerful sermons to the Saints. He was an “even-keeled, no-nonsense realist who got things done,”56 and his sermons were filled with sound doctrine based on the Bible, the Doctrine and Covenants, statements of Joseph Smith, and to a lesser extent the Book of Mormon. The inspired discourses of Brigham Young deepened the doctrinal understanding of church members and awakened in them a deeper desire to know the things of God, yet his counsel was practical and ever applicable. A representative sampling of his teachings from the Book of Mormon follows.

Law of opposition. Brigham understood perfectly the necessity of opposition in life. He referred to 2 Nephi 2:11 and 15 (“it must needs be that there is an opposition in all things”) to teach this eternal truth: “Neither you nor I would ever be prepared to be crowned in the celestial kingdom of our Father and our God, without devils in this world. Do you know that the Saints never could be prepared to receive the glory that is in reserve for them, without devils to help them to get it? ... Some of you may think that this is a curious principle, but it is true. Refer to the Book of Mormon, and you will find that Nephi and others taught that we actually need evil, in order to make this a state of probation. We must know the evil in order to know the good. There must needs be an opposition in all things. ... This is a true principle.”57

Brigham Young noted that this law of opposition even applied to the rise and progress of the church. He observed that “the powers of darkness, the powers of the enemies of all righteousness, were leveled against the few who believed in the Book of Mormon, and who believed that Joseph Smith was a Prophet.”58

He understood that the reason for this persecution was rooted in the premortal war in heaven, that opposition to the Lord’s work in this life was but a continuation of that conflict, and that the Book of Mormon is at the heart of the matter: “One-third part of the spirits that were prepared for this earth rebelled against Jesus Christ, and were cast down to the earth, and they have been opposed to him from that day to this, with Lucifer at their head. He is their great General. ... Do you not think that those spirits knew when Joseph Smith got the plates? Yes, just as well as you know that I am talking to you now. They were there at the time, and millions and millions of them opposed Joseph in getting the plates; and not only they opposed him, but also men in the flesh.”59 He further explained: “Just as soon as the Book of Mormon was declared to the people . . . and the set time had come for the Lord to favor Zion and gather Israel[,] at that very time, on that very day, the powers of darkness were arrayed against the Prophet, against the Book of Mormon, and those who believed it to be what it purported to be.”60

Despite this opposition—much of which he had personally experienced—Brigham understood that all attempts to prevent the Book of Mormon from going forward would be futile: “Those spirits driven from heaven . . . and others . . . tried to prevent Joseph’s getting the plates. . . . From that day to this, [they] . . . have been trying to put down this work. But what have they gained? I should suppose that they would have stopped their operations long ere this, after uniformly meeting with such bad success.”61

The fall of man is not shameful. In Brigham’s teachings and in the Book of Mormon (see 2 Nephi 2:22–26), Adam was not the degenerate reprobate that some Christian thinkers portray him to be. Brigham taught the doctrine known in theology as “the fortunate fall.” The Book of Mormon declares that “Adam fell that man might be; and men are that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25) and that there “must needs be . . . an opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11) or else progression would not be possible. Similarly, Brigham taught that the fall was a blessing to mankind and that through the opposition resulting from it Adam and all mankind experience “the very means of adding . . . knowledge, understanding, power, and glory, and preparing themselves] to receive crowns, kingdoms, thrones, and principalities, and to be crowned in glory with the Gods of eternity. Short of this, we can never receive that which we are looking for.”62

“Ask yourselves,” he said in the same sermon, “whether you think this people would have received as much as they have received, if they never had been persecuted. Could they have advanced in the school of intelligence as far without being persecuted, as they have by being persecuted? . . . How can you know truth but by its opposite, or light but by its opposite? The absence of light is darkness. How can sweetness be known but by its opposite, bitter? It is by this means that we obtain all intelligence.”63

Implicit trust in God. Among Brigham Young’s favorite themes from the Book of Mormon was his
frequent counsel to submit our will to the will of God, regardless of how great the sacrifice. In an obvious reference to passages in Mosiah (see 3:19; 15:7; 24:15), he declared, “Wherever the wisdom of God directs, let our affections and the labour of our lives be centred to that point, and not set our hearts on going east or west, north or south, on living here or there, on possessing this or that; but let our will be swallowed up in the will of God, allowing him to rule supremely within us until the spirit overcomes the flesh.”

Brigham Young’s Impact on the Book of Mormon

As president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Brigham Young was personally involved with publishing successive editions of the Book of Mormon in England and Nauvoo. Presiding over the church in Great Britain from 1839 to 1841, he directed the printing of selections from the Book of Mormon in the Millennial Star, the first time that portions of the book were printed in Europe. With much effort he also raised the funds necessary to print 5,000 copies of the entire book in February 1841.

“I had not even an overcoat,” he recalled. “I took a small quilt from the trundle bed, and that served for my overcoat. . . . Thus we went to England, to a strange land to sojourn among strangers. . . . Most of us were entirely destitute of means to buy even any necessary article. . . . [Yet] we printed three thousand Hymn Books, and five thousand Books of Mormon, and issued two thousand Millennial Stars monthly, and in the course of the summer printed and gave away rising of sixty thousand tracts.” Their efforts eventually resulted in the conversion of thousands in the British Isles. Later, in 1844, Brigham arranged for two ornately bound copies of the Book of Mormon to be presented to Queen Victoria.

When Brigham returned home, the Twelve were given responsibility for publishing a Nauvoo edition of the Book of Mormon in 1845. Later, as president of the church (1847–77), he oversaw the initial translation and printing of the Book of Mormon in Danish in 1851; in French, Welsh, German, and Italian in 1852; and in Hawaiian in 1855. He rejoiced when those translations appeared in print. Moreover, a Hindustani translation was prepared in 1855 but not published, a Deseret Alphabet version was completed in 1869, and selections from the Book of Mormon were published in Spanish in 1875.

In summary, Brigham Young’s testimony and conversion were largely a product of the Book of Mormon. Although he did not often refer to the book in his sermons, the undergirding principles he learned while studying it were always at the forefront of his teachings. His two-year period of pondering its precepts before he joined the church anchored his faith in Jesus Christ and in the restoration through the Prophet Joseph Smith. He recognized the book’s biblical style, discovered answers to life’s questions in its pages, found comfort in its teachings about the afterlife, and drew many practical lessons from the principles it contains. The Book of Mormon had a tremendous impact on his life, and he in turn had a great impact on its subsequent printings and wider distribution. His testimony and appreciation of the scriptures—including the Book of Mormon—were unwavering:

“The revelations contained in the Bible and the Book of Mormon are ensamples to us, and the Book of Doctrine and Covenants contains direct revelation to this Church; they are a guide to us, and we do not wish to do them away; we do not wish them to become obsolete and to set them aside. We wish to continue in the revelations of the Lord Jesus Christ day by day, and to have His Spirit with us continually. If we can do this, we shall no more walk in darkness, but we shall walk in the light of life.”
Revelation in the fully personal sense characteristic of personal agents has been abandoned. —theologian William J. Abraham

The historical cases that one encounters in the Book of Mormon of God communicating directly with humans are striking in at least two respects. In the first place, Christian divines, as William Abraham observes above, have increasingly defined revelation in ways that utterly conflict with the picture we get from the Nephite record, according to which God may choose to communicate information to his individual children in highly particularized ways and circumstances. Second, in spite of certain important parallels, the view of revelation laid out in the Book of Mormon differs markedly even from the kind of revelation depicted throughout the Old Testament. This article elaborates these two points in order to argue that the Book of Mormon presents us with a significantly new formulation of the concept of revelation that might properly be termed revelation as dialogue—or dialogic revelation.

Avery Dulles, in his important study of revelation, notes three models in the theology of revelation that have been significant in Christian history: (1) In “revelation as doctrine,” “revelation is generally identified with the Bible [which is] viewed as a collection of inspired and inerrant teachings.” (2) According to the view of “revelation as history,” the Bible bears witness to the primary revelation, which is the series of historical events wherein “God reveals himself . . . in his great deeds.” (3) By “revelation as inner experience,” the theologian means a “privileged interior experience of grace or communion with God,” such as the mystics have known.
The first two models have by and large been normative for Christians. John Baillie, for instance, refers to a “simple identification of revelation with the total content of Holy Scripture” that became a characteristic of both Protestantism and the Counter-Reformation. For fundamentalists, this first model—revelation as scriptural content—goes by the name of “propositional” revelation. As Clark Pinnock writes, propositional revelation is “the conceptual truth claim extractable from Holy Scripture.”

But the “revelation as history” definition has held equal sway. When Christians in general speak of “special revelation,” for instance, they often mean something like “the self-disclosure of God to man through the Bible, and supremely, in Christ.” This self-disclosure is clearly not to be understood as a personal communication of specific content to a particular individual. As Baillie writes,

> No affirmation runs more broadly throughout recent writing on our subject [of revelation] than . . . that all revelation is given, not in the form of directly communicated knowledge, but through events occurring in the historical experience of mankind, events which are apprehended by faith as the “mighty acts” of God, and which therefore engender in the mind of man such reflective knowledge of God as it is given him to possess.

In his article on “καλόπτω” (to “cover” or “hide”) for Kittel’s Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Albrecht Oepke writes in a similar vein. In the Old Testament, “revelation is not the communication of supranatural knowledge. . . . The revelation can indeed give rise to knowledge . . . yet it does not itself consist in these things but is quite essentially the action of Yahweh, an unveiling of His essential hiddenness, His offering of Himself in fellowship.” In the New Testament, “revelation is likewise understood, not in the sense of a communication of supranatural knowledge, but in the sense of a self-disclosure of God.” In fact, Baillie writes, “the recovery of this fundamental insight is the first thing we notice as running broadly throughout all the recent discussions.” And John Knox agrees that “revelation essentially consists not in the communication of truths about God but in the self-revelation of the divine Personality.”

In other words, both of these models emphatically reject the notion that revelation consists of particular truths or information revealed to individuals outside of the channels of scripture itself or God’s historically significant activity.

Dulles’s third model of revelation, “revelation as inner experience,” holds out the promise of a paradigm in which God communicates particular truths to the individual, but this model is fraught with more qualifiers and limitations than the name suggests. Beginning, as most definitions do, with the premise that God is transcendental and that he has no phenomenal existence, the characterization of any revelation as “interior” becomes problematic. For as Emmanuel Levinas asks, “How can we make sense of the ‘exteriority’ of the truths and signs of the Revelation which strike the human faculty known as reason? . . . [H]ow can these truths and signs strike our reason if they are not even of this world?” Particularized manifestations and communications are illogical if God is utterly transcendent and therefore entirely outside the physical realm. And they are redundant if God is perfectly immanent and therefore already present within the human spirit and all creation. Accordingly, even within this third model, George Tyrrell writes that there can be no revealed statements or doctrines. Auguste Sabatier insists that “the object of the revelation of God can only be God,” and William Ernest Hocking holds that even the mystic, “as he is a mystic pure and simple[,] knows nothing else than God.”

Eventually, the game is up when Dulles says that for the theologians of this third model, “the experience of God . . . may be called grace, and grace, insofar as it brings about a new awareness of the divine, is revelation.” In other words, this model seems little more than recognition of the obvious fact that the reality of God and his great acts, however objective and universally valid (as the first two models emphasize), must be personally experienced to be operative in human life. But when Tyrrell calls this experience “a passive impression,” we seem to have in this model a distinction from the others without a clear difference.

William Abraham notes that in spite of the obvious and emphatic historical dilution of the concept of divine speaking (which would entail both interpersonal exchange and communicated content), traces of a more literal definition stubbornly persist. He points out, for example, that The Catholic Encyclopedia defines revelation as “the communication of some truth
by God to a rational creature through means which are beyond the ordinary course of nature.” And, as Abraham notes, the Oxford English Dictionary defines it as “the disclosure or communication of knowledge to man by a divine or supernatural agency.” But the movement away from this theory of revelation, or what Abraham calls theology’s “vehement reaction against” it, has been pronounced since the 19th century.13

The equivocal and limiting definitions of “revelation as inner experience” are undoubtedly tied to the many theological dragons that lurk in the domain of experiential religion. But the threat—and historical experience—of heresy, schism, and sectarianism is not the only reason for preferring historical or textual definitions of revelation to subjective ones. Hostility to a model of experiential revelation has been grounded in a variety of other reasons as well, including fear of irrationalism, the perceived sufficiency of the canon, the concern to preserve the integrity of individual agency, and, perhaps most emphatically, theological resistance to anything tending toward anthropomorphism.

Christian rhetoric of prayer often reveals—or at least facilitates—this movement away from a literal understanding of revelation as divine discourse. To speak, for example, of an answer to prayer is usually already to speak in a manner inconsistent with models of human communication. When one person “asks” another and is “answered,” we can be fairly certain that a request was framed and a rejoinder expressed in a way that was meaningful, decipherable, and understood as a response to the question. The final condition seems in fact the most essential. Utterance that is meaningful or useful but not responsive to a question is not an answer. Neither is action that is responsive to a question. Handing me a pencil can properly be said to be an “answer” to the query “Do you have a pencil?” only in the same nonliteral sense in which falling rain “answers” the question “Will it rain today?”

In the case of prayer, however, the latter example is precisely the model that has characterized a very long conversation on the subject. “But perhaps you ask, How may I know whether my prayers have been answered or not?” writes Joseph Smith’s contemporary Edward Bickersteth in his popular Treatise on Prayer. “Sometimes the case is so obvious that it cannot be mistaken: Jehoshaphat prays, and he is delivered from his enemies; Hezekiah prays, and he is delivered from sickness.... At other times prayers are answered rather in the increase of grace to bear the affliction, than in its removal, as in the case of Paul’s thorn in the flesh.”14

In other words, we may choose to ascribe to prayer the motive force behind an event that follows our request (e.g., healing or escape), or in the absence of a hoped-for eventuality, we posit a consequence that we may not discern (e.g., grace). This kind of faithful prayer operates in the context of a presumption that petitionary acts call forth divine activity. But a decision must be made to interpret something—or a lack of something—as a response to a
question, and that gesture of interpretation is itself the faithful act that constitutes the “answer.”

“There are,” says Edward Gee in his Treatise on Prayer, “four ways of God’s answering prayers. By giving the things prayed for presently . . . or by suspending the answer for a time, and giving it afterwards . . . or by withholding from you that mercy which you ask, and giving you a much better mercy in the room of it . . . or lastly, by giving you patience to bear the loss or want of it.”15 In petitionary prayer so conceived, then, any “answer” is once again a product of a preimposed interpretive model. If fulfillment of one’s desire is an answer, but deafening silence or continuation of the status quo is likewise read as a response, the process of prayer begins with a cry into the abyss and comes to completion with a faith-backed gesture that, once again, prejudges each and every subsequent development as an answer. Such a model entirely exempts God from the responsibility to speak. “Thou art silent,” says Manfred to the phantom of his lover Astarte. “And in that silence, I am more than answer’d.”16 Or as Bickersteth writes in a preemptive blow against petitionary failure, “The answer of prayer may be approaching, though we discern not its coming.”17

Emerson may not be typical of Protestantism when he pointedly calls prayer “the soliloquy of a beholding and jubilant soul,” which led one atypical 19th-century preacher to object that “prayer . . . is not ‘soliloquy,’ but dialogue.” But that same preacher goes on to define prayerful “dialogue” in a rather more Emersonian fashion than he intends:

Now, in order to have a real energy of spiritual life, we must have actual intercourse with God himself . . . And to commune with him, we must have something to say to him . . . Therefore, God, in order that men may come into real communion with him and so receive real vital energy,—faith, love, peace, joy,—has ordered it so that we may speak to him of our real wants.18

Strange “intercourse” this, where only man must have something to say and in consequence of which he receives not an answer but “vital energy” (which may, in any case, be more a product of the act of petition itself than of any “response”).

Retreating into metaphor, confusing “monologue” for “dialogue,” reading heavenly silence or quotidian events as “answer”—all these strategies cannot belie the fact that, as Rodney Stark reminds us in his quest for more terminological rigor, “a revelation is not an insight or an inspiration. A revelation is a communication. . . . A revelation presupposes a divine being capable of wishes and intentions.”19

Obviously, it would be reductive and inaccurate to characterize all prayer in the Christian tradition as a kind of vague projection into the void, operating with such blithe openness to the outcome that it begs the very question of prayer’s efficacy. But the kind of prayer that is an asking rather than an asking for, and that anticipates a personal response, a discernible moment of dialogue or communicated content, would be a distinctive kind of prayer, one that falls outside the models of revelation that we have seen, relegating as they do God’s operations to historical events, canonized texts, or the infusion of “vital energy.” The response this type of prayer envisions, the experience of “revelation” that follows from a literal conception of divine discourse, is one that William James, for example, characterizes as distinctive and associates with Catholic saints, George Fox, the Old Testament prophets—and Joseph Smith. Here he quotes W. Sanday: “There is something sharp and sudden about it. He can lay his finger so to speak, on the moment when it came.”20 However, in the case of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, even James’s distinction is insufficient. One finds in the Book of Mormon a version of revelation that falls well outside the parameters Dulles charted, and something far beyond a forceful spiritual intimation or the abrupt insight mentioned by Sanday. In the Book of Mormon, prayer frequently—and dramatically—evokes an answer that is impossible to mistake as anything other than an individualized, dialogic response to a highly particularized question.
Nowhere is the concentration of heavenly utterances in the Book of Mormon more intense than in 1 Nephi. (Considering that he labels his own account the record of “sacred” things as opposed to political history [see 1 Nephi 9:19:6], this is not surprising.) In the first 50 pages alone, we read of eight visions, various angelic visitations, and several occasions on which Nephi is “visited” by the Lord, “constrained by the Spirit,” “led by the Spirit,” “commanded” by the Lord, and so forth. But more to the point, Nephi and his father describe several occasions that cannot be interpreted as mere dreams, spiritual promptings, or heaven-sent impressions. When, in response to his pleadings on behalf of his wicked brothers, Nephi records, “The Lord spake unto me,” he could be speaking figuratively. But subsequently he records that “the Lord spake unto” his father, Lehi, telling him to procure wives for his sons for the journey to the promised land. Later, the “voice of the Lord came unto [Lehi]” and “chastened” him for his murmuring; then “the voice of the Lord came and did speak many words” to the rebellious Laman. Preparatory to Nephi’s building a ship for the journey, “the voice of the Lord came unto” Nephi and the “Lord spake” to him about the ship, “showed” him how to construct it, and “told” him where to find ore with which to forge tools. Nephi records that when the time came to depart, “the voice of the Lord came unto my father, that we should arise and go down into the ship” (see 1 Nephi 2:19; 7:1; 16:25; 16:39; 17:7–10; 18:5).

In fact, Nephi recounts how “the voice of the Lord came” to him, to his father, and to Laman and Lemuel, so often that it becomes a refrain almost as pervasive as the numbingly common “and it came to pass.” The precise expression occurs more than two dozen times—and variations of it, including the voice of the Spirit or of angels, occur dozens more. No shadowy spiritual intimations these, no merely intuited guidance or inspiration, but direct divine discourse that frequently rises to the level of genuine dialogic exchange. Most dramatic in this regard are Nephi’s persuasion by the Spirit to kill Laban (depicted as revelatory argument), Enos’s wrestle with the Lord for his own and then his enemies’ salvation (an actual linguistic exchange rather than mere impressions), and the brother of Jared’s progress from general pleading to specific, concrete petition, culminating in glorious epiphany.

At first glance, some of these experiences may suggest the pattern of Old Testament prophets, and, as we saw, William James for one likened Joseph Smith himself to such ancient patriarchs. Indeed, it is true that “the Lord spake” to Moses dozens of times, engaged in a protracted negotiation with Abraham over the fate of Sodom, and obviously revealed his mind and will to a canon of major and minor prophets. So to some extent, one could consider that Joseph’s personal ministry, as well as the Book of Mormon record, reenacts an Old Testament paradigm. But on closer inspection, the Book of Mormon model of revelation diverges in at least one crucial way. In the Bible, outside of prophets acting in the role of national leadership, personal revelation is almost unheard of. Prophets and prophecy are not just linguistically but textually synonymous. Or to state the matter as principle: “[Prophecy] was pre-eminently the privilege of the prophets.” And the concern of these prophets is with the fate of kings and nations and tribes, with the workings and purposes of God in history, with the spiritual destinies of covenant peoples and fledgling churches. Even more grandly, as the great Abraham Heschel writes, “prophecy . . . may be described as exegesis of existence from a divine perspective.”

The Book of Mormon here becomes a study in contrast. Through chiastic form, thematic structure, numerous textual examples, and a final, concluding instance of readerly invitation, the scripture hammers home the insistent message that revelation is the province of everyman. As a consequence, in the world of the Book of Mormon, concepts like revelation, prayer, inspiration, and mystery will find powerful and substantive redefinition. That may well be the Book of Mormon’s most significant and revolutionary—as well as controversial—contribution to
religious thinking. The particularity and specificity, the vividness, the concreteness, and the accessibility of revelatory experience—those realities both underlie and overshadow the narrated history and doctrine that constitute the record. The “knowability” of all truth, the openness of mystery, the reality of personal revelation, find vivid illustration within the record and invite reenactment outside it.

Nephi, as chronicler of the record that bears his name, postpones until chapter 10 (chapter 3 in the 1830 edition) an account of his own “proceedings and reign and ministry,” having spent the previous sections emphasizing those of his father, Lehi. But this is more than a gesture of filial respect, because now when Nephi records his own spiritual epiphany, it is within a context that gives the principle of revelation its first, radically new contours in the Book of Mormon. Following a number of briefly narrated revelations and dreams, Lehi receives an expansive vision of the “Tree of Life,” which he relates to his family. After hearing his father’s account, Nephi writes that he is “desirous also that I might see, and hear, and know of these things, by the power of the Holy Ghost, which is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him” (1 Nephi 10:17).

Believing that “the Lord [is] able to make [those things] known unto [him],” Nephi, after much pondering in his heart, is “caught away in the Spirit of the Lord” to a place where he immediately engages that Spirit in conversation. When Nephi expresses his desire “to behold the things which [his] father saw,” the Spirit responds, “Believest thou that thy father saw the tree of which he hath spoken?” At this critical juncture, two points are highly important. First, Lehi, not Nephi, is still functioning as the unquestioned prophetic figure in the story. Not only has Lehi already been situated as one of “many prophets prophesying unto the people” (1 Nephi 1:4), but Nephi will shortly go out of his way to acknowledge the continuing patriarchal and spiritual leadership of his father, by pointedly asking him for guidance even in the midst of his father’s recent murmurings. (Afflicted by hunger and the loss of weapons while in the Old World wilderness, Lehi “murmur[s] against the Lord.” Nephi takes the initiative to fashion new arms and asks his father, “Whither shall I go to obtain food?” after which Lehi humbles himself and successfully inquires of the Lord [see 1 Nephi 16].) In the divine economy of the Old Testament, Nephi’s inquiry of the Spirit would thus seem to be faithless at worst and redundant at best. The Spirit’s response, worded as it is, might even have been construed as implicit criticism. Even so, Nephi answers unhesitatingly, “Yea, thou knowest I believe all the words of my father.”

Second, as John W. Welch has pointed out, this query occurs at the moment of the book’s most extreme narrative tension, as the culmination of an expansive chiasmic structure that organizes all of 1 Nephi.24 Framed by symmetrical prophetic modes, quest elements, characters, and motifs, Nephi’s interview is the fulcrum on which the entire, complexly organized account of 1 Nephi balances. The angel’s reply to Nephi’s answer is therefore fraught
with special significance. And that answer comes as heavenly exultation: “Hosanna to the Lord, the most high God; for he is God over all the earth, yea, even above all. And blessed art thou, Nephi, because thou believest in the Son of the most high God; wherefore, thou shalt behold the things which thou hast desired” (1 Nephi 11:1–6).

Nephi is commended, not reproved, for seeking access to the mysteries of heaven for personal, rather than public, edification. To forestall any misperception that his prerogative is related to some special spiritual status (or his eventual inheritance of the prophetic role), his brothers are explicitly associated with such a misguided perspective and harshly condemned as a result. Confused by Lehi’s account of his vision, Laman and Lemuel complain to Nephi that “we cannot understand the words which our father hath spoken” (1 Nephi 15:7). The exchange that follows, together with the closing chapters of Moroni, anticipates and frames the entire 1,000-year history of righteousness and apostasy that constitutes the body of the Book of Mormon record. The warning these verses carry will be grimly fulfilled by the end of the book and will be echoed by the last guardian of the records as he directs himself, more hopefully, to a different audience.

And I said unto them: Have ye inquired of the Lord?
And they said unto me: We have not; for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us [“because we are not prophets,” in other words].
Behold, I said unto them: How is it that ye do not keep the commandments of the Lord? How is it that ye will perish, because of the hardness of your hearts?
Do ye not remember the things which the Lord hath said? —If ye will not harden your hearts, and ask me in faith, believing that ye shall receive, with diligence in keeping my commandments, surely these things shall be made known unto you. (1 Nephi 15:8–11)

The brothers do not heed the message, and they and their posterity are spiritually blighted as a result. Nephi’s belief in revelatory experience outside official channels and his brothers’ disbelief in the same principle seem clearly calculated to establish the pivotal importance of the principle that divides them.

Because the Book of Mormon is compiled largely by Nephite prophets, we get few portraits of religious life at the level of common individuals. But in addition to Nephi’s experience, we have instances wherein other individuals—acting outside any prophetic role—are privy to revelations and the mysteries of God. Mosiah fears for his sons’ lives when they plan to preach in hostile territory. We read that he “inquired of the Lord if he should let his sons go up among the Lamanites to preach the word. And the Lord said unto Mosiah: Let them go up” (Mosiah 28:6–7). Similarly, the missionary Ammon watches helplessly as thousands of his converts, now pacifist, suffer death rather than retaliate or defend themselves. He proposes a migration to the Nephite lands, but they are reluctant. “And Ammon said: I will go and inquire of the Lord, and if he say unto us, go down unto our brethren, will ye go?” They give their consent. “And it came to pass that Ammon went and inquired of the Lord, and he said unto him: Get this people out of this land” (Alma 27:7, 11–12).

So it is abundantly clear that, in the Book of Mormon, prophecy is not “preeminently the privilege of the prophets.” Equally clearly, the matter of revelation is not confined to the “exegesis of existence” or matters of “ultimate concern.” Questions that prompt divine replies are in turn quotidian, pragmatic, and at times almost banal in their mundane specificity.

While still in the wilderness on their way to the promised land, Nephi and his brothers lose their weapons and their people suffer hunger and discouragement. Lehi “inquired of the Lord” where to hunt, and he is directed (see 1 Nephi 16:24–31). Later in the record, on two occasions, military plans are informed by divine revelation (see Alma 16:5–6; 42:23).

Queries can also be of a strictly doctrinal nature. Alma is curious about the space of time between physical death and resurrection. He “inquired diligently of the Lord to know” and receives by angelic intermediary a detailed account that he then imparts to his son Corianton (Alma 40:9). Mormon, troubled by reports of infant baptism, and apparently unsure of its merits, appeals to the Lord for guidance. “And the word of the Lord came unto me by the power of the Holy Ghost, saying: Listen to the words of Christ....Little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin; therefore I know that it is solemn mockery before God, that ye should baptize little children” (Moroni 8:7–9). When Mormon inquires of the Lord in another context, it seems to be only slightly more than pious curiosity that prompts him. Pondering the fate of three Nephite disciples, he
inquires of the Lord, who makes it “manifest unto [him] that there must needs be a change wrought upon their bodies, or else it needs be that they must taste of death” (3 Nephi 28:37). Thus is their immortality confirmed to Mormon.

In at least one instance, prayer about a difficult political problem elicits an answer. Unsuccessful in his effort to transfer jurisdiction over zealous apostates to the king, Alma takes his dilemma to the Lord in prayer. “And it came to pass that after he had poured out his whole soul to God, the voice of the Lord came to him,” saying essentially that ecclesiastical dilemmas require ecclesiastical solutions (Mosiah 26:14).

We may contrast these examples with Shlomo Biderman’s assertion that “Christianity is centered on revelation, which contains within it a message (‘good news’) meant for the believer. Given this message, what is important is the content of revelation.” In the Book of Mormon, what is important is not one ultimate “Truth” it embodies, but rather the ever present reality of revelation it 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.

The redemptive role of Jesus Christ is the central tenet of which the Book of Mormon testifies. But conditioned as that knowledge is on spiritual channels, the Book of Mormon gives at least as much attention to the mode as to the object of revelation. When Amaleki winds up the record known as the small plates of Nephi, his closing words, spoken both as summation of past experience and admonition to posterity, are an exhortation to “believe in prophesying, and in revelations,” and in other spiritual gifts (Omni 1:25). Alma, a few years later, will testify to his sons of his own experience with revealed knowledge: “Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that these things are true.” And again, “I would not that ye should think that I know these things of myself, but it is the Spirit of God which is in me which maketh these things known unto me” (Alma 5:46; 38:6). Nephi, the son of Helaman, will continue the theme, writing, “Behold now, I do not say that these things shall be, of myself, because it is not of myself that I know these things; but behold, I know that these things are true because the Lord God has made them known unto me” (Helaman 7:29).

In spite of the recurrent testimonies of the Nephite prophets who affirm the principle of personal revelation, the majority of Nephite history, like the Old Testament counterpart, is one of spiritual blindness and apostasy. But in this case the reader is invited to locate a different culprit than the idolatry of Baal. Moroni, final prophet and editor of the record, proclaims his intention of writing a history of particular relevance to futurity (“Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing” [Mormon 8:35]). Writing with particular poignancy in the aftermath of his entire people’s destruction, Moroni predicts that the same truth lost on Laman and Lemuel may well be lost on generations yet to come, and he repeats the same condemnation. “And again I speak unto you who deny the revelations of God, and say that they are done away, that there are no revelations, nor prophecies, nor gifts. . . . Behold I say unto you, he that denieth these things knoweth not the gospel of Christ” (Mormon 9:7–8). And yet, in concluding his record, Moroni turns from lament to hopefulness. In his apostrophe to futurity (the most often invoked verse in the Book of Mormon), Moroni renews Nephi’s testimony, presumably with the intention of shaping a more successful history than the one he has just witnessed: “I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost” (Moroni 10:4–5).

Judging from the near perfect symmetry of Nephi’s testimony/rebuke directed at his brothers earlier in the days preceding their first settlement and Moroni’s rebuke/testimony at the twilight of his people’s history, and given the unrelenting affirmations of numerous writers throughout the record, the moral of this sprawling epic seems to be the indispensability of personal revelation as a key to spiritual survival—of the individual as well as the nation.

But Moroni, as prophet but also (though to a lesser extent than Mormon) editor and spokesman to future generations, has done more than derive a moral from a millennium of record keeping. He serves to link the principle of personal revelation witnessed within the text to its enactment in regards to the text. His expression of the principle thus echoes this theme but also transposes the text from a record that provides a unified treatment of the principle as enacted by the various prophets into something else (from
Nephi onward, we do not hear sermons about revelation, we observe the transformation of their lives and the catalyst behind their ministries as tangible products of such revelation).

Moroni’s editorial position outside the text allows him to objectify it as the proving ground for contemporary readers to have their own experience of spiritual validation. In other words, our knowing that the particulars of Moroni’s history are true (like Laman’s and Lemuel’s understanding the allegory of Lehi’s vision) is clearly not the point of his challenge. Knowing they are knowable is. In effect, Moroni has transformed the Book of Mormon’s status from carrier of meaning to pointer to meaning; its ability to emphatically call into play the validating power of the Spirit becomes more important than the particulars of its history or its doctrine.

In the context of the theologies of Christian revelation we have surveyed, Joseph Smith’s “golden bible” was radically distinctive. The Book of Mormon patterned a variety of revelation that emphatically affirmed revelation’s dialogic nature—a paradigm mostly at odds with historical conceptions of revelation, though not without some parallels and antecedents in 19th-century American frontier religion. In addition, the Book of Mormon was itself a locus of special revelatory activity that swirled around the Prophet. Finally, the Book of Mormon served to initiate susceptible readers into a new paradigm of personal revelation, appealing in a highly successful way to a spirit of religious individualism.

Historians have successfully argued for contemporary Protestant parallels to Mormonism’s revelatory appeal. Thomas Alexander has found comparisons to “primitive Christian or affirmative mysticism” useful. Ronald Walker has written that “the New England folk culture . . . strongly embraced the idea of personal revelation and the ministry of spirits.” Historian Timothy Smith has likewise emphasized that this “witness of the Spirit,” as the Methodists called it, was a coveted goal “in all evangelical witness.” Dan Vogel writes that “seekers” and other religionists of the day were looking for just that paradigm held out by Mormonism—“direct revelations from God,” and Gordon Wood finds that “visions, dreams, prophesying, and new emotion-soaked religious seekings acquired a validity they had not earlier possessed.” Others could be cited as well. Such situating of Mormonism in the context of related religious movements and developments of the 19th century has become an increasingly popular enterprise for historians. When considering the setting of Mormon origins, however, it is important to remember that the quest for cultural consistencies can undermine the very project of historical inquiry that attempts to assess the particularity of a given phenomenon. As religious historian John Gager has warned:

If early Mormonism or early Christianity are merely warmed-over versions of mid-nineteenth or mid-third century culture, then we are at a loss to explain why these particular movements, and not their many contemporary competitors, not only survived but also flourished in such a remarkable fashion. In other words, the more we are able to demonstrate fundamental similarities between these movements and their surrounding cultures and the more we must dismiss their own self-understanding in relation to their cultural environment, the more we find ourselves unable to explain their success.

In response to this warning, it may be useful to consider that, like many religions of its day and before, Mormonism relied upon “the voluntary acceptance of revealed truth and thus on personal mystical confirmation.” On the other hand, unlike other religions of its day, Mormonism had a book of scripture that provided an unprecedented model for such confirmatory experience. And one should not be too quick to assume that Mormon emphasis on personal revelation alone made it indistinguishable in that regard from contemporary movements that emphasized spiritual manifestations. For example, it may be true, as Adolph Koch has suggested, that “the Great Awakening, the first movement to unite the American colonies from Maine to Georgia in a common experience, opened the doors of salvation to all classes on the same terms.” But some versions of the democratic impulse in American religion could work more to undermine elitism than to promote spiritual populism, to reduce all religious experience to a common denominator rather than empower individuals with new spiritual power. As the Theophilanthropist of 1810 ranted, “The teachers of religion of all denominations assume an arrogant, dictatorial style, in order to convince their followers that they are in possession of the secrets of Heaven.” But, as another issue asks, “What can a Doctor of Divinity . . . know of his maker, which is not known to the illiterate ploughman?” Of course, such spiritual egalitarianism does not necessarily
make of everyone a prophet. In this instance, the writer suggests, the spiritual equality that is invoked is an equality of limitations: “The ploughman knows that there is a God, that he is just and good. What more is necessary?”35

The prominent preacher Alexander Campbell, who accused Joseph Smith of plagiarizing most of his restoration principles, parted company sharply on the principle of revelation. Realizing the unmistakable centrality of dialogic revelation in the Book of Mormon, he saw it not as typical of the age or primitive Christianity, but as ludicrous and downright unscriptural:

I would ask [Book of Mormon witnesses Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris] how they knew that it was God’s voice which they heard—but they would tell me to ask God in faith. That is, I must believe it first, and then ask God if it be true! . . . If there was anything plausible about Smith, I would say to those who believe him to be a prophet, hear the question which Moses put into the mouth of the Jews, and his answer to it—“And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken?”—Does he answer, “Ask the Lord and he will tell you?” . . . Nay, indeed.36

Similarly, Gilbert Wardlaw, an Edinburgh minister, admonished his American audience in 1830 in words uncannily pertinent to the Mormon example:

I am aware that prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit has been, and may be recommended in terms which Scripture sobriety does not justify. Some have spoken of this divine gift as if they expected something actually miraculous, something altogether new to the church in the present day, conferred independently of the word, and in a manner almost perceptible to the senses.37

This effort to restrain revelatory anarchy is clear in the editor’s introduction to Wardlaw’s treatise. Believing the minister’s message was especially apropos of the “Revivals of Religion” sweeping America, he betrays obvious alarm at a society in which prophets and revealers were popping up everywhere.38 Wardlaw goes on to ask “whether we have not misunderstood, and interpreted too largely, the ample assurances which God has given with regard to the answering of prayer.” True, he admits, both biblical testaments affirm that “among the various operations of the Spirit of God . . . were those which communicated miraculous powers of different kinds.” But it is to the “more common, and still more precious influences in the souls of all whom he renews” that we should look for our own answers.39

Wardlaw here echoes John Wesley, who distinguished between what he called “the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit—languages and their interpretation, healing and other miracles—and the ‘ordinary’ one of hallowing, or sanctifying grace . . . available to all Christians.” But who was susceptible to such outpourings, and to what degree and in what form, was clearly a subject of profound renegotiation during the religious ferment of the early 19th century. Caught in the center of these shifting theological winds, the Book of Mormon was alternately repellant and welcome, and both responsive to and a catalyst behind changing spiritual sensibilities. Historian Timothy Smith, for example, believes that after 1830, and reflecting the “constant appeal by Mormon apologists to the presence of the Holy Spirit in their community,” attempts like Wesley’s to confine and limit the operations of the Spirit diminished among evangelicals.40

A modern evangelical, in articulating just where Mormonism pushes the envelope of orthodoxy too far, finds danger precisely where Campbell and Wardlaw did more than a century and a half earlier: “Without some external checks and balances, it is simply too easy to misinterpret God’s answer when we try to apply a test like that of Moroni 10:4–5 and ask him to reveal through his Spirit the truth or falsity of the Book of Mormon.”41 Similarly, scholar of
early Christianity W. D. Davies wonders if Mormonism’s error is in taking “conventional modes of revelation found in the OT ... so literally ... as to give a facticity to what was intended as symbolic.” After all, he writes, “the revelation to Moses as recorded in the OT can hardly be taken literally as an event in which the Divine handed over or dictated to Moses Ten Commandments.”

But of course, this tenacious embrace of revelatory literalism is neither an arbitrary biblical fundamentalism nor a Book of Mormon innovation. It is in fact rooted in Joseph Smith’s own, firsthand experience with revelation, a dialogic encounter with Deity that gave indelible redefinition to the promise of James the Apostle by simply taking it at face value, thereby setting both Joseph and the church he would found on a collision course with orthodoxy. In Joseph’s personal history, his concluding sentence about the glorious theophany in which he participated as a 14-year-old boy was an unadorned affirmation striking for its matter-of-fact simplicity: “I had found the testimony of James to be true—that a man who lacked wisdom might ask of God, and obtain, and not be upbraided” (Joseph Smith—History 1:26, citing James 1:5). Subsequent Mormons would find in that theophany the basis for a radical conception of God’s corporeality, one that abruptly and decisively shattered the Trinity of traditional Christendom. But Joseph’s own summative comment was that when man puts a question to God in guileless faith and humility, God may choose to answer with articulate, discernible, unmistakably human words. “I asked the Personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right ... and which I should join. I was answered that I must join none of them” (Joseph Smith—History 1:18–19).

Whether or not Mormonism’s model was the first to appeal to radically individualistic cravings for spiritual experience by means of a literalized understanding of divine discourse, the Book of Mormon was apparently the most effective vehicle of the age for eliciting, condoning, and affirming such personal encounters with divine powers. Martin Marty has remarked that “historians cannot prove that the Book of Mormon was translated from golden plates and have not proven that it was simply a fiction of Joseph Smith. Instead they seek to understand its revelatory appeal, the claims it makes, and why it discloses modes of being and of believing that millions of Saints would otherwise not entertain.” But secular scholars and church members alike have yet to fathom fully the power and extent of this revelatory appeal.

John Greenleaf Whittier was one of the first to grasp this key to the Book of Mormon’s historical and spiritual significance. The Book of Mormon, the poet wrote, spoke “a language of hope and promise to weak, weary hearts, tossed and troubled, who have wandered from sect to sect, seeking in vain for the primal manifestations of the divine power.” For millions of believers, the Book of Mormon has been the vehicle through which they could find their own sacred grove and reenact on a personal scale the epiphany that ushered in a new dispensation.
Traditionally, Moroni, son of Mormon, has been the recognized author of the title page of the Book of Mormon. Before the late 1980s most Latter-day Saint church leaders and scholars who wrote on the issue attributed the title page to Moroni.1 Official church publications have supported that view, stating, for example, “It is believed that the title page was written by Moroni.”2 In recent years there has been renewed discussion among some LDS scholars about the authorship of the title page. The suggestion has been made that Mormon is the author of the first six lines and that Moroni is the author of the remainder. The most complete explanation of this proposal was published in 1988.3 Others have since agreed with the idea.4 However, a careful look at the text of the title page, its historical context within the Book of Mormon, and the arguments marshaled to support Mormon’s involvement will demonstrate the likelihood that Moroni is the sole author of the title page.

It seems clear that Joseph Smith understood Moroni to be the author of the title page. We know from Joseph’s words that the title page “is a literal translation, taken from the very last leaf, on the left hand side of the collection or book of plates.”5 Since Moroni was the last person to handle the plates before he buried them (see Moroni 10:2), he likely engraved “the very last leaf.” In the 1840 edition of the Book of Mormon, which Joseph Smith helped prepare, Moroni’s name as author was added at the end of the title page (see photo above). We can safely assume that this change was done under Joseph’s direction, because he indicated that he was still making corrections to the scripture as late as January 1842.6 Moroni’s name was probably added to avoid confusion about the actual authorship of this page, for some had thought that Joseph Smith originated it. The addition of Moroni’s name to the title page was not unique to the 1840 edition; it also appeared in a facsimile of the title page in Times and Seasons in 1841,7 the second printing of the 1852 edition of the Book of Mormon, the 1858 Jas. O. Wright edition, and the 1874 and 1892 RLDS editions.8 If anyone would have noticed differences in the engraving styles, or the marks left by engraving tools, as they might have been used differently by Mormon and Moroni on that last plate, it would have been Joseph Smith. Apparently he saw no reason to suggest two authors.

Another issue raised by those who propose dual authorship is that the last two lines of the first paragraph are very similar to the two previous lines. I reproduce them as follows:

Written and sealed up, and hid up unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed—To come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof—

Sealed by the hand of Moroni, and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by way of the Gentile—The interpretation thereof by the gift of God.

If the same author wrote both sentences, the question arises, “Why would he have repeated himself so closely?” It seems likely that, rather than being a repetition, the second sentence, in the form of
poetic parallelism, is a purposeful clarification of the first. By whom was the book sealed up? How long would the record be hidden up, and who would bring it forth? How would the interpretation be given? It is entirely possible, indeed probable, that Moroni wrote both statements, not out of redundancy, but to further illuminate the divine destiny of this important record.

It may be that these two statements were written by Moroni at different times, as Dr. Sidney B. Sperry has proposed, although we cannot be certain. If Moroni wrote the first portion of the title page in A.D. 400 (see Mormon 8:5, 12–14, where Mormon appears to be ending his record the first time) and added the rest sometime in the next 20 years, by then he certainly would have received more understanding concerning the coming forth of the book. Indeed, he wrote: “The Lord hath shown unto me great and marvelous things concerning that which must shortly come, at that day when these things shall come forth among you. . . . Behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing” (Mormon 8:34–35). This statement would account for the clarifications given in the last two lines of the first paragraph of the title page.

It has been suggested that Moroni’s words in Mormon 8:5—”my father hath made this record, and he hath written the intent thereof”—are a direct reference to Mormon’s writing on the title page. However, Mormon’s final words in Mormon 7 are a statement of the intent for which the Book of Mormon was written:

For behold, this [the Book of Mormon] is written for the intent that ye may believe that [the Bible]; and if ye believe that ye will believe this also; and if ye believe this ye will know concerning your fathers, and also the marvelous works which were wrought by the power of God among them. And ye will also know that ye are a remnant of the seed of Jacob; . . . and if it so be that ye believe in Christ, . . . following the example of our Savior, . . . it shall be well with you in the day of judgment. (Mormon 7:9–10; see 5:14–15)

Perhaps the most compelling evidence for Moroni’s authorship of the entire title page comes from a study of two unusual words or word combinations that appear infrequently in the Book of Mormon. The word interpretation appears 7 times in the Book of Mormon text, written once by Nephi and 6 times in the writings of Moroni (Mormon 9:7, 34; Ether 2:3; 4:5; 15:8; Moroni 10:16). The words seal(ed) up occur only 14 times in the Book of Mormon, 5 times by Nephi and 9 times in Moroni’s writings (Ether 3:22–23, 27–28; 4:5; 5:1; Moroni 10:2). Those expressions do not appear anywhere in Mormon’s translated writings, yet they do occur in the very portions of the title page that some scholars have attributed to both Mormon and Moroni. The distribution of those expressions weighs heavily in favor of Moroni as the sole author.

There is another issue in considering whether Mormon wrote the first portion of the title page. Could the statement “written and sealed up, and hid up unto the Lord” have come from him? It is clear from Mormon’s own words that he intended to hide up all the Nephite records “save it were” the abridged set of plates he had written (see Mormon 6:6) and the small plates of Nephi (see Words of Mormon 1:5–6). Mormon did not intend to seal and hide up these last plates personally, for it was his feeling and desire that his son, Moroni, would “survive, . . . that he may write somewhat concerning [the Nephites], and somewhat concerning Christ” (Words of Mormon 1:2). Thus Mormon did not envision the Book of Mormon plates being sealed up or buried during his own lifetime. Moroni confirmed this point when, some 16 years after the final Nephite-Lamanite battle, he declared he would write a few things that his father had commanded him to write (see Mormon 8:1, 6; 6:5). It was at this time that Moroni first mentioned burying or sealing up the plates (see Mormon 8:4, 14). Fortunately for us, Mormon’s intuition was right and Moroni lived for at least 36 years after the final battle. He recorded much of importance pertaining to the Savior and his gospel before burying the plates.

Ultimately, all who have taken the time to comment on or study the issue of authorship of the title page would likely be happy with either Mormon or Moroni as the author, or even both as coauthors. However, when the information presented in this article is joined with what was recognized by earlier writers, perhaps we might now consider the question answered definitively: Moroni himself wrote the title page while faithfully echoing what he had learned from his father, Mormon.
In the world of copyists, especially those who copy what they hear, one of the most feared problems comes with words that sound the same. This challenge faced Joseph Smith’s scribes who wrote down the text of the Book of Mormon as he dictated it. For example, the words son and sun sound the same in English and are referred to as homophones (same pronunciation but different spellings and meanings). The identical pronunciation of these words, for instance, may lie behind the differing readings in 3 Nephi 25:2 and Malachi 4:2. As a further example, English speakers pronounce the terms straight and strait the same way. In fact, it is quite easy to find examples where educated speakers of English have confused the spellings as well, including in early 19th-century America. And here is the rub. The words straight and strait and their derivatives bear very different meanings and, in one form or another, appear in no fewer than 27 passages in the Book of Mormon. But from the very first there has been some confusion over them.

The word straight comes from the Middle English strehte (the past participle of the modern verb stretch, thus its meaning “stretched”) and has consistently been used to mean “not crooked.” Something is straight if it is “free from curvature, bending, or angularity.” It is frequently used of a course or way to indicate movement “directly to or from a place” without deviation. Thus a straight course is the shortest way and is often assumed not to suffer from interruptions or intermediate destinations. On the other hand, the word strait comes from the Middle English streit and was adapted from the Old Frenchestreit (and ultimately from the Latin strictus), denoting “narrow” or “tight,” particularly in the physical sense. Used of a way, passage, or channel, it would mean “so narrow as to make transit difficult.” Used metaphorically of a commandment, law, penalty, or vow, it means “stringent” or “strict”—allowing no evasion.1

The two Book of Mormon manuscripts (the original and printer’s manuscripts), as well as the 1830 edition, provide no help in interpreting whether a given word should be straight or strait. In the printer’s manuscript, both words were always spelled as strait (all 27 times), while in the 1830 edition, the typesetter spelled them all as straight. The original manuscript is extant for only 12 of the 27 occurrences. Only one of those (Alma 50:8) was spelled straight; the 11 others were spelled strait. We can see that the earliest textual sources provide no orthographic evidence for which spelling should be used. In preparing later editions, the editors noticed that neither Joseph’s scribes nor the printers were any more sensitive to the different spellings for these two homophones than were most of their contemporaries. As a consequence, we cannot appeal to spellings used in the original or the printer’s manuscripts or in the 1830 edition, but must rely instead on context and other internal evidences from the text to determine which word was meant in each case.

Two of the later changes back to strait are clearly justified by the context (1 Nephi 17:41, twice); six others follow biblical parallels in Isaiah and Matthew (1 Nephi 21:20; Isaiah 49:20; Jacob 6:11; 3 Nephi 14:13–14, twice; 3 Nephi 27:33, twice; Matthew 7:13–14). Over time, the spelling for these eight non-problematic occurrences was corrected to some form of strait—two in 1906, four in 1907, and two in 1920—but the story does not end there. In the most recent edition of the Book of Mormon, the phrase
straight path in six additional passages was changed back to strait path (three of these followed changes made in the 1953 RLDS edition, though perhaps unintentionally). The problem these occurrences raise is whether we can extrapolate from the “strait gate and narrow way” of the New Testament to the conclusion that Nephi’s “straight and narrow path” should read “strait and narrow.” The Book of Mormon often introduces distinctive phrasing that is not derived from the Bible, as in this case. Nephi’s richer image limits wandering missteps in two ways (both width and direction of the path), whereas the New Testament refers only to the constricted width of both gate and path, with no allusions to directional invariance. Did Nephi have one or both meanings in mind?

The earlier eight changes to forms of strait are not difficult to justify contextually. Obviously, the Lord “straitened,” or disciplined, the Israelites in the wilderness (1 Nephi 17:41, twice). And clearly the Isaiah passage (1 Nephi 21:20) requires strait in the context that explains that the space is too confined (compare Isaiah 49:20). Just as obvious, the gate that opens on the path to eternal life is “strait”—that is, narrow—since repentance and baptism in the name of Christ is the only gate (Jacob 6:11; 3 Nephi 14:13–14, twice; 3 Nephi 27:33, twice). The narrow gate is contrasted with the wide gate that leads to hell. Further, it would be unusual to speak of a “straight gate.”

However, for the reasons listed below, we think the more recent revisions of six additional Book of Mormon passages (which describe the path as both “straight and narrow”) to read “strait and narrow” may lead readers to misread the intentions of the original Book of Mormon authors.

I. The redundancy of strait and narrow as compound modifiers of the same noun cannot be defended by reference to any parallel in the Bible or the Book of Mormon. Rather, both Matthew and the Book of Mormon use strait singly to modify gate and narrow singly to describe the way in contrast to the other gate and way, which are “wide” and “broad,” respectively—employing traditional Hebrew parallel structure to emphasize the contrast between the two ways of living and the similarity within each of both its gate and its path.

II. When Alma tells the people of Gideon to walk in the Lord’s paths, “which are straight” (Alma 7:9), we do not expect him to mean “narrow.” And when he comes back 10 verses later to this theme of “the paths of righteousness” (v. 19) and commends the people for “making his [the Lord’s] paths straight,” it is made explicit and is emphasized that Alma means it in the sense of no variation of direction. For the Lord “cannot walk in crooked paths; neither doth he vary from that which he hath said; neither hath he a shadow of turning from the right to the left, or from that which is right to that which is wrong; therefore, his course is one eternal round” (v. 20). This usage seems to draw here and elsewhere on 2 Nephi 31:9, 18. It also has numerous biblical parallels (e.g., Psalm 5:8; Isaiah 40:3, 4; Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23)—all of which emphasize the straightness of the Lord’s path in the directional sense (“the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord”) and provide the source and context for 1 Nephi 10:8, which in turn provides the context

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for 2 Nephi 31, as it retells in greater detail Nephi’s vision of John the Baptist and the baptism of Christ.

III. Later, while blessing and instructing his son Helaman, Alma develops the idea that God’s paths are straight in the directional sense (Alma 37:44) by comparing “a straight course to eternal bliss,” delineated by the words of Christ, with “a straight course to the promised land,” indicated to their ancestors by the divinely provided compass. Mormon echoes this usage in Helaman 3:29 when he testifies that the word of God will “lead the man of Christ in a straight and narrow course.” The required spelling when modifying course is always straight.

IV. Now we come to the “straight and narrow path” of Lehi’s vision (1 Nephi 8:20). Given the similarity here to Mormon’s usage just cited, we would naturally suppose the directional sense is intended. It is Jacob who most effectively comes to our rescue in articulating the meaning of his family’s way of talking about a path that is both narrow and straight and that leads from a gate that is also constricted: “the way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a straight course before him” (2 Nephi 9:41). Notice how the choice of the conjunction but makes it impossible that Jacob intended the meaning of “strait” or “narrow” for the course or path. It would make no sense to say that “the way or path is narrow, but it is narrow”—that is, strait! Again, we have clear evidence that when a way or path or course is being described, Lehi and his family are thinking of it as minimally straight in a directional sense, even though it is sometimes also narrow. The gate, too, is narrow (or strait) in that it consists alone of the Holy One of Israel and there is no other gate.

V. John Tvedtnes has recently provided another strong reason supporting this conclusion. He demonstrates convincingly that 2 Nephi 4 should be read as a reflection on the great visions given to Lehi and Nephi, because of the repeated specific references it makes to the content and phrasing of those visions. Here Nephi implores the Lord to “make my path straight before me” (2 Nephi 4:33), in apparent reference to the straight and narrow path of the vision (1 Nephi 8:20). In the same vision, John the Baptist was described as crying to the people to prepare “the way of the Lord” and to “make his paths straight” (1 Nephi 10:8). On both counts the narrow path is also straight.

VI. Three of the more recent changes are in 2 Nephi 31. This late chapter begins with Nephi explicitly referring the reader back to his vision of the baptism of Christ: “Wherefore, I would that ye should remember that I have spoken unto you concerning that prophet which the Lord showed unto me, that should baptize the Lamb of God, which should take away the sins of the world” (v. 4). Nephi summarized that part of his vision quickly (1 Nephi 11:27–28) after having earlier given a longer account of this part of his father’s vision with the additional clarification that “much spake my father concerning this thing” (1 Nephi 10:8). In his summary of Lehi’s account, Nephi included the same reference to Isaiah’s prophecy of this event that John himself had used as an explanation for his ministry (see John 1:23): “And he spake also concerning a prophet who should come before the Messiah, to prepare the way of the Lord—Yea, even he should go forth and cry in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight” (1 Nephi 10:7–8; compare Isaiah 40:3). Given that Nephi explicitly invokes this context in 2 Nephi 31:4, it seems we would need a strong and clear reason to ignore that governing context when Nephi begins discussing the “straightness of the path” in verse 9 and the “straight and narrow path” in verses 18 and 19. And again, the text itself helps us to clarify Nephi’s meaning.

With these observations in hand, we can make one final point about these three recent changes in 2 Nephi 31. Given the evidence above that Nephi and others all saw the path to eternal life as straight in the directional sense, it seems doubtful that Nephi would omit that important information in favor of a redundancy such as “strait and narrow.” It is easy to see how the confusion arose. Clearly, it was correct to change references to the gate to “strait.” And the path is always narrow, and therefore could also be called “strait.” But to change Nephi’s unique references to a path that is both straight and narrow is to wash out important information about that path that is clear in Nephi’s source texts and is picked up by Jacob, Alma, and Mormon in many passages—always to be used in the directional sense. This interpretation seems to be confirmed by Nephi’s reference in verse 9 to the “straightness” of the path and the “narrowness” of...
the gate. Again, it is the straightness of the path that Nephi wishes to emphasize. Interpreting “strait and narrow” as an intended pleonasm discounts the richer connections made by these later Book of Mormon authors, who knew Nephi’s language and culture much better than we do.

In his final words, Nephi gives us one more version of this problem. This time Nephi calls on the Gentiles to “enter into the narrow gate” and to “walk in the straight path” that leads to eternal life (2 Nephi 33:9). Literary consistency leads us to always see courses and paths as straight, even though this one may also be narrow in the sense spelled out by Jacob (2 Nephi 9:41), as demonstrated above.

In summary, a complete analysis of the full range of usage patterns for all forms of strait and straight in the Book of Mormon provides sufficient contextual evidence for resolving the orthographic problems that were introduced through these homophones in the manuscripts and the 1830 edition. The following chart lists all 27 occurrences of some form of straight in the 1830 edition, indicating which ones were changed to strait and in which LDS editions they were revised. The evidence, we believe, indicates that most of these later changes were correct. But because the Book of Mormon usage introduced by Nephi was distinctive, and not derived from the New Testament, editorial efforts to make the text more consistent with a perceived biblical parallel may have led to some problematic spellings. These are marked with asterisks in the following list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Text (corrected)</th>
<th>Original Ms.</th>
<th>Printer’s Ms.</th>
<th>1830</th>
<th>Current LDS text (since . . . )</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Alma 14:28</td>
<td>they straightway came forth</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Nephi 27:33</td>
<td>strait is the gate</td>
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NEPHI'S PSALM (2 Nephi 4:16–35) constitutes one of the great lyric outbursts in the Book of Mormon. Like the psalms of David, it is replete with vivid figurative language, dramatically rising and falling emotions, and parallelism (the principal formal feature of Hebrew poetry). It also contains themes that figure prominently in the Psalter—praise, thanksgiving, love of scripture, anger with enemies, and the conviction of sin. Like biblical psalms, Nephi’s psalm articulates universal feelings of self-reproach and rejoicing, of pleading and praising. At the same time, it is enriched by the particular narrative context in which it is embedded, seeming to emerge naturally from the predicament Nephi confronted as he assumed the lonely mantle of leadership following the death of his father (2 Nephi 4:12) to face the fratricidal wrath of his brothers and the imminent dissolution of his extended family.¹

The Psalms have given rise to a long tradition of metrical paraphrases suitable for congregational singing. Nephi’s psalm also begs to be adapted to verse and set to music. Having long felt the need for a metrical version of Nephi’s psalm, I decided to try my hand at it in the summer of 1999. At the time, I was composing a talk on the hymns to be given at the Church Music Workshop and completing an encyclopedia article on Nephi. The long-delayed project of converting Nephi’s psalm into song thus came naturally to mind.

I eventually wrote two poetic adaptations, each for a different tune. “I Love the Lord” was written to Jean Sibelius’s “Finlandia,” which is also the tune of the moving hymn “Be Still, My Soul.” “Sometimes My Soul” was composed to the plaintive American folk tune “Poor Wayfaring Stranger.” Let me briefly comment on each piece.

JOHN S. TANNER
“I Love the Lord”

“I Love the Lord” was built upon a single climactic line in Nephi’s psalm: “Awake my soul! No longer droop in sin!” (2 Nephi 4:28). I chose “Finlandia” chiefly because its meter fit Nephi’s poignant outburst. Hymn texts are categorized by the number of syllables per line and the number of lines per verse. “Finlandia” has six lines with 10 beats per line; it is thus described as 10, 10, 10, 10, 10, 10. Nephi’s cry also has 10 syllables. In fact, it constitutes a perfect iambic pentameter line, meaning that its 10 syllables are arranged in five iambic “feet” in which the stress falls on every second beat. The effect resembles the beating of a heart: dah-dum, dah-dum, dah-dum, dah-dum, dah-dum. This familiar pattern is also the rhythm of blank verse, which is unrhymed iambic pentameter. Blank verse, significantly, constitutes the poetic form most associated with the high style in English. It is the language of much Renaissance drama, introduced to the stage in Marlowe’s “mighty line” and perfected by Shakespeare. It is the medium of epic poetry as developed by Milton and Wordsworth. It is a cadence used to eloquent effect by Tennyson, Frost, and many others. Metrically, Nephi’s great cry of self-reproach, “Awake my soul! No longer droop in sin!” belongs within this grand tradition of blank verse. I knew from the start that I wanted to build a paraphrase around the metrics of this line and that I therefore needed a tune that would preserve its natural eloquence.

But a suitable tune was hard to come by, as 10-syllable lines are somewhat ungainly when translated into hymn texts and hence not as common for hymns as are many other poetic meters. Moreover, Nephi’s exclamation has another problematic metrical feature. Nephi’s great cry is interrupted by a medial pause, called a caesura, between the second and third foot. Ideally, the tune needed to account for the caesura as well as accommodate blank verse. Sibelius’s tune worked on both counts. It fits an iambic pentameter text, and it incorporated the musical equivalent of a caesura after the fourth syllable of each line. It also worked melodically with the mood of Nephi’s lament. My next challenge was to build a pause into each line of my text at exactly the same place. This presented a difficult technical problem for me as a lyricist, but ultimately the text is stronger for the medial pauses, which modulate the rhythm of what are otherwise rather long lines musically.

“I Love the Lord”

I love the Lord. In him my soul delights. Upon his word, I ponder day and night. He’s heard my cry, brought visions to my sleep, And kept me safe o’er deserts and the deep. He’s filled my heart with his consuming love, And borne me high on wings of his great dove.

Yet oft I groan, “O wretched man am I!” My flesh is weak and I’m encompassed by A world of sin, which holds me in its thrall, If I give in and to temptations fall. Then strength grows slack, I waste in sorrow’s vale. My peace destroyed, my enemies prevail.

Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, my heart! And let me praise again The Lord my God, who is my rock and stay To keep me strict upon his straight, plain way. O let me shake at the first sight of sin And thus escape my foes without and in.
Just as I sought for a tune that reflected a metrical pattern in the source text, so I also tried to find a pattern in the flow of Nephi’s ideas that would unify the structure of my paraphrase. I ultimately decided to impose a simplified structure on the emotional vacillations in Nephi’s text—yet one that would still correspond to the basic movement of his thought. Nephi’s emotions ebb and flow in a series of rising and falling feelings of remorse and resolve. I simplified this pattern into a single three-part
movement of emotions: from rejoicing in stanza 1, to remorse in stanza 2, to resolution in stanza 3. I wanted my adaptation, like Nephi’s psalm, to move circularly from soaring heights, down to anguished depths, back up to the heights.

Ronald J. Staheli’s arrangement beautifully brings out the emotional pattern I was aiming at through the musical contrasts it develops from verse to verse. Staheli, division coordinator for choral music and conducting in BYU’s School of Music, uses warm textures appropriate to the expression of testimony for the first verse. In the second verse, which gives voice to deep anguish, Staheli dramatically darkens the tone by changing the key and leading with men’s voices. He also makes the phrase a world of sin roll across the music in successive waves. For the third verse, which marks the climactic upward turn, Staheli appropriately pulls out all the stops. The key changes again as the full choir sings, forte, “Awake my soul!” Finally, the piece returns full circle to the first line—only now in more subdued tones. I was thrilled to hear how well Staheli’s arrangement worked when he led the combined men of the Tabernacle Choir and BYU Men’s Chorus in the premier performance of our piece at the priesthood session of general conference in the fall of 1999. Subsequently, the piece was recorded by the BYU University Singers as well as published in sheet music for choirs.

“Sometimes My Soul”

I composed my other adaptation of Nephi’s psalm, “Sometimes My Soul,” to an American folk tune that derives from a tradition of so-called “white spirituals.” The tune is very old. Its roots in this country go back at least to 1829—that is, to the very year when Joseph Smith was translating Nephi’s words. This pleased me. I was drawn to the tune for its mournful, longing, yearning quality. The melody recalled Nephi’s lament and connected it, unexpectedly, to the soulful laments of American spirituals. As a folk melody, this tune invites a relatively simple arrangement, which K. Newell Dayley, dean of BYU’s College of Fine Arts and Communications and a professor in the School of Music, deliberately aimed to achieve in his lovely setting. It also invites a setting suitable for a single voice. Its only public performance to date was as a solo by Eric Glissmeyer, who sang it at the end of my plenary address to the Church Music Workshop. His rich baritone voice brought out the peculiar blend of dejection and hope, vulnerability and strength, that is so conspicuous in Nephi’s introspective lament.

In wedding text to tune, I was conscious of the rising and falling modulations of emotion that distinguish Nephi’s psalm and sought to preserve this pattern. Each 8-line stanza begins in anguish and then rises toward affirmation in lines 5 and 6. This corresponds to what happens musically at the C juncture in the tune’s traditional ABCB form. At this juncture, the tune takes an upward turn. I exploited the lift in the melodic line by placing in the C position lines of verse that signal a turn from despondency to hope: “Yet still I know in whom I’ve trusted / He’s heard my cries by day and night” and “Awake my soul! And cease from drooping! / Rejoice my heart! And praise thy God!” The last phrase is repeated in a coda, where a different melody reconfigures the emotional force of the line to signal a now quieter and more settled determination to trust in God.

To reach this final resolution and overcome dejection, however, requires repeated efforts. It is not a single, smooth, upward ascent toward hope, but a stumbling climb out of a dark pit, threatened by
repeated bouts of discouragement and requiring repeated efforts to lay hold on hope. Finding these spiritual realities expressed in the falling and rising motions of both my source text and tune, I tried to map onto my verse the vicissitudes of a journey out of despair. Hence, unlike “I Love the Lord,” “Sometimes My Soul” begins in anguish, rises toward hope, and then slips again into anguished self-reproach in the second verse, thereby enacting a double movement of self-reproach and celebration, followed by renewed discouragement and renewed hope. The two verses are intended to reflect the twofold rhythm of the source text, in which Nephi rises from self-condemnation (“O wretched man that I am!” v. 17) toward hope (“nevertheless, I know . . . ” v. 19), only to slide back into self-condemnation (“why should my heart weep . . . ?” v. 26)—requiring that he again rouse himself from the depths of despondency (“Awake, my soul! . . . ” v. 28).

In its vacillating but upward struggle toward hope, Nephi’s psalm articulates a psychological process familiar in the drama of salvation.⁶ We are reminded that it takes repeated effort to overcome the downward gravity of grief for those caught in a slough of despond.⁷ Beyond this, the way out of despair requires more than our own effort; it requires enabling grace from Christ, as Nephi’s psalm and “Sometimes My Soul” both acknowledge. Nephi is finally able to rise above despair only by remembering the rock of his Redeemer (v. 30), on whom all hope rests. Likewise, both verses of “Sometimes My Soul” conclude by pointing to hope in Christ as the only way out of the darkness.

Nephi’s psalm speaks not only to his individual experience but to our common experience with anxiety, discouragement, and temptation.⁸ No doubt it enjoys such immense appeal among Latter-day Saints because it reveals vulnerabilities heretofore hidden in Nephi and because it articulates our own often hidden spiritual struggles. Both my adaptations aim at making Nephi’s very personal psalm universally accessible, while at the same time remaining strictly faithful to my scriptural source. Neither text is an exact paraphrase. Nor, however, is either merely loosely inspired by Nephi’s psalm. Rather, I made a conscious decision to compose texts based exclusively on Nephi’s own images. Every image derives from Nephi’s words, and all but one come from his psalm. (“Grasping his rod” is drawn from Nephi’s vision of the tree of life.) I hoped that my adaptations would at once lead readers and singers back to the Book of Mormon and resonate with their own lives. I wanted them to recall Nephi’s experiences of traveling through the desert and the deep, of praying by day and night, of receiving heavenly visions, of contending with his enemies, and so forth. At the same time, I wanted to speak to their own experiences with sin and sorrow, anger and anxiety, prayer and peril, God’s mercies and miracles—as well as with their own “foes without and in.”

I am persuaded that such musical adaptations of scripture can greatly enrich our understanding of sacred texts as well as implant them more deeply in our souls. I know that hymns based on the Bible have done so for me. For example, through song I have often made the disciples’ entreaty at Emmaus my own Sabbath prayer: “O Savior, stay this night with me; behold ‘tis eventide” (“Abide with Me; ’Tis Eventide,” Hymns, no. 165; compare Luke 24:29). Likewise, I have unwittingly echoed Isaiah’s consoling oracle as I’ve sung “How Firm a Foundation”: “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (Isaiah 41:10; compare “How Firm a Foundation,” Hymns, no. 85). The church has been greatly blessed by Book of Mormon–based music such as Leroy Robertson’s Oratorio from the Book of Mormon and Marvin K. Gardner and Vanja Y. Watkins’s marvelous anthem “Press Forward, Saints” (Hymns, no. 81). But we need more sacred songs drawn from the Book of Mormon. Too few hymns derive from our unique scriptural tradition. As a result, restoration scripture has not been borne by song into the sinews of our speech, the wells of our memory, and the affections of our hearts. I hope that these two adaptations of Nephi’s psalm begin to remedy this deficiency with respect to one of the most extraordinary texts in the Book of Mormon—and, perhaps, thereby to inspire other Latter-day Saints to mine the resources of this sacred text for the substance of new songs to sing to God (compare Psalm 98:1; Revelation 5:9).
Sometimes My Soul

John S. Tanner

D. J. 60

Sometimes my soul in deep affliction should I linger,

Cries out, "O wretched man am I!"

When I'm encumbered, I'll not give way.

Passed by temptation, When flesh is weak and I comply,

Yet still I A-wake my soul!

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night. He’s filled my heart with love consuming. He’s borne my soul.

God. Who is the rock of my salvation. I’ll strictly walk

[Musical notation]

to mountain height. Then why in grasping his rod.

[Musical notation]

Awake my soul! And cease from drooping. Rejoice my

[Musical notation]

Music setting based on the traditional American folk ballad, Poor Wayfaring Stranger.
Serpent Symbols & Salvation

In the Ancient Near East and the Book of Mormon

Andrew C. Skinner
The image of the serpent was tremendously significant in the ancient world. Societies and scriptures of the Near East simultaneously attributed two highly symbolic roles to serpents. One role connected serpents to the heavens by having them represent deity, creative powers, and healing. The other linked them with the underworld and associated them with evil, harm, and destructive influences. We who live in modern times have no difficulty appreciating this double symbol because, in fact, this duality persists in our own day. The symbol of the healing serpent appears on the physician’s caduceus, while a person of disreputable actions—especially treachery—is sometimes referred to as “a snake.”

A careful reading of Israel’s sacred writings reveals that the same duality regarding serpent symbolism that existed among various peoples of the ancient Near East was also an integral part of the religious landscape of Jehovah’s covenant people. Texts from both the Bible and Book of Mormon identify and allow us to attach proper name-titles to the two specific beings who are represented by the dual image of the serpent: Christ and Satan. By surveying non-biblical Mediterranean and Mesopotamian cultural evidence as well as scripture, I hope to do three things: first, demonstrate the dual nature of serpent symbolism; second, examine the proposition that the ancient serpent myths of the Fertile Crescent and Mediterranean-based cultures are echoes of divine truth—namely, that from the beginning the true Messiah was legitimately represented by the image of the serpent, but that the symbol was usurped and perverted by the quintessential false messiah, Satan; and, third, explore whether or not the Book of Mormon fits the biblical and Near Eastern cultural environment regarding the dual nature of serpent symbolism.

Egyptian Evidence

The serpent as a dual, polar symbol emerged in the cradle of civilization during the earliest periods of history. Serpent symbolism among the ancient Egyptians demonstrates the most glaring contrasts between worship on the one hand and abhorrence on the other.

In Egypt the snake was a chthonic animal (a creature representing any one of a number of gods of the earth and underworld) and the embodiment of life-giving powers. Attributing life-giving powers to snakes may have arisen in part from observing snakes shedding their skins, continually exposing a “new body” in the process. Thus, one of the forms of the god Atum, believed to be a primeval creator deity, was the snake or serpent that continued to live season after season. In a fascinating dialogue with Osiris, the Egyptian god of the netherworld and of final judgment, Atum predicts the destruction of the world he created and his own reversion back to the form of a serpent or snake. As Henri Frankfort says, “The primeval snake . . . survives when everything else is destroyed at the end of time.” Thus the serpent was strongly and continually associated with creation and eternal existence in the ancient Egyptian ethos. The Egyptians portrayed life itself by the image of the rearing serpent, and a serpent biting its tail was a common Egyptian emblem for “eternity.”

Another primeval deity mentioned in the Pyramid Texts is Amun, one of whose two primary representations was that of the snake named Kematef (meaning “he who has completed his time”). After the Eleventh Dynasty (the Egyptian Middle Kingdom), Amun appeared as the god of the capital of Thebes and eventually merged with the sun god to be known as Amun-Re, the supreme state god in the New Kingdom (c. 1550–1090 B.C.). At Karnak it was believed that Amun-Re and his divine consort, the goddess Mut, gave birth to a son named Khonsu. Mut is also symbolized as a snake and is called “Mut the resplendent serpent.” Thus the divine triad or family, the preeminent unit of social organization among the gods and humans according to the Egyptian worldview, was linked to the image of the serpent.

The close ties between birth, the goodness of the gods, rebirth, and the image of the serpent infused Egypt during all of her early historical periods down to the end of the New Kingdom. When corn was harvested and grapes pressed into wine, an offering was made to the harvest goddess, Thermuthis, who was depicted as either a snake or a woman with a serpent’s head. Geb, the god of the earth and “the father of the gods,” is referred to as “the father of snakes” that emerge from the earth. It is also significant, given Egyptian obsession with the quest for eternal life, that the snake “became a symbol of survival after death” (even resurrection) among the ancient Egyptians. In the Egyptian Book of the Dead (sometimes referred to by its more precise title, The Book of Going Forth by Day), chapter 87, we are told that transformation into a serpent upon death gives new life to the deceased person.
Veneration of serpents or snakes in predynastic Egypt and during the Old Kingdom coalesced around the most important serpent-goddess of Lower Egypt: Wadjet. Wadjet (meaning “green one”) was the general Egyptian term for cobra, and in that form she became the symbol of royalty and unification. In fact, the cobra, or uraeus, became a generic Egyptian ideograph for the concept of immortality. Thus the pharaoh was described as “the living years of the uraeus.” Wadjet was attached to the royal crown as protectress of the king or pharaoh and in the end became the “eye of Re.” As the “green one,” the serpent Wadjet embodied the forces of growth and health. (Significantly, green was the color that symbolized resurrection in ancient Egypt.)

In opposition to all that was good in ancient Egypt, the most preeminent of all the demons, evil gods, or evil powers was Apophis, who was represented by a snake. Apophis was “the serpent of darkness,” the supreme opponent of the great sun god Re. The Egyptian Book of the Dead fairly crawls with other serpent demons as well, sometimes winged or rearing up, occasionally even standing on legs and spitting fire. And yet the serpent demons are not more powerful or overpowering than those serpent deities in charge of the forces of good. For example, counterbalancing Apophis is the snake Mehen (“the coiled one”), who was the helpful attendant of the sun god Re. Mehen assisted Re on his journey through the realm of night so that he would reemerge unharmed morning after morning, day by day. Thus the plans of a supreme spiritual adversary, represented by a serpent, were foiled by the powers of good, also represented by a serpent.

The negative aspects of serpent symbolism would have been particularly keen in the minds of Egyptian royalty as they thought about the afterlife. In fact, the dangers that had to be overcome after death during one’s journey through the netherworld in order to gain eternal life were so great that discussion of these matters occupies a significant place in the funerary papyri of ancient Egypt. Even certain Pyramid Texts manifest this preoccupation, one of which indicates that the dead king (pharaoh) gains eternity by winning the “snake game.” Though little else is known about this element of the salvific process in ancient Egypt, one wonders if this contest was not symbolic of having to pass some kind of postmortal test or final judgment in which the deceased would be required to demonstrate his knowledge of special information gained through his mortal experiences. Perhaps. However, we can assert that, given such
overwhelming evidence from texts and inscriptions, the serpent stood both for supreme goodness as well as ultimate evil among the ancient Egyptians and that serpent imagery was incontrovertibly associated with the afterlife, resurrection, and eternity.

**Mesopotamian Evidence**

Ancient Mesopotamian culture (indigenous to the area approximately encompassing modern Iraq) displays a dualism associated with serpent symbolism similar to that found in Egypt. The Sumerian god of spring vegetation, Tammuz, was linked to the image of the snake. Both he and his mother bore the title “mother-great-serpent of Heaven,” that is, the serpent deity who emanated from the heaven god Anu.16 The snake was also the sacred symbol of the god Ningizzida, who was called in Sumerian mythology “the companion of Tammuz.”17 He was the guardian at the door of heaven who had the power to bestow fertility, “who protected the living by his magic spells, and could ward off death and heal disease for the benefit of those who worshiped him devoutly.”18 The image of Ningizzida as a horned serpent on the seals of scrolls from ancient Mesopotamia seems to have been a sign of his divine power.19

As with the god Ningizzida, the Mesopotamian corn goddess, Nidaba, was shown in representations with serpents (springing from her shoulders).20 In the Sumerian and Babylonian worldviews the serpent was symbolic of the regenerative and healing properties of certain elements and produce of the earth. Therefore, the Sumerians and Babylonians transformed these aspects of nature into special serpent deities as did other Semitic and Mediterranean cultures.21

The image of the serpent deity in ancient Mesopotamia spanned several time periods as well as cultures. The greatest sovereign the Sumerians ever produced, King Gudea of the city-state Lagash, placed a representation of a serpent deity at the entrance of one of his temples around 2050 B.C., presumably to act as a guardian of the sacred edifice where life is renewed. Fourteen hundred years later, King Nebuchadnezzar II, ruler of the Neo-Babylonian empire (605–562 B.C.), dedicated the monumental Ishtar Gate of Babylon to the god Marduk with the following inscription:

(Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, son of) Nabopolassar (King of Babylon am I). The gate of Nana (Ishtar ...I built) with (blue) enamelled bricks ... for Marduk my lord. Lusty bulls of bronze and mighty figures of serpents I placed at their thresholds ... Marduk, exalted lord ... eternal life ... give as a gift.22

Regarding the joining of the bull and serpent images, Karen Joines has shown that it also was found throughout the ancient Near East:

The cultic association of the bull with the serpent emphasizes the fertility aspect of the serpent. ... The serpent-bull symbolism is widespread. Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Assyria have influenced the Canaanites at this point, and Palestine again becomes part of the larger Near East in its cultic symbolism.23

Not all Mesopotamian serpent images represented something beneficent. The oldest mythologies of ancient Mesopotamia have a familiar ring to them because they often parallel episodes found in the Old Testament and because their themes reflect the primeval struggle between two opposing powers. The story of the fall of man and the first family’s expulsion from the garden (Genesis 3) presents details and undertones also found in the Sumerian tale of Enki and Ninhursag, the Adapa story, and the Gilgamesh epic.

In the Gilgamesh epic, Utnapishtim and his wife, who have become like the gods, present some hope by which
Gilgamesh may also obtain everlasting life. Beyond the Waters of Death there exists a magic, life-giving plant that renews a person’s youth. Gilgamesh gathers it, but an evil snake snatches this plant away, ending the hero’s hope of eternal life. That the snake benefits from possession of the plant and lives on is evidenced by the fact that it sloughs off its old skin and enjoys a rejuvenation. Gilgamesh sits down and weeps over his own loss and the fact that he has played into the hands of the malevolent serpent. Thus the serpent in this epic fills a similar role as the serpent in Genesis, preventing the renewal of life by controlling or manipulating certain special flora to its advantage. Later Persian tradition also tells of a special plant that bestowed immortality. But Ahriman, the evil adversary of the one true “Wise Lord” (Ahura Mazda), created a serpent to destroy the miracle-working plant.

The most troublesome of all serpents in Mesopotamian mythology are described in the Babylonian creation epic (the Enuma Elish)—those primeval “monster serpents” that constitute the forces of chaos in the primeval world of the gods. Described as “sharp toothed, with fang unsparing,” possessing bodies filled “with poison for blood,” they gather in council, preparing to wage a war in heaven against the great gods. The forces of chaos are headed by none other than Tiamat, who is herself a female serpent (frequently referred to as a dragon). Ultimately, chaos is subdued as Tiamat is killed by Marduk, the champion deity, and her body is cast out of the presence of the gods, half to form the earth’s seas and the other half to form the sky.

Phoenician and Greek Evidence

To the west of Mesopotamia, on the Mediterranean coastal plain of northern Syria-Palestine, an important Phoenician deity named Eshmun of Sidon was worshiped. Like the Greek deity Asclepius, Eshmun was the god of medicine whose symbol was a serpent. And, again like the Greek Asclepius, Eshmun of Sidon apparently oversaw the growth and use of medicinal herbs, the cure of poisons, and also potent charms. Since devotees knew about antidotes for poisons and medicinal herbs that came from the ground, it seems only natural that they represented both Eshmun and Asclepius in the form of serpents. In Phoenician inscriptions, Eshmun is called Adonai, “My Lord,” parallel to the use of the Hebrew Adonai in referring to Jehovah.

The influence of Eshmun seems to have been felt over a long period of time and a wide geographical region. Scholars believe that coins from the Roman period depicting the figure of a youthful god standing between two serpents reflect the cult of the god Eshmun, “the Healer.” Though Asclepius is also represented as a serpent in Greek portrayals, an actual Sidonian coin shows Eshmun leaning on a staff with a serpent entwined about it. Sidonian depictions of Eshmun also parallel ancient Syrian representations of their god of healing, Shadrupa, whose image is that of the serpent. If they do not depict Eshmun, the Roman coins certainly depict Asclepius.

The Greek name of the god of medicine, Asclepius, was taken over by the Romans as Aesculapius, and the staff of Aesculapius with snakes wound around it is still the famous symbol, or caduceus, of the medical profession. It is interesting to note that authorities believe that the Phoenicians, Greeks, and Romans worshiped the god of medicine in the form of a serpent for at least two reasons. First, the snake was “the connecting link between the world of the quick and the dead,” between the living and the dead (as seen in other cultures such as Egypt); the serpent could give life or take it, let another creature live or cause it to die by invoking, as it were, a kind of “instant judgment” in deciding to strike or not. This seems true of both venomous and nonvenomous snakes such as constrictors. Second, the snake was the perfect model of regeneration and immortality since it sheds its skin every season.

The precursor of serpent veneration in classical Greece is to be found among the ancient Minoans on the island of Crete. Between 2000 and 1450 B.C. the Minoans promoted an advanced maritime culture that dominated the islands of the Aegean Sea, the mainland of Greece, and the coastal regions of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). The most important Minoan deity was the mother earth goddess of the city-state Knossos, or Cnossus, the capital of Cretan civilization. She is similar to fertility goddesses worshiped elsewhere in ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures. On Crete she was usually depicted in small statue form as a woman holding a snake in each hand, with a bird perched on top of her head.
As in other places and other cultures, the sloughing of the snake's skin probably represented the concept of renewal to the Minoans on Crete.

In the religious thought of the later classical Greeks (who were undoubtedly influenced by their Minoan predecessors), the serpent image sometimes appeared in tandem with the image of a bird (just as it did on Crete and in the art and literature of Mesopotamia). The Agathos Daimon was often depicted as a winged serpent and regarded as a good spirit. Seemingly, this linkage of serpents and birds cuts across a broad spectrum of cultures. Cultic or ritual vessels unearthed from Early Iron Age Canaan bear decorations with the serpent-dove motif. Even the most famous example of the winged serpent motif outside of (but related to) the Near East, namely, the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl (“feathered serpent”), is impressive because that god was revered as the founder of priestly wisdom (almost as if the Aztecs were somehow familiar with Jesus’ statement to be “wise as serpents and harmless as doves” [Matthew 10:16]). Quetzalcoatl’s high priests even bore the title “Prince of Serpents.”

Evidence from the Holy Land

Serpent veneration is attested in virtually every region of the Mediterranean basin, but nowhere more explicitly than in the Holy Land. Jars and vessels decorated with snakes give evidence of the existence of serpent cults in early Canaan. A two-handled cylindrical receptacle, dating to the time of Ramses III (1198–1166 B.C.), was uncovered at Beth-shan, a major city lying between the Jezreel and Jordan valleys. According to experts, this cultic object, which was decorated with serpents coiled around the sides from bottom to top, with doves perched on the handles, may have been used in sacred rites associated with agriculture. In fact, more objects displaying serpent imagery have been found among the strata of Beth-shan than at any other site in the Holy Land. Many if not most of these objects date to the Iron Age I period. A large storage jar decorated with a snake in relief has been found at Tel Dan, one of the two national sanctuaries of the northern kingdom of Israel. Dating from about the 10th century B.C., it was uncovered near the “high place” and was probably used as some kind of cultic receptacle.

According to Philip J. King, the snake goddess was worshiped during the Early Iron Age (1225–960 B.C.) at such sites as Gezer, Beth-shan, Beth-shemesh, Shechem, and Hazor. The serpent-dove motif found at Beth-shan, dating from the 12th century B.C., seems to have been commonly associated with Ashitoreth, the female consort of the Canaanite deity El. The serpent or snake was also associated with Anat, the goddess of war venerated at Ugarit, one of the capital cities of the Canaanites and the repository of tablets containing the myths of that people.

At what was once the largest city in the Holy Land during Canaanite times, Hazor, Yigael Yadin found evidence of serpent worship. In the apparent storeroom of a potter’s workshop, his team uncovered several complete vessels, including chalices, bowls, lamps, and juglets. But the greatest prize was what Yadin called a “cultic standard.” The standard was essentially a bronze plaque with a prong for fastening it to a standard or pole, recalling the brazen serpent erected on a staff by Moses. On the face of the Hazor plaque was the anthropomorphic image of the snake goddess holding a snake in each hand. Just above the goddess was a representation of her emblem, a crescent and a snake, which also appeared on the lower portion of the plaque. Yadin speculates that the cultic standard must have belonged “to the treasures of the sanctuary, and was used probably in the cultic procession, in which the priests carried the standards of various gods.”

Though examples could be multiplied, suffice it to say that enough evidence exists to show clearly that veneration of serpents in one form or another was found throughout the ancient Mediterranean region, especially among Israel’s closest neighbors. The familiar mythology of the ancient Near East manifests the primeval struggle between the powers of good and evil, both of which are often represented by snakes. As a bringer of salvation and giver of everlasting life, the snake became a divine reptile. As the conveyor of death the snake became the incarnation of evil spirits. Against the backdrop of this duality we turn now to sacred scripture, where we find critical information to help us more fully understand and appreciate the numerous echoes and parallels in cognate literature.

Serpent Imagery in the Old Testament

The serpent first appears in the scriptures in the story of the fall of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1). In the Hebrew language the creature is called a nahash, a viper, from which derives the noun for copper or brass (nehosheth), also used as an adjective denoting
the “brass” serpent that Moses erected on a pole in the wilderness for the protection and healing of the Israelites (see Numbers 21:4–9).

On the one hand, the nahash in Genesis is clearly symbolic of evil, even the evil one (Satan), precisely because the serpent was in league with the devil, promoting the cause of the adversary and acting as his agent to bring about the fall (see Moses 4:5–31). On the other hand, when used by Moses under God’s inspiration, the image of the nahash or, more precisely, the nahash nehosheth (brass serpent), became the agent of life and salvation for God’s covenant people.

Numbers 21 is particularly intriguing because it demonstrates the dual nature of serpent symbolism in Israelite culture in a striking fashion.

And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived. (Numbers 21:5–9)

The agent of both harm and healing, death and life, is, in this instance, the serpent. The people sin and fiery serpents bite them. Moses constructs a brass image of the harmful creatures and the people are spared. But it is really Jehovah who is the cause working behind the image, the actual instigator of both death and life. The Israelites may already have been familiar with images of fiery serpents from their exposure to Egyptian mythology while sojourning in Egypt. But the serpent symbol is now seen in its true light—a valid and important representation of God’s ultimate power over life and death. God is the reality behind the symbol.

In the early part of the story of Israel’s deliverance from Pharaoh, king of Egypt, Jehovah showed Moses in a dramatic way that He was the real God represented by the image of the serpent or snake, an image that Pharaoh himself wore on the front of his official head-dress as a symbol of his own deity and sovereignty. (It will be remembered that every pharaoh was regarded as a living god on earth by his subjects.) When Moses threw down his staff, as commanded, it became a serpent. God told the Lawgiver that just such a demonstration should be conducted in front of Pharaoh and his court so that all would know that Jehovah was the one true God who had commissioned his representative, Moses, to stand before the false gods of the Egyptian people, which pantheon included Pharaoh himself (see Exodus 4:1–5, 8).

When Moses and Aaron went before Pharaoh, they did exactly as the Lord had commanded. Their staff became a snake, which in the Hebrew text is
denoted by two different terms, one of which is the very same word used earlier in Genesis to describe Eve’s tempter, *nahash* (see Exodus 7:9, 10, 15). Either through sleight of hand or by demonic power, Pharaoh’s magicians were able to duplicate the action and turn their staffs into serpents as well. In what might be viewed as a quintessential showdown between God and the devil, the serpent of Jehovah swallowed up the serpents of Pharaoh as the God of Israel demonstrated his omnipotent supremacy (see Exodus 7:10–13). This scene dramatically illustrates the duality of serpent imagery in the scriptures. The one true God was represented by a serpent. The false gods of Egypt were also represented by serpents.

That the image of the serpent continued to exist as a powerful symbol of God long after the Mosaic era ended seems apparent from 2 Kings 18:4:

> He [King Hezekiah] removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan.

Equally apparent from this verse, however, is the idea that the serpent at some point ceased to be for the Israelites a pure symbol of the one true God to be worshiped (as Moses intended) and became an idol, the object of worship, instead of a reminder of the reality behind the symbol (Jehovah). We are told that Hezekiah, one of the righteous kings of Judah, removed the high places and idols of the people and broke into pieces the brass serpent. Just when idolatrous significance was attached to the brass serpent is not known, but perhaps it occurred during the reign of Hezekiah’s father, King Ahaz (see 2 Kings 16).

**New Testament Evidence**

Many centuries after King Hezekiah, the association between deity and the image of the serpent was given its fullest expression by none other than Jesus himself, as recorded by the apostle John. “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:14–15). Thus, according to Jesus, the serpent was intended to be the supernal symbol of himself and his atonement.

But John the apostle was also aware of the opposite meaning conveyed by the image of the serpent. In language similar to certain passages in the Book of Mormon, he refers to Satan in his Apocalypse as “the serpent,” “that old serpent,” and “the great dragon” (Revelation 12:9, 14, 15; 20:2). According to John, the serpent fought a war in heaven (see Revelation 12:7), was cast out with a third part of the hosts of heaven (see v. 4), and attempted to destroy a woman who had brought forth a son. But he did not prevail. Selected verses of Revelation 12, arranged in a slightly different order than the King James Version, illustrate our point and tell the story well:

> 7. And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,
> 9. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.
> 4. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.
> 5. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.
> 6. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God ....
> 17. And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

I interpret these verses to mean that Satan was cast out of heaven not only to tempt and deceive humankind on the earth, but also to become the prime mover behind apostasy, forcing “the woman” into the wilderness for a time. The woman appears to be the true church or kingdom of God on earth. The man child, who rules “all nations with a rod of iron,” is Christ, while the wilderness refuge of the woman (the church) is the great period of apostasy. However, the serpent does not succeed in destroying
the church—rather, as John foresaw, the church comes out of the wilderness or is restored to the earth in later times (see Revelation 14:6–7).

Ultimately, says John, the “old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan” (Revelation 20:2) will be bound for 1,000 years, loosed a little season to wreak havoc among the Saints, but finally cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (see Revelation 20:3, 7–10). All of this is done by the power of the righteous one (Jesus Christ), who is also symbolized by the serpent image, as we have noted (see John 3:14–15).

Can there be any doubt that John the apostle was fully aware of the duality of serpent symbolism? In fact, when one considers all of Jesus’ words as reported in the four Gospels, it is clear that Jesus himself understood perfectly the duality of the serpent symbol, as did others in New Testament times. Not only did Jesus speak of himself as the fulfillment of Moses’ brazen serpent typology, but he also spoke of Satan as a serpent—which was a significant image in intertestamental times. One scholar has written:

When Jesus tells his disciples that they have been given authority to “tread upon serpents [ophis] and scorpions” and that “the spirits are subject” to them (Luke 10:19–20), he may have alluded to Ps 91:13 (“You will tread upon lion and the adder, young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot”). Psalm 91 has nothing to do with Satan; but Jesus’ words do (cf. Luke 10:17–18). Would a reference to treading upon serpents have been understood in first-century Palestine as a reference to Satan and demons? Very much so. Consider this eschatological hope expressed in one of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: “And Beliar [i.e., Satan] shall be bound by him...
[i.e., an agent of salvation on whom the Spirit of God shall rest; Isa 11:2]. And he shall grant to his children the authority to trample on wicked spirits” (T. Levi 18:12; cf. T. Sim. 6:6; T. Zeb. 9:8). Since Satan is represented as a serpent (ophis) in Gen 3:1–15 and the righteous will trample serpents under foot, it is not too difficult to see how the language of Psalm 91 could be adopted and applied to Satan and evil spirits as we find it in Luke 10 and the Testament of Levi 18. The targumic tradition also links serpents and scorpions with Satan and evil spirits (and Gen 3:15, which speaks of the woman’s seed crushing the serpent’s head, is understood in a messianic sense in the targums).39

We may even add at this point that the woman’s seed would be able to crush the evil serpent’s head by the power given to them from the true serpent, the Messiah!

**Serpent Symbolism in the Book of Mormon**

It is clear that the righteous peoples of the Book of Mormon understood the symbol of the serpent in much the same way that many of their Old Testament forebears did. However, it is monumentally significant that these American Israelites also knew, even from the earliest periods of their own history, that the ultimate meaning behind the symbol of the serpent was the Lord Jesus Christ and his saving and life-giving power. They understood the true intent of the symbol some 600 years before the Messiah himself appeared in mortality to articulate the message of the serpent’s being raised up in Moses’ day. In the sixth century B.C. Nephi spoke plainly of this symbolism:

And now, my brethren, I have spoken plainly that ye cannot err. And as the Lord God liveth that brought Israel up out of the land of Egypt, and gave unto Moses power that he should heal the nations after they had been bitten by poisonous serpents, if they would cast their eyes unto the serpent which he did raise up before them, and also gave him power that he should smite the rock and the water should come forth; yea, behold I say unto you, that as these things are true, and as the Lord God liveth, there is none other name given under heaven save it be this Jesus Christ, of which I have spoken, whereby man can be saved. (2 Nephi 25:20)

Later on, another prophet named Nephi (son of Helaman) also made reference to the image of the serpent lifted up in the wilderness by Moses and its clearly intended association with the Son of God, the Messiah, the giver of eternal life. In fact, it seems fair to say that Nephi, son of Helaman, described even more clearly than Nephi, son of Lehi, the messianic implications and significance of the brazen serpent symbol.

But, behold, ye not only deny my words, but ye also deny all the words which have been spoken by our fathers, and also the words which were spoken by this man, Moses, who had such great power given unto him, yea the words which he hath spoken concerning the coming of the Messiah. Yea, did he not bear record that the Son of God should...
come? And as he lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, even so shall he be lifted up who should come. And as many as should look upon that serpent should live, even so as many as should look upon the Son of God with faith, having a contrite spirit, might live, even unto that life which is eternal. (Helaman 8:13–15)

Such evidence causes one to wonder how widely known and diffused the serpent symbol became and why its ultimate and most important meaning became lost. If the Israelites themselves promulgated some kind of an association between serpent imagery and salvific power, down to the time of Hezekiah, and the Nephites also possessed a knowledge of such an association (especially in its true and correct interpretation), might not the pagan neighbors of Israel also have had a knowledge, albeit in corrupt form, of serpent-savior symbolism? And, in fact, might not the serpent plaque found at Hazor by Professor Yadin, interpreted by him and others as being created expressly for use on a raised pole or standard, represent a diffusion of such serpent-savior symbolism?

Like the Old Testament, the Book of Mormon also demonstrates the dual nature of serpent symbolism. It is in perfect harmony with the ancient Near Eastern cultural milieu. In this sacred record we find the serpent used as both the symbol of ultimate good and the symbol of ultimate evil. And because Joseph Smith called the Book of Mormon the most correct of any book on the earth, we can be assured that the image of the serpent was an appropriate potent and valuable symbol of both good and bad in the lives of prophets and disciples of Jesus Christ living in the Western Hemisphere. Just as God was represented by the image of the serpent to Lehi’s descendants, so too Satan was portrayed by Lehi and his descendants as a serpent, as can be seen in certain passages referring to the fall of Adam and Eve. Here he is called, as he was in the book of Revelation, the “old serpent,” the one who “did beguile our first parents, which was the cause of their fall” (Mosiah 16:3). In an important autobiographical statement we read:

And I, Lehi, according to the things which I have read, must needs suppose that an angel of God, according to that which is written had fallen from heaven; wherefore, he became a devil, having sought that which was evil before God.

And because he had fallen from heaven, and had become miserable forever, he sought also the misery of all mankind. Wherefore, he said unto Eve, yea, even that old serpent, who is the devil, who is the father of all lies, wherefore he said: Partake of the forbidden fruit, and ye shall not die, but ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil. (2 Nephi 2:17–18)

It is worth noting that both Lehi and Nephi have a direct connection to John the Revelator in that they all saw the same visions and became familiar with the same images—perhaps even some of the same phrases associated with serpent representations of Satan. As Nephi says when recording the words of his heavenly tutor:

And behold, the things which this apostle of the Lamb shall write are many things which thou hast seen; and behold, the remainder shalt thou see. But the things which thou shalt see hereafter thou shalt not write; for the Lord God hath ordained the apostle of the Lamb of God that he should write them... And I bear record that I saw the things which my father saw, and the angel of the Lord did make them known unto me. (1 Nephi 14:24–25, 29)

Meanings and Messages across Cultures

The scriptures give us a fairly inclusive perspective on serpent dualism. Clearly, Satan is well represented as a serpent. But so is the Savior, as the Book of Mormon unequivocally proclaims. Coming together in the person of Jesus Christ is a wide array of the positive powers and attributes of all those ancient Near Eastern deities ever associated with the image of the serpent.

Like the Egyptian Atum, Christ is the primeval creator deity (see Moses 1:32–33). Reminiscent of Amun, the supreme god of Egypt in the New Kingdom, Christ literally provides renewal and rebirth (see Romans 6:3–9; Mosiah 3:19; 5:7; Alma 5:14; D&C 5:16; and Moses 6:59–60). The goodness and bounties of life are not given to us by Thermuthis, the Egyptian goddess of harvest, but rather by Christ (see D&C 59:16–20). And resurrection and eternal life are not bestowed by Osiris but result from the
atoning death of Jesus (see Romans 6:3–9; 1 Corinthians 15:21–22). Just as royalty and unity were symbolized by the serpent Wadjet of Egypt, royalty is truly to be ascribed to Christ the King, and unity is found in him (see D&C 38:27). Though in ancient Mesopotamia Ningizzida was regarded as the guardian at the door of heaven, the Book of Mormon teaches in unequivocal terms that Jesus is the true gatekeeper who employs no servant or substitute there.

O then, my beloved brethren, come unto the Lord, the Holy One. Remember that his paths are righteous. Behold, the way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a straight course before him, and the keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there; and there is none other way save it be by the gate; for he cannot be deceived, for the Lord God is his name. (2 Nephi 9:41)

Furthermore, do not the serpents Eshmun of Sidon, Asclepius of Greece, and Aesculapius of Rome share some fundamental similarities with the real healer, Jesus (see Alma 7:11–12)? It seems that such beneficent deities of early civilizations, which were represented by the image of the serpent centuries or even millennia before Jesus appeared on the scene, bear uncanny resemblances to him. These resemblances suggest a connection that, though unrecoverable solely by an appeal to ancient sources, ties the positive attributes of these serpent-images to those of the Savior.

A review of the evidence leads me to the conclusion that the intensely positive and powerful serpent symbols and images from ancient non-Israelite, non-Christian cultures of the Fertile Crescent and Mediterranean basin represent echoes of divine truth once known in the very beginning of this earth’s temporal existence but corrupted early on. That is to say, the foreknown and long-awaited Messiah of the world, the great Jehovah of the Old Testament and primordial creator of the heavens and the earth, was originally and legitimately represented by the image or symbol of the serpent—evidently before the ancient and renowned civilizations of the Fertile Crescent and Mediterranean region developed. It is apparent that this symbol came to be applied to other important deities of various pantheons as the serpent symbol was handed down from culture to culture. Effectively, the true knowledge of God and the representative symbols that were attributed to him were lost through apostasy and cultural diffusion.

But what of the serpent image as a symbol for Christ? If the serpent was a legitimate emblem of the coming Messiah, how and why did Lucifer usurp the serpent symbol after Adam and Eve were placed on this earth? In a roundabout way, the Prophet Joseph Smith may have provided a clue regarding the origins of serpent imagery as a symbol for Christ and why Satan appropriated it for his own. When speaking of the dove as an identifying symbol of the Holy Ghost, Joseph Smith said, “The sign of the dove was instituted before the creation of the world, a witness for the Holy Ghost, and the devil cannot come in the sign of a dove.”

A possible implication of this statement is that other signs, symbols, and tokens may have been instituted in premortality to represent deity, but the one that Satan absolutely could not imitate was the dove. However, as the preeminent counterfeiter and deceiver, Satan could and does usurp other signs and symbols properly applied to God in order to try to legitimize his false identity as a god. This is why Satan chose to appropriate and utilize the sign of the serpent as the best means of deceiving Eve as well as her posterity.

The scriptures help us to see that Satan imitates and perverts every divine truth; every godly concept, principle, or practice; and every good and positive symbol, image, sign, and token in order to deceive and manipulate the souls of men. This even includes appearing as an angel of light (see Alma 30:53; D&C 128:20). By usurping and manipulating the symbol of the serpent, Satan tried to validate his false identity and his lies, insisting that following his ways would elevate our first parents to the status of the very God represented by the true image of the serpent (see Moses 4:10–11). Satan came to Eve clothed, as it were, in the garb of the Messiah, using the signs, symbols, and even the language of the Messiah, promising things that only the Messiah could rightfully promise. “(And [Satan] spake by the mouth of the serpent.) . . . And the serpent said unto the woman: Ye shall not surely die; . . . ye shall be as the gods” (Moses 4:7, 10–11). In reality only the one who worked out an infinite atonement could legitimately make these kinds of promises. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why Satan is justly called a liar from the beginning (see Moses 4:4; D&C 93:25).

Because Satan appeared as a serpent in the Garden of Eden, thereby adopting a symbol of the Messiah,
it seems plausible that, like the sign of the dove, the sign of the serpent had been instituted in premortal-ty as a symbol of deity, particularly Jehovah (see Exodus 4:1–5; 7:10–13; and Numbers 21:5–9), and later on as a symbol of Jehovah-come-to-earth, or in other words Jesus Christ (see John 3:14–15), the true God of life and salvation. It also seems plausible that the signs of both the dove and the serpent (as specific symbols of true deity) were made known to God’s children in mortality sometime in the distant past. It is interesting to note that at that archaeological site in the Holy Land where most of the cultic objects bearing serpent imagery have been found (Beth-shan), the serpents are usually displayed in association with doves. In addition to the smaller religious objects that display the serpent-dove motif, each of the two Iron Age I temples at Beth-shan display the serpent-dove decoration. A fragment of the relief from the southern temple depicts deities standing and holding doves, while serpents wind upward with their heads almost touching the feet of the deities. In the northern temple, doves sit near the feet of deities as serpents glide toward the doves.  

Conclusion

It seems clear that enough evidence exists from a wide range of sources to establish the dual nature of serpent symbols in the ancient Near East—representing both gods and demons, good and bad, life and death. Furthermore, the Bible exhibits this same dualism. But even more important for our present purposes, we may say that the Book of Mormon also presents this same theological understanding of serpent symbolism and is a record perfectly at home in the cultural milieu of the ancient Near East.

Evidence from all sources (scriptural, cultural, historical, and prophetic) leads us to believe that the serpent symbol appeared first in the Garden of Eden when Satan adopted the form of a snake, which was intended to point to the true Messiah. Over time, its true meaning became corrupted not only as it became established through natural observation—the snake shedding its skin and so on—but also as the symbol passed through many cultures down through the ages. The result, of course, was the appearance of the dual nature of serpent symbolism in the various civilizations of the Near East and elsewhere.

It was the late Spencer Palmer of Brigham Young University who observed that a theory of corruption and cultural diffusion is the most compelling explanation for the many resemblances to the pure gospel found in various religious traditions around the world. This certainly seems to be the case regarding the powerful and pervasive symbol of the serpent in the ancient world. Enough glimpses and echoes of the divinely intended meaning of the serpent symbol exist to enable us to make significant connections to Christ. Of this, the Book of Mormon is a premier witness and source.
Many readers have read about the finding of ancient votive altars in Yemen that appear to bear the Book of Mormon place-name Nahom. This significant find has been noted in the *Ensign* magazine, in the April 2001 general conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and in a recently published volume by Terryl Givens in which he refers to these altars as “the first actual archaeological evidence for the historicity of the Book of Mormon” and “the most impressive find to date corroborating Book of Mormon historicity.” This article considers the altars and their inscriptions, giving the background to this development and its significance within the larger context of research into Lehi’s journey across Arabia.

A 1999 article by S. Kent Brown in the *Journal* noted that an altar recently uncovered at the excavation of a temple near Marib in Yemen bore the tribal name Nihm, apparently a variant of Nahom, where Ishmael was buried while Lehi’s group was en route to Bountiful (1 Nephi 16:34). Because archaeologists had already dated the altar to the seventh or sixth centuries B.C., Brown concluded that this earliest known reference to the name “very probably” referred to the Nahom of which Nephi wrote.

At that time it seemed unlikely that more could be learned about this find, since the altar was one of two altars in an exhibit on ancient Yemen touring Europe since October 1997 and could no longer be examined at the Bar’an temple site. Although a photograph of the altar appeared in the commemorative catalog accompanying the exhibit, the full engraved text—including the actual reference to Nihm—was not visible in the photograph, and readers had to be content with the translation provided in the catalog’s caption. Since then, however, two additional altars bearing the name Nihm have been identified at the same temple site.

The second altar with the NHM name stands solitary in the forecourt of the Bar’an temple east of Marib. Right: A typical altar from the Bar’an temple. Photography in this article by Warren P. Aston.
On 12 September 2000, I and fellow researchers Lynn Hilton and Gregory Witt identified and examined one of the two additional altars at the site, where excavation and reconstruction had been completed by an expedition from the German Archaeological Institute. This artifact (denominated altar 2 for present purposes, reflecting its order in the identification of the three altars) was nearly identical—same size, same inscription, very similar style—to the one touring Europe (altar 1). Unknown to us at that time, another altar (altar 3) found at Bar’an bore an almost identical dedication formula. Due to ongoing restoration work and other circumstances, altar 2 was only briefly examined, measured, and photographed, along with being seen by 23 members of an LDS tour group.

Early in November 2000, I returned to Yemen and, with the kind cooperation of the German restoration team, was able to make an extended examination of all the altars at Bar’an, as well as the temple site itself. While documenting the finds, I examined and recorded several inscriptions on the temple walls and noted a further collection of altars from the site—eight largely intact and several broken—bearing differing inscriptions. Then during May 2001, David Johnson, a BYU archaeologist working in Marib as part of an excavation team, identified the tribal name Nihm on one of those altars (altar 3).

History of the Site

The federally funded Deutches Archaeologisches Institut (DAI), headquartered in Berlin, initiated the excavation of the Bar’an temple in 1988 as part of a larger project centered in the Marib province. Once excavation of the temple was completed in 1997, four seasons of restoration work followed, ending with the formal opening of the site to the public on 18 November 2000.

As the capital of the Sabaean (Sheban) kingdom around 2000–500 B.C., Marib was the economic and religious center of southern Arabia during the rise and zenith of the incense trade. From somewhere in this area Bilquis, the Queen of Sheba, traveled to Jerusalem to meet with King Solomon, a prominent event in Arab history that scholars often discount as mere legend though it seems confirmed by references to it in the Old and New Testaments, the Talmud, and the Qur’an.

Known locally as al-Amaid (the Throne of Bilquis), the Bar’an temple is prominent among the Sabaean ruins that survive in Marib to the present. These ruins include the impressive, huge Marib Dam, which permitted irrigation of a large area in ancient times (construction began before 600 B.C.), and the large Awwam temple nearby—currently in the early stages of excavation—which is believed to have been constructed by the Shebaeans, a people who ruled the region from the 15th to the 1st millennium B.C. The temple is located on a hill overlooking the wadi, a shallow river valley that is dry except during the rainy season.
built earlier than the dam. The Bar’ān site lies about three miles from the ruins of the original city of Marib.

The temple structure was dedicated to the worship of the moon god Ilmaqah, although the names of two other Sabean deities, Hawbas and Athtar, also appear in some engravings. At some point near the beginning of the Christian Era, the Bar’ān temple was largely destroyed and the worship of Ilmaqah began to decline. It is possible that the plundering of the temple took place during the Roman campaign of Aelius Gallus around 25 B.C. Although repairs and modifications were made, the temple had lost its significance by then and began to fall into diminishing importance. As southern Arabia turned from polytheism to Christianity and Judaism by the late fourth century A.D., a second destruction of the temple forecourt took place. In succeeding centuries the Marib Dam finally collapsed, and as a result the area lost most of its population. The temple site was gradually covered by desert sands.8

Until just a few years ago, all that was visible at the Bar’ān site were six columns (one broken) projecting above the sand. The underlying temple structure, including many of the altars, has been well preserved by the sand and desert climate.

The Altars

Constructed of solid limestone locally quarried, each altar stands about 26 inches high with the top measuring 21.5 inches long and 14 inches wide. The dedication inscription carved around all four sides of the altars is in three-inch-tall lettering written in the South Arabian script of that period.

The altars in this temple do not bear the names of incenses (unlike altars that were commonly used for burning incense), nor do they seem suited for any type of sacrifice. As gifts to the temple, they served primarily a votive function by symbolically recording various offerings to Ilmaqah, usually in fulfillment of a vow or promise. Three of the altars bear the name of a single donor, Bī’athar, a fact that underscores his status and wealth.

The altars are not identical. For example, compared to altar 1, altar 2 has more damage to its corners, exhibits 11 rectangular “tooth” shapes below the text on each long side instead of 12, and has five horizontal ridges above the window-shaped recesses instead of four. Likewise, altar 3 has some extensive damage on its sides. Moreover, the text is positioned slightly differently around the sides of all three altars.

Inscription on Altar 2

In simple terms, the inscription on altar 2 (reproduced below), which is essentially unchanged on altars 1 and 3, tells us that Bī’athar, clearly a man of wealth and importance and the grandson of Naw’um, member of the Nihm tribe, donated three altars to the temple.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transliteration</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Bī’athar son of Sawdum, son of Naw’um, the Nihmite,</td>
<td>(1) Bī’athar son of Sawdum, son of Naw’um, the Nihmite,</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2) has dedicated (to) Ilmaqah (the person) Fāri’at. By</td>
<td>(2) has dedicated (to) Ilmaqah (the person) Fāri’at. By</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) ‘Athtar, and by Ilmaqah, and by Dhat-Himyam, and by</td>
<td>(3) ‘Athtar, and by Ilmaqah, and by Dhat-Himyam, and by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Yada’il, and by Ma’adi-karib.</td>
<td>(4) Yada’il, and by Ma’adi-karib.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dating the Altars

French researcher Christian Robin, author of many works dealing with the Nahom/Nihm area, has assigned a date of between the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. for altar 1.10 Construction of a sacred place at this site probably began before 1000 B.C., evolving through at least three identifiable
stages of construction into an ever more substantial temple complex. The three altars donated by Bi’athar appear to precede or belong to a fourth period of construction beginning in the late sixth or fifth century B.C., at the height of the influence of the Sabaean kingdom. The date has been further refined by the altar texts themselves, which refer to the ruler Yada‘-il, who is likely Yada‘-il Dharih II (about 630 B.C.) or perhaps Yada‘-il Bayyin II (about 580 B.C.).11 This places the making of the altars within decades of the time that the Lehites made their desert odyssey.

Significantly, however, since Naw‘um of the tribe of Nihm was the grandfather of Bi’athar, the Nihm name must be at least two generations—perhaps another century—older still, certainly predating the arrival of the Lehites to the area.

Nahom in Nephi’s Record

In a single verse, 1 Nephi 16:34, Nephi tells us all that he wished us to know about the place called Nahom: “And it came to pass that Ishmael died, and was buried in the place which was called Nahom.”

From this and one other terse statement in the Book of Mormon we learn several facts about the location:

1. The wording makes it clear that Nahom was not named by Lehi’s party but was already known by that name to local people. Thus other people were already settled in proximity to the Lehite encampment.

2. Nephi’s Bountiful lay “nearly eastward” from Nahom (1 Nephi 17:1).

3. Nahom was, or at least included, a place of burial. Note that Nephi does not state that Ishmael died there, only that he was buried there, implying that it included an established burial place.

Let us review these three elements in the light of the altars that have been found. Until now, the earliest reference to the NHM name came from historical and religious writings in Arabic that may rest on information that goes back to the first century A.D.12 As already noted, the altar finds take us another seven centuries earlier, squarely linking us to the time period referred to in the Book of Mormon. Latter-day Saints no longer need to conjecture whether the name existed at the time Nephi wrote—it did.

In my view, it is unlikely that Lehi and his family passed close to Marib. After leaving Nahom, north-west of Marib, the “nearly eastward” route recorded by Nephi would have taken them along the uninhabited southern edge of the Empty Quarter, some distance north of Marib. They were then no longer on the famed incense route but were traveling parallel to its eastward leg.

Most readers of the Journal will be aware of the ongoing fieldwork being conducted on the southern coast of Oman.13 This area, the only one that matches Nephi’s detailed description of “Bountiful,” lies within one degree of being due east of the Nahom region. Such precise directional linking of Nahom with the only plausible site for Bountiful is striking confirmation of the accuracy of Nephi’s account.

We now come to the third aspect of Nahom—that it was a place of burial. As Nephi wrote his account years later in the New World, he surely realized that he and his family would never return to the burial place of Ishmael, his father-in-law and a grandfather to his children; thus he was careful to place on record the name of that place. The altar discoveries lend strong support to the view that
anciently Nahom/Nihm may have extended over a much larger area than it now does, a concept first proposed in 1995.14 While we cannot be certain, Bi‘athar would have been unlikely to contribute to a temple that lay outside his tribal area. The simplest explanation is that in his day the Nihm tribal area extended at least as far east as Marib, a view that modern-day scholars have no problems accepting.

Furthermore, this new window into the ancient past of southern Arabia tells us rather clearly that the origin of the name Nahom is connected to a place of burial. And its name is also tied to the Nihm tribe living in the area. Scholars have recognized for some time that the Semitic roots of the name Nahom closely relate to sorrow, hunger, consoling, and mourning, obviously very appropriate for a place of burial, and may therefore reflect the origin of the Hebrew name used by Nephi.15

At the same time that the Bar‘an excavation was completed, a French team conducted the first archaeological examination of a huge area of ancient burial tombs at ‘Alam, Ruwayk, and Jidran, just 25 miles north of Marib.16 While there are isolated burial tombs scattered throughout the Nahom region, this vast cemetery covering many square miles and numbering many thousands of tombs is the largest burial area known anywhere in Arabia.

If in fact Nahom extended into this region in ancient times, this burial area now takes on special significance. The tombs date back as far as 3000 B.C., evidence of the large population in the area even earlier than the generally accepted dates of the Sabaean period, when Marib was at the height of its influence in the region. Could this unique site be the actual scene of “the place which was called Nahom”—the actual burial area referred to by Nephi?

Seen from any perspective, S. Kent Brown’s original assessment of this development as being “dramatic new evidence” in the quest to place Nahom firmly on the modern-day map holds true. Nephi implied that a place in southern Arabia named Nahom already existed in his day, and now three chiseled blocks of stone from a pagan temple in Yemen provide incontrovertible evidence that, in fact, it did.
To judge, or not to judge—is that the question? The seemingly contradictory uses of the word *judge* in the Book of Mormon can be confusing. In 3 Nephi 14:1 the Savior says, “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” Yet Moroni 7:15 says that “it is given unto you to judge.” Fortunately, Moroni 7:18 clarifies the concept of judging: “Seeing that ye know the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light of Christ, see that ye do not judge wrongfully; for with that same judgment which ye judge ye shall also be judged.”

The real question seems to be whether we judge rightfully or wrongfully. The Joseph Smith Translation of Matthew 7:1 confirms this interpretation: “Judge not unrighteously, that ye be not judged: but judge righteous judgment.”

A careful study of the roots of the words *judge* and *righteous* can help us better understand and apply these concepts. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), the etymology of the noun *judge* in Latin is “*jūr*-s right, law + *dic-us* speaking, speaker.” Literally, a judge is someone who speaks rightly or someone who interprets the law for people. Because the concept of choosing rightly is inherent in the semantic DNA of the word *judge*, judgment presupposes righteousness.

The adjective *right* is related to the Latin root “*reg-* to make or lead straight” (OED). Righteous judgment helps us walk with others in a direct path towards the Lord. An example of unrighteous judgment would be false speaking. Self-righteous judgment would be a crooked or unbalanced interpretation of the law. Thus one paraphrase of 3 Nephi 14:1 and Matthew 7:1 JST could read, “Do not speak wrongly or unkindly of others, so that they will not speak wrongly or unkindly of you: rather, speak honestly and thoughtfully about others.”

Using the WordCruncher scripture concordance program developed at Brigham Young University, we can gather insights about righteous judgment from Hebrew and Greek language forms. In the Old Testament the main Hebrew root for the concept of judging is *šp†*. The root has a wide range of connotations that help define the scope of righteous judgment:

- ḫššápatf†āh: “that I may reason with you” 1 Samuel 12:7
- šápat: “the Lord [deliver] me [from] thee” 1 Samuel 24:15
- špatā: “the Lord hath avenged him” 2 Samuel 18:19
- yispāt: “who can [rule] this thy people” 2 Chronicles 1:10
- mšdp†: “I would make supplication to my [accuser]” Job 9:15
- šispāt: “defend the poor and fatherless” Psalm 82:3
- yišpōt: “they [do not do justice to] the fatherless” Isaiah 1:23
- ntššápatf†: “let us plead together” Isaiah 43:26
- nšśp†: “I will [enter into controversy] with thee” Jeremiah 2:35

A few Old Testament scriptures refer to people who exercise unrighteous judgment. In such cases the Hebrew word for *judge* has connotations of futile contention or unjust condemnation:

- mišspē: “he shall . . . save him from those that condemn his soul” Psalm 109:31
- nispāt: “if a wise man contendeth with a foolish man . . . there is no rest” Proverbs 29:9

However, in most Old Testament occurrences, the concept of judging carries a positive meaning. In Ezra 7:25 a synonymous pair reveals another Hebrew root for judging: *dyn*. The phrase “magistrates and judges” in Ezra 7:25 reads šp†on wdayyanon, wherein the šp† root has the connotation of “leaders” and
the *dyn* root has the connotation of “defenders.” So judging righteously can mean to guide others and to protect them.

The main Hebrew word for *righteousness* is *šedeq*, which constitutes the second half of the compound proper noun *Melchizedek* (Hebrew *malko-šedeq*, “king of righteousness”), who is a type of Christ (see Genesis 14:8; Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 7:15–17; Alma 13:14–18; D&C 107:1–4). Thus “righteous judgment” is the duty of those who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood and the responsibility of all who desire to emulate the Savior: “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment [*mišpat*]: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness [*šedeq*] shalt thou judge [*tišpot*] thy neighbour” (Leviticus 19:15). Those who judge righteously are not influenced by the status of people. They neither shun people who are lowly nor flatter people who are powerful.

The Hebrew word *šedeq* is also associated with the concept of just weights and measures in Leviticus 19:35–36: “Ye shall do no unrighteousness [*qawel*] in judgment [*mišpat*], in meteyard [*mīddāh*], in weight [*mīšqal*], or in measure [*mešūrāh*]. Just [*šedeq*] balances, just [*šedeq*] weights, a just [*šedeq*] ephah, and a just [*šedeq*] hin, shall ye have: I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.” This “just measuring” connotation of *šedeq* helps us understand the synonymous meanings of the two parallel phrases in 3 Nephi 14:2 and Matthew 7:2 JST:

> For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged;
> and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

The concrete imagery of the phrase “righteous judgment” lies in the metaphor of building or buying, in measuring dimensions with fair standards, and in weighing goods with accurate balances. In Western civilization this metaphor often appears in the image of the goddess Justice, who carries a pair of balances in her right hand. Job uses a similar image of judgment during his trial of faith: “Let me be weighed in an even [*šedeq*] balance, that God may know mine integrity” (Job 31:6). Righteous judgment includes the idea of giving people exactly what they deserve or purchase.

Unrighteous judgment includes the idea of cheating or shortchanging that which is due to others: “Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. But thou shalt have a perfect and just [*šedeq*] weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: ... For all that ... do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the Lord thy God” (Deuteronomy 25:13–16).

A thorough survey of Old Testament references yields several specific characteristics of both righteous judgment and unrighteous judgment. Unrighteous judgment can include the following acts of cruelty, destruction, pride, and dishonesty:

- despising the poor and favoring the rich (Leviticus 19:15)
- being a respecter of persons (Deuteronomy 1:17)
- perverting justice, showing partiality, taking bribes (Deuteronomy 16:19)
- seeking to destroy the righteous (Psalm 37:30)
- overthrowing righteous judgment (Proverbs 18:5)
- oppressing others (Isaiah 5:7)
- dealing unjustly (Isaiah 26:10)
- wronging strangers, orphans, and widows (Jeremiah 22:3)
- using violence and shedding innocent blood (Jeremiah 22:3)

In other words, unrighteous judgment tends to call good evil and evil good; it substitutes darkness for light and bitterness for sweetness (see Isaiah 5:20). Unrighteous judgment distorts or ignores the truth.

Righteous judgment, on the other hand, honors and upholds the truth. It includes acts of charity, mercy, humility, and justice:

- hearing the cause of neighbors and strangers (Deuteronomy 1:15)
- noticing the small as well as the great (Deuteronomy 1:17)
justifying the righteous and condemning the wicked (Deuteronomy 25:1)
being eyes for the blind, feet for the lame, and father to the poor (Job 29:14–16)
taking away spoil from the wicked (Job 29:17)
speaking wisdom, having the law of God in one’s heart (Psalm 37:31–32)
saving children and breaking down oppressors (Psalm 72:4)
establishing equity (Psalm 99:4)
keeping the Lord’s statutes (Psalm 119:6)
opening the mouth and pleading the cause of the poor (Proverbs 31:9)
slaying the wicked (Isaiah 11:4)
having peace, quietness, and assurance (Isaiah 32:17)

In other words, righteous judgment balances justice and mercy through the atonement of Jesus Christ. The iconic chiasmus and parallelism of Alma 41:13–15 illustrate that righteous judgment is a perfect fulfillment of the Lord’s laws of restoration and compensation:

the meaning of the word restoration is to bring back again . . .
[A] good for that which is good;
[B] righteous for that which is righteous;
[C] just for that which is just;
[D] merciful for that which is merciful . . .
[D] see that you are merciful unto your brethren;
[C] deal justly,
[B] judge righteous,
[A] and do good continually;
and if ye do all these things then shall ye receive your reward;
[D] yea, ye shall have mercy restored unto you again;
[C] ye shall have justice restored unto you again;
[B] ye shall have a righteous judgment restored unto you again;
[A] and ye shall have good rewarded unto you again.

As we have seen, the Lord commends righteous judgment and condemns unrighteous judgment in the biblical Hebrew of the Old Testament and in the translated English of the Book of Mormon.

The Savior also teaches the importance of judging righteously in the Greek of the New Testament. Jesus praises Simon Peter for correctly discerning [orthos ekrinas] the parable of the creditor and two debtors: “Thou hast rightly judged” (Luke 7:43). As in the Old Testament, the Lord, in John 7:24, urges us to judge according to the heart instead of judging the image of people with our eyes:

According to the American Heritage Dictionary (3rd edition), the reconstructed Indo-European (IE) root of the Greek words krisin and krinete is *krei-, meaning to “sieve, discriminate, distinguish.” Latin variants led to the English words discern and discriminate, with meanings of “sifting, separating, and deciding.” In Greek the IE root took on the meaning “separate, decide, judge,” becoming the source of the English word for thoughtful judgment in critic and false judgment in hypocrisy. Although the words discrimination and criticism can have negative connotations, the basic meaning of their root implies righteous judgment.

The IE root of the Greek word dikaios, translated as righteous, is deik-, meaning “to show, pronounce solemnly, to direct words or objects.” From Old English, this root led to the English words teach and token.
Latin derivatives led to the English words *benediction, dedicate, preach, indicate, index, avenge, and vindicate*. Another Latin variant led to the English word *judge*, mentioned above, including the connotation of rightness. In some ways the phrase “righteous judgment” is powerfully redundant, with righteousness being translated into judgment and judgment containing the concept of rightness. The concept of choosing the right appears symbolically in raising the right hand to make an oath in a court of justice. In Spanish the word for the right hand is *diestra*, which is cognate with the Greek word *dikaios*.

Some may feel that only Christ can judge righteously because he is the only sinless person: “He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he” (Deuteronomy 32:4). Although Christ was the only perfectly righteous person in mortality, he has asked us to become perfect like him (see Matthew 5:48; 3 Nephi 12:48). He calls us to follow him in distinguishing between good and evil, in judging between right and wrong. While judgment is a great responsibility, the counsel of the Lord to his servants is a guide to all: “the rights of the priesthood [of Melchizedek, Hebrew *malko-šedeq*]... handled only upon the principles of righteousness [šedeq]... by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; by kindness, and pure knowledge” (D&C 121:36, 41–42).

In response to “What’s in a Word?” in the last issue of the *Journal* (vol. 10, no. 1, 2001), I received three interesting questions. Jeffrey Marsh asked for more information on the word *deseret* in Ether 2:3. Kevin Farnsworth asked about the grammar of the clause “they punished according to their crimes” in Words of Mormon 1:15. John Farmer asked about the term *Anti-Nephi Lehíes* in the book of Alma.

Ether 2:3 states that the word *deseret* means “honey bee,” and Hugh Nibley documents the importance of bee cultivation in ancient societies. Nibley’s book *Abraham in Egypt* contains a whole chapter on the word *deseret* (ed. Gary Gillum, 2nd ed. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2000], 608–31). The Egyptian word *d_ɾ* refers to the Red Crown of the Red Land of Lower Egypt and may be a sacred taboo term for royal bee symbols that represent deities (632–34).

Some readers may feel that a passive *be* verb form is missing in Words of Mormon 1:15. According to Royal Skousen, editor of the Book of Mormon Critical Text Project, the original text probably read “and they were punished according to their crimes.” However, we do not have the original manuscript for this passage, and the printer’s manuscript and all other editions are missing the verb *were*. A similar construction in verse 16 suggests that passive form was intended in verse 15: “all these having been punished according to their crimes” (see Alma 1:17, 18; 30:10, 11; 3 Nephi 5:5; Mormon 4:5).

Finally, the terms *Anti-Nephi-Lehi* and *Anti-Nephi-Lehíes* in Book of Mormon headings are interesting in two ways: the meaning of the prefix *Anti* and the omission of the expected -ite suffix for naming a group of people. Royal Skousen has documented insightful evidence for understanding these forms, and the following discussion is based on his observations.

In the Book of Mormon the morpheme *Anti* is probably not the Greek *anti* (except in cases like *anti-Christ* in Alma 30). Instead, consider the many Book of Mormon names or words that involve *Anti*: Ani-Anti, Antionno, antion, Antionah, Antiparah, Antipas, Antipus. So the Anti-Nephi-Lehíes were probably not the Lehíes who were against Nephi, nor were they a people trying to distinguish themselves from the other Nephites.

Alma 27:27 in the original manuscript reads “& they were numbered among the People of Nephi & also numbered among the People which were of the Church of God.” The first occurrence of the word *numbered* was accidentally dropped by Oliver Cowdery when he copied the text from the original manuscript into the printer’s manuscript. Also, the use of *Anti-Nephi-Lehis* is found in the early printings of the 1953 RLDS edition. Later printings have *Anti-Nephi-Lehíes*, as with all other printed editions. In every occurrence of the name in every edition of the Book of Mormon but one, the form is *Anti-Nephi-Lehi* or -Lehíes, not -Lehíes. In the last heading of the original manuscript, Oliver Cowdery wrote “AntiNephiLehíes.” The use of the -ite morpheme was probably a mistake. By analogy to the forms Nephit and Lamanite, readers might expect the -ite form, but there is no evidence to support that transcription.

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When Day Turned to Night

Archaeological work done in the last 15 years has yielded considerable insight into what happened in or about the Tuxtla Mountains of southern Veracruz state, Mexico, an area often considered a key part of the lands where the Book of Mormon story was played out. In John L. Sorenson’s correlation of the internal and external geographies, this area would have seen three notable events: (1) settlement of the general area by people mentioned in the Jaredite account (Ether 9:3) and their eventual climactic destruction (Ether 14:26–15:32), (2) major effects of the great natural disasters at the time of the Savior’s crucifixion (3 Nephi 8), and (3) the ultimate destruction of the Nephite people (Mormon 6:5–15).

Three scientific studies present the most important findings by recent researchers. Twenty years ago James E. Chase published an intriguing paper titled “The Sky Is Falling: The San Martin Tuxtla Volcanic Eruption and Its Effects on the Olmec at Tres Zapotes, Veracruz.” The second is a paper with the intriguing title “When Day Turned to Night: Volcanism and the Archaeological Record from the Tuxtla Mountains, Southern Veracruz, Mexico.” The third source comprises several papers in a compilation on the archaeology of the Mexican Gulf Coast. Between the three it is possible to see similarities between the historical patterns visible in the Nephite record on the one hand and in the archaeological record (as reconstructed so far) on the other.

In terms of the study of volcanism, the Tuxtla region is called the Tuxtla Volcanic Field (TVF). The elevated zone has been built up from eruptions over the last 7 million years. The last eruption, by Volcano San Martin, the northernmost peak in the TVF, took place in 1793 and was described in graphic detail by Mozino in 1870. Altogether 10 volcanic eruptions have been identified in the TVF and dated within the last 4,000 years. Evidence comes from archaeological excavations at several locations. Since some eruptions were perhaps localized, as shown by the fact that they are evidenced at only a single site, it is possible that the total number of eruptions was greater than 10. In fact, two eruptions that are historically documented during the Spanish colonial period “left no evidence of ash at Matacan,” the archaeological site where the most excavation has been done. Obtaining the full record of volcanic activity is further complicated by the likelihood that ancient inhabitants returning after an eruption removed all ash that had fallen on their residential areas. This would have left no evidence of a particular volcanic episode behind to be found by the archaeologists, who work only in settlement areas.

Of interest in relation to the Book of Mormon record is the fact that corn pollen has been found in the Tuxtlas, witnessing that that crop was being cultivated possibly as early as 2800 B.C., although the earliest actual artifacts date only to 1400 B.C. If the fleeing Jaredite ruler Omer made his way to this area (Ether 9:3, “by the seashore”), the known archaeological sequence can accommodate such a presence. By the last centuries B.C., a significant (though not large) population occupied part of the Tuxtla Mountains and nearby lowlands (compare Alma 63:4, 9). The population of this mountain zone was heavily affected by an eruption soon after the time of Christ. Actually, “the precise timing of the eruption remains unclear.” A number of radiocarbon dates were obtained that relate to the question, but the results are not particularly consistent. (Nor were Santley and associates scrupulous...
in their interpretation of the dates; they estimated that the combined dates placed a particularly destructive ash fall “at approximately 1900 B.P.” [before present], which they take to mean “about A.D. 100.” Actually, following proper scientific procedure, their composite date translates to “about A.D. 50” because present is defined by the scientific community as 1950; elsewhere these authors give four carbon-14 dates ranging from A.D. 90 to 145 yet insist that these indicate a “third”-century A.D. date. Following that eruption in the first century, the number of settlements “plum- metered dramatically,” no doubt because ash layers several meters in depth had fallen on some settlements in the area.

Interestingly, another eruption is said to have taken place “about 1600 B.P.”, that is, around A.D. 350. Of course, all these dates are approximate, but this finding suggests the possibility that a volcano no more than 15 miles away from “Cumorah” had caused destruction either just before or just after the destruction of the Nephite population (if Cerro El Vigía was Mormon’s hill Cumorah, as a number of Latter-day Saint students of the Book of Mormon believe).

Chase’s 20-year-old paper, now somewhat out-of-date with respect to archaeological details, argued that an eruption in the Tuxtla Mountains area around 600 B.C. devastated a key portion of the area occupied by “the Olmecs,” effectively terminating that tradition as a unified cultural entity. In reality, the date of the eruption he documents from archaeological findings at the site of Tres Zapotes, at the foot of Cerro El Vigía, must be around the time of Christ. We know this because ash from the volcano buried the famous Stela C, which is considered to bear a carved date of 31 B.C. Thus the eruption must have been after that date. It could well be that this event was the same one that Santley’s group identified as “around A.D. 100” (but better “around A.D. 50”; see above).

Chase’s piece is actually more valuable for what it tells us about the nature of the destruction that can be produced by volcanic action. He describes some of the harmful effects to health and agriculture brought on by ash falls. The ash and accompanying gases can be noxious. Acid may form in the atmosphere, and the fallout harms humans, plants, and animals in varying degrees. Water supplies are subject to contamination and aquatic life damaged on a temporary basis. Agriculture may become impossible due to heavy ash fall and might continue to be a problem for a generation or more while the ash slowly converts to soil. Mud (ash) flows can also be a serious hazard. Known to move at speeds up to 95 miles per hour, such flows could deeply cover home sites or other buildings.

Obviously, the relation between Book of Mormon statements and the archaeological findings are only similarities, not sure identities. But it is clearly plausible that the volcanism suggested by the Nephite account of the natural disasters at the time of the Savior’s crucifixion could relate to what has been found about known eruptions in the natural and cultural history of the Tuxtla Mountains.
Sunken Ruin off Cuba?

In December 2001, newspapers in the U.S. published a press release purporting to reveal a “ruined city” under the sea off the island of Cuba. The information came from an organization publicizing an unmanned submarine exploring device that had “seen” the ruins via a form of radar. No archaeologist was reported to be involved. This is the latest in a series of uncertain reports of “sunken cities” in waters off the coasts of tropical America that go back to the 1920s, when Charles A. Lindbergh, the famous American aviator, was supposed to have spotted such a ruin under the sea. A branch of LDS folklore has seized upon these reports and connected them with “evidence” of the great natural catastrophe reported in 3 Nephi. None of the claims have been supported by enough reliable information to convince competent archaeologists that there is anything worth investigating further. The most influential report, from the 1970s, claimed that stone ruins could be seen off the island of Bimini in the Bahamas. “Atlantis Found!” trumpeted various articles in the popular press. Eventually, earth scientists looked at that purported archaeological site only to find that all it consisted of was an area of blocks of stone with unusual right-angle corners in a natural formation. It is highly likely that the flurry of publicity surrounding the work off Cuba will at best turn out to have been caused by a similar natural phenomenon. (For comments on previous doubtful reports in the press, see Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 8/1 [1999]: 73–74.)
ENDNOTES

Brigham Young and the Book of Mormon
W. Jeffrey Marsh


6. Brigham Young, as recorded in the minutes of a You...
More Light on Who Wrote the Title Page Clyde J. Williams


2. Book of Mormon Student Manual: Religion 121 and 122 (Salt Lake City: Church Educational System, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1899), 1.


6. Ibid., 4:495.


8. Personal correspondence with Royal Skousen provided this information. I state my opinion that the omission of Moroni’s name from the first 1832 printing was an oversight that was corrected in the second printing. That correction indicated to me the feeling to follow the addition of Moroni’s name that Joseph had made. I am therefore catalogued as “Title Page,” 51.

9. Sidney B. Sperry, “Moroni the Lonely: The Story of the Writing of the Title-Page to the Book of Mormon,” Improvement Era 46 (February 1944), 83, 116, 118. Sperry suggested that Moroni may have written the first paragraph of the title page in a.d. 400, 16 years after the final battle, because he appeared to be ready to seal up the plates (Moroni 8:4). Then, sometime between a.d. 401 and 421, he came back to the hill where he had buried the plates, wrote the books of Ether and Moroni, and added the second paragraph to the title page.

10. Whose are the plates that Joseph (23; 26) points out that Isaiah’s straight highway of the Lord (Isaiah 40:3) would also have been smooth (John W. Welch and Daniel McKimlin, “Getting Things Straight’r,” in Reexplicating the Book of Mormon, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 262.


2. Two Hymns Based on Nephi’s Psalm: Texts and Commentary John S. Tanner

1. I have discussed Leh’s death as a context for Nephi’s psalm in “Jacob and His Descendants as Authors,” in Revising the Book of Mormon, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 54–55.

2. Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), no. 124; hereafter cited in this article as Hymns.

3. It is the lead piece in the CD Songs of the Soul: Brigham Young University Singers (Provo, Utah: Tantara, 2000). It is also published by Jackman Music (Orem, Utah: Jackman, 2000).

4. George Pullen Jackson adopts this term to distinguish this genre from Negro spirituals. See his White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933).


6. Consider the cyclical character of grief in such works as Milton’s “Lycidas,” Jenny’s In Memoriam, and C. S. Lewis’s A Grief Observed, or the repetitive nature of regret in Shakespeare’s Sonnet 80.

7. The metaphor “slough of despond,” of course, derives from John Bunyan’s The Pilgrim’s Progress.

8. In a recent FARMS newsletter, John A. Tvedtnes explores the connections between Nephi’s psalm and personal life history (see “Reflections of Nephi’s Vision in His Psalm,” Insights, February 2000, 2). Although Nephi’s psalm is surely congruent with his biography, it also has universal appeal.

Serpent Symbols and Salvation in the Ancient Near East and Book of Mormon Andrew C. Skinner


5. Moscati, Face of the Ancient Orient, 125–26; and Lurker, Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt, 93.


24. King, Amos, Hosea, Micah, 133–34.


27. See Joshua 11:11, which calls Hazor “the head of all those kingdoms,” that is, the capital of northern Canaan. It was about 200 acres of built-up area. See Yigael Yadin, “Further Light on Biblical Hazor—Results of the Second Season, 1956,” Bibli- archeological 20 (May 1957): 44.


31. See Joines, Serpent Symbolism, 72.

32. Spencer J. Palmer, in “Mormon Views of Religious Resemblances,” BYU Studies 16 (summer 1976), 666, writes that it is reas- onable to say that “Adam, the first man, was taught the fulness of the gospel. In
turn he taught it to others. But men, yielding to the temptations of the evil one, sinned and departed from the truth. The original, true doctrines were changed and warped to suit the appetites of evil, ambitious men. Thus the principles of the gospel have appeared in more or less perverted form in the religious beliefs of mankind.”

Newly Found Altars from Nahom
Warren P. Aston

5. This altar (altar 1) is still on tour in Europe at the time of this printing and is scheduled to be displayed at a major exhibit in the British Museum in London, entitled Queen of Sheba: Treasures of Yemen, from June to October 2002. The inscription on the second touring altar did not mention Nahom but contained a typical dedication: "Il-Amir son of 'Ammi 'Abhir, son of 'Abiyah, has dedicated [the person] Yitha' radum. By 'Abhir, and by Ilmaqah, and by Dhat-Himym." The beginning of the text is marked with a symbol unique to the god Ilmaqah and was usually used by royalty and their officials in dedicatory inscriptions to the moon god.
6. Other Old Testament references to Sheba and the apparent acceptance by Jesus Christ of Queen Bilqis as a historical figure are recorded in Matthew 12:42 and Luke 11:31.
7. Further details of the site history as now understood can be found in Burkhard Vogt et al., ‘Arîh Bilqîs’—The Temple of Almaqaqu of Bar’ān in Marîb (Sana'a, Yemen: German Institute of Archaeology, 2000). Examples of other in-situ inscriptions at the site are included by Norbert Nehez on pp. 16–18.
8. As Kenneth Kitchen notes, the name Nihm or Nuhm occurs in both Arabic tradition and in much earlier Safaitic graffiti in the Syrian-north Arabian deserts, once in a graffito in the Hadramaut. References appear in G. Lankaster Harding, An Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 602f. Christian Robin, in Yeman au Pays de la reine de Sabha (Paris: Flammarion, 1977), dates altar 1 to the seventh and sixth centuries n.c. using maximum chronology (p. 144). The ruler Yada’-il noted on the altars possibly be Yada’-il Dharib II or Yada’-il Baynun II (roughly 630 and 580 n.c., respectively) on that basis. See Kenneth Kitchen, Documentation for Ancient Arabia, Part 2 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 744.
9. Christian Robin et al., edited, Yemen au Pays de la reine de Sabha, 144.

Out of the Dust

7. Santley et al., “When Day Turned to Night,” 156, 158.
8. Ibid., 156.
11. Ibid., 156.

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