Has the Seal of Mulek Been Found?

Ironic in the Book of Mormon

19th-Century Literary Treatments of the Book of Mormon

Word Pairs and Distinctive Combinations in the Book of Mormon

Straightening Things Out: The Use of Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon
ON THE COVER: Photo and reproduced illustration of the seal of Markiyahu ben hamelek. Photographs courtesy of Robert Deutsch. Illustration by Jeffrey R. Chadwick.

Is this the seal of Mulek, son of Zedekiah?
Read the article on page 72.
CONTENTS

2 Contributors

3 The Editor’s Notebook

Feature Articles

4 "Had for Good and Evil": 19th-Century Literary Treatments of the Book of Mormon  RICHARD H. CRACROFT
Nearly 175 years of popular authors’ facile dismissal of the Book of Mormon as a clumsily written imposture have fostered mistaken views of the book, keeping some potential readers at arm’s length. But change is under way in the 21st century.

20 Irony in the Book of Mormon  ROBERT A. REES
Much has been written about irony in the Bible. Is this literary device also discoverable in the Book of Mormon? What might its presence therein suggest about the complexity, richness, authorship, and ancient character of that text?

32 Word Pairs and Distinctive Combinations in the Book of Mormon  JAMES T. DUKE
Linguistic evidence for the Book of Mormon’s antiquity continues to mount with the addition of dozens of newly identified word pairs with substantial linkages to the literary tradition of ancient Israel.

42 Counting to Ten  JOHN W. WELCH
Detecting instances of the symbolic use of the number ten in the Book of Mormon uncovers a previously unnoticed ancient quality of Nephite scripture.

58 Straightening Things Out: The Use of Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon  PAUL Y. HOSKISSON
Biblical Hebrew, poetic parallelism, and internal textual evidence enter the ongoing discussion of the correct use of two easily confused words in the Book of Mormon.

72 Has the Seal of Mulek Been Found?  JEFFREY R. CHADWICK
An ancient Judean stamp seal bears the Hebrew form of a name that some LDS scholars equate with Mulek in the Book of Mormon. Does this mean that an archaeological relic belonging to an ancient Book of Mormon personality has been located?

84 A Test of Faith: The Book of Mormon in the Missouri Conflict  CLARK V. JOHNSON
Affidavits documenting the bitter persecutions heaped upon the Latter-day Saints in 1830s Missouri show that sometimes the mobocrats needed to know only one thing before unleashing violence—whether or not those targeted would renounce the Book of Mormon.

Departments

88 A Conversation with Robert J. Matthews

93 What’s in a Word?  CYNTHIA L. HALLEN
The Language of the Scriptures

96 With Real Intent  CAROLE MIKITA YORK
A Continuing Influence

100 A Reader’s Library  KRISTINE HANSEN, KEITH LAWRENCE

107 New Light  GRANT HARDY
The Book of Mormon as a Written (Literary) Artifact

110 Endnotes
CONTRIBUTORS

Jeffrey R. Chadwick holds a Ph.D. in Middle Eastern archaeology from the University of Utah Middle East Center. He is associate professor of church history at Brigham Young University and visiting professor of Near Eastern studies at the BYU Jerusalem Center. He is also a senior research fellow at the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem and a senior field archaeologist with the Tel Sall/Gath Archaeological Expedition in Israel.

Richard H. Cracroft earned a Ph.D. in English and American literature at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is Nan Osmond Grass Professor in Literature, Emeritus, at BYU, where he was chair of the English Department, dean of the College of Humanities, coordinator of American Studies, and director of the Center for the Study of Christian Values in Literature. He edited three volumes of the Dictionary of Literary Biography: Twentieth-Century American Western Writers and, with Neal Lambert, A Believing People: The Literature of the Latter-day Saints.

James T. Duke is emeritus professor of sociology at Brigham Young University, where he taught from 1963 to 2003. His major interest has been in the sociology of religion and in the sociological study of Latter-day Saint people. He received his Ph.D. from the University of California, Los Angeles.

Cynthia L. Hallen is associate professor of linguistics and adjunct associate professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University. She specializes in the fields of lexicography, exegesis, and philology.

Kristine Hansen is a professor of English at Brigham Young University. Her teaching and research focus on writing in academic disciplines and history, theory, and pedagogy in rhetoric and composition. She is a former associate dean of Undergraduate Education for University Writing Programs.

Grant Hardy is an associate professor and chairman of the History Department at the University of North Carolina at Asheville. He has a B.A. in ancient Greek from Brigham Young University and a Ph.D. in Chinese language and literature from Yale. His scholarly publications include The Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Edition (University of Illinois Press, 2003) and Worlds of Bronze and Bamboo: Sima Qian’s Conquest of History (Columbia University Press, 1999).

Paul Y. Hoskins, professor of ancient scripture, has taught religion at Brigham Young University for 23 years. He did his graduate work at Brandeis University in Assyriology, with an emphasis in ancient Semitic philology. The fruits of his work on the FARMS Book of Mormon onomasticon project have appeared several times in this journal.

Clark V. Johnson received a B.A. in Spanish and history from Utah State University, an M.A. in Spanish literature with an emphasis in the golden age of Spain, and a Ph.D. in U.S. history, specializing in the U.S. western frontier and the Latin American colonial period, from Brigham Young University. He taught in the Church Educational System and at BYU for 38 years.

Keith Lawrence holds a Ph.D. in English, with an emphasis in early American literature, from the University of Southern California. As an associate professor of English at Brigham Young University, he teaches American and world literature and advanced composition. He is coediting two books—one on early Asian American authors and the other on depictions of Asia and Asian Americans in American fiction between 1865 and 1920.

Robert A. Rees is a graduate of Brigham Young University and holds advanced degrees in literature from the University of Wisconsin. He taught for 25 years at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he was also director of continuing education in the arts and humanities and assistant dean of the College of Fine Arts. Rees was a Fulbright professor of American studies in the Baltic States and has lectured at a number of foreign universities. A specialist in American literature, he has published a number of scholarly works on American literature and the Mormon experience.

John W. Welch earned B.A. (history) and M.A. (Greek and Latin) degrees from Brigham Young University and a J.D. from Duke University. He is the Robert K. Thomas Professor of Law at BYU’s J. Reuben Clark Law School, editor in chief of BYU Studies, and director of publications for BYU’s Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History. He is the founder of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS). In addition to teaching contemporary legal subjects, he conducts research on law in the ancient world and on many other subjects of interest to Latter-day Saints.

Carole Mikita York has been a journalist with KSL-TV News since June 1979. She is currently the 6:30 co-anchor and has received awards for her reporting as the station’s religion and arts specialist. Since October 1998, she has written and produced 14 documentaries outlining times of growth and recognition for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
THE EDITOR’S NOTEBOOK

The chambers of the Book of Mormon hold spiritual prizes for those who are willing to seek them. In this issue, four distinguished authors explore some of the literary treasures that lie within the pages of this unique collection of scriptural books, two others uncover how the 19th-century public received and perceived the Book of Mormon, and one author illuminates a possible connection between Mulek, son of King Zedekiah, and an ancient artifact found near Jerusalem.

The four literary studies in this issue celebrate the literary riches of the Book of Mormon. These articles follow a long and growing list of skilled efforts to plumb the literary depths of the book, starting with early attempts to deal with recognizable literary units such as Nephi’s psalm (see 2 Nephi 4:16–35) and continuing with more recent book-length works that explore subtle dimensions of the literary feast awaiting the careful reader. Robert A. Rees skillfully turns our gaze to twists of irony woven into the fabric of both sermons and narratives, prophecy and poetry. Perhaps Rees’s most tantalizing insight features Nephi’s use of the term know in his hard-hitting sermon to his brothers as he is about to build his ship (see 1 Nephi 17). Significantly, no irony appears in the writings of Joseph Smith, indicating a distance between his literary gifts and those of the authors of the Book of Mormon, whose words he translated.

John W. Welch, paying attention as he does to scriptural nuances, noticed a recurring pattern of 10 words or concepts in an unexpected number of key passages in the Book of Mormon. His further exploration led to the discovery therein not of numerology but of the ancient, sacred character of the number ten and its intimate tie to the work of God, whether in its manifestation in the Ten Commandments or in the concept of tithing, whether in the names and titles for God or in the concept of completion or perfection.

In a very different vein, Paul Y. Hoskisson has undertaken a reexamination of the words straight and strait, responding to an earlier study published in the Journal by Noel B. Reynolds and Royal Skousen (2001). While the two words sound the same in English and therefore invite confusion, their dissimilar meanings were readily apparent in ancient Hebrew. On the basis of ancient literary contexts for these words, Hoskisson reaches conclusions different from those of the earlier study, suggesting that the readings of straight/straight in the current edition of the Book of Mormon in English are faithful to the world out of which the Book of Mormon grew.

Word pairs form the chief focus of James T. Duke’s study on a range of suggestive word combinations that grace the pages of the Book of Mormon. Duke’s work illustrates that the underlying spoken language of Book of Mormon peoples drew on ancient patterns of speech and was vibrantly alive. It is striking that many word combinations common in Joseph Smith’s literary and verbal worlds, such as far/wide and words/deeds, do not appear in the Book of Mormon, pointing to the observation that the Prophet did not author the Book of Mormon, whose lines often exhibit surprising word combinations, but was rather its translator.

The longest and the shortest studies in this issue of the Journal, by Richard H. Cracroft and Clark V. Johnson, respectively, examine the reception of the Book of Mormon in the wider American public, but from very different angles. Cracroft has assembled noted 19th-century American authors’ responses to the publication of the Book of Mormon. Most authors, as expected, turned a hostile eye toward the book that others had come to revere as scripture. Cracroft’s penetrating review, written in his vivid style, is the most comprehensive ever published on this subject.

Johnson has drawn upon his massive compilation of the Missouri redress petitions, published by the BYU Religious Studies Center in 1992, to set before readers the highly charged atmosphere in Missouri during the 1830s into which the Book of Mormon was carried. Almost overnight the book became a test of a person’s loyalty to the restored Church of Jesus Christ, for it was seen by adherents and detractors alike as the grand proof or despoil ing disproof of Joseph Smith’s divine calling. People faced the choice of declaring faith in the Book of Mormon and dying or denying it and living. The book thus became a tangible reverse symbol of death and life, in real time.

Jeffrey R. Chadwick has taken readers into the world of tiny ancient objects called seals. Such items held special significance for owners since they often repeated the owner’s name and served as a guarantee that goods or messages delivered with the seal’s impression on them were genuinely from the sender. One such seal, with evident connections to Israelite royalty, preserves a form of the name Mulek. Chadwick examines the possibility that this seal might have belonged to the son of King Zedekiah who fled with supporters to the New World, where their descendants eventually were joined by descendants of the Lehite colony (see Omni 1:14–16; Helaman 8:21).

Happy reading!
“Had for Good and Evil”

19th-Century Literary Treatments of the Book of Mormon

Richard H. Cracroft
From the moment of its publication in April 1830, the Book of Mormon encountered intense opposition and fierce criticism. Almost immediately, the angel Moroni’s prophecy to Joseph Smith on September 21, 1823, was fulfilled: that Joseph’s “name,” and by implication the church he would found and the book he would eventually translate and publish, “should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people.”

In fact, while millions of men and women have wholeheartedly embraced Joseph Smith, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the Book of Mormon, other millions, if they have any opinion at all about the Book of Mormon, consider it to be a “strange,” even evil deception “of infamous and blasphemous character” and a fraud, “garbled,” wrote Abner Cole, of Palmyra, New York, in 1831, “from the Old and New Testaments.”
Although the Book of Mormon has gained such repute as to be listed in Book magazine as one of the “20 Books That Changed America,”


Some rude skeptics might want to locate the origins of “creeping nincompoopism” . . . in the 1830s, when Joseph Smith took from dictation a number of miserably written narratives and injunctions conveyed to him by the angel Moroni and then persuaded a number of hicks to begin a new religion.⁵

Antagonists of the Book of Mormon have always considered the book fair game for easy cheap shots, slurs, and slipshod generalizations—most of which reveal, like Fussell’s comment, a basic ignorance of the book’s origins and contents. Indeed,

“Much of the responsibility for the prevailing ignorance and misunderstanding of the Book of Mormon in 19th-century, 20th-century, or turn-of-the-millennium American and world popular culture can be laid at the feet of the 19th-century authors who promulgated the persistent negative and mistaken image of the Book of Mormon as a literally unsophisticated, clumsy, tedious, and unreadable fraud written by Joseph Smith, an unlettered country boy—or somebody else.”

historian Thomas O’Dea correctly asserts that “the Book of Mormon has not been universally considered by its critics as one of those books that must be read in order to have an opinion of it.” Nearly 175 years of easy and groundless dismissal of the Book of Mormon by a variety of authors—the shapers of popular opinion—as a clumsily written, fraudulent imposture have fostered a negative, even repelling perception of the book among potential American and international readers and surrounded the book with a distracting and undeserved aura of mystery, misunderstanding, and ignorance. Thus, as late as 1921 the prestigious Cambridge History of American Literature was able to get away with describing the Book of Mormon as the account of “the hegira of an adventurous folk moving by successive stages from the East to the Salt Lake Valley”!⁸ And in 1969, a half century later, a sixth-grade elementary school class in Little Rock, Arkansas, could include in their classroom compilation, “A New History of America (sort of),” the following humorously skewed “facts” about Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon:

Joseph Smith started it all. He always wanted to be a good guy and do right. One day J. S. saw this angle coming down on him from the sky. The heavenly body said his name was Macaroni and he showed Joseph Smith where a bunch of golden plates was (not the kind you eat off of). This turned out to be The Book of Mormons, about a profit named Mormons who is to them sorta like Mosses is to us.⁹

As the Book of Mormon nears its second centenary, it seems important, then, to take a closer look at how such a book, revered by millions as holy writ yet by other millions as a fraud, came to be so widely misunderstood, reviled, and misjudged while remaining largely unread. As we shall see, much of the responsibility for the prevailing ignorance and misunderstanding of the Book of Mormon in 19th-century, 20th-century, or turn-of-the-millennium American and world popular culture can be laid at the feet of the 19th-century authors who promulgated the persistent negative and mistaken image of the Book of Mormon as a literally unsophisticated, clumsy, tedious, and unreadable fraud written by Joseph Smith, an unlettered country boy—or somebody else. Their treatments of the Book of Mormon as a volume whose claims of divine origin may be readily dismissed have made an impression upon the public perception of the book that still reverberates at the beginning of the 21st century. What follows, then, are commentaries on the Book of Mormon by some of the most influential authors of the 19th century. Their assessments became the sources of
mistaken impressions of the Book of Mormon in the popular imagination, the points of departure for continuing critical attacks on the Book of Mormon throughout the 20th century, and, since the 1950s, the impetus for Latter-day Saint scholars’ increasingly effective defense of the Book of Mormon as the history of an actual people and a record of the acts of God and Jesus Christ in ancient America.

The Beginnings of Antagonistic Criticism of the Book of Mormon

Launching the Critical Attack: Abner Cole

The shaping of the public’s negative perception of the Book of Mormon began as soon as Joseph Smith’s Palmyra neighbors learned of his claims to have miraculously obtained an ancient record at the hands of an angel sent by God. The publication of the book and its distribution throughout the region by Samuel Smith and other missionaries excited a great deal of interest. Abner Cole, “more than anyone else,” claims Richard L. Bushman, “tried to characterize the Book of Mormon for the public in the first few months after publication” by treating the new book “scornfully and humorously”¹⁰ in several clumsy attempts at satire.

Beginning in January 1831, concerned over the success of Mormon missionaries in Ohio in gaining converts to the new church, Cole undertook to discredit Joseph Smith and his book in a six-part “Gold Bible” newspaper series, written under the pseudonym of Dogberry. Rejecting Joseph Smith’s attribution of authorship and editorship of the book to Mormon, Cole proclaimed the book a fraud, launched ad hominem attacks on Joseph and the Smith family, and suggested that Smith’s whole design was to make money. Cole became the first to assert in print the short-lived theory that Joseph Smith was the book’s author and that he had lifted its contents “almost entirely . . . from the Bible,” its stories being “chiefly garbled from the Old and New Testaments.”¹¹ Cole suggested that the inspiration for the book was probably Walters the Magician, a “vagabond fortune-teller” who sometime earlier had duped locals with a Latin copy of Cicero’s Orationes, which he claimed to be “a record of the former inhabitants of America” that revealed where they had hidden their treasures.¹² Although others voiced their criticism in letters, sermons, and newspaper articles,¹³ it was Abner Cole, asserts Terryl L. Givens in By the Hand of Mormon, who “did as much to inflame and shape public reaction to the Book of Mormon as any (hostile) person of his generation.”¹⁴

Establishing the Critical Attack: Alexander Campbell and E. D. Howe

Others soon entered the fray. Alexander Campbell, founder of the Disciples of Christ and an eminent American theologian, published the first important critique of the Book of Mormon in February 1831 in his newspaper, the Millennial Harbinger.¹⁵ Campbell insisted that Joseph Smith, “as ignorant and as impudent a knave as ever wrote a book,” was the book’s sole author “as certainly . . . as Satan is the father of lies.”¹⁶ Setting a pattern that would be followed ever after by Book of Mormon critics and eager to prove Smith’s authorship, Campbell downplayed the book’s similarities to the Bible, ignored the book’s complex plot and cast of characters, dismissed its contents as “romance,” and focused his attack on Smith’s purported authorial errors—“Smithisms,” he called them—which he claimed were evinced in the book’s anachronisms, especially the worship of Jesus Christ in the Western Hemisphere centuries before his birth.

Campbell’s most significant—and enduring—contribution to future Book of Mormon criticism, however, is the “environmental” theory: that Joseph Smith introduced 19th-century elements into his story, incorporating “every error and almost every truth discussed in N. York for the last ten years.”¹⁷ By 1844, the year of Joseph Smith’s death, however, Campbell had changed his mind about Smith’s sole authorship of the book—the claim simply had not stood up—and accepted the Spalding¹⁸-Rigdon hypothesis for the book’s authorship, despite the contradiction of his earlier arguments that the hypothesis raised. In 1833 Eber D. Howe, publisher of the Painesville (OH) Telegraph and the Book of Mormon’s most dedicated early critic, teamed up with excommunicated Mormon Philastus Hurlbut to advance the thesis, in Mormonism Unvailed, that Solomon Spalding’s unpublished novel manuscript had been acquired and religionized by Sidney Rigdon as the Book of Mormon and that Rigdon was “the Iago, the prime mover of the whole conspiracy.”¹⁹ The Howe-Hurlbut hypothesis was never accepted by citizens of Palmyra as likely, notes Bushman, but nevertheless “remained the standard
explanation of non-Mormon critics well into the twentieth century,” until Woodbridge Riley, a non-Mormon, published a refutation of the Spalding-Rigdon hypothesis in *The Founder of Mormonism: A Psychological Study of Joseph Smith, Jr.* (1902).²⁰

### 19th-Century Travelers Discover the Book of Mormon

The impact of these early critics’ disputations of Joseph Smith’s claims about the authorship and provenance of the Book of Mormon is reflected in the views of a number of popular writers of the era, many of whom traveled to Salt Lake City from the United States and Europe to beard the Mormon prophet Brigham Young in his lair and publish their sensational exposés to a curious world. Their reports were, with few exceptions, antagonistic to the Latter-day Saints. Roberts Bartholow, assistant surgeon of the U.S. Army, typified contemporary sensational anti-Mormon sentiments in his “objective” report to the U.S. Surgeon General, as cited in a report to the New Orleans Academy of Sciences meeting in 1861, that Mormon polygamy in Utah Territory had produced a degenerate “new racial type”:

> Whether owing to the practice of a purely sensual and material religion, to the premature development of the passions, or to isolation, there is, nevertheless, an expression of countenance and a style of feature, which may be styled the Mormon expression and style; an expression compounded of sensuality, cunning, suspicion, and a smirking self-conceit. The yellow, sunken, cadaverous visage; the greenish-colored eyes; the thick, protuberant lips; the low forehead, the light, yellowish hair, and the lank, angular person, constitute an appearance so characteristic of the new race, the production of polygamy, as to distinguish them at a glance.

Travel writers, focusing primarily on “the Mormon menace” of polygamy, the national *cause célèbre* during much of the second half of the 19th century, seldom got around to looking at the Book of Mormon itself, which retained its mysterious aura. As we shall see, with very few exceptions, those who made a pretense of examining the book made light of it and presented contemporary readers and posterity with an enduring, indelible tonal sneer and dismissal of the book, repeatedly reinforced ever since in the minds of many unsuspecting and indiscriminating new readers. In readers’ minds, the universal ill repute of Mormonism was coupled with the mysterious and similarly named Book of Mormon. And woe be unto the reputation of the writer who deigned to write sympathetically of the Mormons or their book.

### Francis Parkman, American Historian

Even young Francis Parkman, soon to earn international renown as the premier historian of French settlement in the New World, allowed his usually clear historical vision to become clouded when it came to matters Mormon. In *The Oregon Trail* (1849), Parkman’s widely read account of his 1847 trip along the Oregon Trail, he describes his encounter with a party of the “much-dreaded Mormons” at their temporary settlement at Pueblo. After hearing them “discuss points of theology, complain of the ill-usage they had received from the ‘Gentiles,’ and sound a lamentation over the loss of their great temple of Nauvoo,” the astute historian of the early American West rode away from history in the making, “happy,” he records, in a tone accepted as standard in describing Mormons, “that the settlements had been delivered from the presence of such blind and desperate fanatics.”

### John Muir, American Naturalist

More objective than Parkman, John Muir, the famous naturalist, listened in 1877 to Brigham Young speak in the Mormon tabernacle just weeks before his death and was pleasantly impressed. Muir makes no reference to the Book of Mormon, but in letters sent to a newspaper and later collected in *Steep Trails* (1918), he expresses his surprise on seeing “little Latter-day boys and girls” (whom he calls “Little Latter Days”) who “seem remarkably bright and promising” and positively illustrate his Mormon hosts’ assertion that the children are “Utah’s best crop.” Ever the naturalist, Muir describes Mormon women in strikingly (and amusingly) botanical terms:

> Liliaceous women . . . are rare among the Mormons. They have seen too much hard, repressive toil to admit to the development of lily
beauty either in form or color. In general they are thickset, with large feet and hands, and with sun-browned faces, often curiously freckled like the petals of *Fritillaria atropurpurea*. They are fruit rather than flower—good brown bread.*²⁷

George Frederick Ruxton, British Soldier-Adventurer

Whether or not he had read the Book of Mormon, another well-known world traveler, George Frederick Ruxton, contributed significantly—and negatively—to the popular image of the Book of Mormon, which in 1848, when he wrote about it, was still generally unavailable to the public and thus all the more mysterious. Ruxton’s discussion of the Book of Mormon in chapter 9 of his landmark mountain man narrative, *Life in the Far West* (1848),²⁸ was for many readers in mid-century Great Britain and the United States their introduction to the Book of Mormon and the Latter-day Saints. Ruxton, a British soldier and adventurer, traversed the Rocky Mountains alone in the winter of 1846–47. He wintered in Pueblo with mountain men, where he encountered a party of westering Latter-day Saints, from which arose his short, slanted history of the Mormons, “which sect flourishes,” he sneers, like Parkman, “wherever Anglo-Saxon gulls are found in sufficient numbers to swallow the egregious nonsense of fanatic humbugs who fatten upon their credulity.”²⁹

Ruxton’s tone and amusing skewing of facts in describing the Book of Mormon’s origins are indicative of the general reception and reputation of Mormons and the Book of Mormon in 1847, even as the harassed Latter-day Saints were trekking west to the valleys of the Wasatch Mountains:

Joe, better known as the “Prophet Joe,” was taking his siesta one fine day, upon a hill in one of the New England States, when an angel suddenly appeared to him, and made known the locality of a new Bible or Testament, which contained the history of the lost tribes of Israel; that these tribes were no other than the Indian nations which possessed the continent of America at the time of its discovery, and the remains of which still existed in their savage stage; that, through the agency of Joe, these were to be reclaimed, collected into the bosom of a church to be there established, according to principles which would be found in the wonderful book. . . . After a certain probation, Joe was led in body and spirit to the mountain by the angel who first appeared to him, was pointed out the position of the wonderful book, which was covered by a flat stone, in which would be found two round pebbles, called Urim and Thummim and through the agency of which the mystic characters inscribed on the pages of the book were to be deciphered and translated. Joe found the spot indicated without any difficulty, cleared away the earth, and discovered a hollow place formed by four flat stones; on removing the topmost one of which sundry plates of brass presented themselves, covered with quaint and antique carving; on the top lay Urim and Thummim (commonly known to the Mormons as Mummum and Thummum, the pebbles of wonderful virtue), through which the miracle of reading the plates of brass was to be performed.

Joe Smith, on whom the mantle of Moses had so suddenly fallen, carefully removed the plates and hid them, burying himself in woods and mountains whilst engaged in the work of translation. However, he made no secret of the important task imposed upon him, nor of the great work to which he had been called. Numbers at once believed him, but not a few were deaf to belief, and openly derided him. . . . Joe . . . packed his plates in a sack of beans, bundled them into a Jersey waggon, and made tracks for the West. Here he completed the great work of translation, and not long after gave to

“In readers’ minds, the universal ill repute of Mormonism was coupled with the mysterious and similarly named Book of Mormon. And woe be unto the reputation of the writer who deigned to write sympathetically of the Mormons or their book.”
the world the "Book of Mormon," a work as bulky as the Bible, and called "of Mormon," for so was the prophet named by whose hand the history of the lost tribes had been handed down in the plates of brass thus miraculously preserved for thousands of years, and brought to light through the agency of Joseph Smith.³⁰

Ruxton describes with some amusement famous mountain man Rube Herring’s short-lived “conversion” to Mormonism. Herring, who also wintered in Pueblo among the Mormons, apparently aspired to be hired to guide the Saints from Pueblo to the Great Basin. He “was never without the book of Mormon in his hand,” writes Ruxton, “and his sonorous voice might be heard, at all hours of the day and night, reading passages from its wonderful pages.” But when Rube found out he was not going to be hired,

a wonderful change came over his mind. He was, as usual, book of Mormon in hand, when brother Brown announced the change in their plans, at which the book was cast into the Arkansa [River], and Rube exclaimed “Cuss your darned Mum mum and Thummum! Thar’s not one among you knows ‘fat cow’ from ‘poor bull,’ and you may go to h— for me.” And turning away, old Rube spat out a quid of tobacco and his Mormonism together.³¹

Richard F. Burton, British World Traveler-A nthropologist

Richard F. Burton’s treatment of the Book of Mormon and the Latter-day Saints is exceptional among the accounts of 19th-century travelers. His three-week visit among the Latter-day Saints in Utah in August 1860 led to his remarkable book, The City of the Saints (1861), which editor Fawn M. Brodie rightly calls “the best book on the Mormons published during the nineteenth century.”³² Recalling at the “venomous” and “thoroughly untrustworthy” accounts of Mormon life,³³ Burton, an experienced world traveler and student of exotic peoples and practices, defied popular sentiment (as was his wont) to present a thorough and favorable study of Mormons in their Great Basin kingdom.

Burton’s refreshingly objective description of the contents of the Book of Mormon begins with a brief and accurate summary of publication data and includes a reproduction of the title page, a summary of the testimonies of the Three and Eight Witnesses, an outline of the contents of each of the books of the Book of Mormon, and an appendix containing a still-useful (borrowed) “Chronology of the Most Important Events Recorded in the Book of Mormon.”³⁴

Although Burton’s nonjudgmental and objective treatment of the Mormons and their sacred book was found in “the century’s most widely read travel book” about the Mormons,³⁵ the book’s author—and thus the book—were often discounted by Victorian readers because of Burton’s reputation for his sensational, exotic (and erotic) interests, which he cultivated in his far-flung travels and described in his several books. Thus his admiration of Mormon theology and society was largely dismissed by readers who preferred the many often lurid and sensational popular accounts of Mormon life. Burton’s descriptions of the Saints and the Book of Mormon would not find a larger audience until his rediscovery by scholars and historians late in the 20th century.

Jules Remy, French Botanist-Traveler

In another widely read account, also told with the authority of “seeing with my own eyes”³⁶ dur-
ing his one-month stay in Salt Lake City in the fall of 1855, French botanist Jules Remy and his scholar-companion Julius Brenchley, M.A., published Remy’s *Voyage au Pays du Mormons* (1860) and Remy and Brenchley’s two-volume *A Journey to Great Salt Lake City, with a Sketch of the History, Religion, and Customs of the Mormons, and an Introduction on The Religious Movement in the United States* (1861). Despite his conclusion that Joseph Smith is “a cheat and impostor” and that Mormonism is “nothing more than the product of calculation, or . . . speculation,” Remy professes that Mormonism “seemed to me to have a character completely special, and to bear no resemblance to any other among the phenomena of the same class in recorded history.”³⁷

Remy undertakes to place Mormonism in the context of American religious thought, particularly that of American transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson, Theodore Parker, and William Ellery Channing. After carefully reporting Joseph Smith’s first vision—mainly in Joseph’s own (1838) words—Remy accurately describes the translation of the Book of Mormon, reproduces the facsimiles of the characters from the plates, reprints the title page, and recounts the story of Martin Harris’s visit to Professor Charles Anthon. He follows a (borrowed) outline of the book’s table of contents with an accurate, “succinct analysis”³⁸ of the contents of the Book of Mormon (also borrowed).

Remy then sheds his objective guise with his sudden assertion that the Book of Mormon is a mixture of Solomon Spalding’s unpublished fictional story, which “fell into the hands of Joseph Smith. This fact is not proved,” he adds, “but neither is it impossible”; he claims that Smith mixed Spalding’s fiction with biblical narratives to produce the Book of Mormon, which is “nothing but a jumble of bad imitations of Scripture, anachronisms, contradictions, and bad grammar.”³⁹ Remy obviates the account of the gold plates by telling of the Kinderhook Plates (a hoax perpetrated by Robert Wiley in 1843 in an apparent attempt to discredit Joseph Smith) and suggesting that Joseph Smith, the “money-digger,” could have found similar plates.

After presenting a lengthy, albeit typically distorted, history of the Latter-day Saints from Joseph’s first vision through the Missouri period, the establishment of Nauvoo, the assassination of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, the trek west, and the founding of Great Salt Lake City, Remy concludes volume 1 with the assertions that Mormonism is a fascinating American religious phenomenon and that Joseph Smith was “no ordinary man” and was “undoubtedly, a superior man,” who, though “an impostor,” was, “when the mask was raised, . . . still a man at heart, and it is not often we can say as much of all of these who had misled mankind.”⁴⁰

In volume 2 of *A Journey to Great Salt Lake City*, Remy examines the particulars of Mormon theology, doctrine, the plan of salvation, and modes of worship, and he discloses in detail the Latter-day Saint temple endowment as then practiced. He devotes chapter 2 to what may well be the most thorough non–Latter-day Saint discussion of polygamy in the 19th century.⁴¹ Many contemporary non–Latter-day Saint readers must have considered Remy’s treatment of Mormonism as definitive and concluded that the new religion posed some formidable danger to be reckoned with in the future.

**Mark Twain, American Humorist**

Unquestionably, however, it is Mark Twain’s treatment of Mormonism and the Book of Mormon in his best-selling travel narrative, *Roughing It* (1872), that has become the most important single factor in forging the popular perception of the Book of

---

Mormon in the 19th century—or, for that matter, the 20th century. *Roughing It*, which also sold well in Great Britain and Germany, provided the literate world with its first popular critique of the book and, unfortunately for the book’s reputation, remains the best-known and most widely cited non-Mormon treatment of the Book of Mormon.

While Artemus Ward was Mark Twain’s comic mentor in the matter of polygamy,⁴² Twain had no peer or precedent in taking on the Book of Mormon as a subject for comedy. His successful burlesque of polygamy in *Roughing It* was offset, however, by his strained and less successful attempts at humor in treating the Book of Mormon; nevertheless, Twain set the standard for the next century for dealing with both topics—much to the chagrin and discomfiture of the Latter-day Saints.

In chapters 13 through 16 of *Roughing It*, Twain presents a comic, fictionalized account of his (and his brother Orion’s) 1861 visit to Salt Lake City and Brigham Young.⁴³ For his “facts” about the Latter-day Saints, Twain relies upon Catherine V. Waite’s currently popular work, *The Mormon Prophet and His Harem, or, An Authentic History of Brigham Young, His Numerous Wives and Children*, published in 1868.⁴⁴ Twain also provides his readers with two long appendices, “A Brief Sketch of Mormon History” and “The Mountain Meadows Massacre,” which, together with chapters 13 through 16, still constitute, for many readers in the 21st century, their indelible and comic, if often erroneous and misleading, introduction to Mormonism and the Book of Mormon.

Writing humorously about the Book of Mormon posed a considerable challenge. As I have noted elsewhere, “Twain’s unfamiliarity with the Book of Mormon, his audience’s unfamiliarity with the book, and his obvious strain in groping for humor in the book’s content” awkwardly compelled him, “first, to educate his audience as to the nature of the book” before he could “make fun of the material he had just introduced.”⁴⁵ He found himself, in other words, in a literary jokester’s nightmare.

Nevertheless, Twain launches chapter 16 of *Roughing It* with a shotgun blast of dismissive comments about the Book of Mormon that have since become better known to his legions of readers than the Book of Mormon itself:

All men have heard of the Mormon Bible, but few except the “elect” have seen it, or, at least, taken the trouble to read it. I brought away a copy from Salt Lake. The book is a curiosity to me, it is such a pretentious affair, and yet so “slow,” so sleepy, such an insipid mess of inspiration. It is chloroform in print. If Joseph Smith composed this book, the act was a miracle—keeping awake while he did it was, at any rate. If he . . . merely translated it from certain ancient and mysteriously-engraved plates of copper, which he declares he found under a stone, in an out-of-the-way locality, the work of translating was equally a miracle, for the same reason.⁴⁶

Twain then undertakes a ten-page analysis of the Book of Mormon,⁴⁷ devoting four pages to discussion of the title page, whose grammar and dictio
had left that out, his Bible would have been only a pamphlet.⁴⁹

Twain concludes his enormously influential treatment of the Book of Mormon patronizingly and damningly: "The Mormon Bible is rather stupid and tiresome to read, but there is nothing vicious in its teachings. Its code of morals is unobjectionable—it is 'smouched' from the New Testament and no credit given."⁵⁰ (In a final trivialization, Twain asterisks "smouched" and in a footnote comically attributes the word to "Milton.") Uneven and stumbling as it is, Mark Twain's comic handling of the Mormon scripture has given generations of readers an authoritative reason to slight the Book of Mormon, dismiss its claims, and ignore its message. (As one of my students, a returned Latter-day Saint missionary, said after reading the Mormon chapters of Roughing It: "He'll roast in hell for this!"—I assume he means a Calvinist hell and not the Latter-day Saint telestial kingdom, which promises a more congenial climate.)

**Eduard Meyer, German Historian**

As the new century got under way, despite the end of polygamy (1890), Utah statehood (1896), and Latter-day Saint efforts to become loyal Americans and a mainstream religion, the popular image of the Mormon people and popular misconceptions about the Book of Mormon remained fixed and unassailed. In 1912 Professor Eduard Meyer, internationally renowned ancient historian, returned to Germany after spending a year among the Mormons in Utah to surprise his colleagues with the publication of a book unrelated to ancient history, a book about Mormonism: *Ursprung und Geschichte der Mormonen, mit Exkursen über die Anfänge des Islám und des Christentums* (The Origin and History of the Mormons, with Reflections on the Beginnings of Islam and Christianity).⁵¹ While Meyer acknowledged that "Mormonism . . . is not just another of countless sects, but a new revealed religion," and urged that "the origin and history of Mormonism possesses great and unusual value for the student of religious history,"⁵² his examination of the Book of Mormon is remarkably superficial and disappointing.

After his astonishing admission that he had "not been able to read the complete Book of Mormon" and that many primary and secondary sources were unavailable to him, Meyer excuses himself by asserting that “no human except a believer could find the strength to read the whole thing.” He declares himself, nevertheless, “sufficiently well-informed about the most important facts to be allowed to risk an independent treatment of the subject.”⁵³ Professor Meyer confirmed the public’s misunderstanding of the Book of Mormon by concluding that the book is as "clumsy, monotonous in the extreme, repetitious, . . . [and] incoherent as one would expect it from a totally uneducated man who dictated it in a state of half-sleep."⁵⁴

**The Book of Mormon and 19th-Century Fiction Writers**

The general suspicion of and ignorance about Mormonism and the Book of Mormon was reflected in 19th-century fiction, which became at once a shaper, reporter, and reflector of the image of Mormonism and the Book of Mormon in the
popular mind. Only one work of anti-Mormon prose fiction appeared during the lifetime of the Prophet Joseph Smith (1805–1844): *The Travels and Adventures of Monsieur R. Violet in California, Sonora, and Western Texas*, by Frederick Marryat (1843). Der Prophet, by Amalie Schoppe, appeared in 1846. Typically, neither book does more than allude to the Book of Mormon. The first full-length American novel about Mormonism, John Russell’s *The Mormoness; or, the Trials of Mary Maverick*, appeared in 1853 and was followed before the turn of the century by 50 more anti-Mormon tales, including *John Brent* (1861), by Theodore Winthrop, a work that literary critic Carl Van Doren called “the first really fine novel of the West.” In fact, the Book of Mormon was pretty bland reading when stacked against titillating accounts of abductions of beautiful Gentile women, exotic harems, and thrilling tales of eluding the mysterious Danites and thus played virtually no role in anti-Mormon fiction, or pro-Mormon fiction, for that matter.

**Herman Melville, American Novelist**

The Book of Mormon cropped up unexpectedly in two novels by Herman Melville, the author of *Moby Dick* (1851). In his novel *Mardi and a Voyage Thither* (1849), Melville follows the journeys of the elusive and mysterious “Alma,” an “illustrious prophet and teacher divine.” Robert A. Rees suggests several interesting parallels between Melville’s Alma and the Book of Mormon prophets Alma the Elder (ca. 173–91 bc) and his son Alma the Younger (ca. 135–73 bc) and concludes: “That Melville could have used *The Book of Mormon* in writing *Mardi* is apparent.” Melville’s only mention of the Book of Mormon by name occurs in his novel *Pierre, or, The Ambiguities* (1852), wherein the book is listed among five mysterious and mystical books rejected by Plotinus Plinlimmon, the mad transcendentalist, as threats to his mad-transcendentalist worldview.

**Arthur Conan Doyle, British Author**

Another notable exception to fiction writers’ general shunning of the Book of Mormon as subject matter is Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), an early case of Sherlock Holmes, Doyle’s popular sleuth. In assisting Jefferson Hope, a targeted victim of “the Holy Four”—leaders of the sinister, vengeance-seeking Mormon Danites from Utah—Holmes and Dr. Watson trace Hope’s fate to his unsuccessful attempt to save his beloved Lucy from a polygamous marriage in Utah. Although he is too late to save Lucy from her fate worse than death, he angers the terrifying Danites, who seek vengeance. Early in the story, John Ferrier and his young ward Lucy are saved from death in the desert by Mormons, who introduce themselves as “the persecuted children of God—the chosen of the Angel Merona,” who “believe in those sacred writings, drawn in Egyptian letters on plates of beaten gold, which were handed unto the holy Joseph Smith at Palmyra.” When the ill-fated Ferrier and Lucy meet Brigham Young himself, they find him reading like a sorcerer researching magic potions from “a brown-backed volume—the Book of Mormon.”

Michael Austin, in his study of the enduring influence of early Mormon stereotypes on contemporary detective fiction, notes that “*A Study in Scarlet* has been one of two classic works of genre fiction (along with Zane Grey’s *Riders of the Purple Sage*) responsible for keeping nineteenth-century stereotypes of Mormons in continuous circulation among readers and writers of popular fiction.” While Zane Grey’s perennially popular *Riders of the Purple Sage* (1912) portrays the “creed-bound,” “creed-mad” Mormon men as “unnaturally cruel”
and willing to “do absolutely any deed to go on building up the power and wealth of their church, their empire,” he blessedly makes no mention of the Book of Mormon.⁶³

**Mormons in the Dime Novel**

In the last quarter of the 19th century, the enormous popularity of the weekly pulp magazine and the dime novel continued the demonization of Mormons but did nothing to lift the aura of mystery from the Book of Mormon. At least by 1897, Frank Merriwell, hero of Gilbert Patten’s “Frank Merriwell Among the Mormons or The Lost Tribe of Israel,” which appeared in *Tip Top Weekly*, attempts to balance the largely negative image of Mormons in the popular mind. On the cover, Elder Asaph Holdfast, an old Mormon, is pictured rejecting Frank’s “evil” modern mode of transportation, the bicycle, exclaiming, “Remove from my sight those inventions of Satan!” In the story, Frank and chums save a young Mormon maiden from entering a forced marriage. But the story heralds a sea change in popular attitudes about the Mormons: After helping Tom Whitcomb, who represents a new type of enlightened Mormon, Frank says to his friends:

> I am getting a different opinion of the Mormons than I once had . . . ; the Mormons I have seen seem like other people. . . . The Mormons are not what they were, Jack. They have changed in recent years, and the younger Mormons are all right. They still hold to their religion, but they have cast aside polygamy, and I believe no man has a right to say how another shall worship God.⁶⁴

**Causes and Effects: The Book of Mormon in the 20th and 21st Centuries**

If, at the dawn of a new century and millennium, the Book of Mormon continues to hover on the edge of respectability as vague, mysterious, and foreboding, and as a fraudulent imposture that does not merit looking into, it is principally because of the misperceptions, misunderstandings, and slanted reporting first foisted on the American public by the 19th-century writers whose commentary we have sampled. Eighty-two years (1830–1912) of this kind of dismissive nose-thumbing by respected and widely read authors took a toll on the reputation, perception, and reception of the Book of Mormon by the American—and international—reader (during the last half of the century the book was at least as well known in Great Britain, Germany, Switzerland, and Scandinavia as it was in the United States).

**The Lingering Influence of the 19th Century: Brodie, O’Dea, Rimini**

The anti-Book of Mormon criticism of the 19th-century writers we have reviewed found new life among the book’s 20th-century critics. Doggedly following Alexander Campbell’s 1832 “environmental” claims, critics such as Fawn M. Brodie, Thomas O’Dea, and recently Robert V. Remini, among a handful of others,⁶⁵ also viewed the book either as sacred fiction or as a grab bag of American 19th-century influences clumsily mixed with scripture-like phrasing and pieced together by Joseph Smith, or somebody else—but never by the editorial hands of Mormon and Moroni, as Joseph Smith claimed.

Thus Fawn McKay Brodie, in her influential 1945 biography of Joseph Smith, *No Man Knows My History*,⁶⁶ reiterates Campbell’s claims of 19th-century influences to be found in the book and repeats Mark Twain’s nostrums about the book’s dreariness but, like her predecessors, fails to come to grips with the contents of the book in any fresh or insightful way. Likewise, Thomas O’Dea, in his otherwise excellent chapter on the Book of Mormon—the most insightful non-Mormon discussion of the book to date—in his 1957 study, *The Mormons*,⁶⁷ delves perceptively into the content and themes of the book only to vitiate his findings by reverting to Campbell’s environmental argument that the book’s contents reflect 19th-century American themes and issues.

And the legacy continues in Robert V. Remini’s 2002 biography, *Joseph Smith*.⁶⁸ Remini presents an accurate history of the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon, as well as a brief but satisfactory summary of its contents, and concludes that the book is complex and “extraordinary”—an unusual admission for a non-Latter-day Saint critic. Then, scholar of Jacksonian America that he is, Remini ignores the contents of the book, turns his back on Joseph Smith’s claims for the book’s “vertical,” or
Latter-day Saint Scholars Respond

Hugh W. Nibley, Mormon Studies Pioneer

Ironically, it was, among other flaws, Brodie’s use of Alexander Campbell’s arguments in her biography of Joseph Smith that provoked the Latter-day Saints’ ire and stirred their scholarly response to criticism of the Book of Mormon. The belated counterattack began with Francis Kirkham’s A New Witness for Christ in America (1942), 70 published in anticipation of Brodie’s long-awaited book, and Hugh Nibley’s withering rebuttal to Brodie’s book: No, Ma’am, That’s Not History (1946). 71

In 1952 Nibley published Lehi in the Desert and The World of the Jaredites, his groundbreaking study of the Book of Mormon as a cultural product of the ancient Middle East. He extended his methodology to the entire book in An Approach to the Book of Mormon (1957), which became the Melchizedek Priesthood lesson manual for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 72 and revived Latter-day Saint interest in the Book of Mormon. Indeed, Nibley, with his vigorous and authoritative nose-thumbing of Book of Mormon crit-
ics of the 19th and 20th centuries and his numerous articles and scholarly treatises on the ancient origins of Latter-day Saint scripture and temple rites, “has done more than any Mormon of his era to further the intellectual credibility of the Book of Mormon” and Mormonism.⁷³

FARMS (Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies)

Nibley’s unprecedented contributions to Mormon studies have led to the establishment of serious Mormon scholarship in ancient studies and have influenced a whole generation of Latter-day Saint scholars. In 1979, John Welch, BYU professor of law and classical scholar, established the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), now part of Brigham Young University’s Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts. Welch’s own interest in Book of Mormon studies began in 1967, when, as a missionary in Germany, he connected the substance of a lecture on “introverted parallelism,” or “chiasmus,” in the Old Testament with his discovery of numerous instances of the Hebrew literary device in the Book of Mormon.⁷⁴ Working under Hugh Nibley’s premise that the Book of Mormon is an ancient historical record, Welch and his FARMS colleagues maintain that “the Book of Mormon should be studied with literary, linguistic, historical, religious, political, military, legal, social, economic, and just basic textual concerns in mind.”⁷⁵

Under the aegis of FARMS, a cadre of well-trained LDS scholars are conducting an ongoing examination of the book, combing its text for reflections of ancient culture, language, law, and history. In addition to publishing the Collected Works...
of Hugh Nibley, FARMS has published a number of books on Book of Mormon themes.⁷⁶ Although such scholarship strengthens Latter-day Saint faith in the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, the revelatory books of Moses and Abraham, and the temple rites, much of this effort so far has had little influence beyond Mormon readership in correcting earlier mistaken impressions of the Book of Mormon. It is Brodie’s (and the 19th-century writers’) horizontal, or naturalistic, explanations of Book of Mormon origins, and not the vertical, or revelatory, explanations of Latter-day Saint scholars, that have prevailed in the popular perception of the book.

But change is under way. In the 21st century the old, long-held horizontal perceptions of the Book of Mormon are being undermined and replaced by vertical truths found in the actual contents of the book. In addition to the work of FARMS scholars, two recent books authored by nationally respected scholars who also happen to be faithful Latter-day Saints and published by prestigious publishing houses have recently reached beyond Mormon readership to a general audience and are aiding in correcting the inaccurate and negative impressions of the Book of Mormon promulgated by earlier writers.

**Richard L. Bushman, American Historian**

Richard L. Bushman, whose biography of Joseph Smith is expected to appear in 2005, is now emeritus professor of history at Columbia University and is a former Latter-day Saint bishop and stake president. In *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (1984), published by the University of Illinois Press, Bushman heralds a new era of Book of Mormon scholarship by summarizing, then refuting, one by one, the arguments of Abner Cole, Alexander Campbell, and E. D. Howe. Bushman points out that they failed to ground their views in the actual contents of the Book of Mormon, ignored the work’s complexity, and thus reached “unstable, even ephemeral”⁷⁷ conclusions.

His close examination of the various theories of the origins and authorship of the book concludes, on the basis of internal literary analysis, that “only limited portions” of the events in the book “were intelligible as expressions of American culture,” and he demonstrates that the methods of such history hunters as Brodie, O’Dea, and, I add, Remini “necessarily obscured differences between American and Book of Mormon culture”⁷⁸ in order to make their theories plausible. Likewise, Bushman’s close comparison of Ethan Smith’s *View of the Hebrews* (which critics claim to be a possible source used by Joseph Smith in writing the Book of Mormon) with the Book of Mormon text shows that “almost everything Ethan Smith undertook to prove in his book “the Book of Mormon disproved or disregarded.”⁷⁹ Bushman’s refutation of the cherished theories of 19th- and 20th-century disparagers of the Book of Mormon must in the future be dealt with by any scholar entering the arena. His landmark study heralds a fin-de-siècle shift in serious Book of Mormon scholarship that reaches beyond Mormon readership and bodes well for future Book of Mormon studies and an eventual change in the popular perception of the book.

**Terryl L. Givens, Scholarly Apologist**

Terryl L. Givens, professor of English at the University of Richmond, Virginia, and a Latter-day Saint bishop, dramatically underscored that shift in *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (2002), published by Oxford University Press. In this handbook to the Book of Mormon, Givens has written what reviewer Jana Riess calls an “eloquent, . . . balanced and gentle apologia for the Book of Mormon as an ancient document.”⁸⁰ Accepting at face value the spiritual claims of the book, Givens carefully studies, examines, explains, clarifies, and convincingly binds into this important volume virtually every idea, thread, and concern of non-Mormon and Mormon scholars regarding the Book of Mormon.

*By the Hand of Mormon* looks at the reception of the book in the 19th century, undertakes a close literary analysis of the book, reviews and refutes (following Bushman) claims of 19th-century cul-
tural influences on the book, considers other theories critical of the book, and provides the best history to date of the search for archaeological and anthropological evidences of Book of Mormon peoples and cultures. Perhaps his most important contribution to public perception of the Book of Mormon is his study, in chapter 8, of the role and nature of revelation as depicted in the book. Labeling as “dialogic revelation” the communication between God and man via inquiry and answer—the form of revelation most often found in the book—Givens asserts that the great contribution of the Book of Mormon to religious thought is “the insistent message that revelation is the province of every man.” While “the redemptive role of Jesus Christ is the central tenet of which the Book of Mormon testifies,” and while the book “was a template for early church organization,” the Book of Mormon’s greatest continuing appeal is that it vividly illustrates and teaches the reality of personal revelation. By paying as “much attention to the mode as to the object of revelation,” the book becomes “a model for the how, who, and what of revelation.”

By the Hand of Mormon must become for any future scholars the point of entry into Book of Mormon studies. While leading Book of Mormon scholarship into the 21st century, Givens’s book will go far toward putting to rest the mistaken theories about the book’s authorship; correcting misleading impressions of the Book of Mormon that have become embedded in the popular imagination by 19th-century and later writers; and, at last, balancing Moroni’s prophecy to Joseph Smith that his name, the church he restored, and the Book of Mormon “should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues.” Evil has had its day; it is high time for the Good!
IRONY
IN THE BOOK OF MORMON
— ROBERT A. REES —
Questions about the authorship of the Book of Mormon have occupied both naturalist and apologist critics since its publication in 1830. Various theorists have marshaled evidence to prove either that Joseph Smith or some other 19th-century American wrote the Book of Mormon or that it is an authentic ancient record. Discussions of authorship have focused on a number of issues—geography, philology, archaeology, anthropology, history, culture, literature, and theology. In an article entitled “Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon and the American Renaissance,” I compare Joseph Smith’s literary capabilities with those of his illustrative contemporary authors—Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, and Whitman.¹ There is a dramatic contrast between the rich intellectual and cultural milieu of these major American writers and the rather backwater, provincial frontier in which Joseph Smith came of age. In comparison to Joseph Smith, all of these major American writers had rich educations, exposure to established literary traditions, supportive environments, and long literary apprenticeships in which to develop their talents.

One example of dramatic irony is when Alma the Younger, who once was struck dumb by an angel for antagonizing the church (left), desires to “speak with the trump of God” and soon after must strike Korihor dumb with that very power (right). *The Convincing Power of God,* by Heather McClellan.
According to those who knew him best, Joseph Smith, at the time the Book of Mormon was published, had little formal education, was not deeply nor widely read, showed no proclivity for imaginative composition, and lacked the knowledge base, sophistication, and talent to produce a book as large and complex as the Book of Mormon. Further, when one considers the short time in which the book was produced and the difficulties in Joseph’s personal life during this period, it is simply incomprehensible to claim that he was the book’s author. As the interfaith scholar Marcus Bach observed many years ago, the Book of Mormon is as “solemn and ponderous and heavy as the plates on which it was inscribed. No Vermont schoolboy wrote this, and no Presbyterian preacher [Solomon Spaulding] tinkered with these pages.” ³ Moreover, as I state in my aforementioned article, I contend that not only was the composition of the Book of Mormon far beyond Joseph Smith’s capabilities, but that he was, in fact, unaware of the subtleties and complexities of the text. There is surely no evidence that he knew anything about writing intricate parallel literary structures or creating a wide range of characters, a complicated fictional plot, or a variety of styles. . . There are simply too many things in the book that neither Joseph Smith nor any of his contemporaries could possibly have known; too many complexities, subtleties, and intricacies in the text that were beyond his or any of his contemporaries’ capabilities; too many examples of spiritual depth and profound expression that were certainly beyond his cognitive or expressive abilities when the Book of Mormon was produced.⁴

Irony is a characteristic of the Book of Mormon that adds a further dimension of complexity to the narrative structure of the text. I view its subtle presence therein as one more clue among many others that Joseph Smith did not write the book. By all accounts, he was unlettered and thus incapable of authoring a narrative so rich, varied, and complex as the Book of Mormon. In this article I analyze several passages in terms of irony. But first some important background information and definitions are in order.

The Elusive Nature of Irony

Irony has been an indelible part of Western literature and culture from ancient times to the present. Irony abounds in the Bible and was one of the main characteristics of Greek drama, from which it derives its name (eiron, “dissembler”). It is a feature not only of our literature but also of our lives. Indeed, in many ways we live in an ironical age, something that the young critic Jedediah Purdy laments in his recent book, For Common Things: Irony, Trust, and Commitment in America Today.⁵

Defining irony is a complex matter. In his Glossary of Literary Terms, M. H. Abrams lists nine categories and subcategories of irony, and the New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics identifies six categories of irony, the first of which has ten subcategories.⁶ For purposes of the overall discussion, however, we will focus on the two general kinds of literary irony: verbal and dramatic.

Both kinds of irony have largely defied simple definition or easy categorization. The late literary critic D. J. Enright observed, “It is unfortunate, it is even ironical, that for so ubiquitous and multifari-

We cannot use language maturely until we are spontaneously at home in irony.
—Kenneth Burke

Every good reader must be . . . sensitive in detecting and reconstructing ironic meanings.
—Wayne Booth²
ous and, some say, alluring a phenomenon there should be but one word.”⁷ In a similar vein, another authority, D. C. Muecke, noted, “Getting to grips with irony seems to have something in common with gathering the mist.”⁸

But since “gathering the mist” has never deterred literary critics, a number of them have attempted to define this elusive literary device. Suffice it to say, most literary critics agree that verbal irony has to do with levels of ambiguity and discrepancy, between what is said on the surface and what is meant below it. One dictionary defines it as involving a “perception of inconsistency, in which an apparently straightforward statement or event is undermined by its context so as to give it a very different significance.”⁹ The eminent literary critic Northrup Frye defines verbal irony as a “pattern of words that turns away from direct statement or its own obvious meaning.”¹⁰ The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics describes it as a form of speech in which “one meaning is stated and a different, usually antithetical, meaning is intended.”¹¹ Karl A. Plank summarizes “several recurring features” of verbal irony:

First, irony occurs through an indirect use of language and expresses a covert meaning. The meaning of ironic language lacks self-evidence and must be reconstructed by the reader. Second, the indirect use of language reflects a contrast between appearance and reality. In the ironic text things are not simply as they appear to be. Third, irony works through the introduction or implications of a second perspective from which the text’s “obvious meaning” can be reinterpreted. . . . Irony typically functions not to undermine a text’s meaningfulness, but to give access to it by indicating the vantage point from which the text’s full meaning can be perceived.¹²

As with verbal irony, dramatic irony defies simple definition or explanation. Dramatic irony takes place within the action and character development of the narrative. Like verbal irony, it deals with indirectness, contrast between appearance and reality, and tension between surface and subsurface levels of narrative action. Dramatic irony also involves the reader in sharing with the author certain information, knowledge, or a point of view of which the character(s) may be unaware or ignorant. In dramatic irony, “the audience knows more about a character’s situation than the character does, foreseeing an outcome contrary to the character’s expectations, and thus ascribing a sharply different sense to some of the character’s own statements.”¹³ For purposes of this discussion, I will use Muecke’s explanation of the “three essential elements” in dramatic irony:

In the first place irony is a double-layered or two-storey phenomenon.

In the second place there is always some kind of opposition between the two levels, an opposition that may take the form of contradiction, incongruity, or incompatibility.

In the third place there is in irony an element of “innocence”; either a victim is confidently unaware of the very possibility of there being an upper level or point of view that invalidates his own, or an ironist pretends not to be aware of it.¹⁴

Both verbal and dramatic irony abound in the Book of Mormon. In some instances both exist in the same narrative episode. The presence of dramatic and verbal irony in the Book of Mormon is reflective of biblical irony.¹⁵

Irony in the Bible

A familiar kind of dramatic irony in the Bible is the presentation of a person who is first shown to be weak or foolish and then, after being touched by God, is transformed into an extraordinary person. An example of this from the Old Testament is Abraham, who in Genesis 17 does not simply find amusing God’s declaration that he and Sarah shall have a child, but he is so incredulous that he falls “upon his face” and laughs (Genesis 17:17). Later, after his son Isaac is miraculously born, God tests Abraham’s faith by asking him to sacrifice his child on an altar. This request is made all the more challenging and ironic by the fact that earlier God had (1) commanded Abraham to leave his father’s people because they were sacrificing children and even threatening to sacrifice Abraham himself and (2) promised Abraham numerous posterity through Isaac (see Abraham 1:5–16; Genesis 17:15–16). Later, after his son Isaac is miraculously born, God tests Abraham’s faith by asking him to sacrifice his child on an altar. This request is made all the more challenging and ironic by the fact that earlier God had (1) commanded Abraham to leave his father’s people because they were sacrificing children and even threatening to sacrifice Abraham himself and (2) promised Abraham numerous posterity through Isaac (see Abraham 1:5–16; Genesis 17:15–16). Ironies abound in this story. He who lacked the faith to believe that God could bless Sarah to bear a son becomes known as “the father of the
faithful”; he who laughed at God becomes God’s trusted friend and chosen prophet; he who could not conceive of God’s blessing him with offspring is promised that through his seed “shall all the nations of the earth be blessed”; and he who was willing to sacrifice his only son becomes known as the father of nations and is promised that through his lineage God’s only begotten son (who would himself be sacrificed for the sins of the world) would be born and that his (Abraham’s) seed would be as numerous “as the stars in the heavens, and the sand which is upon the sea shore” (Genesis 22:17–18).

An example of dramatic and verbal irony in the New Testament is the story of Peter’s denial of Jesus. Just before they go to Gethsemane, Christ tells Peter, “This night before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.” Peter swears to Christ, “Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. . . . Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee” (Matthew 26:33–35). The ironic ending of the drama is established first by Christ’s predicting that before this very night is over, Peter will deny him not once but three times, and second by Peter’s avowing that even though everyone in the world should deny Christ, he would never deny the Savior, even if it costs him his life.

A few short hours later, on three successive occasions, the last spoken with curses and swearing, Peter denies any knowledge of curses and disavows any association with him (“I know not the man,” Matthew 26:74). Immediately thereafter Peter hears the crowing of the cock (a symbol of vigilance, illumination, and resurrection) and is stunned by the dramatic discrepancy between his boasting of complete fidelity to Christ and his betrayal of him. It is ironic that this same inconstant, impetuous fisherman, who in this moment of danger chooses self-preservation over loyalty to his Lord, becomes Christ’s chief apostle, stands in Christ’s stead as the head of the church, and, according to Christian tradition, is crucified upside down in Rome when things fall apart and anarchy is unloosed upon the kingdom. Ironically, Peter’s last act is indeed a fulfillment of his promise not to deny Christ, though it cost him his life.

Dramatic Irony in the Book of Mormon

There are vivid examples of this kind of dramatic irony in the Book of Mormon. In fact, the story of Nephi, the first major Book of Mormon character, epitomizes biblical irony.¹⁶

Nephi: From Youth to Manhood

It is significant that when we first meet Nephi he tells us that although he is “large in stature,” he is “exceeding young” (1 Nephi 2:16). His being not just young but exceeding young suggests, among other things, that he is immature. At the beginning of the narrative, Nephi seems like the archetypal super-righteous younger brother. He is quick to show his older brothers as rebellious and lazy while presenting himself as having “great desires to know of the mysteries of God” and as one who “did not rebel against [his father] like unto [his] brothers” (v. 16). In these opening chapters we might be tempted to ask, “Are Laman and Lemuel really that bad, and is Nephi really that good?” At the very least, we may sympathize a little with Laman and Lemuel in having to contend with such a younger brother.

Nephi is then presented with a defining challenge, one that marks his transition from boyhood to manhood—the trip to Jerusalem to retrieve the brass plates. To this point we have been told only by Nephi of differences between the two older brothers and their younger sibling Sam. Now we see those differences played out in dramatic fashion. Laman and Lemuel do not want to undertake this mission and throughout the episode are basically hindrances to it. Nephi must continually encourage them. One of the results of the trip to Jerusalem is that whatever sympathy we may have felt for Laman and Lemuel up to this point (and I think we are intended to feel some) melts in the face of their continual resistance and negativity and their refusal to show any courage, faith, or leadership.

Nephi, on the other hand, goes forth in faith to do what his father has asked. “Not knowing beforehand” exactly what steps he should take to obtain the plates, Nephi is guided by the Spirit (1 Nephi 4:6). When he comes upon the drunken Laban, what seems to immediately seize his attention is not that this is the very means of fulfilling his mission, but what no typical Hebrew teenager could have failed to miss: “I beheld his sword.” And he doesn’t just behold it: “I drew it forth from the sheath thereof; and the hilt thereof was of pure gold, and the workmanship thereof was exceeding fine, and I saw that the blade thereof was of the most precious
steel” (v. 9). In other words, having described himself as “exceeding young,” Nephi now acts the part. Every teenage boy of his time dreamed of holding such a sword. The detail he reveals in recounting the experience many years later shows how fresh the image of that sword still is.

That this scene is deliberately chosen to highlight irony is seen by what immediately follows. While Nephi is still holding the sword, the Spirit commands him to slay Laban, the keeper of the sacred records and, not incidentally, his kinsman. This is the most difficult challenge Nephi ever faces, and it changes him and, I believe, changes the way we are expected to see him. It is perhaps impossible for modern readers, who live in a world where murder and violence are so prevalent, to comprehend the magnitude of what Nephi is commanded to do. The law that Moses brought down from the mountain was unequivocal: “Thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20:13). To take another’s life was among the most serious of transgressions in Hebrew culture. Nephi says, “Never at any time have I shed the blood of man. And I shrank and would that I might not slay him” (1 Nephi 4:10).

The Spirit tries to persuade Nephi that “the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands.” Nephi begins trying to talk himself into committing the deed, building up arguments gradually as he gains courage: “Yea, and I also knew that he had sought to take away mine own life; yea, and he would not hearken unto the commandments of the Lord; and he also had taken away our property” (v. 11). The Spirit seems to become impatient with Nephi’s reluctance and demands outright, “Slay him!” Nephi continues to multiply the reasons why he should obey and finally reports that he “took Laban by the hair of his head, and . . . smote off his head with his own sword” (v. 18). This episode accomplishes exactly what Edwin M. Good, in his *Irony in the Old Testament*, speaks of as the point of irony: clarifying “with extreme sharpness the incongruity involved in a matter of great moment.”

Having passed this test, Nephi records, “And now I, Nephi, being a man large in stature, and also having received much strength of the Lord . . . ” (v. 31). The irony of Nephi’s going so quickly from being “exceeding young, . . . large in stature” to “being a man large in stature” would not have been lost on ancient readers of this text. The repetition of the phrase *large in stature* in those passages highlights the irony.
Abinadi: Foreshadowing King Noah’s Demise

We encounter a similar kind of dramatic irony in the story of Abinadi. We are introduced to Abinadi in the 11th chapter of Mosiah where he calls King Noah and his corrupt priests to repentance: “There was a man among them whose name was Abinadi; and he went forth among them, and began to prophesy” (v. 20). Like Jeremiah who resisted his calling (see Jeremiah 1:6), Abinadi seems to be a reluctant prophet; at least he makes clear to his hearers that calling them to repentance is not his idea, but God’s. Note the apparent anxiety in his words as reflected in the triple repetition of “thus saith the Lord,” making it clear to his hearers that all the responsibility for this unpopular task falls on the Lord, not Abinadi: “Behold, thus saith the Lord, and thus hath he commanded me, saying, Go forth, and say unto this people, thus saith the Lord . . . ; and thus saith the Lord, and thus hath he commanded me” (vv. 20, 25).

King Noah responds with the kind of hubris that is often a prelude to irony in both Hebrew scripture and Greek drama: “Who is Abinadi, that I and my people should be judged of him, or who is the Lord, that shall bring upon my people such great affliction?” (v. 27). Such pride is almost always an ironic foreshadowing of dramatic downfall, and its presentation early in the story prepares us for the reversal of fortune that King Noah and his retainers will undergo later in the narrative. The irony of King Noah’s prideful downfall is heightened by our being told that he has built “elegant and spacious buildings” (v. 8) like those that Lehi saw the wicked inhabiting in his dream; that he has built “a very high tower, even so high that he could stand upon the top thereof and overlook . . . all the land round about” (v. 12); and that he boasts, “Behold, we are strong, we shall not come into bondage, or be taken captive by our enemies” (12:15).

Offended by Abinadi’s words, King Noah calls for his death: “I command you to bring Abinadi hither, that I may slay him” (11:28). Learning of Noah’s intention, Abinadi apparently flees for his life, and “the Lord delivered him out of their hands” (v. 26). Again suggesting his reluctance to take on his prophetic calling, he stays away for two years, enough time for him to disguise himself so he will not be recognized: “And it came to pass that after the space of two years that Abinadi came among them in disguise, that they knew him not” (12:1). Then, again in a manner typical of Hebrew drama, the writer reveals Abinadi’s foolishness, for no sooner does he open his mouth than he gives away his disguise: “Thus has the Lord commanded me, saying—Abinadi . . .” (v. 1).

Having disclosed his identity, Abinadi proceeds to preach the same message of doom and destruction as he had two years before, only this time he prophesies Noah’s death: “And it shall come to pass that the life of king Noah shall be valued even as a garment in a hot furnace; for he shall know that I am the Lord” (v. 3). This prophecy is ironic because it answers the king’s question, “Who is the Lord?” and foreshadows the death of the king.

In executing Abinadi, King Noah defied God’s authority and displayed a hubris that ironically foreshadowed his own dramatic downfall. Abinadi Seals His Testimony, by Ronald K. Crosby.
and his priests by fire. Not surprisingly, Abinadi’s preaching produces the same result as before: “They were angry with him; and they took him and carried him bound before the king” (v. 9).

King Noah asks his priests to advise him on what he should do with Abinadi. Seeking grounds for an accusation, they begin “to question [Abinadi], that they might cross him, that thereby they might have wherewith to accuse him” (v. 19). During their interrogation, the priests confront Abinadi with a difficult scripture from Isaiah, asking him to tell them what it means. Instead of answering them, however, he turns the tables on them and asks, “Are you priests, and pretend to teach this people, and to understand the spirit of prophesying, and yet desire to know of me what these things are?” (v. 25).

When the priests declare that they teach the law of Moses, Abinadi challenges their obedience to the Ten Commandments. After reciting only two commandments, he asks, “Have ye done all this?” (v. 37). It is interesting to note that while there is no evidence that Noah and his followers were making graven images, they were clearly guilty of breaking other of the Ten Commandments, which Abinadi does not cite on this occasion. Thus, it is difficult not to see irony in his question (“Have ye done all this?), especially since later Abinadi somehow gets a copy of the Ten Commandments and says, “Now I read unto you the remainder of the commandments of God” (13:11).

Having shown us a prophet who is reluctant to fulfill his calling, who readily gives away his disguise, and who apparently cannot remember the Ten Commandments, the author next shows Abinadi as a man of great courage and integrity who is willing to give his life in God’s service. When the priests attempt to take him to be killed, he addresses them with dignity and majesty: “Touch me not, for God shall smite you if ye lay your hands upon me” (v. 3). From this point on, Abinadi fully assumes the mantle of divinely appointed prophet. He preaches a powerful jeremiad to Noah and his corrupt priests. He confronts them about their lack of adherence to the law of Moses, quotes Isaiah to them, tells them the meaning of the scripture with which they had tried to confound him earlier, prophesies of Christ, teaches them the plan of salvation, and foretells their destruction—declaring that they will suffer the same death that they will cause him to suffer. “And now when the flames began to scorch him, he cried unto them, saying: Behold, even as ye have done unto me, . . . ye shall suffer, as I suffer, the pains of death by fire” (17:14–15, 18). Ironically, this is exactly what happens to Noah and his priests (see Alma 25:7–11).

An additional irony in the story of Abinadi, and one that seems to me to be intentional, is that as a reluctant spokesman for God, at times seemingly limited in judgment, Abinadi’s preaching, as far as the record tells us, converts only one person to the gospel. Yet that one person, Alma, turns out to be a man of great intellect and wisdom who is instrumental in turning the tide of Nephite history. Thus, in the hands of God, Abinadi fulfills his divinely appointed mission and at the apex of his prophetic calling is transformed: “his face [shines] with exceeding luster, even as Moses’ did while in the mount of Sinai” (Mosiah 13:5), and he preaches the gospel with power and clarity, revealing that even in chains he is more powerful than the king and all of his priests. This is exactly the kind of irony that one finds throughout the Hebrew scriptures, and its dramatic structure and exposition of character required a level of narrative artistry and rhetorical skill that Joseph Smith lacked at the time the Book of Mormon was produced and that is absent from any of his own later writings.

Alma the Younger and Korihor: The Power of Speech and Silence

Another example of dramatic irony is found in the story of Alma the Younger and Korihor. This dramatic episode is about two protagonists who are both gifted with persuasive speech and struck dumb when they set out to destroy the church. When we first meet Alma and Korihor (respectively, in Mosiah 27:8 and Alma 30:6), they are vigorously engaged in using their intellectual and verbal skills to undermine the work of God. We are told that Alma “was a man of many words, and did speak much flattery to the people; therefore he led many of the people to do after the manner of his iniquities.” When an angel appears to him and rebukes him with a voice of “thunder, which shook the earth,” Alma is struck “dumb that he could not open his mouth” (Mosiah 27:18, 19). After a harrowing darkness of soul that lasts for three days and three nights, Alma recovers and immediately begins to build up the kingdom with the same powers of eloquence and rhetoric that he once used to destroy it,
albeit they are now magnified by the Spirit so that he “speaks with the tongues of angels.”

Alma meets Korihor 16 years after this experience. It is ironic that his encounter with Korihor is immediately preceded by his wish to have the same power of language and speech of the angel who had called him to repentance: “O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people! Yea, I would declare unto every soul, as with the voice of thunder, repentance and the plan of redemption” (Alma 29:1–2).

Alma’s use of identical language and imagery to describe the person he would like to be and to describe the angel who rebuked him so many years before (“voice of thunder,” “shake the earth”) seems intentional. The narrator signals with this repetition his design to link the two experiences and to prepare the reader for the narrative of Korihor that immediately follows. Alma wishes for an angelic voice not for his own glory but so that he “may be an instrument in the hands of God to bring some soul to repentance” (Alma 30:9).

Ironically, no sooner has he spoken these words than he becomes this instrument in countering a man who, as Alma once had done, uses his voice for his own gain and glory. The seemingly intentional shift from Alma’s previous wish to “cry repentance unto every people” to his present wish to “bring some soul to repentance” prepares us for his encounter with Korihor.

The record tells us that Korihor was “Anti-Christ, for he began to preach unto the people against the prophecies which had been spoken by the prophets, concerning the coming of Christ” (v. 6). One can imagine that the sophisticated arguments that Korihor crafts to persuade people to disbelieve were similar to those used by Alma as he went about attempting to destroy the church. Korihor defends his atheistic philosophy with smooth rhetorical arguments and “great swelling words” (v. 31): “God [is] a being who never has been seen or known, who never was nor ever will be” (v. 28).

When Korihor is brought before Alma, who is now the retired chief judge, Alma confronts him with his hypocrisy: “Behold, I know that thou believest [in God and that Christ shall come], but thou art possessed with a lying spirit, and ye have put off the Spirit of God that it may have no place in you” (v. 42).

Korihor declares he will not believe unless Alma shows him a sign. After trying fruitlessly to persuade Korihor to accept the signs that have already been shown him (for Alma has his own vivid memory of the cost of receiving such a sign!), Alma uses the very sign that had been shown him when he was rebellious: “This will I give unto thee for a sign, that thou shalt be struck dumb, according to my words; . . . that ye shall no more have utterance” (v. 49). It is ironic that Alma, who was once rendered powerless by this sign, now has the power to invoke it: “I say, that in the name of God, ye shall be struck dumb, that ye shall no more have utterance” (v. 49).

Ironically, as he once led people away from the church by his words, Korihor now inadvertently leads them back by his silence. When all the people “who had believed in the words of Korihor” (v. 57) see him wordless in Zarahemla, “they [are] all converted again unto the Lord” (v. 58). The irony is compounded when Korihor, a once-powerful man who earned his living by sophistry and flattery, is reduced to begging: “Korihor . . . went about from house to house begging for his food” (v. 56). An ironic twist, and again one that is characteristic of biblical irony, is the suggestion that Korihor’s death comes as a result of his having no voice to cry out when a mob or a carriage approached, for he was “run upon and trodden down, even until he was dead” (v. 59).

A final irony is that Korihor was trodden down and killed while among the Zoramites—because, as Alma 31 shows, the Zoramites essentially were followers of Korihor who lived and believed what he had taught. Thus he was killed by one (or, by implication in the passage, a community) of his own. Notice the parallels here: Korihor reviled “against the priests and teachers, accusing them of leading away the people after the silly traditions of their fathers” (Alma 30:31), saying: “Ye also say that Christ shall come. But behold, I say that ye do not know that there shall
be a Christ. And ye say also that he shall be slain for the sins of the world—and thus ye lead away this people after the foolish traditions of your fathers” (vv. 26–27). These sentiments are repeated almost immediately in the standardized prayer of the Zoramites: “Holy God, . . . thou hast made it known unto us that there shall be no Christ. . . . We also thank thee that thou hast elected us, that we may not be led away after the foolish traditions of our brethren, which doth bind them down to a belief of Christ” (Alma 31:16–17). Of course, the isolation and intellectual elevation of the Zoramites on their Rameumptom tower (likely patterned after the “very high tower” that King Noah had built), which was “a place for standing, which was high above the head, and the top thereof would only admit one person” (v. 13), is a powerful way of symbolizing hubris.¹⁹

As with similar incidents in the Old Testament, the message is driven home with a final homiletic: “Thus we see the end of him [Korihor] who perverteth the ways of the Lord; and thus we see that the devil will not support his children at the last day, but doth speedily drag them down to hell” (Alma 30:60).

Verbal Irony in the Book of Mormon

In terms of verbal irony, the Nephite text contains examples of most forms of verbal irony distinguished by classical rhetoricians, as outlined in the New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, including—“meiosis and litotes (understatement), hyperbole (overstatement), antiphrasis (contrast), . . . chleuasm (mockery); mycterism (the sneer); and mimesis (imitation, especially for the sake of ridicule).”²⁰

Nephi: Fulfilling Lehi’s Hopes for Laman and Lemuel

We encounter verbal irony very early in the Nephite narrative when Lehi’s family, after having left Jerusalem, is camped in a fertile valley. Here Lehi expresses his hope that Laman will be like a river, “continually running into the fountain of all righteousness,” and Lemuel like a valley, “firm and steadfast, and immovable in keeping the commandments of the Lord” (1 Nephi 2:9–10). Since the record of the group’s Arabian desert crossing was made later by Nephi, he would have known that these descriptions did not fit his older brothers; but the first-time reader does not yet have enough information to see that such associations are ironic. Thus Nephi sets up an expectation that his narrative will soon overturn.

Indeed, as the narrative unfolds, we see that Laman seems to be continually running away from “the fountain of all righteousness,” and Lemuel is so inconstant in “keeping the commandments of the Lord” that he is more like a shifting sand dune than a steadfast valley. The irony is deepened when we realize that Laman and Lemuel begin acting contrary to their father’s counsel even before they leave this river valley that he hopes will symbolically guide their behavior. A further ironic element is that as the narrative unfolds, it is Nephi (the younger brother who apparently is left out of his father’s symbolic invocations) who becomes as constant as a flowing river and as steadfast and immovable as a valley. Thus Nephi, as a conscious narrator, uses verbal irony in these initial episodes to establish the dramatic conflict between him and his brothers that will dominate his people’s history.

Nephi and His Elder Brothers: Knowledge versus False Knowledge

As this example illustrates, verbal irony consists of at least two levels of meaning, one of which is antithetical or contradictory to the first. With verbal irony, the meaning of a word can change from its initial meaning to a new, even opposite meaning later on. An example of this is found in 1 Nephi 16 and 17, where the sibling rivalry between Nephi and his two older brothers reaches one of its many dramatic climaxes. Like earlier and later episodes of fraternal conflict in the book, this one is about power, but it is also about epistemology, about what one knows and doesn’t know. The irony one finds in this episode is actually set up earlier with the emphasis
on the word know. In 1 Nephi 3:17, Nephi tells us that his father, Lehi, “knew that Jerusalem must be destroyed.” In 1 Nephi 4:3, Nephi tries to inspire Laman and Lemuel to go up to Jerusalem and get the brass plates by invoking the story of Moses’ delivering the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage through the Red Sea: “Now behold ye know that this is true; and ye also know that an angel hath spoken unto you; wherefore can ye doubt?”

Knowing how much their hearts are set upon the riches the family left in Jerusalem, Nephi testifies to his brothers of the destruction of the city: “And ye shall know at some future period that the word of the Lord shall be fulfilled concerning the destruction of Jerusalem” (1 Nephi 7:13). All this is a prelude to the episode in chapters 16 and 17 where the words knew and know are repeated numerous times. In 1 Nephi 16:38, Laman and Lemuel state declaratively of Nephi’s claims that the Lord has spoken to him, “We know that he lies.” Later, when Nephi tries to engage their help in building a ship, they verbally attack him by saying, “We knew that you could not construct a ship, for we knew that ye were lacking in judgment” (1 Nephi 17:19). Laman and Lemuel blame Nephi for their suffering in the wilderness and complain that had they stayed in Jerusalem, “we might have enjoyed our possessions and the land of our inheritance; yea, and we might have been happy” (v. 21).

The older brothers next state as knowledge something they know is false: “And we know that the people who were in the land of Jerusalem were a righteous people; for they kept the statutes and judgments of the Lord, and all his commandments, according to the law of Moses; wherefore, we know that they are a righteous people” (v. 22). Since they have invoked the name of Israel’s great leader, Nephi recounts the story of Moses and the exodus from Egypt to confront them with their mistaken “knowledge.” He does this with a highly sophisticated use of verbal irony. That is, he states what he knows they cannot deny in order to show that what they say they know is false:

Now ye know that the children of Israel were in bondage; and ye know that they were laden with tasks, which were grievous to be borne; wherefore, ye know that it must needs be a good thing for them, that they should be brought out of bondage. Now ye know that Moses was commanded of the Lord to do that great work; and ye know that by his word the waters of the Red Sea were divided hither and thither, and they passed through on dry ground. But ye know that the Egyptians were drowned in the Red Sea, who were the armies of Pharaoh. And ye also know that they were fed with manna in the wilderness. Yea, and ye also know that Moses, by his word according to the power of God which was in him, smote the rock, and there came forth water, that the children of Israel might quench their thirst. . . . And they did harden their hearts from time to time, and they did revile against Moses, and also against God; nevertheless, ye know that they were led forth by his matchless power into the land of promise. . . . And ye also know that by the power of his almighty word he can cause the earth that it shall pass away; yea, and ye know that by his word he can cause the rough places to be made smooth, and smooth places shall be broken up.

O, then, why is it, that ye can be so hard in your hearts? (1 Nephi 17:25–29, 42, 46)

In this short compass, Nephi repeats the word know 11 times. With wonderful irony, he uses the word know with regard to himself only twice, in the middle of his rejoinder: “And now, after all these things, the time has come that they [the Jews at Jerusalem] have become wicked, yea, nearly unto ripeness; and I know not but they are at this day about to be destroyed; for I know that the day must surely come that they must be destroyed” (v. 43). Note that Nephi states the negative before the positive, showing that, unlike his brothers, he does not claim knowledge that he does not possess, but also that the knowledge he does have is based on revelation. In this same episode, the Lord tells Nephi that he “shall know” things that God promises will happen. Later, Nephi learns from his father’s vision that Jerusalem has indeed been destroyed (2 Nephi 1:4).

This episode ends on another point of irony. For a brief period, Nephi has such great power that his brothers realize he could kill them merely by touching them. The Lord then commands Nephi to stretch forth his hand and shock them. Laman and Lemuel then use the word know honestly for the first time: “We know of a surety that the Lord is with thee, for we know that it is the power of the Lord that has shaken us” (1 Nephi 17:55).
What Nephi is doing, of course, is confronting his brothers with truth that no Israelite could deny: the miraculous deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, their rebellion against God, and their eventual arrival in the promised land. He then uses this great defining moment in Israelite history to parallel the Nephites’ sojourn in the Arabian desert and their voyage to their own promised land. By employing the words know/knew 22 times in this short passage, Nephi dramatically demonstrates the difference between the ways that he and his brothers operate in the world (they are dishonest or, at best, manipulative, while he always acts with integrity) and also helps the reader see that this small episode is in reality a microcosm of the entire Book of Mormon narrative. This episode foreshadows several later accounts of contests between a righteous man who testifies of what he truly knows and a false testifier who says he knows things that he does not know (see especially the conflicts between Gideon and Nehor, Alma and Korihor, Amulek and Zeezrom, and Alma and Amlici—all in the book of Alma).

The Question of Intentional Irony

I contend that such writing as a whole is neither accidental nor subconscious but rather the product of a highly sophisticated, creative, organizing intelligence, one steeped not only in the literature and history of the ancient Hebrews but also in their cultural psychology as well. In the above scene, Nephi knows exactly how to position himself. As he did when he and his brothers first returned to Jerusalem to obtain the brass plates, in this scene he invokes Moses and the exodus from Egypt. By so doing, he completely neutralizes his brothers’ assertions of what they “know.” They could not have failed to get the message that the Jews at Jerusalem, like the Egyptians, would be destroyed, just as Laman and Lemuel would be if they continued in their rebellious ways; that Nephi was another Moses; and that the God who delivered their ancestors through the perils of the Red Sea and carried them over the River Jordan would take them down to the sea in a ship of their own building and take them to their own land of promise.

As pointed out earlier, the Book of Mormon is replete with both verbal and dramatic irony. What is the source of all this irony? As I said in the beginning, there is little evidence that Joseph Smith was an ironist; certainly there is no evidence that he had the rhetorical or expressive skills necessary to produce the rich variety of irony one finds in the book he claims to have translated. D. C. Muecke observed, “An ironist, therefore, is not just like an artist, but is an artist, governed by the artist’s need for perfection of form and expression and all ‘the nameless graces which no methods teach.’” ²¹ I contend that this kind of irony cannot be explained as the result of unconscious genius, absorption of biblical texts, or automatic writing. The most logical explanation is that the ancient writers of the Book of Mormon were writing in an ironic tradition that was part of their literary heritage. That they produced such wonderful examples of biblical irony should not be surprising. For Joseph Smith to have written these narratives, especially from unrehearsed and unrevised oral dictation, is simply beyond credibility. In fact, it is ironic that someone as unlettered and unsophisticated as Joseph Smith was when the Book of Mormon was published could be credited with being a superb ironist!

As someone who has studied, written about, and taught ironic texts for the past 35 years, I am aware that when we discuss irony we are necessarily dealing with matters of perception and interpretation. And yet I cannot escape the fact that the elements of irony I have discussed in the Book of Mormon are at least plausibly imbedded in the text. It is always possible to read too much or too little into a text, and certainly critics may disagree about what a particular text means. Nevertheless, the evidence is for me overwhelming that someone made a number of deliberate, highly sophisticated decisions in arranging the detail and structure of these narratives. How can one account for their presence in the text? Of the various possible explanations, both naturalistic and supernaturalistic, the most plausible for me is not that they were written by Joseph Smith or one of his contemporaries, not that they are the freely composed oral dictations of some “in-glorious Milton” living on the edge of the American frontier, but rather that they are what they claim to be—authentic ancient stories written in the manner and style reflective of Hebrew and other Near Eastern influences.
The Book of Mormon is a masterpiece of literature comparable to the Bible in the richness of its literary styles and expressions. This judgment, however, depends on an appeal to the standards of Hebrew literature, not 19th-century English literature. Ethelbert W. Bullinger found more than 200 different figures of speech in the Bible,¹ and Latter-day Saint scholars are now identifying many of these within the Book of Mormon.² Additional literary forms that can be traced to ancient authors of the Near East are now being recognized by both Latter-day Saint and non–Latter-day Saint scholars.

One of the most significant literary forms found in the Bible consists of word pairs.³ These are variously referred to as parallel pairs, synonymous pairs, stock word pairs, standing pairs, fixed pairs, A-B pairs, and sound pairs.⁴ Professor Yitzhak Avishur of the University of Haifa defined word pairs as

WORD | PAIRS

AND DISTINCTIVE COMBINATIONS IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

—JAMES T. DUKE—

³ Some of the word pairs identified in the Book of Mormon include:

- Body: soul, body
- Hunger: thirst, hunger
- Spiritual: temporal
- Justice: lost, fallen
- Oaths: covenants
- Faith: repentance
- Wars: contentions
- Great: marvelous
- Prophecy: revelation
- Power: authority
- Signs: wonders
- Soul: thirst
- Temporal: spiritual
- Mercy: justice
- Fallen: lost
- Covenants: oaths
- Repentance: faith
- Contentions: wars
- Marvelous: great
- Revelation: prophecy
- Authority: power
- Wonders: signs

⁴ Professor Yitzhak Avishur defined word pairs as:

A word pair is a set of two words that are closely related in meaning, often used together in a sentence or passage.
pairs of synonymous, antonymous, or heteronymous words, whose components are found in tandem as a result of mutual affinity . . . combined in one of the established and accepted modes of pairing that reflect coordination . . . between the components, and there must exist sufficient examples confirming its provenance. The usage of the pair must be repeated in well-defined and formulated stylistic phenomena; and not be a unique, single occurrence in a manner of casual affinity.⁵

Under that definition, a large number of word pairs also appear in the Book of Mormon. Moreover, substantial linkages tie these pairs to the language and culture of the Israelite people. Biblical studies of word pairs developed gradually as investigators have discovered more and more instances.⁶ We would expect that the study of word pairs in the Book of Mormon will also go forward as more and more scholars discover them. Previous studies of word pairs by Latter-day Saint scholars, discussed below, have introduced this subject and brought to light many word pairs, but obviously many more remain to be identified.

Assuming a standard of at least four occurrences, I have identified a total of 81 word pairs that arise at least four times each in the Book of Mormon. I also recognize 13 triplets (three complementary words) occurring four times each, with another five triplets appearing three times. There are also 11 quadruplets (four complementary words) used at least two times each. In addition, there are 40 larger groups, called literary lists, of more than four words. I also want to review three other types of word groups: combinations of (1) adjectives and nouns (7 instances), (2) verbs and nouns (13 instances), and (3) prepositional phrases (17 instances). I also discuss the possible purposes or literary functions of these word combinations. The purpose of this analysis is to underscore the observation that the Book of Mormon is an authentic record of an ancient civilization whose roots were based in the language customs of the Israelite people.

**Word Combinations in Ancient Israel**

It is widely known that Israelite and other Canaanite peoples frequently employed standard, formulaic combinations of two words.⁷ In comparing Ugaritic and Hebrew poetry, language experts found many pairs of words that occurred in both languages. Building on the work of previous scholars, Mitchell Dahood published in 1972 a list of 609 word pairs found in both languages. He added 66 more in 1975 and 344 in 1981.⁸ Adele Berlin concluded that

“There existed a stock of fixed word pairs which belonged to the literary tradition of Israel and Canaan, and poets [and prophets], specially trained in their craft, drew on this stock to aid in the . . . composition of parallel lines . . . That leaves us with the notion of a stock of fixed pairs—the poets’ dictionary, as it has been called. . . . This stock of pairs, once numbering a few dozen, is now over a thousand and still growing.”⁹

Berlin called the discovery and analysis of word pairs “one of the major achievements of modern Biblical research.”¹⁰ This study gained a great boost with the discovery of Ugaritic texts in the 1930s¹¹ and the comparison of these texts with Hebrew literature. But we must acknowledge that there is still a dearth of manuscripts of ancient date, so it is difficult to draw broad conclusions concerning literary conventions of these early cultures.
Calvert Watkins noted that what philologists call *formulas* are set word pairs that “make reference to culturally significant features—‘something that matters’—and it is this which accounts for their repetition and long-term preservation.”¹² For example, the word pair *goods and chattels* is a formula with at least a thousand-year history that is still repeated in English today.¹³ “The collection of such utterances, such formulaic phrases, is part of the poetic repertory of . . . individual . . . languages.”¹⁴

Literary scholar Inna Koskenniemi found the following word pairs that were developed in Old English but have become standard in modern English: *far/wide, part/parcel, honest/true, really/truly, lo/behold, words/deeds, and fame/fortune*.¹⁵ We might expect Joseph Smith to have employed such words if he were the author of the Book of Mormon. But they do not appear, thus lending support to the claim that the book is of ancient origin. The American people employ stock word combinations so frequently that they are commonplace and even trite in our language.

Many contemporary authors write two or more words or expressions with synonymous or complementary meanings. Such combinations usually appear only once in such authors’ works, and these simply reflect ordinary usage when an author seeks to expand the meaning of a word or idea by adding a synonym. At other times, however, the intent of the writer is more symbolic and poetic. Two complementary words can create a special effect in the minds and hearts of the readers, heighten emotion, and produce sayings that are more easily remembered. This is true of the alliterative expression *marvelous work and a wonder*. Many word pairs are stock components of a language, but many may be the creation of an author who writes a poetic pair of words to catch the attention of a hearer or reader. If a word pair occurs frequently in a language, it is likely a standard feature of that language and “less likely that the association of the two words in the pair is mere coincidence,” according to Barney.¹⁶

**Word Pairs in the Bible**

Many words in the scriptures occur in pairs, such as *gold/silver and eat/drink*. Such word pairs are typical of Hebrew literary usage,¹⁷ but many occur in other languages and cultures as well.¹⁸ Watson argued that in the Hebrew language and culture, many word pairs were “ready-made and already existing in tradition.” Word pairs, he contended, were “handed down through tradition and known to both poet and audience.” For example, Watson compared the Hebrew language to the classical language of Greece and noted that word pairs appear frequently in Homer.¹⁹ Word pairs among ancient peoples were important in oral communications, especially sermons.

It would be difficult to imagine a society without words for *up/down, in/out, male/female, hot/cold, father/mother*, and many other combinations. However, some combinations are more unusual and less obvious, such as *honey/oil and David/son of Jesse*. Watson also noted that the A-word (the word in the first parallel phrase) is more common and important, whereas the B-word (the word in the second phrase) may be more varied and perhaps archaic.

**Formats for Word Pairs**

In the Bible, word pairs typically are found in two different formats: parallel pairs and conjoined pairs.

**Parallel Pairs.** Most word pairs in the Bible occur in parallel constructions, with the A-word in the first parallel line and the B-word in the second parallel line. Watson and most other biblical scholars argued that one of the important criteria for
identifying a word pair is that the two words occur in parallel lines, such as

like snow in summer,
and like rain at harvest. (Proverbs 26:1; emphasis added)²⁰

**Conjoined Pairs.** A second format, which is more common than parallel pairs in the Book of Mormon, features two words connected with a conjunction such as and, as in gold and silver. I call these conjoined pairs. They display a different type of parallelism—both words are adjacent to each other and appear on the same line. As we examine biblical usage more closely, we note that conjoined pairs also occur frequently in the Bible. This type of parallelism is more obvious than general pairs but also less noticed by biblical scholars.²¹ The pair good/evil, for example, is used 40 times in a parallel construction in the Bible, and only 17 times in conjoined constructions, whereas good/evil presents itself 25 times in parallel constructions in the Book of Mormon and 24 times in conjoined constructions.

**Types of Word Pairs**

Watson’s classification of word pairs is more extensive than other classification systems. I will discuss only the four most important types here:²²

- **Synonymous** (“components are synonyms or near-synonyms and therefore almost interchangeable”). Examples include flocks/herds, sins/iniquities, prophecy/revelation, and wicked/perverse.
- **Antithetical**²⁴ (words with opposite meaning). Examples include heaven/earth, night/day, quick/slow, temporally/spiritually, and first/last.
- **Correlative** (both words indicate examples of the same category).²⁵ Examples include blind/lame, gold/silver, eat/drink, fear/tremble, and broken heart/contrite spirit.
- **Figurative** (poetic words or phrases). Examples include great/abominable, plain/precious, and true/living.

**Extended Word Combinations**

In addition to word pairs, biblical scholars have observed the occurrence of three parallel words, which Avishur calls “triplets.”²⁶ Avishur also recognizes the existence of “quadruplets,” or four parallel words.²⁷ Five or more words or phrases may be referred to as “literary lists,” which Koskenniemi calls “word-groups,”²⁸ of which there are many instances in the Bible.²⁹ Donald Parry’s discussion of synonymia³⁰ identifies extended lists of synonymous words or expressions in the Book of Mormon. Thus, a significant literary form found in the Bible and in the Book of Mormon consists of combinations of three, four, or more words and phrases that are purposely arranged in parallel or conjoined formats.

**The Significance of Word Combinations**

What might be the literary or spiritual reasons for repetitive word pairs in the Bible and Book of Mormon? To be sure, the authors of the scriptures did not indicate that they were writing poetry, creating parallelistic patterns, or drawing on other literary forms and figures of speech. We are left to study these forms in an attempt to arrive at thoughtful conclusions about their literary impact. The following discussion suggests possible reasons behind the scriptural use of word pairs.

**Literary Functions.** Biblical and Book of Mormon authors took great care in constructing poems and sermons that feature figures of speech as well as theological teachings. One reason that prophets employed so many literary devices was to facilitate smooth, imaginative verse composition and so maintain the attention of a potentially critical audience. By using the technique of adding style, a set of traditional patterns and a measure of economy, the trained [prophet] is able to keep up the flow. . . . The listening [or reading] audience needs aids to attention, and assistance in following the movement of the [sermon or scripture]. . . . It must also be charmed by the familiar, yet aroused and captivated by the unexpected.³¹

Book of Mormon writers appealed to such literary patterns in order to enliven their expressions and to sway the minds and hearts of their readers.

Several word combinations are notable because they use alliteration (at least when they are translated into English). It is almost certain that in the original language of the people of the Book of
Mormon many more expressions were alliterative simply because there are many alliterative expressions in the Hebrew Old Testament. Examples appearing in the English translation of the Book of Mormon include work/wonder, weep/wailing, plain/precious, and life/light.

Other groupings have become notable, such as a broken heart/a contrite spirit, strait/narrow, wars/rumors of war, gall of bitterness/bonds of iniquity, carnal/sensual/devilish, weeping/wailing/gnashing of teeth, and the hardness of their hearts/the deafness of their ears/the blindness of their minds/the stiffness of their necks. Perhaps they have special meaning to us because we have read and spoken them many times.

Some expressions, such as great/abominable, are utilized by a single author only, in this case Nephi. Some combinations, such as great/marvelous and power/authority, are surprisingly frequent among virtually all Book of Mormon authors.

Echoes of the Law of Moses. The word pair statutes/judgments and the triplet judgments/statutes/commandments turn up frequently in both the Book of Mormon and the Old Testament and repeat the language of the law of Moses, especially in Deuteronomy. Ellis Rasmussen noted that Deuteronomy teaches that those who inherit a promised land do so on condition that they remain faithful to the Lord, pure in heart, generous to the poor, and devoted to God’s Law. In a formula that appears several times, the people are promised that they will receive blessings for obedience to God and punishment for disobedience (Deuteronomy 27:30). Book of Mormon prophets taught similar doctrines, and they also indicated that such principles were divinely given long before Moses.

The Book of Mormon also highlights the pairs that apply specifically to the law of Moses: oaths/covenants and performances/ordinances.

Theological Terms. Some word combinations carry special theological significance. This is true of justice/mercy, life/light, flesh/blood, and rock/salvation. Other expressions with theological significance for understanding the character of God include true/living God, life/light of the world, God of Abraham/God of Isaac/God of Jacob, in the name of the Father/and of the Son/and of the Holy Ghost, and for thine is the kingdom/and the power/and the glory.

Universals, or Merisms. Some word pairs or phrases are intended to be encompassing, universal statements. A merism is a linguistic term that points to a combination of two, three, or more words that stand for a larger, whole entity. For example, the combination head and foot not only identifies these two body parts but also signifies the whole body. Likewise, body and soul refers to the whole person. Examples in the Book of Mormon include nations/kindreds/tongues/peoples, yesterday/today/forever, power/might/majesty/dominion, and henceforth/forever. Some word combinations, such as heaven/earth, great/small, and good/evil, express opposites (antitheticals) but are also intended to project universal application.

Repetition. Some word combinations are significant simply because of their frequency. I assume that their repetition derives from their status as stock expressions in the language of the Nephites. The word pair gold/silver appears 43 times in the Book of Mormon and at least 153 times in the Old Testament. Other sayings arise frequently in the Book of Mormon, especially wickedness/abominations (42 times), great/marvelous (27 times), wars/contentions (27 times), and power/authority (26 times). Most modern authors would avoid such repetition in their writings, but biblical authors employed repetition frequently.

Mnemonic Function. Finally, word combinations serve to help listeners and readers remember ideas and doctrines. When the Book of Mormon prophets delivered sermons, they employed key phrases that were easily recognizable to listeners. The expression great/marvelous comes to mind as an example, but all frequent sayings served this function. Sermons on religious themes were an extremely important aspect of Nephite culture, and the organization of the Book of Mormon presents sermons alternating with historical narrative. Because some biblical and Book of Mormon expressions occur many times, some people may consider them to be trite. Other expressions employed only once or twice are notable because of their wonderful literary value. For example, we note the striking pair of expressions “the gulf of misery and endless wo” (Helaman 5:12). The prophets clothed the language of God in the language of their people, but they did so with great flair and literary significance.
Word Pairs in the Book of Mormon

While kneeling beside my father in family prayer, I often heard him pray for “the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted.” Only later did I realize my father was repeating a saying from the Book of Mormon (see Alma 1:27). Many other scriptural expressions combine words that have a poetic ring to them and are familiar to those of us who read the book frequently. Other examples include carnal/sensual/devilish, and nations/kindreds/tongues/peoples.

Many scriptural word combinations are familiar only within Latter-day Saint cultural circles. Members of the church today may communicate with other knowledgeable Latter-day Saints simply through the use of word combinations. For example, just saying the expression “great and abominable” carries a wealth of meaning to hearers who are familiar with the Book of Mormon, while leaving other people wondering about its meaning.

Kevin L. Barney and John A. Tvedtnes have both made major contributions to the study of word pairs and word groups in the Book of Mormon. Barney’s contribution was the first and most extended discussion, and its importance cannot be overestimated. Barney articulated a fundamental ambition: “For some time I have felt that an analysis as to whether word pairs exist in the Book of Mormon would provide an interesting test of the Book of Mormon’s authenticity.”³⁷ After an extended discussion of the use of word pairs by religious and nonreligious authors in the Near East, Barney identified 40 word pairs that are found in both the Book of Mormon and the Bible, with many also found in Canaanite languages.³⁸ He concluded that his list was not exhaustive, and he expected that “other scholars will be able to add to this list.”³⁹

Tvedtnes responded by identifying and discussing a number of other word groupings in the Book of Mormon. He recognized the existence of triplets and other clusters of four or more words, including firm/steadfast/immovable, old/young, bond/free, flocks/herds, and gold/silver/precious things, among others. He identified several types of lists, including a precious-metals word group, an implements-of-war word group, and an animal group.⁴⁰

In the remainder of this study, I propose additional word pairs that I found in the Book of Mormon and that I believe offer further support for the authenticity of that great book of scripture.

As noted earlier, Avishur argued that a word pair, to be accepted as a standard Hebrew deriva-tive, must not be a “single occurrence in a manner of casual affinity.”⁴¹ I have arbitrarily set four occurrences as the standard by which to judge if a pair is not likely a result of “casual affinity” and may therefore be regarded as a stock pair in the Nephite language. To my knowledge, biblical scholars have not established any standard number of occurrences in their analyses of word pairs.

I present the more extensively used word pairs in chart 1. The words sometimes appear in a different order or sentence format. For example, some pairs may be reversed so that vain and foolish becomes
foolish and vain. However, other pairs always stand in the same order, such as great and abominable and wives and concubines. Some pairs contain closely related words, and so I have combined, for example, spiritual/temporal with spiritually/temporally, and fast/pray with fasting/prayer.

In chart 1, the numbers in parentheses are the number of times each word pair appears in the Book of Mormon. (I have not included any of the word pairs identified by either Barney or Tvedtnes.) Most of these word pairs also can be found in either the Old or New Testaments in some form—that is, using the same root words but perhaps in a different arrangement.

Chart 1 reports 81 word pairs that occur at least four times in the Book of Mormon. In my notes I identify another 8 pairs used at least three times, and Dana M. Pike points to one other instance. I have not counted word pairs that appear infrequently (i.e., once or twice). Six pairs occur more than 20 times, with two used over 40 times. I should also note that I have not counted instances of word pairs quoted from Isaiah or Malachi by the authors of the Book of Mormon.

### Triplets

Triplets are three words or phrases with complementary though not identical meanings presented in a distinctive and poetic way. Usually the three words would not appear in a thesaurus as synonyms, so the term complementary is a more accurate characterization than synonymous. For example, the triplet grain/wine/oil appears in both the Bible and in the Ugaritic language, but these words could not accurately be called synonyms. When a writer presents three words or clauses together, they are even more conspicuous and remarkable than word pairs. I present these triplets
in chart 2. Occasionally, one of the words in these word combinations may be replaced with another word with similar meaning. Again, the numbers in parentheses identify the instances in the Book of Mormon.  

**CHART 2: TRIPLETS FOUND IN THE BOOK OF MORMON**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word Combinations</th>
<th>Instances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gold/silver/precious things</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abraham/Isaac/Jacob; also God of Abraham/God of Isaac/God of Jacob</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>men/women/children</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father/Son/Holy Ghost</td>
<td>7 (with an additional four in other formats)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>faith/hope/charity</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>judgments/statutes/commandments of the Lord</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yesterday/today/forever</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hunger/thirst/fatigue</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>carnal/sensual/devilish</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>death/hell/endless torment</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>might/mind/strength</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>famine/pestilence/sword</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eat/drink/be merry</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>signs/wonders/miracles</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>power/mercy/justice of God</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diligence/faith/patience</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>envyings/strifes/malice</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>might/mind/strength</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 2 identifies 13 triplets that occur in the Book of Mormon at least four times each, with five more arising three times. It would be difficult to argue that any triplets occur because of “casual affinity,” but I feel confident in establishing a standard of three occurrences when suggesting the triplet as part of the stock of the Nephite language.

**Quadruplets**

*Quadruplets* is a somewhat inelegant term put forward by Avishur to label four words or phrases with complementary meanings presented in a poetic fashion. Quadruplets typically possess a recognizable and noteworthy meter that makes them especially poetic and beautiful. Watkins gave the example in English of the quadruplet *oats, peas, beans, and barley grow,* which he called “a masterpiece of the Indo-European poet’s formulaic verbal art.”

Such combinations of words or phrases are obviously not simple, run-of-the-mill attempts by ordinary authors to convey everyday meaning. They are wisely and poetically arranged to be striking and memorable. A few of these quadruplets are utilized several times by Book of Mormon authors, but most appear only once in the text (see chart 3). Again, the number of occurrences stands in the parentheses after the quotation.

Chart 3 reports two instances of quadruplets used four or more times, plus another nine used either two or three times. There are 24 other quadruplets used once by Nephite authors. I believe that any quadruplet found in the Book of Mormon...
cannot be said to be the result of “casual affinity,” so I am assured that all of these instances can be considered to be stock phrases in the Nephite language. Others may wish to establish another standard. It is without question, however, that the Book of Mormon contains many quadruplets of significant literary and mnemonic value.

**Literary Lists**

Finally, numerous passages in the Book of Mormon contain more than four complementary words or clauses (see chart 4). What I call literary lists (Watson calls them “tours”) are words or phrases presented in a kind of enumeration that has a poetic or literary style. Such lists are usually classified as “synonymia” by Donald W. Parry. The classic example is found in Isaiah 3:18–23, and repeated in 2 Nephi 13:18–23, in which Isaiah notes the ways that the “daughters of Zion” act in provocative ways, especially in their dress. These are not merely lists of words but take on special meaning because they form an ensemble that exhibits a unity and purpose. Watson noted that a selective listing is another form of merismus.

Because of space limitations, chart 4 is not comprehensive, but further instances of literary lists are found in the accompanying notes. Counting these instances is often arbitrary and complicated, either because the author presents a subject and then gives instances of the subject or because the beginning and the ending of a list are not always clear. Also, two things are sometimes combined into a single entity, such as flocks/herds. Since none of these literary lists occur more than once in the Book of Mormon, they should not be regarded as stock phrases. However, they possess literary and mnemonic value in their own right.

**Other Literary Combinations**

Most commentators on biblical literature argue that word pairs should belong to the same grammatical class, that is, belong to the same parts of speech. This rule applies to the word combinations I have identified. It is obvious, however, that the Book of Mormon prophets wrote and spoke other formulaic combinations of words that involve different parts of speech. These are yet to be studied fully, and I hope they will be the subject of further research in coming years. They involve the following types of stock word combinations (again, the numbers in parentheses are the numbers of each occurrence in the Book of Mormon):

1. Combinations of an adjective and a noun, such as eternal life (30), everlasting destruction (9),

---

**CHART 4: SELECTED LITERARY LISTS IN THE BOOK OF MORMON**

| FIVE: glory/might/majesty/power/dominion (Alma 5:50)⁴⁵ |
| SIX: bows/arrows/swords/cimeters/stones/slings (Mosiah 10:8)⁶⁶ |
| SEVEN: thou/son/daughter/man-servant/maid-servant/cattle/stranger (Mosisah 13:18; Exodus 20:10)⁹⁷ |
| EIGHT: thunderings/lightnings/tempest/fire/smoke/vapor of darkness/opening of the earth/mountains which shall be carried up (1 Nephi 19:11)⁸⁸ |
| TEN: flocks/herds/fatlings/grain/gold/silver/precious things/silk/fine-twined linen/homely cloth (Alma 1:29)⁶⁹ |
| THIRTEEN: wicked ways/evil doings/lyings/deceivings/whoredoms/secret abominations/idolatries/murders/priestcrafts/envyings/strifes/wickedness/abominations (3 Nephi 30:2)⁷⁰ |
| FOURTEEN: sorceries/idolatry/idleness/babblings/envyings/strife/wearing costly apparel/pride/lying/thieving/robbing/committing whoredoms/murdering/all manner of wickedness (Alma 1:32) |
| NINETEEN: Lamanites/Nephites/wars/contentions/dissensions/preaching/prophecies/shipping/building of ships/building of temples/synagogues/sanctuaries/righteousness/wickedness/murders/robings/abominations/whoredoms (Helaman 3:14; see also Ether 9:17–19) |
deep sleep (6), holy order (6), mighty power (4), mighty change (4), and eternal round (3).

2. Combinations of a verb and a noun, such as harden your hearts (37), stir up his people (33), shedding of blood (23), get gain (18), take up arms (17), set your hearts upon (12), lift up your heads (10), harrow up his mind (10), inquired of the Lord (9), laid before [the judges] (8), labor with their hands (6), pour out his spirit (6), and publish peace (3).54

3. Prepositional phrases, or two nouns linked by a preposition, such as face of the land (77), face of the earth (60), Son of God (57), kingdom of God (37), remission of your sins (28), voice of the people (25), ends of the earth (23), foundation of the world (22), spirit of prophecy (19), traditions of your [their] fathers (19), spirit of God (18), sins of the world (17), bands of death (13), holy order of God (10), lake of fire and brimstone (9), instrument in the hands of God (8), and chains of hell (6).

I have not counted any of these expressions as word pairs because they do not fit the criteria for word pairs identified by Watson and others. However, they claim a significance in their own right. All present themselves frequently enough to qualify as traditional stock expressions in the language of the Nephites.

Conclusion

My conclusion echoes that of Kevin Barney:

The Book of Mormon is what it claims to be—an ancient text with roots in seventh-century B.C. Jerusalem. Word pairs [of Semitic origin] exist in the Book of Mormon because Lehi and his family were direct participants in the oral and literary traditions of that time and place, traditions which, to some extent at least, they passed on to their descendants.55

In this study I have identified a total of 174 pairs, triplets, quadruplets, and literary lists. Because many of these arise frequently, there are well over a thousand occurrences of these newly discovered word combinations. I am assured that there are many more word combinations yet to be enumerated in this sacred scripture.

In addition, I recognized other types of word combinations, such as 7 combinations of an adjective and a noun, 13 combinations of a verb and a noun, and 17 prepositional phrases, for a total of 37 such combinations. All of these seem to be as traditional, formulaic, and significant as word pairs.

There is much work still to be done in the study of word combinations. Further research might profitably be directed to the following areas:

• Discovering new word pairs and word combinations to add to those discussed by Barney, Tvedtnes, Pike, and me.
• Studying word combinations favored by the individual authors of the Book of Mormon. As noted, Nephi was the only author to use the pair great/abominable.
• Linking the usage of word pairs to the Bible and to other Near Eastern records. Many stock combinations arise repeatedly in both the Bible and Book of Mormon. Others appear only in the Book of Mormon and seem to derive from the postexilic culture and language of the Nephites.
• Studying variations in the ordering of pairs, including (1) why the order of some pairs are invariant (wives always stands before concubines, and flocks always appears before herds), while other pairs are frequently reversed, and (2) why substitutions occur in longer word combinations (murder/plunder/steal/adultery becomes murder/plunder/steal/woredoms, and Lord/Savior/Redeemer/Mighty One of Jacob becomes Lord/Savior/Redeemer/Mighty One of Israel). The frequency of word pairs and other combinations of words is one of the most notable and as yet unappreciated aspects of the literary style of the Book of Mormon. It is a further witness of the Hebrew roots of the language of the Book of Mormon and its authenticity as sacred scripture. It is my hope that we will ponder the deeper meanings of these expressions and that they will give us, to conclude with a familiar Book of Mormon word pair, further light and knowledge.
COUNTING TO TEN

JOHN W. WELCH
I AM IMPRESSED BY THE SCRIPTURES FOR MANY REASONS. BRILLIANT FEATURES UNDERLIE THEM ALL: DEEP REASONING, ETERNAL PLANS, SUBTLE PATTERNS, POETIC FORMULATIONS, LITERARY STRUCTURES, AND SEMANTIC CONNECTIONS THAT RESOLVE AND HARMONIZE THE TENSIONS OF PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PUZZLES JUST AS TONIC CHORDS RESOLVE DISSONANCE IN MUSICAL COMPOSITIONS.

NUMBERS AND NUMEROLOGY, both real and symbolic, are a part of this expansive picture. I hasten to say that I am not deeply invested in numerology as such. When it comes to scripture study, I do not believe in going so far as to call on cabalistic mysticism or to fabricate alleged Bible codes. But it is a fact of scriptural life that numbers, especially certain numbers, can be important in fully appreciating the scriptures. Many things happen seven times in the books of Leviticus or Revelation; other things happen ten, forty, or seventy times, as most Bible readers can quickly recall. Underlying messages may well reside in these symbolic numbers.

The number of times something occurs or is mentioned, of course, may or may not be intrinsically significant, but the fact that ancient prophets and inspired writers made a point of mentioning these numbers invites gospel students to stop and wonder why. And beyond explicit references to numbered events, some words or events occur a particular number of times in a text without any special attention being drawn to this fact. In such cases, we may well ask if the number of times these events or words occur is accidental or, perhaps, might be freighted with some latent meaning.¹
To explore this possibility, this article turns attention to the number ten. Several things occur ten times in the scriptures. These instances can be organized and analyzed in several ways. Most often, these “decads” have been seen by readers, ancient and modern, as tending to relate to some manifestation of perfection, especially of divine completeness. I approach this phenomenon with respect to the following topics: perfection, worthiness, consecration, testing, justice, reverence, penitence, atonement, supplication, and ascension into the holy of holies or highest degree of heaven.

The “Perfect” Number Ten

Ten was a symbolic number in the ancient world, perhaps for obvious reasons, since humans normally have ten fingers and ten toes. But the significance of the number ten in scripture runs deeper than mere happenstance. Both in the Bible and in the Book of Mormon, counting to ten seems to serve as an important symbol of arriving at completion or perfection before God.

Regarding the meaning of the number ten in the biblical world, the widely published British scholar E. W. Bullinger concludes:

Ten is one of the perfect numbers, and signifies the perfection of Divine order, commencing, as it does, an altogether new series of numbers. The first decade is the representative of the whole numeral system, and originates the system of calculation called ‘decimals,’ because the whole system of numeration consists of so many tens, of which the first is a type of the whole.

Completeness of order, marking the entire round of anything, is, therefore, the ever-present signification of the number ten. It implies that nothing is wanting; that the number and order are perfect; that the whole cycle is complete.

Of course, one must proceed with caution in studies of this type. As the Hastings Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics points out: “It is easy to be led into extravagance in attempting to interpret the significance of numbers; allegorical arithmetic has called forth fantastic absurdities from both Jewish and Christian writers.” At the same time, it remains incontrovertible that “the ancients were sensitive to numbers,” and a school of numerological criticism has even arisen to analyze various literary passages “ordered by numerical symmetries or expressing number symbolisms.” Whether judged by certain standards to be fanciful or not, and without engaging the full range of numerological dimensions of ancient literature and thought, the truth is that certain numbers were commonly associated in many cultures with religious meanings, with “peculiar sanctity attaching to certain numbers, notably 7, 10, [and] 70.”

The number ten is significant in several religions and cultures of the world. For example, in Buddhism it is said that “Buddha is possessed of 10 noble states, 10 powers, understands 10 paths of karma and is endowed with 10 attributes of arhat-ship.” In the Ottoman Empire, the aura of the fabled sultan Suleiman the Magnificent was enhanced because he was the tenth son of the tenth generation of his dynasty.

In civilizations not using a base-ten number system, however, the natural inclination toward the number ten can be overridden. Thus, in Mesoamerica, where the numbering system was based on twenty, the number ten had little if any symbolic significance, being associated only with the albeit important Venus god Lahun Chan (10 Sky).

In the ancient world of the eastern Mediterranean, the origins of the tendency to attach significance to the number ten (among other numbers, especially 7) are very ancient. In Sumero-Akkadian mythology, ten kings ruled in primeval times; Gilgamesh is “laden with axes and swords weighing 10 talents,” and “Utnapishtim tells him how he made his ship 10 Nindan high [and] 10 Nindan square.”

Aristotle explains at considerable length how Pythagoreans of the fifth and sixth centuries BC considered the number 10 to be the perfect number, for it was said to comprise “the whole nature of numbers” (being the sum of 1 + 2 + 3 + 4). But more than that, they also held that “the bodies which move through the heavens are ten,” and when they could see only nine visible bodies, they postulated the necessary existence of a tenth, unseen body, the “counter-earth,” which their metaphysics told them had to be out there somewhere. Other members of this school systematized all matter into ten pairs of opposites: “limit and unlimited, odd and even, one and plurality, right and left, male and
female, resting and moving, straight and curved, light and darkness, good and bad, square and oblong.”¹² Though I will not comment further on the numerous references to the number ten in classical sources, I note here that the number ten figures in a fragment attributed to the pre-Socratic philosopher Ion as “an element of harmony.”¹³

Similar observations about the number ten can be discovered in the world of ancient Israel, as well as in the worlds that derived from that seminal Hebrew culture. The persistence of attaching symbolic meaning to the number ten extends into the Book of Mormon, the New Testament, and early Judaism.

Tenfold Worthiness before God

We can begin with one of the most ancient and obvious uses of the number ten in the scriptures, the Ten Commandments. The laws of God, epitomized in the Hebrew Bible by the Decalogue, qualify people to stand worthily before him. The familiar Ten Commandments are listed in Exodus 20 and again in Deuteronomy 5. In addition, a second decalogue, or set of “Ten Words” (Exodus 34:28), appears in Exodus 34:12–27, known as the Priestly Decalogue. In both cases, it is not clear exactly what is being counted by the “Ten Words,” which leads to the possibility that the idea of the “ten” here is itself more idealistic and symbolic than merely computational.

It is especially evident that the Priestly Decalogue in Exodus 34 pertains to the sancta, worship, sacrifice, redemption, sabbaths, and appearance before God on holy days. Obedience to its “ten” principles will allow God to “go among” his people (Exodus 34:9).

The Sinaitic Decalogue also has everything to do with standing worthily before God. Biblical scholar Moshe Weinfeld has demonstrated in great detail that one of the functions of the Ten Commandments in ancient Israel was to serve as a test or standard of worthiness required for entering the temple. In effect, these ten points served as a type of “binding foundation-scroll of the Israelite community (a constitution?),” and “believers were sworn to observe the Decalogue written on the tablets.”¹⁴ Although the Ten Commandments applied to the holy people of God everywhere and not just to temple visitors,¹⁵ these requirements certainly applied with even greater force to the people when they entered the sacred space, and thus the Ten Commandments may have functioned somewhat like a list of modern temple recommend requirements to determine who might ascend into the mountain of the Lord, or the temple (see Psalm 24).

Whatever their specific functions, the Ten Commandments themselves were certainly considered to be very sacred. These ten worthiness requirements were enshrined in the ark of the covenant and were utilized in temple worship:

In Second Temple times, the Decalogue was read daily in the Temple, together with the Shema prayer, close to the time of the offering of the Daily Offering (m. Tamid 5:1). In the Nash Papyrus, discovered in Egypt, the Decalogue preceded the Shema passage, a text that reflects a liturgical form. In phylacteries found at Qumran, the Decalogue is found next to the Shema’, and according to the testimony of Jerome this was the custom in Babylonia up to a late period. Josephus testifies in regard to the Decalogue: “These words it is not permitted us to state explicitly, to the letter” (Ant. 3:90).
apparently meaning to say that it was forbidden
to pronounce them in improper circumstances
because of their sanctity.¹⁶

In this light, one can better understand why the
prophet Abinadi quoted the Ten Commandments
to King Noah and his court of priests (see Mosiah
12:34–35; 13:12–24). Being worthy was necessary
if the people of Noah were to avoid the impending
judgments of God. Moreover, if the priests of
Noah were not keeping these commandments, they
themselves were not worthy even to enter their own
temple. To a modern reader, Abinadi’s recitation of
the Ten Commandments seems rather naive and
elementary. But to an ancient ear, these measuring
words would have sounded much more imposing
and ominous.

Some later Jewish writers were instinctively
drawn to the aura of the number ten, especially as
it was associated with the holiest of the Hebrew
prophets and patriarchs. For example, according
to Philo, worthiness or excellence was embodied
in that number, which “is extolled in no ordinary
degree by the holiest of men, Moses, who connects
with it things of special excellence, governments,
the first-fruits, the recurrent gifts of the priests,”
and many other things.¹⁷ Thus, Noah was “the first
man recorded as just in holy scriptures, as the tenth
descendant from [Adam],”¹⁸ and likewise there were
ten generations from Noah to Abraham, “to show
how great was his [Abraham’s] long-suffering.”¹⁹

Probably modeled on or influenced by the Ten
Commandments, other lists in scripture contain ten
elements.²⁰ In 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, Paul lists ten
prohibitions of evils that must be avoided if a per-
son is to be worthy to inherit the celestial kingdom
and enter the presence of God:

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not
inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived:
of themselves with mankind, [6] nor thieves,
revilers, [10] nor extortioners, shall inherit the
kingdom of God.

Consecration and Sacrifice

Righteousness and worthiness are manifested
by one’s willingness to consecrate and sacrifice to
the Lord. Thus, the number ten has long been as-
associated with the idea of presenting a holy portion to
God. Inasmuch as the full “ten” (or in other words
“everything”) belongs to the Lord
to begin with, the law of tithing
allows men and women to return
to God a representative part of
his divine goodness by dedicating
back to him a holy portion, which
is reciprocally set at “one tenth.”
This principle of tithing is taught
in the Bible, the Book of Mormon,
and modern revelation, and it was practiced
in Jewish and numerous ancient civilizations.²¹

Tithing is mentioned in the encounter between
Melchizedek and Abraham as the patriarch returns
from battle with the booty of war (see Genesis 14:20).
Jacob covenants to pay tithes: “Of all that thou shalt
give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee” (Genesis
28:22). The practice of paying tithing to the gods or
their temples is also found in ancient Egyptian and
Mesopotamian civilizations,²² and it is extolled in the
Book of Mormon (see Alma 13:15; 3 Nephi 24:8–10).

The sanctity of the tenth part is also reflected
in the law of sacrifice found in the law of Moses.
The tenth was especially holy, being connected
with the divine: “Concerning the tithe of the herd,
or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under
the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the Lord”
(Leviticus 27:32). The Passover was instituted on
the tenth day of the month, when the paschal lamb
was sacrificed: “In the tenth day of this month
they shall take to them every man a lamb, accord-
ing to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an
house” (Exodus 12:3). The priests in Israel were
given charge of the tenth, as a holy priestly inheri-
tance: “Behold, I have given the children of Levi all
the tenth in Israel for an inheritance” (Numbers
18:21); and likewise, the Levites themselves were to
pay a tithe on the tithes they received from Israel: “When ye take of the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then ye shall offer up an heave offering of it for the Lord, even a tenth part of the tithe” (Numbers 18:26).

Perhaps claiming both a royal tithe and a priestly tithe, and hence a double tithe, King Noah and his priests collected a 20 percent tax. Apparently to drive home the weight of this burden-some tax, Mosiah 11:3 mentions this fraction five times: “one fifth part of all they possessed, a fifth part of their gold and of their silver, and a fifth part of their ziff and of their copper, and of their brass and their iron; and a fifth part of their fatlings; and also a fifth part of all their grain” (Mosiah 11:3).

In the New Testament parable, perhaps the woman who had ten pieces of silver but lost one and searched the house diligently for it (a tenth part) rejoices so exceedingly when she finds it precisely because it represents the finding of something holy or divine (see Luke 15:8–10; compare Proverbs 2:4). It is not hard to imagine that this tenth was her tithing, a holy portion, just as the lost sheep or the prodigal son represents souls that are holy and precious to the Lord (Luke 15:3–6, 11–32).

Prominent biblical commentator David Noel Freedman has suggested that the number ten in the testing context “probably has to do with a simple anatomical reality: ten is the number of fingers on the human hand. The rationale is this: once you have counted to ten, you have exhausted all of your fingers, and hence, all of your chances. In fact, that God was in the habit of giving people ten chances is seen in at least two other events in the Bible, both of which occur during the life Moses, the mediator of the Ten Commandments.”

As has been recognized since at least the times of Philo and the Mishnah, this pattern is obvious both in the ten plagues imposed on Egypt and in the ten rebellions of the Israelites against their God in the wilderness. “The Ten Plagues were representative of the complete circle

Testing and Trials

Long-standing tradition connects the number ten with testing and trials. Although not counted explicitly in the scriptures, it was probably not lost on the ancient reader that divine challenges came in blocks of ten. Perhaps recalling to the classical mind the fabled ten labors of Hercules, the Mishnah attests that Abraham withstood ten trials or temptations, thereby showing his deep love for God. Enduring ten tests seems to have become a measure of divine probation and approbation. For example, although Laban probably did not intend to treat his son-in-law badly, the scripture seems to see special significance in the fact that the young patriarch Jacob proved his patience, long-suffering, devotion, and love while his father-in-law changed Jacob’s wages ten times: “Your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times.” So potent was this point that Jacob raises it not once, but twice, in his own successful legal defense against Laban (see Genesis 31:7, 41).
of God’s judgments on Egypt. ‘I will . . . send all my plagues’ (Exodus 9:14).”²⁶ As Freedman explains:

Egypt suffers repeatedly for the obstinate behavior of its king, the Pharaoh, who refuses to let Israel go. Warning after warning, plague after plague, Pharaoh continues to harden his heart. Not until the tenth and final plague, the most severe of them all (the death of the firstborn), does Pharaoh finally agree to release Israel. Even though many scholars today see in this narrative several different sources, each with a different number of plagues, the final form of the text gives us ten. And it is the tenth that results in the final and decisive judgment on the nation of Egypt.²⁷

Although the number of plagues is not counted in Exodus, the Lord makes it clear that he is counting when he announces the final plague: “Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh” (Exodus 11:1). Freedman continues: “That this pattern of ten is not mere coincidence is demonstrated in our next example of ten violations, which also marks

the end of Yahweh’s patience and results in his judgment on a nation,”²⁸ namely Israel’s ten rebellions in the wilderness:

Yahweh has been keeping track of Israel’s rebellions throughout their wilderness wanderings, and they have just reached their limit: TEN! Just as Pharaoh is given ten opportunities to change his heart and comply with Yahweh’s request to “let my people go,” so this generation of Israelites is given ten opportunities to change its collective heart and comply with Yahweh’s com-mands. Both groups fail, and, as a result, God renders severe judgment upon both nations. For Egypt, the punishment is death of its firstborn and the destruction of its army at the Red Sea. For Israel, the punishment is the death of all those who witnessed God’s miracles in Egypt and the wilderness, yet still rebelled against him “these ten times.”²⁹

The fact that Israel rebelled against God ten times in the wilderness is not the product of some later rabbinic fetish with counting or the result of some scribal afterthought. The number ten in this connection was noted expressly by God, as recorded in the sacred record (see Numbers 14:22). Before Israelites entered the land of Canaan, Joshua spoke with the Lord about some of the stubborn ones, and the Lord replied, “Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened unto my voice; surely they shall not see the land which I sware unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it” (Numbers 14:22–23). Perhaps aware of this tenfold offense, Joshua sought out an auspicious day on which to begin the conquest of Canaan, which would put the Israelites to the test in their ultimate military ordeal: the Israelites crossed the River Jordan “on the tenth day of the first month” (Joshua 4:19).

Perhaps for related reasons, in his role as adversary, challenger, and instrument of divine testing or punishment, Satan rules over a kingdom that also sports its tenfold features: “Antichrist’s world-power is comprised in the ten kingdoms, symbolized by the ten toes on the feet of the image of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Dan. 2:41), and by the ten horns of the fourth beast of Daniel’s vision (Dan. 7:7, 20, 24, etc.; Rev. 12:3; 13:1; 17:3, 7, 12).”³⁰

The Book of Mormon also reflects this broad preexilic and general Israelite sense of tenfold testing. Jacob invokes ten woes on the unrighteous in 2 Nephi 9:27–38, testing the character of his people:
Appropriately, the tenth and final wo includes the word all, signifying the perfect totality of this cursing. The intertextuality between these ten woes and the Ten Commandments has been discussed in more detail elsewhere.³¹

Reflecting a similar tone of warning, the book of 3 Nephi ends with a tenfold call to repentance, listing nine evils in particular and concluding with an all-embracing tenth:


The New Testament also utilizes this mode of expression to convey the testing of the children of men. The parable of the ten virgins represents a test of the faithfulness of Christians awaiting the coming of the Messiah (see Matthew 25:1–13). The judgment of God is illustrated through the parable of the talents, in which the most righteous turns his five into the divine number ten (see Matthew 25:14–30). In the parable of the pounds, ten men are given one pound each, and the one most praiseworthy turns his into ten, for which success he is entrusted with ten cities (see Luke 19:13–25). The gratitude of the ten lepers is tested in that only one of them came back to show thanks (see Luke 17:11–18). And finally, the book of Revelation refers to a ten-day testing period as days of tribulation, telling the church at Ephesus that it would suffer the extreme test: “Behold the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days; be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). It seems unlikely that the number ten appears in these teachings of Jesus by accident.

Administration of Judicial and Religious Affairs

With legal trials come judgment and justice. Thus, the number ten is also associated with God’s
justice and the ideal administration of the law. In the Abraham cycle, “ten nations imply the whole of the nations which are to be the scene of Abraham’s covenant possessions (Gen. 15:19–21).” The rules of judicial procedure set forth in Exodus 23:1–3, 6–8 have been seen as embodying a decalogue with ten rules for the administration of local justice.

The number ten is prominent in the legal narrative in the story of Ruth. One of the main purposes of that narrative is to show that God’s justice will eventually come to pass. Thus, Naomi, her sons, and their wives dwell in Moab for “about ten years” (Ruth 1:4), and ten proper personal names or place-names are associated at first with injustice and disappointment in Ruth 1:1–7. Eventually, however, Boaz “[takes] ten men of the elders of the city” and before them sees that justice is done concerning Ruth’s marital rights and inheritance problems (Ruth 4:2). And in the end, ten generations are listed from Pharez to David (see Ruth 4:18–22).

Legal injunctions may come in groups of ten. In the Book of Mormon, in 2 Nephi 27, the people are enjoined to read the plates, with the word read appearing in conjunction with the sacred record ten times (see 2 Nephi 27:11 [twice], 15 [twice], 18 [once], 20 [twice], 22 [twice], 24 [once]).

Another ancient legal application of the number ten, representing an ultimate execution of justice, is found in the requirement in the law of Moses that punishment may extend unto the tenth generation: “A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to his tenth generation shall he not enter into the congregation of the Lord. An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord for ever” (Deuteronomy 23:2–3).

Reverence for God

Building on the foregoing examples, it is easy to understand how, in the minds of people for whom the number ten was seen as the number of perfection, it became especially appropriate to mention or invoke the name of the most high God ten times, a perfect number of times. Philo, the Jewish philosopher from Alexandria of the first century AD, wrote at length about the number ten in the Hebrew scriptures. He connected the number ten particularly with the divine being. He spoke of worshipping God, “who stands alone as the tenth.”

Showing similar reverence for the perfection of God, the Talmud reports that on the Day of Atonement, the holiest day of the year, the ineffable name of God was spoken in the sacred liturgy ten times.

A decade ago, I pointed out that expanded forms of the divine name (as opposed to the generic word for God or the simple term for Lord) appear solemnly and strikingly for a total of ten times in King Benjamin’s marvelous and carefully crafted speech. In that text, the phrase Lord God appears five times and the words Lord Omnipotent or Lord God Omnipotent occur five times, for a total of ten. “Seven of these utterances are in the words of the angel to Benjamin (Mosiah 3:5, 13, 14, 17, 18, 21, 23); the other three are in the words of Benjamin (Mosiah 2:30, 41; 5:15), occurring at important ceremonial breaking points in the speech.”

What has not been noticed before, however, is that reverence for God’s divine greatness is shown even more remarkably by other Book of Mormon prophets in this same manner. Thus, Benjamin’s speech may have been following a long-standing Nephite custom in mentioning the holy name of God this number of times. Specifically, in the exquisitely phrased psalm of Nephi in 2 Nephi 4, the word Lord appears exactly ten times, as does also the interjection O. This does not appear to be inadvertent:

16 Behold, my soul delighteth in the things of the Lord [1]; and my heart pondereth continually upon the things which I have seen and heard.

17 Nevertheless, notwithstanding the great goodness of the Lord [2], in showing me his great and marvelous works, my heart exclaimeth: Q wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities. . . .

20 My God hath been my support. . . .

26 Q then, if I have seen so great things, if the Lord [3] in his condescension unto the children of men hath visited men in so much mercy, why should my heart weep and my soul linger in the valley of sorrow, and my flesh waste away, and my strength slacken, because of mine afflictions? . . .

28 Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin.
Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul. . . .
30 Rejoice, O my heart, and cry unto the Lord [4], and say: O Lord [5], I will praise thee forever; yea, my soul will rejoice in thee, my God, and the rock of my salvation.
31 O Lord [6], wilt thou redeem my soul? Wilt thou deliver me out of the hands of mine enemies? Wilt thou make me that I may shake at the appearance of sin?
32 May the gates of hell be shut continually before me, because that my heart is broken and my spirit is contrite! O Lord [7], wilt thou not shut the gates of thy righteousness before me, that I may walk in the path of the low valley, that I may be strict in the plain road!
33 O Lord [8], wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness! O Lord [9], wilt thou make a way for mine escape before mine enemies! . . .
34 O Lord [10], I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever. . . .
35 Yea, I know that God will give liberally to him that asketh. Yea, my God will give me, if I ask not amiss; therefore I will lift up my voice unto thee; yea, I will cry unto thee, my God, the rock of my righteousness. Behold, my voice shall forever ascend up unto thee, my rock and mine everlasting God.

The ten occurrences of the word Lord in this beautiful psalm of pleading, petition, atonement, and comfort give credence to the idea that the English word Lord is the direct translation in this passage of the Hebrew tetragrammaton, the sacred name of God that would only be spoken in solemn circumstances, if at all. Here that name of the Lord is invoked ten times, a solemn and respectful number of times. The likelihood that this number of occurrences was intentional on Nephi’s part is increased by the fact that the interjection O also appears ten times in this psalm. After saying “O . . . I” or “O my” four times, Nephi turns firmly to the Lord six times with “O Lord.”

Moreover, it is possible that Nephi’s brother Jacob consciously followed his brother’s lead in this regard. The main unit of Jacob’s covenant speech (2 Nephi 9) also contains the word Lord exactly ten times (see 2 Nephi 9:1, 3, 6, 16 [two times], 24, 41 [two times], 46, 53).[40]

Above all, the divine name was holy and sacred in ancient Israel. Thus, it should also be noted that the distinctive “name” given by King Benjamin to his people near the central climax of his speech can be seen as containing exactly ten nouns. That name, as revealed to Benjamin by the angel of the Lord, seems to have consisted of an entire expression: “And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning” (Mosiah 3:8). One may well assume that in the ancient language spoken by Benjamin, this expansive name would have consisted of ten terms, probably inflected or declined to indicate syntax: (1) Jesus (2) Christ, (3) Son (4) God, (5) Father (6) heaven (7) earth, (8) creator (9) all, and (10) beginning. The full expression is repeated absolutely verbatim in Helaman 14:12, confirming the prospect that this full expression was considered to be a formal composite name that was viewed as a solemn title.[41] The precise recollection of this name among the Nephites was encouraged by the fact that Benjamin had promised to give them a special name, one that presumably would have been new and unusual enough so as to distinguish them from all other people of Israel (see Mosiah 1:11). The fact that this expression evidently
contained exactly ten nouns would have added to the integrity and memorability of this *nomina sacra*. Perhaps more than we have previously realized, this ten-part name for the Nephites was very, very holy.

**Penitence and Atonement**

One of the most important reasons for invoking the name of the Lord is to seek forgiveness and atonement from his throne of mercy. In biblical times, ten was an important number associated with achieving atonement, or reconciliation with God.

On the ancient Israelite calendar, the time of fasting, repentance, and reconciliation was especially concentrated during the ten days between the New Year and the Day of Atonement. These ten days were known as the ten days of penitence or ten days of awe. Later tradition located the origin of this ten-day period at the root of Israelite religion:

The *Midrash* records that Moses descended on the tenth day of *Tishray* with the second set of Tablets of the Law. He found the Israelites fasting and repenting for their great sin. G-d accepted their penitence and proclaimed that day as a day of forgiveness and pardon for all Israel and for every generation to come. *Yom Kippur* is the anniversary of this event.⁴²

Even though this season was relatively brief, these ten days “lent a solemnity to the entire period, which became known as the Ten Days of Penitence (*Rosh HaShanah* 18a).”⁴³

The importance of the tenth day and this ten-day period was established by authority of Moses in the Holiness Code given to the children of Israel: “And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in

---

King Benjamin delivered a masterful oration in which he gave his people a distinctive, revealed “name”—one whose sacred nature was reinforced by the ten nouns it comprised. Painting by Bill L. Hill, who used Hugh B. Brown as the model for King Benjamin.
the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you” (Leviticus 16:29). Moreover, “on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord” (Leviticus 23:27; see also Numbers 29:7).

The first ten days of that month at the beginning of the fall were a special time for seeking the presence of the Lord: "In the Talmud it says: It is written in Isaiah 'Seek the Lord while He may be found.' When can an individual find G-d? Rabbah b. Abbuha said: These are the ten days between New Year and the Day of Atonement” (Rosh Hashanah 18a).⁴⁴ Because the fates of the righteous and the wicked were sealed in the book of life during these ten days,⁴⁵ this period of time was especially important and reverenced.

Also connecting the number ten with the idea of atonement and redemption is the fact that "the redemption money was ten gerahs. . . . Now ten gerahs was half a shekel (Exodus 30:12–16; Numbers 3:47). Every male that was numbered over 20 years of age, must pay this sum and meet God's claim.”⁴⁶

Benjamin's word usage in Mosiah 2–5 similarly reflects this old liturgical requirement for showing respect and perfection in calling upon the divine name when seeking atonement. As has been discussed elsewhere, many factors point strongly in the direction of connecting King Benjamin's speech with the Israelite autumn festival complex, particularly the Day of Atonement.⁴⁷ In Benjamin's case, the people cry out, "O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins and our hearts may be purified” (Mosiah 4:2). Atonement, of course, is a dominant theme in Benjamin's speech and temple covenant ceremony (he mentions the root word atone seven times), and atonement also is the key concept in Jacob's text in 2 Nephi 9, thus adding further linkage between these two texts.

Yet another text in the Book of Mormon proclaims the doctrines of redemption and atonement: Alma 12–13. It should not go unrecognized that the words Lord and Son are each mentioned precisely ten times in this masterful exposition, one of Alma's best. In addition, the words hearts, high (as in high priesthood), and men also happen to occur exactly ten times in this same text. It is hard to know if this phenomenon was intentional on Alma's part, either as a speaker or as a recorder, or if it was ever noticed by any of Alma's listeners or readers. But if it was, then Alma's subtle, coded message to his various audiences in this text, including particularly his clueless accusers in Ammonihah but also his inducted convert Amulek and his other faithful followers, emphasized tenfold the sacred truth constructed from those specific words—namely, that all men and God can eventually be reconciled to each other by the Son through his high priesthood, which brings about purification upon the eternal change of the repentant heart.

Supplication and Prayer

Calling on the name of God for forgiveness and atonement requires prayer and supplication. One must ask in order to receive. One must call upon God in order to receive his divine intervention. The pattern of calling on God ten times is present in the Old Testament and also in the Book of Mormon.

At the time of Lehi, the armies of Judah implored the prophet Jeremiah to seek guidance from the Lord. Jeremiah prayed for ten days: “And it came to pass after ten days, that the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah” (Jeremiah 42:7). Patience epitomizes the attitude of prayer. Hence, as Philo remarked, "only after a time and under the perfect number ten do we reach the desire for the lawful discipline which can profit us.”⁴⁸ For that reason, he observed, "Sarah gives Hagar to Abraham, not at once after his arrival in the land of the Canaanites, but after he has stayed there for ten years.”⁴⁹

Alma the Younger knew the importance of prayer, and on one occasion when he was most desperate, fearing that the Zoramites would join with the Lamanites and destroy the Nephites, he and his companions went to the Zoramite capital, Antionum, to see if they could convert any Zoramites back to the true fold of God. The words of his high priestly prayer are recorded in Alma 31:26–35, and, again, it is not likely mere coincidence that the phrase O Lord is found ten times in this powerful petition supplicating the true God for strength in bringing souls to Christ:
26 And he lifted up his voice to heaven, and cried, saying: O, how long, O Lord [1], wilt thou suffer that thy servants shall dwell here below in the flesh, to behold such gross wickedness among the children of men?

[27 Behold, O God, they cry unto thee, and yet their hearts are swallowed up in their pride. Behold, O God, they cry unto thee with their mouths, while they are puffed up, even to greatness, with the vain things of the world.

28 Behold, O my God, their costly apparel, and their ringlets, and their bracelets, and their ornaments of gold, and all their precious things which they are ornamented with; and behold, their hearts are set upon them, and yet they cry unto thee and say—We thank thee, O God, for we are a chosen people unto thee, while others shall perish.

29 Yea, and they say that thou hast made it known unto them that there shall be no Christ.}

30 O Lord [2] God, how long wilt thou suffer that such wickedness and infidelity shall be among this people? O Lord [3], wilt thou give me strength, that I may bear with mine infirmities. For I am infirm, and such wickedness among this people doth pain my soul.

31 O Lord [4], my heart is exceedingly sorrowful; wilt thou comfort my soul in Christ. O Lord [5], wilt thou grant unto me that I may have strength, that I may bear with mine infirmities. For I am infirm, and such wickedness among this people doth pain my soul.

32 O Lord [6], wilt thou comfort my soul, and give unto me success, and also my fellow laborers who are with me—yea, Ammon, and Aaron, and Omner, and also Amulek and Zeezrom and also my two sons—yea, even all these wilt thou comfort, O Lord [7]. Yea, wilt thou comfort their souls in Christ. . . .

34 O Lord [8], wilt thou grant unto us that we may have success in bringing them again unto thee in Christ.

35 Behold, O Lord [9], their souls are precious, and many of them are our brethren; therefore, give unto us, O Lord [10], power and wisdom that we may bring these, our brethren, again unto thee.

In addition to his ten supplications to Jehovah with the words O Lord, Alma also speaks the words O God four times in this prayer, but in those four cases he is either speaking about or quoting from the apostate prayers of the Zoramites, and in such a context he would not want to mention the holy name of the true God whom he served and called upon. Hence, Alma shifts his terminology to reflect this shift in meaning. That shift is marked by the second occurrence of O Lord, which is the only instance of the expanded O Lord God in this text, indicating that the Lord Jehovah is indeed the true God.

A similar occurrence is found in Nephi’s solemn words of prayer in Helaman 11:4, 10–16, in which he sealed up the heavens and called down a famine on the land to bring the people to repentance and then prayed again to end the pestilence. The Book of Mormon text presents these prayers in close proximity to each other, and indeed they go hand in hand. The first prayer caused the famine (see verse 4) and the second lifted it (see verses 10–16), according to the sealing and loosing power Nephi had been given by God (see Helaman 10:7). For that reason I combine Nephi’s two petitions together as an interrelated text. In that combined exercise of priesthood power, Nephi calls out O Lord ten times:

4 O Lord [1], do not suffer that this people shall be destroyed by the sword; but O Lord [2], rather let there be a famine in the land, to stir them up in remembrance of the Lord their God, and perhaps they will repent and turn unto thee. . . .

10 O Lord [3], behold this people repenteth; and they have swept away the band of Gadianton from amongst them insomuch that they have become extinct, and they have concealed their secret plans in the earth.

11 Now, O Lord [4], because of this their humility wilt thou turn away thine anger, and let thine anger be appeased in the destruction of those wicked men whom thou hast already destroyed.

12 O Lord [5], wilt thou turn away thine anger, yea, thy fierce anger, and cause that this famine may cease in this land.

13 O Lord [6], wilt thou hearken unto me, and cause that it may be done according to my words, and send forth rain upon the face of the earth, that she may bring forth her fruit, and her grain in the season of grain.

14 O Lord [7], thou didst hearken unto my words when I said, Let there be a famine, that
the pestilence of the sword might cease; and I know that thou wilt, even at this time, hearken unto my words, for thou saidst that: If this people repent I will spare them.

15 Yea, O Lord [8], and thou seest that they have repented, because of the famine and the pestilence and destruction which has come unto them.

16 And now, O Lord [9], wilt thou turn away thine anger, and try again if they will serve thee? And if so, O Lord [10], thou canst bless them according to thy words which thou hast said.

In these prayers, Nephi invokes the name of the Lord twice in the bleak first part and eight times in the optimistic second part. Perhaps these terms were distributed by Nephi in literary imitation of his namesake’s psalm in 2 Nephi 4, which also mentioned the word Lord twice in the agonizing opening phase (vv. 16–17) and then eight times in the relieved second phase (vv. 26–34).

Wishing to be heard by the Lord is one of the deepest desires of the righteous soul. Standing behind these prayers of Alma and Nephi may be the words of the ancient poem of Zenos quoted by Alma in Alma 33:4–11, words that Alma knew well enough to recite spontaneously by memory as he and Amulek spoke to the poor from Antionum. Perhaps the number of times its key word appears made it easier for the ancients to memorize, for that poem of Zenos contains ten occurrences of the root word hear (appearing in English as didst hear or heard or hear). The ten are arranged in a balanced way: four times in the past tense (vv. 4–7), twice in a future sense (v. 8), and then four times again in the past tense (vv. 9–11), emphatically affirming that the Lord hears the prayers of the righteous wherever they may be whenever they pray.

4 Thou art merciful, O God, for thou hast heard [1] my prayer, even when I was in the wilderness; yea, thou wast merciful when I prayed concerning those who were mine enemies, and thou didst turn them to me.

5 Yea, O God, and thou wast merciful unto me when I did cry unto thee in my field; when I did cry unto thee in my prayer, and thou didst hear [2] me.

6 And again, O God, when I did turn to my house thou didst hear [3] me in my prayer.

7 And when I did turn unto my closet, O Lord, and prayed unto thee, thou didst hear [4] me.


9 Yea, O God, thou hast been merciful unto me, and heard [7] my cries in the midst of thy congregations.

10 Yea, and thou hast also heard [8] me when I have been cast out and have been despised by my enemies; yea, thou didst hear [9] my cries, and wast angry with mine enemies, and thou didst visit them in thine anger with speedy destruction.

11 And thou didst hear [10] me because of mine afflictions and my sincerity; and it is because of thy Son that thou hast been thus merciful unto me, therefore I will cry unto thee in all mine afflictions, for in thee is my joy; for thou hast turned thy judgments away from me, because of thy Son.

This poem of Zenos, built on beautiful strophes and rhythmic parallelisms, seems to be related to the prayer offered by Solomon at the dedication of his temple in 1 Kings 8:22–53, which repeats the prayer formula, “then hear thou in heaven,” seven times (vv. 32, 34, 36, 39, 43, 45, 49), a different but still religiously significant number of times.
Sacred Cosmology

Each of the foregoing meanings associated with the number ten extends beyond the mundane realm and reflects a wider view of divine cosmology and of God’s universe. Indeed, the cosmos itself was said by the Rabbis to have been created by ten sayings or words of God.⁵¹ That total world, as well as the temple that was constructed as a model of that complete realm, was often depicted in terms of tens.

Much earlier in Israelite history, the construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness employed several tenfold elements: “Moreover thou shalt make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet: with cherubims of cunning work shalt thou make them” (Exodus 26:1; 36:8). “And thou shalt make boards for the tabernacle of shittim wood standing up. Ten cubits shall be the length of a board” (Exodus 26:15–6; 36:20–21). These boards, overlaid with gold, enclosed the holy of holies on three sides, with the veil on the east. This made the chamber ten cubits by ten cubits by ten cubits, in other words, a cube. Evidently, this was a symbol of perfection in all three dimensions, as shown by its continued use in Solomon’s temple (see 1 Kings 6:20).⁵² As Philo insisted, this pattern was significant because God’s house embraces “the whole of wisdom,” and thus to it belongs “the perfect number.”⁵³ When the temple of Solomon was built, it also contained many features that came in tens. The height and width of the cherubim in Solomon’s temple were both ten cubits: “And within the oracle he made two cherubims of olive tree, each ten cubits high. And five cubits was the one wing of the cherub, and five cubits the other wing of the cherub: from the uttermost part of the one wing unto the uttermost part of the other were ten cubits. And the other cherub was ten cubits: both the cherubims were of one measure and one size” (1 Kings 6:23–25). The diameter of the brazen sea was ten cubits: “And he made a molten sea, ten cubits from the one brim to the other . . . . And under the brim of it round about there were knops compassing it, ten in a cubit, compassing the sea round about” (1 Kings 7:23–24). Ten

The specific directions given to Moses for building the tabernacle demonstrate the importance of paying attention to its details, such as the many features and dimensions that came in tens. Drawing by Michael P. Lyon.
bases were made for the ten lavers (see 1 Kings 7:27, 38, 43). Other accouterments in Solomon’s temple had dimensions and numbers of ten: the brass altar was ten cubits high; ten candlesticks were made of gold; and ten tables were placed, five on each side (see 2 Chronicles 4:1–8).

The Book of Mormon reports that Nephi built a temple in the city of Nephi “after the manner of the temple of Solomon” (2 Nephi 5:16). Although no architectural details are given in this account, one can be quite sure that the number ten figured into the design of that temple in many ways.

Also in close association with ancient temple symbolism, later Judaism recognized ten degrees of holiness, progressing into the temple’s Holy of Holies: “The rabbinic classification of the ten degrees of holiness, which begins with Palestine, the land holier than all other lands, and culminates in the most holy place, the Holy of Holies, was essentially known in the days of the High Priest Simon the Just, that is, around 200 BCE.” Echoing these ten degrees on earth were ten degrees in heaven. In the book of 2 Enoch, Enoch has a vision in which he progresses from the first heaven into the tenth heaven, where God resides and Enoch sees the face of the Lord, is anointed, given clothes of glory, and is told “all the things of heaven and earth.”

Conclusion

The number ten seems to have been significant in the ancient world, especially in Israelite religious literature. Ten conveyed a tight cluster of symbolic messages associated with the divine realms, namely, completeness, perfection, worthiness, consecration, testing, justice, reverence, atonement, supplication, and holiness (to mention ten). Regardless of whether all ten of these meanings were overtly intentional or only unconsciously subliminal in any particular text, it seems clear that in-group audiences knew enough to look for these messages in pondering the scriptures. In most cases, these meanings are rooted in very early Israelite texts. Detecting these tenfold occurrences in the Book of Mormon uncovers a previously unnoticed ancient quality of Nephite scripture that was probably more obvious to ancient minds than it is to modern readers.
The Savior, in his concern for all of his children, admonished his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, “Enter ye in at the strait gate,” and then warned them that “wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13–14). Later, the resurrected Savior repeated this same admonition to his followers in the Americas (see 3 Nephi 14:13–14; 27:33). The image Jesus introduced to the disciples, and to us, tends, through the contrast with the wide gate and the broad way, to draw attention at least as much to the straitness of the gate and the narrowness of the way as it does to the existence of a gate and a way. The unusual use of both strait and narrow, words that are synonymous, draws the reader’s attention to other expressions in the Book of Mormon where both words also occur, such as the strait and narrow path (see 1 Nephi 8:20).
In other passages in the Bible and the Book of Mormon, the word spelled *straight*, meaning “direct, right (correct), or not bent or curved,” is also used to describe the path. For instance, in Psalm 5:8, the psalmist pleads with God, “Lead me, O Lord, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face.” Hebrews 12:13 admonishes the Saints “to make straight paths for your feet.” In the Book of Mormon, Alma notes that God’s “paths are straight” (Alma 37:12) and that we can gain eternal life by taking the “straight course to eternal bliss” (v. 44).

Thus the holy scriptures speak of a narrow or strait way and also of a *straight* path. Is the way strait or straight? Or is it both? Or is the spelling irrelevant? For example, should the Book of Mormon read strait and narrow instead of strait and narrow?¹

In this study I seek to clarify the imagery of the strait, narrow, and straight “paths” in the Book of Mormon.² First of all, I will explore the general confusion between strait and straight in the English of Joseph Smith’s day, a problem that persists even today and that has led to adjustments in the various printings of the Book of Mormon. Then I will explore the use of *straight* and strait in light of the poetic nature of the Book of Mormon passages. Because I believe these passages are analogous to Hebrew poetry, a knowledge of how biblical authors crafted and enriched their poetry will be used to help explain the Book of Mormon passages.

Confusing Strait and Straight

Three factors combine to create the potential for confusion between strait and straight in the Book of Mormon. First, it is only all too natural among English speakers to confuse homophones (words that sound alike but have different meanings), especially homophones whose written forms appear as similar as do strait and straight.³ A glance in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) under the entries for strait and straight reveals an unexpectedly high number of crossover spellings going both ways, mostly before 1830.⁴ In the Prophet Joseph Smith’s day, the confusion apparently was widespread, if Webster’s 1828 dictionary is any indication. It states, erroneously to be sure, that straight and strait are “the same word” and that to distinguish between them is “wholly arbitrary.”⁵ The confusion is not limited to Joseph Smith’s day or to the examples in the OED. Quite often students in my classes will ask me what the difference is. Some do not even realize that strait exists as a separate word from straight.

Second, the English text of the Book of Mormon, between the original manuscript and the most recent printed edition, has seen changes in the spelling of strai(gh)t (in its various forms) in all 27 instances in the 23 verses where either of these words appears.⁶ The original manuscript, preserved in only 11 of these verses, reads strait in 10 instances and strait in 1. The printer’s manuscript of the Book of Mormon spells all 27 instances with strait, regardless of the contextual meaning. The compositor of the first printed edition changed all 27 occurrences to read *straight* in the 1830 printed edition. That the printer’s manuscript used entirely one spelling and the 1830 edition entirely the other exemplifies the confusion of spelling and meaning surrounding strai(gh)t that Webster’s 1828 dictionary mistakenly legitimizes. This means that early-19th-century sentiments would have accepted either spelling no matter the meaning.

As later editions of the Book of Mormon demonstrate, subsequent editors of the volume must have felt that strait and *straight* are not the same word and that a distinction between them is not at all arbitrary. Over time, they made changes in 14 of the 27 instances of *straight* that appear in the 1830 edition.⁷ These changes must have been based on a realization that the context of some of the passages containing *straight* called for the other meaning, represented by strait (that is, “narrow”).

The third reason for the lack of clarity about strai(gh)t in the Book of Mormon is really a subset of the previous reason. With the Book of Mormon, we cannot appeal to the original Nephite text because it is not available. Neither do we know which spelling the Prophet intended in any single passage. In contrast to the Book of Mormon, the biblical passages containing *straight* or strait leave no doubt that these two English homophones are not synonymous. The reason there is no confusion in the Bible is that strait and *straight* are translations from known languages, either Greek or Hebrew, in which the equivalents of strait and *straight* are neither homophones nor synonyms. The fact that the Bible is not ambiguous will become important when discussing Book of Mormon phrases that are similar to biblical expressions.
Given the above reasons for mistaking *straight* for *strait* and vice versa in English in general, I can now turn specifically to the various phrases in the Book of Mormon in which *strai(gh)t* occurs together with *path*, *way*, or *course*. The context within the Book of Mormon together with comparisons of similar phrases in the Bible will make it possible in all but one case to determine whether *straight* or *strait* is meant.

**The Straight Path**

Seven verses in the Book of Mormon contain *straight* with *path* or *course*, namely, 1 Nephi 10:8; Alma 7:9, 19; Alma 37:12; 2 Nephi 4:33; Alma 37:44 (twice); and 2 Nephi 9:41. The latter three verses will be treated later. The first four verses seem to be related to or dependent on a well-known biblical passage, Isaiah 40:3, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” In the New Testament, Isaiah’s words are applied specifically to John the Baptist, who, in preparation for Christ’s ministry, was sent to restore the gospel one last time under the law of Moses. In addition to this New Testament use, Isaiah 40:3 also supports the Latter-day Saint understanding that forerunners precede the coming(s) of the Messiah and restore (*straighten* = make right) the kingdom of God (the Way of God). Thus, Isaiah 40:3 speaks both in specific ways about the role of John the Baptist in the New Testament and in general terms about the role of forerunners in all dispensations in the restoration of God’s kingdom.

An examination of the Hebrew word that is translated in the King James Version as *straight* will help clarify the use of *straight* in these four Book of Mormon verses that seem to be dependent on Isaiah 40:3. The Hebrew word translated as *straight* comes from a root in the Semitic languages, *yšr*, that means “right, correct” and has the meanings in Hebrew of “straight, smooth, proper, right, level,” and so on. For instance, in Deuteronomy 9:5 the noun from this root is paralleled with *righteousness* and is translated as *uprightness*: “Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness [straightness] of thine heart.” Note also how *yšr* in Isaiah 40:3 in the New English Bible (hereafter NEB) is translated “Clear a highway,” indicating that *yšr* as a verb can mean “to clear” and as an adjective can denote “unobstructed.” Other nuances for *yšr* are also possible.

None of the four verses in the Book of Mormon that seem to be related to or dependent on Isaiah 40:3 quotes the verse exactly the way it appears in the King James Bible. First Nephi 10:8 more closely parallels the version contained in the synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke: “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight.” Alma 7:9 adds a bit more, “Cry unto this people, saying—Repent ye, and prepare the way of the Lord, and walk in his paths, which are straight.” Alma 7:19 changes the exhortation to an observation: “I perceive that ye are in the path which leads to the kingdom of God; yea, I perceive that ye are making his paths straight.” And finally, Alma 37:12, in lan-
language that seems tied more closely to Alma 7:19–20 than to Isaiah 40:3, changes the observation to a statement of fact: “His paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round.”

Three things are of interest about these four verses. First, the further away in time from Isaiah the authors of these verses were, the more their text varied from Isaiah. Second, in all these Book of Mormon instances that seem dependent on or at least related to Isaiah 40:3, the straight paths always refer to God’s paths and, in contrast to the book of Isaiah itself, are always plural.¹⁴ It is as if the Book of Mormon were making a distinction between the plural paths of God and the singular path that mortal men take.¹⁵ And third, in three of the four verses that are related to Isaiah 40:3, the meaning of straight, as in Isaiah, does not necessarily mean “not bent” or “not crooked.” The exception, Alma 7:19, is in fact the only verse in the entire Book of Mormon that requires the meaning “not crooked” for straight when it modifies path or course. In verses 19 and 20, a beautiful antithetical parallelism, Alma commends the people of Gideon for “making [God’s] paths straight” because God “cannot walk in crooked paths, . . . neither hath he a shadow of turning from the right to the left.”¹⁶

In turning now to 2 Nephi 4:33 and Alma 37:44, it can be noted that these two verses, in contrast to Isaiah 40:3 and the Book of Mormon verses similar to it, do not speak of God’s paths but of mortal man’s path and do not use the plural but rather the singular path or course. Also, straight in these two verses cannot mean “not bent” or “not crooked.” This is best seen in 2 Nephi 4:32–33, which seems to be related to Psalm 5:8, “O Lord, . . . make thy way straight before my face.”¹⁷ The word way in this psalm is singular and refers to the path the psalmist desires to follow. Likewise, the pairs of parallel couplets in 2 Nephi 4:33 provide a nuanced description of the path that Nephi wanted God to prepare for him. The following is my tentative poetic structuring of this verse, with the relevant parallel words in italics:

O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness!

O Lord, wilt thou make a way for mine escape before mine enemies!

Wilt thou make my path straight before me!

Wilt thou not place a stumbling block in my way—

but that thou wouldst clear my way before me,

and hedge not up my way,

but the ways of mine enemy.¹⁸

Nephi’s plea, “make my path straight before me,” seems to combine elements of the psalmist’s and Isaiah’s phrasing. But dependence is not the issue here; the issue is the meaning of the phrase straight path that is provided by the antithetical parallel “Wilt thou not place a stumbling block in my way.” That is, Nephi’s straight path should contain no “stumbling block.” Thus the nuanced meaning of straight in this verse is not not crooked but rather clear or unencumbered.

With the various meanings for straight in Hebrew and with Nephi’s use of the word in 2 Nephi 4:33 clearly in mind, it is time to turn to Alma 37:44, a key passage in the Book of Mormon, to see how straight is used. The verse reads, “For behold, it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss, as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass, which would point unto them a straight course to the promised land.” The analogy between the course Lehi took from the valley of Lemuel to the land of promise and the course that we must follow from where we are in order to arrive in the “far better land of promise” (verse 45) is telling for two reasons. First, the context makes it most likely that straight is the preferred spelling. Lehi and his family probably did not take a “narrow” or “constrained” course, although the possibility cannot be dismissed out of hand.¹⁹
Second and equally important, it cannot be maintained that the "straight course" Lehi took from the valley of Lemuel to the land of Bountiful and then across the sea to the Americas was not bent or curved. Their route contained at least one major course change when they shifted directions from traveling south-southeast (1 Nephi 16:13) to striking off in a "nearly eastward" direction (1 Nephi 17:1). Their path no doubt also contained smaller turns and twists that naturally would have been part of their many days of travel. Thus, while straight is correct, it cannot be taken in its sense of "not crooked," but rather must be understood in its sense of "direct," much like the English sentence "She went straight to the boss." In this case, the straight course mentioned by Alma is a particular course, the course taken by Lehi.

That Alma means precisely direct in verse 44 is confirmed by the antithetical parallel in verses 41 and 42. When the people of Lehi were "slothful and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence" in the "compass," they "did not travel a direct course." Not traveling "a direct course" is contrasted in verse 44 with being led in "a straight course" through the wilderness to the promised land when they did "give heed to this compass." The contrast created in this passage between "a straight course" and a course that was "not direct" makes it clear that in this passage straight means direct.²⁰

In summary, the Book of Mormon in six of seven verses seems to distinguish between the straight paths of God in the plural and the straight path of mortal men in the singular. (The seventh verse, 2 Nephi 9:41, will be discussed near the end of this paper.) The singular straight path that each person must take and that is tailored for that person through the guidance of the Holy Ghost may contain occasional course changes and yet be the shortest, most direct way back to God. The ways of God, that is, the gospel, are also straight in the sense of being direct. Perhaps significantly, only one passage in the Book of Mormon also describes God's straight paths as being not crooked.

The Strait and Narrow

The expression strait and narrow, which occurs four times in our present Book of Mormon,²¹ was spelled straight and narrow in the 1830 printing. While I do not know on what basis the 1830 spelling was changed in a subsequent edition to strait and narrow, I believe the internal evidence in the Book of Mormon consistently calls for the spelling strait and narrow.

(Before I present the Book of Mormon evidence, I need to warn about a potential methodological mistake. The popular and widely used expression straight and narrow²² is, in its English origin, derived from a misreading or misunderstanding of "the strait gate and narrow way" in Matthew 7:14.²³ This means that the common English phrase straight and narrow should read strait and narrow. Therefore, an appeal to the proverbial phrase straight and narrow cannot be used to demand that the English translation of an ancient document, the Book of Mormon, also read straight instead of strait.)

One reason for an initial reluctance to abandon the 1830 Book of Mormon spelling straight for the current strait is the supposition that "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."²⁴ As far as the Book of Mormon is concerned, this statement is true only if it is assumed at the beginning that the expression strait and narrow is an error for straight and narrow. However, it is bad methodology to eliminate the expression under discussion and then claim that there are no examples of that expression. It would be more accurate to state that other than the expression under discussion, strai(gh)t and narrow path, there are no examples of strait and narrow modifying the same noun in the Book of Mormon. To do otherwise is to beg the question.

An appeal to the King James Version for an example of strait and narrow modifying the same noun does not help. It contains neither the phrase strait and narrow nor straight and narrow. Therefore, the King James translation cannot be used directly to justify either position.

The Hebrew text of the Old Testament is, however, another matter. It does contain an analogous, synonymous word pair to strait and narrow. But, as far as I can determine, it does not contain an analog to straight and narrow. The Hebrew word pair tswr/lssr and tswq mean, respectively, “distress(ed), strait(en)(ed), narrow, slim, constrain(ed),” etc. and “siege, constric; strait(en)(ed), constrain(ed), narrow,” etc.²⁵ For example, these two word roots stand
behind the King James translation of Job 36:16 (with the corresponding English words in italics), “Even so would he have removed thee out of the strait (tsär) into a broad place, where there is no straitness (mātsāq).” 26 (Other examples follow below in which these two roots are used in even more narrowly parallel structures.) In every instance that I could find in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament where this word pair occurs, no matter what form the roots take, tswr/tsrr always comes before tswq, just as strait in English nearly always comes before narrow when the two are bound in the same phrase.27

While it is possible, even likely, that tswr/tsrr and tswq stand behind the Book of Mormon expression strait and narrow, it would be methodologically unsound to accept this suggestion as fact. Nevertheless, it is precisely these two Hebrew words from Job that have been used to render into Hebrew the Greek of Matthew 7:14, “strait gate and narrow way.”28 In addition, numerous passages in the Old Testament confirm the linguistic similarity and the close grammatical structure of tswr/tsrr and tswq to strait and narrow as synonymous, parallel poetic word pairs.29

Perhaps for two reasons English Bible translations of tswr/tsrr and tswq do not use the adjectives strait and narrow in the same verse. First, tswr/tsrr and tswq almost always appear in a noun or verb form in the Hebrew text, analogous to the reading in 2 Nephi 31:9, “straitness of the path” and “narrowness of the gate” (discussed below). And second, the translation of the Hebrew nouns as straitness and narrowness does not always make for a transparent reading of the biblical passage in which they appear.30

Nevertheless, a closer examination of three passages will demonstrate that tswr/tsrr and tswq form an even closer semantic and more exact syntactic analog for strait and narrow than is already apparent. The passages I have chosen each contain different Hebrew forms of this synonymous pair. For each example I give first the reference, then the phrase in transliterated Hebrew, and finally a more literal rendering in English. The evidence thus demonstrates that the expression strait and narrow does have an exact syntactic parallel poetic word pair in Hebrew, not just because of their semantic similarity but also because the built-in, and therefore unavoidable, alliteration makes the parallel usage of these two words particularly lyrical.32

The evidence thus demonstrates that the expression strait and narrow does have an exact syntactic parallel poetic word pair in biblical Hebrew. This means that the Book of Mormon expression strait and narrow cannot be dismissed out of hand because of “redundancy” or the lack of a “parallel.” Just as strai(gh)t comes before narrow in eight of the ten verses in which they both occur in the Book of Mormon (the exceptions, 2 Nephi 9:41 and 33:9, are discussed below), the fact that these two Hebrew roots always appear in the same order in the biblical examples I found underscores the parallel nature of the Book of Mormon and Hebrew Bible expressions. In fact, the Hebrew usage pattern of tswr/tsrr and tswq (whether or not these two roots have anything to do with strait and narrow) provides analogical evidence that the English text of the Book of Mormon is more dependent in general on ancient Hebrew poetic practice than on King James English.

Now that I have demonstrated that an initial reluctance to read strait and narrow in four verses in the Book of Mormon has no merit, I can turn to a second reason for wanting to read straight and narrow instead of strait and narrow. This reason, also fraught with problems, maintains with regard to strai(gh)t that “the required spelling when modifying course is always straight.”33 By applying this “requirement,” the phrase strait and narrow course in Helaman 3:29 is corrected to read straight and narrow course.

This correction is then used to justify, partly, changing the other three Book of Mormon instances of strait and narrow path to read straight and narrow.

However, further examination shows that it is inaccurate to claim that when strai(gh)t modifies the term course, the required spelling is straight. Of the four verses in the Book of Mormon where strai(gh)t modifies and is contiguous with course, only one occurrence matches the observation above and thus can be used as evidence. This verse, Alma 37:44, reads, “For behold, it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss, as it was for our fathers to give heed to
this compass, which would point unto them a *straight course* to the promised land.” Indeed, the “course” to the celestial kingdom is *straight*. However, this verse is the only one in the entire Book of Mormon where, unequivocally, *straight* and not *strait* is the proper modifier and, importantly, is contiguous with the course back to God. Two other verses, Alma 50:8 (“a straight course from the east”) and 56:37 (“march in a straight course”), do require the spelling *straight* as a modifier of *course*; but neither of these two verses has anything to do with the course back to God or God’s paths and therefore cannot be used as evidence, as has been suggested, for reading *straight* in Helaman 3:29.³⁴

The fourth verse, 2 Nephi 9:41 (“the way . . . lieth in a *straight course*”), cannot be used as evidence either because, as I will argue below, both *straight* and *strait* are possible readings in this verse. A general rule cannot be induced from only one conclusive and a second possible instance. Therefore, it cannot be maintained that “the required spelling when modifying *course* is always *straight*."

In addition, the structure of Helaman 3:29 is distinct from the four verses from which the supposed “requirement” was apparently induced. Unlike the passages just mentioned (Alma 37:44; 50:8; 56:37; 2 Nephi 9:41), where *straight* is contiguous with *course*, in Helaman 3:29, *strai(gh)t* is not contiguous with *course*: “The word of God . . . [will] lead the man of Christ in a *strait* and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery.” Even if the evidence of the one unambiguous verse, Alma 37:44, were accepted as normative, does the norm still hold true if *strai(gh)t* is not contiguous with *course*? In fact, in other instances in the Book of Mormon, *straight* modifies *path*, yet no rule that “*straight* is the required spelling when modifying *path*” is induced. Therefore, an appeal to a “requirement” does not settle the issue of whether *straight* or *strait* is the correct reading in Helaman 3:29. However, to totally exhaust any reluctance to read *strait*, I now turn to one last proffered justification that Helaman 3:29 should read *straight*, namely, literary parallels with other passages.

This third and final argument for reading *straight* and not *strait* in Helaman 3:29 runs as follows: Because Mormon, the editor, “echoes” in Helaman 3:29 the language of Alma 37:44, *strai(gh)t* in Helaman 3:29 should be spelled *straight*, as it is in Alma 37:44.³⁵ This argument would have merit only if it could be proved that Helaman 3:29 “echoes” only Alma 37:44 and no other passages that contain the spelling *strait*. Let us look at the evidence. The relevant parts of Helaman 3:29–30 read, “The word of God . . . shall . . . lead the man of Christ in a *strait* and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery . . . and land their souls . . . in the kingdom of heaven.” The corresponding relevant parts of Alma 37:44–45 read, “The word of Christ . . . will point to you a *straight* course to eternal bliss. . . . The words of Christ, if we follow their course, [will] carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise.” There are indeed similarities between these two passages.
However, there are other passages that “echo” Helaman 3:29 at least as closely, if not more closely, than Alma 37:44 does.⁵⁶ For example, notice how the end result of following the “strai(gh)t and narrow course” in Helaman 3:29 parallels the end result of following the “the way which is narrow” in Jacob 6:8–11. The relevant phrases in Jacob 6:8–11 read, “Will ye reject all the words which have been spoken concerning Christ . . . and deny the good word of Christ? . . . Repent ye, and enter in at the strait gate, and continue in the way which is narrow, until ye shall obtain eternal life.” Helaman 3:28–30, again, reads “All . . . those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ . . . may lay hold upon the word of God, which [will] . . . lead the man of Christ in a strait and narrow course . . . and land their souls . . . in the kingdom of heaven.” Thus, superficially, both Alma 37:44 and Jacob 6:8–11 provide “echoes” for Helaman 3:29.

Perhaps a more in-depth examination of strai(gh)t and narrow in Alma 37:44, Jacob 6:11, and Helaman 3:29 will help clarify the issue. Notice how the elements of these three verses line up with one another: Jacob 6:11 “the strait gate, and . . . the way which is narrow” Helaman 3:29 “a strai(gh)t and narrow course” Alma 37:44 “a straight course”

Helaman 3:29 and Alma 37:44 share only two words in common, strai(gh)t and course.³⁷ Jacob 6:11 and Helaman 3:29, on the other hand, not only share two words, strai(gh)t and narrow, but they also share the conjunction and, and they share the synonymous words course and way.³⁸ While it is true that Jacob 6:11 contains gate and Helaman 3:29 and Alma 37:44 do not, there are still a greater number of parallels or echoes between Jacob 6:11 and Helaman 3:29 than between Alma 37:44 and Helaman 3:29. Therefore, the spelling in Helaman 3:29 should reflect Jacob 6:11, namely, strait. And, by analogy, the other three instances of strai(gh)t and narrow in the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 8:20; 2 Nephi 31:18, 19) should also be spelled strait.

In summary, the weight of the evidence favors reading strait and narrow in its four occurrences in the Book of Mormon. To sum up the arguments: First, the expression strait and narrow has an ancient Hebrew analog, and that analog would require the spelling strait. This is not true of straight and narrow, which to my knowledge has no Hebrew analog. Casual readers of the Book of Mormon should not be misled by the popular English saying straight and narrow, which in its origin is a mistake for strait and narrow. The parallels between strait and narrow path and strait gate and narrow way are convincing, while the similarities between the passages that contain strai(gh)t path are not compelling. The literary parallels also favor reading strait.

The Strait Gate and the Narrow Way

The words strai(gh)t(ness), gate, narrow(ness), and way/path all occur in one combination or another in five verses in the Book of Mormon: 2 Nephi 31:9; 33:9; Jacob 6:11; and 3 Nephi 14:14; 27:33. The latter two contain the words spoken by the Savior to the Nephites and are nearly identical to words that he spoke in the Sermon on the Mount: “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life” (Matthew 7:14). Jacob 6:11, though similar to Matthew 7:14, reads, as might be expected from a different speaker in an earlier epoch, slightly differently: “Repent ye, and enter in at the strait gate, and continue in the way which is narrow, until ye shall obtain eternal life.” In each of these three Book of Mormon verses as well as in Matthew 7:14, the gate is strait and the way is narrow; and the order of the words is also set, with strait always coming before narrow and gate always coming before way. For these four verses, Matthew 7:14, Jacob 6:11, 3 Nephi 14:14, and 3 Nephi 27:33, the Book of Mormon and the Bible are emphatic that the gate is strait and the way is narrow.³⁹

The “Street Called Straight” in modern-day Damascus, Syria. Several feet below it lies the Roman-period “street which is called Straight” of New Testament fame (Acts 9:11). In the nearly 2,000-year history of the street since the days of Paul, the straightness has changed little, but it no doubt has become more strait. Photo courtesy of the author.
The other two verses in the Book of Mormon that contain gate, strait, way, and narrow do vary slightly in their word order from the previous four examples and therefore deserve separate commentary. I will begin first with 2 Nephi 31:9: “And again, it sheweth unto the children of men the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate, by which they should enter, [Christ] having set the example before them.” The expression “strai(gh)tness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate” is so close to “the strait gate, and . . . the way which is narrow” (Jacob 6:11) that a relationship between the former and the latter cannot be dismissed easily.⁴⁰ Indeed, none of the differences change the meaning, as long as strait and not straight is read. Additionally, the use of the noun phrases straitness of the path and narrowness of the gate reflects the ancient Semitic language preference to use nouns as modifiers. English prefers adjective clauses, such as strait path and narrow gate.

Nephi’s own words in this same chapter, 2 Nephi 31, confirm the connection between the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate and the strait gate and narrow way. The expression straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate in verse 9 refers to Christ’s example of being baptized and having the Holy Ghost descend upon him (see vv. 5–8). In the same chapter Nephi makes it clear that “repentance and baptism” are “the gate” (v. 17) and that after cleansing by the Holy Ghost, “then are ye in this strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life” (v. 18). In other words, the “gate” consists of repentance and baptism and is “narrow,” like the strait gate; and the “straitness of the path” leading from the gate to “eternal life” is, like “the strait and narrow path,” the narrow way.

The resemblance between the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate and passages similar to the strait gate and . . . the way which is narrow (Jacob 6:11) is more than superficial. If the first expression is simply a variation of the strait gate and narrow way, as I have just argued, then in good Hebrew style straitness is the synonymous poetic parallel to narrowness.⁴¹

However, if straightness is read in 2 Nephi 31:9, several telling changes occur in the expression. The most obvious difference is that the meaning of the verse is changed to “the not crookedness (or not directness) of the path and the narrowness of the gate.” The second obvious difference is that the poetic parallel structure of the verse suffers because straightness is neither synonymous nor antithetical to narrowness.⁴² In fact, straight(ness) and narrow(ness) never occur in parallel in any scripture in the Latter-day Saint canon, including the Hebrew Bible (unless straight is also read in two of the other verses being discussed in this study).⁴³ Therefore, reading straight does too much violence to the poetic strength and the Hebrew nature of 2 Nephi 31:9 and to its congruence with other scriptures. The evidence calls for reading strait.⁴⁴ Is it nevertheless possible that 2 Nephi 31:9 be emended to read “straightness of the path”?

The reasoning runs as follows:⁴⁵ In this verse the “strai(gh)tness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate” refers to the example Christ set for us in keeping the commandments, including being baptized (vv. 5–8). In verse 4, Nephi introduces the discussion of Christ’s baptism by referring to things he had previously “spoken” on the subject. Nephi’s only recorded previous discourse on the subject came at a time much earlier in his life when he had seen a vision of the baptism of Christ and wrote about it in 1 Nephi 11:27–28. In the chapter preceding the record of this vision, 1 Nephi 10:7–8, Nephi recorded his father Lehi’s words “concerning a prophet [John the Baptist] who should come

Map of old Damascus showing the location of the “Street Called Straight.” Map by Andrew D. Livingston.
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.” (As I discussed above, the latter expression is a paraphrase of Isaiah 40:3.) The supposition linking these verses is that the strait path in 2 Nephi 31:9 must be referring back through verse 4 of the same chapter to Nephi’s previous writings, namely 1 Nephi 11:27–28, then to Nephi’s father’s words in 1 Nephi 10:8 containing the Isaiah paraphrase, where straight is the correct spelling. Therefore, 2 Nephi 31:9, as this hypothesis goes, should read “straightness of the path” and not “straitness of the path.”

Besides ignoring the clear parallels that the expression “strait(gh)ness of the path and narrowness of the gate” has with “the strait gate and narrow way,” this line of reasoning is troublesome for several other reasons. The only common element between these three Book of Mormon passages is that each mentions the baptism of Christ. However, the fact that all three passages mention the baptism is not enough to force the conclusion that the straight of the 1 Nephi 10:8 passage should be imposed on the strait(gh) in the 2 Nephi 31:9 passage, especially since the supposed link between them, 1 Nephi 11:27–28 (or anywhere else in the chapter), does not contain either straight or strait. The contexts in which the baptism is mentioned are sufficiently different that to propose a thematic connection between the two passages in 1 Nephi and the passage in 2 Nephi is at best a stretch. Because Nephi does not draw specific attention in 2 Nephi 31:9 to an earlier text, just to his previous spoken message(s), it would be difficult to believe that Nephi, late in his life, expected his hearers to make the connection back to events that took place many years earlier in his life, namely, 1 Nephi 10 and 11. Simply as a matter of practicality, the thread cannot be stretched back to 1 Nephi.

Additionally, when Lehi’s words make his paths straight in 1 Nephi 10:8 are compared directly with Nephi’s phrase strai(gh)tness of the path in 2 Nephi 31:9, the wording and context of the former do not line up thematically with the latter. Lehi’s paraphrase of Isaiah 40:3 concerns making straight paths for God, that is, straightening out the doctrine in preparation for the coming of the Lord (see the discussion on 1

Nephi may have been employing poetic parallelism after the Hebrew manner when he taught that Christ’s baptism shows “the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate” (2 Nephi 31:9), usages consistent in meaning with references in the Bible and Book of Mormon to a strait gate (i.e., a narrow gate, meaning baptism) and narrow way (synonymous with “strait way,” meaning the path we take after baptism). It was the biblical phrase “strait gate and narrow way” that gave rise to the misstated but now common and felicitous phrase “straight and narrow.” To Fulfill All Righteousness, by Liz Lemon Swindle.
Nephi 10:8 above). On the other hand, the expression “straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate” in 2 Nephi 31:9 is contained within Nephi’s call to his “beloved brethren” (v. 6) to be baptized (enter the strait gate) and receive the Holy Ghost (v. 13) and thereby walk in “this strait and narrow path” (v. 18). Or, as Nephi stated in verse 17, the call in 2 Nephi 31:9 is to “do the things which I have told you I have seen that your Lord and your Redeemer should do.” Thus 2 Nephi 31:9, both in its wording and in its context within the chapter, lines up with the strait gate and narrow way for mortals but not with Lehi’s declaration that the forerunner of the Messiah would “make [God’s] paths straight.”

Because of the differences between 2 Nephi 31:9 and 1 Nephi 10:8, the only possible way to seriously maintain a connection is to try to interpose another passage connecting the two. But even that passage, 1 Nephi 11:27, though clearly linked internally to 1 Nephi 10:8, does not provide the compelling, missing link to 2 Nephi 31:9. As with 1 Nephi 10:8, the particular context of 1 Nephi 11:27 concerns Nephi’s vision of the coming of the Messiah and includes as detail the fact that “the Redeemer of the world, of whom my father had spoken,” would be baptized by “the prophet who should prepare the way before him” (v. 27). The particular context is one in which “the prophet . . . should prepare the way before” “the Redeemer of the world.” The general context within the chapter concerns Nephi’s learning to understand the interpretation of the symbol of “the tree of life” that his father had seen (v. 11; 1 Nephi 15:22). Thus, both the specific and the general contexts of 1 Nephi 11:27–28 concern what Christ did. Nowhere does chapter 11 treat directly the things that mortals must do to follow Christ. On the other hand, the context of 2 Nephi 31:9 concerns precisely the things that mortals must do, the path that mortals must take, to follow Christ. Any supposed connection between the strait(g)hness of the path for mortals in 2 Nephi 31:9 and the fact that Christ as part of his descent would be baptized by John the Baptist does not exist.

For all the reasons given above, 2 Nephi 31:9 should correctly read, “the straitness of the path and the narrowness of the gate.” The parallels with strait gate and narrow way require this reading. The context within the chapter demands this reading. A direct comparison with 1 Nephi 10:8 (Isaiah 40:3) does not support a different reading. Neither can the intervening chapter and verses, 1 Nephi 11:27–28, be used to suggest changing 2 Nephi 31:9.

All that has been said about 2 Nephi 31:9, “the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate,” can also be said about 2 Nephi 33:9, “enter into the narrow gate, and walk in the strait path.” In fact, the only possible reason for changing 2 Nephi 33:9 to read straight instead of strait is “literary consistency,” supposedly on the basis of emending 2 Nephi 31:9. Like 2 Nephi 31:9, this verse contains a variation in the word order of the expression strait gate and narrow way, but in this case the adjectives strait and narrow have changed places. Because strait is correct, the word order does not matter: The parallel poetic structure remains intact, and the meaning is maintained. If straight is read, then the verse does change meaning, a meaning unique in Latter-day Saint scripture. In addition, the poetic parallelism is destroyed, and the variation in word order of this phrase does not make sense. Like 2 Nephi 31:9, this verse occurs in the context of what mortals must do to be reconciled to God, not what prophets must do to prepare the ways of the Lord. Therefore, like 2 Nephi 31:9, there are compelling reasons to read strait and no valid reasons to read straight in 2 Nephi 33:9.

It would be tempting to proclaim, after the foregoing discussion, that any verse containing strai(gh)t and narrow requires the spelling strait. With only one plausible exception, in all ten Book of Mormon verses where the words strai(gh)t(ness) and narrow(ness) occur, the most compelling reading is strait. Were it not for the exception, 2 Nephi 9:41 (“the way . . . lieth in a straight course”), I could state that the “required spelling” is always strait when it appears in the same verse with narrow. As it is, I can state only that when narrow and strai(gh)t occur in the same verse, nine times out of ten the best reading is strait. The one exception, 2 Nephi 9:41, does not fit neatly either with the verses containing strait gate and narrow way or with the verses containing strait and narrow, or even with the verses in which God’s paths are made straight. It is time now to turn to this anomaly.

2 Nephi 9:41 as an Anomaly

Arranged in poetic form, 2 Nephi 9:41 currently reads,

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.

The printer’s manuscript reads strait. The compositor of the 1830 edition changed the word to read straight, and thus it has remained through the 1981 edition, even though other changes in the verse have been made.48 This verse needs careful analysis.

It is possible to read straight in this verse. As mentioned above, straight in Hebrew comes from a form of the root yšr, which can mean “not bent” or “not curved” and also “direct, without hindrance; uprightness, correct,” and so on. For example, in a passage already mentioned above, Deuteronomy 9:5, yšr is the Hebrew word that the King James translators rendered “uprightness,” that is, “Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land.” Uprightness (yšr) and righteousness are paralleled in this verse and in other verses in the King James Version.49 The translators could just as well have rendered yšr with straightness. The verse in Deuteronomy would then read, “Not for thy righteousness, or for the straightness of thine heart,” with righteousness and straightness in synonymous parallel. The poet in me can see a similar poetic parallel, a common element of Hebrew poetry, in 2 Nephi 9:41. Indeed, the printer’s manuscript and the 1830 edition, rather than reading “his paths are righteous” as in later editions, both read “righteousness.”50 Thus, even though Behold, the way for man is narrow separates his paths are righteous and a straight course before him in 2 Nephi 9:41, the latter two phrases could form a synonymous poetic parallel analogous to the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy 9:5.

Nevertheless, I believe that an equally strong case can be made for reading strait in 2 Nephi 9:41. The far better parallel in this verse for strait(gh)t is the word narrow in the phrase separating righteous and strait(gh)t. In fact, if straight is read in 2 Nephi 9:41, then this verse would be the only verse in all of Latter-day Saint scripture, including the Hebrew Bible, in which straight rather than strait parallels narrow (unless of course either 2 Nephi 31:9 or 33:9 are also emended, contrary to the evidence presented above, to read straight). This fact alone should be enough to propose reading strait. Nevertheless, two issues seem to stand in the way of reading strait, neither of which, when carefully examined, is strong enough on its own to rule out strait in favor of straight.

First is the issue that straight is the only acceptable modifier of course. As I have demonstrated above, this supposed rule is based on a single, relevant passage and therefore is not convincing. It cannot be invoked to force the reading of straight in this or any other verse.

The second issue concerns the conjunction but in 2 Nephi 9:41. A perfunctory reading would suggest that “the conjunction but makes it impossible that Jacob intended the meaning of ‘strait.’”51 That is, how can the way be “narrow” but “strait”? This would seem to be a contradiction because strait is synonymous with narrow and the conjunction but seems to preclude a synonymous parallel. On the other hand, reading straight makes sense because it is not synonymous with narrow.

That the conjunction but precludes reading strait is true for only one of the definitions of but. However, in both English and Hebrew, but has a range of meaning that is not limited to the contrastive. Some of these other meanings would not exclude reading strait. The following synonyms of but taken from the Oxford English Dictionary exemplify some of the meanings that but can have in English: “on the contrary,. . . nevertheless, yet, however, . . . on the other hand, moreover.” In the following quotation, but can have several of these meanings in addition to being contrastive: “Feversham passed for a good-natured man: but he was a foreigner.”52 By way of example, replacing but in the foregoing quotation with two different synonyms yields the following two illustrations of the range of meanings but can have: “Feversham was a good-natured man; however, he is a foreigner” and “he was good-natured; moreover, he was a foreigner.” In other words, but can connote, respectively, a contrast or an addition.

Applied to 2 Nephi 9:41, these same meanings for but yield the following possibilities: “Behold, the way for man is narrow; moreover [but indicating an addition], it lieth in a strait(gh)t course before him” or “Behold, the way for man is narrow; however [but indicating a contrast], it lieth in a strait(gh)t course before him.” Only the latter reading, the contrastive, would require the rejection of a synonym such as strait to parallel narrow.53 The first reading does not require strait(gh)t to contrast with narrow and therefore would allow the reading strait as well as straight without doing violence to the meaning of the phrase.54
It could be argued that the many nuances of English *but* are not relevant because the language on the small plates was probably a form of Hebrew. However, like English, not all the equivalents of *but* in Hebrew require the contrastive sense. The common, modern Hebrew word for *but*, ים (`b), occurs only 11 times in the Old Testament, 4 of which can have the force in biblical Hebrew of *truly*.

For example, Genesis 42:21 of the King James Version reads, “We are verily guilty.”⁵⁵ Literally, the Hebrew text reads, “But [truly] we are guilty.”⁵⁷ Applying this Hebrew syntax and meaning of ים to 2 Nephi 9:41, the verse could easily read, “The way for man is narrow; truly it lieth in a strait course before him.”⁵⁸

In addition to ים, the conjunction∨ (ו in Hebrew, usually translated “and”) can be translated as *but*, such as in Genesis 17:21 and Psalm 13:6.⁵⁹ With the reading ∨ instead of ים, 2 Nephi 9:41 could be rendered “The way for man is narrow, and it lieth in a strait course before him.” Other Hebrew words with various nuances are also translated as *but* and would allow for the reading *strait* in this verse.⁶⁰

Thus both English and Hebrew noncontrastive meanings of *but* allow for reading *strait* in 2 Nephi 9:41, and therefore reading *strait* cannot be dismissed out of hand from either an ancient or a modern approach. Additionally, reading *strait* in this verse would also accord with every other instance in Latter-day Saint scripture where both *strait* and *narrow* occur in the same verse. Therefore, though a case can be made for reading *straight* in 2 Nephi 9:41, reading *strait* is possibly preferable to *straight*.

**Summary and Conclusion**

The Book of Mormon speaks of God’s paths as being *straight* in the sense of “direct,” “right,” and “not crooked” in 1 Nephi 10:8, Alma 7:9, and Alma 7:19. Three verses in the Book of Mormon—Alma 37:44, 2 Nephi 4:33, and Alma 37:12—speak of the journey that each mortal must take, or desires to take, on his or her personal *straight path*; and the context in each of these three verses calls for the meaning “direct,” “right,” or “unencumbered,” but never “not crooked.” In terms that apply universally to all mortals, the Book of Mormon states that the *gate* of baptism is *strait* (2 Nephi 31:18) and that the *way* after baptism is *strait and narrow* (2 Nephi 31:19), with the Holy Ghost guiding the way (2 Nephi 32:3).

In the ten verses in the Book of Mormon where the words *strai(gh)*t and *narrow* occur in the same verse, there are compelling reasons in nine of them to read *strait*, while the tenth verse could take either reading. Reading *strait* in the expressions *strait gate and narrow way* and *strait and narrow way* preserves the poetic parallelism, accords with a biblical Hebrew analog, and is consistent within the Book of Mormon.

With this I conclude my attempt to *straighten* and *straiten* the meaning of *strai(gh)*t in the Book of Mormon.

> The title of this article, “Straightening Things Out,” is an intended pun based on Hebrew. In biblical Hebrew the word *dabar* can be translated either as “thing” or as “word.” Thus the title of this paper contains the pun “Straightening Words Out.” For diversion next time you read the Book of Mormon, substitute *word* for *thing* and *thing* for *word* and marvel at the additional meanings that frequently jump off the page. ■
The stamp seal of Malkiyahu ben hamelek (actual size smaller than a dime). Shown are the seal’s printing face (top right), a side view of the seal (top left), a modern impression of the seal in clay (bottom right), and a detailed drawing of the impression (bottom left). Could this have been the seal of Mulek? Photographs courtesy of Robert Deutsch. Drawing by the author.
Is Mulek, a man identified in the Book of Mormon as the only surviving son of Zedekiah, king of Judah, mentioned in the Bible? In 1984 Robert F. Smith pointed to the name “Malchiah the son of Hammelech” in Jeremiah 38:6 as a possible reference to this Mulek.¹ Latter-day Saint scholars of Near Eastern studies have debated the legitimacy of this identification.² Although no consensus has been reached, Smith’s Malchiah-Mulek identification has become part of the scholarly conversation concerning the Near Eastern origins of the Book of Mormon.

Recently, an ancient Judean stamp seal has been identified as bearing the Hebrew form of the name “Malchiah son of Hammelech.”³ Does this mean that an actual archaeological relic that belonged to an ancient Book of Mormon personality has been located? Has the seal of Mulek been found?
To answer this question requires us to explore a number of different but related issues. First, a word of explanation. The reading of Jeremiah 38:6 in the King James Version is somewhat misleading. The Hebrew Bible reads מַלְכִיָּהוּ בֶּן הָאָמֶלֶךְ, pronounced Malkiyahu ben hamelek.⁴ The name Malkiyahu was reasonably rendered into English as “Malchiah” by the King James scholars, and the word ben was accurately translated as “son.” But the King James term Hammelech (pronounced ha-mélek) is not really a name; it is a transliteration. In Hebrew, hamelek means “the king” (ha is the definite article “the,” and melek is the word for “king”). Thus, accurately translated, Jeremiah 38:6 refers to “Malkiyahu son of the king.” Noted biblical scholar John Bright translates the phrase as “Prince Malkiah” (the term prince referring to a royal son) in his Anchor Bible commentary on Jeremiah.⁵

Smith also suggested that the Book of Mormon name Mulek might be a shortened form of the biblical Hebrew Malkiyahu. In support of this possibility, he noted that while Jeremiah’s scribe is called Baruch (Hebrew ברוך—Barukh) in Jeremiah 36:4, a longer form of his name ברקיהו (Berekhyahu) appears on an ancient stamp seal impression published by Israeli archaeologist Nahman Avigad.⁴ Since the Hebrew long-form name Berekhyahu could apparently be expressed in a hypocoristic (short form) version like Barukh, Smith reasoned that perhaps the long form Malkiyahu could have a short form like Mulek. In that event, the “Malkiyahu son of the king” in Jeremiah 38:6 could well have been the Book of Mormon’s Mulek, son of King Zedekiah (see Helaman 8:21).

The Stamp Seal of Malkiyahu

A stamp seal is a small stone, usually about the size of a jelly bean, with at least one side that is flat or slightly convex, engraved with a name, a title, a design, or some combination of these in mirror image. The stamp seal might be encased in a ring to be worn on the finger or might be perforated with a single hole through which a string was passed, allowing the seal to be worn around the neck. The function of the seal was to be pressed into wet clay to leave an impression of the name, title, or design of the seal’s owner. Ancient documents were often sealed by tying them with string and then pressing a stamp seal into a marble-sized ball of clay on the string ends to bond them together. Clay seal impressions are often called bullae (singular bulla) by scholars. The stamp seal might also be impressed into the wet clay of a newly made ceramic jar before kiln firing, on either one or more of the jar handles, or even on the shoulder of the jar. Archaeologists have discovered numerous stamp seals, stamped jar handles, and clay bullae in excavations throughout the land of Israel. Those with names or titles upon them provide valuable data for many fields of biblical and Near Eastern studies.

The oval-shaped stamp seal of Malkiyahu ben hamelek was fashioned of bluish green malchite stone and is very small, measuring just 15 mm long by 11 mm wide (smaller than a dime) and only 7 mm thick. The printing face of the seal is convex, which leaves a concave image on imprinted clay (see fig. 1 for a drawing of the imprinted image).⁷ Two perpendicular lines divide the seal’s image into three fields. The two horizontally parallel fields on the right feature the text in archaic Hebrew. The top right register reads •• lemalkiyahu•• (lemalkiyahu••), or “to Malkiyahu” (i.e., “belonging to Malkiyahu”), followed by two dots that serve as a divider between words. The bottom register reads •• ben•• hamelek, or “son of the king,” with a dot dividing ben and hamelek. The left side register features a vertical line of six pomegranates flanked by a dot at each end. Dots also outline the oval perimeter of the image.

Just where and when the seal was originally found is not known. It was probably excavated illegally or kept (stolen) by a workman at a legitimate excavation in Jerusalem during the 1980s. Work was still being carried out then in the city of David, the southern Temple Mount, and the Jewish Quarter areas. The seal first appeared on the international antiquities market in a 1991 catalog of Numismatic Fine Arts Inc. of New York.⁸ It was purchased by Jewish millionaire Shlomo Moussaieff, of London, who has a large collection of ancient stamp seals and other antiquities. The
The first scholarly reference to the seal appeared in 1995 in an article in French by André Lemaire. The initial English-language publication of the seal appeared in 1997 in the magnum opus of Israeli scholars Nahman Avigad (now deceased) and Benjamin Sass, entitled *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals*, which included a photo of a modern impression from the seal. A subsequent publication in English appeared in 2000 in *Biblical Period Personal Seals in the Shlomo Moussaieff Collection*, by Robert Deutsch and André Lemaire, which included photos of the seal as well as a modern impression. Lemaire’s original assessment of the seal questioned its authenticity. However, the preface to *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* lists it as one of several seals that, despite their unknown provenance, Avigad, the dean of Israeli stamp-seal scholars, considered authentic.

The authenticity of the Malkiyahu seal is supported by the existence of a number of other seals very similar to it, some of which may have been unknown to Lemaire. Avigad and Sass identify a seal of the same general artistic design as the Malkiyahu seal, including perpendicular lines separating the three registers and a pomegranate motif, although the left register features only a single pomegranate. That seal, however, was published after 1991, the latest date it could have been used by a forger as a model for the Malkiyahu seal. Avigad and Sass also display a number of seals and impressions that feature a personal name followed by the term *ben hamelek*, or “son of the king,” demonstrating that this phrasing was not unique to ancient Judaeo seals. Avigad felt that two of the personal names on these seals may have been those of sons of kings known from the Bible. One of the seals (no. 16 in *Corpus*) is inscribed לֹמֶנֶאשֶׁה בֶּן הָמֵּלֶכָּה (leMenasheh ben hamelek), which means “[belonging] to Menasheh son of the king.” This was possibly Manasseh, the son of King Hezekiah. Manasseh, who was the great-grandfather of Zedekiah, became king of Judah himself in 687 BC, ruling until his death in 642 BC (see 2 Kings 20:21–21:18).

Another seal (no. 13 in *Corpus*) is inscribed לֶיוֶהוֹאָהַזי בֶּן הָמֵּלֶכָּה (leyehoahaz ben hamelek), which means “[belonging] to Yehoahaz son of the king.” This was possibly Jehoahaz, the son of King Josiah and older brother of Zedekiah. Jehoahaz was heir to the throne of Josiah and was elevated to the kingship after Josiah’s death in 609 BC, but he was deposed by the Egyptians shortly thereafter and taken to Egypt, where he was never heard from again (see 2 Kings 23:30–34).

Additionally, a seal impression (no. 414 in *Corpus*) that reads יֵרְחוֹמֶאֵל בֶּן הָמֵּלֶכָּה (leyerahme’el ben hamelek), or “[belonging] to Yerahme’el son of the king,” may, according to the model presented in this study, have been the person called “Jerahmeel the son of Hammelech” (properly “son of the king”) in Jeremiah 36:26, possibly the son of King Jehoiakim, although this was not Avigad’s conclusion. Aspects of all of these seals and seal impressions are relevant in attempting to identify Malkiyahu with Mulek.
Could Malkiyahu Have Been Mulek?

A major issue in determining whether Malkiyahu could have been the Mulek of the Book of Mormon is whether Malkiyahu could have been the son of Zedekiah. This issue involves two questions: (1) Does the term ben hamelek, properly rendered into English as “son of the king,” really mean what it says? In other words, were persons such as Malkiyahu, designated in the Bible or on stamp seals as ben hamelek, actually biological sons of kings? (2) If so, of which king was Malkiyahu a son? Can it be demonstrated that Malkiyahu was indeed the son of King Zedekiah?

Meaning of Ben Hamelek

What did the term ben hamelek really mean? At first glance this could seem like a silly question, except for the fact that some scholars have doubted that the term son of the king really meant the biological son of one of the kings. Avigad himself suggested two ways of understanding the ben hamelek title in the Hebrew Bible. First, he posited that “some of these title bearers may have been proper sons of kings.” He cited as examples the two names previously mentioned: Menasheh ben hamelek (i.e., Manasseh) and Yehoahaz ben hamelek (i.e., Jehoahaz), known both from stamp seals and from the biblical record.¹⁷ In the Bible, neither of these names is actually accompanied by a ben hamelek title, but it is clear from the text that the men who bore them were biological sons of kings and became kings themselves (see 2 Kings 20:21; 23:30).

Second, Avigad felt that ben hamelek seals or seal impressions bearing personal names not specifically noted in the Bible as biological sons of kings must have been “members of the royal family . . . employed as officials in the king’s service”—in other words, men of the extended royal family, such as nephews and cousins, serving in a bureaucratic or security capacity.¹⁸ In this category he included Yerahméel ben hamelek, the “Jerahmeel the son of Hammelech” of Jeremiah 36:26.¹⁹ Avigad suggested that in the Bible “several officials with the title ‘son of the king’ are known to have fulfilled duties connected with matters of security.”²⁰ In this claim, however, he overstated the numbers. Only two (not “several”) of the men whom the Bible calls ben hamelek are mentioned in connection with security functions; these are the Joash of 1 Kings 22:26 and the Jerahmeel of Jeremiah 36:26.

Other commentators have doubted that most men called ben hamelek were even members of the king’s family at all, extended or otherwise, preferring to view these title holders as ordinary court officials, not royal stock.²¹ However, these assumptions are not supported by the biblical evidence.

The Hebrew Bible contains 13 occurrences of the term ben hamelek in the singular form, referring to eight different men (see list below). In the King James Version these are usually rendered into English as “the king’s son” rather than the preferable “son of the king,” except for the 2 occurrences in Jeremiah, which are oddly rendered “son of Hammelech.”²² Outside of the Bible, 14 other instances of the ben hamelek title exist—nine stamp seals and five seal impressions—representing a total of 11 different names (a complete list appears in note 14). Stamp seals and seal impressions bearing personal names and the ben hamelek title have no literary context; that is, they do not appear in sentences or passages that tell us more about their owners. The only way to determine the meaning of the ben hamelek title is by studying it as it appears with personal names in the Hebrew Bible, where each usage occurs in a broader story in which the person bearing the name and title is described to some extent. The complete Hebrew Bible list appears here, with King James Version spellings of the personal names and with an asterisk by the names of the four men known with certainty from the biblical context to have been real sons of a king:

1. Amnon* (called) ben hamelek (a son of King David)
   2 Samuel 13:4
2. Absalom* (called) ben hamelek (a son of King David)
   2 Samuel 18:12, 20
3. Joash ben hamelek (associated with King Ahab, possibly his son)
   1 Kings 22:26; 2 Chronicles 18:25
4. Joash* ben hamelek (a son of King Ahaziah)
   2 Kings 11:4, 12; 2 Chronicles 23:3, 11
5. Jotham* ben hamelek (a son of King Azariah/Uzziah)
   2 Kings 15:5
6. Maaseiah ben hamelek (associated with King Ahaz, possibly his son)
   2 Chronicles 28:7
7. Jerahmeel ben hamelek (associated with King Jehoiakim, possibly his son)
   Jeremiah 36:26
8. Malchiah ben hamelek (or Malkiyahu—associated with King Zedekiah)
   Jeremiah 38:6

Amnon, Absalom, Jotham, and the Joash of 2 Kings 11 are all clearly described as sons of kings in the above biblical passages that mention them. In other words, four of the eight men above were without doubt sons of kings. Their citations make up 8 of the 13 ben hamelek references in the Hebrew Bible, a significant statistical majority. These numbers alone lend more support than even Avigad assumed to the idea that ben hamelek likely described a biological “son of the king.”

As for the other 4 references, 2 of them, as we have seen, are described as acting in a “security official” capacity. In 1 Kings 22:26 (paralleled by the 2 Chronicles 18:25 reference), Ahab, the king of Israel, gives a directive for Joash ben hamelek to assist in putting the prophet Michaiah into prison. There is nothing in the passage to suggest that this Joash is not Ahab’s own son. That he acted in a “security official” capacity, assisting with the imprisonment of the king’s perceived enemy, does not rule out the likelihood that Joash was Ahab’s son. In fact, the opposite is true. It makes sense that Ahab would entrust a delicate security matter, such as imprisoning a prophet, to one of his own sons. In a similar story, Jeremiah 36:26 reports that Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, directed Jerahmeel ben hamelek to arrest Jeremiah the prophet. Again, nothing in the passage suggests that Jerahmeel was not Jehoiakim’s actual son, even though he acted in a security capacity.

Why would a political act like arresting an opponent of the king be deemed evidence that Jerahmeel was not the king’s son? One could reason that acts such as silencing pesky prophets were so sensitive that the participation of an actual royal heir was predictable. For a royal son to serve in the administration of his own kingly father is a scenario entirely to be expected. In any event, it is at least as likely that Joash and Jerahmeel were indeed actual sons of the kings they served as they were mere officials of the court, royal nephews, or otherwise.

The stories of Joash and Jerahmeel may, in fact, be construed as evidence against their having been mere court officers. As a general rule, the Hebrew Bible employs the term נָר (sar) to refer to royal officials (the plural is נָרִים—sarim). The term designates a “minister” (in the political sense), or a “chief” or “ruler” or even “captain.” In the case of Joash ben hamelek in 1 Kings 22, he is listed...
with Amon, the sar ha’ir, or “ruler of the city,” of Samaria, in the directive to imprison Micaiah (the KJV reasonably renders sar ha’ir as “governor of the city”): “And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city [sar ha’ir], and to Joash the king’s son [ben hamelek]; and say, Thus saith the king. Put this fellow in the prison” (1 Kings 22:26–27). It is telling that Amon, who is clearly a high official in the king’s employ, is not listed as ben hamelek in his official capacity. If the title ben hamelek were a designation for a royal official, we might expect that Amon, too, would be called by that title instead of sar ha’ir. That he was not suggests that ben hamelek was not merely an administrative designation.

The same is true in the story of Jerahmeel: “But the king commanded Jerahmeel the son of Hammelch [ben hamelek], and Seraiah the son of Azriel, and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel, to take [i.e., arrest] Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet” (Jeremiah 36:26). In this passage, Jerahmeel is the only person designated ben hamelek, even though he is one of three who are given the king’s order. In addition, at least six other men who were royal officials of King Jehoiakim, either scribes or other functionaries, are noted by name in Jeremiah 36 but are not called ben hamelek. All of these officials are called sarim in Jeremiah 36:12 (the KJV misleadingly renders sarim as “princes” when, in fact, the term means “ministers” or “rulers”). Jerahmeel is different from all the rest, however. That he receives orders from the king along with the sarim is plain. But he is also clearly distinct from the other officials in that he alone is designated ben hamelek. What is the difference between Jerahmeel and all of the other officials who are not called ben hamelek? The most obvious answer is that Jerahmeel was a biological “son of the king.” In other words, the term ben hamelek very probably means what it literally says: a son of the king.

As previously noted, Avigad rejected the idea that ben hamelek was a designation for a court official of some sort, favoring instead the idea that it referred to a royal family member (such as a brother or nephew of the king) who may or may not have acted in an administrative capacity. But there is biblical evidence that this scenario, also, is not correct. In 2 Samuel 13 we read of Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, King David’s brother, who converses with Amnon, David’s son: “But Amnon had a friend, whose name was Jonadab, the son of Shimeah David’s brother; and Jonadab was a very subtil man. And he said unto him, Why art thou, being the king’s son [ben hamelek], lean from day to day? wilt thou not tell me?” (2 Samuel 13:3–4). In this selection, Amnon, who was a son of the king, is clearly designated as ben hamelek. But neither David’s brother Shimeah nor Shimeah’s son Jonadab, who was David’s nephew, are called ben hamelek. If ben hamelek could refer to a male of the royal family other than a king’s biological son, as Avigad suggested, we might expect to see this reflected in the above passage, or at least somewhere in the Hebrew Bible. That persons specifically named as the king’s brother and the king’s nephew are not called ben hamelek in this passage, nor in any other passage in the entire biblical record, must certainly cast doubt on Avigad’s assertion. Of the five biblical ben hamelek references in the Bible that do not clearly identify a son-to-father relationship to the king, not a single one indicates that any man called ben hamelek was a son of someone other than the king. There is simply no positive evidence that ben hamelek meant anything other than a biological son of the king.

As for Maaseiah ben hamelek of 2 Chronicles 28, his royal assignment or function is not mentioned. It is only reported that he was killed in Pekah’s attack on Judah (ca. 733 BC). It is very likely, however, that Maaseiah was the actual son of Ahaz, king of Judah, and probably heir to the throne. Maaseiah’s death may have opened the way for Hezekiah, another son of Ahaz, to become the king of Judah after Ahaz (see 2 Chronicles 28:27; 2 Kings 18:1). The death of Maaseiah is reported with the deaths of two other significant court figures: “And Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, slew Maaseiah the king’s son [ben hamelek], and Azrikam the governor of the house, and Elkanah that was next to the king” (2 Chronicles 28:7). Thousands were killed in Pekah’s attack on Judah (see 2 Chronicles 28:6), but only these three were
mentioned by name and title. If Maaseiah were nothing more than a generic court official, as some believe the ben hamelek title designates, then it would be odd for him not only to be listed along with the two highest royal administrators who served King Ahaz, but also to be indeed ahead of them. Azrikam, “the governor of the house” (Hebrew נגיד ההבאי — nagid habayit), held the office that made him essentially the chief of staff over the court of Ahaz; and Elkanah “that was next to the king” (Hebrew mishneh hamelek — literally “second to the king”) was what today would be called the king’s prime minister (similar to the position of Joseph described in Genesis 41:40–43). That Maaseiah is listed ahead of the two as ben hamelek suggests he held a position of importance to the king greater than either the prime minister or the chief of staff, and who, other than the crown prince, would fit this description? Certainly a generic court official, whether a nonroyal retainer or a royal nephew, would not. Maaseiah seems to have been the biological son of Ahaz and very likely heir to the throne before being killed by Zichri of Ephraim.

All of these examples from the Hebrew Bible suggest that the term ben hamelek was used exclusively to describe a biological son of a king, and not merely a member of the extended royal family or a government official. Returning now to Malchiah, or Malkiyahu ben hamelek, who is the subject of this entire inquiry, we come to the next question.

A Son of King Zedekiah?

Was Malkiyahu the son of Zedekiah? Since neither the Malkiyahu seal nor the passage in Jeremiah 38:6 specifically stipulate that Zedekiah was the king to whom Malkiyahu was related, we may only assume that this was so. But there are strong points of evidence for this assumption. The first point is the context of Jeremiah 38, where Zedekiah is the king with whom Jeremiah and his opponents are interacting. Because Zedekiah is mentioned by name in Jeremiah 38:5, it is probable that the scribe composing the text in the subsequent reference to Malkiyahu (v. 6) used the term ben hamelek rather than awkwardly repeating the royal name Zedekiah in a phrase like son of Zedekiah. Since the term ben hamelek appears without a king’s name on the stamp seals and seal impressions mentioned above, it is clear that this was an acceptable way of referring to a royal son and his kingly father without specifically using the father’s name. Indeed, if Jeremiah 38:6 refers to any king other than Zedekiah, we should expect that king to be specifically named in the course of the story, for such was the care taken by Judean scribes. That no other monarch’s name was recorded in Jeremiah 38 suggests very strongly that the king who was the father of Malkiyahu was the king in the chapter’s general context—namely, Zedekiah.

A major question would be the age of Malkiyahu in Jeremiah 38, the chapter that records events during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem in 586 BC, not long before the fall of the city. Was he old enough to have his name mentioned in the context described in Jeremiah 38? In this chapter, Jeremiah was put into confinement: “Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that was in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire” (v. 6). A problem with this verse is that misconceptions

“That no other monarch’s name was recorded in Jeremiah 38 suggests very strongly that the king who was the father of Malkiyahu was the king in the chapter’s general context—namely, Zedekiah.”
arise from certain incorrect terms used by the King James translators. Not only should *Hammelech* be rendered as “the king,” but the Hebrew word that they translated as “dungeon” does not mean “dungeon”—the Hebrew term נָבָר (*bor*) means “pit,” and in the context of Jeremiah 38 it means a pit for water storage, properly a cistern. Note that there was no water in the “dungeon” (cistern) and that “Jeremiah sunk in the mire” (mud); silting was a common problem in water storage cisterns.

The King James use of the word *prison* in Jeremiah 38:6 cannot be correct either. The Hebrew term מָטָראָה (*matarah*) and does not really mean “prison” but “aim,” “objective,” or “target” (compare 1 Samuel 20:20, “mark”). Rather than Malkiyahu, at his young age (see below), being the owner of his own “dungeon” at some royal “prison,” a more accurate rendition of Jeremiah 38:6 suggests that within a palace courtyard used by the royal guard for, among other things, archery practice (as in 1 Samuel 20:20), was the wellhead of a cistern connected with his name. “And they took Jeremiah and put him into the cistern of Malkiyahu son of the king, which was in the target yard; and they lowered Jeremiah with ropes. Now in the cistern there was no water, just mud, and Jeremiah sunk in the mud” (author’s translation). So how old would a royal son have to be in order to have a cistern connected with his name? What was the connection? And how old could Malkiyahu have been, as the son of King Zedekiah, in the context of Jeremiah 38?

It is reported in the Bible that Zedekiah was 21 years old when he began to reign (see 2 Kings 24:18). His reign began in 597 BC and ended 11 years later, in 586 BC, when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians and Zedekiah was captured (see 2 Kings 25:1–7). It was during Zedekiah’s 11th year that the events of Jeremiah 38 occurred, which would make Zedekiah 32 years old at that point. Taking into consideration that a young man in the royal family could marry and father children as early as 15 or 16 years of age, it is perfectly conceivable that Zedekiah could, at age 32, have had a son who was 15 or 16 years old by 586 BC. If, therefore, Malkiyahu were the first son of Zedekiah, and thus the heir apparent to the throne, as the owner of a *ben hamelek* seal might well be, he could have been as old as 15 or 16 years himself in the context of Jeremiah 38. A teenage crown prince might very well have been assigned his own personal wing or apartment in the royal palace complex, whether he had married or not, and that wing or apartment could have abutted a courtyard where the royal guard held archery practice. One cistern (there might have been more) that was accessed by a wellhead in that courtyard could easily have stretched underneath the princely quarters, so that it was designated as the “cistern of Malkiyahu son of the king.” In other words, it is entirely plausible that the Malkiyahu of Jeremiah 38:6 (and of the stamp...
seal in question) could have been the teenage son of Zedekiah and that a cistern in a courtyard of the royal palace could have carried his name. And if that is true, it is entirely possible that Malkiyahu the son of Zedekiah could have been the Mulek of whom the Book of Mormon reports.

Other options for Mulek’s age at the fall of Jerusalem have been suggested. John L. Sorenson, in his detailed BYU Studies article on the “Mulekites,” mentions Smith’s suggested identification of Mulek as Malkiyahu and admits that Mulek “could have been as old as fifteen at the time Jerusalem fell” and that “as a prince may have had his own house, wherein there could have been a dungeon” (he did not identify the pit as a cistern).²⁵ However, Sorenson seems to have preferred a model in which Mulek was much younger: “On the other hand, we do not know that Mulek was more than an infant. The younger he was, the greater the likelihood that he could have escaped the notice of the Babylonians and subsequent slaughter at their hands. Whatever his age, he may have been secreted away to Egypt by family retainers and close associates of the king along with the king’s daughters (Jer. 43:6–7).”²⁶

But while Egypt very probably played a role in Mulek’s being spared from Babylonian execution, the idea that he was secretely brought there by or with the king’s daughters is unlikely. The same passage that mentions those daughters and their associates (Jeremiah 43:6) relates that they had been left in the custody of Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, a man handpicked by Chaldean captain of the guard Nebuzaradan to govern Judah on behalf of Babylon (see 2 Kings 25:23). Prior to that handover, the king’s daughters and the others would have been in the custody of Nebuzaradan himself, who would likely have seen to it that they were carefully searched, interviewed, and observed, with any male heir of Zedekiah being a priority objective of those efforts. Unlike the ease with which princess Jehosheba had hidden the infant royal son Joash from queen Athaliah 250 years earlier (see 2 Kings 11:1–3), it would have been practically impossible for the king’s daughters or any other Judeans to have secreted an infant Mulek from the custody of Nebuzaradan’s security agents.

But if an infant Mulek would not likely have gone undetected by the Babylonians, a 15- or 16-year-old Mulek would have been even less likely to escape capture—unless he was not in Judah at the time Jerusalem fell. In 589 BC Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon, apparently in a conspiracy with Phoenicia and Ammon, to aid Egypt’s efforts to take control of western Asia. Young Prince Mulek (Malkiyahu), perhaps barely 13, could have been sent to Egypt by his father either as part of an ambassadorial mission or as part of the liaison that would coordinate Judah’s role in the rebellious coalition. Another scenario, perhaps more likely, is that a 15-year-old Mulek was sent to Egypt during 587 BC, when the Babylonian siege,
which had commenced early in 588, was lifted so that Nebuchadnezzar’s forces could deal with an Egyptian advance in the south (see Jeremiah 37:5–8). Others evidently traveled safely to Egypt during this time,²⁷ and it may be that Mulek did as well, either to bear messages to Egypt and help coordinate the war or to secure his safety as heir to the throne of Judah, or both. In any case, the choice of Egypt as a safe haven for Mulek was also suggested by Sorenson, who maintained: “It is obvious that

6:10) is not germane to the discussion of his movements. A passage in Omni alludes to Mulek’s travel party without naming him specifically. Key phrases from these passages are of interest:

Curiously, Mulek is not mentioned by name in Omni. The passage correctly specifies that “the people of Zarahemla came out [not “were driven out”] from Jerusalem at the time that Zedekiah, king of Judah, was carried away captive into Babylon.” This would place the departure from Jerusalem of at least some of Mulek’s party, perhaps the bulk of it, sometime in late 586 BC, more than a year after the point suggested for teenage Mulek himself to have gone to Egypt.

Addressing these passages in reverse order, Helaman 8:21 suggests that Mulek and his people “were driven out of the land of Jerusalem.” In the technical sense, whether Mulek was an infant or a teenage prince acting on behalf of his father, his travel to Egypt would not have been the result of having been “driven out.” Rather, it was an escape. The passage does not address whether Mulek escaped from Jerusalem earlier than the party that eventually crossed the ocean with him or whether they all left Jerusalem at once. It is worth noting that the very next verse maintains that “Lehi was driven out of Jerusalem” (v. 22), which is also technically incorrect—Lehi, too, made an orderly

What the Book of Mormon Says about Mulek

Would the model of a teenage Mulek going to Egypt at the behest of his father, King Zedekiah, before the actual fall of Jerusalem fit with the references to Mulek in the Book of Mormon? There are only three places in the Book of Mormon, as we now have it, that mention Mulek, and one of them (Helaman

in order to leave by sea for America, he would have to reach a port. Since the Babylonians controlled the ports of Israel and Phoenicia at the time, going south to Egypt (among his father’s allies) would be about the only possibility.”²⁸
and planned departure from Jerusalem. The inaccurate idea of the parties of Lehi and Mulek being “driven out” of Jerusalem may have developed late in Nephite thought. In any case, Helaman 8 says nothing that would contradict the idea of a teenage Mulek leaving Jerusalem for Egypt before the city’s fall to the Babylonians. The reference in Mosiah 25:2 is of interest because it specifically identifies Zarahemla as a descendant of Mulek. In other words, had the Judean monarchy survived, a direct heir to the throne of Jerusalem, Zarahemla, would ironically have been found in ancient America. A key phrase in the verse mentions Mulek’s party going “into the wilderness.” This theme also appears in Omni. But, again, nothing in Mosiah 25:2 contradicts the proposition that Mulek went to Egypt before Jerusalem’s fall.

Omni 1:15–16 gives the most specific information. Written upon the small plates of Nephi (not the plates of Mormon), the words of Amaleki in Omni represent a far earlier record of events than the other two references. Curiously, Mulek is not mentioned by name in Omni. The passage correctly specifies that “the people of Zarahemla came out [not “were driven out”] from Jerusalem at the time that Zedekiah, king of Judah, was carried away captive into Babylon.” This would place the departure from Jerusalem of at least some of Mulek’s party, perhaps the bulk of it, sometime in late 586 BC, more than a year after the point suggested for teenage Mulek himself to have gone to Egypt. However, since Omni 1:15 does not specifically mention Mulek by name, it does not contradict the proposal that he went to Egypt earlier than the party with whom he eventually came across the sea. It is certainly possible that the party included some of the people who left Jerusalem in Jeremiah 43, as Sorenson suggested. And with the later reference in Mosiah 25:2, Omni 1:16 specifies that the group “journeyed in the wilderness.” That wilderness might have been the trail across northern Sinai from Judah to Egypt, as also suggested by Sorenson, or it could even refer to a subsequent trip from Egypt westward across the desert of North Africa. But returning to the subject at hand, nothing in Omni contradicts the model of a teenage Mulek going to Egypt a year before the fall of Jerusalem.

The Stamp Seal Left Behind

So was Mulek the “Malkiyahu the son of the king” mentioned in Jeremiah 38:6? Nothing in the Bible or the Book of Mormon negates this identification. And the evidence rehearsed above lends significant support to it. The m-l-k basis of both Hebrew names is clear, and the case of Berekhyahu/Baruch demonstrates that there is theoretical precedent for a person being called both Malkiyahu and Mulek—the one a longer, more formal version of the name with a theophoric yahu element, and the other a shorter form lacking that element but featuring a different vowel vocalization. Malkiyahu/Mulek would not have been killed by the Babylonians before Zedekiah’s eyes, as were his brothers (all younger than himself), because as the king’s oldest son and heir to the throne, he was likely sent to Egypt by his father well before the fall of Jerusalem and the capture of the royal family. Whether Mulek was sent to Egypt as a royal messenger or ambassador or in an effort to ensure his safety, it is unlikely that he could have taken all of his possessions with him to Egypt. Other men in Judah with the ben hamelek title are known to have possessed multiple stamp seals, and if Malkiyahu/Mulek did also it would have been easy for him to have left one behind. Some 2,570 years or so later, that seal was found by someone digging in Jerusalem and was surreptitiously sold. The stamp seal of “Malkiyahu son of the king” now in the London collection of Shlomo Moussaieff seems to be authentic. In answer to the question posed at the outset of this article—and the significance of this can hardly be overstated—it is quite possible that an archaeological artifact of a Book of Mormon personality has been identified. It appears that the seal of Mulek has been found.
While huddled with other prisoners in the cold, dank Liberty Jail in March 1839, the Prophet Joseph Smith felt inspired to direct that church members gather a knowledge of all the facts, and sufferings and abuses put upon them by the people of this State [of Missouri]; and also of all the property and amount of damages which they have sustained, both of character and personal injuries, as well as real property; . . . and to take statements and affidavits . . . and present the whole concatenation of diabolical rascality and nefarious and murderous impositions that have been practised upon this people—that we may not only publish to all the world, but present them to the heads of government. (Doctrine and Covenants 123:1–2, 4–6)
The Prophet and the Saints had just passed through one of the most bitter persecutions in the history of the United States. At gunpoint, mobs and militias had forced members of the church from their homes, had beaten them and stolen their livestock, had burned their homes and raped women, had threatened them with extermination, and had driven them, in winter, eastward across the state of Missouri and over the Mississippi River into Illinois, as well as northward into the Iowa territory. The Book of Mormon was one of the contentious elements in this horrible picture of affliction.

Why did the citizens of Missouri respond with such hatred to the Latter-day Saints? The reasons are many. One of the chief objections had to do with Joseph Smith himself. He and his followers claimed that he was a prophet of God. But he was not an ordinary clairvoyant or charismatic religious thinker who spoke of promoting peace and doing God’s will—his claim to be a prophet was inextricably tied to a written work of scripture: the Book of Mormon. For opponents, the quarrelsome issues had nothing to do with the teachings of the Book of Mormon. Instead, as a recent study points out, it was the existence of the book itself that drew angry responses from unbelieving Missouri neighbors as well as other, more distant detractors.¹

In a way, it was an old story. Conflicts over religion litter history. During the centuries before the establishment of the United States, many wars in Europe were fought over religious differences. At one point, thousands of devotees fled from religious persecution there and came to the New World with the hope of practicing their religious principles in an open, untrammelled setting. In a related vein, our earliest scriptural records report conflicts that arose at least in part from religious observances and beliefs, including conflicts between Cain and Abel (see Moses 5:18–21) and between Noah and the evil people in his society who “sought his life” (Moses 8:26). But the matter of Joseph Smith was different. He claimed to have a book that had come from real artifacts—golden plates no less—that he had translated from a religious record from the American past.

In a July 1831 revelation to Joseph Smith, the Lord identified “the land of Missouri” as “the land which I have appointed and consecrated for the gathering of the saints.” Moreover, the Lord designated this region as “the land of promise, and the place for the city of Zion” (D&C 57:1–2). Within months, church members were moving to Jackson County, Missouri, where Joseph had received that revelation. Almost predictably, local citizens first grew suspicious and then resisted the immigrating Saints. By the summer of 1833, a mere two years after the revelation about “the land of promise,” resistance in Missouri had grown to such a pitch that local residents took matters into their own hands, burning and murdering the homes and businesses of Latter-day Saints. Edward Partridge, then bishop of the church, was rounded up with other men and whipped before being tarred and feathered. In the same roundup, the mob grabbed Charles Allen and “stripped and tarred and feathered” him “because he would not agree to leave the county, or deny the Book of Mormon.”²

What is clear from this early incident is that the members of the mob had mobilized partly because of their antagonism toward the Book of Mormon. This observation points to an important subtext of the persecutions: in the back of some persecutors’ minds lay the claims about the divine origin of the Book of Mormon. In addition, they offered their victims a way out of the threatened trouble—deny the Book of Mormon and thereby retain their properties and lives.³ In the case of Charles Allen, he refused the offer and suffered.

It was not until persecutions in Missouri stretched across 1838 and deep into the winter of 1839 that the Prophet saw fit to instruct the Saints “to take statements and affidavits,” as we have seen (D&C 123:4). In response, between 1839 and 1845 hundreds of Saints drew up affidavits with the intent of submitting them to government officials.⁴ Their bleak hope was that Missouri and U.S. officials would view them sympathetically and perhaps even provide compensation for lost properties. But it was not to be. Of the almost 1,000 affidavits sworn before government officers in Illinois and Iowa, 773 are currently known.⁵ These documents paint a picture of the terrible devastation that wrecked people’s lives in Missouri during the 1830s.

Of the surviving affidavits, only five speak directly about the Book of Mormon as a test of faith. But we can be assured that the opponents of the Latter-day Saints thought of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon as inseparably intertwined. An example from one of those five affidavits will suffice to show that the Saints’ belief in Joseph Smith and his work lay at the heart of the calamities. It involves Caleb Baldwin, Alanson Ripley, and Joseph Smith when they were prisoners together.

In his 1843 affidavit, Caleb Baldwin reported what is clear from this early incident is that the members of the mob had mobilized partly because of their antagonism toward the Book of Mormon. This observation points to an important subtext of the persecutions: in the back of some persecutors’ minds lay the claims about the divine origin of the Book of Mormon. In addition, they offered their victims a way out of the threatened trouble—deny the Book of Mormon and thereby retain their properties and lives. In the case of Charles Allen, he refused the offer and suffered.

It was not until persecutions in Missouri stretched across 1838 and deep into the winter of 1839 that the Prophet saw fit to instruct the Saints “to take statements and affidavits,” as we have seen (D&C 123:4). In response, between 1839 and 1845 hundreds of Saints drew up affidavits with the intent of submitting them to government officials. Their bleak hope was that Missouri and U.S. officials would view them sympathetically and perhaps even provide compensation for lost properties. But it was not to be. Of the almost 1,000 affidavits sworn before government officers in Illinois and Iowa, 773 are currently known. These documents paint a picture of the terrible devastation that wrecked people’s lives in Missouri during the 1830s.

Of the surviving affidavits, only five speak directly about the Book of Mormon as a test of faith. But we can be assured that the opponents of the Latter-day Saints thought of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon as inseparably intertwined. An example from one of those five affidavits will suffice to show that the Saints’ belief in Joseph Smith and his work lay at the heart of the calamities. It involves Caleb Baldwin, Alanson Ripley, and Joseph Smith when they were prisoners together.

In his 1843 affidavit, Caleb Baldwin reported that because of the abuses that he and his family had suffered, he sought and obtained an interview in November 1838 with Judge Austin A. King at Richmond, Missouri, prior to the court of inquiry
presided over by Judge King himself. Baldwin petitioned Judge King for a “fair trial,” whereupon the judge, Baldwin testified, replied that “there was no law for the Mormons” and that “they must be exterminated.” Baldwin explained to Judge King “that his family composed of helpless females had been plundered and driven out into the prairie and asked Judge King what he should do.” Judge King answered that “if he [Baldwin] would renounce his religion and forsake [Joseph] Smith he would be released and protected.” Baldwin further wrote that “the same offer was made to the other prisoners all of whom however [also] refused to do so and were in reply told that they would be put to death.” Alanson Ripley, who was with Baldwin and Joseph Smith during the interview, also said that “the same offer was made to him [Ripley] by Mr. Birch the prosecuting attorney, that if he would forsake the mormons he should be released and Restored to his home and suffer to remain [in Missouri]; to which he returned.” Joseph Smith recorded that “he and Mr. Baldwin were chained togeather at the time of the conversation . . . recited by Mr. Baldwin, which conversation he heard and which is correctly stated.” Joseph also testified “that no such offer was made to him it being understood as certain that he was to be shot.” These two men who chose to continue their belief in the teachings of Joseph Smith as exemplified in the Book of Mormon were confined in Liberty Jail, Liberty, Missouri, from December 1838 through April 1839 by Judge King’s court of inquiry to await trial.

In similar incidents, the Saints’ persecutors gave them a specific choice: deny the Book of Mormon, deny Joseph Smith, and live in peace with neighbors and friends. In a second affidavit, Truman Brace testified, “As I was hauling a load of wood I saw a number of armed men on the prairies. When the[y] saw me two of them came up to me. They ordered me to Stop or they would Shoot me. One of them named Young asked me if I believed the book of Mormon; I told them that ‘I did.’” Because of Brace’s belief, the men told him that he “must leave the County.” Brace explained that he had “neither team or means” to do that, to which “Young then Said he would shoot me and immediately made ready to Carry his threat into execution but the other man persuaded him not to do so.” The rest of the men, about 50 in number, rode up. Brace recounted that “John Young then took an axe gad [a tool for breaking rock] which I held in my hand and commenced beating me with the same. I suppose I received about fifty strokes after breaking it he got a Raw Hide and Commenced whipping me with it he cut my Hat nearly all to pieces.” This and other brutal acts apparently took place near Brace’s homestead in 1833, for he recalled, “[S]eeing me thus situated [my wife and daughter] came and entreated the mob to spare my life.”

But the horrors continued. Brace reported that he made his way into his house and, not surprisingly, “the mob . . . came into the House. I sat me down on a chair when one of them thrust the muzzle of the Gun against my neck and thrust me against the wall and then kicked me on the mouth with his foot.” In the process of this persecution, Brace was separated from his “famaly which consisted of wife & six children [who] suferd much by my absence through feer
A third affidavit that mentions the Book of Mormon comes from Barnet Cole. A certain Moses Wilson and Robert Jonson called at Barnet Cole’s home and invited him “to go out a pace with them said they some gentleman wished to see him.” Once they were away from his home, Cole found himself in the presence of 40 or 50 armed men. One of the men said, “[I]s this mister Cole the reply was yes.” At this moment they asked Cole if he believed the Book of Mormon, to which Cole replied, “Yes.” They then took off his “Coat and Jaccoat and laid on ten lashes and then told me I mite go holme,” wrote Cole. A little over a month later, a “Mob headed by Wilson & Jonson . . . Came into his [Cole’s] house and gave him a second Whiping and ordered him to leave the County or it would be worse for him.”

In another affidavit, Lyman Wight said that “some time in the summer of 1833, . . . a strong prejudice among the various sects arose, declaring that Joseph Smith was a false prophet, and ought to die.” Subsequently, “mobs assembled in considerable bodies, frequently visiting private houses, threatening the inmates with death and destruction instantly, if they did not renounce Joe Smith as a prophet, and the book of Mormon.” Concerning his personal experience, Wight reported that he and his family had been separated while the mobbers searched for him. During the separation, Harriet, his wife, had “loaded her three small children, in a skiff [and] passed down Big Blue river, a distance of fourteen miles, and crossed over the Missouri river.” She borrowed a piece of carpet from a friend in order to make a tent for shelter. Wight later found them in that squalid condition. He reported that he “had been hunted throughout Jackson, Lafayette, and Clay counties, and also the Indian Territory.” Wight further wrote, “Having made the inquiry of my family why it was they [the Missourians] had so much against me, the answer was, ’He believes in Joe Smith and the Book of Mormon, G—— d—— him; and we believe Joe Smith to be a ——— rascal’.”

The fifth account comes from John P. Greene’s notable collection titled *Facts Relative to the Expulsion of the Mormons from the State of Missouri, Under the “Exterminating Order”* (1839). In his appendix, Greene recorded that in 1833 a mob took several prominent church members—including Isaac Morley and David Whitmer—from their homes. The ruffians drove these men by “the point of the bayonet to the public square” of the city of Independence, where they “stripped and tarred and feathered them.” In this condition, the men stood while the mob cocked “their guns . . . at the prisoners’ breasts,” the leader “threatening them with instant death, unless they denied the book of Mormon and confessed it to be a fraud.” The leader declared that “if they did [deny the Book of Mormon], they might enjoy the privileges of citizens” of Missouri. To this invitation, “David Whitmer . . . lifted up his hands and bore witness that the Book of Mormon was the Word of God.” Astonishingly, “the mob then let them go.”

A final example, from the aforementioned Wight affidavit, occurred “some time in the summer of 1833,” after two years of peace between church members and their neighbors. At that time, Lyman Wight affirmed, “a strong prejudice among the various sects arose, declaring that Joseph Smith was a false prophet, and ought to die.” Subsequently, “mobs assembled in considerable bodies, frequently visiting private houses, threatening the inmates with death and destruction instantly, if they did not renounce Joe Smith as a prophet, and the book of Mormon.” These threats came as a prelude to “operations of mobocracy” wherein people of ill will united for the purpose of driving church members from Jackson County. Like the other instances, this conflict involved the Book of Mormon as a test of faith for the Saints in the face of threats against their lives and property.

In sum, members of the church living in Missouri in the 1830s suffered the same persecution as their ancient counterparts. They were robbed of their property, whipped, beaten, slandering, and jailed because of their belief in the Book of Mormon and in the divine calling of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Those who chose to deny the Book of Mormon escaped the tribulation heaped upon those who refused. For, as a mob had assured several men whom they held at bayonet point, if “they denied the Book of Mormon, and confessed it to be a fraud . . . they might enjoy the privileges of citizens.” The Book of Mormon had indeed become a test of faith. ✽
A CONVERSATION WITH

ROBERT J. MATTHEWS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK PHILBRICK

This interview with Robert J. Matthews continues a feature added to the Journal two issues ago when the Journal published an interview with John Sorenson, the departing editor. Robert Matthews served as dean of Religious Education at Brigham Young University from 1982 to 1991. He also served as the first president of the Mount Timpanogos Utah Temple. He is best known to many church members as the person who published important inaugural studies on the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. As the following interview will show, the Book of Mormon was one of the important influences that led Brother Matthews to his interest in the Joseph Smith Translation. —ED.

JBMS: How did you become interested in the Book of Mormon? Was it a process? Was it an experience?
RJM: It was a growth experience. I would say my interest was because my parents used to talk to me about the book and tell me I ought to read it. I didn’t find much real interest in it until I came to BYU as a freshman in 1945. Brigham Young University did not have classes on the Book of Mormon in 1945, but I read it on my own. I read it because of my parents’ urging.

JBMS: Were courses on the Book of Mormon later offered while you were a BYU undergraduate?
RJM: No. I never had an undergraduate class on the Book of Mormon. My only Book of Mormon class was a graduate class from Dan Ludlow [formerly dean of Religious Education at BYU].

JBMS: How did your parents encourage you to read the book?
RJM: My parents were converts to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Book of Mormon was very important to them. When I was about 16 or 17, they said that I really ought to start reading the Book of Mormon. I would start, but it wasn’t very interesting to me. When I arrived at BYU, somehow there was an inner urge to read it. So I read it. I decided I would not use any bookmarks and I would read what I could read in the available time. I had to read some of it two or three times, but that is the way I read it the first time.

JBMS: How have you sustained your interest in the Book of Mormon?
RJM: By continuing to read it and listening to other people. I took a class from Brother Sidney B. Sperry on the New Testament, and he talked a lot about the Book of Mormon. It was from Brother Sperry that I first got the idea that we could use the Book of Mormon to help us understand the New Testament.
But my interest in the Book of Mormon was not because I was trying to gain a testimony. I already believed it. I just wanted to read it. Whether or not it was true was never an issue with me. I knew it was true. Through the years, anything else that I have done hasn’t convinced me any more that it was true, because I knew that all along. But an appreciation of it, and joy from reading it, and a comprehension of what the Book of Mormon says and how it fits into the overall picture of all of the scriptures—these have been continually growing. When Brother Nibley wrote his little book *Lehi in the Desert*, that was very impressive to me, as well as his book *The World of the Jaredites*. Then he wrote a book used as the Melchizedek Priesthood course of study, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*. That was also impressive to me.

**JBMS:** Where has this interest led you?

**RJM:** I am sure it was my interest in the Book of Mormon that kept me interested in the church and probably had some influence on my wanting to join the Church Educational System. I remember very well when I was reading the Book of Mormon for the first time and came upon Second Nephi, chapter 29. The passage says, “Many of the Gentiles shall say: A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible.” None of that seemed too compelling to me. But I remember the first time I read a few verses later: “Know ye not that there are more nations than one? Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea; and that I rule in the heavens above and in the earth beneath; and I bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth? Wherefore murmur ye, because that ye shall receive more of my word? Know ye not that the testimony of two nations is a witness unto you that I am God, that I remember one nation like unto another?” (2 Nephi 29:7–8). I was lying on a couch in my apartment just off the hill from the BYU campus. It was a Saturday. There was something about the concept that there is more than one nation and therefore there ought to be more than one book. That really caught my attention. I can remember saying out loud, “This is true.” I was so impressed with that concept: if there is more than one nation, there ought to be more than one record; and God speaks the same things to one nation that he does to another. I have thought a lot about that since. That’s the first real live action I remember getting out of the Book of Mormon.

**JBMS:** Would you characterize that as a spiritual witness?

**RJM:** There’s no question. It’s what the Book of Mormon said about the Bible that really interested me: First Nephi, chapter 13, and Third Nephi, chapters 12 through 14—the sermon that’s like the Sermon on the Mount—and the chapters from Isaiah. I think if they didn’t lead me into the JST [Joseph Smith’s “translation” of the Bible], they always supported what I could see about the Bible.

Before I read the Book of Mormon, I had read a good portion of the New Testament, particularly the Gospels, and also Genesis. I don’t remember the exact sequence. Most of my thinking about scripture in those years was on the need for two witnesses. The Book of Mormon also says that the Bible has not come to us in its original clarity. I think the Book of Mormon had a large impact on me in realizing that the Bible, as wonderful as it is, is not as accurate as it once was. That thought by Nephi surely touched my soul.

If you read the Book of Mormon without any tutelage from anybody, you don’t get it all. But I remembered from my reading that there was a chapter somewhere in the Book of Mormon that told where we go when we die. It turns out to be Alma 40. I didn’t know it was Alma 40, but I remembered reading that. After I went home in the summer, I worked in a service station. A good friend owned an airplane and he wanted me to go up for a ride. He said, “Next Sunday morning let’s go up for a ride.” I really liked him and I wanted to go, but I didn’t think I ought to go on Sunday. Each day at work we would talk about it. Saturday night, as I left the garage, he asked if he should pick me up in the morning. I said, “No. I’m not going.”

He had the most disappointed look on his face. But I knew I needed to be in church on Sunday, not up flying an airplane. So I went to church. I remember as I was walking to church seeing the plane circle above. An airplane in Evanston [Wyoming] that long ago was a rarity. We hardly ever saw one. I went in to church and, when I came out, my sister-in-law met me and said, “There’s been an airplane crash.” I said, “Oh?” I asked about my friend who owned the plane. She said, “He was badly hurt.” But another friend was killed. He was sitting where I would have been sitting because, when I didn’t go, the owner got him to go, and he was killed. That
was a shock. I went home and I thought, “I wonder where he is now?” I remembered that somewhere in the Book of Mormon it told where a person went at death. I searched until I found it. I have never forgotten that. I read that place in the Book of Mormon with a religious fervor.

**JMBS:** What did your pilot friend say?

**RJM:** I went to see him that afternoon. He was badly beaten up but he could talk. He told me that he let the other person fly the plane and they were looking for deer. They saw some and swooped down. But they flew too slowly and went into a stall. The plane crashed.

That experience had a cementing influence on my knowledge of the Book of Mormon. Since I had read that chapter about the spirit world, I knew it was in the book. I searched the Book of Mormon with real intent. I have never forgotten where it was. That was because it had a real meaning in my life. I have often thought that I might have died that day if I had gone. But I do know that Alma became a real hero to me that day.

**JMBS:** So the Book of Mormon really hasn’t shaped your career except for the passage you read in Second Nephi that speaks about the second witness and became a springboard for your interest in the Bible and the JST?

**RJM:** It certainly helped. However, the real thing that triggered my interest in the JST was a statement that Joseph Fielding Smith made on the radio when he quoted John 1:18: “No man hath seen God at any time.” Then he said, “That’s not right. Joseph Smith corrected that verse by revelation.” When he said, “by revelation,” I had another of those spiritual experiences. The word revelation meant something. I hadn’t known that Joseph Smith had made some corrections in the Bible. Joseph Fielding Smith’s statement penetrated me. That was the summer of 1944.

By January 1946, I was on my mission. I asked my mission president about Joseph Smith’s translation of the Bible and he said, “Well, I don’t know everything about it, but I know it is true.” This was Bruce McConkie’s father. He said, “I have heard Bruce talk about it.” None of us knew who Bruce was. Bruce was not a General Authority then. But my mission president told me, “If you are interested in it, you ought to work on it. But not on your mission. Wait until your mission is over. Then if you want to do something about it, you can.”

**JBMS:** Is your testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith tied to the Book of Mormon?

**RJM:** Yes. A great deal. I wasn’t looking for a testimony and searching the book to find it. I never did doubt it. Reading the book gave me these good feelings. I didn’t search the book so thoroughly except for that one chapter in Alma. But that wasn’t a search to learn if it was true. It was a search to find where the chapter was. I would say that my conviction of the Book of Mormon was spiritual. It came from reading the book itself. Then everything I have learned since that time, both by my own study and from others, has broadened my appreciation for it.

**JMBS:** In your view, what direction should Book of Mormon studies go?

**RJM:** What I would say is every direction. I think there is room in the Book of Mormon for a more careful analysis of the book itself—what is in it. Elder Milton R. Hunter toured the mission when I was there. He told me that he had read the Book of Mormon 45 times. By then I had probably read it one and a half times. I was very interested that Milton R. Hunter was such an avid reader of the book. He knew the internal structure very well. He turned to archaeology in his later years. I am a little surprised that that is the direction he took. I would be more inclined to go in the direction of Book of Mormon doctrine rather than archaeology.

There is room for more Near Eastern studies. There is room for Western Hemisphere archaeology. But I feel that the Western Hemisphere archaeology may be a little less important than those other two. I really think the answer to the Book of Mormon, as far as unbelievers are concerned, is going to be better proved by Near Eastern studies than by studies of Central America. I heard Hugh Nibley say one time that if you want to do Book of Mormon research, you should do Middle East research of the sixth or seventh century BC rather than trying to find answers somewhere in the Western Hemisphere through archaeology and such. I thought he was right, and still feel that way.

I don’t think we have done enough on the in-
ternal analysis of the book. I did a little book a number of years ago called *Who's Who in the Book of Mormon*. I did it out of my own private interest. I had just come home from my mission. I was excited about the Book of Mormon. I wanted to analyze it. One thing that impressed me was its complexity. There are so many groups that are hard to track. I heard Brother Nibley say that it is a minority record, and I think he is right. We see branches break off from the main branch. A prophet leads people into the wilderness, taking the records with them. I am not sure that enough people in the church have really analyzed that. I feel like I have not adequately done that. Who is Abinadi? I don't know that we can pinpoint who Abinadi is. I assume he is a Nephite. Who is Samuel the Lamanite? These people just show up. But you know they have families somewhere.

I remember in an Old Testament class that Brother Sidney B. Sperry talked about Bible customs. He had us all buy a little book by [George M.] Mackie called *Bible Manners and Customs*. I had an emotional aversion against that because I felt I didn't need to know that kind of information. Just read the scriptures, I thought. That was because I was naive. I heard him talk about Bible manners, and it changed my whole appreciation. I think that is the kind of thing we could do with the Book of Mormon if we knew more about Near Eastern customs. There is a large portion of the Book of Mormon that we don't know the background to but could know if we researched it, including the name of the place where Ishmael died and was buried, “which was called Nahom.” Ellis Rasmussen [a BYU professor of ancient scripture] told me one day, “You know, there is a Hebrew word that means ‘mourning’ or ‘sadness’ that fits that name.”

**JBMS:** *If the Book of Mormon stands on its own and you received a spiritual witness by reading it, what is the value of the professional teacher?*

**RJM:** For a teacher, studying would not be to determine whether or not the book is true but to understand what it means. There is a good reason to listen to other people because they see things. For example, when Nephi is arguing with his brothers about seeing Laban, they say, “He is a mighty man. He can slay fifty.” Hugh Nibley said that 50 was not just a number out of a hat. That was the size of a military group in Jerusalem in Laban’s day. I didn’t know that. Those kinds of things just continually add to my appreciation of the book.

**JBMS:** In your opinion, what are some of the most important published helps for Book of Mormon students? What could they acquire that would really help them?

**RJM:** Published books that have meant the most to me are Nibley’s *World of the Jaredites, Lehi in the Desert, An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, and *Since Cumorah*. The book *Since Cumorah* sounds like it’s not about the Book of Mormon, but it is. George Reynolds published *A Dictionary of the Book of Mormon*. It has been out of print for years. I think that reference is very helpful. Dennis Largey’s *Book of Mormon Reference Companion* will no doubt be very helpful.

**JBMS:** How about George Reynolds’s *Concordance* [A Complete Concordance of the Book of Mormon]?

**RJM:** He wrote his *Dictionary* and then his *Concordance*. They are both important.

**JBMS:** Wasn’t it important that somebody like Royal Skousen track the history of the text to demonstrate that the text is reliable?

**RJM:** The text is a reliable one. Royal Skousen’s extensive work reaches that conclusion, among other things. It needed to be done. Those kinds of things are extremely helpful, but perhaps not for beginners.

**JBMS:** What would you say are the most important advances in Book of Mormon scholarship during the past few years?

**RJM:** That is where I would put Royal Skousen’s comparative text [a work that will comprise four volumes: typographical facsimiles of the original and printer’s manuscripts, the history of the text, and an analysis of textual variants] and Stan Larson’s master’s thesis [“A Study of Some Textual Variations in the Book of Mormon Comparing the Original and the Printer’s Manuscripts and the 1830, the 1837, and the 1840 Editions,” BYU, 1974]. I think his work was incomplete compared to Royal’s work. But when Stan’s came out, it was more than we knew before. There is a huge portion of the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*...
that deals with the Book of Mormon. I haven’t counted the pages or the number of articles. I think that the *Encyclopedia* is a major source for Book of Mormon information. I find that I get as much help from a dictionary or a concordance as I do from somebody writing an article. Of course, it depends on how good that somebody is.

**JBMS:** Has there been any interest in a modernized version of the Book of Mormon?

**RJM:** The Reorganized Church, now the Community of Christ, put out a modern version. The editors softened some of the language so that it didn’t sound so quaint. My objection to an easy-to-read edition of the Book of Mormon would be that we lose some of its Hebrew character. Craig Bramwell did a master’s thesis on Hebraisms in the small plates [*“Hebrew Idioms in the Small Plates of Nephi,”* BYU, 1960]. It was very interesting: to war a warfare, to traffic in traffic. You would lose that if you modernized the speech.

**JBMS:** Do you think there are things that artists could do in portraying the Book of Mormon?

**RJM:** Possibly. To me it would be particularly helpful if they could illustrate what scholars have done. When I was on the Correlation Committee [of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints], there were groups producing scripture films. They would send to us for approval the text of the words that were to be spoken. We would read the text and decide whether we liked it or not. They would never send us the artwork for clearance. But when you see the artwork, that makes all the difference in the world. It was always too late then. I decided at that point that it is so difficult to create a motion picture, or any illustration, and not convey more than should be conveyed. If you paint a man or woman, they have to have clothes on. And the minute you paint that clothing, you have said something either right or wrong. It would be a marvelous help if there were artists who could illustrate things that researchers and archaeologists had discovered.

**JBMS:** What do you think of publishing children’s approaches to the Book of Mormon? Are they a service or a disservice?

**RJM:** I have seen things done with the Book of Mormon, Bible, and church history. I think people get the main thrust. But sometimes there are things that shouldn’t be in pictures because we don’t know how to accurately depict them. I received a testimony of the Book of Mormon without them. I have a book on the New Testament that we bought when our children were little. It was put out by the Seventh-Day Adventists. They had very good artists, and they told the story of Jesus’ birth just beautifully. But they say that the new star was a group of angels that came together and were the light source. As far as I know, that is not correct. I think that unwittingly we might make mistakes if we illustrate children’s materials based only on the text of the Book of Mormon. On the other hand, we have a statement in the Doctrine and Covenants [55:4] that the Lord wanted Oliver Cowdery and W. W. Phelps to write books so that little children would receive instruction. It didn’t say to illustrate them, but there is a pretty good precedent for that being a good thing.

**JBMS:** From your experience, what might assist others in how they approach the study of the Book of Mormon?

**RJM:** By reading it carefully many times and then reading what others have written. One of the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* articles quotes Read Putnam. He is the man who wrote the article “Were the Plates of Mormon of Tumbaga?” [*Improvement Era*, Sept. 1966]. Tumbaga is a form of gold, an alloy. Putnam is also intrigued by the fact that the Book of Mormon speaks of machinery [*Jarom 1:8*] and that the book of Ether mentions people using big animals for work. The term *machinery* intrigues me too.

**JBMS:** Do you think that 10 years from now the Book of Mormon will be even more emphasized in the church than it is today?

**RJM:** It will not be less emphasized, but I don’t know how much it will go ahead. The very nature of the church is that it doesn’t put all the emphasis on something old. This is a living church. We put emphasis on what the church is doing now. President Benson was able to get people very interested and to get the Brethren quoting the doctrine of the Book of Mormon, which I think is a very good thing. The Book of Mormon is never going to be out of style or out of date, and it certainly isn’t ever going to be replaced. The teachings on faith, repentance, and baptism; the plan of salvation; the atonement; and the resurrection will always be in vogue. But at the present time I don’t see that the Book of Mormon is going to become larger on the horizon, because current events are always going to enter into the picture for the true church.
The Language of the Scriptures

The late President Marion G. Romney, while serving as second counselor in the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, gave wise counsel about the way we study the gospel. He recommended a two-dimensional approach that emphasizes language as well as doctrine:

You ought to read the gospel; you ought to read the Book of Mormon . . . ; and you ought to read all the scriptures with the idea of finding out what's in them and what the meaning is and not to prove some idea of your own. Just read them and plead with the Lord to let you understand what he had in mind when he wrote them. . . . Become acquainted with the language of the scriptures and the teachings of the scriptures.¹

One way to become acquainted with the language of the scriptures is to learn the names of various sentence structures, grammatical features, and rhetorical figures that commonly occur in Joseph Smith’s English translation of the ancient American prophetic records abridged in the Book of Mormon.

Here are a few examples of typical syntactic structures that appear in 19th-century Book of Mormon English. Such structural figures are part of a long tradition of poetic and literary expression in scriptural texts from around the world:

1. Word-order variation (anastrophe and hyperbaton)
2. Interruption (anacoluthia)
3. Parenthesis
4. Ellipsis
5. Fragment (aposiopesis)
6. Conjunctions (polysyndeton and asyndeton)
7. Parallel structure (parison)

The technical terms for word-order variations are anastrophe and hyperbaton. Anastrophe is a general type of inversion for the sake of meter or style rather than emphasis. The words “blessed are ye” are a customary inversion, or anastrophe, of the clause “ye are blessed”:

Therefore blessed are ye if ye shall keep my commandments, which the Father hath commanded me that I should give unto you.
(3 Nephi 18:14)

The standard word order for clauses in contemporary English is subject-verb-object/complement (SVO/C). The inversion of that pattern, the object/complement-verb-subject (O/CVS) anastrophe, is found throughout the scriptures and in many classical literary texts. Other examples from the Book of Mormon include “a written word sent he” in Mosiah 29:4 and “this they have done” in Alma 60:9.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), hyperbaton is a “figure of speech in which the customary or logical order of words or phrases is inverted, esp. for the sake of emphasis.”² Hyperbaton is a more marked kind of inversion that may feature a more complex variation of word order, one that may call more attention to itself by emphasizing constituents that we would otherwise overlook, as in 3 Nephi 25:2: “[U]nto you that fear my name, shall the Son of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings” (see also Malachi 4:2). In standard English word order, we would say, “The Son of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings unto you that fear my name.”

Readers of the Book of Mormon may sometimes be surprised or even confused by verses that begin with one idea but then are interrupted by another idea. The technical term for this figure is anacoluthia,
defined in the *OED* as the “passing from one construction to another before the former is completed.” An example of such an interruption, or anacoluthia, is found at the end of the following verse:

I, Zeniff, having been taught in all the language of the Nephites, and having had a knowledge of the land of Nephi, or of the land of our fathers’ first inheritance, and having been sent as a spy among the Lamanites that I might spy out their forces, that our army might come upon them and destroy them—but when I saw that which was good among them I was desirous that they should not be destroyed. (Mosiah 9:1)

Other examples of anacoluthia are found in 2 Nephi 25:20, Alma 22:18, Mormon 6:11, and 3 Nephi 28:36–37.

The technical term *parenthesis* refers to a syntactic structure in which one phrase or clause appears in the middle of another, often as an interrupting idea. The *OED* defines parenthesis as an “explanatory or qualifying word, clause, or sentence inserted into a passage with which it has not necessarily any grammatical connexion.” Such constructions may or may not be marked by commas, dashes, or parentheses. Here is a good example of structural parenthesis, marked with dashes:

And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of the wicked, yea, who are evil—for behold, they have no part nor portion of the Spirit of the Lord; for behold, they chose evil works rather than good; therefore the spirit of the devil did enter into them, and take possession of their house—and these shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and this because of their own iniquity, being led captive by the will of the devil. (Alma 40:13)

Other instances of parenthesis include Mosiah 8:1 and Alma 30:1–2. In the Book of Mormon, sometimes anacoluthia and complex parentheses are hard to distinguish from each other.

In an *ellipsis*, the author intentionally omits part of a construction. The *OED* defines ellipsis as “omission of one or more words in a sentence, which would be needed to complete the grammatical construction or fully to express the sense.” In 3 Nephi 27:33, the Lord says, “Wide is the gate, and broad the way which leads to death.” The verb *is* does not appear again in the second clause between *broad* and *the way* because the copula meaning and parallel structure do not necessitate repeating the verb. In an ellipsis, authors make an expression more concise by leaving out words that readers can fill in mentally for themselves. Alma 44:21 is a good example:

Now the number of their dead was not numbered because of the greatness of the number; yea, the number of their dead was exceedingly great, both on the Nephites and on the Lamanites.

We expect the text to read “both on the side of the Nephites and on the side of the Lamanites,” but the words “the side of” are understood from the context.

In standard academic written English today, editors may mark sentence fragments, or incomplete sentences, as a problem in an author’s text. However, in less formal writing, many published authors deliberately—and skillfully—employ fragments in the flow of their discourse. The technical term for such fragments is *aposiopesis*, which the *OED* defines as a “rhetorical artifice, in which the speaker comes to a sudden halt, as if unable or unwilling to proceed.” In 2 Nephi 2:10, we see an example of aposiopesis:

Wherefore, the ends of the law which the Holy One hath given, unto the inflicting of the punishment which is affixed, which punishment that is affixed is in opposition to that of the happiness which is affixed, to answer the ends of the atonement—

Although the expression is punctuated as a sentence with a capital letter at the beginning, the idea does not have an independent (main) clause, and it ends abruptly with a dash. The author moves to a new idea in the next verse: “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things” (v. 11). With anacoluthia, the author begins with one structure and finishes with another, whereas with aposiopesis, the author begins an idea and never finishes it at all. Other examples of aposiopesis in the Book of Mormon include Jacob 4:1, Mosiah 13:28, and Alma 52:15.

In contemporary written English, we usually separate items in a series with commas and then
use a conjunction before the last item, as in “faith, hope, and charity.” In scriptural texts, authors used two rhetorical variations of structure for items in a series: polysyndeton and asyndeton. Polysyndeton is the use of multiple conjunctions, placed between every item in a series. We see this in 2 Nephi 9:28: “O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men!” Asyndeton is the lack of any conjunctions between the items of a series. A famous example is the Isaiah passage quoted in 2 Nephi 19:6: “and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” Contemporary readers expect an and before “The Prince of Peace,” but an author can accelerate the rhythm and impact of the expression by leaving the conjunction out. Other examples appear in 3 Nephi 18:3, 4 Nephi 1:16, and Mosiah 3:19.

What we call parallel syntactic structure, or parallelism, is called parison in some rhetorical taxonomies. Authors of scriptural and poetic texts use parison as a matrix for repetition and variation of sounds, senses, and structures in memorable and meaningful patterns. Here is a good example of four parallel phrases, or parisonic structure, connected by polysyndeton conjunctions in one verse of scripture:

```
Behold, it is expedient that much should be done among this people, because of the hardness of their hearts, and the deafness of their ears, and the blindness of their minds, and the stiffness of their necks. (Jarom 1:3)
```

Parison can occur at every level of language: word, phrase, clause, sentence, and even paragraph. Another example is found in 2 Nephi 14:2.

Unfamiliar constructions can act as stumbling blocks for some readers of the Book of Mormon, so learning the language of the scriptures can improve reading comprehension. Some people may find these rhetorical figures to be rather dry details, but readers can benefit from identifying and naming the features of language that constitute a scriptural text. Other readers may simply enjoy exploring the texture of the text, like admiring the patterns and threads of a master weaver. You are welcome to send comments or questions to Cynthia_Hallen@byu.edu.
A Continuing Influence

Carole Mikita York

As I stood looking at the sun gleaming on the Mississippi River, and then turned to watch the group gathered along its bank, I could not help but wonder how I got there. I was standing among the descendants of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. These members of two faiths—the Community of Christ and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—were all singing the hymn “The Spirit of God.” The service took place on June 27, 2002, in memory of Joseph and Hyrum’s martyrdom 158 years earlier. Now, after all that time, these two groups were coming together in friendship. I felt like the proverbial mouse in the corner. I looked up wondering, “Father in Heaven, how did that little nine-year-old girl from Steubenville, Ohio, get here?”

I had traveled with my friend and colleague Alan Neves to cover an important news story for our television station. We were in Nauvoo, Illinois, for the dedication of the rebuilt temple. But this historic event for the Church of Jesus Christ led me to recollect when I first heard of the restored gospel and to recall the two young men who delivered that message. My reflections quickly brought me to the Book of Mormon, whose spiritual power first touched me as a child and whose influence has remained palpably sweet in the renewing of old, treasured relationships in recent months.

It was 1960. By then my parents were prominent members of the Steubenville community. My father was a successful orthopedic surgeon and my mother a leader of numerous civic organizations. Three of their four parents were poor immigrants from eastern Europe, but now my parents and their four children—I am the oldest—were living the American Dream. Not all was perfect, however. My brother Steve, the third child, had been born with a neuromuscular disease, a form of muscular dystrophy. The uncertain prognosis caused my parents to worry about his future and their ability to help him. My father told my mother she was lacking in faith. She was insulted by that, reminding him that she prayed continually. He said her demeanor belied that faith. They had both been raised in the orthodox faith—he a member of the Russian Orthodox Church, she of the Orthodox Serbian Church—and, when they married, had affiliated with an Episcopal church so that their children could sing in its wonderful choirs. We were a churchgoing family. We prayed, read the Bible, talked about the weekly sermon. But my mother was still seeking something more. She would later say, “And then they knocked on my door.”

My mother wrote, “As with every conversion story, I believe there are incidents or experiences that lead us to accept the Gospel. Some may take years. How many stories have you heard or read where the missionaries have been told that they were an answer to a prayer? How often have we heard that the convert was the last house on the block being tracked by the missionaries? Ours was the last house of the last block on a dead-end street. I was the only one who talked to the missionaries. I’ve heard missionaries say that if they meet people for whom everything seems to be going well that they are content with their church. They are not teachable. One must be prodded either intellectually or emotionally by adversity or trial to lead him to seek the true church. And so it was with me.”

And me too, I should say. They taught my mother and I listened. They were two young men...
My mother wished to be baptized immediately. She recognized this answer to her prayers and, even more important, knew that the elders had brought the Spirit with their testimonies. My father was not happy about her choice but said he respected her and would support her in this. That turned out to be the least of her problems. Her parents, brothers, and friends all thought she was making a huge mistake. They were angry. She rose above it. I really did not understand at the time how difficult it was for her.

The Lord soon confirmed that He was her Father. I was 10 years old. We had been praying for months on end. The Lord answered; it is undeniable. I remember wanting this just for a promised blessing.

That one answer was the beginning. In 1973, 13 years after my mother’s baptism, that missionaries knocked on my apartment door. I said something like, “Oh, hi Elders. I guess it’s time I got baptized.” Elders Angelsey and Wright were shocked; they had been tracting all morning, simply trying to get someone to open the door. They quickly insisted that I “take the discussions,” and before long I became a Latter-day Saint. My mother attended my baptismal service. We both cried because this was the fulfillment of a promised blessing.

My mother had written of her own baptism: “At the time, I remember wanting this just for me—I needed it, I desired it. It had not entered my mind that my family should embark on this venture of undertaking a new religion. It was enough for me to handle my own thoughts and accompanying problems. Then as I was confirmed, the only thing that I remember is that I was blessed that I would bring my family into the church. I nearly shook my head, ‘Oh no. That will never happen.’”

Little did she know that this was only the beginning. In 1976, three years after my baptism, my brother Steve, as Duke University’s first full-time wheelchair student, had a summer
help in smuggling copies of the Book of Mormon into the former Yugoslavia for her relatives. Upon hearing the last item, I laughed, thinking, “This man is going to be arrested for a church he doesn’t even belong to!” Finally, he turned to my mother with the surprising news. That Christmas we children traveled home to participate in the ceremony. Bill baptized Dad, Steve confirmed him a member, Judith and I delivered the talks. It was amazing!

Our friend Wayne Lewis, who had baptized mother 23 years earlier, wrote: “Armed with little else but Priesthood and the knowledge that all men and women share a common heritage . . . that we are literal brothers and sisters born and reared in courts of glory by Heavenly Parents, two young missionaries found themselves assigned to Steubenville, Ohio. Their objective: to share the good news; . . . unsure but hopeful, these two traveled from home to home, eager to share a specific message . . . the Heavens are not sealed . . . the Lord is the same yesterday, today and forever. He has spoken today in the same manner He spoke yesterday . . . through a prophet . . . the Lord has called a prophet! Who would listen? . . . One street after the other . . . is it anyone living on Braybarton Blvd.? A warm, smiling face looks searchingly over the shoulder of her housekeeper and says . . . ‘I want to hear your message.’ The rest of our scenario is history . . . 23 years . . . 5 souls . . . and 1 more . . . and now the last act is written and there is rejoicing both in Heaven and on earth.”

Amazing, but not finished. My mother gave us all one year to be sealed as a family. And we did! In December 1984, the six of us gathered in the Salt Lake Temple for a beautiful ceremony. We wondered at the time why Mother had pushed so hard for this to happen as soon as possible, but we soon realized. Not long after our family was sealed, she became ill. Doctors could not diagnose her condition for quite a while, but the news was devastating. Mother had a brain tumor, a large one. There was one more miracle in store for our family. She received a blessing, a special prayer in the Salt Lake Temple, and the tumor disappeared . . . for a time. We had her for another year, during which time each of us children visited to thank her for all she had done for us, especially leading us into the gospel. People of many faiths attended her memorial service in September 1987, in a church building that finally had a chapel. Her children delivered the memorial service. We told our extended family, friends, and neighbors about our mother’s courageous choice to become a Latter-day Saint. We talked of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and the Book of Mormon. Through his tears, Dad told us, “You did your mother proud today, kids.” Once again, she is leading the way, this time on the other side.

School and work had taken Steve and me to Salt Lake City. My job at KSL-TV News as the religion reporter has allowed me to travel the world, seeing firsthand the growth of the church. I have followed the prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, from the palace of the king and queen of Spain to temples that dot the land. My experiences are
nothing short of life changing. Each one, to me, is a miracle.

I am often asked to speak to church and community groups about my experiences. Last year when I addressed the students at LDS Business College in Salt Lake City, I told them there are no coincidences in life, that the Lord knows the desires of their hearts, that he can and does open doors. Not long after that I received a letter from someone I had longed to find after 43 years—Clarence Johnson. Now a stake president in Maryland, he is the other missionary who taught my mother the gospel. He wrote that he had read on the church Web site the talk I had given to the students, and was I that little girl from Steubenville, Ohio? Enclosed with the letter was a photograph of him with my mother on the day of her baptism, a photo I did not know existed!

He wrote: “Although I never told her so, your mother was a powerful example to me and I have thought about her on many occasions. I find it impossible to put into mere words what an inspiration she was to me as a young missionary. She was so determined to do what she believed to be right despite the opposition and difficulty she experienced. I knew that being a member of the Church was going to be difficult for her, but she appeared to be willing to pay the price no matter how great the cost. In my mind she is one of the great pioneer women of the Church who demonstrated enormous faith in the restored gospel.”

April 2003 and the story continues. At my home one evening, my family, Steve, and I hosted our two missionaries and their spouses. They had not seen each other in more than 40 years.

What a reunion we had! I finally had the opportunity to thank them for planting the seeds I needed to help me through life. Those seeds, nourished powerfully yet graciously by an answer to my prayer about the Book of Mormon when I was nine, have grown as I have grown.

I remember President Hinckley advising church members about being missionaries. He said to tell friends and neighbors to bring what faith they have and “we’ll add to it.” That’s what happened to our family. I shall be eternally grateful to each missionary who heeded the call, who had the courage to knock on our doors, and who brought the priesthood, a heartfelt testimony and, most important, the Spirit. Where would we be without them?
Review by Kristine Hansen

The rationale for this reader’s edition of the Book of Mormon is one that I can applaud. In the words of editor Grant Hardy, an associate professor of history at the University of North Carolina at Asheville, the Book of Mormon is “one of the world’s most influential religious texts” and therefore “worthy of serious study” (vii). However, as Hardy notes, it may often be ignored, particularly by those outside the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, simply because it is difficult to read. Its length, complexity, and sometimes archaic language are one obstacle, but Hardy believes its formatting in columns broken into chapters and verses is another. Also, the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon includes numerous footnotes that cross-reference doctrinal concepts with related passages in the other standard works of the church.

This visually daunting format, Hardy believes, may militate against readers’ grasping the overall narrative as well as hinder their understanding of the complex intertextuality of the book, composed as it is of various ancient records compiled, abridged, and edited by Mormon and then translated by Joseph Smith. So to help readers find the text more accessible and readable, Hardy has taken from the public domain the 1920 edition of the Book of Mormon and reformatted it “in accordance with the editorial style of most modern editions of the Bible” (vii). In place of the 1920 edition’s footnotes, he has written footnotes of his own and added several appendices, all of which aim to help the novice reader become familiar with the provenance, stemma, authors, translation, language, and internal consistency of the text. All in all, I find the results praiseworthy and believe this edition of the Book of Mormon will become a useful tool for scholars, teachers, students, and parents.

The reformatting of the text has several noticeable features. First, Hardy presents the text in paragraphs and, where he deems appropriate, in poetic stanzas. The text still has the chapter numbers, which are set in a large stylized font, and verse numbers, which are very small superscripts, usually—but not always—at the beginning of a sentence. Occasionally, a verse is divided so that the first part belongs to one paragraph and the second part to the next. The text still includes the headnotes that preface some of the books in the Book of Mormon, but it leaves out the chapter summaries that are a feature of the 1981 edition. Instead, Hardy has added headings of his own throughout the chapters to help the reader follow the narrative or grasp the points made in a sermon. For example, 1 Nephi 1 has these headings: “Lehi’s Visions and Call” and “Lehi Prophesies to the Jews.” And Alma 5, entitled “Alma’s Sermon at Zarahemla,” has head-
ings that indicate main topics of the sermon, such as “Imagine the Judgment Day” and “Repent and Prepare.” I found the headings in Jacob 5, Zenos’s allegory of the olive tree, particularly helpful, as they indicate the various transplants, decayings, and remedies attempted to save the olive tree.

The poetic passages are the most striking feature as one thumbs through the book. Not only are long passages, such as the chapters from Isaiah, set as poetry, but short passages as brief as two lines are similarly reformatted whenever there is a form of parallelism that has been noted in the Hebrew Bible. So, for example, Alma 5:40 looks like this:

For I say unto you that:

Whatsoever is good cometh from God,

and whatsoever is evil cometh from the devil.

Appendix 5 gives a brief summary of synonymous, antithetic, synthetic, and climactic parallelism, along with illustrations of each, and an explanation of chiasmus. Only a few short chiastic passages are printed in the text in such a way as to reveal their structure, but several longer examples are given in appendix 5. Here Hardy also outlines his criteria for deciding which passages to set as poetry: Where the language is “more refined and elevated” than usual and “where appropriate,” he highlighted the language in indented, parallel lines.

It would have been helpful to know how Hardy defined appropriate because I found some of his poetic passages dubious, especially where the context did not seem to call for the use of poetry. For example, when Amulek rebukes the lawyers in Alma 10:17–18 or when Alma cautions his son Shiblon in Alma 38:11–12, the lines are set as poetry. While it is true that these brief speeches contain parallelism, calling rebukes and cautions poetry along with psalms, hymns, and prophecies required me to mentally stretch the category. But Hardy acknowledges that “literary analysis of the Book of Mormon is in its beginning stages” and that readers may disagree with his choices. He also notes that because readability is his primary goal, he has not attempted to “highlight all the possible literary twists and echoes and symmetries” (663–64). I find this last choice wise because even more variation in the formatting would make the text visually too busy.

Other noticeable and helpful features include the use of quotation marks around direct discourse, the addition of parentheses and semicolons to “clarify relationships among phrases,” and the occasional use of italics “to show how Book of Mormon prophets quoted and commented on earlier prophecies (as in 1 Nephi 22)” (xx). Yet another feature that is likely to help the first-time or non-Latter-day Saint reader is the addition of subscript numbers to names that are given to more than one person or place (e.g., Moroni). These subscript numbers appear only in head- ings, not in the paragraphs, and they correspond to appendix 8, the “Glossary of Names,” where one learns that Moroni₁ was a “Nephite military commander (ca. 100 BC),” first mentioned in Alma 43:16, but that Moroni₂ was the “son of Mormon, last of the Nephites (ca. AD 400),” first mentioned in Words of Mormon 1:1. I find this glossary particularly helpful; Hardy boasts that it “includes several names that were missed in the index of the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon” (690).

The text is relatively uncluttered with footnotes, which may make it seem less formidable to many readers. Some of the footnotes directly highlight the internal consistency of the text and therefore the improbability that Joseph Smith simply made it up. Such notes include cross-references to specific past events or quotations of earlier figures in the text as well as indications of prophecies fulfilled and where those prophecies were first uttered. Other footnotes provide insight into how the book was compiled from various sets of plates and then edited; these notes indicate where a narrative line has been broken off and where it resumes, if it does. Footnotes concerning dates of various events are rendered according to standard practice until the beginning of the reign of the judges at the end of the book of Mosiah. From that point on, dates are rendered as an exact negative or positive number corresponding to the sign of Christ’s birth. Thus, the note for Mormon 8:6 reads “+ 400 years” rather than “AD 421,” as it does in the 1981 edition. Still other footnotes contain comments on editing and sources, glosses or clarifications of names, alternate spellings and plausible alternative punctuation, and indications of chapter breaks in the 1830 edition.

I think an additional kind of footnote would have been helpful, one indicating where significant
wording changes were made in the 1981 edition. Hardy's appendix 6 lists the 50 most significant variants among the original and printer's manuscripts, the first three editions, the 1920 edition, and the 1981 edition; but the reader would not necessarily know when to turn to this appendix to see which manuscript or edition exhibited which variant. In the case of 2 Nephi 30:6, for example, not knowing that the 1981 edition changed the phrase a white and a delightsome people to a pure and a delightsome people might have unfortunate consequences. With just 37 additional footnotes indicating differences between the 1920 and 1981 editions, Hardy could have avoided this potential problem.

But that is my main quibble. I find the remaining appendices very helpful and likely to benefit not only non-Latter-day Saint readers but also long-time readers of the Book of Mormon. In addition to the testimonies of the Three and the Eight Witnesses, appendix 1 contains the less frequently published or discussed testimonies of Mary Whitmer and Emma Smith about the reality of the plates. Appendix 2 gives a useful chronology of the translation process along with various photos related to stages in that process: the hill from which Joseph removed the plates, characters copied therefrom, the first page of the printer's manuscript, copies of the first edition, and the Nauvoo House cornerstone, where the original manuscript was deposited and mostly ruined.

While these appendices are largely focused on establishing external validation for the text, appendix 7 provides more evidence for its internal validity through various charts and maps. Some are adapted from FARMS publications by John W. Welch and others, such as a chart showing how the plates were passed from one scribe to another, a chart showing which books of the Book of Mormon come from which plates, and a chart of the Jaredite kings. Other charts, however, are apparently Hardy's creations. His chart giving a chronology of the narrative begins with the "mid-third millennium bc" and proceeds to AD 420, giving scriptural references for each period and a summary of what happened, if anything, during that period in three places: the Land Nephi (south), the Land Zarahemla (middle), and the Land Desolation (north). Another chart showing leaders of the Lamanites and Nephites gives dates and categorizes leaders by their status as kings, "dissenters and colonists," "missionaries and heretics," or leaders in political, religious, or military affairs. There is also a map of the probable route of Lehi's journey on the Arabian peninsula and a hypothetical map of "relative locations of Book of Mormon sites based on internal references" (689). I would have found these charts and maps very helpful as a seminary student years ago, just as I do today.

Hardy's whole aim in preparing this edition was to show that "the Book of Mormon offers a much more sophisticated and tightly structured narrative than one might first assume, particularly given Joseph Smith's background" (xxiii). His primary audience appears to be non-Latter-day Saint scholars, whom he invites to subject the book to "more sophisticated literary and historical analyses than have long been the norm" and to "enter more deeply into the world portrayed in the text" (xxiii). To that end, he also includes a four-page list of suggestions for further reading at the end of the book, and he particularly singles out Terryl Givens's By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion as "the best introduction to the Book of Mormon" (707). I believe that non-Latter-day Saint readers of Givens's book could do no better than to pick up a copy of Hardy's work to learn for themselves what this scripture contains.

For Latter-day Saint readers, Hardy is careful to note that his edition is not intended to replace the 1981 edition. But I think that many such readers would find it a valuable supplement to their study of that edition. In fact, I would recommend that missionaries consider taking it to their fields of labor to study, as it would give them information not present in the 1981 edition that would help them answer their own questions and those of their investigators. Particularly, I believe seminary teachers and parents would find that young people would respond positively to reading the Book of Mormon in this format. All royalties that Hardy receives from the sale of the book will be donated to the Humanitarian Services Fund of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—a noble gesture that underscores Hardy's commitment to increasing people's understanding of the Book of Mormon.
Review by Keith Lawrence

For the many who love the Book of Mormon and who delight in reexperiencing its language and teachings, Grant Hardy’s The Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Edition (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2003) holds much promise. Recasting the 1920 edition of the familiar text in a reader-friendly format and adding relevant notes and appendices, Hardy characterizes the book as an invitation to “enter deeply into the world” of the Book of Mormon. Although A Reader’s Edition was written primarily “to help non-Mormons understand what it is that Mormons see in this sometimes obscure text,” Hardy seems conscious of the fact that his book may find the bulk of its readership among members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who embrace the Book of Mormon as a divinely inspired translation of ancient scripture.

Convinced that the Book of Mormon is “an intriguing and provocative religious text . . . complex enough to reward many different types of readers and approaches” and that its “increasing prominence makes it an appropriate subject for more sophisticated literary and historical analyses than have long been the norm,” Hardy emphasizes accessibility of the text as his first priority. “Any reader confronting a text divided into verses,” he writes, “must determine which phrases and sentences go together most closely, when direct speech begins and ends, and when new topics and narratives are introduced.” The chronology of such a text, Hardy suggests, and the names appearing within it present additional challenges. His purpose, then, is to make reading easier for new (and returning) readers by emphasizing the narrative structure of the Book of Mormon text.

In general, I am very pleased with A Reader’s Edition. It does indeed make for a different Book of Mormon reading experience, and that is what I had hoped for. When I first sat down with the book, I had not read many minutes before I realized that I was turning Book of Mormon pages faster than I usually turn them. I was experiencing its “story” and its structural and stylistic coherence in ways that I never had. Even the Isaiah sections of 2 Nephi read more quickly, more smoothly—partly because they were transcribed as poetry rather than as dense chunks of prose. Not surprisingly, perhaps, I was most cognizant of the heightened narrative drama of Mosiah, Alma, and Helaman—books that already convey a stronger sense of unfolding history than do the more doctrinal books.

Hardy’s paragraphing is intuitive and, more than any other single element, increases readability and narrative sense. Primary titles and headings are helpful in marking narrative sections, as are page breaks and added punctuation, especially quotation marks. Hardy uses footnotes intelligently and sparingly: explanatory notes are genuinely helpful and never condescending; notes dealing with chronology are likewise unobtrusive (though most Latter-day Saint readers will already be familiar with what these notes convey). The appendices, without exception, are engaging and serviceable. Along with commonly known information, they also provide new contexts for enriched appreciation of the structural complexity of the Book of Mormon.

There are elements of Hardy’s text that might be improved. His introduction affords useful literary and historical contexts; but its “borrowings” from recent scholarship, especially from that of Terryl Givens, should be documented more
clearly and consistently. That is, much of what Hardy says about the literary structure of the Book of Mormon, its transmission and language, and its historical and contemporary reception by Latter-day Saint readers seems condensed from Givens's much richer discussion in *By the Hand of Mormon*. True, Hardy cites Givens as the source of a quotation on page xiii of his introduction, but he does not otherwise credit Givens (or others) for any of the material appearing on the several pages preceding and following that single citation.

While readers may appreciate the increased narrative sense that comes from Hardy’s edition, some may feel (as I do) a kind of diminishment of the integrity or power of individual verses. These readers may also have difficulty (as I also do) locating favorite verses or passages in Hardy’s text. And although I appreciated Hardy’s main headings—demarcating long sections of text—I suppose that I am enough of a literary scholar to see narrative subheadings as disruptive and even somewhat intrusive in their spelling things out for the reader. Not many pages into *A Reader’s Edition*, I found myself wishing the subheadings away—or at least wishing that they had been relegated to the outside margins of each page and set in much smaller type.

In my longing for a fresh reading experience of my favorite book of scripture, I confess to desiring one other formatting change. I wish that Hardy had replaced the contemporary chapter divisions in the body of his text with the original chapter breaks (those from the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon). From a reader’s perspective, the original chapter breaks often make more sense. Not only were they apparently dictated by what was written on the plates themselves (as Hardy notes in his introduction), but they often bring together related narrative blocks or doctrinal passages that are separated from one another in contemporary editions of the text. Contemporary chapter numbers could then be noted in the outside margins (along with subheadings), and contemporary verse numbering could be retained in the text as presently designated by Hardy. True, original chapter breaks are included in the footnotes, but these are easily overlooked—partly because of the fine print used in footnotes and the superscripts referring readers there, and partly because of the excessively large typeface used for in-text chapter numbering.

Hardy’s attention to Hebrew poetry in the Book of Mormon is a mixed blessing. It is arguably the single most delightful element of *A Reader’s Edition*. Certainly it is among the most promising elements of the text: I was pleased, as I began reading, to note that Hardy marks three poetic passages in the first two chapters of 1 Nephi alone. These are Lehi’s psalm of praise following his prophetic call (1 Nephi 1:14), Lehi’s adjuration to Laman and Lemuel (1 Nephi 2:9–10), and the Lord’s words of comfort to Nephi following Laman and Lemuel’s rejection of his counsel (1 Nephi 2:19–24). But the frequency of marked poetic passages drops off significantly in subsequent pages; and Hardy’s seeming inconsistency in marking poetic (or likely poetic) Book of Mormon passages is, finally, one of my biggest complaints about his text.

In his version of 1 Nephi 1:14–15, for example, he fails to note that Lehi’s psalm of praise is echoed in Nephi’s poetic commentary on his father’s experiences:

For his soul did rejoice, and his whole heart was filled, because of the things which he had seen, yea, which the Lord had shown unto him. (1 Nephi 1:15)

The Lord’s warning to Lehi to flee Jerusalem may also be rendered poetically, emphasizing the warning as a blessing for Lehi’s faithfulness:

Blessed art thou Lehi, because of the things which thou hast done; and because thou hast been faithful and declared unto this people the things which I commanded thee, behold, they seek to take away thy life. (1 Nephi 2:1)

Indeed, when the words of the Lord are recorded in the Book of Mormon—and especially in the writings of Nephi—they are frequently recorded, it seems to me, as poetic utterances. Apparently, Hardy’s policy is to follow conventional wisdom. In cases where other scholars have identified poetic passages, he repeats their work—but he does not often hazard identification of new or undiscovered passages on his own. In his rendering of the Nephite “Sermon on the Mount,” for example, Hardy follows long-standing Christian tradition in showing only the Beatitudes and the Lord’s
Prayer in poetic form. Arguably, however, most—if not all—of this sermon employs Hebrew poetic forms; and it seems to me that such a poetic representation of the sermon intensifies its beauty, structure, and power. While I can understand Hardy's desires to be cautious rather than freehanded in representing Book of Mormon passages poetically, to avoid “seeing” poetry where none exists, a somewhat looser or more liberal advancement of poetic passages would make A Reader's Edition more appealing to readers like me. There is a second problem beyond simple identification of poetry in the Book of Mormon. In some instances, Hardy seems to correctly identify a passage written poetically—but then, for some reason, he marks only certain lines of it as poetic. For example, he shows the last segment of 1 Nephi 4:3 as poetry but chooses to render as prose text the balance of verse 3 and the two verses preceding it. All three verses are clearly poetic:

Let us go up again unto Jerusalem, and let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord; for behold, he is mightier than all the earth, then why not mightier than Laban and his fifty, yea, or even than his tens of thousands? Therefore let us go up.

Let us be strong like unto Moses, for he truly spake unto the waters of the Red Sea and they divided hither and thither, and our fathers came through, out of captivity, on dry ground; and the armies of Pharaoh did follow and were drowned in the waters of the Red Sea. Now behold, ye know that this is true; and ye also know that an angel hath spoken unto you; wherefore can ye doubt? Let us go up. (1 Nephi 4:1–3)

In like manner, Hardy represents 1 Nephi 17:35–40 poetically but ignores similar poetic forms in neighboring verses, especially verses 30–31 and 45–46. A more obvious example is his representation of Alma 36. He renders verses 27–29 poetically but represents the balance of the chapter—all of it chiastic poetry, as John W. Welch has shown (and as Hardy himself documents in his fifth appendix to the text)—as prose. These are only three random examples of a rather pervasive problem. For a literary reader, this problem is at best distracting; at worst, it bespeaks editorial haste or naiveté—despite Hardy’s assertion that he has “opted for narrative coherence and ease of reading” rather than chiastic or poetic integrity.

These few complaints aside, Hardy’s edition of the Book of Mormon is, as he intends, highly readable and engaging. I’ve previously alluded to some of the specific features of Hardy’s edition, but a more complete summary might be useful at this point. To make reading easier by emphasizing the narrative structure of the Book of Mormon text, Hardy does the following:

1. Preserves contemporary chapter numbering but adds headings (showing where multi-chapter sections begin and end) and subheadings (designating topics within chapters so that readers may more readily discern speakers or unfolding events)

2. Adds paragraphing—which, he notes, is different from typesetter John Gilbert’s apparently arbitrary and often very long paragraphing in the original 1830 edition

3. Adds page breaks to emphasize discrete structural entities within the text, such as Mormon’s explanatory comments and Moroni’s additions

4. Adds quotation marks and other clarifying punctuation (“where alternative punctuation yields two equally plausible readings,” he writes, “one is incorporated into the text and the other into a footnote”)

5. Designates poetic passages using traditional line breaks and stanzas

6. Uses indentations to show when Book of Mormon authors quote from outside texts

7. Uses italics in the heading material to show original headnotes to books in the Book of Mormon; these headnotes are introduced by Givens’s own descriptive headings

8. Uses italics in the text itself to mark earlier prophecies from the Old Testament or from previous Book of Mormon prophets

9. Uses subscripted names in headings and titles to distinguish Book of Mormon figures sharing the same name (so that, for example, the fourth son of Lehi is “Nephi₁” and the son of Helaman is “Nephi₂”)

10. Uses footnotes to (a) show original chapter divisions as dictated by the printer’s manuscript for the 1830 edition, (b) guide readers through Book of Mormon chronology, (c) refer-
ence past Book of Mormon figures and events as well as previous prophecies whose fulfillment is recorded in the text, and (d) provide the kind of commentary or assistance traditionally expected of footnotes.

Readers will also find Hardy’s appendices enlightening and useful. These provide, among other things, a chronology of the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon; a brief explanation of Hebrew poetic forms in the Book of Mormon; a list of significant textual changes in official editions of the Book of Mormon between 1830 and 1981; a chronology of central events in the Book of Mormon, listed according to the geographical region (land of Nephi, land of Zarahemla, land of Desolation) in which they occurred; and maps showing the likely path taken by Lehi’s family from Jerusalem to the sea and relative locations of Book of Mormon sites.

Overall, then, Hardy’s edition has much to commend it: a largely appealing design and format, structural additions (headings, punctuation, textual breaks) that clarify the text itself, and surprisingly rich and efficient appendices. Above all, it facilitates reading and understanding the Book of Mormon as complex narrative, enabling longtime readers of the text to experience it in fresh and faith-promoting ways. This last reason alone justifies purchasing and carefully perusing A Reader’s Edition.
The Book of Mormon as a Literary (Written) Artifact

By Grant Hardy

Witnesses to the translation of the Book of Mormon are in agreement that Joseph Smith dictated the text, one time through, to scribes who took down his words as fast as they could. While some might see the resulting book as a work of oral literature—with Joseph having improvised the narrative as he went along—the intricate structure and ancient editing evident in the Nephite record are consistent with Joseph's claim that the Book of Mormon is actually a translation of an ancient book that itself had a long history as a written document.

One new piece of evidence for the literary nature of the book comes from a close reading of Alma 13, where it appears that verse 16 is out of place. Because there is no indication of a problem here in the English manuscripts,¹ the transposition must have pre-dated the dictated translation, and it is exactly the type of transmission quirk that shows up regularly in other ancient books that have been edited, copied, and recopied by hand.

Look at verses 15–17:

And it was this same Melchizedek to whom Abraham paid tithes; yea, even our father Abraham paid tithes of one-tenth part of all he possessed.

Now these ordinances were given after this manner, that thereby the people might look forward on the Son of God, it being a type of his order, or it being his order, and this that they might look forward to him for a remission of their sins, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord.

The first thing to notice is that if verse 16 were omitted, we would never miss it. In fact, it interrupts the smooth flow of ideas in the discussion of Melchizedek (verses 14–20). The second clue is that the expected connections do not make sense. The phrase *these ordinances* in verse 16 must refer to something earlier, and though we might in some way conceive of tithing as an ordinance, it is not clear at all how tithing might encourage people to look forward to the remission of sins associated with the Son of God. Even more problematic would be efforts to connect the “manner” of tithing with the order of the Son of God.

But the cryptic elements of verse 16 are intelligible if it is read in the context of the discussion on priesthood ordination that appears earlier in the chapter. Verse 2 introduces the basic terms:

And those priests were ordained after the order of his Son, in a manner that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption.

The verses that follow explain how ordination to the priesthood is symbolic of Christ’s redemption in at least two ways. First, both were “prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God” (as was the priesthood itself); and second, verses 11–12 suggest that, at the time of ordination, a number of these new priesthood holders underwent a redemptive experience (perhaps the “preparatory redemption” of verse 3):
Therefore they were called after this holy order, and were sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb.

Now they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God.

It is here that verse 16 belongs:

Now these ordinances were given after this manner, that thereby the people might look forward on the Son of God, it being a type of his order, or it being his order, and this that they might look forward to him for a remission of their sins, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord.

The term ordnances at the beginning of the verse refers to priesthood ordinations (as in verse 8, which starts with “Now they were ordained after this manner . . .”), the references to remission of sins and the order of the Son of God pick up the terms set in verse 2 and round out the entire discussion, and the phrase rest of the Lord nicely echoes the conclusion of verse 12.

There is a shift in focus with the next verse as Alma ends his theological explanation and directly exhorts his brethren to humble themselves:

And now, my brethren, I would that ye should humble yourselves before God, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance, that ye may also enter into that rest.

The phrase that rest demands an antecedent, which verse 16 provides just as well as verse 12. (It is remarkable that verse 16 connects better with both what came before and what follows if it is shifted to a position between verses 12 and 13). From here Alma takes his listeners into a discussion of Melchizedek, since that king’s people are cited as examples of humility and repentance, but the transition here is not unduly abrupt. Melchizedek, after all, held the priesthood that was the subject of the earlier passage. And without the odd break in verse 16, the discussion of Melchizedek proceeds smoothly from verse 13 to the end of Alma’s speech in response to Antionah’s question.

If we accept that Alma 13 reads better with verse 16 moved forward by three verses, the next question is, does this sort of thing happen with other authentic ancient texts? The answer is, absolutely. I offer four examples that scholars generally agree upon, all from the Bible (most scholarly commentaries discuss these passages):

1. Judges 20:23 is out of place (hence the parentheses in the King James Version). It should probably be moved to precede verse 22.
2. Isaiah 38:21–22 should be moved between verses 6 and 7 (thus bringing Isaiah 38 in line with 2 Kings 20:6–11).
3. Some New Testament manuscripts put Romans 16:25–27 after 14:23, one has these verses following 15:33, and others include them at the end of both chapters 14 and 16.
4. A few manuscripts place 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 after verse 40.

In some cases it is the disruption of narrative flow that alerts us to textual problems, while for other passages there are variant readings in the manuscripts that suggest scribal errors.

Of course, the fact that such mistakes happen challenges scholars to try to determine the cause. How could a block of text come to be misplaced, and why would that error be carried forward? The science of textual criticism is quite sophisticated, and errors in a given manuscript are often due to problems specific to a particular language, writing technique, or scribal tradition. But in general such errors can be the result of (1) scribal additions; (2) editorial comments in margins becoming part of text; (3) the splitting of paper, especially at the ends of rolls; or (4) mistakes by scribes as they looked back and forth from the manuscript they were copying to the one they were writing.

How could such an error have gotten into a text written on metallic plates? Unfortunately, here we have so little evidence that we are forced to speculate. Errors might have crept in before the text was committed to metal (Alma 14:8 speaks of scriptures being burned; were they written on cloth or paper? Were drafts written out on more perishable materials before they were inscribed on plates?), there may have been something in reformed Egyptian that confused a copyist,
or perhaps someone in transcribing the passage onto metal forgot verse 16, caught his mistake three verses later, and then wrote in verse 16 with an arrow or similar sign—which Joseph Smith did not reproduce in English—or in the margins. I imagine that erasing mistakes from gold plates would have been quite difficult.³

In this particular case there is something that would immediately catch the attention of textual scholars—verses 12 and 16 both end with virtually the same phrase: enter(ed) into the rest of the Lord. A copyist could have read verse 12 and looked down to write it out, but then as he looked back at the original, his eye could have skipped to the next rest of the Lord (at the end of verse 16, which I am hypothesizing was the next verse), resulting in the inadvertent deletion of an entire sentence. Realizing his mistake three verses later, he then copied what he had missed, out of order, so as not to lose any of the precious words. This process happens often enough in hand copying that scholars have a name for it—homoeoteleuton—and it is in fact the explanation for an entire verse being omitted just after Alma 32:30 in the 1830 edition (the missing words were finally restored only in 1981).⁴

This latter example, however, was a mistake in the transmission of the English translation, whereas Alma 13:16 seems to be a problem that predated the translation; that is, it was on the gold plates themselves.

The misplacement of Alma 13:16 appears to be the result of some kind of mechanical problem in copying at a particular time in the ancient history of the text. Such errors are fairly common when people are working with handwritten materials (e.g., the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible offers 9 instances of verses being transposed, and the Revised English Bible suggests 20),⁵ but it is difficult to see how such shifts of textual blocks could have occurred if the work was originally an oral composition (as critics must assume of the Book of Mormon if they imagine that Joseph Smith was making it up as he went along). This particular irregularity in the text is best explained as the result of ancient copying of written materials, long before Joseph Smith ever came in contact with the plates.

The writers of the Book of Mormon acknowledged the possibility of human errors in their record; hence the title page warns that “if there are faults they are the mistakes of men; wherefore, condemn not the things of God.” I’m not sure they realized, however, that some mistakes could actually strengthen the book’s claims to be an ancient written text.
ENDNOTES

“Had for Good and Evil”, 19th-Century Literary Treatments of the Book of Mormon
Richard H. Cracroft

6. Critics of the Book of Mormon variously style the book’s title in italic or roman type; the title is not normally italicized because the book is a sacred text. In this paper I will follow, without notice, the various practices of the individual authors when quoting them but will otherwise style the title in roman type.
13. See Bushman, Beginnings of Mormonism, and Vogel, Early Mormon Documents, for discussions of other early critics.
15. See the Millennial Harbinger (7 February 1831); the critique was published later as Delusions: An Analysis of the Book of Mormon, with an Examination of Its Internal and External Evidence, and a Refutation of Its Pretences to Divine Authority (Boston, 1832).
16. Campbell, Delusions, 11, 15; compare Bushman, Beginnings of Mormonism, 125.
17. Campbell, Delusions, 15.
18. The name is often spelled “Spaulding”; I am following Bushman’s spelling.
24. Parkman, The Oregon Trail, 275. Time did not gentle Parkman’s harsh judgment of Mormons. In his preface to the fourth edition, published in 1872, the now-famous author of Pioneers of France in the New World (1865), The Jesuits in North America in the Seventeenth Century (1867), and Discovery of the Great West (1869) can only comment: “We knew [in 1847] that a few fanatic outcasts were groping their way across the plains to seek an asylum from Gentile persecution; but we did not imagine that the polygamist hordes of Mormonism would rear a swarming Jeru- salem in the bosom of solitude itself” (938).
27. Muir, Steep Trails, 920.
33. Burton, City of the Saints, 224.
36. Remy and Brenchley, Journey to Great Salt Lake City, 1:244, 256–57, 257–63.
37. Remy and Brenchley, Journey to Great Salt Lake City, 1:264, 265.
38. Remy and Brenchley, Journey to Great Salt Lake City, 1:401, 403, 406.
41. The entry in Brigham Young’s journal for 7 August 1861, reads: “Mr. Clemens [sic], Svecy of the Territory of Nevada, who was on his way to Carson, accompanied by his Brother [Samuel L. Clemens] and one other gentleman” (Brigham Young’s Secretaries’ Journal, 1857–1863 [LDS Church Archives, Family and Church History Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah]).

110 VOLUME 12, NUMBER 2, 2003


66. Austin, "Troped by the Mormons," 51.


68. Givens, By the Hand of Mormon, 126.

69. Givens, By the Hand of Mormon, 126.

70. Givens, By the Hand of Mormon, 126.


72. Givens, By the Hand of Mormon, 124.

73. By the Hand of Mormon, 124.


75. Bushman, Beginnings of Mormonism, 128.

76. Bushman, Beginnings of Mormonism, 131.

16. I was first introduced to irony in the Book of Mormon more than 40 years ago at Brigham Young University in Robert K. Thomas’s class on the Book of Mormon as literature. Thomas was a brilliant critic and teacher and the first to see examples of biblical parallelism and irony in Book of Mormon narratives. His A.B. thesis at Reed College, “A Literary Analysis of the Book of Mormon,” prefigured a good deal of later critical analysis. For a number of insights in the present paper, I am happy to acknowledge Thomas’s pioneering work.

18. Richard Rust does not agree with my interpretation here. He observes that Abinadi’s “subsequent purpose in reading the Ten Commandments is not that he needs to read them in order to get them right. Quite the contrary: He takes (I’m presuming this) the written commandments that are available to these corrupt priests and reads them (to the condemnation of the priests) because, he says, ‘I perceive that they are not written in your hearts.’ By contrast, Abinadi is one who has the ten commandments written in his heart. He also has Isaiah (lots of Isaiah) written in his heart” (personal correspondence, 3 August 2001). John W. Welch, Gordon C. Thomasson, and Robert F. Smith argue that Abinadi read the Ten Commandments to King Noah’s priests during what would have been Passover in the New World: “At precisely the time when Noah’s priests would have been hypocritically pleading allegiance to the Ten Commandments (and indeed they professed to teach the law of Moses; see Mosiah 12:27), Abinadi rehearsed to them those very commandments (see Mosiah 12:33). On any other day this might have seemed a strange defense for a man on trial for his life, but not on Pentecost—the day on which the Ten Commandments were on center stage!” (“Abinadi and Pentecost,” in Reexploring the Book of Mormon, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 136).

19. I am indebted to Richard Rust for this last observation.

Word Pairs and Distinctive Combinations in the Book of Mormon

1. Ethelbert W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1968). This work was originally published in 1899.
2. See, for example, Donald W. Parry, The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted according to Parallelistic Patterns (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992); Hugh W. Pinnock, Finding Biblical Hebrew and Other Ancient Literary Forms in the Book of Mormon (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999); John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne, eds., Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999); John W. Welch, ed., Re-exploring the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992); and John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, eds., Discovering the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991).
3. For an extensive discussion of the history of the study of word pairs, see Yitzhak Avishur, Stylistic Studies of Word-Pairs in Biblical and Ancient Semitic Literatures (Verlag Butzon & Bercker Kavelaar, 1984), 1–52.
5. Avishur, Stylistic Studies, 1.
7. See Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 657–72, for a discussion of a figure of speech called “hendiadys,” which involves two words expressing a single thought. These two words are always the same parts of speech and are always joined with the conjunction and. For a discussion of ancient Canaanite languages, see Cyrus H. Gordon, Ugaritic and Minoan Crete: The Bearing of Their Texts on the Origins of Western Culture (New York: Norton, 1966); N. Wyatt, Religious Texts from Ugarit, 2nd ed. rev. (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002); Stanislav Serert, A Basic Grammar of the Ugaritic Language (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1984); and Mark S. Smith, Untold Stories: The Bible and Ugaritic Studies in the Twentieth Century (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001).
8. See Mitchell Dahood, “Ugaritic-Hebrew Parallel Pairs,” in Ras Shamra Parallels: The Texts from Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible, ed. Loren R. Fisher (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1972), 171–382. See also articles by the same title and author in volumes 2 (1975, 1–33) and 3 (1981, 1–178). In response to critics, Dahood acknowledged that some of the so-called pairs are not strictly pairs because they are identical words, such as father/father (see vol. 4, p. 4).
9. See, for example, Yehuda Berlin, The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1985), 65–66. Berlin also noted that “a word may elicit a number of different associations. Linguists usually rank them statistically, from the most common to the least. For example, man will elicit woman, but it will elicit boy in a smaller number of cases” (71).
11. Avishur, Stylistic Studies, 6–43.
15. Inna Koskeniemi, Repetitive Word Pairs in Old and Early Middle English Prose (Turku, Finland: Turun Yliopisto, 1968), 11. In the index, Koskeniemi has listed several hundred word pairs encompassing 42 pages (see pp. 120–62).
17. See Watson, Classical Hebrew Poetry, 128–44.
18. See John M. Jeep, Alliterating Word-Pairs in Old High German (Bochum: Universitätsverlag Dr. N. Brockmeyer, 1995); and, generally, Avishur, Stylistic Studies.
21. Watson, Classical Hebrew Poetry, 128. For example, conjoined pairs are not discussed by Watson, a foremost authority on word pairs.
22. Watson, Classical Hebrew Poetry, 131–35. Watson also discusses augmented word-pairs, epithetic word-pairs, identical or repetitive pairs, fixed and variant pairs, distant word-pairs, reversed word-pairs, and numerical word-pairs.
23. Watson, Classical Hebrew Poetry, 131. While the usage of the word synonym has become standard in both biblical and Book of Mormon literary analysis, I prefer the term complementary, because many of the pairs labeled as synonyms would not appear in lists of synonyms in a thesaurus.
24. Watson uses the word automatic here.
25. I admit that I find the categories “synonymous” and “correlative” difficult to distinguish in practice.
27. See Avishur, Stylistic Studies, 629.
30. See Avishur, Stylistic Studies, 629.
33. See Parry, Book of Mormon Text, iii–ix.
34. Watson, Classical Hebrew Poetry, 33.
35. For expressions using “great” and “wonderful,” see Dana M. Pike, “The Great and Dreadful Day
of the Lord'. The Anatomy of an Expression," BYU Studies 41/2 (2002): 149–60. Pike notes that many Hebrew expressions, when translated, are linked by the conjunction and.

33. Ellis T. Rasmussen, "Deutero-

nomion," in Encyclopedia of Mor-


34. This word pair occurs only once in the Bible, as a parallel couplet in Psalm 89:14.

35. See Watson, Classical He-

brew Poetry, 321; also Noel B. Reynolds, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets," BYU Stud-


38. These Canaanite languages include Hebrew, Ugaritic, Phoenician, Aramaic, and Akkadian, as well as a number of other dialects. See Avishur, Stylistic Studies, 50–52.


40. Avishur, Stylistic Studies, 1.

41. Word pairs that occur three times in the Book of Mormon include profit/learning, limb/ joint, large/mighty, power/ gain, thoughts/intents, power/ captivity, wild/ferocious, and days/years. Word pairs that are used twice include go/do, word/deed, prayer/sup-

plication, witness/testimony, sinful/polluted, resurrection/ascension, body/mind, dark-

ness/destruction, joy/peace, preaching/prophesies, and gulf of misery/endless wo. In addition, Dana M. Pike has identified the following word pairs that are associated with the word great: great/coming, great/dreadful, great/everlast-

ing, great/fair, great/judgment, great/lasting, great/notable, great/small, great/spacious, great/tremendous, and great/ true. It is not clear whether Pike considers any of these to be word pairs.

42. See Avishur, Stylistic Studies, 626–63. Bullinger, in Figures of Speech, 673, utilized the

term hendiatris to describe a figure of speech involving "three words used, but one thing meant."

44. See Dahood, Ugaritic-Hebrew Parallel Pairs, 1:250.

45. Other triplets used only twice are weeping/wailing/mourning of teeth, dark/loathsomeness/filthy, sing/dance/make merry, power/mercy/long-suffer-

ing, grace/equity/truth, Re-

demer/Christ/Son of God, wicked/ferocious, wild/ ferocious/bloodthirsty, and spotless/pure/white. Triplets used only once include wild/ hardened/ferocious, desires/fath/prayers, buy/sell/get gain, buy/sell/traffic, rights/privi-

leges/liberty, kingdom/powers/ glory, and adultery/steal/kill.

46. See Avishur, Stylistic Studies, 629.

47. Watkins, Aspects of Indo-

European Poetics, 47.

48. Other quadruplets each ap-

pear only once in the Book of Mormon: plain/pure/pre-

cious/easy, affliction/hun-

ger/thirst/fatigue, dominion/might/power/glory, might/

mind/strength/soul/pride/ wickedness/abominations/ whoredoms, unbelief/wicked-

ness/ignorance/stiffnecked-

ness, nourished/panned/ dug/dug/dug, friends/breth-

ren/kindred/people, mocked/ scoured/cast out/dismayed, bow/

weep/wail/gnash teeth, lawyers/judges/priests/teachers, wars/pestilences/famines/ bloodshed, people/rights/coun-

try/religion/contentions/ disturbances/wars/dissension,

sorrows, overpowered/trodden
down/slain/destroyed, plots/ oaths/covenants/plans, fools/ uncircumcised of heart/blind/ stiffnecked, word/deed/faith/ works, driven/hunted/smit-

ten/scattered, provisions/

horses/cattle/fields, power/ authority/riches/valuable things, wives/children/houses/homes, spotless/pure/faith/white, and Christ/Redeemer/Lord/God. The notable quadruplet heart/ might/mind/strength is used only in the Doctrine and Cov-

enants (4:2–59).

49. See Watson's discussion of lists and what he calls "tours" and "expansion" in Classical Hebrew Poetry, 349–50.

50. See Parry, Book of Mormon Text, iii–ix.

51. According to Bullinger, this is a classic example of "syn-

threoms," or enumeration. This is a method of amplifica-

tion in which a number of examples are given when one larger statement would have sufficed. See Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 436–37. Many other lists in the Book of Mormon could also be classified under this figure of speech.

52. See Watson, Classical Hebrew Poetry, 321.

53. See Watson, Classical Hebrew Poetry, 128.

54. Many of these are also prepo-

sitional phrases.


56. See also a triplet with the ad-

dition of precious things.

57. See also the triplet signs/won-

ders/miracles and the quadrupu-

lets signs/wonders/types/shad-

ows.

58. The triplet stricken/smitten of God/afflicted is found in Isaiah 53:4.

59. See also the triplet hunger/

thirst/fatigue. The seven us-

ages in the Bible extend from Deuteronomy to Revelation, so this was a very common expression of the Israelite people. Christ used this pair twice, once in a conjoined pair (Matthew 5:6) and once in a parallel pair (John 6:35).

60. See Barney, "Poetic Diction," 32.


62. The triplts firm/steadfast/im-

movable, synagogues/houses/ streets, flocks/herds/fatlings, and temples/synagogues/sanc-

tuaries were identified earlier by Tvedtnes, "Word Groups in the Book of Mormon," 263–64, 266.


64. Also utilized in a different format in 3 Nephi 26:4.

65. See also Mosiah 3:19; Alma 4:9; 3 Nephi 8:12; 8:19; and Moroni 6:9.

66. See also Omni 1:25; Mosiah 3:5; 11:8; 29:14; Alma 43:47; 46:12, 3 Nephi 16:9; 17:9; and 4 Nephi 1:5.

67. See also 1 Nephi 18:25; Mo-

siah 9:16; Alma 2:12; 43:20;

50:21; and Helaman 1:14. Tvedtnes, in "Word Groups in the Book of Mormon," 268, also noted the list cow/cow/ ass/horse/goat/wild goat/wild animals.

68. See also 2 Nephi 5:15; Mosiah


69. See also Jarom 1:8.

70. See also 2 Nephi 13:1–3 for a list of 15.

Counting to Ten

John W. Welch

1. See, for example, "Number 24," in Reexploring the Book of Mormon, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 272–74.

2. Ethelbert W. Bullinger, Number in Scripture: Its Supernatural Design and Spiritual Signifi-

ance (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1967), 243.

3. James Hastings, John A. Sel-


4. Jacob Bazak, "Numerical De-

vices in Biblical Poetry," Vetus


5. Alastair Fowler, ed., Silent Po-

yery: Essays in Numerological


vices," 333.


8. I appreciate Allen Christenson for pointing out this connec-

tion to me.


10. Aristotle Metaphysics 985b23–

986a13, quoted in Arthur Fairbanks, The First Philoso-

phers of Greece (London: Ke-

gan Paul, Trench, 1898), 137.


13. Hermann Diels and Wálther

Kranz, Fragmente der Vorsokra-

tiker (Berlin: Weidmann, 1951), 1:381, line 6. Even though the authorship of the Ion B5 frag-

ment is uncertain, this text still pro-

vides evidence that some Greek thinkers regarded the

number ten in this way.

14. Moshe Woznelof, "The

Decalogue: Its Significance, Uniqueness, and Place in Israel's Tradition," in Religion and Law: Biblical-Judaic and
Island Perspectives, ed. Edwin B. Firmage, Bernard G. Weiss, and John W. Welch (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 37; see pp. 32–47.


20. Ten elements are also found in Romans 8:38–39 and Doctrine and Covenants 4:6.

21. For example, donations to temples in ancient Greece around the time of Lehi often involved the gift of a tenth. In describing the riches dedicated to the treasuries at Delphi, Pausanias mentions a tithe sent by the Tarentines “from the spoils of the barbarous Peuketians.” He also tells of the ill fortune of the Siphnians, whose island had yielded gold mines; the god Apollo “commanded them to bring a tithe of the produce to Delphi, so they built a treasure-house and brought the tithe. When out of insatiable greed they gave up this tribute, the sea flooded in and obliterated the mines.” Pausanias, Guide to Greece, vol. 1, trans. Peter Levi (London: Penguin Books, 1971), 441, 433.


23. See TB ‘Abot, 5:3. These ten are listed in Bullinger, Number in Scripture, 244–45.


26. Bullinger, Number in Scripture, 244.


30. Bullinger, Number in Scripture, 244.


32. Bullinger, Number in Scripture, 244.


34. Perhaps echoing the ten who convened at the town of Ruth 4, a minimum of ten men is required in traditional Jewish law in order to constitute a religious quorum. See Abraham P. Bloch, The Biblical and Historical Background of Jewish Customs and Ceremonies (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1980), 76–77. See also TB Megilla 21b and TB Meg. 4.3 as translated by Jacob Neusner in his The Talmud of the Land of Israel: An Academic Commen-dary to the Second, Third, and Fourth Divisions (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 19:154–55.


37. See TB Yoma 39b.


40. For a poetical display of this text essentially in eight quatrains, see Zenos, “Hearing Mercy,” BYU Studies 33/1 (1993): 172–73.


42. I appreciate Michael Lyon for drawing this to my attention.


46. Four verses use a form of strai(gh)t in this article. Distinctions between path, way, and course, which each appear with strait or strait, do not seem to influence either in English or in Hebrew whether strait or strait is correct. Therefore, path, way, and course will not enter into the discussion as determinants.

47. For a general discussion of the confusion of homophones and near homophones in the Book of Mormon, see Stan Larson, “Con-structual Emendation and the Text of the Book of Mormon,” BYU Studies 18/4 (1978): 563–69. In this article, strait(gh) is mentioned but not discussed. For a short treatment of strait(gh) in the Book of Mormon, see John W. Welch and Daniel McKinlay, “Getting Things Strai(gh)t,” in Reexploring the Book of Mormon, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 260–62. See also the more recent article by Rey-nolds and Skousen cited in note 1 above.

48. Second edition on CD-ROM, Version 3.0, under the various forms. Hereafter cited as OED.

49. The complete statement reads, “It is customary to write straight, for direct or right, and strait, for narrow, but this is a practice wholly arbitrary, both being the same word.” See Noah Webster’s First Edition of an American Dictionary of the English Language, facsimile ed. (San Francisco: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1887). I want to thank my friend and colleague Neal Kramer for drawing my atten-tion to the entry in Webster’s.

50. There are 27 instances of strait(gh) in the Book of Mormon. The passages have been conveniently listed in a table in Reynolds and Skou-"Strait and Narrow" 33. Since 1 Nephi 16:23, 17:41 (twice), 21:20, Alma 14:28 (twice), and 3 Nephi 14:13 do not contribute to the questions at hand, I will not discuss them in this article. Distinctions between path, way, and course, which each appear with strait or strait, do not seem to influence either in English or in Hebrew whether strait or strait is correct. Therefore, path, way, and course will not enter into the discussion as determinants.

51. Second edition on CD-ROM, Version 3.0, under the various forms. Hereafter cited as OED.

52. The complete statement reads, “It is customary to write straight, for direct or right, and strait, for narrow, but this is a practice wholly arbitrary, both being the same word.” See Noah Webster’s First Edition of an American Dictionary of the English Language, facsimile ed. (San Francisco: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1887). I want to thank my friend and colleague Neal Kramer for drawing my attention to the entry in Webster’s.

53. Four verses use a form of strait(gh) two times each. The information is conveniently gathered in Reynolds and Skousen, “‘Strait and Narrow’,” 33.

54. In the table on page 33 of “‘Strait and Narrow’,” Reynolds and Skousen have provided a listing of when each occurrence
of straight in the Book of Mormon was changed to strait.
8. See History of the Church, 5:260; see also p. 258.
9. See Doctrine and Covenants 65; 45:8–10; and 128:20; see also 88:66–68.
10. Unless otherwise noted, all Bible references are to the King James Version (KJV).
12. In the following quotations I have italicized the English word used to translate yêt; Psalm 107:7. "And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation"; Isaiah 26:7 (NEB), "The path of the righteous is level, and thou markest out the right way for the upright"; 2 Kings 10:3, "Look even out the best and meetest of your master's sons"; and Micah 3:9, "Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob . . . that abhor judgment, and pervert equity." From this range of translations of the Hebrew root yêt, it is easy to see that the Hebrew text of Isaiah 40:3, "Make straight . . . a highway" does not necessarily mean "make the highway not crooked or not bent." It could just as well be translated as "Make right [or proper] . . . a highway."
14. See also Hebrews 12:13 for another possible similarity. Unfortunately, this is not the place or time for a complete analysis of the complicated structure of the paired and imbedded couples of Nephi's psalm.
15. My colleague S. Kent Brown has made me aware that the ancient prescribed caravan routes between southern and northern Arabia could be very constrained or constrained. See Nigel Groom, Frankincense and Myrrh: A Study of the Arabian Incense Trade (London and New York: Longman, 1981), especially p. 181. Nevertheless, the plain sense of Alma 37:41–45 is straight in the sense of direct, as I demonstrate in the rest of the paragraph.
16. This passage, Alma 7:19–20, provides an example of an important point that needs to be made. One of the key elements of Hebrew writing, indeed of all Semitic literature, is the use of parallel word pairs and parallel constructions. This occurs not only in poetry (many people are familiar with parallel expressions from reading Psalms) but also in prose works. The most common Hebrew parallel forms are those in which a word is paired with a synonym or with its antonym/negated synonym. These two forms of parallelism are called, respectively, synonymous or antithetical parallelism. Thus, besides being poetic, parallels can help provide the meaning or nuance of a less well-known element of the parallel when the other element is well-known. For example, in the case at hand, Alma 7:19–20, the correct nuance of straight in "making [God's] paths straight" comes from the antithetical parallel "[God] cannot walk in crooked paths." That is, straight in this passage means "not crooked." For a general discussion of parallelism, see Adele Berlin, Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994); and James Kugel, The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1981). For a discussion of non-Mormon discussions, see Kevin L. Barney, "Poetic Diction and Parallel Word Pairs in the Book of Mormon," JBSM 4/2 (1995): 15–81; Richard D. Rust, Poetry in the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991); and Angela Crowell, "Hebrew Poetry in the Book of Mormon," 1986 (paper available as a FARMS reprint from the Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah). I have not read all of these works and therefore cannot vouch for specifics.
17. See also Hebrews 12:13 for another possible similarity. Unfortunately, this is not the place or time for a complete analysis of the complicated structure of the paired and imbedded couples of Nephi's psalm.
18. My colleague S. Kent Brown has made me aware that the ancient prescribed caravan routes between southern and northern Arabia could be very constrained or constrained. See Nigel Groom, Frankincense and Myrrh: A Study of the Arabian Incense Trade (London and New York: Longman, 1981), especially p. 181. Nevertheless, the plain sense of Alma 37:41–45 is straight in the sense of direct, as I demonstrate in the rest of the paragraph.
19. Reading "direct" as the intended meaning for straight in Alma 37:44 also makes theological sense. The path back to God, like Lehi's path to the promised land, is not without an occasional course change. The alternative, a path that is not bent or curved, would require all course changes to be made at one time, namely, at the moment of conversion. Common sense dictates that if God were to require us to make all necessary course changes at once, we would surely become discouraged by the sheer number and magnitude of the changes needed. On the other hand, a direct course back to God accurately describes the path we need to take. The promptings of the Holy Spirit will lead to occasional course changes to meet the particular needs of each person, but the path itself will be for that person the most direct, the shortest, and the most obstacle-free path to the celestial kingdom.
20. Reading "direct" as the intended meaning for straight in Alma 37:44 also makes theological sense. The path back to God, like Lehi's path to the promised land, is not without an occasional course change. The alternative, a path that is not bent or curved, would require all course changes to be made at one time, namely, at the moment of conversion. Common sense dictates that if God were to require us to make all necessary course changes at once, we would surely become discouraged by the sheer number and magnitude of the changes needed. On the other hand, a direct course back to God accurately describes the path we need to take. The promptings of the Holy Spirit will lead to occasional course changes to meet the particular needs of each person, but the path itself will be for that person the most direct, the shortest, and the most obstacle-free path to the celestial kingdom.
21. 1 Nephi 8:20; 2 Nephi 31:18, 19; and Helaman 3:29. For a discussion of the options for interpreting this phrase, see Welch and McKinlay, "Getting Things Straig[gh]t," 56–63. For a discussion of the options for interpreting this phrase, see Welch and McKinlay, "Getting Things Straig[gh]t," 56–63.
22. See, for example, hymn no. 144, "Secret Prayer," in Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), where the second stanza begins, "The straight and narrow way to heaven. . . ."
23. The straight and narrow is a misinterpretation of Matt. vii. 14. Because straight is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that finde it" (OED, s.v. "strait;" sense 3a: original spelling retained).
24. Reynolds and Skousen, "Strait and Narrow," 31. See the definitions in Koehler and Baumgartner, Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon, s.v. "ysi and "yêt" and the adjective "yêt." The emphasis is mine. The passages I could find are Deuteronomy 28:53, 55, 57; Psalm 119:143; Proverbs 1:27; Job 15:24; 36:16; Isaiah 8:22; 30:6; Jeremiah 19:9; 49:24; and Zephaniah 1:15. There may be others.
25. I am aware that the Hebrew of this verse has been variously interpreted. I use the KJV here simply because of the use of strait to translate these two roots. The examples I discuss provide sufficient evidence for the existence of this word pair as poetic parallels, making the question of how to translate Job 36:16 irrelevant.
27. See The New Testament in Hebrew and English (London: The Society for Distributing the Holy Scriptures to the Jews, n.d.). The translator's name is given only in Hebrew, but if my reading of the Hebrew is correct, the translator was Franz Delitzsch (of Keil and Delitzsch, Biblischer Commentar über das Alte Testament, fame).
28. For example, English translations of this pair of words include "trouble and anguish" (KJV of Psalm 119:143), "hardship and distress" (NIV of Isaiah 30:6), "anguish and sorrows" (KJV of Jeremiah 49:24), "trouble and anxiety" (NEB of Psalm 119:143), "distress and anxiety" (NEB of Job 15:9), and various other combinations. It is not significant that each of these synonymous pairs is composed of nouns rather than adjectives such as strait and narrow. Where English usually prefers a noun and adjective combination, such as in 2 Nephi 31:18, "narrow path," Hebrew often prefers a noun chain, such as in 2 Nephi 31:9, "straitness of the path," as discussed below.
29. For example, the KJV of Jeremiah 19:9 translates this parallel pair with "siege and straitness," as does Deuteronomy 28:53, 55, 57.
30. See also the Hebrew of Jeremiah 49:24 and Proverbs 1:27.
31. It is unfortunate that English strait and narrow, while demonstrating many of the same
nuances, do not inherently contain poetic alliteration. The King James translators seem to have been aware of this and seem to have made an effort to preserve the poetic alliteration, at least occasionally, for example, with the use of stress in Deuteronomy 28:53, 55, 57 and Jeremiah 19:9.

33. Reynolds and Skousen, “Strait and Narrow,” 32.

34. Alma 50:8 reads, “And the land of Nephi did run in a straight course from the east sea to the west.” The relevant part of Alma 56:37 reads, “When they saw the army of Antipus pursuing them, with their might, they did not turn to the right nor to the left, but pursued their march in a straight course after us.”

35. Reynolds and Skousen, “Strait and Narrow,” 32. Notice, however, that using this same line of reasoning, it could just as well be argued that if straight and narrow is correct in Helaman 3:29, then the “echoes” would require reading strait in Alma 37:44. From what is known of the caravan routes in ancient Arabia, the general area through which Lehi was led in a “straight” course, strait would not be amiss. The routes were purposely made narrow, at least in some places. Also, it was forbidden on pain of death to leave the established trail, meaning that turning to the left or to the right off the trail was a capital offense, a rather stark form of constraint or straitening. See Groom, Frankincense and Myrrh, 169–70, 181, 183.

36. In addition to the “echo” presently to be discussed, the other passages include 3 Nephi 14:14; 27:33, and the three exact parallels on the small plates, namely, 1 Nephi 8:20 and 2 Nephi 31:18, 19. The latter three verses pre-date Helaman 3:29 by at least 400 years and perhaps by as much as 1,000 years (see note 38 below). Thus, strictly speaking, it would be better to let the small plates determine the reading in Helaman 3:29 than the other way around.

37. See the discussion above of straight modifying course, where I point out that there is only one unambiguous passage in the Book of Mormon where straight modifies and is contiguous with the course back to God.

38. Either the commentator in Helaman 3:29, who seems to be Mormon and who therefore wrote the passage nearly 1,000 years after the composition of the small plates, simply used a synonym of path, or the Prophet Joseph Smith translated the original word as course on the large plates but as path on the small plates. Thus, the course in Helaman 3:29, the path in the small plates, and the way in Jacob 6:11 (and 3 Nephi 14:14 and 27:33) appear to be synonymous.

39. Also note that if strait and narrow are synonymous and parallel, any grammatically correct rearrangement of gate, strait, way, and narrow, such as the hypothetical expression the narrow way and the strait gate or the narrow gate and the strait way, would still preserve the original meaning of the expression.

40. Because 2 Nephi 31:9 comes before Jacob 6:11 in the Book of Mormon, it would be difficult to argue that the former is dependent on the latter. It could be argued that both are dependent on a common source, such as some combination of tswr/strsr and tswrg or an expression on the large plates of Nephi. Notice that Isaiah 62:10 does parallel gates with highway in a five-line poetic call to get ready for the coming of the Messiah: Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people.

41. In fact, if straitness is the correct reading, then, just as with Jacob 6:11, 3 Nephi 14:14, and 27:33, it does not matter what the word order is in 2 Nephi 31:9. Any grammatically correct combination of straitness with path or gate and narrowness with path or gate will yield the identical meaning. An anonymous reviewer of an early draft of this article pointed out to me other analogous reversals of word order, such as with abomination and desolation, and particularly with bind, law, seal, and testimony.

42. See the preceding discussion in the body of this article.

43. The verses are 2 Nephi 9:41, “The way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a straight course before him” (a difficult passage that will be discussed below), and 2 Nephi 33:9, “Enter into the narrow gate, and walk in the straight path.”

44. There is an additional though less elegant reason for reading straight and not straight that is contingent on word order. By moving gate and path in 2 Nephi 31:9 to the word positions they occupy in the three Book of Mormon verses discussed above (straight gate and narrow way), the unlikely combination straightness of the gate and narrowness of the path would ensue. (Even Reynolds and Skousen, “Strait and Narrow,” 31, point out that “it would be unusual to speak of a ‘straight gate.’” As my colleague S. Kent Brown reminded me privately, the pathway or road approaching the gates of ancient cities nearly always contained a 90-degree turn just before entering the gate. More advanced fortifications contained several 90-degree turns between the main gate and the exit out of the gate complex into the city proper. Thus, neither the gate nor the way would have been spoken of as being straight in the sense of being not bent.) Thus, when reading strait, the word order can change without changing the meaning of the expression. However, reading straight would not allow a shift in word order without doing violence to the meaning.

45. Reynolds and Skousen, “Strait and Narrow,” 32.

46. Having already paraphrased several passages from Isaiah 11:4–9 in the preceding chapter, 2 Nephi 30:9–15, Nephi could easily have made a direct connection between his straigh(t)ness of the path and Isaiah’s “make straight in the desert a highway for our God” if he had wanted. But he did not do it, perhaps because there is in fact no connection.

47. Reynolds and Skousen, “Strait and Narrow,” 33.

48. These changes include the deletion of Israel after the Holy One and the insertion of remember above the crossed-out of Israel. Also, where the text now reads righteous, it read righteousness in the printer’s manuscript and the 1830 edition. See Part 1 of Royal Skousen, ed., The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001). A facsimile edition of the 1830 edition in my possession contains righteousness.

49. For other examples, see 1 Kings 3:6; Psalm 9:8; and Isaiah 26:10.

50. See note 48 above. The original manuscript of this part of the verse. See Royal Skousen, ed., The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001).

51. Reynolds and Skousen, “Strait and Narrow,” 32.


53. There are possibly other English meanings for but that would also allow reading strait in this verse. For example, “Rehold, the way for man is narrow, so that it lieth in a straigh(t) course before him” (OED, s.v. “but,” sense 14).

54. Other Latter-day Saint scripture provides an example of but used in a noncontrastive sense. Abraham 1:19 reads, “As it was with Noah so shall it be with thee; but through thy ministry my name shall be known in the earth forever, for I am thy God.” If but were used in a contrastive sense in this verse, then it could be replaced by a synonym that is also contrastive, such as however. Notice though that when however as a contrastive conjunction replaces but in this verse, the verse does not seem to make sense. On the other hand, the meaning of the verse is preserved if but is replaced with a word that introduces an idea but not as moreover, yielding, “As it was with Noah so shall it be with thee; moreover, through thy ministry my name shall be known in the earth forever, for I am thy God.” The sense of the verse is also maintained if the but is changed to verily: “As it was with Noah so shall it be with thee; verily, through thy ministry my name shall be known in the earth forever, for I am thy God.” The sense of the verse is also maintained if the but is changed to verily: “As it was with Noah so shall it be with thee; however, through thy ministry my name shall be known in the earth forever, for I am thy God.” The sense of the verse is also maintained if the but is changed to verily: “As it was with Noah so shall it be with thee; verily, through thy ministry my name shall be known in the earth forever, for I am thy God.”
desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy." Notice, however, that the KJV translates the Greek differently than the KJV does. Where the latter has and the NIV has but, and where the KJV has but the NIV has and. Thus the verse reads in the NIV, "Put love first; but there are other gifts of the Spirit at which you should aim also, and above all prophecy." See also 2 Timothy 2:22, "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

55. See Koehler and Baumgartner, Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon, s.v. הָלְכָּה.

56. The other seven examples of 'bl occur in later books and are translated as "but" or "however." As an aside, it is interesting to note that the Hebrew root mentioned above, †šrš, stands behind the KJV words anguish and distress in this verse.

57. Another example would be 2 Kings 4:14, "Verily [but] she hath no child." See also 1 Kings 1:43 and Genesis 17:19. It must be said that in each of these instances of 'bl being translated as "verily," the word does not function as a conjunction but rather introduces a clause, which is one of the possible readings in 2 Nephi 9:41.

58. I am aware that the construction in 2 Nephi 9:41 is different from the biblical passages where 'bl means "verily." Nevertheless, the Hebrew passages do demonstrate one of the possible meanings of 'bl.

59. See Koehler and Baumgartner, Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon, s.v. הָלְכָּה.

60. Hebrew has more complicated locutions, such as מַהְגָּה מַן הָלְכָּה, that in addition to being translated as "but" also have a wide range of meanings, including "nevertheless."

Has the Seal of Mulek Been Found?
Jeffrey R. Chadwick

1. See John W. Welch, ed., Reexploring the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 142–44.


3. See Nahman Avigad and Benjamin Sass, Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1997), 35, item no. 15.

4. Because this article provides Hebrew terms in a Hebrew font, I will give pronunciation transcriptions of Hebrew terms rather than strictly mechanical transliterations of the kind often used in works that do not use a Hebrew font. In my view, strictly mechanical transliterations are cumbersome and difficult for many readers who are not Hebrew scholars, whereas pronunciation transcriptions are easily read and vocalized.

5. See John Bright, Jeremiah (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 226. Bright’s use of the term prince to indicate a royal son differs from the usage of the term in the King James Version, where prince is the translation of מֶלֶךְ (sar), a Hebrew term for a "minister" or "ruler" (see n. 23 below).


7. The drawing of the seal impression uses the photo in Avigad and Sass, Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals (see n. 10 below), since the drawing in Deutsch and Lemaire, Biblical Period Seals in the Shlomo Moussaieff Collection (see n. 11 below), was found to be inaccurate and of lesser quality.


10. See Avigad and Sass, Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals, 55, item no. 15.


12. See Avigad and Sass, Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals, 12.

13. See Avigad and Sass, Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals, 66, item no. 45.

14. The instances (outside the Bible) of Hebrew personal names appearing with the title ben of Avigad and Sass, Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals, 28.

15. See Avigad and Sass, Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals, 28.

16. See Avigad and Sass, Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals, 28.

17. This inconsistency may be due to the fact that the KJV was produced by 47 different translators and that the book of Jeremiah was translated by different men from those who worked on Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles.

18. Unfortunately, the KJV misleadingly renders sarim as "princes" in Jeremiah 36 and many other places. However, the Hebrew Bible usage of sar and sarim never indicates a "prince" in the sense that speakers of English have come to understand the term, namely, as a royal son. Sar and sarim always refer, in the Hebrew Bible, to ruling officials not of royal birth but in service to the throne.

19. It is historically certain that Nebuchadnezzar placed 21-year-old Zedekiah upon the Judean throne in the year we know as 597 bc (see 2 Kings 24:17–18). Some Latter-day Saints will wonder how this can be, in view of the prophecy that Jesus would be born 600 years from the time Lehi left Jerusalem (see 1 Nephi 10:4). Based on the dating model of Elder James E. Talmage, who placed Jesus' birth on April 6, 1 bc, the year 600 bc has appeared as an extratextual footnote to 1 Nephi 2:4 (the passage where Lehi departed from Jerusalem) in all editions of the Book of Mormon since 1920 (the 1920 edition was edited by Elder Talmage). Therefore, some Latter-day Saints have assumed that 600 bc must have been the "first year of the reign of Zede- kiah" (1 Nephi 1:4). A number of dating models have been proposed (different from Talmage's model) to explain how the historical date of Zedekiah's first year (597 bc) can be reconciled with Lehi's 600-year prophecy, but space prevents exploring them here. I will, however, offer a very brief outline of my own solution, which is that Jesus was most likely born in the winter of 5 bc/4 bc (just months prior to the death of Herod the Great in April of 4 bc) and that Lehi's departure from Jerusalem presumably occurred 600 years earlier, in late 605 bc. In this model I presume that the "first year of the reign of..."
have been, so that a port west
of the Straits of Gibraltar, on
the coast of modern Morocco,
would have spared Mulek’s
party a complicated sail across
the Mediterranean.
31. A theophoric element means a
word particle that utilizes all
or part of a divine name. The
theophoric element -yahu-
is an adumbed form of the
full divine name Yahweh (יוהו),
which is rendered in King
James English as Jehovah.
32. For example, Ge’alyahu ben
hamelek, who seems to have
owned at least two different
seals (Corpus nos. 412 and 413),
and Neriyahu ben hamelek,
who seems to have owned at
least three (Corpus nos. 17, 18,
and 415). See Avigad and Sass,
Corpus, 55–56, 174–75, and
endnote 14 above.

A Test of Faith: The Book of
Mormon in the Missouri Conflict
Clark V. Johnson
1. Terryl L. Givens, By the Hand
of Mormon: The American
Scripture That Launched a New
World Religion (Oxford: Oxford
2. Joseph Smith Jr., History of
the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-
day Saints, 2nd rev. ed. (Salt
Lake City: Deseret Book, 1951),
1:390–91; also cited in Givens,
By the Hand of Mormon, 68.

3. Consult the account of John P.
Greene in Clark V. Johnson,
ed., Mormon Redress Petitions:
Documents of the 1833–1838
Missouri Conflict (Provo, UT:
BYU Religious Studies Center,
1992), 22.
4. The affidavits used in this
paper describe the settlement and
persecution of the Mormons
in western Missouri from 1831
through 1839. These 773 docu-
ments were written and sworn
before county officers in ten
counties in Illinois and two in
the Iowa territory between 1839
and 1845. The documents used
in this paper appear to refer to
affidavits or “petitions.” When Joseph Smith
presented them to the United
States Congress in 1839–40, he
referred to them as “claims.”
5. The known petitions are in
the Family and Church History
Department Archives in Salt
Lake City and in the National
Archives in Washington, D.C.
All quotations in this study are
exactly the same as the original
petitions, including the punc-
tuation and spelling.
6. Johnson, Mormon Redress
Petitions, 685–86.
7. Johnson, Mormon Redress
Petitions, 423.
8. In addition to the personal
abuse that Truman Brac suf-
furred, the mobbers took from
him two horses, one steer, a
sheep, two guns, four pistols,
and household furniture, and
they destroyed his crops and
garden (Johnson, Mormon Re-
dress Petitions, 45).
9. Johnson, Mormon Redress
Petitions, 144–45.
10. Johnson, Mormon Redress
Petitions, 431–32. By Cole’s ac-
count, he and his family lost
40 acres of land as a result of
persecution.
11. Johnson, Mormon Redress
Petitions, 652–54.
12. Johnson, Mormon Redress
Petitions, 22.
13. Johnson, Mormon Redress
Petitions, 652–53.
14. Johnson, Mormon Redress
Petitions, 22.

What’s in a Word?
The Language of the Scriptures
Cynthia L. Hallen
1. Marion G. Romney, address
given at Seminary and Institute
of Religion Coordinators’ Con-
vention, 3 April 1973, quoted in
Book of Mormon (Religion
121–122) Student Manual, 2nd
ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Church
of Jesus Christ of Latter-day
2. Oxford English Dictionary
(Cambridge: Oxford Univ. Press,

New Light
The Book of Mormon as a Written
(Literary) Artifact
Grant Hardy
1. Both the original and the
printer’s manuscripts have verse
16 placed exactly where it has
always been in all printed edi-
tions of the Book of Mormon;
there is no indication of an error
in the dictation or the transcrip-
tion and spelling.
2. For more details about the
discipline of textual criticism, see
Bruce M. Metzger, The Text of the
New Testament: Its Transmis-
sion, Corruption, and Restora-
tion, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford
Univ. Press, 1992); or L. D. Rey-
olds and N. G. Wilson, Scribes
and Scholars, 3rd ed. (New York:
3. Daniel Ludlow has suggested
that the strange reading in
Alma 24:19—“they buried their
weapons of peace, or they buried
the weapons of war, for peace”—
might be the result of an
engraving error that could
not be erased but was neverthe-
less immediately corrected.
Other possible examples he
points to include Mosiah 7:8,
Alma 50:32, Helaman 3:33, and
Nephi 16:4. See Daniel H.
Ludlow, A Companion to Your
Study of the Book of Mormon
(Salt Lake City: Deseret Book,
1976), 210. Another instance
may occur in Alma 15:16, the
subject of this essay, when the
writer decides misstatement
that the manner of priesthood
ordinations is not just a type
or symbol of God’s order; it is
actually the order of God itself.
4. See Robert J. Matthews, “The
New Publications of the Stan-
ard Works—1979, 1981,” BYU
5. By chapter, the references
are as follows: New Revised
Standard—Exodus 18, 22;
Judges 20; Ezekiel 21, 22;
Zechariah 5; John 8; Romans
16; 1 Corinthians 14; Revised
English Bible—1 Samuel 9;
2 Samuel 14; Judges 20; Job 3,
14, 20, 24, 29, 31 (twice), 33, 34,
35, 37; Ecclesiastes 2; Isaiah
10, 38, 40; John 8; Romans 16.
The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS)

FARMS is part of Brigham Young University’s Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts. As such, it encourages and supports research on the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham, the Bible, other ancient scripture, and related subjects. Under the FARMS imprint, the Institute publishes and distributes titles in these areas for the benefit of scholars and interested Latter-day Saint readers.

Primary research interests at FARMS include the history, language, literature, culture, geography, politics, and law relevant to ancient scripture. Although such subjects are of secondary importance when compared with the spiritual and eternal messages of scripture, solid research and academic perspectives can supply certain kinds of useful information, even if only tentatively, concerning many significant and interesting questions about scripture.

FARMS makes interim and final reports about this research available widely, promptly, and economically. These publications are peer reviewed to ensure that scholarly standards are met. The proceeds from the sale of these materials are used to support further research and publications. As a service to teachers and students of the scriptures, research results are distributed in both scholarly and popular formats.
COMING IN FUTURE ISSUES

The Delights of Making Cumorah’s Music

Life among the Zoramites

Poetry Inspired by the Hill Cumorah

The Savior and the Children in 3 Nephi

Costuming the Hill Cumorah Pageant