"No Poor Among Them"

Ancient Voyages Across the Ocean to America  ■  The Experience of the Eight Witnesses
The Hebrew Text of Alma 7:11  ■  Three Japanese Translations of the Book of Mormon
The Zoramite Separation: A Sociological Perspective  ■  The Savior and the Children in 3 Nephi
Alma's Enemies: The Case of the Lamanites, Amlicites, and Mysterious Amalekites
AND ALSO THE TESTIMONY OF EIGHT WITNESSES.

By it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come, that Joseph Smith, Jr. the Author and Proprietor of this work, has shown unto us the plates of which hath been spoken, which have the appearance of gold; and as many of the leaves as the said Smith has translated, we did handle with our hands; and we also saw the engravings thereof, all of which has the appearance of ancient work, and of curious workmanship. And this we bear record, with words of soberness, that the said Smith has shown unto us, for we have seen and hefted, and know of a certainty that the said Smith, has set the plates of which we...
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I have come to expect an almost endless stream of splendors from the Book of Mormon. As others, when I read its pages, I bring a type of perception, imagining that I am seeing a very wide range of its treasures. Then an author surprises me by digging out an important jewel from an unexpected nook, hinting that others—many others—lie in other corners, if we are paying close attention. So it is with the studies in this issue.

No fewer than three focus on one aspect or another of the book of Alma, turning up one nugget after another. Sherrie Johnson’s study on the Zoramites finally puts flesh and bone on these people, making their aspirations and characteristics visible to all of us. Appealing to modern sociological studies, she makes a plausible case for the reasons that these people withdrew from the mother Nephite culture, fitting them inside the political and religious milieu of their day. Thomas Wayment’s article brings an entirely different kind of focus, to a verse found in Alma 7. He has deftly and carefully woven together the bits of evidence that lay out the Hebrew connections to a quotation from the book of Isaiah. Then, in a completely different vein Chris Conkling examines the recently published original and printer’s manuscripts of the Book of Mormon and proposes a plausible solution to the longstanding problem of who the mysterious Amalekites were. This matter stands front and center in Alma’s record because they seemingly caused him no end of grief.

A fourth study that takes up an aspect of a single record is Gawain Wells’s treatment of the place and roles of children inside the book of 3 Nephi. Children, as Wells observes, formed one of the chief focuses of the activities and words of the Risen Christ during his three-day visit. Why so? Wells sets out to answer this question.

Two other studies range more broadly across the entire Book of Mormon text. Lindon Robison explores the characterization of rich and poor, as both theological and social categories, investigating the place of economic prosperity within the hegemony of the Lord. With similar broad strokes, RoseAnn Benson and Stephen Ricks cast a wide net in identifying the legal and cultural connections of the verb to know both within the world of the ancient Near East and within the Book of Mormon, illustrating that its main peoples came from that place, bringing their cultural and legal standards with them.

In a study of external evidences for the Book of Mormon, John Sorenson brings his considerable learning to bear on the question of pre-Columbian contacts between the Old and New Worlds. He concludes that, on the basis of a growing number of studies, the evidence for such contacts now drowns out the feeble replies of those who want to see the New World as an isolated island until AD 1492.

The modern story of the Book of Mormon, which the Journal has long featured, is the subject of the final two articles. Richard Anderson, in a study first presented to the Mormon History Association in 2003, has turned his finely honed skills onto a matter raised by a growing chorus of critics who conclude that some of the Eight Witnesses eventually turned from their testimonies about the reality of the golden plates that Joseph Smith showed to them. Anderson demonstrates that such has never been the case. With a different turn and with his engaging style, Van Gessel brings us inside the challenges of creating a translation of the Book of Mormon into a modern language, Japanese. Gessel tells a story that features the tireless devotion of many, underscoring the continuing spiritual influence of the volume.

NEW DEPARTMENT

The editors of the Journal are pleased to announce that Charles L. Swift, assistant professor of ancient scripture, has accepted an invitation to join the editorial board as an associate editor. We extend to him our warmest welcome. Dr. Swift, who holds a PhD in educational leadership from Brigham Young University, earned after student days at the Columbia University Law School in New York City, brings carefully honed literary interests and skills to the pages of the Book of Mormon, having already written extensively on Henry David Thoreau and Mark Twain. The next issue of the Journal will see the publication of his fine study on the literary ties of the dream of Lehi to other ancient visionary sources.

Brother Swift’s special duty for the Journal, besides joining the overall guiding team, will be to shepherd a new department that we have tentatively titled “Types and Shadows,” a department that will feature both literary artifacts that grow out of the ancient world and also unusual literary patterns that appear to be tied to cultural characteristics of Book of Mormon society.

We wish him well in this endeavor.
Nephi’s Boat, by Joseph Brickley and Howard Lyon.
Ancient Voyages
Across the Ocean to America
FROM “IMPOSSIBLE” TO “CERTAIN”

JOHN L. SORENSON
Book of Mormon history in the New World begins with ocean voyages—by the Lehites, the Mulekites, and the Jaredites. For the first and last of those, the record pointedly states that the parties stocked their vessels with supplies both to use on their trip and to start life as agriculturists when they arrived in the new land (see Ether 6:4, 13; 1 Nephi 18:6, 24). Perhaps the Mulekites too brought certain natural resources.

Latter-day Saints may have wondered why virtually all secular scholars and scientists have rejected the idea that ancient sailors succeeded in voyaging from the Old World to the New. Their rejection is not just in reference to the Book of Mormon story but against all claims that seaborne migrants capable of having any significant effect breached the ocean barrier prior to Columbus, except for a few Vikings considered of no historical importance. Prevailing views by reputed experts have assumed that “primitive sailors” would have found it impossible to cross the “forbidding” oceans.1 In the 1930s one scholar even spoke of the American continents as being “hermetically sealed by two oceans.”2 Such views were not so much scientific conclusions as echoes of the prevailing isolationist political doctrine of the times that refused to grant value to “foreign” people or ideas. Thus famous Maya archaeologist Sylvanus Morley opined in 1927 that there was “no vestige, no infinitesimal trace, of Old World influence . . . to detract from the [inventive] genius of our [sic] native American mind.” “There is no room for foreign origins here,” he went on to claim in his article entitled “Maya Civilization 100% American.”3 By the end of the 20th century this absolute view had eased only insignificantly.

There was, indeed, good reason to reject the voyaging explanation as usually presented. Numerous badly informed, or at least weakly argued, theories had been offered to explain the rise of civilization in the Americas. Josiah Priest, who published a popular book three years after publication of the Book of Mormon (i.e., 1833), supposed that not only East Asians in general but also “Polynesians, Malays, Australasians, Phoenicians, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Israelites, Tartars, Scandinavians, Danes, Norwegians, Welsh, and Scotch” people had colonized parts of the New World; but he gave no credible evidence for his speculations.4 Ninety years later, somewhat better supported but still unconvincing evidence for similar ideas was being published in popular works like those by G. Eliot Smith.5

The small minority of scholars who continued to claim that meaningful ancient voyages were made argued for the idea mainly on the basis of cultural parallels.6 They felt that close similarities of customs or beliefs that they pointed out could not be explained in any other way than that people carried those features with them across the waters. (However, much of the evidence that enthusiasts have cited has proven incautiously stated if not in error.) Orthodox scientists reacted against those notions with their own dogma holding that the issue
had already been adequately tested and should be rejected. For instance, Gordon R. Willey, a prominent Harvard archaeologist, said in 1985 that while no other subject in American archaeology had brought about such heated discussions as the role of Old World contacts, if no “concrete evidence” could be produced in the next 50 years, proponents ought to stop talking about the question. Cultural parallels did not count as concrete evidence in the scholarship of people like him. The skeptics maintained that any cultural similarities between the New World and the Old were simply coincidences, explainable because, they claimed, the human mind works the same everywhere in the world, so it should not be surprising that people independently come up with similar inventions or ideas.

For years those who believed in the importance of ocean voyaging in human history (“diffusionists”) tried to overwhelm this opposition by pointing out more and more, stronger and stronger, cultural parallels. A few years ago Martin H. Raish and I compiled a massive bibliography that made accessible the substance of over 5,000 books and articles concerning the diffusion issue—covering pretty much all published sources. But the significance of this compilation has been generally ignored and has done virtually nothing to change the minds of the traditional isolationist majority of scholars. They have frequently countered with what they considered an absolute argument against voyaging: no food plant is common to the two hemispheres. That fact alone was supposed to be “enough to offset any number of petty puzzles in arts and myths [i.e., cultural similarities].”

By the year 2000 I had concluded that the only way to break this particular intellectual logjam was to put forward hard scientific evidence that doubters could not explain away by offhanded reference to the inventiveness of the human mind. The approach I desired could best be pursued by demonstrating that the flora and fauna of the New World had been shared with the Old World. Some useful research had already established a limited body of such evidence. These concrete biological features would be important because no one can claim that the human mind had invented the same plant on opposite sides of the ocean.

Floral Evidence for Diffusion

Over the last four years 98 species of plants have been identified that originated in either the Old World or the New yet were also grown in pre-Columbian times in the opposite hemisphere. That distribution cannot be explained the way cultural parallels have been by inventionist-minded scholars. A plant is an objective fact that demands a physical explanation for the presence of the same species on two sides of an ocean. Yet all purely naturalistic theories fail to account for plants thousands of miles from their natural home. For example, some have supposed that seeds were carried thousands of miles by birds, or evolutionary processes have been claimed as yielding identical species in multiple locations, but these notions are never more than nonempirical speculation. The only rational explanation for multiple plant distributions is that people sailed across the oceans before Columbus, nurturing and transporting plants en route.

As I dug into neglected books and journals, the number of plants reported to be shared across the oceans mounted. Victor H. Mair, a specialist in Chinese literature and language at the University of Pennsylvania, took an interest in the project and invited me to prepare a paper for a conference he was organizing on “Contact and Exchange in the Ancient World.” I invited my friend and colleague Carl L. Johannessen, emeritus professor of geography at the University of Oregon, who had long worked on the topic, to collaborate. By the time of the conference in May 2001, we had identified over 35 plant
species for which there was what we considered conclusive proof that species had been transported between the hemispheres. By 2003, when we submitted our paper to Mair for publication in the report of the conference, the number of plant species on our conclusive list had grown to 85. Since then we have found still more; today the total is 98 species.

What evidence do we consider to be “conclusive” or “decisive”? In some cases it comes from archaeology. For example, in 1966–67 Australian archaeologist Ian Glover excavated in caves on the island of Timor in Indonesia, where he discovered plant remains that included three crops of American origin: *Annona* (custard apple), *Zea* (maize), and *Arachis* (peanut). These dated at the latest to AD 1000 and probably well before. The peanuts were duplicated at two sites on the Chinese mainland that date by radiocarbon to as early as 2800 BC.

In northern India archaeologists have recently found seeds of *Phaseolus vulgaris* (kidney bean), *Phaseolus lunatus* (lima bean), and *Macroptilium lathyroides* (phasey bean, a cousin of kidney and lima beans), in addition to *Argemone mexicana* (Mexican prickle poppy), all natives of America. The sites date from 1600 to 800 BC.

For other American plants, decisive evidence consists of realistic depictions in art. For example, the chile pepper is clearly depicted in a sculpture at a temple that honors the Hindu god Shiva at Tiruchirapalli, India. Chiles are also mentioned in traditional books of India dating to the sixth to eighth centuries. The plants also appear on a sculpted wall panel at the ruined temple near the modern temple at Prambanan, Java, dating to about AD 1000.
An especially striking case from art involves *Couroupita guianensis*, called the *naga* lingam tree in India. This native of South America or the West Indies has been cultivated in South India “from very early times,” as illustrated in a temple carving of medieval age. In India its unusually shaped blossom is thought to look like symbols sacred to a Hindu deity, Shiva; the flowers are still offered today at temples to Shiva. Interestingly, in Mesoamerica, where the tree is common, neither the blossoms nor the tree has any sacred significance. The only sensible scenario to explain these facts historically seems to be that a Hindu visitor to Mesoamerica was struck enough by the meaningful appearance (to him) of the bloom of the tree to decide to carry it to India, where it came to grow widely.

Hundreds of other India temple sculptures show voluptuous women holding upright in one hand an ear of corn (maize) while their fingers make a sacred gesture known as a *mudra*. Maize is, of course, an American crop plant. Two other American plants, the pineapple and the cashew nut, are among additional species seen in Indian art.

References to imported American plants in Asian medical, botanical, and historical documents are a further source of evidence. A Chinese document written in the Jin dynasty (AD 290–307) by a minister of state who had served as a governor in southern China lists some 80 plants that were known to him there. In the list was the sweet potato, *Ipomoea batatas*, another American species.
In India the chile pepper (Capsicum annuum, mentioned above) is cited in the traditional volume Siva Purana as part of a cure for tuberculosis. The silk cotton, or kapok, tree (Ceiba pentandra) not only originated in America but also was deeply involved in the mythology of the Maya of Yucatan, yet it is referred to in the Kurma Purana (5th century AD) and the Brahmanda Purana (10th century). Meanwhile, on Hainan Island, off the southern coast of China, the silk cotton tree was being cultivated and the fiber woven by local tribesmen during the Tang Dynasty (AD 600–900) according to a Chinese history. The pumpkin and the squash are mentioned in India in the medical text of Al-Kindi in the ninth century AD. At least a dozen more New World species are similarly documented historically in India and China.

Lexicons also serve to place plants on the map far from their areas of origin. This kind of data is especially abundant through study of the Sanskrit language in India. Sanskrit was the original language in which the earliest sacred Hindu texts were written in the first and second millennium BC. From around 500 BC to AD 1000, Sanskrit served as the key language of Indian sacred and civilized life in the same manner as Latin did in Europe. And like Latin in Europe for over a thousand years, Sanskrit was an inactive or “dead” language represented by the sacred texts but no longer reflecting contemporary life by adding new words. So when we find that a plant bore a Sanskrit name, we can be sure it was actually known in the country no later than AD 1000.

For example, Asclepias curassavica (the milkweed), a species of American origin, was known in Sanskrit medicine as kakatundi. Moreover, at least two species of hallucinogenic datura plants (in English “thorn apple” and “jimsonweed”) were used in Asia as well as in the Americas; daturas were called by no less than eight Sanskrit names, as well as one in Persian. Tagetes erecta, the large marigold, a Mexican native plant, bore four Sanskrit names, and what our gardeners know as the four-o’clock flower (Mirabilis jalapa) had four names in India as well. As a matter of fact, 38 different species of plants that originated in the Americas each had at least one name in Sanskrit. This observation alone demonstrates that a remarkably abundant flow of New World fauna took place into South Asia between perhaps 2000 BC and AD 1000.

The same naming phenomenon can be noted in other Old World languages. The black nightshade, Solanum nigrum, this too from the New World, was named not only in Sanskrit, Persian, and Chinese...
but also in Arabic. Elsewhere, a name for sweet potato among Chibchan speakers of Colombia and Panama precisely matches the Hawaiian name for the plant. Karl H. Rensch’s linguistic study of names for sweet potato resulted in his proposing “that the sweet potato reached Polynesia at least twice: once via a northern route through Hawaii under the guise of *kuara/*kuala, and once via a southern route as *kumara, with Easter Island as its point of entry.”

Methods of research familiar to botanists who study the distribution of plants were also involved in our study. For example, turmeric, Curcuma longa, was originally Asiatic (it had names in Sanskrit, Chinese, Hebrew, and Arabic), and from there it spread eastward throughout many Pacific islands. So when we learn that turmeric was also grown by native people in the remote Amazon River drainage of eastern Peru, the conclusion seems inescapable—it was carried to South America, presumably from the islands, on some prehistoric voyage.

Other evidence from distributions concerns the bottle gourd, Lagenaria siceraria. Some have proposed that it was capable of drifting across an ocean, although scientists are uncertain whether seeds would still grow after a months-long float to some American beach. But the gourd was absent from western Polynesia, although it does appear in the islands of eastern Polynesia. Obviously, the gourd did not drift from island to island all the way across the Pacific to Peru or else the species would have grown in western Polynesia as well. Yet it appeared in an archaeological site on the coast of Peru almost 5,000 years ago. The only scenario that makes sense of these facts has Asian mariners carrying gourds in their vessels from Asia or the western Pacific directly to western South America thousands of years ago. Later voyagers could have carried the plant to eastern Polynesia, but not farther west, from the mainland aboard vessels like the Kon Tiki raft.

Often several types of analysis, rather than a single method, combine to prove contact by sea. In our study we always demanded at least two lines of evidence before considering contact across the sea to be assured. For instance, for the peanut (see above), where the primary evidence comes from archaeology, added support comes from linguistics. Names for that nut among Native American peoples in interior South America, the area where botanists think the plant was first domesticated from the wild, compare to names for peanuts on the Indian subcontinent. South American names include (in the Tupí family of languages) mandobi, manobi, mandowi, mundubi, and munui; (in Pilagá) mandovi; (in Chiriguano) manduvi; and (in Guarani) manubi. Michael Black showed that those terms are strikingly like peanut names in India: in Sanskrit, andapi; in Hindi, munghali; and in Gujarati, mandavi. These lexical parallels taken together with the actual plant specimens dug up by archaeologists in Asia make clear that transoceanic voyaging was the means by which the plant and its names reached Asia. Furthermore, plant scientist Edgar Anderson concluded that “the most primitive type of peanut, the same narrow little shoestrings which are found in the Peruvian tombs, are commonly grown today, not in Peru, but in South China.”

Proof for one complex of plants involved a particularly wide array of research methods. To the amazement of some scientists and the consternation of others, chemical evidence of tobacco has been found in ancient Egyptian mummies, although tobacco was supposed to be unknown in the Old World prior to Columbus. First, fragments of tobacco were found deep in the abdominal cavity of the 3200-year-old mummy of Pharaoh Ramses II while it was being studied in a European museum. Some skeptics immediately concluded that this had to be due to modern contamination in the museum. This American plant could not possibly have been known in Egypt, they insisted. In 1992 physical scientists in Germany used sophisticated laboratory instrumentation to test nine other Egyptian mummies. They found chemical residues of tobacco, coca (another American plant, the source of cocaine), and the Asian native hashish (the source of
marijuana) in the hair, soft tissues, skin, and bones of eight of the mummies. These traces included cotinine, a chemical whose presence means that the tobacco had been consumed and metabolized while the deceased person was alive. (The ninth mummy contained coca and hashish residues but not tobacco.) Dates of the corpses according to historical records from Egypt ranged from 1070 BC to AD 395, indicating that these drugs were continuously available to some Egyptians for no less than 1,450 years. Investigators have since found evidence of the drugs in additional mummies from Egypt.

Equally startling has been the discovery of the same drugs in Peruvian mummies that date back to at least AD 100. Chemical analysis revealed the use of tobacco and cocaine (not surprisingly, since the former was widely used in the Americas and the latter comes from the South American plant *Erythroxylon novagranatense*, commonly known as coca). But hashish was also used in Peru, although it is from Asian *Cannabis sativa*. Furthermore, two species of beetles that infested Egyptian mummies—*Alphitobius diaperinus* and *Stegobium pan-
What is true of plants is paralleled by the transoceanic carriage of fauna. Let us look first at infectious organisms, because it was long believed that the New World constituted a virtual terrestrial paradise, free from the diseases known in the Old World, until the Spaniards brought in devastating Old World microorganisms. But in the last few years that naïve picture has changed considerably. It is true that many of the epidemic plagues of Eurasia and Africa did not exist in the Americas. (Generally speaking, New World people were protected from the spread of epidemics because they tended not to dwell in densely populated cities nor with large numbers of domestic animals close at hand, as much of the Old World population did.) Still, new research is demonstrating that New World peoples “were exposed to a wide variety of diseases,” including “fungi and staphylococcal and streptococcal environmental pathogens.” At least 21 disease agents have been found to be located in both the Americas and the Old World before Columbus (see table 2), and up to 19 more may yet be shown to have been shared.

A prime example of the kind of evidence at hand to establish transoceanic transport for such organisms is the case of the hookworm, *Ancylostoma duodenale*. Its relative rarity in some tropical areas of the New World and its long-term prevalence in East and Southeast Asia make the latter area the place where epidemiologists think the organism originated. At first early historians of medicine assumed that *A. duodenale* had been introduced into the Americas by slaves brought from Africa. Early in the 20th century, O. da Fonseca discovered the parasite in an isolated Amerindian population in the Amazon basin. Shortly afterward, microbiologist Samuel Darling weighed the evidence and concluded it was likely that the hookworm had reached native South American forest dwellers before Columbus arrived. If that could be proven, he observed, then the only plausible explanation for its presence in the New World would be that it arrived anciently via infected humans who had crossed the ocean.

His confidence that the pest came by sea sprang from facts about the life cycle of this nematode worm. At a certain stage in its life cycle, it must inhabit warm, moist soil (in a climate no colder than North Carolina today). At a later point in the cycle the worms that have developed in the soil penetrate some human’s body and settle in the digestive tract. Immigrants who came to the New World in slow stages via the Bering Strait would have arrived hookworm-free because the cold soil would have killed the parasite during the long trip, while host humans crossing by ship (in a relatively short period of time) could still carry worms upon their arrival.

The hookworm’s pre-Columbian presence in America was finally established by Marvin Allison and colleagues, who in 1973 found traces of hookworms in a Peruvian mummy dated AD 700. In 1988 Brazilian scientists identified the same species from human remains excavated in eastern Brazil. A series of radiocarbon dates at that site placed the remains at about 7,300 years ago, although, given the inland remoteness of the place, the human carriers who introduced the pest from overseas must have arrived on some American coast centuries earlier than that.

This find establishes conclusively that humans crossed the ocean at a startlingly early time, for only in that way can the presence of the hookworms be explained. Scientists continue to assure us that there is no alternative explanation. L. F. Ferreira
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<td>Adenostemma viscosum</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Hawaii, India</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agave sp.</td>
<td>agave</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>E. Mediterranean</td>
<td>300 BC</td>
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<td>Agave americana</td>
<td>agave</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>AD 1000</td>
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<td>Agave angustifolia</td>
<td>agave</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>AD 1000</td>
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<td>Agave cantala</td>
<td>agave</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>AD 1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ageratum conyzoides</td>
<td>goat weed</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Hawaii, India</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
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<td>Alternanthera sp.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amaranthus caudatus</td>
<td>love-lies-bleeding</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amaranthus cruentus</td>
<td>amaranth</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. hypochondriacus</td>
<td>amaranth</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amaranthus spinosus</td>
<td>spiked amaranth</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anacardium occidentale</td>
<td>cashew</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>100 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ananas comosus</td>
<td>pineapple</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Middle East, India</td>
<td>600 BC</td>
</tr>
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<td>Annona cherimolia</td>
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<td>American origin</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>AD 1200</td>
</tr>
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<td>Annona reticulata</td>
<td>annona</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>100 BC</td>
</tr>
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<td>Annona squamosa</td>
<td>sweetsop</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>2500 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arachis hypogaea</td>
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<td>American origin</td>
<td>China, Indonesia</td>
<td>2800 BC</td>
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<td>Argemone mexicana</td>
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<td>American origin</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>1100 BC</td>
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<td>Aristida subspicata</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Polynesia</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
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<td>Asian origin</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
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<td>India, Polynesia</td>
<td>AD 1000</td>
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<td>Aster divaricatus</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bixa orellana</td>
<td>achiote, annatto</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Oceania, Asia</td>
<td>AD 1000</td>
</tr>
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<td>Canavalia ensiformis</td>
<td>jack bean</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>1600 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canna edulis</td>
<td>Indian shot</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India, China</td>
<td>AD 300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canna indica</td>
<td>Indian shot, achira</td>
<td>Indian origin</td>
<td>Peru, China</td>
<td>AD 300</td>
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<td>Cannabis sativa</td>
<td>hashish</td>
<td>Asian origin</td>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>AD 100</td>
</tr>
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<td>Capsicum annuum</td>
<td>chile pepper</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India, Indonesia</td>
<td>AD 800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capsicum frutescens</td>
<td>chile pepper</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>AD 800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carica papaya</td>
<td>papaya</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Polynesia</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceiba pentandra</td>
<td>silk cotton tree</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Southeast Asia, India</td>
<td>AD 900</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chenopodium ambrosioides</td>
<td>Mexican tea</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>AD 1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocos nucifera</td>
<td>coconut</td>
<td>Asian origin</td>
<td>Central America</td>
<td>AD 400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couroupita guianensis</td>
<td>cannonball tree</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>AD 1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cucurbita ficifolia</td>
<td>chilacayote</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cucurbita maxima</td>
<td>Hubbard squash</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India, China</td>
<td>AD 900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cucurbita moschata</td>
<td>butternut squash</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India, China</td>
<td>AD 900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cucurbita pepo</td>
<td>pumpkin</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India, China</td>
<td>AD 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curcuma longa</td>
<td>turmeric</td>
<td>Asian origin</td>
<td>South America</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyperus esculentus</td>
<td>edible bulb. sedge</td>
<td>Peru, No. America</td>
<td>Middle East, India</td>
<td>BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyperus vegetus</td>
<td>edible sedge</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India, Easter Island</td>
<td>AD 1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Datura metel</td>
<td>datura</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Asia, Europe</td>
<td>BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Datura stramonium</td>
<td>datura</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Asia, Europe</td>
<td>BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diospyros ebenaster</td>
<td>black sapote</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>South, East Asia</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Erigeron canadensis</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>AD 1000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Erythroxylon novogranatense</td>
<td>coca</td>
<td>So. American origin</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>1200 BC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Garcinia mangostana</td>
<td>mangosteen</td>
<td>Asian origin</td>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gossypium arboreum (or G. herbaceum)</td>
<td>cotton</td>
<td>Asian origin</td>
<td>So. and No. America</td>
<td>3000? BC</td>
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Table 1. Plants for Which There Is Decisive Evidence of Transoceanic Carriage
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plant Name</th>
<th>Common Name</th>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Introduced To</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Gossypium barbadense</em></td>
<td>cotton</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Polynesia</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Gossypium gossypioides</em></td>
<td>cotton (genes from)</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Gossypium hirsutum</em></td>
<td>cotton</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>West Africa</td>
<td>AD 1475</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Gossypium tomentosum</em></td>
<td>cotton</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Helianthus annuus</em></td>
<td>sunflower</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>AD 400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Heliconia bihai</em></td>
<td>balisier</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Oceania, Asia</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hibiscus tiliacus</em></td>
<td>Linden hibiscus</td>
<td>Tropical America</td>
<td>Polynesia</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Ipomoea batatas</em></td>
<td>sweet potato</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Polynesia, Asia</td>
<td>AD 300</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Lagenaria siceraria</em></td>
<td>bottle gourd</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>E. Polynesia</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Luffa acutangula</em></td>
<td>ribbed gourd</td>
<td>India</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Luffa cylindrica</em></td>
<td>vegetable sponge</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>Mesoamerica</td>
<td>1200 BC</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Lycium carolinianum</em></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Easter Island</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Macroptilium lathyroides</em></td>
<td>phasey bean</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>1600 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Manihot</em></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>E. Polynesia, India</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Maranta arundinacea</em></td>
<td>arrowroot</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Easter Island, India</td>
<td>AD 1000</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Mimosa pudica</em></td>
<td>sensitive plant</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>BC?</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Mirabilis jalapa</em></td>
<td>four-o’clock</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>BC?</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Mollugo verticillata</em></td>
<td>carpetweed</td>
<td>Eurasia</td>
<td>Americas</td>
<td>BC?</td>
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<td><em>Monstera delicosa</em></td>
<td>ceriman</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>AD 1100</td>
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<td><em>Morus sp.</em></td>
<td>mulberry</td>
<td>Asian origin</td>
<td>Middle America</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Mucuna pruriens</em></td>
<td>cowhage</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India, Polynesia</td>
<td>BC?</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Musa x paradisiaca</em></td>
<td>banana, plantain</td>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>Middle Amer.</td>
<td>BC?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Myrica gale</em></td>
<td>bog myrtle</td>
<td>No. Europe</td>
<td>North America</td>
<td>AD 1000</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Nicotiana tabacum</em></td>
<td>tobacco</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>1100 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ocimum sp.</em></td>
<td>basil</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>America</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Opuntia dillenii</em></td>
<td>prickly pear cactus</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>BC?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Osteomeles anthyllidifolia</em></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Pachyrhizus erosus</em></td>
<td>jicama, yam bean</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>AD 1000</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Pachyrhizus tuberosus</em></td>
<td>jicama, yam bean</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>East Asia, Oceania</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Pharbitis hederacea</em></td>
<td>ivy-leaf morn glory</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India, China</td>
<td>AD 1000</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Phaseolus lunatus</em></td>
<td>lima bean</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India, China</td>
<td>1600 BC</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Phaseolus vulgaris</em></td>
<td>kidney bean</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India, Middle East</td>
<td>1600 BC</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Physalis lanceifolia</em></td>
<td>ground cherry</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India, Marquesas</td>
<td>BC?</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Physalis peruviana</em></td>
<td>husk tomato</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India, Polynesia</td>
<td>AD 1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Polygonum acuminatum</em></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Easter Island</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Portulaca oleracea</em></td>
<td>purslane</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India, China</td>
<td>BC?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Psidium guajava</em></td>
<td>guava</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India, Middle East</td>
<td>BC?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sapindus saponarsa</em></td>
<td>soapberry</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Asia, E. Polynesia</td>
<td>BC?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Schoenoplectus californicus</em></td>
<td>bulrush</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Easter Island</td>
<td>AD 1300</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Sisyrinchium acre</em></td>
<td>a “grass”</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Sisyrinchium angustifolium</em></td>
<td>blue-eyed “grass”</td>
<td>Greenland</td>
<td>Newfoundland</td>
<td>AD 1000</td>
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<td><em>Solanum candidum/ S. lasiocarpum</em></td>
<td>naranjillo</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Oceania, SE Asia</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
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<td><em>Solanum nigrum</em></td>
<td>black nightshade</td>
<td>American origin</td>
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<td>BC?</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Solanum repandum/ S. sessiliforum</em></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Solanum tuberosum</em></td>
<td>potato</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Easter Island</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Sonchus oleraceus</em></td>
<td>sow thistle</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>Middle America</td>
<td>AD 1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sophora toromiro</em></td>
<td>toromiro tree</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Easter Island</td>
<td>AD 1300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tagetes erecta</em></td>
<td>large marigold</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>BC?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tagetes patula</em></td>
<td>dwarf marigold</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>AD 1000</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Zea mays</em></td>
<td>maize, corn</td>
<td>American origin</td>
<td>Eurasia, Africa?</td>
<td>2500 BC</td>
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</table>
and colleagues say that “transpacific migrants from Asia by sea must be one component of the ancient American population.” Fonseca agrees: “Shared species of parasites . . . make it inescapable that voyagers reached South America directly from Oceania or Southeast Asia.” Ferreira and colleagues conclude the same: “We must suppose that [the human hosts for the parasite] arrived by sea.” And A. Araújo insists, “The evidence points only to maritime contacts” for the introduction of hookworms (emphasis added).

Two key facts arise from this situation. First, *A. duodenale* could have arrived in America only in the bodies of humans (Asians presumably) who arrived by sea. Since all humans bear a culture, it was not just a source of illness that arrived in South America on that boat or raft, but also features of some particular Asian culture, as well as a set of genes. Second, by the sixth or fifth millennium BC, whether we can describe or conceive of them or not, ships were then available in at least one region on the western side of the Pacific that were capable of crossing or skirting the ocean, for at least one did so.

A second species, *Necator americanus*, is also known as hookworm and has the same life cycle. It has been found in Brazil in human remains similar in date to that of *A. duodenale*. By the same reasoning, it too arrived by a sea voyage.

Not only is the louse that infests the heads of humans (*Pediculus humanus capitis*) precisely the same species in mainland America and the Pacific islands, but the names also virtually match, at least in two languages of the Solomon Islands and the Maya of Mesoamerica.

Some of the other diseases whose agents have recently been shown to have been in America in the pre-Columbian era include other intestinal parasites—the roundworm and the threadworm; the amoeba that causes dysentery; viruses responsible for shingles, chicken pox, and mononucleosis; a fungus that causes ringworm on the body and two others that infest human hair; disease bacteria for whooping cough, typhus fever, and the plague; and the T cell lymphotropic (retro)virus (HTLV-I).

In addition, some larger fauna made the trip directly across the ocean, surely with humans. For example, the native American turkey was known in medieval central Europe. Bones have been excavated from archaeological ruins dated to the 14th and 15th centuries (in Switzerland and Hungary), and jewelry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Faunal Sources of Disease Shared in Both Hemispheres</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alphitobius diaperinus</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ancylostoma duodenale</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ascaris lumbricoides</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Bordetella pertussis</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Borrelia recurrentis</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Entamoeba histolytica</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Human (alpha) herpes virus 3</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Human (gamma) herpes virus 4</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Microsporum spp.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Mycobacterium tuberculosis</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Necator americanus</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pediculus humanus capitis</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pediculus humanus corporis</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Piedreaia hortai.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Rickettsia prowazekii</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Rickettsia rickettsii</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strongyloides sp.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>T cell lymphotropic (retro)virus (HTLV-I)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trichosporon ovoides</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trichuris trichuria</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yersinia pestis</strong></td>
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</table>
that bears engravings of the fowl’s distinctive head and the characteristic neck wattle has come from south-central Europe, dated as early as the 10th century. Moreover, two years before Columbus’s first voyage, a letter was sent from Budapest to an Italian nobleman, asking him to supply a pair of the birds along with a man skilled in their care.\textsuperscript{61}

In addition to the organisms for which we have decisive proof of transoceanic distribution, for another 80 species of flora and fauna there is some evidence that they too may have crossed the oceans with boat travelers. More research is needed to determine which of those, if any, to add to our “decisive evidence” list. (For tables listing the additional candidate fauna and flora, along with full documentation and data supporting the historicity of these movements across the oceans, see the publications cited in notes 12 and 13.)

\section*{Ancient Seafaring Technology}

A question naturally arises as to whether vessels and nautical skills were available to account for the early voyages. Contrary to the picture we were once taught about “primitive” sailors timidly avoiding the open sea until an intrepid Columbus made a breakthrough, evidence now clearly establishes that sailors long ago ventured widely. As long ago as 50,000 BP (before the present), Australia’s first settlers reached that continent across as much as 95 miles (150 km) of open sea, and the Solomon Islands were populated from 105 miles (170 km) away by 29,000 years ago.\textsuperscript{62} Balsa-log rafts (functionally they were steerable “ships,” not what we think of under the term \textit{rafts}) like the \textit{Kon Tiki} vessel of Thor Heyerdahl were preceded by early Ecuadorian craft that sailed up and down the Pacific coast of South and Middle America apparently from 2000 BC on.\textsuperscript{63} However, they, in turn, were modeled on rafts of unknown age from China and Southeast Asia.\textsuperscript{64} Three modern replicas of pre-Columbian rafts constructed in Ecuador in the traditional form were sailed in 1974 as a fleet over 9,000 miles to Australia.\textsuperscript{65} Many other craft, some of them remarkably small and “primitive,”\textsuperscript{66} have been sailed in modern times across various ocean routes; one veteran small-craft sailor reports that “it takes a damned fool to sink a boat on the high seas.”\textsuperscript{67}

\section*{A Changing Paradigm}

We have seen that the old view of completely separate natural and cultural histories for the Old World and the New can no longer be maintained. New research has turned that reactionary idea on its head. The historical paradigm has changed. Hereafter, students of history must start from the position that voyaging across oceans was within the capability of adventurous folks in many times and places. Numerous voyages across the oceans were completed that had substantial consequences on both sides of the world.

That being the case, historians, archaeologists, geographers, and others must not fail to look anew at the massive evidence from \textit{cultural} similarities that they have long considered mere coincidental inventions easily made by the human mind.

How can those who have been considered the authoritative experts have got this aspect of history so utterly wrong? Much of the “new” evidence has actually been around in published form for quite a long time (see note 8). It has been largely ignored because dogmatically opinionated experts have so blindly defended the notion that the histories of the two hemispheres were independent, denying that there was any possibility of meaningful ocean travel.

Yet we should not be disappointed with secular scholars for lacking curiosity and open minds in regard to this topic. We Latter-day Saint students of antiquity too have allowed ourselves to be unnecessarily limited in approaching the Nephite record’s account of transoceanic voyaging. Most of us have been too long stuck with the traditional notion that the scriptural account allowed only Lehites, Mulekites, and Jaredites to sail across the oceans (that is equivalent to assuming that Mormon pioneers were the only ones who crossed the plains of western North America to the Rocky Mountains and beyond). If we want fuller answers about Book of Mormon history, we ourselves need to ask potentially richer questions of the record.

Research so far has not confirmed that ships did carry Jaredites, Lehites, or Mulek and his party from Eurasia to America. But now, for the first time, we have the clear backing of biological history that those voyages fit within a long-standing historical pattern.
Attempts to Redefine the Experience of the Eight Witnesses

—Richard Lloyd Anderson—

An angel showed the Book of Mormon plates to the Three Witnesses, who heard God’s voice declare the translation correct. But the Eight Witnesses report handling the plates under natural circumstances, describing color, substantial weight, individual leaves with engraved writings, and careful craftsmanship throughout. Critics have reacted variously to such physical language. Some see the Eight Witnesses as participants in a fraud. But their lives do not fit that mold, since all suffered in the severe persecutions of early Mormonism and not one reversed his written testimony. Other critics acknowledge sincerity and suppose Joseph Smith constructed an imitation. But the Eight Witnesses were tradesmen and farmers who worked with materials and would recognize a clumsy counterfeit. More recent skeptics advance a double theory: (1) that at various times Joseph Smith allowed the eight men to lift but not see a heavy covered object; (2) that these men testified of seeing plates because of a vision induced by enthusiasm or mind control. This theory is showcased by arbitrary interpretation of very few documents. This article discusses sources that have been misused in attempts to reverse the Eight Witnesses’ statement about their physical contact with the ancient record.
Eight Witnesses See the Gold Plates, by Paul Mann. © 1988 Paul Mann.
The official testimonies of the Three and Eight Witnesses are strengthened by a third tier of witnesses, family members who had contact with the plates as Joseph brought them into his New York farm home, as well as scribes who worked around the plates in the translation process. William Smith was 16 when his older brother outran pursuers and breathlessly carried the covered metal record into the house. William recounted lifting the plates that night, saying several times that they weighed about 60 pounds. In a pulpit speech William told of feeling their outlines through cloth wrappings: “They were not quite as large as this Bible. Could tell whether they were round or square. Could raise the leaves this way (raising a few leaves of the Bible before him).” And he added detail in an interview: “I could tell they were plates of some kind and that they were fastened together by rings running through the back.”

As an early secretary for her husband, Emma Smith remembered how the covered plates were on the translating table, and she sometimes moved them and once felt their shape through the linen covering: “They seemed to be pliable like thick paper, and would rustle with a metallic sound when the edges were moved by the thumb.”

These family descriptions closely correlate with the written “Testimony of Eight Witnesses,” showing that the current theory of a visual illusion is out of touch with the realities of the translation period. Since this subjective concept relies heavily on statements of Martin Harris, it is important to clarify two types of experience he had with the plates. Of course, Martin was one of the Three Witnesses, who saw the angel and plates in 1829. This visitation first came to Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and David Whitmer, and David clarified that they saw but did not handle the plates at that time. About an hour afterward, this visitation came to Martin and Joseph, and Joseph said the first experience was repeated. Thus Martin Harris saw the bare plates when the angel showed them to the Three Witnesses. By contrast, Martin was also Joseph Smith’s first scribe, and his comments about covered plates no doubt come from that early period. He said, “I hefted the plates many times, and should think they weighed forty or fifty pounds.” Much later he told a newspaper editor that the plates weighed “altogether, from forty to sixty pounds.” This early assistant said that he and his family lifted the plates in a box when first investigating Joseph’s story, and he held the plates on his knee while hiding them in the forest with Joseph. Judged by other sources, the record was wrapped at that time. Martin regularly said he saw the plates, and sometimes he said he saw the plates covered. This is not contradictory, because these remarks relate to different occasions during the translation.

Attempts to Repackage the Eight Witnesses’ Testimony

In contrast to seeing a covered record, the Eight Witnesses speak of viewing the plates themselves with unobstructed vision, noting they had “the appearance of gold . . . of ancient work . . . of curious workmanship.” In their official testimony, they looked closely at the engravings while turning the leaves, seeing and handling at the same time. Thus the published testimony contradicts the current subjective theory, which asserts the eight men saw the plates in a mystic group experience but handled them only on other occasions when they were covered. Dan Vogel and Grant H. Palmer give variations of this basic theory, though predecessors published similar arguments. Both authors are noted for challenging the objective reality of Joseph Smith’s founding visions. Palmer largely avoids statements from the witnesses but concludes “that the eight, like the three, saw and scrutinized the plates in a mind vision.” He downgrades Joseph Smith’s own story by repeating rumors and folklore about how the Prophet found and returned the plates. Thus he paints the Book of Mormon witnesses as simplistic believers who possessed the “shared magical perspective” of their culture. After discovering the inner workings of their minds, he concludes that these witnesses thought “the spiritual was material,” meaning that their official statement “sounded more physical than was intended.” So reinterpreting the “Testimony of Eight Witnesses” is really based on knowing their “mind-set” instead of focusing on what they repeatedly said about their experience.
Vogel’s approach to the Eight Witnesses matches Palmer’s, though with more detailed speculation. He starts with flat disbelief: “There is simply no reliable proof for the existence of the supernatural.”

Reading Vogel on the Book of Mormon witnesses, therefore, is tracking a conclusion in search of evidence. In his writing, no witness saw a divine vision or examined an authentic ancient artifact. In explaining the experience of the Eight Witnesses, Vogel uses little material from these men, though he has collected most of their published testimonies. In all his explanations, the Eight Witnesses saw the plates only through imagination, what he calls a “visionary” experience. As for holding the plates, he apparently prefers the possibility of lifting a weighted box, with something like group hypnosis persuading the eight men that they “viewed the plates through the lid of the box.”

This concept comes with a second possibility of how Joseph Smith might have convinced the Eight Witnesses there were plates: “They saw them in vision but handled them in a box, or while covered, on some previous occasion.” However, Lucy Mack Smith refutes a split experience of seeing on one day and lifting the plates at an earlier time. Of course, she knew her family had picked up the covered metal object that Joseph brought home in 1827, but she describes an additional formal inspection by the Eight Witnesses as the translation was ending. Mother Smith was present when the Three Witnesses returned to the rural Whitmer home and reported their gratitude on seeing the angel and the plates. She then describes surrounding circumstances as the Smiths returned some 30 miles to their residence south of Palmyra village. Her unedited manuscript picks up the story as follows, omitting only her quotation of the written testimony of the Eight Witnesses:

In a few days we were follow by Joseph and Oliver and the whitmers who came to make us a visit and also to make some arrangements about getting the book printed soon after they came. They all that is the male part of the company repaired to a little grove where it was customary for the family to offer up their secret prayers.
as Joseph had been instructed that the plates would be carried there by one of the ancient Nephites. Here it was that those 8 witnesses recorded in the Book of Mormon looked upon the plates and handled them of which they bear witness in the following words. . . . After the witnesses returned to the house the Angel again made his appearance to Joseph and received the plates from his hands. We commenced holding meetings that night in the which we declared those facts that we knew to be true.18

During these events of late June 1829, Lucy again resided in her original log home, which was then crowded with guests, and she would know when a group of men left to examine the plates and when they “returned to the house.” Mother Smith’s history states that the Eight Witnesses all saw and handled the plates on the same date. She further states that their joint testimony was drawn up to report their experience in the grove on that occasion. She insists that they “looked upon the plates and handled them” near her house on that day, an understanding gained from observation, conversation, and hearing the Eight Witnesses in the evening meeting when all “declared those facts that we knew to be true.”

The Turley Report and John Whitmer’s Other Statements

This and the next section will discuss the evidence offered by the subjective school. Palmer believes that all of the witnesses “seem to have seen the records with their spiritual eyes and inspected them in the context of a vision, apparently never having actually possessed or touched them.”19 And Vogel broadly equates the experience of the Eight Witnesses with that of the Three Witnesses, who he thinks describe an event of a “subjective nature” that fits “the illusion of a group hallucination.”20 Thus “the experiences of the eight men were apparently visionary in nature, similar to the experiences of the three witnesses.”21

Use of one source shows how little real evidence supports the subjective theory regarding the Eight Witnesses. Vogel revives an anecdote of Illinois governor Thomas Ford, who said Joseph Smith admitted isolating a few followers and whipping up faith and guilt until they imagined they saw gold plates in an empty box. But serious readers want accurate reports from eyewitneses or those who can responsibly report what eyewitnesses say. In this case, Ford said his information came from “men who were once in the confidence of the prophet.” One immediately thinks of turncoat John C. Bennett and his exaggerations, as well as several ex-Mormons around Ford at the martyrdom who were characterized by John Taylor as “some of the vilest and most unprincipled men in creation.”22 Ford’s story traces to no reliable source and appears to be outright folklore. Vogel admits it lacks credibility but trusts it for insight: “The details transmitted by Ford may be inaccurate, but the essence of the account contains an element of truth.”23 Vogel’s use of the “inaccurate” story is justified because the governor’s “account is similar to the claims that dissident Mormons in Ohio and Missouri were making in 1838.”24 But slander circulating in one location is not proved true by similar slanders developed elsewhere, as the history of political campaigns shows.

Revisionists offer one interview with one of the Eight Witnesses to support a mental mirage. As the Mormons were forced from Missouri in 1839,
Theodore Turley temporarily remained as a church business agent and was visited by several residents, including John Whitmer, who had been excommunicated the year before. The hostile group ridiculed Turley’s belief in the Book of Mormon, but he confronted John Whitmer with inconsistency. Turley later reconstructed the rest of the conversation:

Whitmer asked do you hint at me? Turley replied “if the cap fits you wear it. all I know, you have published to the world that an angel did present those plates to Joseph Smith.” Whitmer replied “I now say I handled those plates. there was fine engravings on both sides. I handled them.” and he described how they were hung and they were shown to me by a supernatural power. he acknowledged all. Turley asked him why the translation is not now true, & he said “I cannot read it, and I do not know whether it is true or not.”

One statement here becomes a pillar for the theory of visionary plates: “they were shown to me by a supernatural power.” Vogel insists this “would suggest something other than a normal, physical experience.” And Palmer echoes: “This added detail of how he saw indicates that the eight probably did not observe or feel the actual artifact.” But a strange “added detail” is a red flag. David Whitmer often complained of misquotation in his many interviews. Here the concept of miraculous display differs from all other John Whitmer accounts. Vogel prints relevant parts of 15 interviews with John Whitmer. My files contain an additional 8 reports of John’s own testimony of the Book of Mormon. The total is 23 reports from this last survivor of the Eight Witnesses. Many are brief and general, but when details are given, they speak of seeing and/or handling as a normal event, except for Turley’s phrase “supernatural power” and Joshua Davis’s recollection that John declared: “I, with my own eyes, saw the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated, and I also saw an angel who witnessed to the truth of the Book of Mormon.”

But John Whitmer’s own words counter the odd particulars in these two reports. As official church historian, he named the Three Witnesses, “into whose presence the angel of God came and showed them the Plates, the ball, the directors, etc.” He then named himself and seven others “to whom Joseph Smith Jr showed the plates.” Since John Whitmer personally states that the angel appeared only to the Three Witnesses, Davis obviously got that detail wrong in reporting what John told him. And six statements from John Whitmer speak of handling the plates, including the full Turley reference and John’s editorial farewell in the church newspaper, stating “that I have most assuredly seen the plates from whence the Book of Mormon is translated, and that I have handled these plates.” So John Whitmer claimed to handle the plates as Joseph Smith showed them, not to behold them as displayed by an angel. Though interviews may be quite accurate, they are not transcripts. Davis correctly gave John’s statement about seeing the plates but confused the testimonies of the Three and the Eight Witnesses concerning seeing an angel.

So the Davis interview shows the fallacy of proof-texting with a single phrase suggesting the marvelous. Turley remembered John Whitmer as saying the plates were shown to him “by a supernatural power.” But as just stated, in his church history John noted that Joseph Smith personally showed the plates to the Eight Witnesses, which agrees with their testimony printed in the Book of Mormon. However, Turley erroneously thought the published statement of the Eight Witnesses testified of the miraculous, telling John, “[Y]ou have published to the world that an angel did present those plates to Joseph Smith.” When Turley challenged John to be consistent with his written testimony, John reinforced the physical terms in that document: “I now say I handled those plates. there was fine engravings on both sides. I handled them.” On the other hand, the phrasing “supernatural power” corresponds with Turley’s preconception, not the written testimony that John was supporting. Thus the idea of a supernormal event evidently came from the interviewer, since John only indicates natural circumstances in other statements referring to the Eight Witnesses’ group experience with the plates themselves. The rest of Turley’s report blends with the witnesses’ declaration and with John Whitmer’s other five statements that he handled the plates.

Burnett’s Hearsay Report and Testimonies of Handling

Besides misusing the Turley report, revisionists mainly rely on an 1838 letter of former missionary Stephen Burnett, which mentions two linked occasions when he heard Martin Harris discuss his
own experience and that of the Eight Witnesses. But Burnett’s letter is hostile and accusatory, adding distracting static to the line of information. Warren Parrish also mentions Harris’s initial comments and thereby clarifies how disbelievers reinterpreted the witnesses’ printed testimonies. Parrish opposed Joseph Smith after the Kirtland bank failed in early 1837. A national depression followed that summer, and a counter party proclaimed Joseph Smith a fallen prophet, resulting in the December excommunication of Parrish and about two dozen associates, which probably included Stephen Burnett. Martin Harris first discussed the witnesses’ testimonies about mid-March 1838. Then seceders Burnett and Parrish gave their versions of what Harris said, and the following comes from Parrish, though it is unclear whether he personally heard the Book of Mormon witness:

Martin Harris, one of the subscribing witnesses, has come out at last, and says he never saw the plates, from which the book purports to have been translated, except in vision; and he further says that any man who says he has seen them in any other way is a liar, Joseph not excepted; see new edition, Book of Covenants, page 170, which agrees with Harris’s testimony.

On scores of documented occasions, Martin Harris insisted he saw the angel and the plates. So if Harris used the word vision to describe the Three Witnesses’ experience, he would have meant there was a real visit of an angel, mirroring the normal usage of vision in the New Testament and other scriptures. But Parrish used a skeptic’s definition, referring to what is now Section 17 of the Doctrine and Covenants, to show that faith was required to see the plates, which proved to Parrish that pre-conditioning produced a religious delusion. The approach was not new. For example, Ezra Booth left the church in 1831 and admitted that the Three Witnesses “frequently” testified that an angel appeared “and presented them the golden plates,” yet when he discovered that Doctrine and Covenants 17 promised the Three Witnesses a view of the Nephite artifacts if they had faith, he concluded this meant that the witnesses saw the plates “by faith or imagination.” Booth’s slanted reasoning was reprinted in Howe’s anti-Mormon work of 1834 and sounds like a promptbook for Burnett and Parrish interpreting Harris in 1838.

As indicated, Stephen Burnett heard Harris’s first comments in mid-March, and a week later he renounced the Book of Mormon in the Kirtland Temple, with Harris protesting he was misunderstood. Afterward Burnett reported both occasions in his partisan letter. Following are the relevant portions:

when I came to hear Martin Harris state in public that he never saw the plates with his natural eyes, only in vision or imagination, neither Oliver nor David & also that the eight witnesses never saw them & hesitated to sign that instrument for that reason, but were persuaded to do it, the last pedestal gave way. . . . I therefore three weeks since in the stone Chapel gave a full history of the church since I became acquainted with it . . . I was followed by W. Parrish, Luke Johnson, and John Boynton, all of who concurred with me. After we were done speaking M Harris arose & said he was sorry for any man who rejected the Book of Mormon for he knew it was true, he said he had hefted the plates repeatedly in a box with only a tablecloth or a handkerchief over them, but he never saw them only as he saw a city through a mountain. And said that he never should have told that the testimony of the eight witnesses was false, if it had not been picked out of him but should have let it passed as it was. . . . I am well satisfied for myself that if the witnesses whose names are attached to the Book of Mormon never saw the plates as Martin admits that there can be nothing brought to prove that any such thing ever existed for it is said on the 171 page of the book of covenants that the three should testify that they had seen the plates even as J.S. Jr. & if they only saw them spiritually or in vision with their eyes shut—JS Jr never saw them in any other way & if so the plates were only visionary.

The two-stage interaction with Harris is clear in Burnett’s letter. He first heard what he considered a shocking admission of Harris, which was obviously repeated as the centerpiece of Burnett’s exposure in the later temple meeting. However, Harris’s response in this second stage represents his true attitude, since Harris said his earlier words were misused. This shows that caution is required in quoting Burnett’s version of any of Harris’s words. Burnett’s bias is clear in reporting Harris’s original remarks,
where the witness supposedly acknowledged he saw the plates “in vision or imagination.” Yet the word imagination would not have come from Harris, who later wrote, “no man ever heard me in any way deny . . . the administration of the angel that showed me the plates.” Moreover, Burnett ends with an interpretive paraphrase of Harris, for there is no parallel for the witness equating seeing “in vision” with having “their eyes shut.” These pseudo-quotations are conclusions of the liberated Mormons, for whom a “vision” was by definition an illusion produced by blind faith. And in reporting Harris’s first Kirtland remarks on the plates, Burnett went further to claim that Harris said the “eight witnesses never saw them,” meaning that they saw them only as did the Three Witnesses—“in vision or imagination.”

“At the follow-up meeting, Harris modified his initial comments on the Eight Witnesses. As noted, Burnett claimed that Harris first said that group saw the plates only in vision. Three months before, Hezibah Richards pictured the Kirtland religious climate: “A large number have dissented from the body of the church, and are very violent in their opposition to the Presiden[cy] and all who uphold them.” Harris fraternized with the reorganizers but drew scorn for believing the Book of Mormon. Burnett’s letter indicates that the witness explained he had given an earlier answer under pressure. This means that Harris’s corrections in the second meeting supersede the earlier, nonphysical language. On reflection Harris said that “he never should have told that the testimony of the eight witnesses was false, if it had not been picked out of him but should have let it passed as it was.” To Vogel, this means that “Harris expressed regret about revealing the true nature of the experience of the eight witnesses,” but the context is Harris straightening out Burnett by adding his own testimony that there were physical plates. If we compensate for Burnett’s loaded language, Harris’s retraction was essentially this: he never would have agreed that the Eight Witnesses saw the plates through spiritual sight if he had not been confused by leading questions, but would have let their written testimony speak for itself. Vogel thinks the Harris disclosure theory is validated because Harris knew the Eight Witnesses and their experience, but this view widely misses the point. The real question is whether Burnett quoted Harris accurately. The answer is that Burnett continued to believe in a visionary experience for the Eight Witnesses even after Harris said he had given the wrong impression on that issue. Since Harris insisted he had “hefted the plates repeatedly in a box,” he disagreed with Burnett’s spiritualizing

But the reader comes closer to Harris’s true views when Burnett reports Martin’s later rebuttal. The second meeting was held in the temple in late March 1838, when Burnett no doubt stressed the central argument of his letter, that “the plates were only visionary.” He was followed by Parrish, whose letter embraced the same theory, and then ex-apostles Boynton and Luke Johnson. Finally, Martin Harris stood and said that “he had hefted the plates repeatedly.” This clearly countered the dissenters’ visionary theory, which shows that the physical reality of the plates was Harris’s theme in the second meeting. He had actually held them “with only a tablecloth or a handkerchief over them, but he never saw them only as he saw a city through a mountain.” In this context, Harris was not talking of his testimony of seeing the angel and plates, but speaking of other times when he knew the plates were under “a tablecloth or a handkerchief,” probably the experience that he and Emma shared during the 1828 translation, as discussed near the beginning of this paper.

“[W]ee wass talking about the Book of Mormon which he is one of the witnesses he said he had but too hands and too eyes he said he had seen the plates with his eyes and handled them with his hands.”
of the Eight Witnesses’ experience. Burnett’s report of Harris’s quoting them is not only compound hearsay, but hearsay rejected by its author.

Six of the Eight Witnesses were still alive by March 1838, but all were either in Missouri or traveling there. Hyrum Smith was the last to leave Kirtland, and his group stopped at the home of Sally Parker in central Ohio. Later she sent a letter to relatives in Maine, knowing they had been exposed to messages from Kirtland dissenters. She mentioned the opposition by Parrish and Boynton and reflected back on the faith-promoting visit of Hyrum Smith, who gave his personal testimony: “[W]e wass talking about the Book of Mormon which he is one of the witnesses he said he had but too hands and too eyes he said he had seen the plates with his eyes and handled them with his hands.” Two other solid sources report this language from Hyrum in this period. Hyrum married Mary Fielding at the end of 1837, and a little later her brother Joseph wrote: “My sister bears testimony that her husband has seen and handled the plates, &c.”

After his ordeal in Liberty Jail was over, Hyrum, still sensitive to the slanders of the Kirtland dissenters, wrote to his fellow church members, starting his letter with specific reference to giving “my testimony to the world of the truth of the book of Mormon.” After narrating persecutions, he returned to his published testimony: “I felt a determination to die, rather than deny the things which my eyes had seen, which my hands had handled, and which I had borne testimony to, wherever my lot had been cast.” This means that many times, in several states, Hyrum testified to handling the plates. His brother Samuel gave the same oral testimony. Daniel Tyler was 15 and intensely religious when he heard Samuel simply tell his story: “He knew his brother Joseph had the plates, for the prophet had shown them to him, and he had handled them and seen the engravings thereon.”

The Eight Witnesses left 10 specific statements of handling the plates: the above 4 from Samuel and Hyrum and 6 among the John Whitmer reports.
Vogel quotes 8 of the 10 handling statements and adds the disturbing comment “As can be seen, except for Poulson’s late interview with John Whitmer, specific declarations by the witnesses about handling the plates are few and vague.”49 The basic reliability of Poulson’s interview will be discussed next, but if it is not counted, the remaining 9 references to handling the plates are more than few. Nor is the word handling vague. Smith family members, such as William and Emma, describe their limited examination of the covered plates. But in print and in interviews, the Eight Witnesses speak of unlimited direct contact, not a vision of the plates with previous experiences of lifting them when covered. In fact, two observers note the experience was not strung out over time. As discussed earlier, Lucy Smith states she was present as Whitmer family members, along with her husband and two sons, left her log home for forest privacy on the special day when the Eight Witnesses “looked upon the plates and handled them.”50 Likewise, David Whitmer was present and/or aware of these circumstances, stating that the eight men became witnesses on a particular date. After recalling that the Three Witnesses saw the plates in late June, David explained that “the eight witnesses saw them, I think, the next day or the day after. Joseph showed them the plates himself, but the angel showed us the plates.”51 Thus David Whitmer also pictures the experience of Eight Witnesses as an event on a given date, when the plates were shown by Joseph, not by a divine being or supernatural means.

John Whitmer’s Comprehensive Interview

Subjective interpreters seek to disqualify John Whitmer’s most informative interview. P. Wilhelm Poulson visited both John and David Whitmer in upper Missouri in 1878, sending his accounts to the Deseret News that summer. Poulson had presided over the Copenhagen district from 1861 to 1863, when he came to the United States and was named secretary for his emigrating company.52 He became a homeopathic physician and practiced in Salt Lake City, Council Bluffs, and the San Francisco area. He was doing psychic analysis by late 187353 and expanded this spiritualistic activity up to later years, when he published spirit messages from notable Mormons and non-Mormons.54 He settled in Council Bluffs during the period of his Whitmer interviews, both of which accurately describe families and activities of David and John Whitmer. Poulson was interested in the Smith family, and Joseph Smith III accepted a guarded friendship with him. Soon after Poulson’s Whitmer interviews, Joseph III said he was “a man of ability and learning, is and has been for some years, a Spiritualist.”55 Though Poulson became an eccentric and fictionalized his background, his ability as a reporter is the main issue in evaluating his interviews with David and John Whitmer. He visited them as an educated person and religious eclectic, evidently seeking to preserve the stories of the last surviving Book of Mormon witnesses.

Revisionists consider Poulson’s report as “perhaps suspect since John Whitmer was dead at the time of publication and David Whitmer complained about the accuracy of Poulson’s interview with him.”56 The first problem is trivial: Poulson interviewed John in Missouri in April 1878, John died in July, and Poulson sent the interview to the Deseret News from Idaho at the end of that month. The delay is reasonable and John’s death unpredictable. Regarding accuracy, after the David Whitmer interview appeared in the Deseret News, that witness answered a question about it from L. F. (or T.) Monch (or Mouch), probably capable Ogden educator Louis F. Moench. David said Poulson did not get one of his answers straight: “I surely did not make the Statement which you say he reports me to have made.”57 It is unknown which statement is meant, but critics are sloppy in stating that David complained about the whole interview. Instead, he corrected one issue in a report consisting of answers to 20 questions. Similarly, David corrected many details in his 1881 Kansas City Journal interview, pronouncing the rest “substantially correct.”58 In the Poulson interview, about two-thirds of what David reportedly said is corroborated by what he said in other published interviews (most of the other third being new material that cannot be compared for consistency), so Poulson’s report of his interview with John Whitmer likely reflected a similarly high degree of accuracy.59

In questioning John Whitmer, Poulson concentrated on the tangibility of the metal record, and a similar question to David Whitmer shows the interviewer was careful on this topic. Poulson apparently visited David first, and he was obviously interested in the materiality of each brother’s experience. When Poulson asked David if the Eight Witnesses
did not “handle the plates,” David responded: “We did not, but they did.” Here Poulson accurately reports David, since later and careful interviews with David, as those of Zenas H. Gurley and Nathan Tanner Jr., also report that that the Three Witnesses did not handle the plates.60 Poulson’s dialogue with John follows here:

I said: I am aware that your name is affixed to the testimony in the Book of Mormon, that you saw the plates? He–It is so, and that testimony is true. I–Did you handle the plates with your hands? He–I did so! I–Then they were a material substance? He–Yes, as material as anything can be. I–They were heavy to lift? He–Yes, and you know gold is a heavy metal, they were very heavy. I–How big were the leaves? He–So far as I recollect, 8 by 6 or 7 inches. I–Were the leaves thick? He–Yes, just so thick, that characters could be engraved on both sides. I–How were the leaves joined together? He–In three rings, each one in the shape of a D with the straight line towards the centre. . . . . I–Did you see them covered with a cloth? He–No. He handed them uncovered into our hands, and we turned the leaves sufficient to satisfy us.

61 These seven related answers are impressive on the solid substance of the plates. On the other hand, there are two problematic answers on surrounding circumstances, though they do not invalidate a long interview. Poulson’s account contains minor differences with Lucy Smith’s history regarding place and grouping. Following are the two answers that were omitted from the above line of questions:

I–In what place did you see the plates. He–In Joseph Smith’s house; he had them there. . . . I–Were you all eight witnesses present at the same time? He–No. At that time Joseph showed the plates to us, we were four persons, present in the room, and at another time he showed them to four persons more.

As discussed, Lucy Mack Smith said the Eight Witnesses left her house for a grove, a likely location because that day many Whitmers and Hiram Page were at the small home that the Smith family had recently reoccupied. John Whitmer possibly said something like “at Joseph Smith’s house,” meaning to him that the Eight Witnesses viewed the plates on that property. And Poulson’s report that the plates were viewed by two groups of four is an odd detail, possibly an error in the interview process. Mother Smith’s history should have priority as being dictated and reviewed.62 Nevertheless, Lucy’s history harmonizes with the rest of the answers in the Poulson interview, which clearly state that the men handled uncovered plates in the presence of others.

Miscounted Interviews and the Printed Testimony

More people sought out the Three Witnesses because they had seen a brilliant angel. Even though the Eight Witnesses left fewer interviews, they adequately describe a simple, natural experience. Subjective interpreters seek to replace a material event with a psychic event, and they minimize how much the Eight Witnesses said about examining the plates. Vogel generalizes: “Individual statements by the eight witnesses are rare due largely to their early deaths.”63 This statement prefaces the listing of two group testimonies and 17 times when one of the Eight Witnesses explained or validated his published testimony or when family members said he was always faithful to it. Thus rare is inaccurate, especially since this source scholar has added six John Whitmer interviews to the above inventory.64 And there are a number of other known contacts beyond this. For instance, Vogel writes “no known testimonies” by the names of Christian and Peter Whitmer Jr.65 Yet the latter accompanied Oliver Cowdery on the western mission in 1830–31, when investigator Lyman Wight attended a meeting where “one testified that he had seen angels, and another that he had seen the plates.”66 Another omission is Zenas H. Gurley’s recollection of visiting John Whitmer about 1872: “He had seen the plates; and it was his especial pride and joy that he had written sixty pages of the Book of Mormon.”67 In addition, Edward Stevenson recalled hearing testimonies from the Prophet’s father and brother Hyrum. And the sons of Jacob Whitmer, John Whitmer, and Hyrum Page heard their fathers’ testimonies at least once in life as well as once before their deaths. We now can document over 40 instances when one of the Eight Witnesses restated his testimony, with the printed declaration of that testimony mentioned or understood in the statement or conversation.

Yet personal statements or reports are only part of the story of the Eight Witnesses. Their relatives
said they affirmed their experience throughout life, showing they were deeply impressed by what they had “seen and hefted.” When word reached Kirtland about the deaths of Christian and Peter Whitmer Jr., brother-in-law Oliver Cowdery wrote that “they proclaimed to their last moments, the certainty of their former testimony.”

Thus these brothers regularly validated their formal group statement. Sons and nephews of Jacob Whitmer, John Whitmer, and Hiram Page gave similar cumulative accounts. Likewise, Samuel Smith’s obituary noted “his steadfastness as one of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon.” And William Smith included his father and brothers in saying that all of the Eight Witnesses testified “that they not only saw with their eyes but handled with their hands the said record . . . nor has either or any one of these witnesses ever to my knowledge Counteracted the testimony as given above Concerning the real existence of these Mormon tablets.”

The above family observations point to hundreds of times when the Eight Witnesses stood by their written declaration.

And thoughtful converts, such as the Pratt brothers, John Corrill, and William E. McLellin, recount how they systematically questioned each Book of Mormon witness at the outset. McLellin later said: “When I first joined the church in 1831, soon I became acquainted with all the Smith family and the Whitmer families, and I heard all their testimonies, which agreed in the main points; and I believed them then and I believe them yet.” McLellin was a schoolteacher in eastern Illinois who attended Mormon meetings as teams of elders traveled from Ohio to Missouri to participate in dedicating that land for the gathering. He heard David Whitmer’s testimony of seeing an angel and was so impressed that
he rode across two states to western Missouri, just missing the Prophet but spending time with David Whitmer and Martin Harris, and then conversing with Hyrum Smith for four hours, which McLellin described as follows: “I inquired into the particulars of the coming forth of the record, of the rise of the church and of its progress and upon the testimonies given to him &c.” McLellin was baptized and ordained an elder before returning east as Hyrum’s missionary companion. At Jacksonville, Illinois, both spoke on the validity of the Book of Mormon, with William first giving a picture of the buried book as he learned about it from two of the Three Witnesses, and especially from questioning Hyrum: “a set of thin plates resembling gold, with Arabic characters inscribed on them. The plates were minutely described as being connected with rings in the shape of the letter D, which facilitated the opening and shutting of the book.” The description of “D rings” is unusual and confirms the same point in John Whitmer’s interview with Wilhelm Poulson, who wrote down specifics of a direct examination of an uncovered metallic volume.

The printed “Testimony of Eight Witnesses” is the centerpiece for the nature of their experience. Current arguments for a subjective event read like a study of U.S. constitutional law that rarely mentions the Constitution. Revisionists virtually set aside this definitive source on examining the plates. In quick review, two main documents are used to transform handling the plates into “a vision of the plates.” Both documents are flawed—the Burnett letter contains irresponsible hearsay about the Eight Witnesses, and the Turley dialogue begins with the interviewer’s misconception that John Whitmer’s written testimony spoke of the supernatural. Judged by the agreement of 40 other interviews of the Eight Witnesses, the historian should conclude that Turley misquoted John Whitmer on a miraculous viewing of the plates. Ironically, the main point of Turley’s interview is that John Whitmer still upheld his written testimony, twice saying he handled the plates.

Although current critics claim a conflict between later sources and the original published testimony, its accuracy is the stated or implied theme of all interviews with the Eight Witnesses. In 1847 McLellin asked Hiram Page about his faith in the Book of Mormon and received this reply: “[I]t would be doing injustice to myself, and to the work of God of the last days, to say that I could know a thing to be true in 1830, and know the same thing to be false in 1847. To say my mind was so treacherous that I had forgotten what I saw.” This answer is seen as evidence that Page did not handle the plates, but the reverse is true. Page here insists he cannot modify the published statement. A correspondent in Salem, Massachusetts, referred to hearing Hyrum Smith “declare, in this city in public, that what is recorded about the plates, &c. is God’s solemn truth.” Here Hyrum refers to his published testimony in the Book of Mormon, as did John Whitmer repeatedly. E. C. Brand visited him in 1875 and wrote that John “declared that his testimony, as found in the ‘Testimony of Eight Witnesses,’ in the Book of Mormon, is strictly true.”

Gold tablet of Darius I, deposited at Persepolis about 516 bc. Paul R. Cheesman Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
Among 42 statements or personal reports from the Eight Witnesses, 39 percent give some detail of the experience, such as seeing, handling, or lifting. And as discussed, 10 of these mention handling the plates. The above assertions of Hiram Page, Hyrum Smith, and John Whitmer give a different kind of response, a report of the witness expressly affirming the printed testimony. These simple reaffirmations are 33 percent of the total. Since the original testimony refers to a material event, such restatements do the same and therefore qualify as physical descriptions. Thus over two-thirds of the statements or interviews of the Eight Witnesses are in fact physical descriptions. The remaining interviews are generic assurances of continued belief in the Book of Mormon, which are essentially shorthand reaffirmations of their published testimony.

Finally, advocates of a group illusion for the Eight Witnesses admit that the original declaration "seems to describe a literal event," and its language "implies a natural, physical experience." No evidence to the contrary can be shown to come from the witnesses themselves, so seems and implies should be deleted from these statements. The well-considered published testimony states that Joseph Smith, not an induced apparition, "has shown unto us" not a box or heavy bundle but "the plates," with observable color and engravings, with leaves that "we did handle with our hands." Moreover, a group event is pictured for all these actions, not individual contacts with covered plates over a period of time. The essence of the written testimony is Joseph Smith’s showing of the plates, repeated twice for emphasis, each time followed by how the record was physically examined while being observed. These emphatic redundancies first state that the witnesses saw engravings on the goldlike leaves as they turned them, with the simple restatement that the volume was "seen and hefted."

The documented affirmations of the Eight Witnesses include personal writings from three who in their own phrases verified their official statement published in 1830. Four of these direct statements are discussed above but are summarized here. As church historian, John Whitmer wrote that the Three Witnesses knew “for a surety” because the angel supernaturally showed them the plates, and John added by contrast that he was one of eight men “to whom Joseph Smith Jr showed the Plates.” Similarly, in early church newspapers, John Whitmer and Hyrum Smith mentioned their written testimonies, adding they had both seen and handled the plates. By connecting these actions with their written testimony, these witnesses identified sight and touch as part of the 1829 event when Joseph Smith showed the plates to their group. In addition, Hiram Page wrote to William McLellin, stating he could not change his printed testimony. In addition to these four testimonies penned by three of the Eight Witnesses, near the end of his life John Whitmer reinforced his prior written comments about seeing and handling the plates, sending three personal letters in answer to inquiries of Reorganized Church missionaries. In mid-1876 he told Mark H. Forscutt: “I have never heard that any one of the three, or eight witnesses ever denied the testimony that they have borne to the Book as published in the first edition of the Book of Mormon.” And in late 1876 John Whitmer answered Heman C. Smith, referring to the published declaration and concluding, “That testimony was, is, and will be true, henceforth and forever.” Finally, John Whitmer responded to an 1877 letter “concerning my testimony as recorded in the Book of Mormon.” John wrote: “It is the Same as it was from the beginning, and it is true. . . . I have never denied my testimony as to the Book of Mormon, under any circumstances whatever.” All of these firsthand statements add no adorning spiritual details but establish a standard of comparison for dozens of reports mediated by interviewers. The above seven personal editorial statements or letters combine with the published “Testimony of Eight Witnesses” in direct evidence that Joseph Smith did possess a finely constructed and engraved book, with multiple leaves of deep yellow metal.
“Strange Characters & Expressions”

THREE JAPANESE TRANSLATIONS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

VAN C. GESSEL
LANGUAGE, LIKE RICHES, can be a slippery commodity. However much we may think we are engaged in pure communication with others through the medium of words, human speech or writing is at best an attempt to approximate the thoughts and feelings of the speaker or writer’s heart. Both literary and linguistic theorists concur that whatever the intention of the speaker or writer as thoughts are transformed into words, the hearer or reader has no choice but to process those communicative acts through the filter of personal experience, individual interpretation of the meaning of words, and a multitude of other influences that invariably impinge on the communication act. Little wonder that modern critics use such phrases as “the prison-house of language.”

Of all translators in this dispensation, the Prophet Joseph Smith was surely the most fortunate and the most enviable: those who do literary translation would give anything for just the briefest moment of divine assistance in the process. It is sufficient challenge to render an English text into a Romance language, such as Italian or French, in which common roots and multiple cognates can help make the transformation flow more smoothly. But when the translation is into a “Truly Foreign Language,” such as Japanese, that shares no linguistic or cultural commonalities with the language of Joseph Smith’s inspired translation of the Book of Mormon, issues of interpretation that might not even occur to the casual reader can cause tremendous agonizing for translators. Cultures that share some basic, common understandings (however subtly different in nuance) of such core Christian terminology as God, spirit, atonement, and so on may be able to achieve a high level of communicability in translated form. But in a non-Christian nation such as Japan, virtually untouched by the entire Judeo-Christian philosophical tradition, even the most fundamental religious vocabulary may elicit entirely different images in the mind of the hearer.

Over the course of the 20th century, corresponding to the 100-year period of labors by Latter-day Saint missionaries in Japan, the complete Book of Mormon has been translated into Japanese no fewer than three times. The history of the translation process is in a sense a microcosmic view of the progress of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Japan, replicating the shift from foreign to native administration of church affairs. The first translation was done by a young American missionary who stood at the side of Elder Heber J. Grant when the apostle dedicated the nation of Japan for the preaching of the gospel in 1901. After the calamities of World War II had brought Japan to its...
knees, a small but dedicated group of individuals joined the church; one of them would shortly be charged with producing a new translation of the sacred text. Finally, as the church grew in membership in Japan and became fully organized, the First Presidency commissioned a committee in the mid-1980s to create yet another revision.

The initial translation, started in 1904 and completed five years later, was largely the work of Alma O. Taylor, a remarkable young American missionary who, when he received the call to undertake the translation, prayed for the assistance of the Holy Spirit & gift of interpretation & translation that I may be successful in writing for the Japanese in their own tongue the great truths & powerful testimonies of the Book of Mormon. While my heart throbs with gratitude unspeakable for the honor conferred upon me yet every time I contemplate the magnitude and importance [of] the work before me and the responsibility it places upon me, I fear & tremble from head to foot and sense a weakness such as I have never before known.

O God, remember thy young servant. Magnify him in his new calling. Cause that his mind shall be lit up by the direct inspiration of Heaven that the task which now lies before him might be successfully accomplished by him in the time which Thou hast alloted and make Thine alloted time not too far distant. . . . In this time, when that sacred record is to be written in a language made up of strange characters & expressions like unto the . . . strangeness of the Egyptian writings & language found on the Gold Plates, again open the windows of heaven and pour forth upon Thy young servant, Alma, the gift of tongues & translation to such [an] extent that the purity of the Book of Mormon may in no wise be lost, the clearness in no wise obscured, and the spirit and testimony that always accompanies it in no wise impaired.3

Heartened by a letter from the First Presidency in which they expressed both their gratitude for his success in learning the difficult language and their full support and confidence in his capabilities, Taylor moved efficiently forward in his labors, writing in roman letters to speed the process (since the Japanese writing system, consisting of thousands of complex Chinese characters and two phonetic scripts, is one of the most cumbersome written languages in the world). In his journal he occasionally noted his struggles to find appropriate words to translate the doctrinal concepts in the text. He seemed to encounter his first great difficulty in the 12th and 13th chapters of Alma, where Alma teaches Zeezrom about spiritual death, the mortal...
probation, the plan of redemption, and the nature of the priesthood. Those portions, he noted, contained “many expressions in English the equivalents of which if indeed there are any in Japanese I am as yet unfamiliar with.”

Taylor had worked through his translation as far as the book of Alma by the summer of 1905, when he received word that President Ensign, the current mission president, was to be released and that he would be called as the new mission president. This news frustrated Taylor, for he realized that he would lose the ability to focus the vast majority of his time on the translation. Within a month he had extended a call to Elder Fred A. Caine to assist him in copying his roman letters into kanji, the Chinese characters used to write in Japanese. Caine proved an invaluable companion throughout the rest of the process; in 1906 he was called to read the first draft of the completed translation, provide suggestions and criticisms, and compare the English version with the translation to catch any omissions or careless renderings. In October of 1907 Caine was released as mission secretary so he could devote all his time to this labor.

Because the entire project took five years, it was inevitable that Taylor would look back at some point and realize that his skill in Japanese as he began the translation was not as good as he then thought it was. In March of 1906 he mused: “When I began the translation I did not know as much about the language as I do now therefore I am aware of many places in the first of this translation which I can improve myself. . . . It is my earnest prayer that the way will be opened up for the entire translation to be carefully and well corrected and revised.”

In a letter written to Elder George Reynolds of the First Council of the Seventy in January 1906, Taylor reported: “God has been a faithful friend
to me in this labor and I have not prayed to Him in vain about many, at first, perplexing questions which have arisen."

After a series of consultations about the translation with various Japanese people, including some native church members, Taylor was startled and disappointed by an oft-repeated suggestion that his translation into the contemporary colloquial language was ill suited to a text considered by its adherents to be a sacred book of revelation straight from God. His native informants encouraged him to have his translation rewritten into the more formal literary language. Taylor had hoped to avoid this more difficult form of the language, but the inclination of his fellow missionaries was that the literary style was preferable. Taylor finally concurred, though he was no doubt saddened to think that so much of his own work would have to be altered.

Taylor approached and hired several Japanese people to undertake the stylistic transformation, and they refashioned a goodly portion of the book. But perhaps because he was less confident in his own ability to critique and feel comfortable with the more difficult grammatical usages in the literary language, Taylor decided to have a man of solid literary reputation examine the revised translation. He ended up calling on two of the most important figures in the development of modern Japanese literature: Tsubouchi Shōyō, a critic, novelist, playwright, and...
translator of the complete plays of Shakespeare; and Natsume Sōseki, the first truly world-class novelist to emerge in 20th-century Japan. Neither Shōyō nor Sōseki had the time or the interest to become involved in the project, but Sōseki introduced Taylor to one of his bright young disciples, Ikuta Chōkō, who was more than willing to undertake the revisions. Before he was fully confident in Ikuta’s abilities, Taylor tested him and then showed the work to Shōyō, who gave it high marks. Thereafter Taylor entrusted the entire work to Ikuta and often sat in conversation with him over points of interpretation.

As the work of rewriting progressed, Taylor was delighted with the result and his confidence in Ikuta mounted. In August of 1908 he recorded:

It looks good to see the translation in its completed garb and the feelings that pass through my heart when I look upon this translation feeling satisfied that it is well done, are undiscernible. The joy is just a taste of what I hope it will be when the whole labor is finished . . . .

Mr. Ikuta is a gentleman. He is quick and frank in acknowledging his errors. He gives respectful ear to my side of the questions discussed and thus we get along well and rapidly.

Taylor completed the final revisions and rewrites of the translation on 10 June 1909; three months later, when he laid down his pen after correcting the final proof sheets, Taylor wrote:
This then, so far as my work is concerned, is the grand finale. My feelings of joy, my gratitude, my satisfaction at being permitted to attain this day and see the successful close of this colossal labor cannot be described. It is a day I have hoped, prayed and walked [worked?] hard for, and I must acknowledge that the work has been so arduous, and confining, requiring the concentration of all my physical and mental power for such long stretches at a time, that in taking a retrospective view of the last 5 years and 9 months, I consider my physical and mental endurance almost a miracle—at any rate a direct answer to fervent appeals to God for strength to hold out to the end. And if the Lord sees fit to recognize the fruit of this labor performed in weakness as worthy of his benediction, and commissions the Holy Spirit to companion the Japanese Book of Mormon in its travels in Japan or wherever it goes, then will my most earnest and ultimate hope in regard to the work be realized, and all my toils and anxiety become my ever-joyful memories. I praise the Lord with all my might mind and strength. . . . The Lord also has raised up in time of need sufficient Japanese help thus making it possible to eliminate most if not all the grammatical and rhetorical blunders in my manuscript.¹⁰

The first 1,000 of 5,000 copies ordered from the printer were delivered to the mission office on 11 October 1909. Arrangements were made to have copies specially bound in “deep cardinal red and deep violet morocco” with cover lettering in gold and silver for presentation to the Meiji emperor and his empress, along with limited-edition copies for the crown prince and princess and various government officials. Less than three months after the book was published, Elders Taylor and Caine, having completed the work the Lord had sent them to Japan to do, were released from their missions. Looking today at the translation they produced, and even factoring in the many layers of assistance provided them, it is sobering and inspiring to see what two young Americans (Taylor was 19 when he first arrived in Japan) were able to accomplish in making the Book of Mormon available for the first time in the Japanese language.

The second pioneer translator was the first native Japanese person to undertake a rendering of the sacred book. Brother Satō Tatsui was baptized only 11 months after Japan’s unconditional surrender, the first Japanese person to join the church in some 20 years. He received the Melchizedek Priesthood and was ordained to the office of elder by Apostle Matthew Cowley, who told Brother Satō in the blessing that he would spend his life translating and interpreting for his people. Not long after that blessing, Brother Satō undertook the work of retranslating the Book of Mormon text while simultaneously translating the complete Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price for the first time into Japanese. His labors spanned the tenure of three mission presidents and included some brief but direct interaction regarding doctrinal questions with Elder Joseph Fielding Smith. His translation was published on 30 May 1957.

One of the unique characteristics of the saga of translation of the Book of Mormon into Japanese lies in the motivation behind creating new translations within a mere 40 or 50 years of one another. Most of the new translations of the text into the major languages of the world have been inspired by a desire to correct the wording of a previous translation in order to make it more doctrinally correct.
While one cannot overlook the likelihood that such was also part of the motivation in Japan, it appears to be largely the case that dramatic changes in the Japanese language, not concerns over accuracy, motivated the revisions.

Brother Satō was undoubtedly one of the most humble men of genius ever to tackle a project such as the Book of Mormon translation; I think it must be an expression of his own unassuming nature that his translation of the eighth article of faith literally means: “We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon (in English) to be the word of God.” Of the reasons motivating the second translation, Brother Satō stated:

When we began to translate this amended version of the Book of Mormon, President Clissold asked that we “translate it into simple Japanese so that many people will be able to understand the Gospel.” It was not because of imperfections in the earlier Book of Mormon translation that a new rendition was planned. As I retranslated the book, I frequently opened the older translation. It made me realize how truly superb that translation is. But more than forty years have elapsed since that translation was published in 1909, and social conditions in Japan have changed dramatically in that interval. In the postwar period in particular, a multitude of changes have come in Japanese education and culture. I used a special method in translat-
ing the book. I produced the main passages in
colloquial language, while revelations and the
words of the Lord are translated in the formal
written style. But my intention was to stay as
close as possible to the style of the earlier trans-
lation.\textsuperscript{11}

As Brother Satō suggests, the written Japanese
language in particular has changed over the past
century with a rapidity that is unfathomable in
English, even considering how quickly our own
language is mutating. I think it is safe to say that a
20-year-old, educated Japanese person today would
have a very difficult time grasping what is going on
in Alma Taylor’s translation. It would be like asking
a young American student to gain profound spiritual
insights from reading an unannotated text of
\textit{Beowulf}.

\textbf{Brother Satō calculated, for example, that the total number of kanji
(including numerous repetitions of the same characters) that he
eliminated from the Taylor translation came to an amazing 41,000!}

Brother Satō has written about the challenges
that faced him as he evaluated the first translation.
The older literary language into which Ikuta revised
Taylor’s translation was no longer taught as one of
the critical core subjects in Japanese schools in the
postwar period. Governmental regulations issued in
1946 regarding the use of kanji had significantly re-
duced the number of kanji used in publications and
had modernized the phonetic syllabary. As a result,
postwar readers were educated to read far smaller
numbers of characters. Brother Satō calculated, for
example, that the total number of kanji (including
numerous repetitions of the same characters) that
he eliminated from the Taylor translation came to
an amazing 41,000!\textsuperscript{12}

When I arrived in Japan in 1970—only 13
years after Satō’s translation was published—young
American missionaries had for some time been
calling for yet another new translation of the Book
of Mormon because they were having a hard time
understanding some of the outdated verb forms and
vocabulary employed in the Satō version. We really
shouldn’t give too much weight to linguistic judg-
ments passed by 20-year-old American missionaries
who have largely learned Japanese by mimicking
what they hear on the street, but the fact is that
with each passing generation of Japanese people,
familiarity with the older forms of the language is
diluted, and contemporary writers in Japan seem to
be using fewer kanji. Consequently, I think it is fair
to say that the Satō translation to today’s younger
generation in Japan seems a little quaint and dated
and is, in fact, in some ways less accessible than the
standard colloquial Japanese translation of the Bible
in current usage.

By the mid-1980s, these linguistic changes and
other factors were of sufficient concern that the
church authorized the creation of a committee of
translators to produce yet another version to replace
the Satō version, considered by some “too classic.”\textsuperscript{13}
The First Presidency charged the committee not
only to make the language of the scripture more
comprehensible but also to emphasize literal accu-
ricy in order to preserve the purity of the doctrine
taught by the book. A very helpful “Guide to the
Scriptures” (now available on lds.org) was trans-
lated for this edition, providing explication of many
terms and concepts unique to Latter-day Saint do-
ctrine and lacking simple correlative terminology in
Japanese. The fact that such a guide was considered
essential is but one indication that it is a daunt-
ing, often frustrating task to find suitable words to
explain Christian doctrine in a country where just
barely 1 percent of the population claims affiliation
with any Christian church.

A Japanese high school student affirmed that
the recent translation is more accessible when he
“said he used to read the old translation of the Book
of Mormon, but had trouble understanding it and
gaining a testimony. However, when he got a copy
of the new translation, he read and re-read it, un-
derstood it and could visualize the scenes described
in the book.” Eugene M. Kitamura, Asia North
Area director of temporal affairs and supervisor of
the translation committee that produced the book,
commented that this young man “said at this time
he got a testimony that the book was true. . . . And
I have heard that kind of testimony from many oth-
ers of the younger generation. They have received
many blessings from this updated scripture. . . . The
new translation of the Book of Mormon is easier for
investigators to read and understand.”

The changes that have come to the Japanese
language are problematic for a number of reasons,
not the least of which is that levels of respect in the
language play such a significant role in distin-
guishing the status of the narrator vis-à-vis the reader.
The most obvious example, encountered repeated-
edly by the Japanese Saints, is the translation of the
sacrament prayer. Below is a line-by-line reproduc-
tion of the three different translations to facilitate
comparison:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Translations of Sacrament Prayers on Bread</th>
<th>LITERAL TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TAYLOR</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eien no tempu naru Kami yo,</td>
<td>O God, the Eternal Father,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warera Onko Iesu Kirisuto no mina ni yorite negaiatematsuraku wa,</td>
<td>That which we ask in the name of Thy Son Jesus Christ,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subete kono pan o azukari kurau hitobito ga,</td>
<td>Is that all people who receive and eat this bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onko no karada no kinen ni kore o kurau koto o uru yō,</td>
<td>So that they may eat it in remembrance of Thy Son’s body,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mata tsuneni Onko no mitama o onorera to tomo ni arashimen tame,</td>
<td>And in order that the Spirit of Thy Son may always be with them,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onko no mina o amanji ukete</td>
<td>Willingly taking upon them the name of Thy Son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsuneni Onko o kinen shi,</td>
<td>Always remembering Thy Son,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sono kudashitamaishī imashime o momoru o Nanji ni seiyaku suru koto o uru yō,</td>
<td>So that they may take upon themselves a covenant with Thee to obey His commandments,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kono pan o karera no kokoro no tame ni iwaikyometamawan koto o</td>
<td>We pray Thou wilt bless and sanctify this bread for the benefit of their hearts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amen.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SATŌ</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eien no chichi naru Kami yo,</td>
<td>O God, the Eternal Father,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warera Onko Iesu Kirisuto no mina ni yorite negaiatematsuru.</td>
<td>We humbly ask Thee in the name of Thy Son, Jesus Christ,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koko ni kono pan o itadaku subete no hitobito ga,</td>
<td>That all of the people who partake here of this bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onko no karada no kinen ni kore o itadaku yō,</td>
<td>So that they may partake of it in remembrance of the body of Thy Son,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mata yorokobite Onko no mina o uke,</td>
<td>And gladly receive the name of Thy Son,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onko o tsuneni wasurezu,</td>
<td>Never forgetting Him,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mata sono kudashitamae iru imashime o momoru koto o</td>
<td>And that they will keep the commandments which He has given them,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eien no chichi naru Kami no onmae ni shōmei shi,</td>
<td>They witness before Thee, O God the Eternal Father,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kakushite Onko no “Mitama” tsuneni ichidō to tomo ni mashimasu yō,</td>
<td>So that they will always have the “Spirit” of Thy Son with them,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kono pan o iwaikyometamae.</td>
<td>We implore thee to bless and sanctify this bread.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amen.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CURRENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eien no chichi naru Kami yo,</td>
<td>O God, the Eternal Father,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watashitachi wa Onko Iesu Kirisuto no mina ni yotte Anata ni negaimotomemasu.</td>
<td>We ask You in the name of Thy Son, Jesus Christ,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kono pan wo itadaku subete no hitobito ga,</td>
<td>That all of the people who partake of this bread,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onko no karada no kinen ni kore o itadakeru yō ni,</td>
<td>So that they may partake of it in remembrance of the body of Thy Son,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mata, susunde Onko no mina o uke,</td>
<td>And willingly taken upon them the name of Thy Son,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itsumo Onko o oboe,</td>
<td>Always remembering Thy Son,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onko ga atete kudasatta imashime o momoru koto o</td>
<td>To keep the commandments which Thy Son has given them,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eien no chichi naru Kami yo, anata ni shōmei shite,</td>
<td>They witness unto You, O God the Eternal Father,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itsumo Onko no mitama o ukerareru yō ni,</td>
<td>So that they may always receive Thy Son’s spirit,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kono pan o shukufuku shi, kiyomete kudasai.</td>
<td>Please bless and sanctify this bread.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amen.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the new translation we move away from the attempt in the first two, where every verb used to address God is in a deeply humble form and where not a single pronoun is used to address or refer to the Father. By way of contrast, in the most recent revision of the sacrament prayers, God is twice referred to as anata. The usage of anata is admittedly complex and fluid over the centuries, but one of the most authoritative dictionaries of the Japanese language opines: “At present, ‘anata’ is used with peers and inferiors; in addition, it is the pronoun most commonly used by wives to address their husbands.” Small wonder, then, that some members in Japan were startled by the introduction of this pronoun into the sacrament prayer!

My goal is to suggest that each of these translations, in its own way, is a work of inspired brilliance, reflecting the language and religious climate of its era and serving as the best possible means of conveying the teachings found in the ancient American record to the people of Japan.

It is educational to examine the many differences—as well as the similarities—in the ways Latter-day Saint religious vocabulary has been translated into Japanese over the past century. What intrigues me most as I compare the three Book of Mormon translations into Japanese is both the ways they are very much the same in their essential explication of the gospel in a non-Christian language and the ways in which they differ. It is categorically not my intention here to criticize or belittle any of these translators; having done a bit of secular translation myself, I have personal knowledge of how daunting the task is. My goal is to suggest that each of these translations, in its own way, is a work of inspired brilliance, reflecting the language and religious climate of its era and serving as the best possible means of conveying the teachings found in the ancient American record to the people of Japan. Such faults or shortcomings that might exist in the choice of words or interpretations can, I am persuaded, be laid at the feet of contemporary circumstances, and I do not for a moment doubt that the Spirit has the capability to speak through imperfect words with perfect, persuasive clarity. So the comments that follow should be regarded as considerations of diverse cultural challenges, not as a critique of the consecrated labors of individuals far more gifted than me.

The first key scriptural passage that leaped out at me as I began comparing the translations was Mosiah 3:19: “For the natural man is an enemy to God.” This is an interesting example of the first and third translations being in agreement, while Satō differs from them. The translation for “natural man” in Taylor’s version is umarenagara no sei, literally meaning “the nature with which one is born; one’s inherent nature.” The 1995 translation varies only in changing sei to hito, literally making it “a person in the state he was born.” We could ponder the implications of this translation in light of our understanding of original sin and so forth, and there is, I think, a risk of misunderstanding when the verse seems to indicate that we are enemies to God in the state in which we are born, but if we become like a little child we’ll be okay. But that is beyond my purposes here. It is interesting that Satō chooses to be much more interpretive in his rendition of this verse. He translates “natural man” as nikuyoku ni shitagau hito, literally a “person who follows the lusts of the flesh.” It is difficult to argue with his interpretation, but it is likewise difficult to imagine how his version could be retranslated back into English and end up as “natural.” And yet there is something comfortably attractive and—how shall I say it?—natural about the way he comes right out and defines what the phrase means to him. I might point out here that the Greek term for “natural” translated in Paul’s sermon on the “natural man” in 1 Corinthians 2 is psychikos, defined as “the
sensuous nature with its subjection to appetite and passion,”18 which affirms the accuracy of Satô’s rendition.

When attempting to communicate in a culture that does not acknowledge supreme deity or the kinship connection between God and man or life after death, a simple concept such as damnation can be challenging to convey. All three translations render “damned” (as in Alma 14:21, where Alma and Amulek’s persecutors revile them and cry, “How shall we look when we are damned?”) as “punishment after death” (shigo no batsu). In other locations where “damned” appears in English, the same sorts of circumlocutions are employed, including one in Mosiah 3:25, “therefore they have drunk damnation to their own souls,” where Satô resorts to “cannot be saved in either body or spirit” (mi mo rei mo sukwarezaru nari).

Which leads me to yet another fascinating conundrum. Taylor caught on to it as he translated, and none of his successors has yet come up with a persuasive solution to the problem. In a letter of 15 April 1908 addressed to the First Presidency, Taylor writes:

Your kind letter answering my questions on the Book of Mormon has been carefully read. All of your suggestions are perfectly clear. With but one exception I am very happy over them. The exception is on the rendition of the word “soul.” In the first place the Japanese Bible (because of the limitations made by the language) is no criterion on any difficult question like this. There is no word in Japanese for “soul” which could possibly be stretched to include both body and spirit. It must be straight “spirit” or “heart” or “body.” The Japanese Bible always uses the words meaning “spirit” or “heart.” In the great majority of cases these words may do for our “soul” but, for example, in II Nephi 9:13. The word “spirit” as well as the word “body” are used in their true, distinct meaning while “soul” refers to the two united. There, I may change “soul” to “being” or “person,” but, so said, there is a decided weakness, as the same word in Japanese also means “thing.”19

Second Nephi 9:13 reads, in part: “The spirit and the body is restored to itself again, and all men become incorruptible, and immortal, and they are living souls.” As Taylor indicates, this scripture seems to teach precisely what is taught in Doctrine and Covenants 88:15, that when the spirit and the body are restored to one another, the result is “living souls.” For “living souls,” Taylor gives sude ni ikeru hito (already living persons), Satô, ikeru hito, basically the same notion of a “living person,” and the committee, ikeru mono, returning to the word Taylor ultimately decided to avoid that refers both to “person” and “thing.”20 To underscore the insoluble challenge here, let me cite the two Japanese translations of Doctrine and Covenants 88:15: Satô’s says literally: “man is made up of a spirit and a body” (reitô to karada ga hito o nasu); the current translation reads: “the spirit and the body comprise man” (rei to karada ga hito o nasu).

In the 19th chapter of Alma, when Ammon is describing the spiritual transformation occurring within King Lamoni, the English translation from the plates reads: “Yea, he knew that this [meaning “the light of everlasting life”] had overcome his natural frame, and he was carried away in God” (Alma 19:6). We have already touched on the problem of translating “natural”; my interest here is in the phrase “carried away in God.” I do not pretend to know precisely what this means; unfortunately, that unheralded soul known as the translator must make a decision regarding meaning. Taylor says that because of the light “his body became weak, and he communed with the God of his spirit” (kore ga rei to karada ga hito o nasu). Satô offers this: “his body became weak, and he was led away by God” (kore ga rei to karada ga hito o nasu). And the current translation suggests that the light “won out over the king’s body, and through God the king had lost consciousness” (kore ga rei to karada ga hito o nasu). Words such as “temporal” are variously rendered by the translators as nikutai, as in nikutai no shi (temporal death; literally “the death of the body”) or gense (the present world). I find myself not fully satisfied with any of the renderings of Alma 38:12: “See that ye bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled with love.”21 In the Taylor-made version, we are provided with: “In order that you may be filled with love, control all of your lusts” (ai o motte mitasaruru yō, issai no yoku o osayō). Satô says: “Control all of your lusts and be filled with love” (issai no yoku o osate ai ni michiyo). Our contemporary interpreters give: “Restrain all of
Your violent emotions, and make sure you are filled with love (mata, gekijō o subete sei shi, ai de mitasareru yō ni shinasai). Notice that two translators use yoku (lusts or passions), while the third uses gekijō, which can mean "passions" but has the primary sense of "violent emotions." The notion of restraint is twice rendered as osaeru, which literally means "to push down" and can go so far as to mean "put a stop to," though that nuance is not essential. The most recent verb, seisuru, seems most successful at suggesting some kind of control that does not totally wipe out the object being controlled. Taylor appears to me to do the best job of providing the critical link between bridling of passions and being filled with love, providing a "so that" phrase to create a sense of cause and effect. The two subsequent translations seem to lose that connection.

It is food for thought to ponder how difficult it is to come up with suitable translations for some of the most fundamental principles of the gospel. We can thank missionaries of other denominations from earlier centuries for coming up with the Japanese word tsumi to translate "sin." But we could have a very long and inconclusive discussion about the nuances of the term tsumi in the Japanese context. By and large, tsumi is a violation of the laws of society. Since Japanese religions are devoid of the notion of accountability to a Supreme Being who is our Father and Creator, it is a stretch
to assume that the term is automatically interpreted by a typical Japanese person as the violation of the spiritual contract between man and God. Instead, *tsumi* can often be an offense against one’s peers, and even when it is an act of rebellion against a superior power, that power is the law of the land or a feudal master or a political ruler. In the indigenous Shintō religion, *tsumi* is a physical defilement removed through washing or confinement. For all intents and purposes, *tsumi* could more correctly be translated as “crime”; in fact, the Japanese title of Dostoevsky’s novel *Crime and Punishment* is *Tsumi to batsu*.

Similar problems attend the attempt to translate descriptions of the law of chastity. I confess I have nothing but painful memories of my attempts to teach this law over 30 years ago as a missionary. The lesson plan directed us to have our investigators read from the Ten Commandments: “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” The modern translation of the Bible reads: *Kan’in shite wa naranai*. Using the word *kan’in* to a Japanese person born after World War II would be roughly equivalent—but even more puzzling—to teaching the seventh commandment in English as: “Thou shalt avoid all concupiscence.” It is not a turn of phrase that trips easily off the Japanese tongue. In fact, because of all the homonyms in the Japanese language, a young person in particular hearing this phrase might believe she was being told: “You must never become a government official,” or even “You shouldn’t be too cunning.” I exaggerate slightly, but the simple fact is that the vast majority of those to whom I taught that discussion had no clue what I was talking about. And a little knowledge is, I’m told, a dangerous thing. Picture a 19-year-old American missionary, scarcely able to ask directions to the post office, attempting to respond to a young, say, female Japanese investigator’s question about the meaning of *kan’in*. Not being smart enough to ask an actual Japanese member, many of us resorted to our pocket English-Japanese dictionaries, finding words that brought shrieks of horror from native missionaries and even earned one elder in my mission a slap across the face. It is my duty here to report that the obscure archaic term *kan’in* is employed throughout all three Japanese translations of the Book of Mormon.

Another key gospel term is, of course, “baptism.” The Japanese term created early on to be an equivalent was *senrei*, literally the “ordinance of washing.” The late 19th- and early 20th-century Protestant translations of the Bible, however, rejected that term, perhaps because it was too firmly associated with the Catholic practice of “sprinkling,” and instead they phoneticized the English term and produced the foreign-looking and foreign-sounding term *baputesuma*. There are, I hasten to emphasize, some real problems attending decisions to make Christianity seem even more foreign to the Japanese than it already is by suggesting to them that the religion itself is and will always be alien. I must also reemphasize that there are perhaps equal dangers in trying to approximate gospel terminology in a foreign language in ways that lend themselves primarily to confusion with indigenous concepts.

Alma Taylor seems to have sensed that using the Catholic term for the washing ordinance would not be a proper approximation for the revealed doctrine of immersion. So he used the term *shinrei* in his Book of Mormon translation, since it means an “ordinance of immersion.” The two later translations, however, return to the use of *baputesuma*.

Taylor was not the first religious translator to encounter difficulties rendering Christian terms into Japanese. The problem goes back all the way to the very first Catholic missionary, Francis Xavier, who arrived in Japan in 1549 and promptly declared the Japanese the finest people he had yet encountered. But once the initial words of greeting and praise had passed his lips, Xavier experienced increasing difficulty making anything else he said...
understood by his hosts. He quickly discovered, as so many subsequent missionaries have discovered over the interceding four and a half centuries, that the Judeo-Christian concept of God has no comfortable equivalent—or even clumsy counterpart—in the history of Japanese spiritual experience. The Japanese term *kami* (translated as lowercase “gods”) refers to a spiritual essence that is an equal-opportunity inhabitant of man and beast, wind and rain, tree and flower, the living and their ancestors, making no distinctions of rank between the realm of man and the realm of nature and not allowing for the notion of a Supreme Being who has created man as His own offspring, placed him a little lower than the angels, and given him dominion over all the earth. As the Japanese Christian novelist Endō Shūsaku has a Catholic missionary in his novel *The Samurai* declare:

“The Japanese basically lack a sensitivity to anything that is absolute, to anything that transcends the human level, to the existence of anything beyond the realm of Nature: what we would call the supernatural. . . . They abhor the idea of making clear distinctions between man and God. To them, even if there should be something greater than man, it is something which man himself can one day become. . . .”

“Within the realm of Nature their sensibilities are remarkably delicate and subtle, but those sensibilities are unable to grasp anything on a higher plane. That is why the Japanese cannot conceive of our God, who dwells on a separate plane from man.”22

Consequently Xavier, wise enough to try to meet the Japanese at their level of spiritual understanding and then move forward from there, consulted a number of friendly Buddhist priests for help in coming up with an appropriate Japanese name to describe his concept of God. What they gave him was the closest equivalent of which they could conceive: the Buddhist deity *Dainichi*, the “Great Sun Buddha,” who is the mystical cosmic illuminator of the universe. Once he realized his mistake, however, Xavier turned on his Buddhist informants, declared their deities devils and thereafter resorted to using the Latin term *Deus* to describe what he was trying to teach. Sadly, the Japanese rendition, *Deusu*, was too easy to toy with, and the Buddhists in retaliation began calling the god of Catholicism *Daiuso*, meaning “the Great Lie.”23

Subsequent Catholic missionaries in Japan opted for the term coined in the China mission by the Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci, *Tenshu*, which means “the Lord of Heaven.” *Tenshu* is in fact the word that Alma Taylor decided to use to translate each appearance of “Lord” in the Book of Mormon.

By the postwar period when Brother Satō began his translation, *Tenshu* had become virtually synonymous with the Catholic Church, which was known until more recently as *Tenshukyō*. Consequently, Satō and the later translators followed the lead of the Protestants in using the simple *shu* (“Lord” or “lord”). But from the outset, the word “God” has posed difficulties. The ultimate compromise adopted universally among Christians in Japan, including all three editions of the Book of Mormon, has been to add an honorific ending to the indigenous Japanese term *kami*, giving us something that might, with a great stretch of the imagination, be rendered, “the honorable gods that dwell in all manifestations of natural phenomena.” It can be challenging to talk about the finer points of theology when one struggles with how to name even the central object of worship.

I shall not belabor the point any further, the point being that the role of the translator, in any age and for any purpose, is a complex and challenging one. When the work being translated is a sacred text, the difficulties multiply. Such a translator must be a linguistic expert in two languages, a deft and careful doctrinal arbitrator, a creative circumlocutionist, a cautious and thorough editor, and a person sensitive to the tutorials of the Spirit that will expand his or her natural capacities. It is a thankless task, unless of course one takes into consideration the largely unspoken gratitude of tens of thousands of Japanese people who have, despite any possible “weakness in writing” (Ether 12:23), discovered that the Spirit is able to penetrate linguistic walls and convey the message of the book with even greater clarity than any word could express. As a sometime translator myself, I am filled with admiration, respect, and gratitude for all who dedicated themselves, body, mind, and spirit, to the arduous task of transforming that “most correct book” into, at the very least, “a marvelous work and a wonder” in Japanese. ■
A fascinating connection between Old Testament covenants and ancient Near Eastern treaties was discovered in 1951. That year, a generation after several such treaties became available for examination, Elias Bickerman showed that those treaties and Old Testament covenants exhibit many of the same literary elements (see accompanying sidebar).

Drawing on Bickerman’s observations, Herbert Huffmon found another common dimension in ancient treaties and covenants. He demonstrated that the Hebrew word יד (yādaʿ), “to know,” bore an additional meaning—“to enter into a binding agreement”—a meaning that has parallels in Old Testament covenant language and ancient Near Eastern treaty terminology. Delbert Hillers, citing Huffmon, observed that understanding the lexical point regarding the verb to know, in the sense of “to recognize” a covenant, is important for two reasons. First, it affords a personal benefit in “understanding what the Old Testament means by ‘knowing God.’” Second, it supports a “connection between prophetic language and thought and the terminology associated with treaty relationships,” meaning...
that prophets spoke of covenants in language that framed legal responsibilities between God and his people. For Latter-day Saints who understand that obedience to covenants undergirds the law of eternal progression, or the manner in which humans can eventually become like God, these insights on to know provide new ways of thinking about covenants.

Since the Book of Mormon arose out of the Old Testament era, it seems likely that both works present similar meanings of the verb to know. As this paper will show, the same or a similar meaning of to know as used in ancient Near Eastern treaties is found in Book of Mormon covenants, illustrating another link between the Book of Mormon and the ancient Near East. In order to understand Book of Mormon covenants in this context, we will first discuss the background of the word to know, next compare treaties and covenants, then discuss to know in connection with ancient Near Eastern treaties and biblical covenants, and finally assess to know in Book of Mormon covenants.
Ancient Near Eastern Background

Meaning of the verb to know. The verb to know is common to most Semitic languages and has a wide variety of meanings that can be figurative, literal, euphemistic, or inferential, such as “to understand”; “to come to the knowledge of, by seeing, by hearing, and by experience”; “to know how”; and “to be wise.” In covenant language, to know indicates “God’s knowledge,” primarily in reference to people, with care for those whom he knows; “knowledge of God,” that is, an understanding of where one stands in relation to God; and ignorance of God, meaning “failure to practice the filial relationship in which they [humankind] stand with God.” These meanings characterize the special relationship between God and his people, Israel, and within this use of to know stands the covenant relationship that has parallels in ancient Near Eastern treaties.

We note also that to know signifies the intimate relationship involved in marriage, further amplifying the meaning of this word, hence its common use as an Old Testament metaphor symbolizing the special covenant relationship between God and his people. The marriage bond, as a symbol of the covenant relationship between God and the house of Israel, is found only in the Old Testament. The prophet Hosea was the first to equate the Sinai covenant with marriage. The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel built upon his symbolism. Metaphorical marriage reflected literal marriage; therefore, God’s relationship with Israel was intimate, and he expected absolute fidelity.

In summary, many ancient Near Eastern treaties repeat the verb to know in the technical sense of “to recognize a legal relationship” and “to recognize treaty stipulations as binding.” Thus verbs meaning ‘to know’ in ordinary contexts,” Hillers informs us, “were used for ‘to recognize, ‘be loyal to,’ in the vocabulary of international relations over a wide range of the ancient world.” To know, therefore, conveyed terms of the treaty relationship as well as its obligations. Old Testament covenants use the verb to know in the very same senses, with the added dimension of either marital or sexual intimacy.

Treaties and covenants. Ancient Near Eastern treaties described and codified relationships between peoples. They also defined the political relationship between ancient Near Eastern kingdoms. In typical treaty language, the ruling kingdom is the suzerain and the subordinate kingdom the vassal. Here the term vassal connotes not only a relationship of inferiority but also a carefully defined link to the superior kingdom that was solemnized by an oath. Such a relationship brought a set of reciprocal responsibilities for each party. Generally, the treaty makers wrote down these mutual responsibilities so they could review them periodically, and they often placed them in temples for safekeeping or, perhaps, so the gods would be aware of them.

Old Testament prophets likened God’s covenant relationship with Israel to the marriage bond. Here the artist depicts an exuberant courtship ritual that might have preceded the marriage of Lehi’s sons and Zoram to Ishmael’s daughters. Love Story, by Minerva K. Teichert. Courtesy of Brigham Young University Museum of Art. All Rights Reserved.
Shared Elements of Ancient Treaty and Covenant Texts

A striking feature of Old Testament covenant texts is how closely they model the format of ancient Near Eastern treaty texts. The literary elements that these two different kinds of text commonly share are the introduction of the speaker, the historical prologue, a listing of stipulations and obligations, and the calling upon powerful witnesses such as God or gods who can bring to bear blessings or cursings based on obedience to the stipulations and obligations. The traditional treaty form contains six elements. The following comparison of a Hittite treaty (on the left) and noncontiguous passages from Deuteronomy (on the right) illustrates these elements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hittite Treaty</th>
<th>Old Testament Covenant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Introduction of the Speaker</strong></td>
<td>These are the testimonies, the statutes, and the ordinances [judgements, KJV], which Moses spoke. (Dt 4:45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These are the words of the Sun, Muwatallis, the Great King, King of the land of Hatti, Beloved of the Weather-God. (Muwatallis-Alaksandus of Wilusa = F 5, § 1, I. B 1–2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Historical Prologue</strong></td>
<td>when they came out of Egypt (Dt 4:45) . . . and they took possession of . . . the land of Og. (Dt 4:47).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When, in former times Labarnas, my grandfather, attacked the land of Wilusa, he conquered (it) . . . The Land of Wilusa never after fell away from the land of Hatti, but . . . remained friends with the king of Hatti. (§ 2, I. B 2–8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Stipulations</strong></td>
<td>. . . thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart. (Dt 6:5).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thou, Alaksandus, shalt protect the Sun as a friend! (§ 6, I. A 65–7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. The Document</strong></td>
<td>And thou shalt write on the stones all the words of this law most clearly. (Dt 27:8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moreover, let someone read thee this tablet which I have made for thee three times every year. (§ 19, III. 73–4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. The Gods</strong></td>
<td>[This day thou art become the people of the Lord thy God. Thou shalt therefore obey the voice of the Lord thy God. (Dt 27:9–10, KJV)]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sun God of heaven, lord of the lands, Shepherd of men, the Sun Goddess of Arinna, the Queen of the lands, the Weather-God. (§ 20, IV. 1–30)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. Curse and Blessing</strong></td>
<td>If thou obeyest the voice of Yahwe thy God by keeping His commandments which I command thee today . . . then all these curses shall come upon thee. (Dt 28:1–2, 15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If thou, Alaksandus, break the words of this document, which are placed on this document, then may these oaths wipe thee out . . . and wipe thy seed from the face of the earth. But if thou keepest these words, then may the thousand gods . . . keep thee, thy wife, thy sons . . . with friendly hand. (§ 21, IV. 31–46)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Old Testament covenants that highlight God’s relationship with Israel are found in the Decalogue (see Exodus 20:2–17; Deuteronomy 5:1–21), the Book of the Law (see Deuteronomy 15–28), the Law of Holiness (see Leviticus 17–26), and most completely in the statute and ordinance ceremony at Shechem (see Joshua 24). These covenants are similar to ancient Near Eastern treaties in that the covenant between God and the Israelites was a type of suzerain and vassal relationship, mirroring the vertical, or hierarchical, relationship between a king and those subject to him. On one side, God knows his children and with a covenant recognizes his relationship to them. On the other side, knowing the covenant binds these people to be obedient to the commandments of God. As a consequence of their obedience, God promises to know them, that is, to acknowledge them as his own—gathering them for protection and blessings (see Deuteronomy 28–30). Incidentally, although there are similarities between treaty language and covenant language, it is important to recognize that treaties are temporary agreements, frequently between a superior and an inferior kingdom—and superiority and inferiority change over time. Conversely, religious covenants are binding and eternal links between humans, who will always remain in obeisance to God, and God himself.

Ancient Near Eastern Treaties and Biblical Covenants

As previously stated, ancient Near Eastern treaty references to the verb to know indicated a legally binding agreement. Similarly, Old Testament usage of this verb in certain instances also indicated a legal and binding covenant. In the ancient Near East, the basis of suzerainty of one king over another was military might. In conquering a kingdom, the victor vaunted his superiority and the defeated acknowledged it. Among kingdoms, to know implied binding a vassal state to pay tribute to a suzerain, in return for which he promised to protect or aid the vassal’s citizens against their enemies. Ancient Near Eastern suzerains often claimed to rule as gods or at least by divine right over their vassals, thus imitating the ancient pattern set by God in his covenant to his children—he would bless them if they remembered and were obedient to him.

God’s suzerainty over the house of Israel provided a sharp contrast to earthly suzerains. Prior to rescuing the Israelites from Egypt, God declared his future suzerainty, saying: “And I will take you for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know [recognize] that I am the Lord your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the Lord” (Exodus 6:7–8; emphasis added). Although his suzerainty also was based on might, it was his rescue of the slaves from bondage in Egypt rather than his conquering of them that defined his relationship to them (see Exodus 19:4–5; 20:2). Having established his suzerainty, God, according to his good pleasure, fixed the terms, and the house of Israel, the vassals, accepted them.
In a reiteration of these covenant terms in Deuteronomy, one can see clearly each side of the covenant. The basis of this covenant is the Passover and the “passing through.” God established himself as the all-powerful suzerain who declared the covenant terms after he rescued his enslaved people from physical and spiritual bondage by passing over their firstborn sons and by having the entire group pass through the Red Sea. On the vassal side, we read: “This day the Lord thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and judgments: thou shalt therefore keep and do them with all thine heart, and with all thy soul. Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice” (Deuteronomy 26:16–17). By these stipulations, the house of Israel covenanted to be subject to God by obeying all his commandments. On the suzerain side, we are told: “The Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldst keep all his commandments; and to make thee high above all nations which he hath made . . . that thou mayest be an holy people unto the Lord thy God, as he hath spoken” (Deuteronomy 26:18–19). Thus the Lord promised the house of Israel, upon condition of obedience, that he would honor them above all other nations because keeping the covenant would make them holy.

In this connection, the prophetic anointing of an Israelite king allowed him to stand for the people as a vassal to the suzerain, God. Ze’ev Falk differentiates between the divine status claimed by some ancient Near Eastern kings and the more modest roles of Israelite kings, explaining, “The king [of Israel] was thought to be appointed and even adopted by God; he mediated between God and the people and represented them before each other.” Notwithstanding the differences in kingship, the same meanings of to know that characterized ancient Near Eastern treaties also defined the covenant relationship between God and Israel through her king.

Taking these ideas into consideration, we now turn to elements common in both treaty and covenant relationships that use know in its legal senses. These senses are: mutual recognition of an exclusive relationship, promises of aid between the suzerain and the vassal, reacknowledgment demands and ceremonies, and the consequences of lack of mutual recognition or treaty/covenant breaking with attendant consequences. Each of these senses of know is found in ancient Near Eastern treaties and in Old Testament covenants. Following are a few examples of each.

**Mutual recognition of an exclusive relationship.**

In the 14th century BC, the Hittite king Suppiluliumas, who ruled in ancient Anatolia (modern-day central Turkey), wrote to a vassal, Huqqanas, in eastern Asia Minor, stating:

And you, Huqqanas, know only the Sun [a designation for the Hittite king] regarding lordship; also my son (of) whom I, the Sun, say, “This one everyone should know,” . . . you Huqqanas, know him! Moreover, (those) who are my sons, his brother, (or) my brothers . . . know as brother and associate. Moreover, another lord . . . do not . . . know! The Sun [alone] know! . . . Moreover, any other do not know.

This treaty relationship required that the vassal Huqqanas know (i.e., acknowledge) the king. Thus Huqqanas must legally recognize the suzerain King.
Suppiluliumas, as well as the king’s sons and brothers. Huqqanas was to look to no one else as his king. The language of the treaty exorted compliance and fidelity and implied a threat of harsh consequences if Huqqanas recognized any ruler outside the king’s family. Here, the verb *to know* denotes an exclusive recognition or loyalty to the suzerain.

The first Old Testament example of the verb *to know* in this same covenant sense appears in these words of God to Abraham: “I [God] know him [Abraham], that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him” (Genesis 18:19; emphasis added). God knew (i.e., acknowledged) Abraham intimately and was confident that he and his house would be obedient to his commandments because they had entered into a covenant relationship that each party recognized. In addition, Abraham and his household would *know*, meaning “worship,” no other gods.

The Old Testament is replete with the idea of intimately knowing God in the sense of acknowledging him. The phrase “know that I am the Lord” is found frequently in the Old Testament, sometimes as intimate covenant language and at other times as acknowledgement of God’s power. For instance: “They shall know that I am the Lord their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt” (Exodus 29:46; emphasis added); and “The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch forth my hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them” (Exodus 7:5; emphasis added). The first phrase illustrates God’s desire for the house of Israel to recognize him, even to know him intimately, so that he can live with them (symbolically as husband and wife). In the second, God wants the Egyptians to recognize him as more powerful than their gods in order that they too can enter into a covenant with him.²¹

Perhaps the best parallel to ancient Near Eastern treaty examples, illustrating the exclusiveness of the covenant relationship,²² is this exchange between God and Israel: “I am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou shalt know no god but me: for there is no saviour beside me. I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought” (Hosea 13:4–5; emphasis added).²³ In this example, God, the suzerain, tells Israel, his vassal, to recognize no other god. God clarifies the intimacy of and his fidelity to their relationship in a second passage, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth” (Amos 3:2; emphasis added). Further, in accord with that covenant, God earlier aided his vassal “in the land of great drought” by rescuing the Israelites with water (see Exodus 15:22–25; 17:3–6).

**Promises of aid.** The Hittite king Muwatallis (ca. 1308–1285 BC) made a treaty with his vassal, Alaksandus. The king stipulated the following about a third, unnamed party: “As he [the rebel] is an enemy to you, even so is he an enemy to [me] the Sun; [and] I, [the Sun], will know only you, Alaksandus.”²⁴ This treaty relationship assured aid to the vassal Alaksandus from his suzerain, King Muwatallis, if the unnamed party attacked him.

The Amarna tablets, cuneiform records dating from the 14th century BC that were found in Egypt, contain an actual case of a vassal requesting military aid from the suzerain Amenophis III on the basis of a covenant agreement. The king of Amurru requested military aid from his suzerain, the Egyptian Pharaoh Amenophis III, to help fight against Mitanni, a kingdom...
in western Syria, with this plea: “May the king my lord know me and put me under the charge of Paḥa(m)nate, my (royal) governor.” Here the phrase including know could more clearly be translated as “Let the king, my lord, take care of me,” or “May the king my lord recognize me as a legitimate [loyal] vassal,” and thus provide the support due to me. The following biblical story illustrates breaking and then reestablishing an exclusive relationship between the kingdom of Judah and God. The kingdom of Judah under King Ahaz (ca. 734 BC), who paganized his reign by combining the worship of God with religious practices of the surrounding cultures, was caught between the exclusive recognition demands of two suzerains: those of the earthly kingdom of Assyria and that of God. While the wording of the political arrangement in the following quotation does not contain the word know, a treaty and a covenant relationship are clearly envisioned. “[King] Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, I am thy servant and thy son: come up, and save me out of the hand of the king[s] of Syria . . . and Israel. . . . And Ahaz took the silver and gold . . . and treasures . . . and sent it for a present. . . . And the king of Assyria hearkened unto him” (2 Kings 16:7–9). Ahaz’s referring to himself as servant and son, as well as his payment of tribute, is indicative of his vassal relationship to King Tiglath-pileser. Thereupon, Tiglath-pileser came to defeat Judah’s enemies. However, God, the highest suzerain, sent the prophet Isaiah to tell King Ahaz, his vassal, not to go to Assyria for aid, promising protection. Because King Ahaz trusted an earthly suzerain more than he did the heavenly one, the kingdom of Judah became entangled in a debilitating relationship with Assyria (see Isaiah 7:1–16). As a consequence of ignoring the commands of God, Isaiah prophesied that Assyria would eventually war against its vassal, the kingdom of Judah (see Isaiah 7:17–25).

The fulfillment of this prophecy took place during the reign of Ahaz’s son, King Hezekiah. Unlike his father, Hezekiah worshipped only the God of Israel, obeyed his commands, and listened to the prophetic words of Isaiah. Thus Hezekiah honored the covenant relationship by serving and obeying God as his suzerain (see 2 Kings 18:3, 5–7; 2 Chronicles 31:20–21; 32:6–8).

In consequence of the kingdom of Judah’s later rebellion against vassalship to Assyria, the Assyrians came to Jerusalem, surrounded the city, and demanded an exclusive treaty relationship (see 2 Kings 18:7, 13–16). King Sennacherib wanted no competition from the suzerains in Egypt or in heaven. Hezekiah received assurance from the Lord through Isaiah that God would protect his vassal (see Isaiah 37:6–7). When King Sennacherib sent an additional letter threatening annihilation, Hezekiah responded by going to the temple, spreading out the letter on the temple altar, and again seeking God’s protection (see 2 Kings 19:14–18; Isaiah 37:14–19). He pleaded, “O Lord our God, save us from his [Sennacherib’s] hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord, even thou only” (Isaiah 37:20; also 2 Kings 19:19; emphasis added). While this appearance of know is plainly linked to promises made by the Lord in a prior covenant setting, its sense comes closer to “to acknowledge.” Hezekiah thus put to the test the covenant promise of protection.

In answer to Hezekiah’s pleas, God sent “the angel of the Lord” who “smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand:
and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses,” and the Assyrians withdrew (2 Kings 19:35; Isaiah 37:36). Thus know in these examples meant a reciprocal promise to give aid; the vassal was dependent upon the suzerain to rescue him from his enemies.

Reacknowledgment. The imperative form of know is used to order the vassal to reaffirm an already-existing treaty. For example, the Hittite king Muwatallis wrote to his vassal, Alaksandus, “This tablet which I made for you, Alaksandus, [let them read it to you] three times yearly, year after year, and you, Alaksandus, know it.” In this case, the treaty relationship required a periodic public reading and thereby an acknowledgment by the vassal king of his dependent relationship on the suzerain.

In the Old Testament, the prophet Jeremiah wrote: “I [God] will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me” (Jeremiah 31:33–34; emphasis added). This series of expressions echoes the command of Muwatallis to Alaksandus to review the written treaty regularly. In general, the suzerain expects regular verbal reaffirmation of the treaty. However, God’s reminder here does not involve his people in simply reading aloud the covenant obligations, as in Deuteronomy 31:10–13. Rather, he will give to Israel a new covenant, and they will know it most intimately within their hearts, the part of the body that Israelites believed governed thought processes (see Psalm 64:6; Proverbs 2:2; 23:7). Thus knowing implies that the “whole individual is engaged” both mentally and emotionally. The figurative language lends insight into the level of knowing required by an earthly suzerain and the level required by God. The earthly suzerain wants vassals to know the terms of the treaty; however, God wants his vassals not only to know the covenant stipulations but also to be in a personal and intimate relationship with him.

Lack of mutual recognition. In the following illustration, a particular vassal group did not honor a treaty made with the suzerain kingdom of Assyria. In an eighth-century-BC letter to an unnamed Assyrian king, a royal officer named Esarhaddon called the Cimmerians, barbarian invaders from the north, “nomads, [for] they know neither an oath by the god(s) nor a sworn agreement [treaty].” Various translations render know here as “they do not care for,” “they do not respect,” or “they recognize (as binding) neither.” In this case the suzerain knows, or recognizes, the legal power of a treaty as binding. Not surprisingly, whatever agreements the suzerain, Assyria, had attempted to force upon the wandering Cimmerians were ignored.

Failure to recognize the exclusiveness of the covenant relationship, or covenant breaking, invoked curses upon the house of Israel as shown in this passage: “You only have I known [i.e., chosen to make covenants with] of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniq-

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God fulfilled his covenant obligations; however, his threat of punishment implied Israel’s failure to fulfill its covenant obligations, namely, failure to worship God exclusively.

all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Exodus 19:5–6). God fulfilled his covenant obligations; however, his threat of punishment implied Israel’s failure to fulfill its covenant obligations, namely, failure to worship God exclusively. In fact, ancient Israel’s introduction of the worship of foreign gods into its society was common (see, for example, 2 Kings 17:7–12; 2 Chronicles 28:2–4; 23–25; Hosea 4:12–5:4).

To illustrate, Isaiah prophesied, “Therefore my people [Israel] are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge” (Isaiah 5:13; emphasis added). “The knowledge’ is an abbreviated form of the expression ‘the knowledge of God’” and is a response to God’s saving act of bringing the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt.” Huffmon conjectured that the “lack of knowledge” in this passage most likely refers to covenant obligations with God, a priestly responsibility. Interestingly, Joseph Smith warned of dangerous ramifications in not seeking “knowledge” from God: “A man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge, for if he does not get knowledge, he will be brought into captivity by some evil power in the other world.” If, as Huffmon contends, “knowledge” has to do with covenant obligations, then Joseph Smith’s prophetic warning teaches that a person is saved no faster than he or she makes and keeps a covenant relationship with God.

In the foregoing examples we find several themes characteristic of the verb know in ancient Near Eastern treaties and biblical covenants: mutual recognition of an exclusive treaty/covenant relationship, promises of aid, a requirement of periodically reacknowledging of a treaty/covenant, and consequences for not acknowledging a treaty/covenant. The language of these illustrations implies that both parties understood, first, that the vassal was to give tribute, either financial or in worship, to the suzerain; and second, that the suzerain carried the threat of destroying the vassal if the latter violated his or her obligations.

Covenant Language in the Book of Mormon

Because the Book of Mormon has Old World roots and authors that originated in the ancient Near East—the world of the Old Testament—one would expect that it also would present some or all of the nuances that one finds in the verb to know and its noun knowledge, as well as the same features of covenant making as they appear in ancient Near Eastern treaties and biblical covenants. The Old Testament covenant model is in fact found in the Book of Mormon. Two of the major purposes of the Book of Mormon as identified on its title page are (1) “to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel . . . that they may know the covenants of the Lord”; and (2) “to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ.” Thus an important role of the Book of Mormon is to bring its readers to recognize their covenant relationship with Jesus Christ and the attendant reciprocal obligations that knowing implies. Making covenants—or knowing the suzerain, Christ—are foundational in the Book of Mormon.

Just as God declared his relationship of suzerainty to Israel during the Exodus, early in the Book of Mormon the Lord declared this same relationship with Lehi and his family in a familiar metaphor:

I will also be your light in the wilderness; and I will prepare the way before you, if it so be that ye shall keep my commandments; wherefore, inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall be led towards the promised land; and ye shall know that it is by me that ye are led. . . . After ye have arrived in the promised land,
Just as God led his children out of Egypt, he led this group of his children out of Jerusalem before the Babylonian destruction. The Book of Mormon is replete with references to Old Testament covenants and God’s desire to restore covenant knowledge to this remnant of his children so that he could make covenants with them as he had done with their forebears at Mount Sinai.

In the Book of Mormon, as in the Old Testament, God is a type of suzerain and the remnant of the house of Israel in the Americas is a type of vassal. In addition, similarities to ancient Near Eastern treaty language and its legal applications of know arise in covenant language that elucidates mutual recognition of an exclusive relationship, promises of aid to a vassal, reaffirmation of a covenant agreement, and consequences for lack of mutual recognition. Further, the Book of Mormon delineates unique aspects of covenant making: vassals desiring to know the suzerain by making covenants with him, the suzerain producing a succinct list of demands to the vassal, and the special recognition ceremony reaffirming the covenant between suzerain and vassals, similar perhaps to the interaction between Christ and his disciples as he showed them his wounds (Luke 24:39 and John 20:27).

**Mutual recognition of an exclusive relationship.** The Book of Mormon emphasizes the importance of mutual knowing, clearly linking eternal blessings or cursings to recognizing God as one’s exclusive Lord. For instance, the Lord responded to Alma’s earnest prayer regarding how to judge lapsed believers by saying:

> For behold, in my name are they called; and if they know me they shall come forth, and shall have a place eternally at my right hand. And it shall come to pass that when the second trump shall sound then shall they that never knew me come forth and shall stand before me. And then shall they know that I am the Lord their God, that I am their Redeemer; but they would not be redeemed. And then will I confess unto them that I never knew them; and they shall depart into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (Mosiah 26:24–27)

In this passage, the wicked, who by choice never enjoyed an intimate and covenantal relationship with the Savior, will eventually acknowledge who he is; nevertheless, without his redeeming power to save them, they must attempt the impossible—to save themselves.

One might ask, how does God recognize which of his children are loyal to their covenant with him? Christ himself answers that question. In his sermon at the temple in Bountiful, the Lord repeats what he said to his listeners in the Old World: “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (3 Nephi 14:16; Matthew 7:16; emphasis added). Covenant keepers can be recognized by what they become. To those who have entered into the covenant relationship but not fulfilled its requirements, he will say, “I never knew you” (3 Nephi 14:23; Matthew 7:23; emphasis added). Conversely, how do his followers know that he is their God? God manifests that he knows them by fulfilling his covenant promises, as illustrated in the following passage: “And he gathereth his children from the four quarters of the earth; and he numbereth his sheep, and they know him; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd; and he shall feed his sheep, and in him they shall find pasture” (1 Nephi 22:25). From this passage we learn that an important aspect of God’s knowing his people in this covenant agreement is for God to gather his children under his care so that he can care for and protect them.

**Promises of aid.** When the Nephites acknowledged their covenant with God through obedience, God returned that acknowledgment with protection, deliverance, or some other appropriate response manifesting his caring power. For instance, the Lord said to his people through the prophet Alma:

> Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me; and I will covenant with my people and deliver them out of bondage. And I will also ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs, even while you are in bondage; and this will I do that ye may stand as witnesses for me hereafter, and that ye may know of a surety that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions. (Mosiah 24:13–14)
Here the Nephites sought deliverance from their enemy, and God recognized that the stipulations of the covenant bound upon him, as suzerain, the responsibility to bless and care for his vassals. God responded to their pleas for relief by promising his prophet that respite would come so that his people might testify of him.36

Reacknowledgment. Reminiscent of Jesus’s invitation to 10 of his apostles—“Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see” (Luke 24:39), and later to the apostle Thomas, “Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side” (John 20:27)—was his similar invitation to the Nephites. This Book of Mormon example is unique in that those invited were not apostles, a small and select group of men, but a “great multitude” of righteous men, women, and children who came to his holy temple (see 3 Nephi 11:1). The resurrected Christ invited the Nephites to reaffirm their covenant with him in an intimate way, saying: “Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know [i.e., acknowledge] that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world” (3 Nephi 11:14).

At the conclusion of this recognition scene, we read this statement regarding the participants: “[They] did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come” (3 Nephi 11:15).

Remarking on this experience, President Howard W. Hunter observed, “That experience took time, but it was important that each individual have the experience, that each set of eyes and each pair of hands have that reaffirming, personal witness.”37 Each vassal now knew intimately his or her suzerain, Christ, and the results were obedience to him and a cessation of war for almost 170 years (see 4 Nephi 1:2). Christ also knew his people and their doings individually, as indicated in his words “If [a person] repent not he shall not be numbered among my people, that he may not destroy my people, for behold I know my sheep, and they are numbered” (3 Nephi 18:31).

Lack of mutual recognition. In the following prophecy, God knows (i.e., recognizes) his children; however, they have been scattered and do not recognize the covenant relationship their ancestors made with him.

And at that day shall the remnant of our seed know that they are of the house of Israel, and that they are the covenant people of the Lord; and then shall they know and come to the knowledge of their forefathers, and also to the
knowledge of the gospel of their Redeemer, which was ministered unto their fathers by him; wherefore, they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer and the very points of his doctrine, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved. (1 Nephi 15:14)

According to these prophetic words, the descendants of Lehi will lose their awareness of the covenant; nevertheless, at a future date they will learn of it, embrace it, and gather to the Lord so that he can protect and save them.

Knowing—that is, having made covenants—but refusing to be obedient is called rebellion, as explained by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and such disobedience involves the heart. Ezekiel prophesied that after God cleansed Israel from her iniquities, “a new heart also will I [God] give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26). This same relationship between the heart and covenant knowledge is illustrated in a Book of Mormon passage in which Amulek confesses his lack of consonance between knowledge and actions.

I never have known much of the ways of the Lord, and his mysteries and marvelous power. I said I never had known much of these things; but behold, I mistake, for I have seen much of his mysteries and his marvelous power; yea, even in the preservation of the lives of this people. Nevertheless, I did harden my heart, for I was called many times and I would not hear; therefore I knew concerning these things, yet I would not know; therefore I went on rebelling against God, in the wickedness of my heart. (Alma 10:5–6)

Nephi testifies that the voice of Christ came to him with a warning for all who enter into his covenant: “After ye . . . have received the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost, and . . . after this should deny [knowing] me, it would have been better for you that ye had not [ever] known me” (2 Nephi 31:14). Unlike ancient Near Eastern treaty relationships that often are the result of conquering by force, covenants with God are entered into voluntarily. Thus one who willingly enters into covenant with God is forewarned of serious ramifications for breaching the covenant.

In this vein, covenant breaking invokes curses or, less severely, the withholding of certain promised blessings. The only way for the vassal to avoid punishment is to know the suzerain in the sense of recognizing him. In this context the prophet Abinadi foretold the demise of King Noah. His prophecy implied that Noah refused to recognize God, although he had been raised with that knowledge: “The life of king Noah shall be valued even as a garment in a hot furnace; for he shall know [i.e., recognize] that I am the Lord” (Mosiah 12:3). “Who is Abinadi,” King Noah had boldly questioned, “that I and my people should be judged of him, or who is the Lord, that shall bring upon my people such great affliction?” (Mosiah 11:27). In this case, an earthly suzerain had failed to recognize that he was a vassal to the heavenly suzerain. King Noah did not heed the prophetic warning, and the consequence for him was death by burning (see Mosiah 19:20). King Noah’s refusal to recognize the Lord as God was catastrophic both for himself and, frighteningly, for his people (see Mosiah 11:2–23).38

Desiring to know and make covenants. Several Book of Mormon passages illustrate the desire of individuals as well as whole groups of people to initiate entering into covenant with God, a dimension of know not paralleled in the Old Testament.39 Perhaps the most poignant example is the plea of the Lamanite king who desired to know the heavenly king: “O God, Aaron [a missionary] hath told me that there is a God; and if there is a God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me, and I will give away all my sins to thee” (Alma 22:18). This example is particularly remarkable because one who had been an earthly suzerain desired to become a vassal to God, the highest suzerain, hoping that his repentance would be an acceptable offering for that privilege.

After King Benjamin taught his people that Christ is the only source of salvation and outlined the obligations and consequences of enlisting him as their suzerain, the people declared their desire to “take upon [themselves] the name of Christ” (Mosiah 5:8). However, King Benjamin issued a severe warning that they must know his name, meaning that they must recognize Christ’s authority, in order to receive salvation (see Mosiah 5:14–15).

Recognition demands. As noted previously, in both ancient Near Eastern treaties and in Old Testament covenants, punishment resulted from lack of
exclusive recognition of the suzerain or God. The Book of Mormon clearly identifies what one must know and do in order to please God:

Know ye that ye are of the house of Israel.

Know ye that ye must come unto repentance, or ye cannot be saved.

Know ye that ye must lay down your weapons of war, and delight no more in the shedding of blood, and take them not again, save it be that God shall command you.

Know ye that ye must come to the knowledge of your fathers, and repent of all your sins and iniquities, and believe in Jesus Christ, that he is the Son of God, and that he was slain by the Jews, and by the power of the Father he hath risen again, whereby he hath gained the victory over the grave; and also in him is the sting of death swallowed up. . . . And ye will also know that ye are a remnant of the seed of Jacob; therefore ye are numbered among the people of the first covenant. (Mormon 7:2–5, 10)

The first demand is similar to one mentioned previously between King Suppiluliamas and his vassal Huqqanas. However, God expects more than a legal recognition of him as the reigning monarch. From this list of requirements, we can see a broader scope in the expectations of a covenant relationship with God than is found in ancient Near Eastern treaty agreements and in the extant Old Testament covenants. The Book of Mormon requirements as described by the prophet Mormon form a much more succinct list in comparison with the catalogue of statutes, judgments, and commandments given in Deuteronomy. As is the prerogative of the suzerain, God commanded his people in the Americas to recognize that they are part of his kingdom, that they are to be obedient to his laws or face destruction, that they are to fight only on his command, and that they are to believe in him. Mormon’s Israelite forebears had made a similar covenant and also had been required to enter into this relationship with God by undergoing rites of acceptance (see Exodus 24; Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 27–29; Joshua 8:30–35). The commandments of God are centered in knowing (acknowledging) the covenant relationship and knowing intimately the giver of the law. This means voluntary obedience to requirements so that he can change human hearts. As the suzerain, God sets the demands of the covenant, and those who seek his salvation agree to abide by them.

Treaties, Covenants, and Connections

These few examples from the Book of Mormon illustrate the binding nature of the covenant relationship through mutual and personal acknowledgment on the part of both God and his children. The Book of Mormon states clearly how one is to know God and explains blessings and cursings associated with obedience or disobedience to the always-generous stipulations of the covenant. God’s covenant relationship in the Book of Mormon with a remnant of the house of Israel is linguistically similar to ancient Near Eastern treaty associations and is semantically identical to descriptions of his relationship with Israel in the Old Testament.

The examples cited further indicate that the word know was used in ancient Near Eastern treaties and in Old Testament and Book of Mormon covenants to express both the exclusive and binding nature of the suzerain/vassal relationship. The parallel uses of know in treaty and covenant relationships demonstrate similarities in concept between suzerain and vassal treaties in the ancient Near East and covenant relationships between God and his children as they appear in the Old Testament and Book of Mormon. Further, the Book of Mormon mentions unique aspects of covenants; for instance, it describes individuals as well as groups initiating a covenant relationship with God and reports an intimate recognition ceremony between God and a multitude of his children. The connection between the covenant relationship of the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon illustrates the rich complexity of the Book of Mormon. The linguistic and semantic similarities within the ancient Near Eastern treaties and covenants in the Book of Mormon reach remarkable levels of subtlety. Such similarities stand as further evidence that the historical and spiritual roots of the Book of Mormon lie in the world of the Old Testament and the ancient Near East.
The visit of the risen Jesus to the people of Nephi was a personal and sacred event without parallel in scripture. In the scant space of a few days, Christ prepared a people to live as a Zion community in righteousness for nearly 200 years. As survivors of the great destruction, those to whom he ministered were the more righteous part of the inhabitants (see 3 Nephi 10:12); yet the specificity of his instructions and warnings against contention suggest that they still had much to learn (see 11:28–30; 18:34).

We may assume, therefore, that the Savior’s activities were highly efficient as well as effective. Yet of all that he might have done to teach and otherwise prepare the people and his chosen disciples, the Savior took the time to call children around him, bless each of them one by one, and pray to the Father for them (see 17:11, 21). On the second day of his ministry, he taught and ministered to the children again (see 26:14). The record does not indicate that Christ was present with the children on the third day; however, he had prepared the children such that on that day “even babes did open their mouths and utter marvelous things; and the things which they did utter were forbidden that there should not any man write them” (26:16).

What might we learn from Christ’s repeated focus on the children? The question is intriguing because his initial attention to them might appear to have been the result of a compassionate change of plans whereby he agreed to remain longer than he had intended (see 17:4–6). His subsequent teaching of the children, however, is evidence that his focus on them was an essential element of his mission and thus likely not a change of plans at all.

As we consider the Savior’s interaction with the children and its purposes and modern applications, it will be helpful to first review the context and narrative of the events themselves and then focus on his purposes from several points of view—that of the children themselves, their parents and others in attendance, the disciples, and finally ourselves as recipients of the sacred record. Although such divisions are artificial in some respects (e.g., the disciples were likely parents as well), the different perspectives they afford help us to better appreciate the range and overall impact of the messages explicit in the Savior’s teachings and implicit in his ministrations. For example, the disciples were to bear responsibility for the progress of the church as a whole, so they were likely attentive to the ecclesiastical as well as parental implications of the Savior’s teachings. Moreover, in the larger context it is important to distinguish between those instances when the Savior is speaking to the children as his audience and those when he may be using them as examples, with adults or disciples as the audience.

**Context and Narrative**

The image of Jesus blessing little children directly or pointing to them as living metaphors of what disciples should become is not new. Biblical commentators have written extensively about the lessons to be gleaned from such events. However, in 3 Nephi the central importance of believers becoming as little children is emphasized dramatically by Christ when he speaks amid the darkness caused by the great destructions preceding his appearance in the New World (see 9:22). His initial teaching following his appearance declares characteristics that are foundational requirements for discipleship:

> I say unto you, ye must repent, and become as a little child, and be baptized in my name, or ye can in nowise receive these things. And again I say unto you, ye must repent, and be baptized in my name, and become as a little child, or ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them. (3 Nephi 11:37–39)

Thus the Savior calls his followers to emulate the characteristics of children, to become “as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father” (Mosiah 3:19).

If the most important instructions and experiences are presented first in 3 Nephi, then the most
important knowledge for the people gathered at the temple was that Jesus is the Christ, the very Son of God. He was introduced by the Father himself, he declared his own witness of who he is, and he personally demonstrated his identity by inviting each person to "arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world" (3 Nephi 11:14).

Following that ineffable learning experience and the audience's unified declaration of their witness, the Savior turned to reestablishing the church organization. He called Nephi and 11 other disciples, teaching them the order of baptism and emphasizing the importance of unity of understanding and the pitfalls of contention. He then declared the essential elements of his doctrine, which, as mentioned, include the opportunity and responsibility to become as little children.

During that first day of instruction, Jesus both prepared the disciples for their responsibilities and taught the multitudes. When one considers all that had transpired by the close of 3 Nephi 16, it might be said that the day had been long and very full. The Savior, perceiving the weakness of his listeners, encouraged them to go home, ponder and pray, and come again on the morrow prepared for further instruction. Notwithstanding their weakness, the people loved being with Jesus so much that they could only look upon him in tears, hoping he might stay longer. He did. The Savior of the world, Creator of the heavens and earth, remained with them because, we believe, he loved the people so much that he would not deny their longing. He called for them to bring their sick and afflicted, their dumb and blind to him, and he healed each of them. They all worshipped him, kissing and bathing his feet in their tears (see 17:1–10).

In that context of teaching and training, and then loving and healing, Jesus called for the children to gather around him. He commanded the adults to kneel down, and he began to pray. At first he groaned and admitted to the Father his sorrow and concern for the house of Israel. He then knelt and prayed with such exalted communication that words could not describe either what the people saw and heard or the joy they experienced in participating with him. At the conclusion of his prayer he arose, but the people's joy was so great that they apparently could not arise, and he declared that his joy was now full because of their faith (see 17:11–20). He was so touched that he wept, . . . and he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them. And when he had done this he wept again; and he spake unto the multitude, and said unto them: Behold your little ones. And as they looked to behold they cast their eyes towards heaven, and they saw the heavens open, and they saw angels descending out of heaven.
as it were in the midst of fire; and they came down and encircled those little ones about, and they were encircled about with fire; and the angels did minister unto them. (3 Nephi 17:21–24)

We will return to this supernal event later for more analysis, but let us now finish the narrative in which the little children were involved. Mormon tells us that

the Lord truly did teach the people, for the space of three days; and after that he did show himself unto them oft, and did break bread oft, and bless it, and give it unto them. And it came to pass that he did teach and minister unto the children of the multitude of whom hath been spoken, and he did loose their tongues, and they did speak unto their fathers great and marvelous things, even greater than he had revealed unto the people; and he loosed their tongues that they could utter. And it came to pass that after he had ascended into heaven—the second time that he showed himself unto them, and had gone unto the Father, after having healed all their sick, and their lame, and opened the eyes of their blind and unstopped the ears of the deaf, and even had done all manner of cures among them, and raised a man from the dead, and had shown forth his power unto them, and had ascended unto the Father—Behold, it came to pass on the morrow that the multitude gathered themselves together, and they both saw and heard these children; yea, even babes did open their mouths and utter marvelous things; and the things which they did utter were forbidden that there should not any man write them. (3 Nephi 26:13–16)

In an initial reading, Christ's involvement with the children on the first day would appear to be a late change of plan, leading eventually to a natural unfolding of his love for the people and their “little ones.” Further examination, however, suggests that his loving, blessing, and teaching the children must have been an integral part of his mission to people in the New World, a sacred element that touches the hearts of those who read of it even today. Attempting to “liken all scriptures unto us . . . for our profit and learning” (1 Nephi 19:23), we now consider the possible purposes of his three-day ministry from the points of view of the children themselves, the parents and other adults, the disciples, and the students of the record.

The Children

First, the simplest response to the question of the reason for Jesus's attention to the children is that he loved them and desired to heal them. Perhaps Jesus's loving reciprocation of the longing that he felt from his hearers was to turn and bless those most vulnerable—the sick and afflicted, and the children. Those innocents had lived through the trauma of the cataclysmic events marking Christ's crucifixion, terrifying in and of themselves, from which their parents could do little to protect them and for which the children had no shade of responsibility or understanding. Children could not have been among those crying out, “O that we had repented before this great and terrible day, and
then would our brethren have been spared, and they would not have been burned in that great city Zarahemla” (8:24). They nevertheless experienced the cataclysm, followed by three days of utter darkness attended by “great mourning and howling and weeping among all the people continually” (8:23).

We need not dwell on the awesome destruction witnessed by all those who survived the maelstrom. They would have observed that the whole face of the land was deformed (see 8:17), and if they had not seen it themselves firsthand, they would have heard their parents describe the loss of life in so many cities. From a mental health consideration, these children—and their parents—were likely to have been a wounded population, now experiencing difficulties associated with post-traumatic stress disorder: depression, feelings of numbness to the environment, and, alternately, hypervigilance to sounds, smells, or sights associated with the disaster, inability to sleep restfully, and so on. Although the Savior’s appearance among the people may not have occurred for some months after the destruction (compare 8:5 and 10:18), the nature of post-traumatic stress is such that some of the symptoms would be increasing in debilitating effect rather than abating. There, in what we suppose still must have been the beautiful and calming temple setting of Bountiful, they “were showing one to another the great and marvelous change which had taken place” (11:1) when the Savior came, he who is the balm of Gilead. He blessed and healed each of them one by one. How better might he have responded to the longing of his hearers than to comfort, bless, and heal their children of both the physical and emotional traumas they had experienced?

Inasmuch as Jesus was at first so troubled by the wickedness of the house of Israel, would it be presumptuous to suggest that inviting little children to gather around him was a source of comfort to him as well, somewhat like the solace he sought in the presence of Mary and Martha? (see Luke 10:38–42; John 12:1–3). Little children are a delight to be with, and he who had “not where to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20) may have turned to them out of his own joy in their company.

Hugh W. Nibley suggested a profound purpose in the Savior’s gathering the children around him: his prayer for them was, in essence, a prayer circle.

Having iterated three times that no one can draw near unto the Lord except as a little child, perhaps he drew the children around him for his prayer as a visual demonstration of this sacred practice. The effect of the prayer was marvelous, too wondrous to describe. Similarly, John W. Welch posits that this “Sermon at the Temple” was closely related to the temple ordinances themselves. He suggests that when the Savior said, “Behold your little ones,” these children were now more truly their parents’ little ones than ever before, sealed to them as eternal families.

The Savior’s previous demonstrations of love for little children in the Holy Land may serve as a useful context here. Mark recorded that when some people (we assume mothers) brought their children to Jesus so he could touch them, the disciples rebuked those people (see Mark 10:13). One biblical commentator, Vincent Rossi, suggests that the disciples would certainly have thought they were helping Jesus. There was always a crowd around him, and perhaps the disciples thought themselves responsible to protect him from the press of people. Quite naturally then, the disciples must have felt...
that the children would be a hindrance to the work of their Master.

Jesus was “much displeased.” He rebuked the disciples, saying, “Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:14). He wanted the little children to come to him, and he apparently wanted the disciples to know how essential children are in—and to—the kingdom of God. The Psalmist asserts that children are a fundamental source of happiness to righteous parents:

Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate. (Psalm 127:3–5)

Moreover, children are “the rising generation” (Mosiah 26:1) upon whom the future of the kingdom depends. Early in 3 Nephi, the writer laments:

And there was also a cause of much sorrow among the Lamanites; for behold, they had many children who did grow up and began to wax strong in years, that they became for themselves, and were led away by some who were Zoramites, by their lyings and their flattering words, to join those Gadianton robbers. And thus were the Lamanites afflicted also, and began to decrease as to their faith and righteousness, because of the wickedness of the rising generation. (3 Nephi 1:29–30)

According to Mark’s account, the Savior did more than just touch the children; “he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them” (Mark 10:16). Children have a deep need to know they are loved. Those children knew that they were loved by Jesus Christ.

Children certainly were important recipients of the Savior’s teaching. On the second day of his ministry among the Nephites, Jesus “did teach and minister unto the children of the multitude” (3 Nephi 26:14). While we understand that they were whole and incapable of committing sin, as are all children before the age of accountability (see Moroni 8:8–12), they were capable of growing in faith and understanding to a degree that we may not recognize. These children were to become the second generation of the Zion people that the Savior was forming; as such, their preparation was vital. The Savior’s actions in loving, blessing, and instructing them again suggests that his loving focus on little children was an integral part of his mission to his sheep in the New World.

Indeed, the Savior’s teaching of the children was so effective that they served as teachers of the adults, those of the first generation. Having their tongues loosened by Jesus, these children “did speak unto their fathers great and marvelous things, even greater than he [the Savior] had revealed unto the people” (3 Nephi 26:14). The next day the multitude gathered and were pupils even to babes who taught such marvelous things that the adults were forbidden to write them (see 26:16).

Other scripture suggests that this event was not the first time that children taught adults such marvelous things, nor will it be the last. Note Alma’s comment to the poor Zoramites: “And now, he imparteth his word by angels unto men, yea, not only men but women also. Now this is not all; little
children do have words given unto them many times, which confound the wise and the learned” (Alma 32: 23). Joseph Smith, unfolding the doctrine of the salvation of the dead, similarly declared: “And not only this, but those things which never have been revealed from the foundation of the world, but have been kept hid from the wise and prudent, shall be revealed unto babes and sucklings in this, the dispensation of the fulness of times” (Doctrine and Covenants 128:18).

Scripture, as well as modern commentary, suggests that the characteristics of these and other little children made them apt pupils. After all, of such is the kingdom of God. Biblical commentator Hans Urs von Balthasar, writing about Jesus’s praise of children, suggested that children are more open to any possibility implanted by adults whom they trust and are more willing than at any other age to do only that which is the will of the beloved adult. Therein, he proposed, lies the affinity of the child toward its parents and, in a reflected way, the Heavenly Father. Each of us as adults, he suggests, “thick with adulthood and maturity,” must be led back to that innocent, unquestioning obedience that would make us apt pupils for heavenly instruction.

In Matthew 21, following Jesus’s cleansing of the temple and then healing of the lame and blind, the children recognized him for who he was, the Son of David. Judith Gundry-Volf has commented that the scene was ironic. Of all people, the learned scribes who had spent years studying should have recognized the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies. Yet they not only denied him, but they were incensed by the children’s acclamations of the Savior. Gundry-Volf rightly asserts that the children knew him not of themselves but of God. Indeed, earlier in Matthew, Jesus explicitly thanked the Father for the revelation of his divine identity to “babes,” meaning both children and those with unsophisticated but open minds (see Matthew 11:25). President Thomas S. Monson similarly spoke of the prescience of children: “In our daily experiences with children, we discover they are most perceptive and often utter profound truths. . . . Children seem to be endowed with abiding faith in their Heavenly Father and his capacity and desire to answer their sweet prayers.”

We recall that King Benjamin’s marvelous discourse at the close of his life was so effective for the multitude that, as a community of Saints, they were given a new name, “the children of Christ” (see Mosiah 5:7). They had, indeed, each become “as a little child.” We note that every one of those present was converted except the little children who had “not been taught concerning these things,” presumably because they were too young to understand Benjamin’s message (Mosiah 2:34; see 6:2). Sadly, this exception can be seen as foreshadowing what can happen when children, for whatever reason, are not included as a focus of gospel teaching:

Now it came to pass that there were many of the rising generation that could not understand the words of king Benjamin, being little children at the time he spake unto his people; and they did not believe the tradition of their fathers. They did not believe what had been said concerning the resurrection of the dead, neither did they believe concerning the coming of Christ. And now because of their unbelief they could not understand the word of God; and their hearts were hardened. And they would not be baptized; neither would they join the church. And they were a separate people as to their faith, and remained so ever after, even in their carnal and sinful state; for they would not call upon the Lord their God. (Mosiah 26:1–4)

What went wrong? How could those children have failed to gain a testimony of the gospel similar to that of their deeply committed parents? We may never know, of course, but it is possible that the children were overlooked and not taught the gospel even after they were old enough to understand. Perhaps their parents were so preoccupied with other concerns that they solipsistically assumed their children believed as they did, felt the same joy and reverence about the doctrines as they did. Writing of his concern for the spread of atheism in South Africa, religious writer A. O. Nkwoka wrote that Jesus’s blessing of the children in the Bible “lays an irresistible incumbency on the [Christian] Church. . . . God’s and Jesus’ predilection for little children calls on us to have a very committed concern for their place in the community. . . . The atheistic catastrophe befalling the Church today is traceable to her neglect of children. . . . The best provision is a kind of keep-them-from-disturbing-us Sunday School.”


Prophets and leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have similarly written of the centrality of children as recipients of the Savior’s words. Speaking of Christ’s example in 3 Nephi, President Spencer W. Kimball urged church members to follow Christ in reaching out to children: “He loved them; He took them in His arms and blessed them. Children today need to be taught as Jesus taught—with love, understanding, compassion, and patience. No effort is too great; no labor more worthwhile.”

And former Primary general president Michaelene P. Grassli, recounting the Savior’s appearance to the people as recorded in 3 Nephi, observed: “Because of miraculous instructions, blessings, and attention they and their children received, righteousness was perpetuated by their children’s children for many generations. Let us not underestimate the capacity and potential power of today’s children to perpetuate righteousness. No group of people in the Church is as receptive to the truth, both in efficiency of learning and with the greatest degree of retention.”

Parents and Others Responsible for Children

The message for parents and other adults to be taken from Jesus’s attention to children must primarily come from his example. We are not given specifically what he taught the children. As mentioned earlier, it is also true that the influence of Jesus’s blessing and teaching was so purifying that he could then use them as instruments to teach their parents: “They did speak unto their fathers great and marvelous things, even greater than [Jesus] had revealed unto the people; and he loosed their tongues that they could utter” (3 Nephi 26:14). And on the third day, “even babes did open their mouths and utter marvelous things; and the things which they did utter were forbidden that there should not any man write them” (v. 16).

While we do not learn what the children may have taught the adults when their tongues were loosened, the parents could not have escaped noticing how precious the children were to Jesus or how much these children needed to be taken into account. It would have been difficult indeed for adults to ever overlook these children, having been witnesses of the events of those three days. Even if only offered a brief glimpse, Jesus’s hearers were privileged to see how children should be prized and instructed.

Moreover, to observe Jesus’s teaching and then to be taught by children may have focused the parents’ attention on the qualities of the children that made them such ready pupils. Their unabashed openness, tenderness, and desire to please Jesus were tangible models to emulate. The adults could see what it looked like to become, as mentioned earlier, “as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him” (Mosiah 3:19). S. Kent Brown has noted the significance of the concentric circles of those surrounding Christ during his prayer and ministrations to the children. Brown’s query is this:

If we understand that the Risen Jesus was the most holy Person in this setting, and that holiness somehow diminishes as one moves away from the Savior, then the children sat in the next most holy place, namely, next to Him. Next to them were the angels who “did minister unto [the children]” (3 Nephi 17:24). Beyond them was the celestial fire; beyond the fire, the adults. Was there not a visual message to the adults about the special status of children in Jesus’ eyes? Is there not a message for us?

Surely some of the lessons for the adults had to do with the place of children and other vulnerable members of the community in the minds and hearts of the society. While we have no record that speaks to the treatment of children (or of women and disabled persons) at that time, we recall that the entire colony had been, until the destruction, part of a wicked society. It may have been that the stain of evil in the community had affected even the righteous to some degree. Peter spoke of such contamination upon Lot and his family:

For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; . . . and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; and delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds). (2 Peter 2:4, 6–8; emphasis added)
One of the oft-demonstrated symptoms of the great canker of pride creeping in among the Saints of the Book of Mormon was the stratification of society and the haughty justifications for treating people as “less than.” Jacob put it succinctly: “Woe unto the rich, who are rich as to the things of the world. For because they are rich they despise the poor, and they persecute the meek, and their hearts are upon their treasures; wherefore, their treasure is their god. And behold, their treasure shall perish with them also” (2 Nephi 9:30). In similar fashion the Zoramites deluded themselves, thanking God that they and not others were the chosen and holy ones, and with that philosophy they justified the exclusion of the poorer class from worshipping in the very synagogues that the poor had helped build (see Alma 31:17–18; 32:5).

In the Holy Land, Jesus’s example of honoring children, attending to and nurturing them, may have been in contrast to his society. Allan Boesak noted that in Jesus’s time children were relatively unimportant; they were the little people who were not taken notice of until they could begin to become learned. According to rabbinical views, righteousness was highly correlated with learning. It is true that siring and bearing children was seen as a divine gift and a source of great joy (see Psalm 127:3–5), while to be childless was a source of shame, as we learn from the intense rivalry between the sisters Leah and Rachel in Genesis 29–30 regarding the blessings of bearing children. We presume that Jews did not participate in the harsh practices of abortion or exposure of newborns to the elements—practices common in the Graeco-Roman culture. However, historians are agreed that children in ancient Israel “occupied the lowest rung in the social ladder, and caring for children was a low status activity.” The Savior, a man among male disciples, took little children into his arms to bless them. By his example, he taught the centrality of children in the ministry of those who would be leaders.

Perhaps the place of vulnerable people—widows, orphans, the aged and infirm—is a benchmark of the righteousness and refinement of any culture. Nearly 200 years in the Nephite colony could not have passed without such common social realities and their attendant challenges for society at large. Adversities did not disappear. Yet “there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people. And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier

Christ Healer, by Derek Hegsted
people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God” (4 Nephi 1:15–16).

We contrast this image of a joyous and peaceable people with the fear, horror, and rage in the hearts of their descendants only 200 years later (about 400 years after Jesus’s ministry) because of gross wickedness (see Moroni 9:8–12). In their consuming hatred, these descendants harbored a thirst for revenge that blotted out any feeling for those who were innocent. Women and children were overlooked as people and had become only objects by which to satisfy one army’s desire to wreak vengeance upon its enemy.

The Savior’s example as well as his teachings were indeed powerful. His mission to the people of the Americas prepared them for the life they were to live, provided organizational structure, and positioned them for the whisperings of the Spirit, which guided them for many years. Certainly the proper treatment of children was an important ingredient for keeping the Spirit in their midst.

The Disciples

From the outset of his sojourn, Christ demonstrated the order and structure of the church, devoting considerable time to training the 12 disciples (see 3 Nephi 11). He first called Nephi and then 11 others, giving them power to baptize and instructing them in the process. Like the Sermon on the Mount, part of his address was specific to the disciples. In instituting the ordinance of the sacrament, Christ instructed his disciples to partake first and then give to the multitude. Thus the people were instructed by example that the disciples were Christ’s representatives and would serve them as he would have done. The disciples were to become examples to emulate.

Like their Old World counterparts, the apostles, the Nephite disciples had much to learn. There is no evidence, however, that they experienced the same struggle against pride in seeking positions of importance that occasioned the Savior’s rebuke in Matthew 18, where he used a child to demonstrate the qualities he sought in one who would be a servant of all. The New World disciples paid close at-
Following his example, we must not overlook the children among us. Especially as parents and as teachers or leaders of children in our church assignments, we must gather our little ones around us to pray with them and for them. We must recognize and respect children as capable learners. And we must recognize that we can learn from children, especially from their childlike qualities.

Let us consider a couple of similar lessons gleaned by modern prophets and leaders of the church. For instance, Elder M. Russell Ballard points to a broader and deeper lesson in the account of Jesus calling upon the multitude to behold their children:

He said to behold them [children, in reference to 3 Nephi 17:23]. To me that means that we should embrace them with our eyes and with our hearts; we should see and appreciate them for who they really are: spirit children of our Heavenly Father, with divine attributes. When we truly behold our little ones, we behold the glory, wonder, and majesty of God, our Eternal Father. . . . They are receptive to the truth because they have no preconceived notions; everything is real to children. . . . Their souls are endowed naturally with divine potential that is infinite and eternal.14

President Boyd K. Packer calls each of us to ponder the events of those few days:

This is the Church of Jesus Christ. It is His Church. He is our Exemplar, our Redeemer. We are commanded to be ‘even as He is.’ He was a teacher of children. He commanded His disciples at Jerusalem to ‘suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.’ In the account of the Savior’s ministry among the Nephites, we can see deeper into His soul perhaps than at any other place.15

In his New World ministry, the Master Teacher offered impressive object lessons that have not lost their force and applicability despite the distance of centuries. As we study and ponder the magnificent events of those few days, we too become partakers of the lessons that he intended for all his followers to understand regarding the place of children in our lives and in his church.
The daily experiences and socio-cultural realities of Book of Mormon peoples stand largely beyond our grasp. Few details besides those associated with important political, military, and religious events, rate even a passing notice in the sacred history. However, by applying norms of human social behavior to information preserved in the text, we can sketch a fuller picture of these peoples. A case in point is the Zoramites, a group that withdrew from the larger Nephite-Mulekite culture and, in time, came to oppose it with ferocious energy.

We first encounter the Zoramites when we learn that after being struck deaf and dumb, the antichrist Korihor sought refuge among them in Antionum. Hugh W. Nibley explained that Korihor “sought out a community of certain dissenters who were as proud and independent as himself.” But instead of finding safety, Korihor was “run upon and trodden down, even until he was dead” (Alma 30:59). In noting this, Mormon discloses that the Zoramites had “separated themselves from the Nephites” and were “led by a man whose name was Zoram” (Alma 30:59).

Time of the Zoramite Separation

We do not know exactly when the Zoramites separated from Nephite culture, only that Alma began his efforts to reclaim them in about 74 BC. By this time the Zoramites had built homes and synagogues and established themselves in Antionum. We do know that not too much time had elapsed since their separation because the people that Alma encountered in Antionum were of the same generation that left Zarahemla. Amulek’s words to the Zoramites substantiate this: “I think that it is impossible that ye should be ignorant of the things which have been spoken concerning the coming of Christ, who is taught by us to be the Son of God; yea, I know that these things were taught unto you bountifully before your dissension from among us”
(Alma 34:2; see 31:8–9). Amulek says that those in his audience, not their fathers or grandfathers, had been taught and then had dissented.

Amulek’s claim that the word had been taught to the Zoramites “bountifully” may indicate that they were still in Zarahemla or its environs during the time of the extensive missionary labors that took place there in the seventh year of the reign of the judges (ca. 85 B.C.). During that time 3,500 people joined the church (see Alma 4:5). But in the following year “there began to be great contentions among the people of the church; yea, there were envyings, and strife, and malice, and persecutions, and pride, even to exceed the pride of those who did not belong to the church of God. . . . And the wickedness of the church was a great stumbling-block to those who did not belong to the church; and thus the church began to fail in its progress” (Alma 4:9–10).

Mormon goes on to explain that Alma saw “great inequality among the people” in the land of Zarahemla (Alma 4:12), a troubling setback that prompted him to give up the judgment seat and devote himself entirely to preaching. As we will see, this inequality is the most likely cause of the Zoramite dissension. If so, the oppressed Zoramites probably would have left Zarahemla in the eighth or ninth year of the reign of the judges, when inequality and discrimination became significant problems.

The Question of Zoramite Origins

It is unclear whether or not the Zoramites were an ethnic element within the Nephite culture that traced its lineage back to the original Zoram, the servant of Laban. Even though the Book of Mormon usually delineates people as being either Nephites or Lamanites, both designations include additional groups: “The people which were not Lamanites were Nephites; nevertheless, they were called Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites” (Jacob 1:13).

It is possible to adduce evidence to support either side of the Zoramite origins question. Before he began to teach the Zoramites, Alma prayed, “Behold, O Lord, their souls are precious, and many of them are our brethren” (Alma 31:35). In what sense is the term brethren used here? Alma’s statement could indicate that the Zoramites were not a uniformly ethnic group—that is, they could have been of mixed heritage, with some being Nephites (“brethren”) and some being Mulekites. The statement could also indicate that most were ethnic Zoramites but that some Nephite sympathizers (“brethren”) had dissented along with them. Another possible meaning is that they were all Zoramites by lineage but that some had previously been members of the church and were therefore considered “brethren” while others were not.

It is most probable, however, that the term Zoramite is used as an ethnic designation. For one thing, the Zoramite named Ammoron claims to be a descendant of the original Zoram (see Alma 54:23). It is true that aside from Ammoron (and by extension his brother Amalickiah), no other Book of Mormon personality with lineage through Zoram is noted in the text. And since the leader of the dissident group was named Zoram, it is possible that the people became known as Zoramites when they became his followers. Even so, this founder Zoram could have been an ethnic Zoramite named after his forefather, or he may have adopted the name of his forefather when he attempted to unite the clan members and sympathizers. The most compelling factor in favor of the ethnic origins view, however, is that throughout the Book of Mormon, ethnicity is very important to the people, as we will see later.

A Marginalized People

Another clue that leads us to suspect that the Zoramites were an ethnic group is found in what occurred after they separated from Zarahemla. The practices they adopted are indicative of a marginalized group that separates because of discrimination. In Alma 31:3 we learn that the Zoramites had “gathered themselves together in a land which they called Antionum.” This indicates that rather than being an intact group that moved to a new place, the Zoramites were scattered throughout the land of Zarahemla and for some reason “gathered together” in Antionum.

That they named the place Antionum tells us it was either a new city or an existing city that they came to dominate and then renamed. In either case, they were looking for a new start, a place where they could establish their own rules and regulations. Notably, they did not follow the traditional Nephite practice of naming their city after their leader, Zoram (see Alma 8:7). This is the first in-
dication that they had been discarding Nephite norms and consciously refusing to follow Nephite traditions.

The meaning of the name Antionum is not known, but given the focus that the Zoramite culture placed on wealth and materialism, it is interesting to note that when the Nephite system of exchange was standardized at the beginning of the reign of the judges, one of the gold measures was called an antion (equivalent to three shiblons of silver or to one and one-half measures of grain; see Alma 11:15, 19). While we do not know if there is a direct relationship between the words antion and Antionum, the prospect is intriguing.

Motivation for Separation

In her work *Commitment and Community*, sociologist Rosabeth Moss Kanter explains that separatist groups have traditionally been motivated by religious, politico-economic, or psychosocial reasons. Although Kanter’s study focused on 20th-century American groups that endeavored to establish a utopian or communal society, the traits she identifies apply to any separatist group whether or not it establishes a communal system.

Kanter elaborates on the motivations that prompt groups to separate from a mainstream
culture. She explains that religious separation usually takes place because of “a desire to live according to religious and spiritual values, rejecting the sinfulness of the established order.” Politico-economic separatists are motivated by the “desire to reform society by curing its economic and political ills, rejecting the injustice and inhumanity of the establishment.” The separating party members have usually experienced the injustice themselves and subsequently reject it. Psychosocial groups separate because of “a desire to promote the psychological growth of the individual by putting him into closer touch with his fellows, rejecting the isolation and alienation of the surrounding society.”

Since Mormon’s account of the Zoramites focuses on a report of their religious deviance, it may at first seem that the Zoramites separated for religious reasons. In this case we would expect religious ideas to permeate the culture and the newly established society to be grounded in and centered on regular if not daily religious practices and ideals. This is not the case. The Zoramites met once a week, offered up a rote prayer, and then “returned to their homes, never speaking of their God again until they had assembled themselves together again to the holy stand” (Alma 31:23). In addition, Alma saw that the hearts of the Zoramites were “set upon gold, and upon silver, and upon all manner of fine goods” (Alma 31:24). Yet most dissenting religious groups eschew materialism. This fact, combined with the Zoramites’ limited religious life, suggests that religion was not the main motivation for the Zoramite separation.

There is also little evidence to support a separation due to psychosocial reasons. Psychosocial groups tend to remove themselves so their members can better nurture one another. Their focus is to separate from the predominant, repressive culture in order to build or strengthen the individual. The Zoramites displayed none of these traits. Instead of establishing a more equitable system that focused on nurturing one another, they not only marginalized the poor in their society (see Alma 32:3) but refused to care for others. For example, when the smitten antichrist Korihor sought refuge among them, he found no safety even though he professed a similar belief system, but was run down and killed (see Alma 30). The Zoramites clearly were not people who focused on overcoming the effects of psycho-
others of similar circumstances and banded together to establish a government and economy that favored them. In this case we would expect to find a new society that disavowed the old culture (including its religious and political systems) while disengaging or distancing itself in any way possible in order to create a distinct identity of its own—which is what we find in the account of the Zoramites.

This all brings us back to the point that ethnicity may have been a major reason behind the Zoramites’ marginalization in Nephite society. The population of Zarahemla was largely a mixture of Mulekites and Nephites, with Nephites being a minority (see Mosiah 25:2). The Zoramites would have been a minority even among the Nephites, assuming that the people married chiefly within their respective ethnic groups. In a situation like this, the Zoramites, who traced their lineage from a servant who married one of Ishmael’s daughters, would not have shared the same lineal descent from Lehi that other Nephites did. This may have motivated the Nephites to marginalize the Zoramites, and in turn the more numerous Mulekites could have assumed this attitude when they began to adopt the Nephite culture. That the Mulekites and Nephites maintained their ethnic identities is affirmed by the fact that when Mosiah gathered them together to read them the record of Zeniff, they gathered in two bodies: the people of Zarahemla and the people of Nephi (see Mosiah 25:4). As we have already noted, earlier writers of the Book of Mormon combined smaller ethnic groups when chronicling events (see Jacob 1:13). It is likely that this practice was still occurring so that the gathered Nephites included Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, and Nephites. (see Jacob 1:13). These designations were so important that hundreds of years later the people continued to identify themselves as members of these clans (see 4 Nephi 1:36).

Mormon and his son Moroni stated that they were blood descendants of Nephi (see Mormon 1:5; 8:13), and Mormon further qualified that statement by declaring that he was “a pure descendant of Lehi” (3 Nephi 5:20). Amulek disclosed that he was a direct descendant of Nephi in order to establish his credibility before preaching to the people of Ammonihah (see Alma 10:2–3). Mormon also felt it important to acknowledge that Alma was a direct descendant of Nephi (see Mosiah 17:2). We are reminded in the heading to 3 Nephi that Helaman was a descendant of Nephi. Moreover, when the abandoned children of Amulon and the other priests of Noah wanted to renounce their heritage, “they took upon themselves the name of Nephi, that they might be called the children of Nephi and be numbered among those who were called Nephites” (Mosiah 25:12). These expressions seem to be more than simple declarations of lineage. Being a Nephite, especially through direct lineal descent, obviously placed one in a position of prestige and authority.
The importance of lineage is compounded, as John L. Sorenson points out, by the fact that “the lineage founded by the original Nephi continued to hold the charter and sacred emblems of ruler-ship over all Lehi’s descendants, which is precisely why rivals tried to kill off the line.”

Thus we see that the problem of who has the right to rule is a major source of contention throughout the Book of Mormon. Whenever differences in property, power, and prestige exist, societies become stratified, with the result that the people of low politico-economic standing frequently become marginalized. It is easy to see how, in a society that prized heritage, the descendants of a servant who was not a member of the founding family could have been discriminated against and how a charismatic leader like the later Zoram could have used this inequity to galvanize those people and entice them to dissent.

While acknowledging that the exact descent of the Zoramites is unclear, Sorenson posits that “a reason for their split with the Nephites was evidently recollection of what had happened to their founding ancestor: Ammoron, dissenter from the Nephites and king of the Lamanites in the first century BC, recalled: ‘I am . . . a descendant of Zoram, whom your fathers pressed and brought out of Jerusalem’ (Alma 54:23).” This statement indicates there was a tradition among the people that Zoram had been forced to accompany Nephi. Such a tradition could have been one of the rallying cries Zoram used to recruit his following.

**Distancing from Nephite Norms**

By noticing the way the Zoramites established their new culture, we find more clues indicating that the Zoramites were a marginalized group seeking to establish a society where they were favored. As the sociologist Christian Smith points out, “Groups construct their collective identities primarily by marking socially constructed symbolic boundaries that create distinction between themselves and others.” In forming their society, the Zoramites constructed distinctions that were built not on new ideals but on a foundation of anything anti-Nephite. In other words, their primary motivation seems to have centered on disallowing anything distinctively Nephite rather than on establishing something idealistic.

Even the Zoramites’ perversion of religious practices demonstrated an attempt to place themselves in a polarized position to the Nephites. This perversion was so thorough that Alma and his brethren were astonished upon seeing it. The observation that these people did “worship after a manner which Alma and his brethren had never beheld” (Alma 31:12) indicates that the Zoramites did not simply elaborate on Mulekite practices or revive differing religious traditions they were aware of from the past. Instead they invented new practices, and most of this inventing seems to have been an attempt to do what would most distinguish them from the Nephites or establish themselves as different and thus “better” than the Nephites.

Significantly, they no longer followed the law of Moses, nor did they believe in Jesus Christ. They had...
priests (see Alma 32:5), but we know nothing about how those priests functioned except that they had jurisdiction over the synagogues to the extent that they could control who worshipped and who did not. Instead of engaging in communal practices whereby priests officiated in behalf of a congregation worshipping together, the Zoramites apparently adopted an individualized mode of worship. One at a time the elite, arrayed in their “costly apparel, and their ringlets, and their bracelets, and their ornaments of gold, and all their precious things which they are ornamented with” (Alma 31:28), climbed to the top of their prayer tower (the Rameumptom), lifted their hands toward heaven, and loudly prayed. Of course, only the rich and well-costumed could stand on the platform and worship, thereby maintaining their image. We suspect that the poor were an embarrassment because they could not acceptably demonstrate supposed superiority to the Nephites.

Once atop the Rameumptom, each person repeated the same rote prayer:

Holy, holy God; we believe that thou art God, and we believe that thou art holy, and that thou wast a spirit, and that thou art a spirit, and that thou wilt be a spirit forever. Holy God, we believe that thou hast separated us from our brethren; and we do not believe in the tradition of our brethren, which was handed down to them by the childishness of their fathers; but we believe that thou hast elected us to be thy holy children; and also thou hast made it known unto us that there shall be no Christ. But thou art the same yesterday, today, and forever; and thou hast elected us to be thy holy children; and also thou hast made it known unto us that there shall be no Christ. But thou art the same yesterday, today, and forever; and thou hast elected us that we shall be saved, whilst all around us are elected to be cast by thy wrath down to hell; for the which holiness, O God, we thank thee; and 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, which doth lead their hearts to wander far from thee, our God. And again we thank thee, O God, that we are a chosen and a holy people. (Alma 31:15–18)

More than words of praising God, these are anti-Nephite sentiments uttered in the form of a prayer. The expressions center on the “foolish” Nephites and claim that the Nephite traditions are corrupt, that the Nephite beliefs are childish, that the Zoramites rather than the Nephites are the chosen people, and that the Nephites will be cast down to hell. The people then thank their god for electing them over the Nephites.

As Kanter points out, separatist groups use such ideology to attach people to the new group while detaching them from the old group. However, the new elite excluded the lower classes, who consequently did not achieve a strong emotional attachment to the new culture. Not surprisingly, when Alma and his brethren preached the gospel to this poor and oppressed class, they were not as hardened against the Nephites or as committed to the new religion as the elite were.

Also in counterpoint, the Nephite religion observed the law of Moses, which under prophetic interpretation pointed to the coming of Jesus Christ, while the Zoramite religion unabashedly eliminated Christ. The religion of the Nephites encouraged people to pray anywhere and about all things that concerned them, a teaching that Amulek stressed to the Zoramites (see Alma 34:18–25), who offered a rote prayer only in their synagogue and only on the appointed day for worship (see Alma 31:14–23). The Nephite religion rejected idol worship, but the Zoramites reportedly worshipped dumb idols (see Alma 31:1). The Nephites had temples, sanctuaries, and synagogues built after the manner of the Jews (see Alma 16:13), but there is no mention of temples or sanctuaries among the Zoramites. The defining feature of their synagogues was the Rameumptom, the holy stand in the center of the synagogue with a platform high above the heads of the other worshippers (see Alma 31:13–14).

Such points of differentiation within the religion were a way for the Zoramites to distance themselves from the prevailing Nephite religion and culture. This distancing is typical of groups who become disaffected because of marginalization. This being the case, we would expect to find detaching mechanisms evident in many aspects of their culture besides religion. And in fact the Zoramite practice of gathering “themselves together on one day of the week, which day they did call the day of the Lord” (Alma 31:12), is one such detaching mechanism: the restructuring of time. Mormon’s wording indicates they had purposely chosen a day for their Sabbath that was different from the Nephite Sabbath (see Alma 31:12).

Such restructuring of time is evident in separatist groups that Kanter studied. For example, Synanon, a group that began as a drug-rehabilitation
center and later became a religious commune in Tomales Bay, California, carried out its work and self-improvement routines based on a 28-day cycle consisting of what they called “cubic days.” Twin Oaks, a utopian community located in rural Virginia, sets its own community time and begins the week on Friday. The now-disbanded Baha' i commune of Cedar Grove, New Mexico, divided time into months comprising 19 days. Members of Amish religious districts throughout the United States meet for worship services every other Sunday in an effort to establish a pace of life that is distinctly slower than the world around them.

Language may have been another cultural property the Zoramites sought to alter. They seem to have adopted or coined words that were not common among the Nephites. This is demonstrated by the fact that the word Rameumptom needed to be interpreted for readers (see Alma 31:21). Citing this example, Nibley suggested that the Zoramites had begun to develop “their own strange dialect,” another distancing mechanism.

Continued Stratification

Sociologist James S. Coleman has observed that social classes tend to develop and maintain distinctive cultures typically consisting of styles of speech, etiquette, body language, dress, information, interests, and tastes. Separatist groups alter some or all of those features as they detach from the prevailing culture and establish themselves as a new culture. For example, some separatist groups adopt unisex dress standards hoping to end gender stratification, and many others rotate daily tasks and jobs so that no person becomes associated with a position that could foster perceptions or behavior reflective of prestige or inferiority. Other groups forbid some forms of stratification while consciously maintaining others they deem necessary to preserve their way of life. The Amish fit that last category; they maintain a distinct stratification based on age and gender even though they have eschewed stratification arising from such things as property, dress, or governing power outside the family.

Other groups that rebel against the perceived inequity of existing norms establish a new order only to change the criteria for stratification. The leaders of such groups take the position of the elite while most of their followers remain in the lower-class positions. Communism is an example. Under Communist rule the means of production are removed from the bourgeoisie, eliminating them from the position of privileged class. However, a privileged class and stratification within the society still exists. The new elite consists of members of the party and, more significantly, leaders of the party.

This is essentially what happened among the Zoramites. Instead of doing away with political and economic inequality, they established an elite class based on wealth. The new elite maintained a society built on discrimination, with the pariahs being the poor Zoramites instead of a separate ethnic group. The people who found themselves doomed to lower-class status in the new land were laborers. Amulek’s counsel to them to pray over their crops and flocks (see Alma 34:24–25) indicates they were farmers and shepherds—possibly the ones who grew the foodstuffs and provided meat for the wealthy. They built the synagogues used by the elite (see Alma 32:5), and they probably labored for the
wealthy in other ways as well. Thus the elite were understandably angry with the missionaries and their new converts, since the resulting change in affairs, especially once the poor were cast out of the land, meant that the elite no longer had a lower class to serve them and provide for their needs (see Alma 35).

Population of Antionum

Although the size of the population in Antionum went unrecorded, the narrative provides some clues about its size. We learn, for example, that more than one synagogue served the city, and also that Alma took seven people with him to preach there: his sons Shiblon and Corianton; his former missionary companion, Amulek; the converted lawyer, Zeezrom; and Mosiah’s sons Ammon, Aaron, and Omner. (Except for Alma’s sons and Amulek, these missionaries had at one time been disaffected with the church. Perhaps Alma chose them because they, like himself, could relate to a disaffected people.) Once in Antionum, the missionaries separated and went different ways to preach. The multiple synagogues and the number of missionaries that Alma took with him indicate that the population of Antionum was not small.

Another defining feature of this population was that the people maintained an open society. Unlike the secretive and closed Gadianton society, the Zoramites allowed Alma and the other missionaries to live among them and to preach in their synagogues.

Despite the Zoramites’ hatred toward them, demonstrated to its fullest extent in the binding and stoning of Shiblon (see Alma 38:4), they preached. We are also told that Corianton became proud and caught up in his own wisdom and that he abandoned the work to chase after a harlot (see Alma 39:3). Corianton’s actions aggravated the ill feelings that the Zoramites had for the Nephites and made the work much more difficult for the missionaries (see Alma 39:11), but despite all this they taught without formal restrictions or prohibitions.

The Missionary Message

The record preserves details of Alma and Amulek’s preaching, including doctrines taught. Despite initial setbacks, these doctrines were received by the lower classes, who had not become part of the mainstream Zoramite culture. Because the Zoramites had once known the doctrines of the gospel, Alma did not begin by teaching them basic principles, but instead encouraged them to put what they knew into practice—to act upon the “seed,” or word of God, that they already possessed (see Alma 32). In developing his metaphor of the seed, Alma placed great emphasis on patience and diligence (see Alma 32:41–43), virtues they apparently had neglected before their dissent, resulting in failure to nurture the word. Accordingly, Alma promised that if this time they would nurture the word in patience and diligence, they would “hunger not, neither . . . thirst” (Alma 32:42). In other words, they would no longer feel the discontent that had driven them from their mother culture and the teachings of the gospel.

Alma then recalled the words of three prophets who had also experienced oppression and with whom these people were familiar: Zenos, Zenock, and Moses. Alma quoted Zenos’s prayer: “Thou hast also heard me when I have been cast out and have been despised by mine enemies” (Alma 33:10). From Zenock he quoted, “Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because they will not understand thy mercies which thou hast bestowed upon them because of thy Son” (Alma 33:16). Alma reminded them that for delivering such a message, the people had cast Zenock out of their midst and stoned him. Alma also recalled the promise of healing from the time of Moses—that if the people looked to the brass serpent, they would live. But many of the Israelites who had been slaves—the lowest of social classes in Egypt—refused to look. Each of these accounts reinforced the testimony that despite the stratification that existed in Nephite society, despite the unfair circumstances and bitter injustices, if they would look to Jesus Christ he would heal them and help them.

Throughout their preaching, both Alma and Amulek demonstrated sympathy for the oppressed Zoramites but never encouraged them to run away or withdraw. The better course was to endure and to turn to Jesus Christ for help. Why did Alma not encourage the converted Zoramites to leave Antionum? We cannot be sure, but we do know that while Alma’s primary motivation in reclaiming the Zoramites was his sorrow at their iniquity (see Alma 31:2), his concern also included the fear of an
alliance between the Zoramites and the Lamanites (see Alma 31:4). Since the missionaries came to Antionum in part because they hoped to prevent such an alliance, they may have known that if the poor withdrew from the Zoramite social system, it could lead to a confederacy between the elite Zoramites and Lamanites. On the other hand, Alma may not have realized what the conversion of the poor class would do to the culture, and he may have encouraged the poor to remain because he thought they would be a good influence on the elite and an aid in further missionary efforts.

Whatever the reason, Alma never suggested that the oppressed Zoramites leave Antionum or rebel against the elite. Instead, he promised that if they would nourish the seed of the gospel, it would grow. “And behold, it will become a tree, springing up in you unto everlasting life. And then may God grant unto you that your burdens may be light, through the joy of his Son. And even all this can ye do if ye will” (Alma 33:23). While this advice was pertinent to their problem of overcoming or enduring the oppression they were experiencing in Antionum, it may have led them to reflect on their situation before they withdrew from Nephite culture. Perhaps Alma’s words caused them to wonder how different their circumstances would have been had they remained in Zarahemla and stayed true to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In answer to a question about whether the Zoramites should believe in one God, Amulek testified that Christ would come and that the law of Moses (which the Zoramites had discarded) was designed to point them to the atonement (see Alma 34:14). After bearing testimony, Amulek concentrated most of his teaching on what the oppressed Zoramites must now do: repent, pray, and care for the needy (see Alma 34:17–28, 33–36).

It is interesting that Amulek instructed the oppressed poor to care for the needy. This seems to be a warning that they should not begin a new community (as was done before) that would merely change who the elite were. Rather, they were to always care for anyone in need, thus countering effects of a stratified society that marginalized segments of the population. Amulek then explained, “If ye do not remember to be charitable, ye are as dross, which the refiners do cast out, (it being of no worth) and is trodden under foot of men” (Alma 34:29).

Amulek admonished the people to “come forth and harden not your hearts any longer” (Alma 34:31). This reiterates the major theme of the missionary message—that despite offenses, persecution, and adversity, what matters most in life is not a person’s station or situation but how a person reacts to it. The vital thing is to repent because “this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God” (Alma 34:32). According to Amulek, the Zoramite poor could not afford to wait until they were free or wealthy or part of the elite to do what is good; rather, they needed to soften their hearts, obey the commandments regardless of their circumstance in life, and concentrate on the things of God now.

Amulek then closed with an admonition similar to Alma’s. Rather than urge the people to leave Antionum or to rebel against the elite, Amulek told them to be patient and “bear with all manner of afflictions; that ye do not revile against those who do cast you out because of your exceeding poverty, lest ye become sinners like unto them; but that ye have patience, and bear with those afflictions, with a firm hope that ye shall one day rest from all your afflictions” (Alma 34:40–41).

After preaching, Alma and Amulek and the other missionaries traveled to Jershon, where the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi lived. Their departure should have made the ruling Zoramites happy: the offensive missionaries were gone. However, the “more popular part of the Zoramites” were angry because the missionaries’ message “did destroy their craft” (Alma 35:3). This may indicate that the Zoramite belief system was somehow holding the poor in check, that the teachings of Jesus Christ convinced the oppressed Zoramites of the error of the belief system, and that they were no longer willing to buy into the system and continue to serve the elite as they had done. In their anger the ruling Zoramites identified those who believed the missionaries and banished them from Antionum.

Once cast out, the displaced Zoramites followed the missionaries to Jershon. When the people in Jershon received the fugitives, the Zoramites grew angrier.

The Ruling Zoramites Retaliate

As we have seen, the Zoramite society had consciously and purposely constructed social classes. Sociologists Michael L. Schwalbe and Douglas Mason-Schrock call this process of constructing
social class identity “subcultural identity work,” and they posit that such social construction consists of four elements: (1) creating social representations, (2) coding or rule making that creates the identity, (3) affirming or enacting and validating identity claims, and (4) policing or protecting and enforcing the identity code.20

The Zoramites had defined a society in which the position of the upper classes was dependent upon having a lower class to rule over. Thus the preaching of the Nephite missionaries not only altered the Zoramites’ craft and economic situation, it challenged their carefully constructed identity. Their code had been broken, and this necessitated policing in order to protect the identity of the group. Casting out the believers was an act of both policing and of affirming the ruling class’s position as elites. But instead of solving the problem and returning the society to its norms, that action further disrupted the society and intensified the hatred against the meddlesome Nephites, who were directly responsible for upsetting the social order.

From this point on, the Zoramites who had not reconverted grew increasingly wicked. Their hatred was fueled by a perception that the Nephite missionaries destroyed their comfortable way of life. The fact that the poor Zoramites were being sheltered by the people of Jershon became a rallying cry for war. The vindictive Zoramites sought allies among hostile Lamanites and turned their efforts to subjugating the Nephites. It is easy to imagine them saying, “If they had left us alone, we would have left them alone. But they didn’t!”

In the end, the missionaries may have questioned what they had done. They went to Antionum to reclaim the Zoramites, but in the process some of the Zoramites became even more hateful than before and formed an alliance with the hostile Lamanites to wage war against the Nephites. In fact, so intense was the Zoramites’ hatred for the Nephites that the Lamanites later appointed them to be chief captains and leaders of their armies (see Alma 43:44). The very situation the missionaries had hoped to avoid became a reality: the Zoramites and Lamanites joined forces. As feared, this alliance proved disastrous. For many years to come, the Zoramites continued to be a terrible threat to the Nephites—not only because of their extreme hatred but also because the Zoramites knew “the strength of the Nephites, and their places of resort, and the weakest parts of their cities” (Alma 48:5).

Lessons from the Zoramites

While it is impossible to ascertain the historical and sociological dynamics of the Zoramites in full, when we combine the details in the record it becomes apparent that the Zoramites were a people marginalized by the Nephite-Mulekite culture. Among other lessons, their story shows us what can happen when a society is stratified in a way that disadvantages and oppresses the lower class. Such mistreatment apparently caused the Zoramites to leave the church and to withdraw to Antionum, where they attempted to establish their own religion and culture. It follows that the antipathy engendered by the original marginalization intensified when the Nephites challenged the very foundation of the new society by preaching religious doctrines that the Zoramites had already rejected. At this point the apostate Zoramites turned from their attempt to establish a separate culture and began to war against their mother culture. This demonstrates a major Book of Mormon theme: people who at one time have the gospel and then turn from it become the most embittered enemies of the people of the church and of God.

This transition from quiescent dissidents to spiteful, aggressive enemies forms a powerful study of human nature. These sobering realities underscore the importance of prophetic teachings calculated to promote unity, equality, community, and other Zionlike qualities that lead to being one in Christ (see Mosiah 23:7; 4 Nephi 1:17; and Doctrine and Covenants 38:25–27). Seeing the Zoramite narrative in this fuller perspective, we are powerfully reminded of one of the reasons prophets such as Alma have consistently warned, “Will you persist in turning your backs upon the poor, and the needy, and in withholding your substance from them?” (Alma 5:55).
“No Poor Among Them”

Lindon J. Robison

Like a bright ribbon running through the entire Book of Mormon narrative is the promise that “[if] ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper” (e.g., 1 Nephi 2:20; Alma 9:13; 37:13; 50:20; 3 Nephi 5:22) and be “blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual” (Mosiah 2:41; see Jacob 2:19).
The two most important commandments are to love God with all of one’s heart and to love one’s neighbor as oneself (see Matthew 22:37–40). These two commandments are connected. We cannot love God if we hate his children (see 1 John 4:20), nor can we serve others without serving God (see Matthew 25:40; Mosiah 2:17). Furthermore, if we love and serve God and others, we naturally conform to the great encompassing commandment to “be one” with God and one another (Doctrine and Covenants 38:27).

One way that those who love God and others demonstrate their love and “at-one-ment” (the state or condition of being one) and qualify for spiritual and temporal blessings is by imparting of their substance to the poor (see Alma 1:27). When a people become of one heart and mind, there are no poor among them (see Moses 7:18).

One awful alternative to loving God and his children is to love one’s riches more than one’s neighbors. Those who love their riches more than their neighbors invariably separate themselves from both God and others and break the commandment to be one. Symptomatic of this separation is the economic inequality that “exalts” those who love their riches above those with less (see D&C 49:20). The paradox is that a love of riches not only separates neighbors but also makes acquiring more wealth more difficult.

These scriptural signposts—that we reveal our at-one-ment by our care of the poor and signal our love of riches by our separation and economic inequality—are unchanging truths taught in the Book of Mormon. Because of the unchanging nature of these truths, we may use them as modern measures of our current commitment to keep the Lord’s encompassing commandment to be one and of our interest in both temporal and spiritual blessings.

The Commandment to Be One

Christ commanded his people to be one with one another so they could be one with him (see 3 Nephi 12:23–24). The commandment to be one has both spiritual and economic requirements. To be one spiritually requires that we be united in charity (see Moroni 7:44–48), that we cooperate (see 1 Corinthians 12:14–20), that we acquire similar traits (see 3 Nephi 12:48), that we remember one another and keep our covenants (see 1 Nephi 17:40), that we have the same priorities (see Moroni 10:32), that we be set apart from the world with a holy calling (see Alma 13:3), that we be submissive to God’s will (see 1 Nephi 3:7), that we be pure (see D&C 42:22), and that we be complete, or perfect (see 3 Nephi 12:48).

To be one economically requires that we live as economic equals. As a part of the law of consecration, the Lord commanded, “In your temporal things you shall be equal, and this not grudgingly, otherwise the abundance of the manifestations of the Spirit shall be withheld” (D&C 70:14; see 42:30). The Lord also revealed to Joseph Smith that unless the Saints were equal in earthly things, they could not be equal in obtaining heavenly things (see D&C 78:6).
To live as economic equals may be the most difficult form of at-one-ment to achieve. At least we might infer as much after observing the rich ruler fail his final test of discipleship—to give his wealth to the poor (see Luke 18:18–22). In the Book of Mormon, during that singular season when the Lord’s people did achieve perfect at-one-ment, their drift toward separateness was signaled early on by their divisions into economic classes (see 4 Nephi 1:24–26). Because economic at-one-ment is so difficult to achieve, the poor are always with us (see John 12:8; Mosiah 4:16–21).

Speaking in parables, the resurrected Jesus compared our works to the fruit of a tree. He taught that only a good tree produces good fruit: “Wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them” (see 3 Nephi 14:16–20).

The fruit that speaks volumes about our spiritual trees is the care we provide the poor. Those on God’s right hand, those whose works qualified them to enter his kingdom, cared for the poor. They fed the hungry, clothed the naked, gave drink to the thirsty, cared for the sick and imprisoned, and offered shelter to the homeless—all acts intended to share the abundance of this world with those who have little (see Matthew 25:33–37).

In times past, those unwilling to commit to economic equality were disqualified from society with the Saints. Ananias and Sapphira were called upon to consecrate their wealth for the building up of the kingdom of God and for the care of the poor. But they kept back part and lied about their consecration. When Peter asked them to account for their evil act, they gave up the ghost and died (see Acts 5:1–10). So it is that the likelihood of the unredeemed wealthy entering the kingdom of God is about the same as a camel passing through the eye of a needle. It is also unlikely that those who love their riches and hate their neighbors will prosper economically, as the next section explains.

How At-one-ment Contributes to Economic Prosperity

Economists are remarkably agreed on the requirements for attaining economic prosperity. Adam Smith, an 18th-century Scottish moral philosopher, laid the foundation for much of modern economics in his book *The Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776. The book describes three conditions essential for economic prosperity: specialization, trade, and freedom of choice. Interestingly, Smith made these arguments in an attempt to reason with his countrymen against separating from the American colonists in a destructive war that would reduce opportunities for specialization, trade, freedom of choice, and the economic well-being for both peoples.
Specialization. From observing pin makers, Adam Smith learned the benefits of specialization. Whereas one worker could scarcely produce one pin a day, 10 men working together and performing different pin making tasks could produce 48,000 pins a day, Smith reported. Workers can increase their productivity though specialization because their ability to perform the same task improves with practice. Furthermore, as workers repeat their tasks, they often invent tools that increase their productivity. Ralph Waldo Emerson summarized the connection between productivity and specialization with the aphorism “That which we persist in doing becomes easier for us to do; not that the nature of the thing itself is changed, but that our power to do is increased.”

Trade. The first requirement for economic prosperity, specialization, leads naturally to the second requirement, trade (see Mosiah 24:7). If people specialize, they no longer produce all they require for their own maintenance. The need for those things that they no longer produce leads people to trade with others. It was only because pin makers in Adam Smith’s day could trade their pins for bread and butter that they were able to specialize in pin production.

Smith and many economists since have resisted tariffs and other costs that discourage trade because a reduction in trade leads to reduced specialization and productivity. Joseph Smith taught the importance of cooperative activities, including trade and specialization, when he declared, “The greatest temporal and spiritual blessings which always come from faithfulness and concerted effort, never attended individual exertion or enterprise.”

Freedom to choose and responsibility for one’s choices. The most efficient means for organizing the activities of consumers and producers has proven to be free markets. Free markets exist when information about prices and quantities are widely known, when market prices are determined by supply and demand, and when market participants are free to respond to market signals and are responsible for the consequences of their choices.

Rising prices in free markets encourage producers to produce more and consumers to buy less. Falling prices send the opposite signals. These free market signals lead to equilibrium prices that eliminate surpluses or shortages.

The importance of free market messages in organizing production and consumption has convinced many economists and policy makers that any effort to alter market distributions of goods and services will send uncertain signals to producers and consumers. Then, with both producers and consumers misled by muted market signals, inefficiency, illustrated by surpluses or shortages, will follow. This belief often discourages efforts to redistribute wealth from the wealthy to the poor and has led some to conclude that equity and efficiency are incompatible goals.

To the prosperity requirements listed above, the Book of Mormon adds one more. It is a type of at-one-ment characterized by friendly, trusting relations (see Mosiah 24:5–7; Alma 23:18). Trading requires that market participants agree on and keep the rules of the market, assuring that the benefits from trade are realized for both buyers and sellers. In addition, even if we agree on the rules of the market, we are unlikely to trade with those we dislike and distrust. And if hostility or distrust discourages trade, then our opportunities to specialize are also limited and our productivity is decreased.

The Book of Mormon contrasts the economic prosperity of members of the Nephite church with that of those who did not belong to the church. This contrast provides evidence of the economic advantages of loving one another and the economic disadvantages of loving things.
This contrast provides evidence of the economic advantages of loving one another and the economic disadvantages of loving things. In one era, members of the church “did prosper and become far more wealthy than those who did not belong to their church” (Alma 1:31). The reason that those who were not members of the church failed to prosper was their lack of at-one-ment. Instead of serving one another they indulged in “idleness, and in babblings, and in envyings and strife; wearing costly apparel; being lifted up in the pride of their own eyes; persecuting, lying, thieving, robbing, committing whoredoms, and murdering” (Alma 1:32). All of these evil tendencies had the effect of creating a self-interested elite, thereby reducing opportunities to specialize and trade, and increasing economic inequality.

How At-one-ment Contributes to Economic Equality

Economic prosperity depends in large measure on our opportunities and abilities to specialize and trade. These activities in turn require an absence of hostility and a willingness to obey the laws that organize trade and protect our freedom to choose. However, the outcomes of free markets do not necessarily produce economic equality because the talents and resources that enable us to specialize and trade differ from person to person.

Economic equality may be forced on us during periods of pestilence, war, or other natural catastrophes when all become poor, but these conditions are usually temporary in nature. In fact, nonmarket methods to force people to live as economic equals have destroyed incentives to work hard and smart and were unsuccessful in producing economic equality or economic prosperity, the former Soviet Union being one example. As a result, these methods are always resisted and often abandoned. The only successful effort to reduce economic inequality while maintaining economic prosperity appears to be a result of voluntary redistributions that depend on at-one-ment, the same characteristic required for economic prosperity.

The Book of Mormon describes two stages of at-one-ment that lead to a general economic equality. These two stages are complete at-one-ment and a lesser form of at-one-ment known as equality before the law.

Complete at-one-ment. Mormon recorded that because of the love of God that dwelled in the hearts of people, they were led to spiritual and economic equality: “There were no envyings, nor strife, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God. . . . And how blessed were they! For the Lord did bless them in all their doings; yea, even they were blessed and prospered” (see 4 Nephi 1:15–18).

During this period of complete at-one-ment (AD 34–200), people observed the laws perfectly, and as a result there were no contentions or disputations (see 4 Nephi 1:12–13). Also, during this period of complete at-one-ment, there were none that robbed or murdered, nor were there any social distinctions based on riches, learning, or genealogy, “nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God” (4 Nephi 1:17). One capstone consequence of this complete at-one-ment among people during this period was their economic equality. Because people loved their neighbors, they were willing to work for Zion and the elimination of poverty—“they had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor” (4 Nephi 1:3).

Poverty is a relative term, and it seems to be so in the Book of Mormon: those with more are described as being rich; those with less, as being poor (see Alma 1:29–31; 32:4–5; 3 Nephi 6:12). Why does the elimination of poverty appear to be such an elusive goal even today? A key reason is that in the world, economic equality cannot be achieved even if everyone were provided equal
or identical resources since we all have different needs and talents. Nothing would be more unequal than providing each person the same resources, because some require milk while others need meat, and some can profitably magnify five talents while others can manage only one. Allocating to each according to needs and harvesting from each according to ability would require that we all agree both on what our most important needs are and on what the measures are for determining when our needs have been satisfied. Thus the only instance of perfect economic equality recorded in the scriptures occurred when people lived the law of consecration: “They had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift” (4 Nephi 1:3).

At-one-ment as evidenced by equality before the law. Outward evidence of a people’s unity is their ability to form and be governed by equitable and just laws (see 3 Nephi 6:4). This impressive but lesser degree of at-one-ment was achieved at the end of King Mosiah’s reign. When his sons refused to be king, he proposed a system of judges to replace the regal system of government. While some wished for favored status (see Alma 2:1–2), just laws adopted under the reign of the judges prohibited people from taking advantage of their neighbors through lying, robbing, or murder; and those who desired inequality were restrained because of the fear of the law (see Alma 1:17–18).

Equality before the law was accompanied by other evidences of at-one-ment, all of which reduced economic inequality. Under the reign of the judges, the followers of Christ began to eliminate status and social discrimination. We read that “when the priests left their labor to impart the word of God unto the people, the people also left their labors to hear the word of God. And when the priest had imparted unto them the word of God they all returned again diligently unto their labors; and the priest, not esteeming himself above his hearers, for the preacher was no better than the hearer, neither was the teacher any better than the learner; and thus they were all equal, and they did all labor, every man according to his strength” (Alma 1:26).

While any economic system except consecration produces inequalities, during periods of at-one-ment under the judges, inequality was moderated by voluntary redistributions: “In their prosperous circumstances, they did not send away any who were naked, or that were hungry, or that were athirst, or that were sick, or that had not been nourished; and they did not set their hearts upon riches; therefore they were liberal to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, whether out of the church or in the church, having no respect to persons as to those who stood in need” (Alma 1:30).

One way the loving and the lawful reduced inequality was to provide one another the training needed to support and defend themselves. For instance, using Laban’s sword as a model, Nephi made swords for use by soldiers as a defense against the Lamanites. But he also taught them to build buildings and to work with wood, iron, copper, steel, gold, and other precious metals (see 2 Nephi 5:14–15).

In modern times, one way that the loving and lawful reduce inequality is to invest in public goods, goods that provide public services without requiring private ownership. Such goods include public roads, public education, public water and sanitation systems, and publicly provided protection, among many others. We see similar efforts among Book of Mormon people (see Helaman 3:14; 3 Nephi 6:8).
People also manifested their at-one-ment by constructing cities (see Helaman 3:11; 3 Nephi 6:7; 4 Nephi 1:7–8; Ether 9:23). Construction of cities requires investments in public goods that generally benefit people. Moreover, for people to live in cities, they must agree to live together as neighbors. In addition, the construction of cities requires a high degree of specialization and trade, conditions requiring at-one-ment among people. For example, a group of Nephites who settled the land northward found an absence of timber. So because of their at-one-ment and ingenuity, “they did send forth much by the way of shipping. And thus they did enable the people in the land northward that they might build many cities, both of wood and of cement” (Helaman 3:10–11).

Finally, people manifested their at-one-ment by uniting for their own defense. During one difficult period when the Nephites were threatened by Gadianton robbers, they demonstrated their at-one-ment by uniting themselves under their chief military officer, Gidgiddoni, and their chief judge, Lachoneus, to defeat their enemies. This united effort put a temporary end to divisive and destructive secret combinations and led to renewed investments in public goods that integrated people and reduced inequality.

Stages of Separation and Inequality

While a love of God and others that leads people to consecration is the only system that completely eliminates poverty, the Book of Mormon describes how a love of things produces social separation and economic inequality in stages. Helaman succinctly summarizes: “The Lord had blessed them so long with the riches of the world that they had not been stirred up to anger, to wars, nor to bloodshed; therefore they began to set their hearts upon their riches; yea, they began to seek to get gain that they might be lifted up one above another; therefore they began to commit secret murders, and to rob and to plunder, that they might get gain” (Helaman 6:17). In the initial stage of separation, the people set their hearts on their riches instead of the well-being of their neighbors. As a first example, when asked about the well-being of his brother Abel, Cain arrogantly responded that his brother’s well-being was not his concern: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Moses 5:34).

In the second stage, the separated seek gain so they can be “lifted up” above their neighbors. Early on, the Lord commanded Jacob, brother of Nephi, to call his people to repentance. They needed to repent because many had begun to search for gold and precious ores, and after acquiring more than their neighbors, some Nephites supposed their inequality was evidence that they “were better than” those with less (Jacob 2:12–13). Jacob commanded them to abandon their love of riches that caused significant separations and inequalities among them: “Think of your brethren like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all and free with your substance, that they may be rich like unto you” (Jacob 2:17).

The Book of Mormon spells out a risk for those who try to rationalize inequality by claiming that the poor deserve their deprivations because they are not as smart, don’t work as hard, or have committed some act for which poverty is their prize. Some during King Benjamin’s reign held such views, requiring him to teach that those who failed to share with the poor because they believed the poor deserved their poverty needed to repent or would have no place in the kingdom of God (see Mosiah 4:17–18).

The apostate Zoramites first separated themselves spiritually from Christ by denying his existence and then created social and religious divisions among themselves based on riches. Upon their exclusive place of worship, the Rameumptom, the upper class prayed, “Holy God, we believe that thou hast separated us from our brethren” and “We thank thee, O God, that we are a chosen and a holy people” (Alma 31:16, 18). Alma, sickened at the spectacle, “saw that their hearts were set upon gold, and upon silver, and upon all manner of fine goods” (Alma 31:24). Exclusion and separations among the Zoramites created a large group who were poor (see Alma 32:2). Even though these had “labored abundantly” to build synagogues, they were despised because of their poverty and were excluded from places of worship (Alma 32:5).

In the third stage, though the picture is complicated, the separated generally become hostile and break laws, rob, plunder, and murder in order to get gain (see Helaman 2:4, 8; 3 Nephi 4:5). The Book of Mormon repeatedly recounts the cycle, from at-one-ment to love of riches, from love of riches to separation, and from separation to hostility and economic inequality.
Sometimes those focused on economic inequality and separation perverted the laws to achieve their ends. These Helaman censured because they “did trample under their feet [the laws] and smite and rend and turn their backs upon the poor and the meek, and the humble followers of God” (Helaman 6:39). As another example, King Noah used his position of power to impose a tax on his people. With his heart set firmly upon riches (see Mosiah 11:14), Noah placed a tax on his people of 20 percent on all products and income, including their ziff, copper, brass, iron, fatlings, and grain (see Mosiah 11:3). With these ill-gotten gains, King Noah created not a society where righteousness and prosperity could flourish but “elegant and spacious buildings,” separate from the people, where he and his priests lived licentiously (see Mosiah 11:8, 14–15).

Another way that the wealthy and powerful demonstrated their hostility toward the poor and maintained economic inequality was by denying some people access to education. Then educational inequality increased economic inequality, and the people began to be separated into ranks “according to their riches and their chances for learning; yea, some were ignorant because of their poverty, and others did receive great learning because of their riches” (3 Nephi 6:12). As a result, “there became a great inequality in all the land” (3 Nephi 6:14).

All three stages of separation were evident during the critical period between the 54th and the 56th years of the reign of the judges (see Helaman 4:1–4). Following a period of military successes against their enemies, the Nephites demonstrated the familiar pattern of sliding from unity to a love of riches, from a love of riches to separations, and from separations to hostility and inequality. First, they set their hearts on riches and used them to separate themselves from those who had less. Next they made worse the condition of the poor by withholding from them food and clothing. Then they mocked that which was sacred and ignored their laws by murdering, plundering, lying, stealing, and finally separating themselves from their families by committing acts of adultery (see Helaman 4:11–12). In the end, inequality bloomed as spirituality faded.

Perhaps ironically, an increasing level of hostility and a desire to be rich are attitudes that the poor can acquire. As they pass through stages of hostility, the poor first declare they are not responsible for their poverty, then they blame the wealthy for their meager circumstances, and finally they discover and practice the Mahan principle of exchanging life for material gain. To these wicked poor the Lord warned, “Wo unto you poor men, whose hearts are not broken, whose spirits are not contrite, and whose bellies are not satisfied, and whose hands are not stayed from laying hold upon other men's goods, whose eyes are full of greediness, and who will not labor with your own hands!” (D&C 56:17).

When hostility has matured, on whatever side, it produces complete separation that leads to destruction, demonstrating that the Spirit of the Lord has withdrawn. This condition of people is no longer characterized by a love of riches as much as a hatred of one's neighbors. This state of complete separation was introduced by ancient terrorists when they formed secret combinations that broke the laws and formed covenants to commit crimes against the innocent and to usurp political and economic power (see Helaman 2:3–5; 6:17–26, 38–39; 3 Nephi 3:4–7).

In this state of complete separation, specialization and trade have ceased. Moreover, the human costs of complete separation are enormous. As an illustration, during the destruction of the Jaredites, Ether recorded that “every man did cleave unto that which was his own, with his hands, and would not borrow neither would he lend; and every man kept the hilt of his sword in his right hand, in the defence of his property and his own life and of his wives and children” (Ether 14:2). During periods of hostility, instead of cities and towns being built and maintained, they were destroyed (see Mormon 5:5). Instead of at-one-ment among families and respect for women, during conflict women and children were mutilated and murdered (see Moroni 9:9–10). Finally, during periods of complete chaos, not only did the poor have less, but they starved (see Moroni 9:16).
The Book of Mormon and Modern Applications

The Book of Mormon requirements for prosperity are generally universal in their application. Thus what Alma declared in his day applies to our day as well: “We see how great the inequality of man is because of sin and transgression, and the power of the devil, which comes by the cunning plans which he hath devised to ensnare the hearts of men” (Alma 28:13). Consider some examples of the conditions described in the Book of Mormon that we can observe today.

At-one-ment and separations in the home. The Book of Mormon highlights the unity of husbands and wives after the visit of Christ in the Americas: “They were married, and given in marriage, and were blessed according to the multitude of the promises which the Lord had made unto them” (4 Nephi 1:11). On the other side, the Book of Mormon documents the connection between the love of riches and the separation of husbands and wives. Jacob denounced his people because many had become proud and afflicted their neighbors because they had acquired more riches than others (see Jacob 2:12, 20–21). True to pattern, the love of riches was accompanied by separations—including the evident separation of husbands from their wives. Moreover, the whoredoms of these same proud wealth-seeking husbands broke the hearts of their wives, rupturing their support and leading many into spiritual and, it seems, economic captivity (see Jacob 1:15; 2:27–33, 35).

The emotional—and eventual physical—separation of fathers and mothers in Jacob’s day has a parallel in our own time. Modern prophets have warned that “the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets” (First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” 23 September 1995). One calamity that has followed the disintegration of the family is increased poverty. According to the Economist, households in which fathers are separated from their children because of divorce and unwed births are the “largest and fastest-growing segment of the poor,

Modern prophets proclaim the sanctity of wholesome family life and urge its preservation as a bulwark against social ills and calamities.
making up over half of all poor families [in the U.S.] in 1998, compared with 21% in 1960. The poverty rate is almost six times higher for one-parent families headed by women than it is for those with two parents.” Continuing, the Economist notes that “just over 30% of American children now live in single-parent families, and these account for almost two-thirds of the children in poverty.”

Divisions among nations. When pride and hostility entered into the hearts of the Nephites and Lamanites, they could no longer be governed by laws established by the voice of the people. Then people became “divided one against another; and they did separate one from another into tribes, every man according to his family and his kindred and friends, and thus they did destroy the government of the land” (3 Nephi 7:2). A modern parallel to the division described in the Book of Mormon has been the division among nations. When the United Nations was founded in 1945, the world was organized into 51 countries. This number increased to 100 in 1960 and to 192 in 1994. Since 1994, the number of national divisions among countries has continued to increase. If increasing the number of countries results in trade restrictions between those who were formerly members of the same country, then we can expect less specialization, reduced trading opportunities, limited opportunities to choose, and
reduced income for all, especially for those in newly fragmented countries.

*War and Poverty.* When hostility is fully grown, it inevitably leads to war, and in war’s wake follows famine and poverty. The Book of Mormon reports that a great and lasting war between the Lamanites and Nephites caused much loss of life and famine (see Alma 62:35, 39). In our time, the major famines in recent years—famines that have accounted for the deaths of tens of millions of people—have all occurred in war zones: examples include Biafra, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Chad, Sudan, Liberia, and Somalia.

War creates poverty in the following ways. First, it removes young men and capable older men and women from the workforce and sacrifices them for the war effort. Second, war teaches combatants to hate each other so that the possibility of future commerce between them is reduced. Finally, war soaks up resources that could otherwise be put to productive uses to mitigate the plight of the poor. We can imagine a similar situation among Book of Mormon peoples during periods of conflict.

Unfortunately, very poor countries are those most likely to go to war, or perhaps they are poor because they pursue war. Of the 150 conflicts fought since the end of the Second World War, more than 9 out of 10 occurred in the developing world, and 21 of the 26 current armed conflicts are taking place in developing countries. In 1999, the developing countries spent over $100 billion a year on the military. In 2003, $12.4 billion of this was spent on arms imports from the industrialized countries.

**Looking to the Future**

Experts predict that by 6 April 2030, membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will reach between 75 and 175 million. Of that large number 85 percent will live in Latin America, and Asia, where large segments of the population live in poverty.* The contrast between the economic conditions of Church members living in developing countries with their North American brothers and sisters will lead many to ask, How can we build Zion with so many poor among us?

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland offered some helpful hints about where we can begin. “I know we can each do something, however small that act may seem to be. We can pay an honest tithe and give our fast and free-will offerings, according to our circumstances. And we can watch for other ways to help. To worthy causes and needy people, we can give time if we don’t have money, and we can give love when our time runs out.”

We can also build Zion by avoiding the stages of separation and their ugly consequences: disintegration of the family, perversion of laws, division of nations, and war, which so often begin by our loving things more than neighbors and by assuming that those with more are better than those without (see Jacob 2:13). Ultimately, we must strive for a condition of at-one-ment where our converted hearts consider the happiness and well-being of others to be as important as our own. Then we will ensure that there are no poor among us (see 4 Nephi 1:3; Moses 7:18).
Determining the original language of the brass plates presents a tantalizing riddle, one that has defied numerous attempts to solve it. This riddle contains several relevant clues, each suggesting a certain linguistic background for the plates of brass. Two of the most important clues occur in Mosiah 1:2–4 and Mormon 9:32–33. A third clue derives from modern attempts to understand how the block quotations from Isaiah and Malachi fit linguistically in the Book of Mormon record. While these three pieces of the larger puzzle can be arranged and rearranged to achieve various solutions to this riddle, there is one piece of evidence that has yet to be considered in detail. The Book of Mormon is replete with echoes of, allusions to, and direct quotations of scripture—a veritable treasure trove for the text critic. One such brief scriptural echo, which upon closer examination turns out to be a direct quotation, provides compelling information that in turn suggests a Hebrew origin for at least a portion of the brass plates. This biblical tie is found in Alma 7:11, which is a direct quotation of Isaiah 53:4.

In discussing the value of the brass plates to his posterity, King Benjamin left us an important clue about the language of the plates. To his three
sons he said, “It were not possible that our father, Lehi, could have remembered all these things, to have taught them to his children, except it were for the help of these plates; for he having been taught in the language of the Egyptians therefore he could read these engravings” (Mosiah 1:4). Initially, we might conjecture that the brass plates were written entirely in Egyptian, but the following verse reveals a clue that might suggest otherwise. Perhaps clarifying which portions Lehi might have had access to through his knowledge of Egyptian, King Benjamin mentions “[God’s] mysteries, and . . . his commandments” (Mosiah 1:5). The terms mysteries and commandments may not have been a reference to the Old Testament text of our day, which contains history, psalms, poetry, prophetic discourses, and the five books of Moses; instead, Benjamin may have made reference primarily to that portion of the Old Testament in which the commandments are found, namely, the five books of Moses. From the children of Israel’s sojourn in Egypt, we might expect the writings of that period to reflect that cultural setting. However, it is difficult to imagine that the words of the prophets, which were delivered in Hebrew, would have been immediately translated into Egyptian. We can only imagine that there was an
elitist faction of Israelites, of whom perhaps Laban was a part, who recorded the words of the prophets in a language other than their native tongue. But there is no evidence from any ancient source for such a group.

A second piece of evidence comes from Mormon 9:32–33, where Moroni effectively ended the Book of Mormon for the first time, not knowing how much longer he would be around, and made a brief comment on the language of the Book of Mormon record. Moroni clearly stated that the Book of Mormon had been compiled in the language known among them as “reformed Egyptian” and that this language had been altered by the Nephites according to their manner of speech (see Mormon 9:32). Here we learn that reformed Egyptian, whatever it may have been, was directly linked to the popular language spoken by the Nephites. It is likely that Moroni meant that their speech patterns had brought about alterations in their grammar and that it therefore subsequently forced changes in the more literarily useful reformed Egyptian. The following verse contains a fascinating clue concerning the role of Hebrew among the Nephites. Moroni clearly states, “If we could have written in Hebrew, behold, ye would have had no imperfection in our record” (Mormon 9:33). From a linguist’s viewpoint, Moroni is obviously more comfortable with his abilities to compose in Hebrew than he is writing in reformed Egyptian. This piece of evidence thus suggests that an altered form of Hebrew was in continual use as a spoken tongue throughout the Nephites’ tenure in the Americas.

Like Lehi, whose reliance on the plates of brass helped him continually remember the commandments of the Lord, and unlike the Mulekites, whose language became corrupted because they had no texts with them (see Omni 1:17), the Nephites must
have had some textual basis to help preserve the purity of their language. They may have composed those records themselves while the language was still pure and fresh in their minds. It is also possible that the plates of brass, or at least a portion of them, were composed in Hebrew and that these records helped establish the dual linguistic heritage of the Nephites. Moroni was acutely aware that his people had “altered” the Hebrew, a suggestion that there was an earlier form of Hebrew to which he had access but that differed from his own Hebrew tongue (see Mormon 9:32).

Although the mystery of the language of the plates of brass remains unresolved, another piece of evidence convincingly points to a Hebrew section of the plates. The incorporation of biblical allusions, echoes, paraphrases, and direct quotations in the Book of Mormon has provided a moment of pause for those who desire to ascertain precisely the language of the brass plates. Many have supposed that Joseph Smith simply used the King James Version of the Bible (hereafter KJV) available to him while he translated the Book of Mormon and that when he came to longer block quotations from the prophets, he simply copied out the relevant sections. According to this way of thinking, Joseph would have made changes to the KJV text only when there were differences between the Book of Mormon quotation of that passage and the rendering of the KJV translators. This approach works rather well for explaining the larger block quotations and places where there is explicit mention made of the quoted source. But this hypothesis falls short in explaining numerous other biblical echoes in the Book of Mormon. It is incredible to believe that Joseph, or any other man, would have recognized these numerous allusions to the biblical text and then been able to locate them quickly in his Bible. One important quotation of Isaiah by Alma the Younger calls into question not only the assumption that the plates of brass were written entirely in a form of Egyptian but also the proposed method by which Joseph included biblical quotations in the Book of Mormon.

While we may never know Joseph’s exact method for translating the longer block quotations that are found in the Book of Mormon, some evidence supports the thesis that the plates of brass contained Hebrew writings. This piece of evidence is a direct quotation of Isaiah 53:4 by Alma the Younger in his sermon to the inhabitants of Gideon, which we are informed derived directly from Alma’s personal account. Therefore this quotation had not undergone any known revision by Mormon, the editor of the Book of Mormon, but instead appears to have been taken by Mormon directly from Alma, who in turn had taken his quotation directly from the plates of brass. Alma introduced this brief quotation using the introductory formula “and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith” (Alma 7:11). This formulaic introduction of a biblical quotation is a common feature among Book of Mormon and New Testament authors and others who were quoting sacred materials, and it indicates that the speaker, in this case Alma, wanted to draw the audience’s attention to a text with which they were familiar. In this instance, we are fortunate to recognize the underlying text quoted by Alma as Isaiah 53:4. The version of the text quoted by Alma is quite similar to the Hebrew text that has been passed down to us (known also as the Masoretic Text) but is unlike the English translation provided in the KJV.

What is even more striking is that Matthew 8:17 also quotes Isaiah 53:4. There the Isaiah quotation is set off by the introductory formula “which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying . . . ” Matthew explicitly mentioned the origin of the biblical quotation, whereas Alma referred only to the word that had been spoken previously. We can easily discern that Matthew’s “Esaias” is really the Isaiah of the Old Testament, and with the use of footnotes or lexical aids, the quotation can be identified as Isaiah 53:4. Also interesting is the fact that, even though Matthew explicitly states the source of his quotation, the KJV translators chose to retranslate the passage in Matthew instead of relying on the translation already given in Isaiah 53:4. Therefore the KJV exhibits two different translations of the same passage.

What we have for the Alma, KJV Matthew, and KJV Isaiah versions of Isaiah 53:4 are three different renderings of the Hebrew text. A fourth rendering of the Hebrew Isaiah passage is found in the second-century-BC Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint, or LXX.

Enough dissimilarity exists in the English translations to posit that Joseph Smith did not rely on the KJV’s English translation of Isaiah 53:4 or Matthew 8:17 but that his translation of Alma 7:11 is entirely independent of any known translation. The
fascinating discovery comes when the four different renderings—Alma, KJV Matthew, KJV Isaiah, and the Septuagint—are compared to the Hebrew text. Perhaps surprisingly, Alma’s rendering is superior and is far closer to the Hebrew text than any of the other three renderings.

Masoretic Hebrew: Surely he has borne our pains and sicknesses (MT ṭākēn hōlāyēnū hū nāšāʾ īmākʾōbēnū sebālām)
LXX: Thus he bears our sins and our pains (LXX outōs tas amartias ēmōn ferei kai peri ēmōn odunatai)
Isaiah 53:4 KJV: Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows
Alma 7:11: he will take upon him the pains and sicknesses of his people
Matthew 8:17 KJV: Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses (autos tas astheneias ēmōn elaben kai tas nosous ebastasen)

A comparison of these various renderings of Isaiah 53:4 reveals an obvious linguistic parallel between the KJV Matthew and Alma 7:11, although it is not substantial enough to suggest direct borrowing or copying. Both the KJV Matthew and Alma 7 include the noun sicknesses, but they also vary slightly from each other with their inclusion of the nouns infirmities and pains. Upon comparison with a literal translation of the Hebrew Masoretic Text, it is clear that Alma’s rendering is closest to the Hebrew, followed by Matthew’s rendering. Interestingly, the KJV Isaiah is the most distant translation of the three, and had Alma’s text agreed with it in wording, we would have substantial evidence that Joseph was indeed using the KJV while he translated the Book of Mormon. The KJV’s “our griefs and our sorrows” is not a literal translation of the Hebrew adjectives hōlāyēnū and makʾōbēnū, which would be better translated respectively as “sickness” and “pain.”

In the KJV Isaiah text, the translators have made a causal connection between the more literal terms given in the Hebrew Masoretic Text, sickness and pain, by making sickness an equivalent for “grief” and pain an equivalent for “sorrow.” This roughly equivalent terminology reveals how the KJV translators attempted to understand the original intent of the Isaiah passage. Literal, word-for-word translations are not always the most accurate translations since the literal terms may have very different meanings in the language in which they are being translated. For example, justice to an ancient Israelite meant something very different from what it means to a modern-day American. A more theologically loaded term like resurrection carries very different meanings among Christian believers today; a translation may therefore attempt to convey this nuance by explaining the meaning of the term with the inclusion of adjectives, giving us such phrases as bodily resurrection or material resurrection as distinct from spiritual resurrection or resuscitation of the spirit. For the passage in question, an ancient Greek translation of the same passage by the translators of the Septuagint likewise attempted to understand the meaning of the terms hōlāyēnū and makʾōbēnū by interpreting them as “sins” and “pain.” Of these texts, the KJV Matthew rendering is quite accurate for its base meaning, but the addition of the very suggestive infirmities as an equivalent for “pain” indicates that they understood the pain to be physical, probably in light of their understanding of the atonement. Both infirmities

The Great Isaiah Scroll at Isaiah 53:4 (highlighted), which describes the Messiah as having borne the “pains and sicknesses” of mankind.
and sicknesses in Matthew suggest physical ail-
ment or malady. Of the three English texts, Alma’s
is the most accurate in reflecting the exact lexical
equivalents of the Hebrew text. For instance, both
Alma and Matthew reflect correctly the plurals of
the original Hebrew. Matthew more accurately in-
cludes our while Alma appears to have understood
the Hebrew possessive as “his people.” But it is
Alma’s rendering alone that preserves the original
ambiguity inherent in the terms pains and sickness,
and he offers to his audience an exact parallel to our
modern Hebrew text both in content and without
interpolation.

Several conclusions can be reached from these
considerations. It is obvious that no author has
relied on another at the level of the English text;
Joseph Smith did not rely on KJV Isaiah or Mat-
thew for this passage. Of any author, Alma appears
to rely most directly on the textual ancestor of the
Hebrew Masoretic Text. In fact, the reliance is so
direct as to lead one to suppose that he knowingly
copied from it, which can be used as an argument
to support the thesis that a portion of the plates of
brass was composed in Hebrew. It is also clear that
the Gospel of Matthew is not dependent upon the
Septuagint in this passage and that those two texts
(Matthew and the Septuagint) bear only a very weak
resemblance to each other. Alma and Matthew are
more alike than either of them is individually to the
KJV Isaiah translation. This suggests that the two
authors, entirely independent of one another, trans-
lated the very same text in nearly identical ways,
with the author of the Gospel of Matthew offering
a more interpretive translation. Finally, the Mat-
thew and Alma renderings may be part of a larger
Christian understanding of this passage. It should
be noted that the Alma and the Septuagint transla-
tions were made before the mortal ministry of Jesus
Christ, while Matthew’s was made after Christ’s
mortal ministry and in the context of trying to un-
derstand Christ’s atonement. The temporal setting
of each rendering of the Isaiah passage may explain
the usage of the future and past tenses in the quo-
tations. The setting may have led these ancient au-
thors and translators to consider closely what Isaiah
had in mind as they realized that he was speaking
messianically.

In summary, Alma’s fortuitous inclusion of
Isaiah 53:4 in his sermon to the people of Gideon
allows us to see that Book of Mormon authors did
indeed have recourse to a text very similar to our
Hebrew Masoretic Text, at least in some ways. In
this particular instance, a Book of Mormon author’s
rendering of Isaiah 53:4, as translated into English
by Joseph Smith, is much more accurate than our
modern English translations. It is also unimagi-
nable that the Prophet Joseph Smith, without in-
spiration, could have translated such a passage into
English so that it would be more reflective of our
Hebrew text than the already well-established Eng-
lish KJV translation, which contained significantly
different wording. Most translators tend to gravitate
toward established and authoritative translations of
important texts. In this instance it would be natural
to assume that Joseph would have translated the
Isaiah passage using the wording of his KJV Bible,
but instead he translated it literally, being unaware
that it was an Isaiah quotation included by an
ancient Book of Mormon author.
Even before I joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1973, I felt called to express something beautiful in words. To develop skills as a poet, I majored in creative writing at the University of Arizona, although my great-aunt Elizabeth urged me to pursue a more practical career, such as journalism. During my mission to Bolivia, a keen desire to inscribe beauty was rekindled when I read the July 1977 Ensign, a special issue on the arts. Recently, the Book of Mormon has provided me with specific, practical guidelines for magnifying my work as a writer in Zion. I would like to share some of those observations with fellow word-crafters in the kingdom.

The Book of Mormon inspires us to keep a record of our meaningful dreams. The prophet Lehi wrote “many things which he saw in visions and in dreams” (1 Nephi 1:16). Because Lehi kept a record, we can read about his vision of the tree of eternal life (see 1 Nephi 8:10–20). His son Nephi saw the same vision, reporting that the beauty of the tree was “far beyond, yea, exceeding of all beauty” (1 Nephi 11:8). The tree was not just lovely; it was also pure, desirable, and wholesome, and the fairness of it “did exceed the whiteness of the driven snow” (1 Nephi 11:8). Keeping a record of our dreams can enhance our ability to pluck “excellent and comely” fruit from the “beautiful and glorious” branch of the Lord (2 Nephi 14:2; Isaiah 4:2). If we emulate the vision-keeping of Lehi and Nephi, our writing can be enriched by the images of inspired dreams.

The Book of Mormon urges us to know our family history. Lehi sent his sons back to Jerusalem to obtain records so that his posterity could preserve the language of their forebears, remember the
words of the prophets, and learn their genealogy (see 1 Nephi 3:19–20; 5:16). Scripture records, family histories, and personal journals are the fountains of literacy, linguistics, and literature. We can more fully find our own writing voice when we have listened to the voices of our progenitors. We can write with richer ethos when we are familiar with the lives of our predecessors, because we are more complete with them, and they with us (see Doctrine and Covenants 128:15, 18).

A family record can stand as the cornerstone of our verbal creations and publications. Adam and Eve used their “book of remembrance” as a textbook to teach their children to read and write (see Moses 6:5–6; 3 Nephi 24:16). As members of the church learn about the lives of their ancestors, the Lord pours out the Spirit of Elijah. Authors who call upon God for a “double portion” (2 Kings 2:9) of that spirit to do family history research may also ask the Lord for a double portion of the kind of spirit that attended Isaiah or William Shakespeare or Emily Dickinson or Neal A. Maxwell in their writing endeavors. As we cultivate our writing talent, we will be able to write by the spirit of inspiration in language that is “pure and undefiled” (Moses 6:6).

The Book of Mormon teaches the value of writing to please God. After Nephi read the account of his ancestors, he prepared to make his contribution to the record. His motive was not self-serving, secular, or sensational; his intent was to “write the things of God” and to persuade readers to come unto Christ (1 Nephi 6:3–4). Nephi deliberately excluded worthless things “which are pleasing unto the world” so that he had room on the plates to write priceless things “which are pleasing unto God” (1 Nephi 6:5–6). His brother Jacob later explained that “tender and chaste and delicate” feelings are pleasing to God (Jacob 2:7). As writers, we need not fear that respecting such sensitive feelings will result in repressed, sterile, and boring manuscripts. In Hebrew, tenderness implies vulnerability, youth, compassion, affection, and nourishment (The Scriptures: CD-ROM Resource Edition 1.0). Chastity implies clarity, cleanliness, fulfillment, reverence, and simplicity. Rather than fragility, delicate feelings imply openness, beauty, delight, playfulness, and refinement. Thoughtful writers can act as proxy authors of the “pleasing word of God” that heals the “wounded soul” (Jacob 2:8). We can produce texts that have the power to bind up broken hearts and troubled minds.

On the other hand, authors who write to please the world may increase the pain of “those who are already wounded, instead of consoling and healing their wounds” (Jacob 2:9). Texts based in snobbery, mockery, cynicism, deceit, or permissiveness may work as daggers that pierce the souls and wound the minds of readers who would rather feast upon words of strength (see Jacob 2:9; 3:2). Authors who brandish verbal violence and wanton words will experience “burning instead of beauty” (2 Nephi 13:24). If we court worldliness with words, we may fail to recognize the beauty of Christ’s countenance when he turns to gaze upon us. Instead of seeing him “as he is,” we may see “no beauty that we should desire him” (Moroni 7:48; Isaiah 53:2; Mosiah 14:2).

The Book of Mormon exhorts us to bring forth Zion. Authors who seek to establish Zion through uplifting, inspirational writing will be blessed with “the gift and the power of the Holy Ghost” (1 Nephi 13:37). Those who write under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost will be able to communicate in the tongue of angels, speaking the words of Christ (see 2 Nephi 31:14–15; 32:2–3). In the ancient Indo-European poetic tradition documented by Calvert Watkins, the “language of men” was ordinary human discourse, or the “tongues of men,” whereas the “language of gods” was the discourse of poets and prophets, or the “tongue of angels” (1 Corinthians 13:1). Through the tongue of angels, authors are able to mediate the “opposition in all things” with extraordinary language (see 2 Nephi 2:11). Writers like Emily Dickinson are able to juxtapose joy and sorrow, knowing that there

Must be a Wo –
A loss or so –
To bend the eye
Best Beauty’s way –
But – once aslant
It notes Delight
As difficult
As Stalactite

When writers are filled with the Spirit of the Lord God, their mission is to care for those “that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes,
the oil of joy for mourning . . . that they may be called trees of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:3).

The Book of Mormon encourages us to publish peace. Satan is the “author of all sin” and the “father of contention” (Helaman 6:30; 3 Nephi 11:29). Christ is “the author and the finisher” of faith and salvation (Moroni 6:4; see Hebrews 5:9; 12:2). Since “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace” (1 Corinthians 14:33), we can follow his example by writing about the peace that salvation brings. Citing Isaiah, Book of Mormon prophets promise that those who publish peace will be beautiful upon the mountains (see 1 Nephi 13:37; Mosiah 12:21; 15:16–18; 3 Nephi 20:40). The publisher of peace is a sprinter and a marathoner, a chasqui running on the high plains, carrying words of Christ’s victory from the battlefield to watchers on the towers of Mount Zion. The beautiful messenger is a mountaineer, like the late United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize after he died on a diplomatic mission to Africa in 1961. In addition to public service, Hammarskjöld kept a private journal of contemplations that were translated from Swedish into English by W. H. Auden and published posthumously as the bestseller Markings. In this book of “waymarks” (Jeremiah 31:21), Hammarskjöld wrote that beauty is “the wind” that refreshes the traveler, not the “stifling heat” in dark shafts where miners grub for gold. His life and writings show that peace is not the absence of conflict; it is the presence of moral courage. Peace is an amalgam of beauty, faith, patience, reverence, endurance, and sacrifice.

The Book of Mormon reminds us to sing the song of redeeming love. Like the tree of life and the waters of life in Nephi’s vision, our arts and letters can be representations of the “love of God” (1 Nephi 11:21–25). If we remember with Johann Wondra that “art is therefore a possibility for love,” our words can be clothed with charity regardless of topic, genre, or audience (see Moroni 7:47). The book of Alma contains an inventory of questions that writers can use to evaluate their works, for example:

Can you imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord, saying unto you, in that day: Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been works of righteousness upon the face of the earth? . . . If ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now? . . . [The Lord God] saith: Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely; yea, come unto me and bring forth works of righteousness. (Alma 5:16, 26, 34–35)

As authors, our works can be as beautiful as “the place of Mormon, the waters of Mormon, the forest of Mormon” to readers who are refugees from the wilderness of wickedness (Mosiah 18:30). The
The power of divinely inspired words can liberate people from the pains of hell, enabling them to “sing redeeming love” (Alma 5:9; 26:13).

The Book of Mormon asks us to put on beautiful garments. Paraphrasing Isaiah, Moroni awakens us to possibilities of covenant beauty in our writing:

I would exhort you that ye would come unto Christ, and lay hold upon every good gift, and touch not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing. And awake, and arise from the dust . . . and put on thy beautiful garments . . . that thou mayest no more be confounded, that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee . . . may be fulfilled. (Moroni 10:30–31; compare Isaiah 52:1–2)

As we shake away the dust of unseemliness from our minds and loose the bands of captivity from our hearts, we can put on beautiful garments of thought and feeling (see 2 Nephi 8:24–25; 3 Nephi 20:36–37). We can “stand therefore, having [our language] girt about with truth, and having on the [rhetoric] of righteousness; and [our words] shod with preparation of the gospel of peace” (see Ephesians 6:14–15; D&C 27:16). We can clothe our creative works with meekness and humility “as with an ornament, and bind them on even as a bride” (1 Nephi 21:18; compare Isaiah 49:18). As we pry the bondage of pride from our hearts, Hammarskjöld says that we can realize our individuality, “becoming a bridge for others, a stone in the temple of righteousness.” We can build a temple as the center stake of our aesthetic realms, lifting up titles of liberty to defend marriage, families, and children (see Alma 46:12, 19). All of our writings, whether they be fiction or nonfiction, comedy or tragedy, poetry or prose, should have at their underlying core the beautiful, irrefutable, crystalline fact of Christ’s redemption.

The Book of Mormon invites us to restore plain and precious things. Writers in Zion have the opportunity to create beauty but also the responsibility to renew truths that have been lost through persecution, ignorance, obscurity, or neglect (see 1 Nephi 13; 2 Nephi 25). With the Lord’s help, we can “write many things” that are “plain and precious” (1 Nephi 13:35). If we will avoid the clichés of self-pity, self-indulgence, self-assertion, sobbing sentimentality, and “sickly sexuality” that Arthur H. King warned about in modern culture, then we can produce innovative, intelligent, integrated works of art that “build the old waste places” and “raise up the foundations of many generations” (Isaiah 58:12). Faithful authorship must include the filling of gaps in our stewardship, as we see from the Savior’s evaluation of the Nephite record in Bountiful. When the Lord asks, “How can it be that ye have not written this thing?” we can respond by making sure that essential experiences are “written according as he commanded” (see 3 Nephi 23:7–14).

Like Ether and Moroni, we can abridge and seal up some of our works for the benefit of future readers. Like Emily Dickinson and Dag Hammarskjöld, we can leave consecrated manuscripts in a drawer for loved ones to find and circulate after our death. Rather than aspiring for Pulitzer prizes and Nobel nominations, we will long to be known as “the repairer of the breach” and “the restorer of paths to dwell in” (Isaiah 58:12). We will yearn to hear the commendation “Well done, thou good and faithful [writer]; thou hast been faithful over a few [words], and I will make thee [author of] many [works]” (adapted from Matthew 25:21).

The Book of Mormon guides us to write in beauty. We can glorify the Lord with beautiful words as we walk the “strait and narrow path” and wend the “way of holiness” through life’s mountains (1 Nephi 8:20; 2 Nephi 31:18–19; Isaiah 35:8). Navajo names for the path of harmony, or hózhó, include the Beauty Way and the Mountain Way. We need chanters to sing new songs for the Lord’s way of writing: the Dream Way, the Remembrance Way, the Pleasing Way, the Zion Way, the Peaceful Way, the Loving Way, the Covenant Way, and the Plain Way. With the Book of Mormon as an inspirational guide, we can walk in beauty, talk in beauty, read in beauty, write in beauty, learn of beauty, and weave in beauty.
Most readers of the Book of Mormon recognize that the Lamanites were the perennial enemies of the Nephites. Shortly after Lehi’s colony arrived in the New World, the Lord made clear that the Lamanites would be a “scourge” unto Nephi’s seed “to stir them up in remembrance of me” (2 Nephi 5:25; compare 1 Nephi 2:24). Much of what follows in the record describes seemingly incessant Lamanite-Nephite tensions that end only with the utter destruction of Nephite civilization. The Lamanites were a threat that never went away.
Recent textual studies, however, indicate that the matter of the Nephites’ enemies may not be as black and white as that. This is certainly true during the public career of Alma the Younger (circa 91–73 BC), when the Nephite missionaries to the Lamanites came into contact with the mysterious Amalekites (see Alma 21–43). As we will see, these Amalekites were in fact the same group as the Amlicites, whom Alma encountered earlier in his career (see Alma 2–3). This observation is based on evidence in the text of two kinds: spelling variations in the original handwritten manuscripts of Oliver Cowdery and hints in the traditional text that many readers have not noticed. These findings shed new light on the structure of Alma’s writings and lead us to the more crucial question, Is reading the text in terms of generally good Nephites versus usually bad Lamanites too simplistic for what the record actually says?

This study is a corrective to traditional Book of Mormon scholarship. For example, George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, in their Commentary on the Book of Mormon, hold that “the Amalekites were a sect of Nephite apostates whose origin is not given.” The more recent Book of Mormon Reference Companion shares this point of view in the article on Amalekites: “The Book of Mormon does not supply any information concerning the origin of this group.” Hopefully we can now clear up the mystery of the Amalekites’ origin.

Internal Evidence

Years ago some students of the Book of Mormon noticed curious happenings in the book of Alma. The book begins with Nehor and quickly moves to a major Nephite threat tied to Nehor, the apostate Amlici. Amlici’s followers, the Amlicites, attempt to take over the government and to seize an election but are defeated in major battles and seemingly wiped out (see Alma 1–2). Still, Alma spends the entire next chapter (Alma 3) telling about the threat and mark of the Amlicites, after their disappearance. This seems to be a lot of detail about a past threat. From a structural point of view, Alma 3 reads more like a warning and an introduction to a problem than a comment about a problem no longer present.

Some 18 chapters later, the missionary Aaron runs into another group of troublemakers, called Amalekites, who are allied with the Amulonites and helping to harden the Lamanites (see Alma 21:2–4). This new group is introduced among two other groups we already know well, the name thrown in almost casually as if the reader were fully aware of who they are: “Now the Lamanites and the Amalekites and the people of Amulon had built a great city, which was called Jerusalem. Now the Lamanites of themselves were sufficiently hardened, but the Amalekites and the Amulonites were still harder; therefore they did cause the Lamanites that they should harden their hearts, that they should wax strong in wickedness and their abominations” (Alma 21:2–3). Upon reading that passage for the first time, most people are probably unaware that they have met yet another new group, one with no given origin.

In comparing the Amlicites with the Amalekites, we find that Amlici and the Amlicites are mentioned 43 times between Alma 2:1 and 3:20 and never mentioned again. The Amalekites are mentioned 19 times between Alma 21:2 and 43:44, often in connection with the Nephite-dissenting descendants of Noah’s priest Amulon or with the Nephite dissenters called Zoramites. The Amlicites had theology, political organization, aristocracy, armies, Lamanite alliances, military organization, ties to Nehor, and distinctive, self-imposed skin markings (see Alma 1:4–6; 2:1–2, 5–6, 9, 12, 14, 24; 3:4–6), just as the Amalekites had theology, cities, sanctuaries, synagogues, and ties to the Lamanites, the Amulonites, the Zoramites, and “the Nehors” (see Alma 21:2, 4, 6; 43:6). Aaron, son of Mosiah, contended with an Amalekite in one of the Amalekites’ synagogues (see Alma 21:5–11) and later had a discussion with King Lamoni’s father about their beliefs (see Alma 22:7–18). When asked if he believed in God, the Lamanite king began his answer by commenting on the Amalekites’ belief and worship sanctuaries (see Alma 22:7). Both groups were apparently influential enough to warrant such detail.

At first reading, this casual introduction of a new group called Amalekites (see Alma 21:2) might not have bothered us since the Book of Mormon often takes a shotgun approach to its abbreviated historical record, where names are noted without introduction, including the crucial name Mormon itself (see Mosiah 18:4). However, unlike the case with the names of individuals, we cannot find another instance in this abridged record where a
group is introduced without explanation or introduction—the Amalekites are the only exception. While there are two Amalekis in the record (see Omni 1:12–30; Mosiah 7:6), neither one has any known connection with this group. If there were an Amaleki who founded this group, the record is silent about him.

Chronologically, the Amlicites and Amalekites fit together perfectly; they never overlap. Alma tells of his problems with a large group of obstinate Nephite dissenters called Amlicites, who are after the order of Nehor and allied with the Lamanites. Aaron and Ammon, who were in the Lamanite lands during the same time period, tell of their problems with another formidable Lamanite ally after the order of Nehor, a people whose name—Amalekites—is spelled much like the name Amlicites. They both pursue the same kinds of goals at the same time and cause the same problems. Both groups are specifically not pure-blooded Lamanites (see Alma 2:1–11; 24:28–29). One group is introduced as if it will have ongoing importance. The other is first mentioned as if its identity has already been established. To be sure, the text reads more clearly if these groups are one and the same. John L. Sorenson recognized this strong similarity some years ago and speculated that “it is possible that they [Amalekites] constituted the Amlicite remnant, . . . their new name possibly arising by ‘lamanitization’ of the original.”

Textual Evidence

This new description of the Amlicites and Amalekites as identical groups gained further credibility when Royal Skousen, editor of the long-term Book of Mormon critical text project, presented early textual support for the same conclusion. In 2002 he explained that the apostate groups in the book of Alma currently spelled Amlicites and Amalekites are most likely the same group of dissenters, founded by Amlici, and that the names should be spelled identically. Skousen noticed that these types of errors in the original and printer’s manuscripts were due to inconsistencies in Oliver Cowdery’s spelling style.

Skousen’s careful analysis of the original, dictated manuscript shows how such errors might have crept in. Often when a name was first introduced, Joseph Smith would apparently pause to spell it out.
Section of the printer’s manuscript of the Book of Mormon at Alma 24:1, where the spelling Amalekites appears twice (highlighted). Photograph courtesy of the Community of Christ Archives, Independence, Missouri.

Fragment from the original manuscript at Alma 43:6, containing the variant spellings Amaleckites and Amelekites. Black-and-white ultraviolet photograph courtesy of the Family and Church History Department Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Section of the printer’s manuscript at Alma 43:6, where, contrary to the spellings in the corresponding passage in the original manuscript (above), the spelling Amalekites appears twice (highlighted). Photograph courtesy of the Community of Christ Archives, Independence, Missouri.
Thus we find words crossed out in the original manuscript with corrected spellings above. Joseph apparently did not respell the name when spoken later, for we find Cowdery spelling certain names in many different ways, despite their original correction. After Cowdery prepared the manuscript, the printer presumably was told to refer to the original spelling of names for all subsequent instances of names. In the case of Amlicites/Amalekites, there was no mention of either group by name between Alma 3:20 and 21:2. Thus when the printer came across the name again in what is now Alma 21:2, he likely supposed this was a new group and, rather than referring back to the spelling in what is now Alma 3:20, simply followed the printer's manuscript. The Amalekite spelling may have seemed logical because there were biblical Amalekites (see Numbers 13:29) and there were earlier men in the Book of Mormon named Amaleki (see Omni 1:12; Mosiah 7:6).

Skousen notes that the handwritten spelling in Alma 24:1 in the original manuscript supports the view of a confused spelling of the names. It does not show Amalekites as in the current edition but Amelicites, which is not quite Amlicites but closer than Amalekites. The spelling of the original manuscript in Alma 24:28—that is Amalicites, and only part of the word—Ameli[...]—is visible in Alma 27:2. The spelling of the two occurrences in Alma 43:6 is Amalekites and Amelekites—different spellings in the same verse. In verses 43:13 and 43:20 we read in partially faded letters Amalickites and Amelicites. In Alma 43:44 the spelling is Amalekites. It is clear that the spelling was rather loose and that many of the common letters, especially the c and the k, were interchanged freely. The fact that the words currently spelled Amalekites were often spelled with a c alone or with a ck adds additional support to the internal evidence previously noted. Using the earliest records we have (Cowdery's handwritten manuscripts), there is little support that the Amlicites and Amalekites were two separate groups.

What Difference Does It Make?

If this theory that the Amlicites and the Amalekites are the same group is accurate, then Alma structured his narrative record more tightly and carefully than we may have previously realized. What once was seen as two introductory chapters (Alma 2–3) devoted to a problem soon to disappear can now be seen as introducing the major threat and problem that Alma had to deal with the rest of his life. While theoretically he could have begun his record with the travels of Mosiah’s sons, he apparently felt the need to introduce the major conflict faced by both missionaries sent to the Nephites (Alma and companions) and those sent to the Lamanites (Ammon, Aaron, and companions) before the record could adequately explain the trials of any group. Perhaps there is a similarity here to how Mormon (or Helaman) paused to tell us to carefully pay attention to Gadianton when his group was first introduced (see Helaman 2:13–14). In a similar vein, Alma (or Mormon) provided much detail about the Amlicites in chapter 3 because the Amlicites would return to afflict Alma and the Nephites throughout the rest of Alma’s life.

The record of Alma’s ministry (Alma 1:1–45:19) begins and ends in the same place, embroiled in problems resulting from the apostasy of Nehor and the Amlicites. Both his earliest battle and his final battle 18 years later end with the same story: the dead bodies of the enemy soldiers being thrown into the River Sidon, which carried them to “the depths of the sea” (Alma 3:3; 44:22). Thus Alma’s record carefully shows how dissension, which was dealt with by preaching the word, can lead to apostasy and then to treason, which was dealt with by legal action and war.

The great battles during Alma’s reign were against Lamanite armies allied with or led by Nephite apostates such as the Amlicites (Amalekites), half-Nephite Amulonites (see Alma 21:2–25:9), or Zoramites (see Alma 30:59–43:44). Alma 43:6 states, “As the Amalekites [Amlicites] were of a more wicked and murderous disposition than the Lamanites were, in and of themselves, therefore, [the dissenter] Zerahemnah appointed chief captains over the Lamanites, and they were all Amalekites [Amlicites] and Zoramites.” Alma 43:44 adds, “They were inspired [to war] by the Zoramites and the Amalekites [Amlicites] who were their chief captains and leaders.” And Alma 43:13 ties all these groups together in the final battles before Alma’s departure: “Thus the Nephites were compelled, alone, to withstand against the Lamanites, who were a compound of Laman and Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael, and all those who had dissented from the Nephites, who were Amalekites.
[Amlicites] and Zoramites, and the descendants of the priests of Noah [Amulonites]."

Further, when we read of the atrocities encountered by the missionary sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites—including the slaughter of the 1,005 Anti-Nephi-Lehies (see Alma 24:21–22)—perhaps we will be more likely to notice that Alma’s mention of the true villains is in line with the book’s structure: “The greatest number of those of the Lamanites who slew so many of their brethren were Amalekites [Amlicites] and Amulonites, the greatest number of whom were after the order of the Nehors.” And among the converts to the truth “were none who were Amalekites [Amlicites] or Amulonites, or who were of the order of Nehor, but they were actual descendants of Laman and Lemuel” (Alma 24:28–29).

This new reading helps shed light on another previously perplexing question. Traditionally it has not been possible to tie the 14-year mission of King Mosiah’s sons (see Alma 17–26) very tightly with Alma’s 14-year ministry (see Alma 1–16).13 The only concrete touchstone between the two was the Lamanites’ marching to destroy Ammonihah in the 11th year of the judges as told by Alma (see Alma 16:2–9) and its twin narrative in Alma 25:2–3. Yet there is nothing about the large movements of Lamanite armies in the fifth year as told in Alma 2:24 and 27, which included a Lamanite king (see Alma 2:32–33). The Amlicites were obviously allied with Lamanites (see Alma 2:24), and Ammon and Aaron had been dealing with Lamanite kings no less, but the account of the sons of Mosiah mentions nothing of this threatening alliance of Amlicites. Now, however, we see that these major events of Alma 2 are also referred to by Ammon and Aaron, at least in terms of the Amlicite political influence (see Alma 21:2–5, 16; 22:7). Ammon and Aaron refer to the same problems of Amlicite political influence with the Lamanites in the same time period that Alma faced them (see Alma 24:28–29).

One question remains. Alma 21:1–4 mentions that the first place Aaron went as a missionary was to the partly Amalekite [Amlicite] city of Jerusalem. How could the Amlicites have helped build a great Lamanite city in the first year of the reign of the judges if Nehor didn’t become active before that first year and the Amlicites did not originate until the fifth year? (see Alma 2:1). There are two answers: (1) the record tells of many activities of the missionaries before Aaron reached Jerusalem and never says that he arrived there in the very first year (see Alma 17:6–18)—perhaps it was the second, third, or fourth year, or later (only a very few incidents are recorded from a mission lasting 14 years); (2) the problems with both Nehor and Amlici must have come to a climax in the years recorded in Alma 1–2, but they had apparently been going on for several years before (see Alma 1:16–23). It is highly unlikely that Amlici could rise to prominence with almost half the population’s support, undertake a lively national election, receive an illegitimate coronation, raise a huge army, move major parts of the Nephite population, form alliances with the Lamanites, and manage three major battles all in one year (see Alma 2:2–3:25). Even modern dictators with advanced transportation and mass communications have not accomplished all that in a single year. Alma tells us specifically that much of it did indeed happen in a single year—at least “all these wars and contentions” (Alma 3:25). But the slow building up of a power base and the forging of foreign alliances may have been going on for years before.14 This is how real people and movements in history work.

Another example from secular history makes this point: modern disruptive groups such as Communists and Nazis have a tendency to continue to linger, regroup, transform themselves, or reappear in various forms. So too in the Book of Mormon. Just when we think we have heard the last of the Amlicites in Alma 2:36–38 or of the Amulonites in Alma 25:4–9, we find out they are still around in Alma 21:2 and 43:13. Again, as regards the historicity of the Book of Mormon, this is how real history often seems to work.

Further, if we read these scriptures in the way Brigham Young advised—“as though you were writing them a thousand, two thousand, or five thousand years ago, . . . as though you stood in the place of the men who wrote them”15—we may recall that Alma too had experienced personal apostasy and redemption in his own youth. We might wonder, What was Alma’s first reaction to Nehor and Amlici, this new generation of apostates? Were they similar to the way he had once been? Could they have been old friends or allies, even disciples? The passage in Mosiah 27:32–28:1 tells of a little-known mission to the Nephites by Alma and Mosiah’s sons, seemingly between one and eight years in duration, indicating that Alma’s conversion was
likely less than a decade old. When we later read that Alma fought with Amlici in hand-to-hand battle (see Alma 2:31), we could wonder what his thoughts might have been. Alma had once been like Amlici (compare Mosiah 27:8, 19 with Alma 2:1–2), and had Alma remained that way, Amlici might have rebelled even more successfully—since there might not have been a righteous man like Alma to stop him. Both men began life on a similar path, and they continued on it until they made a crucial choice to continue or change. In killing Amlici, was Alma killing a version of his old self yet again? Even after killing Amlici, Alma faced Amlici’s dissenters until his last battle (see Alma 43:44).

Ethnic and Tribal Issues

As we better comprehend whom Alma saw as the true enemies, we may decide to rethink the simplistic, tribal-based reading of the Book of Mormon—Lamanites as “bad guys,” Nephites as “good guys.” Although John Sorenson and a few other Book of Mormon scholars never use the term race to describe the differences between Nephites and Lamanites, most readers of the Book of Mormon see an ethnic dimension in the book, however loosely we may define the somewhat imprecise terms race and ethnicity. For example, both official and unofficial Latter-day Saint art and film show what seem to be different racial or ethnic characteristics in Book of Mormon peoples, sometimes with moral connotations (see Enos 1:20).

There have always been group-based approaches to national or personal problems where blame was put on the outsiders, on “them.” Because of limited means of transportation, communication, and information exchange, all ancient societies in every culture were race or tribal based when compared to modern Western societies. Loyalty to one’s local group, race, or tribe was vital for reasons of survival. The book of Ruth and the parable of the good Samaritan, among numerous other biblical passages, oppose but tacitly acknowledge the racial thinking so prevalent in biblical culture. Even the “civilized” ancient Greeks actually thought themselves physically different “by nature” from other human races—as different as Greeks were from animals. In fact, any ancient record not reflecting some of that racial or tribal bias would probably not qualify as an authentic ancient record. The so-called racial or ethnic dimension is typical of ancient documents in this aspect. What makes the Book of Mormon stand out is not how much blame is put on “them,” the Lamanites, but rather how little. This is surprisingly true even in the Book of Alma, the book with the longest treatment of wars and contentions with the Lamanites.

An understanding of this requires a close reading of the record, distinguishing at times between what is said and what is shown. For instance, when the story of Ammon and his companions is introduced, the Lamanites are called “a wild and a hardened and a ferocious people; a people who delighted in murdering the Nephites, and robbing and plundering them. . . . They were a very indolent people, . . . and the curse of God had fallen upon them because of the traditions of their fathers” (Alma 17:14–15). Later, the Lamanites are said to be “in the darkest abyss” (Alma 26:3). However, if we read the account of Ammon and Aaron’s 14-year mission among the Lamanites side by side with Alma’s mission among the Nephites, what the records show is that the Lamanites were almost as civilized, decent, receptive, and, yes, hostile, dishonest, murdering, and persecuting as Alma’s Nephites. They had highways, transportation, government, religious buildings, planned cities, various religious customs, government officials, soldiers, outlaws and renegades, and kings and subkings (or “chiefs”), just as the Nephites had, and were not quite as uncivilized as the Nephites originally feared. If anything, their record shows that it was the Nephite apostate groups—Amlicites, Amulonites, and Zoramites—who were responsible for most of Alma’s problems with the Lamanites.

If anything, their record shows that it was the Nephite apostate groups—Amlicites, Amulonites, and Zoramites—who were responsible for most of Alma’s problems with the Lamanites.
In fact, Book of Mormon prophets rarely blamed their people’s problems on outside aggressors, but rather on internal dissent and sinfulness. Indeed, after the original Laman and Lemuel, who understood the gospel well enough to be accountable for their own choices regarding it, there were only one or two other pure Lamanite individual villains named in the entire book.21

When we look at the truly vicious villains in the Book of Mormon, the record shows that after Laman and Lemuel they came almost exclusively from the Nephite groups: Sherem, Noah and his priest Amulon, Nehor, Amllic, the people of Ammonihah, Korihor, the Zoramites in the book of Alma, Alamickiah, Ammonor, Jacob, Pachus and the king-men, Morianton, Kishkumen, Paanchi, Gadianton, and probably Zerahemnah. Even when the record calls some of these lesser-known villains such as Tubaloth and Coriantumr “Lamanites” or even “bold Lamanites,” we have already been told that their true parentage was Nephite or Mulekite.22 To be sure, the Nephites did not consider the Lamanites to be peaceful neighbors, and these unrighteous Lamanites did send armies from time to time to attack the Nephites, but there is no mistaking that the record emphasizes that the majority of the time, it was the Nephite dissenters who were the true “hard hearts” who continually stirred up, recruited, and inspired the reluctant Lamanites to go into battle (see Alma 21:3; 23:13–15; 24; 27:2–3; 43:44; 47:1–6; 48:1–3; 52:1–4; 62:35–38; 63:14–15; Helaman 1:14–33; 4:4). Indeed, within two verses of the death of the dissenting Nephi Ammoron, the great Nephite-Lamanite wars were over (see Alma 62:36–38), and the peace was not broken for another eight years—when more Nephite dissenters stirred up Lamanite hearts (see Alma 63:14–16). The great Nephite-Lamanite wars of the book of Alma, according to the record, were wars where there were large Lamanite and Nephite allies on both sides of the conflicts. The verses in Alma 23:8–13 indicate how large the Lamanite pro-Nephite faction was.

To read the text this deeply, we could well consider the destruction of the city Ammonihah. As S. Kent Brown has noted, the incident contains different information from two different narrations, from the “northern” Nephite perspective and from inside the “southern” Lamanite milieu.23 The traditional Nephite perspective shows only Lamanites as aggressors (see Alma 16:2–11). But the second nar-

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their Lamanite allies. These conflicts become more pronounced until the book reaches its greatest height and its greatest fall. The apex is achieved in a Christ-centered community in 4 Nephi 1:2–23, a time when race or groups truly had become a non-issue: “Neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ” (4 Nephi 1:17). The record does not indicate whether or not they all looked the same, but it does indicate that they all behaved the same and were treated the same. There is no denying that this is the highest ideal reached in the Book of Mormon. Its lowest point follows just a few pages later, beginning in Mormon 3:9–16, when the Nephites become so full of vengeance and hatred that they want to make the first attack into Lamanite lands aiming at complete annihilation, at which point General Mormon “utterly refuses” to lead his Nephites any longer (Mormon 3:11, 16). Things deteriorate rapidly from there to the absolute barbarity described by Mormon’s letter to his son Moroni in Moroni 9:3–10, telling us gruesome details about how both sides have sunk to almost unimaginable horrors of rape, torture, and cannibalism. The end is near. This is what the book’s structure demonstrates to be highest and lowest points of these societies.

We should also remember that in 4 Nephi 1:36–38, the terms Nephite and Lamanite are given religious and political but non-ethnic meanings thereafter, something that seems to have happened often, such as in Helaman 3:16 and elsewhere. We are told that the term Nephite was only a religious or political identification of those groups who initially believed in Christ, whereas Lamanite meant only those who rebelled against the gospel, regardless of ethnicity, although even then some questions remain. In any case, Alma’s record seems carefully organized around who was considered the Nephites’ major problem—dissenting, apostatizing Nephites more than Lamanites.

Alma’s Message: Beware the Enemy Within

Alma knew that his teaching that the sources of evil are often internal was not always easy to hear. Indeed, he ended his ministry by delivering the flip side of the oft-quoted “Inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land” (Alma 36:30), with an equal but opposite “Thus saith the Lord God—Cursed shall be the land, yea, this land” (Alma 45:16). Alma’s entire nation, if not repentant, would become extinct (see Alma 45:11, 14). This was a prophecy so horrific that he commanded Helaman not to repeat it at the time (see Alma 45:9). Then, after blessing his sons, the earth, and the church, Alma departed out of the land for good (see Alma 45:8, 15–18). This is a decidedly different tone than the more positive side of Alma so often emphasized—the impact and elegance of his words in Alma 5, 29, 32, and 36, for instance. While his testimony of the Savior is crucial, we should not overlook this other way that he organized his writings. By getting a clearer picture of how Alma began and ended his testament with the influence of Nehor and the Amlicite-led dissenters of Nephite origin, we gain deeper insight into Alma’s understanding of individual and societal evil. Alma places his greatest emphasis on internal evil. The battle is most often fought within ourselves. ☐
**EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH**

**DANIEL H. LUDLOW**

*This interview between Daniel H. Ludlow, formerly the director of Correlation Review for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and two representatives of JBMS, S. Kent Brown and Dana M. Pike, took place on 16 May 2002.*

**PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK PHILBRICK**

JBMS: How did you first become interested in the Book of Mormon? Was it an event or an experience?

DHL: I have always sort of been religiously inclined. I remember I went to Sunday School for 14 years without missing a single time. I remember when I was the age of the Prophet Joseph Smith when he had his first vision. Knowing how he got a testimony, I decided that maybe I could do that too. So when I was the same age, I remember praying all night about the Book of Mormon. I remember how bitterly disappointed I was when, after I prayed all night about it, my uncle called me to go out and start milking the cows and do the chores. No angel had visited. I couldn’t say I knew. I was bitterly disappointed. But my love has always been the Book of Mormon.

I reached the point, though I was young, that I knew that the Book of Mormon was true as surely as though an angel had appeared to me. So I have never questioned it. That is why it bothers me a little bit when some people feel like they have to prove the Book of Mormon, or they have to have the Book of Mormon proven to them. I am suspicious of that because I think the Book of Mormon is its own best evidence, its own best truth. I am still convinced that the best way to get a real testimony of the Book of Mormon and a love of the Book of Mormon is from the study of it from the spiritual side. I don’t know that archaeology and other things are ever going to convert a person to the Book of Mormon. It might convince them, but to me there is a world of difference between being converted to something as compared with just being convinced that it is true. I lean towards internal evidences much more than external evidences.

This interest in the Book of Mormon is what brought me to BYU. When Ernest Wilkinson recruited me for the BYU faculty, he said, “If we let you teach religion classes, will you come to BYU?” I just loved to teach the Book of Mormon. So that is what I concentrated on when I came to BYU [in 1955]. About that time the Brethren decided that all the students at BYU ought to take a course in the Book of Mormon. Before that, BYU had a religion requirement, but students could fill that religion requirement in lots of ways. The Brethren finally decided that you needed to take a course in the Book of Mormon the first year you attended any church-sponsored college or university, whether you were a freshman student, a graduate student,
or a transfer student. Because of the rapid growth of BYU, and because of that policy, all of a sudden we were teaching scores of Book of Mormon sections. I was the chairman of the Department of Bible and Modern Scripture, so I had to get lots of new teachers. I wrote a letter to nearly all the institute teachers and some of the seminary teachers in the church and said, “If any of you are planning on coming to BYU for advanced degrees, we can arrange while you are here to give you a teaching fellowship to teach the Book of Mormon.” Also, we had to go to other colleges within BYU and ask them to let some of their faculty come and teach courses. Some of the faculty said, “How can we teach it when we are not trained in it?” So, as the chairman of the department, I arranged that each Friday we would have a class for these teachers to cover the topics for the Book of Mormon classes the next week.

**JBMS:** Do you find more interest in studies that probe the book itself?

**DHL:** Yes. Language similarities, word analyses, wordprint analyses, and things like that as compared with external evidences. I started taking tours to Israel for BYU Travel Study very early. But I resisted any tours to Book of Mormon lands because I knew what some of the directors of those tours were saying: “This is where the city of Bountiful was located” or “This is where the land of Bountiful was located,” and so on.

I finally started taking tours for BYU to Book of Mormon lands. I find it very fascinating, and the Maya civilization in particular, but also the Inca. Concerning the Maya civilization, I don’t have any reasonable question but what they had something to do with the Book of Mormon.

**JBMS:** Do you see value in geographical studies?

**DHL:** I have been very, very fascinated with Book of Mormon geography, but you don’t have to read very many of the theories on Book of Mormon geography to know one thing. They cannot all be right. And, as I told one author once, it may be that they are all wrong. And I have talked to others who say essentially the same thing.

Obviously the Book of Mormon people were real people. They lived in real places. There were real cities, and so on. But when people come out and say, “It is this place,” when we don’t know that’s the place, I don’t feel that is right.

In a similar way, I think there are lots of parallels in the Dead Sea Scrolls to the Book of Mormon account. All of these things have whetted my appetite. But I guess my work in Correlation has also made me a little bit cautious, even when I take tours to Israel. We know where Bethlehem was located. But to be able to say, “The Church of the Nativity is the actual birthplace of the Savior,” I don’t feel that strongly. So I usually use the word *traditional*— “This is the *traditional* place.”

I was privileged to go to Israel in 1969 with Elder LeGrand Richards of the Quorum of the Twelve. He finally called me on this word *traditional*. He would say, “Brother Ludlow, you keep saying this is the traditional place. I don’t want to know the traditional place. I want to know the exact spot.” I said, “Well, Brother Richards, I am not sure there are very many places where we can say that this is the exact spot. There are some places where we can say that it was in this area, and it may be within a few feet.”

The shores of the Sea of Galilee and the level of that sea have not changed much over the years, maybe a few feet. But you can come around the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee today and say, “Now we have crisscrossed the path where the Savior went.” Elder Richards wanted to see some of those places, so I took him. I will never forget. He was 84 years of age at that time and had a bad leg. Of course, he was dressed like an apostle, with nice clothes and nice shoes. When we came to the spot called Tabgha, or Peter’s Primacy, we read in the book of John about the Savior’s appearing after his resurrection to the disciples and about their catching fish and finally recognizing the Savior [see John 21]. I told him the traditions associated with this place, that the Savior must have been in this area.
Without presenting arguments, he wanted to know if I would walk out into the sea with him. I said, “Elder Richards, these stones are slippery, and you have your shoes on and you can’t very well go out there in your stocking feet.” He said, “I want to go out.” So I helped this 84-year-old apostle, and we waded out into the Sea of Galilee until he could reach down and touch the water. That was all he needed.

I am quite impressed with that experience. But there aren’t very many places where you can say, “This is the spot.” It bothers me when good Latter-day Saints become too definite too soon.

JBMS: Are there places that impress you as Book of Mormon locales on this continent? We know that there are such places in Arabia.

DHL: You are talking about places like Teotihuacan and Monte Albán. I don’t think there is any question about the Hill Cumorah in New York. I finally reached a conclusion. It is not a matter of testimony, but I am sort of convinced there must have been two Cumorahs. There must have been a Cumorah in Central America somewhere and the one in New York State.

The Lord in his own due time will make things clear. I have a strong testimony that, anytime the Lord wants, he can prove something. And he can prove it very quickly. But as I mentioned, I don’t think he is interested in our being convinced; I think he is interested in our being converted. Building a testimony would impress me much more than to have something that has to do with archaeological evidence and such.

I remember that when I joined the BYU faculty in 1955, I didn’t know Hugh Nibley but I knew of him. One time when I went to talk to him about Book of Mormon geography, he said, “Look, I wouldn’t touch Book of Mormon geography with a 10-foot pole. The proof of the Book of Mormon is not going to come from geography.” Of course, he leans towards the manuscripts.

I don’t think that scholars or the church has really scratched the surface on, say, the writings of Ixtlilxochitl. Sometimes we quote the Popol Vuh. In my opinion, the Popol Vuh is nothing compared to the writings of Ixtlilxochitl. He talks about the very day of the month of the year in which certain events took place, and you can correlate those with Book of Mormon times.

JBMS: If a young person came to you and asked, “What would you recommend is the best way to study the Book of Mormon?” what are some of the guidelines you would give?

DHL: To young people I would say, make sure that first of all you study the book, and then study what the prophets have said about the book, and don’t get too far away from that. Where there is an interpretation that might suggest some other possibility, examine that with great care. But don’t give it the same weight, because honest people can differ.

JBMS: What is your experience of effectively teaching the Book of Mormon?

DHL: Let me tell you a story. It has to do with multiple witnesses. One day in the 1960s West Belnap, dean of the College of Religion, came to me and said, “Brother Ludlow, the Board of Trustees has decided that we are going to offer some of our general education courses by kinescope [by videotape]. We don’t have enough classrooms for all the students to take basic general education courses in a normal way with a regular teacher, so we are going to teach them in the largest rooms we have on the campus. The three courses that are going to be taught by kinescope are a course in the Book of Mormon, a course in physics, and a course in American history, so that hundreds and hundreds of students can complete their requirements in those areas. We don’t have to add any new faculty. We don’t have to build any new classrooms. Students will go into these classrooms hour after hour, hundreds of them each hour, and take these courses.” I said, “I have had work in audiovisual, and I know that it is an effective way to teach, but it doesn’t substitute for a live teacher.” He said, “The Brethren know that you have done that, and you have been selected to teach the course on the Book of Mormon. We are going to ask...
thousands of students take a course in the Book of Mormon from you, 500 at a time. And you are going to record the lectures, and then we will play these lectures every hour in the Joseph Smith auditorium.”

I said, “No way. I am not going to do it.” He said, “I don’t remember asking you whether or not you would do it. The Brethren have decided this is the way it is going to be done, and we want you to do it.” So I said, “Well, okay. I will do it as long as you don’t have any non-LDS students in there. The non-LDS students deserve a live teacher so that they can ask questions. No non-LDS students.” He said, “Dan, you know we can’t do that. Title IX of the Education Act won’t allow us to discriminate. You have to allow non-LDS in there.” I finally said, “Okay. I will do it if you let some other people help me. I will get up and introduce the topic each time, but we will have different people who will present the material on videotape. We will have Brother Sperry give a lecture on Semitic things in the Book of Mormon. We will have Brother Nibley teach an hour. We will have Robert K. Thomas, Chauncey Riddle, and Roy Doxey and others for an hour each. And I will just get up and introduce the topic and say, ‘We have with us today Dr. Sidney B. Sperry, who got his degree in ancient Semitic languages from the University of Chicago, and he is going to teach on this subject today,’ and turn it over to him.” Belnap said, “I don’t know whether the Brethren will agree to that or not. You were approved to teach the course. If you will prepare a list of what you want these people to teach, I will take it back to the Brethren and see what they say.” So I did. He sent the list to the Brethren, and in the main they approved it. So I set up 27 lectures. I would get up and introduce the topic, and the other faculty member would give the lecture.

We used to have a man at BYU by the name of Richard Wirthlin, who was in statistics. He and others analyzed all three courses taught by videotape. (He later became the chief statistician for the Republican Party in the United States.) He analyzed the Book of Mormon course to find out what the students liked, what they didn’t like, and so on. They were compared with students in the regular classes. Even the results of the final examinations were compared.

There is one consistent thing they found in the kinescope Book of Mormon classes. Many of the non-LDS students were joining the church, a much higher percentage than in the regular classes with regular teachers. I couldn’t believe that non-LDS students were much more likely to join the church if they enrolled in these classes than if they were taught in the regular classroom. I wanted to talk to some of these students. So I and others visited with some of them and began to get an inkling of what was happening.

The story was this: The non-LDS student who took the videotaped class would say, “I took the course first of all because I knew there would not be a live teacher. When you get up and at the end of the first lecture you said, ‘I know the Book of Mormon is true,’ I said to myself, ‘Of course he does, or why would he be teaching religion at BYU?’” The next time you introduced Dr. Nibley as professor of history who was trained at the University of California and who is going to speak to us today on this particular subject related to the Book of Mormon. Dr. Nibley at the end of the class said, ‘I testify that the Book of Mormon is true.’ The next time, as an example, Reed Bradford, who got his degree in sociology from North Carolina, talked to us about sociological aspects of the Book of Mormon. Dr. Bradford at the end said, ‘The Book of Mormon is true.’ After about the fifth discussion or so, I asked myself, ‘What is going on here? These people are all well trained people in their own fields and are logical, reasonable, intellectual, scholarly people, and they all say the Book of Mormon is true. I better find out what this book has in it.’” It was the multiple witnesses that brought them in.

**JBMS:** Very interesting. If you had to pick out one or two of your favorite passages, what would they be?

**DHL:** Let me answer this way. It is the old question of interpretation where I think we can go wrong. I think of the statement that we quote from the book of Moroni. It is a tremendous statement. I think it is probably the most frequently quoted, but also, I think, the most frequently misinterpreted scripture in the entire Book of Mormon. Let’s just read a couple of things here. I think it is a question of not only to whom it applies but also what Moroni says. We will start with Moroni 10:2–3.
“I seal up these records, after I have spoken a few words by way of exhortation unto you. Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things [that is, ‘these records’ referred to in verse 2], if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts.”

Now, “these things” in verse 3 obviously has to do with what Moroni says in verse 2: “I seal up these records.” So he is talking about the records known as the plates of Mormon [see Mormon 6:6]. But then he says, “I want you to read the Bible.” He doesn’t say it in so many words, but remember we read “from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it [the way God deals with people] in your hearts.” So in verse 3 “these things” refers back to what was in verse 2, that is, the records. But in verse 4 “these things” in “when ye shall receive these things” refers back to all that is mentioned in verse 3. So what are the “things” we have to receive (accept) according to verse 4? Well, they are not only the records that Moroni has been preparing but also an understanding of how God has dealt with people from the days of Adam on down. “And when ye shall receive these things”—it doesn’t say to read any more from Moroni’s records—“I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true”—that is, the Book of Mormon, the Bible, and how God deals with people. When we are willing to receive those things, then we ask God whether or not the Book of Mormon is true, and “he will reveal the truth of it unto [us], by the power of the Holy Ghost” [Moroni 10:4].

In 1962 I had a young woman in a class at BYU who was a Methodist. In those days, we had special Book of Mormon sessions for non–Latter-day Saints. We were on the quarter system. I challenged students to read the Book of Mormon completely through when they went home at the end of the first quarter. When students came back the next quarter, a lot of them were in the same section. I noticed that this young woman wasn’t in my class the first day, which surprised me because she was one of the best students I had. Finally, after the second class, I saw her. She was standing at the back door. She came up, and I could tell she had been crying. She wanted me to sign a slip to withdraw from the class. I said, “What happened, Judy?” She said, “Well, I found out for myself the Book of Mormon is not true.” I asked her how she found that out. She said, “I did what you said to do and what Moroni says to do. You read the Book of Mormon and you pray about it, and if you pray about it with a sincere heart, then God will manifest the truth of it unto you. I did it, and I don’t know.” She was honest and sincere, and she really believed that. I thought, “Heavenly Father, what do I do with this problem?” I was not only thinking that, but I was praying silently in my mind, “What do I do?” And the impression came very strongly: “Ask her about the Bible.” I didn’t see the relevance of that, but I said, “Judy, do you believe the Bible?” “Oh, of course. I’m a Methodist. I believe the Bible.” “Ask her about the miracles,” came the impression. “What do you believe about the miracles in the Bible, the miracles of the exodus and so on?” I asked.

“Oh, I don’t believe those,” she said. “My minister tells me that they were just put in there to make the Jewish people look good in the eyes of the people.” “Do you believe that Moses parted the waters of the Red Sea, and do you believe that he smote
the rock and water came out?” I asked.

She said, “Oh, no. I don’t believe any of those things.”

Finally I saw why I was being prompted to ask her about the Bible. I said, “Judy, if we go back and read what it says here in Moroni, it says you have to believe the Bible before you can get a testimony of the Book of Mormon. Your problem is that you don’t believe the Bible.” I said, “I have a good friend who is not a flashy teacher, but he has substance, and I would like to recommend you take his course. I know you are required to take a course in the Book of Mormon, but I will sign a waiver for you that you don’t have to take the Book of Mormon this quarter as long as you are in another religion class.” To make a long story short, she became converted to the Bible, and she was then converted to the Book of Mormon. She served a mission. She brought her parents into the church. Some of her sons have served missions.

According to Moroni, we have to read the Book of Mormon, but we also have to read the Bible to see how God has dealt with people from the days of Adam on down, and then ponder how he deals with us. Then we ask God whether or not “these things” [in verse 4 “these things” include the Book of Mormon records, the Bible, and how God deals with people] are true, and then we get the testimony.

Once you see the reference to the Bible in Moroni, then you can go back to the end of Mormon’s writing where he says, “Therefore repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus, and lay hold upon the gospel of Christ, which shall be set before you, not only in this record but also in the record which shall come unto the Gentiles from the Jews, which record shall come from the Gentiles unto you. For behold, this [the Book of Mormon] is written for the intent that ye may believe that [the Bible]; and if ye believe that ye will believe this also” [Mormon 7:8–9]. If you accept one in honesty and truth, you will accept the other.

Brigham Young one time in a great general conference of the church held up those two books and said, “No Latter-day Saint, no man or woman, can say the Book of Mormon is true, and at the same time say that the Bible is untrue. If one be true, both are; and if one be false, both are false” [in Journal of Discourses, 1:38]. That is 100 percent correct. They are either both true or they are both false. So what you have to do is get a testimony of both of them. And as long as you don’t have a testimony of the Bible and refuse to get one, you can’t get a testimony of the Book of Mormon. It is contrary to the way God deals with people. Truth cleaveth unto truth. Why would God say to you that these things in the Book of Mormon are true, but they are not true in the Bible when they are teaching the same things? So what Brigham Young and Moroni and Mormon are saying is true. You can’t believe one without believing the other, if you read both records.
ENDNOTES

Ancient Voyages Across the Ocean to America: From “Impossible” to “Certain”
John L. Sorenson

10. See, for example, G. F. Carter, “Domesticates as artifacts,” in The Human Mirror: Material and Spatial Images of Man, ed. Miles Richardson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1974), 201–30. Many more examples from the literature are listed in Sorenson and Raish, Pre-Columbian Contact with the Americas.
12. The book is entitled Contact and Exchange in the Ancient World, in press 2005 at the University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, the first in a new series by the press called "Global Perspectives on History." Our paper will constitute chapter 9, "Biological evidence for pre-Columbian transoceanic voyages."
19. Gupta, Plants, 58.
22. Gupta, Plants, 18.
23. Gupta, Plants, 17.
25. Gupta, Plants, 49.
33. Pullaiha, Medicinal Plants in India, 2:361.


49. O. da Fonseca, Parasitismo e migrações da parasitologia para o conhecimento das origens do homem americano: Estudos de Pré-história Geral e Brasileira (São Paulo, Brazil: Instituto de Pré-história de Universidade de São Paulo, 1970).


53. Ferreira, “Encontro de ovos.”


55. Fonseca, Parasitismo e migrações.

56. Ferreira, “Encontro de ovos.”


Attempts to Redefine the Experience of the Eight Witnesses Richard L. Anderson


5. Emma Smith, interview between 4 and 10 February 1879, Saints’ Herald 26 (1879): 290.


9. Iowa State Register, 28 August 1870; also in Vogel, Early Mormon Documents, 2:330.

10. See Anderson, Investigating, 25–26; Millennial Star 21 (20 August 1859); also in Vogel, Early Mormon Documents, 2:297.

11. Martin spoke of handling the leaves of the plates, but possibly when the record was covered, as William and Emma Smith did.

12. “Testimony of Eight Witnesses.” Curious is derived from the Latin curiosus, giving one early English meaning of “made with care or skill.” This is the sense of the Book of Mormon phrase curious workmanship, which is
repeated in the Eight Witnesses’ testimony.
12. See Grant H. Palmer, “Witnes-

s to the Golden Plates,” chap. 6 of An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins (Salt Lake

City: Signature Books, 2002). Vogel’s main treatments of this subject are in his Early Mormon Documents, 3:464–72; and in his study “The Validity of the Wit-

nresses’ Testimonies,” in American Apocrypha, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalf (Salt


13. Palmer’s quotations in this paragraph are from Insider’s View, 175–76, 206–7. For Pal-

mer’s pattern of assuming the witnesses’ “mind-set without evidence, see the reviews by


14. Vogel, Joseph Smith, xvi; com-

pare xii.

15. Vogel, “Testimony of Eight Wit-

nesses,” 471.

16. Vogel, Joseph Smith, 469; com-


18. Preliminary manuscript, Family and Church History Department, The Church of Jesus

Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter Church Archives); also transcribed in Lavina Field-

ing Anderson, Lucy’s Book (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), 455–57.


20. Vogel, Joseph Smith, 442, 446. Vogel appears to favor halluci-

nation to explain both testimo-

nies of the witnesses but warns that his explanations contain “qualifying verbs and adverbs” that show “where my analysis is speculative or conjectural” (xvii).


23. Vogel, “Validity,” 103. Compare Vogel, Early Mormon Docu-

ments, 3:333 on the dubious historical pedigree: “For this reason Fawn Brodie was per-

haps mistaken to place so much weight on Ford’s account.”


25. Theodore Turley’s Memoran-

dums,” Church Archives, hand-

writing of Thomas Bullock, who

began clerking in late 1843; also

in Vogel, Early Mormon Docu-

ments, 5:241. Willard Richards made slight changes to this text, which appears with minor modifications in History of the Church, 3:307–8.

26. Vogel, Early Mormon Docu-

ments, 5:240.


28. See Vogel, Early Mormon Docu-

ments, 5:231–51.

29. The most significant of these eight accounts are used with reference citations later in this article.


31. Bruce N. Westergren, ed., From

History to Dissident: The Book

of John Whitmer (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 56.

32. Latter Day Saint Messenger and

Advocate 2 (March 1836): 286–87; also in Vogel, Early Mormon Documents, 5:239. Besides this source and Turley’s report, the other four references from John Whitmer regarding his handling the plates are in Vogel, Early Mormon Documents, 5:245, 247, 250, 251. Vogel is legalistic in commenting on the report of Whitmer’s 1878 schoolhouse speech, which describes the physical plates and states that Whitmer “had often handled” them. Whether or not “often” is correct, Whitmer was obviously speaking about his familiar official testimony. Yet Vogel claims Whitmer did not describe the plates from “personal experience” (Early Mormon Documents, 5:245).

33. Palmer thinks eight men could “handle the plates in a vision” (Insider’s View, 206), whereas Vogel judges “this possibility unsatisfactory” (“Validity,” 102).

34. John Smith to George A. Smith, 1 January 1838, Church Archives; cited in Anderson, Investigating, 119n13.

35. Warren Parrish to E. Holmes, 11 August 1838, Evangelist 16 (1 October 1838): 226. Parrish intended to quote the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants, page 171, now section 17, though he cited the facing page, 170. The Parrish quotations of Harris match those dated in mid-

March by Burnett in the long

extract quoted next.

36. Ezra Booth to Reverend Ira

Eddy, letter 3, 24 October 1831, in E. D. Howe, Mormonism Un-


37. Stephen Burnett to Lyman E.

Johnson, 15 April 1838, in Joseph


38. Letter to H. B. Emerson, Janu-

ary 1871, Saints’ Herald 22 (15

October 1875): 630; also in An-

derson, Investigating, 119n14.

39. Palmer, in Insider’s View, 206, carelessly states that Harris used the metaphor of seeing through a mountain for the experience of “the eight witnesses,” making this error a main proof for his subjective theory concerning their experience.

40. In the indented extract above, Burnett claimed eight Witnesses hesitated to sign a physical certificate because they had seen the plates only spiritually. Harris may have made a more faith-promoting argument. Apparently speak-

ing of the Three Witnesses, David Whitmer told James H. Hart that “when they were first commanded to testify of these things they demurred” because of general skepticism about an advanced urban culture in ancient America, but they were assured the Lord would inspire discoveries about it (Letter to Deseret News, 4 September 1883; cited in Lyndon W. Cook, ed., David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness [Orem, UT: Grandin Book, 1991], 98). Except for the indirect Burnett letter, no source suggests the Eight Witnesses were reluctant to sign their formal testimony.

41. Letter to Willard Richards, 18

January 1838, Church Archives; also reprinted in Kenneth W. Godfrey, Audrey M. Godfrey, and Jill Mulvay Derr, Women’s Voices (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 71.

42. Vogel, “Validity,” 100.


44. Letter to John Kempton, 26

August 1838, Family History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, microfilm no. 840025.

45. Letter to Parley P. Pratt, Millen-

nial Star 4 (August 1841): 52.


47. See context and reference in Anderson, Investigating, 140.

48. These six references appear in the text at note 32 and within that note.

49. Vogel, Early Mormon Docu-

ments, 3:468.

50. Lucy’s full account was quoted earlier in this paper. See Ander-

son, Lucy’s Book, 456.

51. Interview of Orson Pratt and

Joseph F. Smith, Deseret News, 16 November 1878, omitting parallel retranscrip-

tions; also in Cook, David Whitmer Inter-

views, 40.

52. See Andrew Jenson, History of the Scandinavian Mission (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1927), 156, 177, 494.

53. See Ronald W. Walker, Way-

ward Saints (Urbania, IL: Uni-


54. See Peter Wilhem Poulson

Fagerstjerna, The Light of the Messiah (San Francisco: author, 1888), showing some affinity for the Reorganized Church.

55. Joseph Smith III to Dr. E. A.

Kilbourne, 11 March 1879, Brigham Young University transcriptions of Joseph Smith III letterpress books, original at Community of Christ Library–Archives. Archivist Ron Romig located this and a series of Joseph Smith III letters between 1879 and 1888 pertaining to Poulson. His expert assistance has been essential in producing this article.

56. Vogel, Early Mormon Docu-

ments, 3:465n1.

57. Letter of David Whitmer, 18

November 1882, Community of Christ Library–Archives, with my manuscript reading of the name; also in Cook, David Whitmer Inter-

views, 241.

58. Cook, David Whitmer Inter-

views, 71–73.

59. Poulson’s interview with David Whitmer appears in the Deseret News, 16 August 1878; also in Cook, David Whitmer Inter-

views, 19–24. David likely ob-

tained his report from Poulson’s report that David and Oliver Cowdery were also present when the angel appeared the second time, when he was seen by Martin Harris and Joseph Smith.
60. Compare page 22 of Cook, David Whitmer Interviews, with pages 152 and 188. David’s statement that the Eight Witnesses handled the plates is essentially another John Whitmer interview, since the brothers certainly discussed each other’s experiences.

61. Deseret News, 6 August 1878; also in Vogel, Early Mormon Documents, 5:247–49. This interview agrees with the above Turley report concerning engravings on both sides of each leaf and with Mary Whitmer’s report of seeing the plates joined at the side with “D rings” (see Anderson, Investigating, 31). See the last section of this article for another “D ring” report.

62. Perhaps John Whitmer originally said that the Eight Witnesses were composed mainly of two groups, meaning the four Whitmer brothers and the three Smiths, with Hiram Page not included in the general comment. Two sets of witnesses might have been mistaken for two separate viewings of the plates.

63. Vogel, Early Mormon Documents, 3:465, with a redundant term removed.


65. Vogel, Early Mormon Documents, 3:466.

66. Lyman Wight, manuscript journal, in Joseph Smith III and Heman C. Smith, History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LaMoni, IA: Board of Publication, 1897), 1:153. See 1:151n40 for source note.


69. Times and Seasons 5 (1 August 1844): 607, obituary by John Taylor, who had known Samuel for over six years. Emphasis in subsequent citation.

70. “Notes Written on ‘Chambers’ Life of Joseph Smith,” 15, my transcription, with underlining in the original; also in Vogel, Early Mormon Documents, 1:485.


73. Huron Reflector (Norwalk, OH), 31 October 1841, article titled “From the [Jacksonville] Illinois Patriot, Sept. 16.” The article reports a Mormon sermon “last Saturday” by a recent convert who traveled to Independence to investigate Mormonism. The day and its events correspond with the McLellin journal for Saturday, 10 September.

74. Vogel, Joseph Smith, 468. This is one of the few nonphysical conception of how both sets of witnesses saw the plates.


76. See Vogel, “Validity,” 99, indicating Page “only testified that he saw the plates.” Palmer misses the point of Page’s reaffirmation, claiming he mentions “neither handling or seeing the plates” (Insider’s View, 205). Palmer stipulates to that conclusion by not quoting the part of Page’s 1847 statement that said his 1830 testimony was still true. The concept of not forgetting “what I saw” immediately follows and refers back to Page’s 1830 experience. But Palmer artificially connects “what I saw” to Page’s personal vision of angels, mentioned six lines down in the published letter. See Steven Harper’s comment and comparison of the original with the fractured quotation in “Trustworthy History?” 303–5 (see n. 13 above for full citation).


78. First-person note of visit on 18 February 1875, courtesy of Community of Christ Library–Archives; also in Vogel, Early Mormon Documents, 5:250.

79. See the discussion and footnotes in the last paragraph of the Turley interview section above.


81. Earlier English shown appears in the printer’s manuscript and early editions.

82. See text at note 31, and the citation in that note.

83. See text at note 32, and the citation in that note.

84. See text at note 46, and the citation in that note.

85. See text at note 75, and the citation in that note.

86. Letter of 5 March 1876, addressed to “Mark H. Forest,” courtesy of Community of Christ Library–Archives; also in Vogel, Early Mormon Documents, 5:243.

87. Smith and Smith, History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1:576n; copied from the original that was in Heman Smith’s possession (now unlocated), with italics used for the whole sentence in the first printing.

88. Letter to J. R. Lambert, 6 May 1877, copied from the original that was in Joseph Lambert’s possession, attested by Joseph R. Lambert in a letter to E. L. Kelley, 29 January 1884, Community of Christ–Archives reference no. P13, f311.

“Strange Characters and Expressions”: Three Japanese Translations of the Book of Mormon

Van C. Gessel


2. Some in the foreign language teaching community in the United States actually use this term to designate the languages classified by the State Department as the most difficult for Americans to learn: Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Arabic. See Eleanor H. Jorden, “Japanese Missionary and Church History Department Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter Church Archives).

3. Though there is no way to determine the reason for Sōseki’s refusal to become involved, it is interesting to speculate on whether the negative experiences he had had with overbearing Christians on his sea voyage to London in 1900, as well as the unpleasant experience of being coerced into reading the Bible by some British ladies at a tea party in 1902, might have made Sōseki less receptive to Taylor’s petition. See Van C. Gessel, Three Modern Novelists: Sōseki, Tanizaki, Kawabata (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1993), 39–42, 47–48.

4. Alma O. Taylor to George Reynolds, 6 January 1906, Church Archives.


11. Literal translation by author.


13. What are we to make, for instance, of the contrast between
the familiar anata to refer to God and the honorific onko to refer to the Son. Anata no onko simply does not work in Japa-
nese. An interesting study of lin-
guistic problems, extralinguistic problems, and problems caused by Hebraisms in the English Book of Mormon with reference to the first two translations may be found in Jiro Numano, “The Japanese Translation of the Book of Mormon: A Study in the The-
ory and Practice of Translation” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1976).


19. Alma O. Taylor to the First
Presidentcy, 15 April 1908,
Church Archives.

20. Although the Japanese language uses different characters for mono depending on whether it means “person” or “thing,” very
often the term is written only with phonetic characters that make no such distinction.

21. I am grateful to Wade Fillmore
for drawing my attention to the translations of this verse.

22. Shūsaku Endō, The Samurai,
trans. Van C. Gessel (New York:
Harper & Row and Kodansha

23. Summarized in Neil S. Fujita,
Japan’s Encounter With Chris-
tianity: The Catholic Mission in Pre-
Modern Japan (New York:

Treaties and Covenants: Ancient
Near Eastern Legal Terminology
in the Book of Mormon
RoseAnn Benson Stephen D. Ricks

1. Herbert B. Huffman, “The Treaty Background of Hebrew YÁDÁ,” Bulletin of the American Schools of
Oriental Research 181 (Febru-
Oriental Research 184 (Decem-

Press, 1969), 123.

3. See John A. Widtsoe, A Ratio-
nal Theology, as Taught by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-
day Saints, 7th ed. (Salt Lake
City: Deseret Book, 1965), 123. See also David J. Whitaker, “A
Covenant People,” in Seventh
Annual Sydney B. Sperry Sym-
posium (Provo, UT: BYU Stud-

4. See Theological Dictionary of

5. William Wilson, Old Testament
Word Studies, s.v. “yādā.”

6. Theological Dictionary of
the Old Testament, s.v. “yādā.” The quoted text is from The Inter-
preter’s Dictionary of the Bible, ed. George A. Buttrick (Nash-
ville: Abingdon Press, 1962), s.v. “know!” An additional im-
plication to “know” sexually.”
(See Ludwig Koehler and Walter
Bauertmänner, The Hebrew and
Aramic Lexicon of the Old Tes-
tament, s.v. “yādā.”)

7. See Claude J. Peifer, “The Mar-
riage Theme in Hosea,” The Bib-
e Today 20/3 (1982): 139; and
P. A. Krugger, “Israel, the
Harlot (Hos. 2:4–9),” Journal of
Northwest Semitic Languages 11

8. Most commentators believe that the marriage and births repre-
sent actual events in Hosea’s life
because the nature of prophetic symbolism required that the di-
verse message be represented in
actual events (see James Luther
Mays, Hosea: A Commentary
[Philadelphia: Westminster
Press, 1969], 23). Thus demands to
renounce adulterous behav-
ior apply literally to Hosea’s
wife, Gomer, and figuratively to
the nation of Israel (see Krugger,
“Israel, the Harlot,” 10–11; see
also Peifer, “Marriage Theme in
Hosea,” 140).

9. Hosea’s metaphor called for
donot only right actions but also
reciprocal feelings between the
parties of the covenant, with no
separation between mind and
heart or thought and emotion.
Furthermore, God’s expecta-
tions for covenant relationships
are much deeper and more
profound than those of earthly
kings regarding treaty arrange-
ments. See Abraham J. Hes-
chel, The Prophets (New York:

10. See Huffman, “Treaty Back-
ground of Hebrew YÁDÁ,” 31.

11. Hillers, Covenant: The History of
a Biblical Idea, 122.

12. See Huffman, “Treaty Back-
ground of Hebrew YÁDÁ,” 31.

13. See McCarthy, Treaty and Coven-
ant, 10.

14. Huffman, “Treaty Background of Hebrew YÁDÁ,” 31; empha-
sis added.

15. Although ancient Near Eastern treaties predate current biblical
manuscripts, God made cove-
nants with the great patriarchs
beginning with Adam. The
word know is not preserved
in this context in the biblical
manuscripts currently avail-
able; however, it is found in the
Book of Moses. For example, Cain
questioned why he should
know the Lord (see Moses
5:16); Cain and those who fol-
lowed him entered into a “secret
combination” (Satans’s version of
covenant) and recognized
other covenant members (see Moses
5:49–51); knowledge of God,
meaning how to know God, was
given to Adam in the Garden
of Eden (see Moses 7:32); and
Adam participated in initiation
rites, indicating his acknowledg-
ment of their covenant relation-
ship (see Moses 6:6–68). Other
phrases also indicate a covenant
relationship. For example, the
expressions “The Lord God
commanded the man” (Genesis
2:16) and “Adam heartened
unto the voice of God” (Moses
6:1) indicate a suzerain/vassal
relationship, with God com-
manding and Adam obeying.
Hence, the model for the ancient
Near Eastern treaty pattern had
its beginning in the relationship
between God and Adam and not
in another manner. See Doctrine
and Covenants 107:40–52; and
Robert J. Matthews, “Our Cova-
nants with the Lord,” Ensign,

16. See Mark J. Morrise, “Simile
Curses in the Ancient Near East,
Old Testament, and Book of

17. See the Bible dictionary in the
Latter-day Saint edition of the
King James version of the Bible, s.v. “Covenant.”

18. Ze’ev W. Fark, Hebrew Law in
Biblical Times, 2nd ed. (Provo,
UT: BYU Press, and Winona

19. In the Old Testament examples,
all of the words translated as
“know” or “knowledge” derive
from the root “yādā”.

20. Huffman, “Treaty Background of
Hebrew YÁDÁ,” 31–32; empha-
sis added. The bracketed phrase a designation for the Hittite
king is our insertion; all
other bracketed words are from Huffman.

21. The prophet Ezekiel used this
phrase 62 times in prophesying
both cursing and blessing on
Israel for breaking or keeping her covenants with God. For
example, when prophesying of
the Babylonian captivity, Ezekiel
said, “They shall know that I am
the Lord, when I shall scatter
them among the nations, and
disperse them in the countries” (Eze-
kiel 34:27; emphasis added).


23. See Genesis 18:19; Exodus 33:12; Jeremiah 1:5; 2:47.

24. Huffman, “Treaty Background of Hebrew YÁDÁ,” 32; empha-
sis added. The bracketed me is
our insertion, all other bracket-
ated words are from Huffman.

emphais added. The bracketed
loyal is our insertion.

26. Related to protection is the
Hebrew word ḫiph or ḥiph, which
means covering, and also literally “a close and intimate embrace.”
Thus God’s promised protec-
tion refers not only to temporal
protection, but also to eternal re-
demption. See Hugh Nibley, “The
Meaning of the Atonement,” in
his Approaching Zion (Salt Lake
City: Deseret Book and FARMS,

27. Huffman, “Treaty Background of Hebrew YÁDÁ,” 33; empha-
sis added.

28. Interpreter’s Dictionary of the
Bible, s.v. “Knowledge.”

29. In response to Joseph Smith’s
query concerning “which of all
events was worth”), God repeated
words similar to Isai-
ah 29:13: “They draw near to
me with their lips, but their
hearts are far from me” (Joseph
Smith—History 1:18–19). Thus
a major responsibility of Joseph
Smith was to restore true cove-
nant “knowing,” meaning a
heartfelt relationship with God.
See also Whittaker, “Covenant
People,” 196 (see note 4 herein
for full citation).
30. Huffmon, “Treaty Background of Hebrew YĀDĀʾ,” 37; emphasis added. The bracketed for is our insertion, all other bracketed words are from Huffmon.

31. Mays, Hosea, 69 (see note 8 herein for full citation). “Knowing,” or making covenants, binds or obliges the suzerain, God, to bless or curse his vassal, the house of Israel, depending upon their recognition of him. Hosea prophesied: “My people [Israel] are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children” (Hosea 4:6; emphasis added; see note 3 herein).


36. Just as Hosea and Isaiah prophesied destruction or captivity for lack of “knowledge,” the opposite, “knowledge,” will bring freedom, gathering, and protection. In the words of Nephi, “[God] will bring them again out of captivity, and they shall be gathered together to the lands of their inheritance; and they shall be brought out of obscurity and out of darkness; and they shall know that the Lord is their Savior and their Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel” (1 Nephi 22:12). Again, we see a reference to the responsibility of the suzerain to protect and gather his vassals and their responsibility to recognize him as their only source of safety and redemption. Specifically, the children of Israel will learn that their only true source of protection and deliverance comes from God.


38. We see that blessings are withheld as a consequence of “not knowing” God. “The reason why [God] cease the to do miracles among the children of men is because that they dwindle in unbelief, and depart from the right way, and know not the God in whom they should trust” (Mormon 9:20). The logic put forth here by Moroni is that the creation of heaven and earth and humans is miraculous. Since God does not change, miracles should continue. If miracles are not evident, it is not the fault of an unchanging God but the fault of humans who have changed their beliefs and been unfaithful to their covenants with him (see Mormon 9:17–19; Isaiah 24:5).

39. Abraham also desired to enter into a covenant with God; however, this point is not found in the Old Testament but rather in the Pearl of Great Price (see Abraham 1:2–4). Moses desired his people to enter into a covenant with God, but they were too frightened to do so directly (see Exodus 20:18–21).

40. See Whittaker, “Covenant People,” 206 (see note 3 herein for a full citation).

41. George Mendenhall maintains that the similarity of the Sinaitic covenant to Hittite treaties is an argument attesting to the historicity of the Exodus narrative. Along that same line of reasoning, we maintain that the similarity of Book of Mormon covenants to Old Testament covenants is evidence attesting to the historicity of the Book of Mormon. See George E. Mendenhall, “Ancient Oriental and Biblical Law,” The Biblical Archaeologist 17 (May 1954): 37; Nibley calls these similarities “patterns” and titles a chapter “Old World Ritual in the New World”; see Hugh Nibley, An Approach to the Book of Mormon, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1964), 295.

The Savior and the Children in 3 Nephi

M. Gawaiin Wells


19. Many thanks to S. Kent Brown for the insight that the fact the Zoramite leaders were able to “find out pretty much the minds of all the people” (Alma 35:5) without resorting to intimidation reinforces the argument that these people were a distinct clan. A familial relationship would encourage this kind of trust and accessibility to people whereas a mixed-clan community would not.


“No Poor Among Them” Lindon J. Robinson

1. A study of a connection between commandment keeping and economic prosperity could deal with economic issues in each Book of Mormon era; I have chosen to deal with matters that span the entire record.


3. In an earlier issue of this journal, I discussed how keeping the commandments to love God and one’s neighbors leads to increased specialization, trade, freedom of choice, and prosperity; see Lindon J. Robinson, “Economic Insights from the Book of Mormon,” JBMS 1/1 (1992): 35–53.

4. Actually, Adam Smith was well aware of the importance of friendly relations. The first chapter in his book The Theory of Moral Sentiments is titled “Of Sympathy” (London: A. Millar, 1759).

5. Covaglia and I found that the same requirement for friendly relations exists today. A survey of 1,500 farmland operators in Michigan, Illinois, and Nebraska showed that less than 2 percent of the sales occurred between a seller who viewed the buyer as unfriendly. See Lindon J. Robinson, Robert J. Meyer, and Marcelo E. Siles, “Social Capital and the Terms of Trade for Farmland,” Review of Agricultural Economics 24/1 (Spring/Summer 2002): 44–58.


The Hebrew Text of Alma 7:11 Thomas A. Wayment

1. A text critic is one who considers the process by which an accepted text has been passed down through history. All known textual variants are considered in this process as well as historical influences that may have led to alterations in the text. Therefore, it is the work of the text critic to consider which text most accurately represents what the original author wrote or intended.

2. For example, the term the law and the prophets had become a technical term for the Old Testament in Jesus’s day (see Matthew 11:13; 22:40). The descriptive nature of the term adequately expresses the content of the Old Testament while Mosiah’s reference seems to include only the first portion of the Old Testament.

3. Moroni does explicitly state that the Hebrew had also been altered by them; therefore what we call Hebrew may have been significantly different from what he referred to as Hebrew (see Mormon 9:33).


5. The superscription included by Mormon before the beginning of Alma 7 reads, “The words of Alma which he delivered to the people in Gideon, according to his own record.” See The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part I, ed. Royal Skousen (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001), 420.

6. Alma frequently uses introductory formulas to introduce quotations from the brass plates and earlier Book of Mormon prophets; see Alma 9:12, 24; 11:37; 30:8; 33:3, 15, 19. In Alma 11:37 Amulek uses a very similar method to introduce a prophetic quotation from an angel by saying, “I cannot deny his word, and he hath said” (compare Alma 12:21).


8. The Book of Mormon contains one other translation of Isaiah 53:4, which is found in Mosiah 14:4. The Mosiah quotation follows the KJV’s English translation of Isaiah 53:4 much more closely than the quoted version in Alma 7:11.

9. It is important to note that although intiminities and pains offer slightly different meanings, each noun is in the plural and not the singular.

10. The lexical range, or established range of meaning, for these two terms can be better appreciated in Deuteronomy 7:15; 28:61 and Isaiah 38:9 for hōlāqətnî; and in Exodus 3:7 and Isaiah 53:3 for mākʾōbênu.

11. Matthew uses astheneias, which should be correctly rendered as a “weakness” of any sort, and nosous, which would be the natural term for disease.

12. This is surprising given the Gospel of Matthew’s penchant for adhering to the Septuagint over the Hebrew Old Testament. Matthew does not follow the Septuagint in any substantive manner for this quotation. One suggestion is that he wanted to correct the more loosely worded Septuagint, which had translated these terms as “sins and pain.” See W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., The Gospel according to Matthew (Edinburgh: Clark, 1993), 237–38. No significant textual variants to this passage would warrant the suggestion of divergent manuscript traditions for the Hebrew text and the text used by Matthew or Alma.

13. The parallel between Matthew and Alma suggests that Isaiah 53 carried a messianic interpretation even before Christ’s mortal ministry. For Latter-day Saints, and Christians generally, Isaiah 53 is one of the most important Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming of Christ, but hints from the Targum on Isaiah and the Great Isaiah Scroll of the Dead Sea Scrolls suggest that this passage was understood messianically before Christ came; see Margaret Barker, The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: Clark, 2003), 293–4. Although this evidence cannot prove a messianic understanding of Isaiah 53 during the early Christian period, it suggests that other Jews had understood this passage as referring to the ministry of the Messiah before his advent.

Alma’s Enemies: The Case of the Lamanites, Amalics, and Mysterious Amalekites J. Christopher Conkling

1. John L. Sorenson writes that the Nephi sees things simply: “In a broad sense the Nephites’ rivals were called Lamanites, but that master obscure differences that seem to have made little difference to the Nephites. At a strategic level, if Nephi wore white hats, they considered that any sort of Lamanite wore a black one” (“Religious Groups and Movements among the Nephites, 200–1 ce,” in The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges [Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000], 171). Of course, many otherwise astute readers of the Book of Mormon see the Nephite-Lamanite rivalry in the same simplistic terms as the Nephites apparently did, since their view of the Lamanites is reflected in the record. For example, Fawn M. Brodie wrote: “The Nephites, peace-loving and domestic, and the Lamanites, bloodthirsty and idolatrous. The two races fought intermittently for a thousand years” (see Brodie, No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet [New York: Knopf, 1978], 44).


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4. These Amalekites/Nehorites differ from other apostates such as Korihor in that they definitely believed in God (see Alma 1:4; 22:7), whereas Korihor did not (see Alma 30:37–38). This may help explain why Korihor was killed by the apostate Zoramites (see Alma 30:59), who were kindred spirits with the Amalekites (see Alma 43:4–6). Not all apostates in the book are the same. See John L. Clark, "Painting Out the Messiah: The Theologies of Dissidents," JBMS 11 (2002): 18–45.
5. We are not explicitly told how the Amlicites arose and who their leader was (see Alma 21:11), and the same is generally true for the Amulonites (see Mosiah 23:31–24:9), the Zoramites (see Alma 30:59–31:4), the Ammonihahites (see Alma 8:6–7; 16:9), the Amalickiahites (see Alma 46:3, 28), the people of Morianton (see Alma 50:28), the king-men (see Alma 51:5; the leader is not named), the Gadianton robbers (see Helaman 2:4; 6:18), and of course the Nephiites, the Lamanites, the people of Zarahemla, and the Anti-Nephi-Lehies/Ammonites. Indeed, Alma or Mormon tells us exactly how and why groups in towns and villages got such names—"after the name of him who first possessed them" (Alma 8:7). The only exception is these mysterious Amalekites in Alma 21:2.
6. In the casual introduction, the Amalekites are introduced alongside the Amulonites and Lamanites, both groups whom we know well from their detailed introductions. Even the occasional allies of the Amalekites, the mysterious Zoramites, are given an introduction in Alma 30:59: "And it came to pass that as he [Korihor] went forth among the people, yea, among a people who had separated themselves from the Nephiites and called themselves Zoramites, being led by a man whose name was Zoram . . . " I use the word mysterious because this Zoram is unknown—neither the Zoram of 1 Nephi 4:35 nor the Zoram of Alma 16:5 seems a possible candidate.
10. Of course, there were no verses in the original manuscript. References in this paper to chapter and verse refer to current chapter and verse numbering.
12. These ideas are from Orson Scott Card, "Dissent and Treason," Ensign, September 1977, 53–58.
13. Sidney B. Sperry, for example, says "there are few or no data within these chapters [Alma 17–26] that enable us to point out specific dates" (see his Book of Mormon Chronology [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970], 12).
14. Sorenson surmises about Amlici's long history that "it would be a good bet that part of Amlici's appeal to a sizable population was that he was a descendant of the old chief, Zerahemla. He might well have been a person of privilege who wanted kingly authority to augment power he already possessed. He certainly had a strong political base before he launched his move. . . . It is apparent that Amlici had made an arrangement with the Lamanites" (Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985], 195–96).
16. For example, Sorenson prefers such terms as religious groups, lineage groups, and different peoples. See his "Peoples of the Book of Mormon," 194; and "Religious Groups and Movements among the Nephiites," 171.
17. In some ethnic studies, certain secular scholars have questioned if race has scientific meaning at all, although most admit that the common person understands what race implies. Some scholars require 40 to 4,400 generations of separation to define a race (a minimum of 800 years at the rate of five generations per century). See Jay A. Sigler, ed., International Handbook on Race and Race Relations (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), xii–xv; and Michael Levin, Why Race Matters: Race Differences and What They Mean (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1997), 19–20. To distinguish various groups, the Book of Mormon does not use the word race, nor does it mention separation into tribes until 3 Nephi 7:2–4, 12–14. Moreover, the book does not show even a different language arising during the almost 500-year separation of peoples between 2 Nephi 5:7 and the book of Alma (this was not the case with the Mulekites in Omni 1:17–18). Whether or not scholars determine that a group living separately for roughly 500 years could be technically considered a different race, tribe, or ethnic subgroup, there is no doubt that the Nephiites showed different skin characteristics in the Lamanites from the start (see 2 Nephi 5:20–25; Jacob 3:3–9; Alma 3:6–7) that related to sin and righteousness (see Enos 1:20).
18. See the current The Testaments of One Fold and One Shepherd and numerous Latter-day Saint seminary films as examples.
and Gadianton were Nephites from Zarahemla (see Helaman 1:9–12; 2:4–14).

Zerahemnah is the only uncertain figure in the group. Five pieces of evidence make his Nephite (Zoramite and/or Mulekite) heritage likely: (1) in Alma 43:3–5 we are told that the Zoramites had become Lamanites and that the leader of the combined group was Zerahemnah; (2) Zerahemnah only chose Zoramites and Amalekites (Amlicites) as his captains; (3) Zerahemnah’s first attack was through Zoramite lands as if he knew that area best (had been raised there?); (4) Alma 43:44 says that “their chief captains and leaders” were Zoramites and Amalekites and immediately calls Zerahemnah their “chief captain, or their chief leader”; (5) the similarity of his name to Zarahemla may signify a Mulekite side to his family history. A possible reading (although not the only possibility) is that Alma or Mormon went into detail about the Zoramites becoming Lamanites in order to explain why the Lamanite leader would have been a Zoramite.

It would be dishonest to pretend that lineage plays no role in Book of Mormon thinking. If these villains were not pure-blooded Lamanites, they were also not pure-blooded Nephites (in terms of literal descendents of Nephi). They were often of mixed ancestry (Amulonites) or were from Zoramite and Zarahemla (Mulekite) ancestry. Sorenson points out that the major dissidents Nehor, Gadianton, and Kishkumen had Jaredite names (one possibly even “pre-Jaredite”). See Sorenson, “Religious Groups and Movements among the Nephites,” 167–68, 194; and Ancient American Setting, 195–97. The point is not that there had never been Lamanite or Nephite reprobates in the thousand-year history, but that in the highly abridged version of the record, those names were not focused on or included as the villains of primary importance.


24. For me, such subtleties add evidence for the historicity of the Book of Mormon. How or why would a young Joseph Smith think to describe the destruction of Ammonihah with such slight but differently shaded descriptions? Yet it is just what we might expect from people who really lived in such a divided community. Why would Joseph describe the Lamanites with relative pleasantness in Mosiah 9:1–7 and switch, just a few sentences later, to the total negativity of Mosiah 9:10–10:18? It is just the sort of thing we might expect from a real Zeniff writing a few verses before and then in the midst of a violent confrontation after 13 years.

25. An example of such questions is, If the terms Nephites and Lamanites had only religious or political meanings and not hereditary ones, what do the further subclassifications mean, such as Jacobites, Josephites, and Zoramites, as described in 4 Nephi 1:36?
COMING IN FUTURE ISSUES

Birds along the Lehi Trail
Weather Report from the Valley of Lemuel
Reconstructing the Trek of Lehi and Sariah
The Book of Mormon and Automatic Writing
The Plants of Lehi’s Bountiful