The Discovery of Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon: Forty Years Later

Mughsayl: Another Candidate for Land Bountiful

A Tale of Three Communities: Jerusalem, Elephantine, and Lehi-Nephi

Service and Temple in King Benjamin's Speech

Liahona: “The Direction of the Lord”
ON THE COVER: John Welch, as a young missionary in 1967, meets with Paul Gaechter to show him instances of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. Illustration by Jerry Thompson. Used with permission.
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THE EDITOR’S NOTEBOOK

After forty years of its influence, it seems appropriate to celebrate Jack Welch’s initial publication on chiasmus as a literary device in the Book of Mormon. The Journal welcomes to its pages Professor Welch’s recollections of how he came to find passages that feature this notable a-b-b-a structure. The very selective bibliography assembled by Scot Hanson and Daniel McKinlay stands as a shining “Exhibit A” of the significant breakthrough that Welch’s effort has led to. It is as though a huge plug has been removed that dammed a large stream of water. So sweeping has been the influence of Welch’s study, and that of others who have followed a similar path, that Robert F. Smith can write of the muting of critics’ cries against the Book of Mormon, even cajoling them into admitting that the volume possesses a notable value as a literary work. Smith then shows that the world out of which the Book of Mormon grew, most likely ancient Mesoamerica, demonstrates a firm acquaintance with chiasmus in its literature.

The other authors who have dealt with subjects internal to the Book of Mormon text include Heather Hardy who allows us a glimpse into her long and intense study of this book. Identifying subtle nuances in a series of passages that go back to Mormon’s hand, rather than trying to lay bare his overall plan, she lifts to view one of the brightened rooms of his message to readers, that of the grand, illuminated hallways of the Messiah’s work.

In quite another vein, after readers thought that King Benjamin’s speech had received all the attention that it could absorb, Donald Parry walks readers carefully through the paths of the king’s speech and uncovers one of its subtle dimensions, that of service. But this time he does not offer comment on service for others, which stands as a prominent part of the speech, but on priestly service as it was practiced in the ancient Jerusalem temple and as it became ingrained in the worship life of Nephite peoples. Remarkably, the two go hand in hand, with little to distinguish them.

The fourth study that touches on the text itself is Jonathan Curci’s vigorous treatment of the name Liahona. A Swiss legal scholar, Curci’s study also shows his thorough grasp of ancient Hebrew patterns of language, which he brings to bear on this intriguing name. He concludes that the elements of the name reflect a probable Hebrew origin, a pattern that people in Joseph Smith’s world could not have known or guessed.

Of studies that examine the world of the Book of Mormon, Wm. Revell Phillips offers an engrossing approach to a recently completed excavation season in southern Oman. The archaeology team, of which Phillips was a part, began a systematic investigation of a pair of sites that sit at the mouth of Wadi Ashawq next to Mughsayl. This system of canyons drains the largest area in the south of Oman and, remarkably, fits nicely the description of Nephi’s Bountiful, adding another possible candidate from this region of the world.

Jared Ludlow’s study, which rests on his thorough acquaintance with the history of the fifth-century Jewish colony that situated itself on Elephantine Island in Upper Egypt, brings forward the different responses to the loss of Jerusalem and its religious centrality after the Babylonians overran the city and its temple in 587 BC. Among the efforts to carve out a new life, religiously and otherwise, stand those of the Nephites. But others were also trying to patch meaning into their existence, including those who moved to Upper Egypt and built a temple, and those who returned from exile in Babylonia and struggled to make a life among the burned out remains of Jerusalem.

By itself, Donald Cannon’s study discusses the only contemporary set of issues dealt with in this issue of the Journal, namely that of how newspaper articles responded to the publication of the Book of Mormon. As expected, the tenor of articles was largely negative, and ill informed. But he finds aspects that point to fair-mindedness on the part of some writers. They all become part of the pattern that Moroni outlined in his first visit to the boy Prophet: “that [his] name should be had for good and evil among all nations” (JS—H 1:33).
In the Press:

Early Newspaper Reports on the Initial Publication of the Book of Mormon

Donald Q. Cannon
As a long-time teacher and student of the history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I have been fascinated by the question of how people reacted to the first publication of the Book of Mormon. I have wondered how they regarded this unusual book. One way to answer this question is to examine the news stories concerning its publication. As we consider this matter, several questions come to mind. How many news articles were there? How widespread was the press coverage? Were the stories positive or negative?

This interest in the reaction to the 1830 publication of the Book of Mormon has motivated me to collect news articles and to analyze them. Initially, this quest took me personally to libraries and historical societies in the eastern United States. As time passed, Internet sources made a broader search more feasible and much more efficient. An example of the types of material now available online is “Uncle Dale’s Old Mormon News Articles,” prepared by Dale R. Broadhurst.

Since the 1980s I have collected news stories about the Book of Mormon from newspapers in states located primarily east of the Mississippi River. Most of the articles were published between 1830 and 1832, soon after the Book of Mormon first appeared in print. There are a few which came out earlier and later.

As one would suppose, most news coverage originated in Palmyra or other neighboring cities. Although local newspapers paid a great deal of attention to the Book of Mormon, papers in other locations contained far fewer articles.

In order to understand what these news articles discussed, let us first examine the New York newspapers. The earliest article about the Book of Mormon...
Mormon appeared on June 26, 1829, in the *Wayne Sentinel* of Palmyra, New York. The editor of the *Wayne Sentinel* was Egbert B. Grandin, who would later publish the Book of Mormon. This article covered the story of local gossip concerning the so-called “Golden Bible” and even included a sample title page from the forthcoming Book of Mormon. Quoting from the article, “just about in this particular region, for some time past, much speculation has existed, concerning a pretended discovery, through superhuman means, of an ancient record, of a religious and divine nature and origin, written in ancient characters, impossible to be interpreted [sic] by any to whom the special gift has not been imparted by inspiration. It is generally known and spoken of as the ‘Golden Bible.’”

Later that summer another Palmyra newspaper, the *Palmyra Freeman*, ran an article which included a brief history of the plates and described the forthcoming publication as “the greatest piece of superstition that has ever come within our knowledge.” The author of this article has been identified as J. A. Hadley, publisher of the *Palmyra Freeman*.

In 1829, *The Reflector*, another Palmyra paper, had published some items concerning the Book of Mormon. Early in 1830, *The Reflector* began publishing excerpts from the yet unpublished book. The first installment came from “The First Book of Nephi,” beginning with the phrase, “I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents.” The editor of *The Reflector*, Abner Cole, used the name Obadiah Dogberry for his newspaper articles. On weekends, Cole was able to use the press where the Book of Mormon was being published. This gave him the opportunity to obtain excerpts from the forthcoming book, which he printed without permission.

The E. B. Grandin building housed the press where early newspaper reports on the Book of Mormon—and the book itself—were printed.
first excerpt included a statement from Cole which encouraged readers to withhold judgment concerning the book’s authenticity until the book itself came off the press and they had the opportunity to read it for themselves. As Cole continued to publish excerpts from the forthcoming book, Joseph Smith became alarmed and threatened Cole with a lawsuit for copyright violation. This action caused Cole to refrain from publishing more excerpts, but from this point on he ran essentially negative articles about the Book of Mormon.6

The first New York City paper to carry an article on the Book of Mormon was the New York Telescope. On February 20, 1830, it printed a letter from C. C. Blatchly under the title “Caution Against the Golden Bible.” Blatchly, who had secured a few pages of the book from the publisher, criticized the work, warning people not to buy it.7

In the meantime, the Wayne Sentinel began advertising the sale of the Book of Mormon. The first ad appeared on March 19, 1830, and others followed through most of April to May 7, 1830.8 The copies of the Book of Mormon were first made available to the public at the Egbert B. Grandin Bookstore, on March 26, 1830. He had initially refused to publish the book because he thought it to be a religious imposture and an attempt to defraud Martin Harris. Grandin’s associates convinced him that it was purely a business proposition and that he was not responsible for any action of the author. His concern for the financial feasibility of the volume was resolved when Martin Harris signed a mortgage agreement with Grandin to pay the agreed $3,000 through the sale of the necessary acres of farm land within an eighteen-month period if he should fail to pay the regulated amount through other means. On March 26, 1830, bound copies of the Book of Mormon had been readied for the readership.9

Soon after the first copies came off the press, on April 2, 1830, the first full-scale newspaper article about the Book of Mormon appeared in the New York Telescope, dated February 20, 1830, criticizes the Book of Mormon prior to the book’s publication.
The “Book of Mormon” has been placed in our hands. A viler imposition was never practised. It is an evidence of fraud, blasphemy and credulity, shocking to the Christian and moralist. The “author and proprietor” is one “Joseph Smith, jr.” — a fellow who, by some hocus pocus, acquired such an influence over a wealthy farmer of Wayne county, that the latter mortgaged his farm for $3000, which he paid for printing and binding 5000 copies of the blasphemous work. The volume consists of about 600 pages, and is divided into the books of Nephi, of Jacob, of Mosiah, of Alma, of Mormon, of Ether, and of Helaman. — “Copyright secured!” The style of the work may be conjectured from the “preface” and “testimonials” which we subjoin.

The Rochester Republican of December 28, 1830, was one of several newspapers to reprint an article originally published in the Rochester Daily Advertiser and Telegraph.

book in March and had reprinted the April 2, 1830, article from the Rochester Daily Advertiser and Telegraph, now adopted a more hostile stance, calling it “pretended revelation.” It should be noted that while many newspapers of this era reprinted articles from other sources, those articles did not necessarily reflect the views of the paper in which they were reprinted.

Another news article concerning the Book of Mormon adopted a more balanced stance, reflecting the connection of the editor with the new church. William W. Phelps, editor of the Ontario Phoenix did not join the church until June 1831, but he had been investigating the new faith at the time an
article appeared in his paper. In this case he carefully avoided making any judgments about the Book of Mormon.15

The Reflector (Palmyra) published a series of articles concerning the Book of Mormon, beginning with the issue for January 6, 1831. This initial article printed a letter from someone styling themselves “Plain Truth” stating his or her intention of bringing to light the real facts of “this most clumsy of all impositions, known among us as Joe Smith’s ‘Gold Bible.’”16

During February, the Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate published an article which claimed that the Book of Mormon was full of “blasphemous nonsense, silly stories, pretended prophecies, history, etc.”17 The fact that this article was published in Utica, New York, some considerable distance from Palmyra, demonstrates that the story of the Book of Mormon was spreading.

As a matter of fact, people in other states began paying attention to the new Mormon scripture. The Painesville Telegraph, published by Eber D. Howe in Ohio, reprinted articles from the New York newspapers, but its first full-scale, independent examination of the Book of Mormon came in February 1831. Inasmuch as this is a full-scale article, it seems appropriate to quote more fully from its contents. It begins:

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed and done among the Mormonites, it seems good to me also (having had knowledge of many things from the beginning) to testify to my brethren of mankind, that they may know something certainly concerning these wonderful people.

“Wonderful people,” in this case is a sarcastic comment; the author, who has been identified as William W. Phelps began writing about the Book of Mormon in his newspaper before he joined the church.
Matthew S. Clapp, is not praising the Mormonites (Mormons). Clapp knew Sidney Rigdon, and this article reports a discussion the two men had concerning Rigdon’s belief in the Book of Mormon. Sidney Rigdon told Clapp about the supernatural gifts the Mormon prophet possessed. Joseph Smith’s ability to receive revelation and to translate scriptures from ancient languages gave Rigdon a reason to believe.18

In the same paper only a month later, Alexander Campbell19 wrote a very lengthy critique of the Book of Mormon and accused Joseph Smith of being a fraud. In the report, Campbell calls attention to errors in the book, especially in reference to the Bible. In this same article Campbell accused Joseph Smith of being present-minded and seeking to answer all the theological questions of the day. As he put it:

This prophet Smith, through his stone spectacles, wrote on the plates of Nephi, in his Book of Mormon, every error and almost every truth discussed in New York for the last ten years. He decides all the great controversies—infant baptism, ordination, the trinity, regeneration, repentance, justification, the fall of man, the atonement, transubstantiation, fasting, penance, church government, religious experience, the call of the ministry, the general resurrection, eternal punishment, who may baptize, and even the question of free masonry, republican government; and the rights of man. All these topics are repeatedly alluded to.20

In a way, this criticism of Joseph Smith by Campbell was really a kind of backhanded compliment. The fact that this unschooled farm boy could answer all these questions is indeed worth noting.

Other Ohio newspapers besides the Painesville Telegraph also featured items on the Book of Mormon. Among these papers were the Geauga Gazette, the Cleveland Herald, the Cleveland Advertiser, and the Huron Reflector. Most of these articles in Ohio newspapers featured reprints of articles from other newspapers, especially from New York. On April 11, 1831, an article in the Huron Reflector, published in Norwalk, Ohio, called the Book of Mormon “a work fabricated by some jugglers and imposters,” and went on to describe church activity in that area.21

One Cleveland newspaper article accused the Mor-
mons of trying to make money by creating and selling their “Golden Bible.” A news article published in Wooster, Ohio, called the Book of Mormon “a miserable production.”

As one would expect, most of the news articles concerning the Book of Mormon appeared in New York and Ohio, places where the most church members then resided. Nevertheless, newspapers in other places did carry some items on the Book of Mormon.

In New England, for example, the new book of scripture received a fair amount of attention. The Boston Free Press ran a series of advertisements for the Book of Mormon during the summer of 1830. These ads were prepared by Thomas B. Marsh. Generally the ads included the title page of the book and the address of a Boston bookstore where the book could be purchased. An article in the Christian Register (Boston) in March 1831 appears to have been the first newspaper article to pay serious attention to the Book of Mormon. In September 1831 the New-Hampshire Sentinel reported: “We had hoped, that ere this the believers in the Book of Mormon would have been entirely extinct.”

Not able to determine whether the Book of Mormon had been produced by “stupidity or wickedness,” the Christian Register reprinted an article from the Morning Courier which purported to give a complete and accurate history.

The Eastern Argus (Portland, Maine) printed an account of Mormon converts and their feelings. They told of one woman from Boston who “had satisfied herself that the Mormon bible was a revelation from God.” This report, unlike most news articles of this period, had a somewhat positive tone.

The Nashua Gazette and Hillsborough Advertiser (New Hampshire) reported the preaching of William E. McLellin, who cited Ezekiel 37 to substantiate the validity of the Book of Mormon. The article reported: “We thought this part of his subject too ludicrous to be refuted by any man in his right mind.”

Newspapers in Joseph Smith’s birthplace, Vermont, published several stories about the Book of Mormon. As early as May 1830, the Horn of the Green Mountains (Manchester, Vermont) ran an article which called the book “one of the vilest impositions.”

Most of the Vermont news stories appeared in 1831. On March 14, 1831 the American Whig
(Woodstock) reprinted an article from the Geauga Gazette (Ohio) which called the Book of Mormon a “miserable production.” The Vermont Chronicle (Woodstock) reported that the book came from golden plates which vanished as soon as Joseph Smith translated them. The Vermont Gazette (Bennington) ran an article which described the “strange narratives” of the Book of Mormon. The Vermont Patriot and State Gazette (Montpelier) said the Book of Mormon was “detriment of the beauties of sublimity.” Later, the Farmer’s Herald (St. Johnsbury) claimed that the book “is a singular proof of the proneness of the human heart to idolatry.”

The Pennsylvania press contained one of the earliest articles on the Book of Mormon after its publication. This article declared that the testimonies of the witnesses of the Book of Mormon “smacks pretty strongly of what once would have been called blasphemy.” Later that year the Philadelphia Album gave a balanced historical summary of the Book of Mormon, but suggested that it contained doctrines that are “revolting.”

Early in 1831 the National Gazette and Literary Register recommended that the Mormons “melt up the yellow plates . . . and sell them the first opportunity.” In August 1831, the Republican Compiler referred to the Book of Mormon as the “Golden Bible” and a supposed “revelation from Heaven.” The author of an article in the Sun (Philadelphia) claimed to be personally acquainted with the history of the church and then referred to the Book of Mormon as a superstition.

One paper in Maryland wrote about “certain knaves, pretending to have found some holy writings.” This characterization of the writers and the product was fairly common when one considers the articles concerning the publication of the Book of Mormon.

In the nation’s capital, the Daily National Intelligence ran an article about the “Golden Bible Impostion” and said the Mormon movement had no parallel in stupidity.

A Georgia newspaper, the Cherokee Phoenix and Indians’ Advocate, ran several articles during the 1830s describing Mormonism. One article reported on the growth of the Mormon faith in the Canandaigua area of New York, stating: “I have had a good opportunity of witnessing much of the proceedings of those who believe in the book of Mormon. The book causes great excitement in these parts . . . and some believe and become meek and lowly in this region.” This article was a reprint from the Boston Courier and had a little more favorable tone than most articles in the press.

An article that appeared in a Bethany, Virginia, newspaper labeled the Book of Mormon a “romance.” A later article in the same publication spoke of “the delusions of Smith’s book of Mormon.”

Even out on the frontier in Arkansas, news articles about the Book of Mormon appeared in print. An article in the Arkansas Gazette published in Little Rock called the Book of Mormon a “pretended revelation.”

In Missouri, which the Latter-day Saints called Zion, more news articles on the Book of Mormon appeared. The Missouri Intelligencer, published in Columbia, carried an article which contained a fascinating statement: “We hope the people hereafter will be satisfied with the bible God has given us, and the religion it reveals, without the addition of the ‘Book of Mormon.’” This statement is fascinating because it directly relates to a scriptural passage in the Book of Mormon itself. I refer, of course, to 2 Nephi 29:3, which reads, in part, “A Bible! A Bible!
We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible.

In a later issue, the same paper published an article which called the Book of Mormon “an absurd collection of dull, stupid and foolishly improbable stories, which no person, unless under the influence of powerfully excited feelings can mistake for truth and inspiration.” The article then goes on to prophesy about the future of the Book of Mormon. “With its authors, the Book of Mormon cannot survive this generation.” Subsequent events have certainly rendered their prophecy false.

In Michigan news articles concerning the Book of Mormon also appeared in print. One of them got into the theory about the origin of the Book of Mormon, which has come to be known as the Spaulding thesis. The article, which is a reprint from the *Wayne Sentinel* (Palmyra, New York), gives credit to Philastus Hurlbut for discovering the truth about the origin of the new book of scripture. Hurlbut, an apostate Mormon, was bent on exposing Mormonism. The materials he collected were popularized in the press in Ohio by Eber D. Howe and in his book *Mormonism Unvailed*. This theory, the Spaulding thesis or Spaulding Manuscript, has received a lot of attention over the years.

One of the most positive articles concerning the Book of Mormon appeared in Burlington, Iowa. This article appeared in 1841 and is consequently much later than most of the articles examined in this study. Since it is both one of the most affirmative pieces and also reflects the important influence of the Mormons across the Mississippi, I have chosen to include substantial excerpts here:

One of the greatest literary curiosities of the day is the much abused “Book of Mormon.” That a work of this kind should be planned, executed and given to the scrutiny of the world by an illiterate young man of twenty — that it should gain numerous and devoted partizans, here and in Europe and that it should agitate a whole State to such a degree that law, justice and humanity were set aside to make a war of extermination on the new sect, seems scarcely credible in the nineteenth century, and under this liberal Government; yet such is the fact.

The believers in the Book of Mormon now numbering well nigh 50,000 souls in America, to say nothing of numerous congregations in Great Britain. They style themselves Latter Day Saints, as it is a prominent point in their faith that the world is soon to experience a great and final change. They believe and insist upon believing, literally the Old and New Testament, but they also hold that there are various other inspired writings, which in due season will be...
brought to light — Some of these, (the Book of Mormon for example) are even now appearing, after having been lost for ages. They think that in the present generation will be witnessed the final gathering together of the true followers of Christ into one fold of peace and purity — in other words, that the Millennium is near. Setting aside the near approach of the Millennium and the Book of Mormon, they resemble in faith and discipline the Methodists, and their meetings are marked by the fervid simplicity that characterizes that body of christians. It is believing the Book of Mormon inspired that the chief difference consists; but it must be admitted that this is an important distinction.

The Book of Mormon purports to be a history of a portion of the children of Israel, who found their way to this continent after the first destruction of Jerusalem. It is continued from generation [to generation] by a succession of prophets, and give in different books an account of the wars and alliances of the Lost Nation. The Golden Book is an abridgment by Mormon, the last of the prophets, of all the works of his predecessors.

The style is a close imitation of the scriptural, and is remarkably free from any allusions that might betray a knowledge of the present practical or social state of the world. The writer lives in the whole strength of his imagination in the age he portrays. It is difficult to imagine a more difficult literary task than to write what may be termed a continuation of the Scriptures, that should not only [avoid] all collision with the authentic and sacred work, but even fill up many chasms that now seem to exist, and thus receive and lend confirmation in almost every body.

A copy of the characters on some of the golden leaves, was transmitted to learned gentlemen of this city, who of course [were] unable to decypher them, but thought they bore resemblance to the ancient Egyptian characters.

If on comparison it appears that these characters are similar to those recently discovered on those ruins in Central America, which have attracted so much attention lately, and which are decidedly of Egyptian architecture, it will make a very strong point for Smith. It will tend to prove that the plates are genuine, even if it does not establish the truth of his inspiration, or the fidelity of his transaction.

In Illinois, where the Church built the flourishing city of Nauvoo, the press also contained an article on the Book of Mormon. The Pioneer, published in Rock Spring, carried an article entitled "Mormonism." Some of its statements regarding the Book of Mormon are of particular interest. At one point in this article the author states the basic issue that each reader of the Book of Mormon focus "on the truth or falsity of Smith’s pretended inspiration, and of the character of this 'Book of Mormon,' rests the whole scheme. If the Book in general is a fable — with the extravagant stories, then Joe Smith Junior, is a base imposter — a worthless fellow, and his followers are most wretchedly deceived and deluded."

Having examined so many news articles concerning the Book of Mormon published in the 1830s, the obvious question is what does it all mean? What conclusions can or should one draw from these articles?

First and foremost, it is obvious that the Book of Mormon came forth in obscurity. By that I mean that very few people knew about the book or the early LDS Church. A vast majority of these news articles were published in the vicinity of Palmyra, New York, where the book was first published on March 26, 1830. Some of these articles were reprinted in other newspapers in other locations, but the chance of learning about the Book of Mormon in the 1830s through the press was extremely unlikely.

To further emphasize this point, consider the fact that most of America's newspapers in the 1830s made no mention at all of the new book of scripture. As evidence of this fact allow me to present in a footnote, the findings of my own personal research in libraries in the eastern United States.

Further evidence of the obscurity of the initial publication of the Book of Mormon is the reported difficulty in selling copies of the book. Terryl Givens in his masterful book By the Hand of Mormon describes the frustration of Joseph Knight when he reported "the books will not sell for no Body wants them."

The vast majority of the news articles concerning the Book of Mormon were negative, i.e., critical of Joseph Smith’s account of the translation and
publication of the Book of Mormon in 1830. Most news articles displayed a heavy load of skepticism about this new book of scripture. Most of these criticisms charged Joseph Smith with fraud, specifically outright fabrication of the text, or plagiarism of a similar work such as the Spaulding Manuscript.

More sophisticated criticism which called attention to Joseph Smith’s literary genius and natural religious insight would have to wait for a future generation.\textsuperscript{55}

Some of the news articles about the Book of Mormon adopted a more neutral stance. Only a very few came close to being positive or affirmative. In my estimation the most affirming piece was the article signed by Josephine, which appeared in the \textit{New Yorker} and which was reprinted by several other newspapers.\textsuperscript{56}

Those newspaper readers who did learn something about the Book of Mormon faced a choice: either accept or reject the explanation presented by Joseph Smith. As Louis Midgley has convincingly argued, the Book of Mormon is the great divider. It becomes either a stumbling block or a source of faith.\textsuperscript{57}

Finally, let me offer one other conclusion concerning those faithful followers of Joseph Smith who \textit{did} have a testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. Considering that the book was hardly noticed, and that those who did pay attention to it generally condemned it as a hoax, one is compelled to a sense of admiration for the steadfast efforts of the early missionaries to proclaim the true message of the Book of Mormon. Theirs was most certainly an uphill battle—a struggle against nearly overwhelming odds. But struggle they did, and the Book of Mormon has now been accepted by over twelve million people all around the world.\textsuperscript{58}
Another Testament of Jesus Christ

Mormon's Poetics
CHOLARS OFTEN CATEGORIZE TEXTS AS being either didactic or literary. The didactic text features exhortation, narrator insertions, moral summaries, stark contrasts between good and evil, and plot lines with obvious ethical significance. The literary text, in contrast, is characterized by reticence, metaphor, ambiguity, and indirection; by suggesting rather than telling. The literary text, when done well, is deemed worthy of sustained attention and repeated readings, while the didactic is generally disparaged and dismissed as either simplistic, moralistic, or both.

At first glance, there is little doubt which category the Book of Mormon occupies. It is, undeniably, a remarkably didactic text, and there are reasons why this is so. The primary editors are all aware that their record will be read by a distant audience; they share a fundamental message—that mankind must put off the natural man and come to Christ in preparation for the last judgment; and they express a profound sense of urgency, since the salvation of readers depends upon their reception of the message. As a result, Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni aim to be so clear that their readers cannot misunderstand. To accomplish this, they apply their most unambiguous rhetorical skills: plainness, explicitness, and repetition. Certainly they are didactic; each intends his record as a primer for the judgment day.

The narrators seem to have succeeded in their aim. One cannot read very far into the Book of Mormon without understanding the mission of Jesus Christ, the plan of salvation, the role of human agency, or the narrators’ shared belief that those who keep the commandments will prosper while those who disobey will be cut off from God’s presence. The point we seem to have missed as readers, though, is that this undeniable didacticism is not the entirety of the Book of Mormon’s rhetorical design.

In addition to emphatically telling and showing a wide audience their most urgent message, Book of Mormon narrators are simultaneously reaching out to a narrower audience as well, suggesting more refined spiritual truths. Interwoven with the primer for judgment is an additional guidebook for spiritual growth that can be plumbed for insight and will reward repeated readings. The authors of this second book—which is embedded within the first—aim not only to save readers in the world to come but also to sanctify them in mortality. To this book, Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni bring a wider range of rhetorical skills than has typically been recognized. By noticing the particular writing strategies they employ—their individual poetics—we can learn to recognize the narrators’ minds at work behind the text. Doing so can open up the Book of Mormon in intimate and remarkable ways.

We have largely missed the second book, this guidebook to assist the already-converted in becoming saints, because we do not expect it to exist. Knowing something of the narrators’ biographies, we assume that they are men of action, composing on the run amidst dire circumstances, fortunate to get even first drafts laboriously engraved under the strain of other obligations. We take the ubiquity of “and it came to pass” and “behold” as evidence of quick composition, and we are appreciative at least for the consistency and intelligibility of the primer’s tale. But in our generosity, we may have underestimated the care and literary ability that the narrators actually brought to their callings to write.
We have also missed the sanctification guidebook because the didacticism of the primer has created a particular orientation within its receptive readers. As dwellers in a complex world, we respond positively to the refreshing plainness of the Book of Mormon’s teachings and the clarity of its moral vision. Once we have embraced its message of salvation, we use the book didactically to remember our own change of heart as well as to share its message with others. The book’s clarity, created in large measure by the mediating presence of the narrators, has the unintended consequence of turning us into complacent readers. We prefer to be told what to see in the text rather than to discover its meaning for ourselves. We become reluctant to look beyond what its narrators explicitly pronounce.

We have also tended to overlook the sanctification guidebook because, as Terryl Givens has observed, we generally regard the Book of Mormon as a sign of the restoration rather than as a text in its own right. In doing so, we shift our focus from the narrators to the translator, gaining a testimony of Joseph Smith’s prophetic calling but losing sight of (and even interest in) the book’s particular content. In this manner of reading, the Book of Mormon serves as an invitation to individual “dialogic revelation,” which is integral to the narrators’ aims, although, again, not the totality of them.

Finally, we have missed the narrators’ “second book” because we have largely ignored their editorial role in shaping the text’s structure. The chapter and verse divisions we use today are not original to the dictated text but were added several decades later, presumably to make the Book of Mormon consistent with contemporaneous editions of the King James Bible. While the versification enhances the book’s didacticism, making it easier both to cite and to teach from, it also in large measure disintegrates the text, obscuring many of the narrators’ deliberate strategies of coherence. It is these very strategies that highlight the contours of the sanctification guidebook and greatly enrich the power of the book as a whole.

Unlike truisms from the primer for judgment (e.g., “wickedness never was happiness,” Alma 41:10), insights from the “second book” are not usually found at the verse level or even within chapters. They most often emerge, instead, as readers recognize connections across larger portions of the text. Mormon, as we shall see, signals such readings in three primary ways: by structuring the text to emphasize particular issues or themes, by organizing his history as a series of progressive parallel narratives, and by employing the extensive use of phrasal borrowing to allude to particular sources. Through these rhetorical means, Mormon directs attentive readers to his sanctification guidebook just as deliberately as he points to his primer for judgment in his editorial insertions.

We can see Mormon working at both the primer and guidebook levels in Mosiah 23–24. These chapters provide several examples of his characteristic methods, including the progression from telling to showing to suggesting. His moral guidance here moves from “I will show you” to “I will teach you to see for yourselves.” By becoming alert to his methods, we can begin to recognize how Mormon attempts to enact the fulness of Jesus’s gospel in both his text and his readers’ lives.

Following an analysis of Mormon’s presentation of the deliverance of Alma’s people, I will offer a preliminary summary of his poetics, that is, of how, particularly, Mormon composes his two overlapping books to tell the Nephite story. I will conclude by considering why he may have chosen to write in the manner that he does.

**Telling, Showing, and Suggesting**

As Mosiah 23 opens, Mormon has just concluded the tale of the people of Limhi—how they were in bondage to the Lamanites, escaped from slavery, and then were led back to Zarahemla by Ammon (Mosiah 19–22). At this point Mormon inserts a heading: “An account of Alma and the people of the Lord, who were driven into the wilderness by the people of King Noah.” In this way, Mormon tells his readers that he is disrupting the chronology by picking up a story he left off earlier, at Mosiah 18:33–34: “And now the king [Noah] . . . sent his army to destroy them. And it came to pass that Alma and the people of the Lord were apprised of the coming of the king’s army; therefore they took their tents and their families and departed into the wilderness.”

As Mormon returns to the story of Alma and his people, it is not surprising that “they began to prosper exceedingly in the land” (Mosiah 23:19). This is exactly what we have come to expect in reading the “first book” as the consequence for those who follow the prophet, enter into covenants, and
keep the commandments; indeed, it is satisfying and reinforcing to see the righteous duly rewarded. But there is a problem coming, and Mormon tells us directly and ahead of time so that the clear moral of his tale is neither diluted nor confused by what happens next:

Nevertheless the Lord seeth fit to chasten his people; yea, he trieth their patience and their faith. Nevertheless—whosoever putteth his trust in him the same shall be lifted up at the last day. Yea, and thus it was with this people. For behold, I will show unto you that they were brought into bondage, and none could deliver them but the Lord their God, yea, even the God of Abraham and Isaac and of Jacob. And it came to pass that he did deliver them, and he did show forth his mighty power unto them, and great were their rejoicings. (Mosiah 23:21–24)

In other words, “Don’t be too concerned about what you are about to read. God is in control; he has his reasons and everything will turn out happily in the end.”

This is one of Mormon’s earliest editorial insertions. Significantly, he is demonstrating here his rhetorical strategies as well as establishing the expectations he has of his readers, not just for the forthcoming episode but for the entirety of his text. These strategies and expectations can be summarized as follows:

1. Mormon tells us universal moral principles and will subsequently use the narrative to show their enactment. He expects all his readers to recognize both.

2. Mormon tells us how the story is going to turn out beforehand so that we can recognize spiritual causation at work as the story unfolds. Mormon’s storytelling is not about suspense but rather about showing his readers a way of seeing based on particular understandings.

3. Mormon establishes these understandings either by stating them directly—“the Lord seeth fit to chaste his people” (Mosiah 23:21)—or by borrowing distinctive phrases from other authoritative teachings (either from his previous narrative or editorial comments, or from precepts and prophecies included in source texts). He expects careful readers to recognize both the allusions and the ideas he is suggesting by their larger contexts.

For example, in Mosiah 23:23, when Mormon tells us, “I will show unto you that they were brought into bondage, and none could deliver them but the Lord their God, yea, even the God of Abraham and Isaac and of Jacob,” he expects his readers to recognize the nearly identical wording from Abinadi’s recent prophecy: “Except this people repent and turn unto the Lord their God, they shall be brought into bondage; and none shall deliver them, except it be the Lord the Almighty God” (Mosiah 11:23). The connection between a specific prophecy and its fulfillment is made explicit by Mormon’s choice of wording.9

Astute readers will recall that Abinadi did not include Mormon’s identification of the Lord as “the God of Abraham and Isaac and of Jacob.” With a little research, they will discover that this expression was first used when the Lord called Moses to deliver the children of Israel from Egypt (Exodus 3:6). By employing the phrase here, in combination with his usage of “tasks” and “task-masters” in the narrative which follows (Mosiah 24:9), Mormon likens the forthcoming deliverance of Alma’s people to the exodus,10 demonstrating, among other things, the Nephites’ continuity with the house of Israel and the status of Alma’s followers as the Lord’s covenant people.

Truly astute readers (re-readers, actually, since the source has not yet been iterated) will further recognize that Mormon will be suggesting spiritual as well as physical deliverance in the forthcoming episode by recalling the similar wording in Alma the Younger’s account of his own conversion:

I would that ye should do as I have done, in remembering the captivity of our fathers; for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it was the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and he...
surely did deliver them in their afflictions. . . . For I do know that whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day. (Alma 36:2–3, words in common with Mosiah 23:22–23 are in italics)

The extent of the phrasal borrowing here, combined with the overlap of wording from Abinadi’s prophecy, provides strong evidence that Mormon is intentionally alluding to the larger contexts of these other accounts as well as juxtaposing them for thematic ends.

True to his word, Mormon shows what he promised in Mosiah 23:21–24 by enacting the foretold trials, deliverance, and rejoicings in the narrative that follows. In his introductory comment, he noted that God would test the people’s patience and faith. We are shown how they continue to trust in the Lord despite heavy burdens and afflictions, and then once again Mormon underlines his message: “And it came to pass that so great was their faith and their patience that the voice of the Lord came unto them again, saying: Be of good comfort, for on the morrow I will deliver you out of bondage” (Mosiah 24:16). Once the deliverance has occurred, Mormon repeats what he had formerly promised, providing maximal emphasis for the means of deliverance as well as a frame for the actual event:

In the valley of Alma they poured out their thanks to God because he had . . . delivered them out of bondage; for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it were the Lord their God. (Mosiah 24:21, words in common with Mosiah 23:23 are in italics)

It is hard to imagine a more didactic strategy than this “tell-show-tell” sandwich, and the meaning of the narrative is clear—the faithful will prosper under God’s providential care, despite temporary setbacks. This is the message of salvation, and Mormon presents it in a manner not to be misunderstood.

Many readers will simply turn the page and move on, but Mormon, through one seemingly extraneous word, suggests that there is more to the story: “And after they had been in the wilderness twelve days they arrived in the land of Zarahemla; and king Mosiah did also receive them with joy.”

Mosiah received the people of Limhi “with joy.” Illustration by Glen S. Hopkinson.
(Mosiah 24:25). “Also?” Who else was involved? The answer is not difficult since the wording closely follows an earlier passage. When Mormon concluded the story of the deliverance of the people of Limhi, he wrote: “And after being many days in the wilderness they arrived in the land of Zarahemla, and joined Mosiah’s people, and became his subjects. And it came to pass that Mosiah received them with joy” (Mosiah 22:13–14). By including the “also” in the second account, Mormon signals his intention to link the two stories and expects that readers will connect them as well.

On the surface, the two stories have a great deal in common. Both groups were remnants of Noah’s kingdom, witnesses and heirs of Abinadi’s prophecies. Both became subject to the Lamanites, as prophesied; both cried mightily to the Lord for deliverance, also as prophesied (Mosiah 21:14; 24:10; cf. 11:25); both gathered their flocks together by night and escaped into the wilderness (Mosiah 22:11; 24:18); and both, as we have seen, were warmly welcomed into Zarahemla.

These are the sorts of repetitions and recurrences that Richard Dilworth Rust has identified as “an important part of Mormon’s method,” which he uses “to teach, emphasize, and confirm.” But in addition to intending these didactic functions, Mormon also shapes his stories in parallel fashion to communicate more subtly. The stories, then, serve as reflections of each other, and their detailed comparison offers a multitude of potential meanings. What is it, here, that Mormon wants us to understand by connecting the deliverance of Limhi’s and Alma’s peoples?

By paying close attention to differences as well as similarities, we discover ambiguities in the narratives that call for further consideration. Mormon is hereby inviting the readers of his second book to reflect more deeply on the nature of bondage, deliverance, prophecy, agency, faith, and faithfulness—and all this from a single “also” explicitly linking the stories to each other. Both narratives depend on Abinadi’s prophecies in Mosiah 11–12.

Mormon shapes the account of Limhi’s people to demonstrate the fulfillment of Abinadi’s prophecy, remarking explicitly at Mosiah 21:4 that “all this was done that the word of the Lord might be fulfilled.” He employs the prophecy’s distinctive language to describe the people’s afflictions at the hands of the Lamanites: “they would smite them on their cheeks... and began to put heavy burdens upon their backs, and drive them as they would a dumb ass” (Mosiah 21:3; compare 12:2, 5). We learn also that Limhi’s people were driven and slain (Mosiah 21:7–8, 11–12; compare 12:2), and that although they cried mightily, “the Lord was slow to hear their cry” (Mosiah 21:15; compare 11:24). Most of these elements are not mentioned in the account of Alma’s followers, suggesting that not only can prophecy be fulfilled multiple times, but also that some parts may find fulfillment only in particular enactments. A return to Abinadi’s prophecies also demonstrates that several aspects of his dire warnings are never enacted in the narrative, including vultures devouring flesh, famine, pestilence, hail, and insects devouring grain, all of which were prophesied to occur within Alma’s generation (Mosiah 12:2–6).

Although it could be argued that these unfulfilled events may have taken place but were not reported by Mormon, it seems unlikely that he would overlook them given his eagerness to point out the fulfillment of prophecy here and elsewhere (note, for instance, that as late as Alma 25:9–12 he is still telling us how Abinadi’s words were fulfilled).

If Mormon’s intentions were purely didactic, he could have edited the problematic details out of the prophecies either by paraphrase or abridgment—especially since he indicates that what he has provided to us is only an abbreviated account of the proceedings (compare Mosiah 11:20–25 and 12:1–8b with Mosiah 12:8c, 10–12). It seems more probable that Mormon includes the ambiguities to make suggestions about the nature of prophecy, including the possibility that not all details need to be realized for a prophecy to be authentic; or, more specifically, that because of prophecy’s contingency upon the subsequent activities of its recipients, we should anticipate that some aspects may in fact be unrealized. Indeed, although the people of Limhi suffered many of the predicted calamities, they apparently repented before the point when the Lord would “utterly destroy them from off the face of the earth” (Mosiah 12:8). Mormon does not explicitly tell us so, but reticence is precisely what we should expect when reading his “second book.”

The ambiguity increases as we continue to contrast the deliverance of Limhi’s and Alma’s peoples in light of Abinadi’s prophecies. In direct conflict with a central tenet of his message—that only God could deliver them—Limhi’s people appear to
deliver themselves from the hands of the Lamanites by getting their guards drunk with a tribute of wine (Mosiah 22:1–2, 4–11). The text makes clear that this successful stratagem—as well as several previous failures—came from their own design, rather than from relying upon the Lord. Ammon and Limhi consult with the people about “how they should deliver themselves out of bondage” (Mosiah 21:36; 22:1), and then Mormon tells us the name of the man who came up with the plan (Gideon) and has him present it to King Limhi in words that emphasize the theological difficulty: “I will be thy servant and deliver this people out of bondage” (Mosiah 22:4). “And it came to pass,” we are told, “that the king hearkened unto the words of Gideon” (Mosiah 22:9). This should sound ominous—wasn’t the Lord supposed to deliver them? And didn’t their afflictions only intensify when they tried to deliver themselves previously? (Mosiah 21:5–12). Are the vultures, hail, pestilence, and insects close at hand? Contrary to our expectations, all goes well with them. Gideon’s plan works, and they make their way to Zarahemla where they are received with joy.

Yet the central tenet in Abinadi’s prophecy does matter, and Alma sets the record straight after both groups are united in Zarahemla: “And he did exhort the people of Limhi . . . that they should remember that it was the Lord that did deliver them” (Mosiah 25:16), contrary to both their own experience and the narrative’s naturalistic account of causation. And much later, when we meet Gideon again, Mormon recasts his role by describing him as “he who
was an instrument in the hands of God in delivering the people of Limhi out of bondage” (Alma 1:8). Mormon believes, although he does not explicitly tell his readers, “Although we may attribute our successes to our own intelligence and daring, we nevertheless owe everything to God.” He is teaching us how to see here, suggesting that there is more to understand about how God operates in human lives.

When we examine the account of Alma’s people and attempt to correlate their experiences with Abinadi’s prophecies, an even more troubling discrepancy appears. Emphatically, Abinadi tells Noah’s people twice, in the name of the Lord, “Except this people repent and turn unto the Lord their God, they shall be brought into bondage” (Mosiah 11:23, 21). As we learn, Alma’s people do repent, stunningly. They believe the words of Abinadi and enter into a covenant at the waters of Mormon to serve the Lord and keep his commandments. They establish a church and flee at great peril from Noah’s kingdom (Mosiah 18). When Mormon picks up their story again in Mosiah 23, we find that they are prospering in their new land (Mosiah 23:19–20), precisely as we would expect, given Lehi’s promise to those who keep the commandments (2 Nephi 1:20). But again our expectations are overturned. If Abinadi’s prophecy is reliable, why should Alma’s people have been brought into bondage at all?

It is here that Mormon inserts the didactic editorial comment with which we began this discussion (“Nevertheless the Lord seeth fit to chasten his people” [Mosiah 23:21–24]), at precisely the point where the narrative diverges from readers’ expectations. With Limhi’s people, the dissonance was minimal because unexpected good fortune is much less distressing than seemingly undeserved affliction. Mormon’s preemptive move diverts and refocuses casual readers, but careful ones are left trying to work out the reliability of prophecies, the nature of God’s justice, and the sufficiency of moral truisms.

Mormon responds to these concerns, but with the same indirection that he brought them to his readers’ attention. He shows and suggests but tells us nothing beyond the truisms of Mosiah 23:21–22: “Nevertheless the Lord seeth fit to chasten his people; yea, he trieth their patience and their faith. Nevertheless—whosoever putteth his trust in him, the same shall be lifted up at the last day.” A miraculous deliverance will eventually restore moral order, just as Mormon promises, but in the meantime, he suggests, things may not be as they seem—Alma’s people here are being tested rather than punished.14

Mormon proceeds to demonstrate the faithfulness of Alma and his people in the midst of their afflictions in remembering Abinadi’s admonition to cry unto the Lord for deliverance (Mosiah 23:27; 24:10; cf. 11:24–25). The Lord responds directly to their prayers, alluding to both Abinadi’s prophecy and the covenant the people have made at the waters of Mormon:

Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto

The Lord eased the burdens of the people of Alma during their bondage. Illustration by Glen S. Hopkinson.
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)

The two allusions are beautifully linked here by the common notion of burdens—in the case of Abinadi’s prophecy, as a curse for disobedience (“It shall come to pass that this generation, because of their iniquities, shall be brought into bondage. . . . Yea, and I will cause that they shall have burdens lashed upon their backs” [Mosiah 12:2, 5]); and in the case of the covenant at the waters of Mormon, as a mutual pledge of support (“As ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light . . . yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort” [Mosiah 18:8–9]). By so linking these allusions, the Lord is suggesting that because of the faithfulness of Alma’s followers to their covenant in “stand[ing] as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in” (Mosiah 18:9)—even in seemingly unjustified bondage—He will intervene and ameliorate the harsh conditions of the prophecy, “that ye may stand as witnesses for me hereafter” (Mosiah 24:14). The Lord gives Alma’s followers comfort and offers to bear their burdens, thereby becoming at-one with them by doing for them what they had promised to do for each other as members of a covenant community.

To emphasize the Lord’s providential intervention, Mormon constructs a second frame in the midst of his tell-show-tell sandwich.15 Here, it is the Lord who twice promises deliverance to Alma’s people:

A  Mormon: “I will show you that they were brought into bondage, and none could deliver them but the Lord their God.” (Mosiah 23:23)

B  the Lord: “Be of good comfort, for . . . I will covenant with my people and deliver them out of bondage.” (Mosiah 24:13)

B’  the Lord: “Be of good comfort, for on the morrow I will deliver you out of bondage.” (Mosiah 24:16)

A’  Mormon: “For they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it were the Lord their God.” (Mosiah 24:21)

Structurally, we should expect to find Mormon’s central message for the episode between the Lord’s two promises of deliverance, at the center of this double frame. And here we are not disappointed, although Mormon relates the point by indirection. He begins, confirming the Lord’s reliability, by extending the waters-of-Mormon allusion: “And now it came to pass that the burdens which were laid upon Alma and his brethren were made light” (Mosiah 24:15; cf. 18:8). Thus, in a kind of verbal alchemy, Mormon transforms Abinadi’s curse into a demonstration of the Lord’s grace.

The people of Alma made covenants at the waters of Mormon. Come into the Fold of God, by Walter Rane. Copyright By the Hand of Mormon Foundation.
Next Mormon incorporates an echo of yet another prior text, “Yea, the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord” (Mosiah 24:15). The allusion is to King Benjamin’s speech, unknown to Alma and his people but familiar by now to Mormon’s readers, in which an angel urges becoming “submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict” (Mosiah 3:19). In making the connection, Mormon is following a didactic strategy—telling first by precept and then showing by example—but he is doing so in a nuanced manner. To begin with, his telling and showing are more than twenty chapters apart, and to make his point he must rely on readers recognizing the verbal similarity. Additionally, just as he did with “burdens” above, Mormon links the two by distinctive wording, in this case, of submitting with patience to the will of the Lord.16

In an address given at Brigham Young University in 2001, David A. Bednar recommends the connection between Mormon’s narration here and King Benjamin’s address:

As we progress in the journey of mortality from bad to good to better, as we put off the natural man or woman in each of us, and as we strive to become saints and have our very natures changed, then the attributes detailed in this verse increasingly should describe the type of person you and I are becoming. We will become more childlike, more submissive, more patient, and more willing to submit. Now compare these characteristics in Mosiah 3:19 with those used to describe Alma and his people in the latter part of verse 15 in Mosiah 24: “and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord.”

I find the parallels between the attributes described in these verses striking and an indication that Alma’s good people were becoming a better people through the enabling power of the Atonement of Christ the Lord.17

The parallels are even more striking because this is not just creative reading; Mormon intended for us to see them. For readers of his “second book,” Mormon is here reinforcing what he suggested earlier about how the people’s faithfulness has brought them into relationship with God. He does so by drawing upon the larger context of the angel’s words:

For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh 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)

As Elder Bednar recognizes, Mormon suggests at the high point of this deliverance account—at the center of his double frame—that the converted can become saints through the atonement of Christ. He shows us, beyond King Benjamin’s telling, that the Lord was moved not only to try his people but also to intervene and become one with them because of their unwavering trust and their cheerful submissiveness in the affliction of both bondage and unmet expectations. This gracious assistance strengthened their faith, enabling them to “bear up their burdens with ease” (Mosiah 24:15). For those who have learned to read the sanctification guidebook, Mormon’s account of Alma and his followers invites reflection and offers deep spiritual insight on remaining faithful in the face of substantial challenges to belief.

Mormon’s Poetics

We have reviewed two chapters of Mosiah from the perspective of how Mormon presents his message to modern readers. In doing so, we have followed Meir Sternberg, author of the seminal work The Poetics of Biblical Narrative, who recommends seeing scriptural texts as “a means to a communicative end, a transaction between the narrator and the audience on whom he wishes to produce a certain effect by way of certain strategies.”18 We have considered the twofold effect Mormon wishes to produce: to make possible the salvation of readers in the world to come, as well as to sanctify them in mortality. His mode of transaction has been to write two books in one—a primer for judgment and a guidebook for sanctification. He has employed didactic strategies for the first book and more subtle methods for the second, in a progression from
telling, to showing, to suggesting. The totality of these rhetorical strategies may be regarded as Mormon’s poetics.19

In explaining the nature of poetics, biblical scholar Adele Berlin offers an analogy:

If literature is likened to a cake, then poetics gives us the recipe . . . . It is relatively easy to make a cake if you have the recipe. It is somewhat trickier to start with the cake and from that figure out how it is made. But that is exactly what poetics tries to do. It . . . seeks to abstract the general principles of literature from many different manifestations of those principles as they occur in actual literary texts.20

What follows is a very preliminary summary of the ingredients of Mormon’s recipe, incomplete as it is, with such detail as our consideration of Mosiah 23–24 has provided.

**Telling**: Mormon, at his most didactic, interrupts his narrative to make editorial comments that express universal truths or explicitly indicate what he expects his readers to understand from the stories he tells (as we saw in Mosiah 23:21–24). The placement of these insertions can be as significant as their content, as we saw again in Mosiah 23:21–24, where he deftly diverts his readers’ attention away from potential problems. Mormon also explicitly communicates spiritual truths by inserting lengthy source documents that relate precepts, commandments, and prophecies from the mouths of the prophets themselves (e.g., King Benjamin’s sermon and Abinadi’s prophecies). In another didactic technique, he demarcates the narrative episode by providing a heading that summarizes the action to follow. He also eliminates narrative suspense by announcing what will transpire, showing what he has promised, and then articulating what he has demonstrated in the tell-show-tell structure of Mosiah 23:23–24:21. Each of these methods characterizes Mormon’s first book, his primer for judgment, which values moral clarity above other literary concerns.

**Showing**: Here Mormon enacts principles and prophecies, reinforcing in the narrative precepts taught elsewhere. Sometimes this narrative showing follows closely on the heels of its moral telling, as we saw in Mosiah 23:21 and 24:10–15, where the Lord tries the faith of Alma’s people. Elsewhere, the narrative showing is further removed, explicitly connected by phrasal borrowings, as when Mormon tells us that Alma’s people “prospered” in the land of Helam (Mosiah 23:19–20; compare 2 Nephi 1:20), or that they later “cried mightily to God” in their afflictions (Mosiah 24:10; compare 11:25), or that as covenant keepers, their “burdens” were indeed made “light” (Mosiah 24:15; 18:8). Mormon also shows by repeated enactment principles that he expects his readers to understand without being explicitly told—like the fact that the Lord is faithful and will fulfill both his covenants and the words of his prophets.

**Suggesting**: Mormon employs more sophisticated literary techniques as he moves to his guidebook for sanctification. Here he communicates by indirection, acknowledging the challenges and ambiguities that accompany a life of faith. While never sowing doubt by explicitly articulating discrepancies between the narrative and its moral framework, Mormon nevertheless suggests avenues for responding to the difficulties he has chosen not to edit out.

The conflicts are most evident in closely examining Mormon’s juxtaposition of parallel narratives. Often one episode is compared to several others, sometimes explicitly and other times as subtly as by a single common word. The deliverance of the people of Alma, for example, was compared in one way or another to Abinadi’s prophecies, to the exodus story, to Alma the Younger’s account of his conversion, to their prior deliverance from the hands of King Noah, to the parallel deliverance of the people of Limhi, to the covenant making at the waters of Mormon, and finally to the sermon of King Benjamin.21 As we have seen, these comparisons are most frequently suggested either by a cluster of similar narrative elements or, again, by phrasal borrowings.
between the two accounts. Mormon also suggests possible spiritual insights by alluding to the larger context of parallel borrowings (Mosiah 23:23, compare Alma 36:2–3; or Mosiah 24:15, compare 3:19); by shifting the original subject (as we saw in the Lord’s assuming a position as a member of the waters-of-Mormon covenant community in Mosiah 24:13–14, compare 18:8–9); or by creating a framing structure that highlights its central element (Mosiah 23:23; 24:13, 14–15, 16, 21). These are narratives we can reread and ponder, where we can find connections and contrasts as we think through difficult issues and learn how to see God’s hand and will—not only in the text but also in our own lives. This is a guidebook for sanctification, for making saints out of its readers and not just converts.

A Poetics of Atonement

Later in his work, Meir Sternberg offers a refinement on his theory of biblical poetics by asserting that a key task of the ancient writers was to find a way to “expound and inculcate” the text’s most central doctrine into the structure of the narrative itself. “Not the premises alone,” he tells us, “but the very composition must bring home the point in and through the reading experience . . . calling into sacred play all the [aesthetic] choices and techniques” at the narrator’s disposal. There is no question about the Book of Mormon’s most central doctrine; indeed, it is proclaimed beforehand, as a premise, in the subtitle “Another Testament of Jesus Christ.” How might we expect the Book of Mormon to be structured if its narrator had deliberately expounded and inculcated his testament of Jesus Christ not only into the premises of the book but also into its “very composition”? Perhaps not so differently than it is.

In his BYU address quoted above, which highlights the deliverance of Alma’s people, Elder Bednar distinguishes between two aspects of Christ’s atonement, its “redeeming power” (transforming bad people into good) and its “enabling power” (making spiritual growth possible). He explains, again using terms from Mosiah 3:19:

I am not trying to suggest that the redeeming and enabling powers of the Atonement are separate and discrete. Rather, these two dimensions of the Atonement are connected and complementary; they both need to be operational during all phases of the journey of life. And it is eternally important for all of us to recognize that both of these essential elements of the journey of life—both putting off the natural man and becoming a saint, both overcoming bad and becoming good—are accomplished through the power of the Atonement.

So also do Mormon’s two books reflect these two dimensions of the Atonement. The primer for judgment, by its premises and composition, calls the Atonement’s redeeming power into play in the lives of its readers, just as the guidebook for sanctification invites its enabling power. And as Elder Bednar suggests, both books are crucial during all phases of the journey of life. By writing these two books in one, “connected and complementary,” Mormon has created a Poetics of Atonement that brings home the point of “Another Testament of Jesus Christ” in and through the reading experience, mirroring the effects of Christ’s sacrifice for all humankind.

The Book of Mormon is certainly a means by which we can repent, come to Christ, and become converted. But it is also more than that. Mormon and the book’s other narrators anticipate many of the difficulties that accompany a life of faith, providing insight, guidance, and encouragement for the path from conversion to sanctification. By learning how to read their second book, we invite the enabling power of Christ’s atonement to act in us through its words.
Jerusalem about 600 BC. Illustration by Joseph Brickey.
A TALE OF THREE COMMUNITIES:

Jerusalem, Elephantine, & Lehi-Nephi

BY JARED W. LUDLOW

BEFORE THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM AND ITS TEMPLE BY THE BABYLONIANS IN 586 B.C., INHABITANTS OF JUDAH, OR THE JEWS, AS THEY CAME TO BE KNOWN, CENTERED THEIR RELIGIOUS LIFE AROUND THE PRIESTLY ACTIVITIES OF THE JERUSALEM TEMPLE.
Their temple-centered religion changed, however, with the invasion and takeover by the Babylonian Empire. In advance of the looming crisis, many prophets exhorted the citizens of Judah to repent and be preserved from possible destruction. Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 7:1–15; 11:1–17) and Lehi (see 1 Nephi 1:4, 13) were among them. Both Lehi and Jeremiah risked their lives to deliver their prophecies but with little success (see 1 Nephi 1:18–20; Jeremiah 20:1–2; 26:8–9). Finally the Lord commanded the threatened Lehi to take his family into the wilderness prior to Jerusalem’s destruction eventually to inhabit a new promised land (see 1 Nephi 1:20; 2:2; 18:23); still other Jews fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them, and settled there (see Jeremiah 43:4–7). Those who remained in Jerusalem faced the Babylonian onslaught, which included the deportation of captives to Babylon as well as the destruction of the city and its temple. Many of the former inhabitants of Judah now found themselves in spiritual crisis: how were they to live their religion away from the covenant land and the site of the temple? As Lehi’s family entered a new promised land as described in the Book of Mormon, they also faced the task of reconstituting their religious community far away from Jerusalem and the region of their earlier covenant history.

In order to better understand how the Nephites compare religiously with various other Jewish groups during this pivotal period of religious and social recovery (during the fifth and sixth centuries BC) as these groups adapted to changes that occurred to the previous Jerusalem temple worship, I would like to compare three “Jewish” communities that tried to reconstitute their societies in new circumstances: the Jewish community at Elephantine Island in Upper Egypt, postexilic Jerusalem, and the Nephite colony in the Americas. These are the crucial questions: What were key components in these respective religious communities? How did these communities interact with their political overlords and neighbors? What types of festivals were significant for the respective communities? What were the roles of the temple and sacred texts in community life? By examining the categories of temple, social relations, festivals, texts, and priesthood, we can see that the core factors determining a similar religious identity for all these communities were temple ritual practice and festival worship. But in the case of texts and priesthood, unlike the Jews in postexilic Jerusalem and the early Nephites, Jews at Elephantine did not seem to seek a firm connection with or continuation of previous covenant communities and instead chose a different way of developing social relations with their neighbors.

BACKGROUND

A major factor in the founding of the three communities—postexilic Jerusalem, Elephantine, and the colony of (Lehi-)Nephi—was the rise and domination of Near Eastern empires in the region. Beginning in the eighth century BC, Israel came under siege from growing empires in the East. The first of these empires, Assyria, conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and dispersed many of its inhabitants. A little over a century later, the Babylonians conquered the Assyrians and attacked the southern kingdom of Judah, eventually deporting many inhabitants and destroying the Jerusalem temple. Sometime during the period of Assyrian and Babylonian expansion, and probably as a result of these invasions, a Jewish group of mercenaries made their way to Egypt and settled near the Nile’s

In 586 BC, the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. The Destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, by Francesco Hayez. Cameraphoto Arte, Venice/Art Resource, NY.
first cataract on an island known as Elephantine. Although the precise date of the founding of this community is unknown, it seems to have had strong ties to the former northern Israelite kingdom because of its unique worship practices and reliance on Aramaic as its mother tongue. As a result of either the Assyrian invasion or later clashes between the Egyptians and the Assyrians, or the Babylonian attack, these Jews settled in a fort on the island and eventually built their own temple. By the time the Persians conquered Egypt in 525 BC, this Jewish community was well-established, maintaining many aspects of Jewish worship.

The postexilic community of Jerusalem was founded when the Persians allowed exiled Jews to return to their homeland after 538 BC. Many Jews came with such leaders as Ezra, Zerubbabel, and Nehemiah and reestablished their community, rebuilt the city, and restored the temple. Although the exact chronology of some of the key figures is debated, the community began practicing sacrificial worship shortly after returning, and Ezra and Nehemiah reasserted obedience to the law and covenant a few decades later.

Shortly before the Babylonian invasion, around 600 BC, Lehi and his family were warned to flee Jerusalem prior to its destruction. They spent some time wandering in the wilderness near the Red Sea but eventually sailed to a promised land in the Americas. Thus, by the middle of the sixth century BC, these three groups faced new challenges and issues in their religious lives, all within differing environments.

**TEMPLE**

One of the strongest institutions for all three communities was a temple, but the Elephantine community’s temple exhibits some puzzling aspects when compared with the others. Although we don’t know the exact date of the construction of the temple in Elephantine, it seems to have been built before the conquest of Egypt by Cambyses in 525 BC, a number of years before the Jerusalem temple was rebuilt. Elephantine was noteworthy because it was a Jewish community outside of Israel that constructed its own temple, a development that runs counter to the belief “that foreign soil was ritually unclean precluding erection thereon of a temple.”

Why was the Elephantine community so willing to build a temple when the Jews exiled from Judah to Babylon were not? Many have attempted to trace the origin of the Elephantine community to northern Israel, possibly with strong connections to the Arameans of that region (a Semitic, nomadic group related to the Hebrews). This group had apparently experienced minimal contact with the Jerusalem establishment before arriving in Elephantine. Thus, as one scholar put it, the “Jewish character of the Elephantine colony is secondary.” The problem with this view, however, is explaining...
the evident, strong Jewish aspects of this group or especially why Judeans, who were a part of this community, did not seem to have a problem with the worship practices established there. From a different viewpoint, Talmon believes that “Egyptian Jewry had adjusted to their Diaspora conditions. They had accepted life ‘away from the land’ as final and did not entertain any hope of a restoration, or at least did not believe in the possible realization of such hope in historical times.” Although the construction of the temple by Egyptian Jews does seem to indicate a new and vibrant outlook as part of their adjustment to Diaspora conditions, as Talmon suggests, it may not connote a sentiment of finality since they seemed to continue to revere Jerusalem and its religious leadership. The construction of the temple may have been an adjustment they were willing to make to maintain their worship in their current situation—unlike the Babylonian Jewish community—but both could have held out the same hopes for the future restoration of Jerusalem and her temple.

In the Aramaic Elephantine documents, this “altar house”—the temple—was a place where meal offerings, incense, and, at least initially, burnt offerings were offered. Somewhat like the Jerusalem temple, the Elephantine temple suffered its own episode of annihilation when the Egyptian Khnum priests requested its destruction from the Persian general in Elephantine-Syene. This destruction prompted correspondence from Elephantine to Jerusalem seeking approval and assistance to rebuild the temple. The fact that the Elephantine Jews sought a recommendation from Jerusalem shows “that they did not regard themselves as schismatic, nor even opposed to the claims of the Temple at Jerusalem.” However, the first letter to the high priest of

Elephantine Island in the Nile, opposite Assuan, Egypt. This photograph shows the ancient quay walls. Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

The Elephantine papyri, such as the one shown here, describe the functions of the temple in the Elephantine community.
Jerusalem, the governor of Judah, and the nobles of the Jews remained unanswered, despite the description in the letter of mourning within the Egyptian community over the loss of their temple.

A second attempt was made to contact the authorities of Jerusalem and Samaria, this time ignoring the High Priest from Jerusalem. This effort may show that, even though the Elephantine Jews were not opposed to the Jerusalem temple, perhaps the Jerusalem High Priest had some reservations about their temple, and only when the Samarian authorities were invoked did Jerusalem respond to prevent increased influence from Samaria. In the relevant Elephantine letter, a promise was made that, if the temple were rebuilt, "the Jews of Elephantine would pray for the governor of Judah and offer meal offerings, incense and burnt offerings in his name on the altar of YHW* at Elephantine."

Another temple built outside of the land of Israel was constructed in the New World by the Nephites shortly after their separation from the Lamanites, following Lehi’s death. As Nephi’s people began to construct buildings, they built a temple "after the manner of the temple of Solomon save it were not built of so many precious things" (2 Nephi 5:16). According to Nephi’s own record, the workmanship was exceedingly fine. Not much detail is given about the specifics of the Nephites’ temple worship, but since they were following the law of Moses (see 2 Nephi 5:10), they presumably performed customary offerings and sacrifices, perhaps from the flocks and crops they had produced (see 2 Nephi 5:11; see also Mosiah 2:3). The only other specific mention of religious activity related to the initial temple occurred as Jacob used the temple as a teaching site (see Jacob 1:17; 2:2, 11).

The third Jewish community to focus on temple construction was the postexilic Jerusalem community. As members of the Babylonian Jewish community began to make their way back to Jerusalem, the former exiles began to rebuild the temple. Yet while the initial project repaired the altar for sacrificial...
worship, the temple sanctuary remained in need of repair for quite some time. The prophet Haggai became concerned with the problem of worshipping in a ruined sanctuary, especially when the people were living in comfortable homes while the Lord’s house lay in waste (see Haggai 1:4, 8, 14). “Therefore,” notes one prominent study,

the prophet promised the Jerusalemites and their leaders, Zerubbabel and the high priest Joshua, the blessings of Yahweh’s presence in the new temple. This would be the temple’s glory and the community’s hope. National, religious, and cultic identity depended on the reestablishment of the cultic center.\textsuperscript{12}

The temple altar was already being used for sacrifice as soon as the Jews returned, perhaps even before (see Jeremiah 41:5).\textsuperscript{13} But the temple’s importance went beyond sacrifice—it was tied to the Jews’ national identity, which is probably part of the reason why the returning exiles, in rebuilding the temple, refused the assistance of the Samaritans and other inhabitants who had been left behind. The community they were establishing was going to be more narrowly defined, and only those from the narrow group could rebuild and worship in the restored temple. Besides being a religious shrine, the temple was a powerful political and economic institution—primarily as the collection and distribution site of the people’s tithes and offerings—and the returning Jews sought to control these key temple functions.

This exclusion of the Samaritans created antagonism, so the returning Jews had to overcome the local opposition of the Samaritans and others when they tried to rebuild the temple, even though they had the Persian emperor’s blessing and financial support. Historical documents show that only after lengthy correspondences back and forth between Jerusalem and the Persian overlords was this matter resolved to the Jews’ satisfaction, but certainly not to the satisfaction of the Samaritans and others (see Ezra 4:1–6:15).

In both Elephantine and Jerusalem, the religious desires of the community to rebuild their temples had to be balanced with the new political realities. In both cases, the Persians and the Samaritans played key roles. In the case of Elephantine, however, the Samaritans were used more as a tool for arousing jealousy to force the Jewish governor of Judah to support their rebuilding project because he did not want to give the Samaritans that opportunity. In the case of the Nephites, the new political situation brought about by separating from the Lamanites and forming their own community led them to build a temple like the one they had left in Jerusalem.

**SOCIAL RELATIONS**

The political maneuverings among Jerusalem, Elephantine, Samaria, and Persia, and between the Nephites and Lamanites demonstrate that the relationships between these communities and their neighbors were also a high priority because each community sought favor from their overlords. The former exiles in Jerusalem immediately separated themselves from the people of the land, especially the Samaritans. Although they shared similar customs, religious beliefs, and backgrounds, the returning Jews, perhaps in a bid to establish complete political control, refused to interact with the Samaritans, especially prohibiting intermarriage. In fact, this prohibition became a type of litmus test to determine if one was a faithful member of the community: had they separated themselves from the peoples of the land (see Nehemiah 9:2; 10:28)? The last chapter of Ezra describes a mandatory meeting—unless one was willing to lose his property and be cut off from the community (see Ezra 10:8)—wherein citizens of Jerusalem confessed their sins and promised to obey the prohibition against intermarriage. However, it apparently took some time to sort everything out, and the giving up of one’s foreign wives started at the top among the leaders and then moved down. Nehemiah was quite indignant toward those who had intermarried. He contended with them, cursed them, struck some of them, pulled out their hair, and made them covenant that neither they nor their children would intermarry (see Nehemiah 13:25).

The Nephites also experienced a radical separation from even closer kinsmen. Because of Nephi’s older brothers’ anger and desire to kill him and their desire that he not rule over them (see 2 Nephi 5:2–4), Nephi was warned by the Lord to depart into the wilderness with all those who would go with him (see 2 Nephi 5:5). Those who followed Nephi began to call themselves the people of Nephi, or Nephites, and were not only spiritually separated from the others by their desire to follow God’s com-
mands but were now physically separated as well (see 2 Nephi 5:9–10). Spiritual and physical consequences followed those who chose not to follow Nephi (see 2 Nephi 5:20–21). Like the Jews under Ezra and Nehemiah’s jurisdiction, the Nephites were prohibited from intermarrying with their neighbors or else the same cursing would come upon them (see 2 Nephi 5:22–23). Thus began a long and often tumultuous relationship between these two groups that was often the means of stirring up Nephi’s people to remember the Lord (see 2 Nephi 5:25).

The Elephantine Jews, on the other hand, had no problem intermarrying with Egyptians and other neighbors. In fact, the temple records list offerings made to many different gods, not just Jehovah (Yahu). Similarly, some oaths in marriage and other contracts were made in the name of Yahu as well as other gods, particularly if it was a mixed religious family (for example, see Aramaic Papyri 7, 14, 22).

Some have labeled the Jewish worship at the Elephantine temple as syncretistic, but it is unclear whether all the Jews were worshipping foreign gods or merely allowing offerings to be made to other deities in a type of ecumenical arrangement. One scholar, Sami Ahmed, wonders if “the recognition of comparable deities may only have been practical for social acceptance.” Another scholar, Thomas Bolin, concludes that the use of uncustomary titles for God, especially elohe shamaia, was merely a policy of political expediency, equating “their god with the Persian Ahura Mazda in an effort to have their request more favorably received,” rather than a result of theological reflection. In fact, he cautions that the repetition of these terms could be a very formulaic or meaningless protocol, and “to ask questions of theological signification of texts that are clearly not dealing with issues of theological speculation disregards the genre of the texts under study and the limits that genre sets on the type of data a text can and cannot yield.” In agreement
with this concept, Michael Silverman argues that we must “consider those documents in which the Elephantine Jews consciously try to state the main points of their faith. Such a text is AP 30–31, the petition to Bagoas the Governor of Judea for help in rebuilding the temple. Here the god worshipped is Yahu the God of Heaven, the God of Israel, and there is no hint of syncretism at all.”

The community situation in Elephantine certainly indicates that the Jews were not isolated in a separate ghetto but had economic, political, and even marital relations with non-Jews. They seemed to have enjoyed good relations with their gentile neighbors except in the case of the angry, neighboring Egyptian priests who objected to some of their worship practices. For the Nephites and for the Jews in Jerusalem, however, there was a distinct separation between them and their neighbors, primarily based on perceived worthiness within the covenant.

**FESTIVALS**

Festivals and the Sabbath played an important role in all three communities, although admittedly there is less direct discussion of Nephite and Elephantine observance of the Mosaic holy days. Although the Nephite and Elephantine texts are not completely clear on the exact nature of these observances, they are discussed, and we can assume they were part of the worship custom. Again, the Book of Mormon at the time of the formation of the Nephite community makes only a general statement regarding the Nephite observance of the law of Moses: “We did observe to keep the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments of the Lord in all things, according to the law of Moses” (2 Nephi 5:10). Almost two centuries later, the people of Nephi had multiplied in the land and “observed to keep the law of Moses and the sabbath day holy unto the Lord” (Jarom 1:5). We know from later passages that they continued to keep the law of Moses until after Christ’s death and his appearance in the Americas (see 3 Nephi 15:2–10; see also an earlier controversy over whether the law of Moses had already been fulfilled in 3 Nephi 1:24–25).

In the Elephantine texts, the festivals were more frequently mentioned than the Sabbath. From this fact, Silverman concluded that “the festivals are more important than the Sabbath. This certainly differs from Judean practice, but is in consonance with later Egyptian Hellenistic custom.” Passover seems to have been especially noteworthy for Jews at Elephantine. In fact, the observance of Passover, and especially the mission and letter of the Jerusalemite Hananiah to Elephantine, was probably the cause of the temple’s destruction because it “aroused the animosity of the Elephantine Khnum priests against the Jews. Any emphasis of a festival commemorating Egyptian defeat at the hands of the Jews’ ancestors was likely to antagonize, and the Khnum priests may have prevented the Jews from celebrating their festival until Hananiah received renewed royal permission.”

According to Ezra 3:4–6, the first festival celebrated by the Babylonian returnees to Jerusalem was Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles/Booths). The Jews celebrated this festival soon after reerecting the altar, even though they were living in some fear of the local inhabitants. Afterward, they offered all the necessary offerings for the New Moons and appointed feasts, thus apparently reestablishing the normal religious calendar (see Ezra
3:5). Similarly, after rebuilding and dedicating the temple, the Jews celebrated Pesach (Passover), with the report particularly noting that this was possible because the priests and the Levites had purified themselves and were ritually clean (see Ezra 6:20). Nehemiah 13 relates the story of that prophet’s indignation at the lack of Sabbath observance among his people. He scolded them not only for working on the Sabbath but also for engaging in business transactions with the men of Tyre (see Nehemiah 13:15–16). Nehemiah’s immediate solution was to castigate the people, but then in a more pragmatic vein he closed the city gates on the Sabbath and installed guards to ensure that no burdens would be brought in on the Sabbath day (see Nehemiah 13:17–19). It took a few weeks and one more threat before the merchants got the message that they were no longer welcome on the Sabbath (see Nehemiah 13:20–21); the Levites then became the standing guards to ensure that everyone sanctified the Sabbath day (see Nehemiah 13:22).

TEXTS

Texts usually play an important role in the formation of a community’s identity and the maintenance of its ideals. In the case of Elephantine, the lack of texts related to the Hebrew Bible raises questions about whether the Jews had not brought any “scriptural” texts with them or whether no texts related to the later canon have been discovered at the site because of circumstance, destruction, or decay. (The *Words of Ahiqar*, originally a non-Jewish piece of Wisdom literature later popular among Jews, is the main literary text that has been discovered there.) Some texts deal with civil law and in these cases Elephantine usually differs from later Jewish practice, but the silence of the documents on religious law prevents any firm conclusions.

The re-formation of Jerusalem, on the other hand, was strongly aided by texts that were apparently a key tool in reform efforts. Evidently the rebuilt temple was not enough to “reestablish Yahweh to the central place in the life of the...
people.” The exact chronology of the story of Ezra is debatable. Still, it seems that the promulgation of a law code and the establishment of judges based on the laws of the king as well as the laws of God lay at the heart of reform efforts (see Ezra 7:25–26). Nehemiah 8 describes a great public reading of the law with priests and Levites assisting the listeners to understand the text. Later, a rich rehearsal of God’s doings with his covenant people was recounted, culminating in a covenant renewal sealed by the priests, Levites, and leaders (see Ezra 9). All of this certainly forged a strong connection and identification between these postexilic Jews and earlier Israelites. The new community recognized the past errors of their people, and they were making appropriate amends.

Scriptural texts played a very important role among the early Nephites, beginning when Nephi and his brothers risked their lives to retrieve the brass plates from Laban (see 1 Nephi 3–4). As Lehi said, one of the major purposes of obtaining the plates, which were “desirable; yea, even of great worth,” was to “ preserve the commandments of the Lord unto our children” (1 Nephi 5:21). Nephi took “the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass” when he and his followers separated from the Lamanites (2 Nephi 5:12). The words of Isaiah found on those brass plates were sources of significant teaching material for Jacob and Nephi as they taught their new community. The brass plates also included sizable portions of earlier scriptures (see especially 2 Nephi 6–25).
Besides the brass plates, Nephi also kept other records, which included a shorter, more spiritual record and a longer, more historical record:

And I, Nephi, had kept the records upon my plates, which I had made, of my people thus far. And it came to pass that the Lord God said unto me: Make other plates; and thou shalt engraven many things upon them which are good in my sight, for the profit of thy people. Wherefore, I, Nephi, to be obedient to the commandments of the Lord, went and made these plates upon which I have engraven these things. And I engraven that which is pleasing unto God. And if my people are pleased with the things of God they will be pleased with mine engravings which are upon these plates. And if my people desire to know the more particular part of the history of my people they must search mine other plates. (2 Nephi 5:29–33)

As part of Nephi’s closing words to his people and those who would read his record, he shared his testimony of the importance and truthfulness of both the scriptural texts he had helped preserve and those that would come forth in the future (see 2 Nephi 33). Jacob continued the same pattern of following the command to write on the small plates “a few of the things which I considered to be most precious” touching only lightly “concerning the history of this people which are called the people of Nephi” (Jacob 1:2). The small plates were reserved for “preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying” for the purpose of touching “upon them [these topics] as much as it were possible, for Christ’s sake, and for the sake of our people” (Jacob 1:4).25

Thus, as in postexilic Jerusalem, the early Nephites used scriptural texts to continue their link, or “continuation identity,” with the previous covenant followers, as well as to bring forth new scripture and create their own covenant community. Oddly, all these connections with earlier communities of believers in Jehovah through text, law, and written traditions are apparently missing in the Elephantine community.

PRIESTHOOD

Priesthood officials helped lead each of these communities. The exact hierarchy of priesthood is difficult to ascertain at Elephantine. Some of the letters are addressed to “Yedoniah and his colleagues the priests,” but they are not called the sons of Aaron. Yedoniah was probably the head priest and had some responsibility with the temple funds, and, as mentioned earlier, administrators must have overseen lists of offerings to the temple. In one of the few clues pointing to an Elephantine priesthood, the Elephantine texts contain the Aramaic term 

In postexilic Jerusalem, priesthood officials took a significant role in rebuilding the religious community, both in terms of physical construction as well as spiritual leadership. The priestly families, Levites, singers, 

Another noticeable difference between the Jerusalem and Elephantine priesthoods was the Horned Altar of Beersheba. Copyright D. Kelly Ogden.
presence of prophets in the Jerusalem community (see Ezra 5:1–2). The Old Testament states specifically that the “elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah” (Ezra 6:14). No prophets were found among the Elephantine community, but there were prophets among the Nephites, just as in Jerusalem.

In recounting their history shortly after breaking off from the Lamanites, some early Nephite writers mentioned the presence of prophets in their midst (see Enos 1:22). One of the prophets’ major tasks was calling people to repentance and warning them they would be destroyed if they did not keep the commandments (see Jarom 1:10). We are also told that besides prophets there were priests and teachers among the Nephites:

Wherefore, the prophets, and the priests, and the teachers, did labor diligently, exhorting with all long-suffering the people to diligence; teaching the law of Moses, and the intent for which it was given; persuading them to look forward unto the Messiah, and believe in him to come as though he already was. And after this manner did they teach them. And it came to pass that by so doing they kept them from being destroyed upon the face of the land; for they did prick their hearts with the word, continually stirring them up unto repentance. (Jarom 1:11–12)

Jacob and Joseph, Nephi’s brothers, were specifically mentioned as being consecrated to these assignments, and their primary function seems to have been teaching the people and bringing them to repentance (see 2 Nephi 6:2–3 and Jacob 1:7, 17–19; 2:1–3).

Thus, priesthood officials were important in all three communities, but the exact function and range of responsibility differed. Particularly among the Jerusalem and Nephite communities, the prophets and priests encouraged and led the people to greater devotion to their covenants.

CONCLUSION

This tale of three cities has examined five different aspects of religious community building for postexilic Jerusalem, Elephantine, and the early Nephites after the shattering loss of Jerusalem and its temple. We have looked specifically at the temple, social relations, festivals, texts, and priesthood. Each of these groups saw the temple and its accompanying sacrifices and offerings as absolutely vital to their communities. Another important aspect was observance of the festivals and the Sabbath. In these ways, even the Jews at Elephantine maintained their Jewish identity among gentile neighbors.

The relationship between the Jews of Elephantine and their neighbors was evidently one of accommodation, but both Jerusalem and the Nephite colony adopted a policy of separation. Did the Elephantine community go too far? Perhaps too often we see the situation as either/or for Jews in the Diaspora: either turn inward and ignore the gentile world or completely assimilate to that world. Perhaps the Elephantine community was like other later diasporic communities, choosing to adopt and adapt some aspects of the gentile world while still remaining true to their covenants. I agree with Michael Silverman that Elephantine’s “many foreign elements did not alter its fundamental character,” but Elephantine did seem to lose some of the covenant aspects retained in other Israelite communities.

In the case of textual traditions, the Jerusalem community and the Nephites appear to go beyond the
Elephantine community in an effort to preserve the records of God’s covenant relationship with His people, as well as to record new scriptures for the future. In terms of an elaborate hierarchy of priests and temple functionaries, the Jerusalem community went far beyond the Elephantine community and seems to have gone even further than the Nephites, although for both Jerusalem and the Nephites, prophets and priests became important teachers to their respective communities. Perhaps these characteristics, minimal in the Elephantine setting, represent early efforts by the Nephite and Jerusalem communities to reconnect with the pre-exilic traditions and practices as part of their “continuation identity.” This may have been an effort to maintain the covenant while also acknowledging and attempting to correct the sins and mistakes of their predecessor Jerusalem/Israelite community. Elephantine Jews, on the other hand, focused on ways to maintain their Jewish identity and worship in their new circumstance, but they did not seem to have the same focus on connecting their community with earlier covenant communities through a rich scriptural tradition or strong priesthood line. The nature of their community may go a long way to explaining this difference since it was primarily made up of military personnel and merchants and their families. For practical reasons they built a temple to worship, but they probably did not have much opportunity, nor perhaps inclination, for theological instruction and development. For the early Nephites and Jews in postexilic Jerusalem, however, having been led or visited by prophets contributed to their spiritual focus and theological development.

We begin to see some origins of Jewish sectarian development in Elephantine’s seeming adaptation of gentile ideas, but there was still a subservience of one religious community, Elephantine, to the other, Jerusalem. The postexilic Jerusalem community began to create sectarianism by refusing the Samaritans’ aid, thereby pushing the Samaritans to establish their own cultic practices and temple. The Nephite leaders, while acknowledging Jerusalem’s importance and God’s efforts to redeem his people there, warned their people of Jerusalem’s wickedness and of the necessity of leaving it and its ways behind. Thus, the Nephites struck out on their own and created their own religious community, separate and independent from Jerusalem, a phenomenon that would occur only later among other Jewish groups in the Second Temple Jewish period, when we see stronger lines drawn and intentional separation from the main cult in Jerusalem.
In one of the most influential sermons recorded in Nephite annals, King Benjamin introduced his topic in a most curious way. After his expected, straightforward declaration that his audience should not “trifle with [his] words” and his affirmation that his kingship had come to him from “this people,” “my father,” and “the hand of the Lord” (Mosiah 2:9, 11), he turned abruptly to service. In language that is saturated with servanthood, he brings his hearers to his main topic: God the King, God the Servant.
In a concrete sense, this set of concepts about God had governed his own kingship and therefore carried a practical imperative for his people: “If I, whom ye call your king, who has spent his days in your service . . . do merit any thanks from you, O how you ought to thank your heavenly King!” (Mosiah 2:19). It is clear that he is linking together the divine and human spheres of activity. Out of this linkage grows his most famous couplet that combines the divine and human: “When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17). But there is more than meets the eye in Benjamin’s reference to service. Such references fit very naturally, indeed compellingly, within a temple setting. Significantly, Benjamin and his audience were gathered at the temple in the city of Zarahemla. Both this setting and Benjamin’s language about service form an integrated, organic connection that is most easily seen by reference to its Old Testament roots in temple service. In this paper I will link or associate Benjamin’s references to service to that of the ancient temple system. This magnificent temple setting gave Benjamin opportunity to accentuate certain topics during his speech—service (in light of temple service), sin, and the atonement.

**The Temple Setting of Benjamin’s Speech**

The opening verses of Mosiah 2 make clear that the temple imposes itself upon Benjamin’s listeners as he presents his sermon. There are five explicit references to the temple in these verses, shown here in italics. In language that bears the sense of sacred pilgrimage to a holy sanctuary—ascending or going...
Benjamin invited his people to the setting of the temple, a holy place of sacred service, so that he could more effectively teach regarding service to God and service to one’s fellow beings. The setting is key.

2:5–6). In fact, the tents’ doors faced the temple: “Every man [pitched] his tent with the door thereof towards the temple” so that the Nephites “might remain in their tents and hear the words which king Benjamin should speak unto them” (Mosiah 2:6). Apparently, then, Benjamin stood on his tower between the temple and the people. As the people sat in their tents and listened to Benjamin’s speech, they were able to look past the king at the temple, which stood in the immediate background as a chief point of focus.

The fifth reference to the temple explains why the Nephites gathered “round about” the temple rather than within its walls. “For the multitude being so great that king Benjamin could not teach them all within the walls of the temple” (Mosiah 2:7).

In addition to the five explicit references to the temple, there is a pointed statement about the temple’s sacrificial system: “They also took of the firstlings of their flocks, that they might offer sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the law of Moses” (Mosiah 2:3). Some of these offerings were likely thanksgiving offerings (see 2:4, “that they might give thanks to the Lord their God”). While the Book of Mormon specifically refers to the temple, its walls, sacrifices, and priests (see 6:3; 11:5), it does not explicitly mention other parts of the temple. For instance, the text does not refer to the sacrificial altar, temple implements, utensils, furniture, and sacred vestments. Nor does the text mention other things that were part of the temple setting, such as the bleating of the sheep or goats before their slaughter, the smell of burning animal flesh mixed with smoke (but note the allusion in 3:27 of flames and ascending smoke), and the sight of blood splattered on officiants’ vestments. These dimensions are assumed by Mormon, the editor, and therefore do not come into his narrative.

What is important is the fact that Benjamin invited his people to the setting of the temple, a holy place of sacred service, so that he could more effec-
or “to perform a (cultic) rite,”12 referring specifically "to work" or "to serve,"11 also means "to worship" regard to the Levite task of dismantling, transport-approximately sixty times in the Hebrew Bible with temple worship. phers disclose that the verb ʿavodah (service) and ʿavad (serve) frequently refer to the ancient Israelite temple sys-tem.10 In fact, some Hebrew scholars and lexicogra-phers disclose that the verb ʿavad, often translated “to work” or “to serve,”11 also means “to worship” or “to perform a (cultic) rite,”12 referring specifically to temple worship.

In this connection, service and serve occur approximately sixty times in the Hebrew Bible with regard to the Levite task of dismantling, transport-ing, and reassembling the Mosaic tabernacle. Service and serve also occur with regard to other official duties connected to the tabernacle (and later the temple), including the guard duty of the structure and its courtyard, the system of sacrifices, and the upkeep and care of the sacred furniture, utensils, and instruments.

The expressions “service of the tabernacle” (Hebrew, ʾavodat hammishkan) and “to do the service of the tabernacle” (Hebrew, laʾavod ʾet ʿavodat hammishkan) are both formulaic or standard phrases (see Numbers 3:7–8; 7:5, 9; 8:22; 16:9; 18:4, 6, 21, 23, 31).13 After the tabernacle was permanently dismantled and Solomon’s temple was built, the formula “service of the tabernacle” was discontin-u-ued. It was replaced with the expression “service of the house of God” or “service of the house of the Lord,” referring to Solomon’s temple. These phrases also became formulaic, especially in Chronicles (see 1 Chronicles 9:13; 23:28, 32; 28:13).14

Specific examples of serve and service in the Bible demonstrate their usage in different contexts. Let me enumerate them. Numbers 8 sets forth that the Lord called the Levites to “execute the service of the Lord” (v. 11) and to do the service of the taber-nacle for the children of Israel. Verse 19 of the same chapter reads: “I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and to his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the service of the children of Israel in the tabernacle of the congregation, and to make an atonement for the children of Israel.” Verses 21–22 read:

The Levites were purified, and they washed their clothes; and Aaron offered them as an offering before the Lord; and Aaron made an atonement for them to cleanse them. And after that went the Levites in to do the service in the tabernacle of the congregation . . . as the Lord had commanded Moses concerning the Levites.

Further, the sacred vessels and implements of the temple were called “the vessels of service in the house of the Lord,” underscoring the connections between service and holiness (1 Chronicles 28:13; see also 1 Chronicles 9:28). As these verses illustrate, genuine service was thought of as a sacred, sanctifying act.15 Another formula pertains to service in the tabernacle and the age that priesthood members are called to serve. Of such peoples the King James Version generally repeats the wording, “that entereth into the service, to do the work in the tabernacle.” (Hebrew, habba ʾlatsava laʾavod ʾet ʿavodat hammishkan) in place of this formula: “From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old . . . every one that entereth into the service, to do the work of the tabernacle” (Numbers 4:30, 35, 39, 43; compare also vv. 4:47; 8:24–25). Again, the place of holiness—the tabernacle—is explicitly linked to service.

In one of the most basic senses, the term service embraced the Mosaic sacrificial system in the Hebrew Bible. In the book of Joshua, for example, the children of Israel declared, “[Let us] do the service of the Lord before him with our burnt offerings, and with our sacrifices, and with our peace offerings” (Joshua 22:27; emphasis added). As a second example, during the days of King Josiah (640–609 BC) a great Passover was kept, during which the priests and Levites prepared more than 5,000 small cattle and 500 oxen for the sacrifices. The Chronicler states, “So all the service of the Lord was prepared the same day, to keep the passover, and to offer burnt offerings upon the altar of the Lord” (2 Chronicles 35:16; emphasis added). Thus,
both sacrifices and Passover preparations—sacred acts—were thought of as service.16

Sins, Sacrifices, and Service

Benjamin’s last mention of service as recorded in Mosiah 2 is connected to a significant temple theme—sprinkling the blood of the sacrificial victim onto the altar. Mosaic law required priestly officiants to sprinkle the blood belonging to the sacrificial animals of all sin offerings onto the temple’s altar (see Exodus 24:6; Leviticus 4:6, 17).17 On occasion, as the priest sprinkled the blood upon the altar, the blood spilled out of the vessel or splashed from the altar onto his temple clothing. The blood spilling apparently occurred often enough that the law of Moses instructed priesthood members how to care for spilled blood: “When there is sprinkled of the blood thereof upon any garment, thou shalt wash that whereon it was sprinkled in the holy place” (Leviticus 6:27). Thus the priest purges the stain.

A reference to blood on garments appears in Mosiah 2, where Benjamin links service and the blood on his own garments: “As I said unto you that I had served you, walking with a clear conscience before God, even so I at this time have caused that ye should assemble yourselves together [at the temple], that I might be found blameless, and that your blood should not come upon me. . . . I say unto you that I have caused that ye should assemble yourselves together that I might rid my garments of your blood” (Mosiah 2:27–28).18 One may speculate that prior to speaking to the people Benjamin offered sacrifices himself and had blood on his garments that he was unable to remove before his speech. Or during the offering of sacrifices some of the temple officiants may have accidentally sprinkled blood onto their garments, thus creating a visual image to accompany Benjamin’s words. As the temple workers were required by the law of Moses to wash their stained garments, so Benjamin was ridding his garments of the blood of his listen-

ers by serving them and by “walking with a clear conscience before God.”

Benjamin’s expression “that I might rid my garments of your blood” (Mosiah 2:29) depicts three images—garments, human blood, and the removal of that blood. These three images are found in other passages where God’s servants remove others’ guilt and filth (represented by blood) from themselves (represented by garments) through proper service. Jacob 1:19 (compare Mormon 9:35 and Ether 12:38) also contains these three images: “We did magnify our office unto the Lord, taking upon us the responsibility, answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence; wherefore, by laboring with

Christ in Gethsemane, by Richard Burde. Courtesy Museum of Church History and Art.
our might their blood might not come upon our garments; otherwise their blood would come upon our garments, and we would not be found spotless at the last day.”19 Second Nephi 9:44 also presents the three images and explicitly links “iniquities” with “blood.” Alma 5:22 comprises yet another example, speaking of human “garments stained with blood and all manner of filthiness.”

Benjamin’s three images—garments, human blood, and the removal of that blood from the garments—correspond with Book of Mormon passages that also feature the same three images, but with some important differences (see 1 Nephi 12:10–11; Alma 5:21, 27; 13:11; 34:36; 3 Nephi 27:19; Ether 13:10). These passages emphasize Jesus Christ’s atoning blood20 (versus human blood) and its power to rid garments of stains made through sin. These passages emphasize the following elements:

The sacrificial Lamb and his blood. The emphasis rests in naming Jesus as the “Lamb” and referring repeatedly to “the blood of the Lamb” (1 Nephi 12:10–11; Alma 13:11; 34:36; Ether 13:10; compare Alma 5:21; 3 Nephi 27:19).

Washing/cleansing of garments. The image is that “garments are washed white” or “garments must be purified until they are cleansed” (Alma 5:21). In slightly different language we read that “garments are made white” (1 Nephi 12:10–11) or “garments have been cleansed and made white” (Alma 5:27; see similarly Alma 13:11; 34:36; 3 Nephi 27:19; Ether 13:10).

Importantly, in these passages the person’s garments symbolize the person himself or herself, and the Lamb’s blood refers directly to Jesus Christ’s atonement and his power to cleanse those who demonstrate faith in Jesus, repent, and remain faithful (see 1 Nephi 12:11; 3 Nephi 27:19).

In sum, Benjamin’s speech took place in a dramatic and sacred setting, the Lord’s temple. Mosiah 2 incorporates many elements that hark back to the temple system of the Old Testament—multiple references to the temple itself, temple worshippers who go up to the temple, a sacrificial system that includes burnt offerings and a flock’s “firstlings,” both of which are offered “according to the law of Moses,” and reference to garments or temple vestments with blood on them. King Benjamin may have employed various Old Testament formulae—such as “the service of the house of God,” or “in the service of the house of the Lord”—to connect his message of service to the temple system. This language recalls priestly service in the ancient temple system, thus linking service to others to service before God in his holy house. In connection with stained garments, Benjamin’s speech was given after the offering of blood sacrifices, during which blood was used for various ritual purposes. The king’s language regarding blood on the garments skillfully recalls scriptural passages that speak directly to the atonement and Jesus’s power to cleanse one’s own garments from filth and stain caused by transgression. This cleansing takes place only after individuals wash their garments in the Lamb’s blood.

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Mughsayl
Another Candidate for Land Bountiful

Wm. Revell Phillips
For the past ten years, I have been associated in some capacity with the search for Lehi’s trail from Jerusalem to Land Bountiful, where Nephi was commanded to build a ship and sail to a promised land in the New World. I have never been to Saudi Arabia or to Yemen and have never received permission to go there, so I will leave that part of Lehi’s journey to those who have. I have traveled most of Oman from the Yemen border to Musandam, on the Straits of Hormuz, and have traveled the south coast of the Dhofar from Dalkut, on the west, to Hadbin, on the east. Three sites along that coast have been proposed as the land that Nephi called Bountiful. I have read Lynn Hilton’s case for Salalah, Warren Aston’s support for Wadi Sayq, and Richard Wellington and George Potter in defense of Khor Rori. Each has a sound argument and may indeed represent the true Bountiful, but I plan herein to muddy the water with yet another candidate for Land Bountiful—Mughsayl.

Let me begin with a very simple explanation for the topography of the Dhofar coast (figure 1). Along the Dhofar coast a thick sequence of limestone layers, deposited in an earlier ocean that flooded much of the Arabian subcontinent, dip gently northward, ultimately disappearing under the sands of the Rub al Khali (“the Empty Quarter”). Occasional rain waters flow north on this monotonous, gravel plain, called the Najd Plateau, forming long, shallow wadis in dendritic patterns that end at the drifting sands of the Rub al Khali. South of the divide, wadis are short and steep and discharge seasonal, monsoon rain waters into the Arabian Sea (figure 2). Extensional faults, running roughly parallel to the coast, drop structural blocks toward the sea, forming east-west valleys that control the orientation of wadis that descend from west to east before discharging into the sea.

Coastal mountains extend east from the Yemen border to form three large mountain masses along
the southern coast of Oman (figure 3). Jabal al Qamar forms highlands from the Yemen border to about Mughsayl: Jabal al Qana is the name of the highlands east from Mughsayl and north of the Salalah Plain, and Jabal Samhan forms the massive highland north of the Marbat Plain. North of the highland divide, the broad shallow wadis on the Najd Plateau would not seriously influence Lehi’s direction of travel. South of the divide the landscape is rugged, and short, deep wadis descend rapidly to the sea, largely dictating the course of travel. Lehi could follow an eastward course across the Najd Plateau, but once he crossed the mountain divide, his course and ease of travel was largely determined by the wadi he entered. The large wadis follow major faults and lead the traveler east-southeast to the sea, e.g., Wadi Sayq, Wadi Aful, and Wadi Adawnab. Wadi Ashawq is the largest of the wadis in the Raykut Basin and drains a huge area between Jabal al Qamar and Jabal al Qana. Wadi Ashawq does not follow the ESE fault pattern and offers a very large window of opportunity for a traveler to enter from the west and a broad, flat valley floor for him to follow to the sea at Mughsayl (figure 4).

At the mouth of each major wadi, where it enters the Arabian Sea, is a khor, which is the flooded mouth of the wadi, where Nephi likely launched and tested his ship. Today, a baymouth bar of sand separates the khor lagoon from the open sea (figure 5). The bay bars were likely deposited in rather recent times in response to a change in sea level. In Nephi’s time, the khors were probably open to the sea and served as harbors for small ships moving along the Dhofar coast. In the centuries before and after the birth of Christ, Khor Rori was a major port for ancient shipping between the Indian subcontinent and East Africa and the Red Sea, and was a trade center for goods leaving and entering the Dhofar.

Before I embark on my version of Lehi’s sojourn from Nahom into Land Bountiful,
let me reject the idea that Lehi and his party were completely alone in the “wilderness.” Lehi traveled through tribal lands and drank from jealously guarded springs and watering holes. In the desert, no source of water is without a claimant and no one travels or camps or waters animals without permission from a suspicious, and probably hostile, tribal leader. What Lehi offered in return for permission, we can only guess; moreover, iron-age signs of habitation, contemporary with Lehi, are abundant both along the Dhofar coast and inland.

By Nephi’s account, Lehi left Nahom and traveled nearly east. He had come far enough south to skirt the Rub al Khali (“Empty Quarter”) when he turned east, and his route east was most likely between the Rub al Khali sands on the north and the sands of a smaller empty quarter (Ramlat as-Sab’atayn Desert) on the south (figure 6). This passage would lead him into Wadi Hadramaut, which would probably direct him eastward onto the Najd Plateau north of the Oman divide, where shallow wadis drain northward to the Rub al Khali. Somewhere, Lehi crossed the divide into a wadi that would lead him east and south to the sea and Land Bountiful.

The window of opportunity for entry into Wadi Sayq was very narrow, coming from the west, and Lehi would have been traveling near the sea in order to enter Wadi Sayq near its upper end. The area surrounding Wadi Sayq is heavily wooded with brush, which is dry most of the year and endowed with uninviting thorns (figure 7). Wadi Sayq today is a narrow canyon for most of its length and is clogged with huge boulders and unfriendly vegetation, making it almost impossible for anyone to bring a caravan down the wadi.

If Lehi crossed the divide further east, he would have entered a much broader window that would direct him into one of the major branches of Wadi Ashawq, which in turn would lead him to the sea at Mughsayl (figure 4). I have traveled only four kilometers into Wadi Ashawq, but I am told, by the Dhofar governor, that ancient trade caravans from Salalah followed the route of the modern highway up Wadi Adawnab from the Salalah Plain, down Wadi Mudam to the sea at Mughsayl, and then up Wadi Ashawq into the Hadramaut of Yemen, the
reverse of Lehi’s possible route. Wadi Ashawq has a broad, flat floor up to a kilometer wide, although more often it ranges from 100 to 50 meters (figure 8). The floor is cobbles, pebbles, or sand, flanked with soil and grassy vegetation. Hundreds of camels live in and graze the wadi today. A string of watering holes up to a meter deep and ten meters across form a sluggish “river” of clear water that disappears and reappears in the karst wadi floor and form perhaps 10 or 20 acres of wetlands at and near the wadi mouth. These watering holes and wetlands continue up the wadi at least four kilometers. One could easily move a large caravan and drive a large herd of goats and sheep down the wadi, without obstruction, and even rest in the shade of an occasional tree.

Crossing the divide even further east, or crossing over the inviting branches of Wadi Ashawq in his eastward trek, Lehi may have entered the very broad Wadi Adawnab, which would have led him east to Raysut and the Salalah Plain.

I like very much the proposal of Jeffrey R. Chadwick4 that Lehi may have counted his stay at Bountiful as a major part of the eight years in the “wilderness” and that his journey from Jerusalem to Bountiful took no more than two years. Since frankincense caravans covered the distance in a few months, it is obvious that Lehi settled somewhere for a long period of time. Since Nephi was given a very major assignment at Land Bountiful, which would require countless man-hours and huge resources, it seems reasonable that Lehi and his party must have resided at the Bountiful site for a number of years. Wherever Lehi came to the sea and rejoiced, there were people, anywhere from an occasional visitor at Wadi Sayq to a bustling town at El Baleed (Salalah) and a busy seaport at Khor Rori (figure 9). Would Nephi have rejected the help and resources so badly needed and so readily available? I do not limit God’s ability to do whatever he wishes by whatever means he wishes to do it, but if we chose the supernatural explanation there is no meaning or purpose to all our logic and speculation.

Everything has a price, and I can envision Lehi purchasing land and water rights from local leaders or tribal chiefs and engaging in some profitable business in Land Bountiful. Lehi appears to have been a successful businessman or merchant directing camel caravans to Egypt and elsewhere. Perhaps he raised camels for sale, as the Jabalis do today at Mughsayl and throughout the Dhofar (figure 10), or maybe he leased frankincense trees and gathered the precious gum, said, in a later era, to be more
Lehi probably did not engage in farming for profit, although he may have raised a small crop for his family at any stop along his journey, even at Mughsayl. Lehi appears to have been a merchant, not a farmer, and the soil along the Dhofar coast is infertile, leached of virtually all nutrients by monsoon rains. Today, there is no significant agriculture anywhere along the Dhofar coast, except in the vicinity of Salalah, where perhaps a few thousand acres are under cultivation. For many centuries, almost the whole Salalah Plain was farmland, but in recent years the plain is largely abandoned due to the great demand for water by a rapidly growing, major city. On the southern, coastal outskirts of Salalah, near the ancient city of Al Baleed, are a few hundred acres of beautiful fruit orchards—bananas, coconuts, dates, papayas, mangos, etc. (figure 12). Nowhere else on the entire Dhofar coast are there fruit orchards. Nephi says nothing of fertile land, only that there was much fruit and wild honey. Only at Salalah is there “much fruit” today.

precious than gold (figure 11). Nephi needed the support of his brothers and probably more labor and skills than they could provide to build the massive ship capable of transporting forty or more people across the broad oceans.
The southern Arabian coast has always been famous for its wild honey, and perhaps the most expensive honey in the world today is produced in Yemen (figure 13). The “Bedouin Bees” (Apis mellifera jemenitica) occur wild in the plains and hills of the Dhofar, where they make hives in the countless caves and caverns of the karst limestone cliffs. Several years ago, I encountered a Jabali man who made a living by collecting the wild honey from the coastal mountains. With binoculars, he watched bees swarming and entering specific caves, and he then rappelled into those caves from above.

Several times, I have visited the primitive shipyards at Sur, where shipwrights still build traditional Arab dhows by the old methods (figure 14). I have questioned supervisors about methods and accessibility of materials and learned that the ribs of their ships are made from the Acacia trees that are scattered across the deserts of northern Oman. But the long, straight planks that form the sidewalls and decks are teak wood from India, transported as logs and cut by horizontal band saws at Sur. During my last time at Sur, workers were building a large, beautiful dhow for His Majesty the Sultan of Oman. I, and those with me, calculated that Nephi’s ship must have been about that same size. We stood under the huge hull in awe and amazement and with new respect and understanding for the monumental task which Nephi would undertake.

Nephi made only one request of the Lord, so far as we know. Where could he find ore to make shipbuilding tools? Perhaps he could have purchased such tools at Khor Rori, or perhaps not, and surely Lehi had brought basic tools, like a hammer and...
axe, from Jerusalem. Whatever access he may have had, Nephi chose to make his own tools and, having the ore, seemed to know how to proceed. Perhaps only a geologist would understand the sincere need for divine help, as relatively young limestone layers (Tertiary and Cretaceous) are the surface rocks over nearly all the Dhofar province. Only where these limestone layers have been stripped away by erosion is there a real possibility of finding ore, and the only large area of such “basement” exposure is the Marbat Plain, east of Marbat between Jabal Samhan and the Arabian Sea. On a geologic map (figure 15), the “basement” rock stands out in bold colors, contrasting sharply with the monotonous color representing the youthful limestone, but Nephi had no such map. Only the Marbat Plain and a tiny exposure of basement rock at a small wadi between Raykut and Mughsayl are likely to yield ore, and iron ore is, indeed, present at both locations, not enough for an iron industry, but far more than adequate for Nephi’s needs.

No trees grow in Oman that could provide suitable planking for Nephi’s ship, either today or probably in the past. Trees are very scarce in the Dhofar, and those of significant size tend to yield gnarly, punky wood. A huge baobab tree at Dalkut (figure 16) is essentially one of a kind and might supply enough wood for a ship; however, the wood is soft, yellow, and spongy and is filled with water so that one could chew the wood for water in the desert. We know that Indian teak was transported along the Omani coast from the earliest times, and perhaps Nephi bartered for shipbuilding lumber on the docks at Khor Rori or purchased logs to be dropped offshore at Wadi Sayq or Mughsayl to float ashore with the tide.

Aston has listed twelve criteria that he believes any proposed Bountiful site must satisfy. I will list each of the twelve and add my comments.

1. **Nearly eastward from Nahom.**
   All of the proposed sites for Land Bountiful in southern Oman are nearly eastward from Nahom.

2. **Accessible from the interior.**
   Of the proposed sites, only Wadi Sayq has truly difficult access from the interior. The narrow nature of the canyon and huge boulders and vegetation that block the canyon floor would make it very difficult to move a caravan down the canyon in our time. The only real access to Wadi Sayq is from the sea, and even that access is denied almost half of each year when the sea is too violent for small boats to come ashore. However, Wadi Sayq is a charming, pristine site to bring Latter-day Saint tourists, as the high breakers and surf and the “wet” landing on an isolated beach is about the right amount of danger and adventure to challenge the modern tourist.

3. **Surrounding fertility.**
   Nowhere on the Omani coast is the soil fertile enough for agriculture today, except the Salalah plain (i.e., Salalah and Khor Rori), which was farmed for centuries.

4. **Sheltered location.**
   At all of the proposed sites there is a sheltered khor where Lehi’s party might erect a camp and construct a ship. The khor at Wadi Sayq (Khor Kharfot) is by far the smallest.

5. **Much fruit and wild honey.**
   The only cultivated fruit orchards today are at Salalah, and this was likely so in the past as the soil and growing conditions are most favorable there. These cultivated orchards do indeed produce an abundance of seasonal fruits and may have done so in the past. Wild fruits and legumes (figs, dates, tamarinds) grow in all the mountainous areas of the Dhofar relatively near all of the proposed Bountiful sites, but they are seasonal and not really in great abundance. Living “off the land” is always a full-time
job, and gathering wild produce often expends more calories that it provides. Wild honey is available near all of the proposed Bountiful sites.


Timber appropriate for building a conventional, oceangoing ship does not grow anywhere along the Omani coast and probably did not in the past. Either Nephi’s ship was not conventional or he obtained appropriate timber from some distant source. We are told that Nephi’s ship was not “after the manner of men” and that the timbers used were of “curious workmanship,” which opens numerous possibilities. Warren Aston proposes a raftlike ship, which is certainly a possibility and could probably be built with the materials at hand. If the ship were built at Khor Rori or even at Salalah, teak lumber from India was almost certainly available for purchase on the docks at Khor Rori.

7. Year-round freshwater.

All of the proposed Bountiful sites are blessed with abundant freshwater that flows year-round from large springs and that is nowadays impounded as a lagoon behind a baymouth bar. These lagoons and associated wetlands provide habitat for numerous water birds and small mammals, which may well have augmented the diet of a resident family. The smallest of these lagoons and wetlands is at Wadi Sayq. It is somewhat difficult to describe the ancient condition at Salalah because it has been overlaid by the construction of a major city.

8. Nearby mount.

Mountains and hills are everywhere along the Dhofar coast but are several kilometers north of the shoreline along the Salalah Plain.


Cliffs, like mountains, are abundant everywhere, and Nephi writes nothing about cliffs, only that his brothers were desirous to throw him into the depths of the sea. Suitable highlands are not obvious near Salalah, but at Khor Rori two elongated monoliths of rock flank the entrance to the khor and defy an obvious geological explanation.

10. Ore and flint.

Two sources for abundant iron ore have been located by Brigham Young University geologists and have been cited above. Since deposits of ore are very limited in the Dhofar, these two sites are among the most certain sites visited by Nephi; an important observation.

The availability of flint, or chert, is a complete nonissue, as it is abundant in the Tertiary limestones that cover the Dhofar and is everywhere in the wadis and beach gravels. Nephi needed only two hand-sized pieces to strike together to make a fire, or only one if he used the flint-with-steel method of our Boy Scouts. Lehi may even have carried a piece of flint with him on his long journey.

11. Unpopulated.

On this point, I differ sharply with Warren Aston. Lehi would have searched with difficulty to find a suitable site on the seashore that was completely unpopulated. Wadi Sayq is perhaps one of those sites, but it was possibly unpopulated then for the same reason it is today—one can’t easily get to it. Modern Jabalis bring camels and cows into Wadi Sayq on a steep and narrow path that descends from the bluffs above, but not along the valley floor. Wherever he reached the sea, Lehi had neighbors, and if he tried to avoid them and was not curious about them, they were certainly curious about him. In a short time, he must have become aware of significant population centers along the coast and of a major commercial port at Khor Rori, where a wide variety of supplies and amenities were probably available. Surely, some members of Lehi’s extended family must have made friends among the local people and must have traded with them, learned from them, and given help and received help in a wide variety of endeavors.

12. Ocean access.

Any of the khors provided easy access to the open sea, and small fishing boats must have departed daily to return with what must have been a staple of Lehi’s diet. In the stormy season, the khors provided shelter for the fishing fleet and Nephi’s shipbuilding project.

Let me now describe the coastal area called Mughsayl and make a case for its consideration in a list of proposed sites to be called Land Bountiful. I might begin with a suggestion that Lehi may have considered much of the Dhofar coast to be a bountiful land and may even have relocated several times during a long residence there.
Mughsayl features a long sandy beach that extends for about six kilometers from Wadi Mudam almost to Wadi Aful, with Wadi Ashawq reaching the sea at almost the center point (figure 17). The modern road from Salalah ascends Wadi Adawnab from the Salalah Plain at the port city of Raysut, descends again to the coast down Wadi Mudam, and runs west parallel to the beach on a narrow strip between a mountain front on the north and the beach on the south. Two small communities of perhaps a hundred residents have been built recently on the mountain front east of Wadi Ashawq and are supplied by water from the wadi, as are the resort areas on the broad coastal plain west of the wadi. The modern road crosses the Ashawq khor and associated wetlands on an artificial bar inland from the natural baymouth bar and continues westward across the coastal plain, ascending over the coastal cliffs to Wadi Aful. At Wadi Ashawq the western mountain front is displaced northward and a broad coastal plain, up to a kilometer wide, continues westward until it is cut off by limestone cliffs that descend to the sea. A branch of the modern road descends to the beach blowholes and to a restaurant and beach resort where our archaeological group stayed in July 2007. At the west end of the coastal plain, where limestone cliffs descend to the sea, is a huge olistolith rock (slip block) that forms an overhang known locally as the “cave” (figure 18). It is indeed a cave, with its south side completely open to the sea. The karst overhang provides excellent shelter from sun and rain for a half acre or more, where tourists rest on benches to watch blowholes at the water’s edge, which may cast columns of seawater ten meters or more straight into the air.

Almost at the center of the broad coastal plain is a small, low “plateau” of limestone and cemented coastal sands and gravels. The “plateau” is elongated east-west, about 30 meters wide and perhaps 150 meters long. At the west end of the plateau are stone foundations of
ancient structures, which were one focus of BYU excavations in July 2007 (figure 19), and which appear to date from the early iron age—Lehi’s time period. Between the plateau and the mountain front to the north is a broad lowland about 150 meters wide and somewhat shielded from the saline fog and sea breezes. This flat valley was obviously used at some earlier time for small-scale agriculture, and a relatively modern irrigation ditch once diverted water from Wadi Ashawq onto the broad valley floor (figure 20). Could the small community (no more than one or two extended families) that lived on the plateau have used that same valley to grow crops?

Let me summarize the merits of Mughsayl and the reasons it might be considered a candidate for Land Bountiful:

1. Wadi Ashawq drains a huge area between Jabal Qamar and Jabal Qana, which provides an abundant and dependable source of fresh water throughout the year.
2. Wadi Ashawq has many tributaries, which provides a very wide entry window for anyone coming from the west.
3. Wadi Ashawq is very broad and flat, with abundant watering holes and offers an easy journey to the sea for anyone bringing a caravan down the wadi.
4. The khor at the mouth of Wadi Ashawq is large and appears from satellite photographs to be almost as large as Khor Rori. It offered safe harbor for at least small ships sailing along the Omani coast bringing supplies to Mughsayl.
5. Wetlands near the khor cover many acres, providing a large habitat for water birds and small mammals (figure 21).
6. A long sandy beach provides access to the sea for small fishing boats and for collecting sea shells and shellfish.
7. Mughsayl was a major stop on the inland, caravan trade route between Salalah and the Hadramaut region of Yemen, and thence to both sea and land routes of the frankincense trade.
8. Karst topography along the mountain front at Mughsayl (figure 18) provides large sheltered areas, at the “cave” and near the khor, for possible human habitation, for dry storage, and for the collection of wild honey.

9. A small area of several acres west of the khor may be a possible site for small-scale agriculture.

10. The wadi and coastal plain at Mughsayl is ideal for sustaining a large herd of camels and other domesticated animals for trade, meat, and milk.

In summary, let me note that I have no vested interest in establishing Mughsayl or any other proposed site as “the” Land Bountiful, but Mughsayl seems to me as likely as other proposed sites. I have nothing to offer but my experiences and observations, but they lead me to propose that Land Bountiful may refer to an extensive expanse of land on the Dhofar coast somewhere between Dalkut and Marbat and that Lehi may have resided at Mughsayl for up to six years, raising camels for a living while Nephi undertook the enormous task of building a oceangoing ship, interacting and trading freely with the local inhabitants for whatever materials or services he needed.
The name Liahona, although it appears only once in the Book of Mormon text, has drawn the rapt attention of the curious and the learned. My contribution builds upon past efforts to explain the possible etymological meaning of the name Liahona. I offer what I argue to be a more plausible explanation than those of my predecessors in light of the Lehites’ linguistic background. In fairness to past studies on this subject, I must mention that working with the Book of Mormon text in English only, and not with the text in its original language, makes the effort harder. The same can be said about the difficulty of working on the given names in English spellings rather than the originals. My approach is to transliterate back into the Hebraic idioms of the time of Lehi what I perceive that Joseph Smith saw or heard and dictated. Then I present the grammatical elements used to form the name Liahona, which I show to mean quite literally “to Yahweh is the whither” or, by interpretation, “direction of-to the Lord.”

Key to my analysis is a methodology based on the premise that Liahona was formed according to the traditional Hebrew method of forming...
names. The Hebrews created new words by combining existing words in accordance with the circumstances in which the need for that new word arose, taking into account the purpose of the object that received the word. I will demonstrate how the linguistic, textual, historical, and story contexts confirm and strengthen the most literal linguistic interpretation based on this premise and tend to exclude other possibilities unrelated to the linguistic elements of the word. In the process of applying this traditional Hebrew method of name formation, I formulate arguments that might seem circular. However, what superficially seems to be a circular argument in reality connects various pieces of evidence that form a preponderance of evidences in support of one etymology versus another. Hopefully, these arguments will yield all their convincing force “sufficient to free the mind wholly from all reasonable doubt” concerning one meaning over another and “sufficient to incline a fair and impartial mind to one side of the issue rather than the other.”

The Term *Liahona* in the Book of Mormon

The Book of Mormon record associates the word *Liahona* with deliverance and survival, tying its meaning directly to a physical object—a ball—and to its essential function—a director (see Mosiah 1:16; Alma 37:38, 45). The elements forming the term *Liahona* become clear when they are analyzed in light of the customs and the rules of the Hebrew grammar in existence at the time of Lehi in 600 BC. The skillful formation of this word also sheds light on the linguistic world of the Nephite civilization, mainly a descendant of Hebrew. It also demonstrates that Joseph Smith, with his extremely limited language skills, could not have dreamed up such a name. The explanation of the etymology of the name *Liahona* adds another link to the pieces of evidence from other past explanations of names that Joseph Smith could not have known from just reading the Bible.

Paul Y. Hoskisson has written that “the greatest challenge for persons interested in the meanings of proper names in the Book of Mormon has to do with those names whose meanings we already know.” The well-known list of names whose interpretations are already provided in the Book of Mormon text includes *Irreantum*, “many waters” (1 Nephi 17:5); *Rabbanah*, “powerful or great king” (Alma 18:13); *Rameumptom*, “the holy stand” (Alma 31:21); *deseret*, “a honey bee” (Ether 2:3); and *Ripli-ancum*, “large, or to exceed all” (Ether 15:8).

The general interpretation of the name *Liahona* is found in the three following verses of the Book of Mormon:

And now, my son, I have somewhat to say concerning the thing which our fathers call a ball, or director—or our fathers called it *Liahona*, which is, being interpreted, a compass; and the Lord prepared it. (Alma 37:38)

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*Liahona* means “the direction (director) of the Lord,” or literally “to the YHWH is the whither.”

The term *Liahona* is composed of three words: the first part of the name *li* ʏ indicates the possession of something; *iaho* יָהו exhibits the fingerprints of the tetragrammaton YHWH, i.e., the Lord; and *ona* אֹנָא is an adverb that means direction or motion to a certain place.
And moreover, he also gave him charge concerning the records which were engraved on the plates of brass; and also the plates of Nephi; and also, the sword of Laban, and the ball or director, which led our fathers through the wilderness, which was prepared by the hand of the Lord that thereby they might be led, every one according to the heed and diligence which they gave unto him. (Mosiah 1:16)

And now I say, is there not a type in this thing? For just as surely as this director did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promised land, shall the words of Christ, if we follow their course, carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise. (Alma 37:45)

My first observation is that it is questionable whether there was a distinct word for compass at that point in time. So this is likely an interpretation and not a translation. Second, the Book of Mormon writers used the three words compass, ball, and director to refer to the same object. The etymologist needs to analyze the basic elements of the name Liahona by drawing on the interpretations that the Book of Mormon provides.

Liahona as a Hebrew Name

One may suppose that, because the name Liahona first appears in the book of Alma, written about 74 BC (500 years after Lehi), it might have been in an Amerindian language that had developed from Lehi’s Hebrew of 600 BC. The following argument demonstrates that this supposition is not correct.

First, Alma refers to his “fathers” who gave the name Liahona to the ball (see Alma 37:45). Lehi is the first to have found the Liahona and is referred to as “father” in Enos 1:25, Alma 56:3, Helaman 8:22, and 3 Nephi 10:17. The name fathers is a typical indicator of the founding fathers of the Nephite nation and civilization—father Lehi and his son Nephi. The Book of Mormon prophets followed the customary Hebraic tradition of referring to the God of the fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob for the nation of Israel; Lehi and Nephi for the Nephite civilization). It is absolutely unlikely that the term fathers may refer to the immediate ancestors of Alma, who supposedly had spoken a language that had deformed the Hebrew of the founding fathers of the Nephite civilization. The evident Hebrew elements in the name Liahona (explained hereafter) heavily support the conclusion that Lehi and Nephi coined the name Liahona.5

Furthermore, it would be hard to believe that such an important object of the Nephite civilization would have changed its pronunciation from the original Hebrew of Lehi to another language developed in America.

The “fathers” (Lehi and Nephi) must have given this name to the object during the Lehites’ journey in the wilderness. This increases the chance that the name was Hebrew since it was the language that they spoke in everyday life and also the language used in their holy books. The textual and material etymological evidences given hereafter outweigh the supposition that the name Liahona might have been Amerindian, as might be the case for other names that start to appear around the time of Alma.

Past Efforts

“To God is light” and “of God is light”

George Reynolds and Janne Sjodahl state that Liahona, composed of “Hebrew with an Egyptian ending,” means “of God is the light,” giving the meaning “of God is light.”6 I imagine that their translation of God is of Yah that is present in L-iahona. The linguistic distance between the Egyptian element annu and the ‘ona of Liahona makes the connection merely hypothetical and, most importantly, does not reflect the interpretation of “compass” or “director” offered in the Book of Mormon. A second explanation, given by Sidney B. Sperry, suggests that the name derives from Arabic terms lahah and henna, meaning “point where.” However, lahah has no etymological connection with liahono, hence I do not support it. Both lahah and annu are too distant from the transliteration of Liahona. Furthermore, in these two etymologies Liahona would
be composed of terms from different languages, which is not common in ancient Hebrew linguistics practices.

“The Guidance of the Lord”

It has been recorded that Hugh Nibley, during one of his lectures on the Book of Mormon, stated:

And many people have dealt with the word Liahona. We had a teacher from Hebrew University here for a few years; in fact he bought a house in Provo. He was so fond of it he wanted to come and visit often. His name was [Jonathan] Shunary. He never joined the Church, but the first thing that fascinated him was this name Liahona. He traced it back to the queen bee, the leader of bees swarming in the desert. When bees swarm, that’s Liahona. I took it from a different one. Yah is, of course, God Jehovah. Liyah means the possessive, “To God is the guidance,” hona (Liyahhona). That’s just a guess; don’t put it down. But it’s a pretty good guess anyway.

Whereas the translation “to God” catches my attention, the other two elements in the above explanation leave too many questions. This is true for the reference to the queen bees and for the Hebrew hona translated as “guidance,” because hona does not mean “guidance.”

Reynolds and Sjodahl, Sperry, and Nibley have broken the ground for a necessary etymological explanation of this fascinating name.

The Etymological and Grammatical Explanation of the Meaning: “The Direction of the Lord”

Liaho “to (of) the Lord”

The meaning of the Liaho (“to (of) the Lord”) part of the word is common to all the above explanations and seems to gather the agreement of most scholars. The fact that the first two words are...
Hebrew entails that the final term should be of the same language. Although it is known that Lehi was learned in “the language of the Egyptians” (1 Nephi 1:2), until now no Egyptian terms have been convincingly associated with the name Liahona.

Li ʾ: The first part of the name is li-, the letter lamed forming a contraction of ʾel which, in this case, indicates the possession of something, and can also mean toward something.

Iaho ʾ: The three letters yod, he, waw exhibit the fingerprints of the tetragrammaton YHWH because they are the first three letters that appear as a prefix or a suffix in the yahwistic theophoric names. When they form a suffix they are pronounced yahu, e.g., Yesha-yahu, Yerem-yahu, Shelem-yahu, Malk-yahu, etc.

When these letters appear as a prefix of the theophoric proper name, the waw is pronounced “o” instead of “u”; thus we find yeho in names such as Yehonathan (Jonathan), Yehonadab, or Yehoshua (Joshua).

It is a well-known fact that when the scribes introduced the vocalization in the Hebrew Bible, the divine name YHWH ייה (yod he waw he) received with a slight deformation the vowels of ʿadonay (“Lord”) in order to let the tetragrammaton YHWH be pronounced ʿadonay so as to avoid the repetition of the ineffable name. The majority of the scholars maintain that the tetragrammaton was pronounced Yahweh.9 The translators of the Bible in European languages, not fully aware of this tradition, transliterated Yahweh as Jehovah. Because of the shift in the vowels, the pronunciation of theophoric names with the yahwistic prefix were also pronounced Yehonathan and Yehoshua instead of Yehonadab and Yehoshua. The vocalization of Liahona similarly indicates that the name YHWH was pronounced Yahweh in Lehi’s day. This observation points to the antiquity of the name Liahona. The fact that Joseph Smith translated Liahona instead of Leihona is very indicative of the antiquity of the name. Yaho is indeed the original marker of the tetragrammaton YHWH that was originally pronounced Yahweh.

An objection can be raised to the vocalization of liaho as meaning “to (of) YHWH.” Under the rules of Hebraic vocalization of the Masoretic Text of the Bible, the lamed (as the preposition of before a yod) is pronounced li only when the yod has the vowel schwa. In the case of Liahona, the letter yod of yah has the punctuation (vowel) of a patach and not a schwa. Under these rules, if the lamed indicated the preposition to, the lamed should keep the short sound of a schwa, and be pronounced le instead of li; and the Book of Mormon text would read leyah(ʿona) instead of Liahona (see for instance the case of leyaʿaqov in Genesis 48:2). There are two main answers to this objection. The first is that it is anachronistic since both ancient epigraphy and archeology confirm that the most precise rules of the nikud punctuation were definitively fixed around 100 AD in the town of Yavneh near Jerusalem and were almost nonexistent at the time of Lehi, from whose time inscriptions have only the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and no vowel signs.10 Although we do not know the exact pronunciation of names like Yehonathan or Yehoshua at the time of Lehi, one would expect that the 600 BC vernacular adaptation of le (indicating the possessive) before yah would exactly have been liaho instead of le-iaho. The tetragrammaton marker yod, he, waw in this case is not a prefix but is in the middle of the word as L-iaho-na, hence it would be unthinkable that the pronunciation in this case would be yeho (typical of the prefix). A second argument is that the lamed before the yod of Yahweh would be pronounced in the spoken language as liah and not as leyah, even if a schwa was placed under the yod. In other words, the pronunciation liah corresponds to the customary rules of pronunciation of the “to (of) YHWH,” which reflects both a very plausible everyday practice of that time and modern Hebrew formation of names that have these exact features.11

As with the other Hebraic words in the Book of Mormon text, such as Jershon (Alma 27) and the terms in 1 Nephi 2:10, which play around the word ʿafiq meaning both “valley” and also “firm,” “steadfast” or “immovable,”12 the meaning of Liahona can also be derived from an adjoining verse, which might include a quick reference interpretation. A further evidence that the tetragrammaton marker of yod he waw is present in l-iaho-na is when Alma in the same verse (Alma 37:38) says “which is, being interpreted, a compass; and the Lord prepared it.” The word Lord had to be YHWH in the original text, whose marker iaho (yod he waw) is exactly part of l-iaho-na.

“The Direction (Director) of YHWH” or literally “To the Lord Is the Whither”

How can Liahona possibly mean “compass” or “director”? The answer is found in the final part of
The appearance of the terms compass, ball, and director in the text is usually related to the question, “whither shall we go?” (‘ona nelek). This is why they called the compass Liahona: it indicated the direction of the Lord.

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In sum, this etymology is confirmed by, first, the link between the final letter waw of iaho, and the vowel kamatz beneath the alef of ‘ona. They match perfectly in sequence and sound. Second, the surrounding contexts repeat one of the meanings of the name, a practice typical in Hebrew prose.

“To the place of YHWH”

A variant to the above meaning could be “to the place of the Lord,” which is also related to the

words surrounding the name often reveal the elements of which it is formed. The following passages give a contextual meaning of the adverb ‘ona meaning “whither.”

As my father arose in the morning, . . . to his great astonishment he beheld upon the ground a round ball of curious workmanship; and it was of fine brass. And within the ball were two spindles; and the one pointed the way whither [‘ona] we should go into the wilderness. (1 Nephi 16:10)

I, Nephi, did make out of wood a bow, and out of a straight stick, an arrow; wherefore, I did arm myself with a bow and an arrow, with a sling and with stones. And I said unto my father: Whither [‘ona] shall I go . . . ? . . . I, Nephi, did go forth up into the top of the mountain, according to the directions which were given upon the ball. (1 Nephi 16:23, 30)

The compass, which had been prepared of the Lord, did cease to work. Wherefore, they knew not whither [‘ona] they should steer the ship.

And it came to pass after they had loosed me, behold, I took the compass, and it did work whither [‘ona] I desired it. (1 Nephi 18:12–13, 21)

The adverb whither is present with the translations of the word Liahona .

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Bearing in mind the discussion above, I wish to examine ‘on, the typical Canaanite indicator of place-names. I note that Tvedtnes and Ricks have carefully studied this element because it is recurrent in Book of Mormon place-names. However, the ה “local he” or the “final he” is grammatically incompatible with the beginning ל lamed. In other words, Liahona ליונה would have meant “to the place of the Lord,” but in l-iah-ona, the ה “l” and the final ה “a” are grammatically mutually exclusive. Thus this possible solution loses its attractiveness.

Conclusion

As Elder David A. Bednar explained, "The primary purposes of the Liahona were to provide both direction and instruction during a long and demanding journey. The director was a physical instrument that served as an outward indicator of their inner spiritual standing before God." It worked according to the principles of “faith and diligence” (1 Nephi 16:28). In this way, the Liahona not only indicated the geographical direction whither they should go in the wilderness but also directed the Lehites to the Lord. This meaning would be in harmony with the appellation director inscribed by Alma in 37:38: “our fathers call [it] a ball, or director—or our fathers called it Liahona, which is, being interpreted, a compass; and the Lord [Yahweh] prepared it.” After having specified that the interpretation was ball or compass, Alma associates the term compass with the fact that the
Lord prepared it. Retranslating the verse in Hebrew, we would have the concept of direction ʿona, and the director, or Yahweh the Lord, side-by-side, thus composing the name Liahona.

Alma continues to explain to his son Helaman in Alma 37:45 the purpose of the instrument, which is to set forth the direction, by analogy, to our spiritual journey: “just as surely as this director did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promised land, shall the words of Christ, if we follow their course, carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise.” Thus, when the children of Lehi questioned “Whither shall we go?” the Liahona provided the answer in accordance with their faith: it embodied the “direction of the Lord,” which is the literal translation of the term Liahona.

In its own way, this etymological explanation of the word Liahona yields all its probative value to stand as another evidence for the claims of Joseph Smith that the Book of Mormon was not written from his own imagination, but rather by a group of Hebrews who lived between 600 BC and 400 AD. The book’s Hebraic linguistic fingerprints are within its text, and they emerge when we carefully read and diligently study the culture and the language of the people who wrote this holy book. This search reflects at least one facet of President Gordon B. Hinckley’s assertion: “evidence for its truth and validity lies within the covers of the book itself. The test of its truth lies in reading it.”

The fact that Joseph Smith, after translating the plates, never submitted an etymological explanation of non-English terms in the Book of Mormon, or that the historical record does not mention any intellectual research conducted to produce these names, strengthens the evidence of his lack of intentionality or of his unawareness in producing the elements that scholars have demonstrated to be authentically antique and impossible for him to guess with such a frequency in the Book of Mormon texts. Broadly speaking, historians understand the character of Joseph Smith as inclined to be reserved about the supernatural events occurring to him, to the point that he did not try to convince people through rational evidences of the miraculous events surrounding the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. As a matter of fact, he did not possess the rational evidences in the first place until he seriously studied some basics of Hebrew about ten years later.

Joseph’s character traits reveal a distinct insouciance over matters of proof along with a concurrent personal assurance of the reality of the events relative to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

I think that after 150 years of wandering in a linguistic wilderness we are finding the direction we should go to fully appreciate the beauty and meaning of the name of Liahona. Such a finding would have required a deep knowledge of Hebrew transmission of names and the Middle Eastern pronunciation of names that Joseph Smith did not possess after limited formal schooling in rural upstate New York. Although further studies are certainly needed to confirm or refute such a new explanation, this etymology confirms once more that the Book of Mormon is, as Isaiah 29:14 foresaw it, “a miraculous work and a miracle.”
Have Anti-Mormon Assessments Changed?

The anti-Mormon community (if there really is such a thing!) has long scoffed at any suggestion of literary or religious merit in the Book of Mormon. Yet today, some sectors of the anti-Mormon crowd are actually prepared to frankly accept the beauty and power of the Book of Mormon—openly admitting and claiming that, even if it is unhistorical, apocryphal, and fictional, the Book of Mormon is nonetheless a “sacred text” that “makes a powerful statement of humanity’s worth in a world where human worth is everywhere questioned,” and does indeed include visions and sermons of “beauty and brilliance” in a variety of literary genres, including “parables, poetry, hyperbole, psalms, historical verisimilitude,” etc. What has brought about this radical change in attitude for some sectors of the anti-Mormon community? Could it be a relatively recent legacy of the considerable scholarship now available assaying the literary value of the Book of Mormon? And can it be that this major change in attitude followed mainly on the heels of the very interesting discoveries made just forty years ago by young Elder John W. “Jack” Welch while on his German-speaking LDS mission in and around Regensburg, Germany? For, following Hugh Nibley’s compelling publications in other areas, Welch’s work opened up a breathtaking panorama of the true range of possibilities in literary and textual studies of the Book of Mormon, bringing new life and gravitas to the intellectual study of Mormonism.
Is an Assessment Premature?

We are only now beginning to grasp the broad implications of Jack’s very accessible publications and lectures on chiasmus, so any assessment may at this stage be premature. Still, there are some things which may rightly be said:

Jack’s work seems to have provided just the right amount of impetus to get many literary analyses of the Book of Mormon off the ground and into print. We can credit not only his 1979 founding of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), but also a preceding, exciting decade of publication and firesides on chiasmus (how many were repeatedly cloned on audio- and videotape?) leading up to that more systematic and broadscale effort at FARMS to print and distribute very recent and substantial research on the Book of Mormon, which was not otherwise easily accessible. Thus, Jack’s efforts to plumb the depths of chiasmus during the 1970s also stimulated other types of literary analysis of the Book of Mormon. Many faithful Mormon scholars have rightly surmised that where chiasmus could be found, there just might be other literary discoveries to be made.

As a classicist and New Testament scholar who was also a Woodrow Wilson Fellow at Oxford University (1970–1972), Jack Welch had already been thinking along those broader lines. Thus, while in law school at Duke University, he took classes on intertestamental literature from the renowned James H. Charlesworth. It quickly became obvious (if not already clear from the work of Sperry and Nibley) that more than chiasmus was at issue, and that a grounding in Judaica and the whole range of ancient literature would be relevant to the study of the Book of Mormon. There is little doubt that a true “blossoming” of such studies has taken place in recent decades.

The work at FARMS has received primary credit for the fundamental defeat of evangelical (and secular) anti-Mormon efforts. Anti-Mormon polemic apologetics have been rendered largely ineffective, according to Protestant scholars Paul Owen and Carl Mosser6 and Roman Catholic scholar Massimo Introvigne.7 There have been other worthwhile discoveries made in the course of FARMS’s large-scale basic research projects, which have had unforeseen affects, many of which have yet to see widespread publication or correlation. Some parade examples from Mesoamerican studies follow.

Chiasmus in Mesoamerica

For two pioneers in deciphering Mayan inscriptions (Nicholas Hopkins and his late wife, Kathryn Josserand), the matter has been quite clear:

In terms of Classic Maya literary canons, this kind of [chiastic] structure marks a text as very formal, like modern Mayan prayers, which consist entirely of couplets, often nested in this fashion.8

As an example, they present a creation text from the vertical east side of Quirigua Stela C (Monument 3), B5–15 (CR to end), arranged as ABCCCBAA, with the three C-statements “as the peak event of this episode”—which is a report on the placing of

Quirigua Stela C contains a creation text in a chiastic form. Drawing by Annie Hunter.
the Three Hearth Stones in the sky (the stars Rigel, Saiph, and Alnitak of Orion) by the gods at the time of creation.\textsuperscript{10} Going a bit further than Hopkins and Josserand, we may note that the text begins and ends with a 13-baktun date statement:

A  13.0.0.0.0, day 4 Ahau, month 8 Cumku, crossed bands event,
B  Three stones were set,
C    The Paddlers erected a stone; it happened at 5 Sky House, Jaguar Throne stone,
C    The Black God erected a stone; it happened at Earth Center Place, Serpent Throne stone,
C    And then it happened that Itzamna set a stone, Water-Lily Throne stone; it happened at Sky Place,
B  New, three-stone place,
A  13 baktuns were completed under the authority of 6 Sky Lord (Wac Chan Ahau).\textsuperscript{11}

Many other examples can be provided from well-known Classic Mayan texts and glyptic art, such as those presented in the form of text, art, and icon in the carved tablets arranged as triptychs in the funerary temples at Palenque. They include powerful visual chiasms there in the Tablets of the Sun, Cross, and Foliated Cross.\textsuperscript{12}

Kathryn Josserand also pointed out an ABBA sentence in the Palenque Table of 96 Glyphs, L1-K4, Second Episode, last sentence, at 9.17.13.0.7—the 1st Katun anniversary of Lord Kuk II:

A  And then he completed his first katun as ahau
B    He erected a monument (this stone!)
B    He sacrificed (?) under the auspices of Pacal
A  And then he finished his first katun as ahau\textsuperscript{13}

Josserand gave credit for this discovery to the late Richard A. De Long, who had delivered a paper on the subject in June 1986 at the Sixth Palenque Round Table. De Long, a member of the RLDS Church (now Community of Christ) and former professor at Graceland College in Lamoni, Iowa, had in turn been deeply influenced by the work of Jack Welch. De Long made a point of frequently attending Palenque Round Tables as well as Linda Schele’s University of Texas workshops on Maya hieroglyphs—often funded by the RLDS Foundation for Research on Ancient America (FRAA)—from which he regularly returned with interesting

East side of Quirigua Stela C. Photograph by A. P. Maudslay.
Inter Alia: Connections Further Afield

Many of these initial discoveries took place without fanfare and under the radar. Even Jack was unaware of these particular far-reaching effects of his initial stimulus. Yet without his original discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, there might never have been the resultant cross-fertilization of ideas and direct applications among so many disciplines. Jack began by speaking to interested fellow Mormons, then prepared an analysis of chiasmus in Ugaritic that was published in a learned, international journal (on the recommendation of a Jesuit scholar at the
Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, the late Mitchell Dahood), and began corresponding with an Israeli scholar (Yehuda T. Radday) who helped him assemble a group of contributors to a one-volume, broad-scale treatment of chiasmus in ancient Near Eastern and Classical literature and in the Book of Mormon. This attracted the attention of a number of scholars who actually came to Provo, Utah, to visit—including a Capucin Monk from Sicily (Father Angelico di Marco), a district judge from Jerusalem (Jacob Bazak), and a gaggle of Near Eastern scholars who had some very nice things to say about Jack’s work. I was there, and I heard them say so, and I continue to read comments along such lines.

Now, of course, studies of chiasmus in ancient Near Eastern literature have had a long and distinguished history. Jack did not discover the phe-
nomenon of chiasmus in the Bible or the ancient Near East, but he has made some significant contributions to such studies. Moreover, no one else has done more to gather and publish information on what is available in the way of chiastic analyses. Finally, Jack clearly defined how to assay the value of any given chiasm or chiastic claim. There remain plenty of areas of dispute about individual application of the chiastic mode of rhetorical analysis to this or that literature, but there is no doubt among most scholars that the phenomenon is real and is useful.
It was forty years ago, on Wednesday, August 16, 1967, that the discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon occurred. As I have looked back over the intervening four decades, I have enjoyed seeing how far this idea has come and how many people have contributed to its development. To document the events of 1967, I have gone back through my missionary letters, notes, and records, and I have reminisced with my missionary companions to relive that extraordinary experience. I still remember it vividly. I am grateful for each opportunity to share the story of that discovery.

To set the stage for the chiasmus story, I need to go back to my teenage years. I was blessed with good parents and devoted school and seminary teachers. For my sixteenth birthday, my parents gave me a small triple combination. Liking its leather smell and feel, I read the Book of Mormon cover to cover. Trusting my seminary teacher’s assurance, I knelt down and prayed and was blessed with a testimony of its truthfulness. At the same time, I studied Latin and world history from teachers who required lots of grammar and research papers. I enjoyed the rows of books in the Pasadena Public Library. I remember reading a copy of Hugh Nibley’s *Lehi in the Desert* that my mother had.
carried on a backpacking trip in California’s High Sierra Wilderness Area. I was never quite the same again.

I also had a Sunday School teacher who had recently graduated from BYU. He spoke with deep admiration of Hugh Nibley, and so when I came to BYU as a freshmen in 1964, I signed up for Nibley’s Honors Book of Mormon class, which covered his *Approach to the Book of Mormon*, published in hardback that year. Much is owed in the chiasmus story to Hugh Nibley for teaching a whole generation of LDS scholars to read the Book of Mormon in an ancient context.

Appreciation also goes to Robert K. Thomas, director of the Honors Program, my second-semester Book of Mormon teacher, and one who taught an English class called “The Bible as Literature.” Exuding excitement and encouragement, he saw endless possibilities for gospel scholarship and was influential in teaching us to read the Book of Mormon as literature.

My sophomore year, I went on the BYU Semester Abroad to Salzburg, Austria. While there, I attended classes at the Universität Salzburg, where I obtained a *Studienausweis* that gave me access to any university lectures in Austria or Germany. This experience made me comfortable around German-speaking professors, and that familiarity would play a role in the unfolding of the chiasmus story. While in Salzburg, I was called to serve in the South German Mission. Arriving in August 1966, I served in the Bavarian cities of Nürnberg, Regensburg, and München.

In May 1967, I was transferred to Regensburg, on the northernmost bend of the Danube River. This medieval city has foundations going back to the Roman times. The city, with its extremely narrow streets, was famous for its dominant, twelfth-century Catholic cathedral and as a seat of the German Counter-Reformation. Regensburg seemed to me to be a city of priests, Catholic churches, and theological schools. It also was home to the Pustet Press, a large publisher in Catholic Germany of religious books and music.

As one can imagine, our reception was not always bright and sunny. We tried several things to overcome these barriers. One day, my junior companion, Barry Barrus, and I went to the archbishop’s office and talked our way in to see him. He treated us respectfully, which encouraged us to look for other opportunities to make contact with other clergymen.
Shortly afterwards, I saw a poster on a bulletin board outside the church next to the cathedral, announcing some classes that would be taught in the Regensburg Priester Seminar—the Priests’ Seminary. One of the titles was “Die Offenbarung im Gegenwart” (“Revelation in the Present Day”). I wondered what Catholic theologians might say about continuing revelation. But another course, about the New Testament, looked more promising. It was held on Friday mornings, which was convenient because Friday was our “diversion day” (now called “preparation day”). On that day we had free time in the morning hours. By attending this class, I thought we could learn some useful things and might have a chance to say a bit about how we as Latter-day Saints understand the New Testament.

The next Friday we attended that class in the cloistered Priester Seminar on Bismarck Platz. The class was small—about a dozen students, as I recall.

It was in that lecture that I first heard about chiasticus. The topic came up in the professor’s discussion of whether Matthew had been written before Mark or Mark had been written before Matthew. Some scholars
had advocated the theory that Matthew was written originally in Aramaic and then translated into Greek, making it older than Mark; others argued that Mark was the primary Gospel. The lecturer acknowledged that most people believe in the Markan primacy theory, but at the same time he mentioned a new book by Paul Gaechter, called Die literarische Kunst im Matthäus-Evangelium (The Literary Art in the Gospel of Matthew), because it gave innovative literary evidence that Matthew had been heavily influenced by Hebrew thought patterns. I was intrigued.

As we left the lecture, we stopped at the Pustet bookstore to see if they had Gaechter’s book, and sure enough they did. Elder Barrus, who was very cooperative but a bit baffled through all this, remembers buying the book but having no idea what it was all about.

I read this book and could not put it down. On page 6, Gaechter introduced the idea of parallelism and argued that it was especially important to the Hebrews because in their culture oral transmission was important and parallelism helps people memorize. On pages 7–9, he argued that Jesus had spoken in what Gaechter called the “the higher form of Jewish instruction,” and that Matthew had written what Gaechter called “closed forms” or defined units, many of which were symmetrically constructed with an a-b-a arrangement. This symmetry, he wrote, “progresses to chiasmus,” an a-b-c . d . c-b-a pattern. Reading these pages had just introduced me to chastic schemas.

In his summation, Gaechter made some strong statements: “The recognition of closed form leads to important conclusions. For one thing, the originator of closed forms was not a Greek but a Hebrew, for the arrangement of a literary (non-poetical, narrative) piece in this form can only be understood as coming from a Semitic sphere.” Thus, he wrote, “behind our gospel of Matthew lies a Semitic original source.”

From Gaechter’s many examples, there seemed to be no doubt that Matthew in fact used chiasmus and that it was more Hebraic than Greek in nature.

More than that, understanding this pattern in Matthew brought that Gospel to life for me. For example, Gaechter proposed that the book of Matthew was structured in seven parts, which parts had (a) no speech, (b) speech to the people, (c) speech to the disciples, and (d) its center
on chapter 13, a chapter of parables. The Gospel then (c') has a section in which Jesus speaks again to the disciples, (b') to the people, and then (a') a final section containing no speech. Among many examples of chiasmus at the word level, Gaechter offered an analysis of Matthew 13:13–18. With this tool in mind, I found Matthew more interesting and more understandable than ever before.

So far, however, the idea of finding chiasmus in the Book of Mormon had not entered the picture. That discovery occurred on August 16, a few days after I had finished Gaechter’s book and my rereading of Matthew. Early that Wednesday morning, I was awakened by what seemed to me to be a voice, whose words were these: “If it is evidence of Hebrew style in the Bible, it must be evidence of Hebrew style in the Book of Mormon.” With faith that this might be so, I got out of bed. (As I have often mused, that was the real miracle that morning.) It was still dark. I went over to the desk on the other side of our one-room apartment. Picking up the copy of the German Book of Mormon that I had been using that summer, I wondered: If it is here, where? I felt clearly prompted to begin reading where my companion and I had left off the night before, which happened to be in King Benjamin’s speech. I read Mosiah 4. When I turned the page onto Mosiah 5, the classic chiastic passage in Mosiah 5:10–12 jumped off the page.

I do not believe that I ever would have found this through my own intellectual efforts. Indeed, I probably would not have found it at all except for the typesetting in that particular edition of the German Book of Mormon, for the two central words in Mosiah 5:11 were stacked right on top of each other. In good typesetting, one should never stack words at the end of a line, because a stack can trip the eye as it goes from the end of one line to the beginning of the next. But as I read down the left column on this page, the two words Übertrittung and Übertrittung jumped right out (that German translation of the two English words transgression and transgress had used the same word). I immediately looked in the line below and saw the word ausgerottet (meaning blotted out) and in the line above, again, ausgerottet (blotted out). And above that, linken Hand (left hand) of God, and down below, linken Hand, again. The chiastic pattern in this passage appeared instantly, as follows:

“And now it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall not take upon him the name of Christ must be called by some other name; therefore, he findeth himself on the left hand of God. And I would that ye should remember also, that this is the name that I said I should give unto you that never should be blotted out, except it be through
transgression; therefore,” and this word marks a turning point, “take heed that ye do not transgress, that the name be not blotted out of your hearts. I say unto you, I would that ye should remember to retain the name written always in your hearts, that ye are not found on the left hand of God, but that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be called, and also, the name by which he shall call you.”

Finding this chiasm towards the end of King Benjamin’s speech, I turned back to the earlier pages of King Benjamin’s speech to see if the speech contained any other chasms. Within a few minutes, I found Mosiah 3:18–19, in the exact center of King Benjamin’s speech. I remember waking my companion up and excitedly telling him, “It’s here! There’s chiasm in the Book of Mormon!” It was an exciting moment. I have felt gratitude ever since that my faith and testimony were strengthened by the immediate finding of these passages in the Book of Mormon. Coincidentally, August 17, the day after the discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, was the one-year anniversary of my two years as a missionary, a fitting center point at the very middle of my mission time in Germany.

Exactly what happened during the rest of that Wednesday and Thursday is still a little unclear to me. After an unremarkable breakfast, we began showing it to anyone we could. We went out tracting that morning and even tried using chiasmus as a door approach to a cleaning lady who was out mopping the sidewalk in front of her home. She looked at us like she thought we were crazy, but we were undeterred.

Without delay, I began outlining all of King Benjamin’s speech. In the margins of the pages of Mosiah 2 and 3, I marked the distinctive A-B-Cs of chiasmus. Interestingly, I found that Benjamin’s speech breaks into seven discreet units or “closed forms,” just as Gaechter had argued that the Gospel of Matthew had been composed in seven parts. (Some biblical scholars, such as Duane L. Christensen, have argued that such a pattern should be called the “candelabra form,” because it has seven branches, as did the seven-branched candlestick in the temple at Jerusalem.)

And now it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall not take upon him the name of Christ

must be called by some other name;

therefore, he findeth himself on the left hand of God.

And I would that ye should remember also, that this is the name that I said I should give unto you

that never should be blotted out,

except it be through transgression;

therefore, take heed that ye do not transgress,

that the name be not blotted out of your hearts.

I say unto you, I would that ye should remember to retain the name written always in your hearts,

that ye are not found on the left hand of God,

but that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be called, and also,

the name by which he shall call you.

except they humble themselves

and become as little children, and believe that

salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent.

For the natural man

is an enemy to God,

and has been from the fall of Adam,

and will be, forever and ever,

unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit,

and putteth off the natural man

and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord,

and becometh as a child,

submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things

Chiasmus in Mosiah 5:10–12 and 3:18–19, the first two examples found.
At the same time, I also began contacting people about chiasmus. On a note pad, I jotted down a few names and phone numbers. At the top of the list is the name of Huber; I believe this was the man who gave the lecture at the Priester Seminar. I also wrote down the names of Andreas Klause, a history professor; a New Testament scholar named Mussner, who I noted would be out of town until August 29; and Rudolf Mayer, an Old Testament scholar whom I never met because he would not be back until November.

As I recall, we went right away to see the man whose lecture we had heard. We found our way to his office and knocked on the door. He invited us in. I suppose he might have remembered us from the class we had attended, but otherwise he did not know who we were. (In those days, we did not wear missionary badges.) I remember the high ceilings, wood-paneled walls, bookshelves to the top of the walls, papers and books scattered everywhere, and a large desk in the middle of the room. He invited us to sit down. I told him that we were interested in chiasmus. I asked for a few references to other books I might read on the subject, and he gave me some titles to look up. I asked about the Hebraic quality and his opinion of Gaechter’s arguments. He said he did not doubt the Hebraic nature of the form.

I then asked him, “How strong an evidence is chiasmus of Hebraic origins?”

He said, “Very strong.”

Seeing he had swung the door wide open, I asked, “Well, if someone were to find a text, let’s say in Spain, and it happened to manifest this form, would you conclude that there must have been some Hebraic influence in the history of that text?”

He thought about that for a moment and said, “Ohne weiteres” (Absolutely, without any further question).

I then carefully slid forward my copy of the Book of Mormon so he did not see the cover and asked, “Well, would you look at this text? Is this what people mean by chiasmus?” He then read through the two passages in Mosiah 5 and Mosiah 3. He read through them again, and said, “Ach. Das is sehr gut!” (That’s very good!) “Was ist das denn?” (So, what is this?) Whereupon he closed the book, looked at the title, and said, “Ach, Sie sind die Mormonen, hinaus!” (Oh, you are the Mormons, get out!)

On Friday, August 18, on the train to Landshut for a three-day exchange with another pair of missionaries there, I wrote my weekly letter home, addressing it to my grandmother in Logan, Utah. Since my family was traveling from California and they were going to be with her by the time that letter would have arrived in California, I sent this letter to Logan. My grandmother was a literate woman, a schoolteacher who liked writing poetry. As I told her and my family what I had found, my enthusiasm could hardly be contained.

This unusually long, three-page letter began: “Greetings from Germany. What a wonderful summer we’ve been having—gorgeous weather, inspirational work, and rich blessings!”

After a little chit-chat, I dove right in: “Right now about all I can think about is a discovery I made on Wednesday morning. It’s a great idea and I’m really excited about it—we’ve shown it to professors and theologians and no one can refute it!”
I then told about reading Gaechter’s book and even displayed in detail the chiastic structure in Matthew chapters 16–17, after which I blurted out, “See the symmetry! It’s subtle. It’s an acid test for a Hebraic narrative!”

“Well, you can guess what comes next.” Indeed, “that’s just what I’ve done.” I’ve found chiasmus in the Book of Mormon “not once, but 5 (perhaps 7!), and not without a big push from the Lord,” a simple reference to Wednesday morning’s experience.

I then dove right in, announcing that “Benjamin was a scholar and Mosiah 2–5 is loaded with this very form” and proceeding to spell out the structure of Mosiah 2:9–27 as I had already by then outlined it:

For example: Mosiah 2:9–27
A. Purpose of assembly v. 9
B. What is man? vv. 10–11
   “no more than mortal”
C. Laws of Benjamin’s kingdom vv. 12–13
D. Service vv. 14–17
   “one another”
E. Climax—thank your Heavenly King v. 21
D. Service
   “one with another”
C. Laws of God’s Kingdom v. 22
B. What is man? vv. 23–26
   “no more than dust” v. 26
A. Purpose of the assembly v. 27

I ended at the bottom of this page by saying, “If it’s good for Matthew, it’s good for Benjamin. Other climaxes are dead giveaways,” referring to Mosiah 5:11.

As I wrote this letter, I was riding on the train, and the handwriting gets a bit worse toward the end, where I concluded, “Oh well, you get the idea. It’s a new idea (or is something like that already in print?)? I couldn’t imagine where. Tell me what you think of the possibilities—it’s a very convincing demonstration. I’ve got pages of details and comparisons work[ed] out. Enough. Hope all the travel[er]s make it safe and successfully! All have my love and thanks. Gram, keep everyone on the right trail! With love, Jack.”

I then added a postscript to my father, “Dad—is there anything written on the subject? Is the form as old as Isaiah (Lehi) or Jeremiah? Could we show that it was highly influenced by Egyptian style as Mosiah 1:4 suggests?” I had no idea what else might have been written about the use of chiasmus in Lehi’s day; I just knew that the pattern was there in the Book of Mormon.

The next day, Saturday, August 19, I worked in Landshut with Elder Wimmer. My day planner shows that we met with a Protestant minister. No doubt, chiasmus was one of the topics of discussion.

On Monday, August 21, Elder Wimmer took me to speak with a graduate student who was studying at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome and was visiting in Landshut during a summer break. We talked for about an hour. He already knew something about chiasmus and was impressed that I knew of Paul Gaechter’s work. We looked at several passages in the Book of Mormon, and I taught him the missionary lesson about the origins of the Book of Mormon. He readily accepted a copy of the Book of Mormon and was very friendly. He went back to Rome a few days later, and we had no further contact with him, but this conversation was my first
successful academic encounter involving chiasmus in the Bible and the Book of Mormon. It would not be my last.

Back in Regensburg, I wrote home again on the next Friday, August 25. During that week, I had gone back to the beginning of the Book of Mormon, thinking that, since chiasmus was present in King Benjamin’s speech, he must have learned it from somewhere and, therefore, maybe it could also be found in the writings of Nephi and other early Nephites. Indeed, this letter home reported, “My form study of the Book of Mormon is progressing pleasingly,” and I gave as an example the beginnings of a chiastic outline for 1 Nephi:

A. Away from Jerusalem
   B. Ishmael Ch. 7
   C. Tree of Life Ch. 8
      Lehi about the old world
      Nephi and the Lord’s Spirit Ch. 11
      Nephi about the new world
   C. Meaning of Lehi’s dream Ch. 15
   B. Ishmael Ch. 16
A. Away from old world

I concluded by saying: “Lots of details fit really well, but not like in Mosiah, meaning in King Benjamin’s speech. We showed the argument to all the priests and theologians we could get a hold of in Landshut and had nothing but success!” The next week, I outlined the book of 1 Nephi more completely.

On Tuesday, August 29, we made an appointment to see Dr. Mussner at 10:00 A.M. in his office at the Theologische-Philosophische Hochschule. This meeting, however, was not so successful. My companion, Elder Barrus, wrote in his journal: “Today we talked with a Doctor Mussner, Catholic theologian, concerning the literary art in the Book of Mormon and in Matthew. He was very nice until he found out who we were,” not unlike our meeting with Huber twelve days earlier.

Meanwhile, my father had wisely written back to me, cautioning me about trying to prove the Book of Mormon to people. I responded on September 11: “About the chiasmus relationship—it’s no accident or coincidence. The chance of finding it in Thomas Aquinas is at least 0—he’s far too Aristotelian. . . . Now look at the book of Mosiah again—you notice this style intricately interwoven on all levels of understanding and rhetorical possibility. Mosiah 5:11 shows it [1] on the verse level, which is the climax [2] of v. 6–15 which the seventh part of Benjamin’s speech (each part of which is a chiasmus with [3] all the parts together making another); now look at chapters 1–6 which are the first part in the chiasmus [4] in the whole book of Mosiah. That’s four intricate levels, all fitting precisely, hardly accidentally. I know what you mean about proving it to other people, but I feel that the Lord has made it clear enough that man can choose and judge for himself.”

About this time, I wrote to Robert K. Thomas to tell him what I had found and to ask if anybody else had ever come across anything like this. On October 9, he answered. I would have received his letter a week later, in which he said, “The literary form you mention is interesting and convincing. I first heard of it [in the New Testament] from Curtis Wright who taught Greek at BYU for a while and who was very excited about its potential meaning for Book of Mormon scholarship.” He gave me Curtis Wright’s address, and I wrote to him right away.

On October 10, I got a letter back from University of North Carolina Press, where I had tried to obtain a copy of Nils Lund’s Chiasmus in the New Testament, which they had published in 1942. This title had come up in several conversations. The UNC Press said the book was out of print, but they told me that I might be able to get a copy from Barnes & Noble, who had bought the remainders. I sent off my order.

In the meantime, having had a lot of ups and downs the week ending on October 21, my weekly
letter home mentioned, on the good side, the following experience: “I worked in Ingolstadt last week and had quite a great time; on Thursday night we were invited to address a Lutheran Youth group on the subject of Mormonism. The same group had run the Jehovah’s Witnesses out before, but they seemed to like us a bit better. Before the evening was over, we had sold half the group Book of Mormons (including [to] the minister) and they invited us back to discuss the topic further. Afterwards we talked awhile with the minister about some of Nibley’s approach and my chiasmus idea, and he was both overwhelmed and impressed. We felt great.” I also exclaimed, “Hooray! We finally found and ordered Chiasmus in the New Testament, so if you get a cancelled check from Barnes and Noble bookstore, you’ll know what it was for.”

When the Lund book arrived, I was thrilled to find that, despite its title, Chiasmus in the New Testament, this book began with Lund’s chiastic analysis of many passages from the Old Testament, such as the example from Leviticus 24, which is one of the very best examples of chiasmus in Hebrew literature. This was crucial in pushing the presence of chiasmus back into Lehi’s time, making it a style that would have likely been known by Lehi and influential in Nephite writing. It was at this point that I also began to understand how much careful work about chiasmus had been done by scholars and how widely dispersed the pattern of chiasmus is in the Bible, going well beyond what I had learned from Gaechter.

At this same time, I got a letter from Curtis Wright, who had written on October 23. He kindly and informatively wrote: “I have never been really interested in chiastic structures per se, though some of my other interests have made me very much aware of their existence.” Wright (who would go on to become a professor in the BYU library) recommended that a perusal of Lund’s book “would be beneficial to you I am sure.” He concluded by saying, “Lund feels that the chiastic models of the New Testament are Semitic, not Greek, in origin, and is supported in this opinion by many other scholars. Beyond that I have not followed the literature on chiasmus, and . . . I have never seriously looked for chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, although I must admit that the idea intrigues me.” Most of all, this letter gave me even more reason to believe that I was on the right track, that I had already read the right books, and was finding things that no one else had ever noticed before.

In the next few weeks, I kept finding things, especially as I read on into the book of Alma. My scrawling notes show that I had detected chiastic patterns in Alma 5:39–41; 34:10–14; 40:22–24; and 41:13–15. One realization concerned the highly creative structure in Alma 41:13–15. I read this passage first in German and was a bit disappointed that it looked promising but was not quite perfect. Upon checking the passage in English, however, it became clear that the German translator had unwittingly muddled Alma’s carefully constructed chiasm. This made me appreciate all the more the accuracy of Joseph Smith’s translation.

I particularly remember being on the train when I noticed the chiastic structure of Alma 36—the entire chapter! It was an overwhelmingly exciting moment to watch the length and the detail of that text unfold, which turns out to be one of the very best instances of chiasmus anywhere in world literature. Gazing out of the train window and watching the Bavarian countryside roll by, I was transported by the skill and care of Alma as a writer. Amazed at the power of the chiastic form to focus the reader’s attention on the central turning point of Alma’s life, I thought how fortunate we are to have the Book of Mormon. I wondered where this train would take me.

The last eight months of my mission were spent in the mission office in Munich, mostly doing public relations work. Little was done with the chiasmus project at this time. But I did communicate with Father Paul Gaechter, a Jesuit, who lived in a monastery in Innsbruck, Austria. I was deeply gratified when he invited me to visit him. After the end of my mission, my younger brother and sister came to Germany to travel with me around Europe on my way home. On August 14, 1968, we went to Innsbruck, to the monastery a few kilometers southeast of the old town, if my memory serves me correctly. The elderly Gaechter (born in 1893, so he was 74 or 75 at the time) came out promptly to meet us. He ushered us into a small room near the front door. The wooden walls were mostly bare, except for the common Austrian crucifix. We sat on benches with a small table between us. Father Gaechter began by saying that he only had a few minutes in his daily schedule, and that he would need to return fairly soon to his duties in the monastery.
We soon became quite engrossed in our conversation, however, with him telling me about his work on the Gospel of Matthew and me telling him about the excitement of my discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. Father Gaechter was sincerely complimentary. As I showed him several remarkable literary patterns, his former disregard of the Book of Mormon quickly dissolved. He accepted a copy and said he would look at it, although—as my brother Jim wrote in his journal that night—“ONLY if it was for literary style.” Jim’s diary rightly recorded: “We had quite a discussion with him about a lot of things. He was a very kind and learned man.”

As we got up to leave, I thanked him for his time. He in turn detained me and addressed me in a very serious, approving tone. Sensing my intense interest in the subjects we had discussed, he looked right at me, took my right hand in both of his, and said, “You must continue your work on this subject. You are a very lucky young man. You have found a life’s work (eine Lebensarbeit).” I felt deeply impressed by his sincere encouragement. Although we had no further contact, and he died not long afterwards, Father Gaechter’s words have stayed with me ever since.

I returned home at the end of August, and in about two weeks drove with my brother Jim from Los Angeles to Provo to begin the school year at BYU. We arrived in Provo about 8:00 pm and got the key to our room in Helaman Halls. Foremost on my mind was wanting to talk to Nibley about what I had found. I left Jim in the dorm and made a beeline to Hugh Nibley’s home on 700 North, only a few blocks from the BYU campus.

I knocked on the door about 9:00 pm and introduced myself as one of his former students back from a mission in Germany. He said he remembered me. I told him that I had found something that I wanted to show him, and he warmly invited me in. We sat down at the dining room table, crowded next to an upright piano, and I began by asking him what he knew about chiasmus. He said, “Not much.” So I began showing him what I had found in the Book of Mormon. We went through several examples. With each one, his smile widened and his questions accelerated. He wanted to know about every book I had read, with whom I had spoken, and what passages I had studied. After several hours (I think we talked until about 1:00 am), he walked with me out onto the porch. In his inimitable way, he sincerely congratulated me, saying, “Young man, I think you have made the first significant discovery to come out of the BYU.”

In retrospect, I realize that Nibley was prone in such circumstances to hyperbole, but his validation was a crucial confidence builder in my young academic mind. I asked him if he would be willing to help me and he said, “Certainly.” When the time came a year later, he agreed to be on my master’s thesis committee. My thesis, completed in 1970, would compare the presence of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, the Old Testament, Ugaritic epics, the New Testament, and various Greek and Latin authors. I was glad to be back at BYU, especially grateful for the support of Robert K. Thomas, Hugh Nibley, C. Terry Warner, and R. Douglas Phillips in my further education. I found myself being often invited to talk about chiasmus in religion classes, Book of Mormon symposia, Sunday School classes, and firesides.

I conclude these reflections on the initial events in the chiasmus story by mentioning the article “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon” that appeared in BYU Studies in 1969. This article was written and submitted in the fall of 1968, only two months after my return from Germany. Seeing how quickly all this happened makes me even more grateful and eager to recognize the Lord’s hand in prompting and guiding the development of this discovery.
Over the course of the next 39 years, I and many others have continued to work on the main themes raised in that BYU Studies article. First, the article began by defining chiasmus. I have pursued this topic further in my 1970 master’s thesis, in the introduction to the 1981 volume Chiasmus in Antiquity, and in 1989 in a FARMS preliminary report entitled “Criteria for Identifying and Evaluating the Presence of Chiasmus.” That report was finalized and published in the FARMS Journal of Book of Mormon Studies in 1995 and as an appendix to the 1999 Chiasmus Bibliography. The definitional topic is still of current interest; several scholars have written on this subject, most recently the eminent social anthropologist Mary Douglas in her book Thinking in Circles: An Essay on Ring Composition.

Second, the 1969 article raised the issue of when and where chiasmus appears, and it gave examples of chiasmus in Greek, Latin, English, and Hebrew, along with nine examples from the Book of Mormon. Expanding this comparative study, I combined with Yehuda Radday, Robert F. Smith, Jonah Frankel, and others to publish the 1981 anthology entitled Chiasmus in Antiquity. A reprint of this volume, which continues to be cited in exegetical studies, is now available through the Maxwell Institute. Examples of chiasmus continue to be found. Donald Parry’s new Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon elegantly displays over a hundred chiasitic patterns. In the last seven years alone, scholarly works utilizing chiasmus have been published by such authors as Jacob Milgrom, Bernard Jackson, Gary Knoppers, and George Nickelsburg; in books from such presses as Oxford, Yale, Sheffield, the United Bible Societies, Doubleday, Eerdmans, Trinity, Fortress, and Eisenbrauns; or in articles in journals such as Biblica, the Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, and the Journal of Semitic Studies.

Third, a few things were said in the 1969 article about when scholars began to notice and accept the idea of chiasmus in the Bible. In that article, I mentioned that parallelism (but not chiasmus) was understood in the 1750s by Robert Lowth, and I noted that a book entitled Sacred Literature had been published in London in 1820 by John Jebb, arguing for the recognition of a new type of parallelism, which he called epanodos or introverted parallelism. Relying on Lund, I concluded that Jebb’s work was not widely accepted until the work of John Forbes (1854) and the 1860 edition of Horne’s Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. As things have turned out, I should have been more nuanced in stating how little was known about chiasmus before 1829, as I explain in a lengthy article published in 2003 entitled “How Much Was Known about Chiasmus in 1829 When the Book of Mormon Was Translated?” For example, in 1969 I said that there was “no chance that Joseph Smith could have learned of this style through academic channels.” While it remains true that Joseph Smith did not learn about such things through academic channels, a few things were published in Philadelphia about chiasmus in the 1825 edition of Horne’s massive Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Scriptures. In fact, Joseph Smith owned a copy of part of this work, which belongs to the Community of Christ in Independence, Missouri. However, written on the right front endpaper are the words “Joseph Smith Jun. Kirtland O. Jan. 1834,” indicating that he acquired the book in 1834, four and one-half years after he finished translating the Book of Mormon. Perhaps he knew about this book or its contents in 1829, but I doubt it. There is no evidence to that effect.

Finally, the 1969 article looked ahead to the array of things we learn from the presence of chi-
asmus in the Book of Mormon. That article pointed out how chiasmus helps us see the artistry, complexity, creativity, and profundity of the Book of Mormon, and how it helps us interpret the meaning of the text and appreciate the individual personalities of its authors. As evidence that the Book of Mormon is an extraordinary text, I said then, as I say now, that “even had [Joseph Smith] known of the form, he would still have had the overwhelming task of writing original, artistic chiasmic sentences,” as he dictated page after page without notes or opportunity to revise. Regarding clues that the Book of Mormon is a translation of an ancient record, I ended then with the assertion that it makes sense “to consider the book a product of the ancient world and to judge its literary qualities accordingly,” and considering the book a nineteenth-century translation of an ancient record still makes sense. Ultimately I concluded then and still affirm today: “The book reviewed this way is moving; it deserves to be read more carefully.”16 Many publications since 1969 have indeed read the Book of Mormon more closely than it had ever been read before. The question “What Does Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon Prove?” is discussed further in the volume edited by Noel Reynolds, Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited, which appeared in 1997.17

In conclusion, I am grateful to bear my testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. I realize, as Elder Maxwell was always prone to say, “Though argument does not create conviction, the lack of it destroys belief. What seems to be proved may not [necessarily] be embraced; but what no one shows the ability to defend is quickly abandoned. Rational argument does not create belief, but it maintains a climate in which belief may flourish.”18 I think the Lord has blessed us with clear understandings of miraculous things in the Book of Mormon. Isaiah promised that this book would be “a marvelous work and a wonder,” or better said, “a miraculous work and a miracle.” I have no doubt that that’s precisely what the Book of Mormon is.
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——. “Parallelism and Chiasmus in Benjamin’s Speech.” In Welch and Ricks, *King Benjamin’s Speech*, 315–410.


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ENDNOTES

In the Press: Early Newspaper Reports on the Initial Publication of the Book of Mormon
Donald Q. Cannon


2. Wayne Sentinel, June 26, 1829. The printed copy of the page of the Book of Mormon which followed was, with minor punctuation changes, the same as the copy entered by R. R. Lansing, clerk of the Northern District Court of New York as part of the copyright application on June 11, 1829. In order to help the reader, I will use a code to indicate if the article came from library research (L) or the internet (I). This article is identifiable as (L).

3. Palmyra Freeman, August 11, 1829 (L). It should be noted that I have relied heavily upon the excellent work done by Walter A. Norton in his dissertation entitled “Comparative Images: Mormonism and Contemporary Religions as Seen by Village Newspapermen in Western New York and Northeastern Ohio, 1820–1833” (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1991).


5. The Reflector, January 2, 1830 (L).


7. New York Telescope, February 20, 1830 (I). The Telescope printed more negative articles after the publication of the Book of Mormon (see April 17, 1830; December 11, 1830; February 19, 1831). Other New York City papers took longer to react to the Book of Mormon. On March 31, 1830, the Morning Courier and New-York Enquirer had printed a short notice announcing the publication of the Book of Mormon, but the notice remained neutral and informative. Perhaps not until August 31, 1831, did another New York City paper take a definitive stance on the merits of the book when the Morning Courier and New-York Enquirer claimed that the book was authored by Sidney Rigdon.

8. Wayne Sentinel, March 19, 1830; March 26, 1830; April 2, 1830; April 9, 1830; April 16, 1830; May 7, 1830 (L).


10. Rochester Daily Advertiser and Telegraph, April 2, 1830 (L).


12. The Gem of Literature and Science, May 15, 1830 (I). Rochester, of course, was only about 16 miles from Palmyra.

13. Countryman, September 7, 1830 (I).


15. Ontario Phoenix, December 29, 1830 (I). Phelps had obtained a copy of the Book of Mormon soon after the Church was organized. He felt it was still too risky for him to make a statement affirming the truth of the Book of Mormon, for more on Phelps, see Richard S. Van Wagoner and Steven C. Walker, A Book of Mormons (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1982), 204–9.

16. The Reflector, January 6, 1831 (I).


20. Painesville Telegraph, March 15, 1831 (L). Campbell’s report was so long that it had to be printed in two issues of the Telegraph. The first half was printed a week earlier in the March 8 issue.


22. Cleveland Herald, November 25, 1830 (I). Other Ohio papers which reprinted this article included the Ashland County Journal (December 4, 1830) and the Republican Advocate (December 4, 1830).

23. Republican Advocate, February 5, 1831 (I).

24. See, for example, Boston Free Press, July 16, 1830 (L).

25. Christian Register, March 26, 1831 (I).


27. Christian Register, September 24, 1831 (I).


29. Nashua Gazette and Hillsborough Advertiser, October 21, 1831 (I).


32. Vermont Chronicle, June 24, 1831 (I).

33. Vermont Gazette, September 13, 1831 (I).

34. Vermont Patriot and State Gazette, September 19, 1831 (I).

35. Farmer’s Herald, October 26, 1831 (I).


37. Philadelphia Alman, December 18, 1830 (I).

38. National Gazette and Literary Register, April 27, 1831 (I).

39. Republican Compiler, August 2, 1831 (I).

40. Sun, August 18, 1831 (I).

41. Nile’s Weekly Register (Baltimore, MD), July 16, 1831 (I).

42. Daily National Intelligencer, July 6, 1831 (I).

43. Cherokee Phoenix and Indians’ Advocate, January 21, 1832 (I).

44. The Millennial Harbinger, February 7, 1831 (I).

45. The Millennial Harbinger, November 7, 1831 (I).

46. The Arkansas Gazette, October 24, 1832 (I).

47. Missouri Intelligencer and Boon’s Luck Advertiser, June 2, 1832.

48. Missouri Intelligencer and Boon’s Luck Advertiser, April 13, 1833.

49. Michigan Sentinel (Monroe, MI), January 25, 1834 (I).


51. Iowa Territorial Gazette, February 3, 1841 (I). This is a reprint from the original article in The New-Yorker under the date December 12, 1840. This paper was edited by Horace Greeley. Josephine, the author of the article, has been identified as the daughter of Gen. Charles W. Sanford (1796–1878). Charles Sanford was a New York lawyer, commander of the First Division of the Third New York Militia Regiment, and served as a general in the Union Army during the Civil War.

52. The Pioneer, March 1835 (I).

53. The libraries I visited and newspapers consulted include: (I) The Library of Congress. Twelve newspapers in that area were consulted. None of the papers which I examined contained any reference to the Book of Mormon. I consulted mainly those in the Washington DC region 1830–1831 during my research. The papers I examined include:
Colombian Gazette; The American Argus; American Spectator; The Busy Body; Washington Expositor; The Globe; Daily National Journal; National Journal; Washington News; United Telegraph. None of these papers had anything on the Book of Mormon. (2) The Pennsylvania Historical Society in Philadelphia. The two newspapers for that area were: The Philadelphia Price Current; Mechanics Free Press. None had any information on the Book of Mormon. (3) The University of North Carolina, at Chapel Hill. These papers were consulted: New Orleans Bee; The Texas Gazette; The Charleston Courier; The Raleigh Register; Hillsborough Recorder; Carolina Observer. None had anything on the Book of Mormon. (4) New York Public Library included: New York American; For the Country; New York Post; Morning Courier and Enquirer. None of these had information concerning the Book of Mormon. Finally (5), in my research at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts, I found some reference to the Book of Mormon. However, the only thing I discovered was a series of advertisements for the Book of Mormon placed in the Boston Free Press by Thomas B. Marsh. He ran six advertisements during the summer of 1830 in that paper. The purpose of describing my library research over many years is to demonstrate that the Book of Mormon came forth in obscurity—with very little notice.


55. For a discussion of these and other critiques of the Book of Mormon, see Givens, By the Hand of Mormon, 155–84.

56. See the information in footnote 51. A citation from the article is on pages 11 and 12.


Another Testament of Jesus Christ: Mormon’s Poetics
Heather Hardy

1. The final words of each of the Book of Mormon’s major editors includes the anticipation of the judgment day and the expressed hope that their readers will be appropriately prepared by heeding the book’s counsel: Nephi (2 Nephi 33:10–15); Mormon (Mormon 3:17–22; 7:7–8); Moroni (Either 12:38–41; Moroni 10:28–34).

2. From details provided in the text we have no reason to conclude that any of the Book of Mormon’s editors lacked either time or motivation to direct his finest efforts to the writing task. Although Moroni tells us that ore was scarce (Mormon 8:5) and that he lacked confidence in his ability to write as eloquently as his predecessors (Ether 12:23–25), he certainly had time for solitary reflection (compare Mormon 8:6 and Moroni 10:1). Nephi’s contribution was explicitly not his first draft, with decades transpiring between it and his final presentation (see 1 Nephi 9:2–5 and 2 Nephi 5:29–34).

3. Mormon’s situation requires a little more reconstruction, but careful attention to details suggests that he, too, had adequate time to compose carefully. He indicates that he took personal possession of the entire Nephite records in 375 c.e. (Mormon 4:16–23), after thirty years with just the Plates of Nephi (Mormon 2:16–18)—the last thirteen of which while he was without military obligation (see Mormon 3:8, 11 and 3:1). Mormon does not say when he began his abridgment of the Large Plates, though in light of his extensive use of primary source documents we may surmise that it was after he obtained all the records. Even if most of his writing occurred after he had resumed command of the Nephite armies, Mormon describes only a few episodes of active military engagement before the final battle nine years later (Mormon 5–6). While he explicitly attributes some of this reticence to sparing his readers the horrific details, we need not assume that the atrocities so preoccupied him as to preclude careful editing.

It is not difficult to ascertain that the three editors also had the motivation to write as well as they could. Mormon, like Nephi before him, had been remarkably unsuccessful in persuading his contemporaries to embrace the gospel (Mormon 1:17; 3:2–3; Moroni 9:4). With the Lord’s blessing, he turned his preaching efforts to his text (3 Nephi 5:13–16). For all three narrators, the text became their legacy to a distant posterity. We need look no further than the sincerity of each of the narrators’ final plea to their readers (2 Nephi 33; Mormon 3; 5; Moroni 10) to recognize their investment in the persuasive power of their writings.


5. Grant Hardy has done a tremendous service to readers looking for Mormon’s “second book” by highlighting the prominence of the Book of Mormon’s narrator-designed structure in The Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003). This edition retains the Book of Mormon’s words but alters its format (which was not original to Joseph Smith’s dictation), by adding paragraphs, quotation marks, and parallel lineation for poetry. It also clearly demarcates narrator and colophons, original chapter breaks, changes in narrators, and the insertion of external source documents; as well as providing footnotes connecting interrupted narrative lines, intertextual quotations, and the fulfillment of prophecy, among other things. Remarkably, the edition has rendered the narrative of the Book of Mormon much more accessible while simultaneously demonstrating the coherency of its sophisticated composition.

6. Although I expect that few readers will take exception to my categorization of the first two of these, I recognize that more are likely to be skeptical about the third—Mormon’s use of phrasal repetition as a deliberate rhetorical strategy. While phrasal similarities can certainly be demonstrated, proving that Mormon intended to include them is much more difficult since every culture has its tropes and characteristic expressions. I am also not arguing that all instances of Mormon’s use of phrasal repetition are deliberative (many are undoubtedly coincidental), but my point is that noticing the practice may well provide insight into Mormon’s intended meaning. My argument here for Mormon’s intentionality in employing phrasal repetition also presumes that he did not compose as he engraved but rather transmitted to the plates a text previously written and carefully revised. This would have to have been the case in order for him to have included the many intricate interwoven phrases separated by long passages of text that I have identified.

I provide several examples of Mormon’s use of phrasal borrowing in Mosiah 23–24 in the body of the paper. I can confidently assert, however, that these examples are not uncharacteristic of his methods. In studying Mormon’s poetics across his oeuvre, I have identified over 200 occasions where he duplicates phrases from embedded documents, as well as many more instances in which characters in Mormon’s writing similarly quote or allude to specific prior episodes or texts. From the many clear examples of intentionality that I have discovered, along with the sheer number of occurrences and
patterns of usage. I am convinced that Mormon employs phrasal repetition as a deliberate rhetorical strategy. Its widespread manifestation substantiates the notion of a text carefully composed and then divinely translated as opposed to one dictated by an uneducated farm boy at a rate of eight pages a day.

To my knowledge no one has yet systematically considered the use of intratextual phrasal repetition in the Book of Mormon, let alone as a deliberate narrative strategy. John W. Welch has identified subsequent allusions to King Benjamin's speech [*Benja-
im's, the Man: His Place in Nephi History,*] in [*King Ben-


9. I realize that all the verbal repetitions and allusions noted in this paper are from an English translation of Mormon’s record, and thus it is not clear how closely they might be correlated in the original language of Reformed Egyptian. Nevertheless, such connections appear to be deliberate and significant. Royal Skousen’s work suggests that the wording of the Book of Mormon was revealed to Joseph Smith in a fairly exact form (‘‘Translating the Book of Mormon,’’ 87–90), so if the verbal connections are a phenomenon of translation rather than Mormon’s editing, perhaps the inspired nature of the translation would account for them.

10. Although variations of ‘‘the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob’’ are not uncommon in scripture (38 total iterations), in [*this text*] the phrase occurs only in the Exodus story (Exodus 3:5, 15, 16; 4:5). ‘‘Task(s)’’ and ‘‘taskmasters’’ are much more distinctive—they are again found repeated in Exodus (1:11; 5:6; 10, 13, 14, 19) but otherwise appear only at 1 Nephi 17:25; Jacob 2:10; and Mosiah 24:9, 19. The 1 Nephi verse is an explicit reference to the exodus story; the Jacob one, a generic usage of ‘‘task.’’ Mormon’s combination of these words at Mosiah 24 does seem to demonstrate his intentional allusion to the former deliverance.


11. Mosiah 23:22–23 shares two distinctive formulations with Alma 36:2–3. The first, ‘‘whosoever putteth his trust in [God] . . . shall be lifted up at the last day,’’ appears only in these two places in the Book of Mormon. The second, variations of being ‘‘in bondage, and none could deliver them except’’ the Lord, appears in four places—these two along with Abinadi’s initial prophecy at Mosiah 11:23, and Mormon’s reiteration of his Mosiah 23:23 explanation at 24:21. It may be worth noting that Mormon quotes these in reverse order from how they appear in Alma—a practice not uncommon in his poetics of phrasal borrowing.

12. Richard Dilworth Rust, *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mor-
mon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1997), 21.

13. I generally assume that the unattributed narration from Mosiah 1 to Mormon 7 consists of Mormon’s words, but the phrase ‘‘at this day’’ in Alma 25:9 may indicate that the observation was made in Mormon’s original source, presumably by Alma the Younger.

14. This point has been recognized by Mark D. Thomas in *Digging in Cumorah: Reclaim-
ing Book of Mormon Narratives* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 86. After enumerating similarities between the deliverance narratives of Limhi’s people and Alma’s, he comments: ‘‘The similarities . . . of the two stories only reinforce the fundamental difference between the two groups: the reason for their enslavement. Limhi’s group was being punished by God for their sins, while Alma’s people, a righteous group, must interpret their captivity as a trial of their faith.’’

15. The identification of framing devices, and more specifically chiasms, has gained considerable currency among Latter-day Saint readers, but following John Welch, I believe passages should only be labeled as such cautiously (see John W. Welch, ‘‘Criteria for Identifying and Evaluating the Presence of Chiasms,’’ *JBMS* 4/2 [1995]: 1–14). Framing devices represent only one of many techniques used by Nephihe authors to give structure to their writings. While I am not asserting that this passage is a chiasmus (because of the limited number of elements and the inconsistent spacing), it does seem clear from the patterned shifts in speakers, near identical wording, and similar themes that the repetition was deliberate on Mormon’s part. Thus, it seems appropriate to look for ‘‘second book’’ insights at its center.

16. Forms of the verb ‘‘submit’’ appear only six times in the Book of Mormon: in Mosiah 3:19 and 24:15 as we have seen, and also at Mosiah 21:13 (in a reference to the people of Limhi submitting to the Lamanites after being defeated in battle), in Alma 7:23 and 13:28 (in Alma’s ser-
mons to the people at Gideon and Ammonihah respectively, both as allusions to King Ben-
jamin’s address), and in Alma 44:11 (in a speech by Captain Moroni to Zerahemnah regrouping the Alphas of a military surrender).


19. Although I am aware of previous discussions of Mor-
non’s poetics per se, several articles have addressed his editorial and compositional strategies, including Grant R. Hardy, ‘‘Mormon as Editor,’’ and John A. Tvedtanes, ‘‘Mormon’s Editorial Promises,’’ both in *Rediscovering the Book of Mor-
on’s Philosophy of History: Helaman 12 in the Perspective of Mormon’s Editing Proce-
dure,’’ in *Helaman through 3 Nephi & According to Thyr Word,* ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1992), 129–46; and Steven L.
21. Although I have used the phrases "people of Alma" or "Alma's people" for convenience, these terms never appear in the Book of Mormon. Mormon does refer to "Alma and his people" or even "his people," but at key transitions in the narrative, Mormon uses a slightly different—and significant—variation: "Alma and the people of the Lord" (Mosiah 18:34, 19:1, heading before chapter 23; cf. 23:21, 24:13–14). By contrast, "people of King Noah" and "people of King Limhi" each appear three times, and there are twenty-one occurrences of "people of Limhi." S. Kent Brown has suggested that possessive forms connecting leaders and their peoples in these chapters are reminiscent of the exodus. See From Jerusalem to Zarahemla, 111, n. 34.
22. Sternberg, Poetics of Biblical Narrative, 46–47.
23. Bednar, "In the Strength of the Lord," 123.

A Tale of Three Communities: Jerusalem, Elephantine, and (Lehi-)Nephi
Jared W. Ludlow

1. Special thanks to S. Kent Brown who envisioned the juxtaposition of these three communities, gave a lot of pointers to information related to these communities, and then invited me to write about them.
6. The temple was usually designated 'egorai in the Elephantine texts, paralleling the Akkadian term ekurrus.
8. The tetragrammaton YHWH is not found in any Elephantine documents. Instead, these documents use the trigrammaton like many initial or final elements in theophoric personal names. See Bezalel Porten, Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 105–6.
10. There are of course later references to the temple in the Book of Mormon, especially with King Benjamin's discourse at the temple at the beginning of the Book of Mosiah, but I have focused only on the initial temple up until the time of Mosiah to keep it in a similar time frame with the other communities discussed and also to look primarily at the formations of these communities, not at their continuations.
13. For other passages related to the two sets of plates, see Ammon 1:14 and Omni 1:11. Note also Jacob's difficulty engraving on the plates but also his realization of their importance for future readers (Jacob 4:1–4).
15. Ezra 2:61–62 and Nehemiah 7:63–65 list some sons of the priests whose names were not registered in the genealogy and who were consequently excluded from the priesthood by reason of being defiled.
16. Briefly, Bernhard Anderson raises an important point with regard to the priesthood at Jerusalem following Zerubbabel. After the temple was rebuilt and Zerubbabel left under somewhat mysterious circumstances, the high priest became the successor and henceforth Israel became a temple-centered community. See Bernward W. Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 440.
17. President Joseph Fielding Smith wrote concerning the early priesthood among the Nephites: "There were no Levites who accompanied Lehi to the Western Hemisphere. Under these conditions the Nephites officiated by virtue of the Melchizedek Priesthood from the days of Lehi to the days of the appearance of our Savior among them. It is true that Nephi 'consecrated Jacob and Joseph' that they should be priests and teachers over the land of the Nephites, but the fact that plural terms priests and teachers were used indicates that this was not a reference to the definite office in the priesthood in either case, but it was a general assignment to teach, direct, and admonish the people," Answers to Gospel Questions (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 1:224–25.

Service and Temple in King Benjamin's Speech
Donald W. Parry

1. Previously published examinations of King Benjamin's speech include Hugh W. Nibley, "Old World Ritual in the New World," in An Approach to the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 243–56, a comparison of the speech with ancient year-rite festivals; Stephen D. Ricks, "Treaty/Covenant Patterns in King Benjamin's Address," BYU Studies

2. Brown makes this point in his Voices from the Dust, 75–77.

3. Benjamin’s audience consisted of “people that were wise” (Mosiah 1:8). A great multitude responded to Mosiah’s invitation to gather at the temple to hear Benjamin speak. Accord ing to Mosiah 2:1–2, “And it came to pass that after Mosiah had done as his father had commanded him, and had made a proclamation through out all the land, that the people gathered themselves together throughout all the land, that they might go up to the temple to hear the words which king Benjamin should speak unto them. And there were a great number, even so many that they did not number them” (see also v. 7).

4. In addition to Benjamin’s religious affiliation with the temple, it is possible that he also had an emotional bond to it; this is because he may have been “involved to some extent in its construction.” On this idea, see John W. Welch, “Benjamin, the Man: His Place in Nephite History,” in King Benjamin’s Speech, 37. See also John W. Welch, “The Temple in the Book of Mormon: The Temples at the Cities of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Bountiful,” in Temples of the Ancient World, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 348–49.

5. On the language of pilgrim age, see Brown, Voices from the Dust, 72. Scholars propose that Benjamin’s speech was given in the setting of ancient Israelite pilgrimages and festivals, such as the Feast of Tabernacles and the Day of Atonement. See Hugh W. Nibley, An Approach to the Book of Mormon, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 295–310; John A. Tvedtines, “King Benja min and the Feast of Tabern acles,” in By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 2:197–237; Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, “King Benjamin’s Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals,” King Benjamin’s Speech, 147–223.

6. Brown (Voices from the Dust, 72–73) suggests peace offers were made a proclamation throughout all the land, that the people might go up to the temple to hear the words which king Benjamin should speak unto them. And there were a great number, even so many that they did not number them (see also v. 7).

7. Although the Book of Mormon does not mention the temple implements and utensils, perhaps Nephi implied their existence with these words: “And I did teach my people to build buildings, and to work in all manner of wood, and of iron, and of copper, and of brass, and of steel, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious ores, which were in great abundance. And I, Nephi, did build a temple; and I did construct it after the manner of the temple of Solomon save it were not built of so many precious things; for they were not to be found upon the land, wherefore, it could not be built like unto Solomon’s temple. But the manner of the construction was like unto the temple of Solomon; and the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine” (2 Nephi 5:15–16).

8. The time frame of 60 seconds is based on orally reading the opening unit of English text of Benjamin’s speech (Mosiah 2:9–28) with a timer in hand.

9. Benjamin’s repeated refer ence to king in his sermon is certainly not arbitrary, in part because the setting of Mosiah 1–6 includes one of coronation and enthronement. According to Stephen D. Ricks, “The first six chapters of Mosiah . . . portray for us the succession of Mosiah, to the Nephite throne. Many features of this corona tion ceremony reflect ancient Israelite culture.” See Stephen D. Ricks, “Kingship, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6,” in King Benjamin’s Speech, 233 [233–75].

10. These Hebrew words appear in the Old Testament in a variety of contexts that pertain to slaves and slavery, household and family servants, working the soil in the cases of agriculture, and hard labor in the case of the Israelites during their servitude in Egypt. Additionally, the Lord’s prophets are called servants.


13. The formulaic are scattered throughout Numbers, but note also the cluster located in Numbers 18:

- “to do the service of the tab eracle” (Numbers 3:7)
- “to do the service of the tab eracle” (3:8)
- “to do the service of the tab eracle” (7:5)
- “the service of the tabernacle” (7:9)
- “to do their service in the tab ernacle” (8:22)
- “to do the service of the tab ernacle” (16:9)
- “for all the service of the tab ernacle” (18:4)
- “to do the service of the tabernacle” (18:6)
- “the service of the tabernacle” (18:21)
- “the service of the tabernacle” (18:23)

- “your service of the tabernacle” (18:31)

14. By way of example, I list the following: “the service of the house of God” (1 Chronicles 9:10, 13); “for the service of the house of God” (1 Chronicles 23:28); “in the service of the house of the Lord” (1 Chronicles 23:32); “service in the house of the Lord” (1 Chronicles 28:13).

15. A number of additional pas sage from the Old Testament connect service with temple worship. Regarding the Kohathite clan of the Levitical family: “Their charge shall be the ark, and the table, and the candlestick, and the altars,
and the vessels of the sanctuary wherewith they minister, and the hanging, and all the service thereof” (Numbers 3:31). Speaking particularly of priests, the Chronicler wrote: “Of the priests [the text then lists names and genealogies] and their brethren, heads of the house of their fathers, a thousand and seven hundred and threescore; very able men for the work of the service of the house of God” (1 Chronicles 9:10, 13).

16. In Exodus 12, the chapter that describes the laws regarding the Passover, Moses emphasizes that the Passover sacrifice is also called service. Moses instructs the children of Israel, “It shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the Lord will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service. And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? That you shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord’s passover” (Exodus 12:25–26).


18. One source notes that “Benjamin’s statement ‘that his garments and blood signal this as a temple oration.’” Alissom V. P. Coutts and others, “Appendix: Complete Text of Benjamin’s Speech with Notes and Comments,” King Benjamin’s Speech, 529.

Jonathan Cicci

Liahona: “The Direction of the Lord”: An Etymological Explanation

I would like to thank professors S. Kent Brown, Jeffrey R. Chadwick, John W. Welch, Donald W. Parry, and John A. Tvedtines, as well as Frank Kelland, and James Stevens for the enlightening oral and epistolary exchanges on this subject.


2. I believe that one of the purposes of carefully studying the etymology of Book of Mormon names like Liahona is to confirm the historical fact that Joseph Smith did not possess the intellectual tools necessary for the production of the Book of Mormon. All witnesses agree with Joseph Smith establishing that the basic motivation to produce the Book of Mormon started with what he defined as divine manifestations (of the angel Moroni), rather than cogently fabricating them through a sort of conspiracy intention as critics have attempted to suggest. As it has been widely demonstrated by LDS scholarship, Joseph Smith was not seeking or researching through natural intellectual tools the necessary elements to produce the book. These linguistic findings lend credence to the methodology of acquisition of the information as Joseph Smith described it, i.e., through the regular encounters with a messenger called Moroni sent from the presence of God every 21st or 22nd of September from 1823 until 1827, marking the obtaining of the plates that then were translated by the power of God; see Richard Lyman Bushman, Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling (New York: Knopf, 2005), 56.


5. From these considerations, a question naturally arises: Why did the name Liahona not appear in 1 and 2 Nephi but only in the later book of Alma? The chronology of the translation of the Book of Mormon may provide a very plausible answer. It may well be that once the name appeared for the first time in the translation of the Book of Mormon in Alma 37, Joseph Smith did not feel the necessity to constantly report the original Semitic name of Liahona. After all, the Book of Mormon did not undergo an editorial arrangement of harmonization. From historical and textual evidence of the manuscript of the Book of Mormon, it has been acknowledged that, after the loss of the 116 pages, Joseph Smith started to translate from the period of the reign of King Benjamin. Joseph Smith translated from the book of Mosiah until the end of the Book of Mormon and only afterward did he translate from 1 Nephi. The first mention of the “compass” and “director” is in Mosiah 1:16. The statement by Bushman goes in the direction of my hypothesis: “It also appears that the Book of Mosiah in the current Book of Mormon is not complete. It begins abruptly without the introduction that Mormon affixed to all the other books he abridged. Possibly the first pages of Mosiah were among the 116 that were lost. The evidence implies Joseph and Oliver began work on Mosiah when they began translating together in April 1829, finished the book to the end, and then went back and translated 1 Nephi up through Mosiah” (Bushman, Joseph Smith, 579, n. 63; emphasis added). Until which chapter of Mosiah did they translate? In my line of reasoning, the presence of the word Liahona only in Alma 37 and not in Mosiah 1:16 may serve as an additional element to indicate not only that Mosiah was translated after Alma but that, after the loss of the 116 pages, Joseph started translating after the end of Mosiah 1. Additionally, Royal Skousen validly argues that the 116 pages that were lost contained the two chapters of Mosiah and that the book of Mosiah begins with what would have been Mosiah chapter 3 (see Royal Skousen, “Critical Methodology and the Text of the Book of Mormon,” Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 6/1 (1994): 138–39. Further studies on the original manuscripts may verify the correctness of the hypothesis that Joseph Smith started to translate from Mosiah 3 down to the end and then from 1 Nephi to Mosiah 2.


7. I hasten to add that this is totally different from the proposition that the Book of Mormon text could be Hebrew language written in Egyptian characters.


9. See the note of the Exodus 3:13 of La Bibbia di Gerusalemme, ed. Andrea Tessaroio, 9th ed. (Bologna: Dehoniane, 1991), 133; that clearly indicates that the name given to Moses was pronounced Yah- weh based on the Hebrew verb “to be” (the yad–waw he).

10. Further studies are certainly needed to locate the exact time of the change in the pronunciation of the tetragrammaton from yahweh to adonay and the exact way in which the yahwistic theophoric names were pronounced.

11. At this juncture, I should spell out some of the relevant Hebrew rules fixed after the masoretic punctuation (vocalization) of the Bible text. The first says that the schwa at the beginning of the word is pronounced as “e”;
the second rule states that the *schwa* in the middle of the word is silent. However, the customary, rapid pronunciation relaxes the first rule. This is how the general population of the modern State of Israel (a modern version of Biblical Hebrew) pronounces words with a *schwa* at the beginning of the word. For instance, the word *sǐcọha* ("excuse me") is pronounced *sǐcha* instead of *selicha*. By comparison, the customary pronunciation confirms that the hypothetical *schwa* that had to be placed under the *amed* of *Lihon* is practically always silent.

A very accurate grammar of Biblical Hebrew (see also the German *Grammatica della lingua biblica*). The archaic Hebrew *lám* did no longer have vowels (or very few, see the texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls, dated 200 bc) or when the rule was not fixed as yet.

12. Jershon, which is based on the verb "to inherit," is used near various forms of the word *inherit* in the surrounding verses of Alma 27:22. Nahom, which means "to groan" in mourning, is used in the verse before the "daughters of Ishmael did mourn exceedingly" (2 Nephi 16:34–35).

13. As in other languages, in modern Hebrew there is a difference between eîpo יָהֶוּ "where" (see also the German *wo*) and leîro יָהֶוּ which is formed by leי and an י, which does not have the "ל he local" (see also the German *wohinen*). The archaic Hebrew instead of leי had an י ending with the "ל he local."

14. A very accurate grammar of Hebrew demonstrates that "il qametz medio derivar da primitivo a breve, e il più frequente. Ad ambedue però vien dato lo stesso suono, a secondo la pronunzia babilonese, o aperto secondo la tiberiense," Antonio Carrozzi, *Grammatica della lingua ebraica*, 2nd ed. (Casale Monferrato, Italy: Marietti, 1966), 5. This means that medium *kamatz* is a sound that in Palestine was an open "ο". The medium *kamatz* generally appears at the beginning of the word and also lies beneath 'ona.


18. For instance, in a conference, Joseph Smith said "it was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon . . . it was not expedient for him to relate these things." *History of the Church* 1:220.


31. This translation is mine, but is heavily dependent upon the January 1999 Josserand and Hopkins Seminar at UCLA on Maya Hieroglyphic Writing, as well as upon the translation in Harris and Stearns, *Understanding Maya Inscriptions*, 107, 153–58.


17. In the initial section


15. In his review of Joseph Allen’s claims along these lines, John E. Clark objects that it is “mirror imagery” or “bilateral symmetry,” not chiasmus, thus missing the forest for the trees. See John E. Clark, “Searching for Book of Mormon Lands in Middle America,” FARMS Review 16/2 (2004): 42–43.

14. Vogt, 


4. All of my 1967 letters and notes are being deposited in the Chiasmus Collection in the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University.


The Discovery of Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon: Forty Years Later

John W. Welch


2. Victor A. Hurwitz, In Anum sirum: Literary Structures in the Non-Juridical Sections of Codex Himmarrubzi, Samuel Noah Kramer Occasional Publications 15 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum, 1994), 58 n. 67, lauds Welch’s contribution and then adds: “There seems to be no end to the use of long and short range chiasm in ancient literature and it may now be considered a well established and wide spread fact of literary style.”


4. In reviewing a book on symmetrical patterns of repetition (direct and chastic) in Hebrew and Ugaritic, H. Van Dyke Parunak noted that the author “does not appreciate the wide repertoire of structural mechanisms that ancient writers constructed from the primitive elements of alternation and chiasm. As a result, his analyses often miss important nuances” (Parunak, review of Studies in Biblical Narrative: Style, Structure, and the Ancient Near Eastern Literary Background, by Yitzhak Avishur, Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 44/2 (2001): 326). Yehuda T. Radday stated unequivocally that “chastic structure . . . is more than an artificial or artistic device. If it were nothing else, it would hardly warrant more than a passing illustration of a few exemplary passages. It is rather, and most remarkably so, a key to meaning. Not paying sufficient attention to it may result in failure to grasp the true theme” (Radday, “Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative,” in Chiasmus in Antiquity, 51).


6. All of my 1967 letters and notes are being deposited in the Chiasmus Collection in the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University.


“Following Welch’s general invitation to go further with the work he has begun,” she proposes and discusses seven indicators (pp. 33–38). The recent issue of the Journal of Biblical Literature 126/4 (2007): 712, also contains a favorable reference to Chiasmus in Antiquity.


15. Welch, “How Much Was Known about Chiasmus in 1829,” 78.


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