The ancient temple had been used by the first Nephi, six centuries before the birth of Christ, as the model in building his temple.
Hugh Nibley and Joseph Smith

Richard Lyman Bushman

Hugh Nibley seems to have approached the Prophet Joseph Smith from a unique angle—through scholarly discourse rather than bearing testimony of him. Nibley preferred to discuss the historicity of the Book of Mormon on its own terms rather than in terms of the Prophet's character.

Lehi in the Samaria Papyri and on an Ostracon from the Shore of the Red Sea

Jeffrey R. Chadwick

Two different archaeological finds from Palestine attest to the term ḥy as a male personal name—inscriptions found on a papyrus fragment and on an ostracon. A discussion of the pronunciation and spelling of this name contributes to the significance of these finds.

On Elkenah as Canaanite El

Kevin L. Barney

The name Elkenah appears twelve times in the Book of Abraham and likely refers to a god. Possible linguistic structures for the name permit at least six proposals for how the name could be understood in the Book of Abraham, the strongest of which are linked to Canaanite El, a deity.
Seeing Third Nephi as the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon

JOHN W. WELCH

The book of 3 Nephi, the work of a high priest, reflects holiness and temple themes. Jesus came to the Temple in Bountiful to visit the survivors of the great destruction that occurred at the time of his death; the covenant-making context of his teachings at the temple is clear.

The Harrowing of Hell: Salvation for the Dead in Early Christianity

DAVID L. PAULSEN, ROGER D. COOK, AND KENDEL J. CHRISTENSEN

The harrowing of hell, or Christ's descent to hell, presents a solution to the soteriological problem of evil; a just and merciful God makes possible the salvation of those who died without knowing of Christ. Christ's delivery of souls from hell is evidence of God's love.
Kevin L. Barney obtained law degrees at the University of Illinois (JD) and DePaul University (LLM). He practices public finance law with the Chicago office of Kutak Rock LLP. He serves on the board of directors of both the Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR) and Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought.

Richard Lyman Bushman is Gouverneur Morris Professor of History Emeritus at Columbia University in New York City and is now at Claremont Graduate University in California as the visiting Howard W. Hunter Chair of Mormon Studies. He is co-general editor for the Joseph Smith Papers project of the History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Jeffrey R. Chadwick is Jerusalem Center Professor of Archaeology and Near Eastern Studies and associate professor of Church history and doctrine (Jewish studies) at Brigham Young University, senior field archaeologist with the Tell es-Safi/Gath Archaeological Project in Israel, and senior research fellow at the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem.

Kendel J. Christensen enjoys interests ranging from computer technologies to theology. He shares interesting or life-changing discoveries on his Web site, www.kendelc.com. He was president of the Heroes of History Club and graduated with honors from Brigham Young University in sociology with a minor in philosophy in 2010.

Roger D. Cook is an instructor in the Philosophy Department at Brigham Young University and is pursuing a doctoral degree at the University of Utah. He specializes in ancient philosophy and Near Eastern studies, philosophy of religion, epistemology, and apocalyptic Judaism and its contributions to Jewish Christianity.

Hugh Nibley (1910–2005) graduated summa cum laude from the University of California at Los Angeles and completed his PhD as a University Fellow at the University of California at Berkeley. He joined the faculty of Brigham Young University in 1946 as a professor of history and religion and devoted much time to research and writing.

David L. Paulsen is a professor of philosophy at Brigham Young University. He earned a BS degree in political science from BYU, a JD from the University of Chicago Law School, and a PhD in philosophy from the University of Michigan. He has published in the areas of philosophy of religion and Mormon studies.

John W. Welch is the Robert K. Thomas Professor of Law at the J. Reuben Clark Law School. Since 1984 he has served as the general editor of the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, and since 1991 as editor in chief of BYU Studies. Trained in history, classical languages, philosophy, and law, his latest book is The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple.
Dear Reader,

Again, as editor, I am excited about our current issue. My experience is that not all topics are of equal interest to all readers. The difference, might I suggest, is probably based more on our interests as individual readers rather than on the intrinsic nature of each article. Surely several of the wide variety of articles in this issue will be of interest to you. I hope you enjoy both the scholarship of our authors and the diversity of their topics.

To help celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Hugh W. Nibley, the Neal A. Maxwell Institute, Religious Education, and the Harold B. Lee Library, all of BYU, sponsored a twelve-part lecture series. In January of this year Richard Lyman Bushman delivered the first, entitled “Hugh Nibley and Joseph Smith.” I am pleased to offer the reader a slightly edited transcription of his presentation. In this article, Brother Bushman pointed out that Hugh Nibley approached the Prophet Joseph Smith from a unique angle, namely, look at what the Prophet as the Lord’s messenger produced and stop trying to discredit the messenger. What a timely reminder!

Though Lehi and Sariah did not need to be told that their names would be brought together as evidence of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, that is precisely what Jeffrey R. Chadwick has done. When the Book of Mormon was first published, neither name was known as an authentic Hebrew personal name or, for that matter, as a verifiable ancient Semitic personal name in any language. In the last sixty years this has all changed. Brother Chadwick has conveniently gathered the evidence for Lehi as a genuine West Semitic name and then, in his conclusion, brought Lehi and Sariah together as strong evidence for the ancient nature of the Book of Mormon.

Kevin L. Barney in his article “On Elkenah as Canaanite El” takes the reader through the various possible interpretations of the name Elkenah, a name that appears twelve times in the Book of Abraham. Brother Barney suggests that while all these interpretations are possible, one is more plausible than the others.

John W. Welch seems to have a gift for seeing things that many of us miss. In this new offering, “Seeing Third Nephi as the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon,” he has broken new ground. Brother Welch sees in 3 Nephi temple themes and references to holiness that are congruous with the temple setting and covenant-making context in this centrally important book within the Book of Mormon.

The “Harrowing of Hell” may not seem like a particularly edifying topic, but in the hands of David L. Paulsen, Roger D. Cook, and Kendal J. Christensen, it becomes a most interesting window into pre-Restoration Christian teachings. Their article, “The Harrowing of Hell: Salvation for the Dead in Early Christianity,” is the first of three on what is known outside of Latter-day Saint circles as postmortem evangelism and inside the Restoration as work for the dead. This first article on Christ’s teaching the dead and the next one to follow on baptism for the dead explore how the soteriological problem of evil (how can a just and merciful God make possible the salvation of those who died without knowing of Christ?) was handled from the early church fathers down to the Restoration. The third and final article, and the main justification for publishing this three-part series in the Journal, will be a study of the concept of work for the dead among Latter-day Saints.

On occasion, Hugh W. Nibley, whose hundredth birthday was on 27 March of this year, wrote for non-Latter-day Saint audiences. “Worthy of Another Look: Classics from the Past” in this issue offers a little-known piece of his, “The Book of Mormon: A Minimal Statement,” which he penned for a Catholic periodical. I hope you will enjoy it.

Editor’s Notebook
I am honored to inaugurate the Maxwell Institute lecture series on Hugh Nibley, surely the spiritual godfather, along with Elder Neal A. Maxwell, of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship. Nibley’s mind was capacious enough to encompass nearly all of the Institute’s multifarious projects. He may have been the first to grasp the scope of the scholarship required to comprehend the Restoration. Before Nibley, our scholars, for the most part, concentrated on Mormon sources to support their work, with some reference to other texts. After Nibley that was no longer possible. He brought virtually the entire ancient world into our purview, and those who succeed him must now do the same. As well as anyone, Nibley appreciated the achievement of Joseph Smith. And yet as I will argue tonight, he approached the Prophet from a strangely oblique angle.
Like so many rising scholars of my generation, I had a Nibley moment. I had only the slightest personal acquaintance with him, and yet he came into my life at a critical time when my testimony was teetering in the balance. I had entered the mission field without conviction after my sophomore year of college, quite unsteady about my belief. When I told my mission president, J. Howard Maughan, that I lacked a testimony he handed me a book and said: See if you can find a better explanation than the one in the book itself. And so I began my first serious encounter with the Book of Mormon. I don’t know exactly when Lehi in the Desert and the World of the Jaredites entered the picture. It was sometime during my first year. I do remember that by my second year I had written John Sorenson about some problem of evidence that concerned me and received a generous three- or four-page epistle in reply. John was my first introduction to the Mormon intellectual establishment where at that time Nibley reigned supreme. I remember my fascination with the idea of Arabic poetry in the naming of hills and valleys for Laman and Lemuel, and the peculiar oasis on the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula that Nephi named Bountiful and that Nibley identified as a pocket of greenery unknown to anyone in the West in Joseph Smith’s time. These little specks of evidence provided the kind of rational support I was looking for in my quest for conviction. Nibley opened up a Middle Eastern antiquity I had not dreamed existed and securely located 1 Nephi in its desert culture.

The passage I remember most vividly was the famous Snite parable near the end of Lehi in the Desert. Here is Nibley at his sardonic and witty best: A young man once long ago claimed he had found a large diamond in his field as he was ploughing. He put the stone on display to the public free of charge, and everyone took sides. A psychologist showed, by citing some famous case studies, that the young man was suffering from a well-known form of delusion. An historian showed that other men have also claimed to have found diamonds in fields and been deceived. A geologist proved that there were no diamonds in the area but only quartz: the young man had been fooled by a quartz. When asked to inspect the stone itself, the geologist declined with a weary, tolerant smile and a kindly shake of the head. An English professor showed that the young man in describing his stone used the very same language that others had used in describing uncut diamonds: he was, therefore, simply speaking the common language of his time. A sociologist showed that only three out of 177 florists’ assistants in four major cities believed the stone was genuine. A clergyman wrote a book to show that it was not the young man but someone else who had found the stone.

Finally an indigent jeweler named Snite pointed out that since the stone was still available for examination the answer to the question of whether it was a diamond or not had absolutely nothing to do with who found it, or whether the finder was honest or sane, or who believed him, or whether he would know a diamond from a brick, or whether diamonds had ever been found in fields, or whether people had ever been fooled by quartz or glass, but was to be answered simply and solely by putting the stone to certain well-known tests for diamonds. Experts on diamonds were called in. Some of them declared it genuine. The others made nervous jokes about it and declared that they could not very well jeopardize their dignity and reputations by appearing to take the thing too seriously. To hide the bad impression thus made, someone came out with the theory that the stone was really a synthetic diamond, very skilfully made, but a fake just the same. The objection to this is that the production of a good synthetic diamond 120 years ago would have been an even more remarkable feat than the finding of a real one. The passage reminds us of the watch in the field of Deist fame except that the argument takes a different form. The perfect mechanism of the watch points to something beyond itself. We want to know where it came from. Who could have contrived that intricate timepiece? There had to be a watchmaker, the logic requires us to conclude. Not so with the diamond discovered by the ploughboy. Nibley structures the situation so that the diamond does not point beyond itself. His parable does not ask how the diamond got there. His only query is whether the diamond is authentic. The ploughboy, a stand-in for Joseph Smith, we must assume, did not need supernatural powers. He just turned up...
the gem in a furrow. We don’t have to ask how he found the diamond. The only question Snite asks is: How authentic is the diamond? In the story, the ploughboy is an innocent bystander. We make the connection to divinity; Nibley does not fill in that logic for us. Once we know the diamond is real we readily leap to Joseph Smith’s inspiration, the existence of supernatural powers, and ultimately to faith in the Church today. We do all of that work. The point I am making is that Nibley leaves all of it to us. He says virtually nothing about the Book of Mormon as sign, as Terryl Givens has put it. He never uses the Book of Mormon as evidence of divinity working through a modern prophet. He is not interested in validating the ploughboy who found the diamond, only in the diamond itself. I have focused on this one passage in Nibley’s first apologetic work because I believe it foreshadows his treatment of Joseph Smith for the greater part of his life. In his early works especially, Nibley rarely mentions Joseph Smith.

Nibley makes a remarkable statement in the paragraph preceding the Snite passage:

We have never been very much interested in “proving” the Book of Mormon; for us its divine provenance has always been an article of faith, and its historical aspects by far the least important thing about it.3

What can he possibly mean when he says he has never been much interested in “proving” the Book of Mormon? How can a man who dedicated his life to that endeavor say he is not much interested? He has to have been interested to focus his energies so zealously on that enterprise for decades. And then to say that the “historical aspects” were “by far the least important thing about it” compounds the amazement. What was he doing in all those books about the historical aspects if they were not important?

His belief in the book, Nibley tells us, arises in another realm, the realm of faith, not from the historical aspects, which he considers the most trivial of considerations. Apparently, he did not need that kind of proof for either Joseph or the Book of Mormon. The book’s “divine provenance,” Nibley says, comes from another realm—his faith. And so we have the anomaly: Nibley battling ferociously to demonstrate the historical validity of the Book of Mormon, and yet apparently subordinating historical inquiry to a little-mentioned realm of faith that hardly ever entered his public discourse. He seems to be fighting a ferocious rearguard action to protect the faith, which in the last analysis is what is most important to him.

It occurred to me that my own experience in talking about Joseph Smith to Latter-day Saint audiences might bear on Nibley’s reticence. Often in the question period, someone will ask me to bear my testimony. I am a little put off by this question. I often respond that I have been bearing my testimony in every word I have said. The whole story of the Prophet as I relate it is a testimony of the truth. But lying behind the question and my somewhat irritating response is a significant cultural issue. The questioner has been hearing one kind of discourse all night, a scholarly objective discourse, and is waiting for another kind of discourse, one more familiar and one required when speaking of the Prophet. She wants to hear “I know,” the language we use when speaking of Joseph Smith, a language
of divine inspiration as opposed to cognitive examination. In asking the question, the audience is testing my loyalties. All right, you have proven yourself to be a scholar, they implicitly say. Now we want to know if you are one of us, the kind of us who knows about Joseph Smith spiritually. Will you deign to use our kind of speech and show yourself to be a brother as well as a scholar?

I bridle when asked, not because I wish to distance myself from the audience. I am a brother, I would be quick to say. But testimony speech does not fit into scholarly speech. Bearing testimony at the end of one of these talks, I sense in my gut, would undermine the scholarly part of the talk, bringing into question my credibility as a scholar. Think of an attorney defending the church’s interest in a court case involving the First Presidency. The lawyer takes great pains to present the evidence and interpret the law to the end of persuading the bench and the jury. Near the end of his involved presentation, he pauses and says, “I also want you all to know that I know that President Thomas S. Monson is a prophet of God by the power of the witness borne to me by the Holy Spirit. I know therefore that he is innocent of the charge brought against him.” What is wrong with such a statement? It may very well represent the attorney’s deepest convictions and commitments. Is it not proper to bear witness in all times and in all places?

Yes, but we know it would be unsuitable. By shifting the form of discourse from evidence and legal reasoning, to testimony and felt inspiration, the attorney weakens his own case. He becomes a special pleader rather than a trustworthy judge of the evidence and the law. Everything he has said before is thrown into question. I cannot imagine church attorneys changing their speech to testimony-bearing, and I cannot imagine their client expecting them to do so.

I am suggesting that Hugh Nibley adopted a similar tactic when approaching Joseph Smith. He scrupulously remained in the mode of scholarly discourse—what could be proven out of the texts—rather than drawing out the religious consequences, such as the divinity of Joseph Smith’s calling and the necessary evidence of his supernatural powers. I don’t know that Nibley ever wavered from that discipline in his writings; those who know him more intimately may think of instances. But in his published work he was ever the scholar, asking his readers to grant him nothing more than an opportunity to lay out the evidence. I think he always wrote with a scholarly reader in mind. The fact that he argued in the court of scholarly opinion may have required him to stick with scholarly language so as not to undermine his case. He knew he would never persuade the scholars, though he may have hoped from time to time that Klaus Baer or some other of his scholarly friends would yield a point or two. But he never wanted to show weakness. He would always meet the critics on their own ground and slug it out. He would not abandon his lawyerly posture to become a simple testimony bearer. He would assert no more than he could prove. And perhaps most defensively, he would never expose his faith to their attacks. The unbelievers’ blows would never touch that vital spot underneath his armor.

We must then content ourselves with Nibley’s laser-like focus on the Book of Mormon and not expect him to take the next logical step and bear testimony of Joseph. There were doubtless many reasons why Nibley refused to use the Book of Mormon in his arguments. But I think the strategy he adopted was a matter of survival. He knew he would never persuade the scholars, though he may have hoped from time to time that Klaus Baer or some other of his scholarly friends would yield a point or two. But he never wanted to show weakness. He would always meet the critics on their own ground and slug it out. He would not abandon his lawyerly posture to become a simple testimony bearer. He would assert no more than he could prove. And perhaps most defensively, he would never expose his faith to their attacks. The unbelievers’ blows would never touch that vital spot underneath his armor.
Mormon to reach conclusions about either Joseph’s divine call or his character. In *Since Cumorah*, Nibley actually turns the reasoning around and objects to the practice of using Joseph to reach conclusions about the Book of Mormon. In characterizing the tactics of the critics he says they reject the Book of Mormon because its author/translator was untrustworthy. The critics’ version of Joseph undermined the book rather than the book supporting Joseph.

Opponents of the Book of Mormon have always depended heavily on vigorous declamations against the character of Joseph Smith. The accepted procedure has been to argue that since Smith was a rascal the Book of Mormon must be a fraud. In other words, the critics spurned the Book of Mormon because it came from a disreputable source. Nibley objects to that tactic, less out of regard to Joseph’s reputation, it would appear, than out of his desire to defend the Book of Mormon. He had recently defended the Prophet in his book *The Myth Makers,* but he pointedly does not go into that argument here. “The whole discussion of Joseph Smith’s character,” he says “has become academic,” by which he seems to mean either moot or irrelevant. It is as if he wanted to clear away all the underbrush created by the anti-Mormon accounts of the Prophet as a man and make the Book of Mormon the issue. He believed that “the whole discussion [of the Book of Mormon] has shifted ground completely, though critics of the Book of Mormon are still desperately determined to keep it in the old grooves.” Nibley is dedicated to moving the debate to new ground, that is, to discussion of the historicity of the book in its own terms rather than in terms of the Prophet’s character. He seems to imply that we should lay aside Joseph Smith, Moroni, and the nineteenth-century story and concentrate, as Snite recommended, on the diamond itself.

We can understand Nibley’s position better if we remember how badly treated Joseph Smith had been in non-Mormon accounts as Nibley was growing up. The best-known work on the Prophet had come from William Linn, I. Woodbridge Riley, and George Bartholomew Arbaugh, who did nothing but deride Joseph Smith and his family. In 1903, Riley, who went on to become a distinguished historian of American philosophy, posed what he called “The Final Question” about Joseph Smith in his Yale dissertation on “the founder of Mormonism”: “Was He Demented or Merely Degenerate?” An advocate of the epileptic theory of revelation—the idea that revelations were the side effect of a seizure—Riley left the final diagnosis of Smith’s dementia to the psychologists but concluded that his “psychic coordination had disappeared,” and his genetic inheritance had degraded his mind and his character. “Heredity had passed down those abnormal tenden-
person as academic, Nibley chose to look at the indisputable fact that whatever his background and character, Joseph “did give a big book to the world.”

You would think that his reply to Fawn Brodie’s *No Man Knows My History* would compel him to present a favorable portrait of Joseph Smith to set over against Brodie’s pious fraud. How could he treat a biography of Joseph Smith without making some biographical judgments of his own? Surely glimpses of Nibley’s Joseph would be found there. Not so. Most of Nibley’s response takes the form of attacks on Brodie’s scholarship and reasoning, not a defense of Joseph Smith. (Incidentally, it launches a rather powerful attack on Brodie, in my opinion. In recent years, the pamphlet has been so criticized for its sarcasm that it was a pleasure for me to discover on rereading it how on the mark it was.)

Nibley believed the Book of Mormon was a diamond that could cut glass. It slashed through the falsities of modern materialism and humbled the mighty to the dust. The book and its message meant everything to him.

Nibley recognized that compared to previous biographers of Joseph Smith, Brodie gave the Prophet relatively kind treatment. In his opinion she did not write in anger, but although she went beyond the naked scorn of Riley and Linn, her portrait was in the end no more satisfying. “Brodie’s Joseph Smith is a more plausible character than the consummate fiend of the earlier school in that his type is much more likely to be met with on the street any Tuesday afternoon.” But in the end Brodie’s Joseph was even less plausible than his predecessors. “No blundering, dreaming, undisciplined, shallow and opportunistic fakir could have left behind what Joseph Smith did, both in men’s hearts and on paper.” What Brodie failed to explain was what this dreamer produced. Being, on Brodie’s account, a “completely undisciplined imagination,” with an imagination that “spilled over like a spring freshet” in a riot of intense color and luxuriant detail, having a wild, unbridled fancy that was not to be “canalized by any discipline,” Joseph should have produced a phantasmagoria of incoherent mishmash, but did he?

Instead of an opium dream, we find an exceedingly sober document, that never flies off at tangents, never loses the thread of the narrative (which is often quite complicated), is totally lacking in oriental color, in which the sermons are confined to special sections, and which, strangest of all, never runs into contradictions. Joseph might get away with his “outrageous lying” in little matters, but what outrageous liar can carry the game to half the length of the Old Testament without giving himself away hundreds of times? Brodie doesn’t say. In the face of this extraordinary achievement, Joseph Smith as a person was in Nibley’s estimation irrelevant.

We know a butcher who looks just like the great Johann Sebastian Bach, and he walks and talks and eats and breathes—the very things that Bach did—only there is one slight difference: the butcher can’t write music. Brodie’s Joseph is a real enough character—all the details are there, except one: he can’t do the things Joseph Smith did—the only things about Joseph Smith, incidentally, that really interest us.

There I think you have the heart of the matter. “The only things about Joseph Smith” that “really interest us,” Nibley says, is the music. He could have walked
and talked like any butcher without it making a particle of difference. His personality is beside the point. Joseph produced a masterpiece and nothing else about him need concern us. Why then say more about his character or even his divine call?

In Nibley’s mind, vindication of the Book of Mormon was an end in itself, apart from its implications for Joseph Smith. In my opinion, John Welch has it right in the introduction to Lehi in the Desert where he says of Nibley:

> Ultimately, the importance of the Book of Mormon in his opinion is that it conveys a remarkably clear and compelling picture of the plan of salvation. It exposes in unequivocal terms the foibles of the human condition and the choices all people face for temporal and spiritual survival.

Nibley believed the Book of Mormon was a diamond that could cut glass. It slashed through the falsities of modern materialism and humbled the mighty to the dust. The book and its message meant everything to him. The ploughboy prophet, much as Nibley may have loved him, was subordinated to his precious find in the field.

Tracking down references to Joseph Smith in the indexes of Nibley’s collected works, I found the largest concentration in the reprint of a talk Nibley gave at the Sunstone Symposium in 1989 on “Critiquing the Brethren.” It is the only place I know of where Joseph comes to center stage, and we finally get a view of Nibley’s thoughts about the man. He called in Joseph on this occasion to address an issue that frequently troubles intellectuals: how to deal with criticism of church leaders. Nibley used Joseph Smith both as a model of an authority—the first among the Brethren—and also as the target of criticism. Nibley tried to show how Joseph operated in each of these roles, leader and target, as an example for modern church leaders and modern church members. The point he wanted to make was that Joseph was constantly under attack from lesser men who did not value him, but his reaction was not to get upset. He rolled with the punches. Joseph was open, free, and searching, and he allowed all men the same privilege. He was inclined to leave evil to the Lord rather than cracking down.

I was interested to find that the Joseph Smith in this essay was an expanded version of the ploughboy that Snite defended. Nibley portrays Joseph as the simple innocent, assaulted by scornful, arrogant, and ultimately unknowing critics. Joseph Smith did not lay claim to high intellect or worldly might, Nibley reminds us. He simply reported what had happened to him. “He spoke only of what he had seen with his eyes, heard with his ears, and felt with his hands.” And yet, he stumped them all. Nibley let Brigham Young drive home the point. “The whole Christian doctrine, as Brigham Young put it, ‘simmered down . . . into a snuffbox, . . . but, when I found “Mormonism,” I found that it was higher than I could reach, . . . deeper than I was capable of comprehending and calculated to expand the mind . . . from truth to truth, from light to light, . . . to become associated with the Gods and angels.’”

Nibley loved for the simple and plain to outfox the clever and wise. He spent his life showing how the ploughboy surpassed them all.

He loved it too that the simple prophet was neither pompous or self-aggrandizing about his powers. As he said, “this is a man who was not going to get a big head.” The epitome of humility and plain living himself, Nibley celebrated Joseph’s open-handedness in granting his followers powers like his own. “The Prophet’s advantage over the world lay of course in revelation,” Nibley noted, “but in the Church, every follower has an equal right to revela-
tion.” “Search the scriptures,” he quotes Joseph as saying, “and ask your Heavenly Father, in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, to manifest the truth unto you; . . . you will then know for yourselves and not for another. You will not then be dependent on man for the knowledge of God; nor will there be any room for speculation.”

Reading along in Nibley’s talk, I realized that he was offering more than a comment on criticism of the Brethren. He was delineating the form of ideal social relationships within the church—what kind of people we should be and how we should regard one another. He wanted a church of independent revelators who find the answers for themselves and who tolerate one another’s mistakes when we stumble. He refers to the famous Brother Brown incident where an old man was brought to trial for teaching erratic doctrine and Joseph protected him: “I never thought it was right,” Joseph said, “to call up a man and try him because he erred in doctrine, it looks too much like methodism and not like Latter day Saintism.” Nibley’s gloss on the story was that “Joseph Smith said that Brother Brown’s teachings were absolutely ridiculous. He could not keep from laughing at his ideas. But Brother Brown had a right to them.”

We get another taste of Nibley’s good society when he takes up the obvious question about what to do when evil appears. Can we just stand by? “What would Joseph Smith do about evil?” Nibley asks. Apparently not much. “He didn’t worry, because God was in charge.” Then quoting Joseph: “Notwithstanding we are rolled in the mire of the flood for the time being, the next surge peradventure, as time rolls on, may bring to us the fountain as clear as crystal, and as pure as snow.” Thus Nibley concludes, “with that perfect confidence, he never panicked, he never worried.” This is a Joseph who is very sure of himself, again the simple innocent resting in the assurance of his revelations.

Not that Nibley’s Joseph was never impatient. Nibley himself lost patience with more plodding souls, especially if they seemed puffed up with their learning. Joseph had it even worse. “What a trial it must have been for one who had conversed with angels and with the prophets of old to find himself surrounded by a bunch of yahoos who considered themselves very important.” And yet Joseph bore with these brethren, and Nibley advises us to do the same. We must tolerate one another in our failings. At this point a little confusion enters the essay. For a time I could not tell if he was counseling the critics to be patient with the Brethren or for the Brethren to be patient with the critics. Were Church members to tolerate the Brethren or were they to tolerate us? Finally I realize he was advising generosity for both parties. “If I esteem mankind to be in error,” he quotes Joseph as saying, “shall I bear them down? No. I will lift them up, and in their own way too, if I cannot persuade them my way is better; and I will not seek to compel any man to believe as I do, only by the force of reasoning.” “Do not watch for iniquity in each other, if you do you will not get an endowment, for God will not bestow it on such.”

Of course, it would not be a good society for Nibley without scholarship. Although it had little to do with his topic, he could not resist a side comment about Joseph and learning. “Joseph Smith . . . was an impassioned scholar; he hungered for learning; he revelled in it when he had a chance; and he never tired of showing and explaining the papyri to his visitors. His own curiosity was typically the most lively of all.”
He knew much more about it than we give him credit for.” Then a startling speculation from Nibley: “Joseph, had he lived, might have been a specialist.” He might have become a Hebrew scholar. For proof Nibley quotes Joseph saying: “My Soul delights in reading the word of the Lord in the original and I am determined to pursue the study of languages until I shall become master of them if I am permitted to live long enough.” Just as well that never happened, Nibley happily concludes. “Had Joseph and the Brethren followed the line of study that fascinated him, we would be up to our ears today in hair-splitting discussions and recondite speculation.” Can you imagine the miseries of an entire society made up of scholars? Adept at learning like few others, Nibley was scornful of scholarly pomposity. He reminds us that “Joseph Smith had good advice for scholars.” On the occasion of a dispute in the School of the Prophets, he wrote: “I discovered in this debate, . . . too much zeal for mastery, too much of that enthusiasm that characterizes a lawyer at the bar who is determined to defend his cause right or wrong. I . . . advise[d] them that they might improve their minds and cultivate their powers of intellect in a proper manner.” Nibley brings Joseph’s judgment right home. “The critics,” he says to his audience, “are really just showing off, which is what we do in sessions like this [the Sunstone Symposium].”

Nibley has Joseph dealing with his followers’ foibles as Nibley himself did. “Joseph Smith retained his sanity by dealing with this type of situation in high good humor.” I am sure he was thrilled to read Joseph saying: “Beware of self-righteousness and be limited in the estimate of your own virtues. . . . You must enlarge your souls towards each other. . . . We must bear with each other’s failings, as an indulgent parent bears with the foibles of his children.” You see, Nibley concludes, we’re at school. “We must be allowed to make mistakes.”

“Overriding all else,” Nibley sums up, “is that grand feeling of love which makes life a joy, and everything I read about Joseph Smith reflects that promise.” Joseph told the Church: “Let me be resurrected with the Saints, whether to heaven or hell.”

Then the classic: “Friendship is the grand fundamental principle of Mormonism, to revolution[ize and] civilize the world, [to] pour forth love. . . . I do not dwell upon your faults. You shall not [dwell] upon mine. . . . [If] Presbyterians [have] any truth, embrace that. Baptist, Methodist, &c. Get all the good in the world. Come out a pure Mormon.”

At the very end of the essay, Nibley described his own relationship to the Brethren in a story about Spencer W. Kimball. Nibley traveled with Elder Kimball to a stake conference in Arizona one weekend as an emissary of BYU. During a train stop in Los Angeles, Nibley characteristically visited a bookshop near the station and purchased what he described as a ten-volume set of “a very rare collection, of Alfonsus De Lingorio, the seventeenth-century Redemptorist writer on probabilism.” Rushing back to catch the train, lugging his ten volumes, Nibley had to cross an empty lot. When he settled into his seat, Elder Kimball noticed that Nibley’s shoes and trousers were covered with dust. What happened next left an impression on the scholar.

Brother Kimball casually took an immaculate linen handkerchief from the breast pocket of his jacket, and, stooping over, vigorously dusted off my shoes and trousers. It was the most natural thing in the world, and we both took it completely for granted. After all, my shoes were dusty in the race for the train, and Brother Kimball had always told missionaries to keep themselves clean and proper. It was no great thing—pas d’histoire. Neither of us said a thing about it, but ever since, that has conditioned my attitude toward the Brethren.

Nibley told no comparable tales of Joseph dusting shoes, but one senses that he saw in the Prophet’s tolerance of the wayward the same kindness he discovered in Elder Kimball. Nibley’s own richly furnished mind yielded to the superior worth of such saintly men.
Notes
41. Nibley, "Criticizing the Brethren," 441.
42. Nibley, "Criticizing the Brethren," 441.
43. Nibley, "Criticizing the Brethren," 441.
44. Nibley, "Criticizing the Brethren," 444.
LEHI

in the Samaria Papyri and on an Ostracon from the Shore of the Red Sea

JEFFREY R. CHADWICK
The Book of Mormon introduces a man named Lehi, a prophet and native of Jerusalem during the late seventh century BC (1 Nephi 1:4). There is currently no consensus among Latter-day Saint scholars on how this man’s name would have been spelled or pronounced in the Hebrew language of that period. One strong possibility is that it would have been spelled לְחִי (lḥy) and have been pronounced lĕḥy, with a soft ֝ and a hard ḥ (like the ch in the name Bach).¹ This is the same spelling and pronunciation as the geographic name Lehi (lḥy) that occurs in the biblical story of Samson (Judges 15:9, 14), where the Hebrew term means “cheek” or “jaw,” as in the account of a donkey’s jawbone (lĕḥy) used as a weapon (Judges 15:15).² Since the Hebrew term lḥy does not occur as a personal name in the Bible but only as this place name, skeptics might suggest that Joseph Smith simply appropriated it as a male personal name for the Book of Mormon.

However, two different twentieth-century archaeological finds from Palestine attest to the term lḥy as a male personal name. One inscription is on a papyrus fragment found in 1962 among the Samaria Papyri of the Wadi el-Daliyeh; it preserves lḥy as the main element of a compound name. The other inscription in which lḥy stands alone as a personal name appears on an ostracan (an inscribed ceramic sherd) found in 1939 at Tell el-Kheleifeh (ancient Elath) on the shore of the Red Sea. This article will describe and evaluate these two inscriptions as they may apply to the Book of Mormon personal name “Lehi.”

---

¹ Photo and drawing of Ostracon 2071. In the drawing, the name Lehi (lḥy) is enclosed by a red box (added for current article). Prepared by Nelson Glueck, “Ostraca from Elath,” BASOR, no. 80 (December 1940): 4–5. Glueck rendered the name Lehi as Lahai.

² Left page: Papyrus “WDSP PapDeed of Slave Sale F ar.” The three letters of the name element lḥy are inside the red square; the ḥ and the y are partially broken. To the right of the square are the letters ʾb; the entire compound word reads ʾḥbly (“belonging to Ablehi”). Courtesy Israel Antiquities Authority.
Ostracon 2071 from Tell el-Kheleifeh

Since the inscription from Tell el-Kheleifeh has already been mentioned in LDS literature (initially in Hugh Nibley’s landmark 1950 series “Lehi in the Desert”), I will discuss it first. The inscription was discovered by Nelson Glueck, a renowned Near Eastern archaeologist of the mid-twentieth century and president of Hebrew Union College and the Jewish Institute of Religion. Glueck excavated during three seasons from 1938 to 1940 at Tell el-Kheleifeh (generally identified as biblical Elath; compare 1 Kings 9:26; 2 Kings 14:22; 16:6), located on the north shore of the Red Sea’s Gulf of Aqaba. During his 1939 season, Glueck’s team unearthed the inscription referred to in his report as Ostracon 2071 in a stratum of building remains from Period V, dated to the Persian period (fifth and fourth centuries BC), and characterized as a period of Edomite control of ancient Elath. Sherds of imported black-glazed Attic ware, typical of the Persian period, were found in the same stratum as the ostracon, suggesting the fifth-to-fourth century BC dating. According to Glueck’s description of the find, the plain, four-sided 2 x 3 inch ceramic fragment upon which the inscription was written was “a sherd from a thin-walled, hard-baked, wheel-made jug, wet smoothed, of brownish buff texture, with numerous tiny white grits. The outer, wet-smoothed surface is slightly coated with a thin, grayish-white lime accretion, which makes the inscription much less legible on the ostracon itself than on the photographs of it, made with the use of various filters.”

The inscription comprises four horizontal lines and was written in dark ink, in Aramaic script typical of the Persian period. Glueck prepared a photo and facsimile drawing of the ostracon for publication (see photo on p. 15).

Though incomplete because of breakage, the four-line inscription reads as follows (Latin letter transcription by Glueck; my Hebrew letter transcription):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{šlmn} & \quad \text{bd} \\
\text{lly} & \quad \text{b}[d] \\
\text{b}^d\text{y} & \quad (?) \\
\text{šb}^c & \quad (?) \\
\end{align*}
\]

The name lly (ללי) in the second line is the same spelling as the biblical toponym Lehi (Judges 15:14) and is my suggested Hebrew spelling of the name of Lehi of Jerusalem. Glueck, however, renders the name “Laḥai” and reads the broken text of inscription as follows:

First line: “Šalman, the servant of […]”
Second line: “Laḥai, the ser[vant of …]”
Third line: a partial “Baal” name, perhaps “Baali[s]” (compare Jeremiah 40:14)
Fourth line: an unknown name, perhaps ʾšb^c (Ashba?) or just ʾšb (Ashab?) the ser[vant of]^6

Glueck dated the first three lines of script to a fifth-century BC hand but speculated that the fourth line of script was added at a later date in the fourth century BC. With regard to the name lly, Glueck felt that it must be vocalized as “Laḥai” (pronounced lā-hāi) and that it was primarily a south Semitic name: “The name Laḥai occurs quite
frequently either as a part of a compound, or as a separate name of a deity or a person, particularly in Minaean, Thamudic, and Arabic texts.”7 However, a footnote to Glueck’s view was added by the BASOR editor, William F. Albright, who suggested, “The diminutive vocalization Luḥaii seems preferable.”8 The Luḥaii suggestion will be revisited later in this paper.

As already noted, the first mention of this “Laḥai” inscription in LDS literature was by Hugh Nibley in his series “Lehi in the Desert,” which appeared in the Improvement Era in 1950. Nibley mentioned the find, very briefly, in a single paragraph he wrote about aspects of the name Lehi:

One thing is certain, however: that Lehi is a personal name. Until recently this name was entirely unknown, but now it has turned up at Elath and elsewhere in the south in a form which has been identified by Nelson Glueck with the name Laḥai.9

Nibley did not actually mention that “the name Laḥai” had appeared inscribed upon a pottery sherd, although a small, stylized drawing of Ostracon 2071 (as originally published in BASOR in 1940) appeared with the article. The caption for the drawing mentions that the ostracon had been found at Elath (Tell el-Kheleifeh) and identified part of the inscription as reading “lḥy ‘b[d] . . . ‘Lḥy the servant of . . .”10 Although the drawing did not appear in any of the subsequent book versions of Lehi in the Desert, Nibley’s statement about Glueck’s find remained essentially the same.

In An Approach to the Book of Mormon, Nibley’s study that was published by the Church in 1957 as a Melchizedek Priesthood manual, Nibley mentioned that the name “Laḥai” actually appeared on an ostracon:

The name of Lehi occurs only as part of a place-name in the Bible. And only within the last twenty years a potsherd was found at Elath (where Lehi’s road from Jerusalem meets “the fountain of the Red Sea”) bearing the name of a man, LHI, very clearly written on it. . . . While Glueck supplies the vowels to make the name Laḥai, Paul Haupt in a special study renders it Lehi, and gives it the mysterious meaning of “cheek” which has never been explained.11

A brief allusion to Glueck’s find of the name Lehi appeared in a single sentence in Nibley’s 1964 Improvement Era series, “Since Cumorah”, “Which reminds us that in 1938 [1939] Nelson Glueck first showed Lehi to be an authentic West Semitic name, at home in the borders near the Red Sea.”12 There was no illustration of the ostracon in the Improvement Era “Since Cumorah” series, but a drawing of it did appear in the book edition.13

In all of his published works cited above, Nibley cited only non-Hebrew examples as evidence that the Book of Mormon name Lehi was correctly spelled with the Semitic consonants l-h-y.14 He did not equate the Book of Mormon name with the Hebrew term of the same spelling, namely, from lēḥy, which appears in Judges 15 as a place name meaning “cheek” or “jaw.” He seems to have accepted, without question, Glueck’s rendering of lḥy from Ostracon 2071 as “Laḥai,” rather than Albright’s “Luḥai.”15

I certainly agree with Nibley that the discovery of the three-letter name lḥy on Ostracon 2071 is remarkable in that it demonstrates such a spelling can indeed have been a personal name, thus vindicating the appearance of Lehi as a personal name in the Book of Mormon. In saying this I also agree with Nibley that the Book of Mormon name Lehi was spelled l-h-y. However, in contrast to Nibley’s examples from south Semitic origins, I have suggested (and continue to suggest) that the personal name Lehi is a Hebrew term, equivalent to the place name Lehi in Judges 15, and that it carries the same meaning—“cheek” or “jaw.”16 Lehi was a Jew who had “dwelt at Jerusalem all his days” (1 Nephi 1:4). I do not believe he is likely to have been given a linguistically south Semitic name by his Jewish parents (whether that name be Laḥai or Luḥai), but rather a linguistically Hebrew name—Lehi, pronounced lēḥy.

In this regard, it is important to keep some key facts in mind. Ostracon 2071 (1) was found in a fifth-century BC Edomite material culture context and (2) was inscribed with an Aramaic script. It was not found in a south Arabian context, nor was the script thereon any type of ancient south Arabian script. Edomites spoke a northwest Semitic language more closely related to Hebrew than south Arabian, and geographical Edomite territory was not thought of as Arabian territory. In fact, Edom had always been territorially contiguous with Judah,
and during the Persian period Edomite territory had included the Negev and wilderness areas west of the Jordan rift. In terms of linguistic influences which are likely to have been found in Edomite names, it is just as probable that Jewish/Hebrew names would be found in Edomite Elath as that south Arabian names would be found there. In this regard, it is not at all improbable that the ḥy of Ostracon 2071 could have actually been the Hebrew name pronounced ʾlēḥy—in fact it may be even more plausible than a south Arabian pronunciation.

The Name Lehi on a Papyrus Fragment from Wadi el-Daliyeh

In turning to territory that was clearly influenced by Hebrew, we can now report that Lehi may be identified as a male personal name element from the Samaria Papyri found in Wadi el-Daliyeh, located in the so-called West Bank territory of the land of Israel. Lehi (ʾlḥy, לחי) appears in the compound name ʾblḥy, ʾbḥy, which was probably pronounced ʾav-ʾlḥy or perhaps ʾavi-ʾlḥy. If the name were put into King James English forms it would most likely be Ablehi or Abilehi. The meaning of the name would be either “The Father Is Lehi” or “My Father Is Lehi.”

Before discussing the specific papyrus upon which this name was found, a brief background on the deposition and discovery of the Samaria Papyri is in order. The papyri were found in 1962 in a cave in the desolate desert canyon Wadi el-Daliyeh, located some 20 kilometers north-northwest of Jericho on the edge of the Jordan rift. (At the time, the West Bank area was under the administration of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan—the state of Israel took control of the area in June 1967.) The poorly preserved papyri were discovered by Bedouin of the Taamireh tribe (well known as the finders of the Dead Sea Scrolls near Qumran in 1947). Through the offices of Roland de Vaux of the École biblique et archéologique française in Jerusalem, Paul W. Lapp of the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem (now the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research), and Frank Moore Cross of Harvard University, the papyri were purchased in November 1962 for presentation to the Palestine Archaeological Museum in Jerusalem (now the Rockefeller Museum). Two seasons of excavation at the cave site were carried out by Lapp and the American School in January 1963 and February 1964. Skeletal remains of over 200 bodies were recovered, all apparently killed in the cave in antiquity. Pottery from the fourth century BC was recovered as well. In all, 128 clay seal impressions (bullae), seventy of which were legible, were recovered from the original papyri and in the excavations.

Coins from the cave all dated to the late Persian period, immediately before Alexander’s conquest of Samaria in 332 BC. Cross, who worked on the reconstruction and translation of the texts on the papyri, suggested a historical scenario for the massacre at the el-Daliyeh cave. After having initially ingratiated themselves with Alexander upon his arrival in the region in 332 BC, the Samaritans rebelled and burned alive Alexander’s prefect in Syria. Alexander returned to the city of Samaria and destroyed it, resettling the site as a Macedonian colony. Cross believes the Samaritan leaders responsible for the rebellion fled from Samaria in advance of Alexander’s approach, making their way down the Wadi Farah and into the wilderness to the cave in Wadi el-Daliyeh. A considerable number of families were among the refugees, possibly with some of their slaves, and certainly with their pottery vessels and supply of food. They also brought important documents, including deeds and other recorded transactions, written on papyrus and sealed. The papyri represented transactions recorded throughout the fourth century BC. The Macedonians eventually discovered the hiding place of the Samaritans, probably through betrayal, and killed all those who had fled.

The name Ablehi (for brevity I will use the simplest transliteration for ʾbḥy) appears on the document designated as “WDSP papDeed of Slave Sale F ar” (see photo on p. 14). The badly decayed papyrus roll measures 33.4 cm high (long) by 7.6 cm wide. When unrolled, traces of 12 lines of text were detected written across its width (no writing was found on the back side). Douglas M. Gropp estimates that less than 14 percent of the original text was preserved. The only name preserved is Ablehi, and, remarkably, all five letters of the name are visible. Parts of the last two letters, the h and the y, are missing, but enough remains of both letters that they are positively identifiable. The letter l is prefixed to the name as a preposition indicating the
person being sold in a transaction. Gropp’s reconstruction of the rest of the badly broken text is a typical slave sale pattern, indicating that Ablehi and one other person were sold as slaves by one party to another party for a certain amount of money, witnessed by the governor and prefect. The name Ablehi, with its l prefix, appears as the first word of line 2, which is to say that l appears as the first of the six-letter combination ʾblḥy.

Cross, the first scholar to read or reconstruct and then vocalize the names found in the Samaria Papyri, did not render ʾblḥy in the way I have above. Rather, in a study he originally prepared in 1978–79 that was published by the American Schools of Oriental Research in 2006, Cross expressed the opinion that “the name is probably to be read ʿabi-luḥay, ‘My father is (the divine) Luhay.’” Luhay is the name of an ancient south Arabian god and is the same as the name Luḥai that Albright suggested as a reading for lḥy on Ostracon 2071. Cross offers no comment or explanation as to why the name of an Arabian deity is his preferred reading for the three-letter element lḥy in a Samaritan document, beyond noting that Luhay is a frequent element in Arabic names. Likewise Gropp, without comment or explanation, follows Cross’s reading, except that he spells it with an “i” in English (ʾAbiluhai) rather than a “y.”

In fact, however, the Hebrew nature of the name receives support from its appearance in the Jewish/Aramaic names of the Persian period in Egypt. There the name is written מַלְכִּי, lūḥi. The name need not necessarily be a cultural remnant of ethnic Arabs who were brought to Samaria by Sargon II in the eighth century BC, after the Assyrian deportation of large segments of the Israelite population. Cross himself emphasizes that the number of Hebrew names in the Samaria Papyri is much higher than the number of non-Hebrew names. Of the 69 names Cross notes, 28 featured the Hebrew theophoric element yh or yhw (Yah or Yahu), and another 16 were Hebrew names familiar from the Bible or Hebrew seals. The total number of Hebrew/Israelite names in the Samaria Papyri is 44, as compared to only 25 that Cross views as non-Hebrew. He includes the ʿabi-luḥay reading, with its alleged south Arabian element, in his count of non-Hebrew names, but identified only 2 other names in the corpus of 69 which might possibly contain Arabian elements—[d]wnm and lnr. In such a collection, however, so heavily weighted in favor of Hebrew names, it seems odd that Cross would not at least consider the possibility that the lḥy element of ʾblḥy should be read as the Hebrew lĕḥy rather than the Arabic luḥay. In fact, given that lĕḥy is a well-known geographic name in the Hebrew Bible, it would seem the far more likely reading for lḥy in a corpus of predominantly Hebrew/Israelite names, and this in spite of the fact that it is not a personal name in the Bible.
The pronunciation *lehi* rather than *luhay* would seem to be supported by the Amorite personal name *lalwī-malik*, found in a Middle Bronze Age letter, dated to a thousand years before the time of Lehi.²⁸ The Amorite language was a West Semitic dialect spoken during the Middle Bronze Age and is related to other West Semitic languages, such as Hebrew and Aramaic. This is the only occurrence of the element *lalwī* in a personal name in the cuneiform texts from Mesopotamia. If normal rules of vowel change are assumed, Amorite *lalwī* would become in the Hebrew of later years *lehi*.²⁹ In any case, if the name element *lalwī* is the same element as *llły* in the Samaria Papyri name, then the latter would be pronounced *lehi*. Because this name element is a hapax legomenon in Amorite, it would be foolish to posit any meaning. Suffice it to say, it would not be pronounced *luhay*.³⁰

Ablehi would be typical of Hebrew/Israelite compound father-names, which combine the Hebrew word *vāb* (*av, ḥāl*), meaning “father,” or *vī* (*avi, ʾāv*, *ḥav*), meaning “my father,” with a second word or proper name. Examples of such compound father-names in the Old Testament include Abner (*av-ner*), Absalom (*av-shalom*), Abinadab (*avi-nadav*), and Abimelech (*avi-melekh*). As a Hebrew/Israelite name, Ablehi would join the group of 34 other known compound father-names, 24 of which appear in the Old Testament³¹ and 10 additional names not found in the Bible but which appear on known Hebrew stamps and seals.³²

In any event, whether the *llły* element of the name Ablehi was meant as a reference to “cheek” or “jaw” or as a reference to a father whose name was Lehi, the fact that it appears in a proper name in the Samaria Papyri is a significant piece of evidence in support of the notion that Lehi could be a Hebrew/Israelite proper name, just as it is found in the narrative in 1 Nephi. The occurrence of the name Ablehi in the Samaria Papyri (in addition to the name *llły* on Ostracon 2071) is a second confirming witness that the name Lehi was indeed used as a proper male name in Israel during the Iron Age.

## Conclusion

That the *llły* element of Ablehi was written in Aramaic script of the Persian period, just like the name *llły* on Ostracon 2071, and that the two inscribed names even look very much alike, also seems significant. If, indeed, it is quite plausible that the *llły* element of Ablehi is actually a Hebrew name (in a Samaritan context, north of Judea), then the plausibility of *llły* on Ostracon 2071 being a Hebrew name (in an Edomite context, south of Judea) is enhanced.

It is also an interesting coincidence that similar evidence for Lehi’s wife’s name has turned up in a papyrus document, written in Persian period Aramaic, in the era following the sixth century BC. The female Jewish/Hebrew name Sariah appears in an Aramaic papyrus from the fifth century BC (albeit partially restored by the original publisher). The document is known as C-22 (or Cowley-22), and was found at Elephantine in upper Egypt around the year 1900. The appearance of the name Sariah was first published as a possible example of the Book of Mormon female name Sariah by myself in 1993.³³ The female name Sariah does not appear in the Bible, just as the male name Lehi does not. Yet both appear in the Book of Mormon. That we can now identify both the Jewish/Hebrew names Sariah in the Elephantine Papyri and Lehi in the Samaria Papyri and on Ostracon 2071 represents two significant steps forward in corroborating the authenticity of heretofore unique Book of Mormon names.

## Notes

2. The King James Version of Judges 15:19 has “jaw” (*llły*) and “Lehi” (*llły*) in that one verse.
10. The drawing of Ostracon 2071 appears in Hugh Nibley, “Lehi in the Desert,” part 2, *Improvement Era*, February 1950, 104. It is not clear whether the caption that appeared with the
drawing was prepared by Nibley or by the magazine's editors.

11. Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1957), 251, with notes on p. 407. This book was released in a second edition in 1964 (Deseret Book) and in a third edition (with slight alterations) in 1988; see Hugh Nibley, "Proper Names in the Book of Mormon," in *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 3rd ed., CWHN 6 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 290, 500 n. 31. Why Nibley thought it was "mysterious" that Lehı would mean "cheek" is unclear since this is common knowledge among students of Hebrew. But he may have meant that it was mysterious for a term meaning "cheek" to be considered as a personal name since body parts are rarely used in ancient Hebrew personal names. And Paul Haupt could not have been referring to the name on Ostracon 2071 since the publication by Haupt to which Nibley refers in his notes is dated 1914 ("Heb. lehi, cheek, and lih, jaw," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 33 [1914]: 290–95), and the ostracon was not discovered until 1939.


13. The caption for the drawing of the ostracon in the book editions of *Since Cumorah* was much shorter and less detailed than the caption for the same drawing in "Lehı in the Desert" had been in the *Improvement Era*. And curiously, the drawing in *Since Cumorah* did not appear in context with Nibley's text reference to the Glueck find—it appeared 133 pages later in a discussion on Egyptian names: 193 (1967 ed.), 169 (1988 ed.).

14. When Nibley did his original research, examples of 1-h-y as a name element were to be found only in non-Hebrew contexts. This article will demonstrate, of course, that a Hebrew example from the territory of ancient Israel exists.

15. The pronunciation *luḥai*, as suggested by Albright, seems to be supported by the spelling *luḥ, līḥi, among the Jewish/Aramaic names of the Persian period in Egypt. See Betzalel Porten and Jerome A. Lund, *Aramaic Documents from Egypt: A Key-Word-in-Context Concordance*, ed. Stephen A. Kaufman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 366.


27. Cross, "Personal Names in the Samaria Papyri," 77, 82.
Much like the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham is extant only in its English translation (and in other translations based on the English text). In such a situation, the transliterated words in the text’s onomasticon take on added significance as representing possible fossilized remnants of the original text. Although the Book of Abraham contains a number of easily recognizable Hebrew words and names, many of the names in the book are obscure and have a less obvious derivation. The first of these words to appear in the text is Elkenah. In this article, I will explore the possible derivations of this word and then articulate some of the ramifications the most likely derivations would have for understanding the Book of Abraham generally.

Elkenah in the Book of Abraham

The name Elkenah appears twelve times in the Book of Abraham. The first three occurrences appear in the explanations of the figures in Facsimile 1. Figure 3 therein is identified as “the idolatrous priest of Elkenah attempting to offer up Abraham as a sacrifice,” referring to the person standing at the left of the altar. Figure 4 shows “the altar of sacrifice by the
idolatrous priests, standing before the gods of Elkenah, Libnah, Mahmackrah, Korash and Pharaoh,” referring to the lion couch, the four canopic jars, and the crocodile of the facsimile. Figure 5 is labeled “the idolatrous god of Elkenah,” referring to the falcon-headed jar, generally understood in its Egyptian context as Qebehsenuf, one of the four sons of Horus.

Turning to the text itself, we note that Elkenah is mentioned an additional seven times in Abraham 1, at verses 6, 7(bis), 13, 17, 20, and 29, and again in Abraham 2:13 and 3:20. The first three of these occurrences appear in the following quotation from Abraham 1:5–7:

My fathers, having turned from their righteousness, and from the holy commandments which the Lord their God had given unto them, unto the worshiping of the gods of the heathen, utterly refused to hearken to my voice; for their hearts were set to do evil, and were wholly turned to the god of Elkenah, and the god of Libnah, and the god of Mahmackrah, and the god of Korash, and the god of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; therefore they turned their hearts to the sacrifice of the heathen in offering up their children unto these dumb idols, and hearkened not unto my voice, but
endeavored to take away my life by the hand of the priest of Elkenah. The priest of Elkenah was also the priest of Pharaoh.

This text mentions both “the god of Elkenah” and “the priest of Elkenah,” who also does double duty as “the priest of Pharaoh.” The principal evils involved in the worship of this and the other “heathen” gods are idolatry and child sacrifice. Abraham speaks against the practice of child sacrifice but is rebuffed. Verse 10 of Abraham 1 tells of the “thank-offering of a child,” and verse 11 tells us of three virgin girls who were sacrificed by the priest of Elkenah. According to verse 12, the priests also attempted to sacrifice Abraham, apparently in part as a response to his speaking out against the practice, his father having been an instigator of the attempted sacrifice (v. 30). Abraham lifted up his voice unto the Lord, who filled him with the vision of the Almighty and sent the angel of his presence to unloose Abraham’s bands (v. 15). In verse 16 the angel speaks as if he were the Lord (or possibly this was the Lord himself), announcing to Abraham that he has heard him and has come down to deliver him into a strange land. The angel/Lord announces that the fathers have turned their hearts away from him to worship the god of Elkenah and the other idolatrous gods, and that for this reason he has come to destroy the priest who sought to take Abraham’s life (v. 17). Verse 20 tells us that this took place in the land of Ur, of Chaldea. And so the Lord breaks down the altar of Elkenah, and of the gods of the land, and utterly destroys them and smites the priest so that he dies. Finally, verse 29 reports that following the death of the priest of Elkenah, there was a famine in the land, in response to which Abraham follows God’s direction and starts for the land of Canaan (Abraham 2:4).

Was Elkenah the name of a god, a place, or a person? Each appearance of the name Elkenah in the text is preceded by “the god of,” “the gods of” (usually part of a sequence), “the priest of,” or “the altar of.” There is an inherent ambiguity in the English genitive particle of, and Hugh Nibley has suggested that, instead of the name of a god, Elkenah could be the name of a person or place. While I would acknowledge this as a possibility, in my view, the most natural way to read the text is to take “the god of Elkenah” as an epexegetical genitive (i.e., Elkenah is the god), in which case “the priest of Elkenah” would be the priest dedicated to the god of that particular cult. While either “the god [worshipped by the person] Elkenah” or “the god [worshipped at the place] Elkenah” is conceivably possible, and while I do believe that this is the correct way to read the text in the case of “the god of Pharaoh,” these alternatives in the case of “the god of Elkenah” strike me as unduly strained. In particular, I believe the language of verse 20, “and the Lord broke down the altar of Elkenah, and of the gods of the land,” equates Elkenah with the other gods of the land (in this instance not separately named as was the case previously). Indeed, since Elkenah is specifically named here and the other gods are not, and since Elkenah is always listed first (even to the point of requiring right-to-left numbering of the four gods before the altar in Facsimile 1), Elkenah would appear to be not only a god, but the preeminent god in the cultus described in the story.

At this point, let us stop and summarize the main points we can derive from the text concerning Elkenah:

- Although the name conceivably could refer to a person or place, it most likely refers to a god.
- Elkenah represents the chief god in the cult of the fathers against which Abraham argued.
- Child sacrifice was offered to this god, which was evil in the sight of the Lord. Apart from idolatrous representation, this seems to have been the principal fault of this deity from Abraham’s perspective.
- A priest of this god attempted to sacrifice Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees.
- The priest of Elkenah was also the priest of Pharaoh.
- Elkenah was represented on Facsimile 1 by the falcon-headed canopic jar of Qebehsenuf, one of the sons of Horus.
- The Lord broke the bands that bound Abraham, broke down the altar of Elkenah, destroyed the gods, and killed the priest of Elkenah.
- Following the death of the priest of Elkenah, there was a famine in the land that necessitated Abraham’s removal to the land of Canaan.

The name is spelled different ways in the extant Book of Abraham manuscripts. The distribution of these variant spellings is set forth in the accompanying table:
Frederick G. Williams seems to have started spelling the name with an -er ending, but then correcting to an -ah ending for most of his occurrences. Warren Parrish and W. W. Phelps, perhaps following the beginning of the Williams document, retained the -er ending. Willard Richards gives the form of the name as it was published in the *Times and Seasons*, and given that Joseph would have approved that text prior to publication, this is presumably the form of the name as Joseph intended it to be presented in the Book of Abraham.

### The Name Elkenah

With that background, we can begin to approach the name itself. We are fortunate to have a partial Rosetta Stone to aid us in our investigation. The El- element of Elkenah almost certainly represents the Semitic word for deity, ʾel (or *ilu* in Akkadian). Further, in the Bible as elsewhere, Semitic El is very commonly modified in some fashion, which appears to be the case here as well. Based on known uses of the word El, I will suggest six (not necessarily exhaustive) possibilities for how we might take the -kenah element. As a general matter, El could be either the proper name of the god or the generic Semitic term for god. In either case, the following -kenah element could be in apposition with the El- element or in a genitival relationship, or acting as an attributive adjective or participle, a verb construed with El, or a pronominal suffix of some sort.

It would appear that the six most likely possible linguistic structures for this name are as follows:

A. El could be used as the generic appellative god with a divine name following in apposition—that is, “the god Kenah.” This usage is, however, relatively rare (one parallel being ʾil Haddu “the god Haddu”).  

B. Elkenah could be a theophoric name predicated some quality of the El- compound—that is, “El is kenah” or “El kenah [as a verb],” whatever kenah might mean. For instance, Abraham’s chief servant was named Eliezer, “God of help” or “my God is help” (Genesis 15:2). This type of structure would only work if Elkenah were the name of a human being (or an angel) and not the name of the god himself.

C. The -kenah element could refer to a place or people. In this event, the name would mean “El of Kenah,” where Kenah is a land, country, or ethnic designation. An analogous form in the Old Testament would be ʾEl Yisrael “the God of Israel” from Psalm 68.

D. The -kenah element could refer to a person. In this event, the name would mean “El of Kenah,” where Kenah is a human being. An analogous form in the Old Testament would be *elohim Abraham* “the God of Abraham,” as in Genesis 31:53.

E. The -kenah element could be an epithet modifying the El- element. Such epithets are common in the Old Testament. Examples of El epithets include the following:
El Shaddai  El Almighty
El Elyon  El the Highest One
El Olam  El the Everlasting One
El Bethel  El of Bethel (i.e., the El revealed at the shrine Bethel)
El Roi  El of Vision (or Divining)
El Berith  El of the Covenant

F. Kenah could be the name of a deceased king. There is evidence of a Canaanite belief in postmortal divinization.13 The Ugaritic king list precedes each name with the word ʾl, “god.”13

With this brief survey of some of the possibilities inherent in an El combination, let us now turn our attention to six concrete proposals for how the name Elkenah should be understood in the Book of Abraham (see appendix 1 for a summary):

1. ʾEl qanaḥ “God has created.” This name occurs a number of times in the Old Testament as a personal name, mostly with reference to Korahite Levites (see appendix 2), transliterated in the King James Version as Elkanah. The name also occurs a number of times in the Old Testament as Elkenah in the Book of Abraham (see appendix 1 for a summary):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>El Combination</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>El Shaddai</td>
<td>El Almighty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Elyon</td>
<td>El the Highest One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Olam</td>
<td>El the Everlasting One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Bethel</td>
<td>El of Bethel (i.e., the El revealed at the shrine Bethel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Roi</td>
<td>El of Vision (or Divining)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Berith</td>
<td>El of the Covenant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The precise meaning of the name is disputed because there is a significant scholarly debate over whether the Hebrew verb qānah principally means “to create” or “to acquire.”15 In any event, as a theophoric name (pattern B), this name would work only if one were willing to take Elkenah in the Book of Abraham as the name of a person, as in “the god [worshipped by the person] Elkenah.” Pace Nibley, I do not believe that this is a correct reading of the Book of Abraham; I therefore would discount this name as a possible solution.16 It would also be difficult to account for the /a/ to /e/ vowel shift in the second syllable suggested by Book of Abraham “Elkenah.”

2. ʾEl qeni “El is mighty.” This was the first of three suggestions offered by Hugh Nibley in his Improvement Era series17 and involves a combination of the Semitic El with an Egyptian element qen- or qeni, which means “mighty, powerful, brave.” The form would be analogous to Amon-qeni(s), “Amon is mighty.” Although Nibley devotes two columns of text to explaining this suggestion, which appears to have been his favorite, I would discount it for the same reason I would discount ʾEl qanaḥ above; I do not believe Elkenah in the Book of Abraham is meant to refer to a human being.

3. ʾIl Kinaḥṣi “El of Canaan.” This was the second of Nibley’s three suggestions, and one that I came to myself independently. Although Nibley devoted only a few sentences to it, I believe it is actually by far the strongest of his proposals.

On the surface, however, this might appear to be one of the weaker proposals, since in Hebrew Canaan is spelled with a second n: Knʿn, or Kenaʿan with Masoretic vocalization (accented on the second syllable). Egyptian also prefers the second n with the spellings Kynʿw, Kynʿ, and Knʿn. The name is also found syllabically written in Akkadian as Ki-na-ah-num gentilic, with the pharyngeal consonant represented by h, and as Ki-in-a-nim,18 with the pharyngeal unrepresented. In cuneiform texts from Tell El Amarna and Bogazkoy, however, the following spellings are attested: Ki-na-ah-ni, Ki-na-ah-na, Ki-na-ah-hi, Ki-na-a-ah-hi and Ki-na-hi (see image on p. 27).19 Ugaritic also reflects both spellings with the final -n and spellings without it, as in marrʾm MAṬki-na-hi, “men of the land of Canaan.” The appearance of the (normalized) reduced base Kinaḥṣ- indicates that the final -n in the other examples is an affixational morpheme (i.e., a grammatical element).20 The germinate (doubled) final consonant in Kinaḥṣ is a common feature of the Akkadian transcription of non-Akkadian words and geographic names, as in Amurru, Simurru, Mitanni (nominative Mitanna), and Hilakku.21 Of the dozen occurrences of “Canaan” in the Tell El Amarna letters, those originating in Canaan itself (i.e., Tyre and Byblos) use the -n affix, but those originating in Syria and Mesopotamia do not.22

In the Greek of the Septuagint as well as in the New Testament, Canaan is transliterated Xαβααν Chanaan, based on the Hebrew spelling. There are other Greek sources, however, that spell the name Chna [Xva chi-nu-alpha]. For instance, Hecataeus of Miletus affirmed that Phoenicia was called Chna.23 Philo of Byblos in his Phoenician History identifies a certain Chna as the first to carry the name “Phoenician,”24 and Herodianus Grammaticus (second century AD) and Stephanus of Byzantium (sv. Chnā) report that the Phoenicians were formerly called...
These Greek sources appear to represent a continuity with the Akkadian reduced form *Kinaḫḫu*. The etymology of Canaan has been somewhat elusive. Scholars have moved from Semitic, to non-Semitic, and back to Semitic assumptions concerning the origin of the name. Ephraim A. Speiser argued that *Kinaḫḫu* had a Hurrian origin, consisting of *kina* and the Hurrian suffix -(ḫ)ḫu “belonging to.” The meaning of the *kina* element was somewhat uncertain. One possibility was that it meant “reed,” with the word itself meaning “land of reeds” (compare Byblos, so named for being an exporter of papyrus, which was made from reeds, whence the Greek word for “book” [*bublos*] and English “bible”). A second possibility was that *kina* meant red purple dye (derived from a certain type of shell common on the seacoast), which seemed to be supported by cuneiform texts from Nuzi. On this theory the occasional -ḫḫu affix would be the Hurrian definite article or a determinative suffix, and *Kinaḫḫu* would mean “Belonging to (the land of) Purple.” This etymology was appealing because it suggested a continuity with the Greek word for the Phoenicians, *Phoinikē* (from *phoinix*, “red purple”), and it also explained the use of Hebrew *knʿny* for “merchant.” But it has since been shown that the Hurrian word had a different history than that posited by Speiser, and improved attestation of third-millennium-bc geographic names from Syria-Palestine has lessened the likelihood of a Hurrian etymology for Canaan. For instance, the ethnicon Canaanite is now attested in a text from Mari as “*ki-na-ah-nu*.” It now appears that the words for “purple” and “merchant”
took their names from the region, rather than giving their names to the region. The meaning of the word now most likely must be sought in the Semitic lexicon, in which event the -n affix is not a Hurrian grammatical element at all, but an attested, though rare, Semitic noun-forming suffix.

If, as most scholars now believe, the word is Semitic in origin, it almost certainly derives from the root *KN- (“to bend the knee, to bow”), with an affirmative -n sometimes added. One possible Semitic etymology for the word, suggested long ago by Wilhelm Gesenius, is “lowland” (as opposed to the higher country of Aram to the east), but this is problematic because the root does not have the intransitive meaning “to be low.” The most recent and widely accepted Semitic etymology for Canaan was put forward by Michael Astour. He noted that *KN- in Biblical Hebrew [kana'] is found only in the niphal verb stem (“to be subdued,” “to lower oneself”) and in the hiphil (“to subdue”). In Aramaic, the verb [kena'] also occurs in the qal, “to bow down, bend.” Arabic kana'a has several usages, including (1) “to fold wings and descend to earth” (said of a large bird) and (2) “to bow, to incline toward the horizon” (said of a star). As applied to the sun, the word would be exactly equivalent to Latin occidere. Therefore, Astour takes the derived form Kina’u as signifying the “Occident,” the “Land of Sunset,” or “Westland.” This is the West Semitic equivalent of Akkadian Amurru “West.” In Amarna-era texts and in the Bible, the terms Canaan and Amurru are largely synonymous. It is interesting in this connection that the sons of Horus stood for the four cardinal directions and that Qebehsenuf, which represents “the idolatrous god of Elkenah” on Facsimile 1, figure 5 (i.e., “the idolatrous god of Elkenah”), as Duamutef, who represented the East. Since the Kenites lay to the east of Heliopolis, this seemed to him like a natural fit. The hawk-headed figure is usually not, however, Duamutef, but Qebehsenuf, and this is the god representing the West, not the East, as described above. Therefore, a significant portion of the rationale for this proposal was based on a mistake.

4. ’El Qini “El of the Kenites.” This was the third of Nibley’s three suggestions. The Kenites are first mentioned at Genesis 15:19 (as part of a list of peoples God would dispossess to give their land to Abraham’s descendants) and were understood to be descendants of Cain [Qayin], although in fact their name probably refers to their metalworking craft. These were desert nomads who lived to the east of Egypt and were generally viewed favorably by the Israelites. Moses’s father-in-law, Jethro, was a Kenite. Part of the rationale for this proposal, apart from a mild linguistic resemblance, is based on something of a misunderstanding. Apparently following Klaus Baer, Nibley took the hawk-headed jar of Facsimile 1, figure 5 (i.e., “the idolatrous god of Elkenah”), as Duamutef, who represented the East. Since the Kenites lay to the east of Heliopolis, this seemed to him like a natural fit. The hawk-headed figure is usually not, however, Duamutef, but Qebehsenuf, and this is the god representing the West, not the East, as described above. Therefore, a significant portion of the rationale for this proposal was based on a mistake.

5. Il-gi-na (meaning uncertain). John Lundquist has suggested this as a possibility. It is number 407 on a list of 3,800 Mesopotamian deities. Lundquist suggests that the gi syllable can also be read as ki, and the name is accompanied by the Sumerian DINGIR determinative, indicating that this is the name of a god. This is certainly a possibility; since, however, we know nothing else about this deity, it is rather difficult to evaluate how strong a possibility it might be (apart from linguistic similarity).

6. ’El qoneh “El the Creator.” This would be a hypocoristic form of the well-attested Canaanite epithet ʾl qn arṣ, “El, Creator of the Earth,” which is itself a shorter version of the later and longer form of the epithet found at Genesis 14:19, 22: ʾel ʾelyon qoneh shamayim weʿāres ʾEl Most High, Creator of the Heaven and the Earth.” In a Hittite myth borrowed from Canaan prior to 1200 BC, El is called “Elkunirša” (the Hittite spelling of West Semitic ʾl qn ʾars). This El was the husband of the goddess Asherah (= Ashertu) and lived in a tent at the headwaters of the Euphrates (= Mala River). This name appears in the Phoenician-Hittite bilingual inscription of Azitawadda. This same epithet (ʾl qn ʾars, partially restored) was found in a three-line inscription dating to the eighth or seventh century BC by...
Nahman Avigad in the Jewish quarter of Jerusalem in 1971. There is a substantial body of literature on this name.

The similarity in form of this name to proposal 1 is due to the fact that the same verb is used in both names, but here the verb is an attributive participle. While the consonants work well, the vowels are a weakness of this theory. The participial form in Phoenician and Ugaritic would be qaniy(u) (where the final –u is the case ending). Due to the Canaanite and other sound shifts, that participial form comes into Hebrew as qoneh. In neither case do the vowels mesh well with kenah, with its short initial vowel followed by an /a/ quality second vowel. Of course, the Book of Abraham was translated by an inspired rather than an academic translation process, and it is possible that the representation of the name in English is but an approximation of the original, ancient form.

In assessing these six proposals, for the reasons I have indicated, I would consider numbers 1, 2, and 4 as the least likely possibilities. Number 5 is possible, but in the absence of further information it cannot be effectively assessed. In my view, the strongest proposals are numbers 3 and 6. Based on present information, however, it may be difficult to select between these options. This is because number 3 is based on the Semitic root *KNʿ, and number 6 on *QNH, and the English element -kenah in the Book of Abraham is not sufficiently precise to distinguish between these two roots. Number 6 gets points for being based on a strongly attested El epithet. Also, some Book of Abraham manuscripts spell Elkenah as “Elkkaner,” with an “r” ending, which is at least suggestive of the plene form of the epithet. On the other hand, while Kinahli is not to my knowledge attested with an El combination, the patterns “El of [place-name]” and “[god] of Canaan” are both attested. Kinahli itself is attested earlier than number 6, and this proposal does not require that we posit a hypocoristic form. Also, in my view, the vowels work better for proposal 3 than for any other (including proposal 1). All things considered, it seems to me that we have a draw between proposals 3 and 6, at least pending further research. For many purposes, however, our inability to decide conclusively between these two proposals will not matter, because both have reference to the same deity: Canaanite El.

Elkenah as Canaanite El

Does an equation of Canaanite El with Elkenah fit what we know of Elkenah from the Book of Abraham text? I believe that it does. First of all, we suggested that Elkenah must be a reference to a god and not a man. We know that Elkenah could be a human’s name from biblical attestations, but we have now also demonstrated that Elkenah works very well as the name of a god.

Second, we deduced that this god was likely the chief god of its pantheon. El in fact was the supreme deity of the Canaanite pantheon. El was the father and creator of gods and men. He was perceived as an aged patriarch, wise in judgment, the king of heaven, and chief of the council of the gods. He was a tent dweller and lived in the far north. His patriarchal authority was won in the ancient wars of the gods as a great warrior. His principal wife was Asherah, mother and creatress of the gods, although his other sisters Anat and Astarte also served as consorts. His vigorous procreative powers populated heaven and earth.

Third, we saw that Abraham’s experience with this god took place at Ur of the Chaldees. If we can assume the northern location for Ur in Syria, the presence of a Canaanite cult (together with some Egyptian syncretism, seen in the priest of Elkenah also acting as the priest of Pharaoh) in that area is not surprising. El was not only the supreme deity in Canaan, but in Syria-Palestine generally. Lundquist reports that the chief deities at Ebla were Dagan, Baal, Sipish (or Shemesh), Kemash, Ashtar (the male version of Ishtar), and Hadda. Syncretistic Canaanite versions of these deities also existed (with Dagan being the Syrian equivalent of El).

If proposal 3 is correct, this may explain why it was necessary to qualify the name El with “of Canaan” or “of the West,” in order clearly to distinguish this from another El cult. If proposal 6 is correct, note that the myths relating to this deity place him at the headwaters of the Euphrates, which is in the general area of the northern location for Ur.

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, an identification of Elkenah as Canaanite El would help to explain the presence of child sacrifice in the Book of Abraham account. In 1969, William J. Adams Jr. published an article in BYU Studies entitled “Human Sacrifice and the Book of Abraham.” At the time Adams was a graduate student...
in Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Old Testament languages at Hebrew Union College. Adams showed Facsimile 1 to some of his fellow students in Assyriology, who immediately claimed that there was no evidence the Babylonians ever practiced human sacrifice. This led Adams to look into the matter; his interest in the topic was further spurred with the recovery of the original of Facsimile 1 from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Adams found that, while there was a widespread scholarly assumption against Babylonian human sacrifice, certain scholars remained uncommitted either way. Looking into the evidence himself, he did find some suggestive items from four sources: (1) circumstantial evidence from archaeological digs, (2) comments in ancient written texts, (3) human sacrifices as pictured on cylinder seals, and (4) the behavior of other Semitic peoples regarding the practice of human sacrifice. Adams assumed that Ur of the Chaldees was in southern Mesopotamia and therefore assumed that evidence for human sacrifice in the Book of Abraham should come from Babylonian sources. Most of the evidence Adams found was either subject to alternative explanations or apparently based on influence from western Semitic religions.

If we assume a northern location for Ur and take Elkenah as Canaanite El, then human sacrifice in the Book of Abraham is no longer a difficulty. While Babylonian (and Egyptian) evidence of human sacrifice of the type portrayed in Abraham 1 may be somewhat limited, scholars generally agree that human sacrifice was a long-accepted practice in Canaanite religion. The Old Testament preserves a number of allusions to Canaanite practices of human and child sacrifice, such as Deuteronomy 12:31; Psalm 106:37–39; Isaiah 66:3; Micah 6:7, and the numerous references to the Molech cult (including Leviticus 18:21; 20:2; 2 Kings 3:27; 16:3; 17:17, 31; and 23:10; Jeremiah 7:31–32; 32:35; and Ezekiel 16:20–21). The Akedah (“binding” of Isaac) in Genesis 22 likely had a Canaanite background. It was El among the gods who sacrificed his own children, Yadid and Mot. Classical sources and archaeological discoveries attest to human sacrifice in the continuum from Canaanite to Phoenician to Punic religion, with the popularity of child sacrifice at Carthage being dependent on an El cult. If Elkenah was Canaanite El, then the feature of child sacrifice in the Book of Abraham fits that cult very well indeed.

Although the Molech cult spoken of in the Bible, which is a particular manifestation of the long-standing Canaanite penchant for child sacrifice, postdates the time of Abraham, it does have some indirect relevance to the Book of Abraham. Some scholars, notably Moshe Weinfeld, have questioned whether the cult really involved child sacrifice, preferring to see the key expression “to pass through the fire” as a simple dedication to the god. Most scholars, however, acknowledge that the cult did indeed involve the actual killing of children. A second issue is whether Molech should be taken as the name of a god or simply as the name of an offering, as Otto Eissfeldt argued in 1935. Although there is in fact a Punic term mulk that means “offering,” most scholars believe that the Old Testament references to Molech are to an actual deity. A third issue is the identification of this deity. There have been many proposals, but the most widely held view today equates the god with the Mlk resident at ‘ttīt mentioned in the Ras Shamra tablets (Malik in Akkadian texts), a god of the netherworld.

It has sometimes been supposed that human sacrifice to Molech should be identified with the offering of the firstborn male to Yahweh mentioned in the Pentateuch. In distinguishing these practices, scholars have pointed out that the Canaanite sacrifices were not limited to the firstborn, nor were they limited to one child only per family, nor were they limited to sons, as the sources speak repeatedly of offering daughters as well as sons. It is interesting in this light that the Book of Abraham mentions the sacrifice of three daughters, which thus accords with known Canaanite practices.

**Conclusion**

We began by examining the Book of Abraham text to see what it tells us about the figure Elkenah. Based on an assumption that the El-element in the name is Semitic ʾēl, we identified a number of possible linguistic structures for an ancient El combination. We then reviewed six concrete proposals for Elkenah, concluding that the strongest possibilities, “El of Canaan” and “El the Creator,” both point in the direction of the same deity: Canaanite El.
This deity compares favorably with the information set forth in the Book of Abraham text regarding Elkenah.\(^7\) In particular, the type of sacrifice described in Abraham 1 fits a cultic setting in Syro-Palestinian or Canaanite territory much more readily than it fits a Mesopotamian or Assyro-Babylonian scenario. More to the point, the scene on Facsimile 1, with its representation of a human sacrifice on an Egyptian lion couch, fits extremely well with Egyptian Middle Kingdom evidence for the cultic ritual of human sacrifice.\(^7\) Although there is much more work to be done (including similar studies of the other names in the Book of Abraham onomasticon), both the name *Elkenah* and the cult described in the text seem to point to a Syro-Palestinian context for Abraham 1. Consistent with Lundquist’s study, I believe that future research should focus on this region as a prime location for the possible setting of the text.

**APPENDIX 1**

**Summary of Proposed Derivations of Elkenah**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transliteration(s)</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Language(s)</th>
<th>Structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>Ilu-qana</em>; <em>ʾEl qanah</em></td>
<td>God has created [a son]</td>
<td>Akkadian; Hebrew</td>
<td>(B) Theophoric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <em>ʾEl qeni</em></td>
<td>El is mighty</td>
<td>[Semitic]/Egyptian</td>
<td>(B) Theophoric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <em>Il Kinaḥḥi</em>; <em>El Chna</em></td>
<td>El of Canaan</td>
<td>Akkadian; Greek transliteration</td>
<td>(C) God of [place/people]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <em>ʾEl Qini</em></td>
<td>El of the Kenites</td>
<td>[Semitic]</td>
<td>(C) God of [place/people]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. <em>ʾIl-gi-na</em></td>
<td>[uncertain; possibly “God of Regular Offering”]</td>
<td>Sumerian</td>
<td>[uncertain; possibly (E) God + epithet]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Name Elkanah in the Old Testament

| 1. Son of Korah (and great-grandson of Levi) | Exodus 6:24 |
| 2. A Korahite Levite (possibly the same as 1) | 1 Chronicles 6:23, 25, 36 |
| 3. A Korahite Levite, descended from 2 | 1 Chronicles 6:26, 35 |
| 4. A Korahite Levite, descended from 3 and father of Samuel | 1 Chronicles 6:27, 34; 1 Samuel 1–2 (8 occurrences) |
| 5. A Korahite Levite who was one of David’s warriors at Ziklag | 1 Chronicles 12:6 |
| 6. A Levite who was one of two doorkeepers for the ark of the covenant | 1 Chronicles 15:23 |
| 7. A high official in the court of Ahaz, assassinated by Zichri, an Ephraimite warrior | 2 Chronicles 28:7 |
| 8. A Levite who was the ancestor of Berechiah son of Asa, who settled in Jerusalem after returning from the Babylonian exile | 1 Chronicles 9:16 |

Adapted from Ronald Youngblood, “Elkanah,” in ABD, 2:475–76.

Notes
A draft of this article was posted on the Internet at BCC Papers 2/2 (2007) at bycommonconsent.com.

1. Paul Y. Hoskisson, “An Introduction to the Relevance of and a Methodology for a Study of the Proper Names of the Book of Mormon,” in By Study and Also by Faith, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 2:126–35, although focused on the Book of Mormon, provides useful methodological comments that can be applied to the study of the Book of Abraham onomasticon as well.

2. In Abraham 2:13, “gods of Elkenah” is not used as part of a sequence. I would read that as a further evidence that Elkenah was the chief deity of the pantheon, preeminent among the gods.

3. Note that in the usage of the Hebrew Bible, the expression “altar of” can be followed by the material of which the altar is composed (“altar of stones,” “altar of gold”), the purpose of the altar (“altar of incense”), or the deity to whom the altar is dedicated (“altar of the Lord,” “altar of Baal’). This last type of occurrence is attested at Leviticus 17:6; Deuteronomy 12:27; 16:21; 26:4; 27:6; Joshua 9:27; 22:19; 28–29; Judges 6:25; 28, 30; 1 Kings 8:22, 54; 18:30; 2 Kings 23:9; 2 Chronicles 6:12; 8:12; 15:8; 29:19, 21, 33:15–16; 35:16; Nehemiah 10:34; Malachi 2:13. The expression “altar of X” is never used to refer to a human being who owns or has constructed the altar.


5. Stephen E. Thompson, “Egyptology and the Book of Abraham,” Dialogue 28/1 (1995): 156 n. 66, correctly reads “the god of Elkenah” as “the god Elkenah,” but then assumes “the god of Pharaoh” must mean “the god Pharaoh” based on consistency of usage. Nibley made the opposite argument; he (correctly, in my view) observed that, since Pharaoh is a human king and is consistently represented as such in the text, “the god of Pharaoh” most likely means “the god worshipped by Pharaoh,” and then argued based on consistency of usage that “the god of Elkenah” means “the god worshipped by Elkenah,” as discussed above. I believe both of these scholars are wrong to assume consistency of usage. I believe Thompson is correct vis-à-vis Elkenah (Thompson points out that the reference in Abraham 1:7 to a “priest of Elkenah” and not a “priest of the god of Elkenah” supports this reading), but Nibley is correct vis-à-vis Pharaoh (there are a number of references to Pharaoh in the text, in which he is consistently portrayed as a human king and not in his divinized aspect). This reading is confirmed by Abraham 1:13: “and it stood before the gods of Elkenah, Libnah, Mahmackrah, Korah, and also a god like unto that of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.” The genitive with the first four names is epexegetic, meaning that they were themselves gods, but the construction is modified when it comes to describing the god worshipped by Pharaoh, a human king. Further support for this reading occurs at Abraham 1:17, which mentions “the god of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.”

7. Nibley’s emphasis in his Improvement Era series (now reprinted in An Approach to the Book of Abraham, 313–19) was to lay out as many different possibilities as he could, without necessarily choosing the strongest among them. It remains for those who follow him to sift through the many tantalizing leads he provided and make these kinds of judgments.

8. In manuscript Ab5a, Willard Richards spells the three occurrences of the name in the explanations to Facsimile 1 as Elkennah. The manuscript designations are those used by Brian M. Hauglid in his forthcoming textual history of the Book of Abraham. These sigla relate to the traditional designations as follows: Ab2 = KEPA 2; Ab3 = KEPA 3; Ab4 = KEPA 1; and Ab5 = KEPA 4.


10. There is often an ambiguity in ancient Hebrew theophoric names reflecting a mediial yod, which could be either a first person pronominal suffix or an archaic genitive. So, for example, the name Melchizedek could mean either “My king is righteousness” or “King of righteousness.”

11. Numerous other El epithets exist, such as the following examples from the Old Testament: el de’oth “God of Knowledge” (1 Samuel 2:3), el negamoth “God of Vengeance” (see Psalm 94:1), and el gemuloth “God of Recompenses” (Jeremiah 51:56), as well as these examples from the Ras Shamra Tablets: il spu (Illu Sapuni “The gods of Mount Sapuna”), ilib (Illu’ibi “The God-of-the-Father”), il ddmn (Illa Dadmina “Gods-of-the-Land-of-Aleppo”), il lb-ln (Illa LB-]N “Gods of Labana”), and il bt (Ilia-Beti “God-of-the-House”). See the Ugaritic deity lists in Dennis Pardee, Ritual and Cult at Ugarit (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 11–24.


16. Critics typically assume that the Book of Abraham is a nineteenth-century production and therefore claim that Joseph Smith simply adapted the name Elkennah from the biblical precedents. See, for example, newsgroups.derkeiler.com/Archive/Sec/soc.religion.mormon/2005-09/100763.html (accessed 17 March 2010). While this is of course possible, it is my intention in this article to explore openly the possibility of an ancient origin for that book without making any such a priori assumption.


18. The word at the end of these words is called mimation and falls into disuse after the Old Babylonian period.


22. As a geographic name, Kinaḥi usually appears with an -i genitive ending.

23. On the linguistic tendency toward the reduction of final double consonants to single consonants, see Zellig S. Harris, Development of the Canaanite Dialects (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1939), 76.


27. Schmitz, “Canaan (Place),” 1:829.


34. Jeremiah 10:17 reads as follows: “Gather up thy wares out of the land, O inhabitant of the fortress.” The King James Version rendering “wares” of the hapax legomenon kini’a is supported by the Targums [shorta] and by Symmachus [emporia]. The Septuagint, however, has simply hypostasis, here evidently designating any “bundle, load, or burden set down from the shoulder or an animal back to the ground,” thus showing how the word derives from *KNW. See Astour, “Origin of the Terms,” 347 n. 17.

35. That the name was originally a generic term such as “the West” is suggested by the fact that it often appears with the definite article the (especially Egyptian p), i.e., “the Canaan.”


37. Thompson, “Egyptology and the Book of Abraham,” 152, in a misguided attempt to deny Joseph Smith even so much as a lucky guess, tries too hard to rebut this point. See the discussion of Thompson’s article in Kevin L. Barney, “The Facsimiles and Semitic Adaptation of Existing Sources,”


39. To summarize, the attested Akkadian forms reflect two developments, which are both easily predictable and actually attested in the later Hebrew and Greek forms: (1) the shift of mimation and (2) the reduction of the final double consonant to a single consonant. The form Elkenah in the Book of Abraham reflects two additional linguistic developments, which are both easily predictable and actually attested in the later Hebrew and Greek forms: (1) the shift from Akkadian to e or schwa and (2) the dropping of the case endings. If proposal 3 is correct, then the only remaining ambiguity in Elkenah is whether the final -h represents the pharyngeal consonant or is simply to be taken with the preceding a vowel.


44. Lundquist overstates this possibility. The GI5 sign is the KI sign and the GI sign is also the KI2 sign, but they are not as interchangeable as they might appear. Sumerian gi-na = Akkadian gi-utu “regular offering”; see Rykke Borger, Meso potamisches Zeichensystem (Münster: Ullstein-Verlag, 2004), 280; Chicago Assyrian Dictionary G 80–82.

45. I am uncertain as to which LDS scholar deserves credit for first suggesting this connection. Stephen D. Ricks makes the suggestion in John Gee and Stephen D. Ricks, “Historical Plausibility: The Historicity of the Book of Abraham as a Case Study,” in Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2001), 75. The suggestion was also made in W. V. Smith, A Joseph Smith Commentary on the Book of Abraham, at www.boap.org/LDS/BOAP/SecondEd/index.html, p. 22 of commentary (accessed 25 March 2010). I also found a significant amount of information on this subject in the archives of the ANE Listserv at the University of Chicago for 23 June 1998 (volume 1998, number 171); John Tvedtnes of the Neil A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship at BYU was one of the posters in that thread and had significant information on this ephept at his fingertips, which suggests that he may also have known about this proposal at that time. The archive is available at o.u.chicago.edu/research/libby/an/e/digest/1998/v1998.n171 (accessed 17 March 2010). Of course, another scholar may have noted this possibility even earlier, or perhaps several scholars noted the connection independently.


47. For the Phoenician version, see Herbert Donner and Walfgang Röllig, Kanaaäischen und Aramäischen Inschriften (Weibaden: Harrassowitz, 1966), 26 A. III, line 18 (p. 37). Tvedtnes points out that there are Luvin correspondences for this title, on which see Emmanuel Laroche, “Études sur les hiéroglyphes hittites,” Syria 31 (1954): 102–3.


50. For instance, the Sephardic transliteration method Joseph Smith learned from Joshua Seixas in the Kirtland Hebrew School does not distinguish kaph and qoph, using k for both; see Joshua Seixas, A Manual Hebrew Grammar for the Use of Beginners (Andover: Gould and Newman, 1834), 5. As we have seen, Akkadian represented the guttural at the end of KN (‘ayin in Hebrew) either with a hard 𐤇 (like Hebrew ב) or not at all.


52. Numerous LDS scholars have argued for a northern location of Ur in Syria rather than the location in southern Mesopo-
handy, An Approach to the Book of Abraham, 427–28, and Abraham in Egypt, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2000), 85–86; Lundquist, "Was Abraham at Eblat?" 225–27; Paul Y. Hoskisson, "Where Was Ur of the Chaldees?" in The Pearl of Great Price: Revelations from God, ed. H. Donl Peterson and Charles D. Tate (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1989), 119–36; John A. Tvedt, "Ur of the Chaldees and the Book of Abraham" (unpublished paper); and Gee and Ricks, "Historical Plausibility." I concur with the position of these scholars. Wilson, "A Bird in the Hand," strikes a cautionary note and argues for the southern location in Mesopotamia. If this position is correct, more research would be required to determine to what extent there may have been Canaanite influences there. The Amorite migrations mentioned by Wilson would certainly suggest a possible source of such influence.

53. Handy, Syro-Palestinian Pantheon, 69–95.
54. Lundquist, "Was Abraham at Eblat?" 232.
56. Thom Wayment, "Traditions of Child Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East" (unpublished paper), also addresses evidence for both Assyro-Babylonian and Egyptian practices of human sacrifice.
57. Intriguingly, near the end of his lengthy study, Green concludes that "almost all evidence of human sacrifice in the Palestinian region can be traced back to a northern origin around north Syria and south Anatolia. This northern strand may be traced chronologically from the Abraham-Isaac narrative based on seals and subsequently through each consecutive period." See Green, Role of Human Sacrifice, 200.
60. See Sakkunyaton's "Phoenician Theology" preserved in fragments in Eusebius, Praeparatio Evangelica i.10.21, 34, 44, cited in Cross, "el," 1:248.
62. See the discussion in Wayment, "Traditions of Child Sacrifice."
63. The Canaanites and the Phoenicians represent approximately the same culture. Scholars generally use the word Canaanite to refer to the period antedating roughly 1200 BC, and the word Phoenician to refer to the period thereafter. Punic derives from the Latin form of Phoenician and has special reference to Carthage, a Phoenician colony founded on the north coast of Africa in the ninth century BC.
64. Cross, "el," 1:248.
68. This proposal can be found in Day, God of Human Sacrifice, where he argues that the existence of a god named Molech is suggested by a god mlk from two Ugaritic serpent charms, and an obscure god Malik/Malku from Akkadian god lists who in two texts was equated with Nergal, the Mesopotamian god of the underworld. A god of the underworld is just the kind of god one might worship in the valley of Hinnom rather than on a hilltop.
69. Actually, if one were so inclined, one could make an argument that this deity is to be equated with El. It has been suggested that Molech is a dysphemism, the vowels having been tampered with by replacing them with the vowels of boshet "shame" (a process that has been demonstrated in the case of the corruption of Ashtar to Ashtoreth; compare also the use of Ishbosheth "man of shame" for Saul's son Eshbaal "man of the lord," as described in Hoskisson, "Proper Names," 128–29). If that is true, the name in reality could be the generic melek "king" (especially since it is usually preceded by the definite article), in which event the reference would most likely be to El or Baal, the Canaanite deities most commonly designated as "king" in epithets (as in ʾl mlk, "El the King").
70. On why a Canaanite deity would be represented by Egyptian symbols on the facsimiles, see Barney, "Facsimiles and Semitic Adaptation."
71. See the extensive bibliography in the unpublished article, "An Egyptian Context for the Sacrifice of Abraham," by John Gee and Kerry Muhlestein on human sacrifice in the Egyptian Middle Kingdom.
worthy of highest celebration are the words and events recorded in the sacred book of 3 Nephi, the pinnacle of the Book of Mormon. This text truly documents one of the most glorious and crowning moments in all of history. The more I study the book of 3 Nephi, the more I come to see it as the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon and to appreciate it metaphorically as the most sacred inner chamber of the Nephite record. Opening to view the most sublime public experiences ever enjoyed by Lehi’s branch of the house of Israel, the book of 3 Nephi allows attentive readers to glimpse the radiant appearance, at the Temple in Bountiful, of the resurrected Savior and Redeemer, the Creator of all things from the beginning. Indeed, it would seem that everything in 3 Nephi, as I shall argue here, has been composed to echo and to call to mind the solemnity of the presence of the Lord, which was traditionally associated in ancient Israel with Jehovah’s appearance in the inner sanctum of the temple, his holy house.
The Book of a Great High Priest

The abundance of holiness in 3 Nephi should not come as a surprise to readers, for this book bears the name of Nephi, the son of Nephi, the son of Helaman, the son of Helaman (the leader of the stripling warriors), the eldest son of Alma the Younger, who was the High Priest over the Church of God in the city of Zarahemla. This book was shaped mainly by the life and work of a high priest, and it should be read with his experiences and perspectives in mind. The sacred plates and leadership of the Church in that city had been handed down to this Nephi, the inheritor of the premier line of Nephite high priests, called and ordained after the holy order of the Son of God. This Nephi officiated in the same temple-city as had such holy men as King Benjamin, King Mosiah, and Alma the Elder. While it is unknown exactly what uses the Nephite high priests made of their temples, one can easily understand why the records of this Nephi would have so much to do with holiness and with the temple. He knew the practices and blessings of this priesthood personally and intimately.²

The book of 3 Nephi begins, not with information about the writer’s childhood and education, but with a very sacred revelation. It came at a critical time when Nephi cried mightily to the Lord for an entire day on behalf of his people, who were about to be killed because they believed the words of Samuel the Lamanite. I envision the word of the Lord coming to Nephi in his temple or some other holy place where a high priest would likely go to make such an earnest and urgent intercessory prayer.³ There, Nephi heard the holy voice of the Lord saying, “Be of good cheer; . . . on the morrow come I into the world” (3 Nephi 1:13).
While righteous Nephites knew that the sacrifices and performances under the law of Moses pointed exclusively to the coming atonement of Jesus Christ, they still kept the law of Moses with strictness—in whatever ways they understood that law. Indeed, as soon as the sign of the birth of Christ was given, people began to argue with Nephi, claiming that it was no longer necessary for them to observe the law of Moses (3 Nephi 1:24). It fell upon Nephi, as the new High Priest, to convince the people that all of the law “was not yet fulfilled, and that it must be fulfilled in every whit” (1:25).

The fact that Nephi kept the law of Moses says something important about Nephi’s temple. It is hard to imagine him keeping every whit of the law of Moses without a temple patterned after the tabernacle constructed by Moses in the wilderness or the Temple of Solomon of Jerusalem. That ancient temple had been used by the first Nephi, six centuries before the birth of Christ, as the model in building his temple shortly after his arrival in the promised land (2 Nephi 5:16). The Temple of Solomon had an altar of sacrifice; the brassen sea, a large basin used for washings and purification immersions; a rectangular hall (the hekal), which represented four of the days (days 3–6) during which the world was

That ancient temple had been used by the first Nephi, six centuries before the birth of Christ, as the model in building his temple shortly after his arrival in the promised land.
created and held the ten menorahs and tables of the shewbread; and a veil (day 2) which kept the inner sanctum (debir, the Holy of Holies, day 1) most sacred (see items A–H in the drawing of the Temple of Solomon above).

Having begun by announcing the birth of Jesus Christ—himself the new and eternal High Priest, who would come “to do the will, both of the Father and of the Son” (3 Nephi 1:14) by performing his sacrificial mission “to bring redemption unto the world, to save the world from sin” (9:21)—the book of 3 Nephi devotes its next six chapters to the chronicling of some of the most awful wickedness imaginable (3 Nephi 2–7). These years witnessed gross errors, robbers, secret oaths, anti-establishment rituals, taunting, slaughter, fear, blood, execution, iniquity, murder, conspiracy, and assassination, even to the point of stoning the prophets and casting them out from among them. Lachoneus’s answer was to leave the temple-city of Zarahemla and gather his people together for seven years in order to starve the robbers out. And to an extent this desperate scorched-earth strategy worked. Uprooting and relocating would have been difficult enough for the righteous Nephites, but perhaps the hardest thing would have been the abandonment of their temple, a central pillar of strength for them.

During these extremely vile and temple-less years, Satan was on a rampage. Indeed, the name Satan appears in greater concentration in these chapters than anywhere else in the Book of Mormon. Satan knew that Jesus had been born, and in response he did everything he could to reign with...
horror and bloodshed upon this world. But the great wickedness of these years leading up to the coming of Jesus only heightens and intensifies the contrast between Satan’s darkness and the gleaming brightness of the light and goodness that Jesus would usher in.

That contrast is somewhat foreshadowed in 3 Nephi 7, when Nephi was “visited by angels,” heard “the voice of the Lord,” saw as an “eye-witness,” and “had power given unto him that he might know concerning the ministry of Christ” (7:15). From these sacred ministrations, Nephi knew vividly the contrast between the power of Christ unto salvation and the tendency of backsliding people to return quickly “from righteousness unto their wickedness and abominations” (7:15). He then went forth with power and authority, casting out evil and unclean spirits, raising his brother from the dead after he had been stoned by the people, healing people, showing signs, and baptizing by ritual immersion unto the remission of sins (7:19–25).

In spite of all the good that Nephi did, in 3 Nephi 8–9 the darkness reached its uttermost abyss, when all the elements—earth, air, fire, and water—rose up in grief and revulsion at the suffering and death of the God of nature. At least 16 cities were destroyed: they were covered with earth, swept away in the whirlwind, burned with fire, or swallowed up in the depths of the sea as the waters of the deep came up upon them. All this happened, as Jesus explained when he spoke out of the darkness of that cataclysmic destruction, in order that the iniquities, wickedness, sins, and abominations of these people could be hid “from before my face” (3 Nephi 9:5, 7, 9, 11). The holy presence of the Lord could not and cannot countenance sin (3 Nephi 27:19), not even with the “least degree of allowance” (Alma 45:16; D&C 1:31).

Interestingly, to the ancient mind, one of the main functions of righteous temples was to ensure the maintenance of the natural order in the cosmos. The Temple of Jerusalem itself was built on or near a prominent rock, “the great rock of the threshing floor,” on which today the Dome of the Rock stands. The idea of “the rock” holding back waters occurs at key junctures in the Old Testament: When Moses struck “the rock,” much water poured forth (Exodus 17:6). In the millennium, waters will issue forth from the Temple Mount, according to Ezekiel 47:1. According to some explanations, the Holy of Holies sat atop the foundation stone of the cosmos, called the Shetiyyah-stone. That rock, representing the rock of salvation, acted like a plug that held at bay the destructive waters of the deep and the torrents from above. Without the temple, chaos would break loose and reign, as is reflected in the psalms: “The floods have lifted up, O Lord, . . . The floods lift up their roaring.” But “mightier than the thunders of many waters, . . . the Lord on high is mighty! . . . Holiness befits thy house [the temple], O Lord, for evermore” (Psalm 93:1–5 RSV). In this light, one can appreciate even more fully that, when Lachoneus and Nephi had to abandon their temple in Zarahemla, it was a very desperate move indeed. And sure enough, without the Lord in his temple, extreme evil and cataclysmic destruction prevailed in those first twenty pages of 3 Nephi.

**Jesus’s Appearance at the Temple**

With the coming of Jesus to Bountiful, Satan was cast out, and the rock of salvation once again held sway. Building upon and giving new meaning to this traditional temple imagery, Jesus said at the outset of his sermon to the gathered Nephites, “Ye must repent, and be baptized in my name, . . . this is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them” (3 Nephi 11:38–39). Jesus also concluded his sermon with the comparison of the foolish man who built his house upon the sand and the wise man who built upon the rock, evoking images of the temple and its eternal stability when the rain and floods come. How poignantly relieving these words would have been to those who had just recently witnessed the floods and destructions of...
cities all around them! How grateful they would have been for the eternal stability of the temple and its doctrines of Christ that open the doors into his eternal house!

Third Nephi 11 begins with a momentous but unassuming statement: “And now it came to pass that there were a great multitude gathered together of the people of Nephi” (11:1). Indeed, there were 2,500 of them—men, women, and children. Because so many things happened on that day, these people must have gathered early on some appointed morning. They were not there by happenstance.10

Most of all, the text continues, they had gathered “round about the temple which was in the land of Bountiful.” This would have been the natural place for them to be gathered together to seek to learn what they should do next.

But they had no warning of what was about to happen. They knew from a prophecy of Alma that Jesus would “manifest himself unto them” (Alma 45:10), but they do not seem to have known when, where, or even how that manifestation would take place. And they had heard the voice of Jesus say out of the darkness: “Ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away” (3 Nephi 9:19), but they do not seem to have known much about what they should begin doing differently. It is true that they had heard that an old temple teaching, found in Psalm 51:17, namely the law of the sacrifice of “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 9:20), was to be given greater prominence as the essence of the new law of sacrifice.11 And they may have understood that the fire of the old
burnt offering was done away, being filled in the baptism “with fire and with the Holy Ghost” (9:20). But beyond these words from heaven ending an important part of Nephite temple practices, no further directions had been given to the Nephites about what they should now commence doing at their temple instead.

As they were talking, wondering at the changes that had occurred or would yet occur physically and spiritually with the death of Christ, a voice came out of heaven. Three times it spoke, and the third time they understood the words, “Behold, my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him” (3 Nephi 11:7). These words of divine acknowledgment are similar to special words used in the Temple of Jerusalem to mark the installation of a new king or to raise a new high priest to become sons of God, “I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion [the temple]; I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son” (Psalm 2:6–7).12

The Temple Setting of the Lord’s Ministrations in 3 Nephi

Jesus, of course, could have chosen to appear at some other time, at the city gate, out in an open field, or in any number of places. But he did not. He came precisely to the Temple in Bountiful. And for three consecutive days, he met them at or near that holy place (3 Nephi 11:1; 17:3; 19:3; 26:13). Several years ago, while working particularly on the words of Jesus in 3 Nephi 12–14, I was struck forcefully by the importance of the temple setting for the Sermon on the Mount, a version of which appears in those chapters in 3 Nephi. Jesus spoke on that occasion at the temple. This locational clue is a plain and precious detail restored by the Book of Mormon, leading to a captivating contextual perspective within which to understand the otherwise perplexing nature of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7. The idea of a temple reading of the Sermon on the Mount was soon advanced in a FARMS Update, which coined the name for the Nephite discourse of “Sermon at the Temple.” This locational context, explicitly connected with baptism, commandments, and covenantal promises of rewards or consequences.

That work emphasizes the idea that the Sermon on “the Mount” recalls the fact that the temple in Israel was equated with “the mountain of the Lord.” Matthew begins chapter 5 in his gospel with these words: “And Jesus went up into the mountain (anebē eis to oros)” (my translation). It does not say, “And Jesus went out on a gentle hillside.” Significantly, these words in Matthew are precisely the same as the words in the Septuagint text of Exodus 19:3 and 24:12, when Moses and the elders went up into Mount Sinai (anebē eis to oros). In the mountain, the seventy elders “saw God” and received the law. In the sermon, Jesus similarly promised his disciples that if they are pure in heart, “they [too] shall see God,” and he likewise gave them a new dispensation of the law. As some recent biblical scholars have said, these points of parallelism “clearly cannot be ignored.”15 Moreover, when Psalm 24 asks, “Who shall ascend into the hill [or mountain] of the Lord” (anabēsetai eis to oros—the same words again), the psalm is asking, who is worthy to enter the temple? The precise verbal similarity between the Greek texts of these passages in Exodus, Matthew 5, and Psalm 24 comes as further confirmation of the temple setting for the Sermon on the Mount.

Mountains, of course, were the prototype of the temple, in Israelite religion, as well as in ancient Near Eastern thought generally. One always went up to the temple, climbing step by step, up to Jerusalem, onto the Temple Mount and into the outer courts, up into the court of the law; through the degrees of glory or holiness, past the altar, up through the vestibule, into the hekal (the room rep-
resenting the physical creation of the world), and finally through the veil, into the Holy of Holies (representing God’s dwelling place and heaven).

Thanks to the work of Margaret Barker and many others in recent years, one can now better identify numerous elements in the scriptures as reflecting “temple themes.”16 Because modern readers have not experienced firsthand the sights and sounds of the things that transpired in the ancient Temple of Jerusalem, their ears are not attuned to verbal allusions to things that went on there. By way of comparison, in Latter-day Saint culture, all a person needs to say are words like recommend, garments, or holiness to the Lord, and Latter-day Saints know that the subject has something to do with the temple. By the same token, modern scripture readers need to be on the lookout for possible temple themes whenever they encounter concentrations of words such as light, salt, washing, anointing, the name of God, throne, sonship, garments, bread, forgiveness, commandments, covenants, oaths, treasures, wisdom, judgment, seeing God, eternity, rock, and peacemaking—ordinary words though these may be

THE TEMPLE IS THE DOMINANT FACTOR IN THE PSALMS. AS PEOPLE ASCENDED TO THE TEMPLE, THEY SANG THE PSALMS OF JOY, PENITENCE, PRAYER, AND PRAISE. THESE WORDS FROM THE PSALMS WOULD HAVE GIVEN THE SERMON A CLEAR TEMPLE REGISTER FOR THOSE WITH EARS TO HEAR.

in other contexts. Indeed, over 120 such elements can be identified as potential temple themes in the Sermon on the Mount alone.17

Many of these temple themes relate to covenant-making, and it is clear that the Sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi is clearly presented in a covenant-making context, explicitly connected with baptism (for example, 11:21–28; 19:11–13; 26:17), commandments (12:19–20; 15:10; 18:10, 14; 20:10), and coven
tantal promises of rewards or consequences (12:1–14; 18:11–14; 20:11–25:6). Because of this clue, one can see that Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount can also be associated with covenant-making, and perhaps for this reason the Didache, which contains an early Christian instruction given to converts before they could be baptized, draws extensively on the Sermon on the Mount. Likewise, if a person wanted to convert to Judaism, the Talmud required the proselyte to be interviewed and told, first, to expect to be persecuted: “Do you not know that Israel at the present time is persecuted and oppressed, despised, harassed and overcome by afflictions?”18 Likewise, the sermon warns would-be disciples that they will be reviled, reproached, cursed, and persecuted (12:10–12). Next, the proselyte was “given instruction in some of the minor and some of the major commandments.”19 The Sermon on the Mount also gives instructions in the least and greatest laws of the kingdom (12:21–48). Next, the Jewish inductee was informed not to neglect the poor and to observe the law of gleanings and the rule of the poor man’s tithe; and similarly the sermon turns its attention to almsgiving (13:3), laying up treasures and consecrating property with an eye single to serving God (13:19–24). The Talmudic procedure then warned the candidate “of the punishment for the transgression of the commandments” but then concluded with the promise of great rewards for righteousness.20 The sermon does the same (14:21–27).

MORE THAN PROVERBIAL WISDOM

Clearly, more is going on in Matthew 5–7, in 3 Nephi 12–14, and throughout 3 Nephi, than the dispensing of ordinary folk wisdom. The genre of the Sermon on the Mount is not one of broad moral platitudes or proverbs, as is often thought. Since the first step in interpreting any text is to identify what kind of text it is, and since the genre of a text is best detected by its dominant rhetorical register, I have recently catalogued a large number of Greek words and phrases in Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount that come straight from the ancient Greek version of the psalms.21

And why might this be significant? Because the temple is the dominant factor in the psalms. As people ascended to the temple, they sang the psalms of joy, penitence, prayer, and praise. The psalms were chanted in the temple by Levitical cantors,
sung by dispersed Jews yearning for the temple, and by families giving thanks for the blessings of the temple. These words from the psalms would have given the sermon a clear temple register for those with ears to hear.

Thus each allusion to the psalms in the Sermon on the Mount adds corroboration to its temple genre and thus supports its temple setting in 3 Nephi. For example, the word *makarioi*, “blessed will be” in Matthew 5, is also the very first word in Psalm 1:1, and it goes on to appear twenty-five more times in the psalms.

Psalm 37 unmistakably conjoins the words “meek” and “inheriting,” as in Matthew 5:5. The words “filled” and “righteousness” stand together in Psalm 17:15, as they do in Matthew 5:6. Psalm 32:11 issues a double call: “Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice (agalliaste)”! A double call, rejoice and be exceeding glad, also can be heard in Matthew 5:12, using the same word that appears often in the psalms, *agalliaste*, meaning “hallelujah.”

The warning in Matthew 7:6, “lest they trample [your pearls] under their feet, and turn again and rend you,” echoes Psalm 50:22 (RSV), “lest I rend, and there be none to deliver.”

The two diverging ways in Matthew 7:13–14, namely the wide “way” (*hodos*) and the narrow “way” (*hodos*), emerge right from Psalm 1:6, which reads, “For the Lord knoweth the way (*hodos*) of righteousness: but the way (*hodos*) of the ungodly will perish.”

Verse 8 of Psalm 94 contrasts the wise man and the foolish man, using the same root words, *phronimos* and *mōros*, found in Matthew 7:24–26.

Words as distinctive as the Greek *anomia*, used in Matthew 7:23, “depart from me, ye that work iniquity (hoi ergazomenoi tēn anomian),” come straight from Psalm 6:8, “Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity (hoi ergazomenoi tēn anomian).” But most of these significant parallels usually go completely unnoticed.

Moreover, many other Greek words in the Sermon on the Mount appear multiple times in other Old Testament temple texts in the Septuagint, such as the dedicatory prayer for the Temple of Solomon in 1 Kings 8, or the futuristic vision of the ideal temple in Ezekiel 40–48.

It is interesting to me that when the sermon talks about putting your lamp on a candlestick/lampstand, the Greek word there is *luchnia*, which happens to be the word for the menorah. This word is unforgettably concentrated nine times inside of only six verses in the instruction in Exodus 25 about the construction of the tabernacle.

Being “perfect,” *teleios*, recalls not only the technical use of this term to describe complete initiation into the mysteries, but also the word *teleiosis*, which is the temple-significant word for “consecration” in Exodus and Leviticus.

Readers may well be surprised by the number of phrases in the Sermon on the Mount that repeat or allude to temple texts. Of the 383 words in the total vocabulary of the Sermon on the Mount, one-third of them cast a long temple shadow. While the individual significance of each may be small, the cumulative effect of all these verbal echoes only increases the likelihood that attuned listeners would have deeply appreciated the temple register of the Sermon on the Mount as it shed light on the nature of the new covenants they were making. And significantly, Jesus typically spoke in two registers: one at an obvious, ethical level, and the other at a more veiled level. Indeed, it is possible that the Sermon on the Mount might have served in a temple-like way to lead people upward into the presence of God.

These temple connections carry over into our reading of 3 Nephi. In the temple setting expressly supplied by 3 Nephi, it is easy to identify here laws regarding evil speaking (12:22), adultery (12:27–30), gospel love (12:39–44), and consecration (13:19–24). It is also easy to imagine people covenanting to keep those laws by answering simply “Yea, yea,” or “Nay, nay,” as instructed in the sermon (12:37), or to think of a group prayer being offered (13:37), or of people being anointed (13:17) or clothed in garments more

**ATTUNED LISTENERS WOULD HAVE DEEPLY APPRECIATED THE TEMPLE REGISTER OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT AS IT SHED LIGHT ON THE NATURE OF THE NEW COVENANTS THEY WERE MAKING.**
glorious than Solomon’s (13:28–30), as mentioned in the Sermon at the Temple or Sermon on the Mount.

Moreover, new research now allows one to appreciate the overall structure of the sermon as a marvelous ascension text. It begins by placing its hearers in a lowly state and then, step by step, guides them to its climactic end, being welcomed into the presence of God. Through twenty-five stages, it builds in an overall crescendo. Rituals of ascent were common enough in antiquity, from Enoch’s ascent into the tenth heaven in the book of 1 Enoch, to Paul’s being taken up into the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2). Roots of the heavenly ascent motif reach deeply into Akkadian mythology, Greek mystery religions, and Gnostic literature, and these rituals were of a piece with the temple.24

In particular, individual thematic escalations accentuate the sermon’s overall path of ascent.25 Often these steps build in three stages, from an initial concern about one’s obligations toward (1) others (mainly in Matthew 5 or 3 Nephi 12), to a second concern about (2) personal and secret virtues (mainly in Matthew 6 or 3 Nephi 13), and finally culminating in (3) qualities of God and holiness (in Matthew 7 or 3 Nephi 14). The threefold pattern here reflects the three elements in the two great commandments: Loving (1) others as (2) ourselves, and serving (3) God, our master, with all our hearts, might, minds, and strength.

Similarly, prayer is mentioned three times in the sermon. At first, we are told to pray for other people, particularly our enemies (Matthew 5; 3 Nephi 12). Second, we are told to pray for ourselves: “forgive us our own trespasses” (Matthew 6; 3 Nephi 13). Finally, in the third stage, our prayers ask for gifts from our Father in Heaven, and all those who put up a threefold petition (ask, seek, and knock) are told that it shall be opened to them (Matthew 7; 3 Nephi 14).

Concerning generosity, first, one is told in Matthew 5 and 3 Nephi 12 to give generously to others, if people ask for clothing or assistance. Second, in Matthew 6 and 3 Nephi 13, one is told to give of our own accord and in secret for our own eternal benefit. Finally, in Matthew 7 and 3 Nephi 14 one becomes able to give good gifts even as God the Father does, doing all things unto others as they would have done to themselves.

Likewise, punishments are mentioned three times: socially, the salt that is cast out is trodden underfoot by men because it has become useless to other people. Second, when a person jeopardizes his own eternal well-being, it is better for him to cut off his own hand than to lose his entire soul. And third, all those who cast the holy thing before swine will find themselves torn by dogs and trampled by pigs, seemingly seen here as instruments of divine punishment.

Other examples of escalation could be given, showing that in the experience of this ascent a fundamental unity of the sermon is found. Just as the Sermon on the Mount begins on a mountain, it ends by talking about the wise man who builds upon that mountain, by not only hearing but actually patterning his house of righteousness after God’s holy house. Progressively, through these stages of ascent, there comes first fulfillment of the law amidst the people of Israel, next perfection of each individual, and finally hearing the Lord himself say, “Enter,” not “Depart” (3 Nephi 14:21–23).

Third Nephi and the Holy of Holies

If entrance into the presence of God is the end to which the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon at the Temple both lead, readers should consider the profound connections between the heart of 3 Nephi and the inner sanctum of the temple. For example, under the old law, entrance into the Holy of Holies and into the presence of the Lord was the unique privilege of the High Priest.26 His privilege of entering into the presence of God foreshadowed or typified the same honor that will come to all of God’s righteous children, and as Jesus fulfilled and expanded the former law when he delivered the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon at the Temple, he extended the covenantal promise of this sacred privilege to all worthy men and women, who will stand someday in the literal presence of God. For this reason, I wish to suggest that knowing as much as possible about the symbolic aspects of the Holy of Holies and its connected holy places opens to view many ways in which aspects of the Holy of Holies symbolized the coming of the Lord in holiness to his people in general and the wondrous mysteries of the glorious things that happened in 3 Nephi 11–28 during Jesus’s three days at the Temple in Bountiful in particular.
From several rather sacred, and thus appropriately cryptic, texts in the Bible, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Enoch literature, it is possible with great caution to reconstruct basic things that were present or occurred in the Holy of Holies. Knowing things as they did from the plates of brass and from their own temple tradition, which dated back to Lehi and Nephi, who had seen “the things of the Jews” in Jerusalem with their own eyes (2 Nephi 25:5), the Nephite high priests may well have understood some of these characteristic features of things closely associated with the Holy of Holies—all of which bring to mind details reported throughout 3 Nephi. The following discussion, which proceeds mainly in scriptural order from 3 Nephi 11 to 3 Nephi 28, focuses primarily on unique features of the Holy of Holies; however, several of these elements may pertain also or more directly to the adjacent and integrally connected hekal, for as Menahem Haran has said, “neither of [these chambers] had any significance without the other.” Consider the following:

Presence. The Holy of Holies was strongly associated with God’s presence. In the Holy of Holies, the High Priest was said to stand in the presence of God, as Moses and the twenty-four elders had stood in the presence of God on the holy Mount, Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:10). As God then guided Israel in the wilderness in a cloud, so the cloud of incense in the Holy of Holies marked his presence there. Likewise, in 3 Nephi, the people of Bountiful were privileged to stand in the very presence of God: “He came down and stood in the midst of them” (3 Nephi 11:8). It is as if they had been admitted into the Holy of Holies.

Silence. The holy place in the Temple of Jerusalem is spoken of as “the sanctuary of silence,” based on Habakkuk 2:20: “The Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.” The greater the holiness, the more profound the silence. Then and now, temple experiences begin with awe and unfold in silence. As Jesus descended to the Temple in Bountiful, the people looked up, focused on him, and “durst not open their mouths, even one to another” (11:8). Such reverence befits the holiest of places.

Timelessness. In the Holy of Holies, it was as if time stood still, inasmuch as the temporal world was transcended there. Perhaps symbolizing this, the signs of great lights at the time of Jesus’s birth made it appear as if the sun had stood still, for it was “one day and a night and a day, as if it were one day” (Helaman 14:3; 3 Nephi 1:15). Indeed it seems that the place where the visit of Christ happened is more important to Nephi than the date when it happened. Neither Nephi nor Mormon give the date of this appearance. Indeed, as one moves further into Nephi’s book, time references fade into the background and eventually disappear entirely. Jesus will teach there for three days, after which he returned “oft” (3 Nephi 26:13) to instruct the people further, but Nephi’s record does not say whether those visits occurred once a week, once a month, regularly, or at unexpected moments. These record keepers do not seem to want their readers to be thinking about time, which is characteristic of sacred experiences in which time is left behind and the broader vistas of eternity are opened to spiritual eyes. As a result, 3 Nephi has no usual storyline, no heroic action.
scenes, and no sensational narrative attractions. These chapters blend into one great whole, as supernal truths and texts usually do.

The Word of the Lord. From the presence of the Lord in the temple, says Psalm 17:2, the word of the Lord comes forth as his “oracle.” It was in the Holy of Holies that Isaiah saw the Lord “sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple” (Isaiah 6:1), and there the word of the Lord was given to him. Throughout 3 Nephi, one hears in abundance the word of the Lord. He himself spoke. He identified himself: “He stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people saying: Behold I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world” (3 Nephi 11:9–10). He delivered the very words of God the Father, with whom he was “one” (3 Nephi 28:10).

High Priesthood. While all the inner courts of the temple were the realm of the priests, the Holy of Holies was the special domain of the high priesthood, “the preserve of the high priesthood,” where all the angelic hosts were “dressed as the high priests.” In 3 Nephi, dispensations of priesthood authority are prominent. In 3 Nephi 11, twelve disciples were called and given the power and instruction on how to function in the baptismal ordinance of the Aaronic Priesthood, and the people were then told to give strict heed to the words of these teachers and servants: “Blessed are ye if ye shall give heed unto the words of these twelve whom I have chosen from among you to minister unto you, and to be your servants” (12:1). Then in 3 Nephi 18, at the end of that first day, these twelve were ordained to a higher priesthood, which gave them the power to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost (18:37; Moroni 2:1–3).

Covenant. In the Holy of Holies was placed the ark of the covenant, containing the Ten Commandments and perhaps other parts of the books of the law which together formed the law of the covenant. Over the ark of the covenant was a covering of solid gold, called the mercy seat, made up of two cherubim whose wings overshadowed the tablets of law (1 Kings 8:6–7), symbolizing the heavenly throne, this all being the evidence of “a contract between” God and his people. Later in 3 Nephi, the Lord will interpret and explain the meaning of several of the Ten Commandments, and he will give commandments which the people will oblige themselves, by way of covenant, to obey, as they partake of the emblems of his flesh and blood (3 Nephi 18:10). In return for their covenantal commitment, the mercy of the Lord will be extended to them before the throne and judgment seat of God.

Commandments. Next, in 3 Nephi 12–14, Jesus gave the people a series of instructions that relate closely to temple laws and commandments. These involve the inward observance of the Ten Commandments, which were kept in the Holy of Holies in the ark of the covenant (1 Kings 8:9; Hebrews 9:4) and were read daily in the courts of the Temple of Jerusalem. The people were instructed to fast, wash, and anoint their face and head (3 Nephi 13:17). They were also told that, if they brought their sacrifice to the altar and there remembered that their brother had aught against them, they had to leave the altar and first reconcile and eliminate all contention or disputation, “with full purpose of heart” (3 Nephi 12:24), preparing them to proceed further.

Shewbread. The daily shewbread was a sacred presence just outside the Holy of Holies, reminiscent
of the manna given by God to his people in the wilderness and “eaten by the priests in a holy place.” Now these Nephites ate the sanctified bread in remembrance, not of the broken body or of the suffering of the Lord, but of the unforgettably glorified physical body, “which I have shown unto you” (3 Nephi 18:7). Their sacrament was, quite literally, a sacrament of “shew” bread, of the bread of life that had been shown to them, the bread of a resurrected being which they had not only seen but also touched and whose hands had touched them.

*The Divine Name.* The holy name of Jehovah played an important role in the Holy of Holies. The High Priest wore a gold plate on his forehead with “Holiness to the Lord” inscribed upon it (Exodus 28:36). In 3 Nephi 18, all the people took upon themselves the name of Jesus as he ministered the bread and wine to the multitude. It had been promised in the tabernacle of Moses: “They shall put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them” (Numbers 6:27).

*Purity.* The Holy of Holies was a place of supreme purity, even more than elsewhere in the temple. After administering the sacrament of “the wine of the cup” (3 Nephi 18:8), and following stern warnings about the need to pray, especially in families, Jesus gave the Nephites explicit instructions about the need for purity and worthiness to participate in these sacred ordinances (18:28–29), just as worthiness to enter the temple had always been required: “Who shall ascend into the mountain [temple] of the Lord? . . . He who hath clean hands, and a pure heart” (Psalm 24:3–4, my translation).

*Prayer.* Prayer and supplication permeated every part and purpose of the holy temple (1 Kings 8:28–53). Jesus’s second day with the Nephites began as the people assembled again at the temple (3 Nephi 19:3), having spent the night rushing around telling everyone who had missed the first day to be sure to drop whatever they were doing and not to miss what might come next. The twelve disciples began by repeating to the company the “same words which Jesus had spoken—nothing varying from the words which Jesus had spoken”—the day before (3 Nephi 19:8). Verbatim repetition was beneficial not only for those who were hearing for the first time but for those who had already heard. The disciples then led the people in profound prayer.

After they prayed, they were all baptized and received the blessing of the Holy Ghost; and as angels ministered to them, the Lord came into their midst. He asked them to pray again, as he prayed, giving thanks to God, asking for faith and that their hearts be set upon righteous desires, unity, and purity.

*Unity.* The Holy of Holies can be seen as representing Day One of the Creation inasmuch as all things emanate from its primordial state, in which things were undifferentiated and the opposites that characterize this world had not been separated. All that happened in the Holy of Holies derived its truth, power, and goodness from the One, so that all might once again become one with God and with each other. In John 17, in what is called by New Testament scholars his great high priestly prayer, Jesus prayed for unity between himself, the Father, his twelve apostles, and all those who would believe their words. A salient point encountered in 3 Nephi highlights this same element of unity. In 3 Nephi 19, Jesus first offered another exquisite high priestly prayer to the Father “for all those who shall believe on [his disciples’] words, that they may believe in me, that I may be in them as thou, Father, art in me, that we may be one” (19:23), so that “I may be glorified in them” (19:29). In the end, Jesus “expounded all the scriptures in one” (23:14) and declared “the Father and I are one” (28:10). The mystery of unity was one of the greatest revelations and blessings of the Holy of Holies, and this theme is certainly prevalent in 3 Nephi.

*Perfect Order.* This holiest of all chambers was thought of as a place of supreme order and perfection, and this was represented by the fact that the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle was a “perfect cube,” 10 cubits by 10 cubits by 10 cubits, a perfect number in all three dimensions. Here, in an architectural sense, eternal oneness became three-dimensional, and thus in this place heaven and earth could meet. Although there may also be other factors at work here, it is worth noting in this connection that many things happen in threes in 3 Nephi: the destruction and tempest lasted three hours (8:19), the darkness lasted three days (8:3), the voice of the Father spoke from heaven three times (11:5), Jesus prayed three times (19:19; 19:27; 19:31), and he appeared at the temple on three consecutive days (26:13).

*Blessing.* The entire temple was a house of blessing, and so it was in 3 Nephi as well. In the Temple of Jerusalem a beautiful prayer was offered twice
each day at the time of the daily sacrificial services known as the Tamid. This priestly blessing, found in Numbers 6, took place at the altar in the court outside the Holy Place. It reads, “The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace” (Numbers 6:24–26). What could be a more explicit bestowal and fulfillment of that famous priestly blessing, as Matthew Grey has shown so well, than these words coming next from 3 Nephi 19:25? “And it came to pass that Jesus blessed them; . . . and his countenance did smile upon them, and the light of his countenance did shine upon them.”

Quoting Isaiah, the resurrected Lord additionally covenanted and promised the people, “Great shall be the peace of thy children” (3 Nephi 22:13).

Whiteness of the Garments. The seraphim or cherubim were also there in the Holy of Holies (one knows little about these beings except that they were apparently burning bright), along with concourses of angels (as seen by Lehi in 1 Nephi 1:8), who were the hosts of heaven or ministers in “flaming fire” (Psalm 104:4), all in “garments of glory.” It was “a place of fire.”

Similarly, angels abound in 3 Nephi (17:24; 19:14–15; 27:30). The burning whiteness of the robes of Jesus and of others attract special attention in 3 Nephi. Jesus initially appeared “clothed in a white robe” (11:8). On the second day, he came in even greater glory, in radiant “garments” (19:25). After the people prayed, they were “encircled about as if it were by fire” (19:14), reminiscent of the seraphim (Isaiah 6:2, 6) or the radiance of the glorious presence of God; and as Jesus blessed the people, they became “as white as the countenance and also the garments of Jesus; and behold the whiteness did exceed all the whiteness, yea even there could be nothing upon earth so white as the whiteness thereof” (19:25). His disciples became even as white “as Jesus” (19:30).

The day before, Jesus had promised his twelve disciples that they would be given garments even more glorious than Solomon: “I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these, . . . even so will he clothe (endow) you, if ye are not of little faith” (13:29–30). Garments of such whiteness and glory belong first and foremost, not on earth, but in the temple, a model of heaven on earth.

Joy. In the “presence” of the Lord, sings Psalm 16:11, is the “fulness of joy.” The entire temple was a place of peace and joy, culminating in the Holy of Holies, which enshrined divine joy. Indeed, the word joy appears three times in 3 Nephi 17: in verse 17, “no one can conceive of the joy which filled our souls at the time we heard him pray for us unto the Father”; in verse 18, “so great was the joy of the multitude that they were overcome”; and in verse 20, when Jesus himself exclaimed, “Behold my joy is full.” On day two, Jesus quoted from Isaiah 52, “Then shall they break forth into joy” (20:34), and at the end of day three, Jesus exclaimed, “Behold, my joy is great, even unto fulness,” and declared that “even the Father rejoiceth” (27:30).

Awe. The Holy of Holies was a place of amazement and wonder. Things that occurred in 3 Nephi caused the people of Nephi to marvel and wonder about many things. They were “marveling and wondering” when the theophany of the resurrected Lord commenced (11:1). When they “marveled, and wondered” (15:2) about how all things had become new, to allay their concerns, Jesus gave direct assurances in 3 Nephi 15 that he was Jehovah, the Giver of the Law and the Light of the World, who could therefore fulfill the law and give eternal life. As they touched and recognized the prints in his hands, “they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him” (11:17). All of these “marvelous things” (17:16, 17; 26:14, 16) and “marvelous . . . words” (19:34) are important disclosures, fully at home among the mysteries of the temple.

House of Israel’s God. Following his initial sermon on his first day in Bountiful and extending into the second day, Jesus spoke of the covenant of the Father with the House of Israel. He first explained that other sheep would not be so privileged to hear his voice in person, whereas the righteous Nephites had “both heard my voice, and seen me” (3 Nephi 15:24). Only members of the house of Israel were permitted to enter into the inner precincts of the temple, going beyond the outer court (or the Court of the Gentiles as it was later called in the Temple of Herod), where those “other sheep” previously had to stop. Now, however, in 3 Nephi 16, as Jesus went on to explain, if the Gentiles would repent and be numbered among the house of Israel, the words of Isaiah would be fulfilled that “the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem; . . . and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God” and shall see God “eye to eye when the Lord shall bring again Zion” (3 Nephi 16:18–20). Nothing was more
central to the holy temple than redemption, salvation, and seeing God.

Jesus subsequently turned his attention next to the sacred promises made by the Father and the Son to their covenant people. Just as he had given the Sermon at the Temple on the first day (3 Nephi 12–14) instructing the people concerning their obligations in their covenant relationship with God, on the second day he gave another uninterrupted sermon of close to the same length (3 Nephi 20–22, appropriately called the “Father’s Covenant People Sermon”) detailing the irrevocable commitments that God makes as his part of this two-way covenant relationship. Indeed, in these three chapters the dominant words are the Father (39 times), covenant (16 times), and people (35 times). The Father and the Son can be counted on, absolutely, to keep their side of the covenant, sworn in the temple that day. They will never forget. They will “lay thy stones with fair colors, and lay thy foundations with sapphires, . . . and all thy children shall be taught of the Lord” (3 Nephi 22:11–13; compare Isaiah 54:11–13). Temple themes abound in this covenant sermon, which mentions a new ark of the covenant, which, like Noah’s ark, will carry his people when they might be tossed with tempests (3 Nephi 22:9, 11). It assures that, as God has sworn, “the covenant of my peace” shall not be removed (3 Nephi 22:10). He will deliver his people from their adversaries (especially the great adversary). He will bring in the New Jerusalem, with its new millennial temple, to bless all the kindred of the earth in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. And when these words, from the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon, come forth into the world, this shall be a sign to all the world “that the work of the Father hath already commenced unto the fulfilling of the covenant which he hath made unto the people who are of the house of Israel” (3 Nephi 21:7). That work has everything to do with the work of the temple.

Hidden Things. In the Holy of Holies, one learned the hidden or secret things and how everything lives. There one could in some unknown way “gaze on the mystery” of the plan of existence, and could see things which cannot be spoken but must remain “hidden from public gaze.” In 3 Nephi 15–16 and 20–22, the Nephites learned of God’s great plan of happiness, of his covenants with the house of Israel, and how he will bless all the nations of the earth. On each of the three days, Jesus spoke words that could not be written (3 Nephi 17:15; 19:32, 34; 26:6), perhaps not only because he said so many things or because language was inadequate, but also because the things they saw and heard were too sacred. Jesus had told the people that they must not cast pearls before swine or “that which is holy” before the dogs (3 Nephi 14:6); and since they had covenanted not to do so, he could teach them things that were not to be written.

Prophecy. In the Holy of Holies, prophetic words were received (see Isaiah 6:8–13) and heavenly books of remembrance were kept (Revelation 5:1), and in 3 Nephi, prophetic records next play a prominent role. In 3 Nephi 23, the Lord affirmed the gifts of prophecy. He also commanded the people to search diligently the words of the prophet Isaiah (3 Nephi 23:1). He took time to correct the Nephite record so that it would include the fulfillment of the prophecy by Samuel the Lamanite about many saints arising from the dead at the time of the death of the Savior (3 Nephi 23:13). This event showed the reality of the afterlife, given to ordinary mortals because of the resurrection of the Savior. Jesus then quoted the last two chapters of Malachi, in which that

He stood in the middle, children in a circle around him, parents in an outer circle around them. He spoke words which could not be written; things happened that they both saw and heard (3 Nephi 17:11–17). Jesus also prayed for the parents (17:17), wept for joy, blessed the children one by one, and, turning to the parents, said, “Behold your little ones” (17:23).
prophet spoke of the coming of “a messenger of the covenant” to the temple (Malachi 3:1); making pure consecration of tithes and offerings (3:3–10); keeping a book of remembrance (3:16); the appearance of the Son of Righteousness “with healing in his wings” (Malachi 4:2); and the return of Elijah to turn the hearts of parents and children to each other (4:5–6). Each of Malachi’s prophetic points quoted in 3 Nephi 24–25 deals with temple themes pertinent to the events in 3 Nephi.

Healing. The temple was dedicated as a place for the healing of “whosoever sickness there be” (1 Kings 8:37), and in many ways, the great atonement of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement was a “rite of healing,” healing wounds and restoring life to all creation. The Holy of Holies furnishes the great example of wholeness, wellness, and the complete absence of evil or illness. The Son of Righteousness indeed came to the Nephites “with healing in his wings,” throughout his ministry there.

As Jesus was about to leave toward the end of his first day with the Nephites, recognizing that he had just about worn the people out, he was deeply touched by their tears and steadfast faith and fixed gazes. Filled with compassion, he called for any and all of their sick and afflicted to be brought forward, and he healed them one by one. Ancient temples often functioned as shrines of healing. The House of the Lord mitigated the results of the fall of Adam, which so often involves sickness, injury, corruption, and sorrow. It is interesting to wonder—even if this cannot be known for sure—if any of the lame, halt, or maimed whom Jesus healed at this time had been injured in the great destructions that had recently occurred at the time of the death of Jesus himself. If so, one may well imagine that his compassion was intensified by his compassion, knowing that they all had suffered at the same time as he had in consequence of the destructions that accompanied his atoning sacrifice. The healing blessings of the Lord continued on the second day as well, when he “healed all their sick, . . . raised a man from the dead, and had shown forth his power unto them” (3 Nephi 26:15).

Children. In the Holy of Holies, the High Priest became a holy child or “son of God” among all the children of Israel, in the sense of qualifying to enter into God’s most heavenly kingdom. Perhaps with this symbolism and other exalting powers in mind, Jesus gave blessings and paid special attention to the children on all three days reported in 3 Nephi. On the first day, he asked that the children be brought to him. He stood in the middle, children in a circle around him, parents in an outer circle around them. He spoke words which could not be written; things happened that they both saw and heard (3 Nephi 17:11–17). Jesus also prayed for the parents (17:17), wept for joy, blessed the children one by one, and, turning to the parents, said, “Behold your little ones” (17:23). As these extraordinary blessings were given, angels descended, encircled the little ones, and the multitude did bear witness (17:24–25). This event occurred in the presence of God (Jesus), angels, and a host of witnesses. On day two, the hearts of the parents were then turned to their children as Jesus loosed the tongues of the children, “and they did speak unto their fathers great and marvelous things” (26:14). On day three, the multitude gathered themselves together once again. This time “they both saw and heard these children, yea, even babes did open their mouths and utter marvelous things,” which the people “were forbidden” to write (26:16).
Sending Forth. Just as the Nephite disciples were sent forth immediately to preach the gospel and establish the Church of Jesus Christ and build Zion in 3 Nephi 27, prophets of old had been sent out from the Holy of Holies, called and sent forth into the world, symbolically returning back into the created world on the other side of the veil. In Isaiah 6, when Isaiah was called from the temple to cry repentance to the people, God asked, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Isaiah said, “Here am I; send me” (6:8). He was then told what to say and what not to say to the people at large.

Consecration. The Nephites began living the law of consecration,67 having all things in common (3 Nephi 26:19; 4 Nephi 1:3). They called themselves the Church of Christ, built up the Church, and did all things in the name of Christ. When Jesus asked, “What is it that ye desire of me, after that I am gone unto the Father?” (3 Nephi 28:1), nine of the disciples yearned for nothing more than to come speedily unto Christ to enter into his kingdom, while three desired nothing more than to stay to assist in building up the kingdom of God on this earth. These are the two ultimate desires with which all are blessed by the holy temple of God.

Transfiguration. There was also an oil of anointment used to anoint the ark of the covenant as well as the entire tabernacle (Exodus 30:23–25). It is spoken of, in 2 Enoch 22:9, as being “like sweet dew,” making the initiate “like one of the glorious ones,” lifted up into a higher state, allowing them to become sons of God, children of light, like angels, lifted up, transformed into an angelic state, transfigured as translated beings, obtaining “resurrection, life, vision, knowledge.”69 In yet a concluding triad,70 three of these Nephites were so blessed as to never taste death but to be transformed, to be “changed in the twinkling of an eye” and blessed in the kingdom of the Father (3 Nephi 28:7–8). Their eternal mission was to “bring the souls of men” unto Christ (28:9). Without arguing that the transfiguration of these three Nephites somehow involved the use of that oil of anointment, it is possible to see that the book of 3 Nephi ends with an actual transformation, just as the Holy of Holies aimed ultimately to raise and transform mortal souls into immortal, celestial beings.

Other points linking 3 Nephi with the Holy of Holies and its closely connected temple courts and chambers could be mentioned, but enough has been said to appreciate the holy context, character, and qualities of this book of sacred scripture. All of these holy elements can be seen in the book 3 Nephi. This timeless book abounds with temple themes. It calls us to repent, to come unto Jesus, to take upon ourselves the name of Christ, to become his purified covenant people, showing us the way to enter through the narrow gate into his sublime and exalting presence (3 Nephi 27:9–33).

Concluding Thoughts

I find it hard to say enough in praise of 3 Nephi. It has been called a “fifth gospel,”71 “a resplendent portrait,”72 “a crowning jewel,”73 “the pinnacle,”74 “the climax, the apex,”75 and even the “first gospel,”76 “the focal point, the supreme moment, in the entire history of the Book of Mormon.”77 To that may we now add: it is “the inner sanctum” of the Book of Mormon, a sacred and infinite template uniting time and all eternity. As President Ezra Taft Benson has said, “It is clear that 3 Nephi contains some of the most moving and powerful passages in all scripture. It testifies of Christ, his prophets, and the doctrines of salvation.” He went on to encourage people, especially families, to read 3 Nephi together at Easter time and to “discuss its sacred contents.”78

It leaves a powerful impression with me to think that Joseph Smith translated this record in 1829, before he knew—or at least had said anything—about building temples or began revealing any of the ordinances of the House of the Lord. Joseph Smith was inspired by an incessant determination to rebuild Zion by restoring the ordinances of the temple. The roots of that prophetic ideal may well have begun as early as with what he learned or sensed.
from his translation of the Book of Mormon and especially the translation of 3 Nephi.79 Soon, those things would be revealed to him, and likewise to us, line upon line, through the book of 3 Nephi and in other divine manifestations.

Today, the temple helps readers to understand what is going on in 3 Nephi, and at the same time, 3 Nephi can help worshippers to understand the temple. While one cannot go back in time two thousand years to experience all that the people of Nephi saw and heard at their temple in Bountiful, each time a Latter-day Saint goes to the temple, it can be an opportunity to relate very closely to those unspeakably holy days. Joseph Smith said of the Book of Mormon that a person can “get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.”80 One of its precepts is clearly the centrality of the temple. The book of 3 Nephi lays forth a holy template for how one may dwell forever in the house of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the great and eternal High Priest of all mankind.

Of course, biblical critics have long thought of the Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi as its “Achilles heel,” but what we now know indicates otherwise. When I first noticed the temple pattern in the overall structure of the Sermon at the Temple in January 1988, it was an overwhelming, all-consuming experience; time stood still all day as its pieces fell in place. That evening I shared the main outlines of the Sermon at the Temple with Elder Neal A. Maxwell. After reflecting for a few moments, he said (with Ether 12:27 clearly in mind): “Isn’t it interesting how the Lord can turn what people have seen as the Book of Mormon’s greatest weakness into one of its greatest strengths.”

In sum, we are blessed to know, even more clearly than ever before, that the Book of Mormon restores plain and precious parts, covenants, and things (1 Nephi 13:26, 29) that had become lost. The sacred temple setting of the Sermon at the Temple and of the ministry of the Lord among these Nephites may well be seen as one of those restorations. Temple themes can be seen in the puzzling Sermon on the Mount precisely because of the picture on the box given by the Sermon at the Temple and throughout 3 Nephi. The book of 3 Nephi should not be underestimated. It is a true account of the Savior Jesus Christ coming to his people at his temple, the House of the Lord, where resides the power to overcome chaos, Satan, and death. This powerful hope in Christ, who reigns eternally upon the whole face of creation, is indeed the pervasive theme of the book of 3 Nephi, as well as of the entire Book of Mormon.

Notes

1. This is an expanded version of the speech delivered at the opening plenary session of the conference “Third Nephi: New Perspectives on an Incomparable Scripture,” 26–27 September 2008, organized by the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship at Brigham Young University, hereafter referred to as 2008 Symposium (publication forthcoming). In that keynote speech I was asked to address scholarly and general listeners, and also to draw upon my publications on the Sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi as well as updating that previous work. Before delving further into this study, I pause a moment to remember and to thank the patron-mentor of the Maxwell Institute, Elder Neal A. Maxwell, as I did on the occasion of that symposium. He has taught us, in so many ways, that the unvarnished truth of the scriptures and the gospel of Jesus Christ is truer than we have yet imagined. Gratefully, his influence encourages us still to strive to comprehend the soul-satisfying truths in this book of Nephi, the son of Nephi.

2. This background may serve modern readers in seeking out likely or implicit meanings in the connections discussed below, even if one cannot know for sure if they were intended by the author or abridger of 3 Nephi. The cumulative confluence of these temple elements in 3 Nephi provides, in my opinion, substantial circumstantial support for the suggestion that Nephi intentionally selected and emphasized in his record these temple points in order to communicate most powerfully the sacredness of the events that he reports.

3. Although the text gives no indication of where Nephi was when this manifestation was given to him, it is plausible that he was in some very sacred place, for several reasons: his supplications must have been extremely poignant at this point, for he and the other believers stood to be executed the next day if the promised sign did not materialize; as the High Priest, Nephi would have appealed to God for guidance with every sacred means available to him; and he was apparently alone when the voice of the Lord came to him.


5. Margaret Barker, Temple Theology: An Introduction (London: SPCK, 2004), 18–19. While the received text of the Bible does not always provide clear evidence of some of Barker’s claims, she often is able to argue successfully that older versions of the biblical texts reflect an early temple theology of which Lehi and others in preexilic Israel may well have been aware.


8. See David’s purchase of the threshing floor in 2 Samuel 24:18–24. Margaret Barker, The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem (London: SPCK, 1991), 18. A vestige of the temple as a place of threshing may be latent in Jesus’s poignant warning that Satan still desires “to have you, that he may sift you as wheat” (3 Nephi 18:18).

For further developments, see, for example, Barker, *Gate of Heaven*, 18–19, citing b. Sukkah 53b, which in turn is based on Psalm 95 and ancient views of cosmology.

10. This may or may not have been on the occasion of a festival day of some kind. I tend to prefer to see this gathering as a convocation at the temple on the feast of Shavuot, the day of Pentecost, but one cannot know for sure. See John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 36–42.

11. See Dana M. Pike, “Third Nephi 9:19–20: The Offering of a Broken Heart,” in 2008 Symposium; he meticulously unfolds the essence of this aspect of the law of obedience and sacrifice, which was known under the law of Moses (see Psalm 51:17). Now, the offering of the broken heart became the key to this law, as the law of sacrifice by the shedding of blood was done away. The law of sacrifice is not so obvious in Matthew’s version of the Sermon, but it is unmistakable in 3 Nephi 12:19.


14. See Welch, *Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*, which builds on Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990). Among the new points recently added by the present article are (1) seeing the implications of Nephi being the Nephite High Priest, (2) expanding the detection of temple elements in 3 Nephi beyond chapters 11–18 to embrace the entirety of that book, (3) showing the pervasive influence of the psalms on the Sermon at the Temple and Sermon on the Mount, (4) seeing the Sermon on the Mount as a text of sacred ascent, and (5) noticing the characteristics of the Holy of Holies that fill this record with elements, whose connections with supreme sacredness have usually been overlooked.


16. See, for example, Margaret Barker, *Temple Themes in Christian Worship* (London: Clark, 2007); see also her *Temple Theology and Gate of Heaven*.

17. A lengthy list of Old Testament temple-related texts drawn upon by the Sermon on the Mount can be found in table 1 in Welch, *Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*, 184–87.


21. These can be found in table 1 in Welch, *Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*, 184–87.


23. For further discussion and sources on this point, see Welch, *Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*, 116–20.


25. For further exploration of this idea, see Welch, *Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*, 198–207.


27. For information about the Holy of Holies mentioned in the following discussion, I draw mainly on Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, as well as on Barker, *Temple Theology and Gate of Heaven*.


31. At least according to later Jewish sources; see Barker, *Temple Theology*, 25.


35. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 409 n. 55, draws particular attention to the importance of the Sermon at the Temple “to covenant making people.”

36. In the symbols of the ark of the law and the seat of mercy one can find the companion principles of justice and mercy, about which the High Priest Alma spoke powerfully in Alma 42. The close linkage of these two qualities in the Holy of Holies may have enhanced Alma’s testimony that God would cease to be God without uniting both of these divine attributes. Compare Israel Kohl’s argument in his *Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 151, that the location of the tablets of the commandments near the cover above the ark, “near the place of God’s Presence and his revelation[,] expresses the aim to unite the two poles of holiness and commandment[,] two terms comparable to such pairs as mercy and justice, equity and justice, justice and righteousness.”


38. Practical and spiritual insights into this process of removing contention from our lives are offered by Patrick R. Steffen, “Confirmation Bias and Contention,” in 2008 Symposium.
51. See also the threefold ascent developments of the Sermon discussed above.
54. Compare Aaron’s high priestly garments of “glory” and “beauty” (Exodus 28:2). See also Barker, *Temple Theology*, 57, based on 2 *Enoch* 22:8.
56. For a brilliantly clear exposition of the imagery of whiteness here and elsewhere, see Richard Dilworth Rust, “‘Nothing upon Earth So White’: Third Nephi 19:25 and Becoming Like Christ,” in 2008 Symposium.
57. For a synthesis of the element of joy, which is central to the Book of Mormon’s understanding of the purpose of life, see Daniel McKinlay, “Joy in Third Nephi,” in 2008 Symposium.
63. See Aaron Schade and David Seely, “The Writings of Malachi in Third Nephi: A Foundation for Zion in the Past and Present,” in 2008 Symposium, which exhaustively covers the role of Malachi’s prophecies in 3 Nephi 24–25 about the coming of the Lord to his temple with the powers and temple covenants of Elijah. As D. Marshall Goodrich of Portland, Oregon, has pointed out in personal e-mail correspondence, 23 February 2009, temple themes dominate the book of Malachi: for example, the law of obedience (1:6); not polluting the bread on the table of the Lord (1:7); making an acceptable sacrifice and vows to God (1:8, 10); not dealing treacherously with a brother or profaning the holy (2:10–11); keeping the law of chastity and fidelity to spouse and God (2:14–16); making pure consecration of tithes and offerings (3:3–10); bringing parents and children, ancestors and posterity, together (4:5–6).
64. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 50–55. See also 1 Kings 8:37 for the temple as a place for the healing of “whatsoever sickness there be.”
66. While the full nature of this blessing is unstates, and while it may well not have constituted a completed sealing of individual parents to their children, this moving group experience may very well have foreshadowed and securely revealed those ultimate ordinances yet to come.
67. On consecration and the temple in biblical times, see Welch, *Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*, 143–47.
77. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant*, 250. For an exquisitely media portrayal of the transcendent words and experiences embodied in 3 Nephi, see Mark Mabry, *Another Testament of Christ: Reflections of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009), and its companion DVD with the same title, which was filmed in Honduras and produced by Cameron Trejo.
The Harrowing of Hell

Salvation for the Dead in Early Christianity

David L. Paulsen, Roger D. Cook, and Kendel J. Christensen
ORD, ARE THERE FEW THAT BE SAVED?” (Luke 13:23). This question has troubled thinkers from Christianity’s beginning. The faithful readily accept that, save Jesus Christ, there is “none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Yet, the same loyal followers of Christ wrestle with the puzzling reality that countless numbers of souls have lived and died never having heard of Jesus Christ, let alone having had an adequate chance to accept the salvation he offers. What is their fate in the eternities? Are these forever excluded from salvation? Thomas Morris, philosophy professor at Notre Dame, describes this unexplained “scandal” in his book *The Logic of God Incarnate*:

The scandal . . . arises with a simple set of questions asked of the Christian theologian who claims that it is only through the life and death of God incarnated in Jesus Christ that all can be saved and reconciled to God: How can the many humans who lived and died before the time of Christ be saved through him? They surely cannot be held accountable for responding appropriately to something of which they could have no knowledge. Furthermore, what about all the people who have lived since the time of Christ in cultures with different religious traditions, untouched by the Christian gospel? . . . How could a just God set up a particular condition of salvation, the highest end of human life possible, which was and is inaccessible to most people? Is not the love of God better understood as universal, rather than as limited to a mediation through the one particular individual, Jesus of Nazareth? Is it not a moral as well as a religious scandal to claim otherwise?
This “scandal,” otherwise known as the soteriological problem of evil, is the logical incoherence of the Christian triad of ideas that (1) God is perfectly loving and just and desires that all his children be saved, (2) salvation comes only through an individual’s acceptance of Christ’s salvific gifts, and (3) countless numbers of God’s children have died without having a chance to hear about, much less accept, those saving gifts. Would a truly loving and just God condemn his children simply because they had never heard of his Son? Some very influential Christian thinkers have answered in the affirmative,3 and, consequently, some critics have labeled Christianity as a religion of damnation rather than salvation.4

This pessimistic position has not always prevailed in Christianity.5 Indeed, in early Christian thought, as well as in apocalyptic Judaism that preceded it, the merciful doctrine of salvation for the dead, known to early Christians as the “harrowing” of hell,6 was advanced as the divine solution to the problem. In this paper, which is the first of a three-part series, we (1) trace the origin and development of this idea in early Christianity and its formal articulation in the Apostles’ Creed; (2) set forth the rejection of the doctrine, first by Augustine and later by the Reformers, and their reasons for rejecting it; and (3) conclude with a brief survey of some contemporary solutions to the soteriological problem of evil. In the sequels to this paper, we explore the doctrine of baptism for the dead in early Christianity and elaborate on the restoration of the doctrines of the harrowing of hell and baptism for the dead in modern revelation.

Christian Precursors of Postmortem Rescue of the Dead

The writers of the New Testament texts are often described by contemporary Near Eastern scholars as Jewish or apocalyptic Christians to differentiate them from classical Christians, who appear in the second century AD and whose views begin to prevail from that time on. They were part of what scholars now call Second Temple Judaism, or Judaism as it existed from the return of the exiles from Babylon to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by the Romans (516 BC–AD 70). Their writings have a heavenly focus, describing in detail multiple, storied heavens and the ranks of angels that reside in each; the fall of some of those angels and their introducing evil to the earth; and the apocalyptic ascent of chosen prophets and priests to the highest heaven to witness and participate in the proceedings of the divine council of God. In addition, their writings also detail the coming destruction of the world and the paradise that God will establish, the resurrection of the dead and their exaltation in the hereafter, and the fiery, eternal punishment that the wicked will suffer for sins committed in mortality.7 As a direct descendant of apocalyptic Judaism and its unique views,8 early Christianity took an avid interest in the final condition of the dead and in reconciling this final state of affairs with God’s justice.

In the apocalyptic Jewish tradition, of which the New Testament writers who inaugurate the apocalyptic Christian tradition are a part, God is unequivocally understood to be a transcendent, all-powerful, embodied being who seeks the advancement of all mankind. He is otherworldly in that he physically resides in the Holy of Holies of the heavenly temple located in the highest heaven, but his transcendence should not be confused with being exterior to the universe, for he fully exists within space and time.9 From his exalted throne he controls the universe, his unmatched power extending to each and every corner and affecting all that dwell therein.10 Acting on behalf of his children, he shows them abundant mercy and love balanced with justice as he also punishes those who have lived corrupt lives in mortality.11

A theological impasse is created, however, when one attempts to reconcile the loving and merciful God of apocalyptic Judaism with the harsh, eternal punishment of Sheol (Greek hades), even if its inhabitants merit some measure of retribution. In approximately 400 BC, Enochian Jews began writing the Book of Watchers, a portion of the larger text now known as 1 Enoch. These are the first apocalyptic Jews to describe portions of Sheol as being a place of extreme punishment for the wicked. They describe the “scourges and tortures of the cursed forever” (1 Enoch 22:10) and the flaming “abyss” into which the fallen angels are thrown and burn forever (1 Enoch 21:1–10).12 Prior to this time, some expounders of Israelite religion understood that all mortals reside permanently in Sheol after this life, and it appears that their existence after this life could be good or bad, depending upon their
conduct during mortality.\textsuperscript{13} But Enochian Jews treat a portion of Sheol as a temporary holding place for the spirits of the righteous departed, placing the righteous in a place of rest and light and the wicked in places of darkness and confinement, but not physical punishment.\textsuperscript{14} They also taught of the righteous leaving Sheol, their resurrection from the dead, and their subsequent existence in an Edenlike paradise (1 Enoch 22:1–14; 24:1–25:6).

Although these ideas were commonplace in apocalyptic Judaism by the end of the Second Temple period, awareness of the theological dilemma created by the Enochian Jews’ view of Sheol’s eternal punishment also emerges in writings near the end of that period.\textsuperscript{15} Texts from the apocalyptic Jewish tradition dated to the late first century BC or early first century AD draw attention to the soteriological problem as their authors attempt to reconcile the endless torment of the underworld with the existence of a loving and merciful God. The Book of Parables, generally considered an Enochian work of the late first century BC or the first century AD, records that even the archangel Michael at first recoils at the “harshness of the judgment”
of the fallen angels. He exclaims to Raphael, “Who is there who would not soften his heart over it, and . . . not be troubled by this word?” Michael finds some comfort knowing that the worst punishments are reserved for the fallen archangels alone: “for no angel or human will receive their lot” (1 Enoch 68:2–5). Still, the question remains: How can a loving and merciful God justify tormenting any of his creations, especially if this torment is “without end”?

This dilemma is addressed in 4 Ezra, an apocalyptic Jewish work dating to the first century AD. In the text, an angel shows the ancient prophet Ezra the “furnace of hell” where the disobedient are destined to live after this life and the paradise and exaltation reserved for the righteous. He tells Ezra that the wicked will “wander about in torments,” while those who follow God will be “guarded by angels in profound quiet,” having bodies whose faces will “shine like the sun, and . . . be made like the light of the stars” (4 Ezra 7:36, 80, 95, 97)—a literal exaltation of the righteous to an angelic status. 16 Ezra laments, however, that he cannot reconcile God’s overabundant goodness and mercy with what seems to be an overly rigorous justice. If all have sinned and become unclean, then how is it that any deserve salvation at all? How can the final judgment be just with its division of those entering paradise and those entering hell? Ezra ends his lament with a plea to God for mercy for the disobedient:

What does it profit us that we shall be preserved alive but cruelly tormented? . . . And if we were not to come into judgment after death, perhaps it would have been better for us. . . . It would have been better if the earth had not produced Adam, or else, when it had produced him, had restrained him from sinning. For what good is it to all that they live in sorrow now and expect punishment after death? . . . For in truth there is no one among those who have been born who has not acted wickedly, and among those who have existed there is no one who has not transgressed. For in this, O Lord, your righteousness and goodness will be declared, when you are merciful to those who have no store of good works. (4 Ezra 7:65–67, 69, 116–17; 8:35–36)

Additionally, it should be noted that a part of the soteriological problem of evil is at least somewhat mitigated in apocalyptic Judaism in that it does not consign righteous Gentiles to the punishments of Sheol. The Enochian text known as Enoch’s Dream Visions, written approximately 164 BC during the persecutions of the Jews under Antiochan rule, speaks of the eventual victory of righteous Judaism over the gentile nations and the building of a vast, new temple complex to replace Jerusalem and its temple. It is the first apocalyptic Jewish text that explains the full angelic exaltation of righteous Jews in the paradisiacal world that will be created on the earth, with the righteous being symbolically described as “sheep” that are “white” and their wool “thick and pure,” a transformation from their previous mortal state, where they were plain sheep. Significantly, righteous Gentiles, symbolically described as the “animals on the earth and all the birds of heaven,” are subservient to the exalted Jews who reign over the earth from the temple complex, they “falling down and worshiping those sheep . . . and obeying them in every thing” (1 Enoch 90:28–32). Though still not granted the same status as righteous Jews, these Gentiles are not subject to the same fiery punishment that the fallen angels, wicked kings, and apostate Jews receive in Sheol (1 Enoch 90:20–27).

This is significant because the righteous Gentiles are not immediately consigned to eternal punishment; they apparently do not need to fear torment in Sheol. They continue to live on the earth, and they seemingly learn of and follow the God of the Jews, for he rejoices over them (1 Enoch 90:38). Indeed, a transformation is also available for them as the wild animals are “changed, and they all became white cattle” (1 Enoch 90:37), but it is also clear that their eternal status will be as everlasting inferiors to the exalted Jews, for they are white cattle as compared to the brilliantly white sheep that rule over them.17 This partially, but not fully, solves part of the soteriological problem. A more complete resolution of the problem would demand that even the righteous Gentiles could be fully redeemed and exalted, the position that apocalyptic Christians would later adopt.

**Apocalyptic Christianity**

Apocalyptic Christians, having inherited from apocalyptic Judaism the idea that the just are saved and the wicked condemned, were also troubled by
this soteriological problem, but they advanced a unique solution during the first century AD: God will show an abundance of mercy by redeeming from Sheol all who can and will be saved. They affirm that Christ descended to the underworld as a divinely empowered spiritual being, smashed its gates, preached repentance to the captive disobedient, and began the salvific rites that would open for them the gates of heaven.18 So, apocalyptic Christians solved the soteriological problem by (1) conceiving the punishment of those in Sheol as temporary and (2) conceiving God as offering repentance to the unevangelized and wicked of Sheol.19

Comments made by Paul the apostle show that salvation for the dead had been on the minds of apocalyptic Christians since its earliest days. The first reference is found in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, likely written about AD 60.20 He refers to Jesus’s triumph over all things, even over “captivity” itself, and briefly describes Christ’s descent to hades: “He [Jesus] had also descended into the lower parts of the earth” (Ephesians 4:8–10 NRSV). Extant interpretations of this passage include Jesus’s victory over sin and his triumph over the captivity of hades. If Paul is referring to the latter, then by overcoming captivity Jesus freed the prisoners of the underworld.21 Indeed, Christ’s triumph over all things heavenly and earthly—elaborated in detail by Paul as the Father having lifted Jesus above all angelic “rule and authority and power and dominion” and “put all things under his [Jesus’s] feet” (Ephesians 1:21–22 NRSV)—would not be complete unless Jesus also triumphed over the captivity of the underworld. If this interpretation is correct, then the fact that Jesus’s descent is mentioned without any additional comment implies that this is an idea familiar to Christianity’s formative years.22

Another apocalyptic Christian text written at about the same time as Paul’s letter to the Ephe-

sians, 1 Peter,23 gives additional insight into Christ’s redeeming the repentant captives of hades. In the passage quoted below, Peter explains that Christ was made “alive in the spirit,” presumably meaning that between his death and resurrection Jesus descended to hades and there opened the way for salvation of the dead. There he preached to those who had died in sin the hope that even disobedient spirits may be redeemed and returned to God:

For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.24 . . . For this is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does. (1 Peter 3:18–20; 4:6 NRSV)25
Peter seems to have a vindication of God’s justice in mind when writing these passages. If God did not arrange for Christ to proclaim the good news to the captives and allow those who could yet be redeemed to be freed, then his goodness would be suspect. A truly just and merciful God must give full opportunity for all to repent and live righteously, including the multitudes that died at the time of Noah. Despite their actions, God patiently waits for the spiritually dead to change so that he may grant them mercy, both now and in hades. It is not merely escape from Sheol but exaltation that Peter promises, for the captives are freed so that they might “live in the spirit as God does” (1 Peter 4:6). God is no respecter of persons according to Peter (see 1 Peter 1:17), and he includes the deceased among those to whom God shows an abundance of mercy. Given Peter’s stand on redeeming the dead, it should be no surprise to find that other apocalyptic Jews of the same time period attempted to solve the problem as well. A description of an opportunity for repentance for those in hades is found in the Apocalypse of Zephaniah, a work dating roughly to the first century AD and preserved by Christians.

In it, the Old Testament prophet Zephaniah is given a tour of the multiple heavens and of hades, and he prays to God for compassion for those undergoing torment in the underworld (Apocalypse of Zephaniah 2:8–9). Later he sees a multitude of the exalted righteous, including Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Apocalypse of Zephaniah 8:1–9:5), who also pray to God for mercy for the inhabitants of hades (Apocalypse of Zephaniah 11:1–6). The sufferings of the underworld are deserved, according to the author, but the petitions of the exalted righteous are an appeal to God’s compassion, for he can choose to show mercy and forgive whom he will. Zephaniah also sees some inhabitants of hades who are blind and is told by his angelic escort that they are “categoriens [one who receives instruction in preparation for baptism] who heard the word of God, but they were not perfected in the work which they heard.” Zephaniah asks, “Then do they not have repentance here?” with the angel replying, “Yes . . . until the day when the Lord will judge” (Apocalypse of Zephaniah 10:9–12). As the exalted righteous pray on behalf of all of the inhabitants of hades, it is understood that all—not just the catechumens—have a possibility of either some sort of escape from hades or relief from its torments. However, the author does not explain when or how this redemption will take place.

The book of Revelation, likely written in AD 96 during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian, explains the release of the underworld’s captives as Christ having overcome death and opening up hades. Christ says to John that he is the “living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades” (Revelation 1:18 NRSV). And at the great judgment, death and hades will give up “the dead that [are] in them, and all [will be] judged according to what they had done” (Revelation 20:13 NRSV). Then all those who have not turned to God, those whose names are not written in the book of life, will be thrown with death and hades into a lake of fire, identified as the “second death” (Revelation 20:11–15). Those who have fully turned toward God, however, now belong to Christ, the holder of the keys of death and hades. John, who adheres to a view of salvation similar to Peter and the author of the Apocalypse of Zephaniah, states that all who turn to God will be exalted.

Another early Christian text provides convincing evidence for interpreting Ephesians, 1 Peter, and Revelation as portraying Christ’s descent to Sheol and freeing its captives. This text, known as the Odes of Solomon, is a collection of Christian hymns connected to the Johannine community of the late first or early second century AD. In the text, the Christian author speaks as if he were Christ and describes Christ’s original descent from God and the highest heaven and his subsequent descent to Sheol: “He who caused me to descend from on high, and to ascend from the regions below” (Ode 22:1).

He indicates that “I opened the doors which were closed” (Ode 17:9), followed by the claim that “I shattered the bars of iron, for my own iron(s) had grown hot and melted before me” (Ode 17:10). The shattering of the bars refers to Christ destroying the infamous gates of hades, and the melting of his binding chains caused by the fierce heat radiating from his fiery, divine glory that is once again revealed. The opening of the door is best explained as Christ allowing for vicarious baptism for the dead, baptism being the door to salvation for apocalyptic Christians, rather than a further reference to the gates of the underworld, as that which is shattered need not be opened. Christ then states, “I went toward all my bondsmen in order to loose them, that I might not abandon anyone bound or
binding” (Ode 17:12), revealing his intent to free the prisoners who belong to him.

In Ode 42, Christ again details his descent to the underworld and his triumphant overcoming of death and Sheol. Christ is a departed spirit, so he descends to Sheol as do all departed spirits in the apocalyptic Jewish tradition. But the Son of God cannot be contained by either death or hell. His eternal nature repulses death, it being as “vinegar and bitterness” to death. Additional information about the shattering of the gates of hades is also revealed. It is Christ’s very appearance, the blinding, divine light that streams from his face, which penetrates and overcomes Sheol, for the utter darkness cannot withstand effulgent, celestial light. Christ shatters the gates, Sheol is breached, and the captives are set free:

Sheol saw me and was shattered, and Death ejected me and many with me. I have been vinegar and bitterness to it, and I went down with it as far as its depth.

(Ode 42:11–12)

Shattering Sheol is equivalent to the breaching of an otherwise inescapable prison. The Book of the Watchers attempts to describe the spirit world, explaining that four immense, hollowed-out chambers hold the spirits of the departed as they wait for the final judgment. One chamber, which is illuminated and has a fountain of water, is designated as the abode of the righteous. In this chamber the righteous spirits call upon God, with one petitioner described as “the spirit that went forth from Abel, whom Cain his brother murdered.” But even for the righteous, Sheol is impossible to escape, for the chambers are hewn out of “a great and high mountain of hard rock,” and the author describes the chambers as “deep” and their walls as “very smooth” to help his readers understand that one could never climb out of the abyss (1 Enoch 22:1–7). The world of the departed spirits, therefore, is divided between a place of reward and other places dedicated to confinement. The unrighteous dead in the Odes of Solomon are in a vast chamber reserved for the disobedient as they wait for the final judgment, but Christ’s opening of Sheol allows for release.

Ode 42 next speaks of Christ’s spiritual body and his formation of a community of the righteous among the dead. The author explains that death could not long endure Christ’s blazing countenance, and it first releases his feet and then his head. Additionally, Christ has a face and speaks with lips. Clearly, the author holds that the departed Christ retains some kind of material embodiment, a spiritual body, one with head, feet, lips, and a face, and others with a similar spiritual embodiment run to him and cry out for mercy. Theirs would be an inferior embodiment, however, for their faces do not shine with effulgent light, and they cannot effect their own release from Sheol. Christ then makes a proclamation to the departed spirits, offering them the eternal life of the righteous even as they stand in the world of the dead:

Then the feet and the head it released, because it was not able to endure my face. And I made a congregation of living among his dead; and I spoke with them by living lips; in order that my word may not fail.

(Ode 42:13–14)

The response of the captives is a wholehearted turning to God. They cry out and plead for Christ’s pity and kindness. They have wallowed in the shadows of Sheol, chained in an endless darkness that could never be lifted, but Christ, the Light, now brilliantly illuminates the most penetrating darkness and offers them the promise of escape:

And those who had died ran toward me; and they cried out and said, “Son of God, have pity on us. And deal with us according to your kindness, and bring us out from the chains of darkness.”

(Ode 42:15–16)

In another possible reference to baptism for the dead, Ode 42 records that the departed spirits ask Jesus to open the door for them and for their salvation to be with the Savior. Their plea for an opening of the door indicates that this is a future event; therefore, like Ode 17:9 (above), it is not the shattered gates of Sheol that need to be opened, but an acknowledgment that they need the way opened for a vicarious baptism to take place. Note, in fact, that even though Christ now stands in their midst, they request the door to be opened so
that they may “go forth to [him],” an indication that they are in some sense still separated from him; the gates of the heavens are still closed to them. Vicarious baptism will allow them to enter the Way, the Christian path to salvation, ending that separation.

Interestingly, they do not desire salvation alone, meaning an entrance into one of the heavenly realms; they request that they be saved with Jesus, the appointed Savior. This is similar to the request of the apostles James and John that they may have the right to rule at Christ’s right and left hands, with Jesus explaining that the right to assign those thrones of honor belongs to the Father (Mark 10:35–40). It also echoes Paul’s assertion that the righteous will be exalted over all angels to rule at Christ’s right hand. Indeed, in an earlier Ode, Christ proclaims, “upon my right hand I have set my elect ones” (Ode 8:18). The dead who are being freed understand that to be saved by Jesus equates to being exalted with him:

“And open for us the door by which we may go forth to you, for we perceive that our death does not approach you. May we also be saved with you, because you are our Savior.” (Ode 42:17–18)

The final verses of Ode 42 indicate that Christ will fulfill all their requests. He hears their pleas and responds to their sincere faith by internalizing it. In a reference to the Christian rite of anointing or chrism, by which the redeemed are made holy and heavenly, Christ then places his name on the foreheads of the initiates in the new community of the righteous by using olive oil. The chrism connects the initiates to Christ as they now permanently bear the divine name that has been given to Christ by the Father. They now belong to him; indeed, Christ says, “they are mine”:?

Then I heard their voice, and placed their faith in my heart. And I placed my name upon their head, because they are free and they are mine. (Ode 42:19–20)
The placement of the chrism on the foreheads of the departed spirits offers direct evidence that vicarious baptism will soon follow for them. Second-century AD Christian texts, the most important being Syrian baptismal documents, indicate that chrism was directly related to baptism. The initiate would be presented for baptism, and he or she would be marked with oil on the forehead by the bishop or presbyter either in a prebaptismal or post-baptismal anointing, or in anointings both before and after baptism. The chrisms, however, are not done independent of baptism—they are done at the same time. Syrian baptismal documents also record that a chrism for the entire body took place as part of the rite. Additionally, it can be argued that the chrism can be traced back to the first century and the very first Christians. Specifically referring to the chrism placed on the forehead, Gabriele Winkler connects the rite of anointing to the apostolic era:

Christian baptism is shaped after Christ’s baptism in the Jordan. As Jesus had received the anointing through the divine presence in the appearance of a dove, and was invested as the Messiah, so in Christian baptism every candidate is anointed and, in connection with the anointing, the gift of the Spirit is conferred. Therefore the main theme of this prebaptismal anointing is the entry into the eschatological kingship of the Messiah, being in the true sense of the word assimilated to the Messiah-King through this anointing.48

Given that the Christian author of the Odes would be familiar with both baptism and chrism and would understand that one accompanies the other, as well as the fact that he specifically refers to the chrism given to the repentant dead of Sheol, it can be reasonably concluded that the pleading of the repentant dead for Christ to open the door (Ode 42:17) refers to the vicarious baptism of apocalyptic Christianity. They, like all Christians, will receive the rites necessary for entrance into God’s kingdom, but that process has begun in the world of spirits as they now bear his divine name.

As a product of the Johannine Christian community of the late first or early second century AD, the Odes of Solomon serves as a strong indicator of the antiquity of the doctrine of the harrowing of hell. The scattered references found in Ephesians, 1 Peter, and Revelation are enough to make a strong case that apocalyptic Christians understood that God will not torture the repentant for eternity, be these captives evangelized or not, but the explicit description of Christ’s descent and release of the captives seems to confirm this interpretation.

The apocalyptic Christian text commonly called the Epistula Apostolorum, or “Epistle to the Apostles,” also recounts the harrowing of hell. Dated to the early second century, the Christian author reports a dialogue between the resurrected Jesus and the disciples concerning Christ’s descent and rescue of the disobedient dead that lie chained in the darkness of Sheol.49 Christ claims that he will loosen their chains and bring them back to the light. Important is the fact that Jesus will accomplish what seems to be impossible by their release, for the wicked lie in utter despair with no hope for rescue. But as nothing is impossible to God, the empowered Christ will enter Sheol and deliver them. Note that the text also identifies Sheol as the place of Lazarus, implying that the world of spirits is divided into realms of places of punishment and reward. Apparently, the chambers dedicated to the righteous and the wicked will all be emptied through Christ’s ministrations:

Truly I say to you, that I have received all power from my Father that I may bring back those in darkness into light and those in incorruptibility into incorruptibility and those in death into life, and that those in captivity may be loosed, as what is impossible on the part of men is possible on the part of the Father. I am the hope of the hopeless, the helper of those who have no helper, the treasure of those in need, the physician of the sick, the resurrection of the dead... On that account I have descended to the place of Lazarus, and have preached to the righteous and to the prophets, that they may come forth from the rest which is below and go up to what is (above)... (in that I stretch out) my right hand over them... [of the baptism (Eth.)] of life and forgiveness and deliverance from all evil, as I have done to you and to those who believe in me.50

Another such text is the Gospel of Bartholomew, or Questions of Bartholomew, as M. R. James says the manuscripts call it, which purports to be an
exchange between the apostle Bartholomew and the resurrected Christ. Christ tells Bartholomew about his descent into hell, how the angels announce his coming, and how the devils react:

Then I went down into Hades that I might bring up Adam and all those who were with him, according to the supplication of Michael the archangel. . . .

And the angels cried to the powers saying, “Remove your gates, you princes, remove the everlasting doors for behold the King of glory comes down.” . . .

And when I had descended five hundred steps, Hades was troubled saying, “I hear the breathing of the Most High, and I cannot endure it.” . . .

Then did I [Christ] enter in and scourged him [Hades] and bound him with chains that cannot be loosed, and brought forth thence all the patriarchs. 51

In a similar text that was supposedly authored by Bartholomew and that James calls The Book of the Resurrection of Christ by Bartholomew the Apostle, James summarizes the harrowing of hell after Christ’s burial as follows: “Then Jesus rose and mounted into the chariot of the Cherubim. He wrought havoc in Hell, breaking the doors, binding the demons Beliar and Melkir and delivered Adam and the holy souls.” 52

The Shepherd of Hermas, likely dating from the early to mid-second century AD, is another apocalyptic Christian text that further describes the rescue of the dead from hades. Like the Odes of Solomon, the author of the portion of the text known as the Parables indicates that a vicarious baptism is given to the repentant dead:

It was necessary . . . for them to come up through water in order to be made alive, for otherwise they could not enter the kingdom of God, unless they laid aside the deadness of their former life. So even those who had fallen asleep received the seal of the Son of God and entered the kingdom of God. . . . The seal, therefore, is the water; so they go down into the water dead and they come up alive. (Shepherd of Hermas, Parable 9.16.2–4) 53

Righteous Christians who have passed on participate in rescuing the dead: “when these apostles and teachers who preached the name of the Son of God fell asleep . . . they preached also to those who had previously fallen asleep, and they themselves gave them the seal of the preaching” (Shepherd of Hermas, Parable 9.16.5). Additional instances of this rite’s performance include a group in Asia Minor who baptized the living using the names of the dead, 54 as well as the Marcionites who would ask an already baptized, living follower a baptismal question in behalf of a departed and then baptize that follower, with “the benefits accruing to the dead person.” 55

In sum, apocalyptic Christianity inherited the soteriological problem of evil from apocalyptic Judaism, but in its formative years set out to find a solution to the problem, which is that God personally sent his Son to redeem mankind, with an overabundance of mercy offered so that even the repentant wicked who have passed on are offered salvation. And unlike other versions of apocalyptic Judaism, there is no distinction in these early Christian texts between the level of salvation offered to Jews and the unevangelized. All are freely offered redemption upon accepting Christ. The result is that the soteriological problem of evil and suffering is greatly mitigated.

The Apostles’ Creed

These themes from Peter and apocalyptic Judaism are echoed in the Apostles’ Creed, which is the oldest Christian creed 56 and is still used today as part of the baptismal liturgy of the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran churches. 57 The Apostles’ Creed acknowledges a belief in “God, the Father almighty” and in “Jesus Christ, his only Son” who “descended into Hell.” 58 This latter phrase is central to untangling the soteriological knot, for with it comes the possibility of evangelizing those who had passed from mortality. Indeed, this was the very purpose of its insertion, as one scholar illuminates:

This article expresses the faith of the primitive Church in two beliefs: First, it meant that God had not left anyone without the chance of salvation but had sent Jesus into hell in order to save those who had not known him on earth. The article was inserted in the Creed because
the Creed is a brief outline of the saving acts of Christ, and the descent into hell is an important part of his saving work. It is important to remember that hell to the early Church was not the ghastly place of torment it was to become in the mind of the medieval Church.\textsuperscript{59}

Rather, the abode for departed spirits was known as a “resting place . . . until Jesus came.”\textsuperscript{60}

Consider how the Apostles’ Creed has influenced contemporary Catholic thought. According to one Catholic writer, the doctrine of the descent into hell involves a place of four divisions:

Hell as a whole may be differentiated into at least three species: gehenna, purgatory, and sheol; according to a long-standing theological view, there is also a limbo (from the Latin \textit{limbus}, meaning edge or threshold) for unbaptized children, the \textit{limbus puerorum}. Although it may sound strange to the contemporary ear, one can use the generic name in reference to each species: the hell of the damned (gehenna), the hell of purification (purgatory), the hell of the Fathers (sheol), and the hell of the children. Though these four abodes of the dead are very different in character, hell in all these cases can be represented with the generic Latin neuter, \textit{infernum}.\textsuperscript{61}

The Limbo of the Father, where “all the holy men and women who died before the death of Christ” rest, “ceased to exist after Christ’s descent.”\textsuperscript{62} It was these who Christ descended to rescue: “Jesus did not descend into hell to deliver the damned, nor to destroy the hell of damnation, but to free the just who had gone before him.”\textsuperscript{63} The Limbo of the Children, however, “remains a topic of unresolved theological understanding.”\textsuperscript{64}

According to popular legend, the Creed was originally dictated from the Twelve Apostles themselves, though researchers trace the origin to confessions of faith in early baptismal rites.\textsuperscript{65} Researchers do not know the precise authorship and occasion of its writing, only that it likely originated out of Rome between AD 150–75, when there was “every reason for the formation of some credal statement to guard against the misconceptions of Christianity which were widely prevalent and were causing serious trouble.”\textsuperscript{66} It thus came to be known as the “Rule of Faith” and was used as a check against heretical interpretations of the scriptures.\textsuperscript{67}

Yet despite heresy, “there was no more well-known and popular belief . . . and its popularity steadily increased.”\textsuperscript{68} Irenaeus, writing near the end of the second century, strongly confirmed the doctrine of the descent, teaching that Christ “descended into the lower parts of the earth to seek the sheep that was lost,” a clear indication of the salvific nature of his visit there.\textsuperscript{69} In Irenaeus’s mind, “a strict theodicy demanded that those who lived before . . . should share in the Gospel.”\textsuperscript{70} Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215) agrees, stating that “it is not right to condemn some without trial, and only give credit for righteousness to others who lived after the coming of the Lord.”\textsuperscript{71} Emphasizing even more clearly the evangelic purpose of Christ’s descent, Clement further states that “Christ went down to Hades for no other purpose than to preach the gospel.”\textsuperscript{72}

Origen (ca. 185–254) taught that Christ visited and preached to the dead: “When he was in the body he convinced not merely a few . . . and that when he became a soul unclothed by a body he conversed with souls unclothed by bodies, converting also those of them who were willing to accept him or those who, for reasons which he himself knew, he saw to be ready to do so.”\textsuperscript{73} Origen defended this idea against Celsus, who argued that the descent was mere mythology.\textsuperscript{74}

The Creed was still used widely and considered authoritative in the fourth and fifth centuries. Tyrannius (ca. 400), who translated many of Origen’s works into Latin, wrote a full, original commentary on the Creed in which he notes that one of the apostles’ main intents for writing the Creed was for “future preaching . . . [and to be] handed out as standard teaching to converts.”\textsuperscript{75} He also acknowledges that there are some variations of the Creed circulating among the various churches, some without the phrase “descended into hell.” Tyrannius comments, however, that “the fact that He descended to hell is unmistakable”; he cites scriptures confirming the idea\textsuperscript{76} and affirms that Christ descended for the purpose of preaching to and redeeming the souls in hell.\textsuperscript{77}

Many other church authorities confirm the doctrine of the Creed that Christ descended into hell. Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 315–86) affirms that Christ “descended . . . beneath the earth, that from
thence also He might redeem the just.” 78 Ambrose (d. 397) wrote that the “substance” of Christ visited the underworld to “set free the souls of the dead, to loose the bonds of death,” and to “remit sins.” 79 Cyril of Alexandria (ca. 370–444) taught of the descent and of its saving benefits to the departed as “the fullest of all proofs of Christ’s love for mankind.” 80 In a letter written to a Spanish bishop, Turibius, in 447, Pope Leo the Great affirms the descent. 81 Though the idea was noticeably absent in the Council of Nicaea in 325,82 the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Council of AD 381 denounced any who did not affirm the descent,83 the fourth Council of Toledo in AD 633 made it a point to insert language describing the descent into their writings,84 and the phrase became a part of the universally accepted version of the Apostles’ Creed in the eighth century.85 Later, the Council of Sens (AD 1140), supported by Pope Innocent II, condemned an error that had begun to creep into the church and was attributed to Peter Abelard, namely that “the soul of Christ per se did not descend to those who are below [ad inferos], but only by means of power.”86 Of special interest to Latter-day Saints, many leaders of the early Christian church professed a belief in a descent into hell by quoting scriptures that have since been lost.87 The harrowing also appears as the subject of popular art and literature, including the great Divine Comedy. Georgia Frank traces the harrowing of hell from its earliest appearances in the New Testament, to “numerous sermons and legends in late antiquity,” and to its survival “well into the Middle Ages.”88 It is also mentioned, though sparsely, in the writings of various Catholic scholars as late as the thirteenth century.89 Rather than Christ’s rescue of the imprisoned dead being an aberration in Christian thought, both its antiquity and longevity show it to be a normative Christian belief.

Rejection of the Harrowing of Hell by Augustine, Aquinas, and the Reformers

The ideas and implications of the harrowing did not endure in good favor for everyone within Christianity. The writings of Augustine of Hippo in the fourth and fifth century vigorously reject any idea of a posthumous salvation,90 despite his being fully aware of the popularity of the doctrine for lay people as well as for prominent writers91 and despite his own unequivocal acceptance of Christ’s descent into hell.92 For Augustine, the passages in 1 Peter made no reference to hades. He took the phrase “in the days of Noah” to mean just that: the spirit of Christ preached to the disobedient antediluvians before the flood. Augustine further extended the metaphor to mean that any disobedient spirits “in prison” simply referred to being “in the darkness of ignorance.”93 They had not physically died, but were, rather, spiritually dead.94

Augustine strived to explain away this particular doctrine for at least three principal reasons. First, he felt it would undermine the authority generally of the church in this life. Second, he thought that “another” chance was unnecessary, for no one who had died since the resurrection had any excuse for not learning of and accepting Christ. 95 And third, he felt it would defeat the purpose of missionary work in mortality, concluding that “then the gospel ought not to be preached here, since all will certainly die.”96

Interestingly, Augustine struggled with the idea of a posthumous rescue. For example, he interprets Matthew 5:25–26—about coming to terms with one’s accuser quickly “lest . . . thou be cast into prison”—as a metaphor for the final judgment, but he is “troubled” by the phrase “till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.”97 Could someone escape from an eternal prison? Augustine would like to say no, and so he tentatively tries to reinterpret the length of punishment by applying the use of
the word *until* in Psalm 110:1 to the same word in Matthew, but ultimately concedes that “it is better to escape [the possibility of being sent to eternal punishment] than to learn its nature.” Indeed, any serious delving into the possibility of a temporary hell approaches heresy for Augustine, for “if mercy leads us to believe that the punishment of the wicked will come to an end, what are we to believe concerning the reward of the just, when in each case eternity is mentioned in the same passage?” Privately, Augustine wished that holy writ did not even mention a descent into hell.

Although Thomas Aquinas believed that Christ descended to hell, he concluded that it served no salvific purpose. Evangelizing has no effect in hell since repentance is no longer possible after death, and repentance is impossible because individuals’ characters become set at death—the righteous will forever remain righteous, and the unrighteous will forever remain unrighteous. Although Aquinas taught that repentance is not possible after death, he affirmed that in mortality all people can believe and be saved. Nevertheless the beliefs necessary for salvation differ, depending on the times, places, and conditions in which people live. For example, an acceptance of the Trinity is required of those who live after the time of Jesus. So, although Aquinas and Augustine differed as to whether Christ descended to hell, they agreed that evangelizing and thus repentance did not exist after death.

Under Augustine’s influence, Protestant Reformers also denied Christ’s descent to hell. John Calvin, for example, completely rejects any notion of Christ visiting hell to save anyone. For Calvin, the idea of a “descent into hell” is simply a reference to the intense suffering that Christ endured on the cross. Calvin explains it away, much like Augustine, into metaphor by referring to Isaiah’s prophecy of Christ’s sufferings in chapter 53: “There is nothing strange in its being said that he descended to hell, seeing he endured the death which is inflicted on the wicked by an angry God.” He calls any objections to that explanation (specifically, the question as to why the Creed mentions Christ visiting hell *after* his burial when his suffering *preceded* it) mere “trifling” and dismisses the popular idea that Christ literally visited hell to save souls as “nothing but a fable” and “childish.” The Church of the Palatinate as well as the catechism of Geneva took a similar view.

Martin Luther was just as firm in closing the door on the possibility of salvation after death. He denied “the existence of a purgatory and of a Limbo of the Fathers in which they say that there is hope and a sure expectation of liberation. . . . These are figments of some stupid and bungling sophist.” Luther also interprets 1 Peter metaphorically, taking the “spirits in prison” to mean those in mortality who do not respond to the gospel message. In the aftermath of the Reformation, Christ’s descent into hell would be reduced to an obscure minority view, with but few witnesses to the once-ubiquitous doctrine.

One might understand why religious leaders would want to squelch the notion of repentance after death: congregants can live immorally now and convert later. Thus, Augustine and others would declare that only this life determines our status in the next. How do Mormons respond to this problem since we affirm repentance after death?
We address this issue in a subsequent paper wherein we set out the latter-day restoration of postmortem evangelization. A further complication for religious leaders who believe in repentance after death is the implication that “the theory of postmortem evangelism takes the wind out of the sails of missions.”111 As one researcher surmises, the acceptance of postmortem salvation would “weaken the appeal of the Christian preachers to the terrors of the Lord, and... make the condition of the heathen preferable to that of Christians. It would involve, e.g., the possibility of salvation without baptism, without the knowledge of what Christ had done, and this would clash with the dogma which Augustine [and others] maintained so tenaciously.”112 However, although denying posthumous repentance restored urgency to evangelism, it did so at the cost of exacerbating the soteriological problem of evil. It was “common for ministers such as Augustine and Calvin to speak of the massa damnata as though it pained God not at all to damn anyone.”113 Sadly, some view God as so powerful and emotionally detached that, as one British philosopher points out, “for God a billion rational creatures are as dust in the balance; if a billion perish, God suffers no loss.”114

Additionally, the Reformers’ rejection of Christ’s harrowing comes not from one belief but from a package of theological commitments. It would be nearly impossible to teach the doctrine of predestination if people had an opportunity to progress after death.115 Furthermore, they “looked on the popular belief as traditional, not scriptural, they wished to wrest out of the hands of their opponents a belief which seemed to them to give some support to the Romish theory of purgatory, and to the practices which grew out of it.”116

**Divine Perseverance and Other Contemporary Views**

Despite Christianity’s well-nigh universal rejection of the harrowing and its implications, the idea that salvation is possible for mankind even after death can still be found among a few contemporary theologians. Most notably, Gabriel Fackre, Abbot Professor of Christian Theology, Emeritus, at Andover Newton Theological School, supports a view he calls “divine perseverance,” or the idea that “those who die unevangelized receive an opportunity for salvation after death. God condemns no one without first seeing what his or her response to Christ is.”117 He resolutely defends this position, which is strikingly congruent with the Latter-day Saint notion of postmortem evangelism, in his coauthored book *What about Those Who Have Never Heard? Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized.*

In the book, Fackre defends his view against two competing contemporary theologies: **restrictivism** espoused by Ronald H. Nash and **inclusivism** championed by John Sanders. **Restrictivism** affirms that salvation requires that one accept Christ before death.118 **Inclusivism** proposes that some may be saved who did not know about Christ’s atonement, provided they respond in faith to the general revelation of God’s goodness that he gives to all of his children in some measure.119

Fackre begins by explaining that his view follows directly from what we know of God’s attributes, “that the power of God is, mysteriously, the way of the cross, the ‘weakness of God.’ The ultimate power is not machismo but the divine
vulnerability. . . God’s love is *patient* and *persistent*. It outlasts us. It is a ‘weakness’ that is stronger than our rebellion. God’s weakness is a powerful powerlessness, a victorious vulnerability.120 In other words, Fackre emphasizes that we do not truly know the goodness of God or his love for us.121 Fackre’s argument sketches an appealing model of God. God’s love is so great, so far beyond our mortal comprehension, that God eternally “persists” in his attempt to gather his children. Indeed, what else could we expect from a being who possesses infinite love? Surely he does not draw a temporal “line” of love in eternity. Thus, because divine love endures, God will always persist in his evangelistic efforts until he gathers everyone. Fackre believes that this also follows from the justice of God. Since we are not accountable (condemned) for knowledge we do not have,122 everyone will have the opportunity in this life or the next to hear the good news.123

A second tier of Fackre’s argument is based upon God’s sovereignty. He states emphatically that “Christ can ‘do all things.’ No limits can be set to the triune God, except self-chosen limits.”124 In an effort to reach lost souls, Christ uses his power “to breach the very walls of death to make a ‘proclamation to the spirits in prison’ (v. 19 [of 1 Peter 3]). Christ’s implacable power and love will persist to and through the final barrier of death. Even this last enemy is not strong enough to prevent the declaration of the Word.”125 Damnation, then, is not a failure on God’s part but a failure of the individual.

To prepare us to accept Christ’s gospel, Fackre believes that God enlightens humankind (like the LDS notion of the “light of Christ”). In Noah’s day, God established the Noahic covenant, or the rainbow promise: “In Judaism, the rainbow promise has reference to the light given to those outside God’s special saving covenant with the Jewish people. That is, God will judge human beings . . . by the response they make to the universal hints of what is true and good and holy given from Noah’s time on.”126 And from Christ on “God gives to ‘all flesh’ an awareness of basic moral and spiritual standards and expectations.”127

Finally, Fackre rests his case for postmortem evangelization upon the very same elements within the doctrine of the harrowing found in 1 Peter and the Apostles’ Creed that have been previously discussed. Christ’s preaching to and releasing souls from hell, he claims, is further evidence of God’s love and divine perseverance.128 For these reasons, Fackre asserts that “Christ came to rescue us from the death that is ‘the wages of sin’” and that this “stunning offer is made to ‘everyone who believes,’”129 regardless of when a person receives that opportunity. Another assertion is equally stirring, stating that “divine perseverance will not deny the saving Word to any, and will contest all the makers of boundaries, including the final boundary [death].”130

With Fackre, the celebrated Anglican theologian Frederic W. Farrar similarly emphasizes the love of God and how the soteriological problem of evil conflicts with this. He also observes the teachings of 1 Peter 4:6 and observes this poignancy: “Every effort has been made to explain away the plain meaning of this passage. It is one of the most precious passages of Scripture, and it involves no ambiguity. . . . For if language have any meaning, this language means that Christ, when His Spirit descended into the lower world, proclaimed the message of salvation to the once impenitent dead.”131

Besides Fackre, many others have answered the question, What about those who have never heard the gospel? Both Thomas Aquinas and Norman Geisler believe that the message of the gospel will be sent to anyone who responds positively to the light they receive from God. Luis de Molina’s *middle knowledge* view maintains that God, because he knows how anyone would respond in any situation, may save those who would have believed in his Son had they heard his message. The Roman Catholic *final option* theory affirms that Christ “encounters all people at the moment they are dying,” giving everyone the opportunity in this life to accept or reject him. Others maintain an optimistic *universalism* that God will save the vast majority (some say absolutely all) of his children, though the method is less important than this result. *Pluralism* maintains that all religions are valid ways of obtaining salvation. And finally, others hold that the Bible does not support a conclusion in any form.132

**Conclusion**

God “sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:17). The doctrine of the harrowing of hell explains how this can be despite
the fact that so many have died without hearing the Son’s message of salvation. This doctrine was present in apocalyptic Judaism and in apocalyptic Christianity, and Christ taught the doctrine to his disciples. It was also confirmed by the church fathers and in the Apostles’ Creed. Subsequently, it was rejected first by Augustine and later by Reformers such as Calvin and Luther. This led, regrettably, to its almost universal disappearance from the teachings of modern-day Christendom.

In a sequel to this paper, we will describe the restoration of the doctrine in the vibrant revelations of Joseph Smith and Joseph F. Smith and its further elaboration in Mormon datum discourse. These latter-day revelations and teachings disclose once again how Christ reopened the gates of hell to “let the prisoners go free,” thus once again resolving the soteriological problem of evil.

Notes

1. David L. Paulsen is a professor and Roger D. Cook an adjunct instructor, both in the Department of Philosophy at Brigham Young University. Kendel J. Christensen is a BYU undergraduate majoring in sociology with a minor in philosophy. BYU undergraduates Michael Hansen (philosophy), David Lassetter (English), and, especially, Zachary Elison (philosophy), and Aaron Tress (philosophy) have each made valuable contributions to both form and content. Shirley Ricks (Maxwell Institute) and Laura Rawlins (director of BYU Faculty Editing Service) have skillfully edited the document. The authors gratefully acknowledge the generous funding for the project provided by the BYU College of Humanities and Department of Philosophy.


3. The list includes Tertullian, Augustine, Philip Melanchthon, Blaise Pascal, John Calvin, and others. See John Sanders, No Other Name (1992; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 74–79. Representative statements from Augustine and Calvin illustrate the point: “Many more are left under punishment than are delivered from it, in order that it may thus be shown what was due to all.” Augustine, City of God, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Random House, 1950), 783. Calvin asserted grimly and simply that “the vast majority of mankind will be lost.” F. W. Farrar, Mercy and Judgment (London: MacMillan, 1894), 58.

4. Charles Darwin remarked, “I can indeed hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true; for if so the plain language of the text seems to show that the men who do not believe, and this would include my Father, Brother and almost all my best friends, will be everlastingl punished. And this is a damnable doctrine.” Autobiography (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958), 87.

5. For an excellent exposition on the loss of the baptismal ordinance for the dead, see Hugh Nibley’s “Baptism for the Dead in Ancient Times,” in Mormonism and Early Christianity (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 100–167. Our discussion here draws on Nibley’s work but focuses more on the history of the belief in Christ’s visit to hell, the work he was believed to have accomplished there, and its implications for the soteriological problem of evil. In a subsequent article, we will examine the scholarly work on baptism for the dead that has been published since Nibley’s piece.

6. One meaning of the term harrowing is “to break up land by pulling a harrow over it.” It is this imagery, Christ’s “breaking up” and delivering souls from hell, that is evoked by the term in this context; see Encarta World English Dictionary, s.v. “Harrow.” CD-ROM (Microsoft Corporation, 2000).


8. Adler points out the scholarly consensus that “primitive Christianity” not only preserved the apocalyptic Jewish texts but also that the movement “took root on the same soil that produced the Jewish apocalyptic literature”; see Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage, 2. In The Apocalyptic Imagination, Collins states that “Apocalyptic ideas undeniably play an important role in the early stages of Christianity” (1; see 256–79).


10. 1 Enoch 41:9; 84:2–3; 2 Enoch 47:3–6; 53:3; 66:1–4; Matthew 10:29.


12. See also 1 Enoch 54:6; 63:10; 90:26–27; 103:5–8.


14. Gloria Frank contrasts and compares the “graphic punishments” of the dead generally found in apocalyptic works (such as 4 Ezra and Apocalypse of Zephaniah, both quoted below) with apocalyptic Christian texts associated with Christ’s release of Sheol’s captives: “Unlike apocalypses with graphic punishments of the wicked dead, the dead whom Jesus visits endure no bodily torment. Instead, their suffering is temporal in nature: the misfortune of having lived before the coming of Christ into the world. And so these righteous ones remain captive in hell’s dark abode until their liberation...”
by Christ, less punished than detained.” “Christ’s Descent to the Underworld in Ancient Ritual and Legend,” in *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity*, ed. Robert J. Daly (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 212. Even the thirst of the rich man in Luke 16:19–26 is not so much active punishment as it is a result of confinement. Frank seems correct in this claim. Sheol for apocalyptic Christians is confinement as all await final judgment.

15. See, for example, 2 *Enoch* 8:1–10; 4 *Ezra* 2:35–48; 7:36; 2 *Baruch* 51:1–16.

16. In writing about this transformation where the faces of the righteous shine like the sun, Segal implies that this is a change to the angelic life: “The faces of the abstinent are said to shine above the stars, confirming that the ascetic life leads to the angelic life, that cleanliness is next to godliness”; see *Life after Death*, 494. Additionally, Alan F. Segal in *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 30–72, explains that both apocalyptic Judaism and apocalyptic Christianity affirm that God will transform the bodies of the righteous so that they take on an angelic nature. Segal argues that Paul believed that the resurrected bodies will be “transformed” in that they will be “glorified.” For that of the resurrected Christ. Other Jewish apocalyptic texts detail the brilliant light and the associated exaltation that the exalted righteous will have in the hereafter: Daniel 12:3; 2 *Baruch* 51:1–10; 1 *Enoch* 104:2–4; 2 *Enoch* 22:6–10; *Ascension of Isaiah* 7:25; 8:10–15; 9:6–10; *IQ28* 1:4.

17. The animal symbolism in *Enoch’s Dream Visions* 90:1–36 puts in place a hierarchy of humanlike beings that range from the holy to the profane. The holy angels of heaven are portrayed as *men*, while the slightly less holy prophets, Jewish leaders, and the exalted righteous are portrayed as *white sheep*. The Jewish population in general is described as *sheep*, but they are promoted to the status of white sheep after the judgment and resurrection. The unholy Gentiles are portrayed as *animals of the earth* and *birds*, but in the hereafter they become *white cattle*, a level of holiness less than that of the exalted white sheep. Fully unclean are the evil kings and rulers of the earth, portrayed as *dogs*, *eagles*, *vultures*, *kites*, and *ravens*—animals seen as unclean in the Jewish tradition.

18. A full narrative of the more dramatic events of the harrowing was written by early Christians in the Gospel of Nicodemus. The full text can be found at www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/gospelnicodemus.html (accessed 8 March 2010).


20. The authorship of Ephesians is debated by some contemporary scholars who attribute it to an unknown apocalyptic Christian of the late first century who is a disciple of Paul. Regardless of its authorship, the text shows that salvation for the dead was a major concern of Christians in the first century. In the Word Biblical Commentary on Ephesians, Andrew T. Lincoln gives an informative survey of this debate. Relevant to this paper, Lincoln explains that “our implied author, ‘Paul,’ emerges as a Jewish Christian” (lxii). The identity of the author, however, remains uncertain: “In all probability, it is submitted, a later follower of Paul writing in his name is responsible for the portrait of Paul that can be constructed from the letter by the reader and for its other features,” says Lincoln; “for what it is worth, this is now the consensus view in NT scholarship, though a sizable minority continues to uphold Pauline authorship” (lxiii). Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), lxii–lxiii. Markus Barth confirms the heritage of the writer, who “reveals by his thorough acquaintance with Israel’s Bible and with Philonic, rabbinical, apocalyptic or Qumranite methods of Scripture interpretation that he was a Jewish Christian.” Barth, *Ephesians 1–3*, in *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 40.

21. This reading of Ephesians 4:8–10 as referring to Christ’s descent to hell is a common one; see Markus Barth, *Ephesians* 4–6, in *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 433 n. 45; and Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 244, for a selection of eminent commentators who have given it this interpretation. But see Barth, *Ephesians*, 433–34; and Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 244–48, who favor alternate readings.

22. In “Christ’s Descent to the Underworld,” Frank states that Ephesians 4:9 and a more obscure reference in Romans 10:7—“Who will descend into the abyss? (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)” — allude to “Christ’s underworld sojourn” (215). She therefore traces the earliest reference to Christ’s descent to an undisputed letter of Paul and claims that “the idea was picked up by later Pauline communities” (215).

23. The authorship of 1 Peter is also disputed, with many contemporary scholars ascribing it to a disciple of Peter in the late first century. Similar to Ephesians above, even if a late first-century date is accepted, the text shows major soteriological concerns regarding the dead. In the Word Biblical Commentary, J. Ramsey Michaels writes regarding 1 Peter: “The clear impression is that the readers of the epistle are Jewish Christians” (xlvi). He also explains that the epistle can be considered apocalyptic in a “limited sense” due to its status as a Diaspora letter to Israel (xlvi). Michaels ultimately holds that “the discussion of the ‘descent of Christ’ in 1 Peter is a futile discussion if its purpose is anything approaching absolute certainty” (lxii). Michaels, *1 Peter* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), xxxi–lxiv.

24. The *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* 6:15 explains that the spirits of all mankind are “in the abyss and Hades, the one in which all of the souls are imprisoned from the end of the Flood, which came upon the earth, until this day.” In 1 Peter 3:18–21, the descent of Christ to preach to the captive spirits is linked with baptism: “But again Peter’s association of baptism with the Descent and the preaching to the spirits should be noted because the linking of these two ideas may constitute a cryptic reference to the offering of baptism to the dead, and even to vicarious work for the dead.” M. Catherine Thomas, “Visions of Christ in the Spirit World and the Dead Redeemed,” in *The New Testament and the Latter-day Saints*, ed. John K. Carmack (Orem, UT: Randall Book, 1987), 304–6. Frank writes that Christ “journeyed to hell during the interlude between his death and resurrection. There the Savior preached to the dead, baptized them, defeated Death, and liberated the just, including Adam and the patriarchs” (211). She, quoting 1 Peter 3:19, additionally argues that 1 Peter offers the “purpose for the journey. . . . Christ went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison.” Frank, “Christ’s Descent to the Underworld,” 215.

25. All 1 Peter citations in this paper are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).


27. The texts now called the Pseudepigrapha, including 1 *Enoch* and the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, are the primary sources for understanding apocalyptic Judaism. The first Christians were fully immersed in the apocalyptic Jewish tradition, with the New Testament *Epistle of Jude* (14–15) even quoting a passage from the *Book of the Watchers* (1:9), showing the immediate connection early Christians had with other apocalyptic Jews. Interestingly, the Pseudepigrapha and other Hellenistic Jewish texts were preserved by Christians, rather than by the Rabbinic Judaism that emerged from the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70) and the Bar Kochba
war (AD 132–35). But this should come as no surprise, for first- and second-century AD apocalyptic Christians continued to think of themselves as the true path within Judaism, rather than as a completely new religious tradition, while Rabbinic Jews, descendants of Pharisaic Judaism, divorced themselves from the apocalyptic tradition entirely. See Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 1–255. Stephen Robinson has objected to the way apocalyptic sources are sometimes used. He asserts that we ought not to use these texts as proof that LDS doctrines are true, but we may use them as evidence of what early Christians believed. He writes: “The apocrypha do often prove that ideas peculiar to the Latter-day Saints in modern times were widely known and widely believed anciently, but this is not the same as proving that the ideas themselves are true, or that those who believed them were right in doing so, or that they would have had anything else in common with the Latter-day Saints.” “Lying for God: The Uses of Apocrypha,” in *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints*, ed. C. Wilfred Griggs (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1986), 133–54, 148. It is in this sense that we use these texts.

28. “And a spirit took me and brought me up into the fifth heaven. And I saw angels who are called ‘lords,’ and the diadem was set upon them in the Holy Spirit, and the throne of each of them was sevenfold more (brilliant) than the light of the rising sun. (And they were) dwelling in the temples of salvation and singing hymns to the ineffable most high God.” *Apocalypse of Zophaniah A*, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 508.

29. See Romans 9:18. The apocryphal book 2 Maccabees, written in the late second to early first centuries BC, records the prayers of Judas Maccabee and his army on behalf of Jews who died in idolatry, as well as his collecting two thousand drachmas to be delivered to the temple as an atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from sin (see 12:39–45 NRSV). In addition, the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus* contains a section entitled “Christ’s Descent into Hell.” The text gives a third-century AD interpretation of the period of time allowed for the dead of Christ’s day to repent, and it places John the Baptist in hades preaching repentance to its captives: “[Christ] sent me to you, to preach that the only begotten Son of God comes here, in order that whoever believes in him should be saved, and whoever does not believe in him should be condemned. Therefore I say to you all that when you see him, all of you worship him. For now only have you opportunity for repentance because you worshipped idols in the vain and would in any other time this is impossible.” James K. Elliot, ed., *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 186. See also the claim of 1 Enoch 31:1 that “Sheol will restore what it has received.”


31. That the harrowing of hell and vicarious baptism are tied together is nothing new to Christianity. Richard E. DeMaris, “*Corinthian Religion and Baptism for the Dead* (1 Corinthians 15:29): Insights from Archaeology and Anthropology,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114/4 (1995): 672. John Tvedtnes shows that “though most Christians stopped baptizing for the dead in the early centuries after Christ, documentary evidence makes it clear that the practice was known in various parts of the Mediterranean world.” John Tvedtnes, “Baptism for the Dead in Early Christianity,” in *The Temple in Time and Eternity* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 72. Scriptural evidence for the practice is 1 Corinthians 15:29, and Michael Hull writes that modern scholarship acknowledges its historicity: “With reference to our verse, the designation ‘vicarious baptism’ is simple: living persons ... were baptized in the place of dead unbaptized persons. The raison d’être for this seemingly aberrant custom? To secure the (presumed) benefits of baptism for those who died without baptism. Since it is widely held that ‘none of the attempts to escape a theory of vicarious baptism in primitive Christianity seems to be wholly successful,’ the vast majority of exeges and commentators hold that 15:29 is a reference to some form of vicarious baptism—even those who reject such a reading acknowledge its preponderance—and it is aptly labeled the ‘majority reading.’” Michael F. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead* (1 Cor 15:29): *An Act of Faith in the Resurrection* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 10–11. As part of the scholarly consensus, one work explains, “The normal reading of the text is that some Corinthians are being baptized, apparently vicariously, in behalf of some people who have already died. It would be fair to add that this reading is such a plain understanding of the Greek text that no one would ever have imagined the various alternatives were it not for the difficulties involved.” Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 763–64. The New International Commentary on the *New Testament* is of the same opinion: “The objection that the apostle could not have meant anything like a baptism for the benefit of others is exegetically out of place.” Frederik W. Grosheide, “Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians,” in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), 372. And in his master’s thesis on the topic, John Pryce-Davies writes, “All interpretations which seek to evade evicarious baptism for the dead are misleading,” in *Theological Significances of 1 Corinthians 15:29 in the Life of the Christian Community* (RHD thesis, Griffith University, 2005), 123, quoting Albrect Oeppke, “Βάπτω,” in *A Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:542.

32. See the arguments on Odes 42:17 and 42:20 (below) for further evidence that Ode 17:9 refers to vicarious baptism for the dead. The reading that further refers to the inhabitants of Sheol waiting for Christ’s death and his escape from it, with the understanding that his escape will open the way for the escape of all: “And the chasms were opened and closed; and they were seeking the Lord as those who are about to give birth; ... and the end of their labor was life” (Ode 24:5, 8; see also 31:1).


34. Luke 16:19–26 speaks of an impassable chasm that separates the righteous dead from the disobedient in hades. The rich man who was wicked in life wishes for Lazarus to cool his tongue with water, to temper his torment for a moment, but he is told that “they which would pass from hell to you cannot” (v. 26). Note that both of the departed are thought to retain a kind of material embodiment despite the fact that they are spirits.

35. The Odist’s worldview holds that a soul will first depart the body’s furthest extremity, the feet, exiting the head only at the final point of death. Death’s release of Christ follows the same pattern.

36. See Odes 10:1, 6; 11:13, 19; 15:2; 21:3; 36:3.


The text here is taken from James, Apocryphal New Testament, 570–73; see vv. 21 and 27.


43. T. W. Manson lists Galatians 4:6–7; Romans 8:15–16; 1 Corinthians 12:3; 2 Corinthians 1:21–22; 1 John 5:6–8 as passages relating to the chrism, with 1 John 5:7 linking chrism with baptism; see Paul F. Bradshaw, The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 165, but 1 John 2:20 should also be added to his list.

44. Ezekiel 9:4–6 is the source of the Christian chris:

45. The book of Revelation explains that those who conquer will personally receive the chrism from Christ: “I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my love” (Revel 3:12 NRSV).

46. In a clear reference to a pre-mortal existence, the Odes indicate that God knew those who would be faithful and placed the chrism on their faces: “And he who created me when yet I was not known what I would do when I came into being” (Ode 7:9); “and before they had existed I recognized them; and imprinted a seal on their faces” (8:13).


50. The text here is taken from James, Apocryphal New Testament, 570–73; see vv. 21 and 27.

58. Catechism of the Catholic Church (Chicago: Loyola, 1994), 49–50. “The creeds that do not explicitly mention the Descent into hell may be divided into two groups based on the different formulations of the Resurrection article. In both we will find that Christ’s descent is implicit in the profession of His resurrection.” See Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ’s Descent into Hell (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 10–11.


68. MacCulloch, Harrowing of Hell.

69. MacCulloch, Harrowing of Hell, 88. Irenaeus references Matthew 22:40; Ephesians 4:9; and Psalm 86:13 as justification of this view.

70. MacCulloch, Harrowing of Hell, 91.


74. MacCulloch, Harrowing of Hell, 105.


76. Namely Psalms 16:10; 30:3, 9; 69:2; Luke 7:20; and 1 Peter 3:18–20. See Rufinus, Commentary, 61. He also states that, even in the versions that omit the phrase, the meaning of the descent is contained “precisely” in the affirmation “buried.” Rufinus, Commentary, 52. Tyrannius finds allusions to Christ’s descent all throughout the scriptures, especially in the Old Testament. He writes, “No prophet, no lawgiver, no psalmist is silent on this theme: almost without exception, the sacred pages all refer to these events [the death of Christ, his descent into hell, his liberating the captive spirits there, and his resurrection].” Rufinus, Commentary, 63.

77. Rufinus, Commentary, 61. Tyrannius sees it as a fulfillment of Psalm 29:4.


79. MacCulloch, Harrowing of Hell, 120.

80. Plumptre, Spirits in Prison, 94.

81. Pitstick, Light in Darkness, 19.

82. Pitstick, Light in Darkness, 75.

83. MacCulloch, Harrowing of Hell, 71; see also Plumptre, Spirits in Prison, 86.

84. MacCulloch, Harrowing of Hell, 71.

85. MacCulloch, Harrowing of Hell, 71.

86. Pitstick, Light in Darkness, 20. The Fourth Ecumenical Lat eran Council (1215) and the Second Council of Lyons (1274) may also be taken as confirmations of the doctrine.

87. Barclay explains, “In connection with [Christ’s preaching to the dead] there is one interesting fact which no one has ever been able to explain. The early Christian thinkers always aimed to clinch every argument with a quotation from Scripture. In particular they were always eager to produce a passage from the prophets which the actions of Jesus fulfilled. Now when Justin Martyr and Irenaeus speak about this doctrine between them they quote no fewer than six times a proof text, attributing it sometimes to Jeremiah, sometimes to Isaiah. The text is: ‘The Lord God remembered His dead people of Israel, who lay in the graves, and He descended to preach to them his own salvation.’ That indeed would be a precise prediction of this interpretation of the descent; but the odd thing is that that text occurs in no known part of the Old Testament in any language or in any manuscript. Where Justin Martyr and Irenaeus got that text is one of the unsolved mysteries’ (Apostles’ Creed for Everyone, 128). Martyr taught: “From the sayings of Jeremiah they have cut out the following: ‘I was like a lamb that is brought to the slaughter: they devised a device against me, saying, Come, let us lay on wood on His bread, and let us blot Him out from the land of the living; and His name shall no more be remembered.’ And since this passage from the sayings of Jeremiah is still written in some copies of the Scriptures in the synagogues of the Jews (for it is only a short time since they were cut out), and since from these words it is demonstrated that the Jews deliberated about the Christ Himself, to crucify and put Him to death, He Himself is both declared to be led as a sheep to the slaughter, as was predicted by Isaiah, and is here represented as a harmless lamb; but being in a difficulty about them, they give themselves over to blasphemy. And again, from the sayings of the same Jeremiah these have been cut out: ‘The Lord God remembered His dead people of Israel who lay in the graves; and He descended to preach to them His own salvation.’” Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho 72, in Ante-Nicene Fathers, 1:234–35. And Irenaeus likewise taught: “It was for this reason, too, that the Lord descended into the regions beneath the earth, preaching His advent there also, and [declaring] the remission of sins received by those who believe in Him.” Irenaeus, Against Heresies 4.27.2, in Ante-Nicene Fathers, 1:499.

88. Frank, “Christ’s Descent to the Underworld,” 211, see 211–26.

89. Plumptre, Spirits in Prison, 95. Although, it should be men tioned, they talked about it in a more limited form, due to Augustine’s writing as well as to the theory of purgatory. Another reason for its lack of discussion was probably because of the apparently shrinking need for such an idea. The church was so successful in Aquinas’s time, for example, that he thought there “was only a handful” of unevange lized persons. Sanders, No Other Name, 19. Also of note is a controversy involving Antonius when he defended the traditional interpretation of the doctrine against two philosophers trying to teach that Christ’s descent was simply figurative. See Hornik and Parsons, “Harrowing of Hell,” 22.

90. Trumbower, Rescue, 126. Of note, however, is the fact that Augustine’s contemporary and correspondent Jerome taught “the old tradition in its completeness,” Plumptre, Spirits in Prison, 93.

91. Sanders, No Other Name, 51; see also Farrar, Mercy and Judgment, 75–79.
92. “It is clearly shown that the Lord died in the flesh and descended into hell. . . . Who, then, but an unbeliever will deny that Christ was in hell?” From Augustine’s letter to Evodius, 164, in The Fathers of the Church: Saint Augustine Letters, vol. 3, trans. Sister Wilfrid Parsons (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 1953), 383.

93. MacCulloch, Harrowing of Hell, 50–51.

94. MacCulloch, Harrowing of Hell, 57.

95. Augustine does not deny that Christ visited hell—but he was firm that whatever work of salvation that happened there was possible only for those who died before his resurrection.

96. Augustine, Epistula (Letters) 164.4.13, quoted in Trumbower, Rescue, 132, 140.

97. Trumbower, Rescue, 128.

98. Trumbower, Rescue, 129.


100. Augustine states in a letter that “if the holy Scripture had said that Christ after death came into the bosom of Abraham, without naming hell and its sorrows, I wonder if anyone would dare to affirm that He descended into hell.” Fathers of the Church: Saint Augustine Letters, 3:386.


102. Aquinas, Summa Theologica 2.2.3–8. For a discussion on other medieval thinkers who shared Aquinas’s view of a non-evangelic descent and a universally accessible message, see Sanders, No Other Name, 159–62.

103. Sanders, No Other Name, 51 and 186 n. 19; see also Trumbower, Rescue, 3, 108.


106. Plumptre, Spirits in Prison, 96


108. MacCulloch, Harrowing of Hell, 52.

109. Plumptre, Spirits in Prison, 97. Plumptre cites Jeremy Taylor and Bishop Samuel Horsley as notable exceptions in the mid-seventeenth and late-eighteenth centuries, respectively (see 97–99).

110. Trumbower, Rescue, 108.

111. Sanders, No Other Name, 209.

112. Fackre makes reference to Romans 10:14, which states: “How are they to believe in One of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone proclaim Him?” Fackre, Nash, and Sanders, What about Those Who Have Never Heard? 79.

113. Fackre is quick to point out, though, that “No preaching by Christ to the dead is going to make it ‘easier’ for the dead than the living.” Fackre, Nash, and Sanders, What about Those Who Have Never Heard? 80.

114. Peter Geach, “First Lectures on the Psalms (Psalm 86),” in Luther’s Works II (St. Louis: Concordia, 1976), 72. Fackre cites Jeremy Taylor and Bishop Samuel Horsley as notable exceptions in the mid-seventeenth and late-eighteenth centuries, respectively (see 97–99).

115. Interestingly, even Augustine seems to entertain some form of this logic. “Christ, knowing that the world was so full of unbelievers . . . was justly unwilling to appear or to preach to them who He foreknew would believe neither in His words nor in His miracles.” The Fathers of the Church: Saint Augustine Letters, vol. 2, trans. Sister Wilfrid Parsons (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 1953), 158.


120. Fackre, Nash, and Sanders, What about Those Who Have Never Heard? 78, emphasis in original.

The first step in what the Mormons consider the restoration of the gospel in the dispensation of the fulness of times was the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. More than anything else this fixed the unique status of the new religion, of which Eduard Meyer wrote: “Mormonism . . . is not just another of those innumerable new sects, but a new religion of revelation (Offenbarungsreligion).”¹ The Latter-day Saints “believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God” in exactly the same sense as the Bible (Article of Faith 8)—a proposition that has caused great offense to many Christians and led to long and severe persecutions, the Book of Mormon being the principal object of attack.

The book does not, however, take the place of the Bible in Mormonism. But just as the New Testament clarified the long-misunderstood message of the Old, so the Book of Mormon is held to reiterate the messages of both Testaments in a way that restores their full meaning. Its professed mission, as announced on its title page, is “to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever—And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.” Until recently, most Mormons have not been zealous in the study of the book, considering it on the whole a strange and alien document with little relationship to modern life. Its peculiar effectiveness has indeed been as a messenger (it was brought by an angel) to the world at large.

This article was published as “The Mormon View of the Book of Mormon” in Concilium: An International Review of Theology 10 (December 1967): 82–83; in Concilium: Theology in the Age of Renewal 30 (1968): 170–73; and in French, Portuguese, and German editions of this journal. It was reprinted in Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1978), 149–53, under the title “The Book of Mormon: A Minimal Statement,” with the note that appears here as a postscript. In honor of the centennial of Hugh Nibley’s birth, we present this concise view of the Book of Mormon.
The Book of Mormon professes to present in highly abridged form the history of a peculiar civilization, transplanted from the Old World to the New around 600 BC. Of complex cultural background and mixed racial stock, the society endured only a thousand years, of which period the Book of Mormon contains an unbroken account, taken supposedly from records kept almost entirely by the leaders of a minority religious group. The first of the line was Lehi, who with his family and some others fled from Jerusalem to the desert to live the law in its purity and prepare for the coming Messiah. Commanded by God after much wandering to cross the seas, the community reached the New World and there broke up, only a minority choosing to continue the ways of the pious sectaries of the desert. Lehi’s descendants in time met and mingled with yet other migrants from the Old World, and indeed for almost five hundred years they had, unawares, as their northern neighbors, warlike hunting tribes which, according to the Book of Mormon, had come from Asia thousands of years before. The racial and cultural picture of the Book of Mormon is anything but the oversimplified thing its critics have made it out to be. For the Mormons, the Book of Mormon contains “the fulness of the gospel.” Six hundred years of its history transpire before the coming of Christ, and four hundred after that. In the earlier period the faithful minority formed a church of anticipation, their charismatic leaders “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” (Jarom 1:11). There are extensive quotations from the Old Testament prophets, especially Isaiah, with remarkable variant readings, and much that is reminiscent in language and imagery of early Jewish apocryphal writings. The boldest part of the Book of Mormon is the detailed account of the visit of Jesus Christ to his “other sheep” (John 10:16; 3 Nephi 15:21) in the New World after the resurrection, including his instructions and commandments to the new church. This episode closely parallels certain of early Christian apocrypha dealing with postresurrectional teachings of the Lord to his disciples in Galilee and on the Mount of Olives, although none of these sources was available in Joseph Smith’s day.

The historical parts of the Book of Mormon bear witness to its good faith, which never claims for itself any sort of immunity, religious or otherwise, from the most searching scientific and scholarly criticism. Lack of comparative historical documents is offset by an abundance of cultural data: over two hundred nonbiblical Hebrew and Egyptian names offer ample material to the philologist, and a wealth of technical detail invites critical examination, thanks to precise descriptions of such things as the life of a family wandering in the Arabian desert, a great earthquake, the ancient craft of olive culture, a major war in all its phases, the ways of the early desert sectaries, and the state of the world during a protohistoric Völkerwanderung, and so on.

The Book of Mormon is the history of a polarized world in which two irreconcilable ideologies confronted each other and is addressed explicitly to our own age, faced by the same predicament and the same impending threat of destruction. It is a call to faith and repentance couched in the language of history and prophecy, but above all it is a witness of God’s concern for all his children, and to the intimate proximity of Jesus Christ to all who will receive him.

Along with cultural-historical particulars, the religious message of the book is richly interspersed with peculiar expressions, legends, traditions, and customs supposedly derived from the Old World, which may today be checked against ancient
sources. Thus it describes certain practices of arrow divination, an odd custom of treading on garments, a coronation ceremony (in great detail), the evils of the archaic matriarchy, peculiar ways of keeping and transmitting sacred records, the intricacies of an ingenious monetary system, and the like.

Of particular interest to Latter-day Saints are the prophetic parts of the Book of Mormon, which seem to depict the present state of the world most convincingly. The past 140 years have borne out exactly what the book foretold would be its own reception and influence in the world; and its predictions for the Mormons, the Jews, and the other remnants of scattered Israel (among which are included the American Indians) seem to be on the way to fulfillment. The Book of Mormon allows an ample timescale for the realization of its prophecies, according to which the deepening perplexities of the nations, when “the Lord God shall cause a great division among the people” (2 Nephi 30:10), shall lead to worldwide destructions by fire, for “blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke must come; and it must needs be upon the face of this earth.” After this, the survivors (for this is not to be the end of the world) shall have learned enough to coexist peaceably “for the space of many years,” when “all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people shall dwell safely in the Holy One of Israel if it so be that they will repent” (1 Nephi 22:26, 28).

The Book of Mormon is the history of a polarized world in which two irreconcilable ideologies confronted each other and is addressed explicitly to our own age, faced by the same predicament and the same impending threat of destruction. It is a call to faith and repentance couched in the language of history and prophecy, but above all it is a witness of God’s concern for all his children, and to the intimate proximity of Jesus Christ to all who will receive him.

Postscript: The preceding statement was written on request for a journal that is published in eight languages and therefore insists on conciseness and brevity. Teaching a Book of Mormon Sunday School class ten years later, I am impressed more than anything by something I completely overlooked until now—namely, the immense skill with which the editors of that book put the thing together. The long book of Alma, for example, is followed through with a smooth and logical sequence in which an incredible amount of detailed and widely varying material is handled in the most lucid and apparently effortless manner. Whether Alma is addressing a king and his court, a throng of ragged paupers sitting on the ground, or his own three sons, each a distinctly different character, his eloquence is always suited to his audience, and he goes unfailingly to the peculiar problems of each hearer.

Throughout this big and complex volume, we are aware of much shuffling and winnowing of documents and are informed from time to time of the method used by an editor distilling the contents of a large library into edifying lessons for the dedicated and pious minority among the people. The overall picture reflects before all a limited geographical and cultural point of view—small localized operations, with only occasional flights and expeditions into the wilderness; one might almost be moving in the cultural circuit of the Hopi villages. The focusing of the whole account on religious themes as well as the limited cultural scope leaves all the rest of the stage clear for any other activities that might have been going on in the vast reaches of the New World, including the hypothetical Norsemen, Celts, Phoenicians, Libyans, or prehistoric infiltrations via the Bering Straits. Indeed, the more varied the ancient American scene becomes, as newly discovered artifacts and even inscriptions hint at local populations of Near Eastern, Far Eastern, and European origin, the more hospitable it is to the activities of one tragically short-lived religious civilization that once flourished in Mesoamerica and then vanished toward the northeast in the course of a series of confused tribal wars that was one long, drawn-out retreat into oblivion. Such considerations would now have to be included in any “minimal statement” this reader would make about the Book of Mormon.

Note
Hugh Nibley seems to have approached the Prophet Joseph Smith from a unique angle—through scholarly discourse rather than bearing testimony of him. Nibley preferred to discuss the historicity of the Book of Mormon on its own terms rather than in terms of the Prophet’s character.

Two different archaeological finds from Palestine attest to the term lḥy as a male personal name—inscriptions found on a papyrus fragment and on an ostracon. A discussion of the pronunciation and spelling of this name contributes to the significance of these finds.

The name Elkenah appears twelve times in the Book of Abraham and likely refers to a god. Possible linguistic structures for the name permit at least six proposals for how the name could be understood in the Book of Abraham, the strongest of which are linked to Canaanite El, a deity.
The ancient temple had been used by the first Nephi, six centuries before the birth of Christ, as the model in building his temple.