Title

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This book consists of eighteen chapters based on papers read at the twentieth annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium on October 26, 1991. All of the contributors were members of the Brigham Young University religious education faculty except John Welch (Professor of Law at Brigham Young University), Gerald W. Lund (employed by the Church Educational System), and Elder Robert E. Wells of the First Quorum of the Seventy. Prior to publication each paper underwent two reviews, one by a member of the religion faculty and one by a member of another BYU department.

The editors state in the preface to the book that the purpose of the symposium was to teach “sound doctrine” from the Book of Mormon. It was hoped as well that the essays in the book would prove of particular use to Gospel Doctrine teachers in the church. The concept of doctrine espoused by the editors is broad, encompassing any ideas, truths, or insights that can be gleaned from the scriptures. This is in contrast to the more narrow and scripturally more accurate concept of doctrine (2 Nephi 31: 17–21) as those truths essential to our salvation. The different papers in the volume vary considerably in level of interest, depth of insight, relationship to the Book of Mormon text, ability to inspire further dialogue, and soundness of scholarship. Nonetheless, there is much in *Doctrines of the Book of Mormon* of value for members of the Church.

In the first essay, Elder Robert E. Wells shares a remarkable spiritual dream of his about a power or force attracting mankind to Jesus Christ and our inability to take advantage of that power if we lack faith, diligence, and heed. Elder Wells notes that the function of the Liahona was activated by these same three principles and then goes on to discuss how we can chart a certain course toward Christ as we apply faith, diligence, and heed in our lives. He describes how the Book of Mormon can function as a Liahona for us individually and draws an anal-

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ogy between the new writing that periodically appeared on the Liahona and the new insights that can be obtained by reading the Book of Mormon with the power of the Spirit. The article is well written, well organized, and well worth pondering. It is not often that General Authorities relate their personal spiritual experiences in any detail, and we should be grateful to Elder Wells for doing so.

M. Catherine Thomas contributes an interesting and worthwhile paper on the concept of the deliverance of God in the Book of Mormon. She states at the beginning of the essay: “Grasping the Lord’s outstretched hand requires reaching into the unknown for the unseen. . . . In the Book of Mormon the Lord often identifies his empowering grace with the words ‘deliver’ or ‘deliverance’ ” (p. 182). This empowering grace correlates well with the force or power attracting mankind to Christ described by Elder Wells. Thomas, like Elder Wells, emphasizes the ability of the Book of Mormon to serve as a personal Liahona, enlightening the way to personal deliverance for those who approach it with faith, a repentant heart, and humility.

Thomas demonstrates convincingly that the authors and editors of the Book of Mormon fused the idea of deliverance as one of the organizing principles for the entire book. She notes that words derived from “deliver” occur more than two hundred times and describes a number of examples of group deliverance/group journeys in the Book of Mormon, showing that the destination of each divinely guided journey is a promised land where spiritual growth is possible. Consistent with other recent publications, Thomas correlates the principles and stories of deliverance in the Book of Mormon with the Exodus. Her paper is particularly valuable in demonstrating how the major journeys in the Book of Mormon are allegorical (as well as historical) and serve as types for everyone’s sojourn on earth and progress toward individual salvation.

Dennis L. Largey and Robert L. Millet treat two often discussed and critically important gospel principles—enduring to the end and charity, respectively—with great clarity and insight. Both articles, in my opinion, come close to being definitive in

the short essay format. They are thorough, interesting, well grounded in the relevant Book of Mormon passages, and show evidence of a deep understanding of the gospel. For example, Largey’s concept that God’s grace and remission of sins are to be retained in our lives (p. 68) after initially receiving them is very enlightened in contrast to the more common Mormon attitudes that grace is either irrelevant or something that the most fortunate receive only after a long life filled with good deeds. Millet’s excellent paper places charity in sharp perspective both with respect to other gospel principles and with respect to the struggles that we each undergo as part of our mortal probation. Neither of these articles can be effectively summarized in a few sentences and both deserve careful reading.

Brent L. Top discusses the principle of repentance. His thesis is that without a proper understanding of repentance “one may seek through self-justification to make repentance easier than it really is or through doctrinal distortion to make it more difficult than it needs to be” (p. 194). He then attempts to provide the reader with a balanced perspective on repentance based on what the scriptures actually say on the topic. In this he is largely successful. He draws accurate and insightful distinctions between true repentance and simply ceasing to remember sin and between the changes involved in true repentance and those that can be accomplished by self-discipline alone. He demonstrates convincingly that true repentance transcends any checklist of “Rs of Repentance.” His discussion of “godly sorrow” as a motivational sorrow for sin, which always leads to a commitment to change, is insightful and pertinent.

Top describes six characteristics of those who have repented, have become born of the spirit, and have received a remission of sins; these features are particularly valuable in recognizing whether the atonement has been effective in one’s life. In the context of this discussion about how we can recognize whether we have received a remission of sins or have been born of the spirit, Top states: “This condition does not mean that we never again succumb to temptation, but it does mean that sinfulness becomes repugnant to us and that we desire righteousness and seek to do good” (p. 208). In other words, although a remission of sins is granted only to those who have truly experienced a change of heart (Mosiah 4:2–3, 5:2), those who have received a remission of sins are generally not yet perfect and therefore continue to sin, although in relatively minor ways. I was disappointed when Top retreated somewhat from this position in
the last section of the chapter, where he says: “Even in the Book of Mormon, most of the people who exercised faith, repented of their sins, and kept the commandments received a remission of their sins through a gradual process rather than a singular event (see Helaman 3:35, Moroni 8:23–26)” (p. 210). I find this statement to be incorrect. Virtually every time remission of sins is described as having occurred in the Book of Mormon, it refers to a relatively well focused event (Enos 1:2, Mosiah 4:2–3, Alma 5:6–13, Alma 38:8, 3 Nephi 1:23, 3 Nephi 7:25). Rather than being portrayed as a lifelong process completed only when one is perfect, remission of sins is almost always described as something which occurs at the outset of an individual’s acceptance of Christ/the Gospel (2 Nephi 31:17–20) and which must be retained (Mosiah 4:11–12, 26; Alma 4:14) during the long and gradual process of sanctification (Helaman 3:35, Alma 13:10–12). Moroni, however, does use the phrase “remission of sins” in the context of perfection and sanctification (Moroni 10:32–33). Therefore, it seems that “remission of sins” is used in two ways in the Book of Mormon. It almost always refers to a *provisional* remission of sins received when one initially accepts Christ’s atonement. Rarely, it refers to an *unprovisional* remission of sins reached after complete sanctification (3 Nephi 27:19–20). Nonetheless, the necessity of ultimately becoming completely sanctified should not detract from, nor be confused with, the reality and importance of the initial, provisional remission of sins.

Bruce A. Van Orden treats the topic of sanctification in detail. He emphasizes the critical importance of the process of sanctification (becoming clean, pure, and sinless before God) in our lives. His comments on hope and on the role of hope in sustaining one in the often painful process of enduring to the end in sanctification are enlightening and well balanced. The concept of sanctification as being a progressive and gradual process, accomplished by the power of the Holy Ghost as we strive to be obedient is appropriately outlined in the essay. Likewise, the ultimate goal of the sanctification process, becoming perfect, is made clear as something that is not only possible but eventually necessary.

Unfortunately, after giving a definition of “sanctification by blood” (p. 212), which in fact approaches a definition of justification, and after stating that sanctification and justification are closely connected, Van Orden excuses himself from exploring the interrelationships and distinctions between the two by stating
that to do so would constitute "wrestling with legalistic definitions" (p. 213). In fact, a successful attempt to define justification and to relate it to sanctification would have improved the chapter considerably, as would have efforts to describe the interrelationships between sanctification, grace, and being born again. Is the spiritual rebirth the beginning (gateway) to sanctification (p. 216) or actually synonymous with sanctification (p. 218)? Near the end of the paper (p. 221), Van Orden warns those who would try to force sanctification to take place in their lives by becoming obsessed with the nuances and ramifications of the doctrine. It is of course true that some do err in substituting an intellectual understanding of the gospel for genuine spiritual experience. Nonetheless, this does not excuse those who are actually engaged in the process of spiritual sanctification from continually striving to understand the gospel with their minds. This concept is overlooked by Van Orden.

Pride and humility are the focus of two essays. K. Douglas Bassett describes four results of pride: (1) costly apparel and conspicuous consumption, (2) a society divided into classes based on wealth and education, (3) contention, (4) and counterfeit patriotism manifested by an antienemy attitude. Bassett uses scriptures from the Book of Mormon and quotations from modern prophets, particularly President Benson, to warn us against these tendencies. His comments about the responsibility of people with wealth and education to use these gifts in the service of their fellow beings (p. 20) are especially pertinent. Bassett's paper would have benefitted from a deeper analysis of what pride is, how it results in the behaviors he condemns, and how it interferes with an individual's relationship with God. Likewise, a discussion of the differences between contention and constructive disagreement could have been profitably added to his essay. Byron K. Merrill emphasizes the necessity of becoming childlike in subordinating our desires to the Lord's, defining humility as a "cheerful willingness to do the will of the Lord" (p. 115). Merrill's discussion is characterized by a good description of the balance between our own efforts and God's help (grace) in the quest for humility. His paper contains a number of insights into the nature of humility and rewards careful reading.

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Several of the articles support rather familiar and widespread Latter-day Saint beliefs and conceptions, using the Book of Mormon supplemented with other sources. Douglas E. Brinley uses passages from 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi to demonstrate that Lehi was a model husband and father, in addition to being a prophet of God. The other concept explored in this paper is that righteous parents, despite their best efforts, can raise wicked children. E. Dale LeBaron emphasizes the fact that the Book of Mormon was written specifically for our day, in part to prepare us for the second coming. He urges us to learn from the destructions which came upon the Nephites before Christ's coming to them as a type of events in the last days, describes some features of the Millennium, and reminds us to repent to prepare ourselves for the future. Clyde J. Williams's article on Satan contains a discussion of the ways in which Satan would have us think in order to facilitate his control over mankind and describes the choices we must make in order to bind Satan in our lives. I was somewhat disappointed by Williams’s use of the term “intellectuals” several times in a pejorative sense only (p. 246). Intellectual abilities and training may be used either to support or to fight the cause of truth.

David Rolph Seely examines the function of the Ten Commandments in the Book of Mormon. He first provides an excellent perspective by briefly overviewing the role of the Ten Commandments in the Bible and in ancient Israel's covenants with God. He includes several valuable quotations from Moshe Weinfeld and David Noel Freedman, illustrating how familiarity with relevant biblical scholarship can deepen one's understanding and appreciation of scripture. Seely examines in significant detail the occurrence and use of each of the Ten Commandments in the Book of Mormon. He makes insightful comments about the meaning of a number of the commandments, particularly those against using the name of the Lord in vain, bearing false witness, and coveting. He makes interesting observations about the frequency with which the various commandments are emphasized in the Book of Mormon (proportional to the seriousness of the sin and the propensity of mankind to commit it) and about the role of the Ten Commandments in Nephite law (easier to legislate and enforce the second five commandments, which deal with relationships between man and man than the first five commandments, which deal with relationships between God and man). Seely concludes with several cogent comments about the role of the Ten Commandments in salvation and the relationship
between obedience, law, and grace. His article is a valuable addition to Latter-day Saint literature on the Ten Commandments.

John W. Welch contributes a very original paper entitled "Ten Testimonies of Jesus Christ from the Book of Mormon." His thesis is that many personal testimonies of Jesus Christ are both similar and different, agreeing in basic truths and doctrines but differing in emphasis and style (p. 223). Welch carefully examines the testimonies of Jesus Christ from the major Book of Mormon prophets, convincingly demonstrates the uniqueness of each testimony by pointing out significantly different uses of names and concepts of Christ, and attempts to correlate the testimony of each prophet to his individual life circumstances. He insightfully reminds us that we each experience Christ in both similar and different ways so we should not be surprised that prophets' descriptions of their spiritual experiences are influenced somewhat by their individual perspectives.

Welch's attempts to demonstrate the relationship between each of the prophets' testimonies and his unique circumstances necessarily involve a degree of speculation. Welch is careful to identify his speculations as such by using phrases like "perhaps," "may have," or "I infer" to denote them. I found most of Welch's observations and inferences to be very insightful and thought provoking, and most of them seemed to flow naturally from the text. Examples include correlations between Abinadi's description of Christ as one who would suffer alone to bring about the redemption of mankind and Abinadi's isolated impending martyrdom, between Moroni's frequent use of the simple name Jesus and the intimacy he likely developed during his long years of solitary wandering, and between Benjamin's emphasis on the atoning function of Christ's blood and his role as King-Prophet-Priest officiating in the blood sacrifices of the law of Moses.

On occasion, Welch's correlations seem a bit strained; for example, his characterization of Mormon as an indirect witness of Christ based on Mormon's refusal for a time to serve as the Nephite military leader. I disagree with Welch's statement that Alma (Alma 42) gave the only discourse on mercy and justice (p. 233), counting Amulek's speech (Alma 34) as such a discourse, though shorter than Alma's. Likewise, I was not convinced by Welch's assertion that the testimonies of Christ become "linguistically more definite" as time progresses in the Nephite record (p. 239). Despite these minor criticisms, the pa-
per represents another unique and valuable contribution by the author to Book of Mormon scholarship. It does appear that the use of different names for Christ by the various Book of Mormon prophets supports the multiple authorship of the ancient records underlying the Book of Mormon. It is conceivable that rigorous statistical analysis of the use of different names for Christ by different prophets in the Book of Mormon would provide further corroboration of this impression.

Gerald N. Lund explores the meaning and implications of the phrase “condescension of God,” examining it in its Book of Mormon context in 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi and using well chosen scriptures from other standard works to supplement his discussion. He succeeds admirably in communicating a sense of the greatness of Christ as God and Creator, in describing the significance of Christ’s willingness to be born into and suffer in our corrupt and ignorant world, and in bringing Christ’s atonement into sharper focus. Lund’s article is interesting, well written, pertinent for all Latter-day Saints, and full of profound insights. Reading it tends to fill one with reverential awe about God (p. 90) and increases one’s ability to “always remember him” (p. 92).

Two papers examine the virtues of the Book of Mormon as a book of scripture, emphasizing its importance, clarity, accuracy, and completeness. Neither of these papers contributes significantly to an understanding of the Book of Mormon text; rather, they attempt to overview certain features of the nature of the entire book. D. Kelly Ogden endeavors to describe the deliberate and extensive efforts of the book of Mormon authors to make themselves easily understood, to delight in plainness. Ogden’s essay basically consists of lists of examples illustrating how the Book of Mormon text explains its own figurative language, teaches several doctrines more clearly than the Bible, and tends to define its own theological terms. Monte S. Nyman examines twenty verses from the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 20:17–36), which describe truths Joseph Smith learned from translating the Book of Mormon, and shows in brief outline how the Book of Mormon teaches these doctrines plainly. The topics covered in Nyman’s discussion include the creation, the nature of God, the fall, agency, the atonement, the resurrection, the role of the Holy Ghost, and several others. The very breadth of the material involved precludes an extensive analysis of any of the doctrines listed, but the chapter does include some useful
comments on justification, sanctification, and on the general importance of studying the doctrines of the gospel.

In a relatively extensive essay, Robert J. Matthews explores in detail the passages in the Book of Mormon which tell us about the Bible. As a result of his study of these passages, Matthews has developed a number of conclusions which he states at the beginning of the article:

The Book of Mormon declares first that the Bible is a true and sacred witness for Jesus Christ and contains teachings, doctrines, covenants, history, and prophecy of great worth to the human family; second, that the Bible available in our day is not as complete nor as doctrinally accurate as it was when written by the ancient prophets and apostles and, moreover, that the loss of material is both substantial and extensive; third, that the missing material was deliberately removed from the Bible by persons of evil intent among the Gentiles; fourth, that many people have stumbled spiritually because of the loss of so much plain and precious information from the Bible; fifth, that the crucial missing parts shall be restored to the Bible through Latter-day scripture; sixth, that many in the last days, because of pride and unbelief, reject the miraculous events and doctrinal precepts of the Bible; seventh, that the Book of Mormon is the greatest of all documentary witnesses for the Bible. (p. 93)

The balance of the article consists of an exposition of these seven conclusions, citing the evidence, scriptural and otherwise, that Matthews has gathered in support of them. The essay concludes with a few comments on biblical authorship and on the role of the Bible and the Book of Mormon functioning together in the putting down of contention and the confounding of false doctrines. Appended to the article is a valuable list of 105 instances in which the Book of Mormon serves as a witness to the veracity of the biblical text. Matthews's article is worthwhile as a source for the many Book of Mormon passages which discuss the nature and importance of the Bible and its limitations. In addition, the importance of the Book of Mormon as an independent witness of Jesus Christ and as a plain source of precious doctrine is strongly declared and insightfully clarified.

However, a number of Matthews's positions seem to be a bit extreme, neither required by the Book of Mormon text nor
supported by currently available historical evidence. He makes extensive use of the statements in 1 Nephi 13 about the great and abominable church taking away from the gospel many plain and precious parts in order to blind the eyes of men. Matthews interprets these scriptures as follows:

That is telling us that soon after the New Testament was written there were persons among the Gentiles who systematically, with wicked motives and evil intent, removed portions of the sacred word. . . . It had to be done early, before there were multiple copies of the various books. . . . It had to be accomplished by someone near the source who had access to the originals or earliest copies. . . . The process began early, by the end of the first century, and continued into the second and third centuries after Christ. (p. 96)

In fact, there is strong evidence that the New Testament documents were widely disseminated among Christian communities by A.D. 100 at the latest.4 In addition, there is relatively firm evidence of the reliable transmission of the New Testament text from ca. A.D. 120–150 to A.D. 350, the approximate date of the earliest complete manuscript of the Greek New Testament now extant.5 This evidence consists of a number of early (ca. A.D. 125–175) papyrus fragments of the Greek New Testament, of quotations in the Apostolic Fathers (ca. A.D. 100–125) of significant portions of the New Testament, and of ancient versions (translations) of the New Testament (ca. A.D. 150–300). Thus, for the type of textual corruption envisioned by Matthews to have occurred, it must have taken place in a very limited period of time (say between A.D. 70 and A.D. 90) in many documents originally written by many authors at many different times and places, subsequently gathered to a relatively central location be-

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fore wide dissemination. This corrupted text would then be pass-
vively and widely received by an unsuspecting and uncaring
Christian Church. I find this untenable.

In my opinion, a more realistic explanation of the prophe-
cies about the Bible in 1 Nephi 13 is desirable and possible. Might not the loss of plain and precious things from the
gospel/Bible refer at least in part to the loss of ability to interpret
the biblical text properly as the gift of the Holy Ghost and the
presence of living prophets faded? Another possibility, men-
tioned only peripherally by Matthews (p. 99), is that whole
books explaining basic gospel principles more completely and
less ambiguously than our current Bible were lost, perhaps in
the canonization process in a church that was becoming pro-
gressively more doctrinally confused.

The strength of Matthews’s essay lies in his portrayal of
the Book of Mormon as a clarifying witness for the truth of the
Bible, rather than in his speculative digressions into early
Christian history. Other examples of such speculation are the
suggestions that all four Gospels were originally written in
Hebrew (p. 104) and that Mark, Luke, Paul, and Jude became
members of the Quorum of the Twelve before they wrote their
books (p. 105). Matthews expends considerable effort in at-
tempts to document that faith in the Bible is generally lacking
in the world today, using selected books and newspaper articles.
A significant portion of the blame for this lack of faith is placed
on scholarly biblical criticism. Matthews neither addresses the
fact that many outside the church have great confidence in the
divine origin of the Bible nor the question of the degree to which
critical scholarship can actually destroy genuine faith in the Bible
or Christ. In one of his closing comments, Matthews concedes
that although textual scholars are limited by depleted and edited
manuscripts, he does “not feel that all textual and literary critics
are subversive” (p. 106). I would go further and suggest that
there is a role for faithful Latter-day Saint scholars well-versed
in biblical history, biblical languages, and even textual criticism
in improving the level of knowledge about the Bible and early
Christian history in the church.

In the remaining paper Larry E. Dahl attempts to develop a
theology of hell. He uses the Book of Mormon as his primary
text, but a major purpose of his essay is to harmonize the state-
ments about hell in the in the Book of Mormon with those in the
Doctrine and Covenants. Despite the fact that our scriptures have
a great deal to say about hell, the concept of hell is infrequently
discussed and even less frequently written about. Dahl’s chapter is a thought-provoking effort to begin intelligent dialogue on this theological principle. Thankfully, Dahl moves well beyond the commonly held (but completely incorrect and unscriptural) notion of hell as the regrets of those in the celestial and terrestrial kingdoms after the resurrection that they did not make it all the way to the celestial kingdom.

I will here summarize Dahl’s theology of hell as accurately as I can to facilitate subsequent comments. (1) Hell is guilt, pain, anguish, despair, and torment like an unquenchable fire caused by sin (p. 55). (2) All sinners are now in hell, both in mortality and in the spirit world (pp. 43, 49). (3) Sinners escape from hell when they repent and accept Christ (p. 55). (4) All except sons of perdition eventually repent and are redeemed from hell (making hell a temporary condition for most) while sons of perdition suffer a permanent hell both before and after the resurrection (pp. 51–53, 55). (5) The phrases “wicked,” “night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed,” and “outer darkness” in Alma 11–12, Alma 34, and Alma 40 refer exclusively to sons of perdition (pp. 50–53).

I have a number of problems with this theology, particularly as it relates to the Book of Mormon. In my opinion, Dahl obscures an essential feature of our probationary estate, namely that the full demands of eternal law on us (hell or second death or eternal torment) because of our sins are withheld during our probation in order to give us the opportunity to choose freely to repent. Dahl places hell, second death, etc. inappropriately into the context of the probationary period. It is true that we suffer a relative spiritual death because of our sins during our probation, but this is not fully realized hell. Those who have not yet repented during probation are described as “bound by the chains of hell” (Alma 5:7) and as “encircled by everlasting darkness” (Alma 26:15). However, these people on the broad path to hell or eternal death (3 Nephi 27:33) are virtually always portrayed as awaiting an awful destruction (hell) or an awful state (Alma 5:7–8, Alma 26:19, 2 Nephi 9:27–34) rather than actually experiencing it. Alma the Younger appears to be the exception to this general rule, having apparently suffered the actual pains of hell for three days (Alma 36:12–17); but he experienced this in a temporally limited and very altered physiological state not char-
acteristic of ordinary mortality. In Dahl’s theology, Alma would have already been in hell long before he saw the angel.

Dahl’s assertion that “wicked” in Alma 11-12, Alma 34, Alma 40, and presumably elsewhere in the Book of Mormon refers exclusively to sons of perdition troubles me as well. He states that he feels his interpretation of Alma 34:32 derives from the Book of Mormon text itself (p. 42), but instead it seems to me to derive from the Doctrine and Covenants. Dahl takes the concept we learn from sections 76 and 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants that only sons of perdition suffer the second death (hell) after the resurrection and correlates it with the Book of Mormon passages that describe the “wicked” as those who suffer the second death after judgment and or resurrection (2 Nephi 9:15-16, 26-38, 46; Mosiah 2:37-39; Mosiah 3:24-27; Alma 11:40-41; Alma 12:12-18; Helaman 14:15-18). Therefore, according to Dahl, “wicked” in these Book of Mormon passages equals “sons of perdition.” Is this an accurate reading of the Book of Mormon text? I think not. It is explicitly clear in these and other Book of Mormon passages (see Alma 13: 27-30 and Alma 12:31-37) that the “wicked” consists largely of those who hear the gospel but choose not to repent of their sins. Repentance is repeatedly emphasized in these and other scriptures as the way for the typical person to put off the evil/wicked state and avoid the second death which comes after the end of probation. Since sons of perdition do not have the possibility of repentance, these scriptures cannot possibly refer exclusively to them.

Obviously, my interpretation of these scriptures creates a problem which Dahl appears anxious to avoid: it appears to make the Book of Mormon inconsistent with the teaching in the Doctrine and Covenants that only sons of perdition suffer the second death after resurrection. It is possible to resolve this apparent discrepancy by concluding simply that the Book of Mormon prophets received less revelation about hell, indeed about the plan of salvation in general, than Joseph Smith did. They understood that the unrepentant wicked are thrust down to hell after probation ends, but did not foresee their eventual redemption from hell. I would suggest as well that even our current more fully developed understanding of hell is as yet incom-

Dahl prefers to see the Nephite prophets (in fact all prophets) as having precisely the same (complete) understanding of the plan of salvation as Joseph Smith (see note 2 p. 56).

Dahl maintains that the Book of Mormon teaches that all sinners are in hell until they repent and that many depart from mortality without repenting. He also goes to great lengths to attempt to demonstrate that the Book of Mormon text is consistent with the idea of the extension of the probationary period (opportunity to repent) into the spirit world for all except sons of perdition (pp. 50–53, 55). These two conclusions are inconsistent with Dahl’s statement that “I have suggested that the Book of Mormon does not address the issue of a temporary hell in the postmortal spirit world from which one can escape at the resurrection and final judgement” (p. 53). Certainly, if the Book of Mormon does teach that repentance is the means to escape hell and that repentance is possible in the spirit world, it does address the idea of a temporary hell in the spirit world.

Obviously, I have derived a different concept of hell from the Book of Mormon than Dahl. I present this theology here in brief outline form to facilitate comparison by interested readers, recognizing that any theology is only a partial and cloudy attempt to describe reality. (1) We have been granted a probationary period to repent as a gift of the atonement (Alma 12:24, 2 Nephi 2:21–27; Alma 42:4, 7–10), which eventually ends (2 Nephi 33:9, 2 Nephi 9:27, Alma 34: 32–34, 3 Nephi 27:33), and during which time the full demands of eternal law on our sins are postponed (2 Nephi 2:26, 2 Nephi 9:27–33, Alma 13:27–30, Alma 42: 27–28). (2) We suffer the first spiritual death during probation as a combined result of Adam’s fall and our own sins (Helaman 14:15–16, Alma 42:4–10, Mosiah 3:19, Ether 3:2, 1 Nephi 17:44–45, Alma 12:9–11). This first spiritual death is partial: all are exposed to the spirit of Christ (Moroni 7:16) and to the word of God (Alma 12:27–31). It may be completely overcome by fully accepting the gifts of atonement during probation (Mosiah 5:2–7, Moroni 8: 25–26, Ether 3:13, Helaman 14:15–17). Those who are rejecting the atonement during probation are on the broad path leading to hell while those who have accepted the atonement are on the straight and narrow path to eternal life. (3) Those who refuse to repent during probation (die in their sins) suffer the second spiritual death or hell after probation ends, as required by justice (2 Nephi 9: 10,12,19, 26; Jacob 3:11, Mosiah 2:38–39; Mosiah 3:25–27; Alma 12: 13–17, 31–37; Alma 40:13–14: Helaman 14:15–18). This second death or
hell consists of being completely withdrawn (cast out) from the presence of God into outer darkness, of being taken captive by the Devil, and of suffering currently incomprehensible spiritual anguish for unrepented sins (described metaphorically as a lake of fire and brimstone).

In summary, Dahl seems to me inappropriately to conflate selected concepts from the first spiritual death and the second spiritual death into a theology of hell, and he mistakenly places hell in the probationary period for most of those who suffer it. I would suggest, in contrast to Dahl, that we learn from the Doctrine and Covenants, but not the Book of Mormon, both that the probationary period extends into the spirit world to some extent (D&C 76:73–74, D&C 138:28–33) and that all except sons of perdition are eventually redeemed from hell (D&C 76:81–106; D&C 88:28–35, D&C 88:96–103). It should also be apparent that an understanding of these two principles, while valuable, is not essential to one’s acceptance of Christ in mortality. Their absence from the Book of Mormon does not detract from its role as the plainest and most complete description of the means by which man may come unto Christ.

It is evident from my review that I feel that most members of the church and many gospel doctrine teachers would benefit from reading Doctrines of the Book of Mormon. This is partly because interest in doctrine, competence in theology, and even ability to read the Book of Mormon for basic understanding are relatively lacking in the church. Nonetheless, the book could be considerably improved by (1) lengthening it; (2) attempting more thorough coverage of important Book of Mormon principles such as being born again (using editorial invitation on additional topics, if necessary); (3) including more than one paper on important topics such as repentance and sanctification; (4) organizing the papers in the book according to content, rather than haphazardly in alphabetical order by author; (5) tightening the peer review process in order to impede inclusion of papers relatively devoid of insight, originality, or scholarship; and (6) including more essays from faithful scholars not connected to the BYU religion faculty, thus bringing broader perspectives to the discussion of theology.