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Title Christ and Krishna: The Visions of Arjuna and the Brother of Jared

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Abstract A series of striking parallels between the vision of Arjuna recorded in the Bhagavad Gita and the vision of the brother of Jared in the Book of Mormon suggests the need for comparative work to be done on these two volumes of world scripture. This paper works through three interrelated points of contact between the two visions. First, it considers the epic context of each vision, context that provides conditions for the possibility of religious revolution. Second, it looks in detail at the respective religious revolutions produced by the two visions: the Hindu shift toward devotion and the Jaredite shift toward faith. Third, it outlines the theological significance of the principal difference such similarities bring into focus—namely, that between the conceptions of incarnation at work in Hinduism and Mormonism. Where the incarnational logic associated with Arjuna’s vision suggests that embodiment is temporary and instrumental for the divine, the corresponding incarnational logic associated with the brother of Jared’s vision suggests that embodiment is permanent and essential for the divine. The striking parallels between the visions of Arjuna and the brother of Jared thus help to highlight crucial but subtle theological differences between the respective religions associated with those visions.

Christ and Krishna: The Visions of Arjuna and the Brother of Jared

Joseph M. Spencer

THE BHAGAVAD GITA, GENERALLY REGARDED as the chief volume of Hindu scripture, culminates in a revelatory vision.¹ Arjuna, hero of the Kurukshetra war, sees the true nature of his companion and fellow hero, Krishna, who, Arjuna has just learned, is actually the “birthless one,” “the Lord of all beings,” albeit manifest in human form (BhG 4.6).² As the vision comes to its close, Krishna explains the unique nature of what Arjuna has seen: “By my grace toward you, Arjuna, this supreme form has been manifested through my own power . . . which has never before been seen by other than you” (BhG 11.47). Those words have a familiar ring for the reader of the Book of Mormon. In the book of Ether, included almost as an afterthought in the Nephite volume of scripture, the brother of Jared has a remarkable vision of the premortal Christ, in the course of which he is told: “And never hath I shewed myself unto

1. A shorter, preliminary version of this paper, “Introducing Comparative Scripture to Mormonism: Preliminary Thoughts,” was delivered at the meetings of the Association of Mormon Scholars in the Humanities on 15–16 March 2013. I owe thanks to two anonymous reviewers whose remarks have been helpful in shaping this paper in final form, as well—especially—to Adam Miller, who first encouraged me to look at the Gita.

2. Except where noted, I use Winthrop Sargeant’s translation of the Bhagavad Gita. See Christopher K. Chapple, ed., *The Bhagavad Gītā*, trans. Winthrop Sargeant (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2009).

man, whom I have created, for never hath man believed in me as thou hast" (Ether 3:15).³

If, as Grant Hardy has recently suggested, "the Book of Mormon belongs in the library of world scripture," and if there are therefore "engaging comparative questions to be addressed,"⁴ there may be good reason to investigate the apparent point of contact just identified between the visions of Arjuna and of the brother of Jared. My aim here is to use a comparative framework to ask a set of questions about the Book of Mormon.⁵ My hypothesis is that when the Book of Mormon is set side by side with volumes of world scripture drawn from other religious traditions, the mainsprings and inner workings of the Book of Mormon become visible in a way they seldom are when the book is read with an eye only to the sorts of questions commonly asked in primarily studying the Book of Mormon (the sorts of questions asked when seeking spiritual guidance, attempting to decide doctrine, or hoping to establish historical facts). I am convinced that whatever can be done to allow the Book of Mormon to display not only *what it says* but also *how it works* will prove fruitful for theological reflection.⁶

In what follows, I work through three interrelated points of contact between the visions of Arjuna and the brother of Jared. In the first section of this study, I look at the way both vision narratives are presented in epic

3. All quotations from the Book of Mormon are taken from Royal Skousen's Yale edition, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), which incorporates the findings of his critical text project.

4. See Grant Hardy, introduction to Skousen, *Earliest Text*, xxv–xxvi.

5. It is worth emphasizing that my intention in this paper is not to contribute to the literature on Hinduism. Nothing I say about the Bhagavad Gita is original, nor is it meant to be. My intention is solely to see how work in comparative scripture can bring out aspects of the Book of Mormon that might otherwise be missed.

6. I have preliminarily outlined what I take to be the aims and strengths of the method of comparative scripture in my unpublished paper, "Introducing Comparative Scripture to Mormonism." The paper was written largely as an analysis and review of Jad Hatem, *Postponing Heaven: The Three Nephites, the Mahdī, and the Bodhisattva*, which was translated from the French by Jonathon Penny and is forthcoming from the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship. Hatem's book is arguably the first work of comparative scripture that deals with the Book of Mormon in a substantive way.

contexts, contexts that provide conditions for the possibility of religious revolution. In the second section, I investigate in greater detail the broad similarity between the two religious revolutions in question—the Hindu turn to devotion, modeled by Arjuna, and the Jaredite/gentile turn to faith, modeled by the brother of Jared. Finally, having dealt principally with similarities, I turn in the last section to the principal difference such similarities bring into focus: the difference between the conceptions of incarnation at work in Hinduism’s Krishna and Mormonism’s Christ. Thus, along the path this study travels, I move from the aspect of the visions’ closest similarity to the point of their deepest difference. Progressively clearer as the discussion proceeds is the way the Book of Mormon presents, through Moroni’s editorial work on the record of the Jaredites, a startling message meant specifically for the book’s gentile readers—a message ultimately bound up with a certain understanding of the relationship between the divine and the flesh.⁷

Epic contexts and revolutionary visions

Only recently, unfortunately, have Western scholars begun to take seriously the epic context of the Bhagavad Gita.⁸ The Gita is not, after all,

7. As the apocalyptic vision in 1 Nephi 11–14 makes clear, by “Gentiles” the Book of Mormon understands something like “peoples of (especially Western) European descent,” regardless of whether they might have certain genealogical connections with Israel. Traditionally, Latter-day Saints—following hints in section 86 of the Doctrine and Covenants—have regarded most members of the church who claim European descent to be direct descendents of the biblical Jacob or Israel (generally through Jacob’s grandson Ephraim), but it must be recognized that the Book of Mormon makes no such accommodations. (Indeed, even though one Book of Mormon passage—2 Nephi 3:6–16—asserts the Josephite lineage of its latter-day translator, others—in particular the very title page of the book—suggest that the same translator is a Gentile.) For a helpful discussion of the development of Latter-day Saint thinking about the identity of Israel, see Rex E. Cooper, *Promises Made to the Fathers: Mormon Covenant Organization* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990), 67–78.

8. On the Western reception of the Bhagavad Gita generally, see Catherine A. Robinson, *Interpretations of the “Bhagavad-Gītā” and Images of the Hindu Tradition: The Song of the Lord* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

a stand-alone text, but an excerpt from the staggeringly lengthy epic of the Mahabharata. That context is interpretively important in at least two ways. First, although statements within the Gita suggest that its primary purpose is to elucidate for the first time in the Hindu tradition the idea of religious devotion (*bhakti*), the force of this religious revolution is far more visible only when the Gita is read alongside other “doctrinal” conversations that take place elsewhere in the Mahabharata.⁹ Second and more directly connected with the Mahabharata’s status as epic, it is only in the context of the larger story within which the Gita appears—as part of the larger story of the companionship Arjuna and Krishna share—that the full significance of Krishna’s self-revelation can be appreciated.¹⁰ Bringing these two points together, it might be said that the epic context of the Gita uniquely reveals the latter for what it is: a text whose focal point is the vision of Krishna’s true nature, a vision uniquely made possible by Arjuna’s strong sense of devotion. Stripped of its epic context, however, the Gita is likely to be read reductively as a beautiful encapsulation of the teachings of earlier Hindu texts (the Upanishads in particular) that are unfortunately interrupted by the distracting account of a vision with a disappointingly popular emphasis on devotion.¹¹

It is not only Arjuna’s vision, though, that deserves to be set within its larger epic context. The same, I would argue, is true of the brother of Jared’s vision in the book of Ether. Of course, it is necessary to clarify in what sense, if any, it is appropriate to regard the book of Ether as an

9. See Madhav M. Deshpande, “The Epic Context of the *Bhagavadgītā*,” in *Essays on the Mahābhārata*, ed. Arvind Sharma (New York: Brill, 1991), 334–48. What I mean by “religious revolution,” whether in the case of Arjuna’s vision or in the case of the brother of Jared’s vision, is made clear in the course of the second section of this study.

10. See Ruth C. Katz, *Arjuna in the Mahabharata: Where Krishna Is, There Is Victory* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989).

11. This is how the Gita seems to have been read by its earliest American devotees (incidentally contemporary with the appearance in America of the Book of Mormon), for example, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. See Barbara S. Miller, “Why Did Henry David Thoreau Take the *Bhagavad-Gita* to Walden Pond?” in *The Bhagavad-Gita*, trans. Barbara S. Miller (New York: Bantam, 1986), 147–54.

epic.¹² At first glance, it seems impossible or at least irresponsible to compare the book of Ether to epic literature, at the very least because it occupies no more than about thirty pages of text. Nonetheless, Hugh Nibley has argued with characteristic audacity that the source behind the book of Ether is in fact an epic, although it has been “divested of its epic form” by its editor-abridger.¹³ As Nibley explains, “All we have now is Moroni’s brief summary, made from a translation and interlarded with his own notes and comments. That means that all that is left to us is the gist of the [original] epic material.”¹⁴ The strength of this approach to the book of Ether can be seen in the way it allows Nibley to make sense of otherwise curious textual details, such as the presentation of

12. This question can, of course, be asked in two rather different registers. The scholars I discuss in this section have almost universally assumed the ancient historicity of the Book of Mormon and so have staged their arguments regarding the genre of the book of Ether by drawing on its ancient bearings. It is just as possible, of course, for the reader committed to nineteenth-century authorship of the Book of Mormon to ask whether the book of Ether is presented to its readers as an abridged epic. Indeed, the epic nature of the book of Ether would be all the more apparent to those uninterested in the Book of Mormon’s claims to an ancient origin.

13. Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert/The World of the Jaredites/There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 405. Richard Dilworth Rust, *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1997), 56, speaks in a similar vein of the book of Ether’s “concentrated epic.”

14. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 408. He further explains, “Our editor, Moroni, admits the damage. . . . He says that the men of his day were conspicuously lacking in the peculiar literary gifts of those who wrote the original book of Ether: ‘Behold, thou hast not made us mighty in writing like unto the brother of Jared,’ he says, for thou madest him that the things which he wrote were mighty even as thou art, unto the overpowering of man to read them’ (Ether 12:24). . . . Moroni in editing Ether is keenly aware of his inability to do justice to the writing before him.” Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 406. Brant Gardner has highlighted the potential importance of the fact that Moroni would have been working with an already-extant translation of the Jaredite story (that was produced, according to Mosiah 28:11–19, by King Mosiah, son of Benjamin). See Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2007), 6:152–54, 159–63, 170, and so forth. In a similar vein, Grant Hardy has shown that Moroni’s editorial hand was relatively heavy in his treatment of the Jaredites. See Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 235–40.

the brother of Jared as “a large and a mighty man” and “a man highly favored of the Lord” (Ether 1:34). Explaining this passage, Nibley notes that the epic hero “has almost superhuman, but never supernatural, strength, and yet from time to time he receives supernatural aid.”¹⁵ On Nibley’s reading of the book of Ether, the brother of Jared is as much a hero whose constant companion is a god as is Arjuna in the Gita.¹⁶

Nibley’s interpretation is not without potential problems, of course. David Honey has raised important criticisms about whether the genre of epic is really applicable to the book of Ether.¹⁷ To this end, he quotes Robert Alter as saying that “there could be no proper epic poetry, with its larger-than-life human figures and its deities conceived in essentially human terms,” in properly biblical literature (and the Book of Mormon would presumably constitute properly biblical literature, given its claim to have originated in sixth-century Jerusalem).¹⁸ This criticism, however, fails to meet its mark, given Hardy’s remarkable and entirely convincing argument regarding the ultimately nonbiblical, even non-Judeo-Christian flavor of the book of Ether, except where Moroni as the narrative’s editor explicitly interrupts the abridgment with his own, Christian concerns.¹⁹ At any rate, I have already pointed out that the

15. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 300.

16. This constancy is interrupted in the Jaredite narrative for the significant period of four years, during which the brother of Jared “remembered not to call upon the name of the Lord” (Ether 2:14), and one might suggest that this interruption renders problematic any claim that the brother of Jared had a god as his constant companion. In response, however, it might be observed that the period of noncontact is reported in the text only in passing—in fact, only in the subordinate clause of a sentence primarily meant to indicate the Lord’s reinitiation of contact with the brother of Jared. Since to claim that the story of the brother of Jared is an epic is to say something about the way the text presents its story (rather than about what lay historically behind that story), the brevity with which the narrator reports the period of noncontact makes the constancy of contact between the brother of Jared and the Lord a real motif of the story.

17. See, for instance, David B. Honey, “Ecological Nomadism versus Epic Heroism in Ether: Nibley’s Works on the Jaredites,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 2/1 (1990): 143–63.

18. See Honey, “Ecological Nomadism,” 157. Alter’s words appear originally in Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 50.

19. See Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 235–40.

strength of Nibley's interpretation lies in the way it helps to account precisely for the "larger-than-life" nature of the brother of Jared as a character, and it should be said that what is so remarkable about the brother of Jared's vision is in part the fact that in it the Lord is presented as "essentially human," albeit only in form.²⁰ It thus seems best to follow Nibley's interpretation, assuming that especially the first chapters of the book of Ether—the story of the brother of Jared—should be read as a highly condensed epic, an epic "divested of its epic form."

As it turns out, epic context is just as important to the interpretation of the book of Ether as it is to that of the Bhagavad Gita. It is only when Krishna's revelations to Arjuna in the Gita are compared to his other revelations in the Mahabharata that the uniqueness of his emphasis on devotion in the Gita becomes clear. Similarly, it is only when the words of the Lord to the brother of Jared in Ether 3 are compared with the remainder of the book of Ether that one can recognize the startlingly unique nature of the brother of Jared's experience.²¹ It is this point of connection between the visions of Arjuna and the brother of Jared that I will investigate in the second part of this study. Further, the shock of Krishna's true identity and nature can only be felt when one considers his (relatively) this-worldly nature before that point in the story recounted in the Mahabharata. Similarly, the shock the brother of Jared experiences when seeing the finger and then the body of the Lord—as of flesh and bone—derives its force from the self-presentation of the Lord before that point in the story of the Jaredites. I will investigate this point

20. Honey's other two major criticisms—(1) that Nibley wrongly argues that epics "tell the truth" and (2) that Nibley fails to recognize that epics focus on the story of only one great hero, not on a succession of heroes like that in the book of Ether—also fail to call Nibley's claim seriously into question, at least as I am appropriating it here. Honey, it seems to me, simply misunderstands the nature of Nibley's claim about how epics "tell the truth," and while his point about the difference between the singular focus of the epic and the plural focus of the book of Ether is well taken, there is nothing in his argument to suggest that the book of Ether does not open with an epic: the story of the brother of Jared.

21. See Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 235–40.

of connection (and divergence) between the visions of Arjuna and the brother of Jared in the third part of this study.

Before turning to these details, however, I might draw a general principle that could be culled from the shared importance of epic context to the two scriptural texts I am here considering. In each case, it is only because the vision takes place in a larger narrative in which the hero has a divine figure as his constant companion that what is revealed in the hero's vision can have the kind of forceful impact it does. The sustained length and wealth of detail characteristic of the epic (however truncated in the case of the abridged book of Ether), combined with the almost-casual companionship with deity typical of epic heroes, establish a generally stable order that is always ready to be overturned by a self-revelation of the divine.²² The epic is thus uniquely suited to present a vision as the start of a revolution (an overturning of an established and generally stable order) in religion. Even if the book of Ether is an epic "divested of its epic form," enough traces of the original remain to convey the transformative force of what takes place during the brother of Jared's vision.

Devotion and faith

I have pointed out that it is only when Krishna's teachings to Arjuna in the Gita are compared to his other teachings in the Mahabharata that the uniqueness of his emphasis on devotion in the Gita becomes clear. I have suggested that something not unlike this phenomenon is also at work in the narrative of the brother of Jared's vision from the book of Ether. But where the Gita employs the visionary experience to introduce the practice of *devotion* as a hitherto generally unrecognized approach to God, the book of Ether employs the visionary experience to introduce *faith* as a hitherto generally unrecognized approach to God.

22. Of course, there is a sense in which it would be inappropriate to speak of an almost-casual relationship between the brother of Jared and the Lord. The significance of the book of Ether's transformation of this feature is analyzed in the third section of this study.

In each case, what takes place in the course of the hero's vision is an event that renders possible a kind of religious revolution—the explicit recognition and subsequent promulgation of a religious practice that provides a novel means of access to the divine.²³ In each instance, the religious practice in question both leads to the vision's occurrence in the first place (the figure in question approaches the divine in a unique way) and subsequently establishes a model for others (the story of the vision's occurrence is to be repeated so that others will follow the approach of the figure in question).

This “revolutionary” aspect of the Bhagavad Gita is generally recognized. The purpose of Arjuna's vision is to reveal his already-existent devotion (*bhakti*), to clarify that devotion is the key to approaching Krishna, and to encourage acting without attachment to the fruits of action.²⁴ The way this unfolds over the course of the Gita, however, deserves some exposition.

In the first half of the Gita, Krishna expounds to Arjuna through a philosophical dialogue the two hitherto recognized (and therefore traditional) paths that lead to the Hindu ideal of detachment: the path of action (*karmayoga*) and the path of knowledge (*jñānayoga*). This dialogue is, however, interrupted at key points by subtle hints on Krishna's part that he is not exactly human, as follows: (1) In the fourth teaching, Krishna mentions almost in passing that he had delivered his doctrine (his “ancient yoga”) to Vivasvat long before he ever delivered it to Arjuna (BhG 4.1–3). When Arjuna, confused, points out that Krishna's “birth was later, the birth of Vivasvat earlier” (BhG 4.4), Krishna explains for the first time in the epic that he is “birthless” and his nature “imperishable” since he is “the Lord of all beings” (BhG 4.6). (2) In the

23. By the term *religious revolution*, I mean to refer to a transformation of religious practice or belief, internal to a particular religious tradition, that begins from the singular experience of an individual but that subsequently spreads widely among adherents to the religion in question.

24. For a most helpful exposition of the nature of devotion or *bhakti*, see J. A. B. van Buitenen, *The Bhagavadgītā in the Mahābhārata: Text and Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 24–29. For a history of the idea's development, see Wendy Doniger, *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (New York: Penguin, 2009), 338–55.

seventh teaching, Krishna returns to this theme, explaining further the complex distinction between his “material” or “inferior nature” on display to Arjuna throughout the Mahabharata, and his “higher nature,” which Arjuna would subsequently witness in his vision (BhG 7.4–5).²⁵ (3) In the ninth teaching, Krishna goes on to say more about his two natures, explaining how the relation (or nonrelation) between them allows him to act (to intervene in human affairs) without attachment (see BhG 9.5–9), thus providing a model for those who would approach him in devotion.²⁶

These increasingly insistent interruptions eventually spark Arjuna’s devoted desire to ask for the vision he receives: “You have spoken about the highest secret known as the supreme Self. . . . Thus, as you have described yourself, O supreme Lord, I desire to see your divine form, O supreme spirit. If you think it possible for me to see this, O Lord of yogins, then show me your imperishable Self” (BhG 11.1, 3–4). After the remarkable experience concludes, Krishna explains the role that devotion has played in the granting of the vision: “Not through study of the Vedas, not through austerity, not through gifts, and not through sacrifice can I be seen in this form as you have beheld me. By undistracted devotion alone can I be known, and be truly seen in this form, and be entered into, Arjuna. He who . . . is devoted to me, . . . comes to me, Arjuna” (BhG 11.53–55). Here, as Krishna states, it is uniquely because of Arjuna’s devotion that he has been granted his vision and so has come to know the true nature of the divine. Moreover, Krishna stresses the remarkable power of devotion, which can apparently transform even the reprobate: “If even the evil doer worships me with undivided devotion, he is to be thought of as righteous, for he has indeed rightly resolved. Quickly he becomes virtuous and goes to

25. “The spiritual beings” would be the literal translation of *jīva-būtā*, though Sargeant renders it simply as “self.” See Chapple, *Bhagavad Gītā*, 323.

26. See the helpful discussion in Angelika Malinar, *The “Bhagavadgītā”: Doctrines and Contexts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 148–49.

everlasting peace” (BhG 9.30–31).²⁷ Thus, if Arjuna is the first in his age to see Krishna’s true form, it is apparently because he is the first in his age to fully exemplify devotion. In this sense, Arjuna’s vision marks a religious revolution.

Moreover, the exemplary nature of Arjuna’s experience must not be missed. The point of the Gita’s recounting Arjuna’s vision is unmistakably didactic: to ensure that hearers or readers of the Gita will see in Arjuna a model of devotion, which all who wish to achieve the ideal of detachment must pursue if they are to purge the two already-known paths (of action and knowledge) of every trace of egoism. Religious revolution is, after all, really possible only if the force of a revolutionizing revelatory event is communicated to those who did not witness its original occurrence. It is thus significant that, in the whole of the Gita, it is only in the telling of Arjuna’s vision that the narrator interrupts the dialogue. The sudden (and unique) reminder that this event is being recounted helps the hearer or reader to recognize the importance of recounting the story, of ensuring that it is told again and again.²⁸ The Gita presents not merely a story to be enjoyed, but a model to be followed.

The model to be followed is a model that expands the scope of Hindu religion. The paths of action and knowledge seem, for the most part, to make detachment possible only for ascetics and philosophers, for those who could renounce life as it is usually lived. Krishna, however, is quick to emphasize in his conversation with Arjuna that devotion marks the universality of the Hindu ideal: “They who take refuge in me [through devotion], Arjuna, even if they are born of those whose wombs are evil (i.e., those of low origin), women, Vaishyas, even

27. Ithamar Theodore nonetheless argues that, contrary to certain widespread interpretations, this turn to devotion is not a turn to populism or vulgar religion, but rather a raising of the stakes of the traditional paths of action and knowledge. See Ithamar Theodore, *Exploring the “Bhagavad-Gītā”: Philosophy, Structure and Meaning* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 85–86.

28. Perhaps importantly, the narrator is described in the Gita as having the same gift of “divine sight” granted to Arjuna in the course of his vision. See Malinar, “*Bhagavadgītā*,” 166–67.

Shudras, also go to the highest goal” (BhG 9.32).²⁹ In Angelika Malinar’s words, “Rarely considered social sectors like women, traders, and servants are invited to practice *bhakti* and gain liberation. Regardless of status and achievements, this god [Krishna] cares for everyone.”³⁰ Arjuna’s vision thus introduces an approach to God that uniquely expanded the possibilities of religion to those formerly excluded. Detachment is not the prerogative only of those who experience a kind of call; it is open to all who would approach the divine in devotion.

Such is the development of the theme of devotion in the Bhagavad Gita. How does all this compare to the role faith plays in the vision of the brother of Jared? Although commentators generally overlook the point, Moroni explicitly presents the brother of Jared’s vision as introducing or illustrating—as Hardy puts it—“a particular path to religious knowledge.”³¹ The significance of this introduction or illustration to the larger project of the Book of Mormon is crucial, even if it is universally missed.³² Like the development of the theme of devotion in the Gita, it calls for detailed comment.

29. Vaishyas are members of the third caste in the Hindu caste system. Shudras are members of the fourth, or lowest, caste.

30. See Malinar, “*Bhagavadgītā*,” 155. Malinar goes on: “However, this does not mean that one has to strive less, since devotion has to be enacted in a practice demanding a high degree of self-control and detachment.” Malinar, “*Bhagavadgītā*,” 155–56. See also Theodore, *Exploring the “Bhagavad-Gītā*,” 85–86; and Doniger, *Hindus*, 360. Doniger, in one passage, goes still further than others, suggesting that the rise of devotion marked less a universalization than a reversal: “The gender stereotype of women as gentle, sacrificing, and loving became the new model for the natural worshiper, replacing the gender stereotype of men as intelligent, able to understand arcane matters, and responsible for handing down the lineage of the texts. The stereotypes remained the same but were valued differently. And so men imitated women in bhakti, and women took charge of most of the family’s religious observances. At the same time, a new image, perhaps even a new stereotype, arose of a woman who defied conventional society in order to pursue her personal religious calling.” Doniger, *Hindus*, 353.

31. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 241. In my view, Hardy’s emphasis on knowledge is too narrow, as my own reading will show.

32. So far as I have been able to find, only Hardy recognizes the possibility that there is something of real significance at work in the brother of Jared’s exemplary

According to a reading I have worked out at great length elsewhere, Mormon, chief editor of the book called by his name, appears to have constructed his history of Lehi's children with the aim of revealing the importance that should be granted to their rootedness in the covenant given to Abraham and Sarah in the biblical book of Genesis.³³ Beginning with Nephi's apocalyptic version of his father's dream of the tree of life (see especially 1 Nephi 13–14) and culminating in the visiting Christ's complicated midrashim on texts from Micah and Isaiah (see especially 3 Nephi 20–21), the Book of Mormon is from start to finish meant “to shew unto the remnant of the house of Israel how 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.”³⁴ From the very start of the Book of Mormon, moreover, the prayers of its prophetic figures are that “if it should so be that . . . the Nephites should fall into transgression and by any means be destroyed and the Lamanites should not be destroyed that the Lord God would preserve a record of . . . the Nephites, . . . that it might be brought forth some future day unto the Lamanites, that perhaps they might be brought unto salvation” (Enos 1:13).³⁵

The Book of Mormon thus presents itself as a kind of letter written by an ancient covenant people and addressed to a modern covenant people, from the Nephites to the Lamanites. And the letter carriers, the

approach to God. Even Hardy, however, fails to take the theme as far as, on my interpretation, the Book of Mormon wants to take it.

33. See Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology* (Salem, OR: Salt Press, 2012).

34. These words come from the title page of the Book of Mormon, here quoted from Skousen's edition.

35. The Lord's response to this particular prayer in Enos 1:18 makes clear that this was the desire quite generally of the prophets of the first generations of Nephites: “Thy fathers have also required of me this thing. And it shall be done unto them according to their faith, for their faith was like unto thine.” The collective prayers referred to here are what are called in Nephi's writings “the prayers of the faithful” (see, for instance, 2 Nephi 26:15). Importantly, this particular vision of things continues—however marginally and however disconnected from its original covenantal bearings—throughout the whole of the Nephite record, as can be seen from sermons like those of Alma the Younger in Alma 9 and Samuel the Lamanite in Helaman 15.

people assigned to ensure that the book arrives at its destination, are the Gentiles—specifically, it seems, those of European descent situated in the Americas and profoundly shaped by the terrifically complicated history of Christianity in Europe.³⁶ This last detail, the role to be played by the Gentiles in the historical unfolding of the Abrahamic covenant, is one Mormon seems to have been content to make known through his abridgment and arrangement of the Nephite record. His son, Moroni, however, appears to have been a good deal more concerned about this particular detail—worried, at his most anxious moments, that the Gentiles were as likely as not to prevent the delivery of the letter to its rightful addressees.³⁷ This anxiety seems to have motivated Moroni's interest in the story of the Jaredites, as well as to have determined his (heavy-handed) editorial style in abridging and annotating that story. What seems to have interested—if not obsessed—him is the fact that the Jaredites, in Hardy's words, “were not even of the House of Israel and thus had no part in the covenants and promises that were so central to the Nephites' conception of themselves and their role in God's plan for human history.”³⁸ In other words, what seems to have interested Moroni in the story of the Jaredites is what they had in common with the Gentiles: their noncovenantal status.³⁹

36. See especially 1 Nephi 13, as well as note 7 above.

37. See on this point Hardy's crucial discussion in *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 217–47. On the theological stakes of Moroni's eventual overcoming of this anxiety, see Adam S. Miller, “A Hermeneutics of Weakness,” in *Rube Goldberg Machines: Essays in Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2012), 99–105.

38. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 229. That the Book of Mormon does not present the Jaredites as Israelites is clear from the fact that it traces their origins to the confounding of languages at Babel, that is, to an event that the biblical narrative presents as having preceded the calling of Abraham and the election of his children.

39. William Hamblin has suggested to me that certain details in Ether 1 suggest that the Jaredites were Sethites and so would have fallen within what other Mormon scripture presents as the covenant lineage stretching from Adam to Abraham. This is an entirely viable reading of the text. At the same time, however, it must be noted that the Book of Mormon generally does not recognize a pre-Abrahamic covenant (the only possible exception is Helaman 8:18) and that Moroni is remarkably explicit about comparing the Jaredites of the ancient world to the Gentiles of the modern world.

The story of the brother of Jared has to be seen through the lens of the covenant. Moroni presents the brother of Jared as, one might say, *the* non-Israelite, the *exemplary* non-Israelite, and thus the model for every Gentile. This presentation becomes particularly clear when Moroni explains the absence in the published record of most of what the brother of Jared saw in his vision. Moroni did indeed “write them” in the plates, but, he says, he was “commanded” to “seal them up” (Ether 4:5). He then explains:

The Lord saith unto me: They shall not go forth *unto the Gentiles* until the day that they shall repent of their iniquity and become clean before the Lord. And in that day that *they* [the Gentiles] shall exercise faith in me, saith the Lord, *even as the brother of Jared did*, that they may become sanctified in me, *then will I manifest unto them the things which the brother of Jared saw*, even to the unfolding unto them all my revelations, saith Jesus Christ. (Ether 4:6–7)

Here the link between the Gentiles more generally—those who might potentially keep the Book of Mormon from its intended audience by ignoring its covenantal foundation—and the brother of Jared is made perfectly clear. If the Gentiles would develop the appropriate sort of relationship to God, they must follow the example of *the* non-Israelite, the brother of Jared. His model of approaching God, his way of “exercis[ing] faith,” is apparently the properly non-Israelite approach to God, the properly non-Israelite exercise of faith.

This, the reader of the Book of Mormon is meant to understand, is why Moroni decided to give his attention to the brother of Jared. Like the Bhagavad Gita’s narrator, Moroni carefully interrupts his narrative of an unprecedented vision to ensure that his audience would recognize how the story is meant to model a particular approach to the divine. This intent is highlighted in the passage of Ether that most clearly mirrors the account of Arjuna’s vision, cited at the outset of this paper: “And never hath I shewed myself unto man, whom I have created, for never hath man believed in me as thou hast” (Ether 3:15). It is the stark uniqueness of the brother of Jared’s faith that makes his approach to God exemplary.

Interpretation of Ether 3:15 in the literature has largely focused on the apparent contradiction between the Lord's claim in this passage that he had never "shewed [him]self unto man" and passages elsewhere in uniquely Mormon scripture that refer to antediluvian (and therefore pre-Jaredite) appearances of the Lord to mortal human beings.⁴⁰ Primarily concerned to reconcile passages from distinct scriptural texts in the name of doctrinal consistency, interpreters have largely overlooked what seems to be the primary point of the Lord's words—namely, that his appearance was unique in responding to a unique sort of faith. This latter interpretation has, however, been set forth by at least two readers of the Book of Mormon: Daniel Ludlow and Jeffrey Holland. The latter makes the case especially forcefully, paraphrasing Ether 3:15 as follows: "Never have I showed myself unto man *in this manner, without my volition, driven solely by the faith of the beholder.*" Holland explains:

As a rule, prophets are *invited* into the presence of the Lord, are bidden to enter his presence by him and only with his sanction. The brother of Jared, on the other hand, seems to have thrust himself through the veil, not as an unwelcome guest but perhaps technically as an uninvited one. . . . The only way that faith could be so remarkable was its ability to take the prophet, uninvited, where others had been able to go only with God's bidding.⁴¹

40. Moses 7:4 and D&C 107:54 are the texts most often cited. For examples of this sort of approach to the text, see Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957–66), 2:123–25; Sidney B. Sperry, *Answers to Book of Mormon Questions* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1967), 47–51; Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 599–600; Kent P. Jackson, "'Never Have I Showed Myself unto Man': A Suggestion for Understanding Ether 3:15a," *BYU Studies* 30/3 (1990): 71–75; Joseph F. McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987–92), 4:277–78; Hugh W. Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Transcripts of Lectures Presented to an Honors Book of Mormon Class at Brigham Young University, 1988–1990* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1993), 4:272; Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:205–7.

41. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 23, emphasis in original. See also Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 318.

This interpretation helps reveal the stark contrast between the brother of Jared, the father of the noncovenant people to which Moroni would draw the attention of his gentile readers, and Abraham, the father of the covenant people on which the rest of the Book of Mormon focuses. Where Abraham is definitively the called one, the one who—unlike Adam before him—responded to God’s call with “Here am I!” (see especially Genesis 22:1, 7, 11), the brother of Jared is the uncalled or unbidden *but nonetheless faithful* one. As a model for the similarly uncalled Gentiles, the brother of Jared displays a sort of non-Abrahamic faith that, if imitated by Gentiles generally, can result in “the unfolding [of] all [of God’s] revelations” (Ether 4:7).

According to Moroni, it might be noted, the prospects are bleak for the Gentiles if they refuse to follow the revolutionary religious pattern established by the brother of Jared. While a remnant of covenant Israel remains at the end of Nephite history—the remnant to which the Book of Mormon itself is to be delivered to inform them of their covenantal status—nothing of the noncovenantal Jaredites remains at the end of their sad history. For the Gentiles, it seems, Moroni sees two options: faith like the brother of Jared or annihilation without survivors. Indeed, Moroni states this point straightforwardly at the outset of his abridgment of the Jaredite record: “This cometh unto you, O ye Gentiles, . . . that ye may not bring down the fulness of the wrath of God upon you as the inhabitants of the land hath hitherto done” (Ether 2:11).⁴²

The parallels between Arjuna’s devotion and the brother of Jared’s faith are striking. Each in its epic setting essentially produces a startling revelation of the divine, a situation in which the divine figure responds favorably to a request to reveal his true nature. And each is then confirmed as exemplary and presented as a model to be followed. Both mark a kind of revolution in religion, linked in each case with an expansion of the possibility of approaching the divine—in the case

42. Don Bradley suggested to me that this message would have been all the more stark had the book of Moroni not been—unexpectedly, according to the text (see Moroni 1:1)—added at the end of the volume. Had the original plan been followed, the Book of Mormon would have concluded with the utter annihilation of the gentile Jaredites.

of devotion, from ascetics and philosophers to all who would achieve detachment, and in the case of faith, from the covenant people of God to all peoples. To a remarkable extent, then, Arjuna's devotion and the brother of Jared's faith, as each is connected to the self-revelation of the divine, run parallel to each other. It would, however, be a mistake to regard the two texts as identical. Indeed, their broad similarity is precisely what allows their significant—and fascinating—differences to become quite clear. I turn, then, to what seems to me the starkest difference between the visions of Arjuna and the brother of Jared.

Krishna and Christ

I pointed out earlier in this paper that the shock of Krishna's true identity and nature can only be felt when one considers his appearing as fully human in the Mahabharata before his self-revelation to Arjuna. I further suggested that something similar to this is also at work in the narrative of the brother of Jared's vision from the book of Ether. All the similarities I have traced thus far in this paper—along with other similarities that might yet be culled from comparing the texts—culminate in this most startling similarity of all: that both transformative visions, set in their respective epic contexts, turn on the question of *incarnation*. That the similarity between the two texts goes even that far is surprising. And yet it is at this point in each story—Krishna's self-revelation to Arjuna and Christ's self-revelation to the brother of Jared—that the differences between the book of Ether and the Bhagavad Gita, and perhaps between Mormonism and Hinduism more generally, can most clearly be seen. These differences are centered, first and foremost, in the radical difference or even opposition between each scriptural text's conception of divine incarnation. There is, of course, a large literature comparing the incarnational doctrines of the New Testament and the Bhagavad Gita.⁴³

43. For a particularly insightful treatment, which also contains a sizeable bibliography, see Steven Tsoukalas, "Krishna and Christ: The Body-Divine Relation in the Human Form," in *Song Divine: Christian Commentaries on the "Bhagavad-Gītā,"* ed. Catherine Cornille (Dudley, MA: Eerdmans, 2006), 145–63.

My interest, however, is in the unique contribution that might be made to that discussion when Mormonism is introduced into the mix.

Relatively early in the Gita—specifically at the moment when Arjuna first begins to realize that Krishna is no mere mortal—Krishna explains his reasons for taking on human form: “Whenever a decrease of social order exists, Arjuna, and there is a rising up of social disorder, then I manifest myself. For the protection of the good and the destruction of evil doers, for the sake of establishing social order, I am born in every age” (BhG 4.7–8).⁴⁴ In order to intervene among human beings, always with an eye to establishing or restoring social order, Krishna assumes the flesh. Importantly, he apparently always does so in a way that entirely obscures his divine nature. Krishna thus comes among human beings as a human being, but in order, somewhat craftily, to establish a devoted friendship with a choice person (in this case, Arjuna) and then to await the appropriate moment for revealing his eternal nature to this devotee—thereby making clear for all the best way to approach the divine. His incarnation has to obscure his true nature so that his plan to revolutionize religion, if such it might be called, can come to fruition.

How, though, does Krishna go about assuming the flesh? This is a difficult question, given the complicated details Krishna himself outlines concerning the relationship between his two natures, his material or inferior nature and his eternal or higher nature. Helpfully, though, Malinar explains that incarnation

is possible because [Krishna] makes the power of creation (*prakṛti*, 4.6) act according to his will and produce an outward form for him. . . . The already detached self [of Krishna] deliberately turns to the realm of *prakṛti*, activates it and yet manages to stay in control. When in this position, a god, like a successful *yogin*, is

44. I have slightly modified Sargeant’s translation here, replacing “righteousness” with “social order” and “unrighteousness” with “social disorder” to reflect better the scope of the Sanskrit *dharma* and *adharma*. See the discussion in Malinar, “*Bhagavadgītā*,” 99.

still connected to *prakṛti*, but already “liberated” from any egoistic appropriation of its manifestations.⁴⁵

In other words, in his self-manifestation, Krishna’s “apparitional body (*māyā*) . . . is not connected to his eternal self, which remains forever unborn and detached.”⁴⁶ Consequently, Krishna’s incarnation is occasional rather than programmatic, contingent and local rather than necessary and global. His incarnation is a means to an end—specifically, to establishing or restoring social order through a well-timed self-revelation to one who has developed devotion—an end from which he nonetheless remains constitutively detached.

Because being incarnated, or veiled in flesh, is for Krishna a means to an end, in particular because the end in question has to be said to be a drawing aside of the veil of flesh assumed in incarnation, the heaviest emphasis in Arjuna’s vision lies not on incarnation as such, but on the nonincarnational reality the incarnation allows Krishna to reveal to his devotee. The emphasis, in other words, is not on the immanence of the embodied divine so much as on the transcendence of the unembodied divine. The miracle of Arjuna’s relationship with Krishna is not that a mere human is, thanks to the mystery of incarnation, unwittingly accompanied by a divine figure. Rather, the miracle is that that relationship, because it rises to the level of devotion, allows a mere human to witness the true nature of his divine companion. Incarnation is more the *setting* of the miracle of the Gita than the miracle itself. Certainly, what Krishna aims to reveal to Arjuna is not the fact of incarnation, remarkable as that fact may be, but the divine model of detachment, the

45. Malinar, “*Bhagavadgītā*,” 95–96; see also the discussion at 148: “This distinction is the basis of the theological doctrine of the god’s simultaneous presence in and distance from the world. This distinction demonstrates the specific character of Kṛṣṇa’s power, which is referred to as the yoga that is ‘majestic,’ mighty, indicative of his being both the sovereign of all beings and the master of *prakṛti*. While the existence of the world depends on him, his ‘self’ and thus he himself does not depend on the world.”

46. Malinar, “*Bhagavadgītā*,” 128. Krishna is himself careful to distinguish this form of incarnation from other forms offered in the Hindu tradition. See BhG 7.24–25, as well as the helpful commentary in Malinar, “*Bhagavadgītā*,” 134.

absolute transcendence of the divine self. Krishna's assumption of the flesh is, it seems, a condition for the possibility of that revelation taking place, but it is not what that revelation is actually intended to reveal.

Incarnation is equally essential to the brother of Jared's experience, but in an almost inverse manner. The epic of the Mahabharata provides the larger setting in which Krishna can fully conceal his divine nature until the right moment, nonetheless accompanying Arjuna as his devoted friend throughout the story. The first chapters of the book of Ether, however, provide the epic setting in which the Lord accompanies the brother of Jared (and his kin) as the transcendent Lord until he, when the moment is right, reveals his nature as *enfleshed* (albeit through what he calls "the body of [his] spirit"; Ether 3:16). Where Arjuna's companion is an unmistakably flesh-and-blood human being who eventually reveals himself to be a kind of mask for the entirely nonhuman transcendent, the brother of Jared's companion is the unmistakably nonhuman transcendent that eventually reveals himself to be (destined to become) a flesh-and-blood human being. If incarnation is a means to the end of revealing the transcendent in the Gita, transcendence is a means to the end of revealing the incarnate in the book of Ether. Obviously, the details deserve attention.

Throughout the opening narrative of the book of Ether, as I have just said, it is the Lord in his transcendence who is the brother of Jared's companion. Early in the brother of Jared's travels, "the Lord came down and talked with [him]," but only "in a cloud and the brother of Jared saw him not" (Ether 2:4). From that point in the narrative, the Lord "did go before" Jared and his fellow travelers as they journeyed, always "talk[ing] with them as he stood in a cloud" (Ether 2:5). Later, when the brother of Jared earns a rebuke from the Lord, the Lord "came again unto the brother of Jared and stood in a cloud and talked with him" (Ether 2:14). Although the brother of Jared seems to be in constant contact with the Lord throughout this narrative, it is always with the Lord as a disembodied figure from the beyond, an invisible being whose presence can only be figured as a cloud. Perhaps the text's constant references to the Lord's *standing in* the cloud suggest something of his

corporeal nature, but there is no indication that the brother of Jared saw in the cloud anything other than the mark of divine transcendence. And, as will be seen, the report of the brother of Jared's vision indicates unawareness of any immanent corporeality on God's part.

At any rate, the shock of the brother of Jared's vision comes when he sees the Lord (as if) *enfleshed*: "And the veil was taken from off the eyes of the brother of Jared, and he saw the finger of the Lord. And it was as the finger of a man, like unto flesh and blood, and the brother of Jared fell down before the Lord, for he was struck with fear" (Ether 3:6). When the vision comes to its culmination and the veil—here, apparently, the veil of transcendence—is entirely removed for the brother of Jared, the Lord reveals to him his body: "Behold, this body which ye now behold is the body of my spirit. . . . And even as I appear unto thee to be in the spirit will I appear unto my people in the flesh" (Ether 3:16). Where Arjuna is given to see beyond the veil of the visible and corporeal into the transcendent unimaginable, the brother of Jared is given to see beyond the veil of the transcendent unimaginable and so to come face-to-face with the visible and corporeal.

Particularly revealing here is the difference between what Arjuna and the brother of Jared respectively see with their own eyes. When Krishna prepares Arjuna to see his higher nature, he explains: "But you are not able to see me with your own eyes. I give to you a divine eye" (BhG 11.8). Fascinatingly, even this divine eye is not enough to make Arjuna comfortable with the experience; it is not long before he begs to be released from the vision: "Having seen that which has never been seen before, I am delighted, and yet my mind trembles with fear. Show me that form, O God, in which you originally appeared. Have mercy" (BhG 11.45). Even with the divine sight, Arjuna can only look upon Krishna's true nature for a short time. Things could not be more different with the brother of Jared. There is no mention at all in Ether 3 of the brother of Jared receiving some kind of borrowed divine power to see what he sees, which is all the more striking given the fact that other uniquely Mormon scriptural texts suggest that others had to have

some kind of divine assistance in order to endure the presence of God.⁴⁷ What sets the climactic moment of the brother of Jared's vision in motion is the mortal's almost irreverent (because almost insultingly banal) command to Christ, "Shew thyself unto me" (Ether 3:10).

This reversal of Arjuna's experience in the brother of Jared's vision is most suggestive. Indeed, it is here that all the similarities between the Bhagavad Gita and the book of Ether highlight what might be their starkest point of contrast. Although there are, as many scholars have argued, striking parallels between the incarnation of Krishna in the Gita and the incarnation of Christ in the New Testament (particularly as it is understood in the Gospel of John), Mormonism, at least as it is represented by the book of Ether, complicates things.⁴⁸ For Mormonism, Christ's incarnation might be said to be something more like the full realization of Christ's nature than his willing condescension from that nature. That is, the Christ of the book of Ether does not only temporarily take on flesh and bone; it is his aim and his intention to take on flesh and bone from the beginning, long before his birth as Jesus of Nazareth. A certain orthodox Christianity might thus be said to be more akin to the Hinduism of the Gita than is Mormonism because of the way in which Mormonism uniquely dispenses with the ultimate

47. See, for instance, Moses 1:11. A passage from the pseudepigraphical *Apocalypse of Abraham*, which work Hugh Nibley cited frequently, contains a Judeo-Christian parallel to Arjuna's inability to endure the vision for long, despite divine assistance. See the *Apocalypse of Abraham* 16:1–4, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1983–85), 1:696. For references in Nibley's writings, see Hugh Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond This Ignorant Present* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 279, 522–23.

48. It may be important to limit the scope of this complicating of things to the book of Ether. I have already noted that other uniquely Mormon scripture suggests parallels with Arjuna's visionary experience that are absent from the brother of Jared's experience. Still, it is important to recognize that the Book of Mormon seems in striking ways to share the Christology of especially the Gospel of John. See, in this regard, Krister Stendahl, "The Sermon on the Mount and Third Nephi," in *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian Parallels*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978), 139–54; and, more recently, Nicholas J. Frederick, "Line within Line: An Intertextual Analysis of Mormon Scripture and the Prologue of the Gospel of John" (PhD dissertation, Claremont Graduate University, 2013).

unimaginability of the divine in itself. Mormonism's God, since Joseph Smith at least, and perhaps since the brother of Jared, is a God with "toes, fingers, and all that stuff."⁴⁹

Conclusion

It is necessary to put the brakes on too-quick systematization, however, as well as on overly premature theologizing. Before too many conclusions can be drawn, there remains a good deal more to learn from and about the vision of the brother of Jared. What I have developed in the course of this analysis is, I hope, at least preparatory to further study. The remarkable similarities between the accounts of the visions of Arjuna and of the brother of Jared help to bring out what seems to be their starkest point of contrast—distinct notions of divine incarnation. But to do serious justice to the differences between these notions of divine incarnation, especially by comparing them with the notions of divine incarnation in the New Testament, requires much more work. Not only is it necessary to look more closely at the relevant Hindu and Christian texts, it is necessary to look at relevant passages throughout the Book of Mormon, particularly Ether 3, which I have really only touched on here. Indeed, the comparison I have drawn in this paper is perhaps just enough to reveal where attention in further interpretive work ought to be focused: Exactly what is the relationship between Jesus Christ and his body in the few verses that outline the vision of the brother of Jared?

What conclusions might be drawn, then? I believe I have established a certain inverse relationship between Arjuna's vision and that of the brother of Jared—an inverse relationship that is only visible when the profound similarities between the two texts are fully acknowledged. Those similarities are real and essential: both visions have their setting in larger texts presented as epics, parallel contexts that allow each narrative

49. See James Faulconer, "Toes, Fingers, and All That Stuff: Resurrection," retrieved 14 February 2013 from <http://www.patheos.com/Mormon/Toes-Fingers-and-All-that-Stuff-Resurrection-James-Faulconer-04-05-2012.html>.

to present a religiously revolutionary approach to the divine through the self-revelation of a hero's heavenly companion. However striking these similarities are, it is perhaps the inverse relationship that serves as the real motivation to mobilize serious work on the text of Ether 3, exegetical *and* theological. If the brother of Jared's experience with the divine, as recounted in the Book of Mormon, is at once so remarkably similar to and so remarkably different from Arjuna's experience with the divine in the Gita, how might the uniqueness of the Latter-day Saint conception of the body be brought out more clearly by close study of Ether 3? What treasures the vision of the brother of Jared holds for its readers remain to be discovered.

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