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Buried Swords: The Shifting Interpretive Ground of a Beloved Book of Mormon Narrative

J. David Pulsipher

In November 2014 Latter-day Saint children around the world participated in a ritual that would probably seem odd to outsiders—they buried some swords. These weren't actual weapons, of course, only sketches of swords upon which the children were instructed to “write a wrong choice . . . such as ‘fighting with my brother’ or ‘telling a lie.’” They then “buried” these swords by “crumpling their papers or throwing them away.”

Similarly, in February 2010 a small group of teenagers stood with their own paper swords around a freshly dug hole on their church’s property. “I had my class write down a behavior of theirs, if they had one, which might be considered an act of ‘rebellion to God,’” recalled their teacher. “Their challenge was to pick one thing they were serious about stopping. I asked them to pick something they felt they could put aside . . . forever.”

Standing at the edge of this modest excavation, the students quietly laid

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their paper swords in the ground and covered them with dirt, burying individual sins and making “a promise together to work on letting go.”

The essential symbolism of these rituals is immediately apparent to other Latter-day Saints. The children and teenagers were reenacting a poignant scene from the Book of Mormon, when the Anti-Nephi-Lehies (also known as the people of Ammon or Ammonites) turned their backs on bloodshed and buried their weapons deep in the earth. The incident is rich with allegorical possibility. Indeed, Mormon himself employed metaphorical language to describe the conversion of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies as the moment when “they did lay down the weapons of their rebellion, that they did not fight against God any more” (Alma 23:7). Such allegorical power is easily applied to modern life and personal spiritual struggle. Any unrighteous habit, inclination, or behavior—any inclination to fight against God—might be considered a weapon of rebellion. Thus this beloved story is both emotionally evocative and spiritually resonant for twenty-first-century Latter-day Saints, and it is through a metaphorical lens that they most often interpret the narrative.

Nevertheless, the story has always been open to additional interpretations. The physical weapons and tangible pit can also imply a potentially compelling—even radical—social and political ethic. A group of dedicated Christian converts choose disarmed faith over justified self-defense, abandoning and burying not only rebellious attitudes, but also concrete tools “used for the shedding of man’s blood” (Alma 24:17). Should modern disciples of Jesus follow suit? Furthermore, the second part of the story—in which the Anti-Nephi-Lehies confront their enemies on the battlefield, accept and absorb their brutality, and consequently convert many of them into fellow believers—might imply a similarly radical method of resisting and overcoming violence, both individually and collectively. Should Latter-day Saints embrace and promote that ethic?


3. The core elements of the Anti-Nephi-Lehi story are related in Alma 23–27.
Serious consideration of these questions is generally absent from contemporary interpretations of the narrative. Yet there was a time, during the decades between the two World Wars, when such questions were central to Latter-day Saint analysis. In the wake of a futile “war to end all wars,” and at a time when nonviolent strategies were beginning to gain international attention, prominent LDS scholars and official church curriculum writers explored the story’s social and political implications. Given the disappointments of the postwar “peace,” these interpretive frameworks effectively addressed common concerns regarding modern warfare and offered practical hope for a better future. Such questions and concerns persisted, to a degree, through the Second World War and then receded during the Cold War era as a new generation of LDS teachers, writers, and artists—many of whom had participated in or were sympathetic to conventional military strategies—began to question the story’s political practicality and social relevance. Consequently, within a few decades, most political and ethical considerations were superseded with an allegorical approach.

Recovering the process by which this interpretive ground shifted away from political and toward metaphorical approaches serves as a reminder that scriptural analysis is never static. Inspired truth is necessarily conveyed through what Joseph Smith called “crooked broken scattered and imperfect Language,” and each generation must necessarily read scripture in light of its unique spiritual resources, community needs, and predispositions, striving as best it can to discern and implement divine truth. So it is not surprising that different scriptural interpretations rise in prominence during some eras while others dwindle. This constantly shifting ground also reminds us that interpretive paths are not necessarily inevitable. Choices matter. Following one path means abandoning other viable alternatives, and the experience and preference of key individuals can transform the trajectory of a group and solidify certain approaches. But echoes of abandoned paths, or what C. Vann Woodward famously referred to as “forgotten

alternatives,” can linger in the background of a community’s cultural consciousness. For Latter-day Saints, a brief but substantial interest in the Anti-Nephi-Lehies’ potential political ethic is an alternative that merits some acknowledgement—a path ultimately not taken by the community as a whole, yet one that continues to remain accessible within Mormonism’s rich scriptural, cultural, and theological resources.

Political parallels and possibilities

Before exploring the history of this shifting interpretive ground, it is important to note how elements of the Anti-Nephi-Lehi story can resonate with a variety of political and ethical principles, rendering the text open to multiple interpretations. This plurality is complicated by the fact that the broader scriptural narrative provides no explicit framework for extrapolating consistent political or ethical implications, especially in regard to violence. As even a casual reader becomes quickly aware, the Book of Mormon contains frequent references to warfare and other forms of violence, but it is often difficult to distinguish between behavior that is clearly prescriptive as opposed to merely descriptive. Moreover, the book’s explicit and implicit instructions cover a range of responses to violence. Most of the key prophet-narrators, for example, personally engage in war, and other prominent figures are lauded for their righteousness and military prowess. Consequently, while the text does not celebrate warfare nor “delight in bloodshed,” it does at times excuse or justify violence. But it also offers a rather compelling set of alternative ethics, especially during Christ’s sublime visit, when he teaches that “old things are done away” and counsels them to “not resist evil” but rather to love their enemies (3 Nephi 12:38–48). As a result of Christ’s “new” law, his listeners eschew all bloodshed and erase the religious, cultural, and economic distinctions that often fuel friction. Their

7. See Alma 48:14–16 and 23–25; see also Alma 43:45–47.
peaceful society endures for over a century until later generations allow divisions and violence to return, eventually plunging their society into internecine conflict. This tragic descent further complicates the text’s political and ethical message because, even during the Nephite’s moral nadir, God’s prophets at times lead armies—even armies of morally compromised soldiers—in defensive warfare. Thus the book’s tension between war and peace has led one scholar to observe, “If one word might be used to describe the attitude of the Book of Mormon toward war, ambivalent would be a good place to start.”

Nowhere is this ambivalence more evident than in the story of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, which contains intriguing parallels to three political and ethical frameworks that are not easily reconciled—absolute pacifism, active nonviolence, and just warfare. To be clear, the story does not explicitly reference, let alone endorse, any of these frameworks, but it does contain elements that are clearly parallel. To fully comprehend these parallels, it is helpful to divide the Anti-Nephi-Lehi narrative into three parts, each with a different political and ethical emphasis.

Part 1 exudes what political theorists might label a pacifist sensibility, as the Anti-Nephi-Lehies take a vow “that they never would use weapons again for the shedding of man’s blood” (Alma 24:18). While an aversion to war and vows to abstain from it are as old as human history, the term pacifism was coined in the early twentieth century to provide a specific label for such sentiments. It originally embraced a spectrum of approaches ranging from conditional pacifism (opposed to war but reluctantly accepting it as a last resort) to absolute pacifism (rejecting violence in any circumstance), but the term eventually came to be associated with an absolutist orientation. As a whole, the Book of Mormon can be read as a conditional pacifist text—it never glorifies war and consistently expresses a longing for peace—but the particular vow of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies is closer to absolute pacifism. Noting

that their formerly blood-stained swords had “become bright” again through their repentance, the king tells his people, “Let us hide them away that they may be kept bright, as a testimony to our God . . . that we have not stained our swords in the blood of our brethren since he imparted his word unto us and has made us clean” (Alma 24:15). The people follow his lead, taking “all the weapons which were used for the shedding of man’s blood” and burying them “deep in the earth . . . , vouching and covenanted with God, that rather than shed the blood of their brethren they would give up their own lives” (Alma 24:17–18). While this extraordinary vow becomes quite trying at times, “they never could be prevailed upon to take up arms against their brethren” and “would suffer death in the most aggravating and distressing manner” (Alma 27:28–29). Thus they hold true to a form of absolute pacifism.

Part 2 of the Anti-Nephi-Lehi story follows immediately on the heels of the first. Having buried their weapons, the people go “out to meet” their attackers, prostrate themselves to the earth, call upon God, and absorb the violence of their enemies (Alma 24:21). At first glance their behavior might seem a natural extension of their pacifist stance, but it actually parallels another concept known as active nonviolence. As historian David Cortright has noted, “Pacifism and nonviolence are often considered synonymous, but they are conceptually and politically distinct.”

Unlike pacifism, active nonviolence does not necessarily involve a vow to avoid war, and many nonviolent practitioners are not pacifist (though many are). The easiest way to understand the distinction is to note that pacifism is largely a commitment or attitude, while nonviolence is a method or strategy. More specifically, active nonviolence is “a means of struggling against oppression and injustice” and constitutes activities—including demonstrations, boycotts, and civil disobedience, among others—that seek to defeat oppression and aggression without employing violence (although they often provoke or receive it). Similar to those who advocate pacifism, proponents of active nonviolence represent a range of approaches, from pragmatic

10. Cortright, Peace, 211.
11. Cortright, Peace, 211.
nonviolence (which focuses on political practicality and effectiveness) to principled nonviolence (which emphasizes suitability with high moral standards). Two of the most famous practitioners of active nonviolence—Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.—embraced it for both pragmatic and principled reasons.

In its most effective form, nonviolence overcomes violence through conversion, whereby an aggressor “comes around to a new point of view”; one of the most important catalysts for creating a context for conversion is “self-suffering.” Gandhi described this weapon as “infinitely more powerful than the law of the jungle for converting the opponent and opening his ears, which are otherwise shut, to the voice of reason.” Michael Nagler notes that self-suffering bridges the emotional gulf that exists between people who are in conflict with one another: “One party has to ‘give when it hurts’ and reawaken the now seriously alienated opponent by voluntarily taking on that hurt … not trying to avoid it.” The suffering then works as “a kind of deep persuasion that moves people below the conscious level,” transforming an enemy into a friend. But this dynamic applies only to suffering that is “borne voluntarily and without hatred against the opponent.”

The actions of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies parallel these principles. They actively confront their attackers—whom they call “brethren”—and insist on absorbing their blows. At first their attackers slaughter “a thousand and five,” but then they are touched by the sacrifice. Their hearts become “swollen,” they feel “stung for the murders which they

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had committed,” and they “[repent] of the things which they had done,” throwing down their weapons and prostrating themselves “even as their brethren, relying upon the mercies of those whose arms were lifted to slay them.” The text notes that “the people of God were joined that day by more than the number who had been slain” (Alma 24:23–26). So the nonviolent strategy proved effective in two ways. Not only did it spiritually save many of their enemies, it also saved and protected their own community as the remaining (unrepentant) attackers ultimately abandoned their assault and withdrew to their own lands—all this with fewer casualties than the typical Book of Mormon battle.18

If the Anti-Nephi-Lehi narrative ended with part 2, a reader might easily construe the story as a relatively clear endorsement of both absolute pacifism and active nonviolence. But subsequent events complicate this interpretation. Facing renewed violence from their enemies, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies (soon to be called the people of Ammon or Ammonites) seek refuge in Nephite lands and put themselves under the protection of the Nephite army, which they financially support (see Alma 27:22–27).19 Moreover, almost two decades later, during another time of intense warfare, the people of Ammon send their sons to fight on behalf of the Nephite people. These actions, which constitute part 3 of the story, seem to parallel yet another political conceptual framework—just warfare.

The just war tradition acknowledges war as tragic and destructive but also maintains it may at times be a “necessary evil.”20 Because war is so calamitous, the tradition seeks to establish strict standards for

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18. As a narrator, Mormon is sometimes quite precise in his death tallies, noting that in one battle the Nephites lost “six thousand five hundred sixty and two souls” (Alma 2:19), and in another they killed “three thousand and forty-three” Lamanites (Mosiah 9:18). Most of the time he utilizes round numbers, such as “thousands” or “tens of thousands.” While Mormon occasionally records lower casualties in more traditional battles, the loss of 1,005 Anti-Nephi-Lehies seems to represent one of the lowest death tallies in the Book of Mormon.

19. Their new names were given them by the Nephites to honor their spiritual leader, Ammon, a missionary who played the principal role in converting them.

engagement—both in terms of whether a society engages war (*jus ad bellum*) and how it fights (*jus in bello*).\textsuperscript{21} For example, *jus ad bellum* standards require a “just” war to be strictly defensive and a last resort, while *jus in bello* standards require all subsequent violence to be morally restrained, maintaining scrupulous distinctions between combatants and noncombatants, and treating prisoners humanely. These standards, some of which were first proposed by Augustine in the fourth century, inform most mainstream Christian approaches to war. Similar to the different strains of pacifism and nonviolence, just war advocates also fall along a broad spectrum, from those who see the standards as highly (and necessarily) restrictive to those who approach the standards with enormous flexibility.

Many passages in the Book of Mormon exude what might be characterized as a just war sensibility.\textsuperscript{22} Nephite battles are often defensive and reluctantly engaged. Soldiers at times express great sorrow for being “the means of sending so many of their brethren out of this world into an eternal world, unprepared to meet their God” (Alma 48:23). Some commanders, such as Moroni, look for early opportunity to halt their violence and treat prisoners with generosity.\textsuperscript{23} Likewise, the young sons of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies (more popularly known as the stripling warriors) are reluctant combatants who enter the war only after watching “the danger, and the many afflictions and tribulations” of their fellow countrymen (Alma 53:13). As they openly admit to their commander, Helaman, “we would not slay our brethren if they would let us alone,” but they feel compelled to fight “to defend their country” (Alma 56:46; 53:18). They go on to become perhaps the most celebrated warriors in the Book of Mormon. Known for their strength, obedience, and valor, as well as for their deep faith in the religious instruction of their mothers, they are miraculously preserved in battle (see fig. 1). All of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} For a thorough exploration of just war theory, see Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 4th ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2006).
\item \textsuperscript{22} Kyle McKay Brown, “‘Whatsoever Evil We Cannot Resist with Our Words’: An Exploration of Mormon Just War Theory” (master’s thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2007).
\item \textsuperscript{23} See, for example, Alma 43:54 and 62:27–29.
\end{itemize}
(B) Francis R. Magleby (1928–2013), Helaman Did March at the Head (Helaman Triptych #2), c.1960, oil on masonite, 95 1/2 x 95 7/8 inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art.

(A) Francis R. Magleby (1928–2013), Ammon Met All His Brethren (Helaman Triptych #1), c.1960, oil on masonite, 95 5/8 x 95 7/8 inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art.
them fight “most desperately” and receive “many wounds,” but “not one soul of them … did perish” (Alma 57:19, 25).

Thus the pacifism and nonviolence of the parents as well as the just warfare of the sons both produce remarkable results. One group converts a large number of its enemies. The other is miraculously preserved. Both successfully defend their communities. Which, then, provides the best ethical model for the modern reader negotiating a world of violence? Over the course of the twentieth century, Latter-day Saints explored the three-part story in terms of all three potential ethics—absolute pacifism, active nonviolence, and just warfare—emphasizing
one or another according to changing social and political circumstances. Nevertheless, the overall trajectory reflects an increased emphasis on just war principles, and in contemporary Mormon culture the story of the stripling warriors has achieved significant prominence. The young soldiers have become iconic—highly celebrated in Mormon art, music, literature, and pageantry—in ways the parents have never achieved. This fondness is due in large part to the emotional power of the stripling warrior story and the myriad moral lessons that can be and have been extrapolated from it. Their experiences are often employed to highlight courage, integrity, faithfulness, honor, mother-son relationships, and divine protection. Yet it is also true that iconic representations of the stripling warriors fit comfortably with—or at least do not significantly challenge—aspects of modern popular culture that emphasize youth, physicality, and even violence. Likewise, a just war ethic dovetails fairly well with the current political climate, especially in the United States. In contrast, any pacifist or active nonviolence ethic implied by Anti-Nephi-Lehi parents has proven increasingly incompatible with broad cultural trends both in and out of the Latter-day Saint community. The remainder of this essay will trace how the parents’ pacifism and active nonviolence was at one time celebrated and extolled but then came to be perceived as incompatible with and irrelevant to Latter-day Saint ethics, and how their story was made meaningful and relevant again by shifting to a metaphorical interpretation.

Initial interpretations and commendations

For a half century after the Book of Mormon was first published, the story of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies seems to have hardly scratched Latter-day Saint consciousness, for it was rarely if ever mentioned in official

24. Notable examples include a painting by Arnold Friberg, “Two Thousand Stripling Warriors” (1953); a children’s hymn by Janice Kapp Perry, “We’ll Bring the World His Truth (Army of Helaman),” Children’s Songbook (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 172; and a full-scale re-creation of the “stripling warriors” for a heritage parade in Bountiful, Utah (July 20, 2012).
discourse or cultural expressions. The first serious and extended interpretation of the narrative occurred in the 1880s at a time when Latter-day Saints were engaged in a struggle with the United States government over the practice of polygamy. Pursuing a strategy of civil disobedience—or what George Q. Cannon, a prominent architect of the strategy, referred to as “passive resistance”—the Mormon community continued to perform plural marriages in open defiance of national law.25 Near the height of this conflict, George Reynolds—an English immigrant and secretary to church leaders who had also been the first “prisoner for conscience’ sake” in the plural marriage struggle—published several retellings and analyses of the Anti-Nephi-Lehi story that were later adopted as lesson materials for both the Sunday School and Church Educational System.26

Referring to the Anti-Nephi-Lehi strategy as a form of “passive non-resistance,” Reynolds repeatedly highlighted the singular nature of the story, noting that “history often repeats itself, but we have no recollection of any parallel to [these] events.” He noted that when the unarmed defenders “came forth” to “quietly, peacefully, joyously lay down their lives,” the attackers felt compelled “to emulate so noble an example.” Echoing the early Christian scholar Turtullian, Reynolds offered a pithy interpretation: “The blood of the martyrs was indeed the seed of the church.”27 Endorsing the Anti-Nephi-Lehi strategy as both moral and effective, Reynolds’s language seems to obliquely connect it to the larger Mormon struggle. Similar to how the self-sacrifice of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies had pricked


the consciences of their attackers, church leaders hoped their “passive resistance” and “sacrifices” regarding the antipolygamy laws would “have the effect of calling the attention of the nation to those wrongs under which we were suffering” and subsequently “arrest the progress of this crusade against our religious liberty.”

Ultimately, the Latter-day Saints’ active nonviolence strategies failed to move political and cultural sentiments, and the protracted conflict over plural marriage was resolved only when the church announced (and then conclusively demonstrated) its intention to comply with the nation’s monogamy standards. This began a slow, fitful, strained, yet significant transformation in the relationship between the Mormon community and the larger American nation. Stung by decades of incriminating barbs concerning their character, their loyalty, and even their racial identity, Latter-day Saints were anxious to demonstrate their patriotic bona fides and gain greater acceptance within the national mainstream. Many enthusiastically volunteered for military service in the Spanish-American War, effectively ending what one historian has characterized as a Mormon tradition of “selective pacifism” in previous conflicts. Such enlistments did not immediately dispel suspicions (as the subsequent controversy over Apostle Reed Smoot’s election to the Senate made painfully clear just a few years later), but they did signal a willingness by many Latter-day Saints to embrace the logic and goals of the nation-state.

Still, such participation in America’s imperial adventure did not necessarily signal a full embrace of warfare by the Latter-day Saint

29. For the Mormon struggle over racial identity, see W. Paul Reeve, Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2015).
community. There remained significant strands of Mormon pacifist sentiment, most notably a tradition of annual “peace meetings” sponsored by the Relief Society during the first decade of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{32} But even this advocacy can be seen in part as an effort to more fully integrate into the national culture. The meetings were formally initiated under the auspices of the National Council of Women, and their subsequent resolutions (in favor of international arbitration as a viable alternative to war) correlated well with both national and international sentiments.\textsuperscript{33} In keeping with this mood, the first standard lesson plans for the Sunday School, developed during this same time period, advanced a celebratory interpretation of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies’ political ethics. But rather than focusing on the power of their active nonviolence, as George Reynolds had done, these lessons emphasized their pacifist vow, suggesting it represented a form of “godliness.”\textsuperscript{34}

So long as these nascent Mormon pacifist sentiments corresponded with at least some broad national constituency (even if it wasn’t a majority), they created no conflict with a simultaneous desire by most Latter-day Saints to be better acknowledged and respected as part of the national citizenry. The challenge came when nationalist pressures, such as those generated by the First World War, put patriotism and pacifism at odds with each other.\textsuperscript{35} At first, when the initial conflict was

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33} Cortright, \textit{Peace}, 45–52.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Reynolds was a key member of the LDS Sunday School board, which began to publish standard lesson plans for the Book of Mormon in 1903. These brief lesson outlines encapsulated the meaning of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies’ story with a single principle (“Repentance leads to Godliness”) and several supporting “facts” (the people covenanted “not to shed blood,” buried their weapons of war, refused to defend themselves, and many were killed). Deseret Sunday School Union, \textit{Sunday School Outline} (Salt Lake City, 1903), 10.
\item \textsuperscript{35} J. David Pulsipher, “‘We do not love war, but . . .’: Mormons, the Great War, and the Crucible of Nationalism,” in \textit{American Churches and the First World War}, ed. Gordon L. Heath (Eugene, OR: McMaster Divinity College Press, 2016), 129–48.
\end{itemize}
confined to other countries, Mormons could safely express significant sorrow for the war’s victims and distaste for its brutality. Latter-day Saint periodicals consistently decried the devastation and resisted calls for US military preparedness. The April 1916 *Improvement Era* even cited the actions of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies as proof that “some at least of the ancient inhabitants of this continent were averse to the continuous and increased use of weapons of war, and of engaging in mortal combat with their brethren, as a means of settling disputes.”36 However, once the United States joined the Allies, any Latter-day Saint pacifist sentiment, no matter how embryonic, had to be subsumed for the larger interests of the community. As B. H. Roberts, an ardent war supporter, later acknowledged, Mormon-dominated Utah was in a “unique position” when the war began. Had it “acted reluctantly” or “failed in any respect to proceed as the other states of the Union and as the whole nation did, the reluctance and failure would have been chargeable to the Latter-day Saints,” while any “promptness in action . . . would reflect the patriotism, the intensity of the Americanism of the same people.”37 Given their tenuous relationship with the larger culture, many Latter-day Saints, including their highest church leaders, felt an obligation to support the US war effort, and most embraced the martial duties of national citizenship, demonstrating their enthusiasm through high military enlistments and war bond subscriptions.38

Predictably, interest in the Anti-Nephi-Lehies waned during this era of intense patriotic militarism. Official LDS Church curriculum materials tended to either gloss over the story or skip it altogether in favor of an emphasis on the personalities and missionary efforts of the sons of Mosiah. When the Anti-Nephi-Lehi story was addressed, it was either narrated without comment or interpreted without clear conclusions or applications to modern life.39 Nevertheless, after the war, as

39. During this era, the Book of Mormon curriculum for the Church Educational System included an eclectic collection of “essential” principles encompassing thirteen
the national militaristic wave subsided into a disappointing peace, and as Mormon soldiers and missionaries returned from Europe with first-hand experience concerning the human devastation of modern warfare, many Latter-day Saints became skeptical of the efficacy of violence; some began to turn again to the Anti-Nephi-Lehies for ethical instruction and inspiration.

The most prominent exploration of such ethics was articulated by Janne Sjödahl, a Swedish convert, immigrant, and a former Baptist minister. During the war, Sjödahl had worked in Liverpool as an editor for the *Millennial Star*, the LDS Church’s official European magazine, and had become well informed regarding the horrors and injustices of war. After returning to the United States, Sjödahl worked for the *Improvement Era* and became a widely recognized scholar of Mormon scripture. In his groundbreaking 1927 work, *An Introduction to the Study of the Book of Mormon*, Sjödahl referred to the story of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies as one of the “outstanding features that deserve special study,” especially as a model of active nonviolence. Quoting the narrative at length—by far his longest excerpt from the sacred text—he concluded that its “evident lesson” was that “the doctrine of non-resistance . . . when carried out in practice, even in the face of death, is a conquering, regenerating, irresistible force.”

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chapters and proposing twenty-seven general “essentials to emphasize,” leaving the reader confused as to which “essential” principles related to the Anti-Nephi-Lehies: *Outlines in Theology for Use in the Church Schools of High School Grade: The Nephite Dispensation* (Salt Lake City, 1916). A few years later, the next major revision of the curriculum simply glossed over the Anti-Nephi-Lehies’ story, briefly noting their decision to bury their weapons but skipping the effect of their nonviolence on their attackers: Amos N. Merrill, *Lesson Book for the Religion Classes in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Seventh Grade* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1924).


Writing at a time when activists such as Mohandas Gandhi were exploring the moral and strategic power of nonviolent resistance, Sjödahl was deeply interested in how the Anti-Nephi-Lehi story exhibited active nonviolence principles. Clearly interested in pacifist parallels with the ancient Iroquois peace league, he also considered the story’s active nonviolence elements as convincing evidence of the Book of Mormon’s divine origins.\(^{43}\) "It is all the more remarkable to find this distinctively Christian doctrine set forth so forcibly and clearly in the Book of Mormon," Sjödahl argued, because when Joseph Smith first published the book “there were very few advocates of the cause of the Prince of Peace in the world.” Speculating that the young and uneducated Mormon prophet had probably never “even heard of such a thing as disarmed patriotism”—let alone the philosophies of Erasmus, Grotius, and Kant—Sjödahl concluded that the whole incident was so remarkably anomalous that “Joseph could not have invented that story. Nor could anybody else.”\(^{44}\) Moreover, he concluded that the story was central to the book’s mission, declaring, “The Book of Mormon would not have contained ‘the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,’ if this part of it had been absent.” Ultimately, Sjödahl suggested, the pacifist and active non-violent ethics of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies were central to Mormonism’s restored Christian message because they offered a “solution” to the

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44. Sjödahl, *Introduction*, 270. In fairness to Joseph Smith, the young man may have been at least partially exposed to any or all of these ideas. Moreover, some versions of the league’s origins (although not in the Hewitt version Sjödahl quoted) describe a moment in which the league’s tribes bury their weapons in the earth. See, for example, an earlier article by J. N. B. Hewitt, “Legend of the Founding of the Iroquois League,” *American Anthropologist* 5/2 (April 1892): 14. A description of buried weapons was included in enough versions of the founding story that it may have circulated in up-state New York (the heart of Iroquois territory) during Joseph Smith’s time there. For an overview of the core elements of the founding stories, see Christopher Vecsey, “The Story and Structure of the Iroquois Confederacy,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 54/1 (1986): 79–106.
problem of societal violence, which was “inseparably connected with
the salvation of the world.”

A few years after Sjödahl’s analysis was published, another promi-
nent Mormon author, John Henry Evans, further explored the ethical
implications of active nonviolence. In his 1929 centennial celebration
of the sacred volume Messages and Characters of the Book of Mormon,
Evans dedicated an entire chapter to the “Story of the Buried Swords,”
beginning with a provocative thought experiment regarding the First
World War:

Suppose the French soldiers, and the French people back of the
French soldiers, when they saw the helmeted hosts pouring in
upon them from the north-east, had suddenly laid down their
arms, or, to put the matter with strict accuracy, had never taken
them up in the first place, but instead had gone out to them and
said, “Men, kill us, if you will, one and all, for we will not fight; it
is against our principles!”

That would have been a thrill indeed. It would have astonished
us beyond measure—like the coming up of the sun in the west, or
the flowing of water uphill on its own accord. Human nature does
not work that way under the circumstances. At once we should
look back of the act for the motive that inspired it. For that alone
would enable us to tell whether the people who did such a thing
were wiser than the rest of mankind or just plain crazy.

Relating the Anti-Nephi-Lehi story with glowing admiration, Evans
consistently highlighted the counterintuitive yet indispensably “Chris-
tian” nature of their active nonviolent response. He observed that when
the Lamanite armies were preparing for war, even the Nephite princes
who worked among them expected the Anti-Nephi-Lehies to fight back:
“Surely there could be no doubt that they would fly to arms in their
own defense and the defense of their wives and children. For even the

46. John Henry Evans, Messages and Characters of the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake
Nephites did that, and the Nephites professed to be good Christians.” However, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies did not choose this common path of so-called Christian warfare. Rather, he noted, the “spirit of the new faith” led them to bury their weapons. Observing that these converts “would neither fight nor flee,” Evans stressed the confrontational nature of their behavior: “And out went the men of the Anti-Nephi-Lehites [sic], weaponless and without fear of man in their hearts—out to meet the foe with prayer instead of sword! On the ground they fell, before the enemy, to utter a prayer that God would save their souls. Real Christian soldiers, these men!” Noting that the attackers threw down their weapons, Evans triumphantly labeled such active nonviolent resistance as “a power greater than any sword,” because “good had come out of what was intended for evil.”

A burgeoning ethic

Sjödahl’s and Evans’s celebratory interpretations built on the foundational work of George Reynolds, which lauded the story’s model of “passive resistance.” But the context in which they were writing had significantly changed from the 1880s. Reynolds was writing at a time in which church practices were in open conflict with the broader American culture, while the era of Sjödahl and Evans was a time of increasing acceptance and integration between the church and its host nation. Having demonstrated sufficient patriotism during the First World War, Latter-day Saints were no longer eyed with immediate suspicion; and by the late 1920s and early 1930s some had achieved positions of trust in national halls of power. Apostle Reed Smoot, now well past the controversy surrounding his first Senate appointment, was at the apogee of a distinguished career. Likewise, attorney J. Reuben Clark was rising to prominence in a variety of government positions that included under secretary of state (1928–29) and ambassador to Mexico (1930–33).

47. Evans, Messages, 211–16.
Moreover, within Mormonism’s increasingly hospitable home country, Sjödahl’s and Evans’s pacifist and active nonviolence interpretations were a relatively smooth fit because antiwar sentiments were on the rise. “From the ashes of World War I new forms of peace activism emerged,” David Cortright has observed. “Disillusionment with war spread throughout society. In literature, film, and the graphic arts the horrors of the recent bloodletting were graphically depicted and decried. Revelations of government deceit and incompetence fed the antimilitarist wave. Leading intellectuals, religious leaders, and scientists united in rejecting war.”48 These sentiments expressed themselves in both internationalist and isolationist forms. Those advocating both for and against the League of Nations, for example, tended to see their efforts as the best insurance against future wars. The career of J. Reuben Clark is representative of both sentiments. He strongly advocated against some internationalized peace efforts, such as the League of Nations, but he also pushed for (and even participated in negotiations regarding) other internationally binding agreements, such as the Washington Naval Treaty (which limited the size of the US fleet) and the Kellogg-Briand Pact (which sought to outlaw war). Reflecting the intricate and ambivalent relationship between Latter-day Saints and the nation as a whole, Clark’s attitudes toward war were complex and changed dramatically several times. He initially rejected and even denounced pacifism as “impractical and illusionary,” but he also served at various times as a director of the American Peace Society. Throughout his last three decades his speeches became increasingly critical of war, during which time he became, as one biographer has characterized, “an unmistakable pacifist.”49

These decades coincided with Clark’s tenure in the church’s First Presidency, to which he was sustained in 1933. Given his public career

49. D. Michael Quinn, Elder Statesman: A Biography of J. Reuben Clark (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 279–81. As Quinn demonstrates, Clark's pacifism was colored in part by pro-German and anti-Semitic sentiments, which sometimes led him to decry what he perceived as Allied aggression while ignoring similar or worse aggression by the Axis powers.
(in which his fellow Latter-day Saints had taken understandable pride) and his well-known positions, Clark’s new position in the First Presidency served to further open up a cultural, spiritual, and intellectual space that was already burgeoning in regard to potential LDS pacifist and active nonviolence ethics. Unsurprisingly, shortly after Clark assumed his new position, official LDS curriculum, which over the last decade had become increasingly professional and innovative, began to explore such ethics as they related to the Anti-Nephi-Lehi story. In 1935, for example, as tensions increased over rising fascism in Europe, the official Sunday School curriculum included a message that openly approved of a movement among US college students to “organize against war and to take a vow not to go to war,” calling it a form of “good works.”  

That same manual included another lesson that consulted the Book of Mormon to answer a fundamentally ethical question: “What attitude should one take toward war?” Recognizing that the sacred text generally “takes the ground that a defensive war may be a righteous war,” the lesson nonetheless appealed to the Anti-Nephi-Lehies as evidence of “a large body of people” who “would not engage even in a defensive war” and observed that thus “there is a suggestion in the Record that it is better to take a pacific stand in time of war.” In fact, despite the lesson’s emphasis on just war, a significant portion of it focused on avoiding war, noting that “when you stop to think of the trenches, the cooties, and the hazard of death or being maimed for life, the spirit of war would not be so strong in you.” Returning to the initial question, the lesson concluded: “Our attitude, then, toward war should be to avoid it when and if we can.”

At the very least such interpretations suggest a growing Mormon consciousness regarding pacifist and active nonviolence theories, and they demonstrate an increasingly sophisticated engagement with the Anti-Nephi-Lehi story. This heightened engagement is best represented by a Sunday School lesson from early 1939, as another European war loomed on the horizon. In a lesson dedicated specifically to the story

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50. Quinn, Elder Statesman, 71.
of the buried swords, the manual unequivocally stated that “there is no place in a Christian life for war” and attributed the Anti-Nephi-Lehies’ decision to bury their weapons to the fact that they had been taught “Thou shalt not kill” along with the “brotherly philosophy of the Master.”52 In this regard, the lesson took a purely moral approach to questions of violence, highlighting principles of “love and righteousness” and commending a similar ethic to the reader:

If one should question the wisdom of the decision of the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi made on the occasion of this lesson, let him remember that they did as a nation what Jesus did as an individual when he gave his life for mankind. He who was the son of God, could have called legions of Angels from Heaven to protect him from the injustices of his enemies. Instead he, who had taught that his followers should love their enemies, yielded rather than destroy. He gave his mortal life rather than to violate the principles he had taught or defeat the great purposes of his mission on earth. It would have been “human” for him to have saved his life and for the Lamanites to have resisted the attempts of their brethren to destroy them, but there was something “godlike” in the decision of both Jesus and the Lamanites to sacrifice their mortal existence that the standards of righteousness might be preserved.53

Having endorsed the Anti-Nephi-Lehies’ pacifist vow as morally superior, even divine, the lesson pivoted to the practical effectiveness of their active nonviolence, demonstrating a subtle grasp of the dynamics of conflict: “Had the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi resisted the attacks of their brethren with the sword, no doubt many more of them would have been destroyed even if they had been victorious. In addition, the Lamanite nation would have been divided against itself. As it was, fewer were killed, many were converted, and much better conditions prevailed. All this is convincing evidence that obedience to the commandments

of the Lord pays the best dividends even under circumstances which seem most hopeless to the human mind.”

Despite this growing analytical sophistication, such pacifist and active nonviolence ethics did not achieve paramount focus in the Latter-day Saint community, in part because historical forces, cultural dynamics, and the preferences of other influential leaders were simultaneously pulling the community in the direction of the ethics of just warfare. Having enthusiastically participated in two previous American wars, and given the community’s improving but still tenuous relationship with the nation, most Latter-day Saints could hardly be expected to make an about-face and fully embrace pacifist and active nonviolence principles. Thus, just war ethics retained significant purchase in the LDS community despite the inclinations of a few Mormon thought leaders. The 1939 Sunday School manual, for example, also contained a lesson on Nephite warfare and accordingly acknowledged a potential diversity in ethical approaches to armed conflict:

In these lessons we have righteous peoples responding in two different ways to warfare. The people of Ammon would rather be slaughtered than to take the life of another in their own defense. The Nephites on the other hand justified their defense of their families and liberties on the ground that it was the will of God that these things be preserved. However the readers of these lessons might feel on this subject, it seems clear that if war has any justification at all in the eyes of God, it must be a war of defense, not aggression—a war where the right to worship, and to live in family units, and in safety are being fought for.

This ethical diversity was reflected again a few years later in the First Presidency response to US involvement in the Second World War. As first counselor to President Heber J. Grant, Clark helped draft an official statement that was presented at general conference in April 1942. Noting that “the Church is and must be against war” and “cannot regard

54. Quorum Bulletin, 13, punctuation standardized from the original.
war as a righteous means of settling international disputes,” the state-
ment nonetheless made provision for submission to national authori-
ties, counseling young Mormon men to submit to national conscription
and promising them that if they killed someone in the line of duty, they
would not be considered murderers in the sight of God: “For it
would be a cruel God that would punish His children as moral sinners
for acts done by them as the innocent instrumentalities of a sovereign
whom He had told them to obey and whose will they were powerless
to resist.”\textsuperscript{56} Furthermore, the following October conference displayed
diverse First Presidency responses to the conflict. Clark helped draft
and read another official position statement from the First Presidency
referring to “hate-driven militarists” and “fiendishly inspired slaughter,”
presenting a categorical condemnation of violence, and declaring that
“war is of Satan and this Church is the Church of Christ, who taught
peace and righteousness and brotherhood of man.” Yet the next day
of the same conference, second counselor David O. McKay stood and
offered support for the American war effort, calling it “a war against
wickedness,” noting “that peace cannot come until the mad gangsters
... are defeated and branded as murderers, and their false aims repudi-
ated,” and expressing hope to “our soldier boys” that God would “bless
and guide you as you defend the divinely-given principles of freedom.”\textsuperscript{57}

Ultimately about 100,000 Latter-day Saints, representing roughly
ten percent of the total Mormon population, answered the call of the
nation.\textsuperscript{58} As might be expected, interest in any explicit pacifist or active
nonviolence ethic waned somewhat during this time. A 1944 Sunday
School lesson on the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, for example, focused primarily
on the missionaries who converted them and only briefly summarized
their choices and behavior.\textsuperscript{59} Leland H. Monson’s \textit{Life in Ancient America}:
A Study of the Book of Mormon, which became a standard young adult Sunday School manual for the next twenty years, drew no explicit ethical lessons from the story of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, although Monson did highly commend them for being willing to “obey a law of ‘suffering wrong’” and “display[ing] great faith and courage in refusing to fight their brethren.”

Sidney B. Sperry’s adult manual for 1948 took Monson’s commendation one step further, albeit briefly, recommending a more thorough study of the Anti-Nephi-Lehi story to “all who are interested in peace and abolishment of war,” noting that the “world today desperately needs such peacemakers.”

Clashing interpretations

Thus, despite the Latter-day Saint community’s enthusiastic participation in three major US wars, as the nation entered the Cold War era, some form of an LDS pacifist or active nonviolence ethic based on the Anti-Nephi-Lehi story remained a nascent yet viable option. This was the approach taken by J. Karl Wood, one of two central supervisors over LDS seminaries and institutes, who had sent two sons to fight in the recent war. His 1950 curriculum outline for seminary and institute instructors focused on what he called the “strategy” of “non-resistance” and drew connections between the behavior of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies and the Sermon on the Mount. Quoting the Savior’s admonition to “turn the other cheek,” Wood observed that “this is one of the most difficult teachings Jesus gave. Many have said it cannot be lived, but

61. Sidney B. Sperry, Book of Mormon Studies (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union Board, 1947), 74–75. Sperry’s Sunday School text did not achieve the longevity of Life in Ancient America—it was the Gospel Doctrine manual for only one year—but portions of it were reprinted in subsequent trade publications over the next several decades—more specifically, in Book of Mormon Testifies (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952) and Book of Mormon Compendium (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968).
here in the Book of Mormon it is put into life by a large mass of people.” While the Anti-Nephi-Lehies were originally “brought up to kill,” he noted, “when embued [sic] with the spirit of the gospel of the coming Redeemer [they] were able to throw off practices born and bred in them and adopt these new and inspiring principles.” He then made an unusually explicit connection to modern American culture: “Truly these people are an inspiration to us today, who are brought up on revenge and retaliation.”63 Most twentieth-century Mormons, especially those in the United States, tended to see their community as analogous to the prosperous and peaceful (if sometimes prideful) Nephite culture. To instead compare them—and their modern American culture—to “wild,” “ferocious,” and “blood-thirsty” Lamanites was an unusually bold assertion.64

But 1950 proved to be a crucial year for this burgeoning ethic (written on a typewriter and mimeographed for CES instructors), because the official Sunday School manual for that same year (typeset, hard-bound, and for sale in Deseret Book) signaled that just war principles might be strongly ascendant, to the exclusion of any pacifist or active nonviolence alternative. Written by William E. Berrett, a lawyer and professor of church history, Teachings of the Book of Mormon took a thematic approach, “designed to strike directly at the problems of religion and life.”65 Accordingly, it not only extrapolated and endorsed a just war ethic—drawn from the text’s descriptions of Captain Moroni and the stripling warriors—it also, for the first time, articulated an explicit critique of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies’ pacifism and active nonviolence.

Berrett had long maintained an enthusiasm for the military. Too young to enlist during the First World War, he remembered how his brother had been “bitterly disappointed” to be turned away for medical

64. This description of the Lamanites occurs twice in the Book of Mormon (Enos 1:20 and Mosiah 10:12), and similar sentiments can be found repeatedly throughout the text.
reasons. Too old to serve directly in the military during the Second World War, he instead found a way to contribute as a prosecuting attorney for the Office of Price Administration. Eventually he found an even more satisfying outlet for his aspirations through a successful effort to establish the first ROTC program at Brigham Young University.  

Unsurprisingly, he considered the actions of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies—which he referred to as “an interesting experiment in non-resistance”—as ineffectual and nonprescriptive. Laying a foundation for his critique, Berrett asserted, “There is a greater purpose in life than merely remaining peaceful…. The right to a world in which the individual is recognized, the right to protect our loved ones, our liberties and our religion is more important than keeping the peace.” Noting that “the proposal to create peace by casting away armaments among nations has always found many advocates,” he argued that the recent global conflicts “showed how futile disarmament and non-resistance may be to protect either lives or liberties.” The manifest lesson from the Book of Mormon, Berrett maintained, is that “the Nephite peoples opposed disarmament, and generally were successful in warding off the attacks of the enemy because they possessed superior weapons and were entrenched behind superior fortifications.”

Accordingly, as he related the actual details of this “experiment,” Berrett took pains to point out its failures. He noted that only some of the aggressive Lamanites “could not continue the slaughter,” that “not all the Lamanites were so affected,” and that “the greater part of the Lamanites, although refraining for a time from the slaughter of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, seemed roused to even greater fury and vented that fury in raids of wanton destruction upon nearby Nephite cities.” Moreover, “although the Anti-Nephi-Lehies received a short respite it was not long before it became apparent that to save their lives they must

67. Berrett, Teachings, 92–98. The topic of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies was not new to Berrett. He had written curriculum materials for both the Sunday School and the Church Educational System, and he had helped author a 1938 study guide that also labeled the Anti-Nephi-Lehi strategy as an “experiment,” this time “in pacifism.”
flee to the land of the Nephites and be protected by Nephite arms.” Berrett also observed that while the first generation of Anti-Nephi-Lehies continued their “policy of non-resistance,” their strategy “seemed short-lived” because the next generation, the beloved stripling warriors, took up arms. Likewise, Berrett characterized this younger generation as “ashamed” that other people had to protect their community. Thus the Anti-Nephi-Lehies’ experiment was an obvious failure and was quite possibly viewed by their brethren with disdain: “Whether such results caused the Nephites to believe that God desired them to fight when necessary for their liberties, we cannot tell, but this is certain, the doctrine of non-resistance found little place among them thereafter.”

He was even more blunt in the teacher’s supplement, identifying the lesson’s key objective as follows: “To bring class members to a realization that to disarm does not guarantee the preservation and liberty of the righteous, and is not required of God.”

At first glance, Berrett’s unusually public and direct criticism of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies seems anomalous. No previous scholarly study or lesson manual had openly questioned the ethical or practical value of their choices and behavior. Wood’s praise and commendation of pacifism and active nonviolence were more consistent with the existing interpretive tradition. It is possible then, that Wood’s analysis might have served to reassert the old tradition, overriding Berrett’s more disparaging view. Alternatively, Berrett’s interpretation might have gained some traction, with these two incompatible arguments achieving equal influence over the subsequent decades, existing in a state of perpetual and creative tension with each other. As it happened, several factors, including political and cultural dynamics already underway in the Latter-day Saint community, combined to give greater weight and durability to Berrett’s approach, to the point that it not only helped displace but also effectively discredited the previous tradition.

First, Berrett’s manual was published at precisely the moment in which Mormonism was emerging “out of obscurity,” achieving significant national, even international, acceptance. Having now proved their patriotic bona fides in three major American wars, Mormons were increasingly perceived as trusted members of the body politic. This perception was further reinforced by the subsequent appointment and national visibility of Apostle Ezra Taft Benson as Secretary of Agriculture in the Eisenhower administration. Both Benson’s church and public careers reflected and reinforced another significant cultural development—the rise of an increasingly conservative and hawkish Mormon political culture that was buttressed by interpretations of Mormon scripture, particularly of the Book of Mormon, that emphasized the United States as a divinely blessed land, the necessity of staunchly defending principles of agency and freedom, and the dangers of secret combinations.70 Such interpretations were widely perceived by many Latter-day Saints as supporting America’s robust military policies against communism, which also correlated with the views of David O. McKay, who became president of the church in 1951. McKay considered communism to be “anti-Christ” and an expression of “Satan himself,” and in his first newspaper interview as president, he declared, “Communism yields to nothing but force.”71

Second, coming as it did within a year of Berrett’s lesson manual, McKay’s elevation from second counselor to president of the church served to personally buttress Berrett’s interpretations. Having had a long-standing interest in and responsibility for Sunday School curriculum, McKay likely oversaw the book’s publication before he became president.72 Institutional support for the text was also on display throughout his presidency. Both Teachings of the Book of Mormon and Teachings of the Book of Mormon and


72. Also, given Berrett’s enthusiastic support for armaments and armies, it is difficult to imagine J. Reuben Clark signing off on it.
its teacher’s supplement were eventually translated into French (1951), Danish (1956), German (1962), Spanish (1962), and Dutch (1964) to service the needs of an increasingly international church.73 The book was also reissued by the Council of Twelve Apostles as the Melchizedek Priesthood manual in 1962.74 Moreover, McKay’s rise (and Benson’s increasing political influence) corresponded with a reduced role for J. Reuben Clark, who graciously accepted a reassignment as second counselor in McKay’s new First Presidency. While Clark would continue to work behind the scenes to support Latter-day Saints with pacifist sensibilities, nothing akin to his robust denunciations of war would officially emerge again from the First Presidency for over twenty-five years.75

Finally, Berrett’s own career trajectory ultimately placed him in a position from which he could influence future interpretations. Within three years of the book’s publication, he was appointed vice president of Brigham Young University, with responsibility for all religious education in a newly created United Church School System, giving him direct oversight over high school and college-level curriculum for over a decade. One of his first actions was to replace J. Karl Wood and his fellow supervisor of seminaries with two younger men—Theodore Tuttle and Boyd K. Packer—both military veterans.76 Given Wood’s departure and Berrett’s analytical inclinations—as well as his subsequent and significant influence on the next generation of seminary, institute, and university

73. Des Enseignements du Livre de Mormon (1951), Mormons Bogs Lærdomme (1956), Lehren des Buches Mormon (1962), Enseñanzas del Libro de Mormón (1962), and Leringen uit het Boek van Mormon (1964) (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).


75. The next was Spencer W. Kimball’s American bicentennial message, “The False Gods We Worship,” Ensign, June 1976, 3–6.

76. Berrett, My Story, 76–77. Berrett was proud of the subsequent careers of Tuttle and Packer and of his role in first elevating them to some degree of prominence. Tuttle, who served as a marine in the Pacific Theater and participated in the battle of Iwo Jima, was called as a member of the Seventy in 1958, where he served for almost three decades. Packer, who served as a bomber pilot in the Pacific Theater, was called as Assistant to the Twelve in 1961 and then as an Apostle in 1970.
teachers and curriculum writers—it is not surprising that the CES curriculum never again embraced a pacifist or active nonviolence ethic.

Furthermore, Berrett’s analysis of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies simply corresponded better than Wood’s with some of the broader cultural and political trends within the Latter-day Saint community. As mentioned, these included the rise of a robust Latter-day Saint conservative and hawkish ideology, especially in relation to communism. It also included an increasing tendency toward “muscular” interpretations of the Book of Mormon, a trend exemplified by Ezra Taft Benson’s reading of the text, but one that can also be seen by comparing the divergent trajectories of two prominent Mormon painters, Arnold Friberg and Minerva Teichert (see figs. 2 and 3). As it happened, both artists were painting a series of scenes from the Book of Mormon at almost exactly the same time that Berrett’s and Wood’s clashing interpretations were published and disseminated, and each artist’s distinct interpretative choices highlight again a set of clashing ethical possibilities.

Figure 2. (A) Captain Moroni Raises the Standard of Liberty and (B) Two Thousand Young Warriors, by Arnold Friberg, circa 1951. © By Intellectual Reserve, Inc.
Figure 3A. Minerva Teichert (1888–1976), *The Title of Liberty*, 1949–1951, oil on masonite, 35\(\frac{5}{16}\) x 48 inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, 1969.

Figure 3B. Minerva Teichert (1888–1976), *Helaman's Striplings/Samuel the Lamanite*, 1949–1951, oil on masonite, 36 x 48 inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, 1969.
Friberg, who served in the infantry in both Europe and the Pacific, was commissioned in 1950 to paint a series of twelve canvases to “inspire the young with heroic views of the great religious leaders in the Nephite scripture.” The project was the brainchild of Adele Cannon Howells, general president of the LDS Primary, who personally financed the project when church funds were denied. Among the twelve scenes selected by Friberg and Howells—chosen for their capacity to “capture moments of the greatest doctrinal and historical importance”—were several with military themes, including the title of liberty and the stripling warriors, but not the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. With their representations of muscle-bound men and energetic action, Friberg’s paintings became enormously popular and in the process “tended to sweep aside alternative artistic concepts.” Although church leaders initially rejected Howells’s request to officially commission the paintings, they eventually embraced Friberg’s interpretations and highlighted them in a way that made them nearly canonical—publishing them as part of the official editions of Book of Mormon itself. Even in the twenty-first century, they remain the most iconic images of the sacred narrative, having significantly shaped demographic, geographic, and cultural interpretations of the Book of Mormon for over half a century.

One set of alternative interpretations that was “swept away” was that of Minerva Teichert. In contrast to Friberg, Teichert’s artistic journey through the Book of Mormon—a project that ultimately included more than forty paintings—was a self-appointed endeavor that offered a decidedly less martial interpretation of the text. While depicting some of the same military stories as Friberg, including the title of liberty and the stripling warriors, Teichert’s representations were considerably less brawny. Moreover, her other scene selections included many moments when bloodshed was avoided, either through dramatic and divinely assisted escapes or through cleverly executed nonviolent schemes.


78. John W. Welch and Doris R. Dant, *The Book of Mormon Paintings of Minerva Teichert* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997). These other scenes include “Flight,” “Nephi
Furthermore, unlike Friberg, Teichert chose to depict the story of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. In a mural-style painting entitled “Christian Converts,” she included both the (pacifist) burial of their weapons and the (active nonviolent) moment when they confront their enemies (see fig. 4). Her dramatic imagining of the scene shows the Anti-Nephi-Lehies lined up in ranks to absorb the fatal blows of hatchet-wielding attackers, similar to contemporary accounts of Gandhi’s nonviolent activists willingly receiving brutal skull-cracks from lathi-wielding guards at the Dharasana Salt Works in 1930.79 Likewise, with a vivid brush of red in

Leads His Followers into the Wilderness,” “Escape of King Limhi and His People,” “Escape of Alma’s People,” “The City of Gid,” and “The Answer of Lachoneus.” Teichert was also much more likely to depict scenes that highlighted women’s roles.

79. American journalist Webb Miller described the attack on the Dharasana Salt Works: “Not one of the marchers even raised an arm to fend off the blows. They went down like ten-pins. From where I stood I heard the sickening whacks of the clubs on unprotected skulls…. The survivors without breaking ranks silently and doggedly
the palm of one of the awaiting “converts,” Teichert subtly connected the nonviolence of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies to the crucifixion of Christ.

Teichert intended her Book of Mormon paintings to “bring that book to life” and to serve as a missionary tool for the church. However, repeated efforts to convince the church to purchase her collection came to naught, and she eventually donated all the paintings to Brigham Young University. In due course a few of the images found their way into edges of Mormon consciousness, but never to the same level as Friberg’s interpretations. While many twenty-first-century Mormons are familiar with other Teichert paintings—including her portrait of Esther and her depiction of the lost lamb—most are unaware of her Book of Mormon series. Her depiction of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies is even more obscure, remaining virtually unknown even among admirers—another “forgotten alternative” in Mormon ethical and cultural development.

Irrelevant ethic, inspiring metaphor

Even as Friberg’s paintings and Berrett’s critical interpretation of the Anti-Nephi-Lehi story dominated official church curriculum during the 1950s and 1960s, the impulse to extrapolate a pacifist or active nonviolence ethic never completely died out. An influential 1958 commentary on the Book of Mormon, for example, explicitly compared the Anti-Nephi-Lehies’ “passive resistance” to Gandhi’s movement for India’s independence and to ancient peace traditions among Native Americans: “In Asia or America, now or in the remote past, the idea is the same. It connotes, not weakness, but strength. It cannot be defeated. Men’s unbridled passions succumb to its powers. It means, briefly, receiving or enduring harm without resistance or emotional reaction.”

marched on until struck down…. Group after group walked forward, sat down, and submitted to being beaten into insensibility without raising an arm to fend off the blows.” I Found No Peace (New York City: Simon and Schuster, 1936), 446.

80. Welch and Dant, Minerva Teichert, 11, 24–27. The most well-known and reproduced image from the series is “Christ in a Red Robe,” a depiction of the second coming.

81. George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjödahl, Commentary on the Book of Mormon,
But such sentiments were increasingly overshadowed by interpretations that expanded on Berrett’s assertion that the Anti-Nephi-Lehies’ strategy of disarmament and active nonviolence was “not required of God.”

The essential challenge of accepting Berrett’s assertion was how best to explain why similar behavior was “not required” of other Christians. Berrett argued that disarmament carried no divine mandate because it was ineffective, even dangerously irresponsible. Other Mormon writers—perhaps taking a cue from Berrett that military defense was the divine and dutiful response—began to interrogate the Anti-Nephi-Lehi story as ethically irrelevant. In 1955, Eldin Ricks, a veteran army chaplain and professor of religion at Brigham Young University, articulated a set of key questions in his widely distributed Book of Mormon Study Guide: “Only once in the entire course of Nephite-Lamanite history is it recorded that Church members refused to defend themselves when attacked. What accounts for this unusual behavior on the part of the converted Lamanites?” The answer, as implied by the scriptural verses Ricks provided for students to consult, was that the Anti-Nephi-Lehies had previously led grossly wicked and violent lives, and further violence would have jeopardized their hard-won forgiveness. The next question addressed the question of relevance to other Christians: “The Prophet Mormon, who relates this great story of wartime non-resistance, was himself active in the defense of the Nephite nation in his generation. Why do you suppose he didn’t try to persuade his people to follow the non-resistance policy of the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi?” The implied answer, again from the accompanying scriptural references, was that God expected his people to defend their families, “even unto bloodshed.” Ricks later returned to the theme: “Does the Lord expect His people to use passive or active resistance against aggressors?” The implied answer was “active” or, more specifically from the scriptural verses, “with swords.”82

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82. Eldin Ricks, Book of Mormon Study Guide (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1955). The scripture verses to which students were referred to answer these three questions were respectively Alma 24:11–16; 43:46–47; and 61:10–14. The Study Guide was
Such questions and answers rendered the pacifism and active non-violence of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies inapplicable to Christianity in general and to modern Mormonism in particular, and official church curriculum materials noted that irrelevance with relative, although not complete, silence. Between 1947 and 1965, the Sunday School continued to use Monson’s *Life in Ancient America* for youth classes during years when the Book of Mormon was the focus of study, and the text did praise the Anti-Nephi-Lehies because they “would suffer death rather than take up the sword” and “were proud of their scars of battle for the cross.”

Nevertheless, the manual stopped short of explicit ethical conclusions, and its material was not updated for twenty years. Furthermore, during that same era, the Church Educational System usually omitted these elements of the narrative from its teacher’s guides and student manuals, typically focusing instead on the missionary part of the story.

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84. The first seminary manual approved for general use during Berrett’s administration completely omitted the Anti-Nephi-Lehi story. *Resource Units for Book of Mormon Course of Study* (Los Angeles: Southern California District Seminaries, 1955). A later revision of the same manual included the story but used it to “show the effect of true conversion on others.” *Lessons from the Book of Mormon: A Teacher Outline* (Provo, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Department of Education, 1961). The first institute manual of the Berrett administration also mentioned the story but referred to it as an “experiment in disarmament.” *Book of Mormon Theology: College Juniors and Seniors* (Salt Lake City: Department of Seminaries and Institutes of Religion, 1956). Subsequent manuals from this era simply skipped the story altogether. See
A general absence of ethical attention to the Anti-Nephi-Lehies is all the more noteworthy because it coincided with increasingly conspicuous implementations of active nonviolent tactics by the civil rights and antiwar movements. Newspaper and television reports often described or relayed scenes of African Americans and students confronting and absorbing brutal violence in ways that could easily have evoked comparisons to the Anti-Nephi-Lehies—but Latter-day Saint leaders did not note (or perhaps even notice) such comparisons. Rather, some of the most prominent leaders viewed the activism of that era with growing suspicion and alarm. Ezra Taft Benson, whose sermons throughout the 1960s employed increasingly political readings of the Book of Mormon as a warning against modern-day “secret combinations,” considered the civil rights movement to be “fomented almost entirely by the communists,” who were using it “to promote revolution and eventual takeover of this country.”

What’s more, many of the active nonviolence tactics employed by these movements, particularly strategies of civil disobedience, were regarded by church leaders, including President McKay, as “insidious forces” designed to “induce contention and confusion.”

Given such high-level concerns regarding these activist movements,


85. See Mason, “Ezra Taft Benson,” 74. The first quotation is from a speech at a public meeting in Logan, as reported in the Deseret News, December 14, 1963. The second quotation comes from a general conference talk, as reported in the Washington Post, April 13, 1965. This controversial section of the talk was deleted from the official conference report.

86. Conference Report, October 1967, 10. For analysis on church leadership’s attitude toward civil disobedience during this era, see Pulsipher, “Prepared to Abide the Penalty,” 155–59.
it is not surprising that official curriculum materials drew no parallels with the Book of Mormon story.\textsuperscript{87}

Nonetheless, there remained an undercurrent of interest in the Latter-day Saint community concerning the relevance of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies regarding antiwar positions. One of the most prominent Mormon scholars of that era, Hugh Nibley, himself an army veteran of the Second World War, became increasingly vocal in his opposition to all forms of war and frequently referred to the Anti-Nephi-Lehies as exemplary “pacifists” and “conscientious objectors.”\textsuperscript{88} Likewise, in 1971 a collection of essays entitled \textit{War, Conscription, Conscience and Mormonism} referred to the buried swords as scriptural support for a Mormon ethic of conscientious objection.\textsuperscript{89} Such views entailed social costs for Mormons who espoused them because by the 1970s, after more than a decade of an ascendant Mormon political conservatism, and in the wake of another LDS-supported US war, pacifism was clearly beginning to run against the general grain of Mormon cultural consciousness.\textsuperscript{90} Prominent writers such as Cleon Skousen—a former FBI agent, vocal anticommmunist,

\textsuperscript{87.} The one exception to this came over a decade later, when the 1982 seminary student manual introduced the Anti-Nephi-Lehi story with an oblique observation—“Their vow of nonviolence is as fresh as tonight’s news”—a phrase that was taken out of subsequent editions. \textit{Book of Mormon Student Manual} (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982). See the 1989 edition, page 143, for the expunged version.


and popular religion instructor at Brigham Young University—explicitly warned against extrapolating an antiwar ethic: “There is a confusion in the minds of some members of the Church as to their duty in the time of war. Some have taken the example of the Anti-Nephi-Lehites [sic] as the basis for their refusing to serve in defense of their country.” Declaring that church leaders had labeled this interpretation a “misunderstanding” and noting the Anti-Nephi-Lehi situation was “unique” and “would not be typical of the ordinary member of the Church today,” Skousen asserted that the “Lord’s position” was to require Christians “to defend their liberties and the lives of the innocent,” so that no Mormon could “say that he is a conscientious objector, and cite the teachings of the Church as the basis for his belief.”

Thus by the early 1980s, a pattern of interpretation that had been initiated by Berrett and refined by others such as Ricks and Skousen, became the most prominent approach to the Anti-Nephi-Lehies—highlighting the anomalous nature of their sinful past, qualifying their pacifist vow and active nonviolence as particular to their circumstances, then pointing to other scriptural passages to justify armed resistance. This pattern was officially institutionalized in church manuals over the next two decades and by the 1990s was relatively standard both inside and outside official curriculum channels. As summarized by Glenn L. Pearson and Reid E. Bankhead—professors of religion at BYU and veterans of the Second World War—the essential ethical lesson of the

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92. In a 1979 college-level student manual for the Book of Mormon, a section entitled “Insights on the Gospel and War from the Anti-Nephi-Lehies” noted that they “did not categorically condemn war” and that “in other cases, the Lord has directed his people to go to war.” *Book of Mormon Student Manual Religion 121–122* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 257. The 1988 Gospel Doctrine manual likewise noted that the Book of Mormon held the people of Ammon in “extremely high regard” because they “refused to kill again—even in what might normally be considered justifiable self-defense,” but immediately added that the sacred text “also teaches that military action in self-defense is justifiable” and provided scriptural citations to back this claim. *The Book of Mormon: Gospel Doctrine Teacher’s Supplement* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1988), 103.
narrative was that there were “rare conditions under which a Christian would be justified in being a conscientious objector.” These conditions included ones in which a person “had fought and killed so much—and loved it—before his conversion, that any further killing would jeopardize his eternal salvation.” But such circumstances were extremely unusual. “Normally,” they noted, “people are expected to defend their lives, families, liberty, and property.”

The primary difficulty with emphasizing the anomalous nature of the story, however, was that it had the potential of rendering the Anti-Nephi-Lehies completely irrelevant to modern life. If a decision to bury weapons represented no usable ethic regarding violence, did it contain any practical value? To fill this void, a parallel and complementary approach developed during these same decades. Drawing on a general admiration for the sincere repentance and stalwart faithfulness of the Lamanite converts, this approach emphasized the story’s rich metaphorical value. While modern readers of the Book of Mormon may not share the brutal and violent sins of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, everyone has habits that are difficult to shake. Thus the story might serve as an inspiring example of abandoning any “rebellion against God” and surrendering to truth and righteousness. The Anti-Nephi-Lehies are thus

93. Glenn L. Pearson and Reid E. Bankhead, *Building Faith with the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986). Such interpretations have been bolstered by scholars such as John W. Welch, who noted that Book of Mormon societies seemed to require a “duty to fight,” but may have allowed an exemption, according to the law of Moses, for someone who was “fearful and fainthearted,” including “one who is afraid because of the transgressions he had committed.” See “Law and War in the Book of Mormon,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 62–65, emphasis in the original. Nevertheless, there have been some notable variations on this standard theme. Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, for example, articulate the standard logic, but also conclude with a call to peace: “Eventually, men and women must learn the lesson of the ages, a lesson stressed by Mormon just prior to his death, a message he could offer with over a thousand years of Nephite perspective before him: ‘Know ye,’ he said to the future remnants of Israel, ‘that ye must lay down your weapons of war, and delight no more in the shedding of blood, and take them not again, save it be that God shall command you.’” See *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991), 170.
examples of “profound, full conversion” who “demonstrate the complete abandonment of sin following sincere repentance,” because “abandonment of sin often requires a change in our lifestyle.” As one of the earliest expressions of the metaphorical approach, the 1982 Seminary Teacher Outline encouraged instructors to ask their students to identify “what weapons of rebellion today’s youth need to lay down.” Noting that teenagers “may mention such things as conflicts with parents, rivalry among friends, anger, disobedience, immorality, drug abuse,” the lesson suggested teachers should lead a discussion regarding how such “weapons” might be permanently “buried.” Over the next decades, subsequent lesson manuals for both youth and adults asked similar questions: “What can we learn from the Anti-Nephi-Lehies to help us keep the covenants we make with God?” or “Is there anything in your life that you need to ‘bury’?” This metaphorical interpretation was part of a broader trend—facilitated by an institutional effort to systematically correlate doctrine and curriculum—to depoliticize scriptural interpretation and emphasize the devotional implications of sacred narratives, an emphasis that has proved to be both spiritually resonant and pedagogically enduring. As a result, Latter-day Saints in essence

94. Book of Mormon Student Manual, Religion 121–122 (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, 2009), 207. Richard G. Scott expanded this metaphor when he taught that “sometimes our poor choices leave us with long-term consequences” and suggested that the previous “rebellious actions” of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies “prevented them from protecting their wives and children” because their pacifist vows represented “fortifications between their faithful lives and the unrighteous behavior of their past.” Conference Report, October 2013, 79–82.

95. Book of Mormon Seminary Teacher Outline (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982), 161.

96. The first question is from The Book of Mormon Gospel Doctrine Teacher’s Manual (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1991), 24. The second is from Book of Mormon Teacher Manual, Religion 121–122 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009), 98. See also Book of Mormon Gospel Doctrine Teacher’s Manual (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1999, 2003), 117.

97. As part of this trend, recent curriculum materials from the LDS Church have increasingly taken metaphorical approaches to narratives involving violence, including those that were previously employed to endorse warfare. For example, the treatment of
“rediscovered” the Anti-Nephi-Lehies as meaningful role models, not of a pacifist or active nonviolence ethic, but of earnest repentance and resolute faith in the face of adversity.

During the early years of this shift from ethics to metaphor, prominent Mormon artist Del Parson was commissioned to paint the Anti-Nephi-Lehies for the church’s official magazine, the *Ensign*. Parson’s painting depicted the moment of burial, with an unidentified Anti-Nephi-Lehi kneeling before the light of God, his face upturned, and the gift of his sword—his sin—outstretched in a gesture of offering (see fig. 5). The composition emphasized contrition, conversion, and submission, with a young boy looking on in the background. This boy represented the next generation of believers—not guilty of the same sins as their fathers—who will eventually take up the sword in defense of their families and future adopted nation. Unlike Teichert’s painting of the same scene, Parson’s artistic representation contained no hint of the nonviolent confrontation and slaughter to come. Officially embraced, reproduced, and disseminated in church curriculum materials, Parson’s image became the only representation of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies to gain wide distribution.

Shifted and (mostly) settled

Once this interpretive shift had been fully articulated—qualifying the Anti-Nephi-Lehies as anomalous and reading their behavior metaphorically—it effectively tamped down considerations that the story contained any pacifist or active nonviolent ethic. Into the twenty-first

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Alma’s war chapters in the 2012 seminary teacher’s manual for the Book of Mormon notes that “as we study the accounts of physical battles in the Book of Mormon, we can liken them to spiritual battles we face,” and asks, “What can we learn from the examples of Moroni and his army to help us in our battles against the adversary?” *Book of Mormon Seminary Teacher Manual* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2012), 345–46.

98. The painting was first published on the inside of the back cover of the *Ensign*, June 1983.

century, as Latter-day Saints have become well represented in the national security establishment, this interpretive approach has allowed Latter-day Saints to embrace the spiritual power of the story while keeping potential political implications at arm’s length.100 Nevertheless,

100. Regarding Latter-day Saint involvement in the national security establishment, see Mark Henshaw et al., “War and the Gospel: Perspectives from Latter-day Saint National Security Professionals,” SquareTwo 2/2 (Summer 2009), http://squaretwo.org/Sq2ArticleHenshawNatSec.html.
Despite the obvious strength and appeal of the metaphorical approach, the political reverberations have never completely settled.\textsuperscript{101} The narrative power of the Anti-Nephi-Lehi story means that its pacifist and active nonviolence tones are consistently being rediscovered, explored, and debated—if not in Sunday School, seminary, or institute classrooms, then at least in some corners of the Internet.\textsuperscript{102}

Thus ethics of pacifism and active nonviolence keep reemerging in Mormon consciousness, even as metaphorical interpretations keep the story’s radical implications generally subdued. A 1996 interpretation of the story by L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles exemplifies this tension. Perry repeated the dominant rhetorical pattern, reminding his readers that “the message of the story is not that all members of the Church should conscientiously object to war,” citing scriptural examples of justified armed defense and noting that the Anti-Nephi-Lehies’ “unique history caused them to make a unique covenant.” However, Elder Perry’s use of all subtly suggested that some members of the church might in good conscience adopt a pacifist ethic. Moreover, while holding carefully to his previous qualifications, he nonetheless noted the powerful effect of an active nonviolence strategy: “While the message of the story is not to insist on universal pacifism, we do learn that by not returning aggressions from others we can have a profound effect on them. Literally, we can change their hearts when we follow Christ’s example and turn the other cheek. Our examples as peaceable followers of Christ inspire others to follow him.”\textsuperscript{103} Thus as Perry’s inter-

\textsuperscript{101} One of the evidences of such persistence is the frequency with which commentators continue to try to tamp down any interpretation of a nonviolent ethic. See, for example, Duane Boyce, “Were the Ammonites Pacifists?” \textit{Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture} 18/1 (2009): 32–47.


\textsuperscript{103} L. Tom Perry, \textit{Living with Enthusiasm} (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 128.
interpretation suggests, although Mormons will continue to be inspired by the Anti-Nephi-Lehies to make difficult and life-changing covenants and to bury their sins deep in the earth, there will continue to be those who, standing at the edge of the pit, will perceive more in their hands than merely metaphorical swords.

J. David Pulsipher, professor of history at Brigham Young University—Idaho, was a visiting professor and Fulbright scholar at Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi, India. In addition to authoring articles on the Latter-day Saint experience with civil disobedience, war, and nationalism, he also coedited, with Patrick Q. Mason and Richard L. Bushman, *War and Peace in Our Time: Mormon Perspectives.*

The last quotation from Perry was employed as part of the lesson on the Anti-Nephi-Lehies in *Student Manual, Religion 121–122 (2009),* 208.
How the Book of Mormon Reads the Bible:
A Theory of Types

Michael Austin

Typology is a figure of speech that moves in time. . . . What it both assumes and leads to, is a theory of history, or more accurately of historical process: an assumption that there is some meaning and point to history, and that sooner or later some event or events will occur which will indicate what that meaning or point is, and so become an antitype of what has happened previously.


Typology is one of those words whose meaning shifts dramatically with the position of its user. For religious believers studying the scriptures, typology is a mode of history—the belief that certain events and people should be understood as both fully historical and fully allegorical at the same time. To the unbeliever (or the believer in different things), typology is a mode of rhetoric—a connecting strategy that writers use to create retroactive links between otherwise unrelated stories or that readers use to infer connections between otherwise unconnected things. Those in the first group see the repetition of key narrative elements from the Old Testament to the New Testament—say, birth narratives in which both Moses and Jesus escape from an infanticidal massacre ordered by a despot—as a fundamental part of how sacred history works (see Exodus 1:22 and Matthew 2:16–18). Those in the second group would see this repetition as the attempt of a New Testament author (in this
case Matthew) to harness the rhetorical authority of Judaism’s greatest prophet by framing Christ as another Moses.

Before the twentieth century, discussions of typology were almost entirely confined to Christians discussing the relationship between the two Testaments of the Bible. Indeed, even the names “Old Testament” and “New Testament” make the typological argument that both scriptures exist for the same reason: to testify of Christ’s divinity. As the literary critic Northrop Frye writes in *The Great Code*, his monumental study of biblical typology, “The general principle of interpretation is traditionally given as ‘In the Old Testament the New Testament is concealed; in the New Testament the Old Testament is revealed.’ Everything that happens in the Old Testament is a ‘type’ or adumbration of something that happens in the New Testament, and the whole subject is therefore called typology.”

Accepting the theological claims of typological interpretation means abandoning the dichotomy between history and allegory and accepting that a single text can serve both functions at once. Typological interpretation of this sort can also be called “figural interpretation” (Greek *typos* = Latin *figura*), and one of the most important essays ever written about it is Erich Auerbach’s “Figura” (1944), first published in English in the 1959 book *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*. “Figural interpretation,” Auerbach explains, “establishes a connection between two events or persons, the first of which signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second encompasses or fulfills the first.” Both theologically and historically this kind of interpretation asserts the absolute, literal truth of both the type (the Old Testament figure) and the antitype (the New Testament fulfillment). Thus, Abraham’s near-sacrifice of Isaac was a fully historical event and a predictive symbol of God’s sacrifice of his Only Begotten Son. Jonah was a 100 percent historical character who was swallowed by a great fish, but the three

days that he spent in the belly of the whale also symbolize the three days that Christ will spend in the tomb. And so on. As Auerbach concludes, this fundamental alteration of the character of the Hebrew Bible was vital to the early diffusion of Judeo-Christian religion:

The figural interpretation changed the Old Testament from a book of laws and a history of the people of Israel into a series of figures of Christ and the Redemption. . . . In this form and in this context, from which Jewish history and national character had vanished, the Celtic and Germanic peoples, for example, could accept the Old Testament; it was part of the universal religion of salvation and a necessary component of the equally magnificent and universal vision of history that was conveyed to them along with this religion. In its original form, as a law book and history of so foreign and remote a nation, it would have been beyond their reach.  

This view of typology produces a fundamentally different view of history than good post-Enlightenment intellectuals feel comfortable with. In the typological mind, past, present, and future are linked not by cause and effect but by a recurring pattern of prophecy and fulfillment. Thus, when Matthew writes in the New Testament that Mary and Joseph took Jesus to Egypt until the death of Herod “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son” (Matthew 2:15), he is actually overriding any cause-and-effect statement that we might be tempted to read into the narrative (for example, that they went there to hide the baby Jesus from Herod’s soldiers, who were massacring Hebrew children, and that Egypt was a good place to do this because it was far away and reasonably cosmopolitan) with an assertion of typological causation. The reason that the Holy Family went to Egypt was that a prophecy had to be fulfilled.

In An Other Testament: On Typology, Joseph M. Spencer has given us the best reading yet of the implications that this typological view of past and future has for our theological understanding of the Book of Mormon. “To relate to history temporally is to regard the past event as

3. Auerbach, Scenes from the Drama of European Literature, 52.
fixed, an irretrievable fact, while to relate to history spiritually is to see past events as always still relevant,” argues Spencer, adroitly clarifying how the typological mind understands the past. Spencer argues convincingly that the Book of Mormon presents itself to us as a spiritual document that must therefore be understood typologically rather than historically, as we normally define the term. In my analysis I assume that Spencer is correct about this and that the Book of Mormon was written, translated, and brought into the modern world by individuals who understood their relationship to past and future events typologically. In my own analysis of Book of Mormon typology, I will explore the implication of these assumptions for our understanding of both the Bible and the Book of Mormon as collections of narratives.

Unlike the theological understanding of typology, which has always begun and ended with the study of the Hebrew and Christian Bibles, the modern study of typology as a narrative device begins in the interpretation of Homer. In 1933, an influential German classicist named Walter Arend published the book *Die typischen Scenen bei Homer* (*Type Scenes in Homer*), which almost singlehandedly launched a new area of inquiry in classical studies. For Arend, and for those who followed in his footsteps, the typological study of narrative is based in the study of “type-scenes,” or “recurrent block[s] of narrative . . . whose elements consistently appear in the same order.” Type-scenes occur within and across different narratives in all kinds of interesting ways. In early oral cultures, they most often occurred within a narrative or cycle of narratives, where they functioned as a mnemonic device to help storytellers keep track of a large number of narrative details. Type scenes gave early poets the ability to invoke all of the elements of a well-known scene


by associating it, however briefly, with another narrative known to the audience.

The study of type-scenes found its way into biblical studies in Hebrew scholar Robert Alter’s groundbreaking book *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, which argues that the Old Testament uses type-scenes within narratives in much the same way, and for essentially the same reasons, that Homer does. Perhaps the most famous example is the betrothal-at-the-well type-scene that we first see in the book of Genesis. Alter explains the basic narrative block as follows:

The betrothal type-scene, then, must take place with the future bridegroom, or his surrogate, having journeyed to a foreign land. There he encounters a girl—the term “na’arah” invariably occurs unless the maiden is identified as so-and-so’s daughter—or girls at a well. Someone, either the man or the girl, then draws water from the well; afterward, the girl or girls rush to bring home the news of the stranger’s arrival (the verbs “hurry” and “run” are given recurrent emphasis at this junction of the type-scene); finally, a betrothal is concluded between the stranger and the girl, in the majority of instances, only after he has been invited to a meal.7

The first and most elaborate example of this type-scene occurs in Genesis 24, with Isaac (through a servant) and Rebekah. It recurs in a somewhat shorter form in Genesis 29 with Jacob and Rachel and as an extremely compressed scene in Exodus 2 with Moses and Zipporah. Each time it recurs, the scene requires less detail because the author assumes that the reader will remember and import the details from earlier stories into the most recent one. As they do in the works of Homer, type-scenes of this kind appear throughout the Old Testament.

Over the many years of the Hebrew Bible’s composition, type-scenes formed a set of narrative building blocks available to authors at different times. They function as a kind of shorthand capable of invoking an entire narrative with just a few words—as the author of the book of Ruth invokes the betrothal-at-the-well type-scene by having

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Boaz instruct Ruth to “drink of that which the young men have drawn” (Ruth 2:9). Type-scenes could also function as a type of proposition testing, giving multiple perspectives on the same general principle in an attempt to prove or disprove a claim—such as the seven type-scenes in the book of Genesis featuring an older son losing the birthright to a younger brother, which served as a collective rejection of the larger culture’s belief that firstborn sons were especially favored by the Lord.

Recent biblical scholarship has expanded our understanding of the way that type-scenes function across the books of the Hebrew Bible. Sometimes, we are learning, such scenes functioned as corrective, rather than simply connective narratives. In Subversive Sequels in the Bible, Judy Klitsner reads the original Hebrew texts carefully to uncover layers of connection between stories whose messages seem at odds with each other. Klitsner has coined the phrase “subversive sequel” to describe a biblical narrative that intentionally incorporates elements of an earlier story that “questions and overturns the assumptions and conclusions of the [earlier] narrative.” Subversive sequels allowed later biblical writers to reverse or reinterpret earlier narratives in light of new or different understandings. The type-scene then becomes much more than a mnemonic device or a framing strategy; it becomes a way to comment on or correct a perceived error in the earlier text.

In Klitsner’s reading, the first chapter of Job, in which all of Job’s children are killed in rapid succession, is a subversive sequel to the Akeda, or the story of Abraham binding Isaac in Genesis 22. In these stories, Klitsner argues, “some basic similarities are obvious, such as the featuring of God-fearing men who face a mortal threat by God to

8. For an interpretation of the type-scene, see Alter, Art of Biblical Narrative, 58.
their offspring.” But the connections go much deeper. Both Abraham and Job are called “God-fearing,” for example, but the story of Abraham ends with this designation, while the book of Job begins with it, “suggesting the presence of a sequel in that the book of Job begins where the story of the Akeda ended.” And a number of personal names in the Abraham story reappear as place names in Job. Both the thematic and the linguistic connections suggest that we are dealing with a type-scene in which God demands the sacrifice of a righteous man’s child or children as an ultimate test of righteousness. But the reactions of the two men could not be more different. In one, God demands an unjust sacrifice from Abraham and then prevents it from occurring, leading the subject of the test to praise his mercy. In the other, God determines to test Job and simply kills not one, but ten children, leaving Job to make accusations of injustice. These differences lead to very different conclusions:

These differences lead to the most striking point of contrast between the two stories, which is Abraham’s silent compliance with God’s plan to kill the innocent as opposed to Job’s outspoken objections to God’s injustice. Abraham proved his ability to call God to task in Sodom when he boldly insisted that a just God must act justly (Gen. 18:25). But at the Akeda, Abraham’s assertive stance gives way to an unquestioning compliance with God’s morally perplexing decree. In the end, God is pleased with Abraham’s willingness to obey Him (22:12) and seemingly with Abraham’s silence as well. In contrast, as Job’s life is unjustly shattered, the hero rejects all attempts to accept God’s actions as justified and instead demands answers from God with ever-increasing audacity. Yet despite his contentious words, so antithetical to the wordless obedience of the God-fearing Abraham, God upholds Job’s responses over those of his friends, God’s apologists. God instructs Job’s friends to bring sacrifices and to have Job pray for them, “since you have not spoken to Me correctly as did My servant Job” (42:8). In this, the subversive sequel to the binding of Isaac

narrative, to be God’s beloved servant no longer requires voiceless acceptance of all God’s actions and decrees. Rather it is to protest God’s injustice and to demand a quality of life commensurate with one’s deeds.13

What Klitsner points to is a different use of typology than scholars of the Hebrew Bible normally discuss, but one that will be crucial to my analysis of typology in the Book of Mormon. As a Jewish scholar, Klitsner confines her analysis to the Hebrew Bible. But the notion of a subversive sequel works just as well with intertestamental typology and with all the other ways that type-scenes connect to each other across narratives. And this will be my fundamental argument about typology in the Book of Mormon. As “another testament of Jesus Christ,” the Book of Mormon presents itself as a narrative capable of constraining or even correcting the way we interpret the Bible. One of the primary ways that it does this, I suggest, is through the use of type-scenes that it shares with the biblical narrative. The Book of Mormon incorporates some of the most profoundly symbolic stories of both the Old and the New Testaments, but it also changes these stories in fundamental ways that can change the way we read the original texts and the way we make generalizations about the meaning of the scriptures and their relevance for us today.

Before trying to incorporate the Book of Mormon into a larger typological study, however, we will need to spend a little bit more time exploring the vocabulary that narratologists have developed to discuss both typology and type-scenes. We must, in other words, name our tools.

A theory of types: Naming the tools

Narrative theory has developed a rich vocabulary to talk about the ways that type-scenes relate to each other and to the larger narratives

of which they are a part. I want to define four terms from this field of study that can help us understand the different levels at which a typological discourse can function. Taken together, these terms provide a framework that can be used to analyze the Book of Mormon with reference to the way it shares figural representations with the Bible and with other texts. All four words are slippery, though, and they can all be used in different contexts with very different meanings. Here I define them as I use them:

**Type:** A type is the first occurrence of a type-scene. A type-scene is normally a narrative that points (or is read as pointing to) another narrative that will occur later, as Abraham’s binding of Isaac points to God’s sacrifice of his Only Begotten Son. According to the special logic of typology, the type is simultaneously real in every way that the later narrative is real and, at the same time, a symbol or allegory of the later narrative.

**Antitype:** The antitype is the fulfillment of a type, or the later narrative to which the type points. In the Christian typological tradition, Jesus Christ is the universal antitype, which means that nearly every narrative in the Old Testament is read by that tradition as pointing to something in the life or ministry of Jesus Christ. In other contexts, the antitype can simply be a narrative that incorporates elements of an earlier narrative, the way that *The Lion King* incorporates elements from *Hamlet*.

**Neotype:** The term *neotype* was coined in 1972 by literary historian Steven Zwicker to explain the way that John Dryden’s poetry functioned during the political battles of seventeenth-century England. A neotype is an extension of biblical typology to the present historical situation, based on the belief that the scriptures were explicitly written to address our day. For Zwicker, this means that a poem like Dryden’s “Absalom and Achitophel”—which used the Old Testament narrative of Absalom’s rebellion against David as a framing device to discuss the Duke of Monmouth’s rebellion against Charles II—presented a contemporary event as the literal fulfillment of a biblical type. Even in the time of King David, Dryden argues, God knew about the coming perfidy of the Earl of
Shaftsbury. In the language of the Book of Mormon, the neotype is what we get when we “liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning” (1 Nephi 19:23).

**Archetype:** Those who study myth and folklore have long observed similarities in the sacred stories of different cultures. Stories of floods, elixir thefts, journeys to the underworld, tricksters, and heroes seem to exist in cultures that do not appear to have had contact with each other, leading many to speculate that there are even older stories behind these ancient ones that have been lost—stories that stretch far back into human history and penetrate deep into the human mind. These “stories behind the stories” are called “archetypes.” The term is often associated with Carl Jung, who believed that archetypes come from a universal store of memories called the “collective unconscious,” and with Joseph Campbell, who applied Jung’s theories to a wide cross section of human myths.

When we add the Book of Mormon into the mix with the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the present day, we get a lot of interesting permutations in the possible interactions between types, antitypes, neotypes, and archetypes. Not only does the Book of Mormon add a third “testament” to the scriptural canon that incorporates narratives from the other two, the drama of its coming forth in the latter days played out on a typological stage. Joseph Smith and his companions saw nearly every aspect of the restoration movement as the fulfillment of either biblical or Book of Mormon prophecy, and this understanding influenced the way they acted their part. They perceived their story as an integral part of a sacred narrative stretching back to the Garden of Eden and going forward to the second coming of Jesus Christ.

To get a sense of how all these different narratives can come into play in the interpretation of a single text, consider this brief passage from the third chapter of 2 Nephi, in which Lehi, coming to the end of his life, blesses his son Joseph.

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And now, Joseph, my last-born, whom I have brought out of the wilderness of mine afflictions, may the Lord bless thee forever, for thy seed shall not utterly be destroyed. For behold, thou art the fruit of my loins; and I am a descendant of Joseph who was carried captive into Egypt. And great were the covenants of the Lord which he made unto Joseph. Wherefore, Joseph truly saw our day. And he obtained a promise of the Lord, that out of the fruit of his loins the Lord God would raise up a righteous branch unto the house of Israel; not the Messiah, but a branch which was to be broken off, nevertheless, to be remembered in the covenants of the Lord that the Messiah should be made manifest unto them in the latter days, in the spirit of power, unto the bringing of them out of darkness unto light—yea, out of hidden darkness and out of captivity unto freedom. (2 Nephi 3:3–5)

Here we have two characters named Joseph who are connected by patrilineal descent but also by their participation in a shared type-scene. The original type occurs in Genesis 49, in which the patriarch Jacob gives his dying blessing to each of his twelve sons. Joseph, as the favorite son and recipient of the birthright, receives the most elaborate blessing (though all of them are fairly short):

Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:) Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb: The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren. (Genesis 49:22–26 KJV)

The Book of Mormon establishes profound typological connections between Lehi’s and Jacob’s blessings. Both fathers have led their families on long migrations and have established them in a new land. While on
their deathbeds, both assemble all their sons to pronounce blessings that are at once directive and prophetic. And, of course, both of them have a son named Joseph. Most importantly, however, the Book of Mormon presents Lehi and his family as the fulfillment of the prophecy that the branches of Joseph will “run over the wall”—an association that Lehi draws specifically in this blessing. This is an example of a type-scene in which the antitype—directly and explicitly—provides an interpretation of the type that fundamentally alters the way that readers must interact with the text.

But the narrative is not done with Josephs. Lehi states that the ancient Joseph saw a vision of the last days and prophesied that “a seer shall the Lord my God raise up, who shall be a choice seer unto the fruit of my loins” (2 Nephi 3:6). This seer, we learn, will also be named Joseph, as will his father (2 Nephi 3:15), and he “shall write; and the fruit of the loins of Judah shall write” and the two writings “shall grow together, unto the confounding of false doctrines and laying down contentions” (2 Nephi 3:12). These prophecies leave little doubt that the “choice seer” should be interpreted as Joseph Smith or that the writing in question is the Book of Mormon, the very volume in which this prophecy occurs. This prophecy also invokes—and provides a strong interpretation of—a prophecy in Ezekiel that the “sticks” of Judah and Joseph will one day be joined together (Ezekiel 37:15–16). By using language that is almost identical to Ezekiel’s, but that makes it clear that the “sticks” are actually writings, Lehi’s blessing constrains interpretation of a second biblical passage by rewriting its predecessor and connects them both to the nineteenth-century neotype who brought forth the stick of Joseph.

And there is more going on still at the archetypal level, as Lehi’s blessing, like Jacob’s, is part of a much larger narrative tradition of dying fathers assembling their sons in order to impart their final blessings. The tradition of the dying father’s blessing is part of a larger archetypal pattern of interaction between fathers and sons. Most world cultures share stories of father-son interaction that emphasize (1) a son’s need to receive the father’s wisdom, status, and other resources that will help him make his way in the world and (2) the young man’s need to break ties with the father and create his own identity. Paradoxically, the son must both embrace and reject the father in order to become an adult.
Freud invoked this general tension in his theory of the Oedipus complex, in which a child fantasizes about killing his father and possessing his mother—and then feels immense guilt for daring to think such horrible things. Jung invoked a different archetype to account for this tension—the “Wise Old Man” that invariably appears as part of a young hero’s journey to adulthood. This figure (think Gandalf, Dumbledore, or Obi-Wan Kenobi) invariably provides both temporal assistance and spiritual guidance to the hero, but, just as invariably, he must die or be otherwise removed from the narrative before the hero faces the ultimate test. The hero cannot fully individuate while the father figure is still alive, as the whole point of these stories (according to Jung) is to dramatize, through myth, the fact that children cannot become functioning adults until they leave their parents’ spheres of influence.

All these typologies interact with each other through this single passage in 2 Nephi, which (under the definitions I have suggested) occupies the position of the antitype. It changes our understanding of the original type by portraying the biblical Joseph as a prophet whose prophecies of the last days, omitted from the biblical text, were restored in this portion of the Book of Mormon.\footnote{This passage from 2 Nephi forms the basis of Genesis 50:24–38, which Joseph Smith included in his revision of the Bible and which is included as an appendix in the current LDS Bible.} It also reaches forward to the neotype and encourages us to see Joseph Smith and the restoration as part of a recurring typological pattern that was understood by key figures in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon. And it reaches upward to the archetype and incorporates prophecy into the set of gifts that fathers give their sons to prepare them for adulthood. This is all possible because, according to the logic of typology that the passage employs, all four versions of the story are connected to each other in such a way that our interpretation of one affects our understanding of all the others.

In the remainder of this essay, I will examine three type-scenes that occur in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon. The first involves eating a specific fruit, the second deals with the exodus pattern in both narratives, and the third features the conversion of men who persecuted the church. In each case, I will suggest that the type-scene in the Book of Mormon
functions as a subversive sequel to the same type-scene in the Bible—that it deliberately incorporates enough elements of the biblical scene to ensure a connection in readers’ minds and then reworks or corrects that scene in a way consistent with Mormon theology. In this way, many stories from the Book of Mormon constitute “subversive sequels” to the Bible.

Stories of the fall

The story of Adam, Eve, and the fall does a lot of archetypal work in the Judeo-Christian world. It proposes to explain, among other things, why we are subject to death, how sin came into the world, and why we must suffer. And, like most great archetypal narratives, it speaks through symbols, the most prominent being the garden, the forbidden fruit, and the serpent. We can locate similar symbols in the archetypal narratives of other ancient cultures; the Greek goddess Persephone, for example, partially forfeits her right to live on Olympus by eating pomegranate seeds. And the Sumerian hero Gilgamesh goes on an epic journey to find the elixir of eternal youth only to have it snatched out of his hands by a crafty serpent. These are powerful symbols that have been invoked for millennia to explain the human condition.

The Book of Mormon gathers many of these symbols into a prophetic dream that is related by Lehi and recorded by Nephi in the early part of the text. Bruce Jorgensen has astutely observed that the essential logic of Lehi’s dream creates a narrative pattern that becomes important throughout the Book of Mormon. “At bottom the pattern is a simple transformation,” he writes, “from dark and barren waste by means of the Word to a world fruitful and filled with light. And the transformation is enacted again and again in the Book of Mormon.” Jorgensen sees this as the basic typological pattern repeated in the stories of Enos, Alma the Elder, and Alma the Younger—each of which repeats the basic transformation from desolation to light through the vehicle of the Word of God.

If we read the pattern that Jorgensen identifies in reverse—the transformation from a fruitful world to a desolate one—we arrive back in Eden with Adam and Eve. There are several good reasons to associate Lehi’s dream narrative with the Garden of Eden. They are both stories about eating the fruit of a specific tree, for one thing, and the term *tree of life* appears in both.¹⁷ Both stories also include specific mentions of shame, enemies of God trying to convince others to disobey him, and a description of a “dreary wilderness” or a “dreary world.”¹⁸ But these elements from Genesis are inverted in Lehi’s dream.

In his dream, Lehi starts out in a “dark and dreary wilderness” (1 Nephi 8:4), where he sees a man in a white robe who led him to a large field with a single tree.

> And it came to pass that I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy. And it came to pass that I did go forth and partake of the fruit thereof; and I beheld that it was most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted. Yea, and I beheld that the fruit thereof was white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen. And as I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy; wherefore, I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also; for I knew that it was desirable above all other fruit. (1 Nephi 8:10–12)

As he surveys the scene, Lehi sees that that his family, along with many other people, are far away from the tree. To reach the tree they

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¹⁸. The phrase *lone and dreary world* is frequently used in LDS discourse to describe the state of Adam and Eve’s existence after they are cast out of Eden, as James Talmage explains in his classic book *House of the Lord* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1912), 99–100: “The Temple Endowment . . . includes a recital of the most prominent events of the creative period, the condition of our first parents in the Garden of Eden, their disobedience and consequent expulsion from that blissful abode, [and] their condition in the *lone and dreary world* when doomed to live by labor and sweat” (emphasis added).
must follow a “strait and narrow path.” As people tried to navigate the path, dark mists arose and made it impossible for anyone to stay on the path unless they held fast to the “rod of iron” that ran beside it (2 Nephi 8:19–20). Many people lost their way because they did not hold to the rod, and many others reached the tree and partook of the fruit, only to be mocked by naysayers in a great and spacious building. “After they had tasted of the fruit,” Lehi reports, “they were ashamed, because of those that were scoffing at them; and they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost” (1 Nephi 8:28). Only the most valiant—including Sariah, Nephi, and Sam—partake of the fruit and experience the joy that it brings, precisely because they do not feel the shame that the others feel about eating the fruit. Others are lost in the mist, drowned in the nearby river, or absorbed into the cynicism of the nearby great and spacious building.

All the typological elements that Jorgensen finds in Lehi’s dream can also be found in the Garden of Eden story. But in reverse. Oversimplified into a flowchart, the narrative arc of Genesis 3 moves like this: paradise → eats fruit → feels shame → wilderness. First Nephi 8, on the other hand, largely inverts this arc: wilderness → eats fruit → doesn’t feel shame → paradise. To the extent that we can read the Book of Mormon narrative as an antitype of the Genesis story, we must consider it a corrective antitype, or at least one that advances a very different interpretation than the passage has normally been given. If we read the antitype back onto the type, it suggests that, just maybe, Adam and Eve didn’t sin when they partook of the fruit but rather did what God wanted and expected them to because it was the only way that they could have joy.

The notion that Adam and Eve did the right thing by disobeying God and eating the fruit would be considered a dangerous heresy in most of the Christian world today (or at least that part of the Christian world that believes that Adam and Eve lived at all). Yet it is a standard

19. In the many religious conversations that I had with a good friend and Catholic priest when I was working at a Catholic university, the idea that the fall could have been what God wanted from the beginning was the LDS belief that he found most at odds with his own understanding of the Christian tradition.
and accepted part of Latter-day Saint belief that is made clear in a later passage of the Book of Mormon:

And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end. And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin. But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things. Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy. (2 Nephi 2:22–25)

This goes well beyond the Christian notion of the “Fortunate Fall,” derived from the work of Augustine, which holds that God’s goodness and power are so great that he can make even the catastrophe of the fall work out to our benefit. The Book of Mormon suggests that the fall of Adam was fortunate and that not falling would have been unfortunate, as it would have prevented human beings from ever coming into existence. This is the theology of 2 Nephi, and it has become a standard part of the Latter-day Saint creed, which rejects the doctrine of original sin in the second article of faith: “We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam’s transgression.”

To put this another way, the fall does not have the same archetypal significance for Latter-day Saints that it does for the rest of the Christian world. It does not give an etiology of human depravity or show that the human race is fallen. Rather, it portrays Adam as a wise, righteous patriarch on the horns of a dilemma: he has been commanded to multiply and replenish the earth, which cannot happen until he partakes of the fruit, which he has been commanded not to partake of. In his wisdom he uses his agency to disregard the lesser commandment in order

to obey the greater one. Had Adam done otherwise, he would have frustrated God’s plan and therefore been guilty of a sin. And though Latter-day Saints now have multiple sources for this theology, nearly all of it can be worked out through a careful reading of Lehi’s dream in conversation with the biblical type that it first invokes and then subverts.

The exodus type: Colonization without conquest

Just about everybody who writes about typology in the Book of Mormon has observed the close connections between Lehi and his family’s flight from Jerusalem and the children of Israel’s escape from Egypt. In both of these narratives, the Lord leads a chosen people out of captivity (actual in the Bible, eminent in the Book of Mormon) and to a promised land that has been prepared for them. In both cases, the chosen people wander in the wilderness for a time while they are prepared spiritually to enter the promised land. In 1981, George S. Tate dubbed this the “Exodus pattern.” “The Book of Mormon opens with an exodus,” he observes, pointing out that the confluence of the two narratives is reinforced by multiple details that connect them together:

Notice how many details of the early narrative conform to this pattern. . . . Nephi and his family depart out of Jerusalem into the wilderness, “deliver[ed] . . . from destruction” (1 Nephi 17:14). In what might be called a paschal vision—referring fifty-six times to the Lamb (Lamb of God, blood of the Lamb, etc.)—Nephi’s interpretive revelation on his father’s dream recalls the passover lamb of Exodus as it figures Christ (chs. 11–15). While a pillar of light rested upon a rock, Lehi had been warned to flee; and the Lord now provides miraculous guidance in the form of a compass-ball, the Liahona, and assures them, “I will also be your light in the wilderness; and I will prepare the way before you” (1 Nephi 1:6; 16:10; 17:13). When the family begins to murmur from hunger as had the Israelites before receiving manna, Nephi obtains food miraculously at the Lord’s direction (see 1 Nephi 16:23, 31). He repeatedly receives instruction from the Lord on a mountain (see 1 Nephi 16:30; 17:7) and builds a ship not “after the manner of
men; but . . . after the manner which the Lord had shown unto me” just as Moses had received the design for the tabernacle (see 1 Nephi 18:1–3; Exodus 26). (Both ship and tabernacle are types of the church in Christian typology.)

Nephi himself seems aware that his family is writing itself into sacred history by reenacting the foundational event of their faith. He specifically invokes the typology of exodus when he tells his brothers, who have just been cast out of Laban's presence while trying to obtain the brass plates, that they should “be strong like unto Moses; for he truly spake unto the waters of the Red Sea and they divided hither and thither, and our fathers came through, out of captivity, on dry ground, and the armies of Pharaoh did follow and were drowned in the waters of the Red Sea” (1 Nephi 4:2). This is important because it shows that, like Matthew and the other New Testament writers, he understands his own experiences typologically rather than merely historically. As Tate puts it, he realizes that “he and his family are reenacting a sacred and symbolic pattern that looks back to Israel and forward to Christ—the pattern of Exodus.”

Using Tate’s initial observation, other scholars have plumbed the text for similarities and typological connections, which has probably done more than any other line of inquiry to establish the Book of Mormon as a legitimate typological companion to the Bible. But, according to the theory of types that I am advancing, differences matter more than similarities. For it is the differences that allow the type-scenes to function as subversive sequels. How might the Book of Mormon correct or constrain our understanding of the Bible by reformulating the deep

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structure of their shared typology? I would argue that this question has a special urgency when applied to the exodus type, as what lies at the end of that narrative—the conquest of Canaan and the divinely mandated massacre of its original inhabitants—is one of the most difficult parts of the Bible for modern readers to reconcile with their understanding of God. The actions portrayed in Joshua and Judges amount to genocide by any contemporary standard, and most modern readers would prefer that their God not be mixed up in such things.

Though the original party in the Book of Mormon reenacts the biblical exodus in many particulars on the front end, Latter-day Saints can be glad that the Book of Mormon’s version of the exodus does not end in conquest or slaughter. Lehi and his family arrive in an empty promised land just waiting to be peopled by his descendants. More importantly, at least for my argument, we never see either the Nephites or the Lamanites conquering a group of non-Lehite people at the request of the Almighty. This goes well beyond the initial flight-from-Jerusalem story. The exodus type goes on to repeat six more times in the Book of Mormon, becoming an internal type-scene in its own right—and not a single one of these iterations ends in conquest:

2 Nephi 5:5–10: After the Lehites come to the promised land, they divide into two factions, one led by Nephi and the other led by Laman. As hostility between the two groups increases, the Lord warns Nephi that he “should depart from them and flee into the wilderness, and all those who would go with [him].” The Nephites leave the first settlement and establish

24. In saying this, I do not mean to take a position on the limited geography model of Book of Mormon scholarship or to challenge the recent acknowledgment of the LDS Church in the introduction to the Book of Mormon that the Lamanites were “among the ancestors of” and not the “principal ancestors of” modern Native Americans. But these kinds of historical assertions are alien to the typological mind that saw the Lehite flight from Jerusalem as an antitype of the biblical exodus. Nephi clearly held this view and acknowledges such in the text, which does not contain a single clear reference to any non-Lehite inhabitants of the land until the Nephites meet the Mulekites in the book of Omni.
the land of Nephi, which (by all indications given in the text) they find empty.

**Omni 1:12**: The Nephite leader Mosiah is “warned of the Lord that he should flee out of the land of Nephi, and as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord should also depart out of the land with him, into the wilderness.” This group of Lehites discovers another group of Hebrew exiles in the city of Zarahemla. When the Nephites arrive with the plates and an uncorrupted language, they immediately join with the Mulekites, and Mosiah is made king of the combined people.

**Mosiah 18:34**: After Alma leaves the court of King Noah and establishes a church, the king mobilizes an army to attack him and his followers. The new church is “apprised of the coming of the king’s army; therefore they took their tents and their families and departed into the wilderness.”

**Mosiah 22:9–12**: After Limhi becomes king, the Nephites in the land of Nephi experience increasing oppression by and demand for tribute from the Lamanites. In response, Limhi provided a large tribute of wine to the Lamanites and, while they were in a deep sleep, the Nephites “did depart by night into the wilderness . . . and they went round about the land of Shilom in the wilderness, and bent their course towards the land of Zarahemla.” They literally snuck out in the middle of the night.

**Mosiah 24:18–20**: After the people of Alma flee the domain of King Noah, they settle in the land of Helam, which is later conquered by the Lamanites. The Lamanite king makes Amulon, the former chief priest of King Noah, the governor of this area, and Amulon begins to persecute Alma and his people mercilessly. Once again, the people of the church “in the night time gathered their flocks together” and “departed into the wilderness” after “the Lord caused a deep sleep to come upon the Lamanites,” thereafter to become subjects of King Mosiah.
Ether 1:39–42: As the Lord is confounding the languages at the Tower of Babel, the brother of Jared prays that he and his family will be spared. The Lord grants the petition and instructs Jared and his family to gather their flocks and seeds and depart into the wilderness. The Jaredites are led to the New World, where they flourished for more than one thousand years before they destroyed themselves just prior to the arrival of the Mulekites.

Of the seven repetitions of the exodus type-scene in the Book of Mormon, five portray a migration into an empty territory. In one of them (Mosiah 24:18–20), a splinter group seeks reunification with the main body that they split off from—and once again, the delivery of the chosen people is accomplished without the necessity of a bloody conquest. And in one version (Omni 1:12), we see an adaptation of the exodus type that virtually stands it on its head. In this instance, the Lord warns King Mosiah to gather the faithful and leave the land of Nephi; Mosiah then leads the Nephites to the city of Zarahemla—a land that is inhabited by another group of Israelites who escaped the Babylonian captivity. The Mulekites, however, have lost their language and their culture, and they no longer have access to a sacred book. When the Nephites show up, they do not have to conquer the Mulekites; they are embraced as saviors. “There was great rejoicing among the people of Zarahemla,” Amaleki records. “And also Zarahemla did rejoice exceedingly, because the Lord had sent the people of Mosiah with the plates of brass which contained the record of the Jews” (Omni 1:14). The people of Zarahemla are so happy that they willingly turn the government over to the newcomers and consent to live under their enlightened rule.

With this version of the shared scene, the typology of exodus is completely inverted. Rather than having to kill the inhabitants of the promised land to guard against being tempted by their false gods, the Nephites immediately convert the inhabitants to their religion and are invited to become their leaders. We should keep this typological inversion in mind as we move to the neotype, or the modern iteration of the exodus pattern that was called into existence when the Mormons
were expelled from Illinois in 1846. The Saints began almost immediately invoking the language of the exodus typology to describe their experiences, beginning with the choice of the name “the Camp of Israel” for the initial party that made its way west. As Leonard Arrington and Davis Bitton explain, “Biblical rhetoric was used to heighten the Saints’ sense of leaving a place of persecution for a Promised Land and of being miraculously blessed and guided.”

But what about the Native Americans who were already living in the Great Basin? The biblical exodus typology would cast any inhabitants of the new promised land in the role of Canaanites—enemies of the people of God who must be exterminated in order to fulfill God’s promise of deliverance. This typology was actually prominent in the relations between Europeans and Indians on the American continent, as the early American settlers “extended their typology to encompass the American Indians as Canaanites who the Lord had promised Moses would be driven from the land to make way.” This Canaanite–Native American typology allowed European settlers to quote from their sacred texts as they committed acts of genocide. To a mind steeped in biblical typology, being God’s chosen people means conquering whoever was in the land when you got there.

But this was not what it meant to the first generation of Mormons. For one thing, American Indians couldn’t be figurative Canaanites because they were literal Israelites. Joseph Smith and his followers saw American Indians as the literal descendants of the Lamanites of the Book of Mormon and therefore as chosen people and subjects of prophecy in their own right. Furthermore, as we have already seen, the typology of the exodus as reconfigured in the Book of Mormon does not require conquest or displacement. If it involves other people at all

(rather than just empty promised lands), it involves saving these people from their own ignorance and being invited to become their leaders.

In theory this should have made Mormons great allies with the Native Americans. In practice, the results are mixed. From very early on, Latter-day Saints felt a responsibility to proselytize their Indian neighbors. In September 1830, just six months after the LDS Church was established, Joseph Smith called Oliver Cowdery and Peter Whitmer on a “mission to the Lamanites” of western Missouri, to be joined later by Parley P. Pratt, Ziba Peterson, and Frederick G. Williams. These early Mormon stalwarts embraced the task enthusiastically, “knowing that the purposes of God were great to that people and hoping that the time had come when the promises of the Almighty in regard to that people were about to be accomplished.”

If they were thinking typologically, they may well have been expecting that the Indians would respond to them much as the Mulekites had responded to the Nephites—with joy and gratitude for having the faith of their ancestors restored to them. But this is not what happened. The Mormon missionaries were expelled from Indian territory by Indian agents in February 1831 without converting a large numbers of Indians.

Fifteen years later, when the Mormons found themselves sharing the Great Basin with Utes, Goshutes, Paiutes, Hopis, and other Native American tribes, they often found their fellow children of Israel unwilling to help them colonize the territory and convert en masse to Mormonism. Though the Mormons never participated in the kind of wholesale extermination of Indian populations carried out elsewhere in the United States, they frequently did fight with them and consider them the enemy. But not always. The Mormons in Utah also frequently found common cause with the local Indian tribes, for practical reasons, but also because they really did see them as a chosen (if often recalcitrant) people. As Paul Reeve writes in Religion of a Different Color, “The relationships between


Mormons and Indians in the Great Basin were frequently messy. Mormons baptized, married, ordained, murdered, indentured, befriended, fought with, traded with, fed, employed, warred against, and ultimately aided in the displacement of Native Americans to reservations."

There can be no doubt that the first generation of Mormons saw the American Indians as part of the sacred story they were writing themselves into—a sacred story dominated by the typology of the exodus. This is how neotypes work. Latter-day Saints saw themselves as the literal fulfillment of ancient prophecies about the children of Israel, the house of Joseph, the Lamanites, and the gathering of Israel. And while many Mormon accounts of the settlement incorrectly portray it as something like the Lehite settlement of the New World—a group of people colonizing an empty land that had been prepared for them by God—none of them cast Native Americans as Canaanites who needed to be exterminated for the people of God to prevail. The Book of Mormon’s revisions of the exodus type, combined with its portrayal of American Indians as part of the covenant people, permitted, and arguably encouraged, a different ending to the story.

The typology of conversion

Perhaps the clearest example of a biblical type-scene in the Book of Mormon is the conversion of Alma the Younger in Mosiah 27—a scene that incorporates many of the narrative elements of Saul’s conversion on the road to Damascus in Acts 9. The similarities include but go well beyond the fact that each story features a persecutor of Christians who is stopped on a road by a divine agent (an angel for Alma the Younger and Christ himself for Saul) and converted to be a follower of Christ. There are deeper similarities between plot elements, such as the infliction of a physical disability that is healed when the conversion is complete. And the language in the Book of Mormon distinctly mirrors

the language of the KJV account of Paul’s conversion with the phrase “Why persecutest thou me?” (Paul) and the similar “Why persecutest thou the church of God?” (Alma) echoing through both versions. Both stories are told originally as third-person narratives and then repeated, twice each, as first-person narratives by the principal subjects. Table 1 represents a more detailed comparison.

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<th><strong>Table 1. Similarities in the conversions of Saul and Alma</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Saul (Acts 9)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Saul is well known for “breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord” (9:1).</td>
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<tr>
<td>He and his companions were stopped on their way to persecute Christians, “and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven” (9:3).</td>
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<td>“He fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” (9:4).</td>
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<tr>
<td>He is stricken with a physical disability and becomes unable to eat: “And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink” (9:9).</td>
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<td>His blindness is healed, and he becomes able to eat when he is converted to Christianity by Ananias (9:18–19).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years later, he retells the story in two first-person narratives that are also included in the text (Acts 22; 26).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul goes on to become one of the greatest missionaries in the early church, establishing congregations throughout Asia Minor and writing a large portion of the New Testament in the form of letters.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How do we account for these similarities in two narratives that, under their own terms, could not have been known to each other? Readers uncommitted to the Book of Mormon’s account of its own origins might naturally conclude that the story of Alma’s conversion is simply derivative, but believers might just as naturally explain it in their own terms. Maybe all instances of divine intervention into the lives of church-persecutors work the same way. Or perhaps more modest similarities in the narratives were amplified via translation. But the fact that we can see such a clear pattern of similarity in the canonical forms of the texts, both of which present themselves as the result of revelation and inspiration, means that we are almost certainly supposed to notice. And as important as the similarities are, the differences are more important to our overall understanding of the texts (see table 2).

Table 2. Differences in the conversions of Saul and Alma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Difference</th>
<th>Saul</th>
<th>Alma the Younger</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saul and Alma the Younger occupy completely inverted positions within their cultures</td>
<td>Saul is an elite member of his culture’s established church persecuting an offshoot that he believes to be heretical.</td>
<td>Alma the Younger, the son of the head of his culture’s established church, has become a leader in an offshoot that his father believes to be heretical.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The text defines “persecution” very differently</td>
<td>Saul’s persecution is physical. He acknowledges beating men and women in the synagogue and even persecuting them “unto death” (Acts 22:4).</td>
<td>Alma’s persecution is rhetorical. He confesses to “murdering” people, but then defines that as having “led them away unto destruction” (Alma 36:14). His form of persecution was convincing people not to believe in Christ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The kind of conversion is different in both stories</td>
<td>Saul was a deeply religious person who (according to the text) believed in the wrong religion. He had to change his beliefs.</td>
<td>Alma was a person raised in the true church who, out of wickedness, set about to destroy people’s faith. He had to change his behavior.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
They are converted for different reasons

Saul is converted because the Lord needs him for a very specific purpose, as he tells Ananias: “He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15).

Alma is converted because of the prayers of his father. The angel tells him specifically, “I come to convince thee of the power and authority of God, that the prayers of his servants might be answered according to their faith.” (Mosiah 27:14)

It is the third of these differences, I believe, that has the most profound implications for understanding the way the Book of Mormon relates to the Bible—here a major difference between the two scriptural texts emerges: The New Testament, by and large, portrays religious conversion as a change in a person’s knowledge, while the Book of Mormon primarily treats it as a change in a person’s behavior. This is not an absolute distinction; there are examples of both kinds of conversion in both narratives. But we can see an overall pattern emerge out of both volumes, and this pattern is even clearer in the book of Acts (in which all three versions of Paul’s conversion appear) and the book of Alma (in which two of the three versions of Alma the Younger’s conversion appear). It is certainly no coincidence that the primary theme of both books is the process of conversion.

The book of Acts opens with Christ ascending to heaven after instructing his disciples to “be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). This charge is accomplished spectacularly in the second chapter, when an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost leads to the conversion of about three thousand people to a belief in Christ (Acts 2:41). Other major examples of conversion in Acts include Philip’s conversion of the crowd in Samaria (Acts 8:5–12), the vision that converts the Roman centurion Cornelius (Acts 10:1–4), the conversion of the gentiles who hear Paul and Barnabas preach (Acts 13:46–48), the conversion of Lydia in the city of Thyatira (Acts 16:14–15), the conversion of Apollos (Acts 18:24–26), the conversion of the disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 19:1–5), and of course, the three separate versions of Saul/
Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus. In each of the conversion narratives—ten in all—the act of “conversion” means accepting as truth the knowledge of Christ’s divinity and acting accordingly.

If we look at the conversion stories in the book of Alma (including the first story of Alma’s conversion at the end of the book of Mosiah), we see a very different dynamic at play. The only conversions that fit the pattern of the book of Acts are those involving the sons of Mosiah and the Lamanites. Nearly all of Alma the Younger’s missionary work is dedicated to convincing people who already know the truth to change their behavior. The logic of this pattern even holds true in the case of the antichrists of the book of Alma—Nehor and Korihor—who both renounce their heresies at the end of their lives and acknowledge that they intentionally led people away from the things that they knew to be true (Alma 1:15; 30:52). The Book of Mormon narrative regularly assumes that Nephites who do not believe in Christ are not sincere—and that their supposed unorthodoxy is really just rebellion masquerading as disbelief.

As the religion of Nehor permeates the Nephite realm, fanned into open civil war by Amlici and his followers, Alma gives up his political office and devotes himself to full-time missionary work. He begins in Zarahemla proper, where he experiences great success. But his preaching in Zarahemla does not try to persuade people to believe in Christ; rather, he assumes that they believe in Christ already but have lost the will to be Christians. Alma leads them to a conversion, not of belief, but of desire, which is compared in the text to waking up from a sleep:

> Behold, he changed their hearts; yea, he awakened them out of a deep sleep, and they awoke unto God. Behold, they were in the midst of darkness; nevertheless, their souls were illuminated by the light of the everlasting word; yea, they were encircled about

30. In the case of Nehor, the narrative contains an intriguing hint that his recantation of his beliefs may have been coerced: “And it came to pass that they took him; and his name was Nehor; and they carried him upon the top of the hill Manti, and there he was caused, or rather did acknowledge, between the heavens and the earth, that what he had taught to the people was contrary to the word of God; and there he suffered an ignominious death” (Alma 1:15).
Alma’s main message to the people of Zarahemla is that they need to act with integrity to the truth that they already know. “Do ye imagine to yourselves that ye can lie unto the Lord in that day?” he asks them. “Can ye imagine yourselves brought before the tribunal of God with your souls filled with guilt and remorse?” (Alma 5:17–18). His listeners are in the same position that he was in before his conversion: they know what is true and have not been faithful to it. Like Paul, Alma seeks to convert others the way that he was converted himself. But unlike Paul, this is not a conversion that requires a change of belief.

When Alma goes to Ammonihah, a stronghold of Nehorism, he gets a much chillier reception—largely due to his role as the chief judge during the recent civil war in which the people of Ammonihah, as followers of Nehor, would have been on the other side. In their disputations, a lawyer named Zeezrom functions as the chief mouthpiece of the religion of Ammonihah. But we are told right off the bat that Zeezrom and the other judges wanted to stir people up against Alma and Amulek “for the sole purpose to get gain . . . that they might get money according to the suits which were brought before them” (Alma 11:20). In other words, Zeezrom is not a sincere believer in an incorrect doctrine. He does not even have mixed motives. The only reason he opposes the church is because it is profitable for him to do so. “Thou knowest that there is a God,” Amulek tells him in a rebuke, “but thou lovest that lucre more than him” (Alma 11:24).

But Zeezrom comes to his senses and becomes Alma and Amulek’s most prominent convert. This begins to happen in chapter 14, when other converts are burned alive and Alma and Amulek are imprisoned:

And it came to pass that Zeezrom was astonished at the words which had been spoken; and he also knew concerning the blindness of the minds, which he had caused among the people by his lying words; and his soul began to be harrowed up under a consciousness of his own guilt; yea, he began to be encircled about by the pains of hell. (Alma 14:6)
Zeezrom then goes through a conversion that incorporates many of the elements of Alma the Younger’s own conversion. He falls gravely ill due to “the great tribulations of his mind on account of his wickedness,” and his many sins “did harrow up his mind until it became exceedingly sore, having no deliverance; therefore he began to be scorched with a burning heart” (Alma 15:3). Compare this to Alma’s own description of his conversion, when he was “racked with torment, while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins” (Alma 36:17). Like Alma, Zeezrom sins chiefly by knowing the truth and not following it. When he seeks out Alma and Amulek, he repents of his sins and is baptized, ending his torment and turning him into a valiant companion on Alma’s mission.

The conversions of Zeezrom and Alma the Younger typify what we might reasonably consider a core ideology of the Book of Mormon, which sees rebellion and disbelief primarily as failures of will rather than as failures of belief. This is because a primary assertion of the Book of Mormon—and of the nineteenth-century narrative of its coming forth—is that God will reveal the truth to anyone who really wants to know it. This is precisely the gist of the “experiment upon the word” sermon that Alma preaches to the Zoramites in Alma 32. And it is the thrust of Moroni’s famous promise to his readers that they can know the truth of his words, and by extension the entire Book of Mormon, “if [they] shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ” (Moroni 10:4). The flipside of this assertion is that, if someone does not believe that these things are true, they must lack either a pure heart or real intent. Far more than any of the texts of the Old or New Testament, the Book of Mormon frames the lack of faith as a failure of will. In most cases, therefore, conversion is presented as a change in behavior instead of as an increase in understanding.

Conclusion

There are, of course, perfectly good historical arguments to account for the differences between biblical and Book of Mormon narratives that I have mentioned. Lehi’s dream was never intended to be a creation
story—it was supposed to be an allegory of converting to Christ. The exodus of some two million souls from Egypt could hardly have been accomplished as easily as the removal of a single family from Jerusalem, so it makes no sense to compare the two. And Paul’s conversion occurred at the beginning of a movement, so we cannot expect him to have had the same problem as Alma in reconverting lapsed Christians. All this is true. However, these kinds of historical arguments are alien to the typological mind and therefore, I would argue, contrary to the way that the Book of Mormon itself wants to be read.

This requires a little bit of explanation. Narrative theorists frequently talk about texts “wanting” to be read in certain ways, as if an abstract collection of words could have concrete desires and a species of agency. This bit of anthropomorphic fantasy is really just a way to elide messy discussions of authorship that take our focus off of what the text actually says. This is an especially important convention to observe when talking about either the Bible or the Book of Mormon—both of which present themselves to us as the works of multiple narrators and translators compiled over long periods of time. Sustained narrative analysis requires us to assume that the canonical, final form of each scripture has a unified structure and purpose that can be derived from the text. (Such an assumption, I would add, is not at all incompatible with the assumption of a divine origin.)

So, what does the Book of Mormon want? More specifically, how does the Book of Mormon want us to read it in relation to the Old and New Testaments? Given the assumptions above, I think that most readers of the Book of Mormon would agree that it “wants” the following three things.

- The Book of Mormon wants us to be familiar with the Bible before we even start reading. It begins at a specifically identifiable point in biblical history (the reign of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah), and it continually references biblical events (the Tower of Babel, the destruction of Jerusalem, the birth and death of Christ). These aspects of the text clearly
The reader will have a solid understanding of both the Old and the New Testaments.

The Book of Mormon wants us to read typologically. Most of the major figures in the Book of Mormon talk specifically about reading the scriptures, including sometimes their own experiences, as types. These include Nephi (2 Nephi 11:4), King Benjamin (Mosiah 3:15), Abinadi (Mosiah 13:10, 31), Alma the Younger (Alma 13:16; 33:19), Mormon (Alma 25:15), and Ether (Ether 13:6). If we take the Book of Mormon as a unified text, these passages show us clearly that that text understands the notion of typology and expects its readers to apply that understanding to its own narrative.

The Book of Mormon wants to influence and constrain the way that we understand the Bible. This is a more difficult assertion to support than the other two, as it relies partially on extratextual sources, such as the eighth article of faith, which states, “We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God”—a formulation that gives interpretive precedence to the Book of Mormon on the grounds that the accuracy of its translation is not in question. We can find some textual warrant for this argument in Nephi’s prophecy of the future reception of the Book of Mormon. Nephi writes that, in that day, “many of the Gentiles shall say: A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible” (2 Nephi 29:3), and the Lord will answer, “Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written” (2 Nephi 29:10). At the very least, this formulation maintains that the Book of Mormon will add to the totality of the sacred narrative of which the Bible is a part.
Taken together, these three narrative intentions virtually guarantee the presence of the kinds of type-scenes that I am suggesting in this essay—type-scenes that intentionally connect themselves to biblical narratives and then change the underlying logic of those narratives in ways that force us to reread the original. This does not necessarily change the way that we interpret the Bible, but it does shape and constrain our understanding by teaching us which aspects of the original texts to emphasize and which avenues of interpretation to pursue. We should expect nothing less of a book that advertises itself as “another testament” capable of augmenting the teachings of previous testaments and leading its readers to a unique set of truths.

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Women and the Book of Mormon:  
The Creation and Negotiation of a  
Latter-day Saint Tradition  

Susanna Morrill  

At the turn of the nineteenth century, when Mormon school-teacher Martha Cragun Cox took a trip through Arizona to New Mexico, she visited an ancient Native American dwelling. In her autobiography, she describes this dwelling as a “Nephite mansion.” To her mind, this archaeological treasure was the construction of one of the Israelite tribes that the Book of Mormon records as living in the ancient Americas.¹ The Book of Mormon shaped such simple, everyday perceptions, even as it drove the most profoundly religious actions of Latter-day Saint members. Martha Cragun Cox also tells the story of an eccentric

The following article by Susanna Morrill first appeared in Historicizing “Tradition” in the Study of Religion, ed. Steven Engler and Gregory Price Grieve (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), 127–44. We believe that it has, unfortunately, not received the attention it deserves for the light it sheds on the ways the Book of Mormon has been received by its readers. Morrill writes from the perspective that the Book of Mormon is a product of the nineteenth-century, but we feel that all stand to learn much from her analysis. We would like to express our gratitude to Professor Morrill, as well as to De Gruyter, for allowing us to reprint the essay. Similarly, she ruefully recounted her visit to Phoenix, a city originally settled and then given up by Mormon pioneers.

1. She was disturbed that a city fed by—in her words—an ancient Nephite canal had been abandoned to non-Mormons by these latter-day successors of the Nephites (Cox 1928–1930, 222).
missionary to Native Americans who was directed on his missionary work by the Three Nephites, three American followers of Jesus who, according to the Book of Mormon, had been left behind to roam the earth and provide spiritual help to the faithful until the Second Coming (Cox 1928–1930, 222).

Looking at these very personal stories, we can see that, as the founding scriptures of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the LDS Church), the Book of Mormon and related texts have had a pervasive influence on the history and worldview of the Mormon community. Yet Mormon women such as Cox did not simply exist unconsciously within the Book of Mormon worldview, they also actively helped create this worldview. They had a vital hand in building the traditions within which they lived and understood the world. Cox’s straightforward, Book of Mormon–oriented descriptions reveal only a small, passive part of how women interacted with this scripture.

When LDS women and men accepted the Book of Mormon, they rejected both the Catholic reliance on a line of temporally continuous apostolic power, and the Protestant faith focused on localized leadership and individual interpretation of the Bible. The Book of Mormon introduced a new, American scriptural narrative, and just as importantly, it described a lay apostolic and revelatory power that originated from nineteenth-century visitations by various biblical and extrabiblical characters. This presumably unadulterated divine power cut through what Mormon viewed as centuries of corrupted Christian belief and practice. Well into the twentieth century, viewed as dissenting radicals by the mainstream American religious establishment, LDS faithful lived in a religious culture that scripturally recentered Judeo-Christian religious history within the American context.

Marcel Sarot has argued that the Book of Mormon is an example of Eric Hobsbawm’s concept of an “invented tradition”—but a specifically religious case of this phenomenon (Sarot 2001). Sarot uses Karl Popper’s discussion of tradition as an expansive wedge to make Hobsbawm’s concept more flexible and more relevant to the historical study of religion. Perhaps most usefully, Sarot widens Hobsbawm’s concept to include
not just rituals and symbols, but most aspects of religious life, including narrative and scriptural elements. Sarot explains this concept of tradition:

A tradition is a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules, which presuppose a factual context. Traditions may help us 1. To discern order in a prima facie chaotic world, 2. to know how to act within this world, 3. to participate in groups and communities, 4. to claim an identity for ourselves, 5. to let other people know what we expect of them, and 6. to change the contexts within which we live. These rules seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. Traditions need not be invariable, but they do need to exhibit a certain degree of continuity over time. (Sarot 2001, 27)

For Sarot, traditions are the structuring, but flexible guidelines, assumptions, practices, and expectations that members of a religious community live within and, when necessary, modify.

Sarot is not entirely clear on whether he considers Mormonism as a whole a new tradition and the Book of Mormon simply one aspect of that tradition, or whether he considers the Book of Mormon itself a tradition along with other traditions that make up Mormonism as a religious community—temple rituals, weekly worship, tithing, patriarchal blessings. His interpretation seems to assume that latter, and, as I hope the following discussion demonstrates, the idea that a religious community is made up of numerous, sometimes externally and internally contradictory and changing traditions represents most accurately and usefully how this and other religious groups actually exist and operate. Refining this Hobsbawm-Sarot model, in this case study, women writers were agents of tradition making—one group among many similar agents within their religious community. They looked to the Book of Mormon tradition for guidance, but also provided conflicting, woman-centered guidance on how this tradition was shaped in concert with the other traditions, elements, and membership segments of the Mormon community. Traditions within religious groups are many, and
many even seemingly incompatible individuals, influences, and points of view combine to create them.

As a key tradition within the LDS repositioning of Judeo-Christian culture—from the Mormon point of view, a reawakening—the Book of Mormon created a religious narrative that emphasized the importance of fatherhood and patriarchal authority. Thus, the Book of Mormon tells of a series of prophet-patriarchs who either led their families and communities along the true, godly path, or towards religious destruction. Lawrence Foster has noted this recurring theme of family disorder and structuring in the Book of Mormon: “Indeed, the restoration of family ties was implicit in the commission Joseph Smith said had been given in his vision of September 21, 1823—when, according to his account, the angel Moroni told him that he would bring forth the Book of Mormon” (Foster 1984, 132). The Book of Mormon was to be a definitive model for ideal patriarchal family, gender, and divine interactions.

Founder Joseph Smith sought to redress what he felt was the corrupting imbalance of authority between the genders. For him, the original church had declined because the role of the father within the family and the church had corroded. Smith reacted against a nineteenth-century mainstream American culture that promoted or simply assumed mothers to be the central moral anchor of the family. The nineteenth century was the heyday of what has been termed the “cult of domesticity” and, particularly, the cult of motherhood. By way of describing this ethos, Ann Douglas notes:

The cult of motherhood was nearly as sacred in mid-nineteenth-century America as the belief in some version of democracy. Books on mothers of famous men, especially Mary Washington, mother of George Washington, poured from the presses in the 1840s–1850s; their message was that men achieved greatness because of the instruction and inspiration they received from their mothers. (Douglas 1988, 74)

In the popular and religious press, motherhood was adulated and described in glowing and idealized terms as the foundation of families
and societies. Religion and the family were “feminized,” to use Douglas’ term. Women became domestic and spiritual centers who, through their sacrifice and selflessness, controlled the behavior and characters of their husbands and children.

Smith, and then his successor, Brigham Young, sought to reorder this perceived disorganization by instituting a church based on ascending levels of lay patriarchal, priesthood power, and also establishing the practice of polygamy. Their scriptural, patriarchal focus was reflected transparently in the familial and institutional structures of the LDS Church. They made the father-patriarch the pivot point around which the family and the church rotated. Elizabeth Kane, a sympathetic non-Mormon who visited the LDS community in the 1870s was forcibly struck with the patriarchal focus of the society, likening it to the biblical model in which Smith and Young self-consciously found inspiration: “During my whole stay in Utah, I have found the poetry of the Bible running in my mind. I have felt myself to be living in that old Syrian work amid a people whose ways are like those of the ancient pastoral folk to whom Isaiah spoke” (Kane 1995, 129).

In the Hobsbawm-Sarot model, the Book of Mormon was a tradition that claimed to leapfrog back and activate and reinterpret part of the biblical, Christian narrative in order to provide explanation and continuity for a community undergoing a radical shift in familial and social structure. The Book of Mormon authoritatively explained how and why the patriarch was the driving social, religious, and familial force within the Mormon community. This was how God ordained society in the beginning, and it was how God’s chosen people had to live in order to take part in a reactivated and authentic relationship with God. According to the Book of Mormon, the patriarch was the prophetic figure through whom the community authoritatively received God’s will and God’s words. These patriarch/prophets were the religious light towards which the ancient (and modern) Mormon communities turned for direction. Within the scripture, these patriarchs provided a cohesive narrative that ordered the LDS world, showed members how to act and participate within this world, gave religious models for behavioral
expectations, and, thus, actively changed the religious world in which members lived (Sarot 2001, 27).

This male-centered scriptural, institutional, and social focus did not deter women from joining the LDS Church and embracing the Book of Mormon as a meaningful religious document. However, LDS women did not simply accept the patriarchal focus of the Book of Mormon; they actively interpreted this new scriptural tradition for their own circumstances. At around the time Martha Cragun Cox was making her way across Arizona, as a group, women of the church were undergoing their own time of transition as they moved from limited access to prophetic, revelatory authority and actions, and toward the modern LDS Church where female institutional and prophetic presence is, generally speaking, more circumscribed and controlled. At this crucial time of religious standardization and rationalization (1880–1920), LDS women writers played an important role in how the Book of Mormon was integrated into the modern church. These writers helped to negotiate what parts of the Book of Mormon were interpreted and participated in creating and validating the process of tradition making. They sought to make the scripture effective and meaningful for their own lives and priorities.

To do this, Mormon women writers selectively focused on two Book of Mormon episodes: the story of the stripling warriors and the LDS reinterpretation of the fall and Eve. Publishing in the Woman's Exponent, the semiofficial publication of the Mormon women's auxiliary, the Relief Society, LDS women explored and discussed these stories and, thereby, adapted them to voice female concerns and to support a definable women's culture and authority within the Mormon community. Balancing the Book of Mormon focus on prophet-patriarchs, these women writers emphasized the importance of motherhood within the plan of salvation. By interpreting these stories in conjunction with the Old and New Testaments, as well as through a filter of long-standing

2. For a full discussion of this pivotal time period and its institutional changes, see Alexander 1986.
Victorian gender norms, women writers shared in and shaped the theological discourses of their community.

Further, by presenting these stories within the context of religious, but popular literature, women writers participated in an extended, continuing, and often subtextual discussion about what tradition was and how it should be comprehended and enacted. They played a part in negotiating the theological contents of their religion, but they also helped to structure how their religious community internally understood scriptural tradition, history, and interpretation. At this transitional time, for women writers, the Book of Mormon tradition became a combination of scriptural and authoritative institutional revelation combined with more communal public and literary discussions that were fueled by individual prophetic encounters with the divine. Though ostensibly based in obedience to LDS scripture and institutional, patriarchal prophecy, in this case study, in practice, this Mormon tradition became a kind of contained, textual conversation generated by women.

Sarot has developed the term, “counterfactuals,” in order to better grasp the dynamic of how traditions are generated within religious communities. For Sarot, counterfactuals are events or facts that, from the point of view of scholars or outsiders, are open to question, but, from the point of view of members of a religious community, are major generators of meaning and symbolism. They are events, facts, or concepts that serve as a focus of a new tradition—and that must be believed as fact in order to serve as this focus of the community. He writes, “Thus, though the truth of the counterfactual cannot be ascertained, its untruth should not be established either” (Sarot 2001, 33). Sarot argues that the Book of Mormon is an exception to the rule because members continue to believe in the scripture, though it has been proven that Smith was the author of the scripture and borrowed many points from Ethan Smith’s View of the Hebrews (33). Putting aside the controversy about the origin of the Book of Mormon, about which there are countless scholarly views both within and without the LDS community, perhaps we should not single out the Book of Mormon and Mormonism as an exception to the rule. Most religious groups contain elements
of tradition that outsiders and scholars believe are not factually true, but members accept on some level as truth. Humans are able to hold simultaneously starkly contradictory beliefs—oftentimes without much difficulty, and even with a perceptive self-consciousness. More important to understanding any religious group or tradition within a group is to more fully understand how and why traditions develop and become meaningful and authoritative within a community.

As this case study will show, traditions are not simply generated from above and accepted in toto from the members below. The Book of Mormon as, from Sarot’s point of view, a crucial “counterfactual,” was accepted as divinely generated scripture by most members of the early Mormon community. Yet it had to be adapted and interpreted in order to function effectively within the community; it had to be integrated into existing and emerging social, cultural, and religious structures and traditions. In this instance, LDS women writers who also lived within a larger American culture that espoused rather different gender values from their chosen faith community, selected certain, relevant episodes within the narrative. Then, utilizing other traditions within the Mormon community, including direct, individual access to God, they spun out further interpretive possibilities for a seemingly inflexible and unchangeable scriptural tradition. As they negotiated and tested the elements of their religious community, LDS women writers and readers created their own scriptural, interpretive subtradition that inevitably influenced the more general Mormon scriptural tradition. Here, a tradition was so effective because it claimed to hark back to older days, but also because it was made relevant to the present day by those who had to deal with these present-day realities.

**Necessary preconditions to negotiation: Literary and revelatory opportunities**

Women were able to participate in the shaping of their community and their scriptural tradition because they had access to authoritative literary means—and they had issues on which they could speak
authoritatively. These developments are essential to understand as a prelude to setting up how and why LDS women writers participated in scriptural discussions.

The years 1880–1920 saw a renaissance in Mormon women’s literature. The *Woman’s Exponent* was the most important forum in which women of the LDS Church stretched their literary wings—it was a key part of this female literary efflorescence. The *Exponent* was founded in 1872 with the permission and encouragement of then church prophet, Brigham Young. However, its status within the Mormon community was ambiguous because of its somewhat fuzzy relationship with the Relief Society.

The Relief Society was the women’s auxiliary of the LDS Church that was begun in 1842 on impetus of women of the church, but with the blessing of then prophet, Joseph Smith. The organization was disbanded shortly after this when women members, including Smith’s wife, Emma Smith, openly opposed the practice of polygamy that Smith was advocating at this time. The organization was gradually and locally, and, finally, formally reorganized in Utah under the leadership of Eliza R. Snow, a plural wife of Smith and then Young, and a woman who was considered to be a prophetess because of her poetic talents and her ties to the first church prophets.

In its early Utah incarnation, the Relief Society was somewhere between a woman’s parallel to the priesthood and a church auxiliary for women. Like the priesthood, it was organized from the ward (parish) to general level and had similar, repeating levels of triadic and committee leadership. However, key leaders at all levels were selected and installed by male leaders of the church. Though members of the Relief Society did perform semiformal blessings on women before childbirth confinement, or on women who had reproductive or health problems, for the most part, members of the Relief Society looked after the less fortunate women and children of their communities, and also assisted families at times of childbirth, sickness, and death. The Relief Society had a distinctly practical, charitable mission. Nonetheless, the organization had a fairly wide range of autonomy within the church. Relief Society
members collected and maintained their own funds with which they supported the needy, built their own Relief Society meeting places, and ran the basic programs of the auxiliary.\(^3\)

The *Woman's Exponent* had a similar, parallel existence. The tabloid-formatted periodical was financed with subscriptions and edited by women. Emmeline B. Wells was the editor for the lion’s share of the periodical’s existence, beginning her term in 1877 and stepping down only when the *Exponent* ended its run in 1914. The periodical was often described as the “organ” of the Relief Society.\(^4\) Though the Relief Society did not directly fund the *Exponent*, at least one president of the Relief Society urged that local Relief Societies appoint women to collect subscriptions among local members (“The Jubilee Celebration” 1892, 132). The *Exponent* reported and vigorously supported the Relief Society, extensively describing the work and meetings of the organization from the local to the general level. In turn, members of the Relief Society actively drummed up support for the *Exponent*. However, legally and officially, the two organizations remained separate. In many ways, this is a representative snapshot of how the LDS Church as a whole operated at this time; a certain decentralization and informality linked together members and their various church-related projects.

Throughout her tenure, Wells vigorously solicited subscriptions to keep the periodical on its feet, and she also strongly encouraged Mormon women to contribute their work for publication.\(^5\) The *Exponent* carried a wide range of genres including poetry, essays, reports, stories,

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3. For details on the history and work of the Relief Society, see Derr et al. 1992.
4. “Brigham Young and Eliza R. Snow started the Woman’s Exponent, over forty years ago … made it the organ of the Relief Society of the Church” (“Second Literary Child” 1915, 38).
5. Wells frequently inserted notices within the *Exponent* that encouraged women to support the paper with subscriptions (“Notice to Agents” 1891, 4). However, just as frequently she encouraged her readers to send in submissions for publication. In one instance, she exhorted her readers: “Sisters, if you have ideas that will benefit others put them upon paper and send them to the press, they will reach a larger number of people in that way, and by that means you may be sowing some good seed that will eventually bear fruit” (“Editorial Notes” 1891, 69).
sermons, obituaries, and epigrams—women could contribute just about any kind of literary work on just about any subject. This was a women's periodical dedicated to issues of interest to women, but it was also a religiously focused publication dedicated to spreading information and news about the LDS Church to members and nonmembers alike.

Though Wells continually and often unsuccessfully attempted to increase the flow of submissions, she was especially effective in inspiring those she knew personally to write for the *Exponent*. In addition to her editorship, Wells was a highly placed woman within the Relief Society central leadership, and a plural wife to Daniel Wells, a counselor in the church presidency of Brigham Young. Wells’ close friends were often women who were similarly highly placed in the Relief Society leadership, or with close ties to the central male leadership circle of the church. The women who wrote for the *Exponent*, therefore, often were well respected by both men and women members of the LDS community.

As mentioned above, one of these women, Relief Society President Eliza R. Snow was believed to communicate prophetic thoughts by means of her poetry. She converted her poem, “Oh, My Father,” into a hymn that became widely popular within the church throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries. In many ways, Snow was the model for women to follow in combining literary and spiritual work in order to speak convincingly, theologically, and nonconfrontationally. She started a Mormon tradition of (often elite) women using poetic and literary means to speak with authoritative voices—voices that communicated by means of the *Exponent*, and had strong and deep resonance in the institutional church.

One of the reasons that Snow and her literary successors were able to speak theologically and authoritatively was that Mormonism held within it another, more general, formal tradition of individual revelation and access to the divine by every individual. Joseph Smith established this crucial LDS tradition when he described receiving visitations from God, Jesus, and angels while still a teenager. Even more relevant according to Mormon history, Smith translated the Book of Mormon while still in his early twenties. Members of the LDS Church felt that the communication and connection with the divine had been reopened in the latter days,
and while they looked to prophetic leaders such as Smith and Young for guidance, they also felt compelled by these weighty examples to find their own truths and answers from the ultimate divine source.

We see this understanding practice throughout the women’s sources of this time period. In the July 15, 1884, edition of the *Exponent*, an author identified only as M. wrote approvingly about the increasing number of women writers in Utah, arguing forcefully that they were simply and by divine necessity expressing their connection and inspiration from God.

But why should not the women of Utah be able to write, and to write glorious sentiments, too? Are they not living under the voice and influence of inspiration? Have they not the Spirit of God within them to guide their thoughts and expression? And why should they not be permitted to write? The time has come when the Lord is not only willing that their voices shall be heard in the land, but His Spirit calls upon them to speak, and they feel that they must do it. The testimony of the truth which they have often borne to each other is burning within them and they feel they must give it to the world. (M. 1884, 31–21)

The author goes on to argue that though rough and difficult missionary work was not open to women, writing was the appropriate form for women to contribute to the community’s internal and external missionary work. The *Exponent* communicated the personal religious testimonies and revelations of Mormon women to each other, and to the wider reading audience.

As the twentieth century progressed, public expression of personal revelation declined as the leadership of the LDS Church sought to standardize institutional structures and practices. The Relief Society also lost much of its limited autonomy and existence as this standardization process moved through all parts of the church. But, for the years we are

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6. Thomas G. Alexander has written extensively on this process of centralization and standardization that began in the late nineteenth century and accelerated as the twentieth century progressed (Alexander 1986).
examining, women writers, especially women of the elite inner circle of leadership, had access to a literary vehicle of expression designed purposefully to showcase and encourage their theological, revelatory expressions. Their literary voices were extensions of the wider, Mormon tradition of individual revelation, and, following the example of Eliza Snow, also deepened a Mormon subtradition of women speaking authoritatively through textual and literary means. It was from within this LDS female literary tradition that women contributed to the wider, scriptural Book of Mormon tradition.

Women in the Book of Mormon: A tradition of negotiation

The Book of Mormon introduced very few new women characters into Mormon theological discussions. Only three Book of Mormon women characters are mentioned by name—Sariah, Abish, and Isabel—and even these three are only minor players in the overarching narrative of the scriptures. For the most part, in the Book of Mormon, women are mentioned in the collective and usually in reference to family connections as mothers, wives, and daughters.

Therefore, it should not be surprising that a collective female character is one of the most mentioned and most meaningful Book of Mormon figure within LDS women’s literature. The mothers of the stripling warriors appear in the book of Alma in a description of one of the continuing conflicts between factions of the Nephites and Lamanites. The Nephites were the descendants of the first Book of Mormon patriarch Lehi’s godly son, Nephi, and the Lamanites were the descendants

7. An article in the Woman’s Exponent noted: “It is somewhat noticeable how little prominence is given to womankind in the historical narrative of the Book of Mormon, and unfortunately when mention is made of her it too frequently grows out of man’s sins and her misfortunes” (G. 1880, 7–8).

8. Sariah has the greatest part to play. As the wife of Lehi, the first prophet of the Book of Mormon who leads his family from Jerusalem to the Americas, she even appears in dialogue with her husband and family. She appears in the dialogue of 1 Nephi 5:1–8 at first berating her husband for his prophesying and then praising God for leading and inspiring her family.
of Lehi’s rebellious son, Laman. In this particular episode, a group of Lamanites had gone over to the side of the Nephites and had pledged not to shed any more blood so that, in the ensuing armed conflicts, they were not able to help their Nephite allies. Their culturally Nephite sons had not taken this pledge and, so, two thousand of them gathered under the command of the Nephite leader Helaman. They were very young and had never fought in a war. Nevertheless, before their first conflict with the Lamanites, they were not afraid because “they had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them” (Alma 56:47). And, indeed, they not only successfully routed the Lamanites, all two thousand survived the battle because “they had fought as if with the strength of God; yea, never were men known to have fought with such miraculous strength” (Alma 56:56). After this first conflict, sixty more young boys joined the group and they once again proved themselves and their mothers’ faith as they defended a Nephite city from the Lamanites without a single death, even as their allies in the Nephite army fell by the hundreds (Alma 57:18–27).

These unnamed, yet aggressively influential mothers spoke most meaningfully to Mormon women living in the late nineteenth century. As noted, when Joseph Smith instituted polygamous families modeled on his interpretation of the Old Testament patriarchal families, he attempted to reverse the Victorian trend that put women at the spiritual center of the home. Yet Victorian gender norms lingered and even prospered harmoniously in the LDS community. An 1880 editorial in the Woman’s Exponent stated: “It is conceded that woman’s nature is more susceptible to spiritual impressions and the growth and culture of these finer faculties than that of man, that women possess a greater degree of the elements of character that tend heavenward that lead to the worship of a Supreme Being” (Lack of Spirituality” 1880, 92). Following this common understanding, LDS women writers selected and focused on the silently influential mothers of the stripling warriors as among the most relevant female role models in the Book of Mormon. For an era

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9. The stripling warriors and their fathers are first mentioned in Alma 53:10–22.
that elevated to truism the saying “the hand that rocks the cradle, rules the world,” these unnamed, but powerfully influential mothers stood out. These mothers took precedence in women’s literary discussions about the Book of Mormon.

The June 1880 issue of the Exponent offered on its first page an article entitled “The influence of the Home” that extols the far-reaching influence of the mother and home. This same issue carried an article titled “Woman amongst the Nephites.” The article mentions very briefly the three named women of the Book of Mormon and then goes on to speak in generalities about the relatively elevated position of Israelite and Nephite women (G. 1880). Unintentionally picking up themes from the first article on the influence of the home, the author, however, devotes a long paragraph to the story of the mothers of the stripling warriors, noting:

Their mothers’ teachings and their mothers’ prayers were weapons of destruction to their foes and shields of defence to themselves. They went forth conquering and to conquer, and the All-seeing One only knows how much the teachings of those saintly women effected towards the preservation of the Nephite commonwealth from imminent destruction. (G. 1880, 7–8)

The anonymity of the mothers of the stripling warriors confirmed their prophetic authenticity. Balancing the Book of Mormon focus on patriarchal prophets, this author combined contemporary gender norms with authoritative scriptural narrative to reemphasize the spiritual importance, even precedence of the mother. Unnamed and unknown, these mothers saved their community with their faith physically and militarily embodied in their soldier sons.

Throughout Mormon women’s literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, LDS women writers were very engaged with another scriptural mother—the mother of all humanity—Eve. Eve is

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10. “All our great men and women who have obtained notoriety for their works, say that to home, and most of all to their mothers, is due credit for fame they have gained” (World 1880, 1).
one of the few women characters who crosses over from the Bible and appears in the Mormon scriptures. In their work, LDS women writers pulled together different strands of the Mormon and biblical scriptural narratives in order to fully renovate and elevate the figure of Eve and, more generally, mothers. In these textual conversations, we see even more clearly how women writers argued for the theological vitality of women in LDS history, past and present.

The most important part of this renovation lies in the Mormon reinterpretation of the fall. The fall became a necessary step within the overarching movement towards progressive salvation. In a deathbed sermon, the first Book of Mormon patriarch, Lehi, reveals to his sons this new view of the fall. Lehi initially appears to be rehearsing a fairly standard version of the traditional biblical story of the fall: the devil as a serpent tempts Eve with the forbidden fruit, and Adam and Eve eat and are cast out of garden with the various curses laid upon them. However, the story here takes a different turn as Lehi explains that this seeming transgression actually is an absolutely integral part of God’s plan for humanity’s spiritual progress. He says:

> And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed, he would not have fallen; but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created, must have remained in the same state which they were, after they were created; and they must have remained for ever, and had no end. And they would have had no children; wherefore, they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin. (2 Nephi 2:22–23)

At this time, the Mormon plan of salvation promised that humans could become divinized and participate in the process of the creation and divinization of other worlds. However, a key part of this divinization was that humans required the knowledge of good and evil and

11. The most famous explication of this concept is “The King Follett Discourse,” a funeral sermon delivered by Joseph Smith upon the death of a man named King Follett. For a full text of the sermon, see Larson 1976.
the will to freely choose the right path over the wrong way. Human beings were literal spirit children of God and his female divine partner. Originally born into a preexistent state, they had to be born into human bodies in order to be tested in the mortal existence. Utilizing their knowledge and their free will, ideally, they proved themselves as they suffered and found their way past the stumbling blocks of mortality to the final destination of ultimate divinization.

The LDS scriptures revise the story of the fall, but, significantly, they do not positively refashion the image of Eve. In the above story and in a different retelling of the fall in another part of the Mormon scriptures, the Pearl of Great Price, Eve is described as unwittingly falling for blandishments of the serpent devil, even though the ultimate outcome of the scenario is necessary and good (Moses 4–5). God the Father controls the situation and steers it to his own liking. When Lehi described the fall as necessary, it is Adam who does the falling, not Eve, even though just a few paragraphs before it is clearly Eve who gives in to the serpent. In the Mormon scriptural stories, therefore, though the fall is reinterpreted, there is little that directly acquits Eve for her role as the one who initiates the necessary series of events—or that valorizes her for her world-changing choice.

When we examine Mormon women’s literature of this period, we see an extended and lively conversation about Eve. Negative interpretations of Eve persist in some good form throughout the literature. This is not surprising given that, at this period, a large number of church members were first generation converts still carrying with them beliefs from the religions of their upbringings. In one case, assuming that Eve’s act was rebelliousness against God and needed punishment, the unnamed writer of an article on polygamy claims that the marriage practice serves

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12. A few lines down, Lehi states: “And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great mediation of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil, for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself” (2 Nephi 2:27).

13. As one example of a more positive evaluation of Eve, in another part of the scriptures, the Doctrines and Covenants, Joseph Smith has a vision of heaven that includes “our glorious Mother Eve” (Doctrines and Covenants 138:39).
as compensatory and intensive suffering that will eventually lead to the lifting of Eve’s curse. Similarly, the pseudonymous Hehmita uses the serpent in the garden as an example of how women needed to be especially careful to guard against spiritual fraud and deception: “This very monster appeared before Mother Eve in the Garden of Eden; ‘imitating’ all the affability he recollected having seen in the Mansions of Glory; for if possible, to elude aversion, and fascinate Eve, so she should not be able to discern the fraud” (Hehmita 1881, 121). In these two examples, the writers fit the negative interpretation of Eve into characteristically LDS discussions about polygamy and the best way to lead a virtuous life. An unwitting Eve is deceived, though presumably according to God’s plan. The mission for modern women was to avoid or make up for their ancestor’s mistakes.

More commonly, however, within Mormon women’s literature of the time, Eve is a wise and knowing woman who—somehow already in the possession of free will—safely guides the course of human salvation on the right path. God gives her the choice and she makes the right decision. Eve becomes a savior figure: she introduces necessary mortality and suffering that Jesus will end upon his Second Coming.

Sometimes women writers simply assume a renovated Eve in their descriptions. Hannah T. King wrote a series of articles for the *Exponent* about women of the scriptures. She begins the series with Eve: “Eve, the sovereign mother of all living. She stands in close proximity to God the Father, for she is the life giving spirit of the innumerable hosts that have figured upon this earth, the one grand, stupendous act of her life is all that is told of her in the Bible and it is enough” (King 1903, 41–42). In another instance, an article describes how Brigham Young walked into a woman’s meeting and, in awe at the powerful female spiritual presence

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14. “The effect of their [plural wives’] examples upon the rising generation will be of immense value, and as the generations roll by nobler types of womanhood will be developed, until the penalty laid upon woman in the beginning, that ‘thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee,’ will be repealed, and she will stand side by side with man, full of that queenly dignity and self-control which will make her his suitable companion rather than his inferior” (Topics of the Times’ 1884, 157).
he felt, he exclaimed: “What do I see before me? A congregation of Eves” (“Utah County Silk Association” 1880, 56).

Sometimes women writers are much more self-conscious that they are arguing against the grain. An unnamed author, using Lehi’s speech about the fall, wrote into the Cincinnati Enquirer arguing forcefully that the blame must be lifted from Eve. The article was reprinted in the Exponent. Noting that blame for the fall was usually assigned fully to Eve, the article suggests that, from the point of view of the Mormon understanding of salvation, Adam appears as the potential threat: “We could with as much propriety accuse him of being less ambitious and enterprising than the woman; ‘if he could do only as he was told,’ as the writer says, ‘he would be no higher in the scale of moral being than the beasts, who indeed know neither virtue nor vice’” (“Answer to Woman and Sin” 1884, 145). For this author, it is Eve who took the risk of divine wrath to bequeath to humanity potential divinity. She is the unsung and unfairly maligned hero of the story.

Perhaps the most eloquent advocate for the reinterpreted Eve was S. W. Richards, a male church leader who often contributed to the Exponent. In an 1894 essay, he very clearly spells out the eternal consequences of Eve’s actions. “When in the garden, woman was master of the situation; for a time she held the destiny of the world in her hands, and not until man yielded to her persuasive power did she commit that destiny to the keeping of her lord” (S. W. Richards 1894, 81). According to Richards, Eve pleaded with Adam to join her: “to share with her the conditions by which, and by which alone, they could become as Gods, knowing both good and evil, and thereby inherit those attributes without which there is no God” (81). In these views, a fully cognizant Eve must argue with her mate—not to deceive him, but to persuade him to join in the unpleasant task of initiating the slog through mortality so that humans have the opportunity to reach a final salvation, a final divinization. A Victorian-styled Eve stands at the spiritual center of the first family and quietly uses her influence for the good, then fades into the background, only reappearing to sacrificially take unfair blame.

Somewhere in between the negative and positive interpretations of this female scriptural figure, Eve becomes a polemical, even humorous
vehicle for discussion about the respective roles of men and women. In a lecture before a local Utah W.S.A. (Women's Suffrage Association), Amelia B. Sidwell dismisses the blame attached to Eve, noting that she was forced to wander alone for ages in a garden, deprived of her female companions that she knew in the preexistence. Her only company was Adam, who, Sidwell argues: “If I am allowed to judge Adam by most men of my acquaintance, he was probably very indifferent company, as men’s conversational brilliance is seldom exerted to any considerable extent for the benefit or entertainment of a wife” (Sidwell 1890, 136).

Taking a slightly different tack, L. L. Greene Richards poetically and enviously imagines Eve’s idyllic existence in the garden where she had nothing to do but enjoy the beautiful nature:

No dishes to wash after breakfast,
No planning of what to have next,
For luncheons or dinner or supper,
No man disappointed and vexed. (L. L. G. Richards 1899, 28)

LDS women writers utilized a now unfairly maligned Eve as a kind of literary catharsis to release frustration about their own seemingly mundane troubles and injustices. The woman who set humans on the path to divinization through humanization offered a model of how to think about the complicated religious question of free will and the purpose of mortal life. She also served as a literary safety valve for women to express their frustrations about the daily grind of dishes, meals, and family obligations. She gave women writers an opportunity to directly, though nonconfrontationally, critique the patriarchal family structure so emphasized in the Book of Mormon. For these writers, she was a creative, female model in an otherwise overwhelmingly male scriptural lineup.

Interestingly and tellingly, today, within official talks and pronouncements, the dominant interpretation of Eve is overwhelmingly positive.\(^\text{15}\) Eve (often in conjunction with Adam) is shown to have

15. One of the Twelve Apostles, Elder Dallin Oaks, noted in a general conference talk: “It was Eve who first transgressed the limits of Eden in order to initiate the
consciously made the right choice for her descendants and, thus, to have been a crucial player in the Mormon plan of salvation. Women’s early literary work helped to create this scriptural interpretation, and the tradition of noncentralized Mormon scriptural, prophetic discussions that continue within both formal and informal church talks, testimonies, periodicals, and books—despite the more controlled and standardized twenty-first century church. Even today lively intra- and extrachurch interchanges continue about how to interpret the Book of Mormon. In the March 2004 *Sunstone*, a Mormon magazine not affiliated with the church, four LDS members of varying professions and backgrounds wrestle with how to reconcile the Book of Mormon claims of an Israelite descent for Native American with the DNA evidence that Native Americans are genetically related to Asian populations (*Sunstone* 2004). As a vital religious tradition, the Book of Mormon continues to be interpreted and adapted in order to fit the changing social, cultural, and in this case, scientific context within which Mormon members live.

**Conclusion**

Added to the existing biblical tradition, the Book of Mormon shaped the beliefs and practices of the Mormon community. As with many millennialist groups of the early to mid-nineteenth century United States, within the early LDS community, religious traditions—especially as these were manifested in established clergy or institutional authority—were examined with deep skepticism and suspicion. For LDS members, this new scripture upended American Christianity, and the understanding of tradition as an abstract concept. With the opening of direct communication with God, members looked to fresh prophecy and scripture for guidance. When Joseph Smith described his first, teenaged vision,

conditions of mortality. Her act, whatever its nature, was formally a transgression but eternally a glorious necessity to open the doorway toward eternal life. Adam showed his wisdom by doing the same. And thus Eve and ‘Adam fell that men might be’ (2 Ne. 2:25)” (Oaks 1993).
he offered a new and different alternative to the established religious institutions of the day.

However, LDS members inevitably adapted these “new” scriptural and prophetic traditions to fit times and circumstances. In the religious, popular women’s literature of the *Exponent*, we see part of the process of how women writers communally sculpted the scriptural tradition. We see the give-and-take about the role of women within the Mormon theological and scriptural tradition. We see also how, in practice, the women writers of the community negotiated their LDS revelatory understanding of authority; how they moved between newly established scripture, current social norms, and the personal revelatory aspect of Mormonism that was to them so important a part of latter-day communication between God and the church. Christian history was stood on its head with a new set of scriptures, at the same time that the concept of scriptural tradition was redefined. Mormon women writers helped to create another conception of this tradition in which individual, in this case mostly female, voices participated in a negotiating, theological discussion in order to adapt the Book of Mormon to their nineteenth-century women’s lives. For a time, women writers created theological discourse and, thereby, helped to establish the parameters of theological, scriptural tradition for their religious community.

With this case study, we see that religious groups are made up of multiple traditions as described in the Hobsbawm-Sarot model. Further, these traditions provide meaning, structure, and stability to members of religious groups. But, we also see that traditions are not simply imposed from above. The successful tradition is one that passes through many different interpretive hands. Finally, when we look very closely, we witness that even within religious traditions, there are multiple and contradictory interpretations and voices. Traditions are continually negotiated, and shifting. They can never be fully grasped, because individuals and groups are always adapting them to fit personal, historical, and cultural circumstances. They are the ever-shifting foundations upon which religious communities stand.
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Biblical *Merismus* in Book of Mormon

Gospel References

*Noel B. Reynolds*

This study extends concepts presented in two previously published works\(^1\) that identify three *inclusios*\(^2\) in the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi ...

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An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2015 annual Society of Biblical Literature meeting, November 23, 2015, in Atlanta, Georgia.


2. *Inclusio* is a common technique used by biblical writers to mark off a text unit by repeating at the end of the unit a word or phrase or sentence used at the beginning. These three Book of Mormon passages are marked off with obvious *inclusios* featuring “the doctrine of Christ,” “this is my doctrine,” and “this is my gospel” respectively. While Nephi constructed the first, the second two are embedded in the material quoted from Jesus Christ. In “Chiastic Structuring of Large Texts: Second Nephi as a Case Study,” publication pending, I demonstrate that 2 Nephi can be read as a series of thirteen *inclusios* arranged to provide a chiastic structure to the book that also communicates his principal thesis.

Richard G. Moulton may have been the first to describe “envelope figures” in Hebrew poetry in *The Literary Study of the Bible* (Boston: DC Heath, 1898), 53–54. Already known as “ring compositions” in classical rhetoric, later Bible scholars followed Moulton and called them “envelope structures,” or more commonly today, just *inclusios*. While *inclusio* was first recognized in poetry, it also occurs in prose contexts. “Indeed, there are no literary devices that are exclusive to poetry.” *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, and Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter...
—each *inclusio* presenting the same definition of the doctrine or gospel of Jesus Christ. However, none of the three statements of the definition is presented in the way that modern readers might expect. Each offers a series of statements focusing on different actions or events that are related to each other as parts of *the way* that leads to eternal life. On first reading, the statements could easily seem disconnected or even contradictory. But, as the two earlier studies demonstrate, when all the statements and their repeated elements are examined cumulatively, a well-defined account of the gospel emerges. The process by which men and women can come to Christ and be saved is clear and multisteped—though the picture of the whole is almost never fully articulated in one place. Instead, readers of the Book of Mormon find a series of partial statements of this gospel—each of which is designed to add detail and complexity.

My 1991 study presented preliminary evidence that this pattern of presentation corresponds to the rhetorical pattern of merismus, particularly as it occurs in the Bible. In this paper, I will show not only that this same meristic approach to defining or describing the gospel occurs in these three definitional passages, but also that it permeates the entire text of the Book of Mormon. From Nephi at the beginning to Mormon and Moroni at the end, hundreds of references to the gospel occur in meristic form. As I have wrestled with this textual phenomenon over the years, I have found that the rhetorical device of *merismus* provides the most helpful explanation of how these passages work together to convey and reinforce a single message.

The occurrence of biblical *merismus* is consistent with the fact that students of the Book of Mormon have for many decades been finding

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3. I continue to be grateful to Paul Y. Hoskisson who first suggested that I consider merismus as a possible explanation for this pattern in the Book of Mormon.
striking evidences of rhetorical complexity in this text.\textsuperscript{4} John W. Welch’s dramatic discovery of chiasms in the Book of Mormon, which resembled and even exceeded the artistry of biblical chiasms, encouraged readers to be more aware of the rhetorical structures and strategies that might be present in the text. More recently, I have argued that the greatly enlarged understanding of Hebrew rhetoric that developed among Bible scholars during the second half of the twentieth century offers exciting new applications and interpretation possibilities for Book of Mormon students.\textsuperscript{5} Nephi’s opening reference to “all the learning of my father” (1 Nephi 1:1) makes more sense when readers realize that Nephi would have been educated in Jerusalem at the end of the seventh century BCE when the development of Hebrew rhetoric had reached its apex. My own initial foray in an attempt to apply the basic principles of Hebrew rhetoric to 2 Nephi proved promising, as I show in an as-yet-unpublished paper.\textsuperscript{6} The writers of the Book of Mormon, it would seem, had two semi-independent sources of understanding for Hebrew rhetoric: (1) the Hebrew Bible itself, or the parts thereof which they had brought with them from Jerusalem in 600 BCE, and (2) the tutelage of their father Nephi, who claims to have been educated in Jerusalem at the very time when the canons of Hebrew rhetoric were in full flower and just before the cultural destruction that came with the Babylonian conquest of Judea.


\textsuperscript{5} Noel B. Reynolds, “The Return of Rhetorical Analysis to Bible Studies,” \textit{Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture} 17 (2016): 91–98, which is a bibliographical essay focused on leading works in Hebrew rhetoric by Roland Meynet and Jack Lundbom.

\textsuperscript{6} Noel B. Reynolds, “Chiastic Structuring of Large Texts: Second Nephi as a Case Study,” August 26, 2016.
Merismus as a rhetorical device

When E. W. Bullinger identified merismos as a biblical figure of speech in 1898, he saw it principally as enumeration of the parts of a whole, following the model of Greek rhetoric. That understanding has been extended considerably by later Bible scholars; the classic treatment recognized today was published by A. M. Honeyman in 1952. The small list of subsequent studies is acknowledged in Wilfred G. E. Watson’s 1984 guide to classical Hebrew poetry, but he still acknowledges Honeyman’s analysis of merismus as fundamental. In the Hebrew Bible, merismus occurs as concise or condensed expressions that, by mentioning two or more prominent elements of a series, invoke the complete larger entity implicitly. Similarly, David M. Howard says, “Merismus is a figure of speech in which a subject is broken into two or more essential (usually complementary) parts, which nevertheless signify the whole.” Honeyman explains:

Merismus, which is a figure of speech akin in some respects to synecdoche, consists in detailing the individual members, or some of them—usually the first and last, or the more prominent—of a series, and thereby indicating either the genus of which those members are species or the abstract quality which characterizes


the genus and which the species have in common. Symbolically expressed, merismus is the brachylogous [elliptical] use of A+Y or A+B+Y or A+X+Y in place of the complete series A+B+C . . . +X+Y to represent the collective Z of which the individuals A to Y are members, or the abstract z which is their common characteristic.11

Watson has explained that “merismus is the expression of totality by the mention of representative parts of that totality.”12

When a totality is expressed in abbreviated form, we are dealing with merismus. . . . The significant point is that in merismus, of whatever form, it is not the individual elements themselves that matter but what they amount to together, as a unit. . . . Merismus, then, belongs to metonymy (the part for the whole) and is a form of ellipsis, akin to hendiadys. . . . It is the total concept that is important; the components are not significant in isolation. Merismus, then, is an abbreviated way of expressing a totality.13

Tremper Longman and Peter Enns have more recently undertaken to explain this to nonrhetoricians:

Merism is a literary device that uses an abbreviated list to suggest the whole. The most common type of merism cites the poles of a list to suggest everything in between, though the term merism is also used to refer to more extensive, but not exhaustive, lists. Since a merism is a part for a whole, it is an example of synecdoche, which itself is a subspecies of metonymy (a trope of association in which one term stands for another, typically broader, term) rather than metaphor (a trope of comparison).14

While Old Testament “merism occurs most frequently in poetry, … it is also found in prose.” Like other forms of ellipsis, it is one of the devices that contributes to the distinctive terseness of Hebrew poetry and prose by using “abbreviated lists to suggest the whole.” Longman offers his own translation of Psalm 139:2–3 as an example:

You know when I sit and when I rise,
    you discern my thoughts from afar.
You discern my going out and my lying down,
    you are familiar with all my ways.

Here sitting and rising are only parts of a man’s intentional acting, and his goings and lyings down are only parts of “all [his] ways.” But as merisms, these abbreviations bring all a man’s thoughts and all his actions to the table; God knows them all.

Merismus in the Book of Mormon

Of the various forms of merismus identified by scholars, the most common, and the one that best matches the Book of Mormon presentations of the gospel, is the “meristic list,” which tends to have three characteristics: (1) brevity, (2) an implied or expressed totality, and (3) enumerated items belonging to the same level. To illustrate the concept of same level, Watson points to Isaiah 3:18–23, which lists some items that are all part of dress finery:

In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments about their feet, and their cauls, and their round tires like the moon,
    The chains, and the bracelets, and the mufflers,
    The bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the earrings,

17. Watson, Classical Hebrew Poetry, 322.
The rings, and nose jewels,
The changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins,
The glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the veils. (Isaiah 3:18–23)

Perhaps the most famous merism in the Old Testament is the seven-times-repeated “from Dan even to Beer-sheba,” which also occurs twice in the reverse order. The point of all nine of these is to evoke in the reader’s mind the concept not only of the two tribes that mark the north and south borders of Israel and Judea, but also of the full list of other unmentioned tribes and their assigned lands that lie between Dan in the north and Beer-sheba in the south.

When understood as a formula composed of six ordered elements, the gospel presented in the Book of Mormon lends itself well to this rhetorical device. By mention of two or more of the six elements, and by frequently including the sixth element—salvation or eternal life—a writer can immediately invoke all six components of the formula in the minds of readers.

The six elements that define the gospel or doctrine of Jesus Christ in the texts described above are faith in Jesus Christ (F), repentance (R), baptism of water (W), baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost (H), enduring to the end (E), and salvation or eternal life (S). A typical Book of Mormon gospel merism, like the one found in 2 Nephi 33:4, states that believing in Jesus and enduring to the end is life eternal. While repentance, water baptism, and baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost are not mentioned here, these are all treated as additional essential elements in closely related passages. The presentation of the gospel in the text features abbreviated statements that only reveal the full six elements when the separate statements are considered cumulatively. When readers fail to recognize these abbreviated statements as merisms that point to each other and that are intended to invoke the full six-element formula in

18. See Judges 20:1; 1 Samuel 3:20; 2 Samuel 3:10; 17:11; 24:2, 15; 1 Kings 4:25; and with the order reversed in 1 Chronicles 21:2 and 2 Chronicles 30:5.
their minds, they can rush to the conclusion that the text is not clear or even consistent with itself.

The 2015 SJT paper, which updates the 1991 study, identified 150 references to the six gospel elements in the three core passages—as is summarized in table 1.¹⁹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gospel element</th>
<th>2 Nephi 31</th>
<th>3 Nephi 11–15</th>
<th>3 Nephi 27</th>
<th>Subtotal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repentance</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptism</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holy Ghost</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enduring</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saved</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>64</strong></td>
<td><strong>48</strong></td>
<td><strong>38</strong></td>
<td><strong>150</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 reports the items that were repeated in these three passages. Accumulating repeated items made it possible to identify six essential elements and then to see that any statement specifying one or more of them implicitly invokes the full six-element formula as an implied context for understanding that statement. In this paper, I will extend the analysis beyond these three passages to show that this same pattern of meristic (sometimes termed “elliptical”) reference to the full list of gospel elements characterizes gospel discourse throughout the Book of Mormon. It should be clarified that no gospel merisms occur in material quoting Jaredite prophets. Almost all the book of Ether was written by Moroni, the last Nephite prophet, including the four merisms from that book included in the tables below.

Another level

The way meristic statements of this gospel formula are combined in these three definitional passages goes beyond any use of merismus that has been noted in the Bible. In each of these passages, and especially

¹⁹. This table was published first in my “Gospel according to Mormon,” 234.
in 2 Nephi 31, the varied combinations of gospel elements are used artfully by the writer to add meaning to the formula itself and to enrich understanding of the interconnections and dynamics between the six elements. By using merismus, the writer can focus attention in any sentence on two or three specific gospel elements while expecting the reader to keep the whole formula in mind as context for each specific statement. This goes beyond the shorthand or abbreviating function of most biblical merismus by enlisting the technique intensively and pedagogically to expand the reader’s understanding of the shared formula—thereby taking merismus to a whole new level of rhetorical effect. Further, biblical examples usually feature physical things such as geographical entities, body parts, or anything else from human experience with parts that can be listed. The Book of Mormon writers may be alone in using merismus to illuminate doctrines of salvation. But in doing so, they highlight their shared commitment to the same doctrine across the centuries of Nephite belief in Jesus Christ. In so doing, they preserved the form in which Jesus Christ presented his gospel in 3 Nephi 11 and 27 and in which Nephi framed his presentation of the gospel in 2 Nephi 31 as it was taught to him by the Father and the Son.

The first and foremost of these passages is 2 Nephi 31, in which the prophet Nephi quotes repeatedly from a vision he had received over forty years earlier. Here, at the end of his writing, he expands his earlier brief description of the baptism of Jesus Christ, as it had been shown to him centuries before the fact, to now include his previously unreported experience of being taught the gospel or doctrine of Jesus Christ by the Father and the Son, as he heard their voices explaining to him the baptismal scene he was seeing. In an uninterrupted series of twenty-three meristic statements of the gospel, the now aging Nephi interweaves six quotations from these deities with his own conclusions

20. This chapter is analyzed both in context and in detail in Noel B. Reynolds, “The Gospel according to Nephi: An Essay on 2 Nephi 31,” Religious Educator 16/2 (2015): 51–75. By withholding this key element from the initial report of his great vision, Nephi can use it later to anchor his larger rhetorical strategy—both for 2 Nephi itself, and for the thematic relationship he designs between the books of 1 and 2 Nephi.
and understandings to produce what becomes the foundational account of Christ’s gospel as it would be taught by Nephite prophets throughout the Book of Mormon.

The analysis of 2 Nephi 31 yielded insights about the Book of Mormon’s six-part conception of the gospel of Jesus Christ that apply readily to the other two *inclusios* and, as will be shown below, to the rest of the book.

While these six basic elements of the doctrine or gospel of Christ are each mentioned multiple times in Nephi’s brief exposition, it is only at the end that he brings them all together. In all previous discussions, these elements are stated in terms of a multitude of interconnections between different combinations of two or three of them, repetitions which gradually deepen and extend the reader’s understanding of each one and of its role in the larger process. This mode of presentation makes something else clear: whenever some pair or selection of these six elements is mentioned, the entire set is implicitly invoked. Each is an essential part of the *way*, and there is no shorter way. When Nephi quotes the Father saying, “he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved” (v. 15), the reader knows that four other elements—faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, and baptism of both water and of the Holy Ghost—are necessarily implied.21

**Gospel merisms throughout the text**

For this study, we have reexamined the entire text of the Book of Mormon looking for examples of meristic references to the gospel formula.22 The most complete statements of the formula usually name only four or five elements explicitly. Examples include:

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22. Most of the work in compiling these examples was performed by Gage Love, who worked with me as a student research assistant. The use of *we* in this paper refers to him.
3 Nephi 11:32–33 The Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent [R] and believe in me [F]. And whoso believeth in me [F], and is baptized [W], the same shall be saved [S].

3 Nephi 27:16 Whoso repenteth [R] and is baptized in my name [W] shall be filled [H]; and if he endureth to the end [E], behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father [S] at that day when I shall stand to judge the world.

3 Nephi 30:2 Turn, all ye Gentiles, from your wicked ways . . . and from all your wickedness and abominations [R], and come unto me [E], and be baptized in my name [W], that ye may receive a remission of your sins and be filled with the Holy Ghost [H], that ye may be numbered with my people who are of the house of Israel [S].

Already in these clear examples, the reader will note the need for some interpretation. Based on my recent study of Book of Mormon usage, I have learned to interpret “come unto me” in this context as a reference to enduring to the end.23 And those that are held “guiltless before the Father” at the judgment day are saved. Readers learn from 3 Nephi 12:6 that when the repentant are “filled,” this refers to the Holy Ghost, and it is the saved who are “numbered with my people.” As it turns out, a large glossary is required to identify all the alternative terminology that is used to refer to the basic six gospel elements. This predominant use of multiple synonyms may help explain why the large numbers of meristic statements of the gospel in the Book of Mormon text go largely unnoticed. The meristic character of the examples is clear. The absence of one or two of the basic gospel elements in each could never be taken as a suggestion that all six are not implied in this reference.

23. Publication is pending for another paper, “Six Gospel Merisms: ‘Come unto me’ and ‘enduring to the end,’” in which I argue that six important gospel merisms that share a unique rhetorical structure all represent Jesus Christ using the invitation “to come unto me” as a substitute for the requirement that his followers “endure to the end.”
Glossary of gospel terminology

The following preliminary glossary will facilitate understanding the examples that appear in the remainder of this paper. All these interpretations are based on usage examples somewhere in the text. Note that negatives of these terms are often used to evoke the same element by reverse implication.

- **faith in Jesus Christ** (F): Relying upon the merits of him who is mighty to save; believing in Christ and the Father; believe on his name; giving heed to the Lord's servants
- **repentance** (R): Humbling oneself before the Father; contrite spirit; turn to the Lord; covenanted to obey the commandments; or negatively, being unclean (not repentant)
- **baptism of water** (W): Witnessing to the Father that one has repented and will obey his commandments; taking the name of Christ upon one's self
- **baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost** (H): Being filled; finding mercy; receiving the remission of sins
- **enduring to the end** (E): Following the straight and narrow path; faithfulness to the end; living with faith, hope, and charity; pressing forward in faith; coming unto me/him
- **salvation** (S): Eternal life; being found guiltless (or spotless) at the judgment; being numbered with the Lord's people; inheriting the kingdom of God; living in the future; or negatively, being damned; hewn down and cast into the fire

It must also be recognized that an additional number of terms refer to different combinations of these six basic elements. While documentation for some of these is straightforward, others require extensive analysis. A straightforward example would be “the gate by which you enter,” which is defined in 2 Nephi 31:17 simply as repentance and baptism by water. Because “come unto me/him” proves to be far from straightforward, I have written a separate paper, as explained in note 23, in which I found that “come unto me” most often applies to “enduring
to the end”—the life process that follows baptism and the reception of the Holy Ghost, the process through which Christ’s followers are refined spiritually and prepared to stand before the Lord to be judged and found worthy of eternal life. But in some passages—usually briefer merisms—it seems to imply other missing gospel elements as well as enduring to the end. These two are the only compound terms I have relied on in the following textual analyses. For simplicity, I have chosen to leave a few other candidates unanalyzed in this paper.

With these explanations in hand, the reader can now look at some of the clearer examples of brief meristic statements of this gospel—statements that may only include two or three of the six elements, but which are clearly not meant to exclude any of the others.

- “Whoso repenteth not [~R] must perish [~S]” (1 Nephi 14:5).
- “They that believe in him [F] shall be saved [S]” (2 Nephi 2:9).
- “All those who shall believe on his name [F] shall be saved in the kingdom of God [S]” (2 Nephi 25:13).
- “Unto him that endureth to the end [E] will I give eternal life [S]” (3 Nephi 15:9).
- “All men must come unto him [as a compound term, this may refer here to F, R, W, and E], or they cannot be saved [~S]” (1 Nephi 13:40).

Listing Book of Mormon merisms

We have identified hundreds of statements in the Book of Mormon that could be interpreted as gospel merisms. Because many of these involve interpretations that could be controversial, this paper offers only more obvious examples grouped on three charts according to whether they include four/five, three, or only two gospel elements. These charts are selective in that they present only seventy-nine of the
more typical merisms—those that include the final element of eternal life or salvation.

In tables 2, 3, and 4 below, the passages illustrate the pattern of gospel merisms identified in the three gospel *inclusios* listed previously—leaving little doubt but what the entire six-part formula is implied in each one.

**Table 2. Merisms containing four or five gospel elements— including salvation (S)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 9:23</td>
<td>And he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 9:24</td>
<td>And if they will not repent and believe in his name, … and endure to the end, they must be damned;</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 31:14</td>
<td>After ye have repented of your sins, and witnessed unto the Father that ye are willing to keep my commandments, by the baptism of water, and have received the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost, and can speak with a new tongue, yea, even with the tongue of angels, and after this should deny me, it would have been better for you that ye had not known me.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 31:17–18</td>
<td>For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost. And then are ye in this strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life;</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jacob 6:11</td>
<td>Then, my beloved brethren, repent ye, and enter in at the strait gate, and continue in the way which is narrow, until ye shall obtain eternal life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>Text</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mosiah 18:13</td>
<td>Helam, I baptize thee, having authority from the Almighty God, as a testimony that ye have entered into a covenant to serve him until you are dead as to the mortal body; and may the Spirit of the Lord be poured out upon you; and may he grant unto you eternal life, through the redemption of Christ, whom he has prepared from the foundation of the world.</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alma 5:13</td>
<td>And behold, he preached the word unto your fathers, and a mighty change was also wrought in their hearts, and they humbled themselves and put their trust in the true and living God. And behold, they were faithful until the end; therefore they were saved.</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 7:15–16</td>
<td>Yea, I say unto you come and fear not, and lay aside every sin, which easily doth beset you, which doth bind you down to destruction, yea, come and go forth, and show unto your God that ye are willing to repent of your sins and enter into a covenant with him to keep his commandments, and witness it unto him this day by going into the waters of baptism. And whosoever doeth this, and keepeth the commandments of God from thenceforth, the same will remember that I say unto him, yea, he will remember that I have said unto him, he shall have eternal life, according to the testimony of the Holy Spirit, which testifieth in me.</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alma 32:13</td>
<td>And now, because ye are compelled to be humble blessed are ye; for a man sometimes, if he is compelled to be humble, seeketh repentance; and now surely, whosoever repenteth shall find mercy; and he that findeth mercy and endureth to the end the same shall be saved.</td>
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<td>x</td>
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Table 2. (continued)
Table 2. (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 Nephi 11:32–33</td>
<td>And I bear record that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me. And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Nephi 27:16</td>
<td>And it shall come to pass, that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Nephi 27:19</td>
<td>And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Nephi 27:20</td>
<td>Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Nephi 30:2</td>
<td>Turn, all ye Gentiles, from your wicked ways; and repent of your evil doings, of your lyings and deceivings, and of your whoredoms, and of your secret abominations, and your idolatries, and of your murders, and your priestcrafts, and your envyings, and your strifes, and from all your wickedness and abominations, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, that ye may receive a remission of your sins, and be filled with the Holy Ghost, that ye may be numbered with my people who are of the house of Israel.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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</table>

*(table continues)*
Journal of Book of Mormon Studies

Table 2. (continued)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mormon 7:10</td>
<td>And ye will also know that ye are a remnant of the seed of Jacob; therefore ye are numbered among the people of the first covenant; and if it so be that ye believe in Christ, and are baptized, first with water, then with fire and with the Holy Ghost, following the example of our Savior, according to that which he hath commanded us, it shall be well with you in the day of judgment.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ether 4:18</td>
<td>Therefore, repent all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and believe in my gospel, and be baptized in my name; for he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned; and signs shall follow them that believe in my name.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroni 7:34</td>
<td>And he hath said: Repent all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, and have faith in me, that ye may be saved.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Total 9 16 12 8 12 18

The passages in table 3 feature different combinations of three gospel elements, but all appear to be teaching the same thing as the group from table 2.

Table 3. Merisms containing three gospel elements—including salvation (S)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 13:37</td>
<td>And blessed are they who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at that day, for they shall have the gift and the power of the Holy Ghost; and if they endure unto the end they shall be lifted up at the last day, and shall be saved in the everlasting kingdom of the Lamb.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 33:4</td>
<td>And it speaketh of Jesus, and persuadeth them to believe in him, and to endure to the end, which is life eternal.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Total 9 16 12 8 12 18
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<th>W</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mosiah 3:12</td>
<td>But wo, wo unto him who knoweth that he rebelleth against God! For salvation cometh to none such except it be through repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosiah 3:21</td>
<td>And behold, when that time cometh, none shall be found blameless before God, except it be little children, only through repentance and faith on the name of the Lord God Omnipotent.</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosiah 4:6–7</td>
<td>I say unto you, if ye have come to a knowledge of the goodness of God, and his matchless power, and his wisdom, and his patience, and his long-suffering towards the children of men; and also, the atonement which has been prepared from the foundation of the world, that thereby salvation might come to him that should put his trust in the Lord, and should be diligent in keeping his commandments, and continue in the faith even unto the end of his life—I say, that this is the man who receiveth salvation, through the atonement which was prepared from the foundation of the world for all mankind, which ever were since the fall of Adam, or who are, or who ever shall be, even unto the end of the world.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 5:62</td>
<td>Come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye also may be partakers of the fruit of the tree of life.</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 7:14</td>
<td>Now I say unto you that ye must repent, and be born again; for the Spirit saith if ye are not born again ye cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 12:15</td>
<td>He has all power to save every man that believeth on his name and bringeth forth fruit meet for repentance.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alma 12:34</td>
<td>Therefore, whosoever repenteth, and hardeneth not his heart, he shall have claim on mercy through mine Only Begotten Son, unto a remission of his sins; and these shall enter into my rest.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 26:35</td>
<td>And he is a merciful Being, even unto salvation, to those who will repent and believe on his name.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 34:15</td>
<td>And thus he shall bring salvation to all those who shall believe on his name; this being the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy, which overpowereth justice, and bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helaman 8:14–15</td>
<td>Yea, did he not bear record that the Son of God should come? And as he lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, even so shall he be lifted up who should come. And as many as should look upon that serpent should live, even so as many as should look upon the Son of God with faith, having a contrite spirit, might live, even unto that life which is eternal.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Nephi 11:34</td>
<td>And whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be damned.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Nephi 11:38</td>
<td>And again I say unto you, ye must repent, and be baptized in my name, and become as a little child, or ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Nephi 23:5</td>
<td>And whosoever will hearken unto my words and repenteth and is baptized, the same shall be saved. Search the prophets, for many there be that testify of these things.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Nephi 27:5–6</td>
<td>Have they not read the scriptures, which say ye must take upon you the name of Christ, which is my name? For by this name shall ye be called at the last day; And whoso taketh upon him my name, and endureth to the end, the same shall be saved at the last day.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once readers are familiar with these more comprehensive examples, they can now review table 4, which lists some two-element merisms. Again, the evident similarity to the more comprehensive examples would confirm the view that they should be read as meristic statements intended to invoke the full six-element gospel formula.

Table 4. Merisms containing two gospel elements—including salvation (S)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>W</th>
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<th>E</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 22:31</td>
<td>Wherefore, if ye shall be obedient to the commandments, and endure to the end, ye shall be saved at the last day.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 2:9</td>
<td>And they that believe in him shall be saved.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 25:13</td>
<td>And all those who shall believe on his name shall be saved in the kingdom of God.</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 31:15</td>
<td>He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 31:16</td>
<td>Unless a man shall endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God, he cannot be saved.</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omni 1:26</td>
<td>Yea, come unto him, and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him, and continue in fasting and praying, and endure to the end; and as the Lord liveth ye will be saved.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. (continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mosiah 2:41</td>
<td>And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosiah 3:9</td>
<td>He cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men even through faith on his name.</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosiah 4:18</td>
<td>But I say unto you, O man, whosoever doeth this the same hath great cause to repent; and except he repenteth of that which he hath done he perisheth forever, and hath no interest in the kingdom of God.</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosiah 23:22</td>
<td>Nevertheless—whosoever putteth his trust in him the same shall be lifted up at the last day.</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosiah 26:23</td>
<td>And it is I that granteth unto him that believeth unto the end a place at my right hand.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 5:51</td>
<td>Repent, for except ye repent ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of heaven.</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 9:12</td>
<td>Behold, now I say unto you that he commandeth you to repent; and except ye repent, ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 11:40</td>
<td>He shall take upon him the transgressions of those who believe on his name; and these are they that shall have eternal life.</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4. (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alma 13:13</td>
<td>And now, my brethren, I would that ye should humble yourselves before God, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance, that ye may also enter into that rest.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 13:30</td>
<td>And may the Lord grant unto you repentance, that ye may not bring down his wrath upon you, that ye may not be bound down by the chains of hell, that ye may not suffer the second death.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 22:6</td>
<td>If ye will repent ye shall be saved.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 22:6</td>
<td>And if ye will not repent, ye shall be cast off at the last day?</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 36:3</td>
<td>For I do know that whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 38:5</td>
<td>And now my son, Shiblon, I would that ye should remember, that as much as ye shall put your trust in God even so much ye shall be delivered out of your trials, and your troubles, and your afflictions, and ye shall be lifted up at the last day.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 39:9</td>
<td>Now my son, I would that ye should repent and forsake your sins, and go no more after the lusts of your eyes, but cross yourself in all these things; for except ye do this ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. Oh, remember, and take it upon you, and cross yourself in these things.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helaman 3:28</td>
<td>Yea, thus we see that the gate of heaven is open unto all, even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
And he hath power given unto him from the Father to redeem them from their sins because of repentance; therefore he hath sent his angels to declare the tidings of the conditions of repentance, which bringeth unto the power of the Redeemer, unto the salvation of their souls.

Therefore, for this cause, that men might be saved, hath repentance been declared.

And I pray that the anger of the Lord be turned away from you, and that ye would repent and be saved.

Then cometh the Son of God to redeem all those who shall believe on his name.

Whosoever shall believe on the Son of God, the same shall have everlasting life.

And this to the intent that whosoever will believe might be saved.

Therefore, whoso repenteth and cometh unto me as a little child, him will I receive, for of such is the kingdom of God.

Behold, for such I have laid down my life, and have taken it up again; therefore repent, and come unto me ye ends of the earth, and be saved.

Behold, I am the law, and the light. Look unto me, and endure to the end, and ye shall live.

For unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life.

And he that endureth not unto the end, the same is he that is also hewn down and cast into the fire, from whence they can no more return, because of the justice of the Father.
Table 4. (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mormon 7:3</td>
<td>Know ye that ye must come unto repentance, or ye cannot be saved.</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mormon 9:6</td>
<td>O then ye unbelieving, turn ye unto the Lord; cry mightily unto the Father in the name of Jesus, that perhaps ye may be found spotless, pure, fair, and white, having been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, at that great and last day.</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mormon 9:23</td>
<td>But he that believeth not shall be damned.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ether 3:14</td>
<td>I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ether 4:19</td>
<td>And blessed is he that is found faithful unto my name at the last day, for he shall be lifted up to dwell in the kingdom prepared for him from the foundation of the world.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ether 5:5</td>
<td>And if it so be that they repent and come unto the Father in the name of Jesus, they shall be received into the kingdom of God.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroni 7:26</td>
<td>And after that he came men also were saved by faith in his name; and by faith, they become the sons of God.</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroni 7:38</td>
<td>For no man can be saved, according to the words of Christ, save they shall have faith in his name.</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroni 7:41</td>
<td>Behold I say unto you that ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal, and this because of your faith in him according to the promise.</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total        | 16 | 16 | 0  | 0  | 10 | 42 |
There appears to be some pattern in which elements of the gospel formula are included or omitted in longer and shorter merisms as can be seen in table 5 below. None of the two-element merisms included baptism or the Holy Ghost. These two were included less often than faith or repentance in the three-element merisms as well. Only in the group of four-element merisms does baptism surpass most of the other elements in frequency as the formula “repent and be baptized” asserts itself. And in these longer merisms, the references to the Holy Ghost also rise above faith and enduring in frequency of occurrence. While enduring to the end appears in one-fourth of the two-element merisms, its relative frequency drops off in the longer examples.

This pattern reminds us that while all six elements of the gospel formula are essential, the dynamic connections between them are numerous. Faith in Jesus Christ is not just a first step; it is the continuing and necessary foundation for each of the other steps. Enduring to the end is sometimes stated as enduring in faith to the end or as faithfulness to the end. Repentance is the pivotal principle and can be effectively stated on its own or with only one other element. Book of Mormon prophets focused repeatedly on the invitation or commandment to all men to turn away from their self-chosen paths to walk with God on the path he has provided for them and their salvation. Repentance and baptism are tightly linked because baptism is defined as a formal and public witnessing of the covenant one makes when repenting.24 And the gift of the Holy Ghost makes enduring to the end possible by providing the faithful with a witness of the Father and the Son and by showing them “all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:5).

Table 5. Frequency of the repetition of each element

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of elements included</th>
<th>Faith</th>
<th>Repent</th>
<th>Baptism</th>
<th>Holy Ghost</th>
<th>Endure to the end</th>
<th>Saved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be noted in passing that almost one-third of the hundreds of similar merisms we have identified illustrate an interesting variation on the gospel formula in that the promise alluded to is a promised land or gathering of Israel or other tangible blessing in this world rather than eternal life in the world to come. These biblical promises for blessings in this world as given to Abraham and to Lehi also seem to serve as metaphors or surrogates for the eternal promises of the gospel message. This linkage is explicit in both the language and the chiastic structure of Alma 37:44–46:

A  For behold, it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ,\textsuperscript{25} which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss,

B  as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass, which would point unto them a straight course to the promised land.

C  And now I say, is there not a type in this thing?

B’ For just as assuredly as this director did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promised land.

\textsuperscript{25} The Book of Mormon uses five principal terms to refer specifically to this gospel teaching: “the doctrine of Christ” is used twenty-five times; different formulations of “the gospel of Christ” are used forty-two times; the gospel is referred to as “the (straight and narrow) path” twenty-six times; versions of “the way” are used eighty-two times; and phrases featuring “the word” are used seventy-nine times explicitly to refer to the gospel—and, by my count, another 199 times implicitly. For a detailed discussion of this terminological variation, see Noel B. Reynolds, “This is the Way,” Religious Educator 14/3 (2013): 71–83; and “The Ancient Doctrine of the Two Ways and the Book of Mormon,” publication pending.
A shall the words of Christ, if we follow their course, carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise.

While this will be an interesting topic for further research, the point of including some reference to it here is to show that the gospel message itself provided the Nephite prophets with a formula that they could adapt for other distinct, though related, content. It may also help us understand what they perceived the relationship to be between the covenants of ancient Israel and the new gospel of Jesus Christ that was revealed to Nephi (and Lehi) almost immediately after their decisive departure from Jerusalem.

Gospel merisms and the New Testament

One challenge facing New Testament scholars is the absence of a single, clear, and authoritative passage that provides a comprehensive account of the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is no passage that gives the clear foundation for New Testament gospel students that 2 Nephi 31 provides for students of the Book of Mormon. Of course, Latter-day Saints see the same gospel being taught in both these volumes of scripture, so for them it may be of some interest to see whether Jesus may have used the same meristic approach in teaching his gospel in his Palestinian ministry as he did in the Book of Mormon. Even a very aggressive effort to identify such a system of gospel merisms in the four New Testament Gospels yielded only 151 potential examples. But none of these displays sufficient similarity of form or language to encourage further comparison.

Acts, chapter 2, offers the closest thing to a full statement of the six elements listed in the Book of Mormon version of the gospel of Christ. Here Peter, speaking for the rest of the apostles, instructs “all that believed” (F, v. 44) that they should “repent [R] and be baptized

[W] ... in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins,” with the promise that they would then “receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (H, v. 38). After he further testifies of many things and exhorts them to “save [them]selves” (S, v. 40), he then reports that three thousand “gladly received his word [F, R]” and were baptized (W) and “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine [E] and fellowship” (vv. 41–42). With more aggressive interpretation, Hebrews 10 might also be seen to list all six points. But in the Gospels themselves, where Jesus is quoted directly, nothing comes close. And neither of these passages employs merismus to develop its theme. Both are focused on a problem at hand and pretend to no definitional purpose as do the three gospel inclusios provided in the Book of Mormon.

Conclusion

This paper develops and documents insights first mentioned in earlier articles. Three authoritative inclusios in the Book of Mormon define a consistently presented six-part formula that lists the basic elements of the gospel or doctrine of Jesus Christ as taught in that text. These elements are used in various combinations in a meristic way, both in these definitional passages and throughout the volume, and invoke the memory or understanding of the full formula in a variety of rhetorical contexts. Even though the language varies with the incorporation of various synonyms or combination terms, the text promotes, from the beginning to the end, the doctrine that those who trust in Christ and repent of their sins can be baptized in water as a witness to God that they have made a covenant to obey his commandments and take his name upon them. When he judges their repentance to be sincere, he will send the remission of sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost, which in turn will help converts endure faithfully to the end—at which point they will be rewarded with eternal life. The rhetorical device of merismus—as exhibited in the Hebrew Bible in references to lands, body parts, and many other listable things—is elevated in the Book of Mormon as a
primary means of presenting the six essential elements of the gospel or doctrine of Jesus Christ.

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More Than Meets the Eye: How Nephite Prophets Managed the Jaredite Legacy

Frederick W Axelgard

This paper looks closely and critically at how the Nephite prophets dealt with the records of the Jaredites as the text of the Book of Mormon itself presents these dealings. It questions unspoken assumptions that often pervade discussions of these records and of how record keepers from King Mosiah to Moroni managed them. It asks, for example, whether Mormon could realistically have taken on the task of preparing the abridgment of Jaredite history found in the book of Ether. It also challenges the idea that Moroni wrote the book of Ether only because Mormon did not have time to do so, suggesting instead that Moroni’s role in preserving the Jaredite legacy was his own unique commission from the Lord. These questions are part of my appeal for a fundamental reconsideration of the roles played by the key actors who handled the Jaredite records.

I place particular importance on consideration of how the Nephite record keepers dealt with the account of the universal vision of the

1. The phrase “records of the Jaredites” is intended to cover the full legacy of Jaredite record keeping. It includes the large, engraved stone of Coriantumr (Omni 1:20–22); the twenty-four gold plates that contained the book of Ether; the source text from which Ether abridged his account (Ether 1:2); the source text from which Moroni transcribed the visions of the brother of Jared (Ether 4:5); and any other Jaredite records that were received by the Nephite prophets.
brother of Jared, in which he saw “all the inhabitants of the earth which had been, and also all that would be . . . even unto the ends of the earth” (Ether 3:25). This vast vision was transcribed by Moroni on the plates of Mormon (Ether 4:5), but because of its sacred nature it is not contained in the published Book of Mormon. Nevertheless, this vision was part of the challenge the Nephite prophets faced in managing the Jaredite legacy, and it leads us to ask questions such as the following: Was this expansive vision part of Mosiah’s translation of Jaredite records? Did Mormon see it as part of the Jaredite account that he said should be “written hereafter” in his record (Mosiah 28:19)? How did Moroni’s transcribing of this vision impact his approach to writing of the book of Ether? These are just some of the issues that arise when one considers how the Nephite prophets might have dealt with the Lord’s spiritual outpourings to the brother of Jared.

The discussion that follows below presents a detailed look at what the Nephite record keepers did with the records of the Jaredites. It focuses on three record keepers: Mosiah, Mormon, and Moroni. Mosiah, the first Nephite prophet to take custody of the Jaredite records, used sacred interpreters to translate the twenty-four gold plates of Ether. Mormon was aware of this translation, felt it was important, and promised that

2. This vision is believed to make up the sealed portion of the plates of Mormon. Grant Hardy, in summarizing the plates of the Book of Mormon for the Encyclopedia of Mormonism, notes that “the sealed portion containing the vision of the Brother of Jared” was part of the trove of records buried in the earth by Mormon’s son Moroni. See Grant R. Hardy, “Book of Mormon Plates and Records” (accessed January 11, 2017, at http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Book_of_Mormon_Plates_and_Records).

In another useful summary we read: “When Moroni was finishing the Book of Mormon record, he was commanded to seal up some of the plates, and Joseph Smith was later commanded not to translate them. This sealed portion contains the complete record of the vision of the brother of Jared (see Ether 4:4–5). This vision included “all things from the foundation of the world unto the end thereof” (2 Nephi 27:10–11; see also Ether 3:25). So basically the Lord revealed to the brother of Jared the history of mankind, and the sealed portion of the plates was Moroni’s translated copy of it.” New Era, October 2011 (accessed January 11, 2017, at https://www.lds.org/new-era/2011/10/to-the-point/what-is-the-sealed-portion-of-the-book-of-mormon-and-will-we-ever-know-whats-in-it?).
an account of the Jaredites would be included at a later point in his own record. In the end, it was his son Moroni who followed up on this promise by making an abridgment of Jaredite history that became the book of Ether (Mosiah 28:11–20; Ether 1:1–3). That, in essence, is the story of how the Nephite prophets preserved and conveyed the Jaredite legacy, so far as students of the Book of Mormon generally perceive it. But I submit there is much more to the story.

A brief word about methodology: This paper assumes the historicity of the Book of Mormon. In it I make a point of trying to discern the circumstances in which the authorial voices represented there produced their contributions and thereby presuppose a historical world that lies behind the text of the book. I recognize that this might invalidate my discussion and conclusions for certain readers, but there should be merit in approaching the text on its own historical terms in an effort to make real sense of an important but often overlooked segment of the Book of Mormon. In the end, I trust some of my more crucial conclusions will be valuable for all readers of the Book of Mormon, believing or otherwise.

A legacy in two parts

Much of my presentation is premised on the idea that when we think of the Jaredite records, we typically consider only the book of Ether. This, however, is a narrow perspective. The book of Ether represents for the most part the historical aspects of the Jaredite story. Its main thrust is to depict the origins of the Jaredites and their eventual destruction as a consequence of extreme wickedness, a close parallel to the story of Nephite civilization. There is, however, a second and vitally important element to this legacy in the visions of the brother of Jared. Readers of the Book of Mormon will recall that the book of Ether contains a rather detailed description of the brother of Jared’s vision of and conversation with Jesus Christ (Ether 3:1–24). It also briefly mentions that the Lord
showed unto the brother of Jared all the inhabitants of the earth which had been, and also all that would be; and he withheld them not from his sight, even unto the ends of the earth. . . . [T]he Lord could not withhold anything from him, for he knew that the Lord could show him all things. (Ether 3:25–26)

As these things were being revealed to him, the Lord instructed the brother of Jared to write them down, adding that it should be done in a secret language that could not be read without the aid of divine interpreters. The brother of Jared obeyed this instruction (Ether 3:22; 4:1).

Although it is often overlooked, I submit that the vision of the brother of Jared should be considered an integral part of the Jaredite record-keeping legacy. Even though it is not detailed in the present-day Book of Mormon, Nephite prophets, starting with Mosiah, had the responsibility of preserving the account of this vision in accordance with the Lord’s will (Ether 4:1–2). Nor should it be forgotten that at the end of Nephite history, when the time came to incorporate the Jaredite story into the plates of Mormon, the theophany of the brother of Jared was very much a part of the picture. Moroni was charged not only with abridging the book of Ether but also with making a complete record of the things the brother of Jared saw.

Behold, I have written upon these plates the very things which the brother of Jared saw; and there never were greater things made manifest than those which were made manifest unto the brother of Jared. Wherefore the Lord hath commanded me to write them; and I have written them. (Ether 4:4–5)

We do not know how much time it took or under what circumstances Moroni inscribed his comprehensive account of the vision of the brother of Jared. A close reading of the text does suggest that he made it prior to his abridgment of the writings of Ether, inasmuch as the above passage (which appears early in Ether) speaks of Moroni having already recorded the vision. In other words, it can be assumed that writing the far-reaching vision of the brother of Jared was probably part of Moroni’s spiritual preparation to write the book of Ether, as well as a centerpiece
of his prophetic legacy to future generations. This by itself is perhaps sufficient reason not to overlook the place of the brother of Jared's vision in the broader legacy of the Book of Mormon.

A complex custodianship: King Mosiah_2

The Nephite prophets exercised a complex custodianship over the Jaredite records they inherited. The Book of Mormon states that they handed down these records (and the interpreters needed to read them) from one generation to another. Mosiah_2 used these interpreters to make a translation of the twenty-four gold plates, which made the judgments that came upon the Jaredites common knowledge among the Nephites (Mosiah 28:11–17). At the same time, other parts of the Jaredite story were consciously kept from public awareness (Ether 4:1). These limitations are discussed in greater detail below. For now, it suffices to say that Nephite prophets for centuries had an intricate responsibility that involved both revealing and concealing the content of the Jaredite records.

Nephite prophets first learned about the Jaredite civilization when King Mosiah_1 and his people came to Zarahemla. There the Nephites learned of Coriantumr, the last Jaredite survivor, who had been discovered by the Mulekites. Mosiah_1 interpreted a record of Coriantumr and his slain people by “the gift and power of God” from engravings found on a large stone (Omni 1:20–22). Whether Mosiah_1 recorded

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3. Although it is difficult to say with certainty, it seems unlikely that there was any appreciable connection between the stone engravings of Coriantumr and the twenty-four plates of Ether. The two records came into Nephite hands at separate times and by different means: Coriantumr’s record was given to Mosiah_1 by the Mulekites some time after his arrival in Zarahemla; while two generations later, Mosiah_2 received the twenty-four gold plates from Limhi, whose men had discovered them quite accidentally among the ruins of Jaredite civilization. From the little we know about the stone record, it seems that it overlapped to some degree with the account made by Ether. That record told that Coriantumr’s ancestors “came out from the tower [of Babel], at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people,” and that the “severity of the Lord fell upon [Coriantumr’s people],” leaving their “bones . . . scattered in the land
his translation on the large plates of Nephi is not known, but it appears that an awareness of the Jaredites failed to make a lasting impression on the Nephite people at this time.4

Two generations later, Nephite knowledge of the Jaredites took a quantum leap forward. When Limhi and his people returned to Zarahemla, they passed on to Mosiah2 the twenty-four gold plates found by Limhi's people (Mosiah 22:14). Limhi was anxious for the record to be translated, which he believed Mosiah2 could do; indeed, Mosiah's own people “were desirous beyond measure” to learn of the people who had been destroyed (Mosiah 8:6–19; 28:11–12). Using the interpreters, Mosiah2 translated an account that revealed the ancient origins of the Jaredites and their eventual destruction (Mosiah 28:11–19).5 Mosiah's people responded with deep emotion to this new understanding (Mosiah 28:18), and it seems clear that knowledge of the Jaredites also became general among the Nephites since succeeding generations knew that this great civilization had been destroyed because of its wickedness.6

northward” (Omni 1:22). This information coincides with the history written by Ether, but his record also contained a great deal of significant prophetic material (see Ether 3–5, 12). It seems quite certain that the two records were prepared independently, by men of very different backgrounds, and that the record of Ether provided the dominant if not exclusive narrative of Jaredite history for the Nephites.

4. The dramatic reaction of Mosiah2’s people when he told them about the contents of the plates of Ether (Mosiah 28:17–18) suggests this was new information for them. If knowledge of the earlier record of Coriantumr were widespread among the Nephites, they would probably not have reacted in this fashion.

5. Based on early Book of Mormon manuscripts, some confusion exists as to whether Mosiah2's father, King Benjamin, might have translated the Jaredite writings from the plates of Ether. Some scholars who have examined this question seem to agree that Mosiah2 did indeed make this translation. See John W. Welch, “Preliminary Comments on the Sources behind the Book of Ether” (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1986), 9–10. Nevertheless, one’s view on this issue does not affect consideration of the question of whether what was translated at this time (that is, in the Benjamin–Mosiah2 era) was only an account of Jaredite history or also includes the Lord’s extensive spiritual manifestations to the brother of Jared.

6. In his abridgment Mormon made a number of references to the Jaredites' destruction in the land northward (see Alma 22:30; 46:22; Helaman 3:5–6; and 3 Nephi 3:24). This suggests that the Nephites over the centuries were well aware that the judgments of God had been visited upon the Jaredites. Mormon's letter to Moroni, written centuries later,
However, much more can be said about both the contents of the Jaredite records and Mosiah’s responsibilities for them. As already noted, we learn from the book of Ether that the Jaredite records also included some transcendent spiritual manifestations in which the brother of Jared saw the premortal Christ and then was vouchsafed a vision of the entire history of the world (Ether 3:6–26). The Lord commanded that a record be made of these visions, but, in order that it not “go forth unto the world, until the time cometh that I shall glorify my name in the flesh,” the brother of Jared was told to write them “in a language that they cannot be read” and to “seal them up” (Ether 3:21–22).

The book of Ether also reveals that Mosiah knew about the brother of Jared’s visions and of the restrictions the Lord had placed on their distribution: “For this cause did king Mosiah keep them [the visions of the brother of Jared], that they should not come unto the world until after Christ should show himself unto his people” (Ether 4:1). The question then arises: What did it mean for Mosiah to “keep” these visions? How did he and the succeeding Nephite prophets protect this sacred material? When he obtained the Jaredite records and learned what they contained, Mosiah faced a choice. Should he translate both the historical account and the vision of the brother of Jared, or should he leave the sacred writings untranslated as the surest way to prevent their wider distribution? Although it is usually assumed that Mosiah translated everything, I want to highlight the possibility that he decided against translating the visionary material at that time. Such a course of action would make good sense for several reasons. First, there is an issue of size. The brother of Jared’s visionary experiences were voluminous, to say the least. Estimates suggest that the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon plates (where Moroni ultimately recorded these visions) was by itself two or three times the size of Mormon’s abridgment.7 For

shows that there was still a vivid awareness of the Jaredites’ story and its applicability even in his own day: “And if [the Nephites] perish it will be like unto the Jaredites, because of the wilfulness of their hearts, seeking for blood and revenge” (Moroni 9:23).

7. Such estimates rely on statements by David Whitmer, an eyewitness to the plates, and Orson Pratt. See Alexander L. Baugh, “Sealed Portion of the Gold Plates,” in Book
Mosiah₂ to translate and inscribe such a large text would have been a vast burden to assume.

Second, as suggested already, a decision not to translate the visions of the brother of Jared would be an effective means of protecting them. Translating them into a language that was well known among the Nephites would make them vulnerable to unauthorized access. It would also impose a significant, added burden of responsibility (to safeguard the translation) on all future custodians of the plates. The Lord’s own solution, given to the brother of Jared, was to protect these visions by recording them in a language that was impossible to understand until the time came to reveal them. It seems probable, if not highly likely, that Mosiah₂ and his successors would respect the line the Lord had drawn and leave this visionary material untranslated.

What then should we understand when the book of Mosiah states that Mosiah₂ “translated and caused to be written the records which were on the plates of gold which had been found by the people of Limhi” (Mosiah 28:11)? I suggest it means that Mosiah₂ translated the entirety of the twenty-four plates but that they contained only the historical portion of Jaredite history and not the visions of the brother of Jared. Similarly, Mormon’s comment just a few verses later that “all people should know the things which are written” in Mosiah₂’s translation (Mosiah 28:9) should be construed as saying that it is important for “all people” to know the historical reality that the Jaredites were destroyed because of their wickedness. I don’t believe Mormon was advocating that “all people” should know of the visions of the brother of Jared, which strengthens my belief that neither the twenty-four plates nor Mosiah₂’s translation included the account of the brother of Jared’s vast visionary experience.⁸

The suggestion that the expansive visions of the brother of Jared were not part of the twenty-four gold plates of Ether should not be entirely surprising. Logic might suggest that twenty-four plates would not have been enough space to contain both the history of the Jaredites and a record of everything that the brother of Jared saw. There is also valuable scholarly opinion that suggests the brother of Jared's sacred experiences were not written on the plates of Ether. John Welch, for example, has written that Ether himself may not have been familiar with these visions. Instead, he suggests, when it came time for Ether to prepare his twenty-four plates, he may have “simply attached [the brother of Jared’s] esoteric record to his own book” in much the same way that Mormon appended the small plates of Nephi to the plates of Mormon. Alan Miner has written in similar terms, saying that the plates of Ether were “primarily a record of [Ether’s] family and their right to kingship, and probably did not contain the detailed vision of the brother of Jared.” Finally, in the most detailed scholarly treatment to date, Valentin Arts offers seven different reasons to suggest that the brother of Jared’s visions were contained in a separate record that was part of the Jaredite heritage handed down among the Nephite prophets. On the basis of the above discussion, I submit that the brother of Jared’s visions were not part of the twenty-four gold plates of Ether but were contained

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Jaredites and the record that he transcribed of the brother of Jared’s vast vision from the twenty-four plates? I don’t believe so. As noted above, it seems reasonable to conclude that Moroni had already transcribed that vision when he began his abridgment of Ether’s record. Thus, this passage can readily be understood as Moroni saying that he was using the twenty-four plates to make an “account” that was primarily historical, rather than visionary in nature.


10. Alan C. Miner, See Step by Step through the Book of Mormon: A Cultural Commentary (accessed online at stepbystep.alancminer.com, on November 19, 2013), volume 7, Commentary on Ether 4:1 (emphasis in original). Grant Hardy also entertains the possibility that Moroni had access to other Jaredite records besides the twenty-four plates as he made his abridgment of Jaredite history. See Grant Hardy, Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 244.

11. Arts, “Third Jaredite Record.”
in a separate record that was passed down in its original untranslated state until it fell into the hands of Moroni.

A similarly detailed study should be made of the Nephite prophets’ handling of the Jaredites’ secret covenants and oaths. We first learn from the instructions of Alma₂ to his son Helaman of an additional constraint placed on the Jaredite records so that the wicked covenants and secret plans of the Jaredites would not be made public knowledge (Alma 37:21–32). Again, Welch offers the perceptive suggestion that this restriction did not originate with Alma₂ but most likely dated back to Mosiah₂.¹² For Mosiah₂ to conceal this wicked material, it would have made the greatest sense not to translate it in the first place, thus making it necessary to use the interpreters to gain access to this forbidden material. Alma₂’s words to Helaman suggest that this was the arrangement he followed. When he instructed his son, Alma₂ did not mention Mosiah₂’s translation of the gold plates, but spoke only about the plates themselves: “And now, I will speak unto you concerning those twenty-four plates, that ye keep them” (Alma 37:21). He also went on at length about the importance of preserving the interpreters, saying God had prepared them to bring the Jaredites’ wickedness to light and that his word was fulfilled because “their secret abominations have been brought out of darkness and made known unto us” (Alma 37:22–26). It is a solid interpretation of these words to conclude that for the Nephite prophets themselves, knowledge of the wicked plans and covenants of the Jaredites was to be had only through use of the sacred interpreters. This in turn suggests that Mosiah₂ never translated these wicked things and explains why Alma₂ placed such emphasis on safeguarding the interpreters as part of his admonition to Helaman.¹³

The main point to draw from this first part of the study is that while Mosiah₂ was aware of the entire Jaredite record legacy, he may not have

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¹³. Helaman 6:25–26 stresses that Gadianton did not gain possession of these wicked oaths and covenants from the plates, but from Satan directly. By saying nothing about Mosiah₂’s translation, this passage underscores that the plates contained this information and strongly implies that the translation did not.
translated all of it. The best way for him and subsequent prophets to conceal the visions of the brother of Jared and the secret oaths of the Jaredites was to leave them protected by a language barrier that required the use of the interpreters to overcome. It thus seems possible, if not in fact quite likely, that Mosiah_2 translated only the account of the Jaredite history, leaving for later the work of translating these two sensitive sources of information.

Mormon and the plates of Ether

When it comes to Mormon’s relationship to the records of the Jaredites, the key question is why he himself did not abridge their history but instead left this task for his son Moroni. Almost everything Mormon had to say about the twenty-four gold plates of Ether appears in the book of Mosiah. He took pains to account for their discovery and translation but in fact said little about their actual contents. He provided two separate accounts of Limhi’s people finding the plates (in Mosiah 8:7–9, and then again in Mosiah 21:25–27). The first of these features a long conversation about Limhi’s curiosity regarding the plates and about the fact that Mosiah_2 possessed the means to interpret them (Mosiah 8:10–19). Mormon later described Limhi’s handing over the twenty-four gold plates to Mosiah_2 (Mosiah 22:14) but again said nothing about their contents either at this point or when he described Mosiah_2’s reading of the record of Zeniff to his own people in Zarahemla (Mosiah 25:5).

Mormon’s reticence to delve into the Jaredite account continues in Mosiah 28. This chapter contains Mormon’s most important writing about the Jaredite records, but strangely it appears that he did so only as an afterthought, in an unforeseen digression (see Mosiah 28:11–20). The chapter begins with a poignant discussion of the desire of the sons of Mosiah_1 to go preach to the Lamanites, leaving the king with no heir to the throne and no one to take over custody of the sacred records (Mosiah 28:1–10). At this point, Mormon was apparently ready to describe how Mosiah_2 dealt with this difficult situation. But as he started to do so, he abruptly shifted focus. He suddenly decided to make note
of the unrelated fact that Mosiah, had already “translated and caused to be written the records which were on the plates of gold” (Mosiah 28:11) and to discuss the sacred interpreters (Mosiah 28:13–16). Mormon continued in this vein, talking about the translation of the gold plates but said only that “it gave an account of the people who were destroyed, from the time that they were destroyed back to the building of the great tower” (Mosiah 28:17). He punctuated this lengthy digression by adding an editorial comment, promising that “this account shall be written hereafter; for behold, it is expedient that all people should know the things which are written in this account” (Mosiah 28:19).

As noted, this short, tangential burst of narration contains almost all of Mormon’s writing about the Jaredite record. It is a mysterious passage, and it leaves one puzzled as to how Mormon viewed this record and his relationship to it. On one hand he clearly thought it was a vital record, saying that “all people” should know about it. On the other hand his discussion of it is clearly spontaneous, inserted on the spur of the moment without planned intent and with only a bare-bones summary of its content. Even Mormon’s promise that “this account shall be written hereafter” is comparatively indefinite and impersonal. Just a few lines earlier, he had made a bold personal promise where he took direct responsibility for including a later record of the missionary labors of the sons of Mosiah, saying, “And I shall give an account of their proceedings hereafter” (Mosiah 28:9). His words about the Jaredite record don’t have the same tone. Rather they appear to suggest to Mormon’s readers, as Brant Gardner has also noted, that the record “will be available, [but] there is no indication that he personally planned to abridge it as part of his own record.” Ultimately, as we see later, it was Moroni, not Mormon, who inscribed the account onto the plates of Mormon.

Thus, even Mormon’s most extensive discussion of the Jaredites gives a good indication that their history was not a primary focus for

14. Mormon made only two other direct references to the plates of Ether: in Alma 37, during Alma’s discourse to Helaman, and in Helaman 6, where he likened the secret evil works of the Gadianton band to those of the Jaredites.

him. Indeed, it has been suggested that he probably would have been content not to refer to it at all.\textsuperscript{16} This mindset is not what we expect from the man we think of as having comprehensive responsibility for the Book of Mormon. However, it is important to recognize this nuance in Mormon’s attitude and understand the reasons for it. There may be a deeper explanation as to why he is not the one who incorporated the Jaredite account into the Book of Mormon—deeper than saying he ran out of time or perhaps stumbled somehow in his duties as a record keeper. To understand what the task of dealing with the Jaredite records might have meant for Mormon, consider these questions: (1) How large a task was it? Was it manageable? (2) Could it have been done without putting the Nephite abridgment at risk? (3) Was it part of Mormon’s calling? Basic to these questions is an effort to appreciate the challenge Mormon faced in preparing an abridgment of Nephite history while also leading the Nephite civilization through the final stages of its collapse. We will address each question separately.

The first question concerns how large an undertaking it would have been for Mormon to take responsibility for making an abridgment of Jaredite history. At first glance, it doesn’t seem like much of a job. We look at the book of Ether and see a genealogy, a handful of historical chapters, and a measure of commentary by Moroni. It doesn’t seem like too much to expect that Mormon could have written this text or something like it.\textsuperscript{17} But what was really involved here? Are we justified in assuming that Mormon knew Jaredite history as well as he knew Nephite history and that he thus would have been able, with relatively little additional effort, to sift and abridge and comment on the records of the

\textsuperscript{16} Brant Gardner labels Mormon’s short summary of the Jaredite story in Mosiah 28 as “quite disappointing” and suggests that “Mormon might have been content to omit this text entirely, despite the obvious significance attached” to it. Second Witness, 3:467–68.

\textsuperscript{17} “A twenty-four-plate account does not seem like a dauntingly lengthy text. Mosiah, after all, had managed a translation to which Mormon presumably had access and could have integrated into his own book or simply appended to his record, much as he did with the small plates of Nephi. But he chose not to.” Hardy, Understanding the Book of Mormon, 228.
Jaredite saga? Probably not. Alan Miner has thoughtfully suggested that far from being a straightforward and simple thing to do, this task might have taken years to complete. It would require studying Jaredite history carefully from beginning to end so as to know what to include and what to omit, obtaining the inspiration to comment with authority and to apply the text to conditions in the latter days, and finding the time and circumstances needed to do these things, make the plates, and actually inscribe the record itself.18 These points are worth considering before making the assumption that Mormon could have gone effortlessly from abridging the Nephite records to abridging the Jaredite ones. It is valid to leave room for the probability that the process of preparing for and abridging the book of Ether might have taken Mormon much more time and effort than he had to spare.

But is that all there is to it? Was writing an abridged history of the Jaredites (that is, the book of Ether) the only thing that was required to do justice to the Jaredite record-keeping legacy? I ask this question because it seems clear that for Moroni, the task of dealing with the Jaredite records involved much more; it also included translating and inscribing the vision of the brother of Jared onto his father’s plates (Ether 4:4–5). Would Mormon have shouldered the same burden if he had taken on responsibility for the Jaredite records? In view of what happened with Moroni, I suggest that preserving the brother of Jared’s visions may well

18. Following is a useful description of the painstaking effort that Moroni had to invest in writing the book of Ether: “Whether Moroni was retranslating the Book of Ether (from an unknown language to ‘reformed Egyptian’), or whether he was translating what Mosiah had written (from Hebrew to ‘reformed Egyptian’—Mormon 9:32), it could conceivably have taken Moroni years to abridge ‘from the tower down until they were destroyed’ (Ether 1:5). Moroni notes that he only wrote ‘the hundredth part’ of what was contained in the Book of Ether (Ether 15:33). He would have had to painstakingly inscribe the text onto numerous metal plates which he would have had to either acquire or make. And in making his abridgment, he could not have proceeded little by little, he would have had to have understood the whole from the beginning in order to know what to leave in and what to take out so that his abridgment of Jaredite history would parallel aspects of Nephite history. He also would have needed to gain insight as to when he might insert comments relative to conditions among the people in the latter-days (see Ether 4, 5, 12).” See Miner, Step by Step through the Book of Mormon, volume 7, appendix A.
have been part and parcel of the calling to deal with the Jaredite records. If so, Mormon would have had to find a way to inscribe a text that perhaps would have been two to three times as long as his abridgment of Nephite history. Moreover, if I am correct that Mosiah2 did not translate this vision, then Mormon would have had to find time for that job as well.

Thus, the short answer to the first question seems to be that proper handling of the Jaredite records was likely not a manageable task for Mormon to assume. For him to write those things that the Lord wanted preserved from this earlier era would have constituted an immense undertaking, and it was probably a responsibility that Mormon was never in a position to consider seriously. Instead, we should perhaps try to imagine the faith it took for him to predict that somehow the account of the Jaredites would eventually make its way into his record, knowing that the task would fall upon Moroni’s shoulders if he survived the destruction that was coming upon the Nephite nation.

This leads to the second question: Would Mormon’s abridgment of the large plates of Nephi have been at risk if he had widened his focus to include the Jaredite records? We have addressed this question to some degree already by pointing out how large a task this extra assignment would have been. Another point to bear in mind, however, is the vulnerability of Mormon’s abridgment. Because we have known the Book of Mormon only as a finished product, we often forget that Mormon never saw it that way. At the time he made his comment that the Jaredite account would be included “hereafter,” Mormon’s abridgment was far from done: the books of Alma, Helaman, 3 and 4 Nephi, and Mormon did not exist. Nor was it a foregone conclusion that he would be able to write them. The times in which he lived and the circumstances under which he labored were unpredictable at best. Many scholars believe that Mormon worked on his abridgment during the last, most desperate, years of his life, when he was leading an army and a people who were on the path to extinction.19 Here is Mormon’s account of these conditions and the threat they posed to his abridging work:

19. Brant Gardner believes Mormon composed his abridgment between AD 379 and 385; see “Mormon’s Editorial Method and Meta-Message,” FARMS Review 21/1
And now, my son, I dwell no longer upon this horrible scene. Behold, thou knowest the wickedness of this people; thou knowest that they are without principle, and past feeling; and their wickedness doth exceed that of the Lamanites... Therefore, write somewhat a few things, if thou art spared and I shall perish and not see thee; but I trust that I may see thee soon; for I have sacred records that I would deliver up unto thee. (Moroni 9:20, 24, emphasis added)

In this passage Mormon acknowledged the possibility that he might perish before finishing everything he planned to do with his abridgment. He did not take his own survival for granted, and his uncertain surroundings put his work on the abridgment at some degree of risk. Under such circumstances, could Mormon have entertained the idea of writing the Jaredite account as well? The idea hardly seems feasible. For Mormon to take on a major new task would have posed a dangerous distraction from his primary aim of finishing the Nephite record. To understand why Mormon did not deal with the plates of Ether, one must soberly assess his environment and the extreme difficulties he faced in trying to complete his first priority, his abridged history of the rise and fall of Nephite civilization.

Finally, let us ask the third question: Was preserving the Jaredite account part of Mormon’s calling? This question might seem curious to some, given Mormon’s role as custodian of the plates that made up the Nephite prophetic legacy. Wouldn’t that automatically mean he had...
primary responsibility for the Jaredite records as well? Not necessarily. To make such an assumption is to overlay a static picture onto a dynamic situation. Mormon was not principally a librarian. He was a leader, a warrior, and a historian of his times writing under great duress. To take on a vast new project like the writing of the Jaredite account would not be a natural thing to do unless he had been called to do so.

In this regard, note how clear and precise Mormon’s first record-keeping assignment was. It took place when he was ten years of age. Ammon approached Mormon and told him to go to the hill Shim when he was twenty-four years old, take only the large plates of Nephi from their hiding place, and write on those plates a complete record of his own day (Mormon 1:2–4). Mormon’s second record-keeping assignment had a similarly precise focus. His commission was to

make a record of these things which have been done—Yea, a small record of that which hath taken place from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem, even down until the present time. Therefore I do make my record from the accounts which have been given by those who were before me, until the commencement of my day. (3 Nephi 5:14–16)

This statement is clear; Mormon knew that his second record—his abridgment onto the plates of Mormon—was to be small in size, that it should deal with events from the days of Lehi down to his own time, and that it should be drawn from the records of his Nephite predecessors. Given the precise clarity of Mormon’s earlier assignments, one would expect that a calling to make a Jaredite record would be made in similarly precise terms. Moreover, given his past performance in fulfilling the many different responsibilities he was given, Mormon would likely have made a Jaredite record had he been told to do so. Without better evidence to the contrary, I submit we can assume that Mormon did not feel this task was an inherent part of his prophetic duty.

To sum up Mormon’s relationship to the Jaredite records, it seems fair to say that he never showed a systematic commitment to writing them up. He recognized their importance, but this does not mean he felt a direct responsibility for abridging or transcribing them. Perhaps
more clearly than we can, Mormon saw that challenge in its full light: it would likely have taken much more time and effort than he had available and would have conflicted sharply with his duties to finish the Nephite abridgment and lead his people during the last stages of their existence. Nevertheless, he had great faith that this work would be done, faith that centered on his son Moroni.

**Moroni’s legacy and the Jaredite accounts**

Moroni’s writing of the history and visions of the Jaredite people fulfilled the hopes of prophets from two extinct civilizations, and he fulfilled these hopes while he himself was fleeing for his life. How Moroni dealt with this unique burden needs to be studied on its own terms and with a far-sighted lens. To begin, I propose to address two misperceptions that tend to limit appreciation of Moroni’s work with the Jaredite records. The first misperception is that his effort consisted mainly of going over material Mosiah had already translated, and the second is that this task was not central to Moroni’s prophetic role—that is, that he only did it because Mormon was unable to. The persistence of these notions is unfortunate since preserving what the Lord intended from the Jaredite experience may well have been the hardest work of Moroni’s later life. He did it, as already noted, under extreme circumstances. He also had other record-keeping duties—wrapping up the account of the destruction of the Nephites and writing a book of scripture of his own—although those latter projects likely took significantly less time and effort to complete. As the following discussion will show, Moroni’s efforts with the Jaredite records went well beyond that of a passive scribe or an attentive son focused on filling gaps in his father’s record.

The starting point is to separate the two tasks Moroni carried out with the Jaredite records, something discussed at length in preceding pages. The distinction I refer to is between Moroni’s preparation of the abridged history found in the book of Ether on the one hand and

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his production of a transcript of the visions of the brother of Jared on the other. Similar questions need to be asked about both of these jobs: What textual sources did he use? Was translation required or “just” abridgment and transcription? Such questions address the issue of what Moroni went through to deal with these records and provide a basis for appreciating the significance of his achievement.

With respect to his writing the book of Ether, Book of Mormon scholars seem to agree that Moroni probably used Mosiah₂’s translation of the twenty-four gold plates as his source text. Their premise is that this translation, most likely found on the large plates of Nephi, was available to Moroni, and that if he had access to it, it would be “wholly unnecessary” for him to retranslate the Jaredite account. But stop and consider that although having Mosiah₂’s translation was doubtless a tremendous help, it marked only the beginning of Moroni’s work on the book of Ether, not the end. He did not transcribe Mosiah₂’s translation, he abridged it. This means that at some point, he had to to find time and space to read and digest the account thoroughly. He would also have needed to conceive a structure for his abridgment, decide what to include and what to exclude, and where to weave in his own commentary, revelation from the Lord, and passages from the Nephite records. He also had to create the plates themselves, and all this had to be done after Mormon’s death. The point made here is that one cannot readily assume that

21. Sidney B. Sperry set the tone for this point of view many years ago by saying that for Moroni to translate the plates of Ether “would entail a tremendous amount of labor” and would be “a wholly unnecessary preliminary to the abridging process” if he had access to Mosiah₁’s translation. See his Book of Mormon Compendium (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 22. Others who follow this lead include Peterson, Moroni: Ancient Prophet, Modern Messenger, 39; Gardner, Second Witness, 6:160 and 4:511; and Welch, “Preliminary Comments on the Sources behind the Book of Ether,” 9–12. George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjödahl just assert that Moroni’s account is, “substantially, a summary of the translation of Mosiah of the twenty-four gold plates.” See Commentary on the Book of Mormon, ed. Philip C. Reynolds (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1961), 6:44.

22. It is possible that Moroni may have learned Jaredite history to some degree while Mormon was still alive. But it is highly debatable that he had access to the Jaredite records and could have gained a deep understanding of their history (sufficient to make a meaningful abridgment) while he and his father were actively involved in the final tumultuous years of the Nephite struggle.
Moroni’s work to prepare the book of Ether was an easy or short-lived task. If we wanted to compare it to Mormon’s work, it would probably not be far off to suggest that Moroni had to condense a history that was at least as large as the large plates of Nephi into a text of fifteen chapters. It was no doubt a massively difficult, time-consuming task, carried out under extremely threatening conditions.

Now let us add consideration of Moroni’s work with the visions of the brother of Jared. What was his source text for this effort? Was it a translation made by Mosiah, or another earlier prophet, or did he have to interpret the original record himself and then transcribe it? As I have already argued, the best approach for Mosiah would have been to hand down the original record of these visions untranslated, along with the directive not to “touch” them until the Lord gave further instruction (Ether 5:1). This assumption would make it likely that Moroni had to translate the record himself.

Other evidence supports this line of reasoning. This evidence is found in the way Moroni spoke about the power of the language used by the brother of Jared. The reverent, even intense way in which Moroni wrote about the record of the brother of Jared suggests that he had direct experience with the original account rather than a translation. On one hand, Moroni was moved by the wondrous content of the visions he read of, saying, “I have written upon these plates the very things which the brother of Jared saw; and there never were greater things made manifest” (Ether 4:4). On the other hand, Moroni was also deeply affected by the power of expression the brother of Jared used: “Behold, thou hast not made us mighty in writing like unto the brother of Jared, 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). I think, in agreement with John Welch, that these observations by Moroni were the result of his firsthand experience with the record written by the brother of Jared himself, which language he found to be overpowering, and that Moroni could only have had this kind of experience if he

23. Welch, “Preliminary Comments on the Sources behind the Book of Ether,” 5, 11–12.
was translating it.24 Taken together, these details lead me to conclude that Moroni was indeed both the translator and the transcriber of the account of the brother of Jared’s vision and not merely a copyist reproducing someone else’s translation of them.

A second misperception about Moroni’s work with the Jaredite records is the tendency to think of it as secondary, as a task that should have been Mormon’s and thus was not central to Moroni’s calling. This misjudgment is based largely on a supposition that Mormon had responsibility over all records that emerged from the Nephite era. However, we have already seen that Mormon expressed only a tentative connection to the Jaredite record set. We have also seen that Moroni’s work with the Jaredite records was no small effort but rather a monumental task, one that held spiritual significance for both him and future generations. The following discussion delves into Moroni’s strong personal connection to the Jaredite account and how his labor with it involved a significant amount of direct revelation from the Lord. The conclusion I draw from it is that Moroni was called by the Lord to work with these records.

The writings of Mormon and Moroni make clear that Moroni inherited the mantle of record keeper. However, nowhere prior to the book of Ether is anything said about Moroni having the responsibility to write the history of the Jaredites or the visions of the brother of Jared.25 Yet when Moroni started the book of Ether, he began as if it were the most natural thing in the world: “And now I, Moroni, proceed to give an account of those ancient inhabitants who were destroyed by the

24. Valentin Arts has postulated that the brother of Jared’s vision was translated at the time of, or soon after the Savior’s visit to the Nephites, and that this was done by the prophet/disciple Nephi (see Arts, “Third Jaredite Record,” 57–58). This interesting hypothesis merits consideration, but it leaves open the question of why Moroni felt so intensely about the power of the brother of Jared’s language if it had already been translated.

25. Mormon wrote in several places that he planned to pass the record he had made to Moroni, so he would write “somewhat a few things” about Christ and the destruction of the Nephites; notably, he never spoke about giving Moroni the plates of Ether (Moroni 9:24; Words of Mormon 1:1–2; Mormon 6:6). After Mormon’s death, Moroni said he was to write “a few things” that had been “commanded by my father” regarding “the sad tale of the destruction of my people” (Mormon 8:1, 3–5).
hand of the Lord upon the face of this north country” (Ether 1:1). This matter-of-fact opening has led scholars to believe that Moroni was simply taking over a task Mormon had given him26 or that Moroni realized the Jaredite story needed to be written after making a careful study of his father’s record.27 But these interpretations understate Moroni’s own connection to the Jaredite records.

In fact, Moroni’s connection to the Jaredite records was deep and unique, on another level entirely than that of a passive scribe or obliging manager of his father’s legacy. Rather, it was through his handling of these records that we see him rise to his full stature as a prophet. He emerges as a self-aware seer who knowingly fulfilled ancient prophecy and wrote things that reached far into the future, while receiving extensive, direct revelation from the Lord to guide him in doing so.

Scholars have noted that Moroni consciously filled his writings with allusions to earlier Nephite prophets.28 This pattern is directly relevant to this discussion because of three specific prophecies from the writings of Nephi that Moroni recapitulates in the book of Ether. First, Moroni’s reference to the brother of Jared’s vision of “all the inhabitants of the earth which had been, and also all that would be . . . even unto the ends of the earth” (Ether 3:25) is a direct echo of Nephi’s multiple references to a book in which “shall be a revelation from God, from the beginning of the world to the ending thereof” (2 Nephi 27: 7, 10–11). Moroni was the first prophet since Nephi to mention this unique aspect of the “sealed book” Isaiah prophesied about. Second, Moroni also instructed the future translator of his writings to “touch not” the sealed portion of

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27. Peterson stresses this possibility because Moroni had a pattern of fulfilling promises that Mormon had made. See *Moroni: Ancient Prophet, Modern Messenger*, 37.

this record. This directive repeated yet another prophecy that no one had mentioned since Nephi’s day and used words directly taken from Nephi’s writing (see Ether 5:1; 2 Nephi 27:21). Third, Moroni predicted that three witnesses would see the record when it came forth, another unique prophecy mentioned nowhere else except in Nephi’s commentary on Isaiah (see Ether 5:2–4; 2 Nephi 27:13, 22).

Moroni mentioned these prophecies virtually one right after the other, much as Nephi had done in his own writings, and used language he borrowed from Nephi. Clearly he knew Nephi’s prophecies well, but more to the point, Moroni’s careful handling of these passages shows that he knew his work on the Jaredite record was not a random assignment. Moroni straightforwardly connected Nephi’s prophecies to his own commission to preserve Isaiah’s “sealed” book and also to offer instruction to the future translator of that book. Moroni understood that his work with the Jaredite records hearkened back to the very beginnings of Nephite spiritual history—that he was, in effect, fulfilling Nephi’s prophecies—and also connected him to important events far in the future. Far from being incidental or an afterthought, Moroni’s work with the Jaredite records was central to his role as the last prophet of the Nephite era.

There is another impressive visionary dimension to Moroni’s labor. I refer here to the extensive amount of direct revelation that he received concerning his errand with the Jaredite records. The Lord was deeply involved in tutoring and encouraging Moroni in this work. He gave him specific commands to write the visions of the brother of Jared and share warnings about the evils of secret combinations (Ether 4:5; 8:26). In addition, most of Ether 4 consists of the Lord giving Moroni instruction about the future handling of the visions of the brother of Jared (Ether 4:6–19). Similarly, Ether 12 records an extended conversation in

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29. One can infer from these specific instructions that Moroni was commanded by the Lord to translate the Jaredite record as a whole, but Moroni gave no details about when or under what circumstances this broader command might have been given. Similarly, Mormon never said just when or how the Lord commanded him to make his abridgment, although it becomes clear in the course of his record that he wrote under command of the Lord (see 3 Nephi 5:14).
which the Lord gave Moroni much-needed assurance about his worries over the weakness of his written record (Ether 12:22–41). Finally, Moroni was forbidden to write all of Ether’s prophecies, a restriction that no doubt came through inspiration (Ether 13:13). An important implication of all this instruction relates to Mormon. Perhaps one of the main reasons he did not deal with the Jaredite records himself was because he had not been tutored like this. Nor could he have given Moroni meaningfully precise instruction about how to do this task. Indeed, the fact that Moroni received so much clear, precise revelation on this matter is perhaps the best indication that he was, and always had been, the Lord’s man for the job of preserving the Jaredite record.

To summarize this discussion of Moroni’s work with the Jaredite records, it seems clear that his efforts involved much more than reworking material that Mosiah had already translated. It also seems clear that this work was not just an incidental aspect of Moroni’s mission, something that he handled because Mormon was unable to get to it. Rather, it was a time-consuming, far-reaching, and vital part of Moroni’s prophetic contribution, and an assignment for which the Lord took significant pains to tutor him.

The Jaredite records and Christ’s coming to the Nephites

Our discussion thus far can be encapsulated in the following brief scenario that describes the way the Nephite prophets dealt with the Jaredite records.

- Mosiah received the twenty-four gold plates of Ether from Limhi and possibly a separate record as well containing the brother of Jared’s record of his vision of the history of the world. Mosiah translated the plates of Ether, which yielded a history of the Jaredites, but he likely did not translate either the vision of the brother of Jared or the secret oaths and covenants of the Jaredites.
• The Jaredite record-keeping legacy—consisting of Mosiah’s translation, the twenty-four gold plates, and the brother of Jared’s record of his vision—was handed down from generation to generation through the Nephite prophets until Mormon received it—along with the sacred records of the Nephites.

• In his abridgment, Mormon described the finding and translation of the plates of Ether and gave a brief summary of their historical content. But although he must have known of them, he maintained a respectful silence about the brother of Jared and his vision. It seems that Mormon was never directly told to write the Jaredite story but focused on fulfilling his divine commission to abridge a history of the Nephites.

• Moroni was the last prophet to receive the Jaredite records. He probably used Mosiah’s translation as the basis for the book of Ether. However, it appears that before writing the book of Ether, he read the original account of the vision of the brother of Jared, translated it, and transcribed it onto the plates of Mormon. He also received extensive, personal instruction from the Lord in these tasks.

A final dimension of this story remains to be considered—the “unsealing” of the brother of Jared’s vision at the time of the Savior’s visit to the Nephites. This rarely discussed episode merits attention as a milestone in the history of Nephite exposure to the Jaredite records. As mentioned earlier, Moroni’s writings indicate that the Lord had instructed the brother of Jared that the things he had seen should not “go forth unto the world, until the time cometh that I shall glorify my name in the flesh” (Ether 3:21) and that the Nephite prophets had respected this restriction (Ether 4:1). But in virtually the same breath, Moroni goes on to disclose that “after Christ truly had showed himself unto his people he commanded that [the things that the brother of Jared saw] should be made manifest” (Ether 4:2).
Just how these things were “made manifest” to the Nephites has important implications for this study. In particular, it would be useful to know whether the Nephites at the time of the Savior’s visit were taught about the brother of Jared’s vision from a textual translation of the original account. If such a text existed or was prepared at this time, it is possible that Moroni would have used that text when he transcribed the vision of the brother of Jared onto the plates of Mormon (assuming, again, that Mosiah himself did not translate it). To make such a transcription would represent a monumental task but would have been less challenging than having to use the interpreters to make a translation as well. Unfortunately, the record makes no mention of the people being shown any such translated text at the time of the Savior’s visit. The closest evidence it gives as to how knowledge of the brother of Jared’s vision was shared with the Nephites comes in the passage below. Toward the end of the book of 3 Nephi, we read that the Savior quoted from the writings of Malachi, after which he

expounded [these writings] unto the multitude; and he did expound all things unto them, both great and small. . . . And he did expound all things, even from the beginning until the time that he should come in his glory—yea, even all things which should come upon the face of the earth, even until the elements should melt with fervent heat, and the earth should be wrapt together as a scroll, and the heavens and the earth should pass away. (3 Nephi 26:1, 3)

Mormon did not say here that the Savior shared or expounded the record of the brother of Jared. However, his description of what the Savior taught sounds very much like what the brother of Jared was shown, namely “all the inhabitants of the earth which had been, and also all that would be . . . even unto the ends of the earth” (Ether 3:25). For

30. As noted earlier, Arts has suggested that such a translation was made. See “Third Jaredite Record,” 57–58.

31. Notably, Moroni himself drew a connection between the Savior’s appearance to the brother of Jared and his appearance to the Nephites: “And now, as I, Moroni, said I
purposes of this study, I submit that this passage shows that the Savior himself “made manifest” to the multitude teachings that were clearly similar or equivalent to what he shared with the brother of Jared. It also shows that the Nephites were capable of being instructed in such things verbally, without the use of a text or translation.

A written record was indeed made to capture what the Savior taught. Mormon records that “the plates of Nephi” contained “the more part of the things which [Jesus] taught the people” at this time (3 Nephi 26:7, emphasis added). Mormon longed to include this extensive, precious account of the Savior’s words on his own plates, but he was forbidden by the Lord to do so (3 Nephi 26:11). Instead, he had to be content with writing only a “lesser part of the things which [the Savior] taught the people” (3 Nephi 26:8). Taken together, these comments seem to

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could not make a full account of these things which are written, therefore it sufficeth me to say that Jesus showed himself unto this man in the spirit, even after the manner and in the likeness of the same body even as he showed himself unto the Nephites” (Ether 3:17). This comment by Moroni indicates that these two experiences, though centuries apart, were comparable in terms of their revelatory power, and it reinforces the idea that the Savior likely shared with the Nephites the same expansive vision that he gave to the brother of Jared.

32. This restriction fits into a wider pattern of restraint and constraint in hearing or recording the words of the Lord as they were manifest during his ministry among the Nephites. The pattern begins when they were at first unable to comprehend the Father’s voice (3 Nephi 11:3–7); in addition, the multitude’s inability to understand what the Savior had taught them was an important prelude to the experiences recorded in 3 Nephi 17, in which they were unable to articulate what he said while praying for them (3 Nephi 17:1–3, 15–18). Similarly, the multitude could not hear the Savior’s words as he blessed his disciples (3 Nephi 18:36–37), and they were once again unable to express in words the things that he prayed for them (3 Nephi 19:31–36). The record later goes on to say that it was forbidden to record the things that babes and children were given to utter as well as the “unspeakable things” that “many” baptized Nephites beheld (3 Nephi 26:16–18). Finally, we note that Mormon was forbidden to write the names of the three Nephite disciples who chose to tarry in the flesh (3 Nephi 28: 25).

33. It is interesting that, without ever mentioning the vision of the brother of Jared, Mormon makes the same point in 3 Nephi 26 that Moroni later makes about the eventual accessibility of that vision. Mormon writes that if future readers believe his abbreviated account, “which is expedient that they should have first, to try their faith . . . then shall the greater things be made manifest unto them” (3 Nephi 26:9). This coincides with
suggest that if a textual translation of the brother of Jared’s great vision of earth’s history existed among the Nephites at the time of the Savior’s visit, Mormon was unaware of it. In other words, the available evidence suggests that the vision of the brother of Jared was less likely to have been *circulated* and more likely to have been *directly experienced* by the people at the time of Christ’s visit.

Just as we do not know exactly how knowledge of the brother of Jared’s vision was dispensed to the Nephites, we do not know exactly how long they were privileged to retain this knowledge. Evidently, the Nephites’ hold on such sacred things was lost at some point, probably between approximately AD 200 and 325, because of the wickedness of the people. Mormon reported that by the time of his ministry, the Lord had removed the three Nephite disciples, spiritual gifts, miracles, and healing from among the Nephites “because of their wickedness and unbelief” (Mormon 1:13–14). Thus it would appear that at most, the Nephites may have retained an appreciable awareness of the brother of Jared’s vision for just under three centuries.

For purposes of our discussion of Moroni’s handling of the brother of Jared’s vision, I conclude from the evidence presented above that whatever means were used to share this vision at the time of the Savior’s visit, it had little impact on the way Moroni dealt with the vision. By his time, any popular knowledge of the vision had long since disappeared, and there seems to have been no record or translation of the vision that he could draw on. Rather, when it came time for Moroni to make his record of this precious revelation, his appointed commission was to engage directly with the original account written by the brother of Jared and translate it by means of the interpreters provided for this purpose, thereby having an overpowering experience (Ether 3:22–24; 12:24). The plates of Nephi, which contained the “more part” of the visionary things

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Moroni’s statement: “And in that day that they shall exercise faith in me, saith the Lord . . . then will I manifest unto them the things which the brother of Jared saw, even to the unfolding unto them all my revelations” (Ether 4:7). One wonders whether Mormon was stating a general principle of faith or if he was possibly inferring that he knew of the brother of Jared’s vision and the sacred limitations imposed on its distribution.
Jesus had expounded to the Nephites, written in reformed Egyptian, evidently were not suitable for Moroni’s purposes (3 Nephi 26:11–12). Rather, he felt the need to delve into the brother of Jared’s own account, to translate it, and to transcribe it in full onto the plates of Mormon. One can scarcely imagine what it meant for Moroni to know he was vouchsafing to future generations a magnificent vision that had been painstakingly preserved through the duration of two, already-extinct civilizations. To us it is a mysterious, “sealed” book, but to him it was a tool to be prepared for the Lord to deploy at some future time as he would see fit (Ether 4:7). Accordingly, Moroni fulfilled the Lord’s unique commission to him and made a full account of the “very things” the brother of Jared had seen.

Conclusion

This study has reviewed in detail the history of Nephite dealings with the records of the Jaredites. It has dealt primarily with the work of three men: King Mosiah, Mormon, and Moroni. It also focuses clearly on the record of the universal vision of the brother of Jared as a distinct part of the Jaredite legacy and has tried to shed a separate light on how this important vision was handled by Nephite record keepers. The analysis explores why Mormon himself did not write the book of Ether and why Moroni undertook this task as well as the transcription of the brother of Jared’s vision onto the plates of Mormon. This study concludes that it was impractical for Mormon to take on the job of abridging the Jaredite record when his abridgment of Nephite history demanded so much from him. Moreover, I have argued that it was Moroni’s commission (rather than Mormon’s) to deal with the Jaredite records and that the Lord tutored him specifically in executing this responsibility.

This study also serves as a reminder that appreciation for Book of Mormon record keepers should not be limited by the content of the book as it is now published. We know that the volume we enjoy today does not fully reflect the content of the plates of Mormon—it lacks a major portion of Mormon’s abridgment, the translation of which was
lost by Martin Harris in 1828. It also does not contain the vast vision of
the brother of Jared that was inscribed in full, by the hand of Moroni,
as a worthy capstone for a thousand years of Nephite record keeping.
These gaps in mankind’s appreciation of the plates of Mormon are not
permanent, for the book itself clarifies that the Lord’s purposes in them
will be fulfilled

in that day that [the Gentiles] shall exercise faith in me, saith the
Lord, even as the brother of Jared did, that they may become sanc-
tified in me, then will I manifest unto them the things which the
brother of Jared saw, even to the unfolding unto them all my rev-
elations, saith Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of the heav-
ens and of the earth, and all things that in them are. (Ether 4:7)

Thus, even if we now have a clearer picture of the ancient past of the
Jaredite records, we still have only a glimpse of their prophetic future.
Nevertheless, thanks to Moroni’s fulfillment of his divine commission,
the impact of this record will reach far into a future that we even now
can scarcely imagine.

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Reading and the Menardian Paradox in 3 Nephi

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In the Old World Jesus taught, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6), yet in the New World he says, “Blessed are all they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 12:6). Attention, understandably, has been given to the differences, large and small, between the Sermon on the Mount as recounted in the New Testament and the similar sermon given in the New World. At times, we note slight shifts in emphasis (here in the New World, for example, Jesus makes this promise to “all”), more complete understandings (we are filled specifically with the influence of the Holy Ghost), and so on. And these differences raise compelling questions about the possibility that plain and precious truths were lost in translation in the Bible but are restored again in the Book of Mormon. The differences might also suggest the importance of a shifting context that moves Jesus to vary his speech. One wonders if one version is more authoritative than the other. But there is an additional question the two accounts of Christ’s sermon raise. What do readers make of the fact that in most cases the wording is exactly coincident? What might that signify? For example, Jesus tells his listeners in the Old World that “blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7). He tells his audience in the New World, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (3 Nephi 12:7). The punctuational differences aside, are we to
assume a meaning that is precisely coincident in both contexts? Might the same language spoken in different places and in different moments in time necessarily shift, even if only slightly, in meaning? What are we to make of the facts that both statements in standard King James English are not the original language spoken in either case and that the two original languages are dramatically different? What ultimately does the occasional overlap and coincidence with the Bible in the Book of Mormon ask of readers exactly?

Here I focus on the repetition of the Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi in order to offer a literary and theological reflection on the Book of Mormon itself. My question concerns not the content of the sermon so much as the moral stakes of reading scripture, and especially of reading Mormon scripture, which I take to be scripture that places special emphasis on its own weaknesses, textuality, and constructedness. Taking as my companion Jorge Luis Borges, I argue that these features (which exercise both the Book of Mormon's defenders and its attackers) are necessary to the theological meaning of the text rather than difficulties that need to be explained. I suggest they highlight an essential meaning of the act of reading scripture germane to a theology of continuing revelation.

Pierre Menard and scripture

The great Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges wrote what may be his most famous story, “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote,” in 1939 to restore an understanding of the central paradox of what it means to read. The story is a mock scholarly article about a fictional early twentieth-century French writer by the name of Pierre Menard.1 Lost among Menard’s many accomplishments, claims the fictional scholar, are fragments of an attempt to write Don Quixote, the novel already written by the great seventeenth-century Spanish author, Miguel de

Cervantes. The narrator clarifies that this was not an attempt to put the character of Don Quixote in contemporary garb, like some modern adaptation of Romeo and Juliet set in Los Angeles. Adaptations merely “produce the plebeian pleasure of anachronism or (what is worse) to enthral us with the elementary idea that all epochs are the same or are different.”

Instead, Menard’s project was to do something quite different—something seemingly impossible.

I will come back to that impossible task in a moment. First, I want to highlight here Borges’s hesitation in deciding whether anachronism signals that all epochs are the same or whether it signals that all epochs are different. I want to suggest that this conundrum is central not only to understanding Borges’s story but to what it might mean to read scripture. I insist that the question of how historical, geographical, and cultural contexts shape the way we write and read is ultimately undecidable, even though those contexts are undeniably relevant to how we arrive at understandings of textual meaning. Let me explain. On one hand, we might be tempted to emphasize context, as the one-time school of reader response theory did, and insist that all readings are produced primarily or even solely by the context of the reader. To do so is to insist on the radical and perpetual difference between any two given moments in time and any two readers. But for Borges, this point is obvious and even boring. There is no denying that the reader’s situation shapes a text’s meaning according to her needs and desires and that any two readers will read differently as a result, but if we cannot distinguish between a good and a bad reading, we must concede that all readings are misreadings and are all equally off target. If this were the case, why would we want to insist on the difference, for example, between wresting the scriptures and likening them unto ourselves? According to the prophets, interpretation of scripture is a moral act—we might get it right and we might get it woefully wrong. Indeed, we will be judged by the books God has given us. And if meaning were merely produced by readerly context, then there would be no possibility of transcendent

value in texts—let alone, in the case of scripture, of any revelation from God to human beings. Texts would only mean what people think they mean, and all people would have equal claim on interpretation, regardless of the text. Hence, to reduce a text’s meaning merely to its various interpretations in the hands of its thousands of readers is to render all textual meaning and all texts equal under the omnipotent and unbending law of context. Scripture would then hold no special privilege over any other kind of literature, be it a magazine advertisement or a novel by William Faulkner. On such a view, the only way to enrich reading would be to be aware of our own historical entrapment as readers. As readers, we would have the critical obligation to historicize and secularize everything, paying attention solely to the subtle and subconscious ways in which all readers—ourselves included—hide their willful interpretations under the guise of transcendent meaning.

It would initially seem, then, that if we are invested in a belief of the special nature of scripture, as is presumably any believing reader of the Book of Mormon, we must resist reader response theory categorically. But, of course, to insist instead that meaning is always contained solely in the text itself, or that it is no more or no less than the author’s intentions, is to slide into the other extreme rejected by Borges, according to which all epochs are indeed the same. If all epochs and all cultures are the same, why should we need new revelations? Such a position disregards all the ways in which language, culture, historical experience, and beliefs shape and guide the kinds of questions we as readers or writers bring to texts. And this places our own judgment beyond reproach by denying the relevance of our moment and place in a culture and in historical time. Such a philosophy of reading seems almost ashamed of our humanity and places hope in scripture as a categorical escape from it. It is not surprising that such attitudes are often accompanied by a general suspicion of or disinterest in all forms of secular literature, even the “best books” we are told we ought to seek out, since such literature is not believed to offer a similar power of escape. Thus, in an effort to save scripture from the claims of reader response theory, we might end up mistakenly insisting on an exceptional view of sacred writ
and drawing an overly firm line between the divine word and human will. Fundamentalists and relativists alike find a belief in the similarities between literature and scripture threatening, since such a belief threatens to confuse categories of values essential for their respective projects of interpretation.

I want to insist, with Borges, that at both extremes—one we might call radically fundamentalist and the other radically relativist—we create an untraversable abyss between the sacred and the secular, leaving us mistakenly self-assured that we see a radical (and essentially knowable) distinction between that which comes from God and that which comes from human beings. I would argue that such a sharp dichotomy between the timeless and the timely is unacceptable from the perspective of Latter-day Saint theology, a theology that insists on the need for continuing revelation, on more prophets and more books yet to come from peoples and cultures who have not yet joined the chorus of testimonies we have thus far heard. We might call LDS theology dynamically orthodox. We adhere to what we have received not out of fear of competing and inimical claims on truth but in anticipation of what is yet to be revealed.

Let’s return to the passage from Borges to see if it might enlighten us further. His narrator explains that Menard’s task differs from what these extremes represent. Menard’s goal, it turns out, is not to produce another Quixote, “but the Quixote itself.” Needless to say, he never contemplated a mechanical transcription of the original; he did not propose to copy it. His admirable intention was to produce a few pages which would coincide—word for word and line for line—with those of Miguel de Cervantes. Menard himself thinks of this task, so much more interesting than the task of producing mere anachronism or of inhabiting either of the extremes criticized above, as akin to the work of metaphysicians who labor to produce an indisputable affirmation of a transcendent truth, except that in his case there will be no publication of the “intermediary stages” of his labor. All Menard can offer to the

world is his text as final proof of the mysterious process by which he was able to produce the same words. At first he thinks he can accomplish his aims simply by trying to be Cervantes, but then he realizes that the real challenge would be to produce such coincidence in language as Pierre Menard—to find the meeting ground between his world and the world of Cervantes through a production of identical words. Even though it appears he was successful in producing at least part of the same text, the fictional scholar/narrator points out the irony that the perfect coincidence between the words produced by Menard and the words originally produced by Cervantes only highlights their very different meanings, since the words are produced in radically different contexts. The narrator cites two identical passages, one from Cervantes and the other from Menard, and concludes that the passage produced by Menard is full of greater irony and meaning. His reasoning? It cannot be for nothing that three centuries of Western history have transpired between Cervantes and Menard. The same words will only reverberate as different meanings due to the considerable changes of time and place that shape how those words are interpreted.

The Menardian paradox is therefore that the achievement of coincidence and sameness of language—an achievement that has relied on an extraordinary level of devotion to and not mere mechanical reproduction of the original text—not only does not escape the difference of context but in fact highlights it in order to produce new meaning. What Borges’s story underscores in its rhetorical position as an academic article is “the halting and rudimentary art of reading: this new technique is that of the deliberate anachronism and the erroneous attribution.” Menard’s ambition might only be a possibility in the realm of ironic fiction, yet it is certainly what happens every time a reader picks up a text. Reading enacts an exact coincidence of language between the written word and the read word, especially when it is read carefully and devotedly; the same words echo in the mind of a writer and of a reader no matter how many centuries might have transpired in the meantime.

4. Borges, Labyrinths, 44.
(Unless of course it is a translation, but Borges insists that reading is translation, in any case, as we will see.) Because reading always produces new meanings, reading always makes of the text, as the narrator points out is the case with Menard’s Quixote, “a kind of palimpsest” in which the traces of earlier readings are faintly visible on the text. In the Borgesian universe, the reader becomes aware of the impossibility of plumbing the depths of a text to the point of arriving at ground zero of the word’s origin. All readings are rereadings, as all writings are translations. That is, every reader has left her mark on the text—every reading a new rewriting of earlier layers—which blurs the distinction between author and reader.

For this reason, Borges once wrote in a preface to a book of his own poems, “If the pages of this book contain some well-crafted verse, may the reader forgive my daring in having composed it before him. We are all one; our trifles are of little import, and circumstances influence our souls to such a degree that it is almost a chance occurrence that you are the reader and I the writer—the diffident and zealous writer—of my verses.” Far from creating a universe of relativism, this stunning disavowal of the notion of authenticity and originality places the transcendent value and meaning of the text beyond the individual reach of the author and of any one reader. If it bothers us to have to demystify an author’s “genius” in this way, it also grants us hope that we too as readers have the opportunity, even the responsibility, to be coparticipants, cocreators of genius or transcendent meaning. Untouched by genius or by holiness, the reader can scarcely perceive genius or identify revelation in another. But in this model, the text is the catalyst that spurs all readers to become cocreators of the text’s meaning and value. This implies that “the creative process is essentially a reading” and therefore that “only through an act of interpretation can that which is postulated take on meaning.” Truth needs a revelator as much as it needs

5. Borges, Labyrinths, 44.
a translator or interpreter. And this creative process happens both at the moment of creation as well as in the moment of reading, according to Borges. Hence, “meaning develops from the twofold relation of the interpreter: to a literary dream world and to historical context.”

All of this, of course, bears on scripture. When we consider divine meaning, revealed from God to human beings, we might feel tempted to conclude that God’s word is invulnerable to the shifting prisms of time, change, language, and culture. Yet a Latter-day Saint understanding of revelation embraces the ironies and accents of changing context because of the way in which the dialectic between God’s revealed word and human beings’ mimetic word ignites a process of ongoing revelation. The novelty of revelation, from the LDS perspective, is not just dependent on God’s will and his intercession in the human cultural context through prophets; it is dependent also on every reader, who in what Anthony Cascardi calls the “adjectival moments of thought” marks with his own accent of interpretation new meanings of the Word. Indeed it is precisely this refraction of God’s word caused by the contingencies of our reading moment that generates the need for a new revelation that we make possible by faithful reading. But this is not an argument for a free-for-all, every reader for himself. What exposes the differences between contexts and therefore the deeper meanings of new readings is not an insistence on absolute relativism but paradoxically the desire to see the sacred word’s meaning as the same for all time and all places. Without that desire to read attentively and devotedly and bring old words and phrases into the new context of our lives, we would not see the gap between earthly meaning and heavenly truth. However, without an acceptance of the inevitable distance between our understanding and God’s, without an abdication of the claim to know the mind of God precisely and completely, we would stand no chance of advancing in our understanding of truth. This is because we would always assume that our current understanding of God

is sufficient. I suspect that such an assumption is part of what it means to worship a God after our own image.

Confirmations from 3 Nephi

So how does this pertain to 3 Nephi, as my title suggests it must? Critics and defenders of the Book of Mormon have tended to divide along the lines described above, that is, into polar opposite definitions of the sacred and secular. Arguably, this is because the book seems to ask us to conclude one of two things. On the one hand, we might conclude that the Book of Mormon is the work of a human being and is therefore in need of a radical historicization that would expose its human authorship, by Joseph Smith. We might read it, in other words, merely as Joseph's psychology and his moment in time writ large. The book might also delude the believing reader by becoming nothing more than her psychology and her moment of time writ large. This explains the search for the nineteenth-century context evident in the text and the accusation that believing readers are just projecting their own will onto the text. On the other hand, however, we might be tempted to argue alternatively that the Book of Mormon stands outside of time and history, a narrative that comes from the heavens without the taint of circumstance, such that every believing reader is given, by means of passive reception, the entirety of its transcendent meaning. This second conclusion, of course, places the book in a category entirely apart from all other books, even from the Bible, since it is not as vulnerable to the degradations of time and the hand of man. I would argue that coming to either of these conclusions is a mistake; the book offers itself as an enigma, a fusion of two seemingly impossible choices. A reading that combines devotion to God's Word with the creative energies of interpretation reveals textual structures that turn us into Menardian readers. In this way, a third possibility emerges that resolves the apparent enigma.

For a sacred work of literature, the Book of Mormon is unusually preoccupied with its own historicity and textuality, yet it seems that a great number of its believing readers fail to acknowledge the relevance
of our historicity as readers. That is, if we are reluctant to consider how our cultural and historical circumstances have shaped our understandings of the book’s textual meanings, we might go to the extreme of denying the relevance of our particular time and place to whatever God reveals to us. This amounts to a denial of the very need of revelation in the particularities of our circumstances. Alternatively, the book’s disbelieving readers argue that its meaning can be reduced to the story of Joseph Smith’s time and his psychology, delimiting the text by whatever historians can verify. Such an approach, to put it bluntly, replaces God with the historian as the one voice who stands outside of time and orders chaos into meaning without accountability. In the former case, the reader treats the narrative’s claims of historical origins as untouchable, paradoxically above history but ultimately determinative of the text’s truth; we escape our historical condition categorically because of revelation, and the only salvation is to know as much of God’s word as possible. In the latter case, the reader treats the historian’s construction of the past as sacred, as the untouchable, unquestioned determinative source of the text’s meaning; all knowledge, in other words, can be reduced to our historical condition, and the only salvation is to know as much history as possible. But both readers would seem to miss one of the central paradoxes of Christ, which lies at the very heart of what revelation means: that God is revealed in mortal flesh as our brother, that his eternal and life-giving words come to us from a particular moment in time and space and language. That is, Christ’s meaning as Savior is, in the more mundane sense of the word, a translated being. He has translated himself into our human context to make himself understood, and we must still translate him again, reread him as it were, so as to establish the grounds of his relevance to our individual lives.

What if the meaning of revelation is always instantiated by a particular moment in time and place, and what if its meaning receives another layer from each encounter by a new reader? Would this mean that revelation becomes purely secular and historicized every time? Or might this signify that revelation is perpetually necessary, that our failures to finally and completely transcend our historical circumstances open a window that grants glimpses of the mind of God as so much more broad, profound,
This glimpse into heaven requires our obedience and submission to the portion of God’s truth we have been given, but not because this portion is all there is or all that we will receive; rather, it is because the frontiers of truth remain open and subject to further rereadings, illuminations, and iterations. It is certainly true that the inherent ambiguity of such a view of transcendence as always grounded on the earth and never entirely free of the contingencies of human context seems oxymoronic and often proves too much for believers and nonbelievers alike. However, we do not need to dismiss the legitimacy of United States–based readings of the Book of Mormon to suggest that we can anticipate revolutions in our understanding of the book when it is read by generations of Africans, Muslims, or Chinese. This kind of readerly responsibility can be troubling because it places a degree of responsibility for interpretation that most readers would prefer to abdicate: the responsibility Oliver Cowdery faced when he was instructed to “study . . . out in [his] mind” what God might be saying (D&C 9:8). Let us remember that the words he sought to translate were written in a language he could not read. We can only suppose that the Lord was not only calling for Cowdery’s faith but for his imagination, his personality, his mind. The Lord anticipates how we interpret, in any case. He tells us that when he speaks, he speaks in order to correct us “in [our] weakness, after the manner of [our] language, that [we] might come to understanding” (D&C 1:24).

It is hard not to hear the hint that even divine language is not merely the transfer of information but a poetic reformation of a higher idea. A common distinction in literary criticism is made between poetic language that recognizes its own limitations and weaknesses and thus opens us up to new possibilities of meaning and propagandist language that seeks to hide its origins and contingencies in order to close down such possibilities. The great American author Toni Morrison, for example, in her 1993 Nobel acceptance speech, praises Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address for liberating rather than controlling or limiting meaning by its use of poetic strategies:
Refusing to monumentalize, disdaining the “final word,” the precise “summing up,” acknowledging their “poor power to add or detract,” his words signal deference to the uncapturability of the life it mourns. It is the deference that moves [us], that recognition that language can never live up to life once and for all. Nor should it. Language can never “pin down” slavery, genocide, war [or for that matter the mind and will of God]. Nor should it yearn for the arrogance to be able to do so. Its force, its felicity is in its reach toward the ineffable.¹⁰

Morrison’s words here ring true. At the same time, unfortunately, and perhaps in response to the intolerance and dogmatism of many forms of belief, she gives religious language as one of several examples of a language that, instead of acknowledging its weakness, seeks to limit and control in ways not unlike the language of political and commercial propaganda.

Of course, Morrison’s criticism of religious language is not uncommon. Indeed, it is usually assumed that religious faith is inconsistent with tolerance, patience, humility, and self-questioning or open-mindedness and that sacred texts do not exhibit these humble and poetic qualities of language. This is certainly not the sense one has from the Book of Mormon, however, and here I return again to 3 Nephi. One of the most sacred moments of the book is when Jesus prays for those in his presence and the hearers do not bear witness to what he spoke but rather to the ineffable and undeniable power of his words. The most explicit, literal, physical evidence of God’s love for humankind in the New World, this prayer is arguably the very heart of what the Book of Mormon witnesses, yet after so much narrative, preaching, and prophesying, there remains an emphatic denial of the capacity of any human sense to capture the essence of God’s love for humankind: “The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father; and no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard Jesus speak; and

no one can conceive of the joy which filled our souls at the time we heard him pray for us unto the Father” (3 Nephi 17:16–17).

That critics such as Morrison have ignored the essential humility and poetry of revealed scripture is perhaps a reaction to the arrogant triumphalism of many believers, but it is also the shortcoming of contemporary criticism itself, which often thinks about the sacred with no more nuance than the most fundamentalist believer. Paul Ricoeur is a critic who is an exception to this rule, however. He points to a particularly important feature of sacred texts that implicitly, if not explicitly, acknowledges the text’s own partiality and its dependence on readers for the text to expand and magnify its meaning and to realize therefore its universality. Ricoeur points to the sacred text’s capacity to imagine its own poetic force and the consequent need for a semiotic approach, as opposed to a historical-critical method, so as to consider the paradox of the text’s simultaneous resistance to history yet dependence on a fleshly reading that is instantiated in a particular place and time. Revelation, for Ricoeur, is the moment of transfer from the seeming ahistorical space of a sacred meaning to our history. It might be akin to what Nephi means when he asks us to “liken” the scriptures to us (1 Nephi 19:23). This readerly “metaphorizing of narrative” displaces or relocates the text’s meaning in the reader’s capacity to imagine the figural nature of the text.11 In other words, when we liken the scriptures to our circumstances, we allegorize them, we render them figural. This is not in defiance of their literal meaning or their historicity, or in denial of previous attributed meanings, but it is a way of layering a story’s or a passage’s meaning to extend across multiple circumstances. We might consider the way Nephi models this in his rereading of Isaiah as an example of new interpretations that make of the words of Isaiah a kind of Borgesian palimpsest, since we can simultaneously see the meaning of the words for Isaiah’s time, for Nephi’s time, and now for ours.12

We should worry that a purely reader response theory of revelation defeats the very purpose of revelation; it gives license to the reader to imagine whatever the reader desires God’s will to be. The sacred text becomes a mirror, reflecting only what we already wanted to find, rather than a window through which we might catch glimpses of the mind of God. This, I think, is what is meant by “wresting” the scriptures “unto [our] own destruction” (see 2 Peter 3:16; D&C 10:63; Alma 13:20). But a faithful reading must engage in a seeming contradiction. It must admit the likelihood of self-deception and therefore abdicate the need for total identification with the scriptures, even as the reader attempts to liken them to the current circumstances. The apparent contradiction is that a faithful reading imagines a voice speaking to us in our circumstances and yet coming from beyond them. I would thus suggest that wresting the scriptures can happen when a reader forgets or ignores her own role in allegorizing sacred words for personal meaning, as if the personal meaning is generated automatically and accounts for the totality of meaning contained in sacred writ. It is a failure to recognize the provisional and partial nature of the truths we harvest from reading. As a result, the key to faithful reading is humility that is sufficient for the reader to receive the confirmations of the spirit and to acknowledge partiality.

Wresting the word of God, of course, is a real possibility every time we read because there is no way to categorically escape the human conditions that limit our understanding. To come back to 3 Nephi, in perhaps one of the most fascinating and chastening moments in the Book of Mormon, Christ explains to his New World audience that it is because of “stiffneckedness and unbelief [my disciples in the Old World] understood not my word” when he spoke of the other sheep (3 Nephi 15:18). He even goes so far as to suggest that it is “because of their iniquity that they know not of you” (15:19). One has to consider the hard doctrine here. Given what we know about how limited people’s understanding was of the planet prior to 1492 and how common and easy it was for people to imagine that they alone were at the center of all that was known of the world, what kind of wild and creative imaginings would it have required for Christ’s disciples to conceive that he might be going to other peoples on other unknown continents? Perhaps it is
the same kind of imagination Oliver Cowdery needed to study out in his mind a language he could not read. Even Columbus, the one man stubborn enough to erroneously imagine he could travel from Spain to Japan in a matter of six weeks and therefore was eligible for the task of connecting the continents, never understood the meaning of his own discovery. Yet Christ calls a staid and predictable understanding of the world, dictated by our moment in history and our geographical place and unable to imagine or ask about what we might not yet know, a form of iniquity. Revelation is his effort to pull us along, one step at a time, to get us beyond these limitations, yet he also understands that he can only reveal himself to us in the vocabulary of our current understanding. So it would seem that revelation, although bringing new understanding, also potentially comes with vestiges of misunderstanding that we must work assiduously to dust off of his eternal Word. His Old World disciples interpreted the other sheep as the gentiles, an interpretation indicating a major leap of understanding for them, a new and surprising awareness of the universality of Christ’s atonement—and yet one that fell well short of a more truly global understanding of Christ’s mission.

So wrestling the scriptures is perhaps not always a separate act from likening them to ourselves. We might ask why it is not inevitable that all readers, good and bad, will be hindered by the inherent “weakness” of their “language,” by the contingencies of their historicity as human beings in finite and particular bodies, times, and places. It would seem we are back in the same position of having to choose between an interpretation of the meaning of a sacred text as merely and completely determined by an agency beyond our historical condition or merely and completely determined by that condition. If there is no middle ground between these two extreme positions, it is not possible to insist on a difference between good and bad readings, something I have been suggesting crude reader response theory and crude historicist readings of the Book of Mormon alike are not capable of doing. Revelation may come even in the midst of our misunderstandings, which is perhaps one reason why Paul describes our mortal condition as looking through a glass darkly (see 1 Corinthians 13:12). We see, but we are also blinded. This result might not satisfy our yearnings for the clouds
of confusion and contention to finally clear, but it does at least make faith and imagination always necessary, which also importantly makes us more accountable for the knowledge we gain. Reading is a moral activity, interpretation involves moral risk, and this is because knowledge is not passively received but actively desired, imagined, hoped for, and finally grasped. The question then becomes: If an investment of so much of ourselves is required to gain a knowledge of God, how do we move our will closer to God’s will and avoid the risk of self-projection and self-delusion?

Third Nephi as Menardian paradox

Borges suggested, as we have seen, that the moment of coincidence between the same words in the mind of a reader and the mind of an author reveals the inherent anachronism of all readings. And perhaps a Menardian paradox can be found right in 3 Nephi. Christ’s Sermon on the Mount from the Gospel of Matthew repeated there would seem to rather deliberately suggest this paradox, since the identical words are produced by Christ under different circumstances. One meaning of the repetition could be that his teachings and truth are entirely independent of context. (What else can be concluded from the fact that we find such precise repetition in two places in scripture?) Another, for the Book of Mormon critics, is that 3 Nephi is merely mimetic, derivative, and anachronistic. (Why does Christ use similar figural language from the Old World in a new context? If this is an authentic account of a historical visit to another continent, why does he speak of swine and dogs, bread and wine, when he might have invoked, say, agoutis and iguanas, or maize and chicha or pulque.) But I want to point to a third possibility, visible in the light of Borges’s story.

13. I originally gave a shorter version of this paper in 2008 at a conference on 3 Nephi sponsored by the Maxwell Institute at Brigham Young University. Subsequently, I was surprised to discover in Grant Hardy’s 2010 book, Understanding the Book of Mormon, that he makes the same connection between Borges and the Sermon on the Mount as set forth in 3 Nephi. See Grant Hardy, Understanding the Book of Mormon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 194.
As I indicated at the outset of this essay, there are important and subtle discrepancies between the sermon in Matthew and the one in 3 Nephi; the coincidence between the two accounts is only momentary, and these differences often point to new and richer meanings. However, here I am more concerned with how the considerable overlap between the biblical and Book of Mormon accounts might offer new and richer understanding. As J. Hillis Miller has argued, when two accounts of the same event are rendered and differences—no matter how small—emerge, we become aware of a *third* text that lies above the two accounts. Miller insists that an ethics of reading begins with a recognition that every text responds to some “thing” that “demands it be respected by being put in words.”¹⁴ That “thing” can never be finally summed up in language because to try to do so is simply to repeat the problem by displacing that “thing” once more. Every text, then, “only gives itself. It hides its matter or thing as much as it reveals it…. It is unfaithful to the thing, by being what it is, just these words on the page.”¹⁵ Repetition, in other words, highlights the textuality of words and the “thing” that is yet to be summed up. Without denying its own revelatory power, this mechanism renders language poetic.

This is perhaps akin to the so-called law of witnesses: two or three witnesses together point simultaneously to their own partiality and to a reality beyond them precisely because their testimonies coincide and diverge. What I mean to suggest is that in offering hints of richer understanding of Christ’s words from Matthew or Luke, the sermon in 3 Nephi further discloses a gap between what is revealed and what God knows. Even though we do not have unlimited access to the latter, the textuality these discrepancies highlight models for us an understanding of revelation that lessens our tendency to wrest the scriptures to our own destruction. We might remember that, after teaching us of the iniquity of the Old World in failing to understand the meaning of other sheep, Christ teaches us of yet other sheep (see 3 Nephi 16:1).

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¹⁵. Miller, *Ethics of Reading*, 121.
Perhaps we are thus guided toward a radical openness of what is yet to be revealed, since we can now see how partial the Book of Mormon itself is, despite its own marvelous restorations. Like the disciples in the Old World or like Oliver Cowdery, we are chastened to imagine worlds beyond our own.

Ricoeur insists that if there is a readerly need to metaphorize the narrative of a sacred text, a good reading is a response to a semiotic pattern already established in the text whereby metaphors are narrativized. He gives the example of the parable of the sower in which the “destiny of the sower is narrativized as the destiny of the word, the destiny of the word is narrativized as the destiny of the sowing.”\textsuperscript{16} We might consider Alma’s parable of the seed as a similar example, since it is clear that Alma’s allegory models how we ought to treat the very book we hold in our hands. The sacred text, in other words, inserts “into the meaning of what is said something about its being said and its reception.”\textsuperscript{17} If we were to consider Lehi’s journey into the wilderness, we would say that the story appears to have metaphorical shape, that it can be read as a metaphor for the mortal journey to the promised land of heaven. Certainly this is not an uncommon reading of the narrative, as we hear countless attempts in talks, lessons, and sermons to identify the Liahonas in our lives, the Lamans and Lemuels, the trials of broken bows, etc. What is striking in the narrative, however, is how often this metaphorizing is anticipated in the narrative itself. We see, for example, that Lehi’s stories and dreams are all told secondhand by his son, after receiving learning in the language of his father, but are also abridged by Mormon—and all of this, of course, made available in our language to our understanding by the translation of Joseph Smith. The book seems to insist rather emphatically on its textuality, as if reading, abridging, editing, and translating are integral to a seer’s vision and necessary for our understanding.

This textuality is especially apparent when we encounter a perfect coincidence of language in Matthew and 3 Nephi, a coincidence all the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} Ricoeur, \textit{Figuring the Sacred}, 159.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Ricoeur, \textit{Figuring the Sacred}, 158.
\end{itemize}
more self-consciously textual when we consider that the coincidence appears in the English translations of apparently two different original languages—into a form of English, no less, that is antiquated for a contemporary reader. This is just one of many examples throughout the Book of Mormon of 3 Nephi’s almost brazen confession of its own textuality. Despite this overt textuality, however, critics act as if this textuality were some embarrassing facet the book seeks to hide behind its claim to authenticity. Even believing readers are often embarrassed by or at least perplexed about these coincidences. I would suggest that the book’s self-conscious textuality, what Ricoeur calls the “interpretive dynamism of the text itself” or its “interpretive function,” is precisely the key to its interpretation and the key to escaping the false binaries into which so many of its readers fall.\textsuperscript{18}

Ricoeur insists that “a theology that confronts the inevitability of the divine plan with the refractory nature of human actions and passions is a theology that engenders narrative.”\textsuperscript{19} Surely a theology like Mormonism, which produces texts and narratives in excess of the Bible, is guilty as charged. It insists on this meeting ground between a divine plan and the unpredictable and potentially chaotic nature of multiple, individual interpretations. Consistent then with the fundamental meaning of a God in mortal flesh, Mormonism insists that the sacred is an encounter between the will of God and the will of human beings, the language of God and the language of human beings, heaven and earth, spirit and body. In so doing, our theology continually produces texts that, in their overt textuality, indicate their own nature as palimpsests and that therefore point to the need for the poetic imagination of readers and for the unending need for more texts to come. What, in other words, keeps narratives alive and dynamic, what keeps them from becoming flattened out by the exercises of tradition, is the vivification of new interpretations, which is another way of saying that what makes the gospel true is its relevance to human narratives, seized upon by one reader at a time and over time. To the degree that a text

\textsuperscript{18} Ricoeur, \textit{Figuring the Sacred}, 161, 181.

\textsuperscript{19} Ricoeur, \textit{Figuring the Sacred}, 182.
anticipates this unpredictability, it would seem to be a paradox, since there is an anticipation of surprise or a divine plan in unpredictability, but this is a paradox that foments the live nature of the text, that sustains its dynamism as part of a theology of continuing revelation. A theology of continuing revelation, in other words, is radically committed to the value of individual will and the importance of individual context. What is always yet to be, then, is not only future restoration of meaning but the next reader to join the adoption into Abraham’s family. Reading and interpretation do not rest at some transcendent or ahistorical state but instead always point us back to the ground trod by each reader in time and space. This is a theology that is inherently hermeneutical, suggesting that its revelatory truths depend on the imagination to unlock and perpetuate their transcendence in the physical particularities of each human reader. As a hermeneutics in which the mortal context is always interpolated so as to be potentially sanctified, in which the earthly and secular are not separable but instead essential to the unveiling of divine pattern, we might call this an inherently Christian religion: “Christian” because it is Christ who offers himself as a translated being, the Word of God made flesh; and “religion” because, as the word implies, it requires and valorizes our perpetual rereadings of that Word.

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“A Very Fine Azteck Manuscript”: Latter-day Saint Readings of Codex Boturini

Christopher James Blythe

The Book of Mormon presented itself as a history of previously unidentified New World civilizations with origins in the ancient Near East. To defend its claims of historicity, believers pointed to the work’s correspondence with the Bible and their own spiritual witnesses. They also insisted that, independent of their supernatural access to this ancient world, archaeological discoveries had authenticated and would continue to authenticate the book’s historical claims. This article documents the all-but-forgotten Latter-day Saint use of Codex Boturini—a sixteenth-century Mesoamerican codex depicting the Mexica (i.e., Aztec) migration from their mythical homeland Atzlan to Tenochtitlan, the seat of the empire’s government—as physical evidence for Book of Mormon history. In the perspective of these Saints, the pictorial manuscript was an independent record of the Book of Mormon. For decades, Mormons published images from Codex Boturini (or described them) alongside commentary that translated the pictographs through a Mormon lens. As late as 1897, one Latter-day

I would like to express my gratitude to Mason Allred, John Fowles, Matthew Godfrey, Tyson Reeder, Elder Richard Dilworth Rust, and Jordan Watkins, who each read and commented on drafts of this article, and to other friends and colleagues, including David Grua, Jeffrey Mahas, and especially Christine Elyse Blythe, for listening to me discuss this project ad nauseam.
Saint scholar of the Book of Mormon, George Reynolds, enthusiastically juxtaposed a scene from the manuscript with one from the Book of Mormon and asked: “Could any testimony be stronger than this?”¹

Yet, finding parallels between ancient Mesoamerican codices and the Book of Mormon required interpretation if not interpretive leaps. This article documents different interpretations posited for Codex Boturini. In most cases, these interpretations are similar insomuch that they identify migration scenes with the Book of Mormon, positing which chapter and verse was illustrated by which image. Yet, each version differed in detail—sometimes drastically so. These divergent interpretations reveal the extent of nineteenth-century Mormonism’s passion for finding the sacred narrative of the Book of Mormon in American antiquity. Joseph Smith had already pointed to Native American remains and Egyptian papyri as evidences of a holy past, but he was not alone. The number of Mormons who independently discovered Codex Boturini and recorded their “reading” of the manuscript suggests that identifying artifacts and ancient hieroglyphic texts with the Book of Mormon was a collective project (fig. 1). In fact, Mormons on the geographic periphery of the faith, with less access to the church’s leadership, seem to have made the most significant contributions.

Mesoamerican codices in the United States

Americans became familiar with ancient Mesoamerica through archaeological literature published after Mexican independence in 1821. New writers reproduced the findings of scarce older works and even traveled to Latin America to produce their own studies of American antiquities.² The era’s most significant volumes on Mesoamerica were those produced by John Lloyd Stephens and artist Frederick Catherwood. The two recorded their personal observations examining archaeological sites in

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two two-volume sets: *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (1841) and *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (1843). Art historian R. Tripp Evans has credited the publication of these volumes as the first time that Americans could access “accurate information concerning Mexico’s pre-Columbian past . . . in a readable and inexpensive format” since the expulsion of Spain.³

Like many Americans, Mormons relished in Stephens’s verbal descriptions and Catherwood’s visual depictions of ancient ruins and lost cities. In September 1841, John Bernhisel, a Mormon from New

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³ Evans, *Romancing the Maya*, 45.
York City, sent a copy of *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* to Joseph Smith. Smith was impressed and declared “it unfolds and develops many things that are of great importance to this generation & corresponds with & supports the testimony of the Book of Mormon.” *Incidents of Travel* was “the most correct luminous & comprehensive” of all “histories that have been written pertaining to the antiquities of this country.”

Word of Stephens’s and Catherwood’s work disseminated among the Saints through the church’s Nauvoo newspaper *Times and Seasons*, which published a series of articles highlighting their discoveries.

Interest in Stephens’s and Catherwood’s *Incidents* volumes overshadowed other books on American antiquities, even while Latter-day Saints still occasionally referenced them. Eight years before the publication of *Incidents*, Mormons embraced Josiah Priest’s *American Antiquities and Discoveries in the West*, which included descriptions of ruins, artifacts, and hieroglyphics, under the claim that they demonstrated the “strong probability” that several ancient civilizations had colonized the New World throughout its history. Historian Terryl Givens counted five *Times and Seasons* articles referencing Priest’s work in defense of Book of Mormon history.

Another work Latter-day Saints referenced frequently in the 1840s, John Delafield’s *An Inquiry into the Origin of the Antiquities of America*, has been virtually forgotten to Mormon history. *An Inquiry*, like Priest’s *American Antiquities*, argued that archaeological evidence suggested Old

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World colonization was widespread through the Americas. Delafield’s volume set itself apart from the others by its inclusion of full-page and often full-color reproductions of Mesoamerican codices. Most significantly An Inquiry included an eighteen-foot-long reproduction of Codex Boturini.

Codex Boturini, also known as Tira de la Peregrinacion, was initially part of a large collection of Mesoamerican documents gathered by early eighteenth-century Italian antiquarian Lorenzo Boturini Beneduci, from whom it derived its name. The originals were confiscated and preserved in Mexico City. The pictorial manuscript consisted of black-and-white images on one sheet of amate bark paper folded into 22 pages. The migration of the Mexica is depicted through a series of scenes linked together by footprints informing the audience of the “direction and sequence” of the story.7

Mesoamerican codices were largely indecipherable to nonindigenous readers. To translate pictorial histories requires the “interpreter [to be] somewhat familiar with the general story” being expressed.8 While contemporary Mexica possessing the intended cultural context would be able to understand what was meant to be conveyed in the pictograph, other would-be interpreters had to provide their own context in an effort to decipher the manuscript’s meaning. To the culturally illiterate, a pictograph still hints—it points to figures, actions, and events. To decipher their mystery, would-be interpreters depend on a cultural imaginary. There was often wide slippage between authorial intent and colonial reception. Western observers often (though not exclusively) “read” Mesoamerican codices through a biblical logic. The world’s population had descended through the three sons of Noah—Japheth, Shem, and Ham—and dispersed into distinct cultures and languages in the wake of the Tower of Babel. When encountering Mesoamerican


ruins, codices, or mythologies, these Bible believers expected to find survivals of ancient Near East culture.

Boturini himself declared that Native people possessed “a living memory of the Tower of Babel,” which he detected in the “imposing buildings” and throughout their codices. He was also a major proponent for the belief that the apostle Thomas had introduced Christianity to the Americas after Jesus’s death and resurrection. This explained how signs of an ancient Judaism and Christianity remained in the New World. Mormons would have read similar ideas in Priest’s *American Antiquities* and seen how such a lens could be applied to interpreting Mesoamerican codices in Delafield’s work. Most significantly, Delafield printed an image from Codex Vaticanus (fig. 2), another Mexica codex, positing that it depicted Eve speaking to a serpent, two altars for sacrifice, and Cain murdering his brother, Abel.

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As should be apparent, the purpose of this essay is not to present the Mexica understanding of Codex Boturini. However, one problem with my approach is that by not presenting readings that take seriously the Mexica understanding of their own pictographs, readers could be left with the idea that these manuscripts did not possess culturally indigenous interpretations. To alleviate this problem, I have included Mexican historian Orozco y Berra’s interpretations of the codex in captions accompanying some of the images.

Vignettes and codices in Kirtland and Nauvoo

The practice of interpreting pictorial narratives had an immediate antecedent in the Mormon community’s fascination with Egypt. After Joseph Smith purchased four mummies accompanied with Egyptian papyri in 1835, the Saints had ample opportunity to interact with the scrolls. Such interaction led to the development of an Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar and the translation of the Book of Abraham,11 as well as the interpretation of several vignettes that appeared on the papyri. These illustrations were identified as biblical scenes. While deciphering the scrolls’ hieroglyphics was a labor-intensive project, positing a vignette’s meaning was relatively simple. In December 1835, the Messenger and Advocate, the church’s newspaper in Kirtland, Ohio, published an article by Oliver Cowdery detailing the vignettes. He enthusiastically described four scenes, including what he saw as depictions of the Christian godhead, the temptation of Eve (fig. 3), “Enoch’s pillar as mentioned by Josephus,” and the last judgment.12 In 1842, the Times and Seasons published three vignettes alongside the first portion of the Book of Abraham. Individuals also encountered the vignettes on display

11. The Book of Abraham was a scriptural text revealed by Joseph Smith and eventually canonized by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as part of the Pearl of Great Price in 1880.

in Kirtland and Nauvoo, several of whom left accounts of the interpretation they were provided during their tour.\footnote{13}

When a reproduction of Codex Boturini (almost certainly taken from Delafield’s \textit{An Inquiry}) arrived in Nauvoo sometime before May 1841, the Saints were aware that such documents need not be considered indecipherable. William Appleby, a recent Mormon convert, visited

\footnote{13. For a discussion of contemporary and retrospective accounts of these vignettes, see Kerry Muhlestein, “Joseph Smith and Egyptian Artifacts: A Model for Evaluating the Prophetic Nature of the Prophet’s Ideas about the Ancient World,” \textit{BYU Studies Quarterly} 55/3 (2016): 35–82.}

\textbf{Figure 3. Vignette from Joseph Smith Papyri V, MS 2339. © By Intellectual Reserve, Inc.} According to Oliver Cowdery, “the serpent, represented as walking, or formed in a manner to be able to walk, standing in front of, and near a female figure, is to me, one of the greatest representations I have ever seen upon paper, or a writing substance; and must go so far towards convincing the rational mind of the correctness and divine authority of the holy scriptures, and especially that part which has ever been assailed by the infidel community, as being a fiction, as to carry away, with one might[y] sweep, the whole atheistical fabric, without leaving a vestige sufficient for a foundation stone.” Oliver Cowdery, “Egyptian Mummies—Ancient Records,” \textit{Messenger and Advocate} 2/3 (December 1835): 236.
Nauvoo in May and recalled seeing the codex, which he described as “a representation of the travels of ‘Lehi’ and family from Jerusalem, (as recorded in the Book of Mormon, when he came to this continent) represented by Hieroglyphics, containing near twenty feet in length, and one foot in breadth, Their footsteps are particularly laid down, the productions of the soil represented, where they traveled through, the places of their encampments, and the Boat in crossing the ‘large waters’ Their landing on this continent, Lehi’s circumcising his sons. &c.” He inaccurately stated that the hieroglyphics had been “found engraved on Rock in South America,” perhaps conflating the codex’s origins with petroglyphs mentioned in Stephens’s work.

Appleby did not recall who showed him the copy. His only explanation for the document’s presence in Nauvoo was that it was “presented to Joseph Smith by a gentleman of New York City.” For Smith to have received such presents was not unusual during the 1840s. The Mormon prophet had already demonstrated his interest in ancient artifacts with the purchase of the Egyptian mummies in 1835. In 1840, Brigham Young and Willard Richards wrote Smith to see if he was interested in receiving a transcription of “many ancient and curious characters” engraved on a mummy’s headstone at a London museum. “Shall we copy them & send them to you for translation?” Young asked. In 1843, Smith was presented with six brass plates allegedly discovered in a burial site in Kinderhook, Illinois. One critic even claimed to have brought Smith a Greek psalter in 1842 under the pretense that he was unaware of the book’s contents.

In each of these cases, the expectation was that Smith would translate and bring forth new information about an unknown past. Therefore, that some would expect him to provide a partial interpretation of a Mesoamerican codex is reasonable. However, Appleby did not specify whether Smith had showed him the manuscript—even if he claimed it was owned by Smith—or who had identified it as a depiction of the Nephite migration narrative. It is possible that another Latter-day Saint had interpreted the codex, just like W. W. Phelps and Oliver Cowdery had provided interpretive ideas about the Egyptian papyri. If Joseph Smith was involved in interpreting Codex Boturini, it does not seem to have been publicized outside of Nauvoo. When the first known interpreters wrote about the codex, they made it clear they did so without Smith’s prophetic guidance.

That being said, they produced their interpretations in reference to Smith’s work on the Egyptian papyri. Latter-day Saints saw the pictographic Codex Boturini and Joseph Smith’s Egyptian papyri as similar in style, but valued them differently. As historian Samuel Brown has argued, the Saints, like other Americans, expected to find “the mysteries of human origin and religion” in Egyptian hieroglyphics. Those manuscripts possessed untold stories and secrets about the creation of the universe. There were, according to Smith’s translation, portions so sacred that they could not be revealed outside the temple itself. While vignettes were believed to relate biblical stories, they also contained new accounts that needed to be integrated into the Latter-day Saints’ understanding of the sacred past.

This was in stark contrast with the way Mormon interpreters approached Codex Boturini. They certainly viewed it as an impressive manuscript. Yet, if Latter-day Saints expected that ancient Egypt could contain sacred truths to be discovered, they did not seem to hold the same beliefs about Mesoamerica. It was the Book of Mormon that held the secrets to unlock Codex Boturini. As one commentator argued, “The most valuable discoveries in American Antiquity must appeal to

the Book of Mormon for interpretation.” Codex Boturini was never offered as new scripture. Thus, while the translation of the Book of Abraham provided new doctrine and new narrative of the ancient past, interpreting Codex Boturini only validated what the Saints already believed. This was likely why interpreters outside the church’s hierarchy were willing to circulate their interpretations of the manuscript, while at the same time the production of revelatory writings had been condemned. It was another category of writing altogether.

John E. Page

In the summer of 1841, while on a mission to the eastern states, the apostle John E. Page purchased a copy of Stephens’s and Catherwood’s Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan. On September 1, 1841, he wrote Joseph Smith in part to announce that he had developed “a new course of argument” for defending the Book of Mormon. Page’s strategy was to compare Catherwood’s seventy illustrations of Mesoamerican antiquities with the Book of Mormon. This approach, he claimed, “so completely proves the truth and divinity of the Book of Mormon there is not a gentile dog left to stir a tongue in an attempt to put down the collateral testimony which those records afford me in proof of the Book of Mormon.”

Two years later, still eager to amass archaeological proofs with recent publications describing Mesoamerican discoveries, Page purchased Delafield’s An Inquiry into the Origin of the Antiquities of America in Boston. He was captivated by what he called the “curious hieroglyphic map” that came with each volume. Page recalled being “strongly impressed with the idea that if the map could be truly

interpreted it would divulge something directly either for or against the Book of Mormon.”

Not many days passed until I was sitting on a sofa in the city of Boston taking a review of the “curious map,” my eyes became heavy with sleep; I reclined my length on the sofa and, as I suppose without doubt, fell into a sleep, and dreamed I was reviewing the map, still anxious to know where to apply it; of a sudden there appeared the face of a personage before me, apparently far advanced in years, and says, “Read and compare with the Book of Ether,” and then disappeared; and I suddenly awoke and did accordingly, and gave it a critical comparing with the book I assure you, and to my great satisfaction I find that the collateral corroboration of the map with the history of the Jaradites as found in the book of Ether of the Book of Mormon that one is the other in point of history.23

After this revelation, Page removed the reproduction of Codex Boturini from Delafield’s book and attached it to a white muslin cloth, which would serve as a visual aid for his lectures on correlations between the book of Ether and Boturini. He “suspended it across [Boston’s] Boylston hall” where he first explained his new insights to an audience of over one thousand.24 In 1934, Page’s son, Justin E. Page, discovered the banner among his father’s possessions. He described it as “a canvas about 20 feet long and 20 inches wide, but doubled so it shows a 10 inch surface and to which is nicely stitched a fine silken paper or apparently so; and the whole length of the canvas is covered with engravings much like those on the disks of the Book of Abraham.”25 That this canvas was designed by fastening Delafield’s reproduction of Codex Boturini is suggested by its dimensions, as well as by a notation

25. Justin E. Page to M. Wilford Poulson, October 1, 1934, M. Wilford Poulson Papers, MSS 823, Box 5, Folder 8, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University. I would like to express appreciation to Robin Jensen for pointing out this source.
that identified the copy as originating in Cincinnati, Ohio, which also appeared on the reproduction included with *An Inquiry*.

In March 1844, Page repeated the lecture, using the same banner, in Washington, DC. That year he also published a short pamphlet that included a statement signed by three people who were printers in the area. While they did not profess to be believers in the Book of Mormon, they argued that the missionaries’ beliefs “merit a fair, candid, and impartial examination.” They had reportedly come to this conclusion after attending “a recent lecture, given by Mr. Page” in which they “were struck with the extraordinary character of the evidence adduced to sustain the claims of the Book of Mormon.” Apparently they left fully convinced by Page’s basic argument. In their words:

> If we are to rely upon the veracity of men standing in high public estimation, and Government favor, Messrs. Delafield, Priest, Stephens and Catherwood, whose recent important discoveries of ancient antiquities of America, have astounded all, under whose supervision their statements in relation thereto have come, then must their evidence remove, in a great degree, the doubts at present existing in the public mind, in relation to the character of this book; the plates of which, if we are to rely upon the statements made, were found some seventeen years previous to the discoveries made by the gentlemen named above.

The affidavit was later used to raise funds for a publication on the Book of Mormon and American antiquities.

Three years later, Page, now affiliated with a sect of Mormonism led by schismatic prophet James J. Strang, had such a book foremost on his mind. During the October 1847 general conference held in Voree, Wisconsin, Strang announced his support of “the publication of a new work on the evidences of the Book of Mormon as derived from a very full development of American Antiquities, by John E. Page.”

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conference followed suit and voted to “recommend the publication … and commend the work to the saints and all men.” On July 6, 1848, Page published a lengthy article in Voree’s Gospel Herald on the book project, which he then envisioned as a two-volume set, to be entitled The Collateral and Positive Evidences of the Truth and Divinity of the Book of Mormon. Page was convinced that by presenting “indisputable evidence,” the book would “do more to convince the honest in heart of the truth of the faith of the Latter Day Saints than all the elders can do without it.”

Page explained that he would “seek principally to confine [himself] to such items as have been developed since the Book of Mormon was published.” His intended project revealed one of the major appeals of Codex Boturini and other Mesoamerican evidences for the Book of Mormon. While in the 1830s Latter-day Saints had defended the book’s historicity with archaeological and geographical arguments, these arguments were less convincing, namely because they were based on evidences that could have been available to an author in 1830. When Mormons pointed to discoveries that were only available to residents of the United States after 1830, such as Delafield’s An Inquiry and Stephens’s Incidents of Travel, they demonstrated the book’s apparent knowledge of Mesoamerica independent of such discoveries.

Page’s book was never published, although he had clearly begun working on the text. The Gospel Herald published five installments of a column entitled “Collateral Testimony of the Truth and Divinity of the Book of Mormon.” The articles focused on evidences drawn from Stephens and Catherwood or from newspaper articles documenting archaeological finds in America. Unfortunately, perhaps for want of space, Page did not present his interpretation of Codex Boturini in those pages. In fact, he did not so much as reference Delafield’s work.

28. “Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, at Voree.”
31. Page cited an article announcing the discovery of ancient copper tools from the Buffalo Express and an account of Stephens and Catherwood in the Beloit Journal.
Only the brief reference he included in his July 6, 1848, essay, as well as a report of a lecture Page preached before a Strangite audience later that month in Voree, helps reconstruct Page’s interpretation. In the first instance, Page noted that “the map begins with a hieroglyphic representing the tower of Babel, where the book of Ether begins its account of the Jaredites (see fig. 4), and ends with the hieroglyphic representation of two men with sword in hand (see fig. 5), where the Book of Ether terminates the account of the Jaredites, with the combat between Coriantumr and Shiz, the two last commanding generals of that nation.” Thus, Page provided a direct reading of elements in the first and last page of the manuscript (based on the folds of Delafield’s reproduction of the codex).

The relevant description of the July 1848 sermon from the *Gospel Herald* reads:

> It was indeed astonishing to read the book of Ether (part of the Book of Mormon) published in 1830, by Joseph Smith, and lay by the side of it the great picture of M. Bottarini found in the ancient halls of the Montezumas, a relic of the Aztec archives, published some years after the Book of Mormon, and then behold the almost speaking picture of all the same events recorded in that book distributed in the same order, beginning with the same fact and ending with the same. So perfect is the concord that no man can think otherwise than that they are chronicles of the same facts. Even the chronology is marked on the ancient pictures by points corresponding with the years in the book of Ether. The numbers of persons in the various scenes correspond. The number of barges used in crossing various waters is the same. The feasts, the corona- tion of kings, the battles and the mourning for the slain are found painted and sculptured on the ancient ruins of Yucatan, Chiapas and Central America precisely as Joseph Smith had written them in the Book of Mormon years before the world knew that those countries contained any ruins.

32. Page, “Book of Mormon.”
Although the report does not point to specific portions of the manuscript, the reader cannot be sure just where Page believed these events were portrayed.

Another source may provide additional details about Page’s views. Page’s interpretation of the codex was set apart by his use of the book of Ether rather than 1 Nephi. Only one other known interpreter, Isaac Sheen, would follow Page’s lead in a series of articles entitled,
“Antiquarian Evidences of the Truth of the Book of Mormon,” published in the *Latter Day Saints’ Herald* between 1866 and 1868. In two of the sixteen installments of this series, Sheen pointed to evidences from Codex Boturini, following closely to what is known of Page’s interpretations.\(^3^4\) He also saw the manuscript beginning with the Tower of Babel and ending with the depiction of Coriantumr and Shiz. Referring to the eight figures shown toward the right of figure 1, Sheen explained that “these eight houses probably represent eight families which constituted Jared’s company” mentioned in the text of Ether. This detail likely corresponded to the *Gospel Herald’s* reference to Page citing the “number of barges.” Sheen described other scenes that he believed related to the text. “A tree cut off a short distance from the ground” represented the Jaredites constructing barges. “A representation of a person shedding tears on a high place, probably a mountain,” correlated to a passage in Ether 2:14 where God reprimands the brother of Jared for not praying. Sheen reasoned, “The chastening of the Lord often makes men shed tears.”\(^3^5\) Finally, Sheen pointed to an image of “a serpent with its fang protruding from its mouth immediately behind four men” (fig. 6).\(^3^6\) This pictograph, according to Sheen, illustrated a scene from Ether, in which “there came forth poisonous serpents also upon the face of the land, and did poison many people” (Ether 9:31).

Sheen does not explain how he learned about the manuscript or how he developed the interpretation he used. A possibility is that he learned of it through Page or through reading Page’s writings. Sheen also interacted with those heterodox communities that did not follow Brigham Young and as such was in a position to become familiar with Page’s interpretations.

Returning to Page, by the summer of 1849, he had denounced Strang’s movement. Later that year, he aligned with another Mormon sect affiliated

\(^{34}\) “Antiquarian Evidences of the Truth of the Book of Mormon, No. 6,” *Saints’ Herald*, July 15, 1866; “Antiquarian Evidences of the Truth of the Book of Mormon—No. 7,” *Saints’ Herald*, August 1, 1866.

\(^{35}\) Sheen referred to the image toward the right of figure 11, on page 208 herein.

\(^{36}\) “Antiquarian Evidences of the Truth of the Book of Mormon, No. 6.”
with the visionary James Collins Brewster. Page had not given up the hope of completing his book project. In October 1851, the majority of his 1848 fundraising letter was republished in the Brewsterite newspaper, *The Olive Branch*. This was the last time the book was mentioned in the press. Page was never able to see the two-volume *The Collateral and Positive Evidences of the Truth and Divinity of the Book of Mormon* in print. Whether he knew it or not, other Latter-day Saints had already begun publishing portions of Codex Boturini as early as 1845.

*The Prophet*

Beginning on March 1, 1845, *The Prophet*, a New York–based Mormon newspaper, serialized “detached portions” of Codex Boturini, accompanied by interpretive captions and intermittent commentary, in five sequential issues. Each issue reproduced a portion of the manuscript under the paper’s header, leaving approximately 1/3 to 1/2 of the page for columned text. Perhaps *The Prophet’s* editor, Samuel Brannan, intended for the issues to resemble the March 1842 issue of the *Times*

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and Seasons that published “a facsimile from the Book of Abraham” and offered Joseph Smith’s interpretation of the first Abraham vignette (see figs. 7 and 8). A caption identified the images as “The Journey of Lehi and his family from Jerusalem to the continent of America, in the first year of the reign of Zedekiah King of Judeah, previous to the Babylonish captivity,” the central narrative of 1 Nephi. Brannan’s views on Codex Boturini may have stemmed from the interpretation already circulating in Nauvoo in 1841. Each of the identifications recorded in Appleby’s journal appeared in The Prophet’s serialized interpretation, and Appleby himself spent time in New York City a month previous to the serialization, where he could have been in a position to influence the publication.

In the premier issue to feature the reproductions, Brannan expressed his expectation that for Latter-day Saints those “familiar with the Book of Mormon, can at once discover, the harmony existing between the two records.” Indeed, recognizing similarities between the two manuscripts was reasonable based on the scriptural lens Mormons wielded. However, holding this position does not explain the relationship between the documents. Rather than alleging the Book of Mormon was a source text for Codex Boturini, Brannan believed they were two civilizations’ perspectives on one common history. The Book of Mormon was “kept by the more enlightened part of the aborigines (the Nephites),” and Codex Boturini was “kept by the less enlightened (the Lamanites).” The idea that the codex was a Lamanite Book of Mormon reflected the view of many Americans that pictorial texts were less sophisticated and thus they were evidence of a more primitive society than those who used a phonetic alphabet system. Brannan may have also been influenced by a reading of the Book of Mormon that held that Lamanites were illiterate.

40. Untitled, The Prophet, March 1, 1845.
41. Recently, Deanna Draper Buck has argued for the prominence of literacy throughout Book of Mormon peoples, but her argument is the exception that proves the rule when it comes to previous scholars’ perceptions of the state of literacy in the
Figure 7. The Prophet, March 1, 1845.
Figure 8. Times and Seasons, March 1, 1842.
Brannan shared Page’s initial hesitance with interpreting the vignettes without the aid of revelation. “We do not wish to lay down our own opinion as being the only standard for the explanation of these glyphs, for this would not be liberal, but when God speaks we will keep silent.” Yet, some interpretations seemed self-evident. For example, referring to the facsimile, he wrote, “It must be admitted that the above is a very striking representation of some things that are recorded in the Book of Mormon.” Except for the caption that appeared under each image, the first, third, and fifth installments did not include any specific interpretive comments. In the case of the first facsimile, this may have been because the general caption seemed sufficient for readers to understand that Brannan was suggesting that the nautical migration vignette should be seen as the journey to the new continent. In the cases of the last two installments, it may be that no parallel with 1 Nephi was apparent.

The second facsimile of the codex (fig. 9) was identified as a portrayal of Lehi’s significant dream depicting Lehi’s sons and others traveling down a “strait and narrow path” through a mist of darkness (1 Nephi 8:20). Those who succeeded found their way by holding onto a rod of iron that led them to a special tree “whose fruit was desirable to make one happy” (1 Nephi 8:10). With the assistance of a vision of his own, Nephi explains that the tree represented “the love of God,” the rod represents “the word of God,” and the mist of darkness represented “the temptations of the devil” (1 Nephi 11:22, 25; 12:17). Brannan argued that the image depicted five figures surrounding the tree of life with the rod attached. However, in keeping with the narrative, only three of the five were shown eating fruit. In the Book of Mormon, he explained, Lehi had witnessed “his wife (Sarah) with his two sons (Nephi and Sam) partaking of the fruit, while the other two (Laman and Lemuel) did not.” This was an amazing fit, but in this case it was based on Delafield’s miscopying of the original codex, which shows each of the five figures holding a circular object (fig. 10).

Page looked forward in the narrative to explain why the tree was “represented as broken and falling, with a man’s arms clasped around the trunk of the tree.” He posited that the tree of life represented the “kingdom of god on earth” and that Codex Boturini’s author was depicting the eventual corruption of the church in America and an era when Moroni, “but one man that adhered to the commandments of God, … sought to sustain his kingdom on earth.” It was Moroni who was
Concerning the third facsimile (fig. 11), Brannan again identified the four figures on the left of the facsimile as Lehi’s sons on their journey. He interpreted three figures lying backwards over cactus-like plants with a fourth reaching toward one of their bodies as “undoubtedly representing Lehi in the act of circumcision.” Above these figures, “Nephi is trying the strength of his wooden bow that he invented after they had broken their steal ones.” Finally, Brannan explained a final figure positioned on top of a large object as “the pillows of heaven or the firmament.”42 In each of the first three facsimiles, there were visual elements that seemed germane to the Book of Mormon narrative—nautical travel, a tree, and in the third instance, a figure holding a bow. However, each page also contained elements that seem forced. Lehi

“represented with his arms extended around the tree, at the very time the top is severed and falling to the ground.”

42. Untitled, The Prophet, March 15, 1845.
circumcising his sons seemed particularly out of place because there was no corresponding passage in the Book of Mormon. Mexican historian Orozco y Berra identified the scene as a “representation of human sacrifice,” specifically, the “cutting out the heart of a victim.” However, the New World practice of circumcision was frequently cited as proof of Native American origins in Hebrew culture, which likely influenced the Latter-day Saint reading of the scene.

Initially Brannan hoped the serialized manuscript would attract new subscribers for The Prophet. A warning accompanied the March 1, 1845, issue that interested parties should subscribe so as to not miss out on the serialized codex. However, by the April 5, 1845, issue, it had been decided to forego printing additional excerpts in The Prophet and instead publish the manuscript in pamphlet form. The title never materialized.

Codex Boturini in Mexico and the American West (1879–1946)

Despite the enthusiasm for Codex Boturini in the 1840s, for three decades it was omitted from LDS defenses of the Book of Mormon. Of course, Mormons remained convinced that New World archaeology would continue to produce discoveries in favor of the scripture’s historicity. The first missionaries in Mexico City came with that mindset in place and viewed gathering information on Mesoamerican antiquities as an important part of their work. In November 1879, the newly arrived apostle Moses Thatcher recorded his desire to find “Aztec” records kept on maguey leaves, which detailed “in signs & symbols, the history of their migrations; about which I will try & secure some knowledge while in this strange land.”

44. The Prophet, April 5, 1845.
Only a few days later, on November 19, the missionaries paid the first of many visits to the National Museum of Mexico where the original Codex Boturini was on display. Thatcher wrote, “I visited the National Museum and was greatly interested, particularly in the collection of the intrroyer antiquities pertaining to Aztack.” He recorded the museum placard for the codex in his diary, “‘A very fine Azteck manuscript’ (of figures signs and symbols) on Maguey in 21 folds or leaves, on which are is depicted the migrations migrations of that extraordinary people. It is considered in Mexico as the most perfect and valuable one extant.” While Thatcher did not then speculate on the codex’s meaning, he seems to have considered its potential religious significance. He noted “many very interesting figures and hieroglyphics, some remarkably resembling those contained in the Pearl of Great Price.” In other words, he recognized similarities between Codex Boturini and the Book of Abraham.

Strangely, this is the last explicit reference to Codex Boturini in the journals of the early missionaries to Mexico. They returned to the museum, established relationships with historically knowledgeable Mexicans, and acquired a nice collection of literature on the Mesoamerican past. They even purchased the full nine-volume set of Lord Kingsborough’s *Antiquities of Mexico*, of which the first seven volumes are devoted to reproducing codices. Codex Boturini appeared in the first volume. The missionaries made use of their newly obtained knowledge to champion antiquities-based arguments in favor of Book of Mormon historicity.

One of their oft-repeated arguments was based on the Spanish destruction of “Indian histories.” This was the New World counterpart to Mormon beliefs that volumes of Jewish and Christian scripture had been lost or corrupted. In a short article published in the *Juvenile Instructor*, James Z. Stewart, a missionary to Mexico, explained that “at the time of the conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards, in the fifteenth century, the Indians had their histories, complete. They had nearly all

that is contained in the Book of Mormon.” He argued that “had these books been preserved, the truth of the divine origin of the Book of Mormon would have been so clearly proven that no one could reasonably have doubted.” Yet, the Spaniards had not been able to “get them all.” Stewart referenced the “Aztec Museum” and his reading of “old Spanish histories of Mexico, Central and South America,” filled with “astonishing proofs of the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon.” He believed the “time is not far distant when [mankind] will be compelled to accept it as true, or, if they condemn it, they will do it contrary to their own conviction.”

Stewart did not reference any specific manuscripts, promising that Thatcher would provide the evidence in future writings. When a series of articles appeared under Thatcher’s name, they made good use of the historical literature from Mexico but did not once reference Codex Boturini. Thatcher was more taken with the textual Popol Vuh, which he believed paralleled the book of Ether, than with any of the region’s pictographs. If the Mexico mission did not contribute significantly to the interpretive history of the codex, it revived Mormon interest in the Mexican past.

In 1888, George Reynolds’s *The Story of the Book of Mormon* came close to fulfilling Samuel Brannan’s and John E. Page’s vision of a full-length work featuring images from Codex Boturini. *Story* was a Book of Mormon paraphrase and commentary geared to be accessible to the church’s youth. More importantly, it was, as Reynolds noted, “the first attempt made to illustrate the Book of Mormon.” Historian Paul Gutjahr recently observed that the volume’s “illustrations everywhere linked Mesoamerica

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to the Book of Mormon.\textsuperscript{50} In most cases, Reynolds commissioned art work from LDS artists, but he also included five images from Codex Boturini.\textsuperscript{51} He highlighted these “Aztec historical charts” in the volume’s preface, claiming that all previous attempts to translate them “have been ineffectual, and in many cases ludicrous.” From his vantage point, “It required the publication of the Book of Mormon to turn on them the light of divine truth, when their intent at once became apparent.”\textsuperscript{52} That being said, Reynolds did not publish any images from Codex Boturini that had not been previously published in \textit{The Prophet}. This leaves the possibility that Reynolds borrowed directly from \textit{The Prophet} rather than from Delafield’s reproduction. His inclusion of the miscopied image of the five figures eating limits it to one of these two possibilities.

Reynolds’s interpretations were inserted as interesting asides to the larger narrative. In some cases, the readers were left to make their own assumptions about how Reynolds believed an image should be read. For example, the pictograph printed here as figure 1 appeared a page before Reynolds described Nephi decapitating Laban—perhaps suggesting a correlation between the two events. The middle figure may have appeared to Reynolds as a decapitated head. When describing the portion of the codex printed here as figure 9, Reynolds pointed to the same elements from Lehi’s dream of the tree of life as Brannan had before. However, Reynolds’s interpretation of the portion of the codex printed here as figure 11 differed from the 1841 and 1845 understanding. He omitted the reference to circumcision—an element that did not originate from the Book of Mormon text—reasoning instead that it “seems to shew some of the many attempts made by Nephi’s brethren to slay him, when they bound him to trees in the wilderness and otherwise abused him.”\textsuperscript{53}


\textsuperscript{52} Reynolds, \textit{Story of the Book of Mormon}, iv.

\textsuperscript{53} Reynolds, \textit{Story of the Book of Mormon}, 47; Reynolds suggested an alternate reading that because “the faces of two of the men are painted black, it is not impossible that they may represent some persons who had been killed.”
Two other Latter-day Saint interpretations of Codex Boturini appeared in 1937 and 1946 respectively. Both included much more of the complete manuscript than either Brannan or Reynolds had provided. Josiah Hickman concluded his 1937 work, *The Romance of the Book of Mormon*, with a chapter entitled “Aztec Codices.” Whereas earlier interpreters were not as concerned with how the order of scenes matched up with the Book of Mormon narrative, Hickman was particularly concerned with the sequence of events. He paired Codex Boturini with other codices to narrate 1 Nephi. By reordering the images, Hickman could, for example, place the tree of life narrative after and not before what he believed was the central narrative of the codex—the story of Nephi, Sam, Laman, and Lemuel’s efforts to obtain the brass plates from Laban—thus keeping with the sequence of events in the Book of Mormon. Hickman’s reproduction of Codex Boturini included images that did not appear in *The Prophet* and also contained the copying mistake present in the copy of the codex contained in Delafield’s *An Inquiry*.

While some elements of Hickman’s interpretation mirrored earlier interpretations, it included various unique details not found previously. He pointed to images throughout the manuscript that, he alleged, depicted the four brothers bringing treasures to Laban, escaping his wrath, and then one brother sneaking back in to kill him. Hickman interpreted figure 12 as “a man of authority [i.e. Laban] left behind, but it indicates his head has been severed, for blood is coming from his mouth and nostrils.”

Hickman’s most interesting interpretation related to the three figures lying backwards over cactus plants, which Appleby’s journal and *The Prophet* had interpreted as an illustration of Lehi circumcising his sons but that Reynolds believed represented the multiple occasions Laman and Lemuel abused Nephi. Hickman posited a third possibility that the three figures “have their beds placed upon plants or brush, presumably to protect themselves from poisonous insects or reptiles;

or it may be to have softer beds to sleep upon.” The first two are portrayed “covered with a dark covering, which may suggest sleep.” The depiction of the third figure, whose eyes are visible but whose mouth is darkened, “may indicate that physically he is still asleep, though the open eyes would indicate an inner vision inspired by the divine messenger.” The messenger, according to Hickman, “bears the insignia of holiness.” This creative reading neatly placed the vision of Nephi after his father’s dream of the tree of life. Those familiar with the narrative will recognize Hickman’s identification of the “divine messenger” as a reference to one of two of Nephi’s divine guides in the narrative.

Despite Hickman’s expanded interpretation, when compared to earlier renditions, his commentary was often more modest and less certain. He wrote of the “suggested relationship, if not a proof of a relationship between the narrative of the Aztec codices and the story of the Book of Mormon.” Hickman explained that “this chart could reasonably

59. Nephi’s vision begins in 1 Nephi 11:1 under the supervision of the Spirit of the Lord and is continued by an angelic messenger beginning in verse 14.
represent Lehi’s departure.” 61 One subtitle even referenced “The Supposed First Effort of Lehi’s Sons to Get Record.” 62 Yet, even if he used cautious modifiers when discussing the particulars of his interpretation, he clearly believed that when taken together there was little reason to doubt his position. “The wonder is that so much of this classic pictograph lends itself to the Book of Mormon story.” 63

In 1946, James W. LeSueur published The Guatemalan Petroglyphs: The Nephite Story or From Whence Came the Aztecs, which included a reproduction of Codex Boturini in its entirety. 64 LeSueur claimed to have come to the interpretation by revelatory means. While visiting the National Anthropology Museum in Mexico City, he saw Codex Boturini on display. He recognized it from Reynolds’s and Hickman’s books, but seeing the complete and original manuscript was a vastly different experience. “As I looked it over, the interpretation of it came to my mind.” LeSueur met with the curator to share his thoughts. The curator acknowledged the parallels as a “remarkable coincidence.” Unsatisfied, LeSueur pronounced it “more than a coincidence, it is a definite confirmation.” 65

In most cases, LeSueur did not explain how each pictograph depicted a Book of Mormon scene; rather he printed a page of the codex and then a page of scriptural quotes or a summary of a chapter. The reader was then left to determine how the verses related to the scene. LeSueur believed that Codex Boturini represented almost the entirety of Book of Mormon history previous to the coming of Jesus Christ. He began his interpretation with the migration narrative, continuing through Lehi’s dream and the breaking of Nephi’s bow, following the history of the Nephites in the promised land, and quoting scripture in Mosiah, Alma,

61. Hickman, Romance of the Book of Mormon, 249.
63. Hickman, Romance of the Book of Mormon, 252.
64. Like Appleby, LeSueur misidentified the codex as a petroglyph. His association of Codex Boturini with Guatemala was singular to him.
65. James W. LeSueur, The Guatemalan Petroglyphs: The Nephite Story, or From Whence Came the Aztecs (Mesa: n.p., 1946), [1–2].
and Helaman. LeSueur saw the end of the codex as a depiction of the sons of Mosiah’s mission to the Lamanites.

LeSueur based his reproduction of Codex Boturini on a copy he purchased at the National Anthropology Museum, making the images in *The Guatemalan Petroglyphs* the only known LDS rendering of the codex that was not dependent on the Delafield copy. While the only major difference was the fact that all five figures believed to be surrounding the fruit of the tree of life had arms and were holding the fruit, LeSueur was able to interpret the scene almost identically to his predecessors. He pointed out that “Laman and Lemuel, refuse to eat holding it out.” It is not clear how LeSueur interpreted the three figures lying backwards on the cactus-like plants; however, the verses he quoted to correspond with this image discussed the discovery of “fruit and food” in Bountiful. The majority of other interpretations in LeSueur’s *Guatemalan Petroglyphs* were more obscure, referring to the settlement of different lands.

Conclusion

Latter-day Saint interpreters of Codex Boturini were part of a larger collective project of “translating” Mesoamerican relics. There was already a history of well-meaning Christians who had disregarded indigenous contexts and interpreted hieroglyphics through their own worldview. The Latter-day Saint reception history of Codex Boturini demonstrates how early Mormons imbibed and adapted the popular archaeological literature of the early republic to their needs and desires. Their reading Codex Boturini through the lens of the Book of Mormon was not substantially different from John Delafield’s reading Codex Vaticanus through the lens of Genesis.

At the same time, this was very much a Latter-day Saint project. The appeal for these interpreters was in proving the story of Joseph Smith’s

67. LeSueur, *Guatemalan Petroglyphs*, [36].
discovery of an ancient American record engraved on gold plates near his home in New York. Indeed, Latter-day Saints were inspired to read and ponder American antiquity not just from a popular culture still eager to find Near East roots in indigenous populations, but also from Joseph Smith’s own examples. Codex Boturini was a testament to the Book of Mormon and, to quote John E. Page, “the most valuable discoveries in American Antiquity must appeal to the Book of Mormon for interpretation.”

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68. Page, “Book of Mormon.”
In his foreword to this book, Richard Bushman praises it for its meticulous attention to the historian’s craft. Michael MacKay and Gerrit Dirkmaat have served as editors on the Documents series of the Joseph Smith Papers Project—spending months documenting, annotating, and organizing the surviving historical material from the early years of Joseph Smith’s religious career—and their experience with those primary sources shines in this volume. They have tracked down scraps of information in archives from New York to Utah, from obscure nineteenth-century publications as far-flung as the Ohio Observer and the Milwaukee Sentinel, and even from much better-known sources like the Joseph Smith revelations, which they have reread with a keen eye for detail and often-missed nuance.

This means, as Bushman observes, that this book may serve to “bring Latter-day Saint readers up to date on the results of the latest historical research” (p. v). And indeed, that is a great strength of this book. Historians will learn some things from this book, for MacKay and Dirkmaat have done much to unearth material that complicates the conventional narrative of Joseph Smith’s early life. For instance, one might take a single well-known story the authors explore again: that of Martin Harris’s adventures with the transcript of “Caracters” derived from Joseph Smith's
plates, which Martin took to the East Coast with hopes that a scholar might aid him in understanding them. First, MacKay and Dirkmaat suggest that Joseph Smith likely made a sizable number of these transcriptions, a suggestion that may well surprise. Then, far from the conventional narrative, which posits that Charles Anthon of Columbia was Harris’s primary target because of his expertise in ancient languages, MacKay and Dirkmaat suggest that the Rutgers Medical College professor Samuel Mitchill was the man Harris really wanted to see. Mitchill is often glossed over simply as the one who referred Martin to the more well-known Anthon, who gets more notice because Joseph Smith paid him attention in his own history. But MacKay and Dirkmaat posit that taking note of Mitchill’s interests and career contextualizes Harris’s experience in a broader antebellum fascination with Native American civilization. Mitchill had built a reputation for studying Native American languages and, from that study, developing theories about the origins of the Native nations (who came, in his telling, from Asia, Polynesia, and Scandinavia). Indeed, in 1823 a man named Abraham Edwards brought Mitchill a manuscript with strange characters on it that he claimed to have found underneath a building he had owned. He hoped that Mitchill could provide a translation, thinking it was the product of some ancient American civilization. As MacKay and Dirkmaat sensibly point out, the notion that the hieroglyphs on the plates were “reformed Egyptian” and not, as one who took Joseph Smith’s story for granted might reasonably assume, a Native American language seems to have been a later development. MacKay and Dirkmaat have unearthed several letters demonstrating that, in part inspired by Mitchill’s work, Anthon had become a collector of Native American writing and stories. Thus, if Mitchill could make neither heads nor tails of Harris’s transcript, passing him on to Anthon would have made sense.

Several times in the book, MacKay and Dirkmaat perform a feat like this, taking a well-known anecdote from the career of Joseph Smith and tending it until it blossoms into a local representative of a far larger story about life and culture in the early republic. This strategy embeds Joseph Smith in his time, making his story seem more comprehensible for his advocates and less outlandish to his critics. Such rich context
manages to make the ever-elusive mind and heart of Joseph Smith seem much closer; his decisions, beliefs, and calculations emerge into if not clarity, at least comprehensibility.

MacKay and Dirkmaat offer several other novel historiographical updates on the story of the translation. They make the case for the misdating of the revelation now known as Doctrine and Covenants 19; they offer some hypotheses as to why E. B. Grandin did not seem eager to promote the Book of Mormon he had just published; and they do an admirable job sorting out Joseph Smith’s several seer stones. In a move clearly derived from the detailed and meticulous research that the Joseph Smith Papers Project demanded, they also offer a clear and exhaustive unpacking of the various financial and legal maneuvers that the publication of the Book of Mormon required. Given all this, historians will likely find this book useful.

The authors’ command of historiographical technique is all the more admirable considering that this book was written for a lay Latter-day Saint audience. From this perspective, the book reflects what Bushman praises it for: an attempt to inject professional historiographical methods into the lay Mormon conversation about their religion’s past. For instance, the authors routinely cite E. D. Howe’s *Mormonism Unvailed*, long dismissed as a collection of aggrieved testimonies critical of Joseph Smith. That it surely is, but though these authors are friendly to Smith, they acknowledge that the historian’s task is not to dismiss sources when their bias may not be the same as one’s own bias (for all have biases), but rather to evaluate each source for its worth and to use it insofar as it seems worthwhile. To this end, the authors use Howe with care, qualifying quotations when it seems warranted with words such as “likely” (p. 7). But they also acknowledge simply by the citation that Howe’s sources have some worth. They also seek to rehabilitate the reputation of Lucy Harris, the wife of Martin Harris, who like Howe is often dismissed by members of the LDS Church as a shrewish caricature unaccountably hostile to Joseph Smith. The authors argue that the source of this animus was Lucy Smith, Joseph Smith’s mother, who proves herself in her account to be “not fond of Lucy Harris,” and who
therefore “seems to paint her in the worst light possible” (p. 25). They try their best to give context and justification to the variety of inhabitants of the Palmyra and Rochester areas who proved to be uninterested in or hostile to the Book of Mormon, like the printer and later political heavyweight Thurlow Weed. Using these sorts of strategies, the authors work gently to draw lay Mormons away from hagiography and the knee-jerk use of the term anti-Mormon to dismiss any account that seems hostile and toward a fuller and well-rounded grasp of their faith’s history.

Of course, by the same token historians should be aware that the book’s intended audience means that the authors take for granted the essential truth of Joseph Smith’s claims; indeed, the book is scholarly enough that I found it slightly jarring when the authors occasionally make straightforward claims about, for instance, the Book of Mormon–era provenance of the spectacles Joseph Smith found with the plates, or when they ascribe the Whitmers’ willingness to put the young seer Smith up while he worked on the translation not simply to visions (an entirely respectable phenomenological claim) but to the influence of the Lord. These claims are in the language of faith rather than in the language of the academy, and though professional historians will likely find them distracting, it is a credit to the authors how fluidly they are able to shift from one to the other. The authors have also commissioned the BYU artist and professor Anthony Sweat to produce new art documenting the translation process in depictions more accurate than those often seen in official church productions; Sweat’s illustrations, and his brief account of the reasoning behind them, are a welcome addition. Despite this, the book is a bit more heavily illustrated than I would have liked, including multiple instances where an essentially identical photo is reproduced on several pages. This was probably not the authors’ doing, but it is somewhat distracting.

In sum, though this book may well be of interest and use to serious historians, it is most valuable as a book intended for the Mormon lay audience. It is another brick in the edifice of responsible history for a lay LDS audience now being built. Hopefully it finds a wide audience.
In early August 2015, the Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints held a press conference for the forthcoming two-part volume 3 of the Revelations and Translations series of the Joseph Smith Papers Project. While a public event was standard, an actual press conference was a little out of the ordinary. The highlight of the press conference was two pages of photographs included in the volume—beautiful high-resolution photographs of Joseph Smith’s brown seer stone. Though the original stone continues to reside in the LDS First Presidency’s vault, the photographs started a rumble through the Mormon studies community that would quickly reach the larger church. The general absence of seer stones from the devotional church narrative meant that for many, these photographs were a complete surprise. And while the existence of this stone was not surprising for many historians, this was certainly not a predictable part of the larger continued efforts at transparency by the LDS Church History Department. It seemed as though a mystical object of a supernatural past realm suddenly broke through the mundane surface of the present.
This volume of the Joseph Smith Papers Project is the third in the Revelations and Translations series, perhaps the most important in the Smith Papers series. The first volume included the two manuscript revelation books offering unprecedented access to revelation manuscripts. The second included all the earliest published versions of the revelations, and now volume 3 reproduces the printer’s manuscript of the Book of Mormon. Each of these volumes has contained beautiful high-resolution color images of the originals. For those who might question the value of the printer’s manuscript, this is the earliest extant manuscript for more than 70 percent of the Book of Mormon text. In October 1841, Joseph Smith decided to place the original Book of Mormon manuscript into the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House; though this move was historically minded, it was ultimately a lamentable idea that resulted in the loss of a majority of the manuscript.¹ This volume is particularly significant, both for its historical narrative of the translation and printing of the Book of Mormon as well as for being a precise documentary edition of the printer’s manuscript. The latter builds on the decades-long work of Royal Skousen with the Book of Mormon critical text project.

Creation and translation

Any substantive documentary editing project will focus on the history of the document’s creation. For Latter-day Saints believing in the divine origins of the Book of Mormon, the narrative of its creation has always been weightier than the mere process of transcription. The historical introduction to the printer’s manuscript offers a brief but significant narrative of the creation of the Book of Mormon, including Joseph’s brown seer stone. This is particularly remarkable considering that no one who had actually seen the stone had talked about it publicly since the 1970s.²


². See Michael MacKay and Nicholas J. Frederick, Joseph Smith’s Seer Stones (Salt Lake City: BYU Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2016), 181, 190.
The introduction notes that a more precise history of the translation process will be forthcoming, perhaps with the future publication of the extant original manuscript. The brief yet illuminating history of the creation of the manuscript places the stone in its context; explaining the process of translation begins the process of understanding the function of the stone. This also means acknowledging the truthful elements of the long-term accusations of money digging and treasure seeking aimed at Joseph Smith. Critically, the introduction argues that when Joseph Smith was “faced with rumors that he was an active or even leading participant in local treasure-digging activities and concerned that his history might prove an obstacle for some to accepting his religious message, Joseph Smith rarely mentioned his participation in treasure digging and never in great detail. But neither did he deny his early activities” (p. xv). With nuance and brevity, the introduction notes the intersections of what Joseph Smith would later distinguish as a gift from God and the “d____d nonsense” of treasure seeking.3

The photographs of Joseph Smith’s brown seer stone begin to reconstruct a too-often-missing element of the narrative, as well as to illustrate the manner in which Smith took the mundane and the earthly and made it sacred. In 2013, Joseph Smith Papers historians Michael MacKay and Mark Ashurst-McGee first requested photographs of the brown seer stone of then managing director of the LDS Church History Department, Richard E. Turley, without success.4 Now, the photographs of the chocolate-colored stone are published in gorgeous, full-color images with a very clear provenance. Joseph Smith first gave the stone to Oliver Cowdery after finishing the Book of Mormon translation. After the death of Cowdery, his wife Elizabeth Whitmer Cowdery passed the stone to Phineas Young, who passed it to his brother, Brigham. It was almost sold in an estate sale after the death of Brigham Young only to be saved by his wife Zina D. H. Young and then preserved in a small box by her daughter Zina Young Williams Cardall to be later gifted to

the then church president, John Taylor. The egg-shaped stone appears to be a genesis stone of swirled jasper and iron ore. The stone is photographed from four different angles; the custom leather pouch crafted for the stone by Emma Smith also appears in two of those photographs.

Encountering the historical record about the translation requires broadening definitions beyond a strict translation from one known language to another known language. As several different academics have considered the process of translation, they have spanned the distance between a process lacking any volition on the part of Joseph Smith other than the act of seeing—looking at the stone—to those who would argue for considerable volition in the process—from finding vocabulary to the necessary construction of abstract ideas. The introduction and body of this volume begin to require those scholars to consider both the historical record of the process and the text itself.

Moreover, the entry of the stone into the history of the restoration of the church exemplifies significant recent efforts at transparency first modeled with LDS Church History Department sponsorship of the monograph *Massacre at Mountain Meadows*. That effort at transparency has continued and expanded with the release of the seer stone photos and has marked the beginning of a major shift in how Latter-day Saints tell the story of the restoration. The fall 2015 completion of a new LDS Historic Site at Harmony, Pennsylvania, the location of most of the Book of Mormon translation, came almost concurrently. The rebuilt home of Joseph and Emma includes a hat (in which to place the seer stone) near covered plates and Book of Mormon manuscript pages on the kitchen table; they seem to be just waiting for Joseph to pick up the translation again. That October the seer stone photographs were likewise published in both the *Ensign* and the worldwide *Liahona* in the article “Joseph the Seer.” The same month, the new central exhibit of the LDS Museum of Church History opened telling the narrative of the restoration and featuring the seer stone photographs prominently. In the latter part of 2016 the Joseph Smith Papers Project released additional images of the

brown seer stone online.⁶ The February 2017 *Friend*, the official LDS children’s magazine, included a game: “From Gold Plates to Book of Mormon.” One of the steps in the game recognizes Joseph’s primary use of the seer stone in translation.⁷ Beginning with the presentation of these seer stone photographs in *Revelations and Translations, Volume 3*, we are witnessing a sea change in the devotional origin narrative of the Latter-day Saints.

**A precise documentary edition**

The color photographs of the text replicate the 466-page manuscript created by Oliver Cowdery, an unknown scribe, and Hyrum Smith as they prepared to publish the first edition Book of Mormon. After Martin Harris lost Book of Mormon manuscript pages in 1828, Joseph Smith worried about repeating history and possibly losing more manuscript pages. After negotiating the printing of the Book of Mormon, the printer’s manuscript was created as needed between August 1829 and March 1830. At only one point in the printing process was the original manuscript taken to the printing office. In the manuscript we find the punctuation, paragraph, and printing marks of the compiler John H. Gilbert, editing done by the scribes, as well as later edits done by Joseph Smith and others after the publication of the first edition in preparation for later editions. We also learn of a significant loss for the LDS Church when Joseph F. Smith turned down an opportunity to purchase the original manuscript for the Book of Mormon.

Decades in its production, Royal Skousen worked assiduously with other members of the Book of Mormon critical text project to produce a critical text of the Book of Mormon—the first volume was published in 2001.⁸ Long before the inception of the Joseph Smith Papers Proj-

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ect, Dean Jessee worked on the documents of Joseph Smith’s life, first published as *The Papers of Joseph Smith* in 1989. His work has been more completely realized through the Joseph Smith Papers. Though the two projects have significant similarities, in reality there is a space between a critical scriptural text integrating multiple manuscripts and editors and a historical documentary-editing project. This volume seeks to satisfy both desires and approaches and has the considerable benefit of complete full-color facsimile reproductions—something that is rarely seen in documentary editions because of prohibitive costs.

In 2009, Skousen produced *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*—a clear text edition merging the earliest manuscripts. The clearer the text, the more accessible the text. However, less detail in the manuscript means less transparency. The Smith Papers’ transcription here is not a clear text edition. As the introduction notes, the Joseph Smith Papers “represents the manuscript more liberally” than did Skousen in his critical text project (p. xxx). Nevertheless the transcription is tighter in comparison to other Joseph Smith Papers’ transcriptions and presented with careful attention to detail. The introduction also adds, “Def- erence is given to the scribe’s final intent” (p. xxx). Lest some question the liberties taken, all documentary editing projects involve significant judgment calls no matter how detail-oriented and literal the project. Any documentary volume must decide how it will balance literality and emendations. At the cost of much paper and a complicated transcription key, Skousen worked to make his original transcription as literal as possible. In contrast, in other volumes the Smith Papers consistently use emendations to make the transcriptions accessible while still working to maintain the anthropology of the document. This volume endeavors a precarious balance between transcription literality and accessibility; however, this balance finds solid support in the images. Through the

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high-resolution color photographs, the color editorial insertions, and the more compact transcription guide, this edition is eminently accessible and offers ready access to the literal.

The beauty of the immaculate images almost completely collapses that space between reading the text and the physical document itself. The introduction to the text reminds the reader of the limited nature of any transcription: “No matter the care put into transcribing a text, a gap still remains between the reader and the physical document” (p. xxiv). Any loss of specificity in the transcription is almost entirely restored with the color photographs. The introduction includes specifics on capturing and editing images, yet it also reminds us that some of those elements cannot be reproduced nor can the photographs restore damaged portions of the initial manuscript page. Photos of a 1923 negative image helped to re-create some lost text on the initial manuscript page (p. xxxvi). Many readers will need to pull out their reading glasses as they approach the source notes relating the provenance of the printer’s manuscript as the point of the typeface shrinks dramatically.

The text also enables the reader to clearly see the evidence of some of the claims about the creation of the document as well as translation and editing processes. A reader can see John Gilbert’s punctuation of one-third of the manuscript and his grammatical corrections and recognize that the majority of those additions were done on the fly as he was typesetting the book. A reader can clearly distinguish the work of Joseph Smith and others to edit the manuscript in preparation for succeeding editions, as well as study the work of the enigmatic second scribe. The identity of this scribe remains a mystery, though her or his spelling skills shine, particularly in comparison with the spelling of Oliver Cowdery and yet even more so in comparison with Hyrum Smith’s absolute lack of spelling ability. A reader may closely examine the original manuscript where there are contested words as well as reference Skousen’s prior work as needed.
Future perspective

These are Joseph Smith’s papers—the papers of a man; however, this volume particularly missed an opportunity to better single out the contributions of women related to the creation of the Book of Mormon and the preservation of the physical objects connected to it. There are those who contributed to the manuscript even though they never marked it themselves; it is never just Joseph working alone. Emma Smith created the leather pouch in which Joseph and later others kept the seer stone. Since it is unlikely that public examination of the pouch will be forthcoming, additional information could further highlight that contribution. The additional images of the seer stone included in the Joseph Smith Papers’ glossary also include the box where Zina Cardall safeguarded the stone as she handed it over to John Taylor. Including the box provided to protect the stone in the volume would also bring to our attention the valuable contribution of Cardall and her mother Zina D. H. Young in saving the stone from sale or loss.11 Hopefully, the publication of the extant portion of the original Book of Mormon manuscript will prominently spotlight Mary Whitmer’s string used to tie the manuscript together.12

Beyond their scholarly appeal, those working on the Joseph Smith Papers never assumed that the volumes would be highly attractive as bedtime reading to average members of the LDS Church but harbored the hope that their work would distill to a wide church membership through the work of other scholars. With the publication of four photographs of a swirled stone, that goal has been clearly realized. We can already measure how this work has reached a much broader audience. It may be more difficult to measure the impact of other portions of the Smith Papers’ work, but I am also hopeful that the Joseph Smith Papers will continue to be valuable to scholars as well as to the general membership of the LDS Church. This volume is eminently valuable for what

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it has done, but its value will expand as others utilize it in the future and build on the transparency it represents.

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*Reviewed by Christopher Cannon Jones*


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This important new book from Michael Hubbard MacKay and Nicholas J. Frederick is intended as a “friendly introduction” to Joseph Smith’s possession and use of seer stones (p. xiii). Aimed explicitly at a Latter-day Saint audience, the authors—both assistant professors of religious education at Brigham Young University—attempt “to locate and explore the role of seer stones in Joseph Smith’s Restoration theology” (p. 3). To that end, MacKay and Frederick not only provide the single best historical overview of the function and role of seer stones in early Mormon history, but also offer a provocative (if not necessarily wholly convincing) reading of the significance of seer stones to Mormon theology.

*Joseph Smith’s Seer Stones* serves as a sort of sequel to another volume coauthored by MacKay and Gerrit Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto
Light: Joseph Smith’s Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon (2015). Among that book’s signal contributions was its frank discussion of Joseph Smith’s use of seer stones while translating the Book of Mormon and its inclusion of several illustrations depicting that process by Anthony Sweat, MacKay and Dirkmaat’s colleague in BYU’s Department of Church History and Doctrine. A few months after the publication of From Darkness unto Light, the Joseph Smith Papers released several high-resolution photographs of one of Smith’s seer stones; shortly thereafter, photographs of the stone appeared in the Ensign, the monthly magazine published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and intended for the broadest Mormon readership possible. Joseph Smith’s Seer Stones represents an effort to capitalize on the interest generated by those developments, contributing to what MacKay and Frederick term “a process of renormalization” in which “the miracle” of the seer stones is “recaptur[ed] . . . in historical terms” (p. xix).

The authors’ effort to renormalize seer stones begins with a historical overview. Following the book’s introduction and an abbreviated opening chapter on Joseph Smith’s melding of evangelical Christianity, “folk religion, medicine, and common folklore” (p. 2), the book’s next three chapters cover, in successive order, the parallel cultures of money digging and religious revivals that defined the culture of upstate New York where Joseph Smith was raised, the origin of Joseph Smith’s own seer stones, and the role the stones played in the translation of the Book of Mormon. The authors explain that whereas modern readers might see “a deep divide” between Christianity and the use of seer stones or divining rods to locate lost objects, Joseph Smith “saw an environment

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where the ecstatic religious experiences ever present in revivalism were exhibited in folk religion and the occult” (p. 2). Joseph Smith found his first seer stone at roughly the same time that he experienced his first vision. By 1826, he had in his possession at least three such stones, which he believed to be “ancient artifacts” designed to help him and others locate additional hidden objects, ranging from the commonplace (water) to the more exciting (buried treasure). This experience naturally shaped his understanding of events later in his life, including the “retrieval of the Nephite interpreters [and gold plates] and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.” “The interpreters,” MacKay and Frederick explain, “were two seer stones bound together like spectacles,” and the visit of the angelic being Moroni in 1823 was not “the first time [Smith] envisioned himself finding ancient artifacts buried near his home” (p. 6). But the guidance of divine beings did alter Smith’s understanding of seer stones and the landscape of upstate New York. In time, “Joseph bound together the ideas of sacred land, ancient Native American artifacts, and digging for money with seer stones.” He came to believe “that he plucked his seer stones from a blessed landscape where they had been buried by ancient inhabitants and under the direction of God” (p. 16).

In describing this broadened understanding, however, the authors reject the term transition, preferring instead transformation, which they claim more accurately describes the “process of accumulation and selection” in which Smith “molded these tools to fit his Christian religion” (p. 19). The most obvious example of that transformation came in Smith’s translation of the Book of Mormon, a subject MacKay and Frederick examine in detail in chapter four. They argue that Joseph Smith’s use of the stones to translate an ancient record written in an unknown language is the factor that most clearly separated him from other practitioners of seer stones. “The process described by [Smith’s] scribes and witnesses, in which words appeared on seer stones,” they write, “was unique in the folklore of magic and removed from his money-digging experiences” (pp. 44–45).

In rejecting the notion that Joseph Smith transitioned away from seer stones as he grew into his roles as prophet and revelator, the authors note that he continued to possess and use seer stones until his death in
1844, as did other Latter-day Saints in the nineteenth century. Chapter five traces the provenance of Joseph Smith’s brown and white seer stones, respectively. Following the publication of the Book of Mormon in 1830, Smith gave the brown stone to Oliver Cowdery, and from there it was passed down to various leading Latter-day Saint men and women in the nineteenth century before ending up in the possession of the Joseph F. Smith family and then the First Presidency during the twentieth century. Though there is no record of the stone being used in any way approximating its earlier usage to translate ancient records, the authors make clear that “Joseph Smith’s seer stones represented authority” to Latter-day Saints. Its possession by Brigham Young, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and Joseph F. Smith was understood as evidence of their possession of priesthood keys and authority.

Joseph Smith’s white seer stone, by contrast, remained in his possession for the duration of his life. Though the record detailing its provenance is less clear, the surviving evidence suggests that Joseph Smith and other church presidents in the nineteenth century used it more regularly than the brown stone. In 1841, for example, Smith showed the stone to the Twelve Apostles and informed them that it was his personal stone and that each person “was entitled to a seer stone, and should have one.” Brigham Young, who possessed the stone after Smith’s death, made a similar point in the 1850s, and Wilford Woodruff in 1887 “consecrated [the white stone] on the altar” of the Manti Temple (pp. 79–80).

This “deliberate attempt to preserve and value” the seer stones leads into a decidedly different part of the book, in which MacKay and Frederick examine the place of seer stones in the Book of Mormon’s own internal narrative and what that tells us about Smith’s seer stones in the nineteenth century (p. 84). Here the authors move beyond summarizing historical evidence and venture into more original scholarly territory. In seeking to intervene in the debate among some scholars over Joseph Smith’s active role in the production of the Book of Mormon’s text, MacKay and Frederick “examine how the Book of Mormon responds to the questions raised through Joseph’s use of seer stones” (p. 112). The authors argue, for instance, that Nephi’s extensive appropriation and application of
Isaiah’s prophecies to the Lehite people “[show] us a prophet unconcerned with the idea that he is ‘borrowing’ from someone else” (p. 115). So, too, with Mosiah’s “seeric reading” of an ancient stone with engravings in an unknown language, in which a seer receives “a relic and translates the language on the relic … in a way that allows for additional, more important information to be relayed from a divine source” (p. 117). Even more intriguingly, the authors propose that the Liahona, or “directors” that guided Lehi and his family in the wilderness, functioned in some ways like a seer stone, or “that the Liahona was actually a seer stone that had been placed within a golden metallic ball” (p. 120).2 Such readings are, of course, conjectural, but they do provide interesting possibilities about the ways in which the text of the Book of Mormon might have shaped Joseph Smith’s own understanding of his seer stones and their origin and uses.

In some instances, the authors’ conclusions (or conjectures) ignore relevant evidence. In chapter 7, for example, they propose that “the Book of Mormon [is] very specific about separating the concept of translation of texts from the notion of reception of visions” (p. 122). It is not clear that Joseph Smith learned such a lesson about the seer stones’ purposes from the Book of Mormon, though. Indeed, the revelation now canonized as section 7 of the Doctrine and Covenants blurs the lines between vision and translation in interesting ways. In April 1829, “a difference of opinion” arose between Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery “about the account of John the Apostle … whether he died, or whether he continued.” The debate was ultimately settled “by the Urim and Thummin,” which evidently provided Smith and Cowdery a vision of a “parchment, written and hid up by [John] himself.”3 Moreover, if the Book of Mormon

2. This reading of the Liahona was earlier made by MacKay and Gerrit Dirkmaat in From Darkness unto Light, though it receives an extended analysis here. See Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith’s Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2015), 67–68.

identified seer stones as translation tools, the Book of Abraham offered a significant counterexample—one that MacKay and Frederick discuss without acknowledging the apparent conflict just one chapter later. In the third chapter of the Book of Abraham, the ancient prophet is shown, via the Urim and Thummim, a vision of the sun, stars, and planets, as well as a panoramic vision of the premortal world and the earth’s creation.

Perhaps the most innovative and provocative contribution, though, is the book’s concluding chapter, which attempts to outline a theology of seer stones. Pointing to Joseph Smith’s lifelong possession and periodic use of at least one seer stone and his teachings late in life “that the Urim and Thummim would play a part in the celestial kingdom” (p. 136), MacKay and Frederick argue that Joseph Smith’s life and actions as a prophet, seer, and revelator “uncovered an ancient and sacred past of seer stone use that transformed local folklore into a new kind of religious epistemology” (p. 136). That seems clear, at least inasmuch as it applies to Smith’s use of seer stones. But the authors take it a step further, arguing that seer stones will facilitate the reception of future scripture. “If the brass plates or the sealed portion are to be revealed in the future,” they claim, “it seems likely that those records will be brought forth through seer stones prepared for the specific seers called to translate” (p. 132). Perhaps this is a disciplinary difference, in which predicting the future makes me, a historian who is more comfortable in the past, somewhat uncomfortable, but this proposal would appear to put Latter-day Saint leaders in something of a bind, especially now that the church has acknowledged that it possesses at least one seer stone. Are Latter-day Saints merely awaiting the discovery of additional ancient records, at which point the current church president will then use existing seer stones to translate? Perhaps, but that is far from clear, especially given the paucity of both seer stone usage and translation of ancient records in the more recent Latter-day Saint past.

In spite of my own discomfort with some of the book’s more provocative proposals, I highly recommend Joseph Smith’s Seer Stones to interested

readers. It is, without a doubt, the single best accessible treatment of the subject to date. I have used it in teaching courses on the Doctrine and Covenants at BYU and have recommended it to students interested in reading more. MacKay and Frederick have succeeded in their effort to provide a “friendly introduction” to seer stones for Latter-day Saint readers, but the book deserves a much wider audience than that. Historians of early Mormonism and scholars of both the Bible and the Book of Mormon will appreciate not only the careful assessment of what we know about Joseph Smith’s seer stones but also the numerous tables and charts throughout. Especially useful are the book’s six appendices, which cover in detail seer stones and their owners in upstate New York during the 1820s, other seer stones connected with Joseph Smith during his lifetime, the possession and use of seer stones by other Latter-day Saints during the nineteenth century, and analyses of the Urim and Thummim in the Old Testament and the mention of a “white stone” in the book of Revelation. Perhaps most useful to historians is the “selected annotated bibliography for seer stone sources,” which includes citations and excerpts from the various nineteenth- and twentieth-century sources detailing Joseph Smith’s seer stones, arranged in alphabetical order by author. If a book’s value can be judged by the conversations it stimulates and its success in advancing the conversation in potentially productive new directions, Joseph Smith’s Seer Stones is an obvious success.

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**Reviewed by Avram R. Shannon**


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This book was difficult to review. On the one hand, it provides intriguing insights into the Book of Mormon as well as useful tools for Latter-day Saints to look at this important text in new ways. On the other hand, it often provides those tools through methodological missteps and by glossing over elements of historical reading in both Book of Mormon and Jewish studies. I firmly applaud the impetus behind this book and even some of the individual points, but it is also a book that illustrates how having a heart in the right place is insufficient to make it completely successful in its proposed thesis. According to the preface, the purpose of this book is to approach the Book of Mormon in a way similar to how Jews approach the reading of the Torah (see pp. xiv–xv). *Beholding the Tree of Life* broadly succeeds in presenting some Jewish interpretive tools to a Latter-day Saint audience but falls short in a number of specific aspects.

Part of the difficulty stems from the subtitle of the book and the use of the word *rabbinic*, something that Kramer addresses in his preface. Kramer notes that in his usage, rabbinic Judaism refers to those forms of Judaism that derive from the Sages of the Talmud and Mishnah, thus excluding non-Talmudic Jews such as Karaites, as well as Jewish groups that predate the Mishnah (see p. xvii). Defining rabbinic Judaism is a good thing, since there can be a tendency to just talk about “the Jews” without reference to the very real differences between assorted expressions of Judaism in various times and places. However, Kramer and I differ on our use of *rabbinic*, which therefore explains my expectations for this book. I tend to use *rabbinic* in a somewhat more limited sense than Kramer does—the OED suggests that the word *rabbinic* is “used
most frequently with reference to the rabbis whose teachings constitute the Talmud.”¹ As I understand the term, a rabbinic reading of the Book of Mormon is one that is primarily situated in the reading traditions of the Talmudic Sages and not one that draws heavily on more medieval or modern sources. Thus, Kramer’s use of modern Jewish thinkers presents an LDS perspective on a modern Jewish reading of the Book of Mormon, but it falls short of being a rabbinic one, in that sense.

Part of my concern lies in something of the occasionally fraught relationship between Latter-day Saints and Jews. On the one hand, Latter-day Saints inherited from the rest of Christianity something of the traditional difficult relationship with Judaism, a fact that was exacerbated by Latter-day Saint notions of Jewish apostasy.² On the other hand, because of our perspective as being part of Israel, Latter-day Saints have a great enthusiasm for Jews and Judaism. This can be seen in everything from Passover Seders presented annually at Brigham Young University to references to “Jewish tradition” in the footnotes of the Latter-day Saint edition of the Bible. Like Kramer, I believe that understanding Judaism can help us better understand our own tradition. I also believe that we owe it to ourselves and to our Jewish friends to do it right.

Part of the difficulty in reading this book is that no rabbinic approach to the Book of Mormon is going to be truly rabbinic if it does not emphasize halakhah, which is the body of Jewish legal decisions, as well as the various literatures whose purpose is to explore and promulgate those decisions. The rabbinic movement was one that was ideologically centered on the temple and the law, and most of their literature derives from discussions and concerns associated with law.³


³. Jacob Neusner, “Map without Territory: Mishnah’s System of Sacrifice and Sanctuary,” History of Religions 19/2 (November 1979): 103–27; Naftali Cohn, The Memory
The ancient Sages are interested in the Bible at least in part because it is a text from which they can derive halakhic principles and concepts. Latter-day Saints are interested in the Bible (and by extension the Book of Mormon) primarily as places for devotional reading and personal application. The tools that the Sages developed for reading the Bible were tools designed to yield what they were most interested in: articulating and establishing halakhah. The ignoring of halakhah means that this book cannot really be rabbinic.

In a certain kind of irony, Kramer’s book is more like the ancient Sages than is apparent at first blush. The ancient rabbinic Sages would often “rabbinize” biblical individuals to make them accord more with their understanding and their search for halakhah. In some ways, Kramer “Mormonizes” his Jewish sources in ways very similar to how the ancient Sages rabbinized their own sources. Examples of this are visible in a number of places. Chapter 4 discusses the importance of reading the scriptures with others, drawing on the rabbinic concept of havruta (see pp. 76–78). The trouble is that he suggests Nephi or the other Book of Mormon authors as the haver for the reader, which retains the generally solo nature of Latter-day Saint scripture study, somewhat undermining the rabbinic purpose of a havruta (see pp. 75–76). This is in addition to the problematic suggestion that a static literary figure, however skilled at walking through scripture as Nephi, serves the same function as a living study buddy.

Some Mormonizing is to be expected in comparing two disparate systems. I am reminded of Jonathan Z. Smith’s observation that one does not compare things that are identical, either in poetry or scholarship. Kramer is aware of this as well, and in the preface he states, “To be perfectly clear, although I very much see the text of the Book of Mormon


4. Not even God is immune to this process, whom the Sages often describe as doing distinctively rabbinic activities such as studying Torah.

as responding to and even encouraging the use of many fundamental rabbinic interpretive techniques, I do not believe that the Book of Mormon writers knew of or consciously employed these techniques in their writings” (p. xviii, emphasis in the original). I agree with Kramer in his observation that the Book of Mormon authors and the rabbinic Sages were completely unaware of one another. I also agree that looking at the ways in which the Sages understood and read scripture can give valuable insights into ways to read scripture generally. Once again, this is why I approve of the broad project of this book and appreciate some of the specific points but find other individual aspects to be disappointing. Because the Sages and the Book of Mormon authors and editors were, in fact, unaware of one another, sometimes the connections that Kramer highlights seem improbable.

Kramer begins his book by associating Lehi’s dream of the tree of life in 1 Nephi 8 with what he calls a “quotation-centered approach” to the scriptures (p. 4). This approach, which he finds in the New Testament, is essentially looking to the scriptures for individual fruits (that is, scriptures or passages) that can be deployed in various environments. He then suggests that the Book of Mormon also responds well to this kind of reading but that its creation as a unified literary production suggests it should be read “reflectively, carefully, and holistically” (p. 6). This is essentially the source of the metaphor behind Kramer’s title. Quotation-centered approaches to scripture look at the fruit, while more unified approaches look at the entire tree. It is quite a nice metaphor, one that is suggestive of both the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches. It is here that Kramer brings in a “rabbinic”/Jewish approach to reading the Book of Mormon, comparing Nephi’s experience with Lehi’s vision in 1 Nephi 11–14 with the rabbinic experience of interpreting the scriptures. This, then, provides the central metaphor for this book and the source of its title. While Lehi’s dream is about partaking of the fruit, Nephi’s visionary experience is about beholding the tree in its fullness—that is to say, exploring the Book of Mormon

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6. Although this is largely how the ancients read the scriptures, it has fallen out of favor in the modern era.
in all its literary glory. As noted, Kramer’s metaphor is an elegant one, and the call to experience the Book of Mormon as a literary piece is engaging and ultimately fruitful.

Kramer then suggests that rabbinic methods can be useful in reading the Book of Mormon in this fuller way. He lists several propositions that he sees in both Nephi’s vision and the methods put forth by the Sages:

- The scriptures require sustained mental effort in order to be understood.
- The scriptures should be read closely and everything about them should be pondered and thoroughly considered.
- The scriptures should be read deeply on several levels and from many perspectives.
- The scriptures should be read with others and in connection with other books.
- Scripture study ultimately is not about information; it is an experience with God. (see pp. 8–20)

I agree strongly with each of these propositions and with Kramer that an approach to scriptures that incorporates these elements would enhance understanding of the Book of Mormon. Again, in my estimation, Kramer’s book lays out a suggestive program for reading the Book of Mormon that, however, fails in that it doesn’t always correctly represent rabbinic discourse (especially where the halakhah is concerned), and it lacks nuance and specificity in its details.

I get the feeling that this book is the result of a personal journey and experience for Kramer. When Kramer quotes from Jewish writers such as Avigdor Bonchek or Norman Cohen, his respect for the insights they have given him into Latter-day Saint scripture is clear. The books he

7. Kramer’s comparison of the two visionary experiences is an astute one. First Nephi 8:2–38 refers to *fruit* 18 times over the course of 37 verses. First Nephi 11–14 refers to *fruit* one time. Fruit, and the eating of fruit, represents one of the central ideas in Lehi’s vision and is simply background in Nephi’s version.

8. This is especially apparent in the conclusion to his book, where having cited these authors throughout, he cites them again. Kramer, *Beholding*, 198.
gets this material from are, however, primarily designed as nonscholarly introductions to reading the Torah, directed at a modern Jewish audience. Kramer’s dependence on these books means that this book is largely focused on how Jewish modes of reading, developed in both the Talmudic and the post-Talmudic era but essentially filtered through a modern Jewish sensibility, can aid in an LDS-style devotional reading of the Book of Mormon.

The individual chapters in this book are mostly discrete discussions of various ways in which Kramer sees this kind of reading pointing to the entire “tree of life.” Chapter 2, which covers reading the scriptures on multiple levels, presents an excellent example of how Kramer’s book provides a useful suggestion for enhanced Book of Mormon reading alongside missteps (see pp. 23–42). I draw it out as a specific example because it is a distinct example that is illustrative of the book as a whole. Kramer introduces what is known in Judaism as the PaRDeS method.

This represents the four ways in which Jewish interpreters can read a given text—peshat (literal), remez (allegorical), derash (midrashic) and sod (mystical). The idea that the scriptures can be read on multiple levels is one that resonates with Latter-day Saint readers. Looking at the types of levels that some ancient Jews brought to their authoritative texts can provide Latter-day Saint readers with a useful perspective on their own scriptures. So far, so good.

The specific examples go too far, however. A clear example of this is the discussion of the remez, the allegorical reading of scripture. Here Kramer connects this to Jacob 5 and Jacob’s presentation of Zenos’s allegory of the olive tree (see p. 30). The intent here seems to be to show the productiveness of the PaRDeS approach by showing an example of an allegory in the Book of Mormon. The problem with this is that reading

9. Chapter 3 is essentially based on Bonchek’s introduction to Torah reading.
10. *Parde* is a Hebrew word, deriving from the Persian word for “orchard,” which was transferred to “pleasure garden,” and ultimately to the “blessed abode.” The same Persian word is also the source of English *paradise*, which followed a similar trajectory.
an allegory allegorically is not remez at all. Reading an allegory the way its author intended it to be read is, in fact, the plain meaning of the text, and so is reading the peshat, not reading the remez. An example of a remez reading of the Book of Mormon would be something closer to how Latter-day Saints often read the war chapters of Alma as representing our spiritual warfare. In a remez reading, the narrative of the scripture is turned into something that is directly applicable to the reader through the process of generalizing and allegorizing the elements of the narrative. Thus, the Lamanites become the forces of Satan while the fortified cities of the Nephites become places where modern Latter-day Saints have built up their known weaknesses and temptations. All of this shows, as Kramer contends, that the Book of Mormon does yield well to a remez reading. However, pointing to actual allegories in the Book of Mormon is not the place to find such a reading. This kind of methodological misstep plagues the entire project.

On the other hand, Kramer’s discussion of mystical readings (sod), which is probably the most difficult of the ParDeS levels, is quite good, not the least because mystical readings mean something entirely different for Latter-day Saints than for Jews, ancient or modern (see pp. 38–42). According to Doctrine and Covenants 130:22, Latter-day Saints believe that Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ are beings inhabiting physical bodies and physical space, and therefore mystical communion with them entails something a little bit different than a kabbalistic joining with the Ein Sof.12 Kramer connects the Latter-day Saint sod

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12. For example, although I expect it was a visionary experience, Joseph Smith would not have characterized the first vision as a mystical experience. Latter-day Saint seeking of visions lacks the extreme piety and denial that often characterizes the mystic in other religious traditions. See the discussion in Louis Midgley, “Editor’s Introduction: Knowing Brother Joseph Again,” Mormon Studies Review 18/1 (2006): xi–lxxiv, especially xxvi–xxix. In many ways the classic articulation of this distinction is Hugh W. Nibley, “Prophets and Mystics,” in The World and the Prophets (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 98–107. This article was first published 1954 and then revised in 1962. The division between prophet and mystic are not always as sharp as Nibley suggests, but the typology of traditional mysticism is useful and revealing. See also William J. Hamblin, “Everything Is Everything?: Was Joseph Smith Influenced by the Kabbalah?” FARMS Review of Books 8/2 (1996): 251–325.
reading as one rooted in the searching out of the “mysteries” and the searching for spiritual experiences through the scriptures (p. 42). Since Latter-day Saints do not have a mystical tradition in the usual sense of the word, connecting what we call spiritual experiences with the Jewish mystical tradition can provide useful space for thinking about our experiences with the divine world. Essentially, Kramer is able to provide a useful synthesis because the original concept was not meaningful in a Latter-day Saint context.

The above example provides one instance of how this book succeeds in some of its goals but could have accomplished much more. I wish to reiterate that I think this can be a useful book that has potential to enhance readers’ appreciation and understanding of the Book of Mormon. There is much good in this book. A reader thoughtfully working through it will find many things to spark deeper or more meaningful study of the Book of Mormon. Yet, in spite of its use of Jewish sources, the uses to which those sources are turned and deployed remain largely Latter-day Saint. Occasionally this process transforms the original Jewish practice, such as studying in pairs or havruta, into something familiarly Mormon. Other times the Mormonizing produces a useful synthesis, as in Kramer’s discussion of a sod reading in the Book of Mormon. The turning of Jewish methods to Mormon ends is not necessarily a bad thing, as this is a book targeted to Latter-day Saint audiences. It simply means that in the end this is not a really a “rabbinic reading of the Book of Mormon” but instead a Mormon reading of the Book of Mormon that draws inspiration from Jewish writings.

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**Reviewed by Jenny Webb**


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John Christopher Thomas begins *A Pentecostal Reads the Book of Mormon: A Literary and Theological Introduction* by noting several somewhat random events in his life. He visits Temple Square while on a college choir tour, he has various conversations with missionaries, he enrolls in a graduate course on Mormon history as part of his advanced studies—gradually these events ultimately work their way together to form a narrative in which his interest in and study of Mormonism, and particularly the Book of Mormon, seem almost inevitable. And as I read my way through this work, I was continually impressed, and even moved, by the genuine open charity with which Thomas approaches the Book of Mormon. He is not afraid to be critical or ask questions, but his motivation in doing so consistently appears to come from an open curiosity and desire for dialogue. Over and over again, I was struck by the productive *readings* that emerged from this approach: Thomas sees the Book of Mormon foremost as a *book*, and as such, a text capable of being read. This may sound somewhat obvious—of course the Book of Mormon is a book!—but Thomas performs the work of literary reading in a way that results in an oddly familiar yet surprisingly, and productively, jarring orientation to the Book of Mormon and its theology, history, reception, and connections with Pentecostalism. The result is a sort of mapping of one individual’s various approaches to working with and reading the text that is both personal (these are the questions, thoughts, and approaches of a specific individual reading and writing from his own unique context) as well as universal (Thomas’s openness inherently invites others’ engagement and response to the Book of Mormon itself).

Interestingly, Thomas begins his approach through the question of *literary* structure. He wishes to “identify the overall structure of the
book by means of literary markers within the text itself” (p. 3), with “attention . . . given to textual indicators that serve to guide readers through the narrative” (p. 3). His approach allows him to discuss broad structural issues as well as to note structures specific to a discrete portion of the text. He glosses, probes, questions, and compares. He seeks clarity and precision, often running through various interpretive possibilities as plainly numbered alternatives. But what struck me with this approach was the way in which Thomas treats the Book of Mormon as a structural whole—that is, as a complete narrative project. For Thomas, the Book of Mormon is “one extended narrative” (p. 11), and this literary identification carries connotations of textually driven action, cause, and effect (e.g., “the narrative implies” [p. 232, emphasis mine]).

While others have certainly discussed the Book of Mormon as narrative, Thomas’s approach—one that prioritizes the narrative genre over others, including scripture—reads the text with a refreshing clarity of commitment: he is interested in how the narrative of the Book of Mormon works, and focusing on the literary functionality allows questions and conjectures on theology to emerge in such a way that their relationship to the literary or narrative aspects of the text is brought into a unique focus. As a result, I began to consider all sorts of questions and speculations:

- How does literary form produce, in a certain sense, the theological?
- What kinds of literary training actually facilitate productive theological readings? Any? Is there something inherently useful in a structuralist approach?
- How do the narrative structures and emphasis in the Book of Mormon affect Mormon theology?
- In the section on theology, Thomas uses narrative both as an illustration and as a claim—does narrative function in Mormonism as a sort of theological shorthand? If so, why narrative?
- Does a focus on the way the narrative shapes the text and thus the theology momentarily remove God from the text?
• What theological expectations do we Latter-day Saints hold of a narrative? Do we take it as seriously as we would, say, a sermon? A poem? An essay?
• Does narrative provide a secure ground from which to cultivate theology?
• If God has given us the Book of Mormon in the form of a narrative, what can we infer about God being someone who gives gifts like the convoluted narrative structure of the Book of Mormon?
• In other words, when we look at the Book of Mormon, do we see what we expect God to have given, or do we see what has actually been given?

For myself, at least, the questions brought about by Thomas’s work helped me to recognize various lacunae in my thought processes in ways that I will continue to reflect upon for some time and in a variety of contexts.

But beyond the issues of literary structure that Thomas so ably investigates and raises, I was also struck by the conditions of Thomas himself as a reader: after so many responses to the Book of Mormon hinging on the text’s historical validity in one way or another, Thomas separates questions of such validity from his underlying motivations to undertake this project. As Thomas himself put it, “It seems to me that whoever wrote the book or whatever the issues that explain its origins, there are any number of interesting and important issues that insiders and outsiders should be able to discuss about its structure, content, theology, reception, and relationship to other faith traditions without being derailed from the start by the divisive issue of origins” (pp. 445–46). This approach enacts charity through reading and interpretation; it is an approach we would do well to cultivate in our reading and interaction both within and without our faith tradition.

Taking Thomas’s enacted charity as a model allows those who feel they have a proprietary relationship to the Book of Mormon, because of their own response of faith and conversion, to set aside these feelings of ownership. Enacting such charity can feel uncomfortable as
it is accompanied by the recognition that church membership does not bestow permission to control others’ responses to the text. Rather, such enacted charity encourages and welcomes potentially discordant responses to the Book of Mormon because its aim is not to produce doctrine but rather to encourage interaction on any level. As an example of this approach, consider the potential outcomes of rethinking the way the Book of Mormon functions in narratives of conversion. As Latter-day Saints, we often focus on teaching friends and neighbors how to read the Book of Mormon so that it teaches Mormonism. We take the story of Nephi, for example, and direct the attention of our friends to the themes of obedience, prayer, and faith in explicative terminology that corresponds to our current doctrines and practices. But how would that story look if we were not focused on ensuring it was read in order to produce the “right” doctrinal lessons? What if instead our job as believers was simply to provide the opportunity for others to interact with the text? What if we had others reading from their own (uncorrelated) frameworks and our response was to listen? What if we listened not for what others got “right” but for what they actually said? The story of Nephi could, and does, I am convinced, look very different when it is removed from the space of the proprietary pedagogy it currently inhabits.

The question, then, is what do we gain as believers when we read the Book of Mormon narrative from that perspective, and is that gain worth what we could potentially lose by not engaging with secular responses? If the answer is, “I lose nothing,” then we may have a problem: interpretive pride stifles not only the ability to continue to receive personal revelation (with its accompanying increase in faith, light, intelligence, etc.) but also ultimately denies the Book of Mormon’s ability to function as a universal witness of the new covenant in Christ.¹

¹. “The Book of Mormon is the sacred expression of Christ’s great last covenant with mankind. It is a new covenant, a new testament from the New World to the entire world.” Jeffrey R. Holland, “A Testimony, a Covenant, and a Witness,” Ensign, October 2011, 80, emphasis added.
The underlying charity modeled through Thomas's approach also caused me to reflect on the way the Book of Mormon as a text works in the world. If we look at the work that the Book of Mormon, as a text, performs, it is a work of restoration—a rebuilding and refashioning of the contours of Christianity and of the world itself. But the world in which the Book of Mormon appeared was a world originally constructed and contoured through the Bible. In order for the Book of Mormon to work, then, it must first be read, and read consciously apart from its assumed biblical context. The history of the reception of the Book of Mormon parallels, in many ways, the reception of Christ's original teachings and parables: those receiving the word do not necessarily understand it or even know how to respond to that word, precisely because it is a new word working a new language, building up a new world.

So the question then becomes, why should we read the Book of Mormon like the Bible, when it is not doing the same work as the Bible? Two texts, two witnesses, in distinct performative spaces cannot be read as the same. The response to “A Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible” (2 Nephi 29:6) can be flipped: we have a Bible, and from it, a certain world—a mode of understanding and receiving the world in which we live—is built out and established. But, as Thomas's approach brings out, we also have the Book of Mormon. And a proper response to the Book of Mormon allows it to perform its own unique, separate, and distinct work. We need to allow it to work not as another Bible but rather as a text that paradoxically builds a new world specifically through a process of restoration.

Restoration forms the underlying historical and theological impulses of the Book of Mormon as a text. Its own textual history and its appearance in nineteenth-century America is founded upon Joseph Smith's claims to be restoring the primitive church, yes, but as Thomas's approach here highlights, tying the concept of restoration solely to the origin of the book ultimately weakens its theological potential. When Thomas sets aside the question of origin in order to respond to the text as a narrative, he clears a space for a broadened understanding of the work of restoration within the Book of Mormon. What would a new
world, erected through a text thoroughly grounded in and committed to a theology of restoration, look like? Restoration is enacted on multiple levels throughout the Book of Mormon: personal conversions, journeys and their returns, reunited families, reestablished societies, and, of course, the resurrected Christ himself, restored from death, and his ministry. Restoration emerges as both intimate and universal. Significantly, a world built out from this broad conceptualization of restoration validates and provides space for potentially contradictory responses.

I should note that Thomas does not dismiss questions of cultural historical reception of the Book of Mormon in their entirety—origins are discussed, as are various models of reception history. But to Thomas, these questions do not obscure a reader’s ability to interpret the text. Interestingly, the question that arises in the cultural and historical reception of the Book of Mormon is a topic taken up by the Book of Mormon itself on several occasions: it is a question of signs and particularly of how we receive and live with the signs that God is willing to give. As Mormons, how do we shift from reading the Book of Mormon as a functional sign of Joseph Smith’s divine calling, or even of God, and instead allow the book room to do its own work? The clearing of its textual identity, structure, and function is an important step in this process: Mormons hold the Book of Mormon so close, but we grip it as a sign, and particularly as a sign of power. What happens if we let go? Opening the text to readings outside the cultural clutter of modern Mormonism is a crucial part of allowing the text to work on its own terms.

If we truly believe that President Benson’s call to read the Book of Mormon was made in the prophetic mode, then we recognize that it is a call made to the world, Mormons and non-Mormons alike. Put another way, by that same prophet: “I have a vision of flooding the earth with the Book of Mormon.” Floodwaters do not distinguish between faithful and secular readers; they cover all alike. A thoughtful secular

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response to the Book of Mormon is a rare kind of grace. It provides a response from an otherwise unavailable space. It is, quite literally, a gift we cannot give ourselves. We are fortunate, then, and I am grateful, to have readings like Thomas’s that enact both the charity and the clarity the text needs to do its own work.

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Reviewed by Matthew Roper

Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History is Brant Gardner’s most recent contribution to Book of Mormon studies. His earlier works include a six-volume series, Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon (2007), and The Gift and Power of God: Translating the Book of Mormon (2011). This most recent volume provides selections from his commentary as well as new material from his research subsequent to 2007. Readers of Traditions of the Fathers will still find those earlier volumes useful as they contain much research that is not included in this most recent work.

As signaled by the title, Gardner’s work touches on some popular “traditions” or readings of the Book of Mormon that are or may be
erroneous (Mosiah 1:5). These include the old assumptions that the narrative covered both North and South America (p. 16), that Book of Mormon migrants encountered an empty land of promise (p. 153), and that the final battlefield of the Jaredites and Nephites was in New York (pp. 375–79). The author also rejects some correlations that readers have made between the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl and the resurrected Jesus in the Book of Mormon (pp. 353–65).

Gardner provides a useful methodological discussion detailing problems with the uncritical use of parallels made by both critics and defenders of the Book of Mormon. His approach, which he distinguishes from the other approaches previously mentioned, centers on what he sees as interlocking convergences of significant sets of evidence in time and location that can potentially increase understanding of the text (pp. 25–54). The book is organized more or less chronologically with an examination of the world of Lehi’s Jerusalem, the family’s journey through the wilderness (pp. 55–117), the geography of the Book of Mormon in light of Mesoamerican conceptions of direction and the cosmos (pp. 119–50), the Lehite arrival in and acculturation into a Mesoamerican setting (pp. 151–280), the Lamanite culture (pp. 281–310), the warfare (p. 311–23), the Gadianton robbers in a Mesoamerican context (pp. 325–42), the destruction in 3 Nephi (pp. 343–51), the final Nephite destruction in the fourth century AD (pp. 368–79), and the Jaredites (pp. 381–400). In his concluding chapter he summarizes key convergences, “which not only create a connection between the text and a time and place, but which actually use that time and place to make the text more understandable” (p. 408).

Gardner cites an article I wrote on the history of early interpretations of Book of Mormon geography. I had argued that, contrary to

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popular assumption, there was no authoritative doctrine on the location of specific Book of Mormon lands and that this was underscored by the diversity of views expressed by nineteenth-century readers. While he agrees that there was no authoritative position, he questions whether these nineteenth-century interpretations actually constitute different geographical “models” (p. 15). By 1890, however, President George Q. Cannon, surveying past efforts, referred to many “suggestive maps” (for the most part, alas, no longer extant) and drastically contradictory views that had been and were being vigorously advocated by individuals who wanted church approval. Readers were “not united in their conclusions. No two of them, so far as we have learned, are agreed on all points, and in many cases the variations amount to tens of thousands of miles.… One student places a certain city at the Isthmus of Panama, a second in Venezuela, and a third in Guiana or northern Brazil.” These could be characterized as undeveloped or perhaps precritical, but whether one uses “model” or some other term, they clearly do in at least some cases represent significant differences of interpretation, not infrequently on key points of Book of Mormon geography. These include the location of Lehi’s landing, the lands of Nephi and Zarahemla, the narrow neck of land, and the land of Desolation. When one writer places the final battlefield of the Jaredites in New York, while another has it in Honduras, we are clearly dealing with significant differences of opinion among some nineteenth-century readers of the text.

Gardner’s discussion of recent controversies over the question of DNA and the Book of Mormon is well informed (pp. 170–75). It is worth noting that the issue of DNA as a Book of Mormon problem is really an old scarecrow dressed up in more recent clothing. Several decades ago, one heard criticisms based on blood type or physiological features thought to be exclusively Mongoloid, and the argument that

Asiatic origins of Amerindian groups must preclude the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon story go back to the mid-nineteenth century. For several generations now, Latter-day Saint leaders, educators, and scholars have cautioned that the “record of the people of Nephi” does not purport to contain a history of all the Americas, or of all, or even most, native American ancestors. That is why controversies about population genetics, which are now dated Book of Mormon criticisms, are a poor club to beat believers over the head with and for some of the same reasons. Book of Mormon colonists from the Old World were relatively small groups in a sea of pre-Columbian peoples, likely leaving little genetic trace of their Old World origins, even if we could decide what their genome should look like. Most of the genetic information that our ancestors possessed is changed or lost through the process of time, making it highly unlikely that we could identify the genes of Lehi or any other founding migrant mentioned in the Book of Mormon even if we wanted to. As Gardner notes, “The genetic data tell us about what survived, but not what once existed” (p. 174).

Equally misguided have been attempts by some Latter-day Saints to marshal DNA evidence as proof for the Book of Mormon. Advocates of this approach cite studies suggesting that Haplotype X2a had its origins in Eurasia and possibly the Middle East rather than northeastern Siberia. As Gardner indicates, one serious problem with this approach is that Haplotype X2a dates thousands of years before the time of the Book of Mormon. In order to make it fit into a Book of Mormon scenario, these advocates have to dismiss currently accepted scientific methods of genetic dating as erroneous. “This approach,” notes Gardner, “creates an interesting conflict between accepting evolutionary science when it discovers mtDNA connections to Europe or Western Asia but then denying it entirely with respect to timing” (p. 174). Additionally, more recent genetic studies indicate that earlier enthusiasm over a possible Eurasian migration via the Atlantic may have been premature. As Jennifer Raff and Deborah Bolnick conclude in a recent study:

X2a has not been found anywhere in Eurasia, and phylo-geography gives us no compelling reason to think it is more likely to come
from Europe than from Siberia. Furthermore, analysis of the complete genome of Kennewick Man, who belongs to the most basal lineage of X2a yet identified, gives no indication of recent European ancestry and moves the location of the deepest branch of X2a to the West Coast, consistent with X2a belonging to the same ancestral population as the other founder mitochondrial haplogroups.⁵

If the Book of Mormon is an account of a people who knew about Christ in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, why do we not find archaeological evidence of pre-Columbian Christianity? Gardner reasons, “The problem is less in the absence of evidence than in the expectation of what evidence should be found” (p. 192). He notes that Christianity in the Old World emerged in the Greco-Roman culture and adopted the iconography and art styles of the surrounding people to which Christians applied their own interpretations. Early art depicting Jesus was based on representations of the Greek god Apollo and the Roman cross, a horrific method of execution with connotations of shame that was subsequently reinterpreted by Christians into a symbol of Christ’s power and divinity; however, these depictions were each rooted in a Greco-Roman context. Hence, argues Gardner, “The absence of Old World Christian iconography is not evidence of the absence of Book of Mormon Christianity” in the New World (p. 195).

When we look for New World Christians, for what do we look? Do we look for representations of Apollo? Do we look for any of the Greek-inspired icons of the Old World? Clearly we cannot. The conditions that inspired those borrowings occurred long after Book of Mormon peoples left the Old World. Based on the history of both Israel and early Christianity, we might expect the New World Israelites and Christians to do just as their Old World counterparts did—adapt the iconography of the surrounding cultures. (p. 194)

Conceivably, ancient Mesoamerican art forms and iconography, such as the maize god, a deity who died and was resurrected, would have been adapted or reinterpreted as a Christian symbol for a group such as the Nephites, but without an interpretive key, such as a text, it would be impossible for archaeologists to tell if the icon portrayed was intended to have Christian meaning or not (pp. 195–96). In any case, examples of the disappearance or near extinction of even significant religious groups are known from antiquity and even the recent past.

The history, especially of Southeast Asia, shows how easily religions may disappear or be submerged in local cults. Among the Cham of Annam, Hinduism and Buddhism had been firmly established for almost a millennium and a half, from the second to the fifteenth century. Yet, Buddhism disappeared completely after the fall of the Cham kingdom in 1471 and Hinduism declined so rapidly that its influence at present is hardly recognizable. Amongst the non-Muslim Badui and Tenggerese of Java, traces of Hinduism and Buddhism are exceedingly slight, although these must have been the predominant religions as late as the sixteenth century. The Batak of Sumatra were under Buddhist and Hindu influences from probably the third to the fourteenth century, but in the nineteenth century they were pagans.⁶

Gardner discusses convergences between Mesoamerican volcanism and the events described in the text of 3 Nephi 8–10 at the death of Christ, which have been previously discussed by John Sorenson, Bart Kowallis, Jerry Grover, and others,⁷ although he surprisingly fails to cite Sorenson’s most recent review of the evidence, which represents a significant revision and expansion of his earlier treatment (pp. 343–51).

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Sorenson cited a 1998 report of an eruption of the Popocatépetl volcano around the first century AD. Initial tests of available material dated the eruption to between 45 BC and AD 90. Archaeologists Patricia Plunket and Gabriela Uruñuela working at the site of Tetimpa in Puebla, Mexico, have subsequently published additional data and findings from their work that shed further light on that eruption. This volcanic event, a VEI-6 Plinian eruption, created a column of tephra 20 to 30 km high and is believed to have caused “an ecological disaster of unprecedented proportions” that significantly impacted the population and development of cultures in the region.

The archaeology of the Basin of Mexico indicates that sometime between 100 BC and AD 100, the population in the region became concentrated around the site of Teotihuacan. Some had suggested that this may have been due to political pressure from that city. Plunket and Uruñuela suggest rather that this relocation northward was more likely due to necessity, resulting from volcanic destruction further south. The Popocatépetl eruption would have destroyed prime agricultural regions of the southern and eastern Basin of Mexico.

As pyroclastic materials fell on the forested slopes the ash would have suffocated wildlife. The hot pyroclastic flows with


temperatures between 250 and 600 [degrees] C may have ignited multiple highly destructive forest fires that would have spread quickly through the Sierra Nevada during the dry season, and the melting glacier would have formed destructive lahars that rushed down the steep canyons into the Amecameca river and the Chalco area. . . . [D]estruction of important hunting and gathering areas would have been devastating, and the smoke from fires added to the ash could have caused significant short-term climatic changes as well, including frost and drought, that may have resulted in famine and consequent population relocation.\textsuperscript{11}

Plunket and Uruñuela explain, “Prior to 100 BC,” at the southern end of the Basin, “most of the population lived in towns and villages along the lakeshore between Cuicuilco and Chalco, but after AD 100 almost all of these settlements disappear.”\textsuperscript{12} They estimate that as many as 20,000 people in the Basin of Mexico may have perished in the disaster, while as many as 50,000 relocated further north to Teotihuacan, swelling the size of its population and spurring its subsequent development.\textsuperscript{13} The eruption would have also caused similar disruptions on the eastern side of the mountains in western Puebla, where scholars estimate that the population was about 100,000 just prior to that time. “The large complex regional centers, close to the Sierra Nevada—Colotzingo, Coapan, Xochitecatl, and Tlalancaleca—were abandoned at that time.” Afterwards, as had happened at Teotihuacan, “population became concentrated at Cholula and a few other settlements but the total number of inhabitants appears to have diminished, perhaps by as much as 30%.”\textsuperscript{14}

Earlier reports from the archaeological team tentatively placed the eruption toward the end of the first century AD.\textsuperscript{15} Now a total of 14

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} Plunket and Uruñuela, “Social and Cultural Consequences of a Late Holocene Eruption,” 23–24.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Plunket and Uruñuela, “Mountain of Sustenance, Mountain of Destruction,” 116.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Plunket and Uruñuela, “Social and Cultural Consequences of a Late Holocene Eruption,” 23–24.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Plunket and Uruñuela, “Social and Cultural Consequences of a Late Holocene Eruption,” 25–26.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Plunket and Uruñuela, “Preclassic Household Patterns,” 290.
\end{itemize}
radiocarbon dates have been obtained including an AMS (Accelerator Mass Spectrometer) date from a carbonized corn cob recovered from a sealed jar, which yielded a reading of 2010 +/- 40 BP (2 Sigma range of ca. 100 BC–AD 70). These dates, in addition to cultural materials retrieved from the ash-buried houses at Tetimpa, indicate that the eruption “probably took place during the first half of the first century AD.”

Based on archaeological evidence from crops, seasonal cooking patterns found at the site, and wind studies, they “suggest that the most likely time [of the eruption] is late March or April.” The Basin of Mexico would be at approximately the northernmost extremity of most Mesoamerican models of Book of Mormon geography, but the apparent timing of the eruption is of potential interest in light of the death of Jesus at Jerusalem during Passover.

*Traditions of the Fathers* is an important book on the question of historicity and the Book of Mormon. Careful readers of the Book of Mormon interested in understanding the Book of Mormon in a plausible pre-Columbian setting will be both challenged and deeply rewarded.

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“Virtue” in Moroni 9:9

Jason A. Kerr

Latter-day Saint discussions of chastity often include Moroni 9:9 because of its suggestion that “chastity and virtue” constitute “that which is most dear and precious above all things.” The verse also says, however, that people can be “deprived” of chastity and virtue by the violence of rape. For the prophet Mormon, the Nephites’ actions in Moriantum exceed “this great abomination of the Lamanites,” which involved “feed[ing] the women upon the flesh of their husbands, and the children upon the flesh of their fathers” (Moroni 9:8). Mormon’s strong language aims to condemn the rapists, not their victims. Using the verse to teach about chastity, though, invites interpretation from the perspective of the victims, which raises the question of what it means to understand chastity and virtue as something of which a person can be deprived, passively, by another.¹ Such passive loss of virtue runs strongly contrary to LDS teaching about agency, including those rooted in Book of Mormon passages like 2 Nephi 2, with the consequence that victims of sexual abuse or assault can be made to feel guilty for sins that are not their own.

¹ As of 25 September 2016, Moroni 9:9 no longer appears in the chapter on virtue in the online version of the Young Women Personal Progress booklet, a salutary change that undercuts some of the harmful ideas discussed in this note. See https://www.lds.org/young-women/personal-progress/virtue?lang=eng

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In trying to understand a worldview in which it makes sense to say that virtue can be taken away, the Roman story of the Rape of Lucretia provides a useful intertext, and this note will examine that story to show the implications of using Moroni 9:9 to teach about chastity. I am not proposing that the Lucretia story influenced the verse in Moroni; rather, I am using it to illustrate the pitfalls of interpreting that verse as LDS discussions of chastity often do.

This note will focus on virtue, treating it as a synonym for chastity on the basis of popular tendencies to read the text’s “chastity and virtue” as a hendiadys, even though virtue is better understood as a category of moral goods, with chastity as a subset. Other scriptural uses support this latter understanding. For instance, in Proverbs 31:10, “virtuous” renders a form of the Hebrew chayil, which indicates strength or ability rather than sexual purity, even though the verse gets used alongside Moroni 9:9 in discussions of chastity. Similarly, in the three passages from the Gospels where Jesus describes virtue going out of him (Mark 5:30; Luke 6:19; 8:46), “virtue” translates forms of the Greek dynamis, which denotes power or energy, rather than anything having to do with sexuality per se.

The Rape of Lucretia affords a good platform for understanding the idea that virtue can be taken away. The Book of Mormon itself provides a rather slender basis for understanding the sexual mores of its culture: the sermon in Jacob 2, the people of Noah’s proffering their daughters to appease a Lamanite army, the subsequent rape of the Lamanite daughters by the priests of Noah, Alma’s talk with Corianton, and the verse in Moroni. With the possible exception of Jacob’s sermon, none of these episodes understands women in terms other than as sexual objects for men. Consequently, the Book of Mormon affords few to no opportunities for thinking about female sexual agency in positive terms.

The Lucretia story provides an apt analogue in part for linguistic reasons. The nearest translation to the original language of the Book of Mormon is in English, and the word virtue sends us back to the Latin, where it comes from the word vir, meaning “man” (in the male sense, not the generically human sense). Associating virtue with masculinity
raises complex questions of gender, given that the people deprived of it in Moroni 9:9 were women. What might it mean for women to have this masculine trait in the first place? That requires looking at Roman sexual mores, which center on the concepts of *pudicitia*, or the proper inviolability of any freeborn Roman (male or female), and *stuprum*, or the violation of *pudicitia*.²

Even though both men and women can have *pudicitia*, a gendered difference remains. As Craig Williams explains, “According to the prime directive of masculine sexual behavior, a Roman man who wished to retain his claim to full masculinity must always be thought to play the insertive role in penetrative acts, whether with males or females; if he was thought to have sought the receptive role in such acts he was liable to being mocked as effeminate.”³ Thus, Roman virtue—acting like a man—depends on “control and dominion, both of others and of oneself.”⁴

Enter Lucretia, whose story appears in Livy’s history of Rome and in the section of Ovid’s *Fasti* for 24 February, titled “Regifugium.” Rome in its early days was governed by kings, the Tarquins. One king, Tarquinius Superbus (Tarquin the Proud) had a son, Sextus Tarquinius. Sextus, after seeing Lucretia, the wife of his kinsman Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus, decided to rape her. She resisted until Sextus threatened to kill both Lucretia and a slave and leave them naked together in the bed, suggesting in Livy’s words “adultery of the lowest kind [sordido adulterio],” at which point “his lust prevailed as the victor over her resolute chastity [vicisset obstinatam pudicitiam velut victrix libido].”⁵

Livy’s language presents the pre-rape as a debate in which Sextus prevailed by making an argument that Lucretia could not counter. Chastity, in these terms, is a form of eloquence, and Lucretia’s proved insufficient. (Never mind that Tarquin relied on a threat of violence

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³ Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, 137.
⁴ Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, 139.
and not reason alone.) The contest was one of virtue, understood in masculine terms of dominance. It ended when one party forced the other to assume the feminine position, which in this case fell to Lucretia. The debate was a test designed to evaluate whether or not Lucretia truly possessed chastity, understood as the impenetrability of pudicitia. Tarquin, in other words, took away her claim to masculine virtue, which Ovid explicitly assigns her when he describes her as a “matron of manly courage [animi matrona virilis].” She failed to control what happened to her body, which means she could not possibly have virtue.

The chilling consequence of understanding the contest as a debate is that it ended in Lucretia’s consent. “Consent” comes from the Latin verb consentire, which means “thinking or feeling with.” In other words, when Lucretia could not come up with an argument to counter Tarquin’s threat, she is understood as having agreed with his reasoning. Faced with the prospect of murder and implied adultery, she agreed to be raped, and the very fact of her having been penetrated suggests that her chastity was never all she made it out to be. (To be clear: I am explaining this, not approving it.)

The next day, Lucretia called her husband and father, accompanied by another kinsman, Lucius Junius Brutus, to her chamber and explained what happened. In Roman understandings of the family, the paterfamilias acted as a judge over his household, so Lucretia was submitting herself to a kind of family court, in part because the rape was an affront against Collatinus’s pudicitia, too, because his household had been penetrated. Collatinus and Brutus concluded that she was not at fault in what happened. She, however, refused the pardon and killed herself. In Livy’s version, she sets herself up as a moral martyr, refusing to allow that her example might excuse future adultery. In Ovid’s version, she seems driven by posttraumatic despair.

Augustine, writing about this story in The City of God, identifies Lucretia’s double bind: “If she is adulterous, why is she praised? If chaste, why was she put to death [si adulterata, cur laudata; si pudica,

cur occisa]? The tension emerges because, on the one hand, it was clear that Tarquin forced Lucretia against her will, but, on the other, the powerful cultural assumption that chastity means invulnerability to unwanted penetration casts an inevitable shadow on Lucretia’s character. She killed herself either as a way of trying to throw the shadow off (Livy) or out of despairing resignation to it (Ovid). Lucretia is the paradigmatic example of the mindset that thinks death preferable to unchastity (and expressions of that idea in late twentieth-century Latter-day Saint discourse are not hard to find).

I am not suggesting that these assumptions are normative in Mormonism. The Family Proclamation, with its talk of equal partners in marriage, is probably irreconcilable with Roman family values, and the only people who go around thinking in terms of pudicitia and stuprum are classics professors. They, of all people, are in a position to recognize the distance between those ideas and modern life.

Even so, I think that church members import those assumptions whenever they suggest that virtue can be passively taken away. When they make these assumptions, they frame masculinity in terms of domination (contrary to Doctrine and Covenants 121) and deny women full access to the agency that is near the heart of LDS theology. More troublingly, this may imply that rape victims, by the mere fact of having been raped, cannot be chaste, because they must have consented in some way, whether by dressing a certain way, by staying out past curfew, or simply by having been penetrated at all. This mindset can suggest to both victims and their ecclesiastical leaders a need for confession and repentance when the situation more properly calls for reassurance that the victim has not sinned, together with the gentle work of finding healing through a loving Savior.

Certainly Mormon, in writing about the experience of these women, only meant to deplore what happened. He was focused on the negative effects of male agency, not on anything having to do with female agency, with the possibly unintended consequence of treating women as wholly

passive victims. Reading the verse as an admonition to female chastity assumes an agency that the text does not grant and does so in a way that imputes to women the blame for male actions. Such a reading does not comport with the powerful teachings on agency elsewhere in the Book of Mormon, and we would do well to look there, rather than to Moroni 9:9, in our thinking about female sexual agency.

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An Analysis of Benjaminite and Markan Christology

Julie M. Smith

The term Christology refers to the presentation of the life and nature of Jesus Christ. The purpose of this essay is to explore King Benjamin’s Christology (see Mosiah 3), to consider its similarities to that found in the Gospel of Mark, and to explore some implications of Benjamin’s Christology.

Christology is often described as being on a continuum from low (which emphasizes the human nature of Jesus) to high (which emphasizes his divine nature). It is definitely the case that Benjamin’s description of Jesus contains elements of a high Christology since he begins by describing Jesus as “the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity” (Mosiah 3:5). Yet the very next line describes Jesus as “dwell[ing] in a tabernacle of clay” (Mosiah 3:5), which reflects a decidedly low Christology. This emphasis on the mortal nature of Jesus continues as Benjamin relates at length Jesus’s physical suffering (see Mosiah 3:7).

The general scholarly consensus is that Mark displays the lowest Christology of the four Gospels. And it is certainly the case that Mark’s depiction of Jesus emphasizes his very human elements: he is presented as a disciple of John the Baptist; he exhibits a variety of emotions (see Mark 1:41; 3:5; 6:34; 8:12; 10:14; and 14:33–34), including amazement (see Mark 4:40; 6:6; 14:34); his first attempt at an exorcism is not
successful (see Mark 5:7–8); he changes his mind (see Mark 7:24–31); and he does not know all things (see Mark 13:32). However, this consensus ignores the higher elements of Mark's Christology, probably because they are not apparent on the surface but are only noticeable when Mark's stories of Jesus are put into conversation with other biblical texts. In over two dozen instances, Jesus exercises powers that, in the Hebrew Bible, were restricted to God alone. For example, in Mark 1:8, John the Baptist teaches that the one coming after him would bestow the Holy Spirit upon them. In the Hebrew Bible, only God gives the Spirit to people, so one effect of John's statement is to equate Jesus with the God of the Bible. John's statement may echo Ezekiel 39:29—where the Lord God promises to pour out the Spirit on the house of Israel. This allusion would further strengthen the case for identifying Jesus with the biblical God. There is another manner in which Mark's Christology is clearly very high: Mark frequently presents Jesus occupying the narrative role of the God of the Bible. In about a half dozen major instances—and an even larger number of minor ones—Mark's text echoes one or more stories from the Hebrew Bible and places Jesus unequivocally into the role of God. Thus, Mark displays—albeit covertly—a very high Christology indeed. This attribute Mark and Benjamin share. So the best descriptor for both of their presentations of Jesus is a full (neither exclusively high nor exclusively low) Christology.

It is generally recognized that the major thematic focus of Mark's Gospel is discipleship. So it is important to consider Mark's Christology in light of what the text has to say about the disciples. The disciples—especially the Twelve and especially Peter—swing between a too low Christology and one too high. Peter's view of Jesus is far too low in the instances where he wants to manage and direct Jesus's ministry for him (see Mark 1:37; 9:5) and then far too high when he rejects Jesus's

prophecies of his own suffering (see Mark 8:32). Peter, like the other disciples, is unable to grasp a full Christology. (The exception is the woman who anoints Jesus [see Mark 14:3–9]; her actions—uniquely in this gospel—embrace a full christological vision.) The wisdom of King Benjamin has long been acknowledged by interpreters; perhaps his own full Christology was a guard against his people adopting either a too high or a too low Christology. It merits further study to determine if there is any relationship in the Book of Mormon texts between a lopsided christological vision and poor outcomes for the people who hold them.

Unusually, both King Benjamin and Mark give an outsized role to women in their respective christological visions. Given that traditional considerations of Christology have been almost entirely androcentric, this is most remarkable. In Mark’s account, Jesus’s ministry is shaped by his interactions with women: his suffering is foreshadowed by a woman’s experience (see Mark 5:25–34), the scope of his ministry expands to fully include gentiles after an encounter with a woman (see Mark 7:24–30), a woman anoints him in a scene redolent with symbolic allusion to his suffering and kingship (see Mark 14:3–9), and the meaning of his atoning death is explained with reference to its effect on women’s roles (see Mark 15:40–41). Benjamin’s account refers only once to a woman (see Mosiah 3:8). His text, however, is substantially shorter, thus making his reference to Mary more prominent. In a passage entirely focused on Jesus and what he will be and do, a reference to anyone else stands out conspicuously. The fact that that reference is to a woman is then doubly notable. Significantly, there is a parallel structure in Mosiah 3:8 used to name both Jesus and Mary. Just as Jesus is significant and thus named, so is Mary. The oddity of the reference points to Mary’s significance in the story of Jesus. So both Mark’s and Benjamin’s christological visions are much more female focused than would generally be expected.

Interestingly, Benjamin’s description of Jesus’s mortal ministry does not contain any reference to Jesus teaching or speaking. If one had only Benjamin’s account, one would assume that Jesus’s ministry was “all action and no talk.” Similarly, in Mark’s Gospel, Jesus does not speak very much: there is no Sermon on the Mount, there is no farewell discourse. He does, of course, speak—almost all of Mark 4 is devoted to parables, and Mark 13 consists of the Olivet Discourse. But Mark’s portrait of Jesus is focused on Jesus’s actions, not his words. In this regard, King Benjamin’s portrayal of Jesus is quite similar to Mark’s. One senses the root of Saint Francis of Assisi’s famous admonition, “Preach the gospel at all times and if necessary, use words.”

Benjamin’s account of Jesus’s life does not include information about the appearances of the resurrected Jesus. Neither does Mark’s Gospel; it is important to note that the earliest manuscripts of Mark ended with Mark 16:8, which means that these texts did not contain a resurrection appearance. The appearances of the resurrected Jesus seem so fundamental to the Christian tradition that it can be difficult to imagine telling the story of Jesus without them, yet both Benjamin and Mark do so. This constitutes an invitation to reconsider what is essential about Jesus’s ministry. It may be that, in both cases, the simple fact that the audience of both Mark and Benjamin would not personally be in a position to see the resurrected Jesus, so that experience might hold less relevance for them. Additionally, eliding the appearances allows each text to focus on other issues: in Mark’s account of Jesus’s life, the main focal point is discipleship, and in Benjamin’s, the focus is more on the workings of the atonement. In neither case are the resurrection appearances necessary to accomplish their goals.

There are, of course, differences between Mark’s Christology and Benjamin’s. Benjamin speaks specifically about the atonement and how it works, while Mark does not. This is not to say that Mark does not teach about the atonement, but the topic is broached through the narrative and not through direct statements. This is probably the biggest point of divergence between the two Christologies.

8. See Smith, “Narrative Atonement Theology.”
Because most accounts of Jesus's ministry were written down long after his life, it appears that many of the lower elements of Christology were lost as time went on and as the tradition focused more on the exalted Savior than on the humble man from Nazareth. Yet the reality that Jesus was fully human is a crucial aspect of his identity and is of signal importance to understanding his mission on earth. It is no surprise that, generally speaking, later works tend to reflect a higher Christology and to elide lower elements of Christology, but it is nonetheless a loss to the reader, who needs to understand that Jesus was fully human. For example, one element of Mark's lower Christology is the story of a healing miracle where Jesus does not fully heal the man on the first attempt (see Mark 8:22–26). No other canonical Gospel includes this story. Similarly, Jesus's first exorcism attempt in Mark 5 is not successful (see Mark 5:7–8). While Matthew includes this story, Matthew has rewritten Mark's text so that the initial attempt is elided.

The conclusion drawn by many scholars is that Christologies developed from low to high as time went on after Jesus's death. But a close reading of Mark's Gospel disputes this notion: there is historical development to be sure, but it is not low to high but rather full to high. The high elements are there from the earliest records, but the low elements are later expunged. The impulse to present the mortal Jesus as all powerful is of course an understandable one, but it is unlikely that one can appreciate the majesty of Jesus without simultaneously appreciating his humanity. The fuller Christologies—those which include both lower and higher elements—are an important and theologically rich resource that provides the reader with a clearer picture of who Jesus was. Such full portraits of Jesus are found both in King Benjamin's words and in Mark's Gospel. While some interpreters have derided Mark's Gospel as something of a “rough draft” because it lacks the fully magisterial portrait of Jesus found in later Gospels such as John's, King Benjamin's words—especially since they come from an angelic source—are an important additional witness to the importance of presenting a full christological vision. Thus Mark's Gospel deserves close attention, as do King Benjamin's words.
Christological explorations of the Book of Mormon have usually focused on 3 Nephi, which is understandable, given its account of Jesus's New World ministry. However, this record should be bracketed from discussions of Christology—at least in relation to New Testament Christology—because it is the record of the visit of a resurrected and glorified being and not a record of the mortal Jesus. This puts it into an entirely different category as an extremely high Christology. On the other hand, if readers look to Book of Mormon discussions of Jesus’s mortal ministry, they do find a depiction of a full Christology. Unfortunately, the distinct, unique witness of Benjamin’s full Christology has sometimes been muted in favor of the much longer portrayal of Jesus in 3 Nephi, much as Mark’s full Christology has often been missed as his unique witness has been harmonized with the other Gospels and their high (not full) Christology has prevailed. But preserving the distinct voices of each writer is important. The recognition that Mark is the Gospel with the fullest Christology is reason itself to study this text closely, in search of its portrait of Jesus. Perhaps the lower elements of Mark’s Christology constitute some of the “plain and precious things” (1 Nephi 13:29) that Nephi taught were taken away from the record. (Interestingly, they would have been “taken away” by interpreters—not by scribes—and hidden, as it were, in plain sight.)

Similarly, the historical development of Christology from full to high can be put into conversation with the practice of writing Latter-day Saint history. Readers and scholars could compare how the story of Joseph Smith has been told at various moments in the church’s history, with the “lower” aspects—his mistakes and errors—elided by some historians. This trend has reversed just recently; most would agree that the church and the Saints are better for it. Recognition that a movement from full to high Christology and biography is as natural as it is problematic is one important lesson to draw from a study of Mark’s and Benjamin’s Christologies.
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The Structure of the Book of Alma

Joseph M. Spencer

Since John Welch discovered chiasmus in the Book of Mormon fifty years ago, students of the volume have paid attention to textual structures.¹ Unfortunately, little attention has yet been paid to book-length structures, structures organizing larger stretches of the Book of Mormon.² Analysis of whole books within the Book of Mormon has largely remained in a preliminary phase.³ In this note, however, I lay out what appears to be the intentional organizational structure of the book of Alma.

The first major clue for the organization of Alma lies in the obvious parallel between the stories of Nehor and Korihor. Some point out that Latter-day Saints misleadingly group these two figures together (along with Sherem) as the Nephite “anti-Christ,”⁴ but clear features of the text set the two stories in parallel. The most important of these is the way

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³ Much of the best preliminary work is still that of Sidney B. Sperry, Book of Mormon Compendium (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968).

⁴ See the helpful discussion in John W. Welch, The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press and Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2008), 301–9.
both narratives present their subjects in terms of the trouble they cause for Nephite law. Immediately after his death, Nehor’s followers find they have to take care not to run afoul of the law. They can spread their message of priestcraft only by “pretend[ing] to preach according to their belief,” since “the law could have no power on any man for their belief” (Alma 1:17).[^5] It is important to note how similar this description of the Nehorite movement is to the later description of Korihor’s appearance among the Nephites: “There was no law against a man’s belief,” the text explains, such that “if a man … did not believe in [God], there was no law to punish him” (Alma 30:7, 9); consequently, “the law could have no hold upon” Korihor (Alma 30:12). These narrative descriptions clearly establish a correspondence between the stories of Nehor and Korihor.

With this first clue in hand, readers might recognize that the larger consequences of Nehor’s and Korihor’s respective interventions among the Nephites are also parallel. Both figures meet untimely ends because of their disruptive behavior, and each turns out to be connected to a dissenting Nephite movement. Shortly after Nehor’s preaching, one of his followers, Amlici, incites a full-blooded rebellion that creates a separatist group. The Amlicites fight the main body of the Nephites, assisted by Lamanites (see Alma 2–3). In parallel, Korihor’s connections to the Zoramites introduce the story of their rebellion.[^6] The Zoramites end up as another separatist group at war with the Nephites, similarly

[^5]: All quotations from the Book of Mormon are taken from Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). Where it seems appropriate, I have supplied my own rather than Skousen’s punctuation to the text.

[^6]: Brant Gardner raises the speculative possibility that, although Alma 30:59–60 reports Korihor’s death as having happened among the Zoramites, Mormon as editor may have invented the Korihor-Zoramite connection. Perhaps, he suggests, “Mormon did not resist the satisfaction of supplying poetic justice to Korihor’s end or, for literary reasons, placed Korihor’s death among the self-righteous and inhospitable Zoramites to introduce them, his next theme.” Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 4:430. Whatever the merit of Gardner’s speculation, he has clearly underscored the importance of the Korihor-Zoramite connection. And the connections arguably go a good deal further than Gardner suggests, with similar themes occupying
assisted by the Lamanites (see Alma 31–35, 43–44). What clinches this correlation between the Amlicite and the Zoramite rebellions is a note Mormon provides in each account. The battle with the Amlicites ends with the victorious Nephites “throwing the bodies of the Lamanites which had been slain into the waters of Sidon” (Alma 2:34), with their bones eventually swept out into “the depths of the sea” (Alma 3:3); Mormon follows the battle against the Zoramites with a report of when the Nephites “cast their dead into the waters of Sidon, and they have gone forth and are buried in the depths of the sea” (Alma 44:22). Just as the Nehor and Korihor stories serve as parallel narratives, so do the subsequent stories of the Amlicite and Zoramite rebellions.

Following the Amlicite rebellion, Alma leaves the judgment seat (see Alma 4). His subsequent preaching in several cities is reported, with emphasis on three cities in particular: Zarahemla, Gideon, and Ammonihah. Zarahemla, Nephite Christianity’s headquarters, requires diligent effort from Alma to ensure that the church leaders there attend to their duties—regulating church affairs and revitalizing the members’ commitment (see Alma 5). Gideon requires far less from him, with the result that his preaching there is short, but profound (see Alma 7). Ammonihah proves horrifically trying, with Alma’s message largely rejected and his followers either exiled or massacred (see Alma 8–15). Does all this find a parallel elsewhere in the book of Alma? In fact it does, in Alma’s instruction to his three sons after the Zoramite

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7. Christopher Conkling briefly notes that “both [Alma’s] earliest battle and his final battle 18 years later end with the same story: the dead bodies of the enemy soldiers being thrown into the River Sidon, which carried them to ‘the depths of the sea’ (Alma 3:3; 44:22).” Despite seeing this textual connection, however, Conkling does not note the role it plays in the larger organization of the book of Alma. J. Christopher Conkling, “Alma’s Enemies: The Case of the Lamanites, Amlicites, and Mysterious Amalekites,” Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 14/1 (2005): 113.

8. The narrative also reports on his preaching in Melek (see Alma 8:3–6) and Sidom (see Alma 15:12–14), but the text unmistakably privileges the preaching in Zarahemla, Gideon, and Ammonihah.
rebellion.⁹ Alma’s preaching in Zarahemla parallels his instruction to Helaman, who will serve as head of the Nephite church and so requires serious instruction before performing his duties (see Alma 36–37).¹⁰ Alma’s preaching in Gideon corresponds to his instruction to Shiblon, an already-dutyful son who requires few words from Alma (see Alma 38). Finally, Alma’s preaching in Ammonihah correlates with his instruction to Corianton, his wayward youngest son, whose actions have upset the Zoramite mission (see Alma 39–42). As if to make these parallels perfectly clear, a textual tie between Alma’s preaching in Ammonihah and his instruction to Corianton appears in the text, with Alma’s theme concluding each time with why Adam and Eve were prevented from eating from the tree of life. Alma draws strikingly similar conclusions in each case, with a parallel emphasis on preventing God’s word from being made “void” (Alma 12:23; 42:5). Thus, following the parallel stories of Nehor and Korihor and the parallel stories of the Amlicites and the Zoramites, the text provides the parallel stories of three occasions for Alma’s preaching, addressed in turn to (1) a figure of potential responsibility requiring detailed instructions (Zarahemla, Helaman), (2) a faithful figure who appreciates brief adulation (Gideon,)

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⁹. Grant Hardy has noted that Alma’s preaching to his three sons seems out of place in the flow of Alma 30–44 since it basically interrupts the Zoramite rebellion. He brilliantly suggests a motivation for this misplacement, however, namely that the placement of Alma 36–42 serves to “disrupt a smooth reading of the Zoramite story, which, taken as a whole, did not go so well. By the time readers get back to the war [after the report of Alma’s instructions to his sons], they may have forgotten the rather awkward truth that Alma’s preaching to the Zoramites not only did not prevent hostilities [see Alma 31:5] but was itself a major catalyst for the fighting.” Grant Hardy, Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 149. It might be noted that a recent study has shown that there may be reasons to read some of these details somewhat less suspiciously; see Michael F. Perry, “The Supremacy of the Word: Alma’s Mission to the Zoramites and the Conversion of the Lamanites,” Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 24 (2015): 119–37.

¹⁰. Grant Hardy finds evidence that readers are to see Helaman as a less-than-diligent record keeper, which necessitates Alma’s detailed instruction in Alma 36–37. See Hardy, Understanding the Book of Mormon, 142–44.
Shiblon), and (3) a wayward figure requiring sustained intervention (Ammonihah, Corianton).

Finally, following the stories of Alma’s threefold preaching, in each case, is a story about a battle fought between Nephites and Lamanites (see Alma 16; 43–44).

The details covered thus far make clear the parallel presentations of material in Alma 1–16 and Alma 30–44:

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<th>Table 1. Parallel material in Alma 1–16 and Alma 30–44</th>
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<td>Alma in Ammonihah (Alma 8–15)</td>
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These parallels between portions of the book of Alma’s first and second halves clearly seem to be deliberate, as if the editor intentionally selected narrative material to give the impression that Nephite history between Nehor and the situation at Ammonihah was in many ways repeated between Korihor and Alma’s final words of instruction to his sons. This of course follows what Grant Hardy has identified as a major narrative strategy for Mormon as editor: the use of parallel narratives to underscore the theme of “providential recurrence.”11 It seems this strategy organizes the whole of the book of Alma.

This larger structuring of the book of Alma as two parallel halves continues with Alma 17–29 and Alma 45–63, though somewhat more subtly. Each of these two sequences opens with Alma beginning on a journey that is interrupted before its conclusion—a journey to Manti in Alma 17 that is interrupted when Alma encounters Mosiah’s sons (see Alma 17:1) and a journey to Melek in Alma 45 interrupted when Alma mysteriously disappears (see Alma 45:18). In each case, these interrupted journeys set up the larger narrative’s shift from Alma’s story

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to someone else’s: in Alma 17 to the story of the sons of Mosiah, and in Alma 45 to the story of Moroni and Amalickiah. Importantly, the stories of Mosiah’s sons and of Moroni and Amalickiah share broad similarities that indicate their intentionally parallel positions in the book of Alma.12 The story of Mosiah’s sons concerns a few Nephite heirs to the throne who walk away from power to proselytize the Lamanites through Christian preaching (see Alma 17–26), while the story of Moroni and Amalickiah concerns a few Nephites who wish they were heirs to the throne and who walk away from Nephite citizenship to proselytize the Lamanites through power-usurping ideological preaching (see Alma 45–62). Each narrative focuses on two brothers whose stories are told in turn: Ammon and Aaron in the Lamanite mission (see Alma 17–20; 21–26), and Amalickiah and Ammoron in the corresponding story (see Alma 46–51; 52–62).

Numerous parallel details, many antithetical in nature, underscore the parallels between the stories of Ammon and Amalickiah. Both seek out a Lamanite king, the former with a kind of “guile” that proves “wise yet harmless” (Alma 18:22–24) and the latter as “a very subtle man to do evil” (Alma 47:4). After encounters with the king’s inferiors (Ammon’s service with the king’s servants is parallel to Amalickiah’s machinations with the king’s armies), each ends up in a situation with a dead (or apparently dead) king (see Alma 17–18 and, in turn, Alma 47)—though Ammon is innocent while Amalickiah is guilty. These parallel situations bring the complementary characters into direct contact with the Lamanite queen, Ammon with Lamoni’s wife but Amalickiah with the wife of the murdered king (see Alma 19:2–10; 47:32–35). Ammon proves loyal, and Lamoni and his wife secure the conversion of a core group of Lamanites to the Christian faith (see Alma 19:11–36);

12. In other words, the parallels that organize the relationship between Alma 17–29 and Alma 45–63 are what are called antithetic parallels. When antithetic parallelism appears in biblical poetry, it is defined simply in terms of “two lines correspond[ing] with one another by an opposition of terms and sentiments,” ranging from “exact contraposition of word to word” to “a general disparity.” See Adele Berlin, “Parallelism,” in The Anchor Bible Dictionary, ed. David Noel Freedman, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:156.
however, Amalickiah lies about his treachery to secure the conversion of Lamanites to ideological anger (see Alma 48:1–4). The results of these antithetically parallel interventions among the Nephites are striking. Ammon's pioneering work with Lamoni's people paves the way for conversion in six other Lamanite territories (see Alma 23:8–13), while Amalickiah's treachery eventually allows him to take six Nephite territories in a blitzkrieg shortly before his death (see Alma 51:26). Ammon's converts bury their weapons of war, while Amalickiah's brandish their weapons dangerously.

Parallels between Aaron's story and that of Ammoron—antithetical or otherwise—are less overt. Both broaden the scope of their respective brothers’ efforts, Aaron with an eye to a general Lamanite mission (see Alma 22:27; 23:1–5) and Ammoron in hopes of dividing Nephite forces in a two-front war (see Alma 52:12–14). Certainly, Aaron and Ammoron both have more general success than their brothers (although Aaron does so only because he eventually follows his brother's example, and Ammoron's purposes ultimately fail). Further, only after Aaron's preaching do Lamanite converts determine to bury their weapons, covenanting never to fight again (see Alma 24:5–19), just as it is only under the threat imposed by Ammoron that those same Lamanites' sons determine to take their weapons, covenanting to fight for freedom (see Alma 53:10–21). In a remarkable inversion, where the Nephites give their lives to protect Lamanite converts in the first half of the book of Alma, Lamanite converts offer their lives to protect Nephites in the second half of the book. The organization of the larger narrative in two massive parallels makes this inversion perfectly clear.

One particularly fascinating parallel between the stories of Moroni and his enemies and of the sons of Mosiah concerns their narrative turning points. The turning point in the story of the Lamanite mission occurs

13. There may be an intentional contrast in the parallel narratives between Ammon's successes, which yield the conversion of Lamanites in seven territories total, and Amalickiah's successes, which yield the capture of only six territories total—Teancum repelling him just before he could capture the seventh territory (Bountiful) that would have made his violent efforts the perfect parallel of Ammon's peaceful preaching.
while Ammon, the missionary, is lying unconscious on the ground. Overcome with joy at the beginnings of success, Ammon collapses, and the chief actor in the story becomes Abish, “one of the Lamantish women” (Alma 19:16), whose intervention draws the crowd that provides Lamoni and his wife with their first listeners. Abish is prepared for this task because she is already “converted to the Lord,” according to the text, “on account of a remarkable vision of her father” (Alma 19:16–17). A parent-child relationship (in this case, a father-daughter relationship) in a Lamanite family thus features the turning point of Alma 17–29. Strikingly parallel to this is the turning point in the Nephite-Lamanite wars recounted in Alma 45–63. This occurs when the stripling warriors, discussed just above, volunteer to join the struggling Nephite armies. Significantly, their conviction—which leads to miraculous deliverance—they attribute to the instruction of their mothers: “We do not doubt; our mothers knew” (Alma 56:48). Here again the turning point in both Lamanite and Nephite fortunes occurs because of parent-child relationships (in this case, mother-son relationships) in Lamanite families. Further underscoring the congruence between these two turning points, each is recounted in connection with a Nephite man announcing his astonishment at Lamanite faith. Ammon


15. The parent-child relationships functioning among the Lamanites as displayed in the book of Alma hark back to the words of Jacob at the outset of the Book of Mormon’s larger history. According to him, Lamanite “husbands love their wives,” just as Lamanite “wives love their husbands”; particularly important is the fact that Lamanite parents “love their children” (Jacob 3:7). Jacob’s sermon suggests that there is something deeply right about Lamanite family culture that has gone rather wrong with the Nephites, as well as that there is something right about Lamanite gender roles more generally. The book of Alma seems bent on confirming these claims, underscored not only by the fact that Lamanite parents love and teach their children, but also by the fact that fathers are involved with daughters and mothers with sons, just as (presumably) fathers are involved with sons and mothers with daughters. See, again, Spencer and Berkey, “‘Great Cause to Mourn.’”
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says to Lamoni’s wife that “there has not been such great faith” as hers “among all the people of the Nephites” (Alma 19:10); Helaman similarly writes in a letter that “never had [he] seen so great courage” as that demonstrated by the stripling warriors, “nay, not amongst all the Nephites” (Alma 56:45). These literary ties make perfectly clear the intentional parallel between the two turning points in the two narratives.

The evidence thus indicates that Alma 17–29 and Alma 45–63 are intentionally parallel, like Alma 1–16 and Alma 30–44. And again the parallel narratives precede parallel narratives of battles between the Nephites and the Lamanites (see Alma 28; 63:15).

Table 2. Parallel material in Alma 17–29 and Alma 45–63

| Alma’s interrupted journey (Alma 17) | Alma’s interrupted journey (Alma 45) |
| Ammon’s mission (Alma 17–20) | Amalickiah’s dissension (Alma 45–51) |
| Aaron’s mission (Alma 21–26) | Ammoron’s dissension (Alma 52–62) |
| Aftermath and cleanup (Alma 27–29) | Aftermath and cleanup (Alma 63) |

These parallels demonstrate that the whole book of Alma is meant to be read as two large parallel halves. But where the parallels between Alma 1–16 and Alma 30–44 suggest a kind of repetition of history, the parallels between Alma 17–29 and Alma 45–63 suggest something deeper and more theologically provocative. The narrative asks readers to be aware—and to track the sickening implications—of the inverse relationship between what Ammon and Aaron accomplish in their peaceful mission in the first half of the book and what Amalickiah and Ammoron accomplish in their warmongering dissension in the second half. Here, “providential recurrence” indicates the way that history around the time of Alma exhibits profoundly opposed understandings of internecine warfare—profoundly opposed responses to power and violence, as well as to the felt responsibility to enlighten others.16

16. This analysis might suggest a rather different answer than the standard one to the question of why the book of Alma concludes with such a lengthy account of war. The most common response to this question works from an essentially allegorical perspective, noting that the people of God are always engaged in a kind of spiritual warfare and that readers stand to learn much from the war chapters about how to defend the
It seems best, then, to say that the book of Alma is divided into two larger halves, Alma 1–29 and Alma 30–63, intentionally set forth as parallels. Further, it seems that each half is in turn divisible into quarters, with Alma 1–16 in parallel to Alma 30–44 and Alma 17–29 in parallel to Alma 45–63. The parallel between the first and third quarters of the book seems to provide (in Grant Hardy’s words) “evidence of God’s engagement with humankind,” in light of the idea that “certain types of events tend to recur regularly because God is constant.” That is, the repetition of historical patterns from Alma 1–16 (Nehor’s corrupting influence, the Amlicite rebellion and consequent war, Alma’s need to preach to three rather distinct audiences in three different cities) in Alma 30–44 (Korihor’s corrupting influence, the Zoramite rebellion and consequent war, Alma’s need to preach to three rather distinct sons with three different needs) indeed suggests general patterns of divine-human relations. However, the second and fourth quarters of the book serve a rather different purpose. The point of these parallel sections seems to be to contrast opposing approaches to similar situations (Ammon versus Amalickiah, Aaron versus Ammoron).

In the end, the book of Alma divides naturally into four quarters: (1) Alma 1–16, (2) Alma 17–29, (3) Alma 30–44, and (4) Alma 45–63. The first and third are parallel (and, interestingly, together provide a relatively seamless story: that of Alma’s life from the time of his appointment as chief judge to the time of his disappearance). Similarly, the second and fourth quarters are parallel, though the nature of these parallels is fundamentally faith or how to be aware of the devil’s warlike tactics in temptation. The larger structure of the book of Alma suggests instead that the purpose of the so-called “war chapters” may primarily be to show in remarkable detail and at great length the terrifying contrast between the edifying work of the sons of Mosiah and the destructive efforts of Amalickiah and Ammoron. For a sustained interpretation of Alma 43–62 along such lines, see John Bytheway, Righteous Warriors: Lessons from the War Chapters in the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004).

17. Hardy, Understanding the Book of Mormon, 155.

18. Here, then, the point seems to be to set up what Hardy calls “contrastive narratives” rather than simple repeating patterns that evince God’s involvement in history. Hardy, Understanding the Book of Mormon, 166.
different. By way of conclusion, then, perhaps it is best simply to provide the whole of the larger structure of the book of Alma in one final table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First quarter (Alma 1–16)</th>
<th>Third quarter (Alma 30–44)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nehor (Alma 1)</td>
<td>Korihor (Alma 30)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Amlicites (Alma 2–3)</td>
<td>The Zoramites (Alma 31–35)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alma in Zarahemla (Alma 4–6)</td>
<td>Alma to Helaman (Alma 36–37)</td>
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<td>Alma in Gideon (Alma 7)</td>
<td>Alma to Shiblon (Alma 38)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alma in Ammonihah (Alma 8–15)</td>
<td>Alma to Corianton (Alma 39–42)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Details about war (Alma 16)</td>
<td>Details about war (Alma 43–44)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Second Quarter (Alma 17–29)</th>
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<td>Alma's interrupted journey (Alma 17)</td>
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This seems to be the overarching structure of the book of Alma: two parallel histories told in succession, with crucially different purposes underlying the parallel relationships at work in different parts of the structure. I suggest that recognition of this structure ought to guide further interpretive work on the book of Alma—especially where value is granted to larger editorial structure as a kind of guide to theological intention.19

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19. I have reference here to the sort of approach that has come to be known as canonical criticism. For a good introduction to canonical criticism, see James A. Sanders, *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).
The Maxwell Institute is currently making efforts to update the work of Donald Parry, Jeanette Miller, and Sandra Thorne, who prepared the volume *A Comprehensive Annotated Book of Mormon Bibliography* (1996). This earlier work is now available at the Maxwell Institute’s website (see http://publications.mi.byu.edu/book/a-comprehensive-annotated-book-of-mormon-bibliography/), and updates will also be made available on the Institute’s website.

To assist in this effort, the editors of the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* have decided to include in each issue of the Journal a bibliography of scholarly work published on the Book of Mormon during the previous year. We have therefore made efforts to discover all work of an academic nature published during 2016 for inclusion in the following bibliography. The work has been undertaken primarily by Matthew Roper and Alex Criddle.

The editors would like to encourage readers of the Journal to send information regarding any publications of a scholarly nature focused on the Book of Mormon that have escaped our notice. These can be sent to jbms@byu.edu.


Frederick, Julie A. P. “Seals, Symbols, and Sacred Texts: Sealing and the Book of Mormon.” In Spencer and Webb, Reading Nephi Reading Isaiah, 75–87.


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Hardy, Heather, and Grant Hardy. “How Nephi Shapes His Readers’ Perceptions of Isaiah.” In Spencer and Webb, Reading Nephi Reading Isaiah, 33–58.


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