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Apocalypse: Reading Revelation 21-22

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Introduction

Julie M. Smith

In what would become the standard explanation of how parables work, biblical scholar C. H. Dodd proclaimed that the parable “arrest[s] the hearer by its vividness of strangeness, and leave[s] the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.”¹ What is true of parables is doubly, if not triply, true of the book of Revelation. Two millennia have apparently not been enough for a consensus to emerge regarding the interpretation of this enigmatic text. Why is that?

The book itself gives us two clues in its very first verse, where John describes the text and how it came to be. First, he calls it an *apokalypsis* (see Revelation 1:1). We recognize the English cognate *apocalypse* and think, perhaps, of big-budget disaster movies, but the Greek word has a different nuance: it means “uncovering.” The author thus describes his task in writing as one of uncovering truth for the reader, but what truths does he intend to uncover, and how are they to be uncovered?

These questions bring us to our second clue: as the Revelator describes the process by which the revelation was transmitted, he explains that it was “signified” by an angel (Revelation 1:1). From a Greek word meaning “to give a sign” (*sēmainō*), this word implies that the revelation was conveyed through signs or symbols. Putting this clue together with the other, we can say that the author will be uncovering truths by using symbols. This is no surprise. As even the most casual student of the book of Revelation knows, it is chock-full of symbols, many of which strike modern readers as more disturbing than inspiring (what are we to make of seven-headed beasts or death riding a horse?).

How do such symbols work? What do they symbolize? If we uncover them, what will we find? How can we know if we are interpreting a symbol correctly? Faced as much with these rich interpretive opportunities as with the attendant perplexing questions, it is no wonder that Revelation has inspired artists, stumped scholars, fueled cranks, and terrified children.

Into this wonderland tumbled six LDS scholars interested in gleaning meaning from the final two chapters of Revelation.² The unique format of the Mormon Theology Seminar gave us the space to engage this most mysterious of texts.³ This volume gathers the papers that resulted from our collaborative study. Each of these papers deserves a brief word of introduction here.

Kevin Barney opens the volume with “A Book or a Tree? A Textual Variant in Revelation 22:19,” in which he explains why the King James Version (KJV) rendering of the passage in question reads “book” where other translations have “tree” and then explores the interpretive implications of each reading. Barney’s paper provides important insights into the textual history of a passage central to Mormon theology.

My own contribution, “The Beginning and the End: Echoes of Genesis 1–3 in Revelation 21–22,” follows. In it, I examine what might be called the Bible’s bookends, its first and its concluding chapters, as the volume is presently organized. In particular, I explore how we might better understand these two texts by reading them in light of each other.

Next comes Brandie Siegfried’s “The Fruit of Eden’s Tree: The Bride, the Book, and the Water of Life in Revelation.” She considers how the KJV translation can enhance our appreciation for the text. It is common practice for biblical

scholars to get away from translations and turn to the text in its earliest languages as quickly as possible; Siegfried’s approach helps us see the KJV as a unique locus for fascinating insights.

In “Seeing Eye to Eye: Nephi’s and John’s Intertwining Visions of the Tree of Life,” Shon Hopkin discusses the complicated relationship between the vision of Nephi in 1 Nephi 11–14 and the vision of John in Revelation. A comparison of these two visionary experiences yields a fresh approach to both.

Eric Huntsman’s “The Unveiling of Christ. . .and of Angels: Apocalyptic Mediation in Revelation” explores how Revelation complicates the sharp lines often drawn between believers, angels, Christ, and God. His essay helps us better understand the role of intermediaries—as well as the divine and the human—in the book of Revelation and in the latter-day restoration.

Finally, Adam Miller concludes the discussion with “Overwritten, Written Elsewhere: Names, Books, and Souls in St. John’s Apocalypse.” Miller reflects on what the theme of writing in Revelation teaches us about the nature of the soul. Moreover, his analysis guides the reader to a better understanding of this enigmatic text.

It is our hope that these essays will open new lines of theological inquiry into the book of Revelation among Latter-day Saints. As the only book-length apocalypse in the standard works, as the final book in the New Testament, and as one of the few biblical texts referenced in the Book of Mormon, the book of Revelation holds a special place in the LDS canon. It demands more of its readers than most scriptural books, but it also offers them more. If we make some small contribution to expanding the circumference of Mormon thought concerning the book of Revelation, we will be greatly rewarded for our efforts.

These papers were originally presented at a conference, “Latter-day Saint Readings of Revelation 21–22,” held on September 25, 2009, at the University of Texas at Austin.⁴ We are grateful to the Richard L. Evans Chair of Religious Understanding at BYU, held by James Faulconer, for providing material support for that event. Our gratitude also extends to the Latter-day Saint Student Association at the University of Texas at Austin, without whose support the conference could not have happened.

—Julie M. Smith

NOTES

1. C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Scribner, 1961), 16.

2. To ease the difficulty of jumping into a conversation that has been going on for nearly twenty centuries, Eric D. Huntsman—one of this project’s contributors—provided participants with a summary of the major ways the book of Revelation is being interpreted. This essay, titled “Interpretive Approaches to Revelation,” can be accessed online at <http://revsem.blogspot.com/2009/05/interpretive-approaches-to-revelation.html>.

3. More information about the Mormon Theology Seminar can be found at <http://mormontheologyseminar.org>. The full transcript of this seminar can be read online at <http://www.mormontheologyseminar.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Revelation-21-22-Complete-Seminar.pdf> (in pdf form) or <http://revsem.blogspot.com/> (in html form).

4. Podcasts of the original presentations are available for download at <http://www.mormontheologysseminar.org/category/podcasts/>.

A Book or a Tree? A Textual Variant in Revelation 22:

19

Kevin L. Barney
Erasmus

On or about October 28, 1466, a boy was born in Rotterdam to Roger Gerard and a woman we know only as Margaret, the daughter of a physician. His birth name was Gerard Gerardson after his father, but he later would take upon himself the name by which he is known to history, Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus. Erasmus was both the name of a saint and the Greek word meaning “desired.” Desiderius was simply the Latin equivalent of Erasmus, and Roterodamus was Latin for “of Rotterdam,” the city with which he would always be closely associated, although he only lived there for the first four years of his life.

Although he was born out of wedlock, he was loved and cared for by his parents until their untimely deaths from the plague in 1483; Erasmus was only a teenager. Now orphaned, he received from the Catholic Church the finest education available to a young man in his day. Not only did he become an outstanding Latinist, but he also managed to learn Greek by studying day and night for three years. He constantly begged his friends in his letters for books and for money to pay his teachers.

Erasmus was the first to publish the New Testament in Greek, something he did in 1516. (The New Testament had already been printed in Greek two years earlier as part of the *Complutensian Polyglot*, but that work was not actually published until 1520 because the editors had to wait for the Old Testament portion to be finished and sanctioned by Pope Leo X.)¹ Erasmus’s project began in 1512 when he undertook a new translation of the New Testament into Latin, declaring, “It is only fair that Paul should address the Romans in somewhat better Latin.”² Erasmus was a superb Latin stylist, and he knew it (only one with tremendous confidence in his Latin skills would dare to emend Jerome’s Vulgate, the established Bible at the time). In 1516 his translation appeared under the odd title *Novum Instrumentum Omne* (“All the New Teaching”). In addition to giving his new Latin translation, he included the Greek New Testament in a parallel column. Many have assumed that he included the Greek text because he was intent on beating the *Complutensian Polyglot* to publication, but there is no evidence for this. It appears, rather, that his motive for including the Greek was simply to make it easier for readers to check—and presumably admire—his Latin translation. His focus and interest were less on the Greek than on the Latin text, but he considered the two together to constitute the whole of the New Testament tradition (thus his use of the word *omne*, “all,” in the title).

The first edition was riddled with errors since, as Erasmus himself acknowledged, it was *praecipitatum verius quam editum* (“thrown together rather than edited”).³ Consequently, in 1519 he produced a corrected second edition, this time with the more customary title *Novum Testamentum Omne* (“All the New Testament”). Martin Luther used this edition to translate the New Testament from Greek into German. Together the first two editions sold 3,300 copies, while only 600 copies of the *Complutensian Polyglot* were even printed. A third edition followed in 1522, which edition became the basis for William Tyndale’s English translation of the New Testament and for Robert Stephanus’s 1550 edition of the Greek text, which was used by the translators of the Geneva and King James Bibles. Erasmus would go on to publish fourth and fifth editions (1527 and 1535), and these would be followed by a line of subsequent editions during the remainder of the century and beyond, all grounded in Erasmus’s publications.

The term *Textus Receptus* or “Received Text” comes from the publisher’s preface (a sort of advertising blurb) to the 1633 edition: *textum ergo habes, nunc ab omnibus receptum, in quo nihil immutatum aut corruptum damus* (“Therefore you hold the text, now received by all, in which we give nothing altered or corrupted”). The words for “text” (*textum*) and “received” (*receptum*) were changed from the accusative to the nominative case, *textus receptus*, “received text,” and this term was then applied retroactively to the entire line of printed Greek New Testaments that derived ultimately from the early editions of Erasmus.

The last six verses of Revelation

Erasmus drew his Greek text from seven late manuscripts from the Byzantine tradition. Only one of these manuscripts contained the text of the book of Revelation, and that manuscript happened to be missing the last page of text, a page that contained the final six verses of Revelation 22. Undaunted, Erasmus reverse-translated the final six verses of the Latin Vulgate into Greek to complete the manuscript for his first edition.

This famous story is included in every introduction to New Testament textual criticism. When I first heard it, I was flabbergasted. I thought to myself that if I were to look up the definition of *chutzpah* in a dictionary, I would find an account of Erasmus’s bold move. But what Erasmus did was not quite as unusual as it appears at first blush. Erasmus was engaged in producing strict consistency between the Greek and Latin texts. Today we might assume that this ideal consistency would always demand modifying the derivative Latin to conform to the original Greek. But the Vulgate had tremendous religious authority, and consistency as often as not meant revising the Greek to accommodate the Latin. Erasmus felt perfectly free to modify the Greek text to match the Latin if he preferred the reading of the Vulgate. The story of the last six verses of Revelation is only the most dramatic illustration of this tendency on Erasmus’s part; the reality is that he made similar moves throughout his work on the text.

All things considered, Erasmus deserves praise for his reverse translation. He did an outstanding job. If a third-year Greek composition student were asked to reverse-translate into Koine Greek six verses selected at random from the Latin Vulgate and to match as closely as possible the New Testament text, few would do nearly as well as Erasmus did. The *Textus Receptus* of these six verses contains 136 Greek words and the standard critical text 132, but there are only eighteen variations between them. That, to me, is rather remarkable.

Standard critical editions of the Greek New Testament completely ignore these variants. They are not reflected in the critical apparatus of either *Novum Testament Graece* (27th edition) or the United Bible Society’s *Greek New Testament* (4th edition), nor are they mentioned in Bruce Metzger’s *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. I suppose the rationale for this omission is that these variants were created in print rather than derived from pre-printing-press antiquity. Modern translations of the New Testament generally follow the standard critical text and so ignore these variants. Contemporary Mormons, however, continue to read the King James Version (KJV), translated from the *Textus Receptus*, and therefore understanding and deciding on the *correctness* of these variants is still a relevant task for us—even if we are somewhat unique in needing to do so.

Most of the variants in question affect the Greek text but would not be apparent in English translation. Erasmus spelled the name *David* differently and prefaced it with the definite article. He used a different verb for the word *come* in verse 17. But however he rendered the name *David* in Greek, we would still render it in translation as “David.” And whichever verb we follow in verse 17, it would still be best translated as “come” in English. In a few places the Erasmus variants would affect the English translation, but not drastically, adding an “and” here and a “for” there.

Only one variant substantially affects the meaning of the passage, and that is in verse 19. The KJV reads: “And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the *book*

of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (emphasis added). In lieu of Erasmus’s “book of life” (*biblou tēs zōēs*), the modern critical text reads “tree of life” (*xulou tēs zōēs*). This difference does have an impact on the meaning of the passage. How might we decide between these two readings?

A good place to start would be a survey of the two phrases—*book of life* and *tree of life*—in scripture more generally. What can we learn from scripture about the book of life and the tree of life?

Book of life

When I was young, I imagined the book of life like an old “book of remembrance”—one of those manufactured binders for genealogical records once popular among Latter-day Saints, with their long 8½” hard covers connected by expandable metal rods—engraved with the words *book of life*. (I imagined it much bigger than those binders.) Now, of course, people do genealogy with a computer, but I confess that I still imagine the book of life in that way, to some extent. My imagination aside, what do the scriptures teach us about the book of life?

Apart from the contested passage in question, Revelation 22:19, the expression *book of life* has the following distribution in the scriptures:

Volume of Scripture	Number of Occurrences	Citations
New Testament	7	Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27
Book of Mormon	1	Alma 5:58
Doctrine and Covenants	4	D&C 128:6–7 (3x); 132:19
Total	12	

Note that six of these twelve occurrences appear within the book of Revelation, and three of the occurrences in the Doctrine and Covenants appear in a commentary on the use of that expression in the book of Revelation. All in all, three-fourths of all instances of the phrase *book of life* appear in or in connection with Revelation. Obviously, these references should prove helpful in determining if the expression *book of life* in Revelation 22:19 is the better, or original, reading.

The main thing we learn from these passages is that names are written in the book of life—specifically, the names of those who are to inherit eternal life. (To continue with my childhood imagination, this sounds a bit like Santa’s “nice list.”)

First, for example, Revelation 3:5 affirms: “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.” This passage suggests that it is one’s name that is entered in the book of life. One’s name remains in the book if one “overcometh” (though what *overcome* means is not indicated), and a blessing parallel to this overcoming is being clothed with white raiment, which, the previous verse suggests, is an indication of worthiness. Revelation 13:8 suggests the converse: “And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him [the beast; see v. 4], whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” In other words, while those whose names are written in the book of life worship the Lamb, those whose names are not written in the book

worship the beast. Revelation 17:8 is of similar import, but Revelation 21:27 deserves individual attention: "And there shall in no wise enter into it [the New Jerusalem] any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." The phrase *they which are written*, without any mention of names, may seem odd at first glance, but the idea that names were written in the book of life was so pervasive that "they which are written" is simply meant to be a short formation of "they whose names are written." It is only those whose names are written in the book who will enter into the New (or heavenly) Jerusalem.

Such references call to mind a particular adaptation of the judgment of the dead in the Hall of Maat as depicted in the vignette associated with chapter 125 of the Egyptian Book of the Dead. The god Osiris, sitting upon his throne, presides over the proceedings while the jackal-headed Anubis, guardian of the underworld, leads the deceased forward by the hand to the scales of Maat, goddess of truth and justice. The deceased's heart is weighed against a Maat feather that represents truth: if his heart is heavy with misdeeds, it is promptly devoured by the demon Ammut, and the deceased ceases to exist; but if he lived a good life and his heart is light, he continues on his journey in the afterlife. The god Thoth stands by and records the results of the judgment in a papyrus book. This Egyptian scene was adapted by a Jewish writer in a first-century-ad text called the *Testament of Abraham*. In this version, Osiris is Abel, and the Egyptian gods weighing the dead man's soul are angels with new names: Dokiël, the righteous balance-bearer who weighs men's souls, and Purouël, who tries the works of men by fire. Two versions of this text, a long and a short one, are called Recensions A and B, respectively.⁴ In Recension A, one of two angels appears on each side of the scales. One records the righteous and the other the wicked deeds of the deceased. In Recension B, however, only a single scribe (like the Egyptian Thoth but identified as Enoch) records the results of the judgment.

Elsewhere I have written about this kind of Semitic adaptation of Egyptian sources and suggested that it may help us understand the explanations to the facsimiles of the Book of Abraham.⁵ I mention this here because, at least according to the Egyptian-Jewish author of the *Testament of Abraham*, this vignette actually illustrates the production of the book of life, in which the results of judgment are recorded.

These texts collectively suggest that the expression *book of life* works well in the context of Revelation 22:19. The passage, quoted above, records what biblical scholars call a curse formula. The scriptural theme of the book of life places such a high emphasis on the blessings associated with names being written in that book that the threat of being removed from it is real and forceful. Moreover, the parallel of having one's name removed from the book of life as a punishment for removing words from the book of the prophecy of Revelation reflects a certain ironic justice. All of this is suggestive.

What, though, of the tree of life?

Tree of life

The expression *tree of life* has the following distribution in the scriptures:

Volume of Scripture	Number of Occurrences	Citations
Old Testament	7	Genesis 2:9; 3:22, 24; Proverbs 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4
New Testament	3	Revelation 2:7; 22:2, 14
Book of Mormon	16	1 Nephi 11:25 (2x); 15:22–36 (3x); 2 Nephi 2:15; Alma 5:34, 62; 12:21–26 (3x); 32:40; 42:2–6 (4x)
Pearl of Great Price	4	Moses 3:9; 4:28, 31 (2x); Abraham 5:9
Total	30	

These passages are grouped in several distinctive tranches, each of which deserves individual attention. First are the references to the tree of life from the well-known creation story (see not only the references in Genesis, but also those in Moses, Abraham, 2 Nephi, and Alma). This tree of life was in the midst of the orchard of the Garden of Eden, as was the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Once Adam and Eve had partaken of the fruit of the latter, God was concerned that they would partake of the tree of life and live forever. He therefore caused cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to be placed at the eastern entrance to the garden so that Adam and Eve could not reenter the garden and partake of the fruit of the tree of life.

Second and less familiar are the four references to the tree of life in Proverbs. On the surface, the meaning of the tree of life in these passages is unclear; in context, the tree of life seems to stand simply for “a good thing.” Thus, Proverbs 15:4 sets forth the following antithetic parallelism:

A wholesome tongue is a tree of life:

but perverseness therein is a breach of the spirit.

I suspect that these references to the tree of life pertain to Wisdom and, as such, might be read as oblique allusions to our Mother in Heaven. As scholars have begun to realize in recent years, the Hebrews of ancient Israel worshipped a heavenly mother figure named Asherah. Over time, a reform movement attempted to suppress such worship, but rather than being eliminated completely, Asherah was simply absorbed into various characteristics of Yahweh. One such characterization is Lady Wisdom (in Hebrew, *chokmah*), a prominent figure in the book of Proverbs.⁶

The third set of references to the tree of life comes from the vision of the tree of life Lehi and his son Nephi experienced—and from passages in which Nephi interprets the tree, whose fruit is precious and desirable above all and is a symbol of the love of God. (In addition to Lehi’s and Nephi’s visions, the Book of Mormon also preserves later commentary on this theme, particularly in chapters 5 and 32 of Alma.) As it turns out, this third group of passages may be related to the second. Daniel Peterson has written a remarkable study entitled “Nephi and His Asherah” (a play on ancient Near Eastern inscriptions that mention “Yahweh and His Asherah”), in which he surveys the extensive body of non-LDS Asherah scholarship and outlines how this scholarship may help us better grasp the text in 1 Nephi 11.⁷ Nephi is shown the virgin mother and the babe in her arms. An angel then asks him if

he understands the meaning of the tree, and he responds that he does (though he had responded in the contrary before seeing mother and child). Why would a vision of the mother of the Son of God make the meaning of the tree of life clear to Nephi? Peterson, in a brilliant exegesis that places the passage squarely in its ancient Near Eastern context, points to the profound tree symbolism related to Asherah, the mother of the gods, in ancient Israel.

The fourth and final group of passages is in the book of Revelation itself. These passages all have to do with the presence of the tree of life in the New (or heavenly) Jerusalem and thus deserve, given their proximity to Revelation 22:19, individual attention.

The first appears early in the book as part of the letter to the church at Ephesus: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7). Note that the fruit of the tree is said here to be given to “him that overcometh,” phrasing similar to the passage in Revelation 3:5 in which the one whose name is to remain in the book of life is “he that overcometh.” This similarity of language suggests an interchangeability of *book* and *tree* in Revelation 2–3. There is also a blurred distinction between the tree of life from Eden and the tree of life to be found only in the New Jerusalem: the tree is described ambiguously as being “in the midst of the paradise of God.”

The description in Revelation 22:2 is much more elaborate: “In the midst of the street of it [the city of the New Jerusalem], and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” Here we encounter predictable number symbolism revolving around the number twelve (twelve months? twelve tribes?), but it is very difficult to visualize, based on this description, what the tree is supposed to look like or how it is positioned in relation to the other features of the New Jerusalem. Nonetheless, its proximity to Revelation 22:19 might be suggestive in certain ways.

The final occurrence of “tree of life” in Revelation outside our contested passage appears in Revelation 22:14: “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.” Interestingly, the KJV rendering of “they that do his commandments” is in error; the correct wording here would be, rather, “they that wash their robes.” Here again there seems to be a certain connection with Revelation 3:5, which describes those whose names remain in the book of life as those who are “clothed in white raiment.” Once more, the images of tree and book seem to come together. At any rate, Revelation 7:14 states that those who “[wash] their robes” are blessed with a right to the tree of life after passing through the gates of the New Jerusalem.

All these references to the tree of life are just as suggestive as those to the book of life, and there is even some evidence of a certain blending of the two images. Certainly, references to the tree of life are just as compatible with the curse-formula setting of Revelation 22:19 as those to the book of life. Being forbidden to eat the fruit of the tree of life is as much a curse as having one’s name removed from the book of life. What other evidence, then, might be brought to bear on the interpretation of this text?

Textual evidence

Turning to textual history, one might be surprised to learn that some evidence exists for the reading “book of life,” although it is not overwhelming. Obviously, since it was from the Vulgate that Erasmus produced his Greek text, “book” is found in a number of Vulgate manuscripts, but it also occurs in one Greek miniscule (no. 2067, dating to the fifteenth century) and is reflected in the Bohairic Version (an important translation in a Coptic dialect). The word also occurs in a number of the church fathers: Ambrose and Bachiarus (both late-fourth century), Primasius (mid-sixth century) and Haymo (ninth century). Most of the textual evidence, however, and particularly that of the

earliest Greek witnesses, clearly supports “tree.” And it is certainly significant that the church fathers who attest to the variant reading all wrote in Latin.

Another, still more compelling reason suggests that the variant arose in Latin and not in Greek. The Latin for “tree” here is *ligno*, while the Latin for “book” is *libro*, much closer to one another than the Greek terms (*biblou* and *xulou*). Apparently the copy of the Vulgate Erasmus used for his reverse translation had the word *book* (*libro*) in the text, though it is possible that Erasmus himself, whether intentionally or unintentionally, independently replaced *ligno* with *libro* as he translated the verse. But was the change—whether Erasmus inherited or reinvented it—necessarily a *mistake*? The fact that textual evidence exists at all for “book” suggests that something more than a bad translation is at work here.

The lead-in wording to the curse formula of Revelation 22:19, “God shall take away his part out of the [X],” is awkward. (Further note that the words *his part* occur nowhere else in the New Testament.) Regardless of the textual evidence, the wording of the text arguably works better with “book of life” than with “tree of life,” especially since it is the curse imposed on those who themselves remove words from the book of prophecy. If “book of life” were original, the expression would simply be an awkward way of saying that God would blot out the offender’s name in the book of life. If the original expression were indeed “God shall take away his part from the tree of life,” the text would be at least as awkward as, if not more than, its alternative, apparently meaning something like “God shall bar him from partaking of the fruit of the tree of life.”⁸ The awkwardness of the wording, in either case, may suggest—as many scholars have in fact suggested—that the curse formula is, ironically, itself a later addition to the original text.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence adduced in the last section and from a purely text-critical perspective, the original reading would most likely have been “tree,” not “book” as reflected in the King James Version (and in the Textus Receptus on which that translation was based). Thus, if our sole concern is with the original text, the question asked at the outset of this study has been answered.

But before rushing to embrace this answer, we might pause for a moment to reflect on what can be learned from the apparently nonoriginal variant. After all, the Latin variant *libro* is in a sense both a book and a tree. That word is the ablative case of the lexical form *liber*, which (as we might guess from such English derivatives as *library*) came to mean “book, parchment, paper” but which originally referred to the bark of a tree. Perhaps more important, the Prophet Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible (often referred to as the Joseph Smith Translation) may motivate interest in the nonoriginal version of the text. His translation was in large measure a midrashic commentary on the KJV text (rather than a restoration of the original text).⁹ In that very Mormon spirit of investigation, we might consider what we can learn from the nonoriginal variant before discarding it.

The reading “book of life,” as has already been noted, makes excellent sense in the context of the curse formula of Revelation 22:19. Indeed, one could argue that “God shall take away his part out of the book of life” is, as was just pointed out, easier to understand than “God shall take away his part out of the tree of life,” thus making the latter the *lectio difficilior*, or “more difficult reading.”¹⁰ As we have seen, the book of life is a register for the recording of the names of those who will enter the New Jerusalem and therefore inherit eternal life. Those whose names are recorded in the book worship the Lamb; those whose names are either not recorded in the book in the first place or recorded but subsequently blotted out worship the beast. Joseph Smith developed a particularly acute interest in this theme in his final years, suggesting a richness in it that remains to be exhausted. At the same time, the usage of “book of life” and “tree of life” in Revelation is in several respects almost synonymous. Each is a symbol for entry

into the New Jerusalem. Each is achieved only by overcoming. Those registered in the book of life are clothed in white raiment, while those approaching the tree of life are they that “wash their robes.”

But while “book of life” makes excellent sense in the context of the curse formula, the original reading, “tree of life,” has rich implications as well. The four tranches of “tree of life” in the scriptures represent a sort of chiasmic ordering. The inaugural usage referring to the tree of life in the Garden of Eden at the dawn of creation is paralleled by the usage in Revelation, both at the end of the Bible and at the end of days, in which the tree of life is the most prominent feature of the New or heavenly Jerusalem, a mirror of the original tree of life in the center of the paradise of God. Between these two groupings of texts representing the beginning and the end are two other groups of texts that seem related: the Proverbs passages and the Book of Mormon passages featured in the visions of Lehi and Nephi. Explicitly, the Book of Mormon tells us that this tree represents the love of God, but both groups of texts can be read as references to Divine Wisdom, either a characteristic of God the Father or a representation of God the Mother. This latter possibility would of course be a distinctively Mormon reading, and it is one I find intriguing. On this reading, when we finally pass through the veil and enter the heavenly Jerusalem, we will be reunited not only with our Father and his Son, but also with our Mother, as well as our own family from this mortality.

That would be the paradise of God indeed.

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NOTES

1. This volume took its name from the city in which it was produced (Alcalá de Henares, Spain, or *Complutum* in Latin). *Polyglot* indicates that the text was presented in multiple languages.
2. Letter to Pierre Barbier, November 2, 1517 (letter 695). See Erasmus, *The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 594–841*, trans. R. A. B. Mynors and D. F. S. Thomson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 172.
3. Quoted in Alister E. McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 136.
4. These can be read, along with a helpful introduction by E. P. Sanders, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1983–85), 1:871–902.
5. See Kevin L. Barney, “The Facsimiles and Semitic Adaptation of Existing Sources,” in *Astronomy, Papyrus, Covenant*, ed. John Gee and Brian M. Hauglid (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 107–30.
6. The title of a major study of this subject by Bernhard Lang expresses the basic point well; see Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: A Hebrew Goddess Redefined* (New York: Pilgrim, 1986). I have discussed these issues

elsewhere at length in Kevin L. Barney, "How to Worship Our Mother in Heaven (without Getting Excommunicated)," *Dialogue* 41/4 (2008): 121–46.

7. Daniel C. Peterson, "Nephi and His Asherah: A Note on 1 Nephi 11:8–23," in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 191–243. See also Daniel C. Peterson, "Nephi and His Asherah," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000): 16–25.

8. If that is the original reading, then the intended antecedent is Revelation 22:14, just five verses earlier. God removing "his part" from the tree of life should probably be interpreted in light of the "right to the tree of life" described in that verse. Hence, the rendering in the New Revised Standard Version: "If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book."

9. For the concept of much of the Joseph Smith Translation constituting a midrashic commentary on the text, see Kevin L. Barney, "Isaiah Interwoven," *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): 379–85.

10. All else being equal, textual criticism holds that the *lectio difficilior* is more likely to be the original reading. This may seem counter-intuitive, but the fact is that scribes tried to make texts easier to read over time, not harder, and thus the more difficult reading is more likely to be the earlier reading.

The Beginning and the End: Echoes of Genesis 1–3 in Revelation 21–22

Julie M. Smith

The Bible begins with a creation story. It also ends with one: the final chapters of the book of Revelation contain John's vision of "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1). This vision borrows—and develops—symbols from the Genesis creation account. Comparing these texts can yield rich insights; among the most significant is that the first creation was of a temple within a garden while the last creation is of a garden within a temple. This paper will unpack that statement and explore its theological repercussions. To accomplish this task and to organize what follows, I'll draw on the work of evangelical scholar Gregory K. Beale.¹ While thinking about the Garden of Eden as a temple is not uncomfortable for Latter-day Saints, it can be for other Christians. Beale, despite his own persuasive argument for this connection, admits that the idea might sound strange. Nevertheless, he helpfully outlines nine reasons for connecting the Garden of Eden with the temple. In each section of this paper, I'll discuss one of those reasons and then explore how John's vision might impact our thinking about it.

God's presence

Beale notes that one of the key features of the Old Testament temple is that it was a place where God could be present: once per year, the high priest would enter the holy of holies to commune with the Lord (see Exodus 25:22). Similarly, in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve enjoyed God's presence. Beale points out that the same Hebrew verb (*hithallek*) is used for God's "walking" in the garden (see Genesis 3:8) as for God's "walking" in the tabernacle (see, for example, 2 Samuel 7:6–7), suggesting that the author of the Genesis account was thinking about God's presence in the garden in literally the same terms used for God's presence in the temple.² Now what does the book of Revelation do with this theme?

First, it is necessary to establish, however briefly, that the new creation of Revelation 21–22—the New Jerusalem—is to be understood as a temple. A couple of points make this clear. First, its length and width and height are the same, making it a perfect cube (Revelation 21:16), which is true of only one other entity in the Bible: the holy of holies, the central portion of the Old Testament temple. Further, the new creation is also described as having all its surfaces covered in gold (Revelation 21:18), something also true of the holy of holies. Just with these two points, we have clear evidence that both the garden of Genesis and the new creation of Revelation are temples. Further, as we've already seen, a central purpose of temples is to create a space where God can be present. If we consider both Eden and the New Jerusalem as temples, several interesting insights emerge.

One of the consequences of the fall in Genesis, of course, is that Adam and Eve are expelled from God's presence. But the book of Revelation announces that God will dwell permanently in the new creation (Revelation 21:3) because "the curse" is no more (Revelation 22:3). We sometimes speak of the curse of the fall as consisting of Adam's work and Eve's suffering in childbearing, but the Genesis text portrays only the serpent and the ground as being cursed, not Adam or Eve. Thus, we might more accurately read God's words to Adam and Eve after their transgression as an effort to prepare them for what they will experience in mortality. Further, reading intertextually, we might conclude that "the curse" that is no more, referred to in Revelation, is the curse of being denied God's presence. Where Adam and Eve hid from God's face after the fall, inhabitants of the New Jerusalem see God's face continually. And even though they are not strictly a curse, the conditions of mortality Adam and Eve were warned about are also done away in the new creation: food and water are given freely, and there is no more pain or sorrow.

The new creation in Revelation comes down from heaven, but the Garden of Eden was created on earth. Why? Beale argues that the first garden/temple was intended in time to spread to cover the whole earth, but the fall made this impossible because the starting point from which that spreading would occur (Eden) was lost. The New Jerusalem must come down from heaven because it doesn't have a starting place in advance on the earth. Read symbolically, its descent reflects the necessity of atonement: righteousness must come from the heavenly realm because it has lost its foothold on earth. For God to be present with humankind in the New Jerusalem, an atonement is required; something from heaven must bridge the gap between the human and the divine.

Priesthood

Beale's second reason for thinking of the Garden of Eden as a temple is that Adam's role in the former was the same as a priest's in the latter. The Hebrew words for Adam's task in the garden ('*abad* and *shamar*), translated in the King James Version as "dress" and "keep" (Genesis 2:15), are the same words normally used to describe the work of the priest in the temple (see, for example, Numbers 3:7-8). Thus Adam serves as a priest in the temple that is the Garden of Eden.³ On Beale's reading, the fall brought an end to Adam's priestly duties because he had failed to maintain the sacred space (a primary responsibility of priests). He was therefore replaced by the cherubim, who were given the job of guarding the tree of life (Genesis 3:24; the Hebrew *shamar* is again used).⁴ This situation is echoed in Israel's tabernacle, where the cherubim figuratively guard the mercy seat (see Exodus 25:10-22), but note that in the postfall garden it was the tree of life that needed protection, not the ark of the covenant. This difference, however, suggests a relationship between the tree of life and the ark. The symbolism of the tree of life will be explored in more detail later; for now it suffices to note that what the cherubim protect in both cases is the presence of God, which is sacred and cannot be entered except by those with a right to do so.

There are several intriguing resonances between this priestly guarding role in Genesis and what John sees in vision. Revelation 22:14, part of the epilogue to John's vision, notes that the righteous "may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." This verse seems to equate entering the gates of the city with having the right to the tree of life, suggesting a strong parallel between the angels at the gates of the New Jerusalem and the cherubim guarding the tree of life in Eden. Just as much as the garden or the temple, the entire New Jerusalem is to be regarded as sacred space. Interestingly, however, it appears that the need for a guard has disappeared in John's vision: no longer must any effort be made to keep humans away from sacred space; the gates are always open and the wall is comically small in proportion to the city.

There is more evidence that the entire New Jerusalem is sacred space. In an echo of the Old Testament practice of having the high priest wear a small plate with the Lord's name inscribed on it (see Exodus 28:36), all inhabitants of the New Jerusalem have the name of God in their foreheads. Thus they all fill the role of high priest and dwell in God's presence, meaning that they are continually in sacred space. Further, as already noted, the entire city is built according to the specifications of the temple's holy of holies: both are perfect cubes and are covered in gold. Thus the entire New Jerusalem has become space as sacred as that which houses the tree of life or the ark of the covenant. Sacred space has been both vastly expanded and made much more accessible.

The expansion of priesthood is reflected in another way. In the first creation, the only priest is Adam. The law of Moses stipulated a limited number of priests. In the new creation, however, *all* who dwell in the city take on the characteristics of priests. This radical expansion of the priesthood, completely inclusive in scope, is of course good news, but it is not without its own potential challenges. This vision of the new creation, for instance, risks becoming overly impersonal, as there is no longer one Adam or one high priest at a time but an undifferentiated mass of people. Revelation 21:3 encapsulates this potential downside: "They shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God." The expansiveness of this vision is undeniable (it even extends Old

Testament promises originally given uniquely to God's chosen people; in the Greek the plural for *people* is used, implying that the promise now extends to *all* people), and yet it could still feel impersonal because the relationship to God is described in starkly corporate terms. Revelation 21:7, however, presents a comforting contrast: "And I will be his God, and he shall be my son." The text thus suggests that, despite the extension of sacred space and priesthood, each person's relationship with God remains personal and singular.

The theme of personal and community relationships between humans and God resonates in this text in other ways as well. The new creation is, for example, twice described as a bride: first, John describes seeing the holy city "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2); then, a few verses later, an angel tells John he will show him "the bride, the Lamb's wife" and shows him the city (Revelation 21:9). The bride and the city are, apparently, interchangeable symbols for the new creation. The first suggests complete unity among the people of the new creation, while the second suggests the panoply of human differences that are part of any city. By treating the bride and the city as fungible symbols, the vision indicates both a high degree of unity and a high degree of individuality for the inhabitants of the new creation. The bride imagery also implies that the goal of the new creation is to replicate a marriage relationship between the bride and the lamb—a relationship that is extremely close, personal, and intimate. The goal of the two is to become one. Latter-day Saint readers are familiar with reading Adam's description of Eve as "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23) as covenant language and so are primed to find an association between old and new creation in terms of the marriage covenant.

Not only are the people related to each other and to God in compelling and complex ways, but they are related to their abodes as well. In Hebrew, the words for Adam ('*ādām*) and earth ('*ādāmā*) are very similar; the wordplay between these two terms in the creation story of Genesis makes clear that Adam is of the earth. The inhabitants of the New Jerusalem in Revelation are similarly associated with their dwelling. They have, as we have seen, the characteristics of the Old Testament high priest, yet the gems worn on the high priest's breastplate become in Revelation the foundation stones of the city. In both cases, people take on the characteristics of their habitation, but the city of the new creation comes from heaven, not from the earth as Adam does. And because the people of the city have God's name on their foreheads, they share their name not with the earth but with God. They are no longer a part of the creation but rather a part of the Creator.

In still another register, intertextual reading has something to say about the very nature of priesthood and temples. It is sometimes assumed that the Old Testament priesthood was only necessary for performing the sacrificial ordinances of the temple, but this position is obviously incompatible with LDS theology. For Adam to be a priest *before the earth's fall*, as well as for the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem to be priest-like *after the earth's redemption*, indicates that the primary meaning of priesthood does not lie in officiating in the sacrificial ordinances of the Mosaic law (since atoning for sin is unnecessary in both of these cases). There must be something more to the priesthood than sacrifice. Further, we might make the same argument about the temple itself. Sacrifice was unnecessary in the garden before the fall, and yet the garden was a temple. Sacrifice will also be unnecessary in the New Jerusalem, and yet it, too, is presented as a temple. Clearly, the primary reason for temples is not to perform the sacrifices required by the law of Moses. Rather, the point is to provide a space where a worshipper can encounter God.

Tree of life

Beale's third reason to connect Eden to the temple is that the lampstand in the latter was modeled on the tree of life from the garden.⁵ It would be hard to overstate the importance of the tree of life in the scriptures, right from Genesis, where access to the tree of life is what makes "being like God" possible. It is a key symbol, moreover, in the

description in Revelation of the New Jerusalem, where the tree of life takes pride of place over and around the river of water that proceeds from the throne of God. There is also Nephi's vision of the tree of life and Alma's discourse comparing the word to a seed that grows into a tree of life. Daniel C. Peterson, an LDS scholar, has explored the symbolism of the tree of life in an important article entitled "Nephi and His Asherah."⁶ He sketches the extensive evidence in the Old Testament (see, for example, Proverbs 3:18) and other ancient writings that advances an interpretation of the tree as a symbol for female deity and then turns to the Book of Mormon to find the same phenomenon, particularly in Nephi's vision. In that vision, the young Nephi wants to understand the meaning of the tree of life from his father's dream and is shown the mother of the Son of God, apparently to be identified with the tree (1 Nephi 11:1–22). Peterson explains, "Of course, Mary, the virgin girl of Nazareth seen by Nephi, was not literally Asherah. She was, as Nephi's guide carefully stressed, simply 'the mother of the Son of God, *after the manner of the flesh.*' But she was the perfect mortal typification of the mother of the Son of God."⁷ In short, there is strong evidence as much in the Book of Mormon as in biblical texts for a female deity, and she is symbolized by the tree of life.

If we interpret the tree of life as a symbol for the divine female, many insights emerge. On this view, because Adam and Eve had access to the tree of life in the garden, they had access to her in the garden, although as a consequence of the fall they lost this access. Isaiah 50:1 (quoted in 2 Nephi 7:1) may be interpreted as speaking of this event when it explains, "For your transgressions is your mother put away." It may further be significant that Adam and Eve leave the garden clothed not only in skins but also in leaves. We generally interpret the skins as a symbol for the atonement (since the skins were likely those of sacrificed animals) that is meant to serve as a reminder of human beings' relationship with God. Might we interpret the leaves as a similar reminder of the tree of life? Of course, there is also a contrast between the skins and the leaves: the former are *given* to Adam and Eve but they *take* the latter for themselves. It is interesting to contemplate what this difference might suggest about the relationship Adam and Eve had with each of their heavenly parents.

In Revelation 22:14, the King James Version reads, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." This verse appears to be based on a textual error, with the original most likely reading, "Blessed are they who wash their robes" instead of "blessed are they that do his commandments." (Interestingly enough, this apparently original reading appears to be supported by a parallel text in Ether 13:10 in the Book of Mormon: "And then cometh the New Jerusalem; and blessed are they who dwell therein, for it is they whose garments are white through the blood of the Lamb.") Thus, in the book of Revelation, the skins that Adam and Eve covered themselves with have been replaced by robes. The white, clean robes are still a symbol for atonement inasmuch as they are white through the blood of the Lamb, but they lack the symbolism of "covering" that the skins from the garden had.⁸ Now that there is no sin and the people enjoy God's presence unabated, there is no need for covering up with skins, but the white robes—a symbol of atonement—remain. There is no hiding or covering in the New Jerusalem—neither in stolen leaves nor in granted coats of skins.

Coming back to the garden, we might note that Eve's title, "the mother of all living," seems related to the tree of life. We can in fact think of Eve, the prototypical human female, as patterned after the tree of life, the symbol for the divine female. At any rate, in Revelation, the tree of life is the source of healing and life in the New Jerusalem, where it bears twelve crops of fruit—a crop each month (see Revelation 22:2). It might well be asked what significance this image has, given that there is no night in the New Jerusalem and that the tree of life fruits every month (such that nights and months do not reflect changing seasons). The most likely referent for month, therefore, would be the menstrual cycle, a connection that further links the tree of life to female imagery.

The tree of life is in the midst of the city, yet it is described in a way that we cannot completely understand. In wording that has befuddled scholars for generations, the text states that the tree is “on either side of the river” (Revelation 22:2). Perhaps the Book of Mormon suggests a solution to this difficulty. First Nephi 11:25 makes clear that, in Nephi’s related vision, the river and the tree are interchangeable symbolically; Nephi reports that he saw that the iron rod “led to the fountain of living waters, or to the tree of life; which waters are a representation of the love of God; and I also beheld that the tree of life was a representation of the love of God.” Perhaps John the Revelator’s difficult-to-interpret language, like Nephi’s more straightforward wording, equates the symbolic meaning of the living waters with the symbolic meaning of the tree of life. Alternately, it might be that the difficult language in Revelation is deliberately opaque in order to mirror our current inability to mesh our knowledge of the existence of a Mother in Heaven with our understanding of the Godhead.

Another aspect of tree of life symbolism is suggested by Alma 32, where the end result of a person’s choice to experiment on the word results in its taking root: “And behold it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life” (Alma 32:41). In this text, it seems, a person can herself become a tree of life by experimenting with faith.⁹ Another scripture that conceptualizes the righteous as a tree is Jeremiah 17:8: “For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.” (Notably, there need be no contradiction between the idea that a Mother in Heaven is symbolized by the tree of life and the idea that the righteous person is a tree of life; rather, this overlapping symbolism implies unity between the two.)

Gourds, flowers, and trees

Next Beale notes that Israel’s temple had wood carvings of nature symbols—such as gourds, flowers, and trees—suggesting a garden-like atmosphere and encouraging us, yet again, to think of the Garden of Eden as the first temple.¹⁰ But given this emphasis on nature motifs in temples, why is the new creation of Revelation a city—and a very angular, cold, hard city at that? But here we need to take a step back to consider what exactly the new creation is. A curious feature of John’s vision is that although he first saw “a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1), he immediately thereafter says that he saw “the holy city” (Revelation 21:2), and the entirety of the ensuing vision concerns only the city. This culminates, in Revelation 22:14–15, with John’s saying that those who sin are “without” the city and cannot enter into its gates (sinners, obviously not a part of the new creation, are not a part of the city). This distinction is odd because throughout the canon, particularly in Genesis, cities are portrayed negatively. From their origins with one of Cain’s children (see Genesis 4:17) to the corrupted cities of Babel (Genesis 11) and Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 14), cities are the places of corruption. Even in the Book of Mormon, Lehi and his family had to leave the city for the wilderness in order to live righteously.

What lies behind this negative assessment? Cities, it might be said, represent human will, wisdom, and experience. There is nothing city-like or even architectural in the Garden of Eden—no evidence of human will, experience, or wisdom. Only eating the forbidden fruit was evidence of will, but that act was incompatible with dwelling in the garden; it is not until they leave the garden and build an altar that the text presents evidence of anything structural or architectural produced by humans. Throughout the Bible, subsequently, cities are seen as evil to the extent that the exercise of human will associated with them is in fact negative. But, rather suddenly, in Revelation, we have a city that comes “down from God out of heaven” (Revelation 21:2). That it comes from heaven is key. *This* city represents human will and wisdom perfected by God. Because the new creation is a city and not a garden, there is no simple return to the Garden of Eden, which would imply losing the experience and wisdom gained in mortal life. Rather, the new creation suggests that all that has been passed through in the wake of the fall can be enjoyed as purified, perfected entities in God’s presence. The city doesn’t represent just God’s will—the creation story suggests that God’s will is expressed through the creation of the natural world and not through the building of

cities. Rather, it represents human will consecrated to God. The city, as an earthly entity, is redeemed through heaven's intervention.

It might be appropriate here to talk about the city of Enoch. LDS scripture teaches that Enoch led a city where the people "were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them" (Moses 7:18). The city was called Zion, and eventually the city "was taken up into heaven" (Moses 7:21). The New Jerusalem that John sees descending from heaven is—symbolically at least—Enoch's perfected city, where human will and wisdom are aligned with God's desires. Support for this interpretation comes from the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 9, where, in making covenant promises to Noah, the Lord says, "When men shall keep all my commandments, Zion [shall] again come on the earth, the city of Enoch which I have caught up unto myself" (Genesis 9:21 JST).

In the end, however, the New Jerusalem is more than a city. It has at its core a fruitful tree and a river. That is, the New Jerusalem is, at its center, a garden. The carvings in the Old Testament temples were symbolic representations of nature as it had existed in Eden and would exist again in the New Jerusalem. Just as God was symbolically present in the Old Testament temple but actually present in the Garden of Eden and the New Jerusalem, garden elements are symbolically present in the Mosaic temple but actually present in the first and last temples. This nature symbolism is itself suggestive of God's presence—an idea that makes sense given the fact that the flowers, plants, and gourds are God's own creations.

Orientation

The fifth connection between the Garden of Eden and the Mosaic temple concerns orientation, and it can be dealt with more briefly than most of the other connections. Beale notes that just as Israel's temple was to be built on a mountain and to face east, the Garden of Eden faced east and was positioned on a mountain.¹¹ Orientation to the east, symbolically anticipating the coming of the Lord, is absent from the book of Revelation. The new temple-city has gates on all four sides, and all four cardinal directions are named without any one being privileged (see Revelation 21:12–13). This is no surprise: in the new creation, where there is no longer any need to anticipate God's delayed presence, east has lost its special significance. God is present all of the time.

The forbidden

Beale's next point similarly concerns something common to the garden and the Old Testament temple but absent in the New Jerusalem. He points out that touching either the tree of knowledge of good and evil (in the garden) or the ark of the covenant (in the temple) results in death. Moreover, both the tree and the ark (which contained the law) are sources of wisdom.¹² It is interesting to speculate about the symbolism behind the idea that the act of "touching" knowledge is worthy of death. Perhaps the real worry concerns attempting to handle wisdom on one's own terms rather than on God's. Regardless, as already intimated, there is no mention of the tree of knowledge of good and evil in Revelation. This, of course, makes perfect sense, since the people of the New Jerusalem have already partaken of it along with Adam and Eve. There is, it seems, no longer anything that will cause death for those who touch it: death and pain are done away. The tree of knowledge represents the task of mortality and its accompanying pains and difficulties, and these have no place in the new creation.

Rivers

Marking his seventh connection between Eden and the temple, Beale argues that since the postexilic temple, Ezekiel's vision of the temple, and the temple-city in Revelation all have rivers, Eden, which also has a river, should be grouped with these temples.¹³ Eden, in fact, has *four* rivers flowing in it (and, specifically, out of it), while Revelation has only one river, apparently in the city's middle. (Whether that river actually flows out of the city is

not stated.) Interestingly, while the Genesis text gives very little description of the Garden of Eden, five full verses are devoted to describing its rivers. Clearly, rivers are important in the Genesis account. They are also key in the new creation, where it is said that God “will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely” (Revelation 21:6). The book of Revelation provides several hints about the symbolic meaning of the river: it is called the “river of water of life,” and it proceeds out of the throne (Revelation 22:1). It is thus clear that the river symbolizes the eternal life that God grants. If we assume that the new creation’s river does *not* flow out of the city, we might see Eden’s river as symbolic of God’s attempt to offer eternal life to the four corners of the world. But since the New Jerusalem is the whole world, there is no point in having the river flow out of the city.

While the new creation does feature a river, it should be noted that the text says that there “was no more sea” (Revelation 21:1). The sea often represents chaos and evil in scripture—think of Noah’s flood, the parting of the Red Sea, and the disciples’ astonishment when Jesus calms the water. The Genesis text seems, so to speak, to muddy the waters a little bit on this point; there, all aspects of the creation are called “good.” Yet a closer reading reveals that, at least in Genesis, God did not actually create the seas. In Genesis 1:2, God’s spirit moves upon waters already present, already existent. In the second day of creation, God creates “a firmament in the midst of the waters” (Genesis 1:6), and on the third day, the waters are gathered together so that there will be dry land (see Genesis 1:9–10). At no point in this account is water actually created, and it is “the gathering together of the waters”—not the water itself—that is called good (Genesis 1:9–10).

A more complete discussion of the theology of evil and chaos is beyond the scope of this paper, but Genesis 1 suggests that God does not create evil but rather limits and controls it.¹⁴ The natural state is for water to overwhelm everything (as before the creation or as in the flood); only God’s ongoing actions prevent this. In the second creation, because evil has been completely vanquished and does not appear in the city, the sea disappears. The very definition of “the new heaven and new earth” in Revelation is heaven and earth *minus* the sea.¹⁵ Consider closely the way that John begins his description of the new creation: “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea” (Revelation 21:1). The primary defining characteristic of the new creation is that there is no sea. The new creation is thus an act of subtraction. Not only are the waters subtracted in Revelation as a symbol of evil or chaos, but some of the waters separate heaven and earth in Genesis, suggesting that they originally helped to separate humans from God. The absence of these waters in the new creation implies a lack of separation between God and humanity, an idea that—as we have seen—is well developed in other ways in the final chapters of the book of Revelation.¹⁶

Why, though, is there still a river when the sea is no more? The symbolism of the river is actually quite different from that of the sea. The sea is a symbol of evil and chaos in part because it is directionless and purposeless. The river, on the other hand, evinces purpose because it flows in a particular direction and toward a particular end. Moreover, although the sea is no more in Revelation, there is still a lake of fire—albeit outside the city or outside the new creation. Evil and chaos still exist at the end of time—this is logical since they existed before the first creation—but they no longer affect the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem.

Residence

Beale opens his discussion of the eighth link between the garden and the temple with the observation that, contrary to common usage, “the garden” and “Eden” are not synonymous.¹⁷ The Genesis text records that a river went out of Eden to water the garden, meaning that “Eden” and “the garden” are two distinct spaces (see Genesis 2:10). Beale suggests that this arrangement is typical in the ancient world, where a palace would be adjacent to a garden. In this case, then, God’s residence (Eden) would be next to the garden where Adam and Eve lived. Note, however, that in the book of Revelation, God’s throne is in the midst of the city, not off to the side or at a distance.

This means that the New Jerusalem does not merely mark a return to the garden, where humans lived next to (and therefore apart from) God and God could freely visit. Rather, life in the New Jerusalem means dwelling in the midst of God—in God’s very own habitation. Before the fall, human beings dwelt near God; in the new creation, they dwell in God’s home. Having passed through mortal experience makes it possible to enjoy God’s presence in a way that was not possible before the fall.

Ezekiel’s witness

Beale’s ninth and final argument for interpreting the Garden of Eden as a temple is simply that that is how Ezekiel interprets it (see Ezekiel 28:13–14).¹⁸ Although Ezekiel’s immediate audience in the text in question is the ruler of Tyre, the language points to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and describes the garden as a temple—specifically, the “holy mountain of God.” Along the way, Ezekiel touches on virtually every theme explored in this paper. The text even contains a list of precious gemstones and gold, which are described as Adam’s “covering” or clothing (Ezekiel 28:13). This in particular makes a nice link to the New Jerusalem where, as already discussed, that clothing—symbolic of the high priest—becomes the foundation of the city. Through Ezekiel’s writings, the link between the Garden of Eden and the New Jerusalem—and, in particular, Adam’s priestly role—is emphasized. Indeed, Ezekiel’s text serves as a nice capstone to this discussion.

Conclusion

Twice in the final chapters of Revelation we hear, “I am . . . the beginning and the end.” While it is unlikely that Revelation was the last book of the Bible actually written, if we choose to read it in its canonical context we might take those words as reason enough to search for commonalities between the Bible’s beginning and its end. I opened this paper by proposing that the first creation was a temple in a garden, and the new creation is a garden in a temple. As we have seen in taking Gregory Beale as guide, the Garden of Eden was a temple, and a close reading of the book of Revelation shows a garden in the midst of the eschatological city, a city that is itself a temple. Not only is there a close association between the two texts, but also something of an inversion. In the New Jerusalem, we see the priesthood extended, the presence of God more fully realized, and evil banished. At every point in studying the first and final texts of the Bible together, we discover intriguing insights that nuance our understanding of both texts.

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NOTES

1. Gregory K. Beale, “Eden, the Temple, and the Church’s Mission in the New Creation,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48/1 (March 2005): 5–31.
2. Beale, “Eden, the Temple, and the Church’s Mission in the New Creation,” 7.
3. Beale, “Eden, the Temple, and the Church’s Mission in the New Creation,” 7–8.

4. Beale, "Eden, the Temple, and the Church's Mission in the New Creation," 8.
5. Beale, "Eden, the Temple, and the Church's Mission in the New Creation," 8.
6. Daniel C. Peterson, "Nephi and His Asherah," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000): 16–25.
7. Peterson, "Nephi and His Asherah," 22, emphasis in the original.
8. Throughout the Old Testament, "covering" is frequently equivalent to atonement. A covering covers sins—not in the sense of "covering up," but in the sense of "covering for."
9. Alma 32 has been the object of study in a previous Mormon Theology Seminar project. See Adam S. Miller, ed., *An Experiment on the Word: Reading Alma 32* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2014).
10. Beale, "Eden, the Temple, and the Church's Mission in the New Creation," 8.
11. Beale, "Eden, the Temple, and the Church's Mission in the New Creation," 8.
12. Beale, "Eden, the Temple, and the Church's Mission in the New Creation," 8.
13. Beale, "Eden, the Temple, and the Church's Mission in the New Creation," 8–9.
14. For an important study of this theme, see Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).
15. Adam Miller provided this formulation in the course of the discussions that led to this book. See his post, "Omnibus Make-Up Comments – 21:1–9," <http://revsem.blogspot.com/2009/06/omnibus-make-up-comments-211-9.html>.
16. It might be further noted that the intertextual reading offered here suggests that the creation account in Genesis be read more symbolically and less literally than usual.
17. Beale, "Eden, the Temple, and the Church's Mission in the New Creation," 9.
18. Beale, "Eden, the Temple, and the Church's Mission in the New Creation," 10.

The Fruit of Eden's Tree: The Bride, the Book, and the Water of Life in Revelation

Brandie R. Siegfried

Contrary to its reputation as the book of death and destruction (of symbolic beasts, soul-wrenching judgment, and several ends-of-things), Saint John's Revelation is a book that also dwells, often and with fascination, on various symbols of life. The visionary meshing of images—especially the figures of the New Jerusalem, the bride, the book of life, the tree of life, the water of life—suggests abundance: inheritance not of perishable goods but of eternal goods, books not merely about life but about generation, cities not only restored but new-made and ravishingly reflective of heavenly geometries and their reorienting perspectives, water not only available to quench thirst but freely offered for salving the soul. Jesus's simple declaration "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10) seems to have washed through John's consciousness with a reviving awareness, a budding and wild flourishing of visionary vigor that allowed many of these ancient religious and literary symbols—bride, book, tree, and water—to generate new possibilities for understanding human destiny.

In addition to being highly visual, the book of Revelation is also an echo. Quotations from most of the major books of the Hebrew Bible, as well as paraphrases of key teachings of Jesus from the New Testament, may easily be discerned. Revelation's own strains, moreover, are frequently repeated in the Doctrine and Covenants, providing intricacies of perception and attunement that rely heavily on renewed attention to ancient things, as well as to more recent history. Of special interest here is a particular development from the more recent past: the early seventeenth-century King James Version (KJV) of Revelation. This particular English rendering provides a tapestry of skillful word-weavery and multitone hue; it deserves special attention since it belongs to a category of thought and feeling concerned with translation as the disclosure of what Paul Ricoeur calls "unprecedented worlds."¹ It is a translation self-consciously based on the premise that even everyday language (the vernacular) can pry open startling new spiritual possibilities.

Language has spirit. Ricoeur is helpful for thinking about this:

By the spirit of language we mean not just some decorative excess or effusion of subjectivity, but the capacity of language to open up new worlds. Poetry and myth are not just nostalgia for some forgotten world. They constitute a disclosure of unprecedented worlds, an opening on to other possible worlds which transcend the established limits of our actual world. . . . The adequate self-understanding of man is dependent on [the poetic] dimension of language as a disclosure of possibility.²

One of the early readers of the King James Version of Revelation, Sir Thomas Browne, developed a related idea: "Now for my life, it is a miracle of thirty years, which to relate, were not a history, but a piece of poetry, and would sound to common ears like a fable. . . and though I seem on earth to stand, on tiptoe in heaven."³ Browne here contemplates the "virtue of charity" and concludes that shifting his experience into correspondence with the Bible's poetic or mythical framework provides him with glimpses of something deep within—yet well beyond—his own personhood. Language used this way gives him a tiptoe hold on Jacob's ladder for a revealing peep into the heavens.

Any modern form that takes up Revelation also takes up this special capacity of language to reveal the possibility of transcendence. But it does so, paradoxically, by making time the bearer of miracles. "With all respect to heaven,

the scene of miracle is here, among us,” writes Marilynne Robinson in her meditation on what the New Testament reveals. “The eternal as an idea is much less preposterous than time, and this very fact should seize our attention.”⁴ I imagine myself sitting at table with Robinson, Browne, and Ricoeur, conversing with them about the necessity of time as the form from which narrative emerges. Narrative, they suggest, reveals purpose and moral meaning within the variability and vulnerability of human experience. “What is eternal must always be complete, if my understanding is correct. So it is possible to imagine that time was created in order that there might be narrative,” Robinson suggests. “Event, sequence, and causation, ignorance and error, retribution, atonement. A word, a phrase, a story falls on rich or stony ground and flourishes as it can, possibility in a sleeve of limitation.”⁵ Robinson’s words nudge us to recognize the way that the book of Revelation, especially in its English avatar, cherishes human vulnerability and plants in our compound nature the seeds of a story that will flourish into a fullness of life. “Certainly time is the occasion for our strangely mixed nature, in every moment differently compounded,” she continues, “so that often we surprise ourselves, and always scarce know ourselves, and exist in relation to experience, if we attend to it and its plainness does not disguise it from us, as if we were visited by revelation.”⁶

In the final chapter of Revelation, there are two scenes particularly striking in this regard. However, before going directly to them, I want to use three verses from a previous chapter as a telescope for viewing details within the broader landscape of which that final chapter is part. In Revelation 21:7–8, a dramatic juxtaposition forms a narrative hinge on which the door to a more expansive view of the New Jerusalem swings open. The divine throne viewed earlier in the vision is now linked to inheritance, and God insists, “He that overcometh. . . shall be my son.” If there are any doubts as to what is to be overcome, the list in verse 8 gives specific examples, all of which contrast starkly with the theme of abundance: “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.” These contrasting images represent ways of limiting, distorting, or outright ending life’s potential, and they collectively constitute a “second death.” This death is in turn metaphorically constituted as a “lake which burneth with fire and brimstone,” an image set off against the freely flowing water of the fountain of life. The juxtaposition of the fountain of the “water of life” and the “lake which burneth” implies that there are moral implications and consequences for how and why we thirst. Given that thirst sometimes refers to spiritual seeking and sometimes to those who stand in material need, and that frequently scripture suggests that one is satisfied in attending to the other, it begins to look like the New Jerusalem must be conceived as something more than a complete ideal resting at the end of time. We are invited to understand the New Jerusalem as also being fully present in any material case where life is made more abundant. In this sense, the kingdom of heaven is “at hand” or in the doing.

In verse 9 the vision moves from the prospect of inheritance back to “the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” In the following verses this bride is revealed as the “holy Jerusalem,” and again we are invited to blend two images into one. The bride’s capacity for regeneration is framed in terms of holy beauty, and the city’s splendor is likewise developed in terms of incandescence. In short, the graphic but relatively simple metaphors of the living fountain and the burning lake give way to a more spectacular, more complex series of symbols in verses 9–27. To say the least, this is the point in the vision where the theme of abundance becomes mind-boggling in its splendor, requiring our imagination to stretch if it is to accommodate the full breadth and depth of the grandeur. Yet it is also the point in the narrative where we sense a fine equipoise between abundance and thirsting, between narrowing intimacy and broadening inclusiveness. The desire to “worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness” (1 Chronicles 16:29; Psalms 29:2; 96:9) is perhaps a good place from which to view the elaborate images attending this spectacular reintroduction of the bride. Elaine Scarry reminds us that beauty prompts in us a desire to orient ourselves more fully toward it, and then urges us to somehow replicate it; we are also inspired to magnify rather than diminish the

beautiful. To put it another way, the beautiful “fills the mind yet invites the search for something beyond itself.” As Scarry further explains, “But simultaneously what is beautiful prompts the mind to move chronologically back in search of precedents and parallels, to move forward into new acts of creation. . .to bring things into relation, and does all this with a kind of urgency as though one’s life depended on it.”⁷ To worship God “in the beauty of holiness” is thus to reorient, create, search, and connect people and events across time. The bride is a symbol for this mode of holy beauty, and reminds us of what Thomas Aquinas movingly wrote: that charity presupposes rather than excludes the erotic, a point to which I will turn in a moment.

With these earlier segments of Revelation in mind—one that contrasts an abundant life with a second death, the other that asserts the special spiritual capacity of beauty—we return to the two scenes in Revelation 22 that are the main focus of this discussion. The first of these is when the panoramic view of the New Jerusalem’s dazzling geometry narrows to a close-up shot of a surprisingly garden-like street scene:

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:1-2)

Despite the KJV’s awkward description of the tree being “on either side of the river,” one thing is clear: it is central, and it is plural. (The 1526 Tyndale translation stresses that plurality: “In the midst of the street of it / and on either side of the river was there a wood of life”—the river is surrounded by a *forest* full of life.)⁸

In the second scene—in the same chapter and approaching the very end of the book—the tree of life and the water of life make a final appearance, but this time they are explicitly linked to the advent of Christ and to the welcoming call of a compelling couple:

And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. . . . I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come.

And let him that heareth say, Come.

And let him that is athirst come.

And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. (Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17)⁹

Who is this welcoming bride? Where previously she was an iteration of the beautiful new city, here she is within that city. Perhaps she is the potential for more world-making; perhaps she is a reflection of the feminine Wisdom of the Old Testament. She might embody *shekinah*, God’s glory. But at the very least, we should consider her as one of the brackets to the Bible in its entirety, the bride of Revelation as a bookend to the bride of Eden. They are less reflections of one another than reinscriptions—prologue and epilogue to the tale of life.

Both figures give us the possibility of new worlds. “When Eve bit into the apple,” writes Barbara Grizzuti Harrison,

she gave us the world as we know the world—beautiful, flawed, dangerous, full of being. [She] planted in my blood and bone and flesh a variable human love. . . .The mingling, melding, braiding of good and mischief in every soul—the fusion of good and bad in intent and act—is what makes us recognizable (and delicious) to one another. . . .She set in motion the wheels of salvation.¹⁰

To put it another way, with Eve’s first act of longing—to be like God—humanity became both actual and potential. The double-trunked nature of Eve’s tree—two kinds of knowledge (good and evil) and two strands of reality (actual and potential)—may be an instructive pattern for the centrality and plurality of the bride’s tree of life in Revelation. This makes sense if the tree of knowledge was a euphemism for intimacy (and thus life-making, a tree of life) before it was a symbol of peril and precipitous fall. Perhaps Eve’s first *knowing* embrace of another—Adam—only later became a metaphor for humanity’s departure from paradise and entrance into the revelatory mode called time. If so, the knowing embrace might be seen as the grounds of revelation.

Certainly the divine word on divine nature suggests that, had Eve been content to remain in that snug nest, heaven would have had to resort to other means for humanity’s departure. To be “the apple of [God’s] eye,” we are told, is to be like a fledgling encouraged to fly: “As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them upon her wings: So the Lord. . .made [Israel] ride on the high places of the earth” (Deuteronomy 32:10–13). The image of the she-eagle rousting her offspring out of the nest, forcing them to develop the capabilities they had inherited from her, spreading her wings under them when their own strength fails, and rejoicing when at last they “ride upon the high places of the earth” suggests that Eve’s will mirrored the divine will. The new worlds that came of humanity’s first embrace—an encircling of similitude and difference reflected in both the watchful gyres of the she-eagle and the entwined forms of knowledge and life brought about by Eve—are amplified in the New Jerusalem. In the five embraces that follow, we return to the notion of translation as world disclosure, an amplification that relies upon the specific forms (root and branch) of English.

First embrace: Sacred history and the genealogical tree

The 1611 King James Bible was produced by a nation defined by the Reformation—a movement in part driven by a desire to make the word of God available in the vernacular (that is, in a less exalted tongue). Although the scholars of the KJV were not particularly concerned about the masses, William Tyndale, who in the late 1520s and early 1530s heroically translated the Bible into English despite the threat of a death sentence, insisted that even a ploughboy should be able to read the word of God. In response to a cleric’s declaration that the Pope was a better lawgiver for the people than God, Tyndale exclaimed, “If God spare my life, ere many years, I will cause the boy that driveth the plow to know more of the scriptures than thou dost!”¹¹ As Tyndale would have it, scripture was to be remade in the image of common folk, in the language through which farmers and merchants, shipwrights and playwrights, lived their lives. Almost a century later, the translators of the new KJV imagined that the Bible would be the source for fundamentally refashioning individuals, societies, the world—but there was no getting around the fact that its power to do so would be enhanced, paradoxically, by refashioning scripture in the workaday languages of those individuals and their societies.¹² In short, a vernacular bible meant that the Holy Word would be embodied in the language of shoemakers, a further manifestation of the divine Incarnation by which Deity was born into mortality and walked the earth as a carpenter.

In addition, the dawning moments of the Reformation coincided with a growing interest in Hebraic knowledge. Lore from the rabbinical tradition was collected and printed in, among other sources, the *Magna Biblia Rabbinica* (Venice, 1516).¹³ This meant that from Tyndale’s early translation to the King James Version’s authorized rendition, the English Bible was attuned to rabbinical commentaries and custom, as well as to nuances and

inflections buried in both Hebrew and Greek scripture. This is not to say that the English translations were without fault (far from it), but it underscores the degree to which the creed *sola scriptura* always included nonscriptural branches of reading and commentary attached to the main body of scripture. For the sake of intelligibility in translation, there was simply no getting around the fact that human understanding and experience would gloss the divine book. The reform, then, was more than simply dispensing with Latin (a linguistic ease-of-access issue) or shunning ecclesiastical assertions of doctrine not found in scripture (a matter of clearing out the theological debris). It was just as deeply rooted in the radical notion that even ploughboys ought to study and understand the most valuable words available in print—and that those words, in the common tongue (connoting common experience as the further touchstone of spiritual understanding), were more worthy of reverence than the icons of the traditional church.

With root and branch in hand (that is, with the Bible and its history of branching commentary as the focus of theological attention), Protestants flirted with the notion that the tree of knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life were, if not actually one and the same, provocatively entwined. This vision of entangled trees came about for a variety of reasons (including a rabbinical tradition that depicted the tree of life flowering from the Torah's scrolled knowledge), but one is of special interest here. Reading the Bible, it turned out, meant discovering that genealogies had always been part of sacred writ. As delineated in the Bible, lineage is both an expression of divine *intention* as well as worthy of continuous divine *attention*. Indeed, divine creation in Genesis quickly gives way to family history. The book carefully and consistently traces family lineage (who begat whom), a lineage that in turn bears the fruit of family history (who did what and why), and so on. In other words, scripture traces the continuous process of emergence into life and the experience of moral awareness about *being* in that life. For this reason, by the 1550s the old distinction between an elevated spiritual eternity and a mundane material perpetuity was seriously called into question. In short, for early Protestants, scripture presented a narrative in which the tree of knowledge (family history as the repository of the knowledge of good and evil) is tightly twined with the tree of life (the family tree, by which the materiality of eternity is divinely anticipated—and articulated—via posterity).

While the tree of knowledge often had been juxtaposed with the cross (as the tree of life) in Christian iconography, the cross was now more closely related to Christ's genealogy—so carefully recorded in the New Testament—and hence to humanity's ultimate source of ancestry.¹⁴ This was not merely a fashionable theological premise that flared momentarily and then quickly died. A good example of its enduring grip on Protestant thought is found almost a century later in Thomas Browne's writings on the virtue of charity (from the same piece cited above). Browne notes that he felt compelled to help beggars, irrespective of off-putting "scenical and accidental differences between us," because under the "miserable outsides" was a "soul of the same alloy with our own, whose genealogy is God as well as ours."¹⁵

This tree of knowledge/life was used to illustrate a variety of manuscripts and books. In several instances, chronicles, commonplace books, theological treatises, essays on natural philosophy, marriage agreements, and books on husbandry all sported the blazon of the twin-trunked tree. In the interest of space, one image will have to stand for the many in which this twining of tree symbols is graphically illustrated. In this particular example, the saintly Ludwig is portrayed as the root of a double-trunked tree, branching off in two family lines. Imbedded as it is in narratives of good and evil, yet marking the literal history of creation's continual regeneration, one's lineage (or family tree) is always, this print suggests, both a tree of knowledge and a tree of life. Note the background scenes of historical strife and eventual union of the kingly heirs at the top of the page: evil as well as good are clearly imbedded in the family line. The woodcut posits that spiritual salvation and political salvation are twined and require the embracing of the doubled trunk. Both the tree of knowledge and the tree of life are rooted in ancestry (in this case, embodied by the reclining Ludwig who is "sleeping" in death and "dreaming" a vision of the future

union), embraced in the present by the symbol of legitimacy, with an eye toward a future kingdom of peace and tranquility (the kings at the top are swearing to each other by their scepters).¹⁶

In fact, legitimate authority is visually defined as the embrace of that doubled tree, paradoxically proving the heir's right to life and inheritance and saving him from the evil of his own history. The two kings who share ancestry with the Roman figure representing legal order and fealty are meant to see that their common roots should promote brotherhood. Moreover, the illustration takes for granted an audience familiar with the popular debates about the "divine right" traditionally understood to undergird Christian monarchy—and here, clinging to the tree of life is portrayed as *prelude* to the exercise of the divine right of kingship. Browne's observation about charity being bound up with an awareness of our divine genealogy, and this further image of an heir's "right" to inheritance emerging from the embrace of the twining trees that make up such genealogy, together suggest a clear theological orientation: rightful power and authority must always bend to support a practical goodwill that orients action toward those in need.

With this notion of divine right linked to divine genealogy, we return to the throne imagery in Revelation where we are meant to hear the echo of the rebuke given to Jehoiakim in Jeremiah 22. There Jehoiakim is seen as being misguided in his attempts to recover the glory of Solomon through elaborate building projects supported by means of uncompensated labor and restrictions on freedom.¹⁷ His is not a righteously conceived nor divinely approved city. Jehoiakim is thus enjoined to emulate his father, Josiah, whose throne was based on a true and faithful form of righteous sovereignty: "Are you a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. *Is not this to know me? says the Lord*" (Jeremiah 22:15–16, emphasis added).¹⁸ Scripture defines the true rights of inheritance in telling terms. A divine right is the correct use of wealth, power, and privilege in righteousness, which in turn is to correctly judge or see to the cause of the poor and needy. Keep this image in mind when, in a moment, we turn back to the book of Revelation to consider what it might mean to have right to the tree of life.

To conclude the first point: The translation of the divine word into the common vernacular was seen, in the years leading up to and well beyond the translation of the King James Version of Revelation, as an appropriate reiteration of the Incarnation. The Bible itself seemed to reinforce this parallel thematically: family trees unified the tree of life and the tree of knowledge. In both vernacular and genealogy, spiritual and moral awareness are given material expression.

Second embrace: Nature, scripture, and the alphabet of man

In the early seventeenth century, Francis Bacon wrote, "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested."¹⁹ Thomas Browne, penning related thoughts several years later, would turn Bacon's notion inside out to reveal a theological core. "There is surely a piece of Divinity in us, something that was before the elements, and owes no homage unto the sun," Browne tells us. "Nature," he writes, "tells me I am the image of God, as well as scripture: he that understands not thus much, hath not his introduction or first lesson, and is yet to begin the alphabet of man."²⁰ Where Bacon sees a literary feast of ideas requiring the discernment of a gourmand, Browne sees a humanity trying to write itself back into its divine heritage.

Bacon and Browne both had in mind the English translation of Saint John's Revelation when they penned their respective observations. More particularly, they had in mind a passage cherished by seventeenth-century Protestants of all stripes:

And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire: And he had in his hand a little book open. . . And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter. (Revelation 10:1-2, 9-10)

In previous passages, the command to eat has been associated with the tree of life (Revelation 2:7) and hidden manna (Revelation 2:17), cuing us to see these comestibles, spread out in a larger symbolic feast, as related to the edible nature of this sweet-as-honey book. The full savor of fruit, manna, and little book (sweet and bitter) was to be found in the earlier stories from which they were plucked: the books of Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus, as well as the subsequent Wisdom literature, histories, and prophecies that added the flavorful spices of continued relevance. For Bacon, however, to “chew and digest” Revelation would be to savor its various morsels in combination with different bites from *all* other books, but most especially in the study of the other divine “book”: Nature. Bacon is most famous for advocating a new scientific method (inductive and experimental, in contrast to Aristotle's “old” deductive and syllogistic method), but there is another practice he advocated, one which many of the most famous members of England's scientific Royal Society would later espouse: the two divine books (the Bible and Nature) should be used to interpret one another, and neither could be fully understood without reference to the other.

Browne's alphabet of man, on the other hand, is a response to Gregory Nasianzen's assertion that “speculation. . . if it be not stayed with the bridle of fear to offend God, is dangerous.”²¹ In fact, Gregory's point had been quoted and elaborated upon at length in English by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer in his preface to the Great Bible (1540). An influential essay, the preface forcefully asserts Gregory's notion that “the fear of God must be the first beginning, and as it were an ABC, or an introduction to all them that shall enter to the very true and most fruitful knowledge of Holy Scriptures.”²² Fear, according to Gregory, leads to obedience, and then to the “cleansing of the flesh,” until finally there is “the illumination of the Holy Ghost, the end of all our desires, and the very light whereby the verity of scriptures is seen and perceived.”²³

Browne rejects Gregory's placement of fear as the ground for cleansing and illumination, replacing it with *recognition*: we are the image of God. The *purpose* of cleansing and the *kind* of illumination that emerge from recognition are more in line with his idea of charity than with fear. Moreover, when he writes that “Nature tells me I am the image of God, as well as scripture,” he could be saying simply that both nature and scripture tell him he is the image of God. That is, nature and scripture, tree and book, testify of the same truth. But the ambiguity of Browne's wording sets up a parallel possibility. He could also be saying that nature tells him that he is in the image of both God and scripture. In this second sense, nature reveals to him that he is somehow both the writer (as God is author of creation) and the written (as scripture is history-made-poetry via divine direction). He further explains that

there are mystically in our faces certain characters which carry in them the motto of our souls, wherein he that cannot read A.B.C. may read our natures. . . The finger of God hath set an inscription upon all his works. . . By these letters God calls the stars by their names, and by this alphabet Adam assigned to every creature a name peculiar to its nature.²⁴

For Browne, we come into the world already attuned to the divine alphabet, to a givenness of meaning in the phenomena around us and in “the motto of our Soules.” We are both already inscribed and inscribing.

This Edenic alphabet (God’s letters, which are also the source for the alphabet of man) reveals to humankind its own double movement as both root and branch, inhabiting simultaneously inward-oriented and outward-reaching worlds of meaning. To understand this, according to Browne, is merely to *begin* the introduction to what he calls the alphabet of man. Our first lesson, as Browne suggests, is that we are always, first and last, related to the meaning of divinity, and in that sense we are utterly bracketed in the alpha and omega of God’s embrace.

Third embrace: Protestant midrash and the fecundity of interpretation

In the act of embracing the word of God in their own language, the English also took to heart the ideal of midrash: not merely the third-century collection of Hebrew glosses on the Hebrew Bible, but the *technique* of interpretation that it exemplified. Indeed, midrash itself might be seen as the twining of the tree of knowledge and the tree of life in terms similar to those mentioned above. Steven Marx explains that sixteenth-century readers were profoundly influenced by “rabbinic authors of the Midrash as well as St. Augustine and other patristic commentators [who] held that multiple interpretations of the same text, developed by earnest readers, gave evidence of the divine fertility of the original.”²⁵ Protestant reformers devoutly believed that vernacular versions of the Bible significantly amplified the potency of such divine fertility. Simply put, English scripture would bring to light things that might have remained obscure in the Latin. Tyndale’s preface to his 1526 translation frequently makes this claim, stressing the various new forms of love, emerging from English, which will germinate and flourish in the reader’s heart.

The translators of the King James Bible pushed this notion further, insisting that readers need not be satisfied with the interpretations proffered by the famous and learned such as Jerome or Augustine: scripture “is not an herb, but a tree, or rather a whole paradise of trees of life, which bring forth fruit every month, and the fruit thereof is for meat, and the leaves for medicine.” After elaborating on the sheer feast such readings yield, the translators insist that the English version is “a fountain of most pure water springing up unto everlasting life” and the “fruition of an inheritance immortal.”²⁶ Hence, translation could be seen as a kind of midrash since it necessarily participates in a practice of interpretation that expands and elaborates the biblical narrative (almost inevitably, thanks to extended connotative possibilities in the new language). In that sense, translation is made up of both root and branch. The roots of ancient language must be carefully, denotatively, preserved in new soil, even as the new language will provide further figurative grafts of meaning via its own wealth of connotative associations.

The term *midrash* derives from the Hebrew verb meaning “to study” or “to search out,” and as Joseph Heineman explains, it signifies a “way of delving more deeply than the literal meaning,” an “instrument for imparting contemporary relevance to biblical events.”²⁷ The extensive marginal glosses and illustrations of the Geneva Bible, for instance, are evidence of the vigor with which reformers set about amplifying scripture. Like new-formed branches growing from the original tree, these glosses were experienced as fruit-bearing expansions of the main text (and not always, as modern readers often mistakenly assume, an attempt at hedging meaning). Though Tyndale and the King James translators frowned on interpretative skirmishing that grew out of pride, they were exuberant about the unifying prospects of interpretative efforts emerging from devotion to God and love of neighbor. Tyndale would insist that charity was the ultimate key to unlocking scripture, even in complicated theological questions regarding divine law. “For only love and mercifulness understandeth the law, and else nothing,” he writes, “and he that hath not that written in his heart, shall never understand the law, no, though all the angels of heaven went about to teach him.”²⁸ Using various analytical techniques, the midrashic glosses in Tyndale’s New Testament (Lutheran in flavor) and the Geneva Bible (Calvinist in savor) carefully unfold symbolic

meanings latent in the scriptural texts, “linking the various parts of the Bible together by the discovery of typological patterns, verbal echoes, and rhythms of repetition.”²⁹

The Talmud refers to such analysis as “a hammer which awakens the slumbering sparks in the rock,” for it generates new stories, dense revisions of the original, and more symbolic expressions that warrant further explication.³⁰ A phrase peculiar to Protestant writing emphasizes this point: scripture is “the lively word of God.” “Lively” underscores the spark of life found in the Bible, with connotations of vigor, joy, and dance. Although the 1611 KJV would eliminate many of the glosses and the illustrations of the earlier English bibles in an effort to curb such exuberant generation, the early embrace of midrash remained firm throughout the seventeenth century.

A good example of rabbinic midrash revived by sixteenth-century readers is “the first midrashic comment on the first word of the Bible [which]. . .links the word *bereshit* (‘in the beginning’) with the word *reshit*. *Reshit* signifies Wisdom, which is personified in the feminine speaker of Proverbs 8:22, ‘God created me as the beginning of his way, the first of his works of old.’”³¹ In classical Hebrew, Wisdom is also synonymous with Torah, or the scriptures. Midrash thus discovers the Bible within the Hebrew letters of its own beginning, the beginning of the world.³² The Gospel of John begins with a similar midrash on Genesis in Greek: “In the beginning was the Word. . .” Jesus himself made midrash a central feature of his teaching. He often used one parable to explain another, and made wordplay, storytelling, and interpretation come together in ways meant to liberate scriptural knowledge from narrow tradition; in this sense, Jesus made scripture lively to his immediate audience. In short, midrash is creative exegesis, a way of imparting contemporary relevance to biblical events.³³

A further feature of midrash intrinsic to the book of Revelation and given special verbal attention in English translation is a design principle in which wonder is developed in a dialectic of revealing and concealing. In a sense, it is as if one steps through one door only to see that there is another for which a key is required; once that is opened, still another door is seen and another key required. In Revelation, there are brackets (within brackets [within brackets]) whereby meaning goes ever deeper. In literature, these moments are often visible in clusters of symbols. Such “nested discovery spaces,” as Marx calls them, appear frequently in the book of Revelation, as a door in the heaven opens in 4:1, the seal of a scroll is opened in 6:1, the temple in heaven is laid open, and the ark of the covenant is seen inside it in 11:19 (upon which, as Richard Cohen suggests, the cherubim embrace),³⁴ and finally, the gates of the city of God are thrown open in a gladsome greeting to all who wish to enter. In fact, in that final scene, when the gates to the city open to reveal that a tree and a river are nested at the heart of the New Jerusalem, we as readers are explicitly invited to embrace the divine fertility of scripture by way of robust interpretation.

Fourth embrace: The roots and branches of English

In thinking of books and trees, we are reminded that words have roots peculiar to their people. Much of the language used in the King James translation is derived from Latinate roots, but key words that flesh out the final scene at the gates of the New Jerusalem are rendered in simple terms derived from Old English. It is worth tracing their lineage to see what fruit they were meant to bear. It should be borne in mind that the words considered here held their various meanings from the early 1500s until at least the late 1880s.

And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. . . I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come.

And let him that heareth say, Come.

And let him that is athirst come.

And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. (Revelation 22: 12–14, 16–22)³⁵

The series of three purely Old English derivations to which I will give special emphasis here—namely, *behold*, *come*, and *offspring*—are part of the answer to the translators' rhetorical query: "What may we bestow," they ask, comparing translation to good husbandry, "nay, what ought we not to bestow upon the vine, the fruit whereof maketh glad the conscience of man, and the stem whereof abideth forever?" Choice spiritual fruit deserves careful word choice. "And this is the word of God," they explain, "which we translate."³⁶ Even the simplest words plucked from the workaday language of everyday people might yield a theology true to the roots of the vine.

The progression of this scene in Revelation is worth noting: we are asked to "behold" Christ coming; that coming is swift and brings reward; the "I" or *character* of the one who comes is defined in terms of brackets—"Alpha and Omega," "beginning and end," "first and last," "root and offspring." Writing, time, order, and generation are linked by their ability to embrace what is between their bracketing being. In this regard, the simple command *behold* is especially interesting, since it, rather than *look* or *see*, is frequently used throughout the King James Version. Why? Because in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English, the command to behold was not taken as merely directing one's attention to something. *Behold* is, rather, a curious term that links seeing with the hand, with grasping. The Old English *bihaldan*, from which *behold* derives, is made up of two elements: the intensifier *bi*, which means "thoroughly" or "completely," and *haldan*, which means "to grab or embrace." To behold is to embrace completely, to grasp or clasp firmly or fervently. There is an extended bodiliness here that *see* or *look* simply could not have captured. The emphasis, note, is not on eyes at all, but on perceiving with the hands. It is no surprise that *behold* was so frequently preferred for describing the intensity of regard between lovers, wherever seeing with the eyes is linked to touching, embracing, and the intimate emotional and physical bonding that intensifies mutual understanding. Interestingly, this fully physical knowing of the lover would lend itself to the more abstract meaning of "seeing with full comprehension." Moreover, partly based on the word *behold*'s common use as a directive for facing another ("behold me" means "regard me" and presupposes clasped hands as two look upon one another) and its equally common use as meaning "to orient" (for instance, to "behold unto shore" meant "steer the ship to shore" and implies holding the rudder firmly against misdirecting waves), the word weds love to wisdom. All of these meanings are invoked by the translators when they explain that the Bible requires listening, reading, and answering "Here am I" when God "stretcheth out his hand and calleth."³⁷

Christ's command is not simply *look*. As the early English version would have it, the divine "I" to be clasped fervently has just been defined in paired terms embracing modes of expression, time, order, and generation. The command is to embrace these things as embraced by God. But what does this mean? Perhaps the answer is woven with the thrice-repeated *come*, another word whose etymological vines were once laden with more connotative fruit than current usage intimates. For instance, it was a common verb for both "reaching toward" and "becoming present at any point or place." If to behold is to firmly embrace what follows, Christ mirrors what he commands by declaring that he is reaching toward us, becoming present to us at particular points of expression, time, order, and generation. "I come," then, is more than merely an announcement of arrival (he is not saying, "I'll be in the City of God at 10:00 tomorrow"); "I come" has to do with *emergence* from within the brackets of alphabets, with *arising* out of being embraced by time, with *being born* of harmony's ordering of diversity, and with *being manifest* in a life that

is lived both deeply (a root) and outwardly (like a flowing spring). Indeed, at the risk of too much wordplay, even the change of modifier to “quickly” (Tyndale has “Behold I come shortly”) could have been taken two different ways in the KJV’s lexicon of meaning. It might describe the rapid flow of time, but “quick” was just as commonly used to mean “life” or “the living” (as in the phrase, “the quick and the dead”). “To come quickly,” then, could mean both “to arrive swiftly” *and* “to emerge lively or full of life.” That all of these things culminate in an image of the “bright and morning star”—the kind of light that is most clearly seen in darkness, is used for orientation in a dimly gleaming world, and then gives way to the birth of a new day—is suggestive of much more than the posting of a divine itinerary. The King James rendering, “And, behold, I come quickly” would thus mean something like “The more you fervently embrace what divinely embraces, the more present and alive I will become to you.”

There are worlds within words, and this becomes astonishingly apparent when other familial meanings of *come* are resurrected to our understanding. Indeed, many of the simplest archaic meanings richly layer the scriptural text with thematic possibility. For instance, the verb form of *come* evolved out of nouns having to do with agricultural concerns, the kinds of things with which huswives and ploughboys were preoccupied (and harks back to the first couple’s shared labor, “to dress the garden” in Eden). The part of a sprout that is ready to be plucked was referred to as the “come,” and it signified that the plant was ready to finish maturing.³⁸ The verb *come* in this regard means to sprout, blossom, or flourish. If we turn back to the closing scene of Revelation and hear the bidding of the bride to “Come,” we might now hear evocative echoes of Christ’s language of quickening that just preceded it. The bride is not merely saying “Enter the city” or “Present yourself at the throne.” The translation is not simply “Step forward,” nor is it “Proceed.” To those who worked with seeds and soil, she is inviting entrance, but with the declarative connotations of “Flourish!” and “You’ve thrived, progressed, and are ready to bear fruit!”

Even more commonly, the word *come* was used to refer to the froth of items that had been immersed in water and thoroughly cooked. In the cookery section of John Worlidge’s book on husbandry, for instance, we find instructions for boiling peas that are inedible because they have been dried and stored for the winter. “Let Pease be taken and steeped in as much Water as will cover them,” we are instructed, “till they Swell and Come, and be so ordered as Barley is for Maulting.”³⁹ According to this passage, one knows that the peas are done by the fact that they have produced froth, just as barley does in the beer-making process. The froth was greatly prized and carefully gathered off the top because it was thought to be a distillation of the fruit’s “virtue”—that is, a condensation of the power by which the plant grew and flourished, an extract thus thought to have special healing and strengthening properties. This is an especially good example because it illustrates how a common mode of preparing food, distilled into one simple word’s common usage, may become a metaphor for preparing the soul. Things as hard and unyielding as dried peas are softened by immersion in water heated by fire. Made new again, they can subsequently sustain and strengthen life. In short, when the bride says “Come!” in the closing scene of Revelation, the English Bible weds this beckoning gesture to homely usage. She might just as well be saying, “Relent, yield, and let your life’s experience of good and evil flow out from your softened state and provide a strengthening and healing cordial for others”—an important gloss, for English speakers, on what it means to be baptized by water and by spirit.

The connotative prospects of ripening crops and boiling peas in the King James Version also has the overall effect of softening the angularity and bejeweled grandeur of the New Jerusalem developed in Revelation 21. In fact, these rural images ring with the familiarity of Jesus’s parables of vineyards, lost coins, mustard seeds, and the shepherd’s all-too-common anxiety over sheep that have wandered. How strange that in the act of remembering the roots of the scripture’s *adopted* language, the form of Jesus’s teaching—everyday experience made parabolic—bears new fruit. Perhaps the success of such grafting should not surprise us since language is where we transform

bodily experience into moral insight. The roots of language may be traced through the bodies and experiences of real persons, and, as leaves on family trees, these persons constitute pages in the book of life.

“I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright and the morning star.” We are now in a position to appreciate the intricate lacing of connotative meanings the King James Version develops via another simple choice of words: *offspring*, not *heir*, *posterity*, *child*, *progeny*, *descendant*, or *successor*. The reason is simple: *offspring* echoes the several meanings discussed above. It literally means “the branch that flows off from a root source” (with connotations of gushing up out of the earth, leaping or shooting up with vigor). Those in darkness can be as thirsty for light as those in a desert are for water: the “root and the offspring” in conjunction with “the bright and the morning star” set water and light together, and the desire for both are recognized in the subsequent invitations: “And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” The power at the heart of this city is the generative power of love (root and offspring) and is again explicitly linked to wisdom (light).

There is an odd tension, however, between the freely offered water of life, and the preceding declaration, “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.” The waters are freely available, but the tree’s fruit requires something particular, something akin to a right. The New Revised Standard Version, relying on different authority, begins the verse with “Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life.” This alternative suggests a cleansing, a renewal—entering the city and eating the fruit of the tree of life is no casual event, but highly ceremonial. Christians must inevitably read the sacrament of baptism into this verse, and that is a good beginning, especially if we keep the pot of boiling peas in mind. In addition, though, we might combine these two particular textual divergences in a pot of midrash, heat it up, and see what further interpretative froth emerges.

On the one hand, the promise of blessing is linked to the doing of commandments. This doing gives way to the right to the tree of life, entrance into the city, and eventually a special form of freedom with which the poetry concludes. By way of prelude, let’s begin with the Ten Commandments: Israel is invited to be free by means of a divine law without which, and left to themselves, they would fall back into the habit of slavery. Herbert McCabe has called the Mosaic law the “charter of liberation,” beginning with God’s explaining, “I have brought you out of slavery;” and following up with a way to avoid various modes of future enslavement (modes far more subtle and common and easy than their experience under the Egyptians, and therefore more dangerous and immediately destructive).⁴⁰ Similarly, in his first recorded sermon, Jesus echoes the liberating framework for the commandments by quoting Isaiah (who quoted Leviticus), saying that he has come to “proclaim release to the captives. . .to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (Luke 4:18–19). He is referring to the year of Jubilee when the land rests, debts are forgiven, slaves are released, and everyone begins anew in freedom (see Leviticus 25:8–55). This was an ideal perhaps never realized, but it stood as the antithesis of worldly cities where entire social, economic, and political systems (for John, writing Revelation: Rome) rested on domination of the poor by the rich, the weak by the strong, the humble by those who set themselves up as gods. It was called a day of atonement (or ransom), an extended Sabbath for the people—and the land—“unto the Lord.”

If to “do his commandments” is to forgive others into forms of freedom, as on the Day of Atonement (or Jubilee), then perhaps we should similarly frame the meaning of “those who wash their robes.” Again, a quick glance at the roots and branches of English gives us an added perspective worth contemplating. The coinage that resulted in the word *atonement* (at-one-ment) was *not* first employed for the biblical translation of a Hebrew word; it was already a common phrase in English (“onement,” “at onement,” “to be atone,” and “to put atone,” all referred to a condition of unity, harmony, or agreement). Among other things, it was a customary term for a bride’s role as the mediator between powerful (often warring) factions. The bride brought families together (at onement) by means of unifying

the literal genealogies of both sides, and it was done within the flesh of her own body. This literal at-onement yielded offspring who held recognized rights to the powers and privileges of both lines. Looking again at the depiction of the symbolic prince clinging to a double-trunked family tree discussed earlier, one sees that he is the offspring meant to embody desired at-onement. This is more than mere reconciliation; it is a notion of peace born of flesh, of a realm renewed by a bride willing to clasp to herself, as her beloved, the son of her family's enemy.⁴¹ There is nothing easy or assured about this potentiality, as this example clearly shows, but it stands as a potentiality nonetheless.

"At onement" was also an idiom of immediacy, as in "all at once" or "all in one moment," and suggests a modifier for the bride's role: to unite in such a way that all time is pulled into an all-at-once. In this sense, the English version limns the divine mystery with the holy (yet fully human) capability for transforming, in the present, the meaning of the past. "Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have right to the tree of life," when fully modulated by "at onement," invites time into eternity (another name for Divinity). Or rather, a mere sequence of events is reborn as poetry. The bride's robes are the vestments of "unprecedented worlds," suggesting that *what was* and *what is* must be considered in light of *what should be* and *what could be*. These are not abstractions. The emphasis on the bride links spiritual regeneration to flesh-and-blood people and their histories of good and evil. As Desmond Tutu and others have strongly urged, the miracle of repentance and forgiveness is that in tandem, they have the power to transform the past. The facts of the past do not change, but the meaning of the past—its formative effects on the lives of real people—can. It is a gift divinely given. And it is a gift we are invited to give one another.

Precisely for this reason, Thomas Browne's fellow countryman George Herbert would choose to dramatize the welcome at the gates of the New Jerusalem in the humble vernacular of home, where Christ is figured as "Love," welcoming the sinner:

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,

Guilty of dust and sin.

But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack

From my first entry in,

Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,

If I lacked anything.

"A guest," I answered, "worthy to be here":

Love said, "You shall be he."

"I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,

I cannot look on thee."

Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,

“Who made the eyes but I?”

Truth, Lord, but I have marr’d them; Let my shame

Go where it doth deserve.”

“And know you not,” says Love, “Who bore the blame?”

“My dear, then I will serve.”

“You must sit down,” says Love, “and taste my meat.”

So I did sit and eat.⁴²

Herbert weds the English idiomatic expression of at-onement to the vision of the bride in Revelation. Meat is bread, reminding us that in preparation for his atonement, Christ would ask his disciples to remember him by making holy and ceremonial the basic human need for food. The homely answer to human frailty—a simple meal, eaten with gratitude and remembrance—was to be the continued means of divine incarnation. Literally fortified, human hands would then continue the deeds of heaven.

Herbert also helps us to think about the musicality of the final welcome at the gates of the New Jerusalem. Because atonement referred to harmony, it was often used to pun on the idea of “attunement”—finding the right note or chord. For Herbert, commandments and vestments have to do with the attunement of prayer, which he links to an alphabet of musical notation. Prayer is “a kind of tune,” a “heaven in ordinary, man well dressed.”⁴³ Perhaps the prayerful harmonizing of righteous doing with ceremonial remembering is what we should hear in Revelation’s swelling welcome. It begins with the duet of “Come!” by the Spirit and the bride, and it gathers power as a chorus of “everyone who hears” sings, “Come.” Then, in a significant shift, the “let everyone who is thirsty come”—now heard as the dynamic harmony of Spirit, bride, and hearers—crescendos with the final line, “Let anyone who wishes, take the water of life as a gift.” The clasp of “behold,” the virtue of “come,” and the generative power of “offspring,” all culminate in the bride’s song of welcome.

Fifth embrace: Another garden, another tree

The harmony that closes Revelation is really the same that opened Genesis. Indeed, the King James Version enhanced the musicality of Genesis, changing the wording of previous translations and, as Adam Nicolson points out, making it “into something larger, more three-dimensional, more operatic, making of these opening words what is in effect a baroque form.”⁴⁴

In the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth. And the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep: and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.
(Genesis 1:1)

This is very similar to the Geneva version of the Bible previously available, but with the addition of the word *face*. The word in Hebrew means “surface,” and surface might have been chosen for the King James Version. But *face*, in its physicality, is more stirring.⁴⁵ “The spirit of God moving on the face of the waters has a mysterious and ghostly humanity to it which neither the modern translations nor Tyndale’s can match. The face of the waters suggests

that the face of God is reflected in them.”⁴⁶ This language would hover in the mind of Joseph Smith when he saw in creation the image of the creator:

The earth rolls upon her wings, and the sun giveth his light by day, and the moon giveth her light by night, and the stars also give their light, as they roll upon their wings in their glory, in the midst of the power of God. . . . And any man who hath seen any or the least of these hath seen God moving in his majesty and power. (D&C 88:45, 47)

The grandeur of the opening lines of Genesis is balanced by the intimacy the image calls up: God is bending close to the elements of creation and remains near throughout. With the culmination of creation in the figure of Eve, that intimacy is extended not only *to* humanity, but *through* it, as Adam joyfully recognizes her as “bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh.” Moreover, given that the current organization of the Bible constitutes, for its readers, a single narrative, the bride at the end of the book might almost be beckoning to Eve. Another common meaning of *come*, after all, is to enter narrative time, as in “this is where we came in.” To come into narrative time is to give moral meaning to experience, and it is in this sense that genealogy is always also a record of divine intimacy extended through humanity. The moment that Eve—bone of bone and flesh of flesh—came into time was the same moment that bodily experience became capable of virtue, which is both the power to grow and the quality of moral excellence.

Seeing Eve and the bride as prologue and epilogue to the Bible—a literary embrace, if you will, of God’s word—brings to mind another famous embrace of the Word. To conclude, we turn to the story of the resurrection, an account in which the scene of human sorrow, frustration, and confusion culminates in a humorous yet poignant moment of misrecognition (see John 20:1–18). Mary, remember, has come to the tomb where Jesus had been laid after his death but finds the stone that had sealed it is gone. She runs and tells Peter and John, who both race to the sepulchre. John arrives first, abruptly stopping at the entrance where, looking in, he sees “the linen clothes lying.” Peter is just behind and passes John, charging straight into the tomb. We can imagine him closely examining the scene, for now more details emerge: he sees not just the linen clothes, but the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’s head, “not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.” Peter and John do not know what to make of these signs. Puzzled, they return home.

Now Mary decides to investigate, her grief wrestling with a desire to understand. Where the two previous investigators had been preoccupied with discarded linens, Mary immediately senses the presence of others: turning to them, she beholds two holy messengers. They ask her why she weeps and she responds, but turns away, still seeking the precious body of Jesus, grief overwhelming her wonder. Outside the tomb, another man asks, “Woman, why weepest thou?” Eyes blurred by tears, heart crushed with sorrow, she mistakes Jesus for the gardener and inquires about what he knows. In that error—painfully funny yet gloriously apropos—much is revealed. The hanging moment of suspense in the narrative is not about whether Jesus is really alive; that much the story takes for granted. What we wait for, what Jesus waits for, is the moment of recognition—for we know it will, in that instant, also be the point of transformation: grief to joy, an end to a beginning, time into eternity.

There is no command. No “Look.” No “Listen.” No thunderous pronouncement of death overcome; no authoritative gesture meant to provoke awe or fear; no angelic host singing hosannas and filling the earthly skies with a contrastive heavenly majesty.

Jesus simply says, “Mary.”

The entire story hinges on this moment, and in the speaking of her name, she recognizes him. And we recognize *in* him something that the miracle of the moment might otherwise have elided: his humanity. It is no accident that the scripture asks us to share Jesus's perspective, awaiting with some suspense Mary's moment of recognition.

Robinson puts it this way:

Here is Jesus, by great miracle an ordinary man, except that he carries in his body the marks of mortal injury. From whatever cosmic grandeur the moment claims for him, he speaks to the friend of his humanity with joy and kindness but also with deference, honoring her. When Mary looks at Jesus, knowing who he is, what does she see? A more amazing question—when Jesus looks at Mary, and whenever he has looked at her, what does *he* see?⁴⁷

To recognize, in this account, is to embrace. When Mary responds, “Rabboni,” she immediately embraces Jesus, a fierce encircling, surely, since he must gently disentangle himself with the words, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father” (NRSV; the Joseph Smith Translation renders it “hold me not”). No translation is perfect, but to my mind, this is the scene where the King James Version most fails the ideal expressed in the Gospels, switching out divine intimacy for a distancing sense of authority.⁴⁸ Even so, it is worth repeating an earlier point: there are worlds within words. Robinson writes, “When, in the Gospel of John, Jesus says to Mary Magdalene, ‘Woman, why weepest thou?’ he is using, so scholarship tells me, a term of great respect and deference.”

“Of course,” continues Robinson,

Jesus, however he is understood, whatever powers are ascribed to him, could only use the words he found ready for use, and this must mean that over generations the culture in which he was to live his life had been preparing a certain improbable consensus about the meaning of this one word, which, in the narrative, is the first one he speaks in the new world of his restored life.⁴⁹

Add to this another point: although we are not told how long Jesus lingered with Mary, or whether they spoke of anything more, we do learn that Mary was to be the bearer (out of the garden and into the world) of this knowledge of new life. On this reading, “woman” is a conceptual synonym for “in the beginning” and suggests that the bride in Revelation ought to be read in similar terms.

The story of Revelation celebrates abundance, justice, beauty, symmetry, and a welcoming triumph—but not callously, not without memory. The jolting images of death and destruction, of wars and blood and fire, are all refracted from our own histories, and the book acknowledges these things with powerful strokes of expression. The vision of Revelation is firm, though, in its commitment to the poetic dimension of language, to the possibility of opening up for us the other worlds which transcend—even as they are threaded through—our own. The mystery at the heart of the book is not that of bafflement, but of wonder. It is the mystery of how love transcends even death—of how, between birth and the grave, a narrative of holy possibility and moral beauty may emerge from the lives of simple people, imperfect and yearning. The tree of life, the book of life, the waters of life: these are all symbols for the divine word made manifest in Christ, with continued incarnation emerging from our own reading (and living) of that word. With the bride beckoning from Revelation, surely this is where we come in.

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NOTES

1. See Richard Kearney, *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 124. The phrase appears in Paul Ricoeur, "Myth as the Bearer of Possible Worlds: Interview with Richard Kearney," in Paris in 1978. It was first published in the *Crane Bag* 2/1-2 (1978): 260-66.
2. Kearney, *On Paul Ricoeur*, 124.
3. Sir Geoffrey Keynes, ed., *Sir Thomas Browne: Selected Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 83. I have modernized the text for ease in reading.
4. Marilynne Robinson, "Gospels," in *Communion: Contemporary Writers Reveal the Bible in Their Lives*, ed. David Rosenberg (New York: Anchor Books, 1996), 148.
5. Robinson, "Gospels," 148-49.
6. Robinson, "Gospels," 149.
7. Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 9, 29-30.
8. I have modernized Tyndale's English for ease of reading.
9. Although the KJV does not set apart the poetic portion, I have done so here, following the New Revised Standard Version, in order to better emphasize visually the poetic form it is given in the last frame of the vision.
10. Barbara Grizzuti Harrison, "A Meditation on Eve," in *Out of the Garden: Women Writers on the Bible*, ed. Christina B  chman and Celina Spiegel (New York: Fawcett, 1994), 1.
11. Cited in David Daniell, "William Tyndale (ca. 1494-1536)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online ed., May 2011.
12. As Jaroslav Pelikan so aptly puts it, "The Bible of the Reformation and the Reformation of the Bible became two sides of one coin. For the Reformation of the sixteenth century—whether Protestant, Roman Catholic, or Radical—is unthinkable apart from the Bible; and the Bible—at any rate as we know it in the realms of Western literature, culture, and faith—is almost equally unthinkable apart from the Reformation." Moreover, thanks to vernacular translations, many came to know the meaning "not only of the Reformation but of *reformation as such*, by the power of the word of God that spoke to them through the Bible." See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Reformation of the Bible / The Bible of the Reformation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 2.

13. It contained the Bible in pointed Hebrew but the rabbinic materials in unpointed script. Note that the Hebrew Bible had been printed several times before the New Testament was printed in Greek. The first complete Hebrew Bible was produced by the Soncino Press as early as 1488. The one noted here is the first printed Rabbinic Bible (that is, Hebrew Scripture with Targumim, traditional commentaries, and, in subsequent editions, the Massora), printed by Daniel Bomberg under the editorship of Felix Prato. The second edition produced an updated text by Jacob ben Chayyim whose version became the standard form of the Masoretic text for subsequent scholarship by both Jews and Christians.

14. There are earlier, but much rarer, iterations of this unification of the two trees that I trace in a current book project, *The Tree of Life in English Renaissance Thought*. Until the Reformation, Christians typically depicted the two trees as contrasting (or opposing) brackets to the story of redemption.

15. Keynes, *Sir Thomas Browne*, 88.

16. The sequence may seem a little confusing, since the two kings at the top are in the present, even as their unifying ancestor—the Roman figure representing family lines tracing their authority to Rome—is also given a presentist representation. Of course, Ludwig or “Saint Louis” (the only canonized King of France), also in the present, is dreaming forward from the past. This is typical of much art in the period, which often uses simultaneity to emphasize historical links. The historical moment, however, is well documented. The two kings at the top of the page are Catholic Henry III of France and the Huguenot (Protestant) King Henry of Navarre. The Catholic king had originally named the Protestant as his successor to the throne of France. After France was forced to retract the nomination, Navarre waged war against him. Later, following several political twists too lengthy to follow here, the two Henrys made a pact and fought the forces that had originally opposed the nomination. Henry III of France was assassinated shortly thereafter by a Dominican Friar, Jacques Clement (shown in the miniature scene on the left, labeled August 1589). On his deathbed, Henry of France secured his army’s allegiance for Henry of Navarre as heir to the throne.

17. See the notes to Jeremiah 22 in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1112–13.

18. I quote from the New Revised Standard Version here because it is much more plainly spoken on the issue of what constitutes a true throne at the heart of a righteous city. England’s King James asserted an ideology of absolute monarchy, claiming power over subjects rather than power on behalf of citizens, and such themes were handled with excruciating caution by the translators of the King James Version.

19. Brian Vickers, ed., *Francis Bacon, The Major Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 81.

20. Keynes, *Sir Thomas Browne*, 83.

21. Quoted in “Cranmer’s Preface to the New Testament (1540),” in *Documents of the English Reformation, 1526–1701*, ed. Gerald Bray (Cambridge: Clarke, 1994), 242.

22. Quoted in “Cranmer’s Preface to the New Testament (1540),” 242.

23. Quoted in “Cranmer’s Preface to the New Testament (1540),” 242.

24. Keynes, *Sir Thomas Browne*, 68.

25. Steven Marx, *Shakespeare and the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 125. See also David Stern, *Midrash and Theory: Ancient Jewish Exegesis and Contemporary Literary Studies* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 24–25.
26. “Tyndale’s Preface to the New Testament (1526)” and “The Preface to the Authorized (King James) Version (1611),” in *Documents of the English Reformation*, 18–25, 420–21.
27. Joseph Heineman, “The Nature of the Aggadah,” in *Midrash and Literature*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 45.
28. “Tyndale’s Preface to the New Testament (1526),” 23.
29. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1966), 262. For examples of traditional midrash, see Samuel Rapaport, *Tales and Maxims from the Midrash* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1971). Modern examples include Frederick Buechner, *Son of Laughter* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993); the essay collection by Alicia Ostriker, *The Nakedness of the Fathers: Biblical Visions and Revisions* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994); and the critical study by Leslie Brisman, *The Voice of Jacob: On the Composition of Genesis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). Emmanuel Levinas epitomizes this tradition in key passages of even his most pointedly philosophical work. Similarly, the works of Paul Ricoeur illustrate the same technique as it has evolved in the Protestant tradition.
30. Isidore Singer, ed., *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Ktav, 1964), 8:548.
31. Harold Fish, “The Hermeneutic Quest in *Robinson Crusoe*,” in *Midrash and Literature*, 230.
32. See Stern, *Midrash and Theory*, 25.
33. See Stern, *Midrash and Theory*, 25.
34. Richard Cohen, “Place, Sacred Space, and Utopia,” unpublished presentation at a symposium on sacred space, held at Brigham Young University, June 3, 2009. For examples of how Shakespeare and others made use of this dialectic, see also Marx, *Shakespeare and the Bible*, 131.
35. Although the King James Version does not set apart the poetic portion, I have done so here, following the New Revised Standard Version in order to better emphasize visually the poetic form it is given in the last frame of the vision.
36. “Preface to the Authorized (King James) Version (1611),” 427.
37. “Preface to the Authorized (King James) Version (1611),” 436.
38. The noun forms are important because the declarative “come” of the bride in Revelation is not followed by the usual double-verb construction—for instance, “come and worship,” or “come and enjoy peace,” or “come and live.” When the bride says “Come,” then, many meanings might be nested within one another. Indeed, other relevant and common usages of the verb form of *come* (derived from the noun) include the idea of being in an order (as in to “come under a heading”) or to emerge from a source (as in “this stream comes from the Nile”). More biblically, it can mean “to fulfill in time” (as in “it came to pass”) or be used for “to be born” (as in “to come into the world”). It can

mean “gather” or “be at one” (as in “come together”); it sometimes refers to comprehension (as in “come to an understanding”); and it often expresses the crux of an encounter (as in “to come across”).

39. John Worlidge, *Systema Agric* (London, 1681), 47; also cited extensively in Gervase Markham, *The Husbandman’s Jewel* (London, 1695); and Edward Chamberlayne, *The Present State of England* (London, 1683). For a good example of the common uses of *come* in reference to trees more particularly, see Thomas Tryon, *A New Art of Brewing Beer. . .with an Appendix How to Make Fruit Trees Constantly Fruitful* (London, 1690).

40. Herbert McCabe, *Faith within Reason*, ed. Brian Davies and Denys Turner (New York: Continuum, 2007), 160–65.

41. I am not romanticizing the practice of political marriage in the ancient, medieval, and early modern worlds. Often women born into the powerful elite had little or no choice in the matter. However, the Christian nuances of such arrangements eventually intensified their symbolic power and strengthened the rights of the woman involved. That is, such marriages in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance were much more attuned to the need for legal and social protections for the woman—and in England, the role was given special social status precisely because of the presumed personal sacrifices it entailed. Even so, many of the advice books from 1500 to 1700 encouraged parents to find spouses congenial to their child. Moreover, it was often assumed that in the case of a youthful match, the natural inclinations of desire would pave the way for the more mature affection that comes with time and shared experience. Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, derives its excruciatingly tragic power partly from the rival families’ inability to let the natural course of at-one-ment bring them together. The perversion at the heart of the play is found in the parents’ refusal to allow the marriage that would have reconciled the two families in the flesh.

42. George Herbert, “Love III,” in *The Complete English Poems*, ed. John Tobin (New York: Penguin, 2005), 178.

43. Herbert, “Prayer I,” in *Complete English Poems*, 45–46.

44. Adam Nicolson, *God’s Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 194.

45. Even so, it’s worth noting that some modern translations point out the motherly warmth of the connotations of the Hebrew’s “brooding over the surface of the waters,” or “hovering over the surface of the waters”—a useful note, especially given the mother-eagle imagery already mentioned.

46. Nicolson, *God’s Secretaries*, 194.

47. Robinson, “Gospels,” 148.

48. KJV: “Touch me not.”

49. Robinson, “Gospels,” 148.

Seeing Eye to Eye: Nephi's and John's Intertwining Visions of the Tree of Life

Shon Hopkin

This study will discuss the remarkable interconnectedness of John's vision in the book of Revelation¹ and Nephi's vision in 1 Nephi 11–14 of the Book of Mormon. In order to understand the importance and value to Latter-day Saints of the consistent intertwining of these two prophetic visions, some background is necessary.

For Latter-day Saints, one of the valuable contributions of the restored gospel as taught by Joseph Smith is the overarching view that the same gospel found in the New Testament has been taught from the beginning of history and continues to be taught in the same way in modern times. In other words, Joseph Smith revealed that Old Testament prophets understood the same gospel truths that would later be taught by Christ and the apostles in New Testament times:

Some say the kingdom of God was not set up until the day of Pentecost. . . ; but I say, in the name of the Lord, that the kingdom of God was set up on the earth from the days of Adam to the present time.

Whenever there has been a righteous man on earth unto whom God revealed His word and gave power and authority to administer in His name, and where there is a priest of God—a minister who has power and authority from God to administer in the ordinances of the gospel and officiate in the priesthood of God, there is the kingdom of God. . . .Where there is a prophet, a priest, or a righteous man unto whom God gives His oracles, there is the kingdom of God.²

Many Latter-day Saints may not fully appreciate the foundational importance and uniqueness of this grand, panoramic view of God's dealings with mankind. Current (and by now long-standing and widely accepted) trends in biblical scholarship espouse a very different viewpoint, namely that the Old Testament religion (or religions) was something completely separate and different from the gospel revealed by Christ and his apostles.³ However, a Latter-day Saint understanding of biblical scripture provides a lens that allows one to see a greater, more overarching scriptural unity than is typically possible. Through this lens, the words of ancient prophets and the organization of Old Testament religion are not seen as inferior to the words of later apostles and teachers but instead are seen as sharing a matching, complementing message. Similarities in theme and symbol across time and space are not surprising but are instead expected. The prophets from the beginning and in all ages learned the same gospel from the same God, occasionally received similar visions although divided by thousands of miles or hundreds of years, and worked together over disparate times and places to provide an understanding of that gospel message for God's people. The teachings of the prophets unite in the scriptures to bear witness of each other and of the reality that it was indeed God who was speaking to his people in each time period. Since God has worked with prophets in a similar fashion from the beginning and has continued his work in New Testament times, then Latter-day Saints would expect that message to continue in other places (such as in the Americas, as recorded in the Book of Mormon) and in modern times as well.⁴

These complementing prophetic messages from the Old Testament, New Testament, Book of Mormon, and modern times fulfill a prophecy of Isaiah:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! Thy

watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: *for they shall see eye to eye*, when the Lord shall bring again Zion. (Isaiah 52:7–8, emphasis added)

In other words, from a Latter-day Saint viewpoint, the restoration of the gospel allows all to see how the messages of prophets complement and complete each other and how these messages are intertwined, forming one great whole as if the prophets were “seeing each other” across time and space.

The most explicit reference to this intertwining of messages is found at the end of Nephi’s vision in 1 Nephi 11–14. Although Nephi had seen a vision explaining the future unfolding of God’s plan of salvation, he refrained from sharing the remainder of his vision and the final events leading up to and beyond the second coming of Christ. After Nephi had described much of the future destiny of his people, the restoration of Christ’s gospel, and the ideological battle that would occur between truth and error in the last days, he then provided the reason for not continuing his prophecy further:

And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me, saying: Look! And I looked and beheld a man, and he was dressed in a white robe. And the angel said unto me: Behold one of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Behold, he shall see and write the remainder of these things; yea, and also many things which have been. And he shall also write concerning the end of the world. Wherefore, the things which he shall write are just and true; . . . And behold, the things which this apostle of the Lamb shall write are many things which thou hast seen; and behold, the remainder shalt thou see. But the things which thou shalt see hereafter thou shalt not write; for the Lord God hath ordained the apostle of the Lamb of God that he should write them. And also others who have been, to them hath he shown all things, and they have written them; and they are sealed up to come forth in their purity, according to the truth which is in the Lamb, in the own due time of the Lord, unto the house of Israel. And I, Nephi, heard and bear record, that the name of the apostle of the Lamb was John, according to the word of the angel. And behold, I, Nephi, am forbidden that I should write the remainder of the things which I saw and heard; wherefore the things which I have written sufficeth me; and I have written but a small part of the things which I saw. (1 Nephi 14:18–28)

Intriguingly, Nephi literally saw in vision—or saw eye to eye with—the prophet/apostle whose vision would be connected to his own. Nephi’s message purposefully and explicitly points across time and space to another recording of a similar vision, effectively tying together the two times and the two spaces. In fact, since Nephi is speaking to modern-day readers, he effectively ties together three times and spaces to connect the past (John⁵ in his Old World setting), the present (Nephi in his New World setting), and the future (modern-day audiences, in their worldwide settings) into a great, unified whole.

The modern reader might wish that Nephi—with his simple, straightforward style of communication—had been permitted to complete the record of his vision, providing clarity to John’s challenging presentation in the book of Revelation. Perhaps the gap in Nephi’s own communication was designed to strengthen the importance of John’s revelation and to ensure that those who wished to understand the unfolding of God’s plan would be required to study both revelations and use them together. If John’s vision is understood, according to Doctrine and Covenants, section 77, as an overview of the history of the world’s temporal existence, then it would appear that John passed almost entirely over a crucial section of that history, what Latter-day Saints know as the latter days, the time period in which the gospel is restored. John did not omit the restoration entirely but painted it in very broad strokes, focusing instead almost completely on the “end of days,” the winding-up scenes of the violent clash between good and evil. Latter-day Saints have typically connected the vision of Revelation 14:6 to the restoration of the gospel (“I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them

that dwell on the earth”), but the intertwining of John’s and Nephi’s visions would explain why more of the important restoration events were not included in John’s vision. His vision was designed to complement and lead to Nephi’s vision. Each vision is incomplete without the other, and together they give a comprehensive and complete view of God’s plan for mankind in the last days.

A more detailed look at the themes and wording of John’s and Nephi’s revelations shows a satisfyingly deep interconnectedness between these two grand visions. Both help clarify and add power to the overarching message. The remainder of this study will analyze five areas of connection between the two visions, both in wording and in theme, and will take a deeper look at what that interconnectedness might reveal in a reading of both Revelation 21–22 and 1 Nephi 11–14. These areas will focus on (1) the use of the title *twelve apostles*, (2) the use of the title *Lamb*, (3) the angelic messenger, (4) the difference between the heavenly city and the worldly city, and (5) the waters, the road, and the tree of life. At times I will look at the entire vision of John in comparison to Nephi’s vision, but most often I will focus on the last two chapters of John’s revelation, which delineate his vision of the heavenly city and of the tree of life.

The use of the title *twelve apostles*

In the New Testament the term *apostle* (*apostolos* in Greek) and related terms are used ninety-five times and are found regularly throughout the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles. However, the phrase *twelve apostles* is much less common, appearing only four times in the New Testament. Three instances found in the Gospels describe the calling of the apostles by Christ, yet the Gospels appear to use those words less as a title than as a description of the number that were ordained. John, in Revelation 21:14, is the only author to use *twelve apostles* without referring to their original calling by Christ.

Why did John take pains to connect the number twelve with the apostles? The number twelve ties several symbols together in the concluding chapters of John’s vision. John uses the number twelve to overtly connect the apostles with the wall of the holy Jerusalem, with the twelve tribes of Israel, and with the angels who guard the gates of the city. Revelation 21:12–14 states that the holy Jerusalem

had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

A few verses later, John tells the reader that the city measured twelve thousand furlongs (12,000 *stadia*, which is roughly equivalent to 1,400 miles),⁶ with the proportions of the city forming an exact cube (see Revelation 21:16), and reminding the reader of the dimensions of the holy of holies. John then (see Revelation 21:17) gives the height (or possibly the width) of the wall surrounding the city as 144 cubits (probably a little over two hundred feet high, or wide). These measurement numbers (12,000 and 144) remind the reader of John’s previous description of the 144,000 servants of God—12,000 representatives from each of the twelve tribes (see Revelation 7:1–8).

Thus for John, the twelve apostles are connected to the twelve tribes of Israel, and both of these are connected to the angelic guards at the twelve gates. The foundations of the wall surrounding the city were marked with the names of the apostles. Symbolically, the apostles hold the weight of the structure, which (1) provides protection to those inside the city (if indeed protection is necessary in a celestial city), (2) defines the limits of the city or delineates where the sacred space of the city begins, and (3) prevents individuals from entering unless they pass properly through the gates. The angels serve similar purposes: they stand at the division between sacred and

profane space, ensure that the space inside the city remains holy by protecting it from impurities, and grant access to those who wish to be citizens of the city. The names of the twelve tribes are also inscribed on the gates, which grant or prevent access to the city. The gates provide a solemn reminder to those who approach of the divine authority that protects and sanctifies the heavenly Jerusalem. Lest the barrier and the guardians seem designed to unfairly exclude, John very clearly states toward the end of his revelation that the choice to be righteous or unjust, to be inside or outside the city, is up to the individual's agency; all may choose to accept or reject the requirements that must be followed to gain entrance to the city: "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie" (Revelation 22:14–15).

So the twelve apostles, the twelve angels, and the twelve tribes are all linked together, pointing inward, toward the greater blessings of the city. Indeed the traditional image of the pearly gates of heaven, with Saint Peter waiting to cast judgment and grant or deny access, comes directly from this description in Revelation. Deuteronomy 32:8 describes the house of Israel in the role of divider between the inside and outside: "When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel." These bounds sound somewhat similar to the boundaries of the wall surrounding the holy Jerusalem. However, the role of these judges is a supporting one, designed to grant access to the blessings and joy inside the city.

At the center of the city is found the tree of life, with twelve different fruits for the twelve tribes that enter therein. John takes care to mention time in his description of the tree, that the twelve fruits produce every month. Time is a surprising element to be found in the eternal city. Does John here intend to indicate that the destinies of the twelve apostles and of the twelve tribes of Israel (the leadership of God's Old and New Testament organizations) are to be bound together inextricably in the eternal cycles of time? These three elements—the apostles, the tribes, and the angels—certainly seem to be given a permanent abode in the holy city.⁷

In Nephi's vision, as in John's vision, the apostles are given the title of the *twelve apostles*, connecting the numerical image with the office. In fact, the Book of Mormon shows remarkable consistency in its use of the title *apostle*. When Nephi first sees the apostles in vision, he simply refers to "twelve others." Only after the angel has taught him the correct name for the twelve, *apostles*, does he begin to use that term, as 1 Nephi 11:34 illustrates: "For thus were the twelve called by the angel of the Lord." While it is impossible to know exactly what word the angel taught Nephi for the Greek word *apostle* (although the angel could simply have taught the Greek), it is clear that *apostle* was a completely new term for him. Along with the first instance, Nephi uses the title *twelve apostles* ten times during his vision, and he never names the apostles without the number twelve accompanying his description—except where he refers to John alone (three times).

After Nephi's use of the term *apostle*, taught him by his angelic guide, the word completely drops from Nephite usage through most of the rest of the Book of Mormon. Even Christ does not use the term when he visits the Nephites, simply referring to "the twelve." Thereafter, when Mormon refers to either the apostles or to the twelve disciples chosen by Christ in the Americas, he also refers to them simply as "the twelve whom Jesus chose." Indeed, the title *apostle* only shows up three more times in the Book of Mormon, all in Moroni's writings (see Mormon 9:18; Ether 12:41; Moroni 2:2). Why would this term have been used so freely by Nephi in his vision, then disappear for hundreds of years, only to show up once again in the writings of Moroni at the end of the Book of Mormon?⁸ Mormon could be understood as claiming that it was only after he had finished compiling the Book of Mormon that he found and read the small plates, which contain Nephi's vision and introduce the new word *apostle* into Nephi's language (see Words of Mormon 1:3). If this reading is correct, then the only prophet who would have

had the chance to read and be influenced by them, after he placed them with the rest of his compilation, would be his son Moroni (see Words of Mormon 1:5). Thus when the word *apostle* returns to Book of Mormon parlance, it does so with perfect timing.⁹

Does Nephi use the number twelve to connect multiple images together, as John did? As might be expected, 1 Nephi 12:7–9 establishes the connection between the twelve apostles and between another set of twelve disciples chosen to represent the Nephites (much as 12,000 representatives were chosen to represent each tribe of Israel in John’s vision). These two sets of twelve representatives (the apostles and the Nephite disciples) are then connected to the twelve tribes of Israel:

And I also saw and bear record that the Holy Ghost fell upon twelve others; and they were ordained of God, and chosen. And the angel spake unto me, saying: Behold the twelve disciples of the Lamb, who are chosen to minister unto thy seed. And he said unto me: Thou rememberest the twelve apostles of the Lamb? Behold they are they who shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel; wherefore, the twelve ministers of thy seed shall be judged of them; for ye are of the house of Israel. And these twelve ministers whom thou beholdest shall judge thy seed. And, behold, they are righteous forever; for because of their faith in the Lamb of God their garments are made white in his blood. (1 Nephi 12:7–9)

In these verses not only does Nephi connect similar images with the number twelve, he also emphasizes the same role that John emphasized in his vision: the role of judge and gatekeeper. Additionally, John mentioned those who were outside the walls of the city, from which the gatekeepers had to protect those inside the city—“for without are dogs, and sorcerers,” and so forth. With even greater clarity, Nephi describes a real battle between the twelve apostles and those opposed to them in 1 Nephi 11:36:

And it came to pass that I saw and bear record, that the great and spacious building was the pride of the world; and it fell, and the fall thereof was exceedingly great. And the angel of the Lord spake unto me again, saying: Thus shall be the destruction of all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, that shall fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The image of the twelve apostles as guardians and protectors of that which is holy links Nephi’s and John’s visions and strengthens the imagery employed in both.

The title Lamb

The only places in the New Testament where Jesus Christ is given the title *Lamb* are the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation. Both instances of the title in the Gospel of John appear in direct quotations of John the Baptist. As John the Apostle was originally a disciple of John the Baptist, it is likely that this title originated with the latter. In the book of Revelation, the title *Lamb* is used twenty-six times. Unsurprisingly, the Book of Mormon’s usage mirrors these proportions. While Nephi is not the only Book of Mormon prophet to use the title *Lamb*, he uses it, particularly in his vision, much more frequently than any other prophet. The first time the title shows up in the Book of Mormon is in 1 Nephi 10, when Nephi summarizes his father’s words regarding Jesus’s baptism (see 1 Nephi 10:10). Since it is not a direct quotation, it is unclear whether the title was really used by Lehi or whether Nephi simply used the title in summarizing his father’s teachings. However, it is interesting that the setting centers around Jesus’s baptism by John, who was the first to use the title in the New Testament.

After this single mention, Nephi uses the title fifty-six times over the course of the four chapters that compose his vision. He uses the title four additional times in his writings, all of them again connected to Jesus’s baptism by John the Baptist (see 2 Nephi 31:4–6; 33:14). The title is then used only nine more times in the entire Book of Mormon

—twice by Alma (7:14; 13:11), once by Amulek (Alma 34:36), once by Mormon (Helaman 6:5), and five times by Moroni (Mormon 9:2–3, 6; Ether 13:10–11). It is interesting to note again a possible influence of Nephi’s writings on Moroni. Still more striking is the fact that two of the times Moroni uses the title occur in his description of the New Jerusalem. More germane to this paper, however, is the overwhelming similarity of the number of attestations in Nephi’s and John’s visions.

A review of how John and Nephi use the title shows great variety. They both use the title so pervasively in their visions that it is almost interchangeable with the title *Christ*. However, two prevalent themes stand out in both records: (1) the cleansing blood of the Lamb and (2) the triumphant power of the Lamb to overcome evil (most often witnessed in battle scenes). Tying these themes back to Old Testament use of the lamb symbol may indicate why Nephi and John chose to emphasize the title so often. The two strongest Old Testament connections for the symbol of the lamb are the temple setting (in which ritual impurity is overcome through the sacrifice of the lamb), and the Passover meal (in which the children of Israel triumphed over the ultimate symbol of worldliness, Egypt, and the ultimate symbol of mortality, the death of the firstborn). John and Nephi seem to be drawing their readers back to the connection between temple rituals and ordinances, pointing toward the true Lamb whose blood can remove sin and who will triumph over all enemies.

The angelic messenger

While many prophetic visions occur on mountains, the scriptures describe the prophet being carried by God to an exceedingly high mountain in only four of these visions (those received by Moses, Ezekiel, John, and Nephi). All these visions feature a heavenly guide who interacts with the visionary, a consistent feature of apocalyptic literature. In Moses’s case, the guide is God himself. In the other cases, angelic guides walk the prophets through their visions, continually commanding the prophet to “look” or “behold.” In his Old Testament vision of the holy city and its temple, Ezekiel is commanded multiple times to look, hear, and then teach that which he has seen: “And the man said unto me, Son of man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon all that I shall shew thee; for to the intent that I might shew them unto thee art thou brought hither: declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel” (Ezekiel 40:4; see 44:5). The role of the angel who shows John the holy city is emphasized as well in Revelation 21:9–10: “And there came unto me one of the seven angels. . . saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem.” John later emphasizes not just that he saw things in his vision, but that the angel showed them to him; he overtly mentions his discussion with the angelic guide numerous times.

Nephi’s description of the angel’s guidance is even more marked. Nephi’s guide uses direct, forceful commands to lead the prophet to what he should see. Nephi is commanded to “look” with an intense, urgent emphasis on action thirteen different times in his short vision. At the end of the experience, he is commanded to record the vision. The reader is never allowed to forget the presence of the angelic guide, as Nephi provides direct quotations preceded by the speech indicator “and he said” or “and I said” thirty-nine times during his vision.

Why is the presence of the angelic guide so important to the prophets in these visions, particularly in the visions of Nephi and John? First, both visions feature the battle between good and evil, and the presence of the angel could serve as a reminder that God is in control of all things. Second, the presence of the angel might lend authority to the vision and authenticate it as emanating from God. Third, it might be assumed that since John has to pass by angels to enter the holy city Jerusalem, he may need an angelic guide to grant him entrance; similarly, Nephi may need a guide to be able to witness Christ as he does in 1 Nephi 11. Fourth, the angel may serve to remind the reader of the importance of the teacher-student relationship: as the angel tells Nephi to look, the reader is also drawn to the same vision by the prophet’s description. (Such commands encourage action, which can be rewarded

by new views and new revelations.) Finally, the angel consistently points the prophet away from himself toward the important message that the angel is delivering; thus the angel may exist in part to remind the reader that there is more to the scriptures than words on a page or images in the mind. The point of scriptural texts is to cause the reader to see beyond the text to that which truly is. If readers fail to do so, then the text or the vision has failed in its divine purpose.

The heavenly city and the worldly city

Both John's and Nephi's visions are strongly dualistic, another consistent characteristic of apocalyptic literature.¹⁰ Throughout John's vision, the battle between good and evil is portrayed by symbolic opposites: the lamb and the dragon; the wicked city Babylon and the holy city Jerusalem; the mother of harlots and the bride of the Lamb. These last two pairs of opposites may actually be equivalent, since the mother of all harlots is equated with the wicked city, while the bride is equated with the holy city. According to Revelation 17:5, "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth" was written on the former's forehead.¹¹ Interestingly, in this instance a name isn't inscribed on something permanent and glorious—as when the names of the tribes of Israel are written upon the gates, indicating the permanent status of Israel in Jerusalem. Instead, the name of the city is inscribed on the woman, who is mortal and changing, who will not last. The fate of Israel is tied up with the eternal destiny of the holy city, while the fate of the city Babylon is tied up with the infamy and doom of the mother of harlots. In opposition to the harlot, who represents the city Babylon, the angel promises John that he will show him the bride, the Lamb's wife—but when the angel carries him in the spirit to a high mountain, what he sees is the city of the New Jerusalem (see Revelation 21:9–10).

Why are women equated to cities in these passages? Are both women and cities symbolic of life at its most beautiful but also potentially at its worst? While cities can be the breeding ground for the worst of behaviors as they bring self-serving interests into close proximity, they can also be a perfect practicum for celestial, cooperative, unselfish, Zion-like living. For the prophet/apostle, perhaps a beautiful, pure bride symbolizes all that is most cherished and beautiful in life, including the power and strength of covenants with the Lord that have the ability to endure forever. On the opposite end of the spectrum, perhaps the mother of harlots symbolizes the worst and most ugly betrayals of those covenants and just how disconnected from joy and beauty mankind can become when worldly pleasures take precedence over covenants with God. Interestingly, both titles describe relationships in which procreative powers can and will be used. One of the women uses the powers indiscriminately and is destroyed for that abuse, while the other uses them within the boundaries of covenant marriage. Julie M. Smith's and Kevin Barney's papers in this collection both discuss the possibility that Lehi's tree of life, replaced by Mary in Nephi's vision, points to the divine feminine. Perhaps the mother of harlots could then represent the perversion of the true concept of this divine feminine, as seen in the apostate worship of fertility figures such as Asherah.

The images in Nephi's vision are just as strongly dualistic as those in John's, pitting the great and spacious building against the tree of life, the fountain of waters against the dirty river, the rod of iron against the mists of darkness, and most importantly, the church of God against the great and abominable church. Nephi even goes so far as to make all this dualism explicit: "Behold there are save two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil; wherefore, whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church, which is the mother of abominations; and she is the whore of all the earth" (1 Nephi 14:10). These statements and images are so strong in Nephi's vision that I have heard some Latter-day Saint readers express concern about the uncompromising, unbending nature of the pronouncement that anyone who is not of the church of the Lamb is of the church of the devil. However, when viewed in its connection with the vision of John and other apocalyptic literature, this duality is not surprising.

Both visions lead up to the great battle at the end of days. Evil must be shown in its darkest hues to ensure that the saints will choose to be on the side that will ultimately win. Despite the chaos and intensity of the battle in both visions, God is clearly in charge, and good conquers evil. Thus Nephi proclaims in 1 Nephi 14:14–15:

And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the power of the Lamb of God, that it descended upon the saints of the church of the Lamb, and upon the covenant people of the Lord, who were scattered upon all the face of the earth; and they were armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory. And it came to pass that I beheld that the wrath of God was poured out upon that great and abominable church.

The water, the way, and the tree of life

The similarities between Nephi's and John's visions are most striking in the central symbols of both visions. In John's vision, the road (or way), the tree, and the river run together and appear to be intimately connected: "And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life" (Revelation 22:1–2). It is difficult to ascertain exactly how the tree, the river, and the street fit together here and where they are situated. All mesh together and seem to become almost one. Something similar happens as Nephi's vision combines three dominant symbols from Lehi's dream, all described in one verse in 1 Nephi 11:25: "And it came to pass that I beheld that the rod of iron, which my father had seen, was the word of God, which led to the fountain of living waters, or to the tree of life; which waters are a representation of the love of God; and I also beheld that the tree of life was a representation of the love of God." The tree of life and the fountain of waters are clearly equated with each other, and both represent the love of God. This representation gains greater clarity with Nephi's interpretation that the iron rod, and the road or way that follows alongside it, is the "word of God" (1 Nephi 15:24). John's declaration that Christ is the Word (see John 1:1–14) and his claim that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16) reveal that the symbols of Christ and the love of God become just as tightly interwoven in Nephi's vision as in John's.

The urban setting of the heavenly Jerusalem is certainly not reminiscent of the rustic image of the Garden of Eden. However, the symbols of tree and water in the midst of an urban landscape, no matter how dazzling, soften the angular sharpness of the city and remind the reader that this city is welcoming, a place to be lived in. Real people can enter there, receive healing medicine, and bask in the light that Christ provides. The road, the tree, and the river center on God's throne in the city, showing the true focal point of the entire vision. Revelation 21–22 shows itself to be a fulfillment of Ezekiel's vision in which the river originates under the throne or ark of the covenant at the center of the temple. In Ezekiel's vision, trees grow along the river with medicine to heal the nations, just as in Revelation. The fruit of Nephi's tree of life is no less potent to heal all wounds as it grants the joy of the love of God.

All other interconnected symbols of Nephi's and John's visions have pointed inward to these consummate symbols. The apostles, the walls, the gates, the angels, the guide, and the very presence of the city all point to God and the Lamb found within. Just as Christ called himself "the Truth, the Way, and the Life," so do the pure river, the road, and the tree testify of the multifaceted, eternal nature of God.

Conclusion

This paper began by discussing the prophecy that the watchmen would "see eye to eye." That type of seeing and understanding is not limited just to the prophets but extends to all the disciples of Christ. It is not limited just to seeing and understanding each other but, moreover, extends to seeing and understanding God and Christ. All must see and be seen; all must seek to understand and be understood. All must seek to be one, as Christ taught in

the great Intercessory Prayer. In his contribution to this volume, Eric Huntsman writes of the unveiling of Christ, and Adam Miller has written elsewhere about the decentering effect of seeing even another human being.¹² When we simply imagine another being we can be full of confidence that we understand her or him. But when we see the other individual face to face, we are instead confronted with the disconcerting awareness that we are not just seeing, but that we are also being seen by someone with whom we are not completely one. As Christ is exposed to our eyes we must of necessity be exposed to his eyes—in an extremely personal, intimate encounter. In that moment of seeing another face-to-face, we realize that we are not at the center of the universe but that others also “see.” Alma’s prophetic iteration of the tree of life is even more personal. In this example, we must not only come face-to-face with the tree and partake of it as Lehi and Nephi did; we must also let it grow within us, and let it expose us from the inside out so that it can change us into holy “trees” as well. The sacrament, correctly taken, performs a similar function as an extremely personal encounter with Deity, with the bread and water of life, which we must take into ourselves to be transformed by it. This is the type of unveiling of Christ to which the revelations of John, Nephi, and other prophets lead us.

As Nephi sees Christ descend to the earth, he is humbled to learn just how much he still does not comprehend of the condescension of God. In John’s vision, the saints of God live in the glorious but ever so revealing and humbling light of the love of Christ for all eternity. This is the unity for which Christ prayed in John 17. This is the unity that requires a willingness to risk our own deeply cherished self-concept, to lose ourselves in charity that “seeketh not her own” (1 Corinthians 13:5) so as to find ourselves, become one with others, and become whole. This is the unity that must be practiced in the church community, among close friends, and within the family as we seek to see eye to eye. These two intertwining visions—Nephi giving way to John and John giving way to Nephi—teach the interconnectedness that must exist in the heavenly city as the disciples of Christ approach the tree of life and partake of its fruit.

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NOTES

1. For a brief discussion of John as author of the book of Revelation, see note 5.
2. “History of Joseph Smith,” *The Latter-Day Saints’ Millennial Star* 20/28 (July 10, 1858): 438.
3. See, for example, John Day, “Canaan, Religion of,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:831–37. It should be noted that the views represented in this paper are possible *only* through the lens of additional, modern revelation. Biblical commentators relying on only the biblical texts work without that lens and thus come to differing and valuable conclusions.

4. This paper works from the unifying witness of the Book of Mormon and focuses on unity between disparate texts. Although not the goal of this paper, understanding the differences between the texts, occasioned by the significantly different historical and cultural influences at the time of their production, also has significant importance if modern readers are to avoid the danger of incorrectly imposing their modern viewpoints on ancient texts.

5. In this paper I use Nephi's identification of the apostle John as the author of the book of Revelation, along with traditional identifications of the apostle John as author of the Gospel of John. For a discussion of the well-considered questions raised by modern biblical scholarship about the authorship of Revelation, the Gospel of John, and the Epistles of John, see Jeffrey L. Staley, "John," in *Eerdman's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000). A lengthy presentation of the discussion is outside the purposes of this paper. Some Latter-day Saints aware of the scholarly discussion continue to support the position of the apostle John as author of the Gospel, the Epistles, and Revelation. Another position explored by other Latter-day Saints is to view the apostle John as the source of primary content that led to the final composition of these biblical books, but not as the final author of the books in their present form.

6. If the measurement of twelve thousand furlongs was intended to give the circumference of the city, then the city would be close to 350 miles on each side, making it almost twice the size of the state of Utah!

7. It may be helpful to mention some important connections between the symbols discussed here and the symbols found in other prophetic images in scriptures—to show that other prophets also saw eye to eye. Since the wall protects a city wherein is found the tree of life, part of the angels' duty is to keep or guard the way of that tree of life. These words come, of course, from the description of the role of the cherubim in Genesis 3:24. As discussed by Julie M. Smith in her contribution to this volume, the holy city is being compared to the paradisiacal Garden of Eden, complete with a river of water (as in Eden) and the presence of God. In addition, the cube-shaped measurements of the city remind the reader of the holy of holies of the tabernacle designed from God's instructions to Moses, a tabernacle that was also a perfect cube. And of course at the center of the holy of holies was the ark, or throne of God, which is also found at the center of the city. Within the ark of the tabernacle was the rod of Aaron, which God had caused to bloom, making it another symbolic tree of life. Cherubim were stitched on the veil of the tabernacle, keeping the way of the tree of life and of the throne of God inside. Thus the Garden of Eden is connected to the tabernacle, and both are connected to the holy city of Jerusalem.

John's vision does not just seem to be a potent reminder of the Garden of Eden but is also a connection to Ezekiel's vision of the temple in Ezekiel 40–47. In Ezekiel's vision, the prophet is also shown a heavenly city, but his vision places the temple at the center instead of God, as in John's vision. Rather than John's temple-less vision being a rejection of temple-centered religion, as some have suggested, close inspection seems to indicate that John affirmed the important symbols of the temple and of Ezekiel's vision. He understood that the temple pointed to the presence of God and that the literal fulfillment in John's vision of this symbolic temple perfectly fulfilled Ezekiel's vision instead of overturning it.

8. I am indebted to my colleague Jason Crandall for this insight. Grant Hardy has illustrated Moroni's consistent reliance upon the words of previous Book of Mormon prophets in his teachings. This tendency could account for his use of language from the small plates, whether they were lost in intervening years or not. See Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 250–59.

9. It may be significant that while Nephi, whose vision was connected to John's vision of the twelve apostles, consistently uses the word *apostle* in conjunction with the number twelve, Moroni never does so.

10. See Adela Yarbro Collins, "Apocalypses and Apocalypticism," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:280–81.

11. This quotation appears in full caps in the KJV Bible.

12. See Adam Miller, "Revelation 22:4–7," <http://revsem.blogspot.com/2009/07revelation-224-7.html>.

The Unveiling of Christ . . . and of Angels: Apocalyptic Mediation in Revelation

Eric D. Huntsman

The book of Revelation is of course the earliest, premier, and only canonical example of Christian apocalyptic literature. An apocalypse—the word literally means an “uncovering” or “unveiling” in Greek—was both a type of revelatory experience and a type of revelatory literature, one that not only provided comfort to its original audience but also held out the promise of future glory to believers in every age. The New Testament book of Revelation has much in common with earlier Jewish apocalyptic, both within and without the canon, and with subsequent Christian apocryphal apocalypses. As such, it manifests generic similarities, including symbolic representations of God and the *apokalypsis*—the unveiling or uncovering—of God’s will, both spatially and temporally.

As with Jewish apocalyptic, Revelation struggles with the seeming bifurcation or division of God: striving on the one hand to represent God’s qualities, characteristics, and angelic servants—often visually—without, on the other hand, compromising Judaism’s strict monotheism and its developing sense that God was incomprehensible.¹ As a Christian apocalypse, Revelation appears to weaken this monotheism by attributing deity to the resurrected Christ while successfully maintaining the supremacy of God. Despite these tensions, through the principle of mediation Revelation succeeds in setting up a theological hierarchy that assigns divinity to Christ, divine functions to angels, and the promise of similar divine participation to the saints.

Generic conventions of apocalyptic

As just noted, the term *apocalypse* can refer to both a type of visionary *experience* and a type of revelatory *writing*. From a Latter-day Saint perspective, it appears that this type of revelation was first experienced by genuine prophets such as Enoch, the brother of Jared, Moses, Isaiah, Nephi, Daniel, Zechariah, and, in the New Testament era, John. They wrote select portions of the visions they received,² visions pregnant with symbolism that spanned heaven and earth on the one hand and the history of mankind on the other. These writings inspired others, particularly during periods of crisis, to produce their own writings, usually pseudonymously in the names of great prophetic figures of the past and in a similar style. Thus arose *1 Enoch* and other clearly Jewish works (for example, the *Apocalypse of Weeks*, *Jubilees*, *4 Ezra*, and *2 Baruch*), as well as a host of Christian works (for example, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, *Shepherd of Hermas*, and various gnostic works).

Thus, apocalyptic experience seems to have given birth to apocalyptic literature, and the latter has provided scholars with a superabundance of material for study . . . and speculation. Study of the *Sitz im Leben*—or context of the period when most of this literature was produced, roughly the two centuries before and the two centuries after Christ—suggests that apocalypses are examples of “crisis literature.” Apocalypses, in other words, were written at times when communities felt themselves imperiled and needed to know two things: (1) that their earthly struggles were part of a larger, cosmic struggle between good and evil; and (2) that they would ultimately be saved and vindicated, if not in this life then at least at the end of time. Thus, the visions—regardless of whether they described events past, present, or future—remain eschatological, either because they describe phases of the final, future struggle, or because they were themselves seen as part of a continuous flow of events leading to a final denouement at the end of the world. As such, apocalyptic literature had the goal of comforting its original audience, although by extension such writing can afford hope and comfort to believers in every age.

Study of the writings themselves has resulted in a number of detailed definitions of what constitutes apocalyptic literature, including this useful description by J. J. Collins:

“Apocalypse” is a genre of revelatory literature within a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.³

Several of the features of apocalyptic literature mentioned in this definition deserve explanation.

That apocalyptic literature bears a narrative framework is important because it suggests the likelihood—especially on display in canonical apocalyptic works such as a few portions of Isaiah, much of Zechariah and Daniel, and the whole of Revelation—that apocalyptic visions were experienced first and written later. The narrative framework of apocalyptic literature thus provides a way for the vision’s recipient (or the writer when he may not himself have been the recipient) to give structure to visions that may have been received at different times, as well as to relate them to his audience, both contemporary and future. In terms of genre, the presence of a narrative framework distinguishes apocalyptic from revelatory dialogues (such as the apocryphal *Gospel of Mary*) and simple dream or vision accounts.

That apocalyptic texts feature mediation by an otherworldly agent similarly helps differentiate this genre from other genres of revelatory literature, such as oracles, which are not mediated by any agent, and testaments, which are mediated by a human figure.⁴ Unlike narrative framework, however, such mediation seems to have been an original feature of apocalyptic revelation and experience, as suggested by 1 Nephi 11–14 (a text that could be called the *Apocalypse of Nephi*).⁵ In his visionary experience, Nephi is first engaged by the intriguing and uncertain figure of “the spirit of the Lord”⁶ and then subsequently by an angel, who shows Nephi visions, asks him what he sees in them, and helps him interpret and understand them, all in the tradition of Zechariah, Daniel, and Ezekiel.⁷ Indeed, this principle of mediation proves pivotal to understanding the book of Revelation’s portrayal and treatment of the figures both of the resurrected, glorified Christ and of angels. Just as the *Apocalypse of Nephi* proves to be in effect a guided tour of Nephite and restoration history, so Revelation unfolds as a guided tour of the history of the whole world.

The remaining features of Collins’s characterization of apocalyptic literature are concerned with time and space. Apocalyptic literature regularly related recent or contemporary events with events at the end of time, sometimes even portraying them as prophecies or as visions as if they had not yet happened. This type of understanding has given rise to various schools of interpretation, especially for the book of Revelation: (1) the preterist school, which sees John’s visions as reflecting primarily past, recent, or current events; (2) the historicist school, which interprets them as occurring in the future relative to the writer but in the past of modern readers; and (3) the more popular futurist school, which sees them as largely awaiting a yet future fulfillment. The interpretation of the seven seals of Revelation 5:1–11:10 in Doctrine and Covenants 77:6–7 suggests, interestingly, an eclectic approach for at least these particular visions, with some of them applying to past dispensations (a preterist interpretation), some at or subsequent to John’s time (historicist), and some remaining to be fulfilled (futurist). Perhaps the most useful approach, however, is a symbolic approach: seeing each event portrayed, regardless of when it was or will be fulfilled, as representing the kind of events that occur throughout history, all leading to an eschatological fulfillment at the end of days.⁸

So much for the temporal aspect of apocalyptic. The spatial aspect of apocalyptic, however, brings us back to the principle of mediation. Apocalyptic tends to view earthly events either as being determined in heaven or as reflecting larger cosmic struggles occurring on another plane. As with the battle between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness portrayed in some of the Dead Sea Scrolls,⁹ the battle with evil on the earth is but a small part of a larger struggle. Even when participants in a particular battle seem to be losing, they can take comfort that the side of God will win the ultimate struggle and that victory in heaven will at last be realized on earth. Perhaps more important, events on the earth are determined by God and then are both effected on the earth and communicated to God's saints on the earth by means of his agents. In Jewish apocalyptic, these agents are in fact angels, reflecting not only a revealed truth but also a growing interest with angelology in the intertestamental period.

Angels as agents

The seraphim of Isaiah 6 can be seen as forerunners of the angels found in more developed apocalyptic literature (Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah), where the role of heavenly beings and the ubiquitous presence of angels as deliverers of visions and as interlocutors in discussions of their meaning is well known. Angels serve an important role even in earlier writings of the Hebrew Bible—already, for instance, in the Torah. Mal'akhim, or “messengers” who are clearly otherworldly, make appearances throughout Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers. But perhaps more significant for the examination of mediation are cases when angels act for the Lord or actually speak his words as if they were the Lord. Significant in this regard is the figure of mal'akh YHWH, “the angel of the Lord,” who also appears simply as mal'akh 'Elohim, “the angel of God.” This figure delivers a message from God and often speaks in the first person, as in Genesis 16:7–16, where the Lord promises deliverance to Hagar and Ishmael through his angel, or in Genesis 22:11, where the angel of the Lord intervenes in the near-sacrifice of Isaac and then renews God's covenant as if he were, in fact, the Lord speaking. Still more striking are those instances when the angel of the Lord identifies himself by a divine title as if he were God, as in Genesis 31:11–13, where he says “I am the God of Beth-el,” or in Exodus 3:2–6, where he appears to Moses in the burning bush and says, “I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”¹⁰

Consequently, although it is true that the multiplication of angels with individual names and a distinct hierarchy is often seen as the development of later periods (particularly in apocryphal literature), this early biblical evidence suggests that the notion that angels speak for and act on behalf of God was in fact in operation from the earliest stages of biblical history. The function of the angel of the Lord—like possible references to the divine council of the gods in Genesis 1; Job 1–2; 38:7; Psalms 8:5 (where the King James rendering “angels” translates the plural *mal'akhim*); 82:6; 89:6—is actually less clearly monotheistic than are later texts,¹¹ which are at pains to stress their clear monotheism. Postexilic Judaism, perhaps partially in reaction to the paganism around it, strongly asserted the singularity of God at the very time it was exploring the hypostasis (or manifestation) of his qualities and the function of his angelic ministers.¹²

The vast majority of angels in the book of Revelation—and in this text they are virtually legion!—can be viewed in this context. Angels are clearly messengers of God, particularly in the case of “the revealing angel” of Revelation 1:1, by whom God and Jesus Christ “signify” the revelation to John. This figure is sent to the seer and “speaks” and “shows things” to him (implicitly in Revelation 4:1; 12:10; more securely in 17:1; 21:9). Finally, he commands John to “write” and “not seal” the visions (Revelation 19:9; 22:10).¹³ In these instances, the revealing angel's actions are almost identical to those of the angel in the *Apocalypse of Nephi*, but, then, in the tradition of the angel of YHWH, he even speaks for the Lord in the first person in Revelation 22:6–7, 12–13.

Some angels in Revelation function almost exclusively in a heavenly context, interacting with John during his heavenly ascent or singing and praising God (Revelation 5:2, 11–12; 10:9–11; 11:1). Most angels, however, are portrayed as powerful ministers of God, effecting his will on the earth. In chapters 4–11 alone, more than a dozen angels come from heaven to act on the earth on God’s behalf: the horse riders of the first four seals (Revelation 6:1–8); the four angels restraining the winds (Revelation 7:1); the angel ascending from the east with the seal of the living God (Revelation 7:2); the angel who casts the censer to the earth causing natural disasters (Revelation 8:5); the angels who blow the seven successive trumpets upon the opening of the seventh seal (Revelation 8:7–9:20, 11:15); and the mighty angel standing upon the sea and the earth, swearing that time should be no longer (Revelation 10:1–7). Such actions by angels for God and Christ continue into the second half of Revelation.

If the fact that God works through angels is clear, what is not immediately clear is *why* he does so rather than just speaking and accomplishing his will by his own power. This suggests some additional purpose for mediation.

The unveiling of Christ

Whereas the function of angels in Revelation follows earlier patterns, the central role of Christ is completely new to the genre of apocalyptic. Scholarship continues to debate whether the majesty attributed to the risen Christ and the worship accorded him in Revelation (especially in chapters 4 and 22) actually constitutes ditheism.¹⁴ The unique and powerful portrayal of Jesus in Revelation, in fact, suggests an important, alternate meaning for the title of the work, *Apokalypsis*. The Greek word literally means “an uncovering”; the English rendering, “Revelation,” comes from the Latin *revelāre*, “to unveil.” The opening phrase or title of the book, *apokalypsis Iēsou Christou*, is usually taken to be a noun with the possessive genitive of the name Jesus Christ, hence, “Jesus Christ’s revelation.” If, however, it is taken as an objective genitive, one can render the title as “The Unveiling of Jesus Christ.” In other words, this apocalypse may be not just the revelation of hidden knowledge or visions of the future, but also the revelation of Jesus Christ *in his true identity as the glorified Son of God*.¹⁵

That the risen Christ is to be either identified with God the Father or, more usually in Latter-day Saint theology, associated with him in a similar state of divinity is suggested by the important, recurring title given to Christ in Revelation: *ho Ōn kai ho Ōn kai ho erchomenos*, “the one which is, and which was, and which is to come” (Revelation 1:4, 8; 4:8; 11:17). Very possibly this is a free Greek rendering of the meaning of the divine name,¹⁶ especially in view of the Greek text of Exodus 3:14, where the Lord reveals himself to Moses as *egō eimi ho Ōn*, “I Am That I Am.” Thus the tetragrammaton *YHWH* could mean either “the one who was/is/will be” (in the Qal stem) or perhaps “the one who creates/created/will create” (in the Hiphil). While contemporary Latter-day Saints are accustomed to associating the anglicized name *Jehovah* with the premortal Jesus Christ, it is in fact a name-title, one that can properly be attributed to the Father or the Son.¹⁷ This is the pattern in Revelation, where context requires that the first occurrence of *ho Ōn kai ho Ōn kai ho erchomenos* applies to the Father (1:4) but the second to the Son (1:8). Other references (4:8; 11:17) are ambiguous, applying to either or both.¹⁸

After this introduction, the glorified Jesus is “unveiled” in Revelation in a number of guises, representing his divinity, his sacrificial atoning role, and his continuing mediating function as God’s powerful agent. In John’s inaugural vision of Christ on Patmos, the risen Lord appears as a glorified high priest in white sacerdotal vestments but with an almost indescribable glory that marks him as clearly divine:

And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a

furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. (Revelation 1:13–18)¹⁹

At this sight, John falls at the Lord's feet in an attitude of worship, and rather than forbidding this act of reverence, the Lord responds with the familiar "Fear not."²⁰

In the risen Christ's next appearance, he is described as both "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" and "a Lamb as it had been slain" (Revelation 5:5–7). Perhaps reflective of both his role as the mighty king and judge on the one hand and as the healing, merciful Savior on the other, the image of the Lamb predominates from this point on, stressing his sacrificial role as the Lamb of God. It is because of his sacrifice, in fact, that Christ is worthy to open the seven seals of the scroll written on both sides—earning him, along with God who sits upon the throne, the worship of the heavenly court.

The sealed scroll apparently contains the history of the world, and, as has been noted, usual Latter-day Saint exegesis suggests that its seals represent the different dispensations of the earth's temporal continuance. Thus Jesus, under the direction of God, is unveiled in Revelation 6:1–11:18 as the driving force in history when he opens each seal. It is, however, through the agency of angels that he accomplishes this work, his next unmistakable appearance coming only in Revelation 19:11–13:

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

After he personally vanquishes every foe, Christ then returns to the familiar guise of the Lamb in the description of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:9–22:7), becoming with God the temple, the light, and the source of living water for the new heaven and the new earth that comes at the book's end (Revelation 21:22–22:5).

Some commentators, importantly, have seen two or three other possible christophanies between the opening and closing visions of the book. In Revelation 10:1–7, a "mighty angel" takes his stand with one foot on the sea and the other on the earth and brings time to an end. This figure is described as having "come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire." In Revelation 14:14, a figure "like unto the son of man" appears on a cloud, wearing a crown and bearing a sickle to judge the earth. Likewise, in Revelation 18:1–8, "another angel come[s] down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory"; this angel descends to announce the fall of Babylon, after which he pronounces judgment upon her. While described as angels, the figures in each of these instances is described as no other angel in Revelation is, in each case revealed as a being of light, power, and authority beyond all others.²¹ Whereas much of Revelation distinguishes clearly between the risen Lord, who is worthy of worship, and angels, who are mere mediating agents, these instances suggestively blur the distinction between christophany and angelophany.²²

The case of the angel forbidding worship

Another blurring of the difference between Christ and angels occurs on two occasions when John tries to worship an angel who has been serving as his guide and interlocutor: Revelation 19:10 and 22:8–9. In each case, the angel in question is in fact the one who had been mediating a vision to the seer—in the first case a vision of the fall of Babylon (Revelation 17:1–19:10), in the second a vision of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:9–22:9). This angel could, in fact, be the very angel—the “revealing angel”—through whom the entire revelation from God and Christ came to John (in Revelation 1:1; perhaps also 4:1; 12:10; if this is right, it would suggest that, like Nephi, John had one principal guide after his initial encounter with Deity). The reason for John’s falling at the angel’s feet to worship in Revelation 19:10 is not immediately clear; it is perhaps a result of Christ’s momentous victory over Babylon, which John has somehow associated with the angel who has just shown it to him. In Revelation 22:8–9 the reason for John’s action is more explicable. Not only has the angel shown John a remarkable vision of the New Jerusalem brought about by Christ, but the angel also begins in Revelation 22:7 to speak the very words of Christ: “Behold, I come quickly.”

In this regard, “the revealing angel” is following the Old Testament pattern of the angel of the Lord who not only acts for *YHWH*, but also speaks for him in the first person. This pattern is particularly interesting because of the Latter-day Saint doctrine of “divine investiture of authority.” Formulated by Elder James E. Talmage and then promulgated as “The Father and The Son: A Doctrinal Exposition by The First Presidency and The Twelve” in 1916,²³ this concept sought to explain how the Son often acted for and spoke on behalf of the Father in scripture. Most often used today to help unravel Abinadi’s discussion of how Christ was the Father and the Son in Mosiah 15, the concept applies particularly well here. Acting as an agent for Christ, the revealing angel is authorized to speak for him, as he does even more explicitly in Revelation 22:12–13, where he quotes in the first person, “And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.”

Despite this investiture of authority, the distinction between the authority and the agent is made clear by the prohibition on worshipping the mediating figure: “See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God” (Revelation 22:9). The motif of the angel forbidding worship is common in intertestamental literature,²⁴ as in the case of Raphael in Tobit 12:16–22 or Eremiel in the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* 9. The tension here is that he has been confused with another figure other than God, Christ, for whom worship is, nonetheless, permitted.²⁵

Nevertheless, the message is clear: only God deserves worship and no intermediate figure—angelic or prophetic—is worthy of our adoration. Only Christ, who shares God’s throne and alone is worthy because of his sacrifice, can in any way share in the worship otherwise due alone to God.

The spirit of prophecy

Even so, the principle of mediation in the book of Revelation, shared by both Christ and God’s angels, and perhaps represented by the overlapping characteristics of some christophanies and angelophanies, may have one final and important application. The first time an angel restrains John from worshipping him, he enjoins, “See thou do it not,” adding, “I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10). Prophecy here connects this passage to the second instance of forbidding worship, where the angel notes that he was “of thy brethren the prophets” (Revelation 22:9). But perhaps more significant than this connection is the fact that prophecy is specifically defined as “the testimony of Jesus.”

In a sense, a testimony of Jesus comes through an act of mediation, usually through the Holy Ghost that brings a witness of the Son to the believer. Significantly, those with testimonies of Jesus, along with those who “keep the words of this book,” become part of a prophetic fellowship, which includes the angels who are the agents of God and Christ. Just as angels can act and speak for Christ, who in turn speaks and acts for God, so too can believers in every age—those who will be inhabitants of the New Jerusalem—share in a measure, even a full measure, of the divine nature. As the distinctions in Revelation among theophany, christophany, and angelophany blur, so too can the divisions between God and man. Indeed, this prospect of divine communion and participation may be one of the greatest revelations of the book of Revelation.

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NOTES

1. See Larry H. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 85–124; and Peter R. Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 112–19.
2. In Daniel's case it appears that someone else produced the record of his revelations.
3. John J. Collins, “Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 9.
4. Collins, “Morphology of a Genre,” 10.
5. See, for instance, Jared Halverson, “Lehi's Dream and Nephi's Vision as Apocalyptic Literature,” in *The Things My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi's Dream and Nephi's Vision*, ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2011), 63–69.
6. Whether the “spirit of the Lord” here is, in fact, a singular example of a personal manifestation of the Holy Ghost or an appearance of the premortal Jesus Christ is a matter of debate. Here I assume only that Deity initiates the apocalypse and that an angel or angels then continue it. By analogy to the book of Revelation in which John's inaugural vision is of Christ, however, I am inclined to seeing the figure in 1 Nephi 11:11 as the premortal Christ, who then permits an angel to guide Nephi, since Christ himself will appear as an actor in those visions.
7. See Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels*, 24–26, 28–52.
8. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 44–49.

9. John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed. (Livonia, MI: Dove Booksellers, 1998), 166–71.
10. See Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels*, 27–28.
11. See Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 4–11, 28–47.
12. See Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels*, 53–76.
13. See Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels*, 119–27.
14. See, Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels*, 112–19; as well as Richard Bauckham, “The Worship of Jesus in Apocalyptic Christianity,” *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981): 322–23, 355.
15. See Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, Eric D. Huntsman, and Thomas A. Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 282–83.
16. See Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 188–89.
17. See Doctrine and Covenants 109:34, 56, 68, where Joseph Smith used the title *Jehovah* for the Father in the dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple. For the historical development of Latter-day Saint usage of such name titles, see Boyd Kirkland, “Jehovah as Father: The Development of the Mormon Jehovah Doctrine,” *Sunstone* 19 (1984): 36–44; Boyd Kirkland, “Elohim and Jehovah in Mormonism and the Bible,” *Dialogue* 19 (1986): 77–93; and Ryan Conrad Davis and Paul Y. Hoskisson. “Usage of the Title Elohim,” *Religious Educator* 14/1 (2013): 109–27.
18. The critical Greek text of 11:17 actually contains only *ho Ōn kai ho Ōn*, omitting *kai ho erchomenos*. The King James translators, however, analogous to earlier occurrences, provided “and art to come.” The absence of this final phrase in the original text may suggest that God or Christ, having taken power and reigned, is no longer “the coming one” but simply the one who was and is.
19. See, however, the dissenting interpretation of Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels*, 129–30, 145–74. Carrell, noting the influence of Zechariah 1:8 and Daniel 7:9, sees this christophany as still maintaining many features of an angelophany (rather than of a theophany).
20. In the Latter-day Saint tradition, this entire scene is mirrored in the 1836 vision of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 110:1–5.
21. See Barker, *Great Angel*, 180–84, 287–89; Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels*, 130–40, 175–95. Unlike Barker, Carrell does not identify the description of the angel in Revelation 18:1 as a christophany.
22. See Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels*, 222–30.
23. See James R. Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–75), 5:26–34.
24. See Bauckham, “Worship of Jesus in Apocalyptic Christianity,” 323–27.

25. See Bauckham, "Worship of Jesus in Apocalyptic Christianity," 329.

Overwritten, Written Elsewhere: Names, Books, and Souls in St. John's Apocalypse

Adam S. Miller

Two images from the closing chapters of the book of Revelation are central to this paper: (1) having the name of God written on one's forehead and (2) having one's own name written in the Lamb's book of life.

In Revelation 22:3–4, John recounts that once heaven and earth have been made new, “there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.” This image resonates with the account in Exodus 28:36–38 of how Aaron, the Lord's high priest, should “make a plate of pure gold,” “grave upon it. . . Holiness to the Lord,”¹ and then bear this name upon his forehead as part of his temple clothing.

The image is also repeated elsewhere in the book of Revelation. For instance, in Revelation 7:2–3, an angel “cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of God in their foreheads.” In Revelation 9:4, these same instructions are repeated, but with a negative twist: “They should hurt not the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have *not* the seal of God in their foreheads” (emphasis in original). Revelation 14:1 also recounts how the Lamb of God shall stand “on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.” Finally, it is important to note in this connection that, conversely, the mark of the beast is also to be found on the foreheads of those who bear the beast's name: “And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or name of the beast, or the number of his name” (Revelation 13:16–17).

The second image, having one's name written in the Lamb's book of life, while not as visually striking, is equally important. In Revelation 20:11–15, John recounts how he

saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. . . . And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Similarly, in Revelation 2:17 we're told that “to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.” Or, as Revelation 3:5 puts it: “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”

Closely related to this image, the opening verse of Revelation 5 also recounts how John saw “a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.” Section 77 of the Doctrine and Covenants suggests that we ought to understand these seven seals as containing “the things of the first thousand years, and. . . also of the second thousand years, and so on until the seventh” (D&C 77:7). Here, in brief, the seven-sealed book is a kind of compendium of human history. In a final connection with the image of the book, John describes how, as instructed,

he “went unto [an] angel, and said unto him, give me the little book. And he said unto me, take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey” (Revelation 10:9).

In relation, then, to these two sets of images—one set centered on having the name of God written on one’s forehead and one set centered on having one’s name and history written elsewhere in a book—I want to reflect on two basic questions:

- 1. What does it mean to be written on with someone else’s name?**
- 2. What does it mean to have one’s own name written elsewhere in someone else’s book?**

Or, in short, my question is: What does it mean to be *both* written on and written elsewhere?

The soul: Decomposed and distributed

My thesis is that these images, especially when conjoined, tell us something essential about the nature of a soul and what it means for a soul to be saved. But before returning to the images themselves, I’d like to reflect for a few moments on the nature of the soul.

What is a soul?

Laying aside classical and medieval speculations on the topic that would have us understand the soul as an invisible, immaterial, nonspatial, and indivisible substance (though the continuing influence of these speculations should not be underestimated), I’d like to begin instead with section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Here, in verse 15, the soul is described in the following way: “And the spirit and the body are the soul of man.”

This passage, though compact, has deep implications for how we answer the question, what is a soul? According to this verse, the soul should be understood as a composite of two distinguishable things: the spirit and the body. When joined, spirit and body constitute a soul. This, then, is the first crucial point. Souls are not single and indivisible. Souls are split and composite. A soul is a conjunction whose existence depends on the little *and* that joins “the spirit *and* the body.” An additional, related point is that souls, as composite, aren’t localizable in either the spirit or the body. Rather, souls are distributed throughout their composite spirit/body. A soul is a complex, composite, and distributed entity.

A third point: souls are material. We will return in a few moments to the description in section 131 of the Doctrine and Covenants of how spirit is itself material, but even without this information the materiality of the body and the soul’s distribution into its fleshy corporeality is sufficient to identify the soul as deeply material. Even if spirit were immaterial, the soul, as the composite of an “invisible” spirit and a material body, would still be rooted in the spatiality and temporality that is characteristic of matter.

These three strikingly untraditional points, then, characterize the soul: a soul is composite rather than simple, distributed rather than discrete, and material rather than immaterial.

The body of the soul

How deep does this composite, distributed materiality go? Consider, for a moment, the nature of the body. In the course of our daily lives, we treat bodies as if they were simple, discrete unities. But this is not actually the case. In the same way that souls are composite and distributed, bodies are themselves composite and distributed.

It may be helpful at this point to introduce a bit of technical terminology. When, in the course of things, a composite and distributed process is treated as if it were a simple, discrete, and stable unity, let's refer to it (following Bruno Latour) as a "black box."² When we are unconcerned with or unaware of the composite nature of a thing, it appears to us as a black box. For instance, my laptop, though it is obviously composed of many parts and though its functional identity is obviously distributed among its parts, is generally for me a black box: I don't know what many of its parts are, I don't know how they all fit together functionally, and when I use it or carry it around I treat it as if it were a simple unity. (In this sense, we might say that, traditionally, Christianity treats the soul as a black box.) To the degree that something is treated simply as a black box, we will fail to see it as it actually is.

Again, then, in this sense, we typically experience our own bodies as a black box. But if we lift the lid off this black box and look more closely, we're greeted by an astonishing level of multiplicity and complexity. The body is an interpenetrating weave of semiautonomous but deeply interdependent organs, systems, and processes. It is a massive, distributed tangle of heart, lungs, nerves, veins, skin, eyes, tongue, hair, brain, bones, muscles, blood, saliva, acid, cells, DNA, mitochondria, cartilage, bile, teeth, nails, respiration, circulation, digestion, reproduction, sensation, cogitation, and who knows what else—all pulsing in time as one huge semi-stable and quasi-autonomous feedback loop.

In general, however, the human body is a black box.

Of particular importance here is the way in which the body is revealed as an *open* system—once the lid of the black box has been lifted. Nothing in the body is self-sufficient. Everything requires a constant, never-ending, and open engagement with the surrounding environment. Bodies need to breathe, eat, taste, touch, defecate, hear, smell, and feel. At the cellular level, the body is, from moment to moment, perpetually dying and being reborn.

In a crucial sense, then, the body is not only distributed among its parts, it is similarly distributed beyond itself and into its environment. The body, despite its independent motility, has no clean edges, no hard lines. Instead, it bleeds out beyond this fragile, porous shell of skin and hair into the fabric of the world around it, just as the world around it simultaneously bleeds back into the flesh, fiber, and blood of the body itself through constant respiration, digestion, and sensation. Disconnected from air, food, water, and sensation, a body is *not* a body. As a result, to successfully resurrect a body, one would have to successfully resurrect a world.

A final, important point about the nature of the body: the body is not only a composite system that is distributed beyond itself in space; it is also distributed in time. Bodies have (and are) histories. As a composite of processes distributed over a span of time, bodies are constantly in motion. At any given moment, the flesh of the body could be read as a text that tells the story of where that body has been, what it has done, what it has eaten, what it has breathed, what it has thought, and whom it has loved.

But the body bears with it a more deeply distributed history as well, a history that bleeds out beyond the edges of its own birth and death and into the bodies and lives of its parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. We bear this history as the sum total of a biological inheritance that is inscribed in a matrix of genetic and epigenetic processes and that recedes into the mists of deep time and evolutionary history. Everything that a body is, at any given moment in time, is an interwoven composite of many different descending lines of biological inheritance and material history, funneled down, down, down to this particular, narrow configuration given in this particular slice of time. Think of the body at any given moment as a single narrow point of passage where thousands of independent but converging lines of material, ecological, biological, and familial history briefly intersect before they are spun off along new vectors and trajectories of distribution.

The spirit of the soul

It is more difficult to speak of the spirit than the body. Nonetheless, in my view, we know enough to be able to draw a firm line that, at the very least, points in the right direction. First, taking section 131 of the Doctrine and Covenants as our guide, we ought to resist the temptation to think of spirit as entirely different from body. Rather, in order for body and spirit to compose a soul, it makes sense to assume that, despite relative degrees of autonomy, they share enough for their interpenetration to be deep and substantial. Doctrine and Covenants 131:7–8 states bluntly that “there is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes; we cannot see it; but when our bodies are purified we shall see that it is all matter.” Spirit, then, whatever else we might say about it, is material.

But if spirit is not different from the body with respect to materiality, then in what way is it different? These verses suggest that spirit differs in terms of granularity; it is “more fine or pure.” What kinds of material things are finer, purer, and harder to discern?

We might pose the question this way, When we speak of spirit, what do we understand it to be capable of discerning that the body, on its own, cannot? When Spirit speaks to spirit, it speaks, as the Lord tells Oliver Cowdery in section 8 of the Doctrine and Covenants, to minds and hearts: “Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart. Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation” (D&C 8:2–3). The stuff of mind is thought and the stuff of heart is feeling. Whatever else spirit may be, we experience spirit as an interpenetrating weave of thoughts, ideas, judgments, feelings, passions, desires, and aversions. Though rooted in the body, this weave of spirit involves a dimension of looped awareness and reflexivity that is finer and harder to discern than those that belong to the body itself.

To say that a spirit is material is to say that, like all material things, it too is distributed and composite. However, like the body, we often treat spirit as if it were a simple, discrete unity. Or, in other words, as with the body, we often treat spirit as a black box. But when we lift the lid on this box, we see clearly that spirit is itself manifest as a complex network of interconnected but semiautonomous processes of thought and feeling. In particular, spirit is manifest in those patterns of desire that combine judgment and feeling in particular orientations toward the world and our experience of it. Our thoughts, actions, goals, dispositions, attitudes, opinions, emotions, and reactions are shaped in profound ways by these complex patterns of desire and aversion.

Further, spirit, like body, is an *open* system. When we watch what is going on in our hearts and minds at any given moment, we find a dizzying array of ideas and feelings arising, receding, competing, converging, and passing—all of their own accord. Ideas from our conversations with other people, from the class we just attended, or from the scriptures we recently read all share time with a snatch from the song we just listened to on the radio, the billboard we just passed, or the movie we recently watched.

Spirit, like the body, is dependent upon and constantly traversed by the ideas and feelings that compose it, ideas and feelings that, like our cells, are born, reproduce, arise, and pass away. A freestanding, self-enclosed spirit would be a contradiction in terms. Just as bodies are the flow of air, food, and sensation that pass through them, spirits are the flow of ideas, emotions, and desires channeled by them. Mind and heart bleed out into the world and the world bleeds back into our hearts and minds. This raw and mutually constitutive interpenetration of spirit and world are what hearts and minds are for.

A final note about spirit: just as the body is not only distributed in space but also in time, spirit is distributed in history as well. Spirit too bleeds out beyond the edges of its own birth and death and into the lives of its parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. The ideas and feelings that shape my heart and mind are inherited—with

an endless array of variations, mutations, inversions, and extrapolations—from, above all, my parents and, in turn, their parents and their parents.

The ingrained patterns of desire and aversion that shape my every waking hour, from my choice of a profession to my choice of a dessert, unfold in time as a consequence of the lines of desire that gave birth to the heart and mind that are mine. At any given moment, one might read my spirit as a text that inscribes a genealogy of desire and a lineage of dispositions that recedes backward from me, through my parents and grandparents, and into the mists of deep time and evolutionary history. Think of spirit, at any given moment, as a single narrow point of passage where thousands upon thousands of independent but converging lines of opinion and desire intersect before they are spun off along new vectors and trajectories of distribution in my own life and in the lives of my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Overwritten

I would like to return, now, to the two questions I posed at the outset:

- 1. What does it mean to be written on with someone else's name?**
- 2. What does it mean to have one's own name written elsewhere in someone else's book?**

First, the issue of being overwritten. The basic image to which this phrase refers is having the name of God (or, alternatively, the mark of the beast) written on our foreheads. I propose that we read this image as referring to the way that as human beings we are inevitably overwritten by a name (or names) that are not our own.

When we ask, who am I?—when we look carefully and deeply at ourselves to see what our identity consists of—we may be surprised to find only the names of others. We may be surprised, at least at first, to see how our bodies are shaped by and overwritten with genetic and material histories that we did not choose. “This is my father’s nose,” we may say, “these are my mother’s eyes, this my grandfather’s laugh, this my great-grandmother’s diabetes, these my uncle’s two left feet.”

We may be surprised, at least at first, to see how our spirits are overwritten with thoughts, feelings, and patterns of desire that are not our own. “This is my father’s habit,” we may say, “these are my mother’s songs, this my grandfather’s unfulfilled desire, this my great-grandmother’s frugality, this my aunt’s taste in clothes.”

If we look closely, we will see how their outside is written on our inside, how the names, genes, and habits of those nearest to us are inscribed in our own flesh.

And, if we look closely enough we will doubtless find, as John’s apocalypse so beautifully describes, that the sum of this soul is overwritten with the name of God. Having gathered the courage to look into our own eyes, we will find God’s name inscribed in what we had (mistakenly) taken to be a face that was singularly our own.

There is no escaping this. To be human is to be overwritten. If we are not overwritten by the name of God, then we will be overwritten with the mark of the beast. To borrow an image from Freud, human beings are palimpsests, records whose contents have been overwritten (and, likely, overwritten again) in such a way as to simultaneously bear traces from layers of different texts. Whatever a “pristine” or “original” document would be—if such a thing were even possible—it would not yet be a human being. The humanity of a human being is constituted by this overwriting, overwriting that is not an act of desecrating vandalism that we ought to lament, but the very process that allows a human soul to emerge as such.

Written elsewhere

But this is only part of the story. We must also consider the second image: having our own names written in someone else's book—in particular, having our names and histories written in the Lamb's book of life. Just as we are overwritten with names that are not our own, those near to us (in particular, our children) are overwritten by names that are not their own (in particular, ours). Here, we have a double distribution of names: overwritten by the names of others, our own names are written elsewhere. Bearing the name of the Father on our bodies, the Son bears our names in the flesh of his book. Indeed, as Isaiah describes it, our names are irreversibly graven on the palms of his hands (see Isaiah 49:16).

My son may one day be surprised, at least at first, to find words coming out his mouth that are not his own, but his father's. He may one day be surprised to find that his hairline is mine, that his desire to teach is mine (as mine is my father's), that his son's eyes are my own. My son may one day be surprised to find that my name—though I do not bear this name myself—is the name written in *his* book.

But this distributed complexity is, by its very nature, a fragile thing. As John warns, if we do not overcome, if we do not find some way to lay down the burden that is our pride and vanity, then our names will not be found in the Lamb's book of life. If we do not wear out our lives in the service of God and in the service of others, if our lives are not spread like seed over the face of the earth, then our names will not be found elsewhere. To pull back into ourselves, to refuse the suffering and resistance of life, to scurry from petty pleasure to petty pleasure hoping to avoid whatever we do not happen to prefer—to do these things will leave us a rootless branch. Having never inscribed the substance of our lives elsewhere, we will suffer the loneliness of it.

Mark of the beast

It is in light of this second image that the difference between the name of God and the mark of the beast is most plain. We have the name of the Father written in our foreheads only when our names are also written elsewhere in the Son's book of life. If our names are not written elsewhere, if our souls are not willingly distributed into the lives of others, then we will become untethered, condemned to wander the face of the earth bearing only the mark of the beast. Not having our names written elsewhere, we will fail to be human. Failing to be human, we will be only beasts.

What is the difference between the "name" of God and the "mark" of the beast? Where the name is intelligible, the mark is an empty signifier. Where a name distributes meaning beyond itself through a complex network of references, the mark blankly refers only to itself.

In this sense, then, we might say that the name of God and the mark of the beast are identical. We bear this name on our foreheads, but only when the complex and distributed nature of this name is understood does it meaningfully refer to anything beyond itself. Only when the name points beyond itself is it salvific. Otherwise, the mark fails to function as a name and it remains (like an idol) empty, mute, and powerless.

Or again: the name of God is the mark of the beast when that name is received as a black box. Having never inquired into the nature of things, having never lifted the lid off this box to discover its distributed complexity, we treat the soul as if it were a single, autonomous, and indivisible thing. We treat our lives as if they were not overwritten and as if they did not need to be written elsewhere. Treating the soul as a black box, we treat the mark on our heads as if it were our *own* name and as if it pointed no further than the skull on which it is inscribed.

Further, as a black box, reduced to the mark of a beast, the name of God is inevitably and emptily circulated as a kind of currency. John is very clear on this point. The mark of the beast is good for only one thing: buying and

selling. “And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or name of the beast, or the number of his name” (Revelation 13:16–17). Do we sell the name of God for money? Or do we hold it sacred? Is that name, for us, only a mark—a black box, a token of our emptiness, self-regard, and ignorance—that we spend on trinkets and baubles in the hope of being distracted from the distributed difficulty of being human? Or does it in fact name the way in which we—that is, our souls—are not our own?

Money, accumulated, is the universal medium for our pursuit of our “selves” and our own happiness. It is the means we employ in a vain attempt to recover ourselves and have our *own* names written on our *own* foreheads. But if our names are not written elsewhere in the lives of others, then the name with which we are overwritten is an empty signifier without content or vector of redistribution. Having only the mark of the beast, the sign of the natural man, we are overwritten with a meaningless, reference-less name that does not lead us back to someone else in whom we would find our own name inscribed.

The tree of life

By way of conclusion, I would like to reflect on the image of the tree of life as presented in Revelation 22:2. John’s lengthy description of the heavenly city in these final chapters culminates in the following somewhat puzzling image:

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:1–2)

What is potentially puzzling about this image? In this passage, John describes the tree of life as being “in the midst of the street, *and* on either side of the river” (emphasis added). How can the tree of life be on both sides of the river? How can it be in the middle of the street *and* on both sides of the river? Is the tree one or many? Is it single or composite? Is it localized or distributed?

Taking a cue from the redescription of “eternal life” in the Doctrine and Covenants as, in fact, consisting of “eternal lives” (D&C 132:24), we might apply the same emendation to these verses. Here, the tree of *life* (singular) is revealed as the tree of *lives* (plural). The tree of lives is both here and elsewhere, both conjoined and distributed, both root and branch. To be a human being, to be alive, is to be like the tree of lives: ambiguously (and mercifully) distributed.

Finally, we might also note that John describes this tree as bearing “twelve manner of fruits.” Clearly, these twelve fruits refer, at least in part, to the twelve families of Israel. The tree of lives is, in this respect, the family tree common to all human beings. Through all the Lord’s nurturing, grafting, transplanting, digging, dunging, and pruning, this tree has continued to grow and divide. All the tree’s branches, veins, and roots continue to be intertwined in complex patterns of support, dependence, and inheritance. In this tree of lives, the material sum of human history bears fruit—with each of the branches overwritten by the roots, and with each of the roots having their names written elsewhere in the branches.

To read the vast genealogical text of interdependence and variation that this tree is would be to read the Lamb’s own book of life.

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NOTES

1. This quotation appears in full caps in the KJV Bible.
2. See, for instance, Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 2–3.