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Allegories, Prayers, Songs, Genealogies

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Abstract The most significant allegory in the Book of Mormon is the allegory of the tame and wild olive tree, which appears in Jacob 5. Six different types of prayers are found in the Book of Mormon. Perhaps the best example of a true song is “The Song of the Vineyard,” actually a quotation from Isaiah. There is only one example of an extended genealogy, that of Ether, the last Jaredite prophet.

Types Of Literature in the Book of Mormon

Allegories, Prayers, Songs, Genealogies

Abstract: The most significant allegory in the Book of Mormon is "The Allegory of the Tame and Wild Olive Tree," which appears in Jacob 5. Six different types of prayers are found in the Book of Mormon. Perhaps the best example of a true song is "The Song of the Vineyard," actually a quotation from Isaiah. There is only one example of an extended genealogy, that of Ether, the last Jaredite prophet.

Allegories

An allegory, it will be remembered, is a literary form which tells a story for the purpose of presenting a truth or of enforcing a moral. The true meaning of the story is always veiled since its characters and incidents are either figurative or typical; it is necessary for the reader to deduce the meaning of the story from its outward, or literal, sense. Most of us are familiar with Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*,¹ an example of allegory, whose characters and incidents serve as a lure to the consideration of what may be dull or even unpleasant truths. The story of "The Good Shepherd" (John 10:1-18) and of "The Vine" (John 15:1-8) are good examples of biblical allegories. It is interesting to observe the use

This originally appeared as chapter 12 on pages 134-44 of Our Book of Mormon.

¹ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (New York: Penguin Books, 1965, 1987).

of allegory in the Gospel of John, and of parables in the synoptic Gospels, which show the different literary forms preferred by different Gospel writers. One good example of the allegory is found in Jacob 5:2–77.

An interesting feature of this allegory is the fact that it is quoted from the brass plates, with the prophet Zenos credited as its author. Zenos was a Hebrew prophet, but his prophecies and name are not preserved for us in our present Hebrew Old Testament. The allegory by Zenos is commonly known among us as “The Allegory of the Tame and Wild Olive Tree.”

This allegory delineates the spiritual history of Israel, including its main branches, throughout the ages until the end comes and the Lord’s work is finished. The spiritual decay of Israel in her scattered state at different periods, as well as her virtues, is represented. In Jacob 6:1–4, Jacob partly explains the allegory, especially as it applies to our day:

And now, behold, my brethren, as I said unto you that I would prophesy, behold, this is my prophecy—that the things which this prophet Zenos spake, concerning the house of Israel, in the which he likened them unto a tame olive-tree, must surely come to pass.

And the day that he shall set his hand again the second time to recover his people, is the day, yea, even the last time, that the servants of the Lord shall go forth in his power, to nourish and prune his vineyard; and after that the end soon cometh.

And how blessed are they who have labored diligently in his vineyard; and how cursed are they who shall be cast out into their own place! And the world shall be burned with fire.

And how merciful is our God unto us, for he remembereth the house of Israel, both roots and branches; and he stretches forth his hands unto them all the day long; and they are a stiffnecked and a gain-saying people; for as many as will not harden their hearts shall be saved in the kingdom of God.

The grafting in of the branches of the wild olive tree, as related in Jacob 5:7–10, must have reference to the Gentiles of whom Paul speaks in Romans:

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, who are a wild olive, were grafted in their place to share the richness of the olive tree, do not exult over the branches. If you do, remember it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." Very well. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand by faith. Do not be proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. (cf. Romans 11:17–21 NIV)

In connection with the study of this allegory, Romans 11, as well as Isaiah 5:1–7 and 1 Nephi 10:12–14, should be very carefully considered. The allegory of Zenos will amply repay the student who examines it with care.

Prayers

Recorded prayers and deliberately written prayers may be regarded for our purpose here as a distinct form of literature. They are a very solemn type of writing, since they express the most intimate communings of man with his God in such varied forms as ordination, thanksgiving, supplication, confession, intercession, sorrow, and adoration.

Prayers in the Book of Mormon, may, for convenience, be classified as: (1) model—The Lord's Prayer; (2) intercessory; (3) supplicatory; (4) pagan; (5) indignation, sorrow, and comfort; and (6) ordinance prayers.

The Lord's Prayer (a model prayer) is so well known that little need be said about it. Since our Lord also delivered the Sermon on the Mount to the Nephites, this prayer is found, as we have already seen, in "The American Gospel," the specific reference being 3 Nephi 13:9–13. The prayer is, of course, a great Christian classic. It may be called lyric poetry, for it seems to be built upon the principles of poetic parallelism common to the Hebrew Old

Testament. The prayer is remarkable for its freedom, simplicity of manner, and trustfulness in spirit. The fine rhythm and balance of its phrasing are apparent, even in the imperfect English translation. It contains two strophes of about equal length and a doxology at the end. The first strophe refers to great public interests, the second to the needs of the individual.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven.

And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,
and the power,
and the glory,
forever. Amen.

(3 Nephi 13:9–13)

This version differs very obviously from that in Matthew 6:9–13 in that it omits “Thy kingdom come” and “Give us this day our daily bread,” and changes “which” to “who” and “in earth” to “on earth.” Interestingly, the version in the inspired revision of the Bible by Joseph Smith differs from both. The problems inherent in these differences are treated in chapter 15, which deals with literary difficulties in the Sermon on the Mount.²

A number of intercessory prayers can be found in the Book of Mormon, of which we list four: Helaman 11:4; 11:10–16; 3 Nephi 19:20–23; 19:28–29. In this type of prayer the one who prays acts as a mediator or intercessor for others. Let us consider two of these. The first is by Nephi, the son of Helaman. It is a

² See pages 153–66 of this issue.

short prayer in which Nephi asks that his people be stirred up in remembrance of the Lord by means of a famine, rather than by the sword:

O Lord, do not suffer that this people shall be destroyed by the sword; but O Lord, rather let there be a famine in the land, to stir them up in remembrance of the Lord their God, and perhaps they will repent and turn unto thee. (Helaman 11:4)

The second is one of two prayers uttered by the Savior in behalf of the twelve whom he had chosen among the Nephites for the work of the ministry:

Father, I thank thee that thou hast given the Holy Ghost unto these whom I have chosen; and it is because of their belief in me that I have chosen them out of the world.

Father, I pray thee that thou wilt give the Holy Ghost unto all them that shall believe in their words.

Father, thou hast given them the Holy Ghost because they believe in me; and thou seest that they believe in me because thou hearest them, and they pray unto me; and they pray unto me because I am with them.

And now Father, I pray unto thee for them, and also for all those who shall believe on their words, that they may believe in me, that I may be in them as thou, Father, art in me, that we may be one. (3 Nephi 19:20–23)

In a supplicatory prayer one makes a humble entreaty for something much needed or desired. We may note three examples here: Ether 2:18–19; 2:22; and 3:2–5. The last one, with something of an intercessory element in it, is probably the best:

O Lord, thou hast said that we must be encompassed about by the floods. Now behold, O Lord, and do not be angry with thy servant because of his weakness before thee; for we know that thou art holy and dwellest in the heavens, and that we are unworthy

before thee; because of the fall our natures have become evil continually; nevertheless, O Lord, thou hast given us a commandment that we must call upon thee, that from thee we may receive according to our desires.

Behold, O Lord, thou hast smitten us because of our iniquity, and hast driven us forth, and for these many years we have been in the wilderness; nevertheless, thou hast been merciful unto us. O Lord, look upon me in pity, and turn away thine anger from this thy people, and suffer not that they shall go forth across this raging deep in darkness; but behold these things which I have molten out of the rock.

And I know, O Lord, that thou hast all power, and can do whatsoever thou wilt for the benefit of man; therefore touch these stones, O Lord, with thy finger, and prepare them that they may shine forth in darkness; and they shall shine forth unto us in the vessels which we have prepared, that we may have light while we shall cross the sea.

Behold, O Lord, thou canst do this. We know that thou art able to show forth great power, which looks small unto the understanding of men. (Ether 3:2-5)

In Alma 31:15-18 is a prayer which may be denominated a pagan prayer because it came from a group of people called Zoramites, who did not believe in Christ and whose actions were inimical to the spirit of true religion. The Zoramites were extreme dissenters from the Nephite way of life, and they caused Alma, the prophet, and his companions much anxiety. Here is their prayer:

Holy, holy God; we believe that thou art God, and we believe that thou art holy, and that thou wast a spirit, and that thou art a spirit, and that thou wilt be a spirit forever.

Holy God, we believe that thou hast separated us from our brethren; and we do not believe in the tradition of our brethren, which was handed down to them by the childishness of their fathers; but we believe that thou hast elected us to be thy holy children; and also

thou hast made it known unto us that there shall be no Christ.

But thou art the same yesterday, today, and forever; and thou hast elected us that we shall be saved, whilst all around us are elected to be cast by thy wrath down to hell; for the which holiness, O God, we thank thee; and we also thank thee that thou hast elected us, that we may not be led away after the foolish traditions of our brethren, which doth bind them down to a belief of Christ, which doth lead their hearts to wander far from thee, our God.

And again we thank thee, O God, that we are a chosen and a holy people. Amen. (Alma 31:15–18)

Observe the difference in spirit between this prayer and Alma's, which is quoted next as an example of a further classification—the prayer of indignation, sorrow, and comfort:

O, how long, O Lord, wilt thou suffer that my servants shall dwell here below in the flesh, to behold such gross wickedness among the children of men?

Behold, O God, they cry unto thee, and yet their hearts are swallowed up in their pride. Behold, O God, they cry unto thee with their mouths, while they are puffed up, even to greatness, with the vain things of the world.

Behold, O my God, their costly apparel, and their ringlets, and their bracelets, and their ornaments of gold, and all their precious things which they are ornamented with; and behold, their hearts are set upon them, and yet they cry unto thee and say—We thank thee, O God, for we are a chosen people unto thee, while others shall perish.

Yea, and they say that thou hast made it known unto them that there shall be no Christ.

O Lord God, how long wilt thou suffer that such wickedness and infidelity shall be among this people? O Lord, wilt thou give me strength, that I may bear with mine infirmities. For I am infirm, and such wickedness among this people does pain my soul.

O Lord, my heart is exceedingly sorrowful; wilt thou comfort my soul in Christ. O Lord, wilt thou grant unto me that I may have strength, that I may suffer with patience these afflictions which shall come upon me, because of the iniquity of this people.

O Lord, wilt thou comfort my soul, and give unto me success, and also my fellow laborers who are with me—yea, Ammon, and Aaron, and Omner, and also Amulek and Zeezrom, and also my two sons—yea, even all these wilt thou comfort, O Lord. Yea, wilt thou comfort their souls in Christ.

Wilt thou grant unto them that they may have strength, that they may bear their afflictions which shall come upon them because of the iniquities of this people.

O Lord, wilt thou grant unto us that we may have success in bringing them again unto thee in Christ.

Behold, O Lord, their souls are precious, and many of them are our brethren; therefore, give unto us, O Lord, power and wisdom that we may bring these, our brethren, again unto thee. (Alma 31:26–35)

This prayer of Alma has many noble and uplifting sentiments in it. It is a passionate dissent from the practices of the pagans referred to. We especially call attention to Alma 31:28, in which an uplifting universal element is found. Alma particularly derides those Zoramites who say, "We thank thee, O God, for we are a chosen people unto thee, while others shall perish." Like Amos of old (Amos 3:1–2), Alma believes that special privilege implies corresponding responsibility. Israel, indeed, was a chosen people, but only upon the premise that it live up to the responsibility of bringing salvation to the nations of the world. Election to privilege is always a call to duty and responsibility.

Five ordinance prayers are found in the Book of Mormon: Mosiah 18:13; 3 Nephi 11:25; Moroni 3:3; 4:3; and 5:2. The last two, dealing with the set mode of administering the bread and the wine (water with us), are so well known in the Church that we shall not reproduce them here. The first one, used by Alma when he baptized Helam, is of great interest because of the way in which it differs from the second, a set form prescribed by the Savior:

And when he had said these words, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, and he said: Helam, I baptize thee, having authority from the Almighty God, as a testimony that ye have entered into a covenant to serve him until you are dead as to the mortal body; and may the Spirit of the Lord be poured out upon you; and may he grant unto you eternal life, through the redemption of Christ, whom he has prepared from the foundation of the world. (Mosiah 18:13)

The second, which, as we have observed, is a fixed ordinance prayer, follows:

Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. (3 Nephi 11:25)

The third prayer, which seems also to be a fixed ordinance prayer, deals with the ordination of priests and teachers:

In the name of Jesus Christ I ordain you to be a priest, (or, if he be a teacher) I ordain you to be a teacher, to preach repentance and remission of sins through Jesus Christ, by the endurance of faith on his name to the end. Amen. (Moroni 3:3)

If this ordinance prayer is a fixed one, it would appear that Nephite practice in ordaining priests and teachers varied somewhat from our own.

Songs

The song is in every nation the most natural and spontaneous utterance of the higher sensibilities and emotions. In the Book of Mormon are found a few good examples of it. Many passages can be found in which song is incipient, that is, where it is about to manifest itself, but falls just short of completing the poetic pattern necessary to be called true song. Consider Jacob's teaching in 2 Nephi 9:8, 10, 13, 19, 20, 49, as also in 2 Nephi 11:4-7. This, however, is a quotation from Isaiah, and is commonly known as

"The Song of the Vineyard." Let us reproduce the text which appears in the Book of Mormon in poetic form:

The Song of the Vineyard

And then will I sing to my
 well-beloved
A song of my beloved touching
 his vineyard.
My well-beloved hath a vineyard
 In a very fruitful hill;
And he fenced it, and gathered out
 the stones thereof,
And planted it with the choicest
 vine,
And built a tower in the midst
 of it,
And also made a wine-press
 therein;
And he looked that it should
 bring forth grapes,
And it brought forth wild
 grapes.

And now, O inhabitants of
 Jerusalem and men of Judah,
Judge, I pray you, betwixt me
 and my vineyard.
What could have been done
 more to my vineyard
That I have not done in it?
 Wherefore, when I looked that it
should bring forth grapes,
 It brought forth wild grapes.

And now go to; I will tell you
What I will do to my vineyard—
I will take away the hedge thereof,
And it shall be eaten up;

And I will break down the wall
 thereof,
 And it shall be trodden down;
 And I will lay it waste;
 It shall not be pruned nor digged;
 But there shall come up briers
 and thorns;
 I will also command the clouds
 That they rain no rain upon it.

For the vineyard of the Lord of
 Hosts is the house of Israel,
 And the men of Judah his
 pleasant plant;
 And he looked for judgment,
 and behold, oppression;
 For righteousness, but behold, a cry.
 (2 Nephi 15:1-7)

Some passages in Alma 26 border on the song form, if they do not actually attain it. Consider the following excerpts from Alma:

Blessed be the name of our God;
 Let us sing to his praise,
 Yea, let us give thanks to his
 holy name,
 For he doth work righteousness
 forever.
 (Alma 26:8)

Therefore, let us glory,
 Yea, we will glory in the Lord;
 Yea, we will rejoice, for
 our joy is full;
 Yea, we will praise our
 God forever.
 Behold, who can glory too much
 in the Lord?

Yea, who can say too much
of his great power,
And of his mercy,
And of his long-suffering
towards the children of men?
(Alma 26:16)

Genealogies

Genealogies are common in the Bible. The Hebrew people took great interest in their family histories, and genealogies seem to have been carefully kept; the number in the scriptures is an index to their importance. Notice those in Genesis 5, 11, 46; Numbers 26; 1 Chronicles 1–9; read also the accounts in Ezra 9–10 which give an indication of the importance of keeping family histories. The Book of Mormon, however, contains only one example of an extended genealogy, that found in Ether 1:6–32. It gives the genealogy of Ether, the last prophet of the Jaredite people, whose lineage is traced back twenty-nine generations or more to Jared, who left the Tower of Babel with his family at the time of the confounding of the language of the people. Aside from this example, only scattered references of genealogical interest are found. Thus Mormon makes the following statement regarding his lineage:

And I, Mormon, being a descendant of Nephi, (and my father's name was Mormon) remembered the things which Ammaron commanded me. (Mormon 1:5)

In 1 Nephi 5:14, 16, the scribe mentions the fact that the genealogy of Lehi and Laban was found on the brass plates. In 1 Nephi 6:1–2 he records:

And now I, Nephi, do not give the genealogy of my fathers in this part of my record; neither at any time shall I give it after upon these plates which I am writing; for it is given in the record which has been kept by my father; wherefore, I do not write it in this work.

For it sufficeth me to say that we are descendants of Joseph.

These scriptures would seem to indicate that although the Nephites were interested in their own genealogy, they kept their records upon plates other than those translated by Joseph Smith. The problem of space must be kept in mind as a prime essential in our Nephite record.