Many a modern day missionary feels discouraged in their work to spread the gospel. When their teaching inevitably falls upon the “itchy ears” of humans, missionaries may be desperate in their search for open ears. A friend recently related that he and a missionary companion found that they would rather teach a goat the gospel because at least then they, the missionaries, would have a chance to talk. Humorously, he suggested that doing so may even fulfil their mission to “…preach the Gospel to every creature.” (Mark 16:15)

This mission given by Christ to his disciples has been repeated unto his modern day disciples and missionaries as well. The Doctrine and Covenants itself includes 7 different instances of the Lord commanding his people to share the gospel with “every creature” (D&C 18:28, 58:64, 68:8, 80:1, 84:62, 112:28, 124:128). With this much repetition, the Lord must be serious with this calling.

No matter the seriousness of the calling, it begs the question: What does “every creature” mean? Are we to define it as that missionary friend did and start teaching animals the gospel? Are we to define “creature” like the 50’s B-movies do: a scary and terrifying monster? (Imagine teaching resurrection to Frankenstein or baptism for the dead to a zombie) What does creature mean?

The answer can be found through an exegetical look at the use of the word “creature” in The Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon has 11 instances of the word “creature”, each one has a unique context and meaning that gives us insight into the word “creature”. This paper will examine not only the uses of the word “creature” in the Book of Mormon, it will examine what the word meant in Joseph Smith’s time and what can be learned from that knowledge. Doing so
will enhance the study of the student of the scriptures so they may more fully internalize the intent of the original authors.

**Definition of Creature**

The modern definition of “creature” is hard to pinpoint. Some say it means “animal” or “beast”; others say “monster” or “scary being”. However, in the early 1800’s, Joseph Smith’s time, the word “creature” had a different meaning, actually. The definition for “creature” in the Webster’s dictionary of 1828 is given as the following:

**CREATURE, noun**

1. That which is created; every being besides the Creator, or every thing not self-existent….
2. In a restricted sense, an animal of any kind; a living being; a beast. In a more restricted sense, man….
3. A human being, in contempt; as an idle creature; a poor creature...
4. With words of endearment, it denotes a human being beloved; as a pretty creature...
5. That which is produced, formed or imagined...
6. A person who owes his rise and fortune to another; one who is made to be what he is...
7. A dependent; a person who is subject to the will or influence of another...

From these definitions, it is seen that “creature” had a different meaning in Joseph Smith’s time. It can mean an animal or beast according to the second definition, however, most of the definitions include the words “human” or “man” indicating that creature can just as well mean man as it could something non-human.

All of the definitions do have a central definition though. All seem to convey that “creature” is something that has been created (“create”-”ture”, if you will). It can also mean something made, produced, or built (The usage of the word “creature” in Mark 16:15 comes from the Greek *ktisei* which means “build”). With all of these meaning, it can be seen that the
modern comprehension of the definition of “creature” is inadequate for a clear understanding of the scriptures. With this knowledge, it is understood that Christ meant in his admonition to his disciples that his gospel should be taught unto all of his creations, all of which rely on him and owe who they are to him.

Uses of the Word in The Book of Mormon

Now that a basic understanding of the 1828 definition of “creature” is established, an analysis of that word’s usage in The Book of Mormon is now possible. Each verse which uses the word “creature” must be analyzed individually, so the author’s intended meaning may be ascertained.

2 Nephi 23:21

But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there.

This passage from the book of Isaiah, which is quoted by Nephi, is a part of a vision that Isaiah received regarding the destruction of Babylon. This usage of “creature” is most likely to do strictly with the second definition of “creature” (meaning an animal or beast), however, “doleful” in this passage means “sorrowful” or “dismal”, and therefore could mean that the people occupying homes during this time of destruction would be very melancholy and distraught, therefore making “creature” have a more humanistic connotation.

Mosiah 27:26

And thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.

This verse, coming from Alma the Younger relating his conversion experience, is preceded by this verse:
And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters; (Mosiah 27:25)

This verse demonstrates the requirements one needs to inherit the kingdom of God. They must be “born again”, changed from a lower state to a higher state, and therefore become a new person or, as Alma put it, a “new creature”. “Creature” in this context is one who is created by God who makes the changes required to be born (or created) again in God, and therefore becomes a new creation. Verse 26 indicates that such a transformation is essential in obtaining the kingdom of God, therefore signifying the importance of being created again.

Being “created again” and being “born again” do not necessarily mean the same thing. Creation is a process, birth is an event. Creation takes time and effort. Birth lasts a relatively short time when compared to the amount of time it takes to create a body. Creation is faith and repentance, whereas birth is the baptismal ordinance. Creation makes one worthy to be born. An unborn child must reach a certain point of development before they can survive outside the womb; the same is with one’s conversion to the gospel, as it has to obtain a certain level before one can make sacred covenants. If one is not truly converted, the ordinance will not have its full effect. So one must constantly become a “new creature” in order to be born anew and receive the highest blessings.

Alma 42:21-22

And if there was no law given, if men sinned what could justice do, or mercy either, for they would have no claim upon the creature?

But there is a law given, and a punishment affixed, and a repentance granted; which repentance, mercy claimeth; otherwise, justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment; if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God.
These next two uses are used in adjacent verses, so they will be treated like one verse. These verses are taken from Alma’s discourse to his son Corianton about the plan of salvation, commandments, and repentance. Alma, until this point in the chapter, uses “man” or “mankind” when explaining these doctrines. However, in these two verses, he switches from man/men to “the creature”.

These verses are unique in that the uses of “creature” are preceded by the determiner “the”. Doing so makes man not only seem more relatable, but makes it more personal. Before, Alma’s use of the word “man” was very broad, but his clever change to “the creature” hones in on the personal accountability of the audience. It is as if Alma is saying, “if we humans sin, what are justice and mercy going to do for you?”

Alma’s primary audience was his son Corianton, one who had made serious mistakes and was currently repenting of them. Alma’s use of “the creature” could have been a direct statement to Corianton, someone who desperately needed humility and hope during that time of his life. “The creature” may have been a loving father’s statement to a struggling son which had a two-fold purpose, to demonstrate that his actions were animalistic, yet that because he is a “creature” of God, there is someone he can always rely on.

**Alma 30:17**

And many more such things did he say unto them, telling them that there could be no atonement made for the sins of men, but every man fared in this life according to the management of the **creature**; therefore every man prospered according to his genius, and that every man conquered according to his strength; and whatsoever a man did was no crime.

This is a summary of the teachings of Korihor, one of the Anti-Christers in the Book of Mormon. He taught that there was no God, no Christ, no atonement, and no consequences for sin. He also taught, as shown in this verse, that “every man fared in this life according to the
management of the creature,” or in other words, the state of a man depended on how he handled himself.

What must be remembered is that these words were written by the “pen” of Mormon, so it is doubtful that Korihor used the word “creature” in his teachings. Mormon could have written, “every man fared in this life according to the management of himself,” but he wrote “the creature.” The reason that Mormon may have used this specific phrase is unknown, but there are a few possibilities.

Again, Mormon uses the determiner “the”, just as Alma used when talking to his wayward son, so Mormon is singling out Korihor as “the creature.” Just like Corianton, Korihor is entrenched in sin, so perhaps Mormon was using “the creature” in a derogatory way, one, because of deep sin and disregard for commandments, that is no better than a common animal. It could mean the opposite: being beastly because of the pride and competition that comes from ones belief that men “… [fare] in this life according to the management of the creature” which sounds like “survival of fittest” or “natural selection” which is also animalistic.

Mormon could also be displaying the irony and hypocrisy of Korihor. Korihor, a creation of God, is teaching that there is no God. Korihor, a fallen man, does not need to rely on anyone for his life. Korihor, one who teaches that a man is who that man makes himself to be, is who he is because of God and Christ. No matter what he meant, Mormon was very aware of his word usage, and it expertly exposes the faulty reasoning and hypocrisies of Korihor and warns against his animalistic philosophy.

**Mosiah 4:11**

And again I say unto you as I have said before, that as ye have come to the knowledge of the glory of God, or if ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love, and have
received a remission of your sins, which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls, even so I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own nothingness, and his goodness and long-suffering towards you, unworthy creatures, and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily, and standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come, which was spoken by the mouth of the angel.

These words, spoken by King Benjamin, are directed towards those who have “come to the knowledge of God…tasted of his love… and received a remission of your sins”. In other words, he is speaking to those who have shown faith, repented of sins, and participated in the baptismal ordinance, a.k.a members of the church. Becoming a member of the church is a great achievement and is worthy of celebration, but King Benjamin teaches that just because one is baptized, the ride is not over.

He teaches that those who have been baptized are to “remember… [1.] the greatness of God… [2.] [their] own nothingness… [3.] [God’s] goodness and long suffering towards [them]… [4.] humble [themselves]… [5.] calling on the name of the Lord daily… [6.] and [stand] steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come.” From this, we learn that baptism (or other ordinances) is more than just a dunk in the water, but continuous covenant keeping.

In the midst of all that, members are called “unworthy creatures.” According to the 1828 dictionary “unworthy” means “not deserving or inadequate.” From that, it is understood that King Benjamin was teaching that even those who partake in sacred ordinances and keep their covenants are still inadequate and they will always be that way for the rest of their mortal lives. He was also expressing the idea that those who participate in sacred ordinances should not look down on or judge those who do not. God is not a respecter of persons and we are all equal in the sight of the Lord so it should be remembered that one step closer to God does not put one a step above others.

Mosiah 27:30
I rejected my Redeemer, and denied that which had been spoken of by our fathers; but now that they may foresee that he will come, and that he remembereth every creature of his creating, he will make himself manifest unto all.

This of course is a testimony of Alma the Younger to the omniscience, or all-knowing power, of Christ. The use of “creature” in this verse is synonymous with “creation” therefore reading, “…that he remembereth every creation of his creating…”

Christ, being one of the head creators of the earth, personally used his hands to mold every vegetable, animal and mineral. The Savior oversaw every detail in the creation of earth, from planning to implementation, and the fact that he remembers everything He created is unfathomable. Most definitions in the 1828 dictionary for “remember” include the phrase “in mind” so when the Savior “remembers” all of his creations, all of his creations are “in [His] mind.” Alma most likely used this wording to show that even he, a man drowning in sin, was not forgotten of the Lord nor will anyone else be because He created them and they are always on His mind.

2 Nephi 9:21, Mosiah 28:15

And he cometh into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice; for behold, he suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam.

And they have been kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord, that he should discover to every creature who should possess the land the iniquities and abominations of his people;

These usages of “creature” simply signify “man” or “human”. Perhaps to show that however special man as a species is, man is still a creation of God, which puts them on the same plane as plants, animals, and even the earth. How humbling.
What is revealing about these verses, however, is despite the fact that the Lord is over all and that we are on equal ground with animals and plants, humans are the only “creation” of God that requires assistance from on high. 2 Nephi 2:9 is referencing the atonement of Jesus Christ and the salvation that it brings to those who suffer, whether physically or spiritually. Mosiah 28:15 is referring to the seer-stones that Mosiah possessed and how the Lord had given it to them that they may discover (or discern) truth from error. Cows do not need seer stones. Pigs do not need to be saved. These things are gifts from God and Christ that only applies to one of their creations: Man. That makes Man a very special “creature” in the eyes of God.

Mosiah 28:3, Mormon 9:22

Now they were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish; yea, even the very thoughts that any soul should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble.

For behold, thus said Jesus Christ, the Son of God, unto his disciples who should tarry, yea, and also to all his disciples, in the hearing of the multitude: Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature;

These verses are dealing with missionary work and are very similar with Christ’s admonition in Mark 16:15. “Creature” in these instances, of course, mean “men”, but why not say “preach the gospel to every man”? Perhaps because those being commanded to preach to men needed to be reminded of what man is: a creation of God. In this way, “creature” is much more profound than “man”. It is also significant because those who were to be taught did not know they were creations of God. This opens the original commandment to another translation, which could be read: “Preach the gospel until everyone knows they are a creature of God”. No matter the interpretation, the use of “creature” should encourage missionaries in their efforts to teach every sentient “creature” within their reach.

Conclusion
The authors of The Book of Mormon were literary geniuses. Every word and phrase were so expertly placed that it becomes apparent that only God could have been directing them. Nowhere is that more apparent than with the word “creature”, a word that most modern readers overlook, or misinterpret. However, when the original meaning is known, the usage of the word “creature” is no longer derogatory, but becomes the most humble and profound way that one can describe a human being: that one is essentially equal with animals, yet because they are a creation of God, they have a much higher purpose and origin. They also rely on their maker for their daily lives and that they are who they are because of the work and the love of their creators. May those who study the scriptures remember this and know that “creature” means much more than what comes out of the black lagoon.

**Theological Reflection**

For Latter-Day Saints, the most poignant and familiar use of “creature” comes from the missionary admonitions that come from almost every book in the Standard Works, with one instance in the New Testament, two in The Book of Mormon, and seven in The Doctrine and Covenants. With this much repetition, one must wonder why the Lord is so consistent and adamant in both his command and his wording. It always reads: “to every creature” and never deviates. Obviously, the Lord does not mean that we should teach animals, creatures who do not have the mental capacity to accept or understand the gospel, but man, but why the usage of creature?

The Lord uses the principle of repetition when something is important and cannot be forgotten. In this way, his disciples should keep in mind every definition of “creature”. Perhaps the Lord’s wording and repetition are to help His disciples remember who they are to teach: every creation of God on the earth who can understand and accept the Gospel. They needed to be
reminded that everyone that they would come in contact with was someone who relied on God and Christ daily. They needed to be reminded that everyone was who they were because of Christ and God. They had to remember that God loves everyone and that man is nothing compared to God. They had to remember that God had created everyone that they would meet and that they should treat them as such. They needed to remember that because of the fall, everyone is in an animal-like state and that Christ is the shepherd of all mankind.

In remembering all of this, His disciples would be able to feel a small portion of the love He has for all mankind, His creatures, and would treat everyone they met as such. This may be why the Lord uses “creature”, to show his infinite love, and remind us who we rely on.