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**Title** Is There Nephite Anti-Universalist Rhetoric in the Book of Mormon?

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**Abstract** Review of “Anti-Universalist Rhetoric in the Book of Mormon” (1993), by Dan Vogel.

Dan Vogel, "Anti-Universalist Rhetoric in the Book of Mormon." Pp. 21-52.

### Is There Anti-Universalist Rhetoric in the Book of Mormon?

Reviewed by Martin S. Tanner

Like many others, for several years I have been anticipating Signature Book's recent effort, *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*. As soon as it appeared on bookstore shelves, I bought a copy and read it cover-to-cover in just a few days. Having a special interest in arguments for and against the historicity of the Book of Mormon, I found chapter 2, "Anti-Universalist Rhetoric in the Book of Mormon," by Dan Vogel, quite fascinating.

At the beginning of his article, Vogel claims to "believe there is a common ground on which Mormon and non-Mormon scholars can discuss the Book of Mormon in its nineteenth-century context without necessarily making conclusions about its historicity" (p. 21). According to Vogel, this "common ground" is rhetorical analysis. However, this initial claim is open to question for two reasons. First, rhetorical analysis is entirely dependent upon the historical<sup>1</sup> context, which includes knowledge of the author(s) and intended audience(s) of the document being analyzed.<sup>2</sup> Because context is so essential to rhetorical analysis, such analysis can sometimes be used to determine either when a

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<sup>1</sup> By "historical context" I of course mean the specific time, place, and culture in which the work was produced.

<sup>2</sup> Understanding the intended audience is crucial to understanding the rhetorical meaning of any writing (Richard E. Young, Alton L. Becker, Kenneth L. Pike, *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change* [New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970], 277). Vogel should understand this. He indicates at the outset of his article that, "Rhetorical criticism focuses on the dynamic between the speaker or writer and his/her audience" (p. 21). One of the authors Vogel cites, Burton L. Mack, is quoted by Vogel as explaining, "Rhetorical criticism takes the *historical* moment of human exchange" (Burton L. Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990], 101).

text was written<sup>3</sup> or, on other occasions, by whom. Sound rhetorical analysis is inextricably connected to historical context. Vogel's claim that the Book of Mormon can be the subject of rhetorical analysis without making claims about its historicity is implausible.<sup>4</sup> Second, for the rest of his article, Vogel attempts to bolster the idea, expressed in the title to his article, that passages he sees as anti-Universalist rhetoric in the Book of Mormon are consistent only with nineteenth-century authorship. That this really is Vogel's aim is apparent at the end of his article when he questions "whether ancient American cultures could have debated Universalism in a manner that would have been meaningful to those in early nineteenth-century America" (p. 47) and, without hesitation, concludes that "the Book of Mormon not only perpetuates misrepresentations [*sic*] of anti-Universalist rhetoric but historicizes them by having ancient Universalists defend these very misperceptions (e.g., Alma 11:34–35)" (p. 48). Vogel believes that his analysis "challenge[s] traditional assumptions<sup>5</sup> about the Book of Mormon" and "help[s] researchers understand the book's message in its nineteenth-century context" (p. 48). He further claims "it is doubtful that a study of ancient American cultures would produce a similar context for understanding this central theological focus of the Book of Mormon" and admonishes his readers that they must decide "the degree to which Smith adapted his narrative to the concerns of his modern audience" (p. 48). So much for Vogel's beginning claim about not "necessarily making conclusions" about the historicity of the Book of Mormon. Why does Vogel not simply say at the outset of his article that he considers the Book of Mormon's real author to be Joseph Smith in the nine-

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<sup>3</sup> This has been the focus of the so-called "higher criticism" of the Bible. As one historical critic notes, "The Bible proved to be a sizable collection of books from many hands with an inner history of development that had to be *reconstructed from the clues in the text*" (Norman Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987], 11; emphasis added).

<sup>4</sup> According to Gottwald, who echoes other higher critics, "The valid religious truth or 'message' of the Hebrew Bible could *only* be brought to light when seen as the religion of a *particular people* at a *particular time* and *place* as expressed in these particular writings" (*ibid.*, emphasis added).

<sup>5</sup> The assumption challenged seems to be the historicity claimed by Mormons. Vogel apparently believes that the original writer(s) of the Book of Mormon lived in the America of the nineteenth century, not between 600 B.C. and C.E. 400.

teenth century rather than ancient American prophets? After all, Vogel has long held the belief that the Book of Mormon is not an ancient book.

In the past, however, Mr. Vogel has been much more matter-of-fact about his position. He wrote:

Most members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly known as Mormons, and other groups tracing their origins to Joseph Smith, believe that the *Book of Mormon* is a literal history of the inhabitants of the ancient Americas. Joseph Smith, founder and first prophet of the Mormon church, claimed to have translated the book in the late 1820s from a set of golden plates he found buried in a hill near his home in upstate New York. Thus, few careful readers can escape questions about historicity. For example, can the *Book of Mormon* be substantiated as an actual history of native Americans? . . . And Universalists must have recognized their own beliefs in the "false and vain and foolish doctrines" of those teaching that "God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God."<sup>6</sup> (emphasis added)

Vogel concluded:

Those readers who continue to *maintain* the Book of Mormon's *ancient historicity* must do so in the face of what I consider to be some rather *clear indications to the contrary*. . . . The better one understands the pre-1830 environment of Joseph Smith, the better he or she will understand the Book of Mormon. This, I conclude, is the challenge facing future Book of Mormon scholarship.<sup>7</sup> (emphasis added)

But why does Vogel want readers, at the beginning of his article, to latch on to the idea that there is common ground between those who do not believe that the Book of Mormon is a historical document and those who do, *without* making conclusions about its historicity, and then conclude his article with

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<sup>6</sup> Dan Vogel, *Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon: Religious Solutions from Columbus to Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1986), 5-6.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-72.

assertions that the Book of Mormon is not historical? Only Vogel can answer that question with certainty. However, his approach reminds me of a man I spoke with a few years ago by telephone. He wanted to be a guest on a radio talk show I host weekly. He claimed to be a scholar and researcher of World War II and its impact on Germany's Jews. He said he had a new approach to such research and claimed there was common ground for Jews and neo-Nazis to discuss World War II without coming to a conclusion about whether the Holocaust actually happened. I was intrigued, but was skeptical enough to ask more questions even though, at that point, he came across as a neutral researcher. His initial approach had led me to believe he was credible in a way a neo-Nazi never would have been. As I asked him more questions, however, even though he continued to pretend he was not, it became apparent that he was a neo-Nazi. As I disagreed with him point by point, he tried argument after argument to persuade me that the Holocaust never happened. I never did invite him to be a guest on the radio. His approach was like Vogel's: Start out with a premise anyone would accept and only later express your real position.<sup>8</sup>

Ultimately, the question of the historicity of the Holocaust, or of the events chronicled in the Book of Mormon, is one of fact: Either they happened or they did not. No posturing of a neo-Nazi, or of Vogel, can change this. In this life most of us will never, first hand, gather enough evidence to scientifically prove such issues, which therefore largely remain a matter of faith. We often rely on the positions, claims, and testimonies of those we trust. But we should not shy away from difficult questions. Had the neo-Nazi been forthright about his position and approach, I would have invited him to be a guest on the radio, notwithstanding the fact that I disagreed completely with his positions. Similarly, even though I disagree with Vogel's analysis and conclusions, the questions he raises and the arguments he proposes should not be avoided. The fundamental questions Vogel's article raises are worth asking: Does the Book of Mormon contain nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric, and, if so, what does that tell us about the historicity of the Book of Mormon?

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<sup>8</sup> So there is not room for misunderstanding, let me emphatically state that I am not claiming Vogel believes in, or is in any way sympathetic to the neo-Nazi movement. I simply found his approach similar to that of one neo-Nazi I spoke with.

In an attempt to answer these questions, Vogel looks at various Book of Mormon passages and attempts to apply rhetorical analysis to them in an effort to demonstrate that they were knowingly and purposefully directed against nineteenth-century Universalists by Joseph Smith, whom Vogel considers the book's author. Vogel does not think it plausible that Jewish emigrants to the New World in the sixth century B.C., or their pre-Columbian descendants, could have written such material.

### Vogel's Flawed Use of Rhetorical Analysis

Rhetorical analysis is a way of analyzing literature by focusing on the writer and the intended audience to better understand it. The idea is that if the context in which the literature was produced is understood, the meaning of the words will be clearer. According to Burton L. Mack, a well-respected author on rhetorical analysis cited by Vogel, writings from the past cannot be well understood in isolation, but must be read in their historical context, keeping in mind the culture of the audience and speaker.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Vogel acknowledges that all literature has "a historical and cultural existence" and that "rhetorical discourse is designed to persuade a specific audience" (p. 22). What this means is that all writers write for a specific purpose. Their audience may be as small as one person, as with a personal note or letter; it may be a few hundred, as with a letter of the Apostle Paul to a specific church; or it may be as large as "all nations, kindreds, tongues and people," as with the witnesses to the plates of the Book of Mormon (Title Page). Thus, every author has a specific audience in mind, which may be large or small, and short or long in duration. It is the latter aspect of the audience, that it may include generations of people living over very long periods of time, that seems to escape Vogel and the sources he cites.<sup>10</sup> For example, in his article Vogel cites a historical

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<sup>9</sup> Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament*, 15.

<sup>10</sup> The question of audience is not nearly so straightforward as Vogel seems to imply. Not infrequently, a writer has several audiences in mind. The writer must be his own prime audience (Stephen White, *The Written Word & Associated Digressions Concerned with the Writer as Craftsman* [New York: Harper & Row, 1984], 128). The intended audience may be as small as the author and one individual, as with a letter marked "personal and confidential," or the entire world, as with the testimonies of the three and eight special witnesses reproduced at the beginning of the Book of Mormon,

critic as saying, "One must put oneself into the times and into the surroundings in which [biblical authors] wrote, and one must see what [concepts] could arise in the souls of those who lived at that time" (p. 22).<sup>11</sup> The obvious flaw with Vogel and his sources is that they do not seem to comprehend that an intended audience can be very large and spread across large segments of time. The Book of Mormon witnesses certainly did not limit their intended audience to those who would read their testimony in the 1820s or 1830s, but included all those, forever into the future, who would read their words at the beginning of the Book of Mormon. In short, Vogel and his sources seem to believe that the author and his or her audience must live at the same time. However, many Bible passages put such a notion to rest. For what of the countless occurrences of Old Testament passages intended "forever"<sup>12</sup> or "always"?<sup>13</sup> Why is it important to understand that authors can and do write for audiences in the future? Vogel's entire article hinges on the idea that the Book of Mormon has nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric—that is, rhetoric written only to combat Universalist ideas existing in the 1820s and 1830s. This is an idea that, as will be seen, cannot be demonstrated from the Book of Mormon passages cited by Vogel. Not a single passage cited by Vogel applies only to Universalists, let alone to Universalists in the 1820s and 1830s. Vogel assumes, but nowhere proves, that the "intended" audi-

which begin, "Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people

<sup>11</sup> Citing Jean Alphonse Turrentinus, in Wener Georg Kummel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems*, trans. S. McClean Gilmour and Howard C. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 59.

<sup>12</sup> Genesis 13:15, Abram and his seed are promised certain land *forever*; Exodus 3:15, memorial to the children of Israel *forever*; Exodus 12:14, Passover to be kept as a feast and ordinance by the children of Israel *forever*; Exodus 12:17, Feast of Unleavened Bread to be kept by the children of Israel *forever*; Exodus 27:21, statute given to the children of Israel *forever*; Exodus 30:21, ritual washing of the hands and feet a statute *forever*; Exodus 31:17, Israel to observe the Sabbath *forever*; Exodus 32:13, land of Israel given to the seed of Abraham *forever*; Leviticus 10:9, Aaron and his sons forbidden to drink wine and strong drink *forever*; Isaiah 34:17, land inherited *forever*; Isaiah 59:21, spirit of the Lord to be upon Jacob and his seed *forever*. Hundreds of other Old Testament passages are intended to have audiences forever into the future.

<sup>13</sup> Exodus 27:20, Lord commands lamp to burn *always*; Deuteronomy 6:24, statutes of the Lord to be kept *always*.



ence of the Book of Mormon passages he cites is Universalists in the 1820s and 1830s.<sup>14</sup>

Also, Vogel's initial claim that "there is common ground on which Mormon and non-Mormon scholars can discuss the Book of Mormon *without necessarily making conclusions about its historicity*" (p. 21, emphasis added) contradicts his own view and the view of his sources about rhetorical analysis, that a writing can best be understood only in historical context. Later, Vogel admits that "A correct understanding of the social and cultural *setting* of a work of literature can often mean the difference between an interpretation which is consistent with that setting and one that is anachronistic" (p. 23). By understanding the cultural setting, Vogel certainly means, at a minimum, knowing where and when author and intended audience lived, and who they were and are. And yet, how can one possibly know or assume such things about author and intended audience and not make conclusions about the historicity of the Book of Mormon? But this is the very thing Vogel claims he can avoid.

### Flaws in Vogel's Methodology

"Universalism" is the term applied to various denominations of Christianity who believe that eventually *all* mankind will be saved in the kingdom of God.<sup>15</sup> Vogel's hypothesis is that certain passages in the Book of Mormon are best explained or understood as arguments against nineteenth-century Universalism. I shall discuss each of the passages cited by Vogel, summarizing his rationale for believing that they are directed against

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<sup>14</sup> Vogel conveniently fails to ask the question of whether the Book of Mormon passages he sees as anti-Universalist rhetoric might also be directed against other religious groups existing at other times and places than upstate New York in the 1820s and 1830s.

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Richard Eddy, *Universalism in America: A History*, 2 vols. (Boston: Universalist, 1884-1886), often described as the only comprehensive work on the subject; Elmo A. Robinson, *American Universalism: Its Origin, Organization and Heritage* (New York: Exposition, 1970). Universalism and Unitarianism merged into one denomination in 1959. For a history before and after the merger, see Henry H. Cheetham, *Unitarianism and Universalism: An Illustrated History* (Boston: Universalist, 1962). For a more thorough work, see, Earl M. Wilber, *A History of Unitarianism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Press, 1945-52). This two-volume work follows the history of the movement in Europe and America.

the Universalists of the early nineteenth century. I shall also attempt to point out the flaws in Vogel's rationale.

Vogel finds rhetoric directed against nineteenth-century anti-Universalists in 2 Nephi 28, where we read the following:

For it shall come to pass *in that day* the churches which are built up, and not unto the Lord, when one shall say unto the other; Behold, I, I am the Lord's; and the others shall say; I, I am the Lord's; and thus shall every one say that hath built up churches, and not unto the Lord—

And *they* shall contend one with another; and their priests shall contend one with another, and they shall teach with their learning, and deny the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance.

Yea, there shall be *many* which shall say: *Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us.*

And there shall also be *many* which shall say: *Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take advantage of their neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God.* (2 Nephi 28, 3–4, 7–8)

Vogel sees these passages as describing nineteenth-century Universalism because the references to "churches" indicate "an organized group" rather than just "a prevailing attitude" (p. 25). The problem with Vogel's interpretation that these verses are directed against the Universalist church is that they do not contain the view that all people, everywhere, at all times, will be saved. Verse 7 does not read, "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die *because every one is saved in the end.*" Verse 8 does not read, "God . . . will justify in committing a little sin. . . . At last we shall be saved *along with everyone else who has ever lived.*" The verses do focus on the issue of how God views sinful acts. Vogel reads into these verses the idea that they are directed against the concept that *all* people will be saved. Vogel also apparently misses the idea in these verses that *many* churches are diverging from the truth. Verse 3 speaks not of one church, but of "churches." Verse 3 indicates "*they* [the

churches] shall contend one with another." Verses 7 and 8 indicate that "*many* [churches] . . . shall say . . ."

The focus here is not on universal salvation, but on whether sin keeps one from being saved. These passages are therefore more likely directed against the many denominations that have existed before and after the nineteenth century, which believe, "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us" so long as we confess that Jesus is our Lord and Savior. To the many denominations of "born-again" Christians, if only a person makes the appropriate confession, that person is saved; sin or lack of it is irrelevant. These scriptures are far more compatible with the many modern born-again denominations than with only the Universalists in the 1820s and 1830s.

Another problem with Vogel's claim that the phrase "Eat, drink and be merry" is nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric is that it is of ancient origin. Variations of it are found in the Old Testament (Judges 9:27; Judges 19:6; 1 Kings 4:20; Ecclesiastes 8:15; Ecclesiastes 9:7; Isaiah 22:13).<sup>16</sup> The phrase is hardly tailor-made for rhetoric against nineteenth-century Universalism. The idea of a beating with stripes as payment for sin is also found in the Old Testament, indicating its ancient origin (Deuteronomy 25:3; 2 Samuel 7:14; Psalms 89:32; Proverbs 17:10; Proverbs 19:29; Proverbs 20:30; Isaiah 53:5). Some or all of these scriptures would have been found in the brass plates taken from Laban by Nephi in approximately 600 B.C. and transported to the New World with Lehi and his party (1 Nephi 3:3; 1 Nephi 4:18-24).

Similarly, Vogel claims that nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric is contained in Mormon 8:31, which predicts a time "when there shall be many who will say, Do this, or do that, and it mattereth not, for the Lord will uphold such at the last day. But wo unto such, for they are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity." However, again, this passage does not speak of universal salvation. The word "such" indicates that the passage is not concerned with universal salvation, or the lack of it. If the word *such* were replaced with the word *everyone* or the phrase *all mankind*, Vogel's argument might have

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<sup>16</sup> Vogel (p. 29) seems to be aware of these scriptures; however, he does not seem to be aware of the implications: If the phrase "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die" is nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric in the Book of Mormon, then does the Bible contain nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric? Vogel neither asks nor answers this question.

some logic to it. This passage also seems to apply more to born-again Christians than to nineteenth-century Universalists. I have heard several born-again Christians say that they would rather be a born-again murderer on death row than a good and honest heathen who has never heard of Jesus. In other words, it does not matter if you “do this” sin or “do that” sin, for the Lord will uphold such at the last day (if only they are born again).

Vogel seems to believe that nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric is found in 2 Nephi 28:22, which says that in the last days Satan will deceive many because he “telleteth them there is no hell; and he saith unto them; I am no devil, for there is none.” However, this passage does not focus on the issue of universal salvation, but on the existence of the devil and hell. Just as plausible as Vogel’s explanation that this passage is nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric is the idea that it is twentieth-century anti-“American Atheist” rhetoric.<sup>17</sup> This, however, would be an unacceptable explanation for Vogel because Joseph Smith was completely unaware of the group known as American Atheists, founded over a century after his death.

Vogel argues that nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric is found in the Book of Mormon in Alma 1:3–4, where Nehor exclaims that

every priest and teacher ought to become popular; and they ought not to labor with their hands, but . . . they ought to be supported by the people. And he also testified unto the people that *all mankind should be saved at the last day*, and that they need not fear nor tremble, but that they might lift up their heads and rejoice; for the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, all men should have eternal life.

Vogel has also discerned that Alma 21:6–9 is directed against the idea “that God will save all men.” Here, Vogel at last has found two Book of Mormon passages directed against the idea of universal salvation. However, are they directed against early nineteenth-century Universalists? Perhaps yes in the broadest sense, in the same way certain Bible passages indicate that not everyone

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<sup>17</sup> The organization known as *American Atheists*, founded by Madalyn Murray O’Hair, has members in all fifty states.

will be saved (see, e.g., Psalms 119:94;<sup>18</sup> Proverbs 28:18; Jeremiah 30:11; Ezekiel 36:29; Ephesians 5:5; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Peter 4:18). However, there is nothing in these Book of Mormon or Bible passages indicating that they are directed against nineteenth-century Universalists. Just as it is certain that these Bible passages were not written specifically to apply against nineteenth-century Universalists, so the Book of Mormon passages cited by Vogel were not discernibly directed towards the Universalist faith in the 1820s and 1830s.

In addition, there are some differences between the Nehor incident in the beginning chapters of Alma and the way those chapters would necessarily have been written had they been directed against the Universalist faith. Universalists in the 1820s and 1830s did not believe that "every priest and teacher ought to become popular" or that "they ought not to labor with their hands, but that they ought to be supported by the people." Alma 1:3-4 appears to be directed against behavior more like that of today's popular televangelists, than against that of the Universalists. However, Vogel would not be pleased with Book of Mormon passages directed against televangelists, because, of course, televangelism was unknown in Joseph Smith's day.

There are even more striking differences between the beliefs of the Universalists and those of the Amalekites, which indicate these passages are not directed against nineteenth-century Universalists. The Universalist church of the nineteenth century strongly believed in the existence of Jesus as the son of God, who atoned for the sins of mankind.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, the Amale-

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<sup>18</sup> In this passage the Psalmist asks for salvation. He would not have to ask if salvation were universal.

<sup>19</sup> An 1802 convention of the New England Universalists penned the *Winchester Profession*, which said in Article II, "We believe that there is one God, whose nature is Love, revealed in one Lord Jesus Christ, by one Holy Spirit of Grace, who will finally restore the whole family of mankind to holiness and happiness." Russell E. Miller, *The Larger Hope: The First Century of the Universalist Church in America, 1770-1870* (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1979), 45-46. The profession was based upon the "Rule of Faith" adopted at the Philadelphia convention of Universalists in 1790, which states: "We believe that there is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, in whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, who by giving himself a ransom for all, hath redeemed them to God by his blood; and who, by the merit of his death, and the efficacy of his spirit, will finally restore the whole human race to happiness. . . . We believe . . . that the love of God manifested to man in a redeemer." *Ibid.*, 46.

kites did not, as shown in the response to Aaron's query, "Believest thou that the Son of God shall come to redeem mankind from their sins?" The response was an unequivocal, "We do not believe in these foolish traditions" (Alma 21:7-8). A careful perusal of the Amalekite belief system in Alma 21 reveals more differences than similarities between Amalekite and Universalist beliefs. Although Book of Mormon narratives about Nehor and the Amalekites contain admonitions against the notion of universal salvation, they were not directed against the nineteenth-century Universalist church.

Another problem with Vogel's theory that the Book of Mormon contains rhetoric directed against the nineteenth-century Universalist church is that most of the passages Vogel cites for that proposition speak to the idea that sin is incompatible with salvation, rather than the idea that not everyone will be saved.<sup>20</sup> The implication of these Book of Mormon verses is that repentance is crucial to salvation, because the Lord will not save people in their sins, but will save them from their sins if they repent (Alma 7:14; Alma 11:36-37; see also Matthew 1:21; James 5:20). These passages address not the dichotomy between limited and universal salvation, but rather the dichotomy between salvation by grace alone without regard to sin or works, and salvation as a reward for repentance and keeping God's commandments. This is the familiar Book of Mormon idea that we are saved by grace, "after all we can do" (2 Nephi 25:23).

### **Other Flaws in Vogel's Logic: Modern Readers and Ancient Authors**

Vogel provides many quotes for his idea that it was well recognized by both Mormons and non-Mormons that the Book of Mormon "referred to Universalism" (p. 24). A more accurate description, however, would be that it was well recognized in the 1820s and 1830s that the arguments in the Book of Mormon

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<sup>20</sup> Without any evidence or support for the proposition, Vogel (p. 35) claims passages directed against salvation by grace alone are somehow really directed against the Universalist faith (Mosiah 15:26: "the Lord redeemeth none such that rebel against him and die in their sins"; Mosiah 2:33: "there is a wo pronounced upon him who . . . remaineth and dieth in his sins, the same drinketh damnation to his own soul; for he receiveth for his wages an everlasting punishment, having transgressed the law of God contrary to his own knowledge"; see also 1 Nephi 15:33; 2 Nephi 9:38; Mormon 10:26).

could be used against the faith and message of the Universalist Church. From the earliest days, writings considered scripture have been used by readers to establish doctrine and to correct perceived errors in lifestyle. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for *reproof*, for *correction*, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16, emphasis added). This does not mean that the current reading audience is the only intended audience, or even an intended audience at all. In this century, for instance, many state legislatures perceived the fourth commandment to be applicable to twentieth-century Americans: "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . . But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work" (Exodus 20:8–10). So these legislatures enacted Sunday closing laws. Using Vogel's logic, we could conclude that the fourth commandment is twentieth-century anti-Sunday shopping rhetoric. We could likewise determine, as has a recent author, that the second commandment, against worshiping and serving idols, is really rhetoric aimed at organized sports in the twentieth century.<sup>21</sup> Who the intended audience of a scripture is has rarely been more important to many churches than in connection with recent decisions about ordaining women to the clergy.<sup>22</sup> Some churches have decided that issue by first determining whether the intended audience of the Apostle Paul included twentieth-century or only first-century churches in this verse: "Suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (1 Timothy 2:12). The other relevant scripture was also written by Paul: "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak" (1 Corinthians 14:34).<sup>23</sup> Was Paul employing twentieth-century anti-feminist rhetoric or was he talking only to the first-century church in Corinth? Perhaps, instead, part of the gospel message is feminism. According to some, Mary the mother of Jesus was a feminist since her "submission was to God alone, not to Joseph or other male authority fig-

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<sup>21</sup> Avraham Gileadi, *The Last Days: Types and Shadows from the Bible and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Desert Book, 1991), 27–32.

<sup>22</sup> Richard N. Ostling, "The Second Reformation: Admission to the Priesthood Is Just One Issue as Feminism Rapidly Emerges as the Most Vexing Thorn for Christianity," *Time* (23 November 1993): 53–58.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

ures."<sup>24</sup> Indeed, using Vogel's logic we could easily argue that the author of the *Testament of Adam* had Brigham Young in mind when he wrote:

Adam, Adam do not fear. You wanted to be a god; I will make you a god, not right now, but after a space of many years. . . . After three days, while I am in the tomb, I will raise up the body I received from you. And I will set you at the right hand of my divinity, and I will make you a god just like you wanted.<sup>25</sup>

Since Catholic priests are forbidden to marry and Hare Krishna adherents are vegetarians, do we find twentieth-century anti-Hare Krishna and anti-Catholic rhetoric in the writings of the Apostle Paul? He prophesies that "In the latter times some shall depart from the faith, . . . forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth" (1 Timothy 4:1-3). Certainly, each of these examples demonstrates that scripture can be used to argue the pros and cons of contemporary issues. But did the writer in each case have a specific, twentieth-century audience in mind when he wrote? I think not. The role of women in society and the church, human potential, vegetarianism, celibacy, and a myriad of other issues have been with us in the past, are with us now, and will be with us in the future. Is inspired scripture useful in understanding how to decide issues today and in the future? Of course.

When Vogel cites Alexander Campbell, founder of the Disciples of Christ sect, for the idea that the Book of Mormon "decides *all* the great controversies," including "eternal punishment" (p. 27),<sup>26</sup> Vogel implies the Book of Mormon was written precisely for frontier Americans in the 1820s and 1830s who were debating certain religious issues. Would Vogel also say that the biblical and other passages set forth above, which address great religious issues of today, were written precisely for Americans in this century? Of course not. Are the Bible pas-

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<sup>24</sup> Richard N. Ostling, "Handmaid or Feminist?" *Time* (30 December 1991): 62-66.

<sup>25</sup> James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1983), 1:994.

<sup>26</sup> Citing Alexander Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger* (February 1831): 93 (emphasis added).



sages which indicate that there is a devil and that not everyone is saved also nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric? (See, e.g., Malachi 2:17; Luke 8:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:11–12). Vogel would never admit this because he believes these passages are unquestionably of ancient origin. Yet his methodology would lead to the unsound conclusion that *any* document containing anti-Universalist rhetoric must be nineteenth century in origin.

Applied to the Book of Mormon, Vogel's methodology amounts to this: Any Book of Mormon scripture which implies that not that everyone is saved must be nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric. This is poor logic—demonstrably wrong.

## Conclusion

In his conclusion, Vogel questions “whether ancient American cultures could have debated Universalism in a manner that would have been meaningful to those in early nineteenth-century America” (p. 47). However, the idea of universal salvation was not born in the nineteenth century, nor anywhere close to that time. Vogel himself acknowledges that “universal salvation was debated as early as the second century” (p. 27 n. 8). He acknowledges that Clement of Alexandria and Origen, in the second and third centuries respectively, “held the possibility of even Satan being restored” (p. 27 n. 8). But the idea of universal salvation was around far earlier than this. Some of our earliest extant writings attest to it. Carved on the wall of the tomb of Nefer-hotep at Thebes (Tomb No. 50), dating to the reign of Hor-em-heb (about 1349–1319 B.C.), is a text that sets forth the ancient Egyptian belief that, upon death, *all* find a fulfillment of the good things of this life.<sup>27</sup> Regarding the peaceful place to which the Egyptians believed that the soul goes after death, in a sacred writing entitled “The Good Fortune of the Dead,” we find it written, “*All our kinsfolk rest in it since the first day of time. They who are to be, for millions of millions, will all have come to it. . . . There exists not one who fails to reach yon place. . . . Welcome safe and sound!*”<sup>28</sup> Early Zoroastrianism likewise

27 “The Good Fortune of the Dead,” in James B. Prichard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3d ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 33–34; see also A. H. Gardiner, *The Attitude of the Ancient Egyptians to Death and the Dead* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), 32.

28 “The Good Fortune of the Dead,” in *ibid.*, 34 (emphasis added).

contained the idea of universal salvation.<sup>29</sup> There are also Old Testament passages which have been interpreted as authority for the idea of universal salvation.<sup>30</sup> These would have been familiar to Lehi and his descendants as part of the brass plates taken to the New World, which were part of the Nephite culture (1 Nephi 19:21–23; Alma 37:3–4). It is not surprising, therefore, that ancient American cultures, or any others for that matter, have discussed and debated universal salvation. After all, “*Salvation may truly be said to be in some sense the ultimate concern of all religion, even those religions which do not envisage the need of a savior apart from man himself.*”<sup>31</sup> And by all religion, we certainly include the Jewish faith from its inception, and the religions of ancient American cultures.

Vogel’s method of attempting to show that the Book of Mormon contains rhetoric directed against the Universalist church of the 1820s and 1830s is plainly not sound. Vogel simply takes the position that any Book of Mormon scripture which is inconsistent with the idea of universal salvation must be nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric. We can see the fallacy of Vogel’s reasoning clearly when it is applied to other ancient texts. Certainly, Vogel would not claim that all Bible passages that are inconsistent with the idea of universal salvation amount to nineteenth-century anti-Universalist rhetoric. Nor should he.

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<sup>29</sup> George A. Mather and Larry A. Nichols, “Unitarian-Universalist Association (UAA) History,” *Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions and the Occult* (Grand Rapids: Harper Collins, 1993), 286.

<sup>30</sup> Exodus 6:6; Deuteronomy 9:26; 21:8; Psalm 130:8; Isaiah 52:10, 43:1; 44:22; 45:17, all Israel to be redeemed; other passages have been interpreted to mean that all mankind will be saved (Isaiah 50:2; 52:3; Hosea 13:14; 1 Samuel 14:6; 1 Chronicles 16:23; Psalm 28:9; Isaiah 25:9, 35:4; 45:8; 49:6; see also Paul Heinisch, *Theology of the Old Testament* (St. Paul: North Central Publishing, 1955), 12, God’s covenant with Abraham did not involve Abraham only, or Israel only, but promoted “the divine plan for universal salvation” (emphasis added); James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 1:302, Israel, gentiles, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God.

<sup>31</sup> Alan Richardson, “Salvation, Savior,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, 5 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 4:168–81 (emphasis added).