



7-31-2003

### Straightening Things Out: The Use of *Strait* and *Straight* in the Book of Mormon

Paul Y. Hoskisson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms>

---

#### BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Hoskisson, Paul Y. (2003) "Straightening Things Out: The Use of *Strait* and *Straight* in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*: Vol. 12 : No. 2 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol12/iss2/7>

This Feature Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Book of Mormon Studies by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).



---

NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE  
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

---

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

**Title** Straightening Things Out: The Use of *Strait* and *Straight* in the Book of Mormon

**Author(s)** Paul Y. Hoskisson

**Reference** *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/2 (2003): 58-71, 114-17.

**ISSN** 1065-9366 (print), 2168-3158 (online)

**Abstract** Confusion between the use of *strait* and *straight* existed in Joseph Smith's day and continues to persist today. This confusion is manifest in the spelling of the term in the original manuscript (*strait* preserved in 10 of 11 existing occurrences), the printer's manuscript (all 27 instances spelled *strait*), and the 1830 edition (in which the compositor changed all 27 instances to *straight*). Through close examination of meanings, comparison to Hebrew words and usage, and analysis of poetic form, Hoskisson examines each instance of *strai(gh)t* in the Book of Mormon and recommends a spelling for each one.

**STRAIGHTENING THINGS OUT**

# THE USE OF STRAIT & STRAIGHT IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

PAUL Y. HOSKISSON

The Savior, in his concern for all of his children, admonished his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, “Enter ye in at the strait gate,” and then warned them that “wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13–14). Later, the resurrected Savior repeated this same admonition to his followers in the Americas (see 3 Nephi 14:13–14; 27:33). The image Jesus introduced to the disciples, and to us, tends, through the contrast with the *wide gate* and the *broad way*, to draw attention at least as much to the *straitness* of the gate and the *narrowness* of the way as it does to the existence of a *gate* and a *way*. The unusual use of both *strait* and *narrow*, words that are synonymous, draws the reader’s attention to other expressions in the Book of Mormon where both words also occur, such as the *strait and narrow path* (see 1 Nephi 8:20).

In other passages in the Bible and the Book of Mormon, the word spelled *straight*, meaning “direct, right (correct), or not bent or curved,” is also used to describe the path. For instance, in Psalm 5:8, the psalmist pleads with God, “Lead me, O Lord, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face.” Hebrews 12:13 admonishes the Saints to “make straight paths for your feet.” In the Book of Mormon, Alma notes that God’s “paths are straight” (Alma 37:12) and that we can gain eternal life by taking the “straight course to eternal bliss” (v. 44).

Thus the holy scriptures speak of a narrow or *strait* way and also of a *straight* path. Is the way *strait* or *straight*? Or is it both? Or is the spelling irrelevant? For example, should the Book of Mormon read *straight and narrow* instead of *strait and narrow*?<sup>1</sup>

In this study I seek to clarify the imagery of the *strait*, *narrow*, and *straight* “paths” in the Book of Mormon.<sup>2</sup> First of all, I will explore the general confusion between *strait* and *straight* in the English of Joseph Smith’s day, a problem that persists even today and that has led to adjustments in the various printings of the Book of Mormon. Then I will explore the use of *straight* and *strait* in light of the poetic nature of the Book of Mormon passages. Because I believe these passages are analogous to Hebrew poetry, a knowledge of how biblical authors crafted and enriched their poetry will be used to help explain the Book of Mormon passages.

### Confusing *Strait* and *Straight*

Three factors combine to create the potential for confusion between *strait* and *straight* in the Book of Mormon. First, it is only all too natural among English speakers to confuse homophones (words that sound alike but have different meanings), especially homophones whose written forms appear as similar as do *strait* and *straight*.<sup>3</sup> A glance in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) under the entries for *strait* and *straight* reveals an unexpectedly high number of crossover spellings going both ways, mostly before 1830.<sup>4</sup> In the Prophet Joseph Smith’s day, the confusion apparently was widespread, if *Webster’s* 1828 dictionary is any indication. It states, erroneously to be sure, that *straight* and *strait* are “the same word” and that to distinguish between them is “wholly arbitrary.”<sup>5</sup> The confusion is not

limited to Joseph Smith’s day or to the examples in the *OED*. Quite often students in my classes will ask me what the difference is. Some do not even realize that *strait* exists as a separate word from *straight*.

Second, the English text of the Book of Mormon, between the original manuscript and the most recent printed edition, has seen changes in the spelling of *strai(gh)t* (in its various forms) in all 27 instances in the 23 verses where either of these words appears.<sup>6</sup> The original manuscript, preserved in only 11 of these verses, reads *strait* in 10 instances and *straight* in 1. The printer’s manuscript of the Book of Mormon spells all 27 instances with *strait*, regardless of the contextual meaning. The compositor of the first printed edition changed all 27 occurrences to read *straight* in the 1830 printed edition. That the printer’s manuscript used entirely one spelling and the 1830 edition entirely the other exemplifies the confusion of spelling and meaning surrounding *strai(gh)t* that *Webster’s* 1828 dictionary mistakenly legitimizes. This means that early-19th-century sentiments would have accepted either spelling no matter the meaning.

As later editions of the Book of Mormon demonstrate, subsequent editors of the volume must have felt that *strait* and *straight* are not the same word and that a distinction between them is not at all arbitrary. Over time, they made changes in 14 of the 27 instances of *straight* that appear in the 1830 edition.<sup>7</sup> These changes must have been based on a realization that the context of some of the passages containing *straight* called for the other meaning, represented by *strait* (that is, “narrow”).

The third reason for the lack of clarity about *strai(gh)t* in the Book of Mormon is really a subset of the previous reason. With the Book of Mormon, we cannot appeal to the original Nephite text because it is not available. Neither do we know which spelling the Prophet intended in any single passage. In contrast to the Book of Mormon, the biblical passages containing *straight* or *strait* leave no doubt that these two English homophones are not synonymous. The reason there is no confusion in the Bible is that *strait* and *straight* are translations from known languages, either Greek or Hebrew, in which the equivalents of *strait* and *straight* are neither homophones nor synonyms. The fact that the Bible is not ambiguous will become important when discussing Book of Mormon phrases that are similar to biblical expressions.

Given the above reasons for mistaking *straight* for *strait* and vice versa in English in general, I can now turn specifically to the various phrases in the Book of Mormon in which *strai(gh)t* occurs together with *path*, *way*, or *course*. The context within the Book of Mormon together with comparisons of similar phrases in the Bible will make it possible in all but one case to determine whether *straight* or *strait* is meant.

## The Straight Path

Seven verses in the Book of Mormon contain *straight* with *path* or *course*, namely, 1 Nephi 10:8; Alma 7:9, 19; Alma 37:12; 2 Nephi 4:33; Alma 37:44 (twice); and 2 Nephi 9:41. The latter three verses will be treated later. The first four verses seem to be related to or dependent on a well-known biblical passage, Isaiah 40:3, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” In the New Testament, Isaiah’s words are applied specifically to John the Baptist, who, in preparation for Christ’s ministry, was sent to restore the gospel one last time under the law of Moses.<sup>8</sup> In addition to this New Testament use, Isaiah 40:3 also supports the Latter-day Saint understanding that forerunners precede the coming(s) of the Messiah and restore (*straighten* = make right) the kingdom of God (the Way of God).<sup>9</sup> Thus, Isaiah 40:3 speaks both in specific ways about the role of John the Baptist in the New Testament and in general terms about the role of forerunners in all dispensations in the restoration of God’s kingdom.

An examination of the Hebrew word that is translated in the King James Version as *straight* will help clarify the use of *straight* in these four Book of Mormon verses that seem to be dependent

on Isaiah 40:3.<sup>10</sup> The Hebrew word translated as *straight* comes from a root in the Semitic languages, *yšr*, that means “right, correct” and has the meanings in Hebrew of “straight, smooth, proper, right, level,” and so on.<sup>11</sup> For instance, in Deuteronomy 9:5 the noun from this root is paralleled with *righteousness* and is translated as *uprightness*: “Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness [*straightness*] of thine heart.” Note also how *yšr* in Isaiah 40:3 in the New English Bible (hereafter NEB) is translated “Clear a highway,” indicating that *yšr* as a verb can mean “to clear” and as an adjective can denote “unobstructed.” Other nuances for *yšr* are also possible.<sup>12</sup>

None of the four verses in the Book of Mormon that seem to be related to or dependent on Isaiah 40:3 quotes the verse exactly the way it appears in the King James Bible. First Nephi 10:8 more closely parallels the version contained in the synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke: “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight.”<sup>13</sup> Alma 7:9 adds a bit more, “Cry unto this people, saying—Repent ye, and prepare the way of the Lord, and walk in his paths, which are straight.” Alma 7:19 changes the exhortation to an observation: “I perceive that ye are in the path which leads to the kingdom of God; yea, I perceive that ye are making his paths straight.” And finally, Alma 37:12, in lan-



Tel Lachish in Israel. Lachish was a fortified city in the days of Lehi. Notice how the approach ramp to the city rises (just above the later stone wall) from the lower right to the middle left. The approach then takes a 90-degree right turn to enter the gate complex (visible in a partial reconstruction). This alignment, which supports the description of such entrances as “strait” rather than “straight,” is theorized to be a defensive measure intended to deny attackers a straight run at the city gate. Photo courtesy of Jeffrey R. Chadwick.

guage that seems tied more closely to Alma 7:19–20 than to Isaiah 40:3, changes the observation to a statement of fact: “His paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round.”

Three things are of interest about these four verses. First, the further away in time from Isaiah the authors of these verses were, the more their text varied from Isaiah. Second, in all these Book of Mormon instances that seem dependent on or at least related to Isaiah 40:3, the *straight paths* always refer to God’s paths and, in contrast to the book of Isaiah itself, are always plural.<sup>14</sup> It is as if the Book of Mormon were making a distinction between the plural *paths* of God and the singular *path* that

“The ways of God, that is,  
the gospel, are also *straight*  
in the sense of being direct.  
Perhaps significantly, only one  
passage in the Book of Mormon  
also describes God’s *straight*  
*paths* as being *not crooked*.”

mortal men take.<sup>15</sup> And third, in three of the four verses that are related to Isaiah 40:3, the meaning of *straight*, as in Isaiah, does not necessarily mean “not bent” or “not crooked.” The exception, Alma 7:19, is in fact the only verse in the entire Book of Mormon that requires the meaning “not crooked” for *straight* when it modifies *path* or *course*. In verses 19 and 20, a beautiful antithetical parallelism, Alma commends the people of Gideon for “making [God’s] paths straight” because God “cannot walk in crooked paths, . . . neither hath he a shadow of turning from the right to the left.”<sup>16</sup>

In turning now to 2 Nephi 4:33 and Alma 37:44, it can be noted that these two verses, in contrast to Isaiah 40:3 and the Book of Mormon verses similar to it, do not speak of God’s paths but of mortal man’s

path and do not use the plural but rather the singular *path* or *course*. Also, *straight* in these two verses cannot mean “not bent” or “not crooked.” This is best seen in 2 Nephi 4:32–33, which seems to be related to Psalm 5:8, “O Lord, . . . make thy way straight before my face.”<sup>17</sup> The word *way* in this psalm is singular and refers to the *path* the psalmist desires to follow. Likewise, the pairs of parallel couplets in 2 Nephi 4:33 provide a nuanced description of the path that Nephi wanted God to prepare for him. The following is my tentative poetic structuring of this verse, with the relevant parallel words in italics:

O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe  
of thy righteousness!

O Lord, wilt thou make a way for mine escape  
before mine enemies!

Wilt thou make *my path straight* before me!

Wilt thou *not* place a *stumbling block in my way*—

but that thou wouldst *clear my way* before me,  
and *hedge not up my way*,

but the ways of mine enemy.<sup>18</sup>

Nephi’s plea, “make my path straight before me,” seems to combine elements of the psalmist’s and Isaiah’s phrasing. But dependence is not the issue here; the issue is the meaning of the phrase *straight path* that is provided by the antithetical parallel “Wilt thou not place a stumbling block in my way.” That is, Nephi’s *straight path* should contain no “stumbling block.” Thus the nuanced meaning of *straight* in this verse is not *not crooked* but rather *clear or unencumbered*.

With the various meanings for *straight* in Hebrew and with Nephi’s use of the word in 2 Nephi 4:33 clearly in mind, it is time to turn to Alma 37:44, a key passage in the Book of Mormon, to see how *straight* is used. The verse reads, “For behold, it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a *straight course* to eternal bliss, as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass, which would point unto them a *straight course* to the promised land.” The analogy between the course Lehi took from the valley of Lemuel to the land of promise and the course that we must follow from where we are in order to arrive in the “far better land of promise” (verse 45) is telling for two reasons. First, the context makes it most likely that *straight* is the preferred spelling. Lehi and his family probably did not take a “narrow” or “constrained” course, although the possibility cannot be dismissed out of hand.<sup>19</sup>

Second and equally important, it cannot be maintained that the *straight course* Lehi took from the valley of Lemuel to the land of Bountiful and then across the sea to the Americas was not bent or curved. Their route contained at least one major course change when they shifted directions from traveling south-southeast (1 Nephi 16:13) to striking off in a “nearly eastward” direction (1 Nephi 17:1). Their path no doubt also contained smaller turns and twists that naturally would have been part of their many days of travel. Thus, while *straight* is correct, it cannot be taken in its sense of “not crooked,” but rather must be understood in its sense of “direct,” much like the English sentence “She went *straight* to the boss.” In this case, the *straight course* mentioned by Alma is a particular course, the course taken by Lehi.

That Alma means precisely *direct* in verse 44 is confirmed by the antithetical parallel in verses 41 and 42. When the people of Lehi were “slothful and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence” in the “compass,” they “did not travel a direct course.” Not traveling “a direct course” is contrasted in verse 44 with being led in “a straight course” through the wilderness to the promised land when they did “give heed to this compass.” The contrast created in this passage between “a straight course” and a course that was “not direct” makes it clear that in this passage *straight* means *direct*.<sup>20</sup>

In summary, the Book of Mormon in six of seven verses seems to distinguish between the *straight paths* of God in the plural and the *straight path* of mortal men in the singular. (The seventh verse, 2 Nephi 9:41, will be discussed near the end of this paper.) The singular *straight path* that each person must take and that is tailored for that person through the guidance of the Holy Ghost may contain occasional course changes and yet be the shortest, most *direct way* back to God. The *ways* of God, that is, the gospel, are also *straight* in the sense of being direct. Perhaps significantly, only one passage in the Book of Mormon also describes God’s *straight paths* as being *not crooked*.

## The Strait and Narrow

The expression *strait and narrow*, which occurs four times in our present Book of Mormon,<sup>21</sup> was spelled *straight and narrow* in the 1830 print-

ing. While I do not know on what basis the 1830 spelling was changed in a subsequent edition to *strait and narrow*, I believe the internal evidence in the Book of Mormon consistently calls for the spelling *strait and narrow*.

(Before I present the Book of Mormon evidence, I need to warn about a potential methodological mistake. The popular and widely used expression *straight and narrow*<sup>22</sup> is, in its English origin, derived from a misreading or misunderstanding of “the strait gate and narrow way” in Matthew 7:14.<sup>23</sup> This means that the common English phrase *straight and narrow* should read *strait and narrow*. Therefore, an appeal to the proverbial phrase *straight and narrow* cannot be used to demand that the English translation of an ancient document, the Book of Mormon, also read *straight* instead of *strait*.)

One reason for an initial reluctance to abandon the 1830 Book of Mormon spelling *straight* for the current *strait* is the supposition that “the redundancy of *strait* and *narrow* as compound modifiers of the same noun cannot be defended by reference to any parallel in the Bible or the Book of Mormon.”<sup>24</sup> As far as the Book of Mormon is concerned, this statement is true only if it is assumed at the beginning that the expression *strait and narrow* is an error for *straight and narrow*. However, it is bad methodology to eliminate the expression under discussion and then claim that there are no examples of that expression. It would be more accurate to state that other than the expression under discussion, *strai(gh)t and narrow path*, there are no examples of *strait* and *narrow* modifying the same noun in the Book of Mormon. To do otherwise is to beg the question.

An appeal to the King James Version for an example of *strait and narrow* modifying the same noun does not help. It contains neither the phrase *strait and narrow* nor *straight and narrow*. Therefore, the King James translation cannot be used directly to justify either position.

The Hebrew text of the Old Testament is, however, another matter. It does contain an analogous, synonymous word pair to *strait and narrow*. But, as far as I can determine, it does not contain an analog to *straight and narrow*. The Hebrew word pair *tswr/tsrr* and *tswq* mean, respectively, “distress(ed), strait(en)(ed), narrow, slim, constrain(ed),” etc. and “siege, constrict; strait(en)(ed), constrain(ed), narrow,” etc.<sup>25</sup> For example, these two word roots stand



behind the King James translation of Job 36:16 (with the corresponding English words in italics), “Even so would he have removed thee out of the *strait* (*tsār*) into a broad place, where there is no *straitness* (*mūtsāq*).”<sup>26</sup> (Other examples follow below in which these two roots are used in even more narrowly parallel structures.) In every instance that I could find in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament where this word pair occurs, no matter what form the roots take, *tswr/tsrr* always comes before *tswq*, just as *strait* in English nearly always comes before *narrow* when the two are bound in the same phrase.<sup>27</sup>

While it is possible, even likely, that *tswr/tsrr* and *tswq* stand behind the Book of Mormon expression *strait and narrow*, it would be methodologically unsound to accept this suggestion as fact. Nevertheless, it is precisely these two Hebrew words from Job that have been used to render into Hebrew the Greek of Matthew 7:14, “strait gate and narrow way.”<sup>28</sup> In addition, numerous passages in the Old Testament confirm the linguistic similarity and the close grammatical structure of *tswr/tsrr* and *tswq* to *strait* and *narrow* as synonymous, parallel poetic word pairs.<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps for two reasons English Bible translations of *tswr/tsrr* and *tswq* do not use the adjectives *strait* and *narrow* in the same verse. First, *tswr/tsrr* and *tswq* almost always appear in a noun or verb form in the Hebrew text, analogous to the reading in 2 Nephi 31:9, “straitness of the path” and “narrowness of the gate” (discussed below). And second, the translation of the Hebrew nouns as *straitness* and *narrowness* does not always make for a transparent reading of the biblical passage in which they appear.<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, a closer examination of three passages will demonstrate that *tswr/tsrr* and *tswq* form an even closer semantic and more exact syntactic analog for *strait* and *narrow* than is already apparent. The passages I have chosen each contain different Hebrew forms of this synonymous pair. For each example I give first the reference, then the phrase in transliterated Hebrew, and finally a more literal translation than the examples cited above. Notice how the various forms of *tswr/tsrr* and *tswq* and the other words in the phrases make poetic double and triple alliteration unavoidable: (1) Isaiah 30:6, *bəʾerets tsārāh wətsūqāh*, “in a strait and narrow land”; (2) Psalm 119:143, *tsar ūmātsūq mətsāʾūnī*, “constraint and narrowness have found me”; and (3) Job 15:24, *yəbaʿatūhū tsar ūmātsūqāh*, “constraint and narrowness shall make him afraid.”<sup>31</sup> While

my renderings here may be a bit stilted, it is clear in each case that *tswr/tsrr* and *tswq* are synonymous parallels. These two roots form a typical parallel poetic word pair in Hebrew, not just because of their semantic similarity but also because the built-in, and therefore unavoidable, alliteration makes the parallel usage of these two words particularly lyrical.<sup>32</sup>

The evidence thus demonstrates that the expression *strait and narrow* does have an exact syntactic and nearly identical semantic analog in biblical Hebrew. This means that the Book of Mormon expression *strait and narrow* cannot be dismissed out of hand because of “redundancy” or the lack of a “parallel.” Just as *strai(gh)t* comes before *narrow* in eight of the ten verses in which they both occur in the Book of Mormon (the exceptions, 2 Nephi 9:41 and 33:9, are discussed below), the fact that these two Hebrew roots always appear in the same order in the biblical examples I found underscores the parallel nature of the Book of Mormon and Hebrew Bible expressions. In fact, the Hebrew usage pattern of *tswr/tsrr* and *tswq* (whether or not these two roots have anything to do with *strait* and *narrow*) provides analogical evidence that the English text of the Book of Mormon is more dependent in general on ancient Hebrew poetic practice than on King James English.

Now that I have demonstrated that an initial reluctance to read *strait and narrow* in four verses in the Book of Mormon has no merit, I can turn to a second reason for wanting to read *straight and narrow* instead of *strait and narrow*. This reason, also fraught with problems, maintains with regard to *strai(gh)t* that “the required spelling when modifying *course* is always *straight*.”<sup>33</sup> By applying this “requirement,” the phrase *strait and narrow course* in Helaman 3:29 is corrected to read *straight and narrow course*. This correction is then used to justify, partly, changing the other three Book of Mormon instances of *strait and narrow path* to read *straight and narrow*.

However, further examination shows that it is inaccurate to claim that when *strai(gh)t* modifies the term *course*, the required spelling is *straight*. Of the four verses in the Book of Mormon where *strai(gh)t* modifies and is contiguous with *course*, only one occurrence matches the observation above and thus can be used as evidence. This verse, Alma 37:44, reads, “For behold, it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a *straight course* to eternal bliss, as it was for our fathers to give heed to

this compass, which would point unto them a *straight course* to the promised land.” Indeed, the “course” to the celestial kingdom is *straight*. However, this verse is the only one in the entire Book of Mormon where, unequivocally, *straight* and not *strait* is the proper modifier and, importantly, is contiguous with the course back to God. Two other verses, Alma 50:8 (“a straight course from the east”) and 56:37 (“march in a straight course”), do require the spelling *straight* as a modifier of *course*; but neither of these two verses has anything to do with the course back to God or God’s paths and therefore cannot be used as evidence, as has been suggested, for reading *straight* in Helaman 3:29.<sup>34</sup> The fourth verse, 2 Nephi 9:41 (“the way . . . lieth in a *straight course*”), cannot be used as evidence either because, as I will argue below, both *straight* and *strait* are possible readings in this verse. A general rule cannot be induced from only one conclusive and a second possible instance. Therefore, it cannot be maintained that “the required spelling when modifying *course* is always *straight*.”

In addition, the structure of Helaman 3:29 is distinct from the four verses from which the supposed “requirement” was apparently induced. Unlike the passages just mentioned (Alma 37:44; 50:8; 56:37; 2 Nephi 9:41), where *straight* is contiguous with *course*, in Helaman 3:29, *strai(gh)t* is not contiguous with *course*: “The word of God . . . [will] lead the man of Christ in a *strait and narrow course* across that everlasting gulf of misery.” Even if the evidence of the one unambiguous verse, Alma 37:44, were accepted as normative, does the norm still hold true if *strai(gh)t* is not contiguous with *course*? In fact, in other instances in the Book of Mormon, *straight* modifies *path*, yet no rule that “*straight* is the required spelling when modifying” *path* is induced. Therefore, an appeal to a “requirement” does not settle the issue of whether *straight* or *strait* is the correct reading in Helaman 3:29. However, to totally exhaust any reluctance to read



The Roman-period city of Palmyra in present-day Syria. The three arches open onto the main street (seen through the middle arch), which runs in a straight line, like the Roman street called “Straight” in the book of Acts, through the principal part of the city. Through the arch on the right, a crusader-period castle can be seen atop the far hill. The final approach to the castle winds around the base thereof from the lower left to the upper right, where it makes a 90-degree turn to the left into the castle gate complex. Photo courtesy of the author.

*strait*, I now turn to one last proffered justification that Helaman 3:29 should read *straight*, namely, literary parallels with other passages.

This third and final argument for reading *straight* and not *strait* in Helaman 3:29 runs as follows: Because Mormon, the editor, “echoes” in Helaman 3:29 the language of Alma 37:44, *strai(gh)t* in Helaman 3:29 should be spelled *straight*, as it is in Alma 37:44.<sup>35</sup> This argument would have merit only if it could be proved that Helaman 3:29 “echoes” only Alma 37:44 and no other passages that contain the spelling *strait*. Let us look at the evidence. The relevant parts of Helaman 3:29–30 read, “The word of God . . . shall . . . lead the man of Christ in a *strait and narrow course* across that everlasting gulf of misery . . . and land their souls . . . in the kingdom of heaven.” The corresponding relevant parts of Alma 37:44–45 read, “The word of Christ . . . will point to you a *straight course* to eternal bliss. . . . The words of Christ, if we follow their course, [will] carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise.” There are indeed similarities between these two passages.



The “Street Called Straight” in modern-day Damascus, Syria. Several feet below it lies the Roman-period “street which is called Straight” of New Testament fame (Acts 9:11). In the nearly 2,000-year history of the street since the days of Paul, the *straightness* has changed little, but it no doubt has become more *strait*. Photo courtesy of the author.

However, there are other passages that “echo” Helaman 3:29 at least as closely, if not more closely, than Alma 37:44 does.<sup>36</sup> For example, notice how the end result of following the “strai(gh)t and narrow course” in Helaman 3:29 parallels the end result of following the “the way which is narrow” in Jacob 6:8–11.

The relevant phrases in Jacob

6:8–11 read, “Will ye reject all the words which have been spoken concerning Christ . . . and deny the good word of Christ? . . . Repent ye, and enter in at the *strait gate*, and continue in the *way which is narrow*, until ye shall obtain eternal life.” Helaman 3:28–30, again, reads “All . . . those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ . . . may lay hold upon the word of God, which [will] . . . lead the man of Christ in a *strait and narrow course* . . . and land their souls . . . in the kingdom of heaven.” Thus, superficially, both Alma 37:44 and Jacob 6:8–11 provide “echoes” for Helaman 3:29.

Perhaps a more in-depth examination of *strai(gh)t and narrow* in Alma 37:44, Jacob 6:11, and Helaman 3:29 will help clarify the issue. Notice how the elements of these three verses line up with one another: Jacob 6:11 “the *strait gate*, and . . . the *way which is narrow*” Helaman 3:29 “a *strai(gh)t and narrow course*” Alma 37:44 “a *straight course*”

Helaman 3:29 and Alma 37:44 share only two words in common, *strai(gh)t* and *course*.<sup>37</sup> Jacob 6:11 and Helaman 3:29, on the other hand, not only share two words, *strai(gh)t* and *narrow*, but they also share the conjunction *and*, and they share the synonymous words *course* and *way*.<sup>38</sup> While it is

true that Jacob 6:11 contains *gate* and Helaman 3:29 and Alma 37:44 do not, there are still a greater number of parallels or echoes between Jacob 6:11 and Helaman 3:29 than between Alma 37:44 and Helaman 3:29. Therefore, the spelling in Helaman 3:29 should reflect Jacob 6:11, namely, *strait*. And, by analogy, the other three instances of *strai(gh)t and narrow* in the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 8:20; 2 Nephi 31:18, 19) should also be spelled *strait*.

In summary, the weight of the evidence favors reading *strait and narrow* in its four occurrences in the Book of Mormon. To sum up the arguments: First, the expression *strait and narrow* has an ancient Hebrew analog, and that analog would require the spelling *strait*. This is not true of *straight and narrow*, which to my knowledge has no Hebrew analog. Casual readers of the Book of Mormon should not be misled by the popular English saying *straight and narrow*, which in its origin is a mistake for *strait and narrow*. The parallels between *strait and narrow path* and *strait gate and narrow way* are convincing, while the similarities between the passages that contain *strai(gh)t path* are not compelling. The literary parallels also favor reading *strait*.

### The Strait Gate and the Narrow Way

The words *strai(gh)t(ness)*, *gate*, *narrow(ness)*, and *way/path* all occur in one combination or another in five verses in the Book of Mormon: 2 Nephi 31:9; 33:9; Jacob 6:11; and 3 Nephi 14:14; 27:33. The latter two contain the words spoken by the Savior to the Nephites and are nearly identical to words that he spoke in the Sermon on the Mount: “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life” (Matthew 7:14). Jacob 6:11, though similar to Matthew 7:14, reads, as might be expected from a different speaker in an earlier epoch, slightly differently: “Repent ye, and enter in at the *strait gate*, and continue in the *way which is narrow*, until ye shall obtain eternal life.” In each of these three Book of Mormon verses as well as in Matthew 7:14, the *gate* is *strait* and the *way* is *narrow*; and the order of the words is also set, with *strait* always coming before *narrow* and *gate* always coming before *way*. For these four verses, Matthew 7:14, Jacob 6:11, 3 Nephi 14:14, and 3 Nephi 27:33, the Book of Mormon and the Bible are emphatic that the *gate* is *strait* and the *way* is *narrow*.<sup>39</sup>

The other two verses in the Book of Mormon that contain *gate*, *strait*, *way*, and *narrow* do vary slightly in their word order from the previous four examples and therefore deserve separate commentary. I will begin first with 2 Nephi 31:9: “And again, it showeth unto the children of men the *straitness of the path*, and the *narrowness of the gate*, by which they should enter, [Christ] having set the example before them.” The expression “strai(gh)tness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate” is so close to “the strait gate, and . . . the way which is narrow” (Jacob 6:11) that a relationship between the former and the latter cannot be dismissed easily.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, none of the differences change the meaning, as long as *strait* and not *straight* is read. Additionally, the use of the noun phrases *straitness of the path* and *narrowness of the gate* reflects the ancient Semitic language preference to use nouns as modifiers. English prefers adjective clauses, such as *strait path* and *narrow gate*.

Nephi’s own words in this same chapter, 2 Nephi 31, confirm the connection between *the straitness of the path*, *and the narrowness of the gate* and *the strait gate and narrow way*. The expression *straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate* in verse 9 refers to Christ’s example of being baptized and having the Holy Ghost descend upon him (see vv. 5–8). In the same chapter Nephi makes it clear that “repentance and baptism” are “the gate” (v. 17) and that after cleansing by the Holy Ghost, “then are ye in this *strait and narrow path* which leads to eternal life” (v. 18). In other words, the “gate” consists of repentance and baptism and is “narrow,” like the strait gate; and the “straitness of the path” leading from the gate to “eternal life” is, like “the *strait and narrow path*,” the narrow way.

The resemblance between *the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate* and passages similar to *the strait gate and . . . the way which is narrow* (Jacob 6:11) is more than superficial. If the first expression is simply a variation of the *strait gate and narrow way*, as I have just argued, then in good Hebrew style *straitness* is the synonymous poetic parallel to *narrowness*.<sup>41</sup>

However, if *straightness* is read in 2 Nephi 31:9, several telling changes occur in the expression. The most obvious difference is that the meaning of the verse is changed to “the not crookedness (or not directness) of the path and the narrowness of the gate.” The second obvious difference is that the poetic parallel structure of the verse suffers

because *straightness* is neither synonymous nor antithetical to *narrowness*.<sup>42</sup> In fact, *straight(ness)* and *narrow(ness)* never occur in parallel in any scripture in the Latter-day Saint canon, including the Hebrew Bible (unless *straight* is also read in two of the other verses being discussed in this study).<sup>43</sup> Therefore, reading *straight* does too much violence to the poetic strength and the Hebrew nature of 2 Nephi 31:9 and to its congruence with other scriptures. The evidence calls for reading *strait*.<sup>44</sup>

Is it nevertheless possible that 2 Nephi 31:9 be emended to read “straightness of the path”?



Map of old Damascus showing the location of the “Street Called Straight.” Map by Andrew D. Livingston.

The reasoning runs as follows:<sup>45</sup> In this verse the “strai(gh)tness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate” refers to the example Christ set for us in keeping the commandments, including being baptized (vv. 5–8). In verse 4, Nephi introduces the discussion of Christ’s baptism by referring to things he had previously “spoken” on the subject. Nephi’s only recorded previous discourse on the subject came at a time much earlier in his life when he had seen a vision of the baptism of Christ and wrote about it in 1 Nephi 11:27–28. In the chapter preceding the record of this vision, 1 Nephi 10:7–8, Nephi recorded his father Lehi’s words “concerning a prophet [John the Baptist] who should come

before the Messiah, to prepare the way of the Lord—yea, even he should go forth and cry in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight.” (As I discussed above, the latter expression is a paraphrase of Isaiah 40:3.) The supposition linking these verses is that the strai(gh)t path in 2 Nephi 31:9 must be referring back through verse 4 of the same chapter to Nephi’s previous writings, namely 1 Nephi 11:27–28, then to Nephi’s father’s words in 1 Nephi 10:8 containing

of the gate” has with “the strait gate and narrow way,” this line of reasoning is troublesome for several other reasons. The only common element between these three Book of Mormon passages is that each mentions the baptism of Christ. However, the fact that all three passages mention the baptism is not enough to force the conclusion that the *straight* of the 1 Nephi 10:8 passage should be imposed on the *strai(gh)t* in the 2 Nephi 31:9 passage, especially since the supposed link between them, 1 Nephi 11:27–28

(or anywhere else in the chapter), does not contain either *straight* or *strait*. The contexts in which the baptism is mentioned are sufficiently different that to propose a thematic connection between the two passages in 1 Nephi and the passage in 2 Nephi is at best a stretch. Because Nephi does *not* draw specific attention in 2 Nephi 31:9 to an earlier *text*, just to his previous *spoken* message(s), it would be difficult to believe that Nephi, late in his life, expected his hearers to make the connection back to events that took place many years earlier in his life, namely, 1 Nephi 10 and 11. Simply as a matter of practicality, the thread cannot be stretched back to 1 Nephi.

Additionally, when Lehi’s words *make his paths straight* in 1 Nephi 10:8 are compared directly with Nephi’s

phrase *strai(gh)tness of the path* in 2 Nephi 31:9, the wording and context of the former do not line up thematically with the latter. Lehi’s paraphrase of Isaiah 40:3 concerns making *straight paths* for God, that is, *straightening* out the doctrine in preparation for the coming of the Lord (see the discussion on 1



Nephi may have been employing poetic parallelism after the Hebrew manner when he taught that Christ’s baptism shows “the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate” (2 Nephi 31:9), usages consistent in meaning with references in the Bible and Book of Mormon to a strait gate (i.e., a narrow gate, meaning baptism) and narrow way (synonymous with “strait way,” meaning the path we take after baptism). It was the biblical phrase “strait gate and narrow way” that gave rise to the misstated but now common and felicitous phrase “straight and narrow.” *To Fulfill All Righteousness*, by Liz Lemon Swindle.

the Isaiah paraphrase, where *straight* is the correct spelling. Therefore, 2 Nephi 31:9, as this hypothesis goes, should read “straightness of the path” and not “straitness of the path.”

Besides ignoring the clear parallels that the expression “strai(gh)tness of the path and narrowness

Nephi 10:8 above). On the other hand, the expression *straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate* in 2 Nephi 31:9 is contained within Nephi's call to his "beloved brethren" (v. 6) to be baptized (enter the strait gate) and receive the Holy Ghost (v. 13) and thereby walk in "this strait and narrow path" (v. 18). Or, as Nephi stated in verse 17, the call in 2 Nephi 31:9 is to "do the things which I have told you I have seen that your Lord and your Redeemer should do." Thus 2 Nephi 31:9, both in its wording and in its context within the chapter, lines up with the strait gate and narrow way for mortals but not with Lehi's declaration that the forerunner of the Messiah would "make [God's] paths straight."<sup>46</sup>

Because of the differences between 2 Nephi 31:9 and 1 Nephi 10:8, the only possible way to seriously maintain a connection is to try to interpose another passage connecting the two. But even that passage, 1 Nephi 11:27, though clearly linked internally to 1 Nephi 10:8, does not provide the compelling, missing link to 2 Nephi 31:9. As with 1 Nephi 10:8, the particular context of 1 Nephi 11:27 concerns Nephi's vision of the coming of the Messiah and includes as detail the fact that "the Redeemer of the world, of whom my father had spoken," would be baptized by "the prophet who should prepare the way before him" (v. 27). The particular context is one in which "the prophet . . . should prepare the way before" "the Redeemer of the world." The general context within the chapter concerns Nephi's learning to understand the interpretation of the symbol of "the tree of life" that his father had seen (v. 11; 1 Nephi 15:22). Thus, both the specific and the general contexts of 1 Nephi 11:27–28 concern what Christ did. Nowhere does chapter 11 treat directly the things that mortals must do to follow Christ. On the other hand, the context of 2 Nephi 31:9 concerns precisely the things that mortals must do, the path that mortals must take, to follow Christ. Any supposed connection between the *strai(gh)t*ness of the path for mortals in 2 Nephi 31:9 and the fact that Christ as part of his condescension would be baptized by John the Baptist does not exist.

For all the reasons given above, 2 Nephi 31:9 should correctly read, "the straitness of the path and the narrowness of the gate." The parallels with *strait gate and narrow way* require this reading. The context within the chapter demands this reading. A direct comparison with 1 Nephi 10:8 (Isaiah 40:3)

does not support a different reading. Neither can the intervening chapter and verses, 1 Nephi 11:27–28, be used to suggest changing 2 Nephi 31:9.

All that has been said about 2 Nephi 31:9, "the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate," can also be said about 2 Nephi 33:9, "enter into the narrow gate, and walk in the strait path." In fact, the only possible reason for changing 2 Nephi 33:9 to read *straight* instead of *strait* is "literary consistency," supposedly on the basis of emending 2 Nephi 31:9.<sup>47</sup> Like 2 Nephi 31:9, this verse contains a variation in the word order of the expression *strait gate and narrow way*, but in this case the adjectives *strait* and *narrow* have changed places. Because *strait* is correct, the word order does not matter: The parallel poetic structure remains intact, and the meaning is maintained. If *straight* is read, then the verse does change meaning, a meaning unique in Latter-day Saint scripture. In addition, the poetic parallelism is destroyed, and the variation in word order of this phrase does not make sense. Like 2 Nephi 31:9, this verse occurs in the context of what mortals must do to be reconciled to God, not what prophets must do to prepare the *ways* of the Lord. Therefore, like 2 Nephi 31:9, there are compelling reasons to read *strait* and no valid reasons to read *straight* in 2 Nephi 33:9.

It would be tempting to proclaim, after the foregoing discussion, that any verse containing *strai(gh)t* and *narrow* requires the spelling *strait*. With only one plausible exception, in all ten Book of Mormon verses where the words *strai(gh)t(ness)* and *narrow(ness)* occur, the most compelling reading is *strait*. Were it not for the exception, 2 Nephi 9:41 ("the way . . . lieth in a straight course"), I could state that the "required spelling" is always *strait* when it appears in the same verse with *narrow*. As it is, I can state only that when *narrow* and *strai(gh)t* occur in the same verse, nine times out of ten the best reading is *strait*. The one exception, 2 Nephi 9:41, does not fit neatly either with the verses containing *strait gate and narrow way* or with the verses containing *strait and narrow*, or even with the verses in which God's paths are made *straight*. It is time now to turn to this anomaly.

## 2 Nephi 9:41 as an Anomaly

Arranged in poetic form, 2 Nephi 9:41 currently reads,

Come unto the Lord, the Holy One.  
Remember that his paths are righteous.

Behold, the way for man is narrow,  
but it lieth in a straight course before him.

The printer's manuscript reads *strait*. The compositor of the 1830 edition changed the word to read *straight*, and thus it has remained through the 1981 edition, even though other changes in the verse have been made.<sup>48</sup> This verse needs careful analysis.

It is possible to read *straight* in this verse. As mentioned above, *straight* in Hebrew comes from a form of the root *yšr*, which can mean “not bent” or “not curved” and also “direct, without hindrance; uprightness, correct,” and so on. For example, in a passage already mentioned above, Deuteronomy 9:5, *yšr* is the Hebrew word that the King James translators rendered “uprightness,” that is, “Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land.” *Uprightnes* (*yšr*) and *righteousness* are paralleled in this verse and in other verses in the King James Version.<sup>49</sup> The translators could just as well have rendered *yšr* with *straightness*. The verse in Deuteronomy would then read, “Not for thy righteousness, or for the straightness of thine heart,” with *righteousness* and *straightness* in synonymous parallel. The poet in me can see a similar poetic parallel, a common element of Hebrew poetry, in 2 Nephi 9:41. Indeed, the printer's manuscript and the 1830 edition, rather than reading “his paths are righteous” as in later editions, both read “righteousness.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, even though *Behold, the way for man is narrow* separates *his paths are righteousness* and *a straight course before him* in 2 Nephi 9:41, the latter two phrases could form a synonymous poetic parallel analogous to the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy 9:5.

Nevertheless, I believe that an equally strong case can be made for reading *strait* in 2 Nephi 9:41. The far better parallel in this verse for *strai(gh)t* is the word *narrow* in the phrase separating *righteous* and *strai(gh)t*. In fact, if *straight* is read in 2 Nephi 9:41, then this verse would be the only verse in all of Latter-day Saint scripture, including the Hebrew Bible, in which *straight* rather than *strait* parallels *narrow* (unless of course either 2 Nephi 31:9 or 33:9 are also emended, contrary to the evidence presented above, to read *straight*). This fact alone should be enough to propose reading *strait*. Nevertheless, two issues seem to stand in the way of reading *strait*, neither of which, when carefully examined, is strong enough on its own to

rule out *strait* in favor of *straight*.

First is the issue that *straight* is the only acceptable modifier of *course*. As I have demonstrated above, this supposed rule is based on a single, relevant passage and therefore is not convincing. It cannot be invoked to force the reading of *straight* in this or any other verse.

The second issue concerns the conjunction *but* in 2 Nephi 9:41. A perfunctory reading would suggest that “the conjunction *but* makes it impossible that Jacob intended the meaning of ‘strait.’”<sup>51</sup> That is, how can the way be “narrow” but “strait”? This would seem to be a contradiction because *strait* is synonymous with *narrow* and the conjunction *but* seems to preclude a synonymous parallel. On the other hand, reading *straight* makes sense because it is not synonymous with *narrow*.

That the conjunction *but* precludes reading *strait* is true for only one of the definitions of *but*. However, in both English and Hebrew, *but* has a range of meaning that is not limited to the contrastive. Some of these other meanings would not exclude reading *strait*. The following synonyms of *but* taken from the *Oxford English Dictionary* exemplify some of the meanings that *but* can have in English: “on the contrary, . . . nevertheless, yet, however, . . . on the other hand, moreover.” In the following quotation, *but* can have several of these meanings in addition to being contrastive: “Feversham passed for a good-natured man: but he was a foreigner.”<sup>52</sup> By way of example, replacing *but* in the foregoing quotation with two different synonyms yields the following two illustrations of the range of meanings *but* can have: “Feversham was a good-natured man; *however*, he is a foreigner” and “he was good-natured; *moreover*, he was a foreigner.” In other words, *but* can connote, respectively, a contrast or an addition.

Applied to 2 Nephi 9:41, these same meanings for *but* yield the following possibilities: “Behold, the way for man is narrow; *moreover* [*but* indicating an addition], it lieth in a strai(gh)t course before him” or “Behold, the way for man is narrow; *however* [*but* indicating a contrast], it lieth in a strai(gh)t course before him.” Only the latter reading, the contrastive, would require the rejection of a synonym such as *strait* to parallel *narrow*.<sup>53</sup> The first reading does not require *strai(gh)t* to contrast with *narrow* and therefore would allow the reading *strait* as well as *straight* without doing violence to the meaning of the phrase.<sup>54</sup>

It could be argued that the many nuances of English *but* are not relevant because the language on the small plates was probably a form of Hebrew. However, like English, not all the equivalents of *but* in Hebrew require the contrastive sense. The common, modern Hebrew word for *but*, *ʔbl*, occurs only 11 times in the Old Testament, 4 of which can have the force in biblical Hebrew of *truly*.<sup>55</sup> For example, Genesis 42:21 of the King James Version reads, “We are verily guilty.”<sup>56</sup> Literally, the Hebrew text reads, “But [truly] we are guilty.”<sup>57</sup> Applying this Hebrew syntax and meaning of *but* to 2 Nephi 9:41, the verse could easily read, “The way for man is narrow; truly it lieth in a strait course before him.”<sup>58</sup>

In addition to *ʔbl*, the conjunction *v* (ו in Hebrew, usually translated “and”) can be translated as *but*, such as in Genesis 17:21 and Psalm 13:6.<sup>59</sup> With the reading *v* instead of *ʔbl*, 2 Nephi 9:41 could be rendered “The way for man is narrow, and it lieth in a strait course before him.” Other Hebrew words with various nuances are also translated as *but* and would allow for the reading *strait* in this verse.<sup>60</sup>

Thus both English and Hebrew noncontrastive meanings of *but* allow for reading *strait* in 2 Nephi 9:41, and therefore reading *strait* cannot be dismissed out of hand from either an ancient or a modern approach. Additionally, reading *strait* in this verse would also accord with every other instance in Latter-day Saint scripture where both *strait* and *narrow* occur in the same verse. Therefore, though a case can be made for reading *straight* in 2 Nephi 9:41, reading *strait* is possibly preferable to *straight*.

## Summary and Conclusion

The Book of Mormon speaks of God’s paths as being *straight* in the sense of “direct,” “right,” and “not crooked” in 1 Nephi 10:8, Alma 7:9, and Alma 7:19. Three verses in the Book of Mormon—Alma 37:44, 2 Nephi 4:33, and Alma 37:12—speak of the journey that each mortal must take, or desires to take, on his or her personal *straight path*; and the context in each of these three verses calls for the meaning “direct,” “right,” or “unencumbered,” but never “not crooked.” In terms that apply universally to all mortals, the Book of Mormon states that the *gate* of baptism is *strait* (2 Nephi 31:18) and that the *way* after baptism is *strait and narrow* (2 Nephi 31:19), with the Holy Ghost guiding the way (2 Nephi 32:3).

In the ten verses in the Book of Mormon where the words *strai(gh)t* and *narrow* occur in the same verse, there are compelling reasons in nine of them to read *strait*, while the tenth verse could take either reading. Reading *strait* in the expressions *strait gate and narrow way* and *strait and narrow way* preserves the poetic parallelism, accords with a biblical Hebrew analog, and is consistent within the Book of Mormon.

With this I conclude my attempt to *straighten* and *straiten* the meaning of *strai(gh)t* in the Book of Mormon.

▷ The title of this article, “Straightening Things Out,” is an intended pun based on Hebrew. In biblical Hebrew the word *dabar* can be translated either as “thing” or as “word.” Thus the title of this paper contains the pun “Straightening Words Out.” For diversion next time you read the Book of Mormon, substitute *word* for *thing* and *thing* for *word* and marvel at the additional meanings that frequently jump off the page. ■



- Islamic Perspectives*, ed. Edwin B. Firmage, Bernard G. Weiss, and John W. Welch (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 37; see pp. 32–47.
15. See Weinfeld, “Decalogue,” 38.
  16. Weinfeld, “Decalogue,” 34.
  17. Philo, *The Preliminary Studies* 89, in *Philo*, trans. Francis H. Colson and George H. Whitaker (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968), 4:502–3.
  18. Philo, *Preliminary Studies* 90, in *Philo*, 4:502–3.
  19. TB *ʿAbot*, 5:2–3.
  20. Ten elements are also found in Romans 8:38–39 and Doctrine and Covenants 4:6.
  21. For example, donations to temples in ancient Greece around the time of Lehi often involved the gift of a tenth. In describing the riches dedicated to the treasuries at Delphi, Pausanias mentions a tithe sent by the Tarentines “from the spoils of the barbarous Peuketians.” He also tells of the ill fortune of the Siphnians, whose island had yielded gold mines; the god Apollo “commanded them to bring a tithe of the produce to Delphi, so they built a treasure-house and brought the tithe. When out of insatiable greed they gave up this tribute, the sea flooded in and obliterated the mines.” Pausanias, *Guide to Greece*, vol. 1, trans. Peter Levi (London: Penguin Books, 1971), 441, 433.
  22. See Christian Wilson, “Tithe,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6:578–80.
  23. See TB *ʿAbot*, 5:3. These ten are listed in Bullinger, *Number in Scripture*, 244–45.
  24. David Noel Freedman, *The Nine Commandments: Uncovering a Hidden Pattern of Crime and Punishment in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 7.
  25. See Philo, *Preliminary Studies* 118, in *Philo*, 4:518–19; and TB *ʿAbot*, 5:4.
  26. Bullinger, *Number in Scripture*, 244.
  27. Freedman, *The Nine Commandments*, 7–8.
  28. Freedman, *The Nine Commandments*, 8.
  29. Freedman, *The Nine Commandments*, 12–13.
  30. Bullinger, *Number in Scripture*, 244.
  31. See “Jacob’s Ten Commandments,” in Welch, *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 69–72.
  32. Bullinger, *Number in Scripture*, 244.
  33. See John W. McKay, “Exodus XXIII 1–3, 6–8: A Decalogue for the Administration of Justice in the City Gate,” *Vetus Testamentum* 21/13 (1971): 311–25.
  34. Perhaps echoing the ten who convened at the town gate in Ruth 4, a minimum of ten men is required in traditional Jewish law in order to constitute a religious quorum. See Abraham P. Bloch, *The Biblical and Historical Background of Jewish Customs and Ceremonies* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1980), 76–77. See also TB Megilla 21b and TY Meg. 4.3 as translated by Jacob Neusner in his *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: An Academic Commentary to the Second, Third, and Fourth Divisions* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 19:154–55.
  35. See Philo, *Preliminary Studies* 81–120, in *Philo*, 4:498–519.
  36. Philo, *Preliminary Studies* 103, in *Philo*, 4:508–9.
  37. See TB *Yoma* 39b.
  38. John W. Welch, “Ten Testimonies of Jesus Christ from the Book of Mormon,” in *Doctrines of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Bruce A. Van Orden and Brent L. Top (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 232–33. This topic is discussed further in John W. Welch and Terrence L. Szink, “King Benjamin’s Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 179, citing Hayyim Schauss, *The Jewish Festivals* (New York: Schocken Books, 1962), 135.
  39. The ten occurrences of *Lord* include two in the construct state (“of the Lord,” vv. 16, 17), then two in the indicative mood (“the Lord,” vv. 26, 30), and then six in the vocative (“O Lord”). The four isolated uses of *O* appear in two pairs (matching the two isolated pairs of *Lord*): one of exclamation (“O wretched man” and “O then if I,” vv. 17, 26) and one of exultation (“rejoice, O my heart,” twice, vv. 28, 30). The word *God* also appears six times in this passage (balancing the six instances of *O Lord*). The word *God* is a more generic and less significant word than *Lord*; the tetragrammaton was held in sacred reverence in ancient Israel (see Leviticus 24:11).
  40. I appreciate Dan Salgado for pointing this out to me.
  41. See “Textual Consistency,” in Welch, *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 22–23.
  42. Moshe I. Sorscher, *Companion Guide to the Yom Kippur Prayer Service* (New York: Judaica, 1994), xi.
  43. Abraham P. Bloch, *The Biblical and Historical Background of the Jewish Holy Days* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1978), 28.
  44. Moshe I. Sorscher, *Companion Guide to the Rosh Hashanah Prayer Service* (New York: Judaica, 1994), xvi–xvii.
  45. See Hayyim Schauss, *The Jewish Festivals* (New York: Schocken, 1962), 146; and Louis Jacobs, “Rosh ha-Shanah,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), 14:309.
  46. Bullinger, *Number in Scripture*, 243–44.
  47. See Welch and Szink, “King Benjamin’s Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals,” 147–223.
  48. Philo, *Preliminary Studies* 88, in *Philo*, 4:502–3.
  49. Philo, *Preliminary Studies* 81, in *Philo*, 4:498–99.
  50. For a poetical display of this text essentially in eight quatrains, see Zenos, “Hearing Mercy,” *BYU Studies* 33/1 (1993): 172–73.
  51. TB *ʿAbot*, 5:1.
  52. I appreciate Michael Lyon for drawing this to my attention.
  53. Philo, *Preliminary Studies* 116, in *Philo*, 4:516–17.
  54. Elias J. Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988), 134; see Donald W. Parry, “Demarcation between Sacred Space and Profane Space: The Temple of Herod Model,” in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 413–14.
  55. See James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 1:110–61, quotation on p. 140.
- Straightening Things Out: The Use of *Strait* and *Straight* in the Book of Mormon**  
Paul Y. Hoskisson
1. See Noel B. Reynolds and Royal Skousen, “Was the Path Nephi Saw ‘Strait and Narrow’ or ‘Straight and Narrow?’” *JBMS* 10/2 (2001): 30–33.
  2. There are 27 instances of *strai(gh)t* in the Book of Mormon. The passages have been conveniently listed in a table in Reynolds and Skousen, “‘Strait and Narrow,’” 33. Because 1 Nephi 16:23, 17:41 (twice), 21:20, Alma 14:28 (twice), and 3 Nephi 14:13 do not contribute to the questions at hand, I will not discuss them in this article. Distinctions between *path*, *way*, and *course*, which each appear with *strait* or *straight*, do not seem to influence either in English or in Hebrew whether *straight* or *strait* is correct. Therefore, *path*, *way*, and *course* will not enter into the discussion as determinants.
  3. For a general discussion of the confusion of homophones and near homophones in the Book of Mormon, see Stan Larson, “Conjectural Emendation and the Text of the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 18/4 (1978): 563–69. In this article, *strai(gh)t* is mentioned but not discussed. For a short treatment of *strai(gh)t* in the Book of Mormon, see John W. Welch and Daniel McKinlay, “Getting Things Strai[gh]t,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 260–62. See also the more recent article by Reynolds and Skousen cited in note 1 above.
  4. Second edition on CD-ROM, Version 3.0, under the various forms. Hereafter cited as *OED*.
  5. The complete statement reads, “It is customary to write *straight*, for direct or right, and *strait*, for narrow, but this is a practice wholly arbitrary, both being the same word.” See *Noah Webster’s First Edition of an American Dictionary of the English Language*, facsimile ed. (San Francisco: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1987). I want to thank my friend and colleague Neal Kramer for drawing my attention to the entry in *Webster’s*.
  6. Four verses use a form of *strai(gh)t* two times each. The information is conveniently gathered in Reynolds and Skousen, “‘Strait and Narrow,’” 33.
  7. In the table on page 33 of “‘Strait and Narrow,’” Reynolds and Skousen have provided a listing of when each occurrence

- of *straight* in the Book of Mormon was changed to *strait*.
8. See *History of the Church*, 5:260; see also p. 258.
  9. See Doctrine and Covenants 65; 45:8–10; and 128:20; see also 88:66–68.
  10. Unless otherwise noted, all Bible references are to the King James Version (KJV).
  11. See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. M. E. J. Richardson, CD-ROM ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000), s.v. שָׁרַח for the various Semitic languages and the Hebrew meanings.
  12. In the following quotations I have italicized the English word used to translate *yšr*: Psalm 107:7, “And he led them forth by the *right* way, that they might go to a city of habitation”; Isaiah 26:7 (NEB), “The path of the righteous is *level*, and thou markest out the *right* way for the upright”; 2 Kings 10:3, “Look even out the best and *meetest* of your master’s sons”; and Micah 3:9, “Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob . . . that abhor judgment, and pervert all *equity*.” From this range of translations of the Hebrew root *yšr*, it is easy to see that the Hebrew text of Isaiah 40:3, “Make *straight* . . . a highway” does not necessarily mean “make the highway not crooked or not bent.” It could just as well be translated as “Make right [or proper] . . . a highway.”
  13. In rendering this passage, the synoptic Gospels, at Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:3, and Luke 3:4, closely follow the Greek text (usually called the Septuagint, or LXX for short) of Isaiah 40:3, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,” subsuming the phrase *in the desert a highway for our God into his paths*. John 1:23 combines the elements of the Isaiah distich into a single colon.
  14. See the previous note for this passage in the Gospels.
  15. This is not the place to present an analysis of why the Book of Mormon uses the plural *paths* for God and the singular *path* for man. The important point is that the Book of Mormon is consistent in this usage. The fact that the Hebrew and therefore the KJV of Isaiah 40:3 use the singular and the LXX uses the plural may or may not be relevant to the discussion at hand. As mentioned above, the synoptic Gospels follow the LXX, including the use of the plural.
  16. This passage, Alma 7:19–20, provides an example of an important point that needs to be made. One of the key elements of Hebrew writing, indeed of all Semitic literature, is the use of parallel word pairs and parallel constructions. This occurs not only in poetry (many people are familiar with parallel expressions from reading Psalms) but also in prose works. The most common Hebrew parallel forms are those in which a word is paired with a synonym or with its antonym/negated synonym. These two forms of parallelism are called, respectively, synonymous or antithetical parallelism. Thus, besides being poetic, parallels can help provide the meaning or nuance of a less well-known element of the parallel when the other element is well-known. For example, in the case at hand, Alma 7:19–20, the correct nuance of *straight* in “making [God’s] paths straight” comes from the antithetical parallel “[God] cannot walk in crooked paths.” That is, *straight* in this passage means “not crooked.”
 

For a general discussion of parallelism, see Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994); and James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1981). For Book of Mormon discussions, see Kevin L. Barney, “Poetic Diction and Parallel Word Pairs in the Book of Mormon,” *JBMS* 4/2 (1995): 15–81; Richard D. Rust, *Poetry in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991); and Angela Crowell, “Hebrew Poetry in the Book of Mormon,” 1986 (paper available as a FARMS reprint from the Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah). I have not read all of these works and therefore cannot vouch for specifics.
  17. See also Hebrews 12:13 for another possible similarity.
  18. Unfortunately, this is not the place or time for a complete analysis of the complicated structure of the paired and imbedded couplets of Nephi’s psalm.
  19. My colleague S. Kent Brown has made me aware that the ancient prescribed caravan routes between southern and northern Arabia could be very constricted or constrained. See Nigel Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh: A Study of the Arabian Incense Trade* (London and New York: Longman, 1981), especially p. 181. Nevertheless, the plain sense of Alma 37:41–45 is *straight* in the sense of *direct*, as I demonstrate in the rest of the paragraph.
  20. Reading “direct” as the intended meaning for *straight* in Alma 37:44 also makes theological sense. The path back to God, like Lehi’s path to the promised land, is not without an occasional course change. The alternative, a path that is not bent or curved, would require all course changes to be made at one time, namely, at the moment of conversion. Common sense dictates that if God were to require us to make all necessary course changes at once, we would surely become discouraged by the sheer number and magnitude of the changes needed. On the other hand, a *direct course* back to God accurately describes the path we need to take. The promptings of the Holy Spirit will lead to occasional course changes to meet the particular needs of each person, but the path itself will be for that person the most direct, the shortest, and the most obstacle-free path to the celestial kingdom.
  21. 1 Nephi 8:20; 2 Nephi 31:18, 19; and Helaman 3:29. For a discussion of the options for interpreting this phrase, see Welch and McKinlay, “Getting Things Strai[gh]t,” 261–62.
  22. See, for example, hymn no. 144, “Secret Prayer,” in *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), where the second stanza begins, “The straight and narrow way to heav’n . . .”
  23. The *straight and narrow* is “a misinterpretation of Matt. vii. 14 ‘Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that finde it’” (*OED*, s.v. “straight,” sense 3a; original spelling retained).
  24. Reynolds and Skousen, “Strait and Narrow,” 31.
  25. See the definitions in Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon*, s.v. צָרִיךְ and צָר and the adjective צָרָה. The emphasis is mine. The passages I could find are Deuteronomy 28:53, 55, 57; Psalm 119:143; Proverbs 1:27; Job 15:24; 36:16; Isaiah 8:22; 30:6; Jeremiah 19:9; 49:24; and Zephaniah 1:15. There may be others.
  26. I am aware that the Hebrew of this verse has been variously interpreted. I use the KJV here simply because of the use of *strait* to translate these two roots. The examples I discuss provide sufficient evidence for the existence of this word pair as poetic parallels, making the question of how to translate Job 36:16 irrelevant.
  27. *Narrow* comes before *strai(gh)t* in two verses in the Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 9:41 and 33:9.
  28. See *The New Testament in Hebrew and English* (London: The Society for Distributing the Holy Scriptures to the Jews, n.d.). The translator’s name is given only in Hebrew, but if my reading of the Hebrew is correct, the translator was Franz Delitzsch (of Keil and Delitzsch, *Biblicher Commentar über das Alte Testament*, fame).
  29. For example, English translations of this pair of words include “trouble and anguish” (KJV of Psalm 119:143), “hardship and distress” (NIV of Isaiah 30:6), “anguish and sorrows” (KJV of Jeremiah 49:24), “trouble and anxiety” (NEB of Psalm 119:143), “distress and anxiety” (NEB of Job 15:24), and various other combinations. It is not significant that each of these synonymous pairs is composed of nouns rather than adjectives such as *strait* and *narrow*. Where English usually prefers a noun and adjective combination, such as in 2 Nephi 31:18, “narrow path,” Hebrew often prefers a noun chain, such as in 2 Nephi 31:9, “straitness of the path,” as discussed below.
  30. For example, the KJV of Jeremiah 19:9 translates this parallel pair with “siege and straitness,” as does Deuteronomy 28:53, 55, 57.
  31. See also the Hebrew of Jeremiah 49:24 and Proverbs 1:27.
  32. It is unfortunate that English *strait* and *narrow*, while demonstrating many of the same

- nuances, do not inherently contain poetic alliteration. The King James translators seem to have been aware of this and seem to have made an effort to preserve the poetic alliteration, at least occasionally, for example, with *siege* and *straitness* in Deuteronomy 28:53, 55, 57 and Jeremiah 19:9.
33. Reynolds and Skousen, "Strait and Narrow," 32.
34. Alma 50:8 reads, "And the land of Nephi did run in a straight course from the east sea to the west." The relevant part of Alma 56:37 reads, "When they saw the army of Antipus pursuing them, with their might, they did not turn to the right nor to the left, but pursued their march in a straight course after us."
35. Reynolds and Skousen, "Strait and Narrow," 32. Notice, however, that using this same line of reasoning, it could just as well be argued that if *strait* and *narrow* is correct in Helaman 3:29, then the "echoes" would require reading *strait* in Alma 37:44. From what is known of the caravan routes in ancient Arabia, the general area through which Lehi was led in a "strai(gh)t" course, *strait* would not be amiss. The routes were purposely made narrow, at least in some places. Also, it was forbidden on pain of death to leave the established trail, meaning that turning to the left or to the right off the trail was a capital offense, a rather stark form of constraint or *straitening*. See Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh*, 169–70, 181, 183.
36. In addition to the "echo" presently to be discussed, the other passages include 3 Nephi 14:14; 27:33, and the three exact parallels on the small plates, namely, 1 Nephi 8:20 and 2 Nephi 31:18, 19. The latter three verses predate Helaman 3:29 by at least 400 years and perhaps by as much as 1,000 years (see note 38 below). Thus, strictly speaking, it would be better to let the small plates determine the reading in Helaman 3:29 than the other way around.
37. See the discussion above of *straight* modifying *course*, where I point out that there is only one unambiguous passage in the Book of Mormon where *straight* modifies and is contiguous with the course back to God.
38. Either the commentator in Helaman 3:29, who seems to be Mormon and who therefore wrote the passage nearly 1,000 years after the composition of the small plates, simply used a synonym of *path*, or the Prophet Joseph Smith translated the original word as *course* on the large plates but as *path* on the small plates. Thus, the *course* in Helaman 3:29, the *path* in the small plates, and the *way* in Jacob 6:11 (and 3 Nephi 14:14 and 27:33) appear to be synonymous.
39. Also note that if *strait* and *narrow* are synonymous and parallel, any grammatically correct rearrangement of *gate*, *strait*, *way*, and *narrow*, such as the hypothetical expression *the narrow way and the strait gate or the narrow gate and the strait way*, would still preserve the original meaning of the expression.
40. Because 2 Nephi 31:9 comes before Jacob 6:11 in the Book of Mormon, it would be difficult to argue that the former is dependent on the latter. It could be argued that both are dependent on a common source, such as some combination of *tswr/tsrr* and *tswq* or an expression on the large plates of Nephi. Notice that Isaiah 62:10 does parallel *gates* with *highway* in a five-line poetic call to get ready for the coming of the Messiah:
- Go through, go through the gates;  
prepare ye the way of the people;  
cast up, cast up the highway;  
gather out the stones;  
lift up a standard for the people.
41. In fact, if *straitness* is the correct reading, then, just as it was with Jacob 6:11, 3 Nephi 14:14, and 27:33, it does not matter what the word order is in 2 Nephi 31:9. Any grammatically correct combination of *straitness* with *path* or *gate* and *narrowness* with *path* or *gate* will yield the identical meaning. An anonymous reviewer of an early draft of this article pointed out to me other analogous reversals of word order, such as with *abomination* and *desolation*, and particularly with *bind*, *law*, *seal*, and *testimony*.
42. See the preceding discussion in the body of this article.
43. The verses are 2 Nephi 9:41, "The way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a straight course before him" (a difficult passage that will be discussed below), and 2 Nephi 33:9, "Enter into the narrow gate, and walk in the strait path."
44. There is an additional though less elegant reason for reading *strait* and not *straight* that is contingent on word order. By moving *gate* and *path* in 2 Nephi 31:9 to the word positions they occupy in the three Book of Mormon verses discussed above (*strait gate and narrow way*), the unlikely combination *straightness of the gate and narrowness of the path* would ensue. (Even Reynolds and Skousen, "Strait and Narrow," 31, point out that "it would be unusual to speak of a 'straight gate.'" As my colleague S. Kent Brown reminded me privately, the pathway or road approaching the gates of ancient cities nearly always contained a 90-degree turn just before entering the gate. More advanced fortifications contained several 90-degree turns between the main gate and the exit out of the gate complex into the city proper. Thus, neither the gate nor the way would have been spoken of as being *straight* in the sense of being not bent.) Thus, when reading *strait*, the word order can change without changing the meaning of the expression. However, reading *straight* would not allow a shift in word order without doing violence to the meaning.
45. Reynolds and Skousen, "Strait and Narrow," 32.
46. Having already paraphrased several passages from Isaiah 11:4–9 in the preceding chapter, 2 Nephi 30:9–15, Nephi could easily have made a direct connection between his "strai(gh)tness of the path" and Isaiah's "make straight in the desert a highway for our God" if he had wanted. But he did not do it, perhaps because there is in fact no connection.
47. Reynolds and Skousen, "Strait and Narrow," 33.
48. These changes include the deletion of *of Israel* after *the Holy One* and the insertion of *remember* above the crossed-out *of Israel*. Also, where the text now reads *righteous*, it read *righteousness* in the printer's manuscript and the 1830 edition. See Part 1 of Royal Skousen, ed., *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001). A facsimile edition of the 1830 edition in my possession contains *righteousness*.
49. For other examples, see 1 Kings 3:6; Psalm 9:8; and Isaiah 26:10.
50. See note 48 above. The original manuscript is not extant for this part of the verse. See Royal Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001).
51. Reynolds and Skousen, "Strait and Narrow," 32.
52. See under "But," senses 23, 24, and 25. This sentence from the *OED* is attributed to "[Thomas B.] Macaulay *Hist. Eng.* I. 615."
53. There are possibly other English meanings for *but* that would also allow reading *strait* in this verse. For example, "Behold, the way for man is narrow, so that it lieth in a strai(gh)t course before him" (*OED*, s.v. "but," sense 14).
54. Other Latter-day Saint scripture provides an example of *but* used in a noncontrastive sense. Abraham 1:19 reads, "As it was with Noah so shall it be with thee; but through thy ministry my name shall be known in the earth forever, for I am thy God." If *but* were used in a contrastive sense in this verse, then it could be replaced by a synonym that is also contrastive, such as *however*. Notice though that when *however* as a contrastive conjunction replaces *but* in this verse, the verse does not seem to make sense. On the other hand, the meaning of the verse is preserved if *but* is replaced with a word that introduces an addition, such as *moreover*, yielding, "As it was with Noah so shall it be with thee; moreover, through thy ministry my name shall be known in the earth forever, for I am thy God." The sense of the verse is also maintained if the *but* is changed to *verily*: "As it was with Noah so shall it be with thee; verily, through thy ministry my name shall be known in the earth forever, for I am thy God." *Verily*, as will be shown immediately, is one of the nuances of *but* in Hebrew. Thus, the meaning of *but* in this verse could coincide with English usage of *moreover* or of *verily* but not with the contrastive *however*.
- In addition, see also 1 Corinthians 14:1. In the KJV it reads, "Follow after charity, and

desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy." Notice, however, that the NEB translates the Greek differently than the KJV does. Where the latter has *and* the NEB has *but*, and where the KJV has *but* the NEB has *and*. Thus the verse reads in the NEB, "Put love first; but there are other gifts of the Spirit at which you should aim also, and above all prophecy." See also 2 Timothy 2:22, "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

55. See Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon*, s.v. אבל.

56. The other seven examples of *ʿbl* occur in later books and are translated as "but" or "however." As an aside, it is interesting to note that the Hebrew root mentioned above, *tswr/tsrr*, stands behind the KJV words *anguish* and *distress* in this verse.

57. Another example would be 2 Kings 4:14, "Verily [but] she hath no child." See also 1 Kings 1:43 and Genesis 17:19. It must be said that in each of these instances of *ʿbl* being translated as "verily," the word does not function as a conjunction but rather introduces a clause, which is one of the possible readings in 2 Nephi 9:41.

58. I am aware that the construction in 2 Nephi 9:41 is different from the biblical passages where *ʿbl* means "verily." Nevertheless, the Hebrew passages do demonstrate one of the range of meanings of *ʿbl*.

59. See Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon*, s.v. 1.

60. Hebrew has more complicated locutions, such as אף על פי כן, that in addition to being translated as "but" also have a wide range of meanings, including "nevertheless."

**Has the Seal of Mulek Been Found?**  
Jeffrey R. Chadwick

1. See John W. Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 142–44.
2. For a history of the discussion, see John A. Tvedtnes, John Gee, and Matthew Roper, "Book of Mormon Names Attested in Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions," *Journal of Book of Mormon*

- Studies* 9/1 (2000): 79n58.
3. See Nahman Avigad and Benjamin Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1997), 55, item no. 15.
  4. Because this article provides Hebrew terms in a Hebrew font, I will give pronunciation transliterations of Hebrew terms rather than strictly mechanical transliterations of the kind often used in works that do not use a Hebrew font. In my view, strictly mechanical transliterations are cumbersome and difficult for many readers who are not Hebrew scholars, whereas pronunciation transliterations are easily read and vocalized.
  5. See John Bright, *Jeremiah* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 226. Bright's use of the term *prince* to indicate a royal son differs from the usage of the term in the King James Version, where *prince* is the translation of שר (*sar*), a Hebrew term for a "minister" or "ruler" (see n. 23 below).
  6. See Nahman Avigad, *Hebrew Bullae from the Time of Jeremiah* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1986), 28–29.
  7. The drawing of the seal impression uses the photo in Avigad and Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* (see n. 10 below), since the drawing in Deutsch and Lemaire, *Biblical Period Seals in the Shlomo Moussaieff Collection* (see n. 11 below), was found to be inaccurate and of lesser quality.
  8. *A Sale of Egyptian, Near Eastern, Greek & Roman Antiquities* (New York: Numismatic Fine Arts Inc., 11 Dec. 1991), item no. 50.
  9. Andre Lemaire, "Epigraphie palestinienne: Nouveaux documents II—Decennie 1985–1995," *Hennoch* 17 (1995): 209–42, item no. 162.
  10. See Avigad and Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals*, 55, item no. 15.
  11. See Robert Deutsch and Andre Lemaire, *Biblical Period Seals in the Shlomo Moussaieff Collection* (Tel Aviv: Archaeological Center Publications, 2000), 29, item no. 23.
  12. See Avigad and Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals*, 12.
  13. See Avigad and Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals*, 66, item no. 45.
  14. The instances (outside the Bible) of Hebrew personal names appearing with the title *ben*

- hamelek* occur on 9 known stamp seals, 4 known *bullae*, and 1 known jar handle impression. These 14 occurrences represent 11 different names. Following is the Hebrew alphabetical list, by name, of these seals and impressions. It includes the initial *lamed* (ל), which indicates "belonging to," with the seal(s) or impression(s) noted according to its number and page in the *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* of Avigad and Sass:
1. לאלשמע בן המלך—name: *Elishama ben hamelek* (cf. 2 Kings 25:25; Jeremiah 41:1), seal, *Corpus*, no. 11, p. 53.
  2. לגאליהו בן המלך—name: *Ge'alyahu ben hamelek*, bulla, *Corpus*, no. 412, p. 174; bulla, *Corpus*, no. 413, p. 174 (from a different seal than no. 412).
  3. לגדיהו בן המלך—name: *Gadiyahu ben hamelek*, seal, *Corpus*, no. 12, p. 54.
  4. ליהואחז בן המלך—name: *Yehoahaz ben hamelek* (cf. 2 Kings 23:30), seal, *Corpus*, no. 13, p. 54.
  5. ליראיהו בן המלך—name: *Yareyahu ben hamelek*, seal, *Corpus*, no. 14, p. 54.
  6. לירחמאל בן המלך—name: *Yerahme'el ben hamelek* (cf. Jeremiah 36:26), bulla, *Corpus*, no. 414, p. 175.
  7. למלכיהו בן המלך—name: *Malkiyahu ben hamelek* (cf. Jeremiah 38:6), seal, *Corpus*, no. 15, p. 55 (this seal is the subject of this paper).
  8. למנשה בן המלך—name: *Menashe ben hamelek* (cf. 2 Kings 21:1), seal, *Corpus*, no. 16, p. 55.
  9. לנריהו בן המלך—name: *Neriyahu ben hamelek*, seal, *Corpus*, no. 17, p. 55; seal, *Corpus*, no. 18, p. 56 (different from seal no. 17); bulla, *Corpus*, no. 415, p. 175 (from a seal different from nos. 17 and 18).
  10. לפדיהו בן המלך—name: *Pedayahu ben hamelek*, seal, *Corpus*, no. 19, p. 56.
  11. לשבניהו בן המלך—name: *Shebanyahu ben hamelek*, jar handle impression, *Corpus*, no. 662, p. 243.
  15. See Avigad and Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals*, 55.
  16. See Avigad and Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals*, 54.
  17. See Avigad and Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals*, 27, 54–55.
  18. Avigad and Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals*, 27.
  19. See Avigad and Sass, *Corpus of*

- West Semitic Stamp Seals*, 28.
20. Avigad and Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals*, 28.
  21. See Avigad and Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals*, 28.
  22. This inconsistency may be due to the fact that the KJV was produced by 47 different translators and that the book of Jeremiah was translated by different men from those who worked on Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles.
  23. Unfortunately, the KJV misleadingly renders *sarim* as "princes" in Jeremiah 36 and many other places. However, the Hebrew Bible usage of *sar* and *sarim* never indicates a "prince" in the sense that speakers of English have come to understand the term, namely, as a royal son. *Sar* and *sarim* always refer, in the Hebrew Bible, to ruling officials not of royal birth but in service to the throne.
  24. It is historically certain that Nebuchadnezzar placed 21-year-old Zedekiah upon the Judean throne in the year we know as 597 BC (see 2 Kings 24:17–18). Some Latter-day Saints will wonder how this can be, in view of the prophecy that Jesus would be born 600 years from the time Lehi left Jerusalem (see 1 Nephi 10:4). Based on the dating model of Elder James E. Talmage, who placed Jesus' birth on April 6, 1 BC, the year 600 BC has appeared as an extratextual footnote to 1 Nephi 2:4 (the passage where Lehi departed from Jerusalem) in all editions of the Book of Mormon since 1920 (the 1920 edition was edited by Elder Talmage). Therefore, some Latter-day Saints have assumed that 600 BC must have been the "first year of the reign of Zedekiah" (1 Nephi 1:4). A number of dating models have been proposed (different from Talmage's model) to explain how the historical date of Zedekiah's first year (597 BC) can be reconciled with Lehi's 600-year prophecy, but space prevents exploring them here. I will, however, offer a very brief outline of my own solution, which is that Jesus was most likely born in the winter of 5 BC/4 BC (just months prior to the death of Herod the Great in April of 4 BC) and that Lehi's departure from Jerusalem probably occurred 600 years earlier, in late 605 BC. In this model I presume that the "first year of the reign of