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Das Mormon.
Ein Bericht
gefasst von
der Hand Mormon
auf Tafeln
Nephi's Tafeln entnommen.

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THE EDITOR’S NOTEBOOK

At its heart, this issue of the Journal celebrates the Book of Mormon as a book. The four studies that focus on the European translations that appeared during 1852—Welsh, Italian, German, and French—underscore the urgency that leaders and missionaries then felt to have in hand copies of the work that demonstrated above all the divine calling of their beloved prophet Joseph Smith. For most European readers, of course, the English publication would not do. Those involved in the translations worked with considerable persistence and skill to produce versions that have stood the test of time. And that test consists of the ability of the translated versions of the book to touch the lives of people deeply enough that they changed their lives and set out in fresh, Spirit-driven directions.

Except for the Welsh translation, which John S. Davis completed almost single-handedly, each of the translations has undergone later revisions that have benefited from a carefully regularized and institutionalized approach to translating efforts. After all, there is virtue in doctrinal and conceptual consistency across translations so that they agree with the inspired English version that the Prophet Joseph produced “by the power of God” (D&C 1:29; Mormon 8:16). Even so, we stand in awe of the tremendous effort by a few to translate and publish the Book of Mormon into four languages within a short amount of time. The astonishing character of this accomplishment is thrown into sharp relief when we consider that only 56 translations of the full Book of Mormon text had appeared by September 2000 (39 others were available in “selections”). Since 1852, the church has published only 13 new foreign-language translations for each of the four European translations. If one adds the Danish translation that was published the previous year, 1851, the ratio becomes 1 in 11 rather than 1 in 14. Moreover, in those days there were few Latter-day Saints who spoke and wrote in languages other than English, which makes the accomplishment all the more impressive. To be sure, the process of making translations available has been a companion to the speed with which the church has been able to move into other regions of the world. But the publications of 1852 stand as a notable witness to the tireless dedication of a few.

In their own way, the articles by Valentin Arts and Ehab Abunuwara lift the Book of Mormon as a book into the spotlight, though from very different angles. Brother Arts deals with a feature underlying important segments of the Book of Mormon, the sources from the Jaredite people. In his study he seeks to uncover both the Jaredite contributions to the book as it now stands as well as—most importantly—the contribution of the brother of Jared to sacred history through the recording of his vision that now lies within the “sealed portion” of the plates once entrusted to Joseph Smith (see Ether 4:1–7). In a different vein, Brother Abunuwara, a native of Nazareth, recounts his initial encounter with the Book of Mormon as a book for learning English and, because of his background, his growing awareness of passages that link back to the book’s Near Eastern origins.

Two of the most persistent features of the Book of Mormon have to do with the visit of the resurrected Savior to Nephites and Lamanites and the possible vestiges of that visit that may still linger among native cultures in the New World. Diane Wirth takes up this pair of issues in her study of Quetzalcoatl and the Maya Maize God, pointing to possible connections with the Savior but also adding an important set of cautions about concluding too much from the available evidence.

One of the most important studies to appear in this issue is that of Camille Williams. She directs her skills to the question of why so few women are mentioned in the Book of Mormon. She sets this matter against the wider backdrop of feminist studies on the Bible and, from a woman’s point of view, offers compelling observations why the Book of Mormon can and does speak relevantly and spiritually to women.

John Clark’s study asks a fresh set of questions about one of a host of elements that lie just under the surface of the Book of Mormon account—for example, what can we learn about those who rate mention in the narrative chiefly because they opposed the dominant religious views within Nephite society? Brother Clark’s study uncovers a number of the unifying ties that linked dissident movements to one another, including their conscious dismissal of the need for a redeeming Messiah.

For several years the editor and associate editors felt a need for “soul food” within the pages of the Journal. Some of our past authors have graciously offered that to readers. With this issue we seek to regularize this aspect by adding a department that we have titled “With Real Intent,” an expression borrowed from Moroni 10:4. Our first author for this new department is James Faulconer, a professor of philosophy and former dean of general and honors education at Brigham Young University.

Not least, we wanted to publish an interview with the former editor of the Journal, John L. Sorenson. We thought it very worthwhile to gain an appreciation of his thoughts about the Book of Mormon. Throughout his career, his orientation to Book of Mormon studies has allowed him to view the text in interesting and provocative ways, as the interview will show.

This issue of the Journal, the first under a new editorial team, is a bit longer than issues of the recent past. We have felt as an editorial board that we wanted to offer to readers a few more of the riches that our authors have found within the pages of the Book of Mormon. We judge the studies published herein to be of the same quality as those that have appeared in past pages of the Journal. We invite all to read for information and edification.
Quetzalcoatl, the Maya Maize God, and Jesus Christ

Sarcophagus lid of Pakal, king of Palenque (died A.D. 683), who is resurrecting with the tree of life. © Merle Greene Robertson, 1976.
Legends about Quetzalcoatl from Mexico and Central America bring forward tantalizing resemblances to aspects of the life and New World ministry of Jesus Christ. In the past, some leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints occasionally drew attention to certain of those similarities. Among those mentioned in post–Spanish conquest manuscripts were that Quetzalcoatl was the Creator, that he was born of a virgin, that he was a god of the air and earth (in his manifestation as the Feathered Serpent), that he was white and bearded, that he came from heaven and was associated with the planet Venus, that he raised the dead, and that he promised to return. The full picture, however, is extremely complex.

In light of ancient sources and modern studies that have appeared in recent decades, some proposed links between Jesus Christ and Quetzalcoatl remain quite plausible while others are now questionable. This article examines and sets into a helpful context possible links that may derive from, or be related to, the Nephites’ knowledge of and teaching about the Savior.
The Primary Sources

Documentary sources for pre-Columbian beliefs vary in nature and value. The only truly ancient texts are inscriptions in Mayan hieroglyphs, which scholars finally are able to decipher in whole or in part. We may glean some information from these writings pertaining to Maya beliefs about the creation. Current interpretations of the iconography (artistic expressions) found in Mexico are beginning to make valuable contributions to our understanding of Quetzalcoatl and the mythology associated with him, an understanding that did not exist even a few years ago. Useful information about Quetzalcoatl is also found in native records known as codices. These screenfolded pictorial books (see fig. 1) date to both before and after the Spanish conquest of Latin America. The bulk of the Quetzalcoatl legends come from colonial-period translations of the codices into Spanish and transcriptions of the codices in the native tongues.

The later Mexican records, a third set of sources, are the most inconsistent but must be considered in any discussion of Quetzalcoatl. Because Catholic clergy and missionaries wrote most of the postconquest manuscripts, dating chiefly from the 16th century, any review of that material must exhibit caution, for as H. B. Nicholson advises, “anything that has come down to us through the intermediation of early friars must always be critically examined for possible Christian influence.”

There is a very simple reason for such skepticism. Spanish chroniclers, desiring to please adherents of both Christianity and the religion of the indigenous natives, emphasized the powerful symbolic continuity between the Catholic and Mesoamerican belief systems. They did this by frequently combining myth and history from pre-Hispanic times. Such manipulation was even a native tradition in Mesoamerica. Kings caused historical records to be manipulated in order to strengthen and authenticate their legitimacy to rule their people. Because of these practices, scholars are sometimes in a quandary as to what is historical and what is mythological.

Some post-conquest stories clearly rest on Christian embellishment. For example, an account of a language that was no longer understood, akin to the episode of the Tower of Babel, appears in the Popol Vuh of the Quiché Maya, who live in the Guatemalan highlands. A story about parting waters, also mentioned in the Popol Vuh, is comparable to Moses’ dividing the sea; and the writers of the Título de Totonicapán attest that they came from “the other part of the sea, from Civán-Tulán, bordering on Babylonia.” Referring to the latter source, Allen Christenson notes that “most of the scriptural material [of the writings of Totonicapán] was taken directly from a Christian tract, Theologia Indorum, written in 1553 by a Spanish priest named Domingo de Vico.” Thus, apparent references in Mesoamerican texts to events known from the Bible cannot always be taken seriously.

On the other hand, although some accounts from ancient America may sound overtly Christian, we should not dismiss them entirely for exhibiting such missionary influence. In fact, these manuscripts sometimes report the same events that are recorded in other documents from Mesoamerica. Because it is highly doubtful that such correspondence is coincidental or that Catholic friars contacted one another as they related nearly identical information from different cultures in separate regions and from various time frames, such accounts may be authentic and thus warrant serious consideration.

In this discussion we will concern ourselves with those aspects of Quetzalcoatl that some LDS authors suggest are related to Christ. This will include accounts about the ruler Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, whose
history is often confused with that of his god, Quetzalcoatl. The Maize God of the Maya is also important to this analysis because characteristics of this supernatural entity may also relate to the life of the Savior.

Quetzalcoatl and the Maya Maize God

To identify our principal characters, we begin with the Mexican deity Quetzalcoatl, whose name means “Feathered Serpent” (see fig. 2). Farther east the Yucatec Maya name for this god is Kukulcan, which has the same interpretation. Several ancient leaders who worshipped Quetzalcoatl/Kukulcan took upon themselves this appellation, much as Muslims today add Mohammed to their names.

The most prolific form of ancient Mesoamerican writing observable today is the Mayan language in hieroglyphic inscriptions. A name tied to Kukulcan was discovered on a Late Classic pot (a.d. 600–800) from Uaxactun, Guatemala, that mentions a date corresponding to 25 December 256 b.c. and applies the name to the current ruler. In fact, it was common Maya practice to associate the current king with another ruler from the past, perhaps even from an earlier mythical time. As already mentioned, this custom was prevalent among the Maya in order to strengthen their ruler’s legitimacy to reign. Associating the current king with a highly revered ancestor accomplished this goal. The importance of this inscribed pot found in Guatemala is that it contains a shortened version of the name of the earlier ruler—Kukulcan. Thus the name Kukulcan refers to a much earlier king than the Mexican Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, who lived sometime between a.d. 700 and 1000. Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, a Toltec ruler, is the most popular of the culture heroes noted in colonial literature. Apparently, the name Quetzalcoatl, or Kukulcan, enjoyed a long duration in Mesoamerica, whether it referred to rulers, high priests, or the god himself.

The Maize God is the other deity with which we are concerned in this study. This mythological, supernatural figure is called by various names among the Maya, depending on the locale, but the most prominent names are Hun Nal Ye and Hun Hunahpu. In terms of a general time frame, the Maize God is referred to in iconography and other texts before the conquest, as well as in the Popol Vuh after Spanish contact. References in the Popol Vuh likely go back to earlier hieroglyphic sources.

Without going into a detailed explanation, we simply note that the Maize God is intrinsically involved with later creation mythologies of central Mexico and the Mixtec people of Oaxaca, where Quetzalcoatl stories abound. While the Popol Vuh does not mention Hun Hunahpu as being one and the same with the Maize God, a codex-style polychrome bowl from the Late Classic period clarifies his identify (see fig. 3). In the scene portrayed on the bowl, Hun Nal Ye, the Maya Maize God, resurrects from a split tortoise shell representing the earth. His sons, the Hero Twins, are depicted at his left and right and are identified as Hun Hunahpu’s sons: Hunahpu, written as Hun Ahau, and Xbalanque, written as Yax Balam.

To understand Hun Hunahpu’s identification as the Maize God in Guatemala, we need to retell some of the story surrounding him. In the Popol Vuh, Hunahpu and Xbalanque defeat the evil lords of the Underworld who have killed their father, Hun Hunahpu. After avenging their father’s death, the Twins are responsible for his subsequent rebirth. Hun Hunahpu is then resurrected from the earth, which is often portrayed as a turtle carapace. Therefore, this vessel, which visually demonstrates the same story told in the Popol Vuh hundreds of years later, clearly establishes Hun Nal Ye and Hun Hunahpu as the same person.

In the Popol Vuh we see readily the Twins’ association with maize. Hunahpu and Xbalanque instruct their grandmother that if the corn planted in her house dies, they die; but if it lives, they will remain
alive. According to the story, after they defeat the Lords of Death in the Underworld, the Hero Twins are reborn; that is, the maize remained alive in their grandmother’s house. We conclude that both the father, Hun Hunahpu, and his sons, particularly his namesake Hunahpu, are related to maize and may be designated as maize gods. Importantly, David H. Kelley presents additional evidence from the Popol Vuh that Hun Hunahpu and the Maize God are one and the same.11

The importance of including the Maize God with his differing appellations in this study is significant. We will see that the Maize God functions as a sacrificial god who dies and resurrects and who also plays an important role in the creation and therefore is reminiscent of the roles of Christ as Savior and Creator.

The Creation

The available Mesoamerican sources dealing with the creation follow in chronological order. Pre-Columbian Mayan hieroglyphic texts found in Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico (see fig. 4), and Quirigua, Guatemala, disclose a role for the Maya Maize God in the creation.12 Polychrome vessels and plates also testify to the Maize God’s participation at this pristine time. In addition, pictorial codices drawn before the conquest deal with Quetzalcoatl’s role in the creation. Concerning other documents, most scholars agree that the Quiché Maya’s Popol Vuh is the least corrupted text written after the conquest. It also repeats stories of the Maize God that coincide with Quetzalcoatl creation myths from Mexico. The Maya accounts corroborate the acts of creation in a somewhat different manner because they were recorded by another culture, but they still present a pan-Mesoamerican mythological paradigm. Finally, we possess legends in 16th-century manuscripts declaring Quetzalcoatl as the Creator.

These declarations are discussed in a later section of this paper pertaining to plausible pre-Hispanic beliefs recorded after the conquest.

On the whole, scholars view stories concerned with the god Quetzalcoatl and his involvement in the creation as exhibiting the least amount of Christian influence. Referring to colonial period manuscripts, Michel Graulich found that “careful reconstruction and analysis of the myths dealing with the first phase of the creation of the world . . . all [show] variations on a single theme. Comparative analysis also suggests that the often-suspected Christian influence is minor and points to the unity of Mesoamerican thought” on Quetzalcoatl as Creator.13

At Palenque, inscriptions inform us that Hun Nal Ye, the Maize God, raised the sky in one phase of creation from the primordial sea (see fig. 4). This happened when he positioned the World Tree (or Tree of Life) at the center axis of the cosmos.14 Speaking to this theme, Kent Reilly explained that Mayanists now believe the creation involved bloodletting by First Father, another name for Hun Nal Ye,15 which blood fertilized sacred space, causing maize to spring forth. The sprouting maize served as an axis mundi, or World Tree, lifting the sky off the earth and allowing light to enter creation.16

One further connection exists between the Maize God and creation. The god Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl was born on the day 9 Ik (9 Wind), and the Maya Maize God is associated with this day in 3409 B.C., a point in mythological history. Some scholars associate these two deities as near equivalents not only because they were associated with the same day but because they participated in similar creation events.17 In the pre-Columbian Mixtec Vienna Codex, Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl is shown raising up the sky (see fig. 5). A variation of this theme appears in a post-conquest text wherein
Quetzalcoatl is described as metamorphosing into an enormous tree. Then he and another deity push up the sky with their tree forms.18

An identifying feature of Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl is a projecting, red avian snout (see fig. 5). Through this beaklike device he blew wind, air, and the breath of life, which was his primary role. This strange-looking anthropomorphic deity can be traced from the time of the conquest back to the pre-Classic era. A terracotta pot sculpted with the face of Ehecatl was found at Izapa, Chiapas, Mexico, and dates to the first or second century B.C.19 (see fig. 6). However, we do not know whether this particular image bears the same creative connotation that Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl possessed 1,700 years later. Because wind precedes rain, Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl is associated with life-giving rains. In other words, the title of Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl designated him as a god of life, even the Creator.

The Bread of Life

Both Quetzalcoatl and the Maya Maize God are responsible for bringing maize to humankind, maize being the most important staple in Mesoamerica. According to legend, Quetzalcoatl transformed himself into an ant in order to retrieve seeds from the Mountain of Sustenance, where maize is kept.20 Ceramics portray the resurrected Maize God bringing maize to the surface of the earth from the Mountain of Sustenance. These kernels served as food and were believed to be the substance from which humans were created.21

Sacrificed for Humankind

A story of how Quetzalcoatl saved humankind appears in the post-conquest Leyenda de los Soles (Legend of the Suns). This deity descended to the Underworld to shed his blood onto the bones of the deceased so that they would live again.22 The entire legend, with all its strange details, sounds pagan to the Christian world, but Latter-day Saints hear echoes of the saving work of Jesus Christ among departed spirits. To summarize, Quetzalcoatl goes to the Underworld to retrieve human bones after a great flood destroyed his world and its people, people who were subsequently transformed into fish but were considered “the ancestors.” An old goddess grinds the bones of these ancestors like maize and places the flourlike meal in a container. Quetzalcoatl performs a bloodletting ritual in which he drips the sacrificial blood onto the ground bones, giving them the potential for life. The present race of humans beings is believed to be descended from those who were reborn from their deceased state. In an illustration in the Borgia Codex, Quetzalcoatl appears as the god of breath and air, Ehecatl, and sits back-to-back with the God of Death (see fig. 7). It has been suggested by some LDS scholars that this illustration represents the above story. The skeleton lives because it contains a living heart hanging from its rib cage.

As noted previously, the Maize God, or First Father, gave his blood and thereby caused maize to be reborn from seed. Maize is intrinsically involved with man because the Maya believed man to be made of maize. As with the above story of Quetzalcoatl, fish were also associated with maize. For example, in the Popol Vuh, the Hero Twins’ bones were ground like maize, thrown into a river, turned into fish, and eventually resurrected.23

The Tree and Resurrection

A World Tree (Tree of Life) is also significant to this scenario. To the Maya, the World Tree is a motif
of resurrection and life and has been for over 2,000 years. In Maya myth the Lords of Death hang the decapitated head of Hun Hunahpu on a nonbearing tree, after which it bears fruit. When his sons defeat those denizens of the Underworld, the Maize God Hun Hunahpu is resurrected.

In the human realm, Pakal, the great Maya king of Palenque, is buried in a magnificent sarcophagus deep within the Temple of Inscriptions. The carving on the lid of the sarcophagus depicts Pakal as the young Maize God, with the Tree of Life springing from his body in resurrection (see the photo on p. 4; compare Alma 32:28–41). This is Mesoamerica’s most famous and remarkable story in stone, carved approximately 800 years before the Popol Vuh was set in cursive writing after the arrival of the Spanish. Much of this ideology had already existed for many centuries in Mesoamerica.

Deity, Light, and the Sun

A Catholic friar named Juan de Cordova wrote the following account while working among the
Zapotec Indians of Oaxaca, Mexico. Quoting them, he recorded:

On the date we call Tepatl a great light came from the northeastern sky. It glowed for four days in the sky, then lowered itself to the rock . . . in the Valle [Valley] in Oaxaca. From the light there came a great, very powerful being, who stood on the very top of the rock and glowed like the sun in the sky . . . Then he spoke, his voice was like thunder, booming across the valley.26

Allen Christenson brought to my attention that the above story may be related to the account in the Popol Vuh of the first dawn, which describes the light as a man. Dennis Tedlock’s translation follows:

The sun was like a person when he revealed himself. His face was hot, so he dried out the face of the earth. Before the sun came up it was soggy, and the face of the earth was muddy before the sun came up. And when the sun had risen just a short distance he was like a person, and his heat was unbearable. Since he revealed himself only when he was born, it is only his reflection that now remains. As they put it in the ancient text, “The visible sun is not the real one.”27

These citations illustrate that a being of intense light, comparable to the sun, made a deep impression on the natives of the New World. It is no wonder that these ancient people related this personage to the living sun.

Any early association of Quetzalcoatl with the sun is a bit obscure. However, we should consider a story in post-Columbian literature. The god Nanahuatzin, an aspect of Quetzalcoatl, became the sun. This ulcerated, sickly being jumped into a fire pit after a ritual fast, resulting in his emergence as Tonatiuh, the sun god of the Aztecs28 (see fig. 8). Here we see aspects of death and life, dark and light woven together. Importantly, Nanahuatzin combines the facets of immortality and light in himself. We should also consider that he sacrificed himself for the well-being of humankind.

The Maize God, as well as Quetzalcoatl’s counterpart, Nanahuatzin, are solar gods. To further substantiate this connection between the Mexican god Quetzalcoatl and the Maya Maize God, we may look to a story in the Popol Vuh wherein the Hero Twins, sons of the Maize God, go to the Underworld to play a ball game with the Lords of Death. These demons of the Underworld trick and decapitate one of them, Hunahpu. Later in the story, like Nanahuatzin, the Twins jump into a fire pit, an act that leads eventually to Hunahpu’s resurrection as the sun. Regarding the conclusion of this story, Raphael Girard explained:

Hunahpu rises triumphant and ascends to the heavens, symbolizing at one and the same time the appearance of dawn and the shoot of maize breaking through from the Underworld onto the earth’s surface, where it is crowned by a crest of green leaves, identified with the magnificent feather headdress of the young Solar deity.29

The ball of the ball game was considered Hunahpu’s head, as well as the life-giving sun. In art, the ball sometimes is portrayed with a skull inside it, denoting this tradition. Played throughout Mesoamerica, this ball game exhibited rich cosmic and mythological significance.30

Association with Christ: The Questionable and the Plausible

The Spanish texts were written 1,500 years after Christ visited the people of the Book of Mormon. By A.D. 200 the growth of the seeds of apostasy were well under way (see 4 Nephi 1:24–26), indicating an interim of 1,300 years between the distortion of the gospel and the writing of the post-conquest Spanish
texts. Consequently, in approaching possible links between Christ and Quetzalcoatl, scholars need to be careful in determining which sections of the post-conquest manuscripts contain pre-Hispanic traditions. In contrast, pre-conquest traditions are more well defined and therefore preserve people’s beliefs more accurately. We will examine specific problems and perhaps find some solutions to questions about possible connections between the Savior, Quetzalcoatl, and the Maya Maize God.

**Questionable Associations**

Colonial sources referring to the deified ruler Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl often cause confusion about the god Quetzalcoatl and Jesus Christ. Characteristics of this ruler are that he was born of a virgin, that he promised to return, that he had an association with the planet Venus (the Morning and Evening Star), and that his emblem was the Feathered Serpent (presumably connected to the nonfeathered, brazen serpent raised by Moses to heal the Israelites).

We notice that there is certainly more than one human named Quetzalcoatl, and maybe even more than one Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, and that later chroniclers amalgamated them into one historical person. This perception arises from the varied dates assigned to Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl’s life in the post-conquest manuscripts. The repetition of histories by Mesoamerican natives, a practice tied to their concept of time as cyclical rather than linear, does not make for an easy study of this ruler. Unraveling these tales simply cannot be done with accuracy. Even so, we attempt to tell the story of this revered legendary hero, Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl.

To some extent, the records fuse Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl’s life and deeds with those of his god, Quetzalcoatl. Nicholson comments on this fusion that “a certain degree of ‘mythification’ of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl almost certainly occurred, . . . as well as some assimilation to the deity whose particular protagonist he was credited with being.” Therefore, it is extremely important for researchers to look at the surrounding content and context of these various colonial manuscripts when determining which portion of the account is referring to the deity Quetzalcoatl and which is giving a historical narrative of the famed culture hero Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl.

We will begin with the “virgin birth” myth. There is no account in the pre- or post-conquest texts that says Quetzalcoatl or the Maize God experienced a miraculous virgin birth. However, Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl’s illustrious life began with his “virgin birth,” which story is garnished with a biblical overlay throughout but obviously mixed with historical places and events. A strong supernaturalist flavor pervades the whole account, especially regarding this culture hero’s mother, Chimalman, who received an announcement from a heavenly messenger sent down by the creator god. Because both the Book of Mormon and the New Testament testify that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, it is tempting for a Latter-day Saint to see ties between this trait and that found in the story of these 16th-century manuscripts. But we must be cautious.

We come to the second point, that of the return. Nowhere in these colonial-period texts do we find the god Quetzalcoatl declaring that he would someday return. However, the historical narrative of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl’s life states that he said that he would return to his people. Since confusion has developed among scholars over the “returning myth,” I suggest that we look to one of two possible answers: (1) this ruler actually said he would return, or (2) his people’s oral traditions held that their god Quetzalcoatl said that he would return and incorporated this part of the tradition into their mortal leader’s history. Clearly, there is no definitive answer as to what actually occurred, and researchers can only make guesses in their conclusions. It is certain, of course, that this myth is pre-Hispanic. However, it is telling that King Motecuhzoma believed that Cortés was the returning Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, who emulated the personification of his god Quetzalcoatl.

The worship of Quetzalcoatl underwent a resurgence with the birth of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl. As a result, a clear-cut distinction cannot be drawn between the ruler and the god, as noted above. The Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl saga includes stories of drunkenness, fornication, and murder. Nevertheless,
this ruler was regarded as a deity by his followers, as was true of some kings in Mesoamerica. Therefore, we face a smoky screen of mythological, historical, and Christian influence throughout these legends that tie mortal Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl to the god Quetzalcoatl.

The third element has to do with the planet Venus. Toward the end of Mesoamerican history, Quetzalcoatl is shown in pre-Columbian pictorial codices as associated with this planet. Quetzalcoatl himself is not linked to Venus in any written text, yet the history of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, as recorded in colonial literature, shows this ruler’s association with Venus. David Carrasco has noted that “a Topiltzin-Morning Star cult was celebrated in Cholula, suggesting that a fusion of the culture hero and deity Ehécatl [an aspect of Quetzalcoatl] and Morning Star developed.”

These legends state that upon Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl’s death and cremation, he rose to heaven and became the Morning Star. This is how this culture hero became resurrected, deified, and connected to Venus.

Fourth, a more prominent symbol of Quetzalcoatl is the Feathered Serpent. As we shall see, this figure also ties into the Venus ideology. The Feathered Serpent may exist in artistic motifs as early as the Olmec civilization, whose culture some Latter-day Saints equate with the Jaredites. A rock sculpture, Monument 19 from La Venta, Tabasco (circa 900–400 B.C.), portrays a rattlesnake with an avian beak and feather crest (see fig. 9). Two quetzal birds are also carved on this Olmec monument from the Middle Formative period. Taking into consideration that the Jaredites never knew the story of the brazen serpent that Moses lifted up on a pole about 1250 B.C.,

we need to question the assumption that the Olmec version of the Feathered Serpent has something to do with Christ. The snakes that attacked the Israelites are referred to as “fiery serpents.” There is no mention that Moses’ brass serpent represented Christ before he visited the New World.

In this connection, it was the Nephites who brought this story from the Old World. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that Monument 19 was carved late in the La Venta sequence, circa 400 B.C. If by chance any remaining Jaredites heard this famous Hebrew incident from Mosaic traditions brought by Lehi’s family or the Mulekites, the Olmecs/Jaredites could have portrayed the serpent raised on a pole. But this is not the case. According to the Book of Mormon, it was not until 22 B.C. that Nephite teachers made the connection that Moses lifted up the brazen serpent as a type of Christ.

Of course, the Nephites may have made the connection earlier, but we do not possess an earlier reference at the present time. Therefore, we cannot be sure that the Feathered Serpent had anything to do with Jesus Christ during Jaredite times. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that Nephites adopted the symbol of the Feathered Serpent after the coming of Christ. We may rationalize that the quetzal bird represents heaven and the serpent represents earth. Christ is both a god (from heaven) and a mortal man (from earth). We do not know all the names that the peoples of the Book of Mormon gave to Christ, even though he may have been called Quetzalcoatl, the “Feathered Serpent,” at a later date.

In a related vein, iconographers now know that the artistic expression of the god Quetzalcoatl is strongly linked to militarism. If this deity originally referred to Christ, its nature quickly changed, for around A.D. 200 the symbolism of the Feathered Serpent came to denote power, sacrifice, and war. Archaeological findings within the Pyramid of Quetzalcoatl (Temple of the Feathered Serpent) at Teotihuacán depict this scenario all too clearly. Starting with excavations in the 1980s, approximately 200 human victims of dedicatory sacrifices have been found under the Temple of the Feathered Serpent.

In later years many of the plumed-serpent motifs were combined with images of soldiers and implements of war. Feathered-serpent columns at both Tula Hidalgo and Chichen Itza display sacrificial
altars in front of them. At the latter site, panels depict feathered serpents with warriors coming out of their mouths.42

A very graphic illustration of Quetzalcoatl in his animal guise as the Feathered Serpent appears in the Codex Telleriano-Remensis. Here he devours a male victim whose body has wounds (see fig. 10). The Feathered Serpent’s tail includes a sacrificial knife. To the Aztecs, death through ritual sacrifice was necessary for a continued existence or rebirth of all things.43 This would include the era when the Feathered Serpent and images of Venus were vehicles propagating the cult of Quetzalcoatl through military conquest and the founding of new dynasties44 (see fig. 11).

Post-conquest literature records nothing about Venus that is benevolent or what we would expect if Christ was related in any way to this aspect of Quetzalcoatl.45 The iconography of the Feathered Serpent and Venus appears at an early date at Teotihuacán with a clear message of warfare and sacrifice. A bowl from this site portrays the Feathered Serpent with several stars. Beneath the serpent’s body are four blood-dripping hearts.46 This is another example of the association of the Feathered Serpent, Venus, and sacrifice (in this case, the sacrifice of prisoners of war).

An explanation of the Feathered Serpent as a representative of Venus is in order. This fabled serpent is a combination of a god of warfare and blood sacrifice as well as water and fertility. Carlson observed, “The Venus cult was concerned with the symbolic transformation of blood into water and fertility through the ritual execution of captives.”47 This is a running theme found throughout ancient Mesoamerica, for worshippers truly believed that through death (and sacrifice) comes life. In a roundabout way, this may form a parallel to Christ’s atoning blood, which is for the benefit of all humankind. However, apostasy destroyed any true meaning of sacrifice among these ancient people.

The Venus sign of Quetzalcoatl or Kukulcan pictured over a shell is a direct reference to war.48 In fact, epigraphers dub this hieroglyph “Star Wars.” The doctrinal shift that led to the sacrifice of war captives and others no doubt started at the beginning of the apostasy that swept through Mesoamerica about A.D. 200 (compare Moroni 9:7–8), eventually causing the spiritual downfall of those Nephites and Lamanites who denied Christ after his visit to their ancestors. In fact, Esther Pasztory has contemplated the idea that the Ciudadela, the compound where the Temple of the Feathered Serpent was constructed about A.D. 150–200, seems to be the architectural representation of a major change in the social and political structure of Teotihuacán, particularly in its militaristic orientation and perhaps in a new dynastic lineage.49 This striking innovation would certainly coincide with the apostasy as recorded in the Book of Mormon.

There is another issue that needs clarifying with regard to the role of the Feathered Serpent. We have already noted that at about A.D. 200 the people of Teotihuacán associated the Feathered Serpent with Venus. But Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, the creation god who raises the sky, had nothing to do with these two symbols at that early time. Raúl Velázquez remarks that “there are no identifying ties that connect them to one another. Nevertheless, as of the beginning of the postclassical period (A.D. 900–1000), these three beings begin to mesh until they are melded in the multifaceted character Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl.”50 Hence, there seem to be accurate traditions about the god Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl until Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl incorporated this god’s attributes into his personality, attributes that are mentioned in the post-conquest manuscripts.

Plausible Associations

Many of the symbols associated with Christ also belong to Quetzalcoatl and...
the Maize God, symbols that may appear both in pre-Columbian art motifs and in some later colonial literatures that do not seem to be Christian interpolations. Thus it is quite possible that features of the god Quetzalcoatl may be derived, in part, from Mesoamericans’ remembrance of Christ’s visit to the Americas. Those parts that fit the native traditions are these: a deity playing a role in the creation, “raising the sky”; a deity associated with the bread of life (a correspondence to maize); a deity assisting the dead; a deity shedding blood to save mankind; a deity dying on a tree (the Maize God’s head hung in a tree); a deity resurrecting and being responsible for the rebirth of the deceased; and a personage of light who is associated with the sun.

We have already reviewed some of these attributes, and others are self-explanatory. There are further interesting aspects to explore. For example, other Christians equate some of the elements of the Maize God with Jesus Christ. In fact, the Maya of today find a strong association between their old god, the Maize God, and their new Christian god. A Catholic priest, Father Rother, wanted an ancient Maya symbol to represent God’s aspect as the “bread of life” on the pulpit of a church in Santiago Atitlán, in Guatemala. Perhaps significantly, he chose the image of the Maya Maize God in lieu of an image of the Savior.

Bracketing mythological elements in the colonial manuscript Leyenda de los Soles, one glimpses a possible original understanding of Christ’s sacrifice, his descent to the spirit world, and his promise to resurrect all people. Although this account apparently refers to those who died before the flood, this aspect may have been introduced after natives lost their understanding of the gospel.

The writing of Juan de Cordova regarding the light that emanated from a powerful man, and the account in the Popol Vuh of the sun’s being like a person may stem from Christ’s visit to the Americas. These two stories do not appear to be Christian manipulations and are in keeping with Christ’s visit to Book of Mormon peoples. Although 3 Nephi 11:10–11 does not specifically say that the Lord descended from the clouds as a personage with light emanating from his being, it is plausible that he did. After all, he wore “a white robe” and, on the second day of his visit, radiated a brilliant light to his 12 disciples (see 3 Nephi 11:8; 19:25, 30).

There may also be an answer to the feathered-serpent motif that is so prevalent in Mesoamerica. If the Feathered Serpent was once considered benevolent and not malevolent, this would explain the apostate situation from an LDS point of view. The Feathered Serpent’s association with war and sacrifice would then be a secondary manifestation. And this may well be the case. In addition, it is known that when warriors conquered their enemy in pre-Hispanic times, they sometimes adopted the god of the vanquished people. Is it possible this is what happened to the feathered-serpent symbol? We cannot be certain, but it stands as a possibility.

One more source pertaining to the Feathered Serpent is found in the Popol Vuh, wherein the Feathered Serpent is one of the creator gods in the view of the Quiché Maya. This supernatural deity is known as Gucumatz (Quetzal Bird Serpent) and is in no way related to war and sacrifice, only to creation. The Popol Vuh mentions this supernatural personality briefly, although his role is crucial in the creation. His creative actions, however, are not performed alone—he is one of several gods who are involved in the emergence of the earth from the primordial waters, sowing seeds of plants, and populating the earth with people. This matches the ancient teaching that the Savior participated with the Father and others in the creative process (see Moses 2:1, 26; Abraham 4:1).

Despite discrepancies among Quetzalcoatl myths in colonial sources and the fairly good mythology and symbolism in pre-Columbian inscriptions and iconography, we are left with several crucial points about Quetzalcoatl and the Maya Maize God that apply to Christ’s premortal state, his mission on earth, and his role in the hereafter. Are there plausible links? Yes. Are there significant differences? Again, yes. This review should help us to see a complex picture of continuities and discontinuities between Quetzalcoatl and the Savior. Because parts of the picture are rather faint, there is a need for caution in our studies when we approach the intriguing and mysterious figures of Quetzalcoatl and the Maya Maize God and attempt to draw connections between them and the resurrected Jesus.
IN A REVELATION UNEQUALED FOR CLARITY, God gave through the prophet Nephi the most comprehensive description of the Messiah that we possess in any pre-Christian source. Despite later expansions or clarifications of Nephi’s description, its key elements, found in passages in 1 and 2 Nephi, established a messianic doctrine that remained remarkably stable throughout the 1,000 years of Nephite history. Belief in that doctrine, however, lacked stability.

Certain declines in belief can be attributed to the competing theologies of anti-Christians and to the moral malaise of an overwhelming majority, many of whom dissented from the teachings of the prophets but did not develop distinct theologies of their own. The dissenters, of whatever stripe, eventually painted the Messiah out of the picture. This study begins with a summary of Nephi’s messianic doctrine; identifies, insofar as it is possible, the beliefs of dissidents who taught competing theologies; and discusses reasons for their dissent.

Nephi’s Messianic Doctrine

Nephi’s description of the Messiah can be summarized under three general headings. First, the Messiah is God, the premortal Jesus, called Jehovah by Old Testament prophets. He is “the very God of Israel, . . . the God of our fathers, . . . yea, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (1 Nephi 19:7, 10). This was not some subordinate being—angel, king, or prophet—but God himself whom Nephi expected to come to earth.2

Second, he is the Redeemer. Nephi alludes to the Messiah’s redemptive role in 1 Nephi 10:4:

Six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem, a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews—even a Messiah, or, in other words, a Savior of the world.3

Nephi subsequently gives a prophetic vignette of the Savior’s life and elaborates on his redemptive role, explaining that “all mankind were in a lost and in a fallen state” and were therefore dependent on the Redeemer (1 Nephi 10:6). Nephi identifies the Messiah as the “Lamb of God” who would be “lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world” (1 Nephi 10:10; 11:33).4 The foregoing statements imply universal eligibility for redemption, an idea that Nephi gives fuller expression to in the following verse:

And he cometh into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice; for behold, he suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam. (2 Nephi 9:21)

Third, the Messiah would be born in the flesh. This doctrinal truth is obvious in Nephi’s reference to the Messiah’s mother:

And I looked and beheld the virgin again, bearing a child in her arms. And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father! (1 Nephi 11:20–21)5

Nephi testified further of the Messiah’s incarnation by elaborating on Jesus’ baptism, ministry, and death on a cross for the sins of the world (see 1 Nephi 11:27, 28–31, 32–33).

Historical Setting

A brief review of relevant Nephite history will clarify the social contexts from which the dissidents emerged and will help shed light on the nature of their beliefs.

Sherem

Jacob does not tell us where Sherem came from nor why or how he developed the doctrine he preached, but he informs us that Sherem was well educated, had a perfect knowledge of the language, and had sufficient background in the scriptures to be very persuasive. Jacob focuses on Sherem’s rejection of Christ in favor of the law of Moses. Sherem’s beliefs were most likely an extension of the attitude prevalent in Jerusalem before the exodus of Lehi and his family. When Lehi testified to the Jews of the coming of a Messiah, they

did mock him because of the things which he testified of them; for he truly testified of their wickedness and their abominations; and he testified that the things which he saw and heard, and also the things which he read in the book, manifested plainly of the coming of a Messiah, and also the redemption of the world. And when the Jews heard these things they were angry with him. (1 Nephi 1:19–20)
No doubt Lehi’s testimony of their wickedness antagonized the Jews and contributed to his exile, but according to Nephi the son of Helaman, Lehi was driven out of Jerusalem specifically because he testified of the “coming of Christ” (Helaman 8:22). Preexilic Jews in Jerusalem did not universally understand or believe what the Old World prophets taught concerning the coming of a Messiah with redemptive powers (see 1 Nephi 10:5). Sherem did not believe that doctrine either.

Sherem’s antagonistic position regarding the Messiah was shared by “many” of the Nephites (see Jacob 7:3). Considering the relatively small size of the colony at that time, the many people who followed Sherem would have had a significant impact on the religious complexion of the group. Evidently viewing messianism as a threat to Jewish orthodoxy, Sherem accused Jacob of blasphemy (see Jacob 7:7). An exclusive belief in the law of Moses may have been the dominant belief among Nephites for the next four centuries. Gary L. Sturgess argues that with the exception of Enos’s private experience in the wilderness, the doctrine of Christ disappears entirely after the book of Jacob. A plausible case could be made that Nephi and his brother were unsuccessful in their bid to establish the doctrine of Christ as the official religion of the Nephites. The Zeniffites had left Zarahemla many years before the revelation of Christ by King Benjamin at his final cultic assembly. It is probable, then, that they had brought with them a religion that knew only the law of Moses. When Abinadi confronted the priests of Noah and inquired what it was that they taught, their answer was, “We teach the law of Moses” (Mosiah 12:28).

Priests of Noah

Shortly after the first Mosiah led the Nephites to Zarahemla (see Omni 1:12–14), Zeniff, with a small colony of like-minded people, returned to the land of Nephi (see Mosiah 9). Many years later, the return of that colony (now led by King Limhi) to Zarahemla followed King Benjamin’s spiritually reforming sermon on the Messiah (see Mosiah 2–4; 22). Two generations later, as Sturgess suggests, King Noah (Zeniff’s grandson) and his cohorts believed firmly in the law of Moses, exclusive of a Messiah.

Zarahemla Dissidents

With the exception of Sherem and the priests of Noah, the dissident groups that developed between the reign of the second King Mosiah and the beginning of the Nephite/Lamanite wars came out of a milieu characterized by several major cultural changes in Zarahemla. These changes precipitated political and religious upheavals.

Before his death, King Mosiah changed his theocratic, monarchal government to a decentralized system of judges and separated civil matters from those that were ecclesiastical in nature (see Mosiah 29). The new political system was democratic to the extent that questions were submitted to a general consensus of the people for resolution and judges settled legal issues that arose. The population was growing, new cities and villages were being built, the economy was expanding, and new wealth gave rise to class distinctions. After dissolving the theocracy, King Mosiah confirmed Alma the Younger as high priest over the church (see Mosiah 29:42). The monolithic church was divided into branches with priests and teachers called to administer to the needs of people. Mosiah retained his position as prophet/king until his death.

When changes take place in a government or a church, leaders usually expect from their constituents more loyalty, cooperation, and commitment to the ideals of the organization. They also exhibit less tolerance for lack of support or rebellion. Just before the dramatic political and ecclesiastical changes took place in Zarahemla, Alma the Elder called for a spiritual renewal and organized disciplinary councils to deal with the younger generation who rebelled against the teachings of the church (see Mosiah 25:19–23; 26). These revolutionary modifications implemented by Mosiah and Alma created a volatile situation. Amlici, who was dissatisfied with the new government, led an unsuccessful revolt to reinstate the monarchy and place himself on the throne. Nehor, a status-conscious religious rebel, reacted against Alma’s new disciplinary policy and the teachings that supported it and advocated a liberal, God-will-save-all doctrine that had wide influence among the rising generation. The tension in these situations came from the nobility and the wealthy whose political positions or lifestyles were affected by governmental changes and Alma’s disciplinary policies. These protest groups responded with political rebellion and by developing alternative religious beliefs that caused many to reject a belief in the Messiah.
Reasons for Dissent

Book of Mormon record keepers did not provide details about the beliefs of those who rejected Nephi’s doctrine, and it is likely that they identified only a fraction of those groups. Sherem, for example, was the only apostate identified on the small plates. All the other dissidents whose theologies are mentioned in the record were identified by Mormon, and these groups all arose during the late monarchical period and the early reign of the judges. For the most part, we learn about these competing theologies from scriptural passages in which the prophets speak out against the dissidents. By evaluating such passages and the few direct statements made by the dissidents themselves, I have identified five reasons why individuals or groups rebelled against Nephite orthodoxy.

1. The dissidents felt that for a Messiah to come to earth to atone for the sins of humankind was redundant because in their view God had already provided a means for their salvation through the law of Moses.

   Nephi’s teachings on the Messiah’s redemptive mission were explicit, but clarity does not necessarily make a doctrine convincing to those who are not prepared to receive it. Sherem, his followers, and the priests of Noah were not convinced of the doctrine; they rejected the Messiah in favor of adherence to the law of Moses. Jacob 7:6–7 contains the essence of Sherem’s objection:

   Brother Jacob, . . . I have heard and also know that thou goest about much, preaching that which ye call the gospel, or the doctrine of Christ. And ye have led away much of this people that they pervert the right way of God, and keep not the law of Moses which is the right way; and convert the law of Moses into the worship of a being which ye say shall come many hundred years hence. And now behold, I, Sherem, declare unto you that this is blasphemy; for no man knoweth of such things; for he cannot tell of things to come.

   Similarly, in response to Abinadi’s inquiry as to what they taught, the priests of Noah informed him that they taught the law of Moses and that salvation came by that law (see Mosiah 12:27–28, 31–32). In contrast, however, the prophets saw the law as a type referring to Christ, not as an end in itself (see Mosiah 13:30–32). The dissidents retained the law but rejected the Messiah as an unnecessary perversion of their doctrine.

   The prophetic writings in the Old Testament do not explain the symbolic relationship between the sacrifices offered by Israel and the future sacrifice of the Messiah. That relationship is made clear in the writings of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price. According to Moses 5, Adam was commanded to sacrifice the firstlings of his flocks as an offering to the Lord. When an angel later asked him why he offered sacrifices, Adam responded that he did not know other than the Lord had commanded him to do so.

   And then the angel spake, saying: This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth. Wherefore, thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore. (Moses 5:7–8)

   In the book of Leviticus, Moses recorded God’s instructions concerning animal sacrifices. Referring to the offerings, God frequently used the following expression, or ones similar to it: "the priest shall make an atonement for him as concerning his sin, and it shall be forgiven him" (Leviticus 4:26). In addition, he cautioned against misusing blood, because of its special atoning role:

   For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul. (Leviticus 17:11)

   Without definitive statements to the contrary, it could easily be assumed that the law of sacrifice, which was designed by God and revealed to the children of Israel, was sufficient and that there would have been no logical necessity for a future Messiah to come and redeem the world. To these dissidents who remained loyal to the law of Moses, the doctrine of a messianic redemption was an unnecessary appendage to what they considered a fully functional system, and to preach of a coming Messiah was to be disloyal to a divinely revealed redemptive plan. They chose to believe that what God had revealed to them through Moses was adequate and complete.
2. Nephite dissidents rejected the Messiah because they failed to understand and accept messianic prophecies that were recorded in figurative language on the brass plates.

According to the Book of Mormon narrative, Nephites and subsequently the people of Zarahemla, at least by the time of Alma the Younger, were relatively literate and had access to Hebrew scriptures. The scriptures appear to have been widely available because the audiences addressed by Nephite prophets were chided for not studying them (see Jacob 7:10–11; Mosiah 13:11). These inspired writings were sufficiently accessible, even to the common people, that Alma told the poor among the Zoramites to search the scriptures (see Alma 33:2). An underlying assumption of the prophets was that the dissidents believed the scriptures. Thus the prophets used the scriptures in their teachings about the coming of a Messiah.

The texts that the prophets cited from the brass plates—unlike the clear, specific revelations forming the basis of Nephite messianic doctrine—were figurative in nature, and the dissidents did not accept the prophets’ interpretation of them. Jacob and Abinadi both affirmed that not just some but all of the holy prophets have testified of Christ (see Jacob 4:4–5; Mosiah 13:33). The examples they used to support this idea illustrate the figurative nature of messianic prophecy in the brass plates. Jacob explained that the law of Moses pointed souls to Christ and that the story of Abraham’s offering up Isaac was a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son (see Jacob 4:4–5). Abinadi quoted Isaiah 53 to support the idea of an incarnate God (see Mosiah 13:34; 14). In addition, Alma the Younger, while teaching the Zoramites, identified the brazen serpent held up by Moses in the wilderness as a type of Christ (see Alma 33:19). However, none of these examples contain perfectly clear and unambiguous language when compared with the language in the revelations given to Lehi and Nephi (see 1 Nephi 10–12). Clear prophecies that are unique to the brass plates are found in the teachings of Zenos, Zenock, and Neum (see 1 Nephi 19:10), but we find that even these prophecies are much less specific than those of Lehi and Nephi.

One would think that the prophets would have used more specific texts from the brass plates to support their position if such texts were available. Because they did not do so, we may need to reexamine our views of what we think was written on the brass plates but was lost or removed before the compilation of our Old Testament. Even though many Latter-day Saints believe that the brass plates contain prophecies about the coming of the Messiah that are clearer than what is found in the Old Testament, I do not think a careful study of the Book of Mormon will support that assumption, even in light of the fact that the great and abominable church has “taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away” (1 Nephi 13:26).

The teachings of Lehi and Nephi formed the foundation for a belief in the Messiah among Book of Mormon peoples. Those teachings came through revelation, not through restored texts found on the brass plates, which differ from the Old Testament records. The messianic renaissance during King Benjamin’s reign was likewise based on revelation rather than on insights derived from scripture study (see Mosiah 3:2). And although Abinadi’s messianic teachings may have been based on an inspired understanding of the texts he referenced from Isaiah 52 and 53, these were not restored texts unique to the brass plates. Thus the Book of Mormon prophets frequently relied more on personal revelation than on previous scripture because the brass plates did not contain enough of the kind of truths they might have used in their preaching to dissidents.

If there are more specific statements in the brass plates testifying of Christ’s coming and the relationship
between blood sacrifices and his redemptive role, why did the prophets not appeal to them when such statements would have lent considerable additional authority to their preaching? This gives credence to the idea that any messianic prophecies now absent in the Old Testament but available to the Nephite prophets were no more explicit than the prophecies that have remained.

In contrast, Noel B. Reynolds compared texts from the Book of Moses and the Book of Mormon and concluded that the brass plates version of Genesis that Book of Mormon prophets relied on may have been much more like the Book of Moses version of Genesis than the version available in our traditional Bible. In my study I assume that because Jacob, Abinadi, Amulek, and Alma were sincere in their desire to convince their adversaries of the reality of the Messiah, they would have drawn attention to the very best texts available to them. These prophets cite the Hebrew scriptures as a source of support for their arguments, but none of the texts they quote are as specific as those that appear in the Book of Moses, and none of them explain the relationship between sacrifice and the Savior’s redeeming act. If there were more detailed, more compelling, or more relevant statements available to them, why did they not quote them?

The Nephite prophets seem to have accepted the figurative nature of the prophecies that they referenced from the brass plates and chide their listeners for not having the spiritual sensitivity to understand them. For example, when Jacob said to Sherem, “Believeth thou the scriptures?” and Sherem answered in the affirmative, Jacob responded, “Then ye do not understand them; for they truly testify of Christ” (Jacob 7:10–11). Abinadi corroborated the idea that a certain spiritual sensitivity was required to understand messianic teachings in the Hebrew scriptures:

> The law of Moses is a wonderful expression of the redemptive significance of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and the gradual development of the understanding of this redemptive significance in the course of sacred history is an important aspect of spiritual growth. (Abinadi, Mosiah 13:32–33)

Commenting on this verse 33, Hugh Nibley observed that the Messiah was there in the law of Moses but that neither the priests of Noah nor the Jews could see him:

> Well, they could ask, Where does Moses speak of these things? Where do the prophets tell us about the Messiah? The Jews still ask that. They say, “We don’t see any Messiah there.” Well, in the next chapter he proceeds to recite chapter 53 of Isaiah, . . . [a chapter that] describes the coming of the Lord. This says that he shall come forth in the form of a man and go forth in mighty power—that “God himself shall come down among the children of men. . . Yea, and have they not said also that he should bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, and that he, himself, should be oppressed and afflicted?”

There is value in searching out the meaning of nonliteral expressions. Inspired insights are given through our struggle to understand them. Elder Dallin H. Oaks remarked:

> Our belief in an open canon also includes private revelations to individual seekers of the meaning of existing scriptures. Such revelations are necessary because, as Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the Quorum of the Twelve observed, “each pronouncement in the holy scriptures . . . is so written as to reveal little or much, depending on the spiritual capacity of the student.”

Elder Oaks further observed, “If we seek and accept revelation and inspiration to enlarge our understanding of the scriptures, we will realize a fulfillment of Nephi’s inspired promise that those who diligently seek will have ‘the mysteries of God . . . unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost’” (1 Nephi 10:19). If that reasoning is applicable to the messianic prophecies on the brass plates, the quotations of Zenock, Zenos, and Neum may represent the high-water mark of messianic prophetic literalism.

The dissidents did not, or would not, look beyond the figurative expressions in the scriptures to see the Messiah revealed there. Without spiritual insight, they saw only the words and missed messages of great, even eternal, import. Book of Mormon prophets, whose focus was always on Jesus Christ, made explicit in their teachings what is implicit in Old World scripture.
3. Dissidents denied that prophets could know of future events and thus concluded that the Messiah was a figment of their imagination.

The Book of Mormon preserves statements from three apostates—Sherem, an Amalekite follower of Nehor, and Korihor—who denied the revelations foretelling the coming of Christ because they did not believe that people could know of future events (see Jacob 7:7; Alma 21:8; 30:15). Through much of his dialogue with Alma, Korihor played the role of an agnostic, or one who does not deny the existence of God but believes it is not possible to come to an ultimate certainty about him. He argued that since the future is outside the realm of human experience, it is unknowable, and to believe in something that cannot be tested empirically is to embrace a vain and foolish hope (see Alma 30:13).

Although Korihor did not speak for the other people, he raised a relevant concern when he responded to a question asked by the high priest Giddonah: “Why do you speak against all the prophecies of the holy prophets?” (Alma 30:22). Korihor declared that the prophets had used prophecy as a tool to manipulate followers into making the sacrifices necessary for the success of the prophets’ ambitions (see Alma 30:23–28). A similar attitude appears in the undercurrent of frustration exhibited...
by Laman and Lemuel, whose lives were dramatically changed by Lehi’s visions and prophecies (see 1 Nephi 2:11; 17:20–21). The reactions of Sherem, Korihor, and the followers of Nehor testify to the endurance of this attitude as they declared their independence from doctrines that originated from prophecy.

The cynical attitude of Korihor and of Nehor’s followers concerning prophecy may have influenced Alma’s son Corianton. In one of a series of questions that Corianton discussed with his father, he asked why the coming of Christ should be known so long beforehand (see Alma 39:15–17). A careful reading of Alma 39:12–15 suggests that Corianton was not fully committed to the idea of Christ’s coming and the redemptive doctrines associated with it. More to the point, he questioned the relevance of an event that would occur so far in the future. Alma subtly shifted the focus from the coming of Christ, as important as it is, to the plan of redemption, which would have been just as relevant to Corianton’s contemporaries as it would be to the souls of those living at the time of Christ’s coming (see Alma 39:17–18).

4. Because of their belief in universal salvation, dissidents rejected the idea that there was a need for a Redeemer.

During the first year of the reign of judges, Nehor went among the people teaching a radically different doctrine from that taught by Alma. He endorsed the ecclesiastical structure of the church—presided over by priests and teachers—but advocated that they become popular and that they should be supported by the people. Alma described this practice as priestcraft (see Alma 1:12). In addition, Nehor taught a universalist doctrine that all mankind would be saved at the last day (see Alma 1:3–4). This teaching became much more popular and had a deeper impact on Nephite religious beliefs than did priestcraft.

Nehor’s universalism was an apparent reaction to Alma’s efforts to maintain discipline among the rebellious younger generation in Zarehemla. God revealed to Alma’s father the disciplinary policy of the church (see Mosiah 26:15–32), which included the expression that those who knew not God at the second trump would “depart into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mosiah 26:27). Beginning with Nephi, and especially in the teachings of both Almas, there is a well-defined doctrine of everlasting postmortal punishment for sin. Nehor may not have been familiar with the teachings of the prophets who taught earlier in Nephite history, but he could hardly have avoided knowing the contents of the revelation to Alma since it outlined the disciplinary policy of the church and was recorded and undoubtedly publicized among church members (see Mosiah 26:33).

A textual comparison of Nehor’s teachings and the disciplinary policy revealed by God indicates that Nehor was reacting to the concept of “everlasting fire” in Mosiah 26:27 and possibly, depending on how widely known they were, to the concepts of eternal torment and everlasting punishment that Alma describes in his conversion experience as recorded in Mosiah 27:29–31. Note the parallels between the following passages:

For it is I [Jesus Christ] that taketh upon me the sins of the world; for it is I that hath created them; and it is I that granteth unto him that believeth unto the end a place at my right hand ....

And then I will confess unto [the unrepentant transgressors] that I never knew them; and they shall depart into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (Mosiah 26:23–24, 27)

Nehor restated the same ideas with a unique twist:

And he [Nehor] 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. (Alma 1:4)
Nehor saw a relationship between God’s creating all people and redeeming all people. By ignoring the conditional clauses in the revelation, he concluded there was no need to “fear and tremble” in anticipation of “everlasting fire”; all people would escape postmortal consequences for sin.

His followers not only rejected the concept of everlasting postmortal punishment but took the next logical step and insisted that people could be saved in their sins; therefore, there would be no punishment at all and no need for repentance. For example, in his dialogue with Amulek, Zeezrom implied that people could be saved “in their sins” (see Alma 11:34–37), and the people of Ammonihah, who were followers of Nehor, “did not believe in the repentance of their sins” (Alma 15:15).

Nehor’s rejection of the concepts of eternal punishment and of the consignment of sinners to a state of misery seemed to have influenced Corianton, for Alma said:

And now, my son, I perceive there is somewhat more which doth worry your mind, which ye cannot understand—which is concerning the justice of God in the punishment of the sinner; for ye do try to suppose that it is injustice that the sinner should be consigned to a state of misery. (Alma 42:1)

Alma responded to this issue by giving his wonderfully insightful discourse on justice and our need to repent to qualify for mercy, but he did not address the issue that seems to be implied in Nehor’s doctrine and Corianton’s concern. The issue is misery, but more particularly the well-documented teaching of a never-ending state to which the wicked are said to be consigned. We can empathize with Corianton. For people to suffer throughout all eternity for what was done during the few years of mortality seems disproportionate and unjust. Were these statements that describe interminable suffering intended to be understood literally or as hyperbole or metaphor? Did they apply to all sinners or only to the sons of perdition? These issues were evidently not made clear by Book of Mormon prophets. The Lord gave a revelation to Joseph Smith to help us understand the concept of eternal punishment.

In light of the last sentence, it would seem that the duration of postmortal punishment for sons of perdition is a question that God chooses to leave unanswered. The message I receive from sections 19 and 76 is that God loves us and that his overwhelming concern is our salvation, not our damnation.

Another vital element of the dissidents’ universalist doctrine was the principle of restoration. Its proponents believed that without repentance a person could be restored from a life of sin to a state of perfection, a state that was unqualified and universal. This belief was rooted in the idea that since God created all men, he could restore all men to eternal life, in a qualitative sense (see Alma 1:4). Restoration, then, as used and understood by Nehor’s followers, was not a synonym for resurrection. Amulek and Alma chose to use this apostate teaching as a starting-off point to elaborate on the resurrection and to reinforce a correct understanding of this principle in contrast to the dissidents’ faulty application of the concept of restoration.

Amulek explained to Zeezrom that the resurrection will restore a person’s body and spirit but that a person will not be restored from sin to perfection:

The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be
restored to its proper frame, even as we now are at this time; and we shall be brought to stand before God, knowing even as we know now, and have a bright recollection of all our guilt. Now, this restoration shall come to all,... both the wicked and the righteous; and even there shall not so much as a hair of their heads be lost; but every thing shall be restored to its perfect frame, as it is now, or in the body, and shall be brought and be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil. (Alma 11:43–44)

Amulek insisted that “this restoration,” which was understood to be resurrection, will “come to all” but that sinners will still be held accountable for their sins. Corianton was also concerned about the connection—or distinction—between restoration and resurrection. Alma explained that Corianton should not suppose, because it has been spoken concerning restoration, that ye shall be restored from sin to happiness. Behold, I say unto you, wickedness never was happiness.... O, my son, ... the meaning of the word restoration is to bring back again evil for evil, or carnal for carnal, or devilish for devilish—good for that which is good; righteous for that which is righteous; just for that which is just; merciful for that which is merciful. (Alma 41:10, 13)

Alma’s point is that God is going to restore our body to its perfect frame but that this restoration applies only to the physical body. Salvation is conditional, and there is a pending judgment for the guilty.

For that which ye do send out shall return unto you again, and be restored; therefore, the word restoration more fully condemneth the sinner, and justifieth him not at all. (Alma 41:15)

Nehor’s doctrine of universal salvation was way off the mark because it minimized an individual’s responsibility for his or her own actions, and it is especially erroneous because Nehor missed the connection between righteousness and consequent happiness in his doctrine of restoration.

5. Dissidents objected to the incarnation, the teaching that God himself would come to earth, take a mortal body of flesh and blood, and be sacrificed for the sins of the world.

The priests of Noah and the Zoramites both rejected the idea that the Messiah would become incarnate. Abinadi was put to death because he taught that Christ was the God, the Father of all things, and said that he should take upon him the image of man, and it should be the image after which man was created in the beginning; or in other words, he said that man was created after the image of God, and that God should come down among the children of men, and take upon him flesh and blood, and go forth upon the face of the earth. (Mosiah 7:27)

In the prayer that the Zoramites offered each week from the Rameumptom, they intoned, Holy, holy God; we believe that thou art God, and we believe that thou art holy, and that thou wast a spirit, and that thou art a spirit, and that thou wilt be a spirit forever. (Alma 31:15)

As I studied the beliefs of these two groups, I expected to find an antimatieralist doctrine implied in their rejection. History records numerous examples of people who adamantly rejected the incarnation on the basis that God is pure spirit and would not befoul himself by coming into contact with matter. Some groups extended this idea to a practice of celibacy, a vegetarian diet, and various other ascetic practices aimed at subduing the flesh. Even in the writings of Nephi, we see some human, fleshly impulses cast in a negative light. For instance, he speaks critically of the “lusts of the flesh” (1 Nephi 22:23) and laments, “My heart sorroweth because of my flesh” (2 Nephi 4:17). But these ascetic-like sentiments are not evident in the beliefs of the priests of Noah or the Zoramites. Their rejection of Christ’s corporeality was related to the theology of redemption, not materialism.

Redemptive theology is a belief that deliverance from sin is dependent on a sacrifice offered for the sinner. The priests of Noah endorsed this limited definition completely. To their way of thinking, the sacrifices outlined in the law of Moses were sufficient in and of themselves to bring about deliverance. What they did not believe were the teachings of the Nephite prophets that God would take upon himself a body of flesh and blood in order that he could be the sacrifice that would redeem mankind from their
sins. The priests were not rejecting materialism; as pointed out earlier, they were rejecting what they saw as an alternative form of redemption that placed the law of Moses in a secondary position. In their view, such a belief made the law contingent, not sufficient.

Much of Zoramite theology was a reaction to Nephite beliefs. It could be defined more by what the Zoramites did not believe of the teachings of orthodox Nephites than by the teachings that were unique to the Zoramites. They replaced the Nephite belief in the incarnation of Christ with belief in a God who always was and always will be a spirit. They thanked God that they were separated from the Nephites, their traditions, and their belief in Christ. They rejected the plan of redemption in favor of salvation by election. They believed not only that they were elected exclusively but also that those around them (the Nephites?) would be cast down to hell (see Alma 31:15–17).

As with the priests of Noah, there is no evidence to suggest that Zoramite rejection of God’s corporeality was based on antimaterialism, but unlike the priests of Noah who rejected the Messiah based on their theology of redemption, the Zoramites did not equate salvation with redemptive sacrifice. For them salvation was exclusively a product of election. There was no need for sacrifice, whether it be self-denial, animal sacrifice, or the sacrifice of an incarnate Messiah. They were saved simply as an endowment from God. It was a shallow, reactive, elitist belief. Alma made a good-hearted effort to reconcile them to a belief in Christ but ended up teaching the less-fortunate people of their society, helping them overcome the false ideas that they might have retained from the doctrine taught to them by the upper-class Zoramites.

**Conclusion**

A substantial number of Nephites, at times a majority, rejected the Messiah through embracing the counter-beliefs of the dissidents identified in this study and falling away from a covenant relationship with Christ through spiritual lethargy. Amulek, in his teaching to the Zoramites, identified the issue central to the theological history of dissidents when he said, “We have beheld that the great question which is in your minds is whether the word be in the Son of God, or whether there shall be no Christ” (Alma 34:5). In answering this “great question,” he went to the very heart of redemptive theology and explained the necessity for a Messiah, testifying that it is expedient that an atonement should be made; for according to the great plan of the Eternal God there must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must unavoidably perish; yea, all are hardened; yea, all are fallen and are lost, and must perish except it be through the atonement which it is expedient should be made. For it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a human sacrifice; but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice. . . . And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal. (Alma 34:9–10, 14)

His conclusion is as relevant for us as it was for the dissenters:

And thus he [the Son of God] shall bring salvation to all those who shall believe on his name; this being the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy, which overpowereth justice, and bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance. (Alma 34:15)

The Book of Mormon serves as another witness that Jesus Christ is a reality, that he came to earth and freely offered himself as the great and last sacrifice for the sins of the world. Through their theology, philosophy, or moral malaise, dissenters painted out this conviction. But in the latter days God called a prophet to bring forth the Book of Mormon and thereby take brush in hand and paint again the message that Jesus is the Messiah, the Redeemer of the world. ■
The year 1852 saw the unprecedented publication of translations of the Book of Mormon into four European tongues: French, German, Italian, and Welsh (listed in alphabetical order). A year before, in 1851, the Book of Mormon appeared in Danish, the first in a series of translations that has now grown into 56 foreign-language translations as of September 2000, along with 37 partial translations (called “selections”). The following four articles set the translation activities of 1852 into historical contexts that disclose firm ties to the church’s early missionary push into countries that would allow the preaching of the gospel. Early on, of course, missionaries and their leaders sensed the need to equip themselves with copies of the Book of Mormon—the scripture that set them and their message apart from other religions. Thus they turned their energies to translating efforts that bore fruit in terms of converts and making the Book of Mormon available to a wider public. One notable figure who moves in and out of two of the stories is Elder John Taylor of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. It becomes evident that, within a short period, he engaged in a multipronged translation initiative that affected the work of the church across Europe for decades to follow. —ED.
Ideally, a team of well-educated, fluently bilingual, fully converted, and time-tested members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints would collaborate on an effort as important as translating the Book of Mormon. Absent this luxury in producing the first French edition of that book, the church did the best it could. Between June 1850 and January 1852, an unlikely mix of five men put their efforts into translating the Book of Mormon into the French language. Theirs proved to be a monumental translation, persisting as the foundation for every subsequent French edition of the Book of Mormon. This story would be incomplete unless set against the backdrop of the considerable distractions that threatened to undermine the work. That fuller picture shows that it is perhaps a miracle that such an enduring translation could be finished so quickly.

In December 1847 the British Mission presidency issued a plea for volunteer missionaries to France, and by August 1849 Elder William Howell was working there. Two months later, in the October general conference in Salt Lake City, three men were called to serve missions in France: Elder John Taylor of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; Curtis E. Bolton, the son of a wealthy ship owner in New York; and John Pack. By the time these missionaries arrived, Howell had already established a small branch in Boulogne-sur-Mer. The French Mission officially opened on 18 June 1850 with the arrival of the new mission presidency—Elder Taylor as president and Elders Bolton and Pack as counselors.

Of these early missionaries, Bolton deserves special attention because of his instrumental role in translating the Book of Mormon. He was also an interesting character. It appears that he seldom allowed diplomacy and self-restraint to soften the harshness of his honest feelings. In his diary he comes across as melodramatic and paranoid yet extraordinarily sincere, regularly citing the efforts of many people (both below and above him in authority) to undermine his work and destroy his character and authority. For such perceived affronts, he viciously berated both John Taylor and Louis Bertrand, one of the earliest converts in France. Despite this severity, because Bolton was the only one of those first missionaries who spoke French, Elder Taylor immediately appointed him to translate the Book of Mormon. Bolton worked on the translation sporadically until...
October 1850, when he laid it aside to translate other tracts under Taylor’s instruction. During their first few months in France, Bolton and Taylor encountered Louis A. Bertrand, who would later play a significant role in the translation. Bertrand wrote of his introduction to the church:

I was editing the political section of Le Populaire at the time the first Mormon missionaries came to Paris. . . . From my first meeting with them I was struck by the far reaching importance of the work they were commissioned to introduce in France. My knowledge of English permitted me to initiate myself into the doctrines of the new Church, and I found in their writings and especially in a work entitled *Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon*, by Orson Pratt, the complete demonstrations of the divinity of that work. The two apostles who landed on French soil were Messrs John Taylor and Curtis E. Bolton. All the questions, all the objections which I raised were answered or explained to my entire satisfaction.1

In 1850 Le Populaire was the largest Communist paper in France. The French socialist Étienne Cabet, who founded the utopian experiment known as the Icarian movement, owned the paper. Also at this time, a few hundred Icarians were settling into the Mormons’ abandoned houses in Nauvoo,5 possibly providing a reason for Taylor’s visit to the paper’s office in France, where he met Bertrand.

Bertrand had traveled a lot in his younger years, returning to France in time to be caught up amid significant political unrest. It was likely sometime between 1846 and 1848 that the man originally named John Francis Elias Flandin adopted the pseudonym Louis Alphonse Bertrand, possibly to protect his wife and two children from negative fallout due to his political activities.7

Three points suffice to describe Bertrand’s involvement in the French Revolution of 1848: he held some form of public influence, having been elected to the Revolutionary Committee; he was a socialist under Cabot’s tutelage (for this he spent a few months in prison despite his support of the revolution); and he was working as *Le Populaire’s* political editor when he was contacted by Taylor and Bolton in 1850. “I was then a mad Politician, the cashier & editor of the Journal *Le Populaire*, a demagogick paper of the first water. I did spend about 10 years of my life in Paris, and I am extensively known in that city and by the French Government.”8 Bertrand wrote the following of his conversion:

I was born and reared up in the bosom of Catholicism, but had thrown off the yoke of priestcraft and the false traditions of my fathers for many years; yet I was distressed with doubt and uncertainty, and was assailed by scepticism in every form. I had lived till then absolutely indifferent to any matters of religion.—My conversion was sudden, indeed it might be considered instantaneous. By my obedience to the gospel and by prayer I experienced a complete transformation, so that my eyes once blind were opened, and I can truly say that old things passed away and all things became new.9

Within five months of landing in France, Taylor and Bolton prepared two future translators—Bertrand and a Mr. Wilhelm—for membership in the church, while the final team member would not be a Latter-day Saint. Bolton wrote, “I had three persons ready for baptism, one Editor of a Communist Newspaper, named Bertrand and Wilhelm and his wife.”10 Wilhelm was first and Bertrand was second of five individuals baptized (in order of age) by John
Taylor on the island of Saint-Ouen on 1 December 1850. While Wilhelm was joined by his wife in the new faith, “much to [Bertrand’s] disappointment, his wife did not share his enthusiasm for the new religion nor would she consent to their sons’ being baptized.” A week later, Bertrand and Wilhelm were two of eight members present at the creation of the Paris branch.

The fledgling branch put Mr. Wilhelm to work immediately with an assignment to help translate the Book of Mormon, probably at the same time Bolton resumed the work himself. At this time the translation probably began in earnest. Unfortunately, after only a couple months’ efforts, Wilhelm quit work in late February when John Taylor refused to publish a tract he had written on the church. After bickering with Bolton over pay for another few months and finally being more than sufficiently reimbursed by Taylor, Wilhelm left the church altogether. He was stripped of his priesthood at a council held on 1 May 1851 and excommunicated soon thereafter. On 22 March 1851, Bertrand sent Lazare Auge, a nonmember friend seeking employment, to replace Wilhelm in the translation. The help rendered by Wilhelm and Auge from December 1850 until November 1851 was important largely because they were native French speakers, though Wilhelm’s sincerity may come into question because he left the church so soon and Auge, a nonmember who spoke no English, did not profess to believe in the texts he was translating.

Though Bertrand performed little work on the Book of Mormon during his first nine months as a member, his editorial skills were tapped as he became actively engaged in the church’s other publication efforts. Bolton reported to Taylor in March 1851 that “Brother Bertrand is very busy writing his pamphlet; it is addressed to the working classes of France, so he says. And that if it meet your approbation he will write another for the higher class, more deep and logical.” On 29 May the first issue of Étoile du Déséret, edited by John Taylor, came off the press, constituting the “first Mormon periodical on continental Europe.” Articles authored by Taylor, Bolton, and Alphonse Dupont regularly appeared in Étoile. Bertrand published three poems or hymns in the paper (October and November 1851 and February 1852), as well as a substantial article on the church’s beliefs (April 1852). He also independently published a similar article of 32 pages sometime during 1852 titled “Autorité Divine.” Bertrand also put together a collection of hymns in French, including several of his own. Bolton records singing “the songs of Zion composed by our dear Brother Bertrand.”

Perhaps feeling he was not doing enough, Bertrand, on 7 July 1851, “offered to come every evening and revise for the press, Mr. Auge’s work, of which he is eminently capable.” Bolton, whose diary recorded this, had faith in Bertrand’s abilities as the final reviewer of the text. Further, he was pleased that Bertrand was not only an experienced writer in French and English, but also one who (unlike Wilhelm and Auge) firmly believed in the veracity of the book and so would render it more effectively.

The frustrations of the project were creating tension between Bolton and Taylor. On 20 July 1851, Bolton, who only a few months before had prayed that “the Lord preserve and bless [Taylor] most abundantly,” let loose a tirade against him in his diary, complaining that Taylor intended to have his name put as sole translator:

I received a letter from Elder Taylor, very uncourteous, very unjust, very ungentlemanly, untrue and very undeserved on my part and for which he will be sorry some day or other. God knows . . . that the translation of the Book of Mormon into French is literally, emphatically, truly, and essentially my own work. 95 out of 100 of the words are my own, yes, I may say 99. . . . He wants his name to be put as translator of the Book of Mormon into French, tho he has never had anything to do with it at all, except to raise part of the money for its publication, and left me to get the rest which I have done (850 francs). I write this, being determined that these facts shall be on my journal for the benefit of my posterity.

This entry sheds interesting light on the frustrations of working with less than optimal resources and capabilities. It seemed clear to Taylor that, because he had been placed in charge of the translation and had gathered funding for it, his name would appear on the title page. It was not uncommon at the time for leaders to assume credit for work they had delegated to others. Bolton, who spent his days struggling through the grammar word by word, thought it preposterous that someone who did not speak French should be credited with the translation. Taylor’s
frequent absence from France likely complicated the situation. Notably, Bolton’s claim that 99 percent of the words were his own was made before Bertrand began assisting.

Although Bertrand had volunteered to help out in early July, it was another two months before he actually began revising the translation. For the following two and a half months he spent his evenings editing the work generated by Bolton, Wilhelm, and Auge. On 18 November 1851 Bertrand suddenly was able to dedicate more time to the project when Cabet returned to Paris and fired him. This dismissal accomplished several things: it helped extricate Bertrand from his political involvement, which may have saved his life; it proved a major boon to the progress of the Book of Mormon translation; and it elated Curtis Bolton, who desperately wanted help from somebody who knew what he was doing.

Mr. Auge came at 10, Bro Bertrand came in a few minutes after and said with tears in his eyes that Cabet had turned him out of his office and that he was without resources. My joy was extreme, for I knew that as long as he remained in that Newspaper Office (Communist) the government would be enmical [enimical] to us. But he looked only on the dark side of the picture and saw nothing but starvation staring him in the face. I then went to Mr. Auge and told him the circumstances, & that it would be my wish to let Elder Bertrand finish the Book of Mormon. He instantly saw the propriety of it, and bid me adieu for a while with strong expressions of lasting esteme [sic] and friendship. This affair is glorious for the Church as it removes Bro Bertrand from his present political associations and from politics of which he is full full. And now as he will devote his whole time to the church his mind will naturally [be] drawn towards the things of God.

Bertrand began helping Bolton full-time on the translation the next morning, and after the day’s work an impressed Bolton recorded: “I hope his ardor will continue. He is an elegant writer.”

Great political unrest still prevailed in Paris. With the advent of a second Napoleon to the throne, political leaders of opposing parties—even those who had supported the revolution—were hunted, imprisoned, and exiled. Church members worked under constant scrutiny from the French government, which suspected virtually any kind of independently organized social, political, or religious movement or activity as potentially treasonous. As Napoleon’s term neared its end, his hunger for power increased, and when “the Assembly declined to consider an extension of his term beyond the four years for which he had been elected, he prepared a military coup d’etat. The date chosen was December 2, 1851, anniversary of the great Napoleon’s coronation and of his victory at Austerlitz.” For Louis Bertrand, who had become persona non grata in Paris, the possibilities were terrifying. On the Tuesday of the coup d’état—one year and one day after Bertrand’s baptism—there were riots in the streets, and news reached Bolton that many of Bertrand’s friends had been captured, thrown into prison, and even executed. “There was danger for Bro Bertrand. . . . On account of his safety we concluded to leave Paris for a day or two, which we did at 4 Oclock. Fighting had commenced in Paris. The streets are full of dismal looking faces.” They returned two days later and, despite continued fighting in the street, translated for the entire day.

The unrest also led to immediate changes in the leadership of the mission. Among the ideas published by John Taylor in France was the notion that the kingdom of God, as established by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, would subdue all other political entities, a doctrine not received well by the transitioning government. When Taylor was ordered to leave the country, he simply changed his address, but the ruse was soon discovered. He was in hiding by the time he reorganized the mission presidency on 20 December 1851, with Bolton as president and Bertrand, now a high priest, as counselor and president of the Paris conference. A few days later, Taylor sought refuge from the police at a new convert’s house in the middle of the night. The member found passage for him early the next morning, then stalled government officials until Taylor’s ship was safely out of port.

The translation was nearing completion at the time of Taylor’s departure and the mission’s reorganization. Printer Marc Ducloux began setting type for the Book of Mormon on 13 January 1852, and 1,000 copies of the book were finished by the 22nd, with Paris still in a tumult. Two weeks after the book went to press, Bolton recorded:
A Commissary of the police called today accompanied by two agents of police to inquire about what Elder Bertrand was doing—Elder B was terribly frightened. This very morning I had coaxed and councilled [sic] Elder B to write to this very same Commissary to say that he was no longer a political but a religious man. He acted accordingly, but the comissary had not yet received the letter. I spoke boldly and fearlessly to the comissary so much so that he was astonished, not being accustomed to it. I told him Cabet had turned Elder B away because he was opposed to him in politics. At one time the man confounded asked me if I was at home. I told him yes all the time.31

By the month of March, Paris, Le Havre, and one-third of France had been put under martial law, effecting a season of constant fear for Bertrand.32 Fortunately, church leaders replaced Bolton as mission president and reassigned Bertrand to the refugee island of Jersey, where he taught the gospel to a former compatriot from the 1848 revolution, the author Victor Hugo. There Bertrand continued work on church literature, including a complete translation of the Doctrine and Covenants, which was sent to the Liverpool office and never seen again.33 After living in Brigham Young’s home in Utah for a few years, Bertrand returned to France as president of the mission until it was closed in 1864.

Properly crediting the 1852 French translation of the Book of Mormon remains a problem. Bolton’s journal tirade suggests that Taylor intended to have his name listed alone, despite the fact that he “knew practically no French and actually performed no translation on the book.”34 Taylor’s biography, on the other hand, admits that he was “greatly assisted by the patient labors of Elder Curtis E. Bolton, Brother Louis Bertrand and several highly educated gentlemen whom he baptized in Paris, but whose names unfortunately cannot be obtained.”35 The Encyclopedia of Mormonism cleanly asserts that John Taylor “supervised” translation by Bolton.36 None of the sources contemporary to the translation claim that Taylor ever translated, suggesting rather that he spent his time in administrative functions, traveling back and forth to England, and raising money for the publication. Essentially, he viewed Bolton and the three native French speakers as “ghost-translators” and himself as the producer or sponsor. The title page of the 1852 Book of Mormon (and subsequent editions) is thus something of a compromise:

TRADUIT DE L’ANGLAIS PAR JOHN TAYLOR ET CURTIS E. BOLTON

Bolton’s name may have been added after Taylor fled France and Bolton took over leadership of the mission. Given Bolton’s strong feelings on the subject, it comes as a surprise that Taylor’s name remained in the credit line. The book went to press a month after Taylor was forced to leave the country.

Curtis Bolton doubtless contributed the most time to the effort. He maintained that the brunt of the work was his own, but this assertion was made before Bertrand became involved in the project. Before that time, the only other men to perform translation work appear to have been Wilhelm and Auge. Wilhelm worked for three months before being excommunicated, and Auge spoke no English—according to Bolton, he was there merely to argue the French. Louis Bertrand, a seasoned editor, was the only person on the project who was fluent in English and French. He likely accomplished more during his two and a half months of part-time revising and three months of full-time translating than
Bolton had been able to do while working sporadically on the project since June 1850. However, given the time Bolton had already put into the translation before Bertrand started, much of Bertrand’s work was likely reworking what was already a substantial document. Bertrand simply wrote, “I contributed considerably.” One scholar says the following of Bertrand’s involvement:

Bertrand proved to be an invaluable aid with the Book of Mormon, and continued his help until it was finished. Indeed, in later years he related that it was he who had translated almost all of the Book of Mormon into French. He felt that those who were not Mormons who had worked on it had not put its true spirit into the translation, and Curtis Bolton’s knowledge of the French language was not perfect enough to give a meaningful translation. He, therefore, felt that he had been obliged to redo the portion that had been translated as well as the remainder, and thus, in effect, he had done almost all of it.”

In sum, as mission president for all but the last month before the book was published, John Taylor had charge over the project, collecting funds for it while delegating the translation to those who spoke French. Bolton spent the most time on the translation and oversaw the tedious work of hammering through the book word by word. He was assisted by Wilhelm, Auge, and Bertrand—the first left the church mid-project, the second was a nonmember who spoke no English, and the third was precisely whom Bolton had wanted (and needed) all along.

Significantly, all subsequent editions of the French Book of Mormon have been based on this original work despite the fact that those involved had no precedents or models to follow. “The stereotype plates of the Book of Mormon in French were sent immediately after the [first] printing was accomplished, Feb. 2, 1852 by Ducloux from Paris to Liverpool, England, where they remained until the second printing . . . took place.” Sometime after Bolton left France in 1852, the book was published a second time, without changes. In 1907, 10,000 copies of the second edition were printed, with “extensive revisions, chapter divisions, new versing, and footnotes having been added by James Barker and Joseph Evans.” By 1952 the book had been completely revised by Roger Dock, but the title page still credited Taylor and Bolton with the translation. Dock updated the book again in 1962. It appears that by the time of the 1989 printing the church had ceased the practice of crediting translations.

When Bolton began translating in June 1850, the Book of Mormon had never been published in a language other than English. In light of the political, cultural, and even social impediments in France at the time, it is no small wonder that this team of five men, each with different ideals and interests, was able to produce a translation that has endured for so many years. This they did while devoting time and energy to such things as opening a mission, learning French, joining the church, securing food and lodging, and avoiding government persecution. Sometimes God uses small and simple things to further his work; this time everything was small but not very simple. ❲
On 25 May 1852, the first German edition of the Book of Mormon came off the press in Hamburg. Earlier that year France and Wales saw translations appear in their languages, following the first foreign-language edition of the Book of Mormon in Danish in 1851. A dozen years before, a chain of events began that would have far-reaching effects in Germany and on the translation of the Book of Mormon into German.

On 6 April 1840, the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, members in Nauvoo were still afflicted by debilitating circumstances resulting from their expulsion from Missouri. On that date Joseph Smith called one of the apostles, Orson Hyde, to go to Palestine to dedicate the Holy Land for the return of the Jews.1

A month later, on 1 May 1840, having started his journey to the Middle East in the company of John E. Page, Elder Hyde wrote to Joseph Smith from Columbus, Ohio, “The mission upon which we are sent swells greater and greater. . . . There is a great work to be done in Germany, as manifested to us by the Spirit.” Elder Hyde proposed to write brief lectures in German on the faith and doctrine of the church, including a brief history of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. Elder Hyde then asked, “Should we consider it necessary to translate the entire Book of Mormon into German, and Doctrine and Covenants too, are we or are we not at liberty to do so?” One week later, on 8 May, Joseph Smith replied, “I entirely approve” of the plan.2 In Philadelphia, Elder Page discontinued this mission and Elder Hyde proceeded alone.

A few months before Orson Hyde arrived in Germany, James Howard, who had recently become a Latter-day Saint in England, moved to Hamburg, Germany, on 13 September 1840, to work in a foundry. He had received instructions from Brigham Young, then president of the British Mission, to pursue missionary work. But this first Latter-day Saint in Germany wrote, “As soon as I saw what sort of place it was I dropped [sic] my preaching directly. I durst not pretend to say anything about religion to them. Tell Brother Brigham Young how things are and that I am too weak a creature to do anything with them in Hamburg.” He soon returned to England, where the church’s first overseas mission had begun three years earlier. With Howard’s departure, the first effort to carry the gospel message to Germany came to an end.3 But help was on the way.
Nine months after Howard’s failure, Orson Hyde arrived in Frankfurt, Germany, on 27 June 1841. He was the first official of the church to set foot on the European mainland. Fortunately, when a visa problem delayed Elder Hyde in Frankfurt, he began studying the German language. “I have read one book through,” he wrote, “… and [have] translated and written considerable. I can speak and write the German considerable already.” Elder Hyde was in Germany for two and one-half months, until September 1841, before he resumed his journey to the Middle East. He preached the gospel in Egypt and Syria and then traveled on to Jerusalem to dedicate, on 24 October 1841, the land as he was instructed.6

Following his travels in the Middle East, Orson Hyde spent seven months in Regensburg, Germany, from January 30 to August 1842. “I found it appropriate to stay in this city for a season or two, to enjoy the flowers of German literature, after I had been wandering through the thistles and thorns of the uncivilized world.” During this time, he finished writing Ein Ruf aus der Wüste (A Cry out of the Wilderness), a booklet announcing the restoration and the Book of Mormon. To sustain himself he taught English to students, who may have helped him with his translation. The apostle intended to publish his work in Regensburg, but city officials did not grant permission. He soon succeeded in printing the pamphlet in Frankfurt. This work contained basic teachings of the church and spoke of the Book of Mormon and the angel Moroni, who had directed Joseph Smith to the original plates. In its introduction Orson Hyde stated:

In the course of divine providence it becomes our duty to record one of the remarkable events which gives birth to a new era. . . . It fills the mind with wonder, astonishment and admiration. How welcome are the rays of the morning light, after the shades of darkness have clothed the earth in gloom. So after a long tedious night of moral darkness under which the earth has rolled, and her inhabitants have groaned for the last fourteen hundred years, an Angel, commissioned from the Almighty descended and rolled back the curtains of night. . . . Go forth therefore, little volume, to nations and tongues . . . and may the Almighty speed your way.4

Ein Ruf aus der Wüste was the second foreign-language publication of the church and the first in German. It is not known what effect this booklet had on LDS proselyting efforts in Germany because later missionaries make no mention of it. The tract might have been confiscated.

Interest in Germany and its language began to grow among church members. Shortly after Elder Hyde returned to Nauvoo, he and Joseph Smith read German together.9 The first German immigrant to be baptized in the church in the United States was probably Jacob Zundel in 1836, in Kirtland, Ohio. On 7 December 1842, German-speaking members who had joined the church in America became established in Nauvoo. Daniel Carn was called as the bishop of this German ward.11 A decade later he became the first mission president in Germany and helped translate the Book of Mormon into German.

Another person who would help turn the attention of church leaders, especially that of Joseph Smith, toward Germany was immigrant Alexander Neibauer. He was born on 9 January 1805 in Ehrenbreitstein, Germany, which became part of a reunited nation in 1871. A Jewish dentist-matchmaker, Neibauer immigrated to Preston, England, where he was baptized into the church on 9 April 1838. Soon thereafter, he immigrated to the United States. Having studied at a Berlin university, intending to become a rabbi, Neibauer later taught Joseph Smith Hebrew and German in Nauvoo.

The influence of German and German people seems to have matured in the Prophet Joseph Smith before his death in 1844. He apparently had gained some understanding of the German language, for in his last public speech, given at the funeral of a man named King Follett, he remarked, “I have been reading the German, and find [the Lutheran Bible] to be the most (nearly) correct translation, and to correspond nearest to the revelations which God has given to me for the last fourteen years.” In the same sermon, the acknowledged climax of the Prophet’s career, he translated into English while reading from the German Bible and added, “I know the text is true. I call upon all you Germans who know that it is true to say, Eye [sic]. (Loud shouts of ‘Aye.’)” A few days later Joseph Smith made further reference to this subject: “The Germans are an exalted people. The old German translators are the most nearly correct—most honest of any of the translators.”

“Our missionaries are going forth to different nations, and in Germany . . . the Standard of Truth has been erected,” wrote Joseph Smith in his famous
1842 Wentworth Letter, adding, “no unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing.” The church founder also stated that “out of the different German tribes will yet some day a great nation grow and in these countries many would yet hear and accept the Gospel.” When the Prophet made this statement, Germany was divided into many small states, and unification would not occur until 1871, at the beginning of the Second Reich. Joseph Smith is also quoted as saying that thousands and tens of thousands of the House of Israel are among the German-speaking people.

Joseph Smith did not live to see his predictions fulfilled. However, his assassination in 1844 and the subsequent exodus of Latter-day Saints to the Salt Lake Valley in 1847 did not slow LDS missionary efforts much. Two years after the first Saints arrived in the Great Basin, a major missionary thrust took place. It was the year of the famous California gold rush in 1849, when thousands of Americans headed west. At the same time, Mormon missionaries headed east, including three apostles. Erastus Snow was sent to begin the work in Scandinavia, while Lorenzo Snow was assigned to Italy. A third apostle, John Taylor, went to France. Although the three did not receive direct instructions to work in Germany, Joseph Smith had told them earlier to open other areas “as directed by the Spirit.” It was John Taylor who became most directly involved in laying stepping stones for future missionary work in Germany.

Within months, a series of events brought key individuals together, thereby facilitating the translation of the Book of Mormon into German. The area known as Schleswig-Holstein in northern Germany was at that time under Danish rule. The first two German convert baptisms for which there is any record took place 15 September 1851 in this province that earlier belonged to Germany. The two baptisms were performed by a Scandinavian missionary, George P. Dykes, who knew the German language well. Elder Dykes was subsequently banished from this area and was on his way home to Utah, stopping in London, when he met Elder John Taylor. The apostle had planned to return home from France after arranging for the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon into the French language. However, he received a letter from Brigham Young asking him to work in Europe another year. Elder Taylor wrote in his journal, “It immediately occurred to my mind to go to Germany.” Elder Taylor had actually come to England looking for a British member who could help with the German translation, but he had no success. When he discovered that Elder Dykes was proficient in German, he persuaded the elder not to return home but to meet him in Hamburg. Elder Taylor first stopped in Paris to check on his flock.

George Dykes arrived in Hamburg the latter part of September 1851. John Taylor arrived days later, in October, bringing with him a German schoolteacher, George Viett, who had been converted in Paris. The three began the translation of the Book of Mormon into German. These elders also undertook missionary work at the same time, converting John Miller, who also helped with the translation. Elder Taylor said he asked some of the best professors in Hamburg to look over the early pages of the Book of Mormon translation and a German publication that they started, and only few alterations were made. Elder Taylor had to leave Hamburg when the first draft of the translation of the Book of Mormon into German was only half completed. Threatened with arrest, he returned to Paris on 18 December 1851, where he found France in chaos with Napoleon’s ascendency to power. He soon left for England.

When Elder Taylor first decided to go to Germany, he wrote to Brigham Young in Salt Lake City and asked him to send Daniel Carn to be the mission president in Germany and to help with the translation. While still in London, John Taylor met President Carn on his way to Hamburg. Elder Taylor briefed him about happenings in Germany, including the progress on translating the Book of Mormon. President Carn continued on to Hamburg, arriving on 3 April 1852, a date that marks the formal beginning of the German mission.

President Carn and Elders Dykes, Viett, and Miller worked to finish the translation project. Elder Dykes reported, “I continued my labors in Germany until the translating, revising, printing, and stereotyping of the Book of Mormon in the German language was completed.” He left Germany on 25 May 1852, the day the first edition of the German Book of Mormon and the second printing of the French translation were published side by side in one volume. This was done because those were the two main languages spoken in Hamburg. Separate French and German copies were also printed.

Publishing the Book of Mormon in German was a singular event because little else went right for
church members during the next 20 years. President Carn was arrested and banished several times, including on 22 January 1853, when five new elders arrived. One of the new missionaries was Orson Spencer, who tried to establish missionary work in Berlin but was surrounded by armed soldiers with bayonets. He tried to get an appointment with the king of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm, to present him with a Book of Mormon but was banished from Berlin instead. This failure was in sharp contrast to his earlier work as the British Mission president from 1846 to 1848, when membership there increased by 8,647 souls to 17,902, about the same membership as in the entire United States at that time.

While some missionaries retreated to England to labor because of troubles with the police, others went to distant parts of Germany but had no success. On 3 October 1852 President Carn was again arrested in Hamburg and given “a choice of a $16 fine, eight days in jail, fifty stripes, or leaving.” He decided it would be unwise to remain and went to Denmark. On 24 December 1853 the first German Mission president returned to Utah with 33 German immigrants and about 300 from Scandinavian countries. Perhaps the most important accomplishment of his labors was the publication of the Book of Mormon in German. Other missionaries soon left, and the work in Germany ended for a season. Ironically, at that same time in 1854, 225 miles southeast of Hamburg, in the kingdom of Saxony, the conversion of a prominent educator, Karl G. Maeser, took place. He would later have a remarkable impact on education in the church.

In 1871 independent German federations reunited as one realm known as the Second Reich, with the king of Prussia, Otto von Bismarck, leading the German people. This empire lasted 48 years until Germany lost World War I and the Second Reich came to an end. For Latter-day Saints, progress was reflected in additional publications of the Book of Mormon, beginning in 1871 with the printing of the second edition of the Book of Mormon in Hamburg, where the first edition had come off the press in 1852. The fifth edition, printed in Bern, Switzerland, in 1893, exhibited a major revision reflecting the chapters and verses that had been added to the English editions. The first triple combination, considered the eighth edition, was published in Basel in 1924. Although each of these versions of the Book of Mormon was numbered as a new edition, in reality they were usually reprints of earlier publications. The fifth edition, because of its major reformating, does qualify as an “edition” by today’s standards.

After the second edition of the Book of Mormon appeared in Hamburg in 1871, missionary success improved. The first German Mission had lasted only three years, but now it began to flourish. In the years ahead, conversion success would increase and persecution decrease. By 1930, Germany was the number one foreign-speaking area of the church and second only to the United States in total membership. Beginning in 1959, several printings of the German Book of Mormon were done in Salt Lake City. The first was a completely new 13th edition translated by Jean Wunderlich and Max Zimmer. Between 1974 and 1979 the present edition was prepared and translated by Immo Luschin. At the moment, since this text is so very controversial in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, a new translation is in progress as authorized by the First Presidency. Since 1976, all printings of the Book of Mormon have taken place at the church’s then-new printing and distribution complex in Frankfurt. Counting the first German
To illustrate the importance of the Book of Mormon among German Saints, we note that between 1945 and 1989 devoted Saints in East Germany carried on under the most oppressive conditions behind the “Iron Curtain.” While two dozen or so local missionaries labored at all times and made converts in East Germany, American missionaries in West Berlin took boxes containing copies of the Book of Mormon to East Berlin, and from there the native German missionaries distributed them throughout East Germany, since the American missionaries were not allowed to labor there. Sometimes the books were confiscated at the border, sometimes not. Frequently, East German missionaries who distributed copies of the Book of Mormon were followed by the police, who confiscated the books. There was always a demand for more copies of the Book of Mormon in East Germany, where members of the church relied on printings in the West.

During the dark years of oppression in East Germany, there was one silver lining that helped offset the curtailed growth and lack of freedom. No literature printed in the West after 1920 was permitted in the East Zone of Germany. Latter-day Saint leaders in East Germany asked members to burn lesson manuals and other church material to avoid arrest. This was good advice because police began searching homes of members hoping to find them in violation of the law. Burning this material proved to be an advantage in disguise. Because the Book of Mormon had been published before 1920, it was legal. The lack of lesson materials necessitated that East German Saints center their reading and teaching entirely on the Book of Mormon and the other standard works. One mission president’s wife from Utah, whose husband served in Germany, remarked, “In a way this may be a blessing. I have never known a people so devoted to and so familiar with the scriptures.”

Some East German members reported that the Book of Mormon kept them loyal to the church. One young troubled member, who was tempted to join the Communist party in order to receive preferential treatment, agonized as to what she should do. “I went out walking in the evening, and I thought to myself, ‘Is there really a Father in Heaven?’ I was taught quite differently at school. . . . So I began reading extensively in the Book of Mormon. . . . I became very calm, I felt a genuine peace, but when I stopped reading, anxiety rose up in me again. I didn’t realize what was happening. About a month later, I had such an overwhelming feeling of joy while reading I can’t even describe it. I felt so happy, and from that moment on, I knew I was in the right church, I knew the meaning of life, and I never doubted these things again. I knew them.” In 1955 she served a full-time mission in East Germany.

Most of the isolated Latter-day Saints who lived in Germany during the fearsome war years and their oppressive aftermath became uncommonly steadfast members of the church as they immersed themselves in sacred writ, including the Book of Mormon.
When Elder Lorenzo Snow of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles organized the Italian Mission in the Kingdom of Sardinia in 1850, he began a three-step process that culminated in the translation of the Book of Mormon into Italian.1 At the same time, two dimensions of life in the Italian peninsula converged to open the way for missionary work and the translation of the Book of Mormon into Italian. First, the revolutions that began in 1848 had dissipated, and the Kingdom of Sardinia (whose principal territory and capital were located in northwest Italy in Piedmont) was now viewed as a free enclave for Protestant Christians.2 Second, King Carlo Alberto (1798–1849) of the Kingdom of Sardinia had granted a constitution in 1848 that guaranteed individual liberty, press freedom, the right to congregate without arms, and certain civil and political privileges to non-Catholic minorities (Jews and Waldensians). Nevertheless, there were still serious impediments to the work. The constitution did not guarantee religious liberty to non-Catholics nor the same degree of press freedom that was ensured in England and the United States. In fact, the Catholic Church remained “the sole religion of the State,” and no Bibles, catechisms, or liturgical prayer books (Catholic or non-Catholic) could be published without permission of a Catholic bishop.3

Welcomed by the Waldensians
In June 1850 Elder Snow arrived in the Waldensian valleys, a Protestant enclave located approximately 40 kilometers from Turin. He candidly admitted that during the first phase of the Italian Mission he and his companions did not “actively and publicly engage in communicating the great principles which I had come to promulgate” and that “[a]ll the jealous policy of Italy has been hushed into repose by the comparative silence of our operations.” In fact, during this phase it is unlikely that the Waldensians realized that Mormons were not Protestants. Elder Snow met Charles Beckwith, the Waldensians’ “great benefactor” who had devised a program to train ministers in their own valleys and had encouraged them to look beyond their valleys to seek converts among the Catholic population. In 1848 Beckwith told the Waldensian clergy: “Henceforth, either you are missionaries, or you are nothing.... Stand up for something, or be nothing.” After meeting Beckwith, Elder Snow wrote a letter to President Brigham Young to report that the great benefactor told him, “I shall not attempt to hinder your efforts, and if you preach to all in these valleys as faithfully as to me, you need fear no reproach in the day of judgment.” Beckwith probably concluded that the Waldensians could benefit from observing the...
Mormons, since the Waldensians needed, according to Beckwith, to return to their roots, go forth as missionaries without purse or scrip, and witness to the Catholics in Italy. In large part, because of Beckwith’s benign attitude, Snow and his small band of missionaries were initially welcomed to mingle among the Waldensians and to preach before their congregations.

**Pamphleteering Stirs Opposition**

In December 1850 Elder Snow initiated the second phase of the Italian Mission: to proselytize among the Waldensians and in French-speaking Switzerland. To begin this process, he sent Elder T. B. H. Stenhouse to Switzerland to begin proselytizing in Geneva and Lausanne. Within the next six months, Elder Snow also published two pamphlets in French. The first pamphlet, *Exposition des premiers principes de la doctrine de l’Eglise de Jésus-Christ des Saints des Derniers Jours*, was a translation of *The Only Way to be Saved*, which he had written a decade earlier while serving a mission in England.² It was apparently translated in Turin and published in January 1851 by Louis Arnaldi in the same city.³ The pamphlet described the first principles of the gospel. The discussion was based on passages in the Bible and did not mention Joseph Smith or the Book of Mormon (topics reserved for the second pamphlet).

Elder Snow wrote the second pamphlet, titled *The Voice of Joseph*, especially for the Italian Mission. After “fruitless endeavors” to locate someone in Italy to translate this pamphlet into French, perhaps because its content was obviously non-Catholic, Elder Snow sent the manuscript to England to be translated into French. But in June 1850 Elder Orson Pratt made arrangements with the University of Paris to translate it.⁴ When Elder Snow received the translation, he contracted with a printer in Turin, Ferro et Franco, to produce *La Voix de Joseph* even though the Albertine constitution required that a local bishop give his permission before such works could be published.

Due to its obviously controversial nature, *La Voix de Joseph* was published with “a woodcut of a Catholic Nun, Anchor, Lamp and Cross on the first page, and on the last, Noah’s Ark, the dove and the olive.” Although Elder Snow confused a lamp with a monstrance, all of these symbols were frequently used on religious material, and the printer may have insisted that they be included to avoid the appearance of impropriety.⁵ Despite this precaution, Elder Snow also recognized that he had “published books at the risk of coming into collision with the government. The Catholic priests called upon the Minister of State to prevent their sale, but in spite of every obstacle, we have disposed of nearly all we printed.”⁶

Waldensian pastors became more anxious about Elder Snow’s activities when they learned from *La Voix de Joseph* that Mormonism was not a Protestant church. *La Voix de Joseph* emphasized those aspects of Mormonism that were particularly attractive to some French-speaking Waldensians. It recounted Joseph Smith’s first vision and subsequent events leading to the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon in 1830. It also described Joseph Smith’s teachings that the primitive church had been restored through revelation and that the church was endowed with continuing revelation, spiritual gifts, and priesthood authority. It explained the Mormon doctrine of gathering converts to America in anticipation of the Millennium and also a church program—the Perpetual Emigrating Fund—that provided financial assistance to those who could not afford to emigrate.
Elder Snow sent Elder Stenhouse to Switzerland because he recognized that the Waldensians’ alignment with the Swiss reformers, and the “long . . . [and] intimate connection between the Protestants here [in the valleys] and in Switzerland,” provided him with an opportunity to ensure “that the Gospel may be established in both places.”12 Shortly after arriving in Switzerland, Elder Stenhouse began distributing Elder Snow’s pamphlets, and the following year he republished *Exposition des premiers principes*.13 These pamphlets attracted more criticism from Protestant writers in Switzerland than they had in the Waldensian valleys. In 1851 Louis Favez, then a pastor of the Swiss Reformed Church, wrote a pamphlet published in Vevey that criticized Elder Snow’s pamphlets.14 Two years later another Swiss cleric, Emile Guers, published a tract in Geneva that also discussed *La Voix de Joseph* and *Exposition des premiers principes*.15 Both Favez’s and Guers’ pamphlets were eventually circulated in the Waldensian valleys.16 To counter these criticisms, Elder Stenhouse began publishing a church periodical, *Le Reflécteur*, in January 1853, and the following year he published a book that rebutted Favez and Guers.17 Both Swiss clerics responded to Elder Stenhouse’s censure in three pamphlets between 1854 and 1856. These pamphlets discussed the Book of Mormon that was published in French in 1852.18

**Translating the Book of Mormon into Italian**

In January 1851 Elder Snow returned to England, where he planned the third and most important phase of the Italian Mission. Because the Waldensians comprised less than 1 percent of the total population of the Italian peninsula, Elder Snow believed that an Italian translation of the Book of Mormon and other missionary pamphlets would help facilitate an expansion of the mission to Turin, Genoa, Nice, and other cities in the Kingdom of Sardinia. Surprisingly, we know almost nothing about that translation effort.

In March 1851 Elder Snow retained a scholar in England to translate the Book of Mormon into Italian.19 To this day, the identity of this person remains unknown, for it appears in none of the records—private or ecclesiastical—from that era. In August, Elder Snow reported, “I am getting forward very well with the translation of the ‘Book of Mormon.’ I shall commence with the printing shortly, and will soon be able to present it to the people of Italy in their own language.”20 The translation was completed by October, and in December William Bowden, a London printer, began printing *Il Libro di Mormon*. In April 1852 Bowden finished printing 1,000 copies of *Il Libro di Mormon*. Out of this print run 167 copies were bound in the same type of green, blue, and brown sheep binding that was used for the third English edition of the Book of Mormon published in Liverpool during the same year, and 25 copies were bound in blue-purple morocco binding as presentation copies for the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Deseret University, and the Territorial Recorders Office.21

When Elder Snow returned to Italy in March 1852, he carried the unbound signatures for the first 400 pages of *Il Libro di Mormon*. On his way, while he was visiting Elder Stenhouse in Switzerland, he showed these signatures to Costantino Reta, a former member of the Subalpine Parliament (the House of Deputies in the Kingdom of Sardinia) who was forced into exile in 1849 because he had participated in the attempt to establish a republican government in Genoa. Reta, who taught Italian in Geneva and Lausanne, assured Elder Snow that it was “a correct and admirable translation, and a very appropriate style of language.”22 Before returning to Italy, Elder Snow also commissioned an Italian translation of *The Only Way to be Saved*, which was retitled *Restaurazione dell’antico Evangelio, ossia esposizione dei primi principii della dottrina della Chiesa di Gesù dei santi degli ultimi giorni* (Ancient Gospel Restored: An Explanation of the First Principles of the Doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints). This pamphlet was published, apparently without the name of the printer, when Elder Snow returned to Italy.23

**Missionary Work in the Catholic Cities**

After Elder Snow returned to the Waldensian valleys, he encouraged his missionaries to proselytize in the largest Italian-speaking cities in the Kingdom of Sardinia: Turin, Nice, and Genoa. Shortly thereafter, two missionaries took lodgings in Turin. They published announcements, placed in cafes and on the streets, in which they stated they were “authorized to give all necessary information” concerning their church and that they would be present “every-day from 7 to 9 in the evening, in via della Chiesa, n. 9 bis, left staircase, at the end of the courtyard, first floor” to explain to the public “information concerning their doctrines and emigration program which
they have established to the United States.” Although it is unclear whether these missionaries had copies of *Il Libro di Mormon*, they did distribute copies of *Restaurazione dell’antico Evangelio*. At least one Catholic newspaper was offended by the presence of Mormon missionaries in the capital city of the Kingdom of Sardinia.

*L’Armonia* was one of many newspapers founded in Turin in 1848 after the Albertine constitution was granted. It was not an official organ of the Catholic Church and in fact was considered ultraconservative by other more moderate Catholic newspapers. On 1 August 1853 *L’Armonia* published a supplement with a headline for its lead story that announced “Mormons in Torino [Turin].” The article discussed, for the first time in an Italian newspaper, the history and contents of the Book of Mormon. It also provided information on church history and doctrines. The article argued that both Mormons and Waldensians were conducting missionary work and publishing religious pamphlets contrary to the law of the Kingdom of Sardinia and that the government was ignoring this and, as a result, undermining the Catholic Church.

One week later the headline of the lead article in *L’Armonia* asked, “Who is better off in Torino? The Catholics or the Mormons?” The newspaper complained that “unfortunately the Mormons, about whom we wrote last Sunday, are in Torino beginning their mission in the shadow of liberty, under the beneficial influence of the three-colored flag, protected by those great and spastic Catholics who are our state ministers.” The article discussed Elder Snow’s *Restaurazione dell’antico Evangelio* and warned readers not to be surprised if the missionaries began publishing a newspaper in Turin, or even built a temple, because the government’s ministers might allow such activities with a “nod of the head” because of their “agreed upon love of liberty.” In fact, the Waldensians were publishing a paper and building a temple in Turin at the time the article was published. The article then complained of what it characterized as the government’s shabby treatment of the Catholic Church while the Mormon missionaries were being allowed to conduct their activities without fear of legal action. Eventually the government prosecuted the owners of *L’Armonia* for its dogged opposition to the Risorgimento (the movement to unify Italy) and for its continued criticisms of government ministers.

Following the appearance of these articles in 1852, *L’Armonia* did not report specific Mormon missionary activity in Turin. The missionaries were unsuccessful in their quest to convert Catholic investigators, and this failure probably explains the lack of continued newspaper coverage. One Mormon missionary speculated that the “Catholics have been much more civil to us than the Protestants for some time, perhaps it has been because we have not menaced their positions heretofore.” But *L’Armonia* did continue to report on Mormonism in general, including political events in Utah. Meanwhile, supplied with copies of *Il Libro di Mormon* and *Restaurazione dell’antico Evangelio*, Mormon missionaries repeated their attempts to find converts in Turin and other cities in the Kingdom of Sardinia. Without exception, their visits were brief because of the city’s hostile environment. In July 1853 Thomas Margetts reported: “On my arrival in Turin I found that I was well known.... Finding I could not remain there more than a few days, I was compelled to return to the vallies [sic] of the Waldenses.”

In March 1854 Elder Stenhouse reported that because of “the many difficulties and much suffering attending open circulation of our publications in
Italy, I have been led to change tactics, and have sent two young Geneva Elders to Turin and Nice, to labor at their occupations, and to seek out opportunities of distributing the printed word, and of doing as much more as circumstances and the Spirit of the Lord may direct.”30 In June 1856 Elder Samuel Francis reported that he was determined to establish “a Turin Branch, of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, before the close of 1856.31 He attempted to proselytize not only among the Catholics but also among the Protestants who held services in the city. He reported that he had “a good supply of the Only Way to be Saved, in Italian (the only work we have in that language, except the Book of Mormon),” which he distributed “at the church doors, and along the public walks and gardens.” But he also complained that there continued to be negative articles about the church in the local press.32

Ultimately Il Libro di Mormon did not have a major impact in Italy during the 19th century. One of the only remaining testaments to Il Libro di Mormon in Italy during the 19th century is a copy that remains in the collection of the Biblioteca Comunale di Pinerolo. All but one of the 171 Mormon converts were French-speaking Waldensians.3 The first introduction that most of these converts had to the Book of Mormon was the explanation given by Lorenzo Snow in La Voix de Joseph. One of the first Mormon converts in Italy was described as a “firm believer in The Voice of Joseph.” The church was unable to distribute Il Libro di Mormon in the Catholic cities because the constitution and laws of the Kingdom of Sardinia did not guarantee religious liberty. The Catholic Church was the state religion under the “Statuto.” No minority religion was authorized to assemble, to publish religious propaganda, or to seek converts among the Catholic population. Even the Waldensian Moderator (the highest church official) complained to his representative in Parliament that Mormon missionaries were breaking the law by proselytizing in the Protestant valleys.34 Although the government refused to expel Mormon missionaries from the valleys, preferring to tolerate them in a rural “ghetto,” it would not allow them to establish congregations in the rest of the kingdom. Prime Minister Camillo Cavour’s proclamation that there would be “a free church in a free state,” that the state had the right to dismantle many of the prerogatives of the Catholic Church, and that non-Catholic religions should be allowed to worship was conditioned by his observation that “the King’s government cannot tolerate proselytism or public acts in locations where they could produce popular tumult and disorder.”35

The first Italian converts, including Joseph Toronto and Vincenzo di Francesca, read the Book of Mormon in English. Most of the print run from Il Libro di Mormon was not bound during the 19th century, and after the Italian Mission was closed in 1867, those signatures were shipped to Salt Lake City. The surviving signatures were eventually bound in variant cloth bindings during the early 20th century.36 In 1929 the Church of Jesus Christ (Bickertonites) published another Italian edition of the Book of Mormon for distribution to its Italian-speaking investigators. In 1964 the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints published a new Italian translation of the Book of Mormon shortly before the Italian Mission was rededicated in November 1966 by Elder Ezra Taft Benson in the Waldensian valleys. Since that time, many thousands of copies of Il Libro di Mormon have been distributed in Italy. It has become the key to the conversion of the core membership, which is now concentrated in the Italian-speaking metropolitan areas of not only Turin and Genoa but also Florence, Milan, Rome, and many other cities throughout the Republic of Italy.
In June 1850, Thomas Conway, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in North Wales, expressed in the above verse the longing of many Welsh Saints to have the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants in a language they could understand. At that time the Welsh converts to the church numbered more than 4,000, the vast majority of whom could not read or speak English. Latter-day Saint missionaries proselytized in Wales for more than a decade without the benefit of a Welsh translation of the Book of Mormon, a key tool for conversion. In the fall of 1840 the first branch of the church was established in the little town of Overton in North Wales, very near the border with England. The Welsh language was not widely spoken in this farming community and surrounding areas, so a Welsh Book of Mormon was not needed.

Just over two years later, when Elder Lorenzo Snow sent William Henshaw to the heartland of Wales, to the industrial town of Merthyr Tydfil, there was a definite need for proselytizing materials in Welsh. Not only did Elder Henshaw go about his missionary work without such Welsh-language tools, but he did not speak a word of the ancient Celtic tongue. Fortunately, however, Merthyr Tydfil was becoming quite cosmopolitan and had a fair number of English speakers. Many of these English-speaking residents, such as William R. Davies, came from among the native Welsh. Davies, his wife Rachel, and their two teenaged sons, George and John, were all baptized in February 1843, the first-fruits of Elder Henshaw’s efforts.

Davies and his sons were instrumental in the conversion of some of their fellow coal miners, the majority of whom spoke only Welsh. New members introduced family members and friends to the church, and within a few months there was a growing nucleus of the church in Merthyr Tydfil. However, with the exception of one small pamphlet in Welsh on the first principles of the gospel, the only church literature available to the branch members was in English.

The person who would eventually initiate the printing of Welsh-language materials was Captain Dan Jones. On 11 May 1843, four months after being baptized in the Mississippi River and one month after meeting the Prophet Joseph Smith, Dan Jones was called to serve a mission to Wales. More than a year later, shortly before the Prophet Joseph Smith was martyred, he told Jones: “I have a check in the house for $1200; as soon as I can get it cashed you shall have $1100 of it, and the start for Wales, not with your fingers in your mouth but prepared to buy a press, and do business aright.”
Because of the confusion resulting from the martyrdom, the promised money was never given to Dan Jones. However, Brigham Young sent an order for $500 to the Liverpool office of the church, and Jones was permitted to draw from that fund to cover his living and publishing expenses as a missionary in Wales.

In April 1845, just three months after beginning his mission, Elder Jones published his first pamphlet, a 48-page treatise on the immutability of the kingdom of God, printed by the William Bayley press in Wrexham, North Wales. Eight months later he wrote to Brigham Young about another publication:

After so long a silence I take the liberty thus to reintroduce myself, and send you & each of the Twelve, a copy of the Welsh translation of yr [your] “Proclamation,” tho’ now near midnight, tis but a few minutes since I finished printing 4000, with my own hand, on a borrowed Press.9

The “borrowed Press” belonged to Jones’s brother John, an ordained Congregationalist minister in Rhydybont, a village near Llanybydder, Carmarthenshire. Other members of the Welsh clergy irreverently referred to the Reverend John Jones’s press as the “prostitute press” because he allowed LDS materials to be printed on it.10

With the exception of his first pamphlet, all of Dan Jones’s church publications during his first mission (1845–49) were printed on his brother’s press at Rhydybont. Working at the press during the latter part of 1845 and the first part of 1846 was a 23-year-old employee by the name of John S. Davis. While setting the type for some of Dan Jones’s early publications, Davis took a serious interest in the doctrines of the church and requested baptism. Five years later he would translate the Book of Mormon into Welsh.

During his first mission, Dan Jones produced a variety of publications: several pamphlets, a 580-page periodical titled Prophet of the Jubilee, a 288-page scriptural commentary, a 104-page history of the church, and a small hymnal.11 Noticeably absent from this impressive list is a Welsh translation of the Book of Mormon. Jones undoubtedly wanted to make this standard work of his faith available to his fellow countrymen, nearly 4,000 of whom had received baptism into the church before Jones’s release from his mission at the end of 1848. Had Jones published the Book of Mormon in Welsh during his first mission to Wales, it would have been the first translation of that book besides Joseph Smith’s original English translation. Perhaps sufficient funds were not available for that undertaking, or perhaps Jones’s church leaders in Liverpool were simply reluctant to authorize such a huge, pioneering project.

Oddly enough, the Doctrine and Covenants appeared in the Welsh language before the Book of Mormon.12 John Davis, selected to oversee all printing activities for the church in Wales when Dan Jones emigrated in early 1849, announced in August 1850 that he had been “counseled” to translate and publish the Doctrine and Covenants. His announcement appeared in Udgorn Seion (Zion’s Trumpet), the official Mormon periodical in Wales and successor to Prophet of the Jubilee.13 His intention was to send out a 16-page “signature” of the Doctrine and...
Covenants in Welsh every other week with an issue of the periodical. He proudly announced in the 22 February 1851 issue of Zion’s Trumpet that the first signature of the Llyfr Athrawiaeth a Chyfammodau was off the press. He also wrote, “If the Saints in general wish it to be published every week instead of every fortnight for one-and-a-half pence, let us know.” The response to Davis’s idea was positive, for in 27 weeks from that time the 20th and final signature was sent out with the 23 August 1851 Zion’s Trumpet. These 20 signatures were then to be bound together for the final product.

About a month before finishing the Doctrine and Covenants, Davis announced the following in the 26 July 1851 Zion’s Trumpet: “We wish for all the Presidents and the Distributors to gather subscriptions for the Book of Mormon without delay. It will come out in the same manner as the ‘Doctrine and Covenants,’ until it is complete, for a penny and a half per signature. It will probably contain from 30 to 32 signatures.” Sent out with that issue of the periodical was a flyer containing a list of publications in Welsh on one side and a prospectus for the Book of Mormon on the other. In the prospectus, Davis outlined the procedure for producing his translation and proudly stated, “The entire book will be printed with completely new type, and on good paper, and each Signature will contain more reading than the Signatures of the ‘Doctrine and Covenants.”

In Zion’s Trumpet John Davis offered strong encouragement to his team of distributors and church leaders throughout Wales to be very aggressive in obtaining a large number of subscriptions:

9 August 1851—Now is the time for the Presidents and the Distributors, and all the Saints, to strive for the sale of the Book of Mormon among our nation; be as one man. We have begun to translate it, and pray for us that we might have every gift necessary for such an important task. Let us know, without fail, by the 31st of August, what number will be received in each place. Do not neglect this. It is quite likely that a signature will come out every week, although we cannot promise that every time.

6 September 1851—BOOK OF MORMON AGAIN.—We are sorry that we have but 1,223 subscribers at this point. We must delay until more are obtained. The little branch of Pontytypridd has requested 138, which represents true effort; and if every branch and conference were to do as this branch has done, we would have over 5,000 subscribers. Brethren, strive harder; our Father is all-wealthy, and he will give money to you.

20 September 1851—BOOK OF MORMON.—The number of subscriptions for the Book of Mormon has almost reached 1,500, not counting the order from Liverpool for 200 after it is finished. The 1st Signature will come out with this Trumpet; and if the number of subscribers increases to two thousand by the 10th signature, the signatures from the 20th on will be priced at one penny each! Please take note, brethren.

After receiving the first few signatures of the Welsh translation of the Book of Mormon, Thomas Conway sent John Davis his appreciation in verse:

Rejoice, all you monoglot Welshmen,  
We shall have the wish of us all,  
Namely the translation of the BOOK OF MORMON  
Into our harmonious and unfading language:  
The fulness of times has come,  
For the God of heaven to give to us,  
The secrets he gave to Mormon,  
And his dear associates.

Here is the book that for many years,  
Namely for fourteen hundred,  
Was in the earth at Cumorah,  
Like some fair and beautiful treasure;  
It was like the setting sun  
For such a long time:  
Now it is like the shining sun  
Rising to do its work.

Its light is spreading,  
Through different languages of the world,  
Now it is coming to the Welsh;  
Oh, how lovely it gladdens our hearts;  
“And at that day the deaf  
Will hear the words of this book,  
The eyes of the blind will see out  
Of the cloud and darkness,” I know.  
The light of the Book is so dazzling,
That it darkens the weak eyes,
But the eyes will grow strong again,
They will see better presently;
An object of great surprise to the Welsh,
Will be the Book of Mormon when it comes,
In the language of their birth;
Now it is almost here.20

Two weeks after Thomas Conway’s letter and poem, John Davis also expressed his enthusiasm for the project:

BOOK OF MORMON.—We would like to notify the subscribers of the Book of Mormon, that its signatures, from the 20th on, will be a penny each! We congratulate our brethren for the effort they have made in its behalf. We think it best to refrain from cutting its pages before binding it, lest some of them be lost, and that some will not be in order. Since it will be out in about six months, it is best for the most careless not to read it, rather put the signatures safely aside for binding, and after that to remember to read it.21

In the 21 February 1852 issue of Zion’s Trumpet, Davis inserted the following notice:

BOOK OF MORMON.—We wish to notify the distributors of the Book of Mormon that the profit from the 20th signature to the end will be the same as for the Trumpet; and generally the profit with respect to the Welsh Book of Mormon, to all the distributors, will be more than that for the English.22

Finally, on 17 April 1852, 31 weeks after the distribution of the initial signature, Davis sent out the final signature with his periodical. He proudly announced:

We are happy to inform our readers that the last number of the Book of Mormon, in Welsh, is being sent out with this TRUMPET; and we feel gratitude in our hearts to God, for providing us with health and abilities to complete a task that was so important in our sight. The Welsh nation has reason to rejoice, that they have this treasure in their own language, and that they now in many respects stand equal with others of their brethren in privileges. We believe that public thanks should be given to God for his goodness toward us as a nation.23

He also gave some advice concerning the binding procedure:

Since the ink in new books requires time to dry, it will not be wise to bind the Book of Mormon too soon, unless you warn the binder not to push too hard on it, so as not to cause it to be printed double. We will receive the Book of Mormon here to bind it, the same as we did for the “Doctrine and Covenants,” and for about the same price; and whoever wishes to get a handsome and inexpensive binding done in London may send us the volume, and we shall endeavor to take care of it. We will need to raise the price for those who do not come to request their volumes promptly, after we have let them know of their arrival from London, for we have to pay for them when we receive them.24

At that time the periodical appeared every two weeks, so an average of two signatures of the Book of Mormon in Welsh accompanied each issue of Zion’s Trumpet.

Two interesting sidelights to the translation are preserved in a biographical sketch of John Davis in Orson F. Whitney’s History of Utah: first, the entire translation was written with one quill pen; second, Samuel Evans, editor of Seren Gomer (Star of Gomer), a Baptist periodical for which Davis worked before becoming a Latter-day Saint, said that it was a “pity such valuable labor in producing so perfect a translation had been bestowed upon so worthless a work as the Book of Mormon.”25

In his foreword to the Welsh edition of the Book of Mormon, titled “Foreword to the Welsh” and dated 6 April 1852, Davis stated that the translation was “the best that could be done under disadvantages which the majority of translators do not labor under.” He explained that “perspicuity and plain language” had been sought more than “any kind of adornment.” Davis also declared to the antagonists of Mormonism in Wales: “Many of you have freely given your opinion of this book and condemned it without ever having seen it; but now after [our] laboring so long under disadvantages, you can read it for yourselves and see whether your former opinions were correct.”26 Davis did not specify what those disadvantages were. Perhaps he had reference to the lack of qualified typesetters and proofreaders from among church members, the vast majority of whom had but little formal education. Or perhaps he
meant the very cramped conditions where the press was located in his home on John’s Street, in an area of Merthyr Tydfil known as Georgetown.

John Davis was one of the most highly educated converts to the church in mid-19th-century Wales. His education came not as much from years of formal schooling as it did from years of setting type and reading proof of numerous publications in both Welsh and English. He became a printer’s apprentice at the age of 13. During his apprenticeship his exposure to proper grammar, to exposition of ideas, to logic in arguing points of view, and to the world of printing in general equipped him well to serve as editor of the church’s Welsh-language periodical in 1849 and to assume at that time the responsibility for all church publications in his native tongue.

When permission was granted to prepare a translation of the Doctrine and Covenants in August 1850, Davis had already produced 18 issues of *Udgorn Seion*, 21 pamphlets of various sizes, a dozen poems, a large register book for keeping membership records, and a 104-page hymnal. In the 27 weeks from 22 February 1851 to 23 August 1851, Davis published all 20 signatures of the Doctrine and Covenants. And in the 31 weeks from 20 September 1851 to 17 April 1852, he published all 31 signatures of the Book of Mormon. During this period of time, Davis married Elizabeth Phillips on 30 December 1850, moved from Nantygwenith Street to John’s Street by 11 January 1851, became a father on 8 December 1851, and served as counselor to William S. Phillips during his five-year tenure as mission president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Wales from January 1849 to December 1853. He emigrated to Utah in 1854, where he continued as a printer and later as a merchant. Orson F. Whitney characterizes John Davis as being of “a retiring disposition, gentle but impressive in manner, a deliberate thinker, and a vigorous writer.”

Davis’s work in translating and publishing the Doctrine and Covenants and the Book of Mormon is nothing short of remarkable, especially considering the narrow time frames and the labor-intensive conditions. No further Welsh translations of either of these volumes of scripture have been made.
A THIRD JAREDITE RECORD

THE SEALED PORTION OF THE GOLD PLATES

VALENTIN ARTS
The Book of Mormon informs us about two Jaredite records possessed by the Nephites. The first was a large stone with engravings that recounted the history of Coriantumr and his slain people, as well as a few words concerning his fathers. The people of Zarahemla brought this stone to Mosiah the elder, who translated the engravings by the gift and power of God (see Omni 1:20–22). Several decades later, King Limhi sent a small number of men to search for the land of Zarahemla. On this expedition they found 24 gold plates among the bones of a destroyed people (see Mosiah 21:25–27). Mosiah the younger translated this second Jaredite record by the gift and power of God (see Mosiah 28:11–13). Moroni abridged these 24 plates and called the record the book of Ether (see Ether 1:2). This abridgment, which does not contain the "hundredth part" of the original (Ether 15:33), is included in the Book of Mormon.

Evidence demonstrates that the Nephites also possessed a third Jaredite record, one that was translated only after Jesus Christ’s appearance to the Nephites. This study will focus on who wrote this record, what it contained, how the Nephites obtained it, and what became of it. Most of the evidence for my conclusions is found in Ether 3–5. Within these chapters, Moroni provides us with a wealth of information on this third Jaredite record that has often been neglected or overlooked.

The Vision of the Brother of Jared

The unabridged book of Ether contained a history of the Jaredites, whose civilization lasted many centuries longer than that of the Nephites, as well as an account of "the creation of the world, and also of Adam, and an account from that time even to the great tower" (Ether 1:3). Ether is the author of the book and probably consulted many records to write his inspired history, much as Mormon appealed to the Nephite records to write his own account. In his abridgment of Ether’s book, Moroni omits the first part of Ether’s account, the early Genesis story, because he knows that it will come to our knowledge through the record of the Jews (see Ether 1:3–4). He then begins the abridged history, or rather prosopography (which is more like an annotated genealogy), by giving the genealogy from Ether back to Jared. From there Moroni starts the story line with the account of Jared and the Tower of Babel and ends with the life of the prophet Ether and the destruction of the Jaredites.

While commenting on the most important persons and events of Jaredite history, Moroni digresses several times to draw attention to important lessons, usually starting with the words “And now I, Moroni...” (Ether 3:17; 5:1; 8:20; 12:6). In the first digression, which is also the longest, Moroni informs us about the vision of the brother of Jared, the record that was made of that vision, and its destiny to come forth in the last days (see Ether 3:17–5:6).

Moroni describes in Ether 3:1–16 how the brother of Jared, as a consequence of his efforts to provide light for the barges in order to cross the oceans, first saw the finger of the Lord and afterward the Lord himself in a vision. It is that very important vision upon which Moroni wishes to elaborate.

Moroni informs us that the Lord ministered to the brother of Jared as he ministered to the Nephites (see Ether 3:18). The verb to minister means "to serve or to supply with" and seems to connote more than just conversing or preaching. Moroni does not spell out the exact manner in which the Lord ministered to the brother of Jared, but he does provide us with some clues. Moroni draws a parallel with the ministering of the Lord among the Nephites. We know from the book of 3 Nephi that Jesus taught the people, healed them, and administered ordinances to them such as the sacrament and ordination. Thus we may infer that the Lord also administered ordinances to the brother of Jared, some of which were sacred and not to be revealed. This suggestion can be supported by another clue from Moroni. After the ministering session, the Lord commanded the brother of Jared,

Behold, thou shalt not suffer these things which ye have seen and heard to go forth unto the world, until the time cometh that I shall glorify my name in the flesh; wherefore, ye shall treasure up the things which ye have seen and heard, and show it to no man. And behold, when ye shall come unto me, ye shall write them and shall seal them up, that no one can interpret them; for ye shall write them in a language that they cannot be read. (Ether 3:21–22)

The brother of Jared was not to divulge the things he had "seen and heard." He was further commanded to treasure up the things that he had learned. Then he was once more commanded to “show” his knowledge to no one. The word show in this verse deserves our attention because it must refer to a particular kind of
knowledge, namely the kind that can be shown or demonstrated visually. This commandment might refer to the record of the Lord’s ministering to the brother of Jared, which was to remain hidden or sealed; but we are also informed in the next verse that he was not allowed to write “these things” until he would come unto the Lord, or, in other words, at the end of his life.1 During his lifetime, the brother of Jared was therefore not able to show in written form the things he had seen and heard. He had to remember it all. Hence, the Lord stresses that he treasure up the things that he had heard and seen. If the knowledge that the Savior was referring to consisted of sacred ordinances, it was indeed important for him to remember it, since he could not be reminded of any sacred words or signs by anyone else. Such ordinances were to be performed only after the resurrection of Christ, including those for departed spirits. This view makes sense of the Lord’s commandment to the brother of Jared not to show the things he had both heard and seen and to delay making a record of them.

As has been noted, at the end of his life the brother of Jared was to seal up his record of the sacred things he had received from the Lord (see Ether 3:22). The Lord further declared that he had confounded the language in which the brother of Jared should write, so that those things could not be read except through the interpreters (see Ether 3:22–24). From this we might suppose that because the record was not readable for anyone without the interpreters, it was, in a way, already sealed and thus may not have needed further physical attachment or burying. However, it appears that when the Lord commanded him also to seal up the two interpreting stones (see Ether 3:23), the sealing involved a physical act. Keeping in mind the way that Moroni uses the term seal up when referring to the gold plates, and remembering the commandment of the Lord to the brother of Jared to “show them [the interpreters] not” (Ether 3:28), we can infer that the record of the brother of Jared had to be buried in the ground.

The interpreting stones were prepared for the special purpose of translating this record of the Lord’s ministering unto the brother of Jared: “These two stones will I [the Lord] give unto thee, and ye shall seal them up . . . ; wherefore . . . these stones shall magnify . . . these things which ye shall write” (Ether 3:23–24). The interpreters were to remain with the record for which they were prepared until it was translated. This understanding is very important for the thesis that a third Jaredite record contained the full account of the brother of Jared’s vision. It implies that any reference to either the sealed record or the interpreters would mean that both were held in possession at the same time. (The information that the Book of Mormon provides on this matter will be considered later in this study.)

After the Lord ministered unto him and gave him the commandments concerning this record, the brother of Jared was shown another vision, or the rest of the same vision. He saw all the inhabitants of the earth, “even unto the ends of the earth,” for “the Lord could not withhold anything from him” (Ether 3:25–26). It appears that Moroni is not our only source for the contents of that vision. Nephi, commenting on the prophecy of Isaiah about a sealed book (which refers to the sealed part of the gold plates), said: “They reveal all things from the foundation of the world unto the end thereof . . . ; and all things shall be revealed unto the children of men which ever have been among the children of men, and which ever will be even unto the end of the earth” (2 Nephi 27:10–11). Moroni tells us that “never were greater things made manifest than those which were made manifest unto the brother of Jared” (Ether 4:4). Moroni does not say that the brother of Jared was the only or even the first prophet to receive such a great vision. He only says something about the vision itself. There are many examples of prophets who have seen very similar visions.2 It is important to realize, however, that it was the special privilege of, and commandment to, the brother of Jared to record the vision in full, something forbidden to other prophets. The reason the brother of Jared, of all great prophets, was chosen for this task could be that it would serve the Lord’s plan that a knowledge of this record would be given to the Nephites in their day and to the Latter-day Saints in the future. Both groups, then, will have had the opportunity to possess the sealed record and its interpreters.

The Lord speaks in the future tense in Ether 3:22: “When ye shall come unto me, ye shall write them and shall seal them up.” But in verses 3:27 and 4:1 the Lord commands him to “write these things and seal them up” and to “write the things which he had seen,” as if the brother of Jared had to fulfill the commandment straightaway. Possibly the second part of the vision, wherein he saw all the inhabitants of the earth and the history of mankind from the
beginning until the end, was to be recorded first and immediately, while the part wherein the Lord ministered unto him had to be recorded later on in his life. In any case, both records were to be sealed up with the interpreters, not to be shown to anyone until the due time of the Lord.

The Book of Ether and the Vision of the Brother of Jared

Because Moroni interrupts his story on the migration of the Jaredites to tell more about the great vision of the brother of Jared, and only afterward continues his story of the Jaredites, it is possible that the record of that vision was contained in the unabridged book of Ether. It seems apparent that Moroni received his information about the vision from those 24 plates and that he made only a few general comments on the vision while abridging that record. It is certain that Ether did indeed include some information in his book about that great vision (see Ether 12:20). However, he could not have included the entire record of that vision by the brother of Jared. Moroni writes:

> Behold, I have written [note: not abridged] upon these plates the very things which the brother of Jared saw... Wherefore the Lord hath commanded me to write them; and I have written them. (Ether 4:4–5)

While it seems that Moroni had access to the entire record, we will review seven arguments for believing that Moroni could not have copied the record of that vision from the unabridged book of Ether.

First of all, there simply was not enough space on the 24 plates to contain such an extensive record. This point can easily be demonstrated by doing a little arithmetic. The sealed portion of the gold plates contains, as Moroni explains, the complete record of the brother of Jared’s vision. After elaborating on the origin and future of the record of this great vision (see Ether 3:17–4:19), Moroni writes a short letter, effectively addressed to Joseph Smith, wherein he warns him not to touch the sealed plates, evidently so he can keep the gift to translate them (see Ether 5:1). Although we might suppose that other great revelations were also contained in the sealed part of the gold plates, the Book of Mormon does not support this idea. Nephi, explaining the prophecy of Isaiah 29:11–12, writes:

> And it shall come to pass that the Lord God shall bring forth unto you the words of a book, and they shall be the words of them which have slumbered. And behold the book shall be sealed; and in the book shall be a revelation from God, from the beginning of the world to the ending thereof. . . . Wherefore the book shall be kept from them. . . . For the book shall be sealed by the power of God, and the revelation which was sealed shall be kept in the book until the own due time of the Lord, that they may come forth; for behold, they reveal all things from the foundation of the world unto the end thereof. (2 Nephi 27:6–8, 10)

Nephi refers to the content of the sealed part of the plates in the singular as a or the revelation from God, which will reveal all things from the beginning to the end. It seems evident that he is referring to the great vision of the brother of Jared. In this connection, early and modern church leaders have taught that the sealed part of the gold plates consisted of the record of the vision of the brother of Jared. If the great vision of the brother of Jared constituted about two-thirds of the gold plates, it should render us more than twice as many pages (about 1,000) of English translation as those in our current Book of Mormon, which represents less than one-third of the gold plates, if we take into account the 116 pages that were lost by Martin Harris. We also read that Moroni did not record the “hundredth part” of the Jaredite history as written by Ether (Ether 15:33). If we take that statement literally, as well as exclude Moroni’s insertions of approximately 7 pages out of 30 in the English translation of the book of Ether, the unabridged book of Ether would render more than 2,300 pages of English translation. This amount of text from only 24 plates seems rather difficult, but we simply have to believe Moroni on this point. However, if we suppose the record of the vision of the brother of Jared was also included on those plates, another 1,000 pages would have to be translated from them. So much text from so few plates is simply impossible. The problem of limited space on those plates suggests that the Nephites possessed another Jaredite record. Lack of space on the 24 plates, however, is by no means the only, nor the most important, inconsistency that supports this view.

The second observation has to do with the very sacred nature of the revelation to the brother of...
Jared. This record was not to be unsealed until Christ showed himself unto the Nephites (see Ether 4:1). However, there is no indication anywhere that even part of the 24 plates was sealed. A large part of the Jaredite record would have been sealed if it had contained the record of the brother of Jared’s vision. Mormon gives us detailed information on what the people of Limhi found, including the rust on the hiltless swords (see Mosiah 8:11), but there is no mention that a portion of the plates was sealed, something that could hardly have escaped attention and thus inclusion in the text. Furthermore, we read that Mosiah the younger “translated and caused to be written the records which were on the plates of gold which had been found by the people of Limhi, which were delivered to him by the hand of Limhi” (Mosiah 28:11). Because there is no hint in this statement that Mosiah translated only a part of the 24 plates, we may assume that they were translated in their entirety. We also read that after Mosiah had finished translating it, this record “gave an account of the people who were destroyed, from the time that they were destroyed back to the building of the great tower, at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people and they were scattered abroad upon the face of all the earth, yea, and even from that time back until the creation of Adam” (Mosiah 28:17). This passage refers only to Jaredite history, not to the sealed vision. If the sealed record was included, the Lord would not have allowed it to be unsealed in the days of Mosiah. It seems that Mosiah was allowed to translate all that was written on the 24 plates.

My third point also deals with the sacred character of the record of the brother of Jared. The Lord commanded the brother of Jared to seal up his record so it would not be made public or fall into the wrong hands. The people of Limhi found the 24 plates somewhere among the bones and ruins of the Jaredites (see Mosiah 8:8–9). This circumstance is very strange, to say the least, when we consider the sacredness and importance of the sealed record. Although scripture has come to us before in unusual ways (e.g., the Book of Abraham), it does not seem the Lord’s way that a most sacred record be found, apparently unsealed and by chance, by a group of soldiers, particularly in an era when the Lord expressly commanded that it should not come to the world.

Fourth, it is not only the length and nature of the sacred record that indicate the great vision was not written on the 24 plates. If the vision was contained in the book of Ether, something very important was missing: the interpreters. We notice that the people of Limhi did not have means wherewith to translate the discovered record, which would not have been the case if it contained the great vision. We recall that the Lord commanded the brother of Jared to seal up the interpreters together with his records for the purpose of translating them. Not King Limhi but, very interestingly, King Mosiah the younger in the land of Zarahemla was in possession of interpreters, evidently those that the Lord had entrusted to the brother of Jared. This is most remarkable because, reversing the argument, it implies that Mosiah had not only the interpreters but also custody of the sealed record (see Ether 4:1–2; Mosiah 8:13–14) even before he received the book of Ether, since the sealed vision and the interpreters must come together (see Ether 3:23, 28). That the interpreters of King Mosiah were the very same that the brother of Jared had received becomes obvious from Doctrine and Covenants 17:1, where we learn that Joseph Smith also had custody of the Urim and Thummim that were given to the brother of Jared. To assume that Mosiah, or the Nephites in general, had other interpreters than the ones given to the brother of Jared would raise more questions than it would answer.

Fifth, there is a stronger point—one based on chronological reasons—that shows the sealed record was not contained in the book of Ether. The printer’s manuscript of the Book of Mormon reads “Benjamin” instead of “Mosiah” in Ether 4:1: “for this cause did king Mosiah keep them.” Critics have assumed that the change from the original name Benjamin to the current name Mosiah provides evidence that Joseph Smith wrote the book himself, since it is an obvious anachronism to refer to King Benjamin when we are also told that the 24 plates were not brought to Zarahemla until the days of his son Mosiah. Although most Latter-day Saints attach little weight to the change, it is generally accepted that it would indeed be an anachronism if we were still to read “Benjamin” in this verse. This change from the original translation is one of the very few of a few thousand changes that really can affect the meaning of what is said. If the Mosiah of Ether 4:1 was Mosiah the younger, the original reference to Benjamin would be an anachronism and thus be a “mistake of man,” as Moroni calls such an error on the title page. In fact, this change
has actually led to serious misunderstanding because we almost automatically assume that Mosiah the younger is meant. However, the change appears to be an improvement rather than a correction, for it seems that not Mosiah the younger but his grandfather Mosiah the elder is meant, which leaves the original reading of "Benjamin" perfectly correct. This is because, if King Benjamin did keep back the records of the vision, "that they should not come unto the world until after Christ should show himself unto his people" (Ether 4:1), the record could not possibly have been written on the 24 plates, which were only later handed over to his son Mosiah.

My sixth observation arises from this statement of Moroni: "Behold, I have written upon these plates the very things which the brother of Jared saw.... Wherefore the Lord hath commanded me to write them; and I have written them" (Ether 4:4–5). It appears from these verses that Moroni had already finished writing, or copying, the whole vision of the brother of Jared even before he had finished, or possibly even begun, the abridgment of the book of Ether. The phrase “these plates” refers to the gold plates that were delivered to Joseph Smith. This is an important chronological note. Apparently, the record of the sealed vision was attached (or ready to be attached) to the gold plates even before Moroni finished abridging the book of Ether and before he added his own book of Moroni. Hence, when Moroni addressed Joseph Smith in Ether 5 to instruct him, he was already referring to the sealed part of the gold plates and had just barely begun to abridge Ether’s book.
The seventh and last point is that Ether alone is the author of the book of Ether (see Ether 1:6; 15:33). Of course, he may have quoted extensively from other sources, as Mormon did. But if he had copied the entire vision of the brother of Jared onto the 24 plates, we are led to ask several compelling questions, such as: Was Ether allowed to unseal the original record of the brother of Jared despite the fact that it was “forbidden to come unto the children of men until after that he [Jesus] should be lifted upon the cross” (Ether 4:1)? If so, did he translate the record from the original language into the later Jaredite language with the aid of the interpreters? Or did he engrave thousands and thousands of characters that he simply could not understand? Finally, what happened to the original record after Ether copied it onto the 24 plates, since we read that Moroni also possessed the original sealed record (see Ether 4:3)? To remain consistent with the directions of the Lord on the matter, the first three questions must be answered in the negative. Ether, too, was not to unseal the record and therefore could not translate it nor copy all the strange characters. In this light, we must conclude that Ether also kept the original records safely sealed and that they were handed over that way to the Nephites (see Ether 4:1).

In summary, I have tried to demonstrate that, sometime before the 24 plates were found, there was a sacred record among the Nephites that contained the sacred words of the brother of Jared. This record was kept untranslated until the coming of Christ among the Nephites. It now becomes our object to investigate just how and when this sealed record was obtained by King Benjamin and how Moroni eventually came to possess it.

**The Sealed Record and Interpreters among the Nephites**

If King Benjamin held the sealed record of the vision of the brother of Jared, he must also have possessed the interpreters. But how and when did the Nephites get possession of these Jaredite materials? The first direct reference to the interpreters comes from the days of the younger King Mosiah (see Mosiah 8:13). The first direct reference to the sealed record among the Nephites is, as we have seen, in the days of King Benjamin (see Ether 4:1, 1830 edition). The first indirect reference to the interpreters among the Nephites is in Omni 1:20. We read that the elder Mosiah translated the engravings on a large stone “by the gift and power of God.” To understand this expression, we notice that the title page of the Book of Mormon reads, “To come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof . . . The interpretation thereof by the gift of God.” The phrase “by the gift and power of God” thus has reference to the interpreters and the gift of translation. From this we may conclude that Mosiah the elder was already in possession of the interpreters that the Lord had entrusted to the brother of Jared and therefore also in possession of the sealed record. This explains why Joseph Smith changed the name Benjamin in Ether 4:1 to Mosiah. Apparently, not only did Mosiah the younger hold both the sealed record and the interpreters, but his grandfather did too. This would mean that the original reading of Ether 4:1 was absolutely correct, but that the emended reading is more accurate because Mosiah the elder’s possession of the sacred relics predated Benjamin’s possession of them.

The question is now placed back in time, but it still remains the same: How did the elder Mosiah obtain the sealed record and the interpreters? Since Joseph Smith changed the name Benjamin to Mosiah, it was probably Mosiah the elder who was the first Nephite to possess the sealed record, and he must have found or received them by revelation. If we consider the way in which Joseph Smith received the gold plates (including the sealed part) from the angel Moroni, it would be no surprise if an angel or prophet had led Mosiah to the sacred material or handed it over to him in a similar manner. I suggest that this Jaredite messenger could have been Ether, author of the 24 gold plates.

There are at least two reasons to believe that Ether might have visited Mosiah to hand over the plates or disclose where they were. First, the prophet Ether was the last surviving righteous Jaredite and as such possessed all the sacred records of his civilization. Like Moroni, he probably held the keys to bring forth the scriptures that belonged to his dispensation.

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Second, although it is possible that an angel showed Mosiah where the sacred material could be found, there is a pattern in the scriptures that suggests otherwise. Whenever a prophet has held keys that needed to be transferred to another dispensation, this has always been done by a resurrected or translated being (see Matthew 17:2–5; D&C 13; 110; JS—H 1:39–54). In this light it is reasonable that Ether passed on the sealed record.

How so? Ether was a contemporary of Coriantumr, who lived among the people of Zarahemla for “nine moons” and thus also lived in the era of the Nephites (Omni 1:21). It is therefore possible that in his old age Ether visited Mosiah, either still in the land of Nephi or in Zarahemla. He also might have been translated. In this connection Moroni preserved an interesting note from Ether. After finishing his abridgment of Ether’s book, Moroni found it worthwhile to quote Ether’s last words: “Whether the Lord will that I be translated, or that I suffer the will of the Lord in the flesh, it mattereth not, if it so be that I am saved in the kingdom of God” (Ether 15:34). Moroni must have had a reason to include these words of Ether. Apparently, Ether suspected he would be translated. If he were chosen to hand over the sealed record and interpreters to the Nephites, he was likely aware of this calling when he wrote his last words, and he also would have known that he lived contemporaneously with the Nephites (see Ether 11:21), even though he must have been in his old age. It is possible, then, that Ether knew he had an important mission to fulfill but had not yet been commanded by the Lord to carry it out.

If such an important event as an appearance of Ether to Mosiah the elder occurred, why was it not explicitly recorded in the Book of Mormon? To that question we do not have a definitive answer. Maybe there was information on this topic in the 116 pages that were lost by Martin Harris. The small plates of Nephi contain very little information on Mosiah the elder, no more than 11 verses (see Omni 1:12–23). In our present Book of Mormon, Moroni is the only prophet who supplies clues about such an event.

It seems that the Nephites were little aware that their king, and later their high priests, possessed a sealed record. We raise the question, In what respect would the Nephites have benefited by knowing about a very sacred record of another dispensation that was to be kept sealed? The sealed record was of no practical interest to them until Christ came to unseal it. Even the high priests were only to keep the record, not to read or translate it. The Nephites in Zarahemla were aware, however, that their king had the interpreters, because he had used them to translate the large stone containing a history of the Jaredites (see Omni 1:20; Mosiah 8:13–14). This knowledge was clearly demonstrated when Ammon met King Limhi in the land of Nephi. After Ammon heard about the 24 plates, he was very quick to inform Limhi that his own king had interpreters that could be used for translating.

The Sealed Record Unsealed

After Mosiah there is no other specific mention of any other prophet having the sealed record except for Moroni himself (see Ether 4:1). There is no doubt, however, that the sealed record was transmitted along the same line as the interpreters, as well as the other sacred records, the sword of Laban, and the Liahona.

From Ether 4:1–2 it is apparent that the sealed record was translated after Christ showed himself to the Nephites. In all probability it was the disciple Nephi, the presiding high priest, who translated this extensive record with the aid of the Urim and Thummim. Nephi already held the sealed record and the interpreters, but he could not start the translation until after Christ explicitly commanded him to do so. Nephi probably did not begin to translate the vision until after Jesus left the Nephites, because it would have taken quite some time to translate such a long record. In any event, during his ministry among the Nephites, the Lord revealed many things that were contained in the sealed record. For at one point he did expound all things, even from the beginning until the time that he should come in his glory—yea, even all things which should come upon the face of the earth, even until the elements should melt with fervent heat, and the earth should be wrapt together as a scroll, and the heavens and the earth should pass away; And even unto the great and last day, when all people, and all kindreds, and all nations and tongues
shall stand before God, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil. (3 Nephi 26:3–4)

These verses have much in common with the report of Jesus’ ministry to the brother of Jared, who was also shown all things (see Ether 3:26; 12:21) “even unto the ends of the earth” (Ether 3:25; see 2 Nephi 27:10).

Such language clarifies in part Moroni’s declaration that “he [Christ] ministered unto him [the brother of Jared] even as he ministered unto the Nephites; and all this, that this man might know that he was God” (Ether 3:18). Thus the Lord not only administered ordinances to both the brother of Jared and the Nephites, but he also prophesied to both concerning the history of mankind to the end of the earth.

In this light, after Nephi had recorded the teachings of the resurrected Savior and had translated the sealed record, the Savior’s teachings in their virtual entirety were in written form among the Nephites. Knowing this throws more light on the awful fate of the Nephites. In the decades leading up to their annihilation, it seems evident that many had sinned against the greater light that had come from the Lord.

Moroni and the Sealed Record

From the time of Nephi (ca. A.D. 35), there were two copies of the record of the great vision of the brother of Jared: the original, “in a language that . . . cannot be read” (Ether 3:22), and “the interpretation thereof” by Nephi in the Nephite language (Ether 4:5; see vv. 1–2). Moroni possessed both records and added a third copy by writing or copying the words of the vision upon “these plates” (Ether 4:4), that is, the gold plates. He most likely used Nephi’s translation as his master copy because he was familiar with that language and not with the language of the brother of Jared. For the same reason, Moroni probably also turned to Mosiah’s translation of the book of Ether to make his abridgment.

Moroni does remark on the wondrous power of the sealed account from the brother of Jared and, in comparison, on his own modest ability. Moroni’s words offer a sense of the extraordinary character of the sealed record:

Thou [the Lord] hast made us that we could write but little, because of the awkwardness of our hands. Behold, thou hast not made us mighty in writing like unto the brother of Jared, for thou madest him that the things which he wrote were mighty even as thou art, unto the overpowering of man to read them. Thou hast also made our words powerful and great, even that we cannot write them; wherefore, when we write we behold our weakness, and stumble because of the placing of our words; and I fear lest the Gentiles shall mock at our words. (Ether 12:24–25)

The Interpreters

So far we have paid attention mostly to the history of the sealed record of the brother of Jared. The history of the interpreters follows very much the same story line as that record, but the interpreters have an additional history. While the sealed record was simply kept for a long period of time, the interpreters were used for other purposes besides the translation of the sealed record for which they were primarily created. They were the means of several translations and revelations in various dispensations. King Limhi, referring to the translation of the 24 plates, said that “these interpreters were doubtless prepared for the purpose of unfolding all such mysteries to the children of men” (Mosiah 8:19).

We do not know whether other Jaredite prophets, apart from the brother of Jared and Ether, possessed or used the Urim and Thummim. The Book of Mormon is silent on this matter. The first instance that we know of wherein the interpreters were ever used was for the translation of the large stone brought to the people of Zarahemla by Coriantumr. It was Mosiah the elder who undertook the translation of the account engraved on this stone.

His grandson Mosiah used them next for the translation of the 24 plates, or the book of Ether. This extensive, unabridged translation of the book of Ether was in many respects of the same value to the Nephites as the Book of Mormon is to us. It was scripture, and it functioned as a prophetic warning to Nephite society. So it seems that the Nephites received the sealed record early, before it was to be translated, simply because they needed the accompanying interpreters for other important work.

After the time of Mosiah the younger we hear little of the use of the interpreters, except that they were handed over to Alma and his successors until they came into the possession of Nephi (see Alma 37:1; Helaman 3:15–16). Even though it is not explicitly stated in the Book of Mormon, we have already
postulated that Nephi the disciple translated the sealed record into the Nephite language. His forefathers had handed over that record together with the interpreters to him. From the time of Nephi, the by now unsealed record of the vision of the brother of Jared and its translation, as well as the interpreters, were handed over to a succession of record keepers until they came into the possession of Mormon and finally Moroni. Moroni did not translate any record but copied the entire vision of the brother of Jared, abridged the book of Ether, and added scripture of his own to the Book of Mormon.

On 21 September 1823, Moroni, then a resurrected being, appeared to Joseph Smith Jr. to inform and instruct him concerning the gold plates and the interpreters that were fastened on a breastplate. Four years later, Joseph Smith received the plates and the interpreters, which would aid him in the translation effort. During the time of translation, he also used the Urim and Thummim to receive several revelations between July 1828 and June 1829, which are now contained in the Doctrine and Covenants (see D&C 3; 6; 7; 11; 14; 15; 16; 17). After the translation of the gold plates was completed (the record of the brother of Jared was still sealed), the plates and interpreters were returned to Moroni. The Book of Mormon itself prophesies that the sealed portion will come to us in some future time when we exercise enough faith. When it comes to us, it will again be translated with the aid of the Urim and Thummim.

We note again that in the above summary the interpreters were never separated from the sealed record for which they were given. No person ever held the interpreters without possessing the record of the brother of Jared, either sealed or unsealed.

Conclusion

In this study we have explored plausible answers to compelling questions concerning the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon, such as How could the extensive vision of the brother of Jared, which was sealed, possibly have been written on the 24 Jaredite plates, which were not sealed? Why is there a first reference to the Urim and Thummim among the Nephites in the days of the elder King Mosiah and not earlier? How and from whom did he receive those interpreters? Why does the first edition of the Book of Mormon say that King Benjamin was in possession of the sealed record of the brother of Jared, and why was this changed to Mosiah in later editions? Why did Ether think that he might be translated? These questions, which once appeared to have little to do with one another, now appear to be connected to the sealed record.

Through a better appreciation of the mission of Ether, we can see the similarities of his mission to that of Moroni more clearly. Both possessed all records of their dispensations. Both were among the last survivors of their respective civilizations and spent a great part of their lives in witnessing the destruction of their people and preparing records for other peoples and generations. Both held the record of the brother of Jared and the interpreters and (evidently, in the case of Ether) passed them on to a great prophet in another dispensation.

This study shows that the Lord has provided means for both the Nephites and the Latter-day Saints to receive scriptures from ancient prophets, as well as interpreters to translate them. The Lord provided another testament of Jesus Christ for the Nephites through the book of Ether and again for us through the Book of Mormon. It is amazing how the Lord prepared, in the era of the Tower of Babel, a most important revelation for humankind to be given later to the Nephites, after his ministry among them, and then again around the time of his second coming (see Ether 4:1–7, 16–17). It is also notable that, at the same time, he prepared the means whereby the Nephites could have the book of Ether and the Latter-day Saints the Book of Mormon.

The story of the record of the brother of Jared is not finished. It will be revealed to us also if we continue to grow in faith. The apocalypse of John teaches us about a book with seven seals, each seal covering the history of humankind for 1,000 years. Christ alone can unseal that record. Either the sealed part of the gold plates and this book spoken of by John cover much the same history or they could well be the same. Many great prophets have received a vision of the history of the world and have offered glimpses of that revelation to others. But the brother of Jared was chosen to write down the vision in its entirety. His writings will be the means for us to come to a far greater knowledge and understanding than we currently enjoy.
In his article “A Māori view of the Book of Mormon,” Louis Midgley observes that Latter-day Saints around the world tend to read in the Book of Mormon a reflection of their own cultural and personal experiences. He draws on his missionary experiences among the Māori people in New Zealand in the early 1950s as support for his view. According to Midgley, the Māori acknowledged seeing in the Nephites’ cycles of righteousness and apostasy a likeness of their own personal struggles with life’s temptations.

This essay is a personal reflection on the Book of Mormon from an Arab viewpoint. It is modeled on Midgley’s work but with some limitations. The Middle East remains one of the few areas in the world where the reach of missionary work continues to be very confined. Currently, small Arabic-speaking branches exist in Lebanon and Jordan. On the other hand, a large number of people of Arab origin have joined the church outside the Middle East; so even though it would be hard to speak of an Arab LDS culture in the Middle East, members of Arab or Middle Eastern origins can provide insights into understanding and reading the Book of Mormon from a Middle Eastern point of view. My hope is that such insights will enrich our understanding of the book’s Middle Eastern origins and cultural imprints.

A number of images and emotions have resonated within me as I have read and interacted with the Book of Mormon for the last two decades. I first learned about the Book of Mormon 22 years ago from the back of an insert that the church used to put in Reader’s Digest. I was living in Nazareth and was in the middle of a work year between high school and college when I bought a copy of Reader’s Digest in an attempt to improve my English. I vaguely remember the content of the insert—something to do with principles of good living. My English was so poor that I did not even realize that the insert was of a religious nature. At the end of the insert was a referral card for a free Book of Mormon. The book was in English and it was free, so I filled out the card and mailed it to Salt Lake City.

Months later I began attending the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. My name and address on the referral card had been forwarded to a missionary couple who represented the church in Israel. On a Friday morning in December 1981, I met with them and received a copy of an Arabic translation of selections from the Book of Mormon. At the time I was not looking for religion. I come from a Greek Orthodox Christian Arab family, but my religious education had come from weekly religion classes at the Baptist school in Nazareth, a private school sponsored by the American Southern Baptist Convention where we had daily chapel meetings and weekly Bible study classes. This was the extent of my religious education. Sunday church attendance was not a part of my life. Before giving me the Book of Mormon selections, the missionaries told me the story of Joseph Smith’s first vision, which struck me as remarkable. After about a two-hour visit, the couple surprised me by showing me a shortcut from where they lived to the campus, and we then made

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Months later I began attending the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. My name and address on the referral card had been forwarded to a missionary couple who represented the church in Israel. On a Friday morning in December 1981, I met with them and received a copy of an Arabic translation of selections from the Book of Mormon. At the time I was not looking for religion. I come from a Greek Orthodox Christian Arab family, but my religious education had come from weekly religion classes at the Baptist school in Nazareth, a private school sponsored by the American Southern Baptist Convention where we had daily chapel meetings and weekly Bible study classes. This was the extent of my religious education. Sunday church attendance was not a part of my life. Before giving me the Book of Mormon selections, the missionaries told me the story of Joseph Smith’s first vision, which struck me as remarkable. After about a two-hour visit, the couple surprised me by showing me a shortcut from where they lived to the campus, and we then made
arrangements for me to attend a meeting at the Jerusalem branch the next day.

The Book of Mormon selections was a thin publication. I don’t have any memory of when or how fast I read it. I think it contained parts of 1 and 3 Nephi and of the book of Alma. Curiosity and the novelty of the experience were probably my main drive during the next few weeks as I met with the missionaries and attended church meetings with them. I remember reading Alma 32, where Alma discusses faith in terms of an experiment of planting a seed. Those were among the few verses that I underlined in the book. At some point I decided to follow Alma’s words, so without telling anyone, I began the experiment. A short time later I received my spiritual witness of the truth of the church and knew that God wanted me to become a member of it. The Book of Mormon was now a part of my life, my story. But Alma 32 is not the part of the book that speaks to me as an Arab.

As I consider how I respond to this book as an Arab, I am drawn to the story of Lehi and his family as detailed in 1 Nephi. The conflicts, struggles, and fears of Lehi and his family as they make their way out of Jerusalem and into the desert evoke in me vivid imagery that is strongly related to my cultural origins. The actual telling of the story of Lehi and his family in the desert is done in only a few verses while entire chapters cover that period of the family’s experience. It is obvious that Nephi was much more interested in recording the spiritual context of the family’s journey—the visions, sermons, and exhortations. Still, those few verses on the desert experience bring about intimate, personal, and emotive images. I believe that even though these events took place millennia ago, their sociogeographical and cultural context seems to transcend the passage of time. I am intrigued when I reflect how much these Middle Eastern cultural themes of desert travel, grief, bonds of oaths, and family structure impressed themselves on Joseph Smith’s mind.

**Laman and Lemuel**

Reading the first few chapters of 1 Nephi has always left me with many questions concerning the motives and emotions of the main characters. This is probably due to the psychologist in me seeking for the deeper meaning behind the actions, especially when those actions seem to defy common sense. Such is the behavior of Nephi’s elder brothers Laman and Lemuel, who in spite of witnessing miracles and angels resisted their father’s wishes and fought against their brother Nephi.

The most sympathy these two characters receive from the average Book of Mormon reader is a shake of the head at their “stiffneckedness.” But I read their story as a tragedy and overturning of the family structure. The status of eldest brother within a Middle Eastern family is culturally entrenched and derives its strength from the culture’s patriarchal structure. The eldest brother is the father-in-waiting and demands equal respect with the father. I think that it would have been even more so in the preindustrial society of Lehi’s time, when the first son would most likely have followed his father’s career as he grew into the family’s business or trade.

Lehi was surely troubled by the tensions between his sons. He understood his elder sons’ need for respect, especially Laman’s need in that regard. After leaving Jerusalem and traveling in the wilderness...
near the Red Sea for three days, the group camped. Lehi named the river there “Laman” after his oldest son and the valley “Lemuel” after his second son. I see this as a sign of Lehi’s offering proper respect to these brothers as well as trying to subdue their resistance to his plans.

Laman and Lemuel’s resistance to Nephi’s leadership is disastrous to them and their children for generations to come, but is it much different from the conflicts between Cain and Abel, Esau and Jacob, and Joseph and his brothers? I wonder whether those stories of earlier sibling rivalry did not weigh heavily on Laman and Lemuel and fuel their sense of injustice and resentment as they saw themselves evolving into the role of the rejected, displaced elder brothers.

Oath Taking

The Book of Mormon is filled with stories about bond relationships that rest on oaths. Most of these appear in negative contexts, as part of secret and evil-doing societies. But in 1 Nephi we read the story of Zoram, the servant of Laban. After Nephi killed Laban and disguised himself as Laban, he used Zoram to gain access to Laban’s treasury and the plates of brass. Nephi then led Zoram outside the city gate, and when he had to reveal his identity to Zoram, he was able to bind him by an oath to follow him and take part in his family’s journey into the desert. In fact, Nephi spoke to the servant Zoram with an oath, promising him freedom as well as safety and companionship if he would go with them. In return, Zoram gave an oath to Nephi that he would stay with them. From any rational consideration, Zoram was under great duress, and whatever he agreed to do at that moment could not be seen as binding. Still, Nephi wrote that “when Zoram had made an oath unto us, our fears did cease concerning him” (1 Nephi 4:37). After that oath, Zoram’s loyalty to Nephi was never in question, even in the most dire of situations when Laman and Lemuel physically turned against Nephi. I think that Zoram remained loyal to Nephi at least in part because of his oath with him.

Whenever I read this story, I am reminded of my years as a teenager when my grandmother would call me to her and proceed to put me under oath that I would do her bidding before she even told me what she wanted. I still remember the feeling of resistance that this generated within me. I must have known that whatever errands she thought to ask of me would not have been much trouble. But taking an oath imposed a much more demanding requirement on me. It was something of an archaic experience for my generation but still very real, evoking a sense of solemn duty and obligation that could not be shirked.

Recently, as I was reading in the Book of Mormon, I came across the story of Amalickiah, a king of the Lamanites who was a Nephite by origin. When Amalickiah heard of his army’s defeat at the hands of the Nephites, he was “exceedingly wroth, and he did curse God, and also Moroni, swearing with an oath that he would drink his blood” (Alma 49:27). As I read, I found myself translating the words into Arabic as if that were how they were intended to be written. I have known English for many years now, but still I am not sure that I know how to curse God in English or that I have ever heard anybody do that.

But taking an oath imposed a much more demanding requirement on me. It was something of an archaic experience for my generation but still very real, evoking a sense of solemn duty and obligation that could not be shirked.

Nor have I heard anyone make an oath to drink someone’s blood. But in Arabic both expressions are common, and, unfortunately, I have heard both. On a preconscious level, that verse was more meaningful to me in Arabic than in English.

The Daughters of Ishmael

One of the sharpest cultural differences I have experienced between American culture and mine is the attitude toward grief for the dead. My culture’s personal and outward expression of grief over death is very intense, and for women it is accompanied with symbols and restrictions that can last for years.
When Ishmael died during the desert journey, his daughters “did mourn exceedingly” (1 Nephi 16:35). Their grief and anguish intensified the pain they had felt during the months of desert travel to such an extent that they drove the men to another rebellion against Lehi and Nephi and to another threat to return to Jerusalem. It is interesting that Nephi did not make a distinction between his wife and her sisters at this point. It seems that the grief and anger were so intense that only the intervention of the Lord’s voice was able to quell the rebellion. The Lord chastised them and brought about repentance, followed by blessings and food (see 1 Nephi 16:39). It seems that the Lord also brought much comfort to the group, so that the place where they buried Ishmael, Nahom (a name derived from the Hebrew root NHM, “to comfort”), carried meaning for them thereafter.

In a somewhat parallel situation, the only time that Sariah murmured against her husband was when she thought her sons were dead after Lehi sent them back to Jerusalem for the brass plates. In the words of Nephi, she “truly had mourned” for them (1 Nephi 5:1). It was in her sorrow and grief that she complained against Lehi and called him a visionary man who had brought about the death of her sons. The point is that her sorrow was deeply personal and very intense, for if she were to lose her sons, she would see her own life as having no more worth.

**Into the Desert**

During recent trips to Qatar and Egypt, I had the chance of spending time in the desert. Even though I traveled in reliable cars and enjoyed modern means of communication, the desert was uninviting and formidable. It stretches endlessly, barren and monotonous with a harsh climate. Such a route must have been much more inhospitable and treacherous to Lehi’s band. At that time, the Arabian desert was sparsely populated. Off the beaten path, its inhabitants were mostly nomads who accumulated wealth by raiding and pillaging other tribes. When Lehi led his family out of Jerusalem, he wisely left his gold and silver behind. Such wealth would only have marked them as an easy and profitable target. Of course, their journey across the desert would not have been possible without the aid of the Liahona, and still the trek was fraught with difficulty. It took the group eight years to cross an area that would take an experienced traveler about four months.

Nephi described the afflictions the family suffered, including hunger, thirst, and fatigue. In one remarkable entry, he wrote that they had to eat their meat raw, probably to avoid exposing themselves to danger by lighting a fire and thereby attracting the attention of marauders (see 1 Nephi 17:2, 12). These trials and difficulties underscore a sharp Middle Eastern demographical division between city dwellers and nomads. I imagine that Lehi and his
people were, like me, city dwellers who only wanted to survive the desert. Though this division has largely narrowed since the formation of the modern Arab states and the beginning of the oil boom, the desert and its nomads retain their mystique in the Arab subconsciousness.

A Book for Our Days

One major characteristic of the Book of Mormon is that it was compiled with our times in mind. The lessons, sermons, and stories are for us to learn and apply in our lives. If there is a theme that has dominated the psyche of the Middle East for the last 55 years, it has been the Arab-Israeli conflict. As I became a member of the church and then attended Brigham Young University, I could not escape the political and cultural leanings in America toward the Middle East, informed in part by religious beliefs about the Lord’s covenant with the house of Israel and the return of Jews to the land of their forebears. How does the Book of Mormon fit into this picture for me as an Arab Christian? It was with great personal relief that I found these promises clarified plainly and repeatedly in the pages of the Book of Mormon: in the words of Nephi (see 1 Nephi 19:14–15), Jacob (see 2 Nephi 6:11; 2 Nephi 10:7), and the Savior (see 3 Nephi 20:30–33, 46). In all these writings it is clear that God welcomes the return of Jews to their ancient homeland. It is also clear that he does so with conditions, including a belief in Christ. For example, Jacob wrote, “When the day cometh that they [the Jews] shall believe in me, that I am Christ, then have I covenanted with their fathers that they shall be restored in the flesh, upon the earth, unto the lands of their inheritance” (2 Nephi 10:7).

For me, this is one example of the wonder and importance of the Book of Mormon: that it makes clear what is often muddled in the Bible. The story of the peoples of the Book of Mormon extends the story of the Israelites in the Bible. It rehearsing the journey of a chosen people and their interaction with God. But in the Book of Mormon, there is not a chosen people but chosen peoples—the Jaredites, the Nephites, the Lamanites, and the Mulekites, among others.

As John the Baptist told crowds at the river Jordan, “Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham” (Matthew 3:9). The principle of being chosen is a universal one in the Book of Mormon, which makes clear that it is not who I am but my relationship with God that is important. Whenever Book of Mormon peoples were righteous, the divisions of the “-ites” disappeared, only to reappear in times of wickedness (see 4 Nephi 1:17). This is a very important message for people in the Middle East, where Moslems, Christians, and Jews with their sects and divisions live side by side. It reminds me of one of the great sayings in Islam—“No virtue to an Arab over non-Arab except in piety”—which means that no person is better than another and that the highest worth of a human being comes in living a truly religious life. This saying became current when the newly organized Arab-Moslems conquered and converted other nations to their new religion and there was a danger that the Arab lineage was turning into an elite class that might undermine the universality of humankind under Islam.

I hasten to add that other Arab members of the church might have different reactions to the scriptural passages I have discussed and will likely have additional insights regarding the events recorded in the Book of Mormon. As Midgley observed, the Book of Mormon can impress on its readers different messages, depending on their cultural backgrounds and life experiences. As I have considered the Book of Mormon in that light, I have come to appreciate more its richness and depth.
Women in the Book of Mormon
Inclusion, Exclusion, & Interpretation
Camille S. Williams
all interpretations of scripture are, in some sense, a dialogue with the text, or, as Old Testament scholar Phyllis Bird notes, “an exercise in cross-cultural understanding.” This exercise may be aided by knowing the writers’ and compilers’ worldviews and by avoiding interpretations that “distort the ancient writer’s understanding or intention, whether to a ‘negative’ or ‘positive’ effect.”\(^1\) Our understanding of scriptural texts, as with other “dialogues,” is affected by our expectations, experiences, and purposes for reading those texts.

In reference to the Bible, Sharon Ringe cautions:

> Although the careful reader attempts to distinguish between the voice of the ancient author and his or her own concerns as a modern interpreter, this distinction is never absolute. The place in history, culture, and society occupied by the reader inevitably influences what she or he can perceive in any text and what questions seem important to ask about the text and its context.\(^2\)

During the past 30 years, the most important questions for some readers have been what Katharine Bartlett calls “the woman question,” actually a set of questions about the status and treatment of women in law and in cultural practices.\(^3\) As a result of interdisciplinary interest in women’s issues, the amount of research about women in biblical times and texts has grown exponentially. During this same period of time, the amount of published research on the text and cultures of the Book of Mormon has increased significantly, although few feminist explorations of Latter-day Saint texts have been published.

A common assumption among some contemporary readers is that most women’s stories have been excluded from scripture, that women have been “silenced” by male scribes, editors, and commentators.\(^4\) So far as we know, virtually all of the texts we have “about the lives of women in the ancient world . . . have been written by men.”\(^5\) Ruth and Esther are the only book-length narratives in the Bible focusing on females. “No other female characters in the Hebrew canon dominate the narrative scene for more than one chapter, not even the extraordinary character of Deborah.”\(^6\) The stories that have been included are frequently interpreted “as a primary source and legitimator of patriarchal religion.” Feminist biblical scholars have extended this view to every branch of their theology but consider it to have “particular bearing on the question of biblical authority,” or the truth of the scriptural testimony concerning the nature of humanity and the nature of God.\(^7\)

> “Modern feminist critique of the Bible as male-centered and male-dominated has elicited widely differing historiographical and hermeneutical responses, ranging from denial of the fact or intent of female subordination to rejection of the authority of the Scriptures as fundamentally and irredeemably sexist.”\(^8\) The relative absence of women and women’s voices in scriptural texts, including the Book of Mormon, has raised questions for some LDS readers about issues of equality and the meaning and authority that these texts can or should have for us today.

Questions about women’s status in scripture are not trivial and cannot be answered by recommending that we focus instead on the “big questions,” such as the nature of God, the problem of evil, or the meaning of life.\(^9\) For a significant number of readers, questions about the treatment of women anciently and currently are the “big questions.”\(^1\) The answers or lack thereof will be predictive of the value some readers place on the scripture text and, to some extent, on the religious institutions that consider those texts canonical. Because these questions matter to so many, we ought to seriously consider them. That is the purpose of this paper. Asking questions about women’s roles, ancient and modern, as we read the scriptures can bring new insights, even when the texts are incomplete and women’s stories abbreviated. In addition, an examination of the Book of Mormon in light of its stated purpose and provenance suggests that the presence or absence of women in the text is not determinative of its authority as a witness of Jesus Christ nor, therefore, of its relevance to women as well as to men.

**The Context of the Contemporary “Woman Question”**

While significant interest in women’s issues now permeates our society as a whole, spanning the political and social spectrum, it is an overtly feminist\(^1\) approach to the Bible that has had perhaps the most impact in the academy and in publishing about women in scripture.\(^1\) Women have not always been “self-conscious about reading [the Bible] as women,” but many now consider it important to do so.\(^1\)

Some scholars have argued that the Bible “might be patriarchal and androcentric without necessarily being misogynistic.”\(^1\) But for religiously committed feminists, there is a persistent tension between their
belief that the Bible is the word of God, and therefore must support the equality of male and female, and their view that the Bible is a primary source and sanction of women’s oppression and cannot, therefore, be divine revelation—or worse, that it reveals a God unworthy of reverence." Some women have jettisoned much of the religious traditions in which they were reared and are seeking religious forms they feel honor women and the experiences of women.14

Latter-day Saint feminist commentaries are, by comparison, few and generally less caustic.2 LDS doctrines and the statements of prophets affirming the worth of women as individuals and in their various roles in the family, church, and community have also consistently stressed the value of women2 and have turned aside some harsh interpretations of women in scripture, most notably that of Eve and the treatment of Lot’s daughters.19

However, LDS women have challenges that some of their sisters of other faiths do not have. In addition to the problems presented by biblical texts, latter-day scripture contains far fewer stories of individual women than those in either the Old or the New Testament. Carol Lynn Pearson argues that the dearth of women mentioned in the Book of Mormon is a “strong anti-female statement made by Nephite society,” in whose record we see a few “spiritually dependent [women]” and a plethora of faceless, nameless women listed as part of their husband’s possessions.20 Francine Bennion has attributed to Nephite culture what might be seen as a fairly common set of assumed characteristics about ancient societies:

The power of men over women in Book of Mormon societies produced abuses, as does any hierarchy not based on virtue alone. Even when good men did not abuse their power but protected women and were tender with them, men did have the power. Men made the decisions. Men did the ruling, the judging, and the prophesying. Men did the preaching, and addressed it to “my brethren.” Men defined the history and recorded it.

Women were primarily accessories to men, dependent upon them not only for survival but also for identity, which is presented as a matter of relationship to a man, usefulness to a man, or use by men.21

When the harshest of LDS commentaries criticize the Book of Mormon’s treatment of women, they do so from a perspective that might be called the “hermeneutic of suspicion,”22 wherein there is an adversarial or distrustful approach to a text coupled with an examination less of the text’s content per se than of the author’s presumed self-interest.23 A few writers are engaged in reconstructing LDS theology in ways they believe are more amenable to feminist principles of equality.24 Most of current Book of Mormon commentary targeting an LDS audience reflects what might be called the hermeneutic of charity or consent,25 in which Book of Mormon stories, for the most part, are universalized to include females in one way or another26 in an interpretation intended to conform to church teachings.27 Unfortunately, this truce may not last. Marie Cornwall has predicted that “the next generation of [LDS] readers will find the scriptures’ lack of attention to women, particularly in the Book of Mormon, to be disquieting.”28

Of course, Book of Mormon scholarship has challenges that differ from those in biblical studies: we have a relatively short history of research on the Book of Mormon, there are few scholars focused on Book of Mormon research, no ancient texts of the Book of Mormon are available to us for textual criticism,29 and the Book of Mormon text abridges the spiritual histories of peoples across a span of more than a thousand years, with the linguistic, sociological, and archaeological evidence of those peoples considered sparse at best.30 Further, those with a particular interest in the history of women appear to have even less to work with, given the small number of individual women named in the Book of Mormon.

Probing the Portrayal of Women in the Book of Mormon

A consideration of the portrayal of women in the Book of Mormon text would likely include these questions: Why are there so few women in the Book of Mormon? How many women should we expect to find in an ancient text, and what should we expect them to be doing? Why are there so few individual women named in the text? Why aren’t women more prominent in the Book of Mormon narratives? Why didn’t God command the prophets to include more women in the record? Why were specific stories included in the Book of Mormon and others apparently excluded? Is a writer advancing his own self-interest by excluding stories about women?
Obviously that list is not exhaustive, and neither are the proposed answers that follow. But asking such questions invites discussion that may help us better understand the text as well as ourselves.

Why are there so few women in the Book of Mormon?

The short answer is we don’t know. This question may reflect a reader’s honest concern, or it may be a polite way of asserting that women do not have enough power, visibility, or prestige in the church today—an issue unlikely to be resolved by examining ancient cultures and their texts. The question may also reflect concern for children: can our youth, most of whom are aware of disparities between the sexes, find Christ in the Book of Mormon if they cannot find women there? Obviously, it is not counting the number of women, nor assessing their prominence in the text that is our real task; rather, we must decide how we are to interpret the apparent absence of women in the Book of Mormon. For some readers, merely stating that there are few women in the Book of Mormon is a way of concluding that women were unimportant to the writers of the book or even that women are unimportant in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints today.

But are such questions that are ultimately grounded in the feminism of our own day truly legitimate when voiced as though their assumptions and unchallenged presuppositions were a valid basis for a substantive criticism of the text? “If [the woman questions] are not the agenda of the authors or even of their principal audiences, should—or even can—they be pursued?” asks Sharon Ringe in reference to biblical texts. As with many ideological approaches, Pearson’s feminist approach is predictive of her conclusion: “The valuable things I have gleaned from the Book of Mormon have been bought at the expense of putting my femaleness aside and ignoring what is said of it. And while I am more than my femaleness, my femaleness is a profound and highly valued part of me, and to have to put it away when I pick up the book violates my spirit.”

To experience scripture as demeaning to women is an unhappy outcome, to say the least. If we are as skillful at questioning ourselves as we think we are at questioning a text, or at least as able to recognize our own biases as we are able to recognize the potential biases of the authors, our reading of ancient scripture will be less distorted than it might otherwise be. In other words, if we are to engage in a dialogue with the text, “reader bias” must be examined as closely as is “writer bias.” Kevin and Shauna Christensen argue that paying attention to narrator perspective and cultural context, and incorporating recent research about text and context, allows a more satisfactory reading than Pearson’s, for it reveals “that women play a broader role in the Book of Mormon narratives than appears to the casual reader.” With these considerations and caveats in mind, we may proceed to question the text, and to question ourselves as we read the Book of Mormon.

Reader Expectations and Observations

What do we expect to find?

We likely have at least two sets of expectations. One set is related to the structure or genre(s) of the text: we don’t look for poetry in a phone book, nor do we expect that spiritual insights will readily flow from census records. The standard works include the following genres: historical accounts, genealogies, dialogue, narratives or stories (about individuals, tribes, and nations), sermons and expositions of doctrine, letters, accounts of visions, poetry, parables, proverbs, prayers, and songs.” These types of texts may conform to certain literary or other conventions, some of which may initially be unfamiliar to us.” In addition, the Old Testament, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants contain sections outlining religious practices and ordinances or describing the organization and administration of the church.

Coupled with our expectations about the form of the text, we have expectations about content. The title page of the Book of Mormon leads us to anticipate an abridged record about a remnant of the house of Israel and an abridged record from the people of Ether. The abridgments were written to a specific audience of Lamanites, Jews, and Gentiles for purposes specific to each subset of readers: to show the remnant what God did for their fathers and to disclose the covenants that prevent them from being cast off forever, and to convince both Jews and Gentiles that Jesus is the Christ of all nations. The nature of the book’s stated audience and purpose suggests that what is included was chosen to meet those criteria, rather than to give, for example, a detailed account of the history, economy, or
family life of those ancient inhabitants, as interesting as those topics might be.

In addition to expectations about the form and content of a text, our culture has expectations about gender relations. Equal treatment for women is a contemporary cultural value, and we are suspicious of arrangements that smack of a “separate but equal” justification. Equality is usually measured not only in terms of educational and economic opportunities but also in terms of participation, representation, power, and prestige. The asymmetrical relations in the family and in society that we see in so many scripture texts looks not only foreign but frequently offensive to our contemporary taste.

We should acknowledge at the outset that every age has its issues, concerns, and fads that may be brought to the scripture texts as the expectations of successive generations. Paula Fredriksen argues that when we read accounts of Christ’s life, for example, though we tend to invoke the historical Jesus, we too often see a "( thinly disguised ) version of ourselves. . . . The Jesus of the 1960s was a freedom fighter. And the most recent Jesus of the modern academy battles not ancient demons [such as devils who possess people], but our own [demons]—sexism, nationalism, social hierarchy." Such an approach may be a way of likening the scriptures to ourselves, a recycling of old issues renamed in current jargon, or a reflection of changing social values.

While contemporary social issues are significant, we must not assume that we are the generation to finally get everything right. We must consider the possibilities that some of our cherished values (e.g., individual autonomy) may have their downside and that earlier values or practices (e.g., arranged marriages) may not have been wholly invidious. It may be that reading the Book of Mormon is less like reading the editorial page of the Sunday paper than it is like the experience of temple ordinances: an invitation to separate ourselves from the world and join with others in a common purpose before the Lord. Suspending our enculturated expectations may allow us to read the Book of Mormon not so much in terms of our self-defined, biologically defined, or culturally defined differences of sex, race, or class, but rather in terms of our commonality as offspring of deity, as sinners in need of the Savior.

How many women should we expect to find in an ancient text, and what should we expect them to be doing?

There are, of course, ancient texts with fairly extensive stories about individual females, particularly female deities. Women also appear in ancient legal codes, contracts, and other legal documents. Extant ancient texts contain examples of females whose social status varies widely: goddess, queen, princess, high priestess, daughter, wife, mother, sister, aunt, grandmother, merchant, hierdoule, prostitute, and slave. While most women were likely occupied much of the time by responsibilities within the family and household, they likely also had additional opportunities or responsibilities according to marital and social status (e.g., according to whether they lived in a rural or urban area, and whether they lived within a tribal system or under a centralized monarchy). Bird’s caution about women in the Bible seems applicable to women in the Book of Mormon:

A common status or lifestyle cannot be assumed for the woman of an Early Iron Age pioneer settlement, the wife of a wealthy merchant or large landowner in Samaria or Jerusalem, the daughter of an indebted eighth-century peasant, the foreign wife of a returned exile, a priest’s daughter, queen mother, palace servant, childless widow, or prostitute. Nor can one expect a common portrait from narrative compositions, proverbial sentences, prophetic oracles, and legal stipulations.

In the Book of Mormon we do see women occupying a wide range of social roles and performing a variety of activities. In addition to their family roles as daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers, apparently some of them made yarns, textiles, and clothing (see Mosiah 10:5; Helaman 6:13). Some armed themselves for battle (see Alma 54:12; 55:17; Ether 15:15); some rebelled, murmured (see 1 Nephi 7:6; 16:35); some complained, mourned, received comfort, testified, rejoiced, and gave thanks (see 1 Nephi 5:1–9); some pleaded for Nephi’s life (see 1 Nephi 7:19); and some danced or sang (see 1 Nephi 18:9; Mosiah 20:1, 2, 5; Ether 8:10–11). Some were conspirators in murder and overthrowing a kingdom (see Ether 8); some were martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ (see Alma 14:8–12); some were deceived by an anti-Christ (see Alma 30:18); some were polygamous wives or
concubines (see Mosiah 11; Ether 10:5); some were prisoners of war who were fed human flesh or were raped, tortured, and eaten by their captors (see Moroni 9:7–10); some were harlots (see Mosiah 12:29; Alma 39:3); some were queens (see Alma 19; 47:32); some were slaves or servants (see Alma 19:15–16; 50:30); some were witches (see 3 Nephi 21:16; Mormon 1:19; 2:10); and some were “married” by capture and later pleaded for the lives of their husbands/captors (see Mosiah 20:1, 2, 5; 23:31–34).

Although we have no indication that women authored religious texts in Book of Mormon subcultures, it is apparent that women were converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ, participated in ordinances, bore testimony, and taught their children the gospel. It appears that the transmission of the gospel was primarily by word of mouth and that the peoples of the Book of Mormon probably did not have access to vast quantities of texts in the way that we do. Writing and reading reformed Egyptian may have become a specialized task. But it appears that whether or not women could themselves read the sacred records, they knew the content, including knowledge of secret combinations.

There are no direct references to goddesses, although some of the peoples in the Book of Mormon at times were practicing idol worship, including human sacrifice (see Mormon 4:14). So it is possible, but not certain, that goddesses were represented or associated with some of the idols. Nor do we find direct references to priestesses in the Book of Mormon. Just as the secular record is truncated or absent, the record of religious activities is also partial in the Book of Mormon, as it is in the Bible. Phyllis Bird argues that “where women appear at all in the standard [biblical texts], it is in incidental references, as exceptional figures, or in limited discussion of practices or customs relating especially to women. . . . But it can no longer be viewed as an adequate portrait of Israelite religion.” Noting that the incomplete material gives a skewed view of women’s participation, Bird points out that women appeared to have a supporting role that did not require clergy status, such as spinning or weaving temple hangings, preparing meals or foods used in sacrificial ritual, and cleaning temple vessels, furniture, or quarters. She also suggests that women perhaps enjoyed more public roles as members of a royal or priestly household. It may be the case that women in Book of Mormon cultures served in similar ways. While we do not have that record, neither do we have the extensive outline of the Mosaic law of sacrifice or of ritual impurity found in the Bible, nor as much information about the religious practices of those who rejected the gospel.

Ze’ev Falk contended that in order to understand the status of women in biblical law, one must see it as a reaction “against the worship of female goddesses and the role of women in fertility cults.” It may be that the peoples of the Book of Mormon were also tempted to worship goddesses and engage in the practices of fertility cults, although it seems that the abridger and compiler included relatively little about competing religious practices. If it was the case that women were fully engaged in the tasks of family and household, then it is not surprising that the record of Mormon contains relatively little about those roles, given its focus on the spiritual state of the people as a whole.

Why are there so few individual women named in the text?

It is fair to ask why certain things are included in a text and others may have been excluded from it. For example, we may ask why a person in a narrative might be named or not named. In the Book of Mormon only six women are named (Sariah, Mary, Eve, Sarah, Abish, and Isabel), and three of those are from the Bible. The inclusion of a name may provide meaning if the name is descriptive or symbolic in some sense (e.g., Adam meaning “[hu]man”), or
simply may make it easier to refer to an individual (e.g., referring to Sariah by name avoids repeating a phrase such as “the mother of Nephi” or “the wife of Lehi”). Such constructions as those in the latter example seem awkward to us, but depending on how the character or glyph was written, and on the social or linguistic conventions of the culture, they actually may have been more natural to the writer or may have demonstrated respect for the individual woman or her family.56 Certainly such constructions linked to a family or a city was to have no identity, to be an outcast. Merely being named, however, gives relatively little information about the individual. Although there are two dozen genealogical lists in the Old Testament, two in the New Testament, and one each in Alma 10:2–3, Ether 1, and Moses 6, we know little or nothing about most of those named persons in most of those lists.58 Because the Book of Mormon contains fewer genealogies than does the Bible, we need not conclude that familial identity was less important to Book of Mormon peoples than to those of the Old Testament. It seems that for the purposes of the abridgment, the full list was not necessary:59

And now I, Nephi, do not give the genealogy of my fathers in this part of my record; neither at anytime shall I give it after upon these plates which I am writing; for it is given in the record which has been kept by my father; wherefore, I do not write it in this work. For it sufficeth me to say that we are descendants of Joseph. . . . I desire the room that I may write of the things of God. For the fullness of mine intent is that I may persuade men to come unto the God of

are numerous and are not confined to references to women (e.g., brother of Jared, sons of Ishmael, priests of Noah). Given the difficulty of etching the plates, it is reasonable to suppose that this may have been the easiest or most efficient way of designating those individuals or groups.

While naming has had tremendous importance in most cultures, public knowledge of one’s name may not necessarily indicate the importance of the name or the named person. It was the custom anciently to identify people according to family—their primary source of sustenance and social identity for both males and females, although not all cultures use surnames, or family names.57 In fact, not to be linked to a family or a city was to have no identity, to be an outcast. Merely being named, however, gives relatively little information about the individual. Although there are two dozen genealogical lists in the Old Testament, two in the New Testament, and one each in Alma 10:2–3, Ether 1, and Moses 6, we know little or nothing about most of those named persons in most of those lists.58 Because the Book of Mormon contains fewer genealogies than does the Bible, we need not conclude that familial identity was less important to Book of Mormon peoples than to those of the Old Testament. It seems that for the purposes of the abridgment, the full list was not necessary:59

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Israelite captives from Lachish approach the Assyrian king Sennacherib (704–681 B.C.), as poignantly portrayed in a panel from Ninevah (now in the British Museum). Note the mother in the cart kissing her baby and the boys clinging to their father. Redrawn by Michael Lyon.
Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved. (1 Nephi 6:1–4)

Nephi subordinated the custom of giving a complete paternal lineage to his task of bearing testimony of Christ. He may have expected that other records would survive to more fully identify him and those who traveled from Jerusalem.

Further, it is unlikely that simply giving the names of Nephi’s sisters or of Lamoni’s queen would provide much insight regarding their lives and their respective testimonies. Their actions suggest more about their spiritual contributions to ecclesiastical history than about their individual identities. Nephi’s sisters recognized the “warnings and the revelations of God” and chose to separate themselves from Laman and Lemuel, following Nephi’s counsel (see 2 Nephi 5:6). It appears that Lamoni’s queen used her own powers of observation (“as for myself, to me he doth not stink”), investigation (“The servants of my husband have made it known unto me that . . .”), and judgment to know that Lamoni was not dead before calling Ammon to confirm her evaluation (see Alma 19:4–5). By believing Ammon, a witness for the Lord’s hand in the matter, she demonstrated a faith greater than any Ammon had witnessed among the Nephites (see Alma 19:10). She was quite obviously teachable and amenable to the Spirit, despite her elevated social status and Ammon’s servant/alien status. While we do not have extended narratives of named women in the Book of Mormon, we do have interesting glimpses that point to ways in which women participated in family, religious, and social life.

Why aren’t women more prominent in the Book of Mormon narratives?

Obviously, the mere presence of women in a text is not sufficient to make that text of interest and value to women. Nor is it logical to suppose that merely because women do not appear in a specific text that the text was written by a misogynist. Biblical scholars look to comparable cultures as part of their task of interpreting women’s lives in ancient Israel; we may also reasonably look to biblical and comparable cultures to better decipher why the role of women in the Book of Mormon may, upon first consideration, seem small.

A primary reason may be that the book focuses on the larger culture, rather than the family, and on extraordinary events rather than daily occupations. This focus does not give attention to modesty or unheralded service, both of which are undervalued in our own culture and perhaps in most others. Bird also reminds us that “a woman’s primary and essential role within the family, with its multiple demands of time and skill, . . . accounts for her highest personal and social reward—but also for her restriction in roles and activities outside the family and her hiddenness in documents from the public sphere.”

Even when women are prominent in narratives, their stories might not be considered helpful to women or positive in general. According to Alice Bach, while a substantial number of feminist biblical studies during the past 20 years have examined ancient texts with the purpose of “recovering submerged female voices,” the results have been mixed. A significant number of “subversive” readings affirm women’s courage, strength, faith, ingenuity, talents, dignity, and worth. Some interpreters see women as sometimes challenging the patriarchal culture in which they lived. But the “valorization” of mothers, Esther Fuchs argues, is also in support of patriarchy, making those women “enablers” in their own suppression and in the suppression of women generally.

Because our larger contemporary culture does not value mothering, it is difficult for us to believe that any culture, ancient or modern, truly can. Because modern society in general has been educated to regard population growth as negative, it is hard for some people living today to appreciate the social value of giving and sustaining life in a subsistence economy or a preindustrial society. Both in terms of religious belief and economic need, the birth and survival of children was a necessity, and women were the workers who ensured the continuation of the family and the society through birthing, childcare, and management of the household.

It is also difficult for us, steeped as we are in power politics, to appreciate roles that appear to have little or no power in the polity. Yet the too-common view of ancient women as uniformly oppressed is being discarded in light of the “anthropological study of gender [which] reveals complex patterns of male-female relationships within patriarchal societies, involving distinctions of formal and informal power and recognition of spheres of influence and authority, which require qualification of many commonly held views of women’s lives in ancient Israel” and elsewhere.
Clearly, women did not receive “equal treatment”—nor did anyone else, for that matter—in ancient societies. Martha Roth points out that “to assess the standing of a person before the law, to arrive at a systemic valuation of the individual, it is necessary to know much more than simply whether the person is female or male. A wide range of tangible and intangible factors, such as citizenship, wealth, age, family position, as well as gender, combine in often subtle and unexamined ways to produce an individual’s standing in the law as a ‘legal subject.’” Early legal codes, with their distinctions among citizen and noncitizen, male and female, husband and wife, parent and child, slave and freeborn, appear glaringly unjust to contemporary readers. Nevertheless, they set a predictable standard for conduct and outlined a person’s rights and duties, although we have relatively little documentation of the application and enforcement of those laws. No person in ancient societies was completely unfettered simply because he was male, and even slaves had some minimal protections.

Men as well as women were constrained by family duties and customs. Lehi apparently arranged marriages for his sons, just as Ishmael apparently arranged marriages for his daughters. Predisposed as we are to prize individual autonomy above subordinating our desires to the good of family or group, practices such as arranged marriages seem obviously oppressive to us. But part of our repugnance may arise from our ignorance of the values or the safeguards that may be inherent in such practices, or of the relative merits of the then-available alternatives.

Clearly, the Book of Mormon record is not the detailed history of any one individual or family; rather, it is a story of peoples and a witness of Christ. The emphasis on peoples and witnessing does to some degree keep the record focused on activities outside the household, women’s primary sphere of influence and action. About 50 percent of the Book of Mormon could be classified as historical narrative or historiography designed to inculcate moral values. In addition, significant portions of the book comprise doctrinal exposition (including what Sperry calls “prophetic discourse”), oratory such as King Benjamin’s address, and the words and actions of Christ (see 3 Nephi 11:8–28:13). The condensed nature of the book may have also decreased the incidence of women’s stories or the number of stories about individuals in general. Covering 1,000 years in 522 pages allows only an average of about one-half page per year, scant space for recording names or events, much less prophecies, revelations, and testimonies.

While the Book of Mormon’s witnessing of Christ is more pronounced than its narrative, some of the narratives of the Bible seem at times almost unrelated to the witness of Jesus Christ, the Father, or the Holy Ghost. Susan Niditch sees the tales of the women of Genesis as arising from traditional Hebrew literature. She argues that several of the women in Genesis are “portrayed as active tricksters who, like Eve, alter the rules, men’s rules.” This creates a tension between the wishes of the males (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and “the women’s wishes and God’s wishes,” which are aligned in these stories. This kind of tension between the sexes is a classic scenario in folklore. The books of Ruth and Esther are named after their protagonists but contain relatively little that is overtly about God. “Women in the biblical texts,” Bird states, “are presented through male eyes, for purposes determined by male authors.” It does mean, however, that women are not heard directly in the biblical text, in their own voices; the Old Testament gives no unmediated access to the lives and thought of Israelite women. It might be safe to say we have no unmediated access to any ancient author or person, given our understanding of the means of transmission. We may feel we are closer to the ancients in the Book of Mormon because the individual writers identify themselves and frequently tell their own stories. In contrast to the overwhelming use of the third person in biblical narrative, the first person is used extensively in Book of Mormon narrative.

Why didn’t God command the prophets to include more women in the record?

Francine Bennion’s hypothetical critical reader asks: “Whatever the assumption of the people [of Nephi], couldn’t God tell the men to record women’s names and make opportunities equitable, even if the men didn’t know enough to ask about it?” Bennion concludes that “God speaks to us according to our own language and understanding, which at the same time both aids and limits us.” Of course, such commandments for inclusion might have had results that would now dismay us: had the text included as many named women as men, or many women functioning equally in the public sphere, it is likely that today’s
critics would view such an “ancient” society as anachronistic and see the inclusion as evidence that the Book of Mormon is not an authentic ancient text.

Perhaps reading scripture as a woman has its limitations and drawbacks. Sensitivity to individual and group differences can be positive, but once we begin to read scripture from an interest-group perspective, we may enter the clash of diversity politics so common in academe today. Such an approach can eventually lead to the view that a male Savior cannot understand the suffering of women or other marginalized groups, or it can turn Christ from a person to a symbol. This may encourage the view that what we seek is not a literal savior who atoned for our sins but principles for a “redemptive community” that “transforms people and social systems,” the focus remaining on a social system rather than on a savior.

Some feminists both inside and outside the church argue that viewing God as literally male disadvantages women as individuals and as members of the church. For example, drawing on the LDS standard works and principles of equality, Janice Allred sees the Holy Ghost as the immanent manifestation of God the Mother and argues that “we must also picture God as female and experience her as mother if women are to attain equality and if feminine attributes and roles are to be valued equally with masculine ones.” Pearson contends that significant detrimental effects result from the absence of women in the Book of Mormon, coupled with the positive images of males and what she considers the negative images of females.

To those who never viewed the alleged negative female imagery as hurtful to women, the emphasis on re-imaging or reconstructing women in the Book of Mormon may seem at best unnecessary or speculative. For some readers, even if the Book of Mormon contained only the equivalent of the published proceedings of a contemporary general priesthood meeting in Moroni’s time, it might still be of interest and spiritual value to female readers. Asking the “woman question” is not tantamount to apostasy, and neither Ruether nor Allred nor Pearson would recommend that we simply reconstruct God or women in scripture according to our own tastes. Rather, it appears that asking the woman question can become, for some readers, an indictment of our collective religious history and the foundation for recommendations to change our practices today. Certainly that is not the trajectory of every questioner. However, we might ask ourselves: Am I concerned about the status of women in scripture, or am I more worried about my own status today? Am I reading into an ancient text my own self-concern? Clarifying our own concerns and motivations may change how we approach the text. At the least, we may be able to evaluate whether we are acting on what we find as evidence about women in the Book of Mormon or whether we are actually focused on women’s roles in our own time.

If scripture is simply narrative aimed at personal religious experience, then those questions are relatively unimportant. If, on the other hand, the Book of Mormon is an ancient record designed to give witness of factual events of eternal import, then a focus on myself and contemporary social or psychological concerns may distort the witness and obscure the saving message. The Book of Mormon is about the saving mission of Christ, and in a very real sense the mission of Christ is about us—those he was sent to save. Examining how the record keepers in the Book of Mormon tried to communicate Christ’s message to us is an interesting venture, whether we ask the woman question or not.

Inclusion and Exclusion in the Book of Mormon Text

Why were specific stories included in the Book of Mormon and others apparently excluded?

How did the stories function as part of the cultural history? Why so much about Nephi and the journey and relatively little about Jacob and the time and lives that passed away like a dream? (see Jacob 7:26). Why is the book of Omni so short and the book of Alma so long? Why is there so little about how those peaceful people lived for 200 years after Christ’s visit (23 verses) and so much about so many wars?

Robert Alter proposes that “biblical narrative characteristically catches its protagonists only at the critical and revealing points in their lives.” The Book of Mormon narratives highlight important transitional events in the history of the gospel among the children of Lehi but do not provide much detail. Unlike biblical narrative, they contain considerable interspersed or embedded explanation to aid the reader’s interpretation.

The first part of the Book of Mormon lays the foundation for the Nephite-Lamanite schism that dominates the bulk of the record. Just as Genesis
presents the patriarchs, introduces the Abrahamic covenant, and sets the stage for the rivalry among brothers—all preparatory to understanding the Egyptian sojourn, the exodus, and the struggle to maintain Israelite allegiance to God—so 1 Nephi presents to us in rapid succession the exodus of the Book of Mormon patriarchs, a covenant specific to Lehi’s family and the intersibling rivalry, and a prophecy of the coming of Christ while introducing the theme of preserving sacred records, which permeates the remainder of the text. Book of Mormon links to Old Testament narratives are numerous and richly allusive, although narrative in the Book of Mormon is subordinated to the interpretive or didactic treatment of the events and helps fill in the gap in religious history between the Old and the New Testaments. In the Bible, each writer/compiler gives relatively few interpretive comments and virtually no information about the preparation of the text itself or the purpose of the book. In contrast, the editing, abridging, and custody of the Book of Mormon text are matters repeatedly brought to the fore.

Concerning the Book of Mormon, some have concluded that the male record keepers overlooked women or did not understand what it feels like to be a woman and so did not include female role models in their records. But if we say, in effect, to Mormon, “What do you know about being a woman?” couldn’t he fairly reply, “What do you know about being a prophet?”

The Record Keeper’s Self-Interest and Burden

If we take the words of the record keepers at face value, the provenance of the Book of Mormon is a model of simplicity and clarity in comparison to that of the Bible. Even if we grant that the biblical books were written by those traditionally considered the authors or by their scribes, we do not know who had custody of the texts for significant periods of time. In contrast, the chain of custody for the Book of Mormon record is unbroken (which explains the inclusion of the otherwise puzzling book of Omni). That these record keepers took their charge seriously, and testified that they had custody of the record, even when they gave little other information about themselves, their families (except as it was relevant to the task of record keeping), or their times may be an indication of the authenticity of the record.

Feminist studies commonly conclude that women and women’s stories “have been (and continue to be) erased from the historical record” because men fear them or do not value them. We cannot conclude that those topics the Book of Mormon authors did not or could not write about were excluded because they were feared or not valued. Nor can we conclude that those topics were all too sacred to be recorded. Rather, in the Book of Mormon, we see a range of topics excluded, from the very sacred words of Christ (and those blessed by him) in 3 Nephi to the names of the three Nephites who remained upon the earth and the prohibition on including in the record information about secret combinations (see Alma 37:29; Ether 8:20), as well as much of the historical information regardless of its moral content.

We know that Mormon and the other record keepers faced a number of constraints that limited the length of their records. One was spatial—the surface area of the available plates was relatively small. For example, Jarom explains his brevity by twice noting that “these plates are small” (Jarom 1:2, 14). Amaleki notes that “these plates [the small plates of Nephi] are full,” adding, “And I make an end of my speaking” (Omni 1:30). Moroni, finishing his father’s record, states, “I would write it also if I had room upon the plates, but I have not; and one I have none [to make additional plates], for I am alone [with neither family nor friends who could obtain plates]” (Mormon 8:5). Moroni apparently left room for an abridgment of the Jaredite record (the book of Ether), then was surprised to find that there was still some space on the plates and that he was still alive to write something (see Moroni 1:1, 4). There were also orthographic or linguistic challenges outlined by Moroni, who referred to “our weakness in writing,” for “we could write but little, because of the awkwardness of our hands,” and “when we write we behold our weakness, and stumble because of the placing of our words” (Ether 12:23–25).

The more important constraint, however, was deciding which “hundredth part” of the record of the peoples should be included. Some things were included because the Lord directed or commanded that they be included. Since at least two kinds of records were kept—one historical, the other religious—and we have an abridgment of the religious record alone, we can reasonably assume that there may be more about women in the historical record or in the complete religious record, neither of which we can access at this time. Even in the religious record, some things were excluded by way of commandment, forbidden to be written. At other times
there is a record of an event, but the time was not right to have the record come forth.¹⁰⁷

Mormon and Moroni have given us a remarkably cohesive abridgment of the records of at least 18 men who were given custody of the record and the assignment to write the things of God. We possess few details about the manner of transferring the record, the usual age (if there was one) when the recorder was given the plates, or how the decision was made about when to transfer the plates to another person. These decisions appear to have been at the discretion of the record keepers. It is possible, too, that the length of the various books is directly related to the importance Mormon placed on each book rather than to the length of the unabridged records alone. Occasionally a particular writer’s comment is preserved in Mormon’s abridgment and may echo to a certain extent the principles and exigencies guiding Mormon’s handling of the record. For example, Amaleki gives two reasons for ending his record: “I am about to lie down in my grave; and these plates are full. And [so] I make an end of my speaking” (Omni 1:30). Jarom notes that the plates are small, so he needs to write but little, then states tellingly: “I shall not write the things of my prophesying, nor of my revelations. For what could I write more than my fathers have written? For have not they revealed the plan of salvation? I say unto you, Yea; and this sufficeth me” (Jarom 1:2).

Is a writer advancing his own self-interest by excluding stories about women?

While it may be possible to apply the hermeneutic of suspicion to the Book of Mormon and assume that the stories were included in order to advance male interests, or the interests of specific males, the text may not support such a conclusion. If Mormon wanted to consolidate patriarchal or male power, it was a mistake for him to have included Jacob 2, which better than any other scriptural...
discourse advances the interests of women and children and clearly condemns their exploitation by men. Jacob's words are remarkably like President Hinckley’s at the priesthood session of the April 2002 general conference, except that Jacob castigated the men in the presence of their wives and children (see v. 7), indicating that the meeting was not segregated by age or gender. Mormon should also have edited out Jacob 3:7, 10 and other empathic references. Had the record keepers sought to portray males well, it would have been wiser, perhaps, for the writers and editors not to have used women as an index of the health of the Book of Mormon societies. Even Laman and Lemuel describe their wives' travails in the wilderness as the sufferings of persons, distinguishable from damage to or loss of their possessions (see 1 Nephi 17:1, 20–21). In the Book of Mormon, war is justified only as a defensive action to protect religion, freedom, and family (see Alma 48:14; also Alma 24:5; 35:14; 43:23, 26, 30; 3 Nephi 3:22). War to avenge supposed wrongs was not justified (see Mormon 3:15–16). In the Book of Mormon there are no triumphal hero celebration scenes akin to the praise received by Saul or David (see 1 Samuel 18:7; 2 Samuel 6:15–16). In fact, war is seen as the destructive force that it is, leading not only to death by violent means but also to famine (see Alma 62:35, 39), either because armies ravage the crops or because farmers must leave their fields to fight and have no time to plant.

Rather than describing the depth of Nephite and Lamanite depravity in terms of the suffering of women (as in Moroni 9:8–10, 16, 18–20; Mormon 4:15, 21), Mormon could have focused more on male suffering. Mormon's descriptions of final battles include women and children (see Mormon 6:7) but give little detail about the glory of war or the gore involved in the killing of around 220,000 warriors. Even his lament is inclusive, addressed to fair sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, husbands and children, rather than to his soldiers (see Mormon 6:16–20). More detail about the male martyrs cast out and stoned in Alma 14:7–8, rather than on the suffering of their wives and children in verses 8–9, would have created more admiration for the men and would have avoided expressions of concern for the women and children. The tone of the above passages, coupled with the overt denunciation of wrongs against women and children, suggests that Nephi, Jacob, Mormon, Alma, and Moroni felt the same empathy that contemporary readers feel for those women and children. In fact, Mormon's syntax breaks down as he describes atrocities against women and children (see Moroni 9:11–15), in the way that a man's voice catches when he is near weeping. It is difficult to see how those passages advance either the self-interest of males generally or of the writers and editors specifically.

It is possible that the Book of Mormon writers and editors were fairly uninterested in advancing themselves at the expense of their task and the text. Perhaps they were kept on task and in the right frame of mind in part by the admonishment of the Lord (as in Ether 12:35) and by the ability they were given at various times to “see” those for whom they made the record (e.g., Mormon 8:35). Some readers of the Book of Mormon focus on the woman questions; some readers from other faiths seek answers to the “fundamental questions of mankind” or to “the great question”: Is there really a redeeming Christ? The Book of Mormon prophets may not answer the questions we have about women today, but they do advance considerably the knowledge we have of Christ, which advances the self-interest of every reader, whether male or female. The Book of Mormon does not deal with every contemporary concern; that was clearly not its mission or purpose. Certainly the testimonies of the prophets are expansive in comparison to the amount of history, sociology, geography, demographics, or law contained in their accounts.

The record keepers and the abridgers were united in their desire to present the testimony of Christ and the plan of salvation. In fact, if they showed a “self-interest,” it was the interest they had in ridding their garments of the blood of those to whom they were called to preach. After outlining the calling Nephi gave to him and Joseph, Jacob states:

\[
\text{And we did magnify our office unto the Lord, taking upon us the responsibility, answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence; wherefore, by laboring with our might their blood might not come upon our garments; otherwise their blood would come upon our garments, and we would not be found spotless at the last day. (Jacob 1:19)}
\]

Being found spotless seems to have particular relevance for those called as special witnesses of Christ. Jacob’s concern is repeated by the Three Witnesses in their testimony of the Book of Mormon.
and is echoed in the warning of the title page: “condemn not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment-seat of Christ.” Moroni is even more direct, promising that “the time speedily cometh that ye shall know that I lie not, for ye shall see me at the bar of God; and the Lord God will say unto you: Did I not declare my words unto you, which were written by this man, like as one crying from the dead, yea, even as one speaking out of the dust?” (Moroni 10:27).

The writers and abridgers were convinced of the purpose of their calling, even if they did not know the details. They were witnesses of Christ to their own people and to generations unborn, seen by some of them in vision (see Mormon 8:35). It may be churlish to condemn an aged prophet and his prophet son, hunted fugitives lugging 60-plus pounds of plates, for failing to include more of the female perspective. All things considered, they were remarkably faithful and successful in carrying out their charge.

Conclusion

The status of women anciently and currently is both interesting and important and is not unrelated to the mission of Christ, Savior of us all. The record of women in the Book of Mormon, like the record of virtually every other aspect of those people, is incomplete, fragmentary. Nevertheless, the Book of Mormon is a worthy witness of Christ and a resounding affirmation that “all are alike unto God,” for through its divinely inspired teachings Christ invites all of us—each of us—to come unto him (see 2 Nephi 26:33). And even if some female readers were to insist that they could access the Book of Mormon witness of Christ only through Book of Mormon women, the book makes that possible.

In the very heart of the abridgment, Alma 19, is the story of the queen and her servant Abish, a narrative that could serve as a pattern for our efforts to understand “the things of God.” These women are at opposite ends of the social scale: if anyone lived in luxury or had access to education, it was likely to be the king, the queen, and their children; we don’t know Abish’s marital status, but she was at least a working woman, if not a slave, and already converted to the Lord. Whatever else she didn’t have, we know she had the gospel of Jesus Christ, the one thing we all must possess.

We don’t know the queen’s name, but we know the name of the servant, a believer who was able to understand “the power of God” (Alma 19:17). Abish naively assumed others would also understand merely by “beholding th[e] scene” of the court and Ammon, sunk to the earth, overcome by the power of God (see vv. 19:14, 17). The multitude that gathered faced a task of interpretation not unlike our own as readers of the Book of Mormon.

Some could not perceive the power of God because of the cultural tradition that viewed Nephites as enemies: a Nephite witness such as Ammon was unacceptable. For how could a Lamanite be touched by a witness so foreign and unaware of the unique Lamanite experience of perceived Nephite dominance and oppression? Some thought Ammon a “monster,” not a man. Some tried to slay Ammon where he lay. The actions of the faithful servant woman in gathering a crowd and taking the hand of the queen set in motion the successive testimonies of the queen and the king, resulting in the conversion of many hearers. By the end of the story there are an abundance of witnesses: many hearts are changed, many see angels, many are baptized, and the church is established among the Lamanites.

While it does not do to push the analogy too far, it might be said that some feminist critics may reject the Book of Mormon because it is the “witness of males” and therefore unavoidably sexist. Some may view the Book of Mormon as a “monster” created by Joseph Smith, an amalgam of biblical and other sources, some manifestation (even if unintended) of a male-dominated culture. Some may have supposed the Book of Mormon vulnerable, capable of being “slain” or rendered powerless by those aggrieved by it or its alleged “male perspective.” But, like Ammon, it has been and is preserved by God for his purposes. Whatever its perceived shortcomings, it possesses a spirit that no other book has. Readers have responded to that spirit and testimony as did those who heard the queen and King Lamoni: their hearts have been changed. That change of heart is a primary component of coming unto Christ. And like the queen and Abish, we each are dependent upon Jesus Christ for our salvation.

Will women today, trained to be suspicious of texts that appear male-dominated, be able to find themselves through reading and pondering the Book of Mormon? If we are first able to find Christ, who has promised that he will neither forsake nor forget us, we will surely find ourselves where we have always been: “graven . . . upon the palms of [his] hands” (1 Nephi 21:16).
Publishing the following interview with the departing editor of the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies takes a step that we will continue to follow, at least for a brief period. The editors have observed that there is a small group of individuals who have devoted much of their lives to teaching and studying the Book of Mormon and who, when invited, can offer important insights into the book itself as well as into what Book of Mormon research might look like in coming years. The natural starting place is with John L. Sorenson. In coming issues, the Journal will publish a few such interviews as opportunities arise. In April 2002, two of the new editors of the Journal sat with John L. Sorenson to ask about his own involvement with the Book of Mormon, about his perception of studies related to the Book of Mormon, and about his view of the future of Book of Mormon studies. Here are excerpts from that interview. —ED.

JBMS: How did you first become interested in the Book of Mormon?

John: I don’t know how to answer that. I had no special interest in the Book of Mormon before going on my mission. Then I imbibed the living waters of Polynesian tradition—about Hagoth. In New Zealand, members had been taught by generations of mission presidents and missionaries that they descend from Hagoth. Everyone pointed to the Book of Mormon. In the Cook Islands, where I was assigned, people were so new in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1947 that they didn’t really know enough to think any complicated thoughts, and the Book of Mormon wasn’t translated into their language. So we had to answer their questions at a basic level. I guess that activity made me somewhat interested. Furthermore, while I was there, Thor Heyerdahl was on his raft Kon-Tiki going from Peru to the Society Islands. As a matter of fact, where I was serving there was a very odd American who was a ham radio operator. He invited us once to come to his home while he was trying to make radio contact with the raft Kon-Tiki. He was unsuccessful that night, but for me it was a moment of contemplation about oceanic crossings.

I also read a couple of articles that Hugh Nibley wrote from 1947 to 1949. He had just started to write for the church. Wells Jakeman published an article, and Sidney Sperry had something published at the same time. I thought that was kind of interesting stuff. Earlier than that, before I went into the military in World War II, I had been studying electrical engineering. I went over physics and math so many times that I was just sick and tired of it. It wasn’t for me. So I guess I was looking for something romantic. I wanted to study archaeology, although I had no idea really what that meant. I had never read anything about it. But that is how I got into the field, from a totally uninformed level. In 1949 I came to Brigham Young University and declared archaeology as my major. There were very few students in that program. One of my teachers, Wells Jakeman, had his views on the Book of Mormon, which were very valuable to me in some ways. But I soon learned that I did not want to follow his approach. I went on from there.

However, I never had any questions about the Book of Mormon that troubled my faith. My life has been one of belief from the beginning. It has been obvious to me since I was a child that the Book of Mormon is true. Even when I learned of arguments that people could throw against it, I thought, “That’s stupid.” I just had no patience for dealing with such
issues. Those who torture themselves up and down and over and under on some of these subjects, I have a certain sympathy for the dilemma they have made for themselves, but I can’t empathize with them. We each must soldier on and do the best we can to reconcile what we find of concern.

My interest in the Book of Mormon never needed any sustaining. It just rolled. I have always been interested in it. In career terms, I never had a career. I just had jobs and bounced from place to place pretty much by what seemed accident. Mine were fortunate accidents in almost all cases. That’s how I got into archaeology, through minor accidents. Then I happened to be in the right place at the right time to be chosen as one of two students at BYU to go with the first expedition of Thomas Ferguson’s New World Archaeological Foundation, in January 1953. I was in Mexico for five and a half months. Only two of us were LDS. There were four graduate students from other schools and the director who was a Ph.D., a Spaniard. There I learned to listen and learn. I picked up a great deal about how to think in terms familiar to archaeologists. The boss was a quasi-Marxist who had no interest in Ferguson’s Book of Mormon concerns. His assistant, from Harvard, was soon to be a Ph.D. but had quite a bit of experience already. He became an important figure in Mesoamerican archaeology. His Festschrift came out about three years ago. There was also a Mexican who became famous; when he died last year, he was probably the most eminent Mexican archaeologist. But he was a student then. I was trying to make sense of what these other folks were saying. While I understood a good deal about how they viewed matters, it was a challenge for me to relate it to the Book of Mormon. In my view, we were in the middle of Book of Mormon territory. I asked myself, Where are we to go? What are we to do? What are we to look for? Challenged by these issues, I have continued asking those questions for 50 years now. But I had never questioned whether it was possible to make sense of the whole thing simultaneously in scriptural and professional terms. I have been trying to make sense of the book and its archaeological setting ever since.

**JBMS:** To us it appears that, at an early point in your life, the Book of Mormon stood center and you saw issues that needed to be solved and have worked on those for a long time.

**John:** Actually, I have seen so many issues. A person could ask the question in another way: What are some of the topics that I wished I could have researched? The list would go into the hundreds. There is nothing about the book that doesn’t interest me. Some parts of it interest me much more than others in the sense of having to make choices.

I guess the one comprehensive question of greatest concern to me has been, How did the Book of Mormon events take place? After my mission, it was not at all clear to me that reading the book would tell one how events took place. It told a person some “whats” and some “whys,” perhaps, as interpreted by Mormon. But it didn’t recount what was going on. I found the same kind of disappointment with conventional history too. It didn’t satisfy me with an understanding of how life was lived. I guess that is why I resonated with anthropology, because it purported to try to find out how people live their lives.

I started as an archaeologist at BYU because that was the instruction available. I liken my broadening experience to having lightning hit the roof and make a hole in it, and when I crawled up through the hole and looked around, there was a whole world out there called “anthropology.” What happened is that I went to graduate school at UCLA to become an archaeologist. The first semester my mentor, the only Mesoamerican archaeologist there, with whom I planned to study, died of a heart attack. Since I was on a National Science Foundation
scholarship, I had about a month to get somebody to back me up so I could get my support renewed for the next year. I explored among the rest of the department faculty to assess the prospects and was encouraged to take up social and cultural anthropology. Actually, it turned out, that sort of anthropology was a much better preparation for my real interests than archaeology would have been. I found potsherds to be completely boring. I could do without them. But I wanted to know about the natural world. I wanted to know what people were thinking. I wanted to know their hearts—the whole thing. Archaeology as it was conceived in the 1950s didn’t do much of that. So this “accident” opened me up to a scholarly world that I welcomed. There were so many prospects. My dissertation was on “The Effect of Industrialization on American Fork.” That was social anthropology by the standards of my department. My work could have focused on any other place, but my advisor and I decided that Utah Valley was probably the best example of a farming community being suddenly struck with an industrial presence. It was an exciting study.

**JBMS:** More than a year ago, you made a presentation to one of the FARMS brown bag sessions, and you reviewed projects that you want to finish. Can you briefly describe what you see yourself doing in coming years?

**John:** I’m not sure that I can divide my interests easily. Partly out of my missionary days and the *Kon-Tiki* experience, I have always wanted to know more about transoceanic voyaging. My master’s thesis was on evidence for Polynesian contacts with America. This came partly from living on islands. In the war, I was on Ascension Island in the middle of the South Atlantic for six months, and the boundedness of such a place always made me want to look over the horizon. I have been working on the significance of “primitive” voyaging all of these 50-plus years since I began. Some very important things—important for me—to provide closure on the issue have come clear in the last few years. Of course, this topic is related to the Book of Mormon. It has fallen to me to see it through for an LDS audience. I guess that is one of the maintaining motivations that I have had all the way along.

I have been disappointed that there are not any LDS people who seem interested in doing what I have wanted to do—to learn how Book of Mormon peoples lived. I have never been one to particularly want to “prove” one thing or another or to engage in controversy about it. But I do have this desire to set the life of scriptural people in context. It appears that, if that task is going to be done, it must be done by me. I am not aware of a single person in the LDS world who has an interest that’s even close to mine. So I will try to stay alive and finish my work so far as it can be finished. That is what I am trying to do.

My question about ancient voyaging is a part of the more general problem of how things took place in early times. Those are the two things—voyaging and the context within which the recorded events took place—that are most important to me. I split off portions of those from time to time, manageable as projects. I also have strong interest in the lands of the Bible—not to make a major contribution myself, which is one career too many for me. But from a New World point of view, serious study requires a background in the Old World. I am about as familiar dealing with some aspects of Palestinian archaeology as I am with Mexican archaeology, as far as it seems helpful to my concerns.

**JBMS:** You seem to have nurtured an interest in the Book of Mormon homeland—you have even published Ensign articles on this topic.

**John:** People tend to label me a “Book of Mormon geographer.” That is an accident in itself. That is just the first stage of everything I want to see done. I simply haven’t got entirely past the first stage yet! Geography is a foundational piece of the work in treating the Book of Mormon. I have satisfied myself, though tentatively, where the Nephites lived, at least enough that I have a basis for other studies. I don’t expect to visit that subject again. I am now at the point where I am trying to synthesize all of what I have learned that seems to me to relate to the Book of Mormon. I am trying to get a product out there so that it can be seen before I pass away and leave it in the form of incomplete notes. My urge, before my brain is dried up, is to put the results of my studies on
paper in a form that satisfies me. I don’t expect anyone else to do it. I would be delighted if somebody came along who really wanted to be involved, but I have never found anyone willing and able. I can’t even find students to partake of my vision enough to do anything about it. So I borrow students and take them as far as I can and then get somebody else.

**JBMS:** You have spent time in some interesting places during your set of careers. You have been a department chair, and you have written a couple of major volumes on the Book of Mormon.

**John:** I was seven years in think-tank work that had no connection whatever with religion, let alone archaeology.

**JBMS:** But your work was analysis, right?

**John:** Yes. I was involved in analysis of difficult real-world problems, problems for which an appropriate approach was not even apparent. We had to come up with a comprehensive, effective approach on the wing, so to speak. Furthermore, I never specialized in anything. It was never my privilege. I kind of cobbled together an academic preparation in anthropology. For example, some of the most exciting anthropology I tasted but could not master was linguistics. At UCLA, Harry Hoijer, who was one of the major figures in the mid-20th century in anthropological linguistics, took a real liking to me. He was a Navajo and Athabascan specialist. But I found the whole, wide-ranging span of anthropology interesting. I got interested in studying the Mormons. On the basis of my study of Utah communities, I was the first one really to examine the Mormons as a “tribe,” so to speak. One of my professors, Bill Lessa, was a comparative religionist, and he wrote what was a standard textbook for many years. While I was still a student, he used to have me come talk to his classes at UCLA about the Mormons from an anthropological point of view. Of course, one of my challenges was to be a Mormon and still talk about Mormonism in useful academic terms. So I became analytical about my role as an anthropologist, about my people, and subsequently about Mormon culture, as well as the Book of Mormon and my relationship to it. So I have chosen to be analytical all the way along. Why? I don’t know. It was born into me, I guess.

**JBMS:** What positive steps have people made in the last 40 or 50 years in Book of Mormon studies that have really moved us forward in understanding the world of this book and what its essence is?

**John:** I think I can’t really address that question without contemplating who has “moved things forward” for whom. At the level of lay people generally, they still have far to go to utilize the rich sources of knowledge about the Nephite record already available. At the level of, say, Sunday School and seminary teachers, I think considerable help has been given to them in the last 50 years in providing them with some sense of context for the scriptures. Fifty years ago they had very few helps. From the point of active LDS scholars who are not into archaeology, which includes most of those who work with FARMS material, I would ask, Have they “moved forward” in recent decades? Have they made substantial advances? I would like to think so. But I think the most important thing for further enlightenment is not tools but enthusiasm—the fact that more ambitious folks are talking about Book of Mormon studies now than used to be the case. And that, frankly, is one of the things that I was most concerned about in moving the Journal along the lines I started to do five years ago. I wanted to get more people excited about doing something to further our understanding of the scripture through studying the settings for the record. I really don’t care what studies get done next as long as something positive is done that is a serious attempt to clarify and to shed light. I like shedding light. That is not the same as “explaining,” but they are obviously related.

We have had some good tools all the way along. I am sincere when I say that George Reynolds’s Concordance is probably the most important single tool that was ever written. Everything done on computer now is just a slight mechanical expansion of what he did. It was impossible to do any studies until he had produced his Concordance. On another hand, one of the areas where we have taken steps ahead is that a lot of “unlearning” has been brought to pass. There was so much for Latter-day Saints to unlearn. As a people we were once so ignorant and so confused about the Book of Mormon. (Many people still are.) Some still can only talk or think about the Nephite scripture in memorized terms. The first thing anyone needs to do before undertaking serious study of this book is to make a conscious effort to try to forget everything “scholarly” we thought we knew 40 years ago, because it was probably wrong. It is wrong at least in the sense of being highly incomplete.

**JBMS:** Don’t you feel gratified after having compiled a major bibliography of diffusionist documents?
[This refers to the two-volume work that John did with Martin Raish, Pre-Columbian Contact with the Americas across the Oceans: An Annotated Bibliography, published in 1996 under FARMS’s Research Press imprint.] Don’t you feel gratified that articles are coming out in Scientific American and U.S. News and World Report, secular sources that now agree that the Americas were populated by many peoples and that there probably were many transoceanic crossings?

John: These articles show a little bit of agreement. The older “experts” are still bitterly opposed to any such notions. Younger scholars will not have those same biased feelings to the same degree as they mature.

JBMS: We feel that this is one of your most important contributions, to bring together that body of knowledge.

John: The most important one is still coming this year. It will be a big article on plant evidence for crossings. When that comes out, I intend to mail reprints to foot-dragging “experts” so they may not be able to say, “I never saw that.”

JBMS: Where do you think Book of Mormon studies could or should go in the next decade or two? What are profitable directions for LDS students to look?

John: I started to answer that in terms of varying levels and different audiences. I would say that educating many more of the public to even a moderate degree of analysis and intelligent thinking about the subject is maybe more important than the professional research itself. There is a lot of professional research that is never communicated adequately and is still hardly known to interested persons. Frankly, that was one of my intentions with the Journal and with my picture book, Images of Ancient America. Years ago I was encouraged by one of the church leaders to pay attention to improving the communication of research results on the Book of Mormon to the public, to members of the church. I have taken that seriously and have spent a great deal of time on this task, starting with the book that I coedited with Mel Thorne, Rediscovering the Book of Mormon. That was an attempt to see if scholars could speak simply so that less-informed people could share the light. That objective was part of my sense of mission with the revamped Journal of Book of Mormon Studies, to make accessible to a wider audience some of the eye-opening things that have been found. I am not yet satisfied with the results. But I am satisfied that something has been done to move in that direction.

LDS scholars dealing with the scriptures are now seen by church leaders and members as potentially faithful and good. Leaders don’t agree with those findings in every case, but many more are now willing to look at the possibilities. There were some very stupid things that were done by LDS researchers in the early days when we were just starting to think in these terms (and that may still be the case). Researchers tried to eat the whole scholarly whale without being sufficiently critical.

JBMS: Earlier you mentioned being analytic and anthropological rather than merely apologetic. I am curious how one maintains a faithful scholarly approach, such as is defined in the FARMS mission statement, without falling into the trap of the cynical intellectual.

John: Frankly, I don’t know how. But I know one component, following role models. Here, in my view, is Hugh Nibley’s greatest contribution. He obviously has come up against so much material and has thought deeply about it. The fact is that he has done remarkably well in that whole arena for his time and place. Incidentally, we are all in a time and place, and people will look back at me years from now and think, “Good heaven! What was he thinking?” And the answer is that I was thinking what I could think and not thinking what I had not been alerted to. Even so, role models are very important. I think that is Hugh’s greatest contribution, to be able to say, “I can think with the best.” And he can. There is a great deal that he doesn’t know and that future scholars will know, but he thinks with the best—with power—and he is faithful. That is one of the things that makes me look at Elder Maxwell as a role model too. On the other hand, bad examples may also be helpful, seen in the right light.

JBMS: What advice would you give to someone who maybe could go on to contribute to answering your questions about the “hows” of the Book of Mormon, not only what they could do but what they should avoid?

John: As far as I know, the only solution to the problems of keeping the faith is exercising faith. I literally don’t understand why people don’t live faithful lives. I see some factors at work in or on them, but I don’t really understand the process. I think when we have enough faithful, critical researchers on the Book of Mormon, then Book of Mormon research will be in good shape. That is one reason why, from the beginning of my editorship of the Journal, I have insisted that we try to get more and different people involved. I am pleased with the fact that, with the
release of the fall 2001 issue of the Journal, we have had 37 different contributing authors. Ten years ago, that was unthinkable. But now many of these 37 people can be held up as having done good work, as still doing intelligent work and also being faithful.

**JBMS:** They have come from different fields— from music, geology, history, genetics, biology, and so on.

**John:** There are so many more who could participate. The quality of the contents in BYU Studies has also risen in the last 10 or 15 years. And that in part is due to the sheer increase in the number of writers at work and willing to publish.

**JBMS:** Is there a future in Book of Mormon art?

**John:** Yes. I would say that unequivocally. But it will take unusual kinds of artists, particularly brave ones, maybe more than creative ones. I think there are many technically competent artists—hundreds upon hundreds—who could paint Book of Mormon art, but they are afraid of offending somebody, either church leaders or the public. So they copy the works of other artists who have had a measure of success. If I had a fortune, I would offer a purchase prize—$10,000 every year—for artistic renditions of the Savior. But they would have to be based on a scripture such as “He suffered for all” and not portray Jesus as only happy-faced or staring into space. That’s so unreal to me. This issue brings me back to “how” things happened. In my view, that’s not how he lived his life. His life was deeply engaged—deep, deep, deep—and artists should try to portray that depth. But they have to have courage because there will be a lot of people who won’t like the attempts.

**JBMS:** What kinds of articles could the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies publish that would help its readers? You have obviously thought about that as you reshaped the Journal. Is there a kind of article or a range of pieces that you would like to see published? I know that you have held to the notion of diversity in approaches. You have thought of the modern story of the Book of Mormon as part of the history of this book. It is not just an ancient document. It engages modern history as well.

**John:** And a future history too. One could write science fiction about it. One of the best compliments that I occasionally hear about my own work is, “After I read your work, I can never think of the Book of Mormon in the same terms again.” That is what I would like to see the Journal do a bit at a time, to turn people’s minds so they see new facets of the Book of Mormon. That is certainly what I had in mind with the multicultural slants that we started with Lou Midgely’s piece on the Māori (spring 1998).

There are other important works. Royal Skousen, for example, has provided the means for taking a drastically different look at the book. Noel Reynolds’s study “Nephi’s Political Testament” is of the same sort. And the study that advances the idea that Lehi’s party met other people in Arabia and were even in bondage. Boy! That shakes up some old conceptions. I like the old conceptions to be shaken when we have something positive to replace them with, a responsible alternative script or scenario.

You know the list of things that I hoped for, articles that I have thought of over the years. I would be interested in any of them. It continues to strike me how incurious many of our people are, how they want to hear the same thing over and over again. Too much of our scripture “study” is like a bedtime story where, if we get one syllable wrong, the child says, “Oh, that’s not the way it goes.”

I am convinced that we have a long way to go in uncovering the stone box of meaning where the scriptures lie passively for too many of us. The first thing we need is an opening up of curiosity, a willingness to accept that it is okay to be curious, it is okay to try to learn something new. If we merely accept the status quo in our studies, we find ourselves playing the tape over and over again instead of grasping the riches of light for ourselves.
Loving the Book of Mormon

James E. Faulconer

I had a testimony of the Book of Mormon long before I had a love for it. I joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a teenager, and I joined because I had an overpowering spiritual experience in which I learned that this church is indeed Christ's church. I had read little of the Book of Mormon before that experience, and I had not prayed about the truth of the book. But once I knew that the church is true, I knew also that the Book of Mormon is scripture.

After being converted, I read church history and books about church teachings. Several knowledgeable Saints took me and my family by the hands and helped us learn what it means to be members. They taught us about Latter-day Saint beliefs and helped us learn the customs and practices of the church. I continued to read the Bible, with which I was already familiar. But in the sixties there was not very much emphasis in the church on scriptural literacy, and the few times I tried reading the Book of Mormon, I found myself agreeing with Mark Twain's description of it as “chloroform in print.” I didn't know the Book of Mormon stories or teachings. I didn't enjoy reading the book, and I had little motivation to change. During the three years after my baptism, I never read more than the first few pages and whatever individual passages someone might refer to in a lesson.

Finally, as a freshman at Brigham Young University, I was supposed to read the Book of Mormon because I had to take a Book of Mormon class, and I did read most of it. Still I didn't know it well or appreciate it as scripture. I first read the Book of Mormon from cover to cover while on my mission in Korea, and I read it regularly while I served there; but the book was not available in Korean for most of my mission, so it played a relatively small role in my missionary teaching. Finally I began actually to know something about the Book of Mormon’s contents, but I continued to much prefer the Bible. I had not yet discovered the wonder of the Book of Mormon.

After my return home, I continued to focus most of my scripture study on the Bible, though reading church history had made me interested in the Doctrine and Covenants as well. While I was in graduate school, experience with one of my professors who was also a rabbi deepened my appreciation for the Bible and gave me a new set of study techniques and habits, as well as insight into the profundity of the scriptures. Nevertheless, the Book of Mormon remained on the periphery of my spiritual life.

Then, sometime in the 1980s, that changed. A friend, Bruce Jorgensen (an English professor at BYU), gave me a copy of an essay he had written on the tree of life in the Book of Mormon. Bruce is an excellent teacher and writer. I had long admired him and was flattered that he would ask me to read and comment on his essay. After reading his work, I was not only flattered but thankful, for as I read it I began to see the Book of Mormon in new light. For the first time, I found it beautiful and interesting. For the first time, I knew that the Book of Mormon is not only true, but that it has important lessons to teach me. For the first time, I began to grasp why the Prophet Joseph Smith called the Book of Mormon “the keystone” of our faith.

There are many things the Book of Mormon gives us that we can find no place else, but for me one stands out: without the...
witness that Alma says to be baptized is to through the covenant of baptism. The obligations that come to us do we have a clear presentation of behavior can be responsible for. The title page of the Book of Mormon makes this explicit when it says the Book of Mormon “is to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever.” Many people, like me, are not part of the remnant to whom that purpose is addressed, namely, the descendants of Lehi. Nevertheless, like them, we can learn about our covenant relation to the Lord by reading the Book of Mormon. One important part of understanding that relation is something of which we often speak—obedience. But the Book of Mormon teaches that obedience is broader than we think if we only think in terms of specific rules to follow. To know the covenants of the Lord is to know what the Lord expects of those who have covenanted with him, and as Alma makes clear, he expects more than formulaic obedience. Our covenant obligation is wider than any formulaic behavior can be responsible for.

Only in the Book of Mormon do we have a clear presentation of the obligations that come to us through the covenant of baptism. Alma says to be baptized is to witness that ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light; yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life. (Mosiah 18:8–9)

To read the Book of Mormon is to learn that to be baptized and to renew that covenant at the sacrament table is to covenant that we will imitate Christ in bearing the burdens of and comforting our brothers and sisters and in being witnesses of God—which are probably two ways of saying the same thing: On the one hand, to bear the burdens of others and comfort them is to imitate, though in a very small way, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ; so it is to bear witness of God. On the other hand, to bear witness, as when one bears testimony, is to offer strength to those who hear that testimony by the Spirit. It is to comfort in the sense suggested by the Latin roots of that word: “to strengthen.” That both giving comfort and bearing witness are required of those who enter the covenant of baptism can be inferred from the New Testament, but only the Book of Mormon makes them explicit.

Besides promising Lehi’s children a knowledge of their covenants, the title page of the Book of Mormon promises them more, and I assume that the rest of us can profit from the same promise. It not only says that we will learn our covenants, it says that by knowing those covenants, we will know that we are not cast off from the Lord forever. Knowing our covenant relation is a great blessing, for as we come to know it, we come to understand that repentance and salvation are possible and, by inference, that the sealing power of the covenant is real and eternal. We learn that the promises made to Abraham and his descendants can be fulfilled in us.

Just as he did with ancient Israel, the Lord exercised patience and long-suffering with the Lamanites and Nephites. He endured their constant backsliding and repentance followed by more backsliding. Though he did not countenance their wickedness and though they moved deeper and deeper into sin, the Lord continually held out the promise that they could be saved. Even when total annihilation loomed, the Lord left open a path for saving the children of Lehi. Of course, in the Hebrew Bible we can see this same cycle of righteousness, followed by prosperity, followed by pride, followed by wickedness and then downfall, followed by humility and a return to righteousness. However, we see it more easily in the Book of Mormon because it shows that pattern so clearly. Perhaps most important, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon proves that the Lord keeps his promise that Israel’s children will be given a means of salvation. If we apply the message of this teaching to ourselves (see 1 Nephi 19:23), we begin to appreciate the patience and long-suffering that the Lord will have as he deals with us, our parents, and
our children; and he teaches us the kind of patience we must have with others.

The message of patience and long-suffering, of the possibility of salvation and restoration, gives the Book of Mormon a different look than we might think it to have. In spite of what someone might think he or she sees in the Book of Mormon at first glance—seeing the increasing hostility and war among the Lamanites and Nephites and, finally, the total destruction of the Nephites—the Book of Mormon teaches us to hope. In spite of the total destruction of their people, Mormon and Moroni continue to hope. They compile the Book of Mormon with an eye toward those who are to come, those whom they do not know and cannot see (except as they see them in revelation). They do not know specifically how or when their people will be saved, but they do not give up hope. They trust the Father and the Son to keep their covenants, and Mormon and Moroni continue to hope. They compile the Book of Mormon with an eye toward those who are to come, those whom they do not know and cannot see (except as they see them in revelation). They do not know specifically how or when their people will be saved, but they do not give up hope.

Abinadi seemed to have something like this in mind as he addressed the wicked priests of King Noah:

And now I read unto you the remainder of the commandments of God, for I perceive that they are not written in your hearts; I perceive that ye have studied and taught iniquity the most part of your lives.

(Mosiah 13:11)

I infer that Abinadi believed that reading the scriptures to those who heard him could somehow write the commandments of God in their hearts. Reading and studying the word of God will allow the Lord’s word to be written in our hearts, and if we have it written in our hearts, we are different. To study and teach scriptures, if we do so diligently and faithfully, leaving our hearts open to the changes that the Holy Ghost can bring about, is to study and teach righteousness. More important, it is to learn righteousness, to become righteous.

The title page also says to all that its purpose is to convince us that Jesus is the Christ. As the subtitle to the Book of Mormon reminds us, the Book of Mormon is a witness of Jesus’ divinity. The primary purpose of the Book of Mormon is to convince us that Jesus is the Savior, the Son of the Father.

King Benjamin spoke of both purposes mentioned in the title page, namely, that the Book of Mormon teaches of our covenant relation with the Lord and testifies of him:

I say unto you, if ye have come to a knowledge of the goodness of God, and his matchless power, and his wisdom, and his patience, and his long-suffering towards the children of men; and also, the atonement which has been prepared from the foundation of the world, that thereby salvation might come to him that should put his trust in the Lord, and should be diligent in keeping his commandments, and continue in the faith even unto the end of his life, I mean the life of the mortal body—I say, that this is the man who receiveth salvation, through the atonement which was prepared from the foundation of the world for all mankind, which ever were since the fall of Adam, or who are, or who ever shall be, even unto the end of the world. And this is the means whereby man can be saved except the conditions which I have told you. (Mosiah 4:6–8)

No scripture in the Bible gives us such explicit instruction in what it means to have entered into a covenant with the Father and how that covenant with him requires us to understand and accept the atoning sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ. We do not see much of the life of Jesus Christ in the Book of Mormon, but we are taught much about what it means to say that he is the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ.

We read scripture over and over again so that we can experience the scriptural testimony of Jesus Christ—hearing it with our hearts. Most church members have read the Book of Mormon before, and even those who have not read it often know a good deal
about its message because they have been taught about it in
Primary, Sunday School, sacrament meetings, and seminary. I
knew the basics of the teachings of the Book of Mormon before my
mission, but knowing those teachings is not enough. There is a dif-
ference between knowing the doctrines of the kingdom and under-
going an experience that motivates us to live those doctrines.

Alma teaches that “the preaching of the word had a great ten-
dency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had
more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the
sword, or anything else” (Alma 31:5). He explicitly says that
preaching is a more powerful tool for conversion than any other kind
of experience. To read scripture attentively and prayerfully is to
be preached to. In the scriptures the Lord and his prophets speak to
us, preach to us, and in preaching to us they do something more
than just convey information. If we will listen as we read, if we
will allow our hearts and minds to be open to the new things that
we may discover and be taught, the scriptures will teach us to be
just, to be the kind of people a covenant people must be. In a
word, we hear the voice of God.

Thus, reading the Book of Mormon does more than teach
us doctrines. It gives us experience, the vicarious experience of
those we read about and, more important, the experience with the
Spirit that comes from reading their stories and sermons. Reading
the Book of Mormon gives us an opportunity to be influenced. If
we read prayerfully and with a heart open to the Spirit, any
scripture can give us an experience with the Spirit. Reading script-
ure is a way to allow the Lord to teach us, to preach to us, as it
were, and the Book of Mormon is the scripture provided explicitly
for our times as the means for teaching that Jesus is the Christ.

As every Latter-day Saint knows, Moroni 10:4–5 makes a
promise to the Lamanites, one on which the rest of us also rely: that
we can know the truth of the Book of Mormon through prayer. We
often speak of that promise. It takes little thought to see that it is
a promise that we too can come to know that Jesus is the Christ.
Less often we discuss the exhor-
tation made to the whole world that follows Moroni 10:4–5:

And again I would exhort you that ye would come
unto Christ, and lay hold
upon every good gift, and
touch not the evil gift, nor
the unclean thing. .. . Yea,
come unto Christ, and be
perfected in him, and deny
yourselves of all ungodli-
ness; and if ye shall deny
yourselves of all ungodli-
ness, and love God with all
your might, mind and
strength, then is his grace
sufficient for you, that by
his grace ye may be perfect
in Christ; and if by the
grace of God ye are perfect
in Christ, ye can in nowise
deny the power of God.
And again, if ye by the
grace of God are perfect in
Christ, and deny not his
power, then are ye sancti-
fied in Christ by the grace
of God, through the shed-
ing of the blood of Christ,
which is in the covenant of
the Father unto the remis-
sion of your sins, that ye
become holy, without spot.
(Moroni 10:30, 31, 32–33)

That is the promise of the
Book of Mormon: if, learning of
Christ, we come to him, we can
be sanctified. If we read with our
hearts attuned to the Spirit, we
hear the message of sanctification
preached throughout the Book of
Mormon.

Though it was a while in
coming, my experience with the
Book of Mormon is that, as much
or more than any other scriptural
work, it opens the opportunity for
me to enjoy an experience with
the Spirit, an experience in which
I learn not only the content of the
Book of Mormon, but, more im-
portant, what it means to be a
saint, a person who desires to be
holy, who desires to be like the
Savior, Jesus Christ. Reading the
Book of Mormon gives me a
chance to hear the call of the Spirit,
to have, at least for a while, my
desires purified, to have “no more
desire to do evil” (Alma 19:33).
The Book of Mormon straight-
forwardly directs me along the
path I started on when was bap-
tized, and that is why I love it.
Irreantum

Paul Y. Hoskisson, with Brian M. Hauglid and John Gee

The greatest challenge for persons interested in the meanings of proper names in the Book of Mormon has to do with those names whose meanings we already know, such as Rameumptom, “the holy stand” (Alma 31:21); Rabbanah, “powerful or great king” (Alma 18:13); and Irreantum, “many waters” (1 Nephi 17:5). Six such names with their translations appear in the Book of Mormon. Determining their meanings etymologically is a challenge because any attempt to trace their ancient roots has to come to results that match the translations given in the Book of Mormon and do so without many complicated steps. After all, the ancient people who conferred these names most likely did so with ease, without convoluted linguistic manipulation. On the other hand, names that are not accompanied by a translation are open to any number of possible interpretations because the text does not require a specific outcome.

This study of the name Irreantum has been a double challenge, for the reason just given and also because it was necessary to delve into languages outside the Northwest Semitic language group. For the latter reason, I asked two of my colleagues at Brigham Young University, Brian M. Hauglid and John Gee, whose specialties are respectively Arabic and Egyptian, to contribute to this article.

Biblical Hebrew and Egyptian are the obvious first sources to mine when looking for etymologies for Book of Mormon names. This is because Lehi, who spoke Hebrew, had also “been taught in the language of the Egyptians” (Mosiah 1:4) and had in turn apparently instructed his son Nephi in the same (see 1 Nephi 1:2). Hence, Egyptian and Lehi’s native language, Hebrew, are legitimate sources to examine for possible etymologies. We therefore expect that most Book of Mormon names, at least those on the small plates, would be derived from Hebrew or Egyptian or both. Irreantum and other names accompanied by a translation do not seem to fit into this category.

Why does our English Book of Mormon, the received text, contain both the transliteration, Irreantum, and its translation, “many waters”? Because translators of ancient documents normally render either the transliteration or the translation of a proper name, providing both seems rather unusual. Indeed, of the 188 transliterated proper names that are original to the Book of Mormon and reproduce their ancient form (of which Irreantum is only one example), only 3 percent, that is, six, have also been given a translation. Why just those six? Why are 97 percent of the unique Book of Mormon names given only in transliteration, such as Ether and Anti-Nephi-Lehi? The simplest answer must be not only that the name Irreantum and its translation were recorded on the small plates but also that the Prophet Joseph Smith dutifully rendered both.

Observing that both transliteration and translation were on the plates only moves the original question back one step: Why would Nephi include both the name and its translation on the plates? We can reasonably assume that Nephi believed that his audience would be able to read the script and the language in which the small plates were composed. (In order to avoid specificity at this time, we will call the language of the small plates of Nephi “Nephite.” In fact, the Book of Mormon never mentions what the language and the script on the small plates were.)

If the name Irreantum is Nephite, Nephi would not have

WHAT’S IN A NAME?
needed to supply a translation. He would have expected his Nephite readers to understand and the translator of his record to provide either the translation, as with Bountiful (1 Nephi 17:5), or the transliteration, as with Nahom (1 Nephi 16:34). The only rational reason for Nephi to include both the transliteration and translation is that he did not expect his audience to immediately grasp the meaning of Irreantum, because it was not a readily recognizable Nephite word. Irreantum may have been either a newly coined word in Nephite, thus not immediately transparent for persons who could read that language, or it could represent a borrowing from another language. In either case, Nephi would have felt obligated to provide a translation for an audience that knew only Nephite.

The literary device of supplying the translation of a foreign word or unknown phrase within a text is called a gloss and is well documented in ancient Near Eastern texts. Perhaps the most widely known examples come from the Amarna letters, which were discovered more than a 100 years ago in central Egypt and which were discovered more than a 100 years ago in central Egypt and which were composed in the land of Canaan in the 14th century b.c. These letters, written by scribes who were not native speakers of the language that they were writing (Middle Babylonian), occasionally exhibit a Canaanite gloss, that is, a translation of a Middle Babylonian word into Canaanite as a helpful guide to the reader.

If Irreantum is therefore not Nephite, what language is it? Another way of stating our question is, To what language should we turn to provide a possible etymology for Irreantum? Hebrew and Egyptian can be ruled out because Nephi would have expected Nephites to know both languages and both scripts, just as he did. That is, if the small plates were composed in Egyptian and Irreantum were a Hebrew word, a gloss would not be necessary, and

Limestone mountains rise dramatically from the Indian Ocean along the coast of south Arabia; similar waters were called “Irreantum” by Nephi. Courtesy S. Kent Brown.
vice versa. Hence, when looking for an etymology for *Irreantum*, we need to look in languages other than Hebrew and Egyptian. At the same time, we need to restrict the search to roots that would allow the translation “many waters.”

During the eight years that Lehi and his family traveled in the wilderness toward the land of Bountiful, they either could have picked up enough of other local languages to coin exotic place-names or they could have borrowed non-Nephite place-names from local people, which is evidently the case with the place-name *Nahom*. Such a language could be ancient South Semitic, which was used in the general area through which Lehi and his family traveled during their eight-year journey.

In turning now to *Irreantum*, and in particular the first part of the name, the root *rwy*, whose basic meaning has to do with watering, appears in South Semitic pre-Islamic proper names of Arabia. The most interesting name among these texts is *Irreantum*. Because it is both the name of a place and in particular the first part of the name, the root *rwy* could be ancient South Semitic. This is precisely what we find. The first element, *–an*, is a common affix (a particle appended to a word) used in all the Semitic languages, including ancient South Semitic. It occurs “especially in abstracts,” meaning abstract nouns, similar to the use of the particle *–ship* in the English word *kingship*. An abstraction from “watering” seems to fit the requirement here that *Irreantum* have something to do with water.

As the element is rendered here, it cannot be a Hebrew form of the affix. Due to the so-called Canaanite shift, Hebrew and a few other Northwest Semitic languages have a long *ā* where other Semitic languages have an (accented) long *ā*. Thus, this common Semitic affix, *–ān*, became *–ān* in Hebrew. Therefore, *irre–ān* fits well what we might expect from a South Semitic word but not from Hebrew, from which we would expect *irre–ān*. This may be the reason that at first glance *Irreantum* might not have been immediately transparent to the native Nephite reader.

The final presumed element of the name, *–tum*, could be derived from the fairly common Semitic root *tm(m)*, which has meanings related to “completeness” or “wholeness” or “entirety,” as in the last word of the phrase *Urim and Thummim*. Thus, a phrase in Isaiah 47:9, which includes the element *–tum* and is translated in the KJV as “in their perfection,” literally means “in their entirety.” But “a more free rendering is in superabundance.” If we accept this explanation, then *–tum* in *Irreantum* could represent the common Semitic root *tm(m)*. In keeping with our hypothesis above that irre and *–ān* could be South Semitic, *–tm* also occurs as an element in pre-Islamic South Semitic names.

To sum up, if *Irreantum* is a South Semitic name, it could be composed of *irre–ān* plus *–tum*. These words would form a two-noun construct chain that would mean something like “watering of completeness” or “watering of (super)abundance,” a meaning...
that is compatible with the translation “many waters.” Admittedly, arriving at this proposed etymology required considerable dexterity and several conjectures. But all of the conjectures fall well within accepted Semitic philological norms.

**

Because some scholars in the past have proposed an Egyptian derivation for *Irreantum*, a glance at possibilities in Egyptian might be in order. Indeed, such a derivation, if it were clean and neat, would be desirable. It would obviate the need to propose Semitic language conjectures that cobble together a number of linguistic possibilities.

It has been suggested that *Irreantum* might be derived from the Egyptian phrase *iiry ʻnd.t*, attested only in a fourth-century B.C. Egyptian papyrus. On the surface this appears to be a good candidate for *Irreantum*. However, the suggestion stems perhaps from seeing the determinative for water, ☉, as the writing of the word *mw*, “water.” The writing of both possibilities would be identical, *iiry ʻnd.t mw*. But reading the final signs as *mw*, “water,” is gramatically less likely than reading them as the water determinative. A possible later Coptic equivalent could be ḫẹr-??-ḥoıy, where the question marks represent the word ʻnd.t, which is unattested in Coptic. We would need a Coptic form, *wnte*, from a hypothetical Old Kingdom ḫanqat (where ṛ represents an unknown vowel), in order to have a proper vocalization of *Irreantum* in Nephi’s day.

In addition, the passage in which this lone candidate for *Irreantum* occurs does not entirely support the meaning of “many waters.” The words of the passage that correspond to *iiry ʻnd.t* have been bolded in the following translation: “O lord of the slaughter that is beside the water of Busiris, who is over the water of the ocean, who extends the life of the chief of the palace, who lives and causes others to live, come that you may protect me from death today, and the terror and the coming of darkness because I am he who binds on heads and establishes necks, and who gives breath to the weary of heart” (Urk. VI 67). Though water is mentioned in the passage, the plain reading of the text does not seem to support a meaning such as “many waters.” Thus, the suggestion based on Egyptian, as morphologically tempting as the phrase *iiry ʻnd.t* may be, is not any better than the South Semitic proposal above, and in fact may not be as plausible. In addition, it does not explain why Nephi provided a translation.

**

In conclusion, the best solution seems to be the South Semitic etymology, *irre–ān tum*, meaning “watering of completeness” or “watering of (super) abundance.” Perhaps future scholars will find a cleaner derivation in Egyptian or an even better suggestion from one or more Semitic languages. Nevertheless, future explanations would still need to explain why Nephi provided both the transliteration and the translation and would still need to account for each element in the name using accepted philological methods. The present South Semitic suggestion adequately addresses both issues.
The prophet Jacob frames one of the most powerful and poignant scriptures in the Book of Mormon when he addresses wayward Nephite men in the presence of their families:

And also it grieveth me that I must use so much boldness of speech concerning you, before your wives and your children, many of whose feelings are exceedingly tender and chaste and delicate before God, which thing is pleasing unto God; and it supposeth me that they have come up hither to hear the pleasing word of God, yea, the word which healeth the wounded soul. (Jacob 2:7–8)

Jacob further clarifies that the Lord is not pleased with those who disregard the tender feelings of others:

And I will not suffer, saith the Lord of Hosts, that the cries of the fair daughters of this people, which I have led out of the land of Jerusalem, shall come up unto me against the men of my people, saith the Lord of Hosts. For they shall not lead away captive the daughters of my people because of their tenderness, save I shall visit them with a sore curse, even unto destruction; for they shall not commit whoredoms, like unto them of old, saith the Lord of Hosts. (Jacob 2:32–33)

According to Jacob, those among God’s people who, through unworthiness, break hearts, destroy confidence, and wound others emotionally do more harm than outsiders who live unrighteously:

Behold, ye have done greater iniquities than the Lamanites, our brethren. Ye have broken the hearts of your tender wives, and lost the confidence of your children, because of your bad examples before them; and the sobbings of their hearts ascend up to God against you. And because of the strictness of the word of God, which cometh down against you, many hearts died, pierced with deep wounds. (Jacob 2:35)

Those who compromise standards or disregard covenants are often not capable of respecting or responding to the feelings of family members with tenderness. Those who are hardened may accuse the tenderhearted of being hypersensitive, sanctimonious, or self-righteous.

On the other hand, when we keep the commandments and set a good example, we can be sensitive to the feelings of others and thus be instrumental in healing broken hearts. An understanding of the word *tender* in the scriptures can help us nurture tender feelings in ourselves and in others. The WordCruncher version of the Latter-day Saint scriptures provides the following translations (listed first) and connotations (in parentheses) for the word *tender* in Hebrew, Greek, and English:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affectionate (pleasing, delightful)</th>
<th>Merciful (kind, beautiful, pious)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cherishing (serving)</td>
<td>Nursing (fostering, supporting, quiet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassionate (sparing, sympathetic)</td>
<td>Sensitive (intelligent, perceptive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faint (relaxed)</td>
<td>Soft (secret, melting, fine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentle (modest, humble, meek)</td>
<td>Weak (still)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our capacity for tender feelings can give pleasure, delight, and beauty to our relationships, even though such feelings may likewise make us vulnerable to hurt and pain.

Some may wonder why the Lord would be pleased with “weak” or “faint” feelings in the hearts...
of the Saints. While the words *faint* and *weak* often have negative meanings, they can also have positive senses in their etymologies. One of the positive connotations for the word *faint* is "relaxed," that is, "compliant" or "not resisting," as in Psalm 84:2: "My soul longeth, yea, even *fainteth* for the courts of the Lord." Likewise, *weak* can mean "still" or "not aggressive," as in the scriptures "Be *still*, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10) and "God hath chosen the *weak* things of the world to confound the things which are mighty" (1 Corinthians 1:27).

Tenderness does imply a kind of literal weakness or vulnerability, as we can see in the following translations of the Hebrew word *rak*: "Leah was *tender eyed*" (Genesis 29:17) and "children are *tender*" (Genesis 33:13). However, tenderness has positive connotations of softness or humility in translations of the same Hebrew root: "God maketh my heart *soft*" (Job 23:16) and "thine heart was *tender*, and thou didst humble thyself before God" (2 Chronicles 34:27).

In another Hebrew root, the word *tender* evokes sweet images of maidenhood, motherhood, and godhood. The Hebrew root *rhm* lies behind words rendered in the King James Version of the Old Testament as "bowels," "compassion," "damsel," "tender love," "great mercy," "pity," or "womb." The literal meaning appears in 1 Kings 3:26: "her *bowels* yearned upon her son." The figurative meaning with regard to the Lord’s compassion appears in Psalm 25:6: "thy *tender* mercies."

The Lord’s tenderness is also conveyed in the translation of the Hebrew root *ynq*: "he shall grow up before him as a *tender* plant" (Isaiah 53:2; Mosiah 14:2). In this case the Hebrew root carries connotations of suckling, nursing, and giving milk, showing that the Messiah would be raised up by a loving mother but also implying that he would develop nurturing qualities such as tenderness and compassion.

In Greek the noun *tender* appears as *splanchnon*, probably derived from the word for spleen. The figurative connotations of *splanchnon* include pity, sympathy, inward affection, and tender mercy, as in "the *tender mercy* of our God" (Luke 1:78) and "be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted" (Ephesians 4:32). The very essence of the word *tenderness* lies in positive aspects of family life: our desire to become as little children (see Mosiah 3:18) and to nurture as mothers and fathers (see 2 Nephi 6:7).

Chastity and virtue are also "clear and precious" to the Lord and his children (see Moroni 9:9). Jacob warns the unfaithful Nephite men that the Lord is not pleased with those who deprive others of chaste feelings:

> But the word of God burdens me because of your grosser crimes. . . . This people begin to wax in iniquity; they understand not the scriptures, for they seek to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms. . . . For I, the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women. And whoredoms are an abomination before me. (Jacob 2:23–28)

Jacob is loath to discuss violations of the law of chastity in the presence of those who are morally clean, but he must warn those who stray:

> But, notwithstanding the greatness of the task, I must do according to the strict commands of God, and tell you concerning your wickedness and abominations, in the presence of the pure in heart, and the broken heart, and under the glance of the piercing eye of the Almighty God. (Jacob 2:10)

Jacob admonishes married men to be chaste, so the call to be chaste is not limited to those who are unmarried. Chastity is not the absence of intimate feelings; chastity is both the preparation for and the preserver of true intimacy in marital relations.

A study of the meanings and translations of the word *chaste* in the scriptures can help us nurture chaste feelings in ourselves and others:

| Blameless (clean, clear, free, innocent) | Modest (orderly, decorous) |
| Clean (fair, pure) | Perfect (true, full, complete, spotless) |
| Clear (bright, glorious) | Pure (clean, clear) |
| Consecrated (clean, dedicated, holy, sacred) | Religious (reverent) |
| Innocent (not guilty) | Simple (plain, complete, consummated) |

While the word *chaste* means being clean and spotless, it also carries connotations of consummation and total fulfillment. The word also has figurative applications in the metaphor of Christ as the Bridegroom and the church as a bride:

> For . . . I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a *chaste* virgin to Christ.
But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:2–3)

According to Strong’s Greek dictionary in the WordCruncher scripture program, the word for chaste is related to Greek hagios, which is often translated as “holy.” It literally means “clean” and figuratively means “innocent,” “modest,” “perfect,” “chaste,” “clear,” or “pure.” Pure or chaste feelings will identify us when we meet the Lord in the second coming (see 1 John 3:2–3; Moroni 7:48).

A related Greek term is hagnos, which means “sacred, physically pure, morally blameless, religious, ceremonially consecrated, most holy, saint.” The word appears as pure in Philippians 4:8: “whatsoever things are pure, . . . think on these things.” Hagnos also appears as chaste in Titus 2:4–5: “teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands.” Forms of the word hagnos appear as the word throughout the English New Testament, so pure and chaste feelings are related to our identity as Latter-day Saints.

After addressing the wayward men, Jacob turns his remarks to those who are pure in heart:

Look unto God with firmness of mind, and pray unto him with exceeding faith, and he will console you in your afflictions, and he will plead your cause, and send down justice upon those who seek your destruction. O all ye that are pure in heart, lift up your heads and receive the pleasing word of God, and feast upon his love; for ye may, if your minds are firm, forever. (Jacob 3:1–2).

Jacob explains that Saints can keep their heads high, commune with the Lord, and feel his love if they will keep their minds firm. In English the words mind and music both have the same Indo-European root, so our mental and musical faculties are linguistically intertwined. Uplifting music is one way to keep our minds firm, our thoughts pure, and our feelings chaste, especially the hymns of Zion (see Boyd K. Packer, “Inspiring Music—Worthy Thoughts,” Ensign, January 1974, 25–28). K. Newell Dayley, dean of the Brigham Young University’s College of Fine Arts, reminds us that singing “can provide a conduit to spiritual enrichment for those who are seeking with real intent to purify their lives” (Centering the Arts in Christ,” BYU devotional address, 6 March 2001).

Sometimes those who do not value chaste feelings label those who are seeking to purify their lives as being prudish or repressed. When the broken-hearted or the pure in heart face opposition because of their tender and chaste feelings, they can take comfort in beautiful music, now and in the world to come. Gustav Mahler uses a passage from “Des Knaben Wunderhorn” to describe heavenly music in the fourth movement of his fourth symphony. The soprano soloist sings the opinion of the little children in paradise that “Kein’ Musik ist ja nicht auf Erden, / Die uns’rer verglichen kann werden” (There is not yet any music on earth that can compare with ours).

Jacob teaches that the Lord is not pleased with those who wound the delicate minds of others:

Wherefore, it burdeneth my soul that I should be constrained, because of the strict commandment which I have received from God, to admonish you according to your crimes, to enlarge the wounds of those who are already wounded, instead of consoling and healing their wounds; and those who have not been wounded, instead of feasting upon the pleasing word of God have daggers placed to pierce their souls and wound their delicate minds. (Jacob 2:9)

Each of us has a responsibility to treat the souls and minds of others with care. By “feasting upon the pleasing word of God” and searching out the meaning of words in scripture, we can nurture delicate feelings in ourselves and others. Surprisingly, the word delicate is not just a synonym for the words tender or fragile; it includes a wide range of positive connotations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breakable (open)</th>
<th>Fair (goodly)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cheerful (bright, glad, merry, joyful)</td>
<td>Playful (laughing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comely (beautiful)</td>
<td>Pleasant (delectable, precious, beloved)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dainty (charming)</td>
<td>Refined (purged, purified, clarified)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delightful (favorable)</td>
<td>Soft (gentle)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Volume 11, 2002)
In English the words *delicate* and *delight* have the same origin. In fact, the primary use of the word *delicate* in the Old Testament refers to women who live in wealth and refinement. For example, one Hebrew root underlying delicate is ’ng, literally meaning “to be soft or pliant” and figuratively meaning “luxurious,” “delicate,” “delightful,” or “pleasant,” as in Jeremiah 6:2, “I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and *delicate* woman.” However, the same root also has meanings of tenderness and righteous joy, as in Micah 1:16, “poll thee for thy *delicate* children” and Job 22:26, “then shalt thou have thy *delight* in the Almighty.”

A set of similar meanings applies to the Hebrew root ’dn, which means “voluptuously” in Lamentations 4:5: “They that did feed *delicately* are desolate.” The same root means “pleasure” or “joy” in Proverbs 29:17: “he shall give *delight* unto thy soul.” The root ’dn also lies behind Eden, so to have delicate feelings can be likened to having paradisiacal joy, or the millennial joy of the Garden of Eden.

Just as the Saints may feel delight in the Lord, the Lord himself has delightful feelings of love for his children. According to Strong’s Hebrew dictionary in WordCruncher, the root ḥṣq includes the meanings such as “cling,” “join,” “love,” “delight in,” “deliver,” and “desire,” as in Deuteronomy 10:15: “the Lord had a *delight* in thy fathers to love them.” Like the word *chaste*, the words *delicate* and *delight* imply a fulness of love rather than limitations on our ability to love one another.

Delicate or delightful feelings are pleasing to the Lord. The Hebrew root ḫḥṣ literally means “to bend,” but it implies being pleased with someone or delighting in something, as in “If the Lord *delight* in us, then he will bring us into this land” (Numbers 14:8) and “I, the Lord God, *delight* in the chastity of women” (Jacob 2:28). Several other Hebrew words for the concept “delight” also yield interesting insights.

In summary, the prophet Jacob teaches that tender, chaste, and delicate feelings are pleasing to God. We can develop such feelings in our hearts and minds by feasting upon the scriptures, which may include searching out the Hebrew, Greek, and Indo-European forms of key words in dictionaries and concordances. Tender feelings are intelligent as well as sensitive. Chaste feelings are fulfilling as well as clean and pure. Delicate feelings are refined and delightful as well as fragile and fragrant, like flowers in the Lord’s garden. We often associate such feelings with the role of women, as in Margaret Nadauld’s inspired counsel:

> The world has enough women who are tough; we need women who are tender... There are enough women who are rude; we need women who are refined... We have popularity; we need more purity. (“The Joy of Womanhood,” *Ensign*, November 2000, 15)

However, the Lord expects all of us to develop reverence, creativity, and sensibility in our lives, whether we are men, women, or children. Those who do not nurture such feelings may lose the capacity to heal, help, respect, and respond to the hearts, minds, and souls of others.

You are welcome to send comments, questions, and suggestions to Cynthia_Hallen@byu.edu.
Review by Martin Raish

Reading and pondering *By the Hand of Mormon* is time well spent, for this book brilliantly exemplifies the label “difficult to put down.” Yet while it is fascinating and inspiring, it is also very challenging. It is not the author’s writing style, choice of words (with some interesting exceptions), or organization of ideas that are demanding, but simply the fact that he covers so much ground. To gain the most from his book, readers should take the time to consult its 800 or so endnotes, where countless hidden treasures may be found. Taking notes along the way is a good idea as well.

Serendipity intervened as I searched for an effective way to illustrate how densely packed this book is. The day that I began writing this review, the latest issue of the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* (vol. 10, no. 2, 2001) arrived. In it Givens adapted a chapter from his book as an article, “The Book of Mormon as Dialogic Revelation” is about one-third as long as chapter 8, “‘Plain and Precious Truths’: The Book of Mormon as New Theology, Part 2—Dialogic Revelation.” The article contains the essence of the chapter in 11 rather than 30 pages (and 45 rather than 99 endnotes) and makes a portion of his book more accessible.

For example, in his book Givens contends that the Book of Mormon presents divine revelations “as the province of everyman” (p. 221) rather than “preeminently the privilege of the prophets” (p. 220), which is the understanding of prominent Christian thinkers concerning the Bible. In making this point, he offers a detailed analysis of ideas from about a dozen writers (supported by no fewer than 42 endnotes!) and then introduces the Book of Mormon. In contrast, his *Journal* article covers the same topics without all the supporting materials and by simplifying some language. Consider this sentence from the book: “Particularized manifestations or communications are either redundant or illogical in a universe that is itself coextensive with God” (p. 212). In his attention in other review publications, the *Journal* has chosen to print two reviews not only to probe the book from different points of view but also to lend emphasis to the importance of the book’s appearance. Givens’s book also raises the possibility of writing for a broad audience since, even though it concentrates on a Latter-day Saint scripture, it enjoys a place on the world stage because of the publisher.
shorter essay he expresses the same idea using more words but with a sentence structure that more clearly accentuates his point: “Particularized manifestations and communications are illogical if God is utterly transcendent and therefore entirely outside the physical realm. And they are redundant if God is perfectly immanent and therefore already present within the human spirit and all creation.” Similarly, a few lines later in the Journal article, he argues that “the reality of God and his great acts . . . must be personally experienced to be operative in human life,” rather than speaking of revelations as being “intersubjectively” experienced, as in the book. In neither of these examples is anything lost by using the simpler wording or structure.

Readers should not let such difficulties dissuade them from tackling this book. Givens’s writing style is by and large succinct and elegantly sufficient. But his book is intended for an audience much larger than only Latter-day Saints. He writes for educated individuals of all faiths who may already have ideas about concepts such as the nature of revelation or the power of mystical intuition, and he does so in their language, which may be somewhat foreign to many LDS readers. We should accept his efforts to reach well-informed non-LDS readers as an invitation to lift ourselves and broaden our understanding. By the Hand of Mormon is well worth a second (or even third or fourth) reading.

In his introduction Givens sets out what he intends to cover in his book. He explains that he will attempt to answer the question of why any intelligent person would ever accept the Book of Mormon as true and will examine “the initial shape and subsequent transformations of the Book of Mormon, how it has been understood, positioned, packaged, utilized, exploited, presented and represented, by its detractors and by its proponents” (p. 6). The first goal is met in numerous, subtle ways. The second he approaches more head-on.

Chapter 1 reads like a fast-paced novel as Givens recounts the story of Joseph Smith’s life, his first vision, the recovery of the plates, the translation, and other events of the early years of the church. He provides valuable insights into who Joseph was and how he likely felt or thought about himself. Chapter 2 summarizes the structure of the Book of Mormon, its events and writers, its teachings with respect to the Old Testament, and its publication and circulation.

Chapter 3 introduces an idea that many readers may not have previously encountered: that the enormous significance of the Book of Mormon is to be found as much in the manner of its origin as in the religious teachings it contains. Givens cites the testimonies of several early converts to substantiate his contention that the book “has exerted influence within the church and reaction outside the church not primarily by virtue of its substance, but rather its manner of appearing, not on the merits of what it says, but what it enacts” (p. 64). Many Saints can vouch for the veracity of this statement. Countless conversions rest on the conviction that its “manner of appearing” was of God, which made the acceptance of its teachings easier and more efficacious.

“Book of Mormon archaeology” (whatever that might mean, as Givens so correctly points out) is the focus of Chapter 4, “The Search for a Mesoamerican Troy.” He provides an excellent summary of the major (non-LDS) writers of the early 19th century whose discoveries in Central and South America were seized upon by church leaders as substantiating evidence for the reality of Nephite culture. He then leaps over the second half of the century, when Mormonism was focused on migration and colonization and thus minimally concerned with where the Book of Mormon lands might have been, and closes with a pithy discussion of the efforts and impact of B. H. Roberts and, at mid-century, the New World Archaeological Foundation.

Chapter 5, “The Search for a Rational Belief,” shows how rational argument, in the words of Austin Farrer, “does not create belief, but [does maintain] a climate in which belief may flourish” (p. 118). He reviews the ideas of Hugh W. Nibley, the research efforts of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), and the writings of John L. Sorenson. He delineates the state of the debate of several questions, such as the language and form of the Book of Mormon and Book of Mormon names. He concludes with overviews of the evangelical, scholarly, and LDS responses to these issues.

Chapter 6 offers a series of mini-reviews of theories by Fawn Brodie, Dan Vogel, Michael Quinn, John Brooke, and other writers who have attempted to explain the Book of Mormon from various alternative theoretical perspectives. He outlines the strengths
and weaknesses of their views, sometimes in prose that is complex but with clear summaries to help readers stay on the path. For example, after a detailed examination of how the Book of Mormon is both like and unlike the Bible, he brings the point home by “putting it differently”:

Helaman’s miraculous story of the Stripling Warriors, like the Book of Job to many Christians, could be considered fanciful but inspiring mythology to Mormons and the Book of Mormon still be scripture. But the story of the gold plates could not be fanciful mythology and the Book of Mormon still be scripture. And this relationship of Joseph Smith—and his story—to the Book of Mormon simply has no counterpart in the history of the Bible. And any attempt to find middle ground by analogizing the Book of Mormon and the Bible that does not take cognizance of this fundamental and irreducible difference between those two sacred texts may be an exercise in futility. (p. 178)

Chapter 7, “‘Plain and Precious Truths’: The Book of Mormon as New Theology, Part 1—The Encounter with Biblical Christianity,” is another difficult one, but judiciously placed summaries provide the necessary respite to understand the chapter’s message—that “as regards its religious teachings . . . the Book of Mormon has been valued by the faithful for teaching the ‘plain and precious truths’ of the gospel while testifying to a historically enlarged role for the embodied Christ and his church” (pp. 207–8).

The concluding chapter ties all the topical threads together. Givens reminds us that “in spite of the Book of Mormon’s shifting fortunes among skeptics, scholars, and even saints, the scripture has remained a constant in anchoring Mormon identity and distinctiveness” (p. 242). He describes how it “is poised to become increasingly central to Mormon worship, identity, and culture” in the years to come (p. 245). With these thoughts in mind, he then looks hopefully toward the time when we all will turn greater attention to the many questions and challenges that the Book of Mormon “imposes on its vast public, willingly or no” (p. 245).

By the Hand of Mormon will reward and enrich every diligent reader with new understandings of, and a deeper appreciation for, the Book of Mormon. I wholeheartedly recommend it to all who are serious about expanding their knowledge of this sacred book.
Review by C. Gary Bennett

In his new work, Terryl L. Givens, professor of English at the University of Richmond, Virginia, and author of *The Viper on the Hearth*, which won the Chapman Award from the Mormon History Association, has featured the Book of Mormon as the sacred scripture that has shaped—and continues to shape—an emerging world religion. He argues that detractors’ past facile treatments of the book as the product of a mere deceiver, or the work of a charlatan or cultist, are woefully inadequate explanations of a book with growing importance among both scholars and believers. With over 100 million copies in print in over 100 languages, the Book of Mormon, he argues, must be given a much broader hearing than heretofore. Above all, without arguing for its historical or divine authenticity, Givens demands that it be respected for its content, mission, and position of scriptural authority by its millions of readers from all over the world.

In the first few chapters, Givens presents a thoroughly researched historiographical overview of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, including a discussion of the ancient plates as its source, the witnesses, and the translation process. He postulates that the authenticity of the metal plates, the many eye and ear witnesses, and the meaning and message of the text itself form a substantial basis for a rapidly growing new Christian religion. He has a talent for presenting the case with care and scholarship, which often causes his readers, Latter-day Saint or otherwise, to reconsider the old questions within the robust and expanding reality of a new religion. Without being a blind apologist, Givens successfully demonstrates intrusive fallacies in the old Solomon Spaulding and Ethan Smith theories of Book of Mormon origins. In his chapter on archaeology and Book of Mormon geography, he shows, quite convincingly in fact, that although evidence remains inconclusive, ongoing research in linguistics, language, and archaeology continues to add plausibility to the book’s origins, so much so that even the Smithsonian is no longer willing to claim that discrepancies exist between the Book of Mormon and the current state of American archaeology (p. 132).

Givens also takes up matters of Book of Mormon theology and presents a strong case that its theology does not merely mirror the issues of 19th-century America, as theorized by Alexander Campbell and others. Rather, it exhibits many elucidations, doctrines, and points of view peculiar to itself.

In a later chapter on “dialogical” revelation, Givens shows that the book itself is full of examples of God’s speaking to people in interactive revelation and that such revelation is a strong element in the conversion of millions. Givens summarizes:

In the world of the Book of Mormon, concepts like revelation, prayer, inspiration, mystery find powerful and substantive redefinition. That may well be the Book of Mormon’s most significant and revolutionary, as well as controversial, contribution to religious thinking. The particularity and specificity, the vividness, the concreteness, and the accessibility of revelatory experience—those realities both underlie and overshadow the narrated history and doctrine and constitute the record. The “knowability” of all truth, openness of mystery, the reality of personal revelation find vivid illustration within the record and invite reenactment outside it. (p. 221)

The author never claims to prove or disprove the Book of Mormon but concludes that now, more than ever before, it is presented to a wide world as vibrant scripture, seriously claiming its place as another testament of Christ. As significant a contribution as *By the Hand of Mormon* is, it is not without faults. For instance, Givens is somewhat abstruse in his writing, excessively wordy and complicated. He also relies almost exclusively on the so-called Mesoamerican theory of Book of Mormon geography. This being said, this reviewer, who has taught Book of Mormon classes for more than 30 years, considers *By the Hand of Mormon* to be among the most significant works extant on Book of Mormon studies. ☉
The Queen of Sheba, Skyscraper Architecture, and Lehi’s Dream

The recently closed Queen of Sheba exhibition of ancient treasures from Yemen, which was showing at the British Museum (9 June–13 October 2002), featured artifacts that replicated certain architectural aspects from large buildings, including temples. Importantly, among the artifacts was the seventh-century B.C. votive altar that preserves the name Nahom/Nihm (see 1 Nephi 16:34) and has been featured previously in the Journal.1 That altar and other decorative pieces mirror the squarish nature of the buildings of ancient Yemen—there were few if any arches, circles, or curved lines.

Why touch on this point? Because “the great and spacious building” of Lehi’s dream is one of only two visual aspects that he calls “strange” (1 Nephi 8:26, 33).2 Why would Lehi call the building strange unless it had a basis in reality? We suggest that it does.

At this point we have to be clear about one important point: Lehi’s dream was prophetic throughout. In the long view, for example, he beheld the Messiah, who was to come “six hundred years” later, as well as the prophet who would announce and baptize him (see 1 Nephi 10:4, 8–9). In the short view, he foresaw his trek into the wilderness with the aid of divine help while traveling at night through “a dark and dreary waste” (see 8:4–7). Among other topographical features that Lehi and Sariah and their party would encounter as they moved south into Arabia were deep wadis or canyons—called variously “terrible gulf” or “awful gulf”—that would fill with mud and debris—“filthy water”—after seasonal rainstorms (12:16, 18; 15:28).

Now we return to the question, Why does Lehi call the building strange? The first and most natural answer is that its appearance, its architecture, was unfamiliar to Lehi. Even though he may well have traveled to remote and interesting destinations, he had evidently not seen all of the cultural peculiarities of his extended world. Most architectural influences in the Jerusalem area came from Egypt and Phoenicia, where the architecture is typically one or two stories in height. This is an important point because, in contrast, the architecture of south Arabia, where Lehi and Sariah traveled, featured skyscrapers. To a person from Jerusalem, these skyscrapers would have been unusual, even strange. Such skyscrapers continue to modern times. In this connection we note with interest that Lehi describes the “spacious building” of his dream—it probably had a broad floor plan—as standing “as it were in the air, high above the earth” (1 Nephi 8:26). Skyscraper architecture would seem to be a match, even in a heavensent dream wherein objects and scenes are highly symbolic.

How do we know that buildings in ancient south Arabia reached significant heights? After all, tall buildings have not survived. On the basis of archaeological discoveries at the ancient site of Shabwah in the 1970s, the French team concluded that the foundations of public buildings supported structures that rose four and five stories into the air. (None of the upper stories had survived; it was the design of the foundations that provided the decisive clues.) What is most striking is the fact that these early foundations went back to the eighth century B.C. and earlier, more than 100 years before Lehi and Sariah undertook their memorable trek. That is not all. Building inscriptions discovered at other ancient sites in the region “indicate the number of floors within houses as three or four, with up to six in [the town of] Zafar.” That is, private dwellings also rose several stories into the air. What is more, these inscriptions that “provide the names of the owners” of the buildings also date from the eighth century B.C.

Returning to Lehi’s dream, we ask how such tall buildings would appear to Lehi to be “in the air, high above the earth” (1 Nephi 8:26). One answer is that travelers in the deserts of Arabia typically traveled at night because of the heat and because of the danger of marauders. That is exactly what Lehi does at the beginning of his dream, for the wilderness through which he travels with his guide is “dark” (1 Nephi 8:4, 7). The first row of windows in tall buildings was high enough to offer safety to inhabitants. At night, light from the windows of these buildings made them appear as if suspended in the air.

In conclusion, Lehi evidently foresaw an aspect of ancient architecture that was by his day a characteristic of buildings in south Arabia and was unique in that part of the world. Contemporary buildings there “stood as it were in the air” (1 Nephi 8:26), rising to imposing heights of five and six stories. Did contemporaries of Joseph Smith know about this building feature of the ancient past? The answer has to be no. Nor did Joseph Smith. Instead, it was Lehi, who beheld such a structure in his vision, and members of his party traveling through the region, who saw this “strange” appearance of skyscraper buildings.

This review is based on the recently published study of S. Kent Brown, “New Light from Arabia on Lehi’s Trail,” in Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, eds., Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2002), 55–125, especially pp. 68–69.
The Ossuary of “James, . . . Brother of Jesus”

Recent media attention on an inscribed ossuary—an ancient stone box that was the final resting place for the bones of a certain “James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus”—has caught the imagination of most of the Christian world.1 Might this box have once held the remains of the James whom Christians know as both the “brother of the Lord” and “the Just”? (see Galatians 1:19). If it does, then the box forms the earliest known artifact that affirms the existence of the Savior, even earlier than the gold plates that underlie the Book of Mormon. How so?

So what do we make of the ossuary of James? As many people are aware, an ossuary was a carved stone box that held the bones of one or more deceased persons. Throughout most of the first century B.C. and first century A.D., the custom among Jews was for relatives to bury a person in a tomb and, about a year later, after the soft tissues of the body had decayed away, to move the bones into this type of a box, which was then stored in a niche or on a shelf in the family tomb. Two hundred thirty-three of the almost 900 known ossuaries recovered in Israel bear inscriptions that repeat the name of the deceased person whose bones are stored in the box. Other decorations, including floral designs in the form of roundels or rosettes, appear on the sides of some ossuaries.2

The ossuary bearing the names of James, Joseph, and Jesus exhibits both an inscription and one decorative roundel on the opposite side. Unfortunately, the place and time of discovery of the stone box—what scholars call its provenance—are not known. The current owner, a Mr. Oded Golan of Jerusalem, who is an antiquities collector, bought the ossuary from a dealer who, presumably, had purchased the box from the person who had excavated the box illegally.

During the past autumn, the box was packed and then shipped by air to the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada, where it was on display from 16 November to 29 December 2002. Unfortunately, during transit a crack developed near the bottom of the box that runs almost around the entire circumference of the ossuary. Regrettably, the crack crosses a few of the letters near the end of the inscription so that the best views of that part of the writing come from photographs taken before the ossuary was moved to Toronto.

Currently, the main questions under review are (1) whether the ossuary is authentically ancient and dates to the first century A.D. and (2) whether the inscription—the writing on the side of the ossuary—is authentic and dates to the same period of time. If scholars can answer both positively, then there is a reasonable possibility that the deceased James is indeed the brother of the Savior, Jesus of Nazareth.
At the moment, virtually all scholars agree with André Lemaire, the French scholar who first studied the ossuary and authored the initial study, that the stone box fits the general pattern of Jewish ossuaries known from the first century A.D. And all agree that the box was manufactured to hold the remains of an adult, not a child. Beyond these points of agreement, there is a very wide range of views about the inscription itself and the persons whom it identifies.

Concerning the inscription, scholars are divided over the question of whether the writing was incised on the side of the box all at the same time. A number of individuals, including paleographer Ada Yardeni, have concluded that the second part of the inscription—“brother of Jesus”—was written later than the first part. They believe there were two carvers, one who inscribed his letters in a formal way and a later one who was less careful in his work. In the opinion of these scholars, the earlier carver plied his craft in the first century A.D. and the second did so at a later date, though there is no consensus on a date. Hence, in their view the expression “brother of Jesus” is a later addition. If that is so, one has to suggest a plausible motive for adding this expression to an ossuary that would be hidden in a tomb out of the public gaze. And none comes readily to mind, unless one could show that the phrase “brother of Jesus” is modern and therefore a clear forgery. A second set of issues has to do with the customary first-century A.D. Aramaic spelling of the term for “brother of” and why a later carver would not only be acquainted with this spelling, an unlikely prospect, but would also want to reproduce it.

On the other side of the debate stands Lemaire, who is an expert on inscriptions from the biblical period. He maintains that the inscription dates to the right time frame, the early 60s A.D., when James was martyred as a result of a plot against him. And science seems to stand on his side, for one of the important aspects of the physical makeup of the ossuary concerns the patina adhering to its outer surface. This patina, which consists of the discolored surface owing to contact with surrounding soil over an extended period of time, shows evidence of ancient date because it does not flake off when touched and has even penetrated the cuts made by the artisan’s tools after he incised the letters of the inscription except, apparently, the part that reads “brother of Jesus.” That the patina is old is affirmed by the laboratory report from the Geological Survey of the State of Israel, which concludes that “the patina does not contain any modern elements (such as modern pigments) and it adheres firmly to the stone.” In addition, the “same gray patina is found also within some of the letters of the inscription.”

In a different vein, what are the chances that a family from the first century A.D. would include the names of Joseph, James, and Jesus, the first as father and the other two as sons? Lemaire has drawn together a few statistics based on the inscribed ossuaries known from ancient Palestine. One problem, of course, is that such statistics rest on artifacts that happen to have been preserved and then discovered—a random enterprise—rather than on all ossuaries that were carved during the New Testament age. Based on an estimate that the total number of inhabitants of Jerusalem at the middle of the first century A.D. was probably about 80,000 people (thus about 40,000 males), and based on the frequency of the names Joseph, James, and Jesus in all recovered inscriptive materials, Lemaire calculates that in Jesus’ day about 0.05 percent of the population of the capital city—1 in 2,000 males—would have been named James with a father named Joseph and a brother named Jesus. That is, there were perhaps 20 males living in Jerusalem whose name and family names would fit the expression “James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus.” The unknown factors here are how many such persons received final burial in ossuaries and, next, how many of their ossuaries were inscribed.

Naturally, the most intriguing matter concerns the expression “brother of Jesus.” One sees quickly that there are four possibilities for understanding this phrase. First, the bones of the two brothers, James and Jesus, were buried in the same ossuary. Second, the brother Jesus was responsible for seeing to the proper burial of his brother James and therefore inscribed his name. Third, because the brother Jesus was a prominent person, the carver—on his own or at the instruction of a family member—added the phrase in order to identify James with his famous brother. Fourth, as Yardeni and others have urged, a later carver added the phrase to an already existing inscription. But the motives for taking this action are
not readily apparent. On the surface, there is no way to tell what the artisan intended when he carved “brother of Jesus” unless, as noted, it is a modern forgery.” Most believing Christians today incline to the view that, because of the reference to James as a brother and Joseph as the father, the Jesus of the inscription was a very prominent person. And the most prominent person named Jesus during that era was Jesus of Nazareth, the Savior.

It would help, of course, if the James of the ossuary had been called by one of the titles by which Jesus’ brother was known, such as “brother of the Lord” or “the Just.” But the inscription on the ossuary offers no such hint, leaving us without a firm piece to grasp. Even so, there are reasons, taken together, that point to James the brother of Jesus of Nazareth. First and foremost, it is highly unusual for the name of a brother to appear on the ossuary of a deceased person. Without evidence for an established custom of naming the man who is responsible for the burial of a brother, it seems likely that the mention of Jesus on this ossuary points to a prominent, known brother of James. Second, because inscriptions appear on only about 25 percent of the known ossuaries, there must have been a reason to inscribe the name of the person whose bones went into the box. In this view, it is probable that the James of the ossuary was himself a notable personality. This dimension, too, fits what we know of Jesus’ brother—before his death he became the leader of the Christian church in Jerusalem and, according to sources outside the New Testament, among fellow Jews and Christians he enjoyed a reputation for righteousness.  

Third, the statistical probability that a person named James whose father was Joseph and whose brother was Jesus had his name inscribed on an ossuary is very low, even in the Jerusalem area. Fourth—we have not noted this point so far—the Aramaic form of the language of the inscription clearly fits in the middle of the first century a.d., the time of James’s death. Such observations lead one to see the ossuary as very possibly belonging to James the brother of the Savior, though one cannot be fully certain.

If the James of the ossuary is indeed the brother of the Savior—and this is an imposing if—a number of biological and theological points rise from the language of the inscription, “James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus.” There has never been any question that James was the son of Joseph, even though in the New Testament he is not formally linked to Joseph. Instead, he is known as a brother of Jesus (see Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). Because of the language of the inscription, questions arise about the ties between James and Jesus and between Joseph and Jesus. Assuming that the entire inscription is authentic, it then seems evident—the objections notwithstanding—that the James mentioned on the ossuary is a biological brother of a person named Jesus. As many are aware, an early Christian tradition grew up that James “the Just” was a son of Joseph by an earlier marriage and that Joseph, after losing his first wife, married the young Mary but shared no physical intimacies with her. Thus Mary remained a virgin and Jesus reportedly was her only child. But the inscription clearly stands against this view. Moreover, the inscription on the box does not affirm that the Joseph and the Jesus are biologically related. One might assume that the inscription says as much. But the only father-son connection that the inscription firmly demonstrates ties James to his father Joseph.

The last point to make is that the current owner of the stone box and others intend to subject the box to DNA analysis, hoping to learn whether it held the bones of more than one person. If the results are positive—and this appears to be a distant possibility because the box has been subjected to cleaning—then scholars would understand that James the brother of the Lord may have been buried with another person. The Savior, of course, is eliminated as a person buried in the ossuary because he is resurrected and his body lay in a tomb for only a short time, not long enough for his bones to be transferred to an ossuary. If the results are negative and show that the remains of only one person were stored in the stone box, we are no farther along in resolving with certainty the identity of the James and Jesus of the ossuary.
4. The expression Savior of the world usually appears in the Bible to John 1:29, 36. Nephi uses the expression repeatedly and defines it as the Son of the Eternal Father and the Savior of the world (see 1 Nephi 13:40).

5. In the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, the words referred to. In the 1830 edition shows that other such clarifying insertions of synonyms among the Nephites, 201–201 c., in The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World, ed. Richard Lloyd Anderson, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2001), 163–208, see also his essay “When Levi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?” JRSM 1/1 (1992): 4, for Jacob’s encounter with the Amalekites.


9. Richard Bushman points out that the democracy in Zarahemla was unlike democracy experienced in America. The line between church and state was blurred—Alma was chief judge and high priest—and there was no distinct separation of powers between the branches of government. The chief judge was judge, governor, and legislator. For more on government in Zarahemla, see Bushman, “The Book of Mormon and the American Revolution,” BYU Studies 17/1 (1976): 14–17; see also Nibley R. Reynolds, “The Book of Mormon Government and Legal History,” Enyclopaedia of Mormonism, ed. Dale E. H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:60–62.


13. For more information on Nephi culture, see John L. Sorenson’s insightful essay “Religious Language and Mormonism: the line between church and state was blurred—Alma was chief judge and high priest—and there was no distinct separation of powers between the branches of government. The chief judge was judge, governor, and legislator. For more on government in Zarahemla, see Bushman, “The Book of Mormon and the American Revolution,” BYU Studies 17/1 (1976): 14–17; see also Nibley R. Reynolds, “The Book of Mormon Government and Legal History,” Enyclopaedia of Mormonism, ed. Dale E. H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:60–62.


16. For more on Nephi culture, see John L. Sorenson’s insightful essay “Religious Language and Mormonism:
Bertrand’s wife under the name Mrs. J. E. Flandin, not Mrs. L. A. Bertrand, he may have altered his name after he was married if, not used his real name for his wedding.

8. Letter to Brigham Young, 23 August 1859, LDS Church Archives.


11. Il Libro di Mormon: Anticipating Growth beyond Italy’s Waldensian Valleys


14. Dennis Mack Smith, Modern Italy: A Political History of Sardinia, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia—were dominated by, controlled by, or allied with foreign governments that were opposed to Italian unification (see Dennis Mack Smith, Modern Italy: A Political History of Sardinia, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia—were dominated by, controlled by, or allied with foreign governments that were opposed to Italian unification (see Dennis Mack Smith, Modern Italy: A Political History of Sardinia, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia—were dominated by, controlled by, or allied with foreign governments that were opposed to Italian unification (see Dennis Mack Smith, Modern Italy: A Political History of Sardinia, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia—were dominated by, controlled by, or allied with foreign governments that were 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handed down from one generation to another? Why would the Lord allow a people to have two sets of interpreters? Where did Moroni leave Mosiah’s other interpreters, if not with the gold plates (Joseph Smith found only one set)?

7. Hugh Nibley, in trying to solve the semiotic-logic problem that Benjamin in his last years had a share in the record-keeping of the 24 plates with his son Mosiah. Besides the possibility that the sealed record and the 24 plates were separate records, this is rather unlikely since Benjamin was probably already dead or, if he still lived, in his very last months. Why would Moroni particularly refer to Benjamin’s very short joint record-keeping in this manner, if he still had a hand in the writing?

8. See, for example, Robert C. Solomon, *Writing the Wrongs*, 9–15, 249.

9. For a brief outline of this movement, as represented particularly in the work of Mark Andrus, see *Women of the Church: A Proclamation to the Sisters* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995).

10. While published discussion of women in the Book of Mormon has focused on the small number of named women, and their mostly unknown roles in the narratives of these peoples, interpreting the role of women in the Book of Mormon may also ask, for example: Is there a woman or women’s point of view in this text? (The places where women do not appear in the text can be as significant as the places where they do appear.) How are women portrayed in this text? How is power distributed? How have women’s lives and voices been shaped by the texts? What hidden gender assumptions lie behind this text? (for example, women lead a life of constant struggle, men cannot answer for (Feminist) Treatment?) in* *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies,* ed. Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 69.

11. There are many “feminisms.” Perhaps the most widespread is what is sometimes called “equality feminism,” such as that defined by B. Kent Harrison and Mary Stovall Richard as affirming “the equal worth of all people, the right to life, liberty and capacity for spirituality, and the evils of abuse” (“Feminism in the Light of the Good News of Jesus Christ,” BYU Studies 32/1 [1996–97]: 181). Feminism concerns itself with the status of women in all areas of life, including theology and church practice. Feminist scholars and publishers have been encouraged to focus on women and girls in the Bible, but women’s voices and experiences have been reduced to a secondary role. Feminists have worked to change this, to create a more equal society.


14. For a brief outline of this movement, as represented particularly in the work of Mark Andrus, see *Women of the Church: A Proclamation to the Sisters* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995).


16. For a brief outline of this movement, as represented particularly in the work of Mark Andrus, see *Women of the Church: A Proclamation to the Sisters* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995).

17. Thompson attributes the coining of this term to Paul Ricouer, who also envisioned a “topic of reflection” that can “run throughout texts” (Maxine Hanks, “Feminist Theology,” *Journal of Mormon Thought* 10/2 (1985): 15–16).


23. For example, Maxine Hanks sees a need for what she calls “Mormon feminist theology,” in which “the female or feminine needs to fully emerge in Mormon theology and doctrine” (Maxine Hanks, *ed., Mormon Feminism* [Salt Lake City: Signa- ture, 1992], xxvii-xxviii).

24. See, for example,84 which sees a need for what she calls “Mormon feminist theology,” in which “the female or feminine needs to fully emerge in Mormon theology and doctrine” (Maxine Hanks, *ed., Mormon Feminism* [Salt Lake City: Signa- ture, 1992], xxvii-xxviii).

25. See Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1992), noting, however, that she does not attempt in their “Over the Reformation” to make official pronouncements about LDS the- ology. Related treatments include Melodie Moomch Chang, *The New Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, forthcoming).


want “the assurance that the efforts and faithfulness of young women were noticed [in ancient times]. And matters—there as well as now. Without role models, without stories, that’s a hard point to get across.” Christie B. Gardner, in her review of Heroes from the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), makes the same point: “I think of the many lovely and faithful young women who also had not had feminine heroes. The only element I might suggest for consideration in creating such a book as Heroes from the Book of Mormon is to include some women for us to emulate” (FARMS Review of Books 9/1 [1997], 10).


30. The potential of having more active and/or representative, including their social or political manifestations. And fictions of male domination and the ideological phenomenon, the hatred and malecentrality of women,...out of19

31. Ringo, “When Women Interpret the Bible,” 2:1 am extending Ringo’s analysis of interpretation to the Book of Mormon, though she was referring to the Bible only.

32. Some theorists argue that there are no nonideological approaches, merely alternative ideologies that may be judged according to standards of reasonableness, justice, or other virtues or qualities, including their social or political manifestations.

33. Pearson, “Could Feminism Have Saved the Nephites?” 34.


35. Ringo, “When Women Interpret the Bible,” 2.1 am extending Ringo’s analysis of interpretation to the Book of Mormon, though she was referring to the Bible only.

36. Some theorists argue that there are no nonideological approaches, merely alternative ideologies that may be judged according to standards of reasonableness, justice, or other virtues or qualities, including their social or political manifestations.

37. Some would judge this value more honorific than universal, and it would be included as ‘good’ or ‘positive’ in a particular narrative—this narrative is not misogynous, it does not necessarily mean that the narrative is not patriarchal. See Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative, 30.

38. We don’t know, for example, how Levi earned his living; though we know he was a shepherd. Nibley suggests that Levi may have been a merchant, perhaps a caravanner (Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites, John W. Welch, Darrell L. Matthews, and Stephen R. Callister (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998), 34–38.


41. Ringo, “When Women Interpret the Bible,” 2.1 am extending Ringo’s analysis of interpretation to the Book of Mormon, though she was referring to the Bible only.

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43. Pearson, “Could Feminism Have Saved the Nephites?” 34.

44. In the Bible, servant probably means “slave” in some contexts.

45. Wizards are mentioned in 2 Nephi 18:19 (quoting Isaiah 8). Sorceries or sorcerers are mentioned in Alma 1:32; 3 Nephi 5:20 and Mormon 1:5, 8:13, of Mormon; Ether 8:9). It could be argued either that to obtain kingdoms and great glory (see 2 Nephi 9:37; Enos 1:20; Mosiah 9:12; 50:21; Helaman 6:31; 3 Nephi 30:2; Mosiah 7:6); so the inclusion of this detail does not have to be regarded as a sign of weakness or a sign of the Nephite demography, see James E. Smith, “Nephite Descendants’ Historical Demography and the Book of Mormon,” FARMS Review of Books 6/1 (1994), 255–96.


47. Ringo, “When Women Interpret the Bible,” 2.1 am extending Ringo’s analysis of interpretation to the Book of Mormon, though she was referring to the Bible only.


49. It is possible that Isaiah was a hierodule, as suggested by Hugh W. Nibley (The Prophetic Book of Mormon, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989), 542). If this were the case with Isaiah, then Corianton was probably guilty of not only sexual sin but also apostasy.

50. Bird, Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities, 83.

51. See ibid, 93–99.

52. John W. Welch has illustrated, however, that Book of Mormon legal and religious practices exhibit a significant number of similarities to those that appear in the Bible. Consult his “Nephite Ancient Near Eastern Law and the Book of Mormon” (FARMS, 1989).


55. There are many abbreviated genealogies: Mosiah 7:3, 12; 3 Nephi 20:15; Ether 17:2, of Alma; Alma 17:21, of King Lamoni, Alma 54:23, of Ammon; Helaman 1:15, of Coriantum; 3 Nephi 5:20 and Mormon 1:5, 8:13, of Mormon; Ether 11:1–17, of Shulamith, Ether 11:17, of an unnamed brother of Jared. Being named in a text does indicate some level of respect from one’s descendants. It is believed that biblical genealogies probably vary in historiography and purpose, so a mere count of the number of men’s names compared to the number of women’s names in a text may not be of primary significance. For a cursory outline of the function of bibli-cal lists, see Paul J. Achtermeyer, ed., Harper’s Bible Dictionary (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), s.v. “genealogy.”

56. Even in Judges, where “there is an apparent centricity of women, … of 19 female figures or collective figures, only four are named and the other are name- less. Such namelessness can be variously interpreted but, ultimately, hardly seems to indicate complementary centrality. Those ‘woman stories … are, by and large, androcentric’ (Bremmer, ed., Judges: A Feminist Companion to the Bible, 13).

57. Esther Fuchs defines misogyny as a psy-chological phenomenon, the hatred and fear of women. She distinguishes that “feminismandrocentrism, which is the ‘episte-mology of masculine normativity,’ and from patriarcalism, which is ‘the poli-tics of male domination and the ideological validation of androcentrism.” She concludes, “While the portrayal of women as ‘good’ or ‘positive’ in a particular nar-rative may perhaps indicate that the narrative is not misogynous, it does not necessarily mean that the narrative is not patriarchal” (Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative, 30).
81. Susan Niditch, “Genesis,” in
80. This is, of course, a very crude estimate,
79. Consider, for example, Mormon’s and
83. The first person is also used in the words
82. Bird,
77. An Indian woman explained to me her
illustrates what is desired to be inculcated
as opposed to our contemporary fascina-
guished from personal narrative or biog-
Historical narrative might be distin-
95. See 1 Nephi 10:15. Mormon also abridges
29. This is, of course, a very crude estimate,
80. This is, of course, a very crude estimate,
79. Consider, for example, Mormon’s and
83. The first person is also used in the words
82. Bird,
77. An Indian woman explained to me her


111. See, for example, 2 Nephi 4:14: “For I, Nephi, was constrained to speak unto [Laman and Lemuel], according to [his] word for [he] had spoken many things unto them, and also my father, before his death; many of which sayings are written upon mine other plates; for a more history are written upon mine other plates.” See also Jacob 1:2. “And he (Nephi) gave me, Jacob, a commandment that I should write upon these plates a few of the things which I have considered to be most precious; that I should not, save it were lightly, concerning the history of this people which are called the people of Nephi.”

112. For example, Nephi is forbidden to write part of his vision in 1 Nephi 14 (see vv. 19–28) and is told that John, “the apostle of the Lamb of God,” should write them. Nephi is “hidden” not to write things he viewed that were too great for man (2 Nephi 25). Mormon was forbidden from writing all of Christ’s teachings that were engraved on the plates of Nephi (see 3 Nephi 26:11); the day after Christ healed the multitude and ascended a second time into heaven, the words given to children and babes, heard by the multitude, “were forbidden that there should not any man write them. . . . And many of the days of law and heard an unspakable things, which are not lawful to be written” (3 Nephi 26:16, 18). Christ instructs the disciples to write “the things which ye have seen and heard, save it be those which are forbidden” (3 Nephi 27:23). Mormon was forbidden to record the names of the three Nephites who would remain upon the earth until Christ’s second coming (see 3 Nephi 28:23); and Moroni was forbidden to write more of the prophecies of Ether (see Ether 13:13).

113. See Ether 4, 11, where the brother of Jared was constrained to lose his vision of the Lord, but the record was not to come forth until after Christ’s crucifixion. Moroni testifies in Ether 3:1: “I, Moroni, have written the words which were commanded me, according to my memory; and I have told you the things which I have sealed up; therefore they touch not in order that ye may translate; for that thing is forbidden you, except it be by it and it shall be wisdom in God.”


115. An alternative interpretation would be to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers’/translators’ apostolic authorship and thereby to see these affirmations of the writers/
under מ"ת. In Ugaritic the root occurs also in a personal name, bn rwy, but the meaning of the name is uncertain (see Frauke Gröndahl, *Die Personennamen der Texte aus Ugarit. Studia Pohl 1* [Rome: Pontificio Institutum Biblicum, 1967], 312).

9. G. Lankester Harding, *An Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 38. (I have not yet been able to find the location of the town based on the information provided, partly because the BYU library does not have the relevant sources.) In addition, there are family, clan, and/or tribe names in pre-Islamic inscriptions, such as rwym and rwm, containing the root rwy, which in the Arabic form rwyy means “abundant, well watered” (see ibid., 291). 10. Another possibility from pre-Islamic inscriptions, rwyy, is less likely because it is a personal name (see ibid., 668). Yet even this name carries the basic meaning of “watering” and exhibits an initial vowel before the root, though the y would not necessarily suggest a doubling of the r.

11. I am not aware of a single instance of an ancient Semitic name being composed of more than one language, though this may reflect more my ignorance than reality. Some scholars in the past have suggested that Jerusalem is composed of a Sumerian and a Hebrew word. This proposed etymology has been rejected by nearly all Hebrew scholars today.


13. An example of where this shift appears in the Book of Mormon occurs in the place-name Jerohem. This name represents no doubt the Hebrew root ירה, “heir,” plus the Hebrew form of the abstract-forming affix –ו. Possible exceptions to the Canaanite shift in Hebrew might be šallátu, “table,” and pōhīn, “offering” or “sacrifice” (see Moscati et al., *Comparative Grammar, 82*, §12.21).


16. See Harding, *Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions*, 136, under TM.

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[New Light]  
The Queen of Sheba, Skyscraper Architecture, and Lehi’s Dream


2. The other consists of the “strange roads” that lead unwary travelers to become lost” (1 Nephi 8:32).

3. Except for buildings that had a stone and rubble core, such as the hanging gardens of Babylonia, few if any buildings ever reached even a second story. See Michael Roaf, *Palaces and Temples in Ancient Mesopotamia*, in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack M. Sasson et al. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1995), 1:423–41, especially p. 434; and Elizabeth C. Stone, *A Catologue of Jewish Ossuaries in the Collections of the State of Israel* (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 1994).


8. Ibid., 33.
