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Abstract Between 1830 and 1981, all printed editions of the Book of Mormon contained the phrase “straight and narrow path [or course]” in four verses. The change in 1981 to “strait and narrow path [or course]” has been supported by several arguments, including the lack of the phrase “straight and narrow” in the King James version of the Bible. Welch counters this argument with the history of the introduction and rise of the phrase “straight and narrow” among Western authors. Working through each of the other arguments and offering his own counterarguments and evidences, he delivers his opinion that these phrases should not have been changed and should still read “straight and narrow path [or course].”

Straight (Not Strait) & Narrow



John S. Welch



In all printed editions of the Book of Mormon between 1830 and 1981, four verses—1 Nephi 8:20; 2 Nephi 31:18–19 (twice); and Helaman 3:29—contained the phrase “straight and narrow path [or course].” This phrase does not appear in the King James version of the Bible. The Savior, in twice describing the “way, which leadeth unto life” (Matthew 7:14; 3 Nephi 14:14), only mentioned the way’s width and not the shape of its length; but that was a part of a lovely poetic parallelism that paired the “strait gate” with the “narrow way,” both of which “leadeth unto life.”

Had the Lord said, “Strait is the gate, and straight and narrow is the way,” it would have been more descriptive but less poetic. And had he said, “Strait is the gate, and strait and narrow is the way,” it would have been no more descriptive and also less poetic. The Savior may have seen no need to spoil the poetry in that one instance with

the addition of another dimension of the way to life (“straight”), knowing that his hearers were well aware of the ancient commandments to “walk in all the ways which the Lord your God hath commanded you” (Deuteronomy 5:33) and to “not turn aside to the right hand or to the left” (v. 32)—that is, to go straight.¹

In order to understand the rise and influence of the more descriptive expression “straight and narrow” among Western authors, it is important to sketch a brief history. In the early Christian church, the phrase “straight and narrow” came into use. Cyprian, a church father of the third century, in an apparent paraphrasing of Matthew 7:13–14, wrote, “How broad and spacious is the way which leadeth unto death, and many there are who go in thereby: how straight and narrow is the way that leadeth to life, and few there are that find it!”² He also wrote, “We must persevere in the straight and narrow road of praise and glory.”³



Likewise, Origen, of that same era, seemingly paraphrased Jesus: “Now, those who believe in Him are those who walk in the straight and narrow way, which leads to life, and which is found by few.”⁴ The Oxford English Dictionary says that this derivation (“straight and narrow”) from Matthew 7:14 is incorrect, apparently because of the presence in the verse of *strait*, an adjective describing *gate*, not *way* (OED Online, 2nd ed., s.v. “straight”). In my view, these early writers were probably not misreading the verse but verbalizing what seemed to them to be a natural implication in it of a more complete description of “the way which leadeth unto life.”

The circulation of this phrase in the Christian world was greatly increased by the publication of John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in 1678, which was eventually reissued in 100 other languages and is called the greatest of all Christian writings. In this classic, Goodwill tells Christian, the protagonist, “[T]he way thou must go . . . is as straight as a rule can make it.” Christian then asks, “[A]re there no turnings or windings, by which a stranger may lose his way?” And Goodwill answers, “Yes, there are many ways butt down upon this, and they are crooked and wide. But thus thou mayest distinguish the right from the wrong, the right only being straight and narrow.”⁵

Thomas B. Macaulay, in volume 2 of his *Critical and Historical Essays*, wrote in about 1831 regarding *The Pilgrim’s Progress* that “[e]very reader knows the straight and narrow path as well as he knows a road in which he has gone backward and forward a hundred times.”⁶ Scores of literary and religious usages could be cited.⁷

It seems reasonably certain that by the time of the translation of the Book of Mormon (1829), the phrase “straight and narrow” was a common English idiom used in secular and religious writings and meaning essentially, according to many dictionaries, “the way of proper conduct and moral integrity.” So it is not difficult to believe that the concept of a straight and narrow path leading to life eternal was a firm part of the young Joseph Smith’s working vocabulary.

The spelling of English words in 1829 was less rule-bound than today—*straight* was sometimes spelled *strait*, and *strait* was sometimes spelled *straight*.⁸ Oliver Cowdery’s choice of spelling in the printer’s manuscript of the Book of Mormon (and presumably in the original manuscript) for dictated

words that sounded like “strate” was uniformly *strait* whether the context indicated “straight” or “tight, narrow, or constricted.” Conversely, the printer changed the spelling of all these words to *straight* (even to *straight gate*) in the first edition. Either approach was acceptable at a time when *straight* could also mean “strait” and *strait* could also mean “straight,” depending on the context.

I see no reason to think that either Cowdery or the printer was trying to specify the translator’s intent or doing anything else except to prefer a single spelling for both meanings. But this development left it up to the reader to determine the meanings and presented a need for emendations based on context and usage. Thus, when the rules of spelling changed, editors emended occurrences of *straight* in the Book of Mormon back to *strait* where the context indicated the need. This process began in 1906 and continued until 1920, so that the following verses then variously read:

he did straiten them . . . straitened them
(1 Nephi 17:41, twice)

the place is too strait (1 Nephi 21:20)

strait gate (Jacob 6:11; 3 Nephi 14:13–14 [twice];
27:33 [twice])

Those changes (eight in all) were obviously needed. And of equal importance, the following seven occurrences of the word *straight* were left unchanged from 1830 to 1981.

make his paths straight (1 Nephi 10:8)

a straight stick (1 Nephi 16:23)

make my path straight (2 Nephi 4:33)

in a straight course (2 Nephi 9:41)

his paths which are straight (Alma 7:9)⁹

his paths are straight (Alma 37:12)

straight course to eternal bliss (Alma 37:44; see
also Alma 50:8; 56:37)

The four other usages in question here—1 Nephi 8:20, 2 Nephi 31:18–19, and Helaman 3:29, reading “*straight* and narrow path [*or course*]”—were also left unchanged until 1981, when in the new edition of the Book of Mormon the spelling of *straight* was changed in these four instances back to *strait*. All



subsequent printings of the Book of Mormon conform to that spelling. Some reprints of pre-1981 works by Latter-day Saint church leaders and writers also conform to that spelling, while some post-1981 writings by such authors have continued to use the phrase “straight and narrow.” The reason for or significance of these 1981 spelling changes has never been officially explained. Perhaps as a consequence, and certainly from a language standpoint, these changes and their meaning have since been and still remain a subject of question, discussion, and some differences of opinion among Latter-day Saint scholars and others. The four instances and two others now read:

strait and narrow path
[or course] (1 Nephi 8:20;
2 Nephi 31:18, 19; Helaman 3:29)

the straitness of the path . . . narrowness of the gate (2 Nephi 31:9)

the narrow gate and . . . the strait path (2 Nephi 33:9)

The changes in 2 Nephi 31:9 and 33:9 (introduced into the 1981 edition) are reminiscent of Matthew 7:14 (although the adjectives in the former passages are reversed, with *strait* defining *path* and *narrow* defining *gate*) and seem to be good poetic parallelisms, and thus different from the four other cases in which two synonymous adjectives, *strait* and *narrow*, redundantly define only one subject, a path or course.

As noted above, the four 1981 changes in 1 Nephi 8:20, 2 Nephi 31:18–19, and Helaman 3:29 have resulted in questions, discussions, and different opinions. For example, in 1992, in a brief article in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, Daniel McKinlay suggested that the words *strait* and *straight* can be



In this painting, the artist shows the rod of iron running to the tree in a straight line, with the path next to it necessarily being in a straight line as well. *Lehi’s Dream*, Jerry Thompson. © IRI.

interpreted in several permissible ways, even within a single appearance.¹⁰ His observation left open the possibility that *strait* in the Book of Mormon may, in a given instance, mean either “straight” or “narrow.” It seems a fair inference to me, however, that in leaving many of the spellings of *straight* in place while changing six of them to *strait*, the editors of the 1981 edition must have intended these two words to be understood as always mutually exclusive. Otherwise, the Book of Mormon would contain three sets of words, a set spelled *strait*, which clearly means only “narrow” or “confined”; a set spelled *straight*, clearly meaning only “not crooked” or “direct”; and a set spelled *strait*, which could mean either

“straight” or “strait,” depending on the reader’s preference. It seems doubtful to me that there was any intent to create such ambiguities.

This *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* article also suggested that the phrase “strait and narrow,” when read to mean “narrow and narrow,” might reflect a Hebrew literary parallelism in the original Nephite text. I address this possibility later in my discussion.

In 2001 a study by Noel B. Reynolds and Royal Skousen that appeared in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* expressed the modest opinion that, in the four passages listed above, the word *strait* is a “problematic” spelling.¹¹ In passing, it also gave the view that, when read as a redundancy, “strait and narrow,” as compound modifiers of a single noun, cannot be read as a poetic parallel. I agree with this last assessment.

Another article published in this journal, in 2003 by Paul Y. Hoskisson, focused on the aforementioned four verses,¹² spelled in the 1981 Book of Mormon as “strait and narrow path [or course].” In reading that phrase to mean a “narrow and narrow



path [or course],” the author of that study disagreed with the 2001 article, offering reasons not only to justify but also to favor this parallel but less informative redundancy. This conclusion was reached not by asking which reading is supported by the context or which is more enlightening or more descriptive of the metaphoric path or course leading to the tree of life (or to eternal life or to the kingdom of heaven, as the four contexts variously indicate), but by a comparison of two ancient Hebrew roots. I do not find this theory to be persuasive for reasons I will elaborate on below.

In 2004, in *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part One*, Royal Skousen recommended, as a procedure of conjectural emendation, that the spelling of *strait* as it appears in the four verses under consideration be returned to its pre-1981 spelling, *straight*.¹³

Quite clearly, a consensus on *straight* versus *strait* is lacking. My attempts to help reach it follow.

First, I suggest that when a word like *strait* is used in a modern printing of an 1829 text, it should be understood to have the same meaning that it had in 1829, if that meaning can be ascertained. This brings us to the question of whether “strait and narrow” with the proposed meaning “narrow and narrow” might actually reflect a Hebrew literary parallelism in the original Nephite text.

I submit that it does not. This rendering would not appear to be a good example of parallelism even if it read, “The way for man is narrow and the way of man is strait,” because it does not seem to conform to the poetic format—it adds no emphasis or color. Consider for comparison the scriptural verse “shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint” (Doctrine and Covenants 89:20). *Run* and *walk* are related but not synonymous. So are *be weary* and *faint*. But paired together, the two ideas create a more vivid image than either phrase does alone. In this connection, I see a striking difference between, on the one hand, a phrase in which the word *gate* appears with *path*, with each noun modified with one similar adjective, thus allowing a poetic comparison (as in 2 Nephi 33:9 and Jacob 6:11, “strait gate and narrow path”) and, on the other hand, a phrase (such as in the four verses under discussion) in which the word *gate* is not present alongside reference to a path (or course) described as both “strait and narrow.”

More pointedly, I cannot imagine any good reason why a poet would have used two synonymous adjectives to describe a path if the intent was to portray only the width dimension. I know of no scriptural passage other than the four verses being considered where the speaker or writer saw fit to describe either a gate or a path as both strait and narrow. And these four can hardly be used to establish their own claimed validity.

Wherever in the Book of Mormon there is an adjective other than the word *narrow* defining a path or course (except for the four verses under discussion), it seems always to be *straight*, never *crooked*. Nephi prayed for his path to be “straight” (2 Nephi 4:33). Jacob spoke of the way of man as being a “straight course” (2 Nephi 9:41). Alma the Younger spoke to his son Helaman of a “straight course to eternal bliss” (Alma 37:44), and he taught the people of Gideon that Christ “cannot walk in crooked paths” (Alma 7:20). Hence *straight* is an important Book of Mormon concept in connection with the terms *way*, *path*, and *course*. It is also biblical. In Luke 9:62 one finds the analogy of the farmer’s ideal of plowing in a straight line, which one can do only by fixing his eye on the goal ahead. Going further back, we note that the children of Israel were commanded, as mentioned earlier, to walk a straight path (see Deuteronomy 5:32–33).

Any competent stenographer or scribe who hears a homophone with two or more meanings will write the word that the context of the dictation indicates. The speaker (again, presumably competent in spelling) will change the spelling on review if the wrong homophone was used.

Joseph Smith dictated his translations to Oliver Cowdery by spoken English words. It is reasonable to assume that Oliver knew both meanings for the spoken sound “strate” (i.e., “straight” and “narrow”) and, under the lax spelling rules mentioned above, always spelled the word *strait* in the manuscript for both meanings, possibly because the word was two letters shorter than *straight*. It is reasonable to assume that the printer also knew both such meanings but thought the word in either case should be spelled *straight*, and so he corrected all the words accordingly.¹⁴ It does not seem reasonable to assume that in such spelling choices Oliver meant for the reader to think that in every usage the correct meaning of *strait* was “narrow” or that the printer meant for the reader to think that in every usage



the correct meaning of *straight* was “in a straight line” or “direct.” Perhaps they were not sure which meaning was intended by Nephi or Mormon and chose to leave that to the reader (or to later authoritative interpretation). We don’t know. But in later editions of the Book of Mormon published when stricter rules of spelling were observed, editing that occurred up to 1920 to change *straight* to *strait* in proper cases was appropriate.¹⁵

What seems to have happened in the case of a homophone (except wherever the change was inspired) is that the editor selected the spelling that seemed to better present the meaning indicated by the context. In the 1920 edition the word *straight* in the four verses (as well as all other usages) was allowed to remain in place. As noted, in the 1981 edition the word *straight* in those four verses was changed to *strait*.

Let us now consider the possible factors that may influence one’s choice of meanings. For one thing, a presumption should stand against a reading that creates a mere redundancy. Unless some strong reason for a redundancy existed, it seems unlikely that Nephi or Mormon would have used up a rare commodity like gold plate and taken the extra time to painstakingly inscribe the redundant word in four different places.¹⁶

Moreover, in selecting a meaning, one should consider all of the possible alternatives. *Straight* can mean more than “in a straight line.” It can mean “direct.” In fact, that is a good meaning as applied to define *course* or *path*. Nephi’s poetic prayer for redemption in 2 Nephi 4:33 includes the plea “Wilt thou make my path straight.” This is one of a number of scriptural images of the path (course) to salvation (eternal bliss, promised land, the way to the keeper of the gate) being a straight (direct) route (see also 2 Nephi 9:41; Alma 37:44). When a mother says, “After school, you come straight home,” it means by either the shortest, quickest, safest, or easiest route, as the child has been given to understand. In the case of directions given by the Liahona (see Alma 37:44), a straight or direct course probably connoted “expeditious” or “best.” Thus we should be open to more possibilities than one might ordinarily think of.

When a substantive change to a scriptural text is being considered, some weight should be afforded to the traditional understanding of the text. Leaders, writers, and composers of the restored Church

have found the phrase “straight and narrow way [or path or course]” to be a useful tool, using it on at least 625 published occasions, with a significant number of these having occurred after 1981.¹⁷

For example, President J. Reuben Clark in *Behold the Lamb of God* (1962) and Elder Neal A. Maxwell in *All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience* (1979) use this expression repeatedly. Nor is this phrase a recent construction. Eliza R. Snow used the term in her 1884 biography of Lorenzo Snow,¹⁸ and in 1954 Elder Joseph Fielding Smith wrote in his *Doctrines of Salvation*, “While no doubt, that path which leads into the presence of God is straight, it is also strait, which means that those who enter into it will find it restricted; it is narrow.”¹⁹

Turning now to the main issue, I submit that in searching for meaning in the four occurrences of *straight* versus *strait* in question, the correct questions to ask are, Which is more enlightening? Which presents the richer or more descriptive image? What image naturally comes to mind in these passages? Which meaning will help me more to order my life in my quest for eternal life?

To me, the metaphor that projects an image of a path or course that has not only width but also direction, especially a path or route that is straight (or most direct, shortest, or quickest), is more helpful than one that tells us twice what the width of the path is but is silent as to whether the path is straight or full of twists and turns.

Turning to the four passages under discussion, we note that 1 Nephi 8:19–20 describes a path that “came along by the rod of iron,” which “extended along the bank of the river,” even “to the tree.” The precious image is of people holding to the rod of iron as they press forward to the tree. The rod of iron is not expressly described as straight, but it had to be straight. The rod of iron is, after all, a metaphor for the word of God, which is never visualized as twisted or bent or meandering. It is very hard to mentally picture the rod of iron weaving to the right or left in leading to the tree of life. A crooked rod would suggest a great waste of metaphoric iron and make the route to the tree longer for the eager seekers. Obviously, if the rod of iron was straight and if one could both hold to the rod and walk in the path, then the path also had to be straight—not bent, not crooked, and not even merely direct. And a very narrow path would suffice for one holding to the rod. So it would have been sufficient to merely



refer to the path without adjectives; but if adjectives were to be used, it would seem that they would need to define the path completely (i.e., straight and narrow) or not at all. Likewise, the gist of 2 Nephi 31:18–19 is to give advice on how to enter the celestial kingdom. This context certainly suggests moving onward and upward in a straight or unwavering path as well as in a narrow or restricted one.

Helaman 3:29 deals with getting across that “everlasting,” “terrible,” and “awful” metaphoric gulf, which clearly implies that the surest way to go is to stick to the shortest and most expeditious (i.e., straight) route (see 1 Nephi 12:18; 15:28). This verse refers not to a path or way, but to a “course.” If the word *gulf* calls up a mental picture of a body of water, then there is no path or way to travel on. It is a course or route, and by definition the course is narrow—no wider than the body of the man of Christ’s or his boat, as he wades, swims, or rows. It adds nothing to say once, let alone twice, that the course is narrow (i.e., strait and narrow). Properly instructed, he will get across the gulf as quickly as possible by spending no time meandering about. So it is important to say the course across the gulf is straight. Alternatively, if some Latter-day Saints see the gulf as a metaphor for mortal life in the lone and dreary world, then, again, the desire of the righteous is to go straight home to Father—not wandering, not falling away into “forbidden paths,” and not getting lost.

To me, the contexts of these four occurrences all make it quite clear that the correct meaning is “straight and narrow,” not “strait and narrow.” That correct meaning gives us two complementary dimensions to the path or course. It fits within the textual context. Beyond that, I submit that it is plausible and edifying, whereas the phrase that means “narrow and narrow” is a mere redundancy, incomplete, and, within these metaphors, not sufficiently informative. In my view these points are persuasive criteria for deciding such an issue when there are no other criteria of comparable force.

Crucial to this discussion is the scripture in 2 Nephi 9:41 that reads:

Come unto the Lord, the Holy One. Remember that his paths are righteous. Behold, the way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a straight course before him.

The spelling of *straight* here has remained unchanged since the Book of Mormon’s first publication in 1830. Such consistency should not be an amazing or disturbing fact. This reading is perfectly clear. It expresses a complete thought. But if *straight* were to be replaced with *strait*, the reading would no longer be clear, beautiful, or complete. On the contrary, it would be, I think, unclear, ungraceful, and incomplete, unless the reader is mentally able to substitute *straight* for *strait*.

In contrast, Hoskisson’s 2003 article cited earlier, in which the current reading of these four verses is defended, asserts that 2 Nephi 9:41 is an anomaly and that the word *but* in this passage can be read to mean “moreover” or “in addition.”²⁰ That article contends that this verse is anomalous because it stands alone in its pairing of the word *straight* with *narrow*. It stands alone, however, only if it is assumed that the word *strait* was correctly substituted in 1981 for *straight* in the other four verses under examination, which, of course, is begging the unresolved question.

In every printed edition of the Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 9:41 has read, in part, “The way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a *straight* course before him.” The phrasing is clear as it stands. Substituting the word *strait* for *straight* would seem to be wrong unless the word *but* is also actually wrong. But this *but* does not seem to be actually wrong. In what seems to be a last resort for justifying the replacement of *straight* with *strait* in these four verses, Hoskisson goes on to say that the word *but* in this supposedly anomalous verse really means “moreover,” “in



This artist’s conception of Lehi’s dream shows the rod of iron and the path to the tree of life as straight lines. By Jerry Thompson. © IRI.



addition,” or “and.”²¹ This shift is necessary in order to validate the change from *straight* to *strait*. But a simple experiment with these proposed substitutions shows that the proposal does not work. Which makes more sense: “the way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a straight course before him” (as 2 Nephi 9:41 now reads) or any of the following proposed emendations?

the way for man is narrow, *and* it lieth in a strait course before him

the way for man is narrow; *moreover*, it lieth in a strait course before him

the way for man is narrow. *In addition*, it lieth in a strait course before him.

Once again, after any such recommended semantic substitutions, we would be left with a verse with two synonymous modifiers that tell us twice that the course is narrow but that its length is undefined, instead of two contrastive modifiers that tell us that the course is not only narrow but straight or direct. I believe that 2 Nephi 9:41 needs no emendation and should be left as it has stood since 1830. I also believe that if this reading is allowed to stand, the disharmony between this strong provision and the four instances of *strait* in 1 Nephi 8:20, 2 Nephi 31:18–19, and Helaman 3:29 will also need to be corrected by emending them back to how they stood from 1830 to 1981—that is, by restoring *straight*.

The Hoskisson article also needs to call 2 Nephi 9:41 an anomaly because it conflicts with the article’s theory of the two ancient paired Hebrew roots. But I submit that the two-root theory can as easily be called anomalous because it conflicts with 2 Nephi 9:41. I think (and attempt to show below) that this is the stronger position, namely, that 2 Nephi 9:41 reflects consistent usage in the Book of Mormon text and is correct as written.

If I understand this theory, the Hebrew root for “narrow” is sometimes paired with the Hebrew root for “strait,” and therefore this pairing might have been present in the Hebrew version of this verse. Possibly. But these Hebrew words are not always paired. In Job 36:16 the word *strait* (the Hebrew root for which, according to *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, is *tswr*, one of the cited roots) stands unpaired in an antithetical parallelism with *broad*.

This theory seems to be based on the following assumptions: For the two Hebrew roots, there were

two different reformed Egyptian characters in the gold plates that seemed to Nephi and Mormon to form a redundancy sufficiently important in defining only the width of the metaphorical way or course to overcome the need for economy in inscribing on plates of gold. But they saw no need to say whether that narrow and narrow (*sic*) route lies in a straight line or meanders about. The entire theory of the paired ancient Hebrew roots rests on these assumptions, and they are merely assumptions.

In short, I do not find this two-root scenario persuasive. Nor do I think a compelling case can be made for replacing *straight* in 2 Nephi 9:41 with *strait* or for retaining that spelling in the 1981 versions of 1 Nephi 8:20, 2 Nephi 31:18–19 (twice), and Helaman 3:29. Even if that theory gives a proponent for change a 50 percent chance of being right, it would certainly not be enough to warrant emendation of the Book of Mormon text, since conjectural emendation adheres to a higher standard. In *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part One*, we read, “The crucial restriction on conjectural emendation is that there must be something actually wrong with the earliest extant reading.”²²

After saying all of the above, I suspect that no more than a few people will see a pressing reason to have these issues resolved in an official way. Changes in the Book of Mormon text always seem to be used by enemies of the Church in their ongoing claims against its authenticity. And these four 1981 changes in the wording can hardly be said to have seriously confused the members in their scriptural imageries. Just ask a member to draw a sketch of the path alongside the rod of iron or the course across the everlasting gulf of misery and you will most likely get a straight path or course. As the accompanying illustrations for this article show, artists see it that way too. A straight line is still the shortest distance between two points. A direct route is better than one that meanders, no matter how strait it may be.

I conclude that readers of the Book of Mormon should continue to understand these “strait and narrow” phrases to mean “straight and narrow,” just as they appeared for 150 years in all pre-1981 editions of the Book of Mormon, and should continue to picture that straightness in their minds as they ponder the images brought up by the applicable scriptures. ■

- dictated to Edward Stevenson, September 4, 1870, in *EMD*, 2:332). Martin and Lucy Harris, who were first cousins, separated when Martin followed Joseph Smith to Ohio in 1831. After Lucy's death in the summer of 1836, Martin married Caroline Young, Brigham Young's niece. Arnold K. Garr, Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard O. Cowan, *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 469. (Vogel, however, dates Lucy's death to 1837 [*EMD*, 2:34].)
51. New York law at the time may not have allowed Lucy Harris to file the suit herself. (The legal scholars I consulted did not agree as to whether this was the case.) If not, her brother Peter may have filed on her behalf.
 52. *Lucy's Book*, 442.
 53. *Lucy's Book*, 442–43.
 54. *Biographical Sketches*, 133. The fact that this incident took place in the cabin indicates that the Smiths had already moved from the frame home.
 55. *Biographical Sketches*, 134. The first witness may have been Peter Ingersoll, who claimed in an 1833 statement that Joseph had confessed to filling his frock with sand and then telling his family that the frock contained the plates (see *EMD*, 2:43–44).
 56. *Biographical Sketches*, 134. The magistrate tearing up the testimony is certainly a possible explanation of why no record of the hearing has been found (although several historians, including those involved in the Joseph Smith Papers project, have searched). Martin Harris confirmed that a hearing had been held when he said, “in March [1829] the People Rose up & united against the Work gathering testimony against the Plates & Said they had testimony Enough & if I did not Put Joseph in Jail & his father for Deseption[,] they Would me” (Harris testimony, in *EMD*, 2:332).
 57. Harris testimony, in *EMD*, 2:332–33. The excerpt in question reads as follows: “So I went from Waterloo 25 mls [miles] South East of Palmyra to Rogerses [in] [Suscotua?] [Seneca?] Co[unty] N.Y. & to Harmony Pennsylvania 125 [miles] & found Joseph. Rogers unknown to me had agreed to give my wife 100 Dollars if it was not A Deseption & had Whet his Nife to cut the covering of the Plates as the Lord had forbid Joseph exhibiting them openley[.]”
 58. Gain C. Robinson Day Book, in *EMD*, 3:439.
 59. Manchester Commissioners of Common Schools, report.
 60. Hugh Jameson Docket Book. The court record for March 31, 1829, simply reads “Recd \$13.00,” not explaining who made the payment. Since Oliver may have still been in the area to make this March 31 payment, and since he and Samuel are known to have arrived in Harmony on April 5, it is likely, but not certain, that they departed Lyons on April 1.
 61. *Biographical Sketches*, 130.
 62. Alexander C. Flick, ed., *History of the State of New York*, vol. 5, *Conquering the Wilderness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), 263, 267–68, 278.
 63. *Whitmer Interviews*, 61.
 64. See Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 122–34, for background on the Whitmer family.
 65. Roger Haydon, *Upstate Travels: British Views of Nineteenth-Century New York* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1982), 50.
 66. Haydon, *Upstate Travels*, 247.
 67. Preliminary Manuscript, 438.
 68. *Broome County Republican*, May 5, 1831, as cited in William G. Hartley, *Stand By My Servant Joseph: The Story of the Joseph Knight Family and the Restoration* (Provo, UT: The Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History and Deseret Book, 2003), 5.
 69. Joseph Knight Sr. reminiscence, in *EMD*, 4:19.
 70. Harris testimony, in *EMD*, 2:333.
 71. Doctrine and Covenants 5:11, 24. Section 5 was originally published in 1833 as chapter 4 of the Book of Commandments.
 72. William S. Sayre to James T. Cobb, August 31, 1878, in *EMD*, 4:145. As Vogel points out, Sayre calls Rogers “Richards” and reverses the identities of Martin Harris and Rogers/Richards. In other respects, however, his memory seems surprisingly accurate. As for the order of events, Joseph Knight's mention of “revelations” (possibly referring to sections 4 and 5 in the Doctrine and Covenants) and his specifying that he went to Harmony “the last of March” indicate that the Knights arrived in Harmony shortly after Martin Harris and Rogers (Joseph Knight Sr. reminiscence, in *EMD*, 4:19). Martin Harris's statement that he went in March, accompanied by Sayre's recollection that he was traveling on the stagecoach in April, indicates that Harris and Rogers may have arrived the last week in March and left a day or two before the Knights arrived (Harris testimony, in *EMD*, 2:332; Sayre to Cobb, in *EMD*, 4:144). It could have been April by the time they boarded the same stage as Sayre—somewhere between Bainbridge and Geneva. As for Sayre's mention of a one-room house, the home occupied by Joseph and Emma originally had two rooms on the ground floor and one room upstairs (Porter, “Origins,” 51). Martin may have been referring to the upper story, where Joseph worked on the translation.
 73. Haydon, *Upstate Travels*, 19.
 74. Sayre to Cobb, in *EMD*, 4:145.
 75. Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, September 7, 1834 [Letter 1], *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 1 (October 1834): 14. See *EMD*, 2:416–21.
 76. *Biographical Sketches*, 131. Lucy, Joseph, and Oliver all make it clear that Joseph and Oliver met for the first time on April 5, 1829. Those who argue that they actually met before that time have provided undocumented speculation but no real evidence. See note 3.
 77. See *EMD*, 4:424–31, for details on the land transaction.
 78. Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, September 7, 1834, 14, emphasis in original. See *EMD*, 2:419, and Joseph Smith—History 1:71 note. Statements from David Whitmer, Emma Smith, and others indicate that Joseph used the seer stone to translate during this time. Both Joseph and Oliver, however, apparently used *Urim and Thummim* generically, sometimes referring to the apparatus delivered by Moroni and sometimes referring to the seer stone (which was purportedly discovered by Alvin, Joseph Jr., and Willard Chase when the three of them were digging a well in 1822—see Chase statement, in *EMD*, 2:65).
- Straight (Not Strait) and Narrow**
John S. Welch
1. See Joshua 23:6; compare Alma 56:37, “They did not turn to the right nor to the left, but pursued their march in a straight course.”
 2. Cyprian *Treatise* 12.3.6 (“Three Books of Testimonies against the Jews,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965], 534).
 3. *Epistles of Cyprian* 6.3 (in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 5:284).
 4. Origen, *Commentary on John* 10.28 (in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 10, ed. Allan Menzies [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969], 408).
 5. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Harvard Classics, ed. Charles W. Eliot (New York: P. F. Collier and Son, 1910), 15:32.
 6. Accessible at www.worldwide-school.org/library/books/hst/european/CriticalandHistoricalEssaysVolume2/chap29.html (accessed 31 August 2007).
 7. For examples, see William Penn, *Advice of William Penn to His Children* (London: Assigns of F. Sowle, 1726), “the straight and narrow Way that leads to Life Eternal” (image no. 7 in the online version in the database “Eighteenth Century Collections Online,” accessible at infotrac.galegroup.com with a subscription); Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise concerning Religious Affections* (Edinburgh: Laing and Matthews, 1789), 472, “the strait and narrow way which leads to life”; and Jane E. Leeson, “Prayer to the Good Shepherd,” *Hymns and Scenes of Childhood* (London: 1842), 25 (hymn no. 17), “Loving Shepherd ever near, / teach thy lamb thy voice to

- hear; / Suffer not my steps to stray / from the straight and narrow way.”
8. See Edwards, *Treatise concerning Religious Affections*, 472; Francis Price, *The British Carpenter: or, a treatise on carpentry* (Dublin, 1753), 6, “With some good, dry and strait-grain’d English oak”; John Smith, *A compleat practice of Physick*, ed. J. Ridgley (1656), 163: “If the parts swell hard, it [the bandage] is too straight” (OED Online, s.v. “strait a., n., and adj., A [adj.] 1b”); Sir Walter Raleigh, *History of the World* (London, 1614), 2:632: “They returned home by . . . the straights of Gybraltar” (OED Online, s.v. “strait a., n., and adj., B [noun] 3a”). These double meanings of both words are confirmed in Webster’s 1828 dictionary.
 9. Punctuation has been omitted from this quotation and elsewhere for ease of comparison.
 10. See Daniel B. McKinlay, “Strait and Narrow,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1419; see also John W. Welch, ed., “Getting Things Straight,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 260–62.
 11. Noel B. Reynolds and Royal Skousen, “Was the Path Nephi Saw ‘Strait and Narrow’ or ‘Straight and Narrow?’” *JBMS* 10/2 (2001): 30–33. To the same effect, see Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part One: 1 Nephi 1 – 2 Nephi 10* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 174–81.
 12. See Paul Y. Hoskisson, “Straightening Things Out,” *JBMS* 12/2 (2003): 58–71.
 13. See Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants, Part One*, 174–81.
 14. I think we have no evidence that Joseph Smith objected to these early spellings, but I have not searched any of his unedited written work to see how he may have spelled these words.
 15. These were by no means the only cases in the early editions of the Book of Mormon where editing was needed, and quite a bit has been done to date, most of which postdates the death of Joseph Smith.
 16. From my reading, I do not regard poetic Hebrew parallels as redundancies, especially when biblical writers such as Isaiah are being quoted by Book of Mormon authors.
 17. Gospelink.com, searching “straight and narrow.” Of course, all these writers had before them Book of Mormon editions that spelled the word in these four verses as *straight*.
 18. Eliza R. Snow Smith, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow, One of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Co., 1884), 473, 486.
 19. *Doctrines of Salvation: Sermons and Writings of Joseph Fielding Smith*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954–56), 2:13.
 20. See Hoskisson, “Straightening Things Out,” 70–71.
 21. See Hoskisson, “Straightening Things Out,” 70–71.
 22. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants, Part One*, 7.
- Killing Laban: The Birth of Sovereignty in the Nephite Constitutional Order**
Val Larsen
1. John W. Welch, “Legal Perspectives on the Slaying of Laban,” *JBMS* 1/1 (1992): 119–41.
 2. Welch, “Slaying of Laban,” 131.
 3. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1994), 76.
 4. Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling; and, The Sickness unto Death* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954).
 5. David Rolph Seely, “Lehi’s Altar and Sacrifice in the Wilderness,” *JBMS* 10/1 (2001): 62–69.
 6. Camille Fronk, “Desert Epiphany: Sariah and the Women in 1 Nephi,” *JBMS* 9/2 (2000): 4–15.
 7. Responding to this paper, Brian Walton highlighted facts which suggest Nephi becomes in the Laban episode the prophet of his people rather than their king. The episode is recounted in Nephi’s small plates, rather than in the larger plates. And Nephi desires that his people “should have no king” (2 Nephi 5:18), though he ultimately agrees to be anointed as king and to anoint a successor. And while the national symbols Nephi acquires—the sword of Laban and the brass plates—quite clearly symbolize distinct civic and sacred aspects of Nephite society, it is surely true that his role as prophet looms larger than his role as king. But in the specific focus of this paper—the slaying of Laban—Nephi acts more in a civic than in a sacred capacity, more as king than as prophet.
 8. Terry Givens, “Fit Audience Find Though Few: The Book of Mormon and Its Audiences” (plenary address, Mormon History Association, Tucson, AZ, 19 May 2002).
 9. Brett L. Holbrook, “The Sword of Laban as a Symbol of Divine Authority and Kingship,” *JBMS* 2/1 (1993): 39–73; Daniel N. Rolph, “Prophets, Kings, and Swords: The Sword of Laban and Its Possible Pre-Laban Origin,” *JBMS* 2/1 (1993): 73–79.
 10. Noel B. Reynolds, “The Political Dimension in Nephi’s Small Plates,” *BYU Studies* 27/4 (1987): 15–37.
 11. Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 128–29.
 12. Welch, “Slaying of Laban,” 136–37.
 13. John A. Tvedtnes, “Rod and Sword as the Word of God,” *JBMS* 5/2 (1996): 148–55.
 14. Nibley, *Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 120–27. Nibley gives considerable detail on Laban’s likely position in the governing hierarchy. Cf. John A. Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Salt Lake City: Cornerstone, 1999), 59–75.
 15. Nibley, *Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 112–13.
 16. Robert A. Rees, “Irony in the Book of Mormon,” *JBMS* 12/2 (2003): 24–25.
 17. This is just the first manifestation of Nephi’s kingly power and leadership. By chapter seven (1 Nephi 7:20), Laman and Lemuel are bowing down before Nephi and by chapter seventeen (1 Nephi 17:55), they are attempting to worship him as if he were divine.
 18. Nibley, *Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 115–18.
 19. As Szink has noted (pp. 64–65), the word *murmur* evokes the Mosaic exodus, framing Nephi as Moses and Laman and Lemuel as part of rebellious Israel. Its first appearances in the Bible are Exodus 15:24 “And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?” Exodus 16:2 “And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.” Exodus 16:7–9, etc. Terrence L. Szink, “To a Land of Promise (1 Nephi 16–18),” in *Studies in Scripture: Volume Seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, ed. Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 60–72.
 20. Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 8–11; Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 62–63.
 21. In the text, Zoram is called Laban’s *servant*, but *servant* is probably a euphemism for *slave* as it is in the King James Bible where the Hebrew *ebed* and Greek *doulos* are both translated as *servant* but, in most cases, would be more correctly translated as *slave*.
 22. Sidney B. Sperry, “Some Problems of Interest Relating to the Brass Plates,” *JBMS* 4/1 (1995): 185–91.
 23. Ben McGuire, “Nephi and Goliath: A Reappraisal of the Use of the Old Testament in First Nephi,” <http://www.fairlds.org/pubs/conf/2001McGB.html> (accessed 21 March 2007).
 24. Holbrook “Sword of Laban as a Symbol,” 48–54, focuses intensively on various similarities between Goliath’s sword and the sword of Laban.
 25. Holbrook, “Sword of Laban as a Symbol,” 53.
 26. After reading a draft of this article, Newell Wright pointed out that the Book of Mormon sets up an ironic contrast between Nephi who has killed but is not a murderer and Laman and Lemuel who have not killed but are “murderers in [their] hearts” (1 Nephi 17:44). The nub of this contrast is the striking difference in the intentions and will of