Narrating the Scriptures: Using a Literary Approach to Enhance Scripture Teaching

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Evaluating the scriptures from a literary perspective can enhance reading and teaching the scriptures, yet it remains an untapped resource for many religious educators. Bible and literary scholar Robert Alter queried, "What role does literary art play in the shaping of biblical narrative?"[1] The question extends beyond biblical narrative to scriptural narrative and teaching. A literary approach to scripture enhances the classroom experience for teachers and students. Literary analysis allows a class to explore the nuances of a text and identify authorial intent of the scripture while encouraging students to see a complex, beautiful narrative.

A literary approach, or literary analysis, consists of using skills normally employed in literature classes to understand scriptures. This paper introduces some literary skills focused around the narrator and characters that can enhance scripture teaching, followed with a model of how to use these methods in a classroom. Narrators use omissions, repetition, and pace of narration to navigate the reader to ideas. Characters' motives emerge through the use of actions and reactions, as well as details such as names, dialogue, and actions. Understanding the techniques of the narrator and characters

increases reliance upon the text of the scriptures while encouraging students to discover principles with greater efficacy.

Evaluating scriptural literary qualities reveals important characteristics about the text, but it should not be the only method used to evaluate the scriptures. Historical analysis helps to understand meaning beyond the literary components of a scriptural narrative. Biblical scholar Mark Allan Powell explained the use of literary analysis well: "Narrative criticism is best understood as one key among several that are available to biblical interpreters. Used properly, it is able to open some doors and grant access to certain kinds of insight that may not be otherwise attainable. But it will not open all the doors or answer all the questions that people ask about the Bible and about the meaning of biblical material."[2] Literary analysis should be used as one tool within a teacher's repertoire of methods. While reading scripture as narrative can be beneficial, it also has limitations. Generally, this method ignores historical factors in the text.[3] Though this paper ignores historical perspectives while accentuating the literary concepts, teaching and studying scripture without including historical factors would produce a skewed version of the text. Scripture does not exist in a vacuum. Historical and literary components factor into the creation of the text, and both should contribute in the reading and teaching of scripture. The narrators in scripture include both factors when compiling the sacred records.

Narrator

The narrator operates one of the most essential capacities of the narrative: he or she determines what the reader understands about it. Superficial readings might not identify the narrator in scripture, but the narrator acts in an essential role in the presentation of the narrative. He or she invokes editorial decisions throughout a story about what to include or omit, how to emphasize different portions, or how to portray a character. The narrator invites the reader into the narrative. Readers will benefit from identifying the narrator and how he or she influences the text.[4]

Narrators differ in Latter-day Saint scripture depending on the book of scripture. The Bible employs a reticent narrator who frequently disappears into the background. The biblical narrator supplies sparse details and recounts events without giving commentary or telling the reader how to interpret the story. For example, the Lukan narrator avoids commentary even in the poignant moment where Christ informs Peter that the Apostle will deny his Lord three times. The Lukan narrator shifts the focus from Peter to Christ, who is counted as a transgressor, without explaining what will happen to Peter or what the reader should learn (Luke 22:37). The narrator recounts the three denials but gives no explanation on the meaning of the events. Instead, the narrator states casually, "And Peter went out, and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62). The narrator's silence in this and other instances throughout the Bible allows varying modern interpretations about the significance of the event.

The Book of Mormon narrators are different and intervene actively in the text, which creates less ambiguity for the reader—especially for the inexperienced reader.[5] The narrators' insertions in the Book of Mormon create key moments for the reader to see the purpose of the story. Biblical scholar Shimeon Bar-Efrat explains the power of this method: "Whenever this is done, it shifts the readers out of the stratum of the plot and transfers them to the narrator's own sphere. Explanations of events are a powerful look in the hands of the narrator, enabling clear and unequivocal messages to be conveyed to the readers."[6] The Book of Mormon contains this approach with "And thus we see" statements, but it is more expansive than just that. Nephi articulates, "I desire . . . 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 Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved" (1 Nephi 6:3–4). Moroni laments his imperfections in writing and acknowledges that he is writing for his future reader: "Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not" (Mormon 8:35). In the Korihor narrative, Mormon inserts that "they [the people of Ammon] were more wise than many of the Nephites" before explaining that the people captured Korihor and brought him before the judge (Alma 30:20). Mormon's insertion demonstrates that the narrator felt dismissing Korihor was the best course of action against the offender. These acknowledgements establish a framework for evaluating the narrative and inform the audience about the narrator's editorial decisions. The burden of identifying the meaning of the narrative shifts away from the reader, since the narrator articulates the moral. Subsequently, the narrator helps the teacher identify where to direct the attention of a student. Teachers can mine these moments to depict how the text operates and how the narrator invites the reader into the text.

The different types of narrators in scripture become an important format for students to understand. Many LDS students expect a narration style similar to that found in the Book of Mormon, and the biblical narrators employ

different techniques which make the text appear foreign and uninviting. Teachers who help their students understand the different types of narrators in the scriptures equip students with an ability to discover meaning in *all* scripture rather than just the familiar stories. Teaching students to identify the role of the narrator promises to enhance their personal and classroom scripture study.

Omissions

Creating omissions is another technique that provides additional insights into the text. Omissions occur when the narrator excludes details from the narrative, which leaves the reader to speculate about a portion of the story. For example, Christ appeared to the brother of Jared in one of the poignant moments of the Book of Mormon. The narrator mentions the corporeal nature of Christ but provides no details about whether the markings from the cross were present on the body of Christ or what Christ was wearing. The omissions imply that those details would distract the reader from Christ's main message to the brother of Jared. Christ's dialogue focuses on his body rather than the Crucifixion and Atonement: "And never have I showed myself unto man whom I have created, for never has man believed in me as thou hast. Seest thou that ye are created after mine own image? Yea, even all men were created in the beginning after mine own image. Behold, this body, which ye now behold, is the body of my spirit; and man have I created after the body of my spirit; and even as I appear unto thee to be in the spirit will I appear unto my people in the flesh" (Ether 3:15–16). The omissions in this selection provide an opportunity for students to analyze the text and try to determine what happened with the characters of the story.[7] Many times, the students seek the easiest answer to omissions in the narrative. Yet a teacher can enhance the scriptural narrative by encouraging the students to see other explanations that would enhance the narrative. The danger of this discussion is theorizing about the scriptures instead of staying grounded in the text. A teacher must guide students to fill the omissions with the surrounding contextual passages in order to avoid the danger of theorizing about the text. This type of reading encourages students to look closer at the text of the scriptures, especially the words of the narrative.
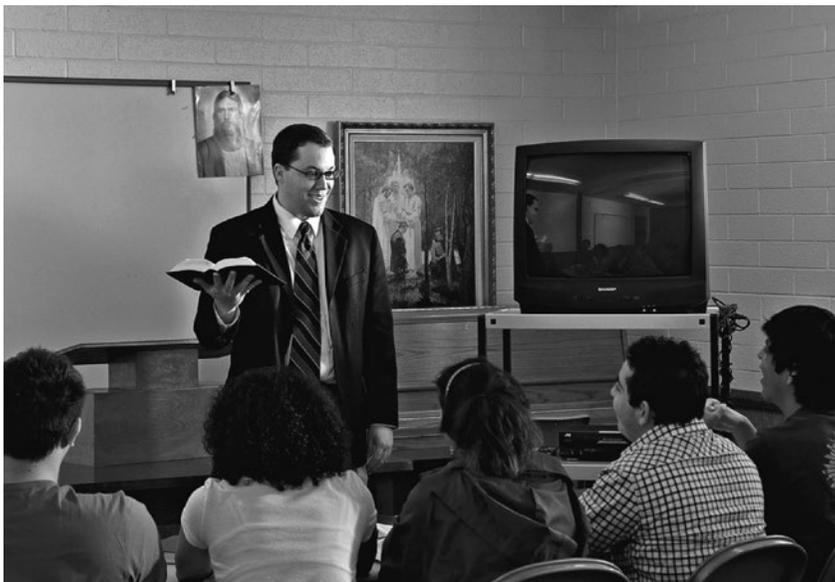
Repetition

A literary approach also includes the analysis of the narrator's word usage. Biblical scholars D. M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell state, "The story world—with its setting, its events, its characters—is a verbal construct, a world made of words. In narrative, life is language. Words create the narrative world, and the words hold the key to the significance of that world."[8] One technique is repetition. Modern writers avoid repetition throughout their text, while ancient writers repeated words and phrases intentionally.[9] Repetition in scripture requires increased searching to discover, but it draws additional meaning and themes from the story.[10] Narrators echo words and phrases in the text to build tension and draw attention to certain elements of the story. Repetition may occur in a set pattern, or they may be scattered randomly throughout a passage. In many instances, repetition forces the reader to notice the other factors in the narrative. The context of the repetition develops the meaning of the text, while an isolated iteration might not bring such a clear meaning.

Repetitions appear beyond word usage to include repeated actions in the narrative. In the story of Balaam and Balak, the donkey refuses to progress in three separate instances. Each refusal escalates the intensity of the situation until the donkey verbally informs Balaam that an angel forbids the animal from proceeding. Finally, Balaam sees the angel and acquiesces (Numbers 22).[11] The narrative of Abraham and Sarah frequently acknowledges their inability to have children. The narrator repeats the promise of fertility and concurrent barrenness to intensify the joy felt with the birth of Isaac and the torture of the command to kill the son (Genesis 11–22). Repetitions in the narrative are intended to build upon each other throughout the text, and draw the reader's attention to the occurrence. The reader should feel the difficulty of the situation with each repetition of a phrase. A skilled teacher draws the student's attention to the initial iteration and guides the student to find the repetition throughout the narrative. Incorporating repetition into the lesson helps students experience the moment in the scriptures and connect with the narrative beyond a superficial reading.

Repetition also intertwines narratives, which invites the reader to draw comparisons. The Gospel of Luke frequently couples narratives together to create an interaction between them. For example, the births of John the Baptist and Christ repeat similar language and actions to demonstrate the supremacy of Christ, as seen hereafter. Both narratives feature an angelic

visitation to announce a miraculous birth. One miracle occurs due to age, while the other virginity. The angel proclaims "Fear not" to both Zacharias and Mary (Luke 1:13, 30). The same language is repeated when naming the child: the angel commands Zacharias to "call his name John," while the angel tells Mary, "and shalt call his name Jesus" (Luke 1:13, 31). The repetition continues when the angel says John "shall be great in the sight of the Lord" and later states that Jesus "shall be great" (Luke 1:15, 32).[12] Each iteration of similar characteristics invites the reader to compare the two great men, and eventually, they elevate Christ above John. This type of repetition furnishes teachers with an activity for students to look through the scriptures to see the beauty of these narratives.

The use of repetition in the text reminds the reader of the carefully crafted nature of the scriptural texts. The nuances of the text intend to do more than simply identify principles. The text draws the reader into the story and captivates him or her, which gives teachers confidence that the word can interest a student when understood and used properly. Understanding the language of the literature and the narrator's methods provides more power than a superficial reading can summon.

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Robert Casey

Flow of the Text

The narrator controls the flow of the text, meaning how quickly or slowly a narrative moves. The narrator provides and explains details to slow the story, while quickly mentioning other aspects of the story. Readers of scriptures should carefully observe the narrative unfolding. Pace demonstrates the intent of the writer, which should signal to a teacher where to slow down the lesson and where to move quickly. Robert Alter states, "The obverse of this necessity to watch for the when and how of the beginning of dialogue is equally interesting: in a narrative tradition where dialogue is preponderant, it may often prove instructive to ask why the writer decided to use narration instead of dialogue for a particular block of material or even for a particular brief moment in a scene."[13] For example, the narrative spends little time explaining Judah's spouse in the narrative of Judah and Tamar. It moves swiftly through the births and deaths of their children. The rapid-fire succession of events depicts the relative insignificance of these details in the overarching narrative. Conversely, the narrator devotes considerable attention to the dialogue between Judah and Tamar as she negotiates the price for her prostitution. This is just one example of how nuances in the text and the speed of the narrative can assist a teacher in planning the lesson and funneling attention to the salient points within a scriptural block.

The narrator shapes the narrative as well as how the class evaluates the story. Narrator intervention identifies explicit principles in the stories, while other tactics lead readers to understand the implicit principles. Identifying techniques of omissions, repetition, and pace of delivery will help teachers show a nuanced text that demonstrates the carefully crafted nature of scripture.

Character

Readers tend to overlook the role of narrators because the text focuses considerable attention on the characters in the narrative. Alter defined biblical characters and what a reader should identify in the text: "Character can be revealed through the report of actions; through appearance, gestures, posture, costume; through one character's comments on another; through direct speech by the character; through inward speech, either summarized or quoted as interior monologue; or through statements by the narrator about the attitude and intentions of the personages, which may come either as flat assertions or motivated explanations."[14] Inexperienced readers dichotomize

characters into good and bad categories when reading and teaching scripture. Either the person follows God or they do not.[15] This dichotomy creates characters that are flat and lack relatability. Narrators depict characters with more complexity than the simple dichotomy, which better reflects the intricacies of life. Book of Mormon scholar Grant Hardy explains, "The narrators have deliberately shaped their characterizations to provoke certain reactions in readers, and this process is more interesting than a simple up-or-down judgment on whether any particular figure is compelling or inspiring."[16] Each detail or omission provides critical information to shape a nuanced character.

Scripture offers sparse details about peripheral issues such as routine tasks.[17] Details given about characters shape the narrative almost immediately. The short-story form of the scriptures forces the narrator to use and incorporate details quickly and efficiently.[18] Each detail or omission of detail becomes salient to the story. For example, the scripture narrators rarely include description of characters' physical movements except for in few instances, such as when Jacob blesses Ephraim and Manasseh. The narrator informs the reader that Jacob crossed his hands. The additional detail designates the change in birthright and superiority of Ephraim and Manasseh.[19] A different Jacob, a Book of Mormon prophet, mentions that Sherem "had a perfect knowledge of the language of the people; wherefore, he could use much flattery, and much power of speech" (Jacob 7:4). These details are specific to Sherem and become important later in the narrative as Sherem employs sophistry to try to confound Jacob. The narrator, in this case Jacob, identifies Sherem's character traits to develop the plot and explain the motives of the characters. The inclusion of details acts as a marker for the reader to identify future actions and significant points in the narrative.

Names and Titles

The names of characters mold the reader's perception of the participants in the narrative. Names demonstrate the importance of a character to the narrative or suggest future actions of the character. The name or title becomes a narrator's tool to frame how the reader views the individual. For example, Bathsheba is not immediately identified when David looks upon her. The text only refers to her as a woman without a name who "was very beautiful to look upon" (2 Samuel 11:2). The narrator depicts her only as an object for lust with the use of "beautiful" and dehumanizes her by omitting a name. The title and adjective establish Bathsheba's primary role in the narrative as

someone to fulfill David's lust. Doctrine and Covenants 3 identifies Martin Harris as a wicked man, instead of naming him, which adds to the Lord's displeasure with his actions regarding the lost 116 manuscript pages (D&C 3:12). Korihor is originally called "Anti-Christ" before Mormon shares the actual name in Alma 30:6. The label denotes Korihor's intention to lead away followers of Christ before the reader observes his actions.

Descriptive titles assist readers to understand the character or create a conception about the individual early in the story.[20] Hagar is consistently referred to as Sarai's maid, which reminds the reader of her inferior status to Sarai (Genesis 16:1, 3, 8). Emma Smith is called "my daughter" by the Lord, showing her distinguished position before God, which sets up the eventual announcement that she is "an elect lady" (D&C 25:1, 3). These names and titles prepare later aspects in the narrative and provide clues into principles and ideas for teachers to emphasize while teaching.

Omission of names minimizes or dehumanizes the character in the story but also suggests a short role for a character in the narrative. David and Bathsheba do not name the child born from the illicit act. The omission suggests the child died in birth or shortly thereafter.[21] Multiple groups comprise nameless characters, including family members, servants, attendants, and other minor characters. However, the nameless character can play a major role in the story, similar to Lamoni's father in Alma 20 or Lot's wife in Genesis 19. Both characters shape the role of the narrative, even though the narrator never identifies them. Lesser characters inform the reader about the relationship between the main character and others in their world.[22] Minor characters direct attention to the main character.

Acts 3 provides an example of the role of nameless characters. The narrative focuses on a lame man sitting outside of the temple collecting alms. The man asks Peter for donations. Peter responds that he lacks the resources to help him financially but can bless him. The Apostle says to the man, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6). The man receives strength and departs praising God. The narrator never identifies the man throughout the narrative. A teacher could begin a discussion that invites students to identify the name of the man, followed with questions about why the narrator did not incorporate his name into the story. Responses could include a discussion about how the lame man could represent any individual in need. The man lacked prominence in society and did not receive help because of

what he could do for Peter. Instead, the nameless figure represents any person. The teacher could then direct the students to realize that Christians have the same responsibility to help people, regardless of the individual's position in the world. Identifying the narrator's intentions about the character enhanced the story and demonstrated to students how the scriptures use subtlety to teach powerful principles.

Actions and Reactions

Characters operate in a larger capacity than plot development. Actions and reactions formulate perception of the characters.[23] Shimeon Bar-Efrat explains, "In biblical narrative deeds do in fact serve as the foremost means of characterization, and we know biblical characters primarily through the way they act in varying situations."[24] Narrators choose from multiple actions of each character to best represent the primary actions of the characters and provide insight into the narrative.[25] Actions and responses develop the message of the narrator.

Occasionally, narrators furnish the thoughts of the characters within the narrative, which clarifies the characters' actions and simplifies interpretation. A character's conduct, coupled with thoughts, affords opportunities for understanding the motives and beliefs of the character. These actions, with or without thoughts, prove indispensable for religious educators because they provide occasions for analysis and application. Principles generally emerge from the choices of the characters. The story of Judah and Tamar exemplifies this style of narration. The narrator inserts the story to depict how each character acts when confronted with sexual immorality. The narrative does not advance the plot, yet it exemplifies principles, especially when connected with Joseph in Genesis 39. Moments focused on the characters' actions establish principles, even when the deeds do not necessarily add to the storyline.

Dialogue

The use of dialogue enhances the depth of characterization. Dialogue weakens characters with silence or minimizes the role of other characters with limited discourse. For example, Laman and Lemuel speak one time during the confrontation with Laban. The utterance questions whether the brothers should continue to pursue the plates because of Laban's army (1 Nephi 3:31). Nephi, the narrator, silences Laman and Lemuel, which shows their lack of importance to the narrative.

The exchange between characters shapes the narrative and highlights principles from the text. Robert Alter speculates that biblical writers used dialogue because "they tended to feel that thought was not fully itself until it was articulated as speech."[26] Throughout the scriptures, editors use dialogue to convey thought as well as conversation. For example, Alma's conversation with Korihor in Alma 30 reveals Korihor's craftiness with language. The dialogue between Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22 magnifies the tension of the scene. Readers begin to sense how each character felt as Abraham bound Isaac. Instructors can guide students to comprehend Abraham's emotions, which heightens the symbolism of Heavenly Father's sacrifice of his son. Teachers draw these principles from the scriptures to enhance their own reading and discover the complex beauty of scriptures. The dialogue in scriptures reveals the motives of characters when the narrator does not supply the information. Identifying the motives of a character's life enlivens the scriptures and enriches a student's ability to relate the scriptures to his or her individual challenges.

1 Nephi 2–4: A Model

The beginning of the Book of Mormon provides a familiar place to demonstrate how to implement narrative techniques when preparing and delivering a lesson. Narrative readings begin with identifying Nephi's role as a narrator in the text. Nephi acts as both narrator and character in this story.[27] Throughout his narration, Nephi explains that he wants to persuade people to believe in Christ and that he glories in plainness (2 Nephi 33:6). These intentions help focus the narrative.

The narrative appears to begin in chapter 3 when the narrator identifies that Nephi spoke to the Lord and returned to the tent of his father. The brief comment of returning to the tent of his father links 1 Nephi 2:15 into the narrative where Nephi identifies that his father dwelt in a tent. Nephi's interaction with the Lord at the end of chapter 2 sets the stage for the excursion to obtain the plates, and creates a new beginning to the narrative.

Nephi approaches the Lord in chapter 2 to assuage his concerns about leaving Jerusalem and entering the wilderness. This encounter with God introduces the differing levels of obedience between Nephi and his brethren to the narrative. Nephi wrote, "I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all words which had been spoken by my father; wherefore I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers" (1 Nephi 2:16). Nephi interrupts the narrative to inform the reader

that Sam would later accept his words while Laman and Lemuel would reject his words. The interruption accentuates the tension between Nephi, Laman, and Lemuel regarding their attempts at obedience.

Nephi returns to the narrative with instructions from the Lord, which informs him of four facts: (1) he will inherit a land of promise and prosper in the land; (2) Laman and Lemuel will rebel and be cut off from the presence of the Lord; (3) if Nephi keeps the commandments, then he will be a ruler and teacher over Laman and Lemuel; and (4) the Lord will curse Laman and Lemuel for rebellion. The direction from the Lord foreshadows how Nephi will narrate the story. Nephi will cast Laman and Lemuel into the role of rebellion while he strives to keep the commandments. Nephi will try to teach and correct his brothers with little success.

Chapter 3 links the tent where Lehi dwelt and revelation from God when Nephi writes, "I, Nephi, returned from speaking with the Lord, to the tent of my father," but then creates a subtle repetition of commandments that carries throughout the first few verses (1 Nephi 3:1). The repetition originates in 1 Nephi 2:20 when the Lord exhorts Nephi to keep the commandments, and continues in verse 22 with the instruction to keep the commandments. Lehi reveals to Nephi that the Lord commanded him to return to Jerusalem. Verse 5 reiterates, "It is a commandment of the Lord." Finally, verse 7 intensifies the usage with three variations of the word *command*: "do the things which the Lord had commanded," "giveth no commandments unto the children of men," and "they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them." Nephi's repetition gradually builds to his decision to follow the commandments of God. Nephi directs additional attention to this section of the narrative with the use of dialogue between Lehi and himself.

In the classroom, a teacher using a literary focus demonstrates how the narrative begins in chapter 2. The class identifies the promises of the Lord to Nephi, and then the teacher could share how this will foreshadow the narrative. The class studies 1 Nephi 3:1–7 to look for the repeated word in those verses and where the highest concentration of the word occurs. The students would notice the frequency of *command*, and the high concentration in verse 7. The teacher asks about Nephi's objective in repeating *command*. Answers could include how Nephi wants to show his interest in following God and how he concentrates a significant number of verbs into verse 7, which alert the reader to the verse he wants attention directed. The teacher could reference Nephi's vision of God in chapter 2 to show the origins of Nephi's

motives. Nephi gained the courage to follow the commands of his father from a heavenly revelation. Many lessons would focus on Nephi's obedience, but the discussion could be enhanced by considering how revelation encouraged Nephi's obedience to the commandments. Students would learn obedience and how to acquire greater obedience to the commandments of God.

Incorporating repetition into lessons help students experience the moment in the scriptures and connect with the narrative beyond a superficial reading.

The lesson would pivot to the characters in the narrative. This would be a good opportunity to remind the students that Nephi writes the record significantly later in his life. He edited the materials to convey meaning and sort through the circumstances in his life.[28] The narrative centers on Laman and Lemuel as one character and Nephi as another throughout most of the story. The narrator merges Laman and Lemuel together consistently in the text, which makes them appear as twins and eliminates any individuality. Nephi, the narrator, employs the verb *murmur* to explain Laman and Lemuel's actions throughout the text. Sariah "complains" when she feels Lehi

is potentially delusional, but she does not murmur (1 Nephi 5:2). Nephi's use of the term reminds the reader of the children of Israel's murmuring in the wilderness.[29] Nephi draws the reader's attention to what he feels is an audacious pattern of rejecting the word of the Lord. The angel arrives and speaks to the brothers. The angelic dialogue in the narrative accentuates the importance of the message. Laman and Lemuel do not speak until after the angel departs. Nephi then repeats almost the exact same phrase to emphasize the angelic appearance and departure before Laman and Lemuel murmur. Nephi writes, "And after the angel had spoken unto us, he departed. And after the angel had departed . . ." (1 Nephi 3:30–31). The experience should align the reader with the children of Israel who had many supernatural experiences yet murmured. Nephi uses the term to lead the reader to a negative conception of his brethren. The experience fulfills the prophecy of chapter 2 that Laman and Lemuel rebel and are severed from divine presence due to rebellion. Nephi's repetition and use of the word *murmur* intend to show how Laman and Lemuel rebelled against God, which justified Nephi's ruling over them as promised in chapter 2. The teacher could point out many of these literary aspects while explaining the storyline.

Nephi, the narrator, fashions himself, the character, as a contrast to Laman and Lemuel. The experience in chapter 2 left Nephi with a new confidence in the journey, which he displayed in his decision to retrieve the plates. The juxtaposition of Nephi and his older brethren is intended to elevate Nephi above his brothers. They murmur, while he shines as an ideal. Yet a close reading shows a more fragile Nephi when he is confronted with killing Laban.

Nephi introduces a fourth physically present character when he comes across Laban in the alley: the Spirit. Nephi produces a verbal dialogue between himself and the Spirit as though the Spirit is a corporeal individual at the scene. The narrative suggests Nephi's experience came through impressions and feelings rather than an audible conversation with a present individual when Nephi writes, "I said in my heart" (1 Nephi 4:10). Nephi constructs the narrative to appear as a conversation between two people. He uses dialogue to draw the reader's attention to the situation and makes the Spirit a crucial character in the story. Playing the role of editor, Nephi elevates the necessity of the Spirit to help him justify killing Laban. The dialogue between the two characters depicts a timid Nephi. The young man cowers and fears. He writes, "And I shrunk and would that I might not slay him" (1 Nephi 4:10). The Spirit

charges Nephi to slay the man: "Behold the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands. . . . The Lord slayeth the wicked to bring forth his righteous purposes" (1 Nephi 4:11, 13). The dialogue and the construction of the Spirit as a physical entity intend to elevate the message—that of slaying a man—above reproach for the reader.[30]

A teacher could guide this situation in many directions in the classroom. The instructor may discuss Nephi's creation of an existing character in the Spirit. A class could discuss why Nephi would design this character who verbally speaks to him instead of suggesting that impressions came to his heart only. Many teachers rely on 1 Nephi 4:6, "And I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do," to carry this lesson, while more content about the Holy Ghost exists in the text. Emphasizing the dialogue frames the narrative for a fuller discussion for how the Spirit operates in the lives of individuals. Also, a teacher could look at Nephi's change in persona in this passage. The class could discuss why Nephi lacked confidence at this moment as compared to the valiance displayed earlier. A class could observe that faith does not come instantly. Even people who possess faith waver. Only relying upon God can situate the disciple of Christ in the right place.

Nephi succinctly ends the narrative with, "And it came to pass that we took the plates of brass and the servant of Laban, and departed into the wilderness, and journeyed unto the tent of our father" (1 Nephi 4:38). The reference to the tent of Lehi weaves the narrative together with 1 Nephi 2:15 and completes the narrative.

Conclusion

This discussion of 1 Nephi 2–4 modeled evaluating narrators and characters in the scriptures. The role of the narrator helps readers understand the authorial intent. Narrators may or may not insert their opinion into the scriptures. Overt narrators will explain exactly what the reader should draw from the text. Reticent narrators use repetition, omissions, and the pace of the story to invite the reader to see the meaning in the story. Both narrators encourage readers to search with greater intensity for these clues in the scriptures. A teacher can instruct and assist students to search and find these methods with their personal study.

Narrators use characters as a primary means to develop the principles and lessons in the sacred text. Readers become primarily concerned with the

character's actions and reactions. The actions help the reader discern the principle in the story. Details in the narrative, such as names and titles, lead the reader to identifying the lesson, while dialogue shows the reader the motive of the characters. Each component unites to depict a lesson for the reader. Characters become dynamic people with whom the reader can identify. Students may have a greater desire to study scripture because they see a character that experienced similar situations in life.

Teaching students the scriptures is one of the most fundamental roles of religious educators. Demonstrating a literary perspective for students equips them with skills that can be used outside the classroom. Students will learn to analyze the scriptures and learn the intent of the author, instead of skimming the words of the page and missing significant content. A literary reading does not require additional historical information and is especially useful for a less-experienced scripture reader. It can also encourage an experienced teacher to look deeper into a story. A literary reading can help students develop a deeper understanding and love of the scriptures that continues through their life. ▣

Notes

1. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 3.

2. Mark Allan Powell, "Narrative Criticism," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B Green (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 253.

3. For examples of isolation narrative from historical factors, see D. M Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 11.

4. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 53.

5. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 15.

6. Shimeon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 26.

7. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 188.

8. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 147.

9. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 148.

10. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 95–96.

11. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 105–6.

12. Joseph A Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (I–IX)*, vol. 28 of *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 313–314.

13. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 74–75.

14. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 116–17.

15. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 49.

16. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 32.

17. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 79.

18. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 115.

19. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 102.

20. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 57.

21. Adele Reinhartz, *Why Ask My Name? Anonymity and Identity in Biblical Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 23.

22. Reinhartz, *Why Ask My Name?*, 32.

23. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 66.

24. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 77.

25. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 82–83.

26. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 85.

27. Nephi's role as a narrator and character create an interesting tension in the text. Nephi, the narrator, benefits from knowing the results of his own life decisions, which allows him to portray Nephi the character in positive ways. For more explanation on how Nephi's role as narrator effects his portrayal of himself, see Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 12–16.

28. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 32.

29. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 42.

30. Nephi does not elevate the dialogue to the same level as his visionary experience in chapter 2. He states that the *Spirit* directed him here, instead of the Lord. In chapter 2, Nephi says that "the Lord had manifested unto me by his Holy Spirit" (1 Nephi 2:17). The Spirit communicates with Nephi in both instances, but Nephi elevates the visionary words above the directions to kill Laban.