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## The Ancient Doctrine of the Two Ways and the Book of Mormon

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## **The “Way of the Lord” and the Doctrine of the Two Ways as Displayed in the Bible and in the Book of Mormon**

July 20, 2016  
Noel B. Reynolds

From its opening pages to the end, the Bible describes a bifurcated world in which God bids, commands, and teaches the men he has created to follow him in the way of righteousness, and in which the devil leads men into wickedness. And while great blessings and cursings are promised and realized in this life according to which way men choose to live their lives, the final judgment comes after this life when all men will be judged righteously by their god, according to whether they chose to follow good or evil. This way of seeing things surfaces explicitly in various texts and is known among scholars as the Doctrine of the Two Ways. It tends to appear in pedagogical contexts—and especially when God or his prophet is calling the wayward to repentance or to a renewal of covenants. This motif of an ongoing competition between good and evil for the souls of men is not unique to the Bible, but also occurs in the literature of many ancient cultures. But biblical peoples did develop some unique concepts and vocabulary in their teachings of the Two Ways.

The principal scholarly discussions of the Two-Ways doctrine over the last six decades have focused on non-biblical Jewish and Christian texts from the Greco-Roman era in which the doctrine took on a more elaborate form—in a familiar kind of debate over the dating and sources for different writings. Much less attention has been given to the forms the doctrine takes in older biblical texts or in the writings of non-biblical cultures in the ancient world.

While the same teaching has been noticed in the Book of Mormon, there is as yet no study that examines the Book of Mormon presentations systematically to identify the ways in

which they might follow any of the ancient versions of the Two-Ways doctrine, or the ways in which these might feature original formulations.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I will show that the Book of Mormon writers did retain most elements of the earliest biblical teaching, but with enriched understandings and original formulations featured in their even more frequent recurrence to the doctrine of the Two Ways in their prophetic teachings. In the process, we will discover that their employment of the Two-Ways doctrine served Book of Mormon writers as a pedagogical device to facilitate the introduction of the gospel of Jesus Christ generally as the one true way by which men and women can find salvation—and specifically as an explanation of the fundamental necessity of repentance and obedience to the laws or covenants they had received from God.

### **The Doctrine of the Two Ways in the Bible**

The Two Ways are introduced in the opening drama of Genesis as Adam and Eve are divinely commanded in one thing that is then contradicted by the serpent. They followed the serpent's direction, instead of God's, gaining the ability "to know good and evil" as a result, and subsequently were cursed and driven out of the garden of Eden (Genesis 3). The Hebrew word for *road* or *way* (*derek*) is used twice as "a flaming sword which turned every way" was placed by the Lord God "to keep *the way* of the tree of life" (Gen 3:24).<sup>2</sup> While we traditionally

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<sup>1</sup> Mack Stirling has examined much of the Two-Ways material in the Book of Mormon in his excellent doctrinal study on the ways of life and death. See Mack C. Stirling, "The Way of Life and the Way of Death in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6/2 (1997): 152–204.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout the paper I have introduced italics to focus the reader's attention on key

interpret this to mean the sword guards or protects the tree of life, the Hebrew for *keep* here is *shamar*, which also has another primary meaning of *observe* as used next in Genesis three times in the Lord’s instructions to Abraham that he and his posterity should *keep* the covenant or *the way of the Lord* (Gen 17:9–10).<sup>3</sup>

In the very next pericope, this opposition is reformulated and generalized in the Lord’s response to Cain: If thou *doest well*, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou *doest not well*, sin lieth at the door (Genesis 4:7). The Hebrew *yâtab* here suggests that *doing well* will be measured by acting or living in a way that will be pleasing to the Lord, and—in a covenant context—according to one’s covenant with him. Congruent with the metaphor of God’s covenant or way of life as a road or path is the language of walking in his way. We are told twice that Enoch “walked with God” (Genesis 5:22–24). Noah also “walked with God,” but no one else did in his generation. Rather, “all flesh had corrupted his (God’s) way” (Genesis 6:9, 12).

The language of Genesis shifts explicitly to the parallel terminology of covenant keeping when Abraham comes on the scene. “And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to

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words in quoted materials.

<sup>3</sup> If “the way of the Lord” and “the way of the tree of life” were interpreted to refer to the same thing, we might expect Nephi and Lehi to read this as a reference to the gospel or “the way,” which “is the only and true doctrine” “whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God” (2 Nephi 31:21). Our task then would be to discover how the flaming sword would contribute to observing the gospel.

thy seed after thee.” Further, Abraham is admonished that both he and his posterity must “keep my covenant” (Genesis 17:7, 9). Then, in the lead-up to the Sodom and Gomorrah crisis, the Lord states his confidence in Abraham and his posterity, for “ they shall *keep the way of the LORD*, to do justice and judgment” (Genesis 18:19). The Abraham narrative also introduces the covenant language of blessings and cursings. In the first announcement of this covenant with Abraham, the Lord tells him “And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 12:2–3). The blessing is confirmed again and linked to obedience when the Lord speaks to Abraham after his trial with Isaac: “And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Genesis 22:18).

The content of that obedience is specified more fully when the Lord renewed the covenant with Abraham’s son Isaac: “Sojourn in this land, and I *will be with thee*, and *will bless thee*; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father; and I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because that *Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws*” (Genesis 26:3–5). Jacob used similar language in vowing to worship the Lord , if he would “be with me, and will *keep me in this way that I go*” (Genesis 28:20). Seven chapters later he invokes the same phrasing in acknowledging that God “was with me *in the way which I went*” (Genesis 35:3).

The ancient wisdom literature of Israel uses the Two-Ways doctrine extensively, but

sometimes resembles other ancient cultural traditions more than the Israelite tradition of the Old Testament. The proverbs are usually framed as advice from a wise father to his youthful son in language that works for any culture and does not depend so obviously on the covenant structure of Abrahamic religion with its revealed commandments, laws, statutes, and laws. Proverbs 2:10–23 provides an excellent example:

- 10 When wisdom entereth into thine heart,  
and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul;
- 11 Discretion shall preserve thee,  
understanding shall keep thee:
- 12 To deliver thee from *the way of the evil man*,  
from the man that speaketh froward things;
- 13 Who leave *the paths of uprightness*,  
to walk in *the ways of darkness*;
- 14 Who rejoice to do evil,  
*and delight in the frowardness of the wicked*;
- 15 Whose *ways are crooked*,  
and *they froward in their paths*:
- 16 To deliver thee from the strange woman,  
*even from the stranger which flattereth with her words*;
- 17 Which forsaketh *the guide of her youth*,  
and forgetteth *the covenant of her God*.
- 18 For her house *inclineth unto death*,  
and *her paths unto the dead*.
- 19 None that go unto her return again,  
neither take they hold of *the paths of life*.
- 20 That thou mayest *walk in the way of good men*,  
and *keep the paths of the righteous*.
- 21 For the upright shall dwell in the land,  
and the perfect shall remain in it.
- 22 But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth,  
and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it.

Obviously, the underlying binary structure of the proverbs lends itself structurally to the Two-Ways tradition and repeatedly invokes the imagery of paths or ways in these simple parallel structures. This is evident in several of the verses of this same passage:

- 13 Who leaves the *paths of uprightness*,  
to walk in the *ways of darkness*.
- 15 Whose *ways are crooked*  
And they *froward in their paths*.
- 17 Which forsaketh *the guide of her youth*,  
and forgetteth *the covenant of her god*.
- 20 That thou mayest *walk in the way of good men*,  
and *keep the paths of the righteous*.

The psalms assume the same division of mankind into two groups, the wicked and the righteous, and also use the imagery of their ways or paths in various contexts:

Psalms 7:9

Oh let the wickedness of *the wicked* come to an end;  
but establish the just:  
for the *righteous* God trieth the hearts and reins.

Psalms 5:8

*Lead me*, O LORD, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies;  
*make thy way straight* before my face.

Psalms 1:1, 6

Blessed *is* the man that *walketh* not in the counsel of the ungodly,  
nor *standeth* in the way of sinners,  
nor *sitteth* in the seat of the scornful.  
For the LORD *knoweth the way of the righteous*:  
but *the way of the ungodly* shall perish.

Psalm 1 taught the writers of Qumran and the early Christians that “blessed is the man who *walks* not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the *path* of sinners . . . for the Lord knows the *way* of the righteous, but the *way* of the ungodly shall perish” (Ps 1:1, 6 NKJV). And in Deuteronomy 11 they read “Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the *way* which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known” (Dt 11:26–28 NKJV). In Deuteronomy 30 this blessing and cursing is expanded: “See, I have set before

you today life and good, death and evil” (Dt 30:15) with the added explanation and admonition “that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to *walk in his ways*, and to keep his commandments, His Statutes, and His Judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your god will bless you in the land which you go to possess” (30:16). The negative possibility is also expanded: “But if your heart *turns away* so that you do not hear, and *are drawn away*, and worship other gods and serve them . . . you shall surely perish” (30:17–18). The concluding admonition becomes “*choose life*, that both you and your descendants may *live*; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your *life* . . . .” (30:29–20).

Jeremiah similarly reduces the choice of ways to life and death: “Behold, I set before you *the way of life and the way of death*” (Jer 21:8). Isaiah famously distinguished between the ways of man and of God:

A For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
 B neither are your *ways* my *ways*, saith the LORD.  
 C For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
 B\* so are my *ways* higher than your *ways*,  
 A\* and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8–9)

Ezekiel extends a similar idea in much more detail. Ezekiel 18 explains how the Lord holds each man responsible for his own sins and not those of others—not even the sins of his parents or his children and rewards both the righteous and the wicked according to their willingness to repent effectively. Restating and summarizing at the end of the chapter, he writes:

25 ¶ Yet ye say, *The way of the Lord* is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not *my*



*way equal? are not your ways unequal?*

26 When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and *dieth* in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he *die*.

27 Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul *alive*.

28 Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely *live*, he shall *not die*.

29 Yet saith the house of Israel, *The way of the Lord* is not equal. O house of Israel, are not *my ways equal? are not your ways unequal?*

30 Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to *his ways*, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. (Ezekiel 18:25–30).

Some of the foregoing passages have received more attention than others from the biblical scholars who, over the last half century, have analyzed the uses and origins of the doctrine of the Two Ways that appears in both testaments and in their associated literatures. Much of this attention was stimulated by Robert Kraft's 1965 translation and joint commentary on *Barnabas* and *Didache*, both of which borrow the language of Deuteronomy and Jeremiah and demonstrate the importance of this motif in early Christian literature.<sup>4</sup> While the bulk of this scholarly literature focused on specific issues raised by these two documents, the emergence of

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<sup>4</sup> Robert A. Kraft, *The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation and Commentary*, Volume 3, *Barnabas and Didache*, Thomas Nelson, New York, 1965.

the Dead Sea Scrolls in this same time period forced a reversal of earlier thinking and made it clear that the origins of the Two-Ways doctrine preceded its Christian developments.<sup>5</sup> Form critic Klaus Baltzer even went so far as to claim that the doctrine of the Two Ways developed in Jewish writings from “the basic commandment ‘to walk according to God’s ways’.”<sup>6</sup>

Jesus used the image of Two Ways somewhat differently, with the same emphasis on life and death, emphasizing the ease of the way that leads to destruction and the difficulty of the way that leads to life. “Enter by *the narrow gate*; for wide is *the gate* and broad is *the way* that leads to *destruction*, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the *gate* and difficult is *the way* which leads to *life*, and there are few who find it” (Mt 7:13–14). He also taught “I am *the way, the truth, and the life*. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Jn 14:6 NKJV), and some early Christians apparently referred to their church or its gospel as “*the way*” (Acts 16:17, 18:25, 26).

While the doctrine of the Two Ways is fully articulated in only a few biblical passages, a very large number point to one or the other of the two ways—the ways of God or of men—assuming an awareness of the other that will make their meaning clear. This paper will identify a strikingly large number of passages featuring both familiar and original versions of the doctrine

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<sup>5</sup> This can be readily seen in the Damascus document, the Community Rule, and especially in the less well known Fragment 4Q473—all of which will be discussed in more detail below.

<sup>6</sup> Klaus Baltzer, *The Covenant Formulary in Old Testament, Jewish, and Early Christian Writings*, trans. David E. Green, Fortress Press, 1971, p. 180.

in the Book of Mormon and will examine their similarities and differences as compared with one another and with the biblical passages.

### **Non-biblical Jewish and Christian Two-Ways texts**

While many questions about the original composition, influence, and uses of *Barnabas* and *Didache* continue to attract significant scholarly inquiry, these documents make it quite clear that the Christians of the first and second centuries did have a doctrine of the Two Ways that likely played a significant role in the catechization of converts and in preaching repentance to the faithful.<sup>7</sup> In these and other sources it is evident that the early Christians were drawing on both Old and New Testament sources.

Much of the earlier scholarship that viewed the doctrine of the Two Ways as a Christian development had to be reconsidered after the texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls became available. The opening exhortation of the Damascus Document repeatedly opposes “the *ways* of evil,” “the *paths* of sin,” and following “their own will” or “willful hearts” or the “will of his own spirit,” to God’s “wonderful *ways*,” “the proper way,” “*paths* of righteousness,” or even God’s “mysterious *ways*.” Apostates from the new covenant are described in this same text as having gone “*astray*” or as having “traitorously *turned away* from the fountain of living water.”<sup>8</sup> The

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<sup>7</sup> See James N. Rhodes, “The Two Ways Tradition in the *Epistle of Barnabas*: Revisiting an Old Question,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 2011 (73), pages 797–816, for a helpful reflection on the scholarly debates of the last six decades and discussion of some current issues.

<sup>8</sup> All references to the Dead Sea Scrolls are taken from Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Jr., and Edward Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1996. These

Community Rule compiles rules for those who have entered this new eternal covenant with God and see themselves as Children of Light or The Way. They are foreordained to “walk faultless in all of His *ways*,” without *turning aside* to “the right nor the left”—not deviating “in the smallest detail from all of His words.” Recognizing the human tendency to “*walk* in the stubbornness” of their own hearts, initiates should seek “atonement for a man’s *ways*.” God has appointed for humankind “*two spirits in which to walk* until the time ordained for His visitation—the spirits of *truth and falsehood*.” While the righteous “*walk* in the *paths of light*,” the wicked “*walk* in the *paths of darkness*.” For the Sons of Light, the God of Israel and his Angel of Light enlighten “a man’s mind, making straight before him the *paths of true righteousness* and causing his heart to fear *the laws of God*,” engendering “humility, patience, abundant compassion, perpetual goodness, insight, understanding and powerful wisdom” in the process.

The path one chooses determines one’s rewards in this life and the next. “All who *walk in this spirit* will know healing, bountiful peace, long life, and multiple progeny, followed by eternal blessings and perpetual joy through life everlasting. They will receive a crown of glory with a robe of honor, resplendent forever and ever.” On the other hand, “the operations of *the spirit of falsehood* result in greed, neglect of righteous deeds, wickedness, lying, pride and haughtiness, cruel deceit and fraud, massive hypocrisy, a want of self-control and abundant foolishness, a zeal for arrogance, abominable deeds fashioned by whorish desire, lechery in its filthy heart—to the end of *walking* in all the *ways of darkness* and *evil cunning*.” “The judgment of all who walk in such *ways* will be multiple afflictions at the hand of all the *angels of perdition*,

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phrases are excerpted from pages 51–61.

everlasting damnation in the wrath of God's furious vengeance, never-ending terror and reproach for all eternity, with a shameful extinction in the fire of *Hell's outer darkness*.”<sup>9</sup>

The Qumran community derived its label as “the *Way*” from Isaiah. Men who progress “conforming to these doctrines . . . shall separate from the session of perverse men to go to the wilderness, there to prepare the *way* of truth, as it is written, ‘in the wilderness prepare the *way* of the Lord, make straight in the desert a *highway* for our God’” (Isa. 40:3).<sup>10</sup> Further direction is provided for the instructor “of those who have chosen the *Way*.” He is to instruct them “in truly wondrous mysteries” that “the secret *Way* [may be] perfected among them.” Each will “walk blamelessly” in this time of “preparing the *way*.” “These are the precepts of the *Way* for the Instructor in these times.”<sup>11</sup>

Finally, the small fragment known as 4Q473 as reconstructed presents the doctrine of the Two Ways in almost the same Deuteronomic language that would be used a century or so later to open that discussion in *Didache*.

He is setting [before you a blessing and a curse. These are] t[wo] *ways*, one goo[d and one evil. If you walk in the good *way*,] He will bless you. But if you walk in the [evil] *way*, [He will curse you . . . ].<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 129–131.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 405.

### **Margaret McKenna and the perspective of form criticism.**

Probably because of its much broader approach to the Two-Ways traditions, the 1981 PhD dissertation of Margaret McKenna, working under the supervision of the noted biblical scholar, Robert Kraft, seems not to have been used by any of the numerous writers on this topic over the last three decades, including Kraft himself.<sup>13</sup> While they have focused their efforts on questions of chronological priority and interdependence between a number of Greco-Roman period Christian and Jewish writings, McKenna took on the related, but much larger task of collecting and carefully categorizing the principal examples of Two-Ways motifs in ancient literatures of the Mediterranean and Near eastern traditions—all from the perspective of twentieth-century form criticism. I find McKenna’s study particularly valuable, not only because of her comprehensive approach to ancient literature, but especially because of her detailed form-critical approach, which makes it possible to detect trends and relationships between different strands of Two-Ways traditions. While her conclusions apply to a wide range of issues, I will draw on only a few of these here to illuminate some of the shared and distinctive features of Two-Ways passages in the Bible and in the Book of Mormon.

McKenna began her search for an established form of Two-Ways texts with a study of texts from the Greco-Roman period that explicitly employ “the phrase *Two Ways* in a textual unit.” The texts selected for initial analysis and comparison were: Testament of Asher 1, 2

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<sup>13</sup> Margaret McKenna, *The Two Ways in Jewish and Christian Writings of the Greco-Roman Period: A Study of the Form of Repentance Parenthesis*, a dissertation in Religious Studies, University of Pennsylvania, 1981, available through University Microfilms International.

Enoch 30, Didache I–VI, Pseudo Barnabas 18–20, Sibylline Oracles VIII, and Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromata* V:31.<sup>14</sup> McKenna did find a recurring and complex form in the clearest presentations of the Two-Ways doctrine in these texts:

Two Ways Texts are characterized by a unity of antithetical structure and thematic content composed of five elements: way imagery, guides, ethical content, ends, and turns which appear in a great variety of expressions. Their function is almost always repentance parenthesis. They appear in a limited and recurring variety of life contexts which are related to this general function.<sup>15</sup>

But this identifiable, recurring form obviously developed over time, and the handful of pre-exilic examples are not nearly so complete or well-defined as are those from Qumran and the second- and third-century Christians.<sup>16</sup> While the Two-Ways passages bear obvious similarities with covenant-making and renewal texts, she argues that while the two clearly share some form and terminology, they each have their consistently distinct elements and functions.<sup>17</sup>

After searching through the older literature of the ancient world, she found three clear early precedents, two in Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, and one Persian, all of which plausibly share even more ancient Aryan links. She recognizes that there are simply no texts available that could test such a speculated connection. But it is clear that the Two-Ways metaphor and literary form

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<sup>14</sup> McKenna, 32–33.

<sup>15</sup> McKenna, 281.

<sup>16</sup> McKenna, 273.

<sup>17</sup> McKenna, 288–290.

featuring antithetical imagery blossomed in the post-exilic period of Jewish writings, and that the highly developed form used in Qumran and early Christianity comes through that line. She also detected differences in writers that were more influenced by the Persian or the Greek perspective, but was not inclined to argue for direct influence by either tradition.<sup>18</sup> Her survey

indicates irresistibly that the great dividing line in the history of the Two-Ways tradition is the exile. While there are several pre-exilic texts that relate to the Two Ways tradition, there are (with the sole exception of Hesiod 13:12–14:10) no Two Ways texts, properly so called, in existence until the exile comes at least into view (as e.g. in Jr 21, Dt 30 and Ez 18). Also, of the texts listed from the OT, the only fully developed . . . texts are from the Wisdom writings, and the largest group of fully developed Two Ways texts are from extra-canonical writings of the Greco-Roman period.<sup>19</sup>

McKenna found a significant development in Two-Ways language between the writing of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. In the writings of Jeremiah and Hosea before him, the negative way “was conceived of . . . as the reversal of the positive one.”

In the view of Jeremiah, there is really only one Way. The other negative one consists in straying from it or going backwards on it. This is in fact the dominant view in all the pre-exilic texts. No substantial negative way is to be found among them.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> McKenna, 293–397, and especially 330 and 377–387..

<sup>19</sup> McKenna, 293–94. McKenna’s category 1 texts are those that use the phrase “two ways” and exhibit most of the standard features.

<sup>20</sup> Mckenna, 305.



McKenna used the *Testaments of the Patriarchs* in general and the *Testament of Asher* in particular to illustrate the full-blown development of the Two-Ways form:

Throughout the Testaments the concepts of light, Law, truth, spirits of various virtues, Lord, good works, knowledge and life or salvation, are intimately connected, as are their antitheses: darkness, lawlessness, deceit, and its various spirits of vices, Beliar or Satan or Prince of Deceit, evildoing, blindness, and perishing. The terms are easily interchanged and almost seem to represent each other.<sup>21</sup>

McKenna recognized that other scholars have interpreted “the metaphor of the Two Ways [as] a natural and universal rhetorical device . . . simply a theme.”<sup>22</sup> In response, she reports that while the non-antithetical use of the way metaphor and imagery is much more common, and that when it does appear “in other than Jewish or Christian literature, it is rarely elaborated into the elements of the texts analyzed.” Rather, “such texts are found predominantly within Jewish and Christian contexts of the Greco-Roman period,” and “the complex of elements typical of them cannot be explained by attributing universality to the metaphor of Two Ways.”<sup>23</sup> She argues that the recurrence of the way metaphor in passages containing the same five thematic elements structured antithetically with the constant text function being repentance parenthesis cannot be explained as random or non-intentional. She argues further that these passages tend to recycle

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<sup>21</sup> McKenna, 53.

<sup>22</sup> McKenna, 282–83. Hugh Nibley’s readers will recognize this perspective in his recurring references to “the ubiquitous doctrine of the two ways.”

<sup>23</sup> McKenna, 282.

the same phrases and themes and even quote from one another. Lexicons show that when these occur, the passage is quite likely to have a Two-Ways form. She provides examples to demonstrate that the Two-Ways texts “sometimes witness to the development of consciousness of that tradition, usually by the intensification of way imagery and metaphor and of the antithetical structure when quoting earlier Two Ways texts.”<sup>24</sup>

### **The Book of Mormon**

While readers of the Book of Mormon have long known that the book is informed by the Two-Ways teaching and advances it repeatedly in a variety of contexts, there has not previously been any attempt to assess the content and the variations that may occur in that teaching. Nor has there been any systematic effort to compare Book of Mormon versions of the doctrine with the Jewish and Christian versions surveyed above. Twentieth-century Book of Mormon scholar Hugh Nibley referred repeatedly in his writings to “the famous and ubiquitous doctrine of the Two Ways,” but never explored how it is embedded in Book of Mormon discourse.<sup>25</sup> Mack

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<sup>24</sup> McKenna, 283–85.

<sup>25</sup> Hugh Nibley and Michael C. Rhodes, *One Eternal Round*, Deseret Book, 2010, CWHN 4:498. Nibley’s real message may be to biblical scholars who have not usually recognized how widespread this doctrine was in ancient Near East cultures. In other writings, Nibley did demonstrate culturally diverse examples of the doctrine in the ancient world. *See* “The Ancient Law of Liberty,” CWHN 3:182–85, “Evangelium Quadraginta Dierum: The Forty-day Mission of Christ—The Forgotten Heritage,” CWHN 4:16, and “The Expanding Gospel,” CWHN 12:195–99. His one-volume text on the Book of Mormon does not mention the doctrine.

Stirling has produced an excellent and thorough review of Book of Mormon passages, interpreting them as a consistent teaching on the ways of life and death specifically as a fundamental part of the doctrine taught in the Book of Mormon.<sup>26</sup>

In what follows, I will survey and document twelve passages in the Book of Mormon which explicitly refer to two paths or ways to assess the extent to which these follow or vary from each other or from the Jewish and Christian models listed above. I will then illustrate how the prevalence of this teaching throughout the Book of Mormon goes hand in hand with the idea that there is only one true way by which man can be saved in the kingdom of God, and that that way is provided by the gospel of Jesus Christ, which in turn is made possible through his atonement.

Any reader familiar with the Jewish and Christian Two-Ways writings listed above will have no difficulty recognizing similar passages in the Book of Mormon. In fact, the first impression will be that the Two Ways appear to be thematic from the beginning to the end of the book and are developed even more explicitly and extensively in a number of sermons and editorial commentaries. As many as a hundred less obvious passages assume the Two-Ways

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See Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Deseret Book, CWHN 6, 1988. See also Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3–7:27 and Luke 6:20–49)*, Fortress Press, 1995, p. 521–22, where Betz briefly reviews the ancient Jewish, Egyptian, and Greek literature that uses the Two-Ways motif.

<sup>26</sup> See note 1 above.

doctrine implicitly for their meanings.

### **The Two-Ways Doctrine according to Jacob**

I will begin this analysis with the central section of the sermon that Jacob, the younger brother and spiritual heir of the first principal prophet/recorder Nephi, delivers to the Nephite people as recorded in Second Nephi, chapter 9. The full sermon occupies five chapters (ch. 6–10) of Nephi’s second book, and is set off from the surrounding text with the simple inclusio formed by repeating the phrase “the words/things that Jacob spake.” In the first section of the sermon, Jacob reads directly from Isaiah 48:1–52:2. In the second section (2 Nephi 9:1–53), which is also marked off as an inclusio with the phrase, “the covenants of the Lord,” Jacob presents his own teaching of the gospel of Christ and the plan of salvation. The final section contains Jacob’s prophetic explanations of both the past and the future of Israel, of the gentiles, and of his own people in terms of both his and Isaiah’s prophecies of the coming of Christ and the Lord’s efforts to bring salvation to all the children of men.

At the conclusion of the full sermon, Jacob reminds his hearers that they “are free to act for [themselves], to choose *the way* of everlasting death or *the way* of eternal life.” They can accomplish this by reconciling themselves “to the will of God and not to the will of the devil and the flesh” (2 Nephi 10:23–24).<sup>27</sup> After an extensive earlier call to repentance, Jacob acknowledged that “the words of truth are hard against all uncleanness.” But, he explains, “the righteous fear it not, for they love the truth and are not shaken” (2 Nephi 9:40). With this

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<sup>27</sup> All Book of Mormon quotations are taken from the critical text prepared by Royal Skousen: Royal Skousen, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*. Yale University Press, 2009.

warning, he extends his central appeal, and brings the eschatological context and Two-Ways structure of his doctrine into focus:

O then, my beloved brethren, come unto the Lord, the Holy One. Remember that *his paths* are righteousness. Behold, *the way* for man is narrow, but it lieth in a *straight course* before him. And the keeper of *the gate* is the Holy One of Israel, and he employeth no servant there. And there is *none other way* save it be by *the gate*, for he cannot be deceived, for the Lord God is his name. (2 Nephi 9:41)

Although this passage from Jacob is much richer conceptually than the related passage in the Sermon on the Mount, it does raise the same question about the location of the gate in the image that has troubled Bible scholars. Is the gate at the beginning or at the end of the path? Hans Dieter Betz has argued strongly that the image in the Sermon on the Mount requires the strait and broad gates to be at the end of the two paths—one opening to the heavenly Jerusalem, and the other to hell.<sup>28</sup> But Jacob is clearly following the teaching of his older brother Nephi, who learned in a very early vision that “the *gate* by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism . . . . And then are ye in this *straight and narrow path* which leads to eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:17–18). So entering on this path requires divine approval of one’s repentance and baptism, and the final judgment comes at the end.

Repentance is the key, and “he will not open unto them” who “are puffed up because of their learning and their wisdom and their riches . . . save they shall cast these things away and consider themselves fools before God and come down in the depths of humility” (2 Nephi 9:42).

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<sup>28</sup> See Betz, pp. 520–523.

The “happiness which is prepared for the saints” will be hid forever from the unrepentant (2 Nephi 9:43). To emphasize the seriousness of his invitation to repentance, Jacob shakes his garment before his brethren so that at the day of judgment, the God of Israel will know “that I shook your iniquities from my soul and that I stand with brightness before him and am rid of your blood” (9:44). He then launches one more appeal:

45 O my beloved brethren, *turn away* from your sins. *Shake off the chains* of him that would bind you fast. *Come unto that God* who is the rock of *your salvation*.

46 Prepare your souls for that glorious day when *justice* shall be administered unto the *righteous*, even the *day of judgment*. (2 Nephi 9:45–46)

In the lead-up to this central passage, we are introduced to many additional features of Jacob’s version of the doctrine of the Two Ways. Jacob begins his parenthesis referring to the ancient “*covenants* of the Lord, that he hath *covenanted* with all the house of Israel . . . by the mouth of his holy prophets . . . from the beginning down from generation to generation” until they shall be restored to the true “fold of God, when they shall be gathered home to the lands of their inheritance and shall be established in all their lands of promise” (2 Nephi 9:1–2). Jacob thus reminds his brethren that they have cause to rejoice “because of the *blessings* which the Lord God shall bestow upon [their] children” (2 Nephi 9:3) in accordance with the Abrahamic covenant. But then he transitions immediately into a Christian account of the fall which brought death upon all men and made “a power of resurrection” necessary “to fulfill *the merciful plan* of the great Creator” (2 Nephi 9:5–6). Because fallen men “were cut off from the presence of the Lord,” it was also necessary that there be “an infinite atonement” (2 Nephi 9:6–7). Thus cut off, “our spirits must become subject to that *angel which fell* from before the presence of the Eternal

God and became the *devil*, to rise no more. And our spirits must have become like unto him, and we become devils, angels to a devil—to be shut out from the presence of our God” (2 Nephi 9:8–9).

In the face of such a hopeless eventuality, Jacob exclaims his praise for the great “goodness of our God who *prepareth a way* for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster”—*death and hell*—“which I call the *death* of the body and also the *death* of the spirit” (2 Nephi 9:10). But “because of *the way of deliverance* of our God . . . hell must deliver up its captive spirits and the grave must deliver up its captive bodies. And the bodies and the spirits of men will be restored one to the other” (2 Nephi 9:11–12). Because they have again become “living souls,” they will have “a perfect knowledge”—for the wicked “a perfect knowledge of all [their] guilt and [their] uncleanness and [their] nakedness”—and for the righteous “a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment and their righteousness, being clothed with purity, yea, even with *the robe of righteousness*” (2 Nephi 9:13–14). “And then cometh the *judgment*,” and “they which are *righteous*” will inherit the kingdom of God,” and “they which are *filthy* . . . the *devil and his angels*, . . . shall go away into *everlasting fire*” (2 Nephi 9:15–18).

Jacob then goes on to contrast “the merciful *plan of the great Creator*,” or “the great *plan of our God*” (2 Nephi 9:6, 13) with the “cunning *plan of the evil one*” (2 Nephi 9:28). Wilhelm Michaelis has shown us that the biblical term for *way* ( ὁδος) when referring to human lives, can often be best translated as *plan*.<sup>29</sup> Jacob likewise moves back and forth between the language of

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<sup>29</sup> Wilhelm Michaelis, “ὁδος,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Eerdmans, 1967, vol. V,

way and of *plan*. He praises the greatness, justice, mercy, and holiness of God, who delivers “his saints from that awful monster, the *devil and death and hell*” by coming “into the world that he may save all men, if they will hearken unto his voice” (2 Nephi 9:17–21). The Christian character of the plan as understood by Jacob becomes clear as he then proceeds to spell out the gospel or way to salvation that will be explained in greater detail by his brother Nephi in chapter 31 at the end of this same book, listing five of the six elements of that gospel or doctrine of Christ.<sup>30</sup> While Jacob mentions faith, repentance, baptism, enduring to the end, and being saved, he leaves out the reception of the Holy Ghost—which, as Nephi teaches, is responsible to bring the remission of sins, to testify of the Father and the Son, and to show the faithful “all things which [they] should do” as they endure to the end.<sup>31</sup> Jacob sees this gospel as a law given by “the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel,” for those who would “be saved in the kingdom of God.” But, “if they will not repent and believe in his name and be baptized in his name and endure to the end, they must be damned” (2 Nephi 9:23–24). The Two Ways are now stated in terms of the Christian gospel, and only those who follow God’s law and embrace that gospel and endure to the end can be saved.

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p. 50.

<sup>30</sup> For an explanation of how this six-element definition of the gospel of Jesus Christ is established in the text, see Noel B. Reynolds, “The Gospel According to Mormon,” *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 68 (2:2015), pp. 218–234.

<sup>31</sup> See the detailed discussion of 2 Nephi 31 in Noel B. Reynolds, “The Gospel According to Nephi,” *Religious Educator*, 16 (2:2015), pp. 65–66.



But Jacob also recognizes that many peoples have not received this gospel or law, and goes on to explain that the law can have no hold on such people, but that “the mercies of the Holy One of Israel hath claim upon them because of the atonement, for they are delivered by the power of him” (2 Nephi 9:25). These will be “delivered from that awful monster, *death and hell and the devil*” and be restored to God. “But woe unto him that hath the law given, . . . that hath all the commandments of God, . . . and that transgresseth them and that wasteth the days of his probation, for awful is his state” (2 Nephi 9:26–27). It has become clear that the Two Ways apply only to those who have received the true way—the law or the gospel.

Jacob turns next to an account of the other path or “cunning *plan* of the evil one” which exploits “the vainness and the frailties and the foolishness of men! When they think they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not to the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves” (2 Nephi 9:28). He then goes on to specify the common failings or sins of those who yield “to the enticings of that cunning one,” by pronouncing woes on those who commit any of a list of nine offenses (2 Nephi 9:30–39). Those who are “carnally minded” are on the path to death, while the “spiritually minded” are headed for life eternal (2 Nephi 9:39).

Having spelled out the Two Ways, Jacob issues the appeal to his brethren cited earlier that they “*turn away* from [their] sins” by shaking off “the chains of him that would bind [them] fast” that they may “*come unto that God* who is the rock of [their] salvation” (2 Nephi 9:45). His call to repentance is built squarely on a Two-Ways teaching, as he reminds them that “there is none other *way* [to salvation] save it be by the *gate*” that is kept by the Holy One of Israel. But “his *paths* are righteousness,” and “the *way* for man is narrow,” and “it lieth in a *straight course*

before him” (2 Nephi 9:41).

### **The Two-Ways Doctrine as Taught by other Book of Mormon Prophets**

I have identified eleven additional passages in which a doctrine of Two Ways is explicitly taught, and over a hundred others which implicitly assume the logic of the Two-Ways doctrine in promoting “the right *way*.” Among these explicit passages, some introduce new vocabulary.

The binary logic of the Two-Ways doctrine derives from repentance parenthesis in an eschatological context. All the family of Adam are headed for a final judgment where the wicked and the righteous will receive just rewards for the kind of lives they have chosen to live, the paths they have walked in mortality, by receiving eternal life in the presence of God, or being banished to hell with the devil and his other followers. Most preaching of repentance focuses on these two alternatives explicitly or implicitly and often employs the metaphor of two paths or ways of life that lead to one or the other of these eternal outcomes. The story told in the Book of Mormon of Lehi and his progeny begins as he and other prophets are called to preach repentance to the apostate Jews in Jerusalem, warning them around 600 BCE of impending destruction and captivity if they will not turn back from their wicked ways to the Holy One of Israel. And it will end over 500 pages later with similar written calls to repentance addressed to the gentiles and to the prophesied descendants of Lehi in a much later day.

1. The first explicit Book of Mormon description of human lives in terms of their choices between Two Ways or paths occurs in Nephi’s summary description of the vision or dream his father Lehi received shortly after leading his family out of Jerusalem at the Lord’s command. In this dream, Lehi found himself being led by a man dressed in white for hours across “a dark and dreary waste” and finally to “a tree whose fruit was desirable

to make one happy” and the “most sweet, above all that I ever had before tasted” and “white to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen” (1 Nephi 8:4–11). Looking around, Lehi discovered that “a *straight and narrow path*” led to the tree and was equipped with an iron rod that would help people following the path, even when the path was obscured in a “mist of darkness.” Although great multitudes grasped the rod and began the journey on the path, many “fell away into *forbidden paths* and were lost,” or were “lost . . . wandering in *strange roads*” (1 Nephi 8:24–32). Even Lehi’s eldest sons, after coming to him at the tree, were among those who fell away—leading him to share his dream with his family and to “exhort them then with all the feeling of a tender parent that they would hearken to his words, in that perhaps the Lord would be merciful to them and not cast them off” (1 Nephi 8:36–37). And so the iconic *straight and narrow path* so frequently used in Book of Mormon repentance parenthesis<sup>32</sup> was first counterposed to “forbidden paths” and “strange roads.”

2. In launching the second half of his first book, Nephi rehearses the prophecies of his father about a coming Messiah, whose gospel would be taken to Israel and to the Gentiles alike. And again he emphasizes the eschatological version of the Two-Ways doctrine that “the *way* is prepared” if men will “repent and come unto him.” But those

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<sup>32</sup> Jacob’s description of the “righteous” paths of the Lord as both narrow and straight (2 Nephi 9:41) is implicitly invoked in several simpler passages such as 1 Nephi 10:8, 2 Nephi 4:33, Alma 7:9 and 19, and Alma 37:12, echoing the biblical patterns seen in Isaiah 42:16 as reflected in Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:3, Luke 3:4, and in Hebrews 12:13.

who seek to do wickedly “must be cast off forever” (1 Nephi 10:18–21).

Next, Nephi reports that he was also allowed to share this same vision, which he now describes in much greater detail using the same binary language associated with Two-Ways preaching. Nephi saw that the iron rod was “the word of God” (1 Nephi 11:25), a phrase that refers repeatedly to the gospel or doctrine of Christ in the writings of Nephi and later prophets.<sup>33</sup> It can also refer to “the words of Christ,” which Nephi later equates to the specific gospel principle that personal guidance by the Holy Ghost “will shew unto you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:5). Nephi was also shown the nativity, the baptism, and the ministry of the Messiah that would come to the Jews, and was taught “that all men *must come unto him* or they cannot be saved” (1 Nephi 13:40).<sup>34</sup> He was shown a future time when the Messiah would come to the Nephites after which “three generations did pass away in righteousness.” But that did not last forever, and he also saw that “the mists of darkness are the temptations of the devil” that lead the children of men “into the *broad roads* that they perish and are lost” (1 Nephi 12:11, 17), implicitly contrasting these evil ways with the straight and narrow path of the vision.

Nephi’s extended vision account moves on to the future Gentiles that would come

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<sup>33</sup> Noel B. Reynolds, “This is the Way,” *Religious Educator*, vol. 14:3 (2013), 75.

<sup>34</sup> See my paper, “‘Come unto me’ as a technical gospel term,” for a detailed treatment of this and other similar scriptural statements. The pre-publication version is available at: [http://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/do/search/?q=author\\_lname%3A%22Reynolds%22%20AND%20author\\_fname%3A%22Noel%22&start=0&context=5485626&sort=date\\_desc](http://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/do/search/?q=author_lname%3A%22Reynolds%22%20AND%20author_fname%3A%22Noel%22&start=0&context=5485626&sort=date_desc)

to this same promised land bringing with them the Bible, which originally had contained the fullness of the gospel, but from which “many parts which are plain and most precious” had been removed,” leading to a perversion “of the *right ways* of the Lord” (1 Nephi 13:24–27). But the fullness of the gospel will be brought forth to the Gentiles, and Nephi learns that “if the Gentiles repent, it shall be well with them,” but “whoso repenteth not must perish” (1 Nephi 14:5). The eschatological focus of the Two-Ways doctrine as taught to Nephi in this vision continues to be evident as the long-term outcomes of following one way or the other are distinguished:

For the time cometh, saith the Lamb of God, that I will work a great and a marvelous work among the children of men, a work which shall be everlasting, either on the one hand or on the other, either to the convincing of them unto peace and life eternal or unto the deliverance of them to the hardness of their hearts and the blindness of their minds, unto their being brought down into captivity, and also unto destruction both temporally and spiritually, according to the captivity of the devil of which I have spoken. (1 Nephi 14:5, 7)

This binary language is emphasized when Nephi identifies the multiplicity of churches of that latter day solely in terms of the two authors of the opposed paths they promote:

“Behold, there is save it be two churches; the one is the church of the Lamb of God and the other is the church of the devil” (1 Nephi 14:10). Nephi returns again to an exhortation of his brothers, that they should “hearken unto the word of God and . . . *hold fast* unto it,” so that “they would never perish, neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to *lead them away* to destruction”

(1 Nephi 15:24).

The eternal consequences of following the right or the wrong paths receives one final emphasis. Explaining the vision further to his brothers, Nephi said that there was “an awful gulf” separating the wicked from “the saints of God,” which was “the awful hell . . . prepared for the wicked.” And “the justice of God did also divide the wicked from the righteous” (1 Nephi 15:28–30). “Wherefore they must be brought to stand before God to be judged of their works. . . . And if they be filthy, it must needs be that they cannot dwell in the kingdom of God; . . . there cannot any unclean thing enter into the kingdom of God. . . . Wherefore the final state of the soul of man is to dwell in the kingdom of God or to be cast out because of that justice of which I have spoken. Wherefore the wicked are separated from the righteous” (1 Nephi 15:33–36). The language of the Two Ways resurfaces explicitly as Nephi ends by urging his brothers to “*walk uprightly* before God,” and expresses his new hope “that they would *walk in the paths of righteousness*” (1 Nephi 16:3–5).

3. Nephi’s second book opens with Lehi again calling his oldest sons to repentance with allusion to Deuteronomy 4:8 and the Two-Ways language of blessing and cursing. If the oldest sons will hearken unto the voice of Nephi,” he will leave unto [them] a blessing” (2 Nephi 1:28). But he fears for them because of their rebelliousness, that they may be “cursed with a sore cursing” and “cut off from [the Lord’s] presence” and “come down into captivity.” For the *ways* of the Lord “are righteousness forever” (2 Nephi 1:19–22). “Awake, my sons, put on the armor of righteousness, shake off the chains

with which ye are bound, and come forth out of obscurity and arise from the dust” (2 Nephi 1:23).

As Lehi moves on to a blessing for his younger son Jacob, he shifts into the mode of doctrinal instruction and provides an account of the Two-Ways doctrine that seems both original and new. Lehi begins with an explanation of the atonement performed by the Holy Messiah, the Redeemer, who has prepared the way for the salvation of men, who have been “cut off,” having perished “from that which is good,” having become “miserable forever” (2 Nephi 2:3–5). Because he laid “down his life,” and took it again, he brought to pass the resurrection. “And they that believe in him shall be saved” (2 Nephi 2:8–9). Because he made “intercession for all the children of men,” they must all “stand in the presence of him to be judged of him, according to the truth and holiness which is in him” (2 Nephi 2:–10). This much sounds quite familiar, but Lehi goes on to provide a theological explanation for this, setting out as his starting point the necessity of “an opposition in all things.” Without this there could be no wickedness nor righteousness, happiness nor misery, good nor bad, life nor death, corruption nor incorruption, sense nor insensibility, law nor sin. There could be “no purpose in the end of . . . creation,” which would “destroy the wisdom of God and his eternal purposes” (2 Nephi 2:11–12).

In that context of opposition in all things, “the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself,” which could not occur unless “he were enticed by the one or the other” (2 Nephi 2:16). And so the source of opposition is pushed back to the time when “*an angel of God . . . had fallen from heaven*” and “*became a devil*,” and “*sought also*

*the misery of all mankind*” (2 Nephi 2:17–18). Likewise, all men “were lost because of the transgression of their parents,” and so their days “were prolonged . . . that they might repent while in the flesh.” And the Lord God commanded “that all men must repent,” making of this mortal life “a state of probation” (2 Nephi 2:21). But through the redemption provided by the Messiah, men “have become free forever, *knowing good from evil*, to act for themselves. . . . They are *free to choose liberty and eternal life . . . or to choose captivity and death*” (2 Nephi 2:26–27). Applying this doctrine to his own sons, Lehi mounts his final appeal:

I would that ye should look to the great Mediator and hearken unto his great commandments and be faithful unto his words and *choose eternal life* according to *the will of his Holy Spirit*, and *not choose eternal death* according to *the will of the flesh* and the evil which is therein, which giveth *the spirit of the devil* power to captivate, to bring you down to hell, that *he may reign over you* in his own kingdom. (2 Nephi 2:28–29)

4. Following these final blessings and teachings of Lehi to his family, Nephi records his own plea to God, employing once again the Two-Ways language to articulate his own struggles with temptation and “the enemy of my soul.” He prays that the Lord will keep “the *gates* of hell . . . shut continually before [him],” but that he will “not shut the *gates* of [the Lord’s] righteousness before [him].” Further, Nephi prays that he “may *walk in the path* of the low valley,” and that he may “be strict in the *plain road*.” He prays that the Lord will “make a *way* for [his] escape” from his enemies, that he will “*make [his] path straight* before [him],” that he “not place a stumbling block in [Nephi’s] *way*,” but



that he would “clear [his] way before [him] . . . and hedge not up [his] way but the ways of [his] enemy” (2 Nephi 2:32–33).

5. It is important to note that when Nephi seeks Old Testament support for his teachings, he goes to different passages of Isaiah than those used by the writers in Qumran and the early Christians. One case of Isaiah’s use of the Two-Ways teaching may signal Nephi’s chief source for the doctrine: “And many people shall go and say: Come ye and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways and we will walk in his paths.” And further, “O house of Jacob, come ye and let us walk in the light of the Lord, yea, come, for ye have all gone astray, every one to his wicked ways” (2 Nephi 12:3, 5, quoting from Isaiah 2). The same things echo six chapters later where Nephi continues the Isaiah insertion with Isaiah 8 and 9: “For the Lord spake thus to me with a strong hand and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people . . . because there is no light in them.” But more optimistically he prophesies that “the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light. They that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined” (2 Nephi 18:11, 20 and 19:2, quoting Isaiah 8:11, 20 and 9:2).

6. Following the long section of chapters borrowed from Isaiah, Nephi undertakes his final sermon to his righteous followers, but concerns himself first with their future descendants who will become wicked. Nephi feels his teachings “are sufficient to teach any man the right way.” Twice he affirms that “the right way is to believe in Christ and deny him not.” By implication the wrong way is to deny Christ, by which they “also deny the prophets and the law” (2 Nephi 25:28–29). Having seen in vision the Lord’s

punishments for these wicked descendants, Nephi is constrained to acknowledge “Thy ways are just” (2 Nephi 26:7). Nephi contrasts the fates of his wicked and righteous descendants, and notes that “the righteous that hearken unto the words of the prophets . . . shall not perish.” Rather, the Lord will heal them and bless them with peace across three generations or more. But those who “yield unto the devil and choose *works of darkness* rather than *light*, . . . must *go down to hell*” (2 Nephi 26:8–10).

Nephi goes on to describe the Two Ways in the last days by first describing the sins of the Gentiles and recognizing the devil as “the founder of all these things.” He is “the founder of murder and works of darkness; yea, and he *leadeth them* by the neck with a flaxen cord until he bindeth them with his strong cords forever.” Nephi goes on to contrast this with the Lord God who “worketh not in darkness. He doeth not any thing save it be for the benefit of the world, for he loveth the world.” Nephi then summarizes all the Lord has done for men and re-emphasizes his invitation to all that come to him and repent “and partake of his salvation, . . . his goodness” (2 Nephi 26:20–33). Continuing this binary mode of analysis in his final sermon, Nephi describes the positive and the negative responses that will meet the restoration of the gospel in the last days and refers again to Abraham, whose seed will respond positively: “Jacob shall not now be ashamed . . . They shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob and shall fear the God of Israel” (2 Nephi 27:28–35). By contrast he describes the wicked in those days who have denied the Holy Ghost and have been seduced by the persuasions of the devil, who *leads them* carefully down to hell. He distinguishes those who are built on the rock from various kinds of sinners who are built on a sandy foundation. But even though they

will deny the Lord, he will still be merciful “if they will repent and come unto [him].”

The doctrine of the Two Ways now distinguishes those “that fight against my word and against my people,” who heed the Lord’s words (2 Nephi 29:14). “For the time speedily cometh that the Lord God shall cause a great division among the people and the wicked will he destroy and he will spare his people” (2 Nephi 30:10).

7. In the final section of his farewell sermon, Nephi presents his most complete explanation of “the doctrine of Christ,” which is “the *only way*” that leads to salvation in the kingdom of God. Using the image of a path and a gate, Nephi teaches that repentance and baptism are the *gate* by which all men should enter. The remission of sins will then come by fire and by the Holy Ghost, and they will then be in “the straight and narrow *path*” that leads to eternal life. And the Father will send the Holy Ghost to all who “enter by *the way*” (2 Nephi 31:17–21). Here Nephi has told us clearly that the Lord’s way is and has always been the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the ways of Satan are the many paths into which he leads those who follow him into sin. But Nephi can only hope for those who reconcile themselves unto Christ “and enter into the narrow *gate* and walk in the *straight path*<sup>35</sup> which leads *to life*, and continue in the *path* until the end of the day of probation” (2 Nephi 33:9).

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<sup>35</sup> Skousen elected to use “strait” in this passage but acknowledged he could also have justified “straight,” which does seem to me to be the better choice. See his superb discussion of the strait/straight problem in the Book of Mormon in Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, Part One, pp. 174–181.

8. In his own farewell sermon, King Benjamin also chooses binary terminology to describe the lives of men that will be judged at the last day. For “there shall be no other name given *nor any other way* nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ the Lord Omnipotent” (Mosiah 3:17). “Men drinketh damnation to their own souls except they humble themselves and become as little children and believeth that salvation was and is and is to come in and through the atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent” (Mosiah 3:18). Benjamin categorizes the Two Ways of *living* with new language:

For the *natural man* is an enemy to God and has been from the fall of Adam and will be forever and ever but if he yieldeth to the enticings of the Holy Spirit and putteth off the natural man and becometh a *saint* through the atonement of Christ the Lord and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father. (Mosiah 3:19)

Mosiah goes on to warn his people not to suffer their children

14 that they transgress the laws of God and fight and quarrel one with another and *serve the devil*, which is the master of sin, or which is *the evil spirit*, which hath been spoken of by our fathers, he being *an enemy to all righteousness*.

15 But ye will teach them to *walk in the ways of truth* and soberness; ye will teach them to love one another and to serve one another” (Mosiah 4:14–15).

And the *ways of sin* are “so many that I cannot number them” (Mosiah4:29).

9. A few generations later the Nephites had fallen into great apostasy and “the more

part of them had *turned out of the way of righteousness* and did trample under their feet the commandments of God and did turn unto their *own ways*” (Helaman 6:31). These would include “secret *plans*” or “*plans* of wickedness” (Helaman 6:26–36). But at the same time, the Lamanites “did begin to keep his statutes and commandments and *to walk in truth and uprightness* before him” (Helaman 6:34).

10. When the Savior came to the Nephites after his crucifixion, he included in his teachings much of the New Testament sermon on the mount, including:

13 Enter ye in at the strait *gate*, for wide is the *gate* and broad is the *way* that leadeth to destruction.

14 And many there be which go in thereat, because strait is the *gate* and narrow is the *way* which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. (3 Nephi 14:13–14)

While this formulation is consistent with the earlier Two-Ways teaching of the Book of Mormon prophets, no distinctive features of this passage seem to show up in other Book of Mormon examples.

11. Moroni wrote that “in the gift of his Son hath God prepared a *more excellent way*” (Ether 12:11). For the benefit of the future Gentiles, Moroni summarizes in the concluding chapters of the Book of Mormon the measures that were taken in the Nephite church of Christ to keep their new converts “in the *right way*” (Moroni 6:4). Moroni goes on to include his father Mormon’s contrast between the ways of good and evil and explains that men cannot follow Christ and the devil at the same time, but must choose to follow one or the other. And *the way* to judge between them is plain. “The Spirit of Christ is given to every man that they may know good from evil” (Moroni 7:15–16).

## **Conclusions**

It should be stressed again that these twelve Book of Mormon passages constitute only a small group of the total number that appear to state or assume a doctrine of the Two Ways. But these twelve stood out for me as passages that offer new language or perspectives while at the same time exhibiting some of the structure, function, and characteristic content of the biblical texts introduced in the opening sections of the paper. The Book of Mormon writers do refer to the ways of light and darkness, the ways of life and death, competing guides, the context of covenant, and the function of repentance parenthesis. But they also introduce a number of additional and fundamental notions that indicate some originality and independence from even pre-exilic models. And they do not display the formulaic patterns that McKenna found evolving in the biblical and non-biblical texts of Judaism and Christianity in the post-exilic and Greco-Roman periods.