



6-1-2014

## Full Issue

BYU Studies

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

### Recommended Citation

Studies, BYU (2014) "Full Issue," *BYU Studies Quarterly*: Vol. 53 : Iss. 2 , Article 1.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol53/iss2/1>

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

## Advisory Board

Alan L. Wilkins, chair  
James P. Bell  
Donna Lee Bowen  
Douglas M. Chabries  
Doris R. Dant  
R. Kelly Haws

## Editor in Chief

John W. Welch

## Church History Board

Richard Bennett, chair  
*19th-century history*  
Brian Q. Cannon  
*20th-century history*  
Kathryn Daynes  
*19th-century history*  
Gerrit J. Dirkmaat  
*Joseph Smith, 19th-century Mormonism*  
Steven C. Harper  
*documents*  
Frederick G. Williams  
*cultural history*

## Liberal Arts and Sciences Board

Barry R. Bickmore, co-chair  
*geochemistry*  
Eric Eliason, co-chair  
*English, folklore*  
David C. Dollahite  
*faith and family life*  
Susan Howe  
*English, poetry, drama*  
Neal Kramer  
*early British literature, Mormon studies*  
Steven C. Walker  
*Christian literature*

## Reviews Board

Eric Eliason, co-chair  
*English, folklore*  
John M. Murphy, co-chair  
*Mormon and Western*  
Trevor Alvord  
*new media*  
Herman du Toit  
*art, museums*  
Angela Hallstrom  
*literature*  
Greg Hansen  
*music*  
Emily Jensen  
*new media*  
Megan Sanborn Jones  
*theater and media arts*  
Gerrit van Dyk  
*Church history*

## Specialists

Casualene Meyer  
*poetry editor*  
Thomas R. Wells  
*photography editor*



INVOLVING READERS  
IN THE LATTER-DAY SAINT  
ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE



## ARTICLES

- 4** From the Editor
- 7** The Perils of Grace  
Robert L. Millet
- 21** Spirit Babies and Divine Embodiment: PBEs, First Vision Accounts, Bible Scholarship, and the Experience-Centered Approach to Mormon Folklore  
Eric A. Eliason
- 29** Laying Up Treasure: Mormons in the Marketplace  
Douglas D. Anderson
- 57** A Study in Seven: Hebrew Numerology in the Book of Mormon  
Corbin Volluz
- 140** *The Prophet*: The Latter-day Saint Experience in the East, 1844–1845  
Susan Easton Black

## DOCUMENTS

- 94** A Mormon and a Buddhist Debate Plural Marriage: The Letters of Elder Alma O. Taylor and the Reverend Nishijima Kakuryo, 1901  
Reid L. Neilson
- 121** Sidney Rigdon's Plea to the Saints: Transcription of Thomas Bullock's Shorthand Notes from the August 8, 1844, Morning Meeting  
Transcribed and Introduced by LaJean Purcell Carruth and Robin Scott Jensen

## ESSAYS

- 85** Mossy Pools, Unkempt Paths, and Living Memory  
Patrick Moran
- 89** Be It unto Me  
Rebecca Clarke

## POETRY

- 20** Foundry  
Jared Pearce
- 84** Horizon  
Darlene Young

## REVIEW ESSAY

- 161** Jean Valjean, the Prodigal Son: Review Essay on Regional  
Productions of *Les Misérables*  
Bradley Moss and Shawnda Moss

## REVIEWS

- 168** *Exploring Mormon Thought: Of God and Gods* by Blake T. Ostler  
Reviewed by James Morse McLachlan
- 173** *Armenian Apocrypha Relating to Abraham* by Michael E. Stone  
Reviewed by E. Douglas Clark
- 180** *Latter Leaves in the Life of Lorenzo Snow* by Dennis B. Horne, with  
material prepared in 1890 by Orson F. Whitney  
Reviewed by William G. Hartley
- 184** *Navajo Tradition, Mormon Life: The Autobiography and Teachings of  
Jim Dandy* by Robert S. McPherson, Jim Dandy, and Sarah E. Burak  
Reviewed by Jessie L. Embry
- 187** *Ephraim's Rescue*, written and directed by T. C. Christensen  
Reviewed by John Hilton III

## NOTICES

- 190** *Izapa Sacred Space: Sculpture Calendar Codes*  
*Exploring the First Vision*  
*Villages on Wheels*  
Scripture Bibliography

## From the Editor



This year *BYU Studies* celebrates its fifty-fifth year of publication. As I look back at the table of contents of the first issue, published in 1959, I am struck that the same multidisciplinary variety still flourishes today in *BYU Studies* as it did then. Articles, essays, and book reviews in that issue covered topics of contemporary interest that are still of interest today.

In that inaugural issue, subjects included an LDS philosophical engagement with existentialism, a Mormon embrace of the human values found in modern art, an economic historical analysis of the Word of Wisdom, and a literary reading of Hawthorne's wrestle with the complexities of human interactions and of moral transgressions. Found in that first volume were department chairs as well as rising young assistant professors whose names were larger-than-life presences in LDS academic circles and on the BYU campus when I arrived as a freshman in the fall of 1964. They included such notables as Truman Madsen, Conan Matthews, Marden Clark, Leonard Arrington, and Kent Fielding.

In marking any anniversary, it is good to glance back into the past, in order to regroup and reestablish our bearings. In this present issue, as Patrick Moran's personal essay sensitively states, memory "is the very glue that keeps me bound to what I have been, what I am, and what I will become."

Fifteen years ago, on the fortieth anniversary of *BYU Studies*, I reflected on the precepts that have come to epitomize the academic code of professional conduct found today in our Author Guidelines.<sup>1</sup> Its six main ideals still today are:

1. Unity: The goal of unity with God and our fellow beings must be continually cultivated and nourished. The goal of unity does not imply that all scholarly methods or personal views must be the same, but “if ye are not one ye are not mine” (D&C 38:27).

2. Harmony: *BYU Studies Quarterly* seeks to harmonize and transcend, in a spiritual, intellectual, and practical unity, elements of this mortal existence that appear to most people to be incompatible contradictions.

3. Honesty: Accuracy and reliability are of the essence in scholarship.

4. Thoroughness: It is expedient to understand “all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God,” at home and abroad, in heaven and in earth, “things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass” (D&C 88:78–79).

5. Humility: No person says or understands everything perfectly, and a variety of opinions on a shared scale of progression are expected. Scholarship is not an end in itself. Research cannot create faith; it can only set the stage for greater light and knowledge.

6. Charity: In order for communication to occur, there must be charity, for no statement exists (including this one) that cannot be misconstrued. If fellowship and goodwill do not exist, especially in an academic setting, we will not communicate with one another.

If you as a reader resonate positively to these professional values, *BYU Studies* hopes to always be your trusted friend. Recently, Steve Piersanti, a highly positioned West Coast book publisher, dropped me a note to say, “The guidelines for authors from *BYU Studies* are wonderful and amazing. I’ve never seen anything like them before.”

As I have looked over the page proofs for this issue one last time, I have seen these values pervading the pages of this journal.

I feel a sense of unity in the various faithful voices of men and women who cherish relationships and communion with the household of faith.

I find cohesion as these authors harmonize dichotomies and conundrums, as they evenhandedly conjoin evangelical grace and Latter-day Saint works (Robert Millet), wisely blend the world of business and the values of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Douglas Anderson), and take seriously both folklore and inspiration (Eric Eliason).

I am amazed at the painstaking efforts that have been taken to ensure the greatest possible accuracy in our transcriptions of early Church discourses (LaJean Carruth) and Church newspapers from the 1840s (Susan Easton Black).

Expansive interests draw together Mormons and Buddhists (Reid Neilson), bring together the factoids of numerology with the sacred

messages of scripture (Corbin Volluz), and draw to attention a dozen early Armenian reflections on the life of Abraham (Douglas Clark). Thoroughness is exemplified by the scripture database noticed here, which pinpoints hundreds of thousands of scripture references found in over seven thousand books and speeches and articles.

Humility is found not only in recognitions by these authors of their own inadequacies and vast amounts of work yet to be accomplished, but also in submitting to personal disappointments and still being able to say, “Be it unto me, according to thy word,” as in the award-winning personal essay by Rebecca Clarke.

And charity can be found rolling alongside the “villages on wheels” whose stories have been rescued from obscurity by the late Stan Kimball’s astonishing collection of thousands of firsthand records never before compiled, telling details of suffering, love, humor, tragedy and joy on the trails of the Saints gathering to Zion, the quintessential Mormon experience.

Moving forward in this fifty-five-year tradition of distinctive scholarly LDS publishing, all of us at BYU Studies are very happy to bring you this latest issue. We hope it enriches the goodness of your life.

John W. Welch

---

1. The points listed here are extracted from John W. Welch, “Moving On,” *BYU Studies* 38, no. 1 (1999): 226–28, and are found at the BYU Studies website as Author Guidelines: <https://byustudies.byu.edu/NewsAndEvents/AuthorSubmissions.aspx>. ^

# The Perils of Grace

*Robert L. Millet*

There is no question but that the Latter-day Saints have been hesitant, even slow, to reflect upon and teach what the Book of Mormon and latter-day revelation have to say about the grace of God. This is understandable when we remind ourselves that the early Saints viewed the restored gospel and Church as major correctives to a Christian world that had gone off course. Speaking of Protestantism as a branch broken off from Catholicism, Joseph Smith stated, only eleven days before his death, “Here is a princ[iple] of logic—that men have no more sense [than to adopt]—I will illustrate [it by] an old apple tree—here jumps off a branch & says I am the true tree. & you are corrupt—if the whole tree is corrupt how can any true thing come out of it?”<sup>1</sup>

More especially, since Mormonism arose in a largely Protestant America, it ought not surprise us that there was an especially strong emphasis by the Saints on the need to perform the works of righteousness in order to qualify for salvation. Many Mormons would have responded to any kind of “easy believism” or the accompanying antinomianism in much the same way the Apostle Paul did: “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid” (Rom. 6:1–2).

---

1. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, comp. and ed., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, Utah: Grandin Book, 1991), 382, Thomas Bullock report, June 16, 1844. Text in brackets was added editorially to the Bullock notes for publication in Joseph Smith’s history. Other editorial additions are not included here. See Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 6:478.



## A Risky Proposition

When the liberating concept of the grace of God began to dawn on me in about 1980, and as I began to teach or comment on it in Sunday School classes, BYU religion classes, at conferences and symposia, and at Education Week and Know Your Religion programs, it was not uncommon to have persons after a class discussion or lecture ask, “This is really exciting stuff, Brother Millet, but isn’t it just a bit risky? I mean, don’t you worry that some members of the Church will take this teaching and run with it, will use it as license to goof off, permission to do less than their best, or even violate their covenants?” I concurred then and agree now that it is indeed a risk, one that is as real in the twenty-first century as it was in the first century. Gospel liberty is very appealing, and what becomes a godsend and a breath of fresh air to a woman who is doing her best but falling short becomes a temptation to sin to a man looking for shortcuts or flirting with evil. As one woman remarked tearfully to me after a lecture on what I called graceful living, “This is simply too good to be true!” It really is, either to the glory or the condemnation of the person who responds to this supernal doctrine.

Since the late 1980s, I have had a fascination with evangelical Christianity. This interest began in a rather innocent way—I discovered an evangelical radio station in Provo and began listening on the way to work in the mornings as well as during the drive home in late afternoon. I first encountered the radio programs of such personalities as John MacArthur, Tony Evans, Chuck Swindoll, Charles Stanley, James Dobson, Haddon Robinson, and David Jeremiah. I then began to read their books, and this season of discovery laid a solid foundation for a more formal LDS/Evangelical dialogue that began in 1997 and continues on a semiannual basis to this day with a larger group of Evangelical and LDS scholars. I consider the time spent in conversation and friendship building with Evangelicals to be among the most significant and rewarding hours in my personal and professional life. During the last fourteen years, I have learned a ton about Christian history and theology, but I have learned half a ton about Mormonism; one cannot engage seriously another religious tradition without doing some major introspection, soul searching, sifting, and sorting between what proves to be pop theology or folklore on the one hand and actual doctrinal teachings of the Church on the other. Let me share what I have observed in the lives and beliefs of Evangelicals and what we can learn from it.

In the Evangelicals, I have discovered a people who love God and are tenacious in their desire to honor him and acknowledge his sovereignty;

who have a commendable and contagious love and devotion for the Lord Jesus Christ; whose trust in the Crucifixion and redeeming blood of the Savior drives and dominates their lives; who adore the word of God found in the Holy Bible, and more particularly the writings of the Apostle Paul; and who are fully persuaded that salvation comes by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. These beliefs are central to their faith and way of life, and that is true for theologians as well as the evangelical woman in the pew or the born-again man on the street. That these teachings can be misunderstood and occasionally misapplied should not surprise Latter-day Saints; we see the same tendencies among our own people. But I'd like first to focus on the abuses or pitfalls that I have observed among my evangelical Christian friends, and then turn my attention toward the Latter-day Saints.

First, I have become aware of what might be called a hyperorthodoxy of speech or a "received vocabulary." When one grows up in an evangelical home or has a conversion or born-again experience, he or she gradually comes to speak with a tongue trained in the lingo of the faith. This would obviously be true of any faith community, including our own. But I have encountered among Evangelicals an exaggerated stress upon the use of the word *grace*. For example, some friends of other faiths occasionally watch our general conference or study our conference issue of the *Ensign*. Almost always I will receive their "report" of conference, their assessment of the talks and tone of the two-day event soon after the conference ends. On several occasions, one of them has commented to me, "Bob, the conference was good, but I just wish your leaders would focus more on grace," or "I liked the talk by Elder —; he mentioned grace a number of times," or "I was really bothered by the way Elder — put so much emphasis on keeping the commandments or being worthy." More than once after my friend has expressed disappointment about the lack of the word *grace*, I have said: "Did you really listen to the sermon by Elder —? He may not have used the word *grace* many times, but he spoke repeatedly of what men and women can do only through the power of Christ's Atonement." Or, I might say, "Did you even hear the words of Elder — as he focused on how our sins may be forgiven only through applying the precious blood of Christ?"

Spencer Fluhman of the BYU History Department and an important member of the LDS/Evangelical dialogue once remarked to our evangelical friends that sometimes our discussions seem to take the form of "Mormon tryouts for Christianity" rather than true dialogues. In the context of my story above, some Evangelicals appear almost to believe

that the number of uses of the word *grace* in a given sermon is a true test of the Christianity of the message. In a broader way, LDS mention of the works of righteousness, labor, obedience, or keeping the commandments really should not be a turnoff to those who take seriously the teachings of Jesus in the four Gospels (see Matt. 7:21; Luke 9:23; John 14:15). Faith always manifests itself in faithfulness. Salvation may come by grace alone, but grace is never alone.

Even a cursory reading of Christian history reveals a second peril of an excessive stress upon grace—namely, a discounting or almost dismissal of the church. Most of us can appreciate why such notable reformers as Luther and Calvin would rebel against the abuses of the Mother Church, including the sale of indulgences. But their rebellion soon took the form of a revolt against the institution of the church, a denunciation of a priestly hierarchy, and a clear de-emphasis on the sacraments or ordinances of the gospel. Even and especially today we can see how the Reformation's stress on a "priesthood of all believers" has led to an excessive focus on individual salvation and a personal relationship with Christ, the decline of denominations within Protestantism, and an approach to scriptural interpretation that smacks of "every man for himself." Historian Randall Balmer pointed out:

Luther's sentiments created a demand for Scriptures in the vernacular, and Protestants ever since have stubbornly insisted on interpreting the Bible for themselves, forgetting most of the time that they come to the text with their own set of cultural biases and personal agendas.

Underlying this insistence on individual interpretation is the assumption . . . that the plainest, most evident reading of the text is the proper one. Everyone becomes his or her own theologian. There is no longer any need to consult Augustine or Thomas Aquinas or Martin Luther about their understanding of various passages when you yourself are the final arbiter of what is the correct reading. This tendency, together with the absence of any authority structure within Protestantism, has created a kind of theological free-for-all, as various individuals or groups insist that *their* reading of the Bible is the only possible interpretation.<sup>2</sup>

Third, I once heard an evangelical preacher declare that "a Christ supplemented is a Christ supplanted." Because Evangelicals are so eager to ensure, in their teaching and lifestyle, that nothing, absolutely nothing,

---

2. Randall Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America*, 3d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 24, emphasis in original.

can or should be substituted for the grace of God, they have for the most part limited the ordinances to baptism and the Lord's Supper. More seriously, they have relegated to the category of "nice but not needed" the ordinances of salvation themselves. I once attended a church service with a couple of my Christian friends. The pastor, an excellent teacher and superb expositor of scripture, took occasion during his sermon to chasten his flock, to scold those members of the congregation who had undergone a conversion but had never been baptized. Knowing what I do about how many Protestants feel about the sacraments or ordinances, I asked my friends after church, "Well, given what the pastor said, is baptism necessary or not?" After a short pause, one of them, a pastor himself, replied, "Baptism is necessary but not essential." I came back with, "Would you like to tease apart *necessary* and *essential* for me?" I was told that nothing but the "finished work of Christ" was essential for salvation. Baptism is necessary, he continued, in the sense that every good Christian ought to be baptized; it's what true Christians do. But nothing, including baptism, can be added to or required for salvation beyond Jesus's death on the cross. Frankly, I find it extremely difficult to read the Acts of the Apostles and not conclude that certain ordinances are absolutely essential and a vital facet of the Christian faith.

My perception after almost two decades of interaction with Evangelicals—and it is a generalization, I freely admit—is that they have what might be called a very high view of forgiveness and a low view of repentance. That is, Evangelicals rejoice regularly in the power and beauty and grandeur of God's forgiveness, and these glad tidings are sounded, even trumpeted, by all. That is as it should be, and Latter-day Saints could take a lesson from our friends. On the other hand, I hear repentance spoken of very little. I think I have never heard an evangelical sermon on *how* to repent, how to forsake our sins, how to repair the relationship with Deity that has been damaged through sin. In other words, what I hear consistently is how important it is for us to reach up and receive the Lord's forgiveness but not much on how it is to be received. Some have gone so far as to suggest that one of the reasons Evangelicals teach repentance so seldom is the fear that people may somehow begin to view their repentance as a work!

What is the result? Notice the following from pastor and theologian John MacArthur:

The more I have examined Jesus' public ministry and His dealings with inquirers, the more apprehensive I have become about the methods and content of contemporary evangelism. On a disturbing number of fronts, the message being proclaimed today is not the gospel according to Jesus.

The gospel in vogue today holds forth a false hope to sinners. It promises them they can have eternal life yet continue to live in rebellion against God. Indeed, it *encourages* people to claim Jesus as Savior yet defer until later the commitment to obey Him as Lord. It promises salvation from hell but not necessarily freedom from iniquity. It offers false security to people who revel in the sins of the flesh and spurn the way of holiness. By separating faith from faithfulness, it leaves the impression that intellectual assent is as valid as wholehearted obedience to the truth. Thus the good news of Christ has given way to the bad news of an insidious easy-believism that makes no moral demands on the lives of sinners. It is not the same message Jesus proclaimed.<sup>3</sup>

Robert Jeffress, the rather controversial Fundamentalist Baptist in Texas who has been no friend to the Mormons in recent years, has written, “In an attempt to ‘rescue’ grace from legalists [those who would turn the gospel into a set of regulations and good works that save us], we have unwittingly delivered it into the hands of libertarians, who insist that grace exempts Christians from any standard of conduct. Instead of saying that there is nothing we need to do to cause God to love us any more than He already does, a libertarian places the period after the word *do*. ‘Grace means there is nothing we need to do.’”

After quoting Ephesians 2:8–9, Paul’s teaching that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ, Jeffress explains:

For several centuries we Baptists have enjoyed beating Methodists (and others) over the head with this verse as proof positive that there is no relationship between good works and salvation. We scoff at those poor souls who attempt to work themselves to the pearly gates. “Why would you ever choose a faith that is so difficult? Why not try our brand of works-free Christianity? It is so much easier.” . . .

Obviously, something is wrong with this picture! Why is it that those who have received—and actually claim to believe—God’s instructions . . . as revealed in the Bible brazenly ignore those same instructions? Two words: *Bad grace*.<sup>4</sup>

What Jeffress called “bad grace” is what an evangelical acquaintance, Gerald McDermott, calls “greasy grace” or “sloppy *agapē*.” It is also what German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer labeled as

---

3. John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1988), 15–16.

4. Robert Jeffress, *Grace Gone Wild: Getting A Grip on God’s Amazing Gift* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Waterbrook, 2005), 12, 71, 114.

“cheap grace.” “Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church,” Bonhoeffer wrote.

We are fighting today for costly grace. . . . Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner. . . . Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field. . . . Costly grace is the gospel which must be *sought* again and again, the gift which must be *asked* for, the door at which a man must *knock*.

Such grace is *costly* because it calls us to follow, and it is *grace* because it calls us to follow *Jesus Christ*. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is *costly* because it cost God the life of his Son: “ye were bought at a price,” and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us.<sup>5</sup>

The results are what one Evangelical, Ronald Sider, has referred to as the “scandal of the evangelical conscience,” a painful admission that in many ways—including divorce rates, materialism and the failure to care for the poor, sexual immorality, racism, and physical abuse in marriage—Evangelicals do not tend to live any better than what they themselves would refer to as worldly people.

Today, unfortunately, many people despise Christians, not for their unswerving obedience to Christ, but because of the hypocritical disconnect between Jesus’s teaching and our actions. . . .

Jesus gladly forgave even the most vile of sinners. But he called them to costly discipleship and holy obedience. . . . Cheap grace results when we reduce the gospel to forgiveness of sins; limit salvation to personal fire insurance against hell; misunderstand persons as primarily souls; at best, grasp only half of what the Bible says about sin; embrace the individualism, materialism, and relativism of our current culture; lack a biblical understanding and practice of the church; and fail to teach a biblical worldview.<sup>6</sup>

---

5. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 43–45; emphasis in original.

6. Ronald Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why Are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2005), 33–35, 56. See also Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’s Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper, 2006).

## LDS Perils

And what of Latter-day Saints? What of our own culture? Are there risks associated with how we choose to emphasize “the merits and mercy and grace of the Holy Messiah” (2 Ne. 2:8)? Certainly. As a bishop and a stake president, I have encountered members of the Church who have, as a result of their newfound gospel liberty, chosen to refuse all church callings that may come their way, to live a more laid-back, laissez-faire lifestyle, and in general to celebrate the Savior’s grace by essentially taking a furlough from church activity. I have been in conversation with persons who refuse to acknowledge the seriousness of their sins, since, as they now relate, they are no longer living under the law but rather “living under grace.” Others have become so enamored with “God’s unconditional love” that they assume he will pass lightly over their sins and wink at their indiscretions.

In point of fact, the closer we get to God, the more sensitive we become to even the slightest deviations from the path of righteousness. The purest men and women to live on this earth have been eager to acknowledge their weakness and their weaknesses, to confess their utter ineptitude to engage life’s challenges and temptations on their own, and to lean and rely wholly upon the Lord’s tender mercies. Nephi, son of Lehi, was keenly aware of where and when he fell short: “O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities. I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me. And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins.” What follows are words that demonstrate where Nephi’s confidence and trust were: “Nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted. My God hath been my support” (2 Ne. 4:17–20).

A second potential risk in teaching and glorying in the grace of God is to take an individualistic approach to happiness here and eternal life hereafter, much as some of our evangelical friends have. It is to assume that what really matters in one’s personal life is the gospel, not the Church. This is both doctrinally unsound and practically foolish. The Church of Jesus Christ *administers* the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is through the Church that we receive the doctrinal teachings, the priesthood ordinances that channel divine power to us, and what Elder Neal A. Maxwell called the “clinical material”<sup>7</sup> to assist us in our quest for spiritual matu-

---

7. See, for example, Neal A. Maxwell, *The Promise of Discipleship* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001), 46.

rity. That is, no person can grow fully in spiritual graces independent of the Church; there are qualities of Christian character that can only be acquired and developed in community, as we associate with, serve, and learn to forgive one another. Recently Elder Donald L. Hallstrom of the Seventy pointed out that “we need the gospel *and* the Church. In fact, the purpose of the Church is to help us live the gospel.”<sup>8</sup>

But these two risks—of grace-based apathy or individualism—do not represent what I see as the greatest challenge to Latter-day Saints as they grapple with the idea of grace. Perhaps an experience I had several years ago can shed some light on this particular issue. Stephen Robinson and I were invited to Kansas City to spend the day in conversation with leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention. At a certain point in the conversation, however, one of our Baptist friends reacted to our insistence that we are Christians with, “But you folks do not believe in the grace of Jesus Christ.” Steve and I both leaned forward in our chairs and proceeded to try to convince our new acquaintances that in fact we did believe in and teach the importance of salvation by the grace of Christ. At that point one of the Baptists responded: “Yes, we understand—you believe in the Christ of the gaps.” I replied: “I’ve never heard that before in my life. Who or what is the Christ of the gaps?” He went on to explain that it was his understanding that Latter-day Saints believed in a kind of works-righteousness, that men and women are to do everything they can and expend all of their efforts and then Jesus would fill in the remaining deficit. An hour later, and after seeking again and again to dissuade them from their caricature of Mormonism, we realized that we had failed.

Of course Jesus Christ, the one who makes all the difference in our salvation, will make up the difference at the time of judgment, at least for those who have come to trust in and rely upon him. But too often, I fear, Latter-day Saints think that men and women are expected to do their 85 or 90 percent and leave the remainder, a modest percentage, for Jesus to handle. This is incorrect and misleading, inasmuch as it causes us to overstate our own role in salvation and grossly understate the role of him who has bought us with his blood. The scripture that seems to lend itself to this misunderstanding, is, oddly enough, 2 Nephi 25:23: “For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our

---

8. Donald L. Hallstrom, “Converted to His Gospel through His Church,” *Ensign* 42 (May 2012): 14, emphasis in original.



brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved *after all we can do*" (emphasis added).

I have met members throughout the Church who suppose this means that Christ can help us, strengthen us, empower us only *after* we have expended our best efforts and done everything we know how to do. First of all, do you know anyone who will have done *everything* they could have done? Do you know anyone who will have spent every waking hour of every day of every year serving God tirelessly and tenaciously? Only one person fits this bill, and that was the Lord Jesus Christ himself; he was the only one to live a perfectly obedient, perfectly sinless life. I believe Nephi is trying to teach that we are saved by the grace of Jesus Christ—meaning his unmerited divine favor, his unearned divine assistance, his enabling power—*above and beyond* all we can do, *notwithstanding* all we can do, *in addition to and together with* all we can do. Too often we're prone to think of grace only as the Lord's final boost into celestial glory hereafter. To be sure, we will need all the divine help we can get in order to qualify to go where God is. But the grace of God is extended to you and me every hour of every day and is not limited to the final bar of judgment.

If there had been no Atonement of Christ, no amount of good works on our part could ever, worlds without end, make up for its absence. "No matter how hard we work," Elder M. Russell Ballard has pointed out, "no matter how much we obey, no matter how many good things we do in this life, it would not be enough were it not for Jesus Christ and His loving grace. On our own we cannot earn the kingdom of God—no matter what we do. Unfortunately, there are some within the Church who have become so preoccupied with performing good works that they forget that those works—as good as they may be—are hollow unless they are accompanied by a complete dependence on Christ."<sup>9</sup>

Jesus is not only central to the plan of salvation; he is vital and indispensable. We cannot save ourselves. We cannot earn our exaltation. We cannot exercise the sufficient grit and willpower to do the works of righteousness and battle against Satan on our own. Christ is our Lord, our Savior, our Redeemer, and our King. He is the Lord of Hosts, meaning the Lord of Armies, the Captain of our Salvation. He is God, and if it were not so, he could not save us. Without him, we have nothing. With him, we have everything.

---

9. M. Russell Ballard, "Building Bridges of Understanding," *Ensign* 28 (June 1998): 65.

## Conclusion

Christian leaders and pastors, including Latter-day Saint teachers and Church officers, walk a fine line when they emphasize the grace of God in their teachings, sermons, and writings. On the one hand, this doctrine breathes encouragement into deflated souls who try their best to follow Christ but continually fall short; it highlights the goodness and tender mercy of an omniloving God. It provides hope and strength, what we have come to know as “enabling power,” for disciples who seek to accomplish what would be the impossible were it not for the heavenly assistance proffered by our Lord and Savior.

On the other hand, it does indeed, as I have pointed out, constitute a genuine risk. Bruce C. Hafen explained some years ago that

*the person most in need of understanding the Savior's mercy is probably one who has worked himself to exhaustion in a sincere effort to repent, but who still believes his estrangement from God is permanent and hopeless.* By contrast, some people come before a bishop feeling that the repentance process requires them to do little more than casually acknowledge the truth of an accusation. An increasing number of younger Church members even seem to believe they are entitled to “a few free ones” as they sow their wild oats and walk constantly along the edge of transgression. Constant emphasis on the availability of forgiveness can be counterproductive for those in these latter categories, suggesting—wrongly—to them that they can “live it up” now and repent easily later without harmful consequences.

Elder Hafen then addressed what he perceived to be the far greater risk:

*I sense that an increasing number of deeply committed Church members are weighed down beyond the breaking point with discouragement about their personal lives.* When we habitually understate the meaning of the Atonement, we take more serious risks than simply leaving one another without comforting reassurances—for *some may simply drop out of the race, worn out and beaten down* with the harsh and untrue belief that they are just not celestial material.

The Savior himself was not concerned that he would give aid and comfort to backsliders or that he would seem to be soft on sin. Said he, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. . . . For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28–30). He spoke these words of comfort in the overall context of his demanding teachings about the strait and narrow way and the need to develop a love so pure that it would extinguish not only hatred, but lust and anger [Matt. 5:21–22, 27–28, 43–45]. He said his yoke is easy, but he asked for all our hearts.

His words do not describe an event or even simply an attitude, but a process; not the answer to a yes or no question, but an essay, written in the winding trail of our experience. Along that trail, *he is not only aware of our limitations, he will also in due course compensate for them*, “after all we can do” [2 Ne. 25:23]. That, in *addition* to forgiveness for sin, is a crucial part of the Good News of the gospel, part of the Victory, part of the Atonement.<sup>10</sup>

Striking the delicate balance between grace and works, faith and discipleship, in today’s complex world is a formidable challenge. Many of our Protestant friends have assumed a theological posture called *monergism*, the belief that God alone is sovereign, is in complete control, determined long beforehand who will and who will not be saved, and even provides the desire and hope and prompting motive to choose Christ and his gospel. Taking that choice out of men and women’s grasp leaves it all with God, and one can appreciate why so many who subscribe to such a belief do not live lives appreciably different from unregenerate and unconverted souls. As Elder Neal L. Andersen taught, faith is much, much more than a feeling; it is a *decision*.<sup>11</sup> It is a decision to come out of the world, to ignore the allures and enticements of those who proselytize from the great and spacious building, to attend to the quiet voice of him who has “called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). It is a decision to pattern our lives after the only perfect being to walk this earth.

It seems to me that the LDS way is quite different from monergism: our approach is what might be called *synergism*—God and humanity are working together for the salvation of souls. Is this not what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippian Saints? “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” If we stop there, it appears that salvation is something that man himself is to “work out,” a process over which we as mortals have the greatest control. But we dare not stop there, for Paul adds, “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philip. 2:12–13). Now it sounds like God is the principal, the initiator, the prompter and

---

10. Bruce C. Hafen, *The Broken Heart: Applying the Atonement to Life’s Experiences* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 5–6, emphasis on “addition” in original, all other emphasis added.

11. Neil L. Andersen, “It’s True, Isn’t It? Then What Else Matters?” *Ensign* 37 (May 2007): 74.

motivator, the conductor of our soul's symphony. "You see," C. S. Lewis explained, "we are now trying to understand, and to separate into water-tight compartments, what exactly God does and what man does when God and man are working together."<sup>12</sup>

"In recent years," Elder Hafen stated, "we Latter-day Saints have been teaching, singing, and testifying much more about the Savior Jesus Christ. I rejoice that we are rejoicing more. As we 'talk [more] of Christ' (2 Ne. 25:26), the gospel's doctrinal fulness will come out of obscurity." Elder Hafen spoke boldly of the spread of falsehood relative to LDS doctrine. He drew our attention to the fact that "the adversary is engaged in one of history's greatest cover-ups, trying to persuade people that this Church knows least—when in fact it knows most—about how our relationship with Christ makes true Christians of us."<sup>13</sup>

As Latter-day Saints, we rejoice with our Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant friends in what God has preserved for us, the Holy Bible—the lessons for life it contains, the commandments and statutes of God it lays out, and, most importantly, the redemption it foreshadows (Old Testament) and the messianic dispensation it describes (New Testament). The Bible is God's holy word, and we delight in the normative doctrine and direction it provides. But Mormons also find great comfort in knowing that God has revealed himself and his Beloved Son anew and has opened the heavens and expanded the canon of scripture. It is that independent revelation, that new dispensation of truth and divine power, that provides the needed clarity and perspective, both on how to lay our burdens and cares at the feet of the Savior and also how to manifest our faith by our faithfulness. And it is the proper management of that dynamic tension that leads, not only to doctrinal resolution, but more importantly, to that consummate peace promised by the Master, the peace that passes all understanding (Philip. 4:7).

---

Robert L. Millet is Professor Emeritus of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University. A former chair of the Department of Ancient Scripture and dean of Religious Education, Millet has worked for almost twenty years in the area of Christian interfaith relations in an effort to build bridges of understanding between professing Christian groups.

---

12. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 131–32.

13. Bruce C. Hafen, "The Atonement: All for All," *Ensign* 34 (May 2004): 97, 98.

## Foundry

It takes the baby several seconds looking  
From your pointing to the stars  
To solder the word and a heaven-blue glint  
Firm, until tomorrow when he'll have

Forgotten how four sounds melt  
And make an entire galaxy centered  
On his mother's outstretched index finger;  
Still molten, sounds and things pour

Quickly into words like molds and break  
Cooling too fast, unsettled when open.  
But for now it's almost enough to have  
A mother mining jewels from the sky,  
Crimping with sounds the stars to his hands—  
Yes, it's almost enough to have.

—Jared Pearce

---

This poem won first place in the BYU Studies 2014  
poetry contest.

# Spirit Babies and Divine Embodiment

## PBEs, First Vision Accounts, Bible Scholarship, and the Experience-Centered Approach to Mormon Folklore

*Eric A. Eliason*

To a devout insider, “Mormon folklore” might seem an oxymoron. To a skeptical outsider, it might seem a redundancy. Both reactions assume definitions of “Mormon” and “folklore” that differ from how academic folklorists use these terms. “Mormon” refers not only to official LDS doctrines; it includes all varieties of Mormon people and their experiences. “Folklore” does not mean merely the bogus, quaint, or pioneer-era vestigial aspects of Latter-day Saint life. Rather, folklore includes the living traditions, stories, and beliefs that are passed on in face-to-face situations outside of official channels. Examples include legends of folk heroes (the “cussing Apostle” J. Golden Kimball and frontier lawman Porter Rockwell), encounters with the angelic Three Nephites, Relief Society quilting bees, BYU coed jokes, creative dating traditions, and the homemade wall charts used to rotate family home evening assignments. Folklore also encompasses testimonies, conversion stories, and traditional healings by priesthood blessings.

Veracity is not what distinguishes folklore from other forms of cultural expression. Rather, it is the mode of transmission—informal vs. formal, intimate vs. remote, small group vs. mass media, personal vs. impersonal, and oral vs. written. Folklorists who study religion distinguish between the dogmas and practices that disseminate top-down through denominational authority structures and the customs, beliefs, and stories that bubble up from the pews. This institutional/vernacular cultural divide is often blurred—especially with Mormons, who have no clergy/laity distinction, who often align with the hierarchy’s teachings, and who commonly implement top-down directives with personalized folkways.

Rather than merely revealing oddities, folklore transmits Mormons' most cherished experiences. Folklore provides a window into *actual* beliefs and practices, rather than the ideal types sometimes proffered by normative proclaimers. Mormons—as subject matter and as scholars—may well figure more prominently in folklore than any other discipline.

A most distinctive variety of Mormon folklore is the stories parents tell of angelic yet-to-be-born children appearing to them. This essay presents some examples of this phenomenon and looks at how dramatically resonant they are with the leading theoretical approach in religious folklore studies. This “experience-centered approach” reveals a deep universal significance to these stories that may be of great interest to Latter-day Saints.

Rushing to the hospital in April 1947, Jenalyn Wing Woffinden fell unconscious from premature labor pains. The receiving physician doubted she would survive. But after waking she related the following:

I found myself in the Celestial Room of the Salt Lake Temple. As I walked across the back of the room . . . a man dressed in white robes . . . came up to me and introduced himself as Peter, a disciple of Jesus Christ. He told me I would have great difficulty rearing this child. . . .

Peter then introduced me to the child's spiritual mother who was dressed in white. . . . She told me of the difficulty she had had raising the child in the spiritual world and [said] the only way I would be able to successfully raise [him] would be with unbounded love.<sup>1</sup>

Peter foretold many hardships for the boy and repeated his charge to love him unceasingly. As of 1965—when Brigham Young University student Russell Bice collected this story from Sister Woffinden's daughter for folklore professor Tom Cheney—the boy's sickly and rebellious nature was validating his mother's vision.

Though dramatic, this story is not doctrinally foundational like Joseph Smith's First Vision. Sister Woffinden is an ordinary Mormon. Her vision, though doubtless important to her family, remains largely unknown to other Mormons. What is remarkable about this story—besides the specific instruction encouraging unrestrained love in an era of ostensible emotional distance—is that it is not unique. Thousands of Mormon parents today tell similar stories.

---

1. Russell Bice, “A Child Called Peter,” individual collection assignment FA 02 1.1.1.5.1 (1964), William A. Wilson Folklore Archive, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

While Sister Woffinden had a sleeping NDE (near death experience) and while research by Craig Lundahl and Harold Widdison suggests people often experience prebirth visions and visitations along with an NDE, most LDS preborn-children narratives describe a wakeful encounter. In 2010, a young Arizona married couple began hearing noises in their house and sensed a watcher on their roof.

Joe was outside bringing in the groceries and our bishop drove by. He said to Joe, "I have a strange question to ask you." Joe responded, "I have a strange answer!" Our bishop proceeded to ask if we have ever seen a little girl at our home. Joe just got chills. The bishop explained how the young neighbor girl had been seeing "Angel girls" on our roof and outside of our home. The Bishop believed these spirits were our own children in spirit waiting to come to our home.<sup>2</sup>

In another instance, a couple agreed to stop talking about having more children, since this caused too much marital tension. Almost immediately, a blue-eyed little girl with blond pigtails began to visit the wife repeatedly, asking to be born. Wearied and deprived of sleep, the wife warily told her reluctant husband about these encounters. He replied, "So, she's been bothering you too has she?"<sup>3</sup>

Folklorists call personal narratives of supernatural encounters *memorates*. Memorates featuring spirit children not yet born are called pre-birth experiences (PBEs). Relatively few people have had a PBE, but most Mormons know someone who has. Parents pass them on as etiological narratives of how their children came to be. They are often the most cherished spiritual experience in one's life. Notably, official Church publications rarely mention, and neither discourage nor encourage, PBEs. Yet this vibrant folk tradition is deeply enmeshed with official LDS doctrines such as people's prebirth spiritual life, spirits' human shape, entitlement to personal revelation, and parenting's centrality to our purpose on Earth. These are not abstract notions only for those few interested in theological esoterica. They are living concepts dramatically emergent in the lives of Latter-day Saints through PBEs.

PBEs suggest a possible correlation between LDS beliefs and scientific findings about the human mind. Folklorists have shown how traditional cultures can pass on sophisticated knowledge that science embraces only later. Ethnobotanists have developed hundreds of

---

2. Brook Weinberg, conversation with Eric Eliason, December 26, 2011.

3. Story related by Bert Wilson at a Fife Folklore Conference, May 1995.



modern medicines from traditional remedies around the world. Ethnohistorians have shown that preliterate societies' rigorous oral traditions can perpetuate genealogical information unrecorded by documents but corroborated by genetic testing. However, scholars have been less eager to plumb memorates for insights into psychological or spiritual matters. Folklorist David Hufford is one of the few working to develop ethno-psychology and ethnotheology as disciplines. He regards encounters with spirit children, deceased relatives, and human-shaped beings, both glorious and ominous, as akin to other kinds of firsthand empirical evidence. In his "experience-centered approach," memorates are not anomalies to be ignored or delusions to be cured. They are instead means to uncover the nature of common psychological and spiritual realities.

Bolstered by PBE researchers Elizabeth and Neil Carman, Harold A. Widdison, and Sarah Hinze, Hufford's quantitative data show that memorates like PBEs and sleep paralysis involving malevolent spirits seizing people in bed at night happen to about 20 percent of people. This rate does not correlate with psychiatric diagnoses or cultural, educational, or religious background, but seems to occur evenly across populations. Spirit-encounter memorates happen more frequently than the more academically respectable mystic or transcendent states of notable people in various religious traditions. In fact, rather than sensationalizing a mystic experience by presenting it as tangible, Hufford has found people more likely to obfuscate or "mystify" what were originally straightforward meetings with personlike beings.

According to Hufford, some cultural and religious traditions are better equipped to make sense of memorates. Baptists and atheists might not find understanding cobelievers to listen to their PBE, since neither worldview brooks a preearth life. Mental health professionals typically offer little help or deem them delusional. Many who have had a PBE understandably remain reticent.

Hufford suggests that psychiatry follow ethnobotany and ethnohistory in learning to draw on traditional data—especially if doing so can help patients. LDS apologists might enjoy the fact that Hufford, a Catholic, finds LDS theology the best suited to making sense of the full spectrum of spiritual visitations (PBEs as well as appearances of deceased loved ones and angelic and demonic persons) as they actually happen to people across cultures. Hence, Mormons tend to be less anxious about sharing them. However, PBE-relating traditions have also developed among Hindus and Buddhists, who understand them quite comfortably in terms of reincarnation. Also, despite Hufford's contention that robust,

cross-culturally similar experiences constitute evidence for a knowable external spiritual reality, his findings may merely demonstrate common powerful subjective psychological experiences. These two views are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Both could be true.

In either case, the experience-centered approach has potential implications for understanding foundational Mormon memorates—Joseph Smith’s First Vision and the angel Moroni’s appearance. The Prophet presented these as literal meetings, not mystic dreams or transcendent impressions. Terryl Givens contends the great uniqueness of Mormon theology is its nondivision of the spiritual from the material, its foundational episodes’ resistance to metaphoric interpretations, and its understanding of humans, angels, and gods as the same class of beings at different stages of progression. The experience-centered approach suggests that such understandings are not merely LDS notions but part of the world’s underlying reality—or at least the human mind part of it.

Some scholars have seen differences between the earliest First Vision accounts and ostensibly more concrete later ones as evidence that Joseph Smith elaborated a standard mystical experience for his day into one where he met glorified persons face to face. Experience-centered findings make it reasonable to suppose just the opposite—that he remembered humanlike beings from the first, but only revealed fuller details later as he felt more comfortable doing so. Scholarship by James B. Allen and John W. Welch closely counting motifs in Joseph Smith’s First Vision corroborates this idea. There is little evidence of a “development” or “elaboration” in a particular direction; rather, the pattern seems more suggestive of Neal Lambert and Richard Cracroft’s earlier claim of attention to audience shaping how the Prophet presented his story and what he chooses to divulge.

Even the canonized First Vision account shows signs of reticence. Without later interpretive glosses, a reader might not catch that “personages” refers to God the Father and Jesus Christ. But the echo in the Sacred Grove of the voice that spoke “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” at Jesus’s baptism (Matt. 3:17) and at the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:5) suggests as much.

Some claim a fabulist Joseph Smith inflated his story from seeing one angel, to just Jesus, to both God the Father and Jesus. But if Joseph was inconsistent about the numbers and identities of beings he encountered, he places himself squarely in Old Testament prophetic company. Abraham and Lot’s hospitality toward two or three travelers whom the Bible variously calls “the Lord,” “men,” and “angels” (Gen. 18:1, 2; 19:1); Jacob wrestling with what is traditionally glossed as an angel but what the

text actually calls “a man” or “God face to face” (Gen. 32:24, 30); Joshua meeting “a man,” the captain of God’s angelic army or the Lord himself, before the battle of Jericho (Josh. 5:13–15; 6:1–2); and the annunciation of Samson’s birth by what his parents are unsure is a man, an angel, or perhaps the Lord himself (Judg. 13:2–23) are all examples. Resonant with both experience-centered folklore and Mormon theology, Bible authors present ambiguity about visitor identity in memorates, because men, angels, and gods come in similar form.

James Kugel, an Orthodox Jew and Harvard professor of Hebrew literature, explains that the Bible’s earliest authors saw humans, angels, and “the God of Old” as all having physical bodies that allowed them to walk and talk together. Only later did Bible authors abandon clearly anthropomorphic gods for Ezekiel’s fantastic animal symbolism and the incomparable seemingly formless God of Isaiah’s prophecies. For generations, Bible readers have understood early memorate accounts through later authors’ and interpreters’ metaphorizing eyes. In line with Kugel, Catholic theologian and New Testament scholar Stephen H. Webb claims that it is misguided later-theology, not the scriptural accounts themselves, that has shorn the resurrected Christ of his bodily physicality. LDS nonscholars like Joseph Smith, who believed the Bible world was being restored, and experience-centered folklorists, who have found such memorates as a norm, might say “amen” to Kugel’s and Webb’s proposed face-to-face encounters and continuity of form among heavenly beings and earthly persons.

But seeing PBEs as emergent from ancient psychic universals only helps explain their form. It does little to explain the particular contexts in which they might occur. Feminist folklorist Margaret Brady suggests PBEs provide wives a revelatory “trump card” forcing foot-dragging husbands to father children. According to Brady, motherhood is women’s primary means of validation in LDS patriarchal culture. However, actual LDS households are typically much more egalitarian, even matriarchal, and very few recorded PBEs suggest gender power struggles. When they do, PBEs tend to bring unity, as in the blonde-pigtail-girl story.

PBEs could also be a response to tensions Mormons feel between Church teachings and modern lifestyles. In the past, Church leaders encouraged large families and discouraged birth control. Such admonitions abated in the 1980s and virtually disappeared in the mid-1990s. But pronatalism remains strong, and Mormons still tend to have more children on average than other Americans. With worldly voices calling

children a burden, quality better than quantity, and “breeders” threats to the environment, prophetic calls not to limit family size stand in stark contrast. In the struggle to know which path to follow, PBEs can provide clear resolutions to difficult dilemmas. However, even granting these interpretations, just because PBEs can serve certain functions does not mean these functions cause the experiences.

Positive valuation of “faith-promoting rumors” such as PBEs coexists with caution toward them. Sharing such stories may make one seem kooky, even to other Mormons. Merciless Internet debunkings can reveal one as a dupe, but being too skeptical of a friend’s personal experience can brand one insensitive to spiritual things. Perhaps in a community open to visions, miracles, and prophecies, it is especially important to guard against fakery. But Salt Lake City has no office like the Vatican’s that investigates miracles and pronounces them genuine or fraudulent; Mormons are generally on their own in such matters. Many Mormons avoid giving too much credence to such tales the further away they get from firsthand experience. And some firsthand experiences are accompanied by an impression not to share them except in sacred moments.

It is little wonder then that some American Mormons tend to avoid investing too much in such tales one way or another, unless the PBE in question happened to them or someone very close. However, Mormons in the expanding worldwide Church may find themselves in cultures much more friendly to sharing the supernatural than the secularized, disenchanting Western world. And experience-centered theory suggests that this is nothing to worry about as weird, but something to embrace as real.

## Bibliography

- Allen, James B., and John W. Welch. “The Appearance of the Father and Son to Joseph Smith in 1820.” In *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, ed. John W. Welch with Erick B. Carlson, 35–75. Provo, Utah: BYU Studies; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011.
- Bice, Russell. “A Child Called Peter.” Individual collection assignment FA 02 1.1.1.5.1 (1964). William A. Wilson Folklore Archive, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.
- Brady, Margaret K. “Transformations of Power: Mormon Women’s Visionary Narratives.” *Journal of American Folklore* 100 (1987): 461–68.
- Carman, Elizabeth M., and Neil J. Carman. *Cosmic Cradle: Souls Waiting in the Wings for Birth*. Fairfield, Iowa: Sunstar Publishing, 2000.

- Eliason, Eric A., "Toward the Folkloristic Study of Latter-day Saint Conversion Narratives." *BYU Studies* 38, no. 1 (1999): 137–50.
- . *The J. Golden Kimball Stories*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007.
- Givens, Terryl L. *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- . *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-mortal Existence in Western Thought*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Hinze, Sarah. *We Lived in Heaven: Spiritual Accounts of Souls Coming to Earth*. Provo, Utah: Spring Creek Book Company, 2006.
- Hufford, David J. *The Terror That Comes in the Night: An Experience-Centered Study of Supernatural Assault Traditions*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982.
- . "Beings without Bodies: An Experience-Centered Theory of Belief in Spirits." In *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and the Supernatural*, ed. Barbara Walker, 11–45. Logan: Utah State University Press, 1995.
- Kugel, James L. *The God of Old: Inside the Lost World of the Bible*. New York: Free Press, 2004.
- Lambert, Neal E., and Richard H. Cracroft. "Literary Form and Historical Understanding." *Journal of Mormon History* 7 (1980): 33–42.
- Lundahl, Craig R., and Harold A. Widdison. *The Eternal Journey: How Near-Death Experiences Illuminate Our Earthly Lives*. New York: Warner Books, 1997.
- Webb, Stephen H. *Jesus Christ, Eternal God: Heavenly Flesh and the Metaphysics of Matter*. London: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Widdison, Harold A. *Trailing Clouds of Glory: First Person Glimpses into Pre-mortality*. Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 2004.
- Wilson, William A. "Freeways, Parking Lots, and Ice Cream Stands: The Three Nephites in Contemporary Society." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 21, no. 3 (1988): 13–26.

---

Eric A. Eliason is Professor of folklore at Brigham Young University. His publications include *The J. Golden Kimball Stories*; *Celebrating Zion: Pioneers in Mormon Popular Historical Expression*; and *Latter-day Lore: A Handbook of Mormon Folklore Studies* with Tom Mould. He has also published books on military, hunting, Caribbean lacework, and black velvet painting traditions.

# Laying Up Treasure

## Mormons in the Marketplace

*Douglas D. Anderson*

*Douglas D. Anderson is Dean and Professor at the Jon M. Huntsman School of Business at Utah State University. This address was delivered at the Claremont Graduate University as part of the Claremont Mormon Studies Student Association Conference “Mormons in the Marketplace,” held April 13–14, 2012.*

**I**t's a real pleasure to be back in Claremont. I am honored to be invited to address this conference and to participate in an academic institute dedicated to the memory of Howard W. Hunter. During most of the first eighteen years of my life, I lived in the Pasadena Stake, which was presided over by Elder Hunter before he was called to be a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Then and later, in Salt Lake City, my parents and I had special, personal encounters with President Hunter. He was always a gracious, kind, and courageous man and someone I admired greatly. Throughout his lifetime, and especially during his career as an attorney in Southern California, President Hunter did much to define what it meant to be a Latter-day Saint in the world of commerce. I am pleased to honor his memory.

I have been invited to consider the theme “Laying Up Treasure: Mormons in the Marketplace” and have been told that the choice of the theme is intended to give us an opportunity to reflect upon what the LDS tradition might bring to bear on our understanding of Mormons as economic actors.

That's a tall order for someone who was trained not as a sociologist or a historian, but as a political economist; who has spent most



Douglas D. Anderson

of his career as a management consultant; and who has only relatively recently returned to the academy. My views on this subject are shaped more by my own experience in life and reflections on the associations I have enjoyed than by either research or a review of academic literature. So, while I can speak about my personal experiences and observations, I am not sure how much one can reliably generalize from them.

So, let me start out with a disclaimer. When I was an undergraduate at Utah State University, I made two mistakes: the first was that I did not get a season's pass to our local ski resort, Beaver Mountain; the second was that I did not read more history. The consequence of these choices is that I am a middling skier and a mediocre historian. The good news about both endeavors, however, is that you don't have to be particularly gifted at either to enjoy them.

That said, I can tell you that I have known some historians. Does that count? I consider it an enormous privilege to have been associated with and to learn from some of the best in the field of Mormon history. I became acquainted with Richard Bushman, the first incumbent of the Howard W. Hunter Chair, when I left Logan for Cambridge and graduate school. He was my stake president. Later, two of Bushman's sons (Karl and Serge) spent a couple of summers in our home in Belmont, Massachusetts. Much of what I know about Mormon history comes from reading Professor Bushman's books.

Most of the rest of what I know about Mormon history comes from reading Leonard Arrington, under whom I had the privilege of studying at Utah State University as an undergraduate. In fact, I enrolled in the last course Professor Arrington gave before leaving the university to become the Church historian. It was a directed reading course, and I was invited to write a paper about Utah economic history on any subject that interested me. The topic I chose—the history of the Cache Valley Dairy Association—has some bearing on our theme today. I chose this particular subject because my maternal grandfather, Walter Angus Funk, was a dairy farmer in Benson Ward, and because my father was

once employed making cheese at the plant in Amalga as a way to support his young family while attending Utah State Agricultural College. I wanted to learn more about this institution that had played an important role in my family's economic history. I learned that at one point in their search for additional markets, the Dairy Association targeted Denver and began trucking milk there. (Denver lies about 500 miles from Cache Valley.) They found a ready market. The folks in Denver seemed to like Cache Valley milk. There was only one problem: What to do on the return trip? It seemed like a terrible waste to bring the milk trucks home empty. So they configured a flat undercarriage to enable the trucks to bring a product home. Do you know what they chose to bring home to Cache Valley? Beer! That's right. Mormons in that marketplace exported milk to the "Gentiles" and imported beer in return! I am not sure exactly what that says, but I can tell you that Leonard Arrington got a big kick out of it. Almost twenty years later, we were seated at a dinner together at the university, and I asked him if he could remember my paper on the Cache Valley Dairy Association. "Oh yes," he said with a chuckle, "the beer!"

### THE MORMON WAY OF DOING BUSINESS

Mormons today have a much higher national profile than they did in the time of the Cache Valley Dairy Association. Lately, the topic of Mormons as economic and social actors has received a great deal of attention, due in part to Mitt Romney's candidacy for the U.S. presidency. I have known and admired Mitt since 1974, and because of his candidacy, Mormons as a people are being examined more generally.<sup>1</sup>

The world will find much to admire. Americans are learning that faithful members of the Church are known, among other things, for the practice of tithing their income to benefit the Church. A recent study by Dr. Patrick Rooney, executive director of the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University, concluded that Mormons lead all other faith groups in the amount and extent of their giving, with around 90 percent of Mormon households surveyed making financial donations to the Church.<sup>2</sup> Latter-day Saints are known to be generous with

---

1. Michael Kranish and Scott Helman, *The Real Romney* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012).

2. Luiza Oleszczuk, "Religious Giving Is More 'Recession Proof;' Mormons Give the Most," *Christian Post*, February 12, 2012, <http://www.christianpost.com>



their time as well as with their money. A separate recent study, sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania's School of Social Policy and Practice, analyzed survey data from 2,664 church-attending Latter-day Saints living throughout the United States. These researchers found that while the average American volunteers some 48 hours per year to charitable causes, an active Latter-day Saint volunteers nearly nine times as much—428 hours annually.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, in fairness, a close examination will also reveal that our aspirations are not always reflected in our reality. Mormons, like other people, tend to suffer from a “knowing/doing gap.”<sup>4</sup> The United States Army created the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) to translate knowledge gained on the battlefield into action. A practice they use, called the After Action Review (AAR), is designed to close the knowing/doing gap. The army doctrine “There is no lesson learned until a behavior is changed” could apply to people in any organization—business, military, or religious.<sup>5</sup> As the Apostle Paul taught, in the last days men

---

[post.com/news/religious-giving-is-more-recession-proof-mormons-give-the-most-70235/](http://post.com/news/religious-giving-is-more-recession-proof-mormons-give-the-most-70235/).

3. Ram Cnaan, Van Evans, and Daniel W. Curtis, “Called to Serve: The Prosocial Behavior of Active Latter-day Saints,” reported at <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/mormon-volunteerism-report>. Utah volunteerism was most obviously on display during the 2002 Winter Olympics. Twenty-five thousand volunteers were recruited by the Salt Lake Organizing Committee, and five thousand additional volunteers were assembled by the LDS Church to work at the Church's sites, including its own media center. Candy Thompson, a *Baltimore Sun* reporter who had covered numerous Olympics, said, “The Salt Lake games were better than the Turin games by a lot and better than the Athens games. And the difference was the volunteers. [Utah's] were amazing.” See Peggy Fletcher Stack, “Remembering the ‘Mormon’ Olympics That Weren’t,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, February 17, 2012, C1–2.

The “prosocial behavior” of active Latter-day Saints would seem to contradict Robert Putnam's finding of a general decline in civic engagement and social capital. See Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000). It is notable that the index to Putnam's book does not mention the words “Mormon” or “Latter-day Saints,” and the faith receives scant mention in his book (see p. 77).

4. Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert I. Sutton, *The Knowing/Doing Gap* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2000).

5. Gordon R. Sullivan and Michael V. Harper, *Hope Is Not a Method: What Business Leaders Can Learn from America's Army* (New York: Random House, 1996), 204–10. See also David A. Garvin, *Learning in Action* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Business School Press, 2000), 9–10, 92.

would be “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7). Perhaps that is because we don’t put our knowledge to use. President Brigham Young said, “There is no doubt, if a person lives according to the revelations given to God’s people, he may have the Spirit of the Lord to signify to him His will, and to guide and to direct him in the discharge of his duties, in his temporal as well as his spiritual exercises. I am satisfied, however, that in this respect, *we live far beneath our privileges.*”<sup>6</sup>

Acknowledging the inherent imperfections attendant to the human condition, it is still possible to articulate elements of the “Mormon way of doing business.” These include honesty, persistence, and a commitment to hard work, to family, and to a purpose beyond simply making money.<sup>7</sup> These qualities are abundantly displayed among active Mormons of my acquaintance.

In his book *Turnaround*, Romney has said that he grew up “idolizing” his father. He thought everything he said was interesting. At the age of ten, he watched his father “grab the reins of a failing car company,” American Motors. His father’s example had an enormous impact on him. “Listening to him,” Mitt wrote, “he was not like a businessman speaking about business. It was more like he was on a great mission with American Motors to build innovative cars so that people could save money and fuel, and have better lives. Work was never just a way to make a buck to my dad. There was a calling and purpose to it. It was about making life better for people.” Years later, when George Romney left government service, he committed himself to promoting volunteerism and worked hard to instill the public service gene in Mitt and his siblings. “In the back of my mind . . . there was always an innate sense that if the opportunity presented itself, there had to be something greater to life than just earning a living. We would have to make some contribution.”<sup>8</sup>

The Romney family tradition, as passed on from George to Mitt, is certainly in keeping with Mormon doctrine. I have seen it in many of my associates. My own father loved to quote from the Book of Mormon sermon of King Benjamin: “I tell you these things that ye may learn

---

6. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 12:104 (November 3, 1867); emphasis added.

7. Jeff Benedict, *The Mormon Way of Doing Business: Leadership and Success through Faith and Family* (New York: Warner Books, 2007).

8. Mitt Romney, *Turnaround* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2004), 10–13.

wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17).

Two other prominent Utah Mormons who have shaped the “Mormon brand” are Bill Child and Jon M. Huntsman. I am honored to call both of them friends and neighbors. Bill is the entrepreneur behind RC Willey, the highly successful furniture and electronics chain in Utah, Idaho, Nevada, and now California. Bill took over the company that had sales of \$250,000 in 1954 and sold it to Warren Buffett forty-one years later when it had sales of \$257 million. As Buffett was later to write, “He didn’t do this by inventing something new. He just applied the oldest and soundest principle ever set forth: Treat the other fellow as you’d like to be treated yourself. By consistently following this principle, [Bill] transformed a hole-in-the-wall operation in the tiny town of Syracuse [Utah] into a business that enjoys the trust of millions of his fellow citizens.” The story of how Bill accomplished this remarkable feat is well told in a book by Jeff Benedict entitled *How to Build a Business Warren Buffett Would Buy*.<sup>9</sup>

The RC Willey story should be used as a case study in every business school to illustrate the importance of persistence to business success. It is so relevant to the theme of this conference that I’d like to share a little of it with you. Bill wanted to expand the company, and he felt that Warren Buffett would be the right partner to work with. But they had a rule at RC Willey: they did not do business on Sundays. This was highly unusual in an industry where in most markets Sunday was the top day for in-store sales. Bill explained to Warren that if they ever expanded, they would want to remain closed on Sundays. “Well,” Buffett said, “if you can produce these kinds of sales and profit numbers, we’ll be glad to support you in being closed on Sundays.”<sup>10</sup>

If Bill Child had been content to stay in Utah, that story might not have been so remarkable. But he wanted to expand to Las Vegas, and Buffett would not budge because of the Sunday closing policy. Then Bill tried to persuade Buffett to allow the company to expand to Boise. The answer was still no.<sup>11</sup> The way Bill finally persuaded Warren is best told in Buffett’s own words, as recorded in his annual shareholders letter

---

9. Jeff Benedict, *How to Build a Business Warren Buffett Would Buy* (Salt Lake City: Shadow Mountain, 2009), v–vi.

10. Benedict, *How to Build a Business*, 122.

11. Benedict, *How to Build a Business*, 134–35.

in 2000 under the heading “A Managerial Story You Will Never Read Elsewhere”:

Here’s a remarkable story from last year: It’s about RC Willey, Utah’s dominant home furnishing business, which Berkshire purchased from Bill Child and his family in 1995. Bill and most of his managers are Mormons, and for this reason RC Willey’s stores have never operated on Sunday. This is a difficult way to do business: Sunday is the favorite shopping day for many customers. Bill, nonetheless, stuck to his principles—and while doing so built his business . . . to \$342 million in 1999.

Bill felt that RC Willey could operate successfully in markets outside of Utah and in 1997 suggested that we open a store in Boise. I was highly skeptical about taking a no-Sunday policy into a new territory where we would be up against entrenched rivals open seven days a week. Nevertheless, this was Bill’s business to run. So despite my reservations, I told him to follow both his business judgment and his religious convictions.

Bill then insisted on a truly extraordinary proposition: He would personally buy the land and build the store—for about \$9 million as it turned out—and would sell it to us at his cost if it proved to be successful. On the other hand, if sales fell short of his expectations, we could exit the business without paying Bill a cent. This outcome, of course, would leave him with a huge investment in an empty building. I told him that I appreciated his offer but felt that if Berkshire was going to get the upside it should also take the downside. Bill said nothing doing: If there was to be failure because of his religious beliefs, he wanted to take the blow personally.

The store opened last August and immediately became a huge success. Bill thereupon turned the property over to us—including some extra land that had appreciated significantly—and we wrote him a check for his cost. And get this: *Bill refused to take a dime of interest on the capital he had tied up over the two years.*

If a manager has behaved similarly at some other public corporation, I haven’t heard about it. You can understand why the opportunity to partner with people like Bill Child causes me to tap dance to work every morning.<sup>12</sup>

I love that story. Not only does it illustrate Bill’s hard work and persistence but also his commitment to principle and his willingness and ability to innovate in order to stay true to his beliefs.

---

12. Benedict, *How to Build a Business*, 142–44; italics in original.

Outside of Utah, few (if any) Mormon businessmen have had a higher profile for honesty and philanthropy than Jon M. Huntsman Sr., after whom the business school at Utah State University is now named. It's been my privilege to know Jon well for more than ten years and to work closely with him for more than five. Jon's book *Winners Never Cheat* is required reading at our business school and at many others, including Wharton, where Jon has had an enormous influence in helping that school rise to international prominence.

There are many anecdotes in Jon's book that are worth telling in connection with the theme of this conference, including the idea that a man's word is his bond. But one that I am particularly drawn to is the story he tells about working in the White House and the request he got from Bob Haldeman to engage in some dirty tricks. Here's the story in Jon's own words:

I worked as White House staff secretary and a special assistant to the president during the first term of the Nixon administration. I was the funnel through which passed documents going to and from the president's desk. I also was part of H. R. Haldeman's "super staff." As a member of that team, Haldeman expected me to be unquestioning. It annoyed him that I was not. He proffered blind loyalty to Nixon and demanded the same from his staff. I saw how power was abused, and I didn't buy in. . . .

I was asked by Haldeman on one occasion to do something "to help" the president. . . . It seems a certain self-righteous congressman was questioning one of the Nixon's nominations for agency head. There was some evidence the nominee had employed undocumented workers in her California business.

Haldeman asked me to check out a factory previously owned by this congressman to see whether the report was true. The facility happened to be located close to my own manufacturing plant in Fullerton, California. Haldeman wanted me to place some of our Latino employees on an undercover operation at the plant in question. The information would be used, of course, to embarrass the political adversary. . . .

There are times when we react too quickly to catch the rightness and wrongness of something immediately. We don't think it through. This was one of those times. It took about 15 minutes for my inner moral compass to make itself noticed, to bring me to the point that I recognized this wasn't the right thing to do. Values that had accompanied me since childhood kicked in.

Halfway through my conversation, I paused. "Wait a minute, Jim," I said deliberately to the general manager of Huntsman Container, "let's not do this. I don't want to play this game. Forget I called."

I instinctively knew it was wrong, but it took a few minutes for the notion to percolate. I informed Haldeman that I would not have my employees spy or do anything like it. . . . He didn't appreciate responses like that. He viewed them as signs of disloyalty. I might as well have been saying farewell.<sup>13</sup>

In fact, Jon Huntsman left the White House within six months of this incident. For his moral courage in this case, if for no other reason (and there are many other reasons), Jon Huntsman is a hero of mine. I have reflected about what might have happened had Jon given in to Haldeman. The pressure must have been enormous. After all, this was the second most powerful man in America giving him direction. Mormons, typically, are thought to be pretty obedient to authority. It would have taken a lot to stand up to Haldeman as a young thirty-four-year-old. I think it is clear in hindsight, given the subsequent events associated with the Watergate affair, that things would have played out very differently for Jon if he had given in to this pressure. I don't believe Jon Huntsman ever would have realized his great stature in business or philanthropy had he not said no to Haldeman.

#### **“MORMONS IN THE MARKETPLACE” CONSIDERED MORE GENERALLY**

As interesting as are the lives of George Romney, Bill Child, and Jon Huntsman, the question is, can we generalize about Mormons in the marketplace from these examples? Although I believe the values represented in these anecdotes are deeply embedded in Mormon culture, we should move from the particular to the general only with caution. After all, these are three extraordinary individuals. To tackle the more general task, we need to look carefully at three elements that interact in our theme. The first consists of the economy of the market and the culture of the market economy. The second focuses on doctrine—scripture and the pronouncements of prophets and apostles. The third has to do with how tradition and culture have shaped the behavior of Mormons as economic actors. This is a huge topic, fully worthy of a book-length study (or at least a doctoral dissertation). But let me give you some assurance (and let you down gently): It won't happen here. Please don't expect the

---

13. Jon M. Huntsman, *Winners Never Cheat: Everyday Values We Learned as Children, but May Have Forgotten* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Wharton School Publishing, 2005), 9–11.

moral equivalent of Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (although I will have something to say about Weber in due course). I will take up each of these three topics in order, first with a brief overview of thinking about "markets."

### Markets and Values

It says something about the era we are living in that it has been referred to as the "triumph" of the market.<sup>14</sup> The ascendance of the market has been particularly pronounced in the last thirty-five years. Following a period of stagflation in the United States in the mid-1970s, the market as an allocator of goods and a generator of wealth was "rediscovered," and with it a new appreciation for the concepts of "price" and "profit." Both major political parties sought to deregulate much of commerce and to use market-based incentives to achieve public ends.<sup>15</sup> Alfred Kahn, the great Cornell economist who deregulated the airline industry as head of the Civil Aeronautics Board under President Carter, was fond of saying, "The only economic function of price is to influence behavior."<sup>16</sup> The key was to get relative prices (and thus incentives) right so that individual consumers and businesses interacting through markets could efficiently solve the central problems of economic organization: What goods and services to produce? How to produce them? And for whom?<sup>17</sup>

This focus on the virtues of the market accelerated under Presidents Reagan, Bush, and Clinton. By the end of the century, Michael Mandelbaum, one of America's leading foreign-policy thinkers, advanced the view that "the free market" was one of three ideas that dominate the world today by virtue of its near universal acceptance as "the path to what had become, in the twenty-first century, a supreme and undisputed national goal: the creation of wealth."<sup>18</sup> The fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent rise of China as the second-largest economy in the world supported

---

14. Michael J. Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012).

15. Charles L. Schulze, *The Public Use of Private Interest* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1977).

16. Quoted in Douglas D. Anderson, *Regulatory Politics and Electric Utilities* (Boston: Auburn House, 1981), 103.

17. Paul A. Samuelson and William D. Nordhaus, *Economics*, 12th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1985), 24, 41, 43.

18. Michael Mandelbaum, *The Ideas That Conquered the World: Peace, Democracy, and Free Markets in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Public Affairs, 2002), 4.

the view that man has yet to devise a better mechanism for organizing economic activity and producing affluence than through markets.<sup>19</sup>

That is not to say that markets are without their critics. In the wake of the financial crisis of 2008, the critics of unfettered and unlimited markets have become more vocal. Harvard political philosopher Michael J. Sandel worries that in a society where “everything is up for sale” markets can have a corrosive tendency by putting a price on things that should not be traded for money. “Markets don’t only allocate goods,” he argues; “they express and promote certain attitudes toward the goods being exchanged,” including individual competitiveness and acquisitiveness. Markets, maintains Sandel, leave a mark. They can crowd out nonmarket values worth caring about. Without quite realizing it, he says, we have drifted from having a market economy to being a market society. “The difference is this: A market economy is a tool—a valuable and effective tool—for organizing productive activity. A market society is a way of life in which market values seep into every aspect of human endeavor. It’s a place where social relations are made over in the image of the market.”<sup>20</sup>

When we consider the role of Mormons in the marketplace, we are obliged to consider whether the characteristic set of behaviors or “brand” associated with Mormons is shaped more by the culture of the marketplace or by the doctrines, beliefs, and history of the Church. There is a well-known tension between the market ideology of individualism, competition, and the pursuit of wealth on the one hand, and the egalitarian, cooperative, and communitarian values of the nineteenth-century economic heritage of the Church.<sup>21</sup> What is it that makes today’s Mormon businessmen “highly effective people,” to use the well-known concept of my Utah State University colleague Stephen R. Covey? My own view is that Mormons are not unlike other rational economic actors. They are heavily influenced by “what works” in the market. But committed

---

19. See Robert E. Lane, *The Market Experience* (Cambridge University Press, 1991); Charles E. Lindblom, *The Market System: What It Is, How It Works, What to Make of It* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

20. Michael J. Sandel, “What Isn’t for Sale?” *Atlantic* (April 2012): 64–65. See also Robert Kuttner, *Everything for Sale: The Virtues and Limits of Markets* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), xiii.

21. See F. Neil Brady and Warner Woodworth, “A Mormon Perspective on Business and Economics,” in *Spiritual Goods: Faith Traditions and the Practice of Business*, ed. Stewart W. Herman (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Press, 2000).



members of the Church are also influenced by the Lord's Spirit and his teachings. They know that "man shall not live by bread alone" (Matt. 4:4). In scripture and in the prophetic utterances of modern Apostles, Mormons find inspiration that serves as a circuit breaker and a shock absorber to the current and relentless pace of the market. It is to these influences that I turn next.

### Prophetic Utterances

The scriptural reference that frames the theme of this conference is the Sermon on the Mount. Therein the Lord admonishes us, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:19–21). And to make sure we get the point, three verses later we read this: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24).

The prophets and the apostles, both ancient and modern, echo the Lord's caution about the love of money and the accumulation of wealth. Moses cautioned the children of Israel to "forget not the Lord" when their poverty turned to abundance, "lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; . . . And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers" (Deut. 8:11–13, 17–18).

The Mormon Moses, Brigham Young, issued a similar warning to the destitute Saints of the Great Basin, shortly after gold was discovered in California: "I hope that the gold mines will be no nearer than 800 miles. . . Prosperity and riches blunt the feelings of man."<sup>22</sup> Subsequently, and with customary candor, Brigham added this: "The worst fear I have

---

22. Journal History of the Church, July 8, 1849, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as CHL), cited in Dean L. Larsen, "Beware Lest Thou Forget the Lord," *Ensign* 21

about this people is that they will get rich in this country, forget God and His people, wax fat, and kick themselves out of the Church and go to hell. This people will stand mobbing, robbing, poverty, and all manner of persecution, and be true. But my greater fear . . . is that they cannot stand wealth.”<sup>23</sup>

The prosperity and pride cycle is well known to Latter-day Saints. The Book of Mormon is replete with examples of people who get caught up in the pursuit of wealth, only to have it turn to ashes as greed, avarice, and pride replace temperance, brotherly kindness, charity, and the love of God.

The Book of Mormon prophet Alma told of a devastating invasion that humbled the Nephite people, who in their humility turned to God and were blessed abundantly by him, only then to again “wax proud” and forget their duty. Here is Alma’s account of the cycle:

The people were afflicted, yea, greatly afflicted for the loss of their brethren, and also for the loss of their flocks and herds, and also for the loss of their fields of grain, which were trodden under foot and destroyed. . . .

And so great were their afflictions that every soul had cause to mourn; and they believed that it was the judgments of God sent upon them because of their wickedness and their abominations; therefore they were awakened to a remembrance of their duty.

And they began to establish the church more fully; yea, and many were baptized in the waters of Sidon and were joined to the church of God. (Alma 4:2–4)

Sadly, the lesson was not learned. In just three years, Alma reports, “The people of the church began to wax proud, because of their exceeding riches, and their fine silks, and their fine-twined linen, and because of their many flocks and herds, and their gold and their silver, and all manner of precious things, which they had obtained by their industry; and in all these things were they lifted up in the pride of their eyes” (Alma 4:6). The prosperity/pride cycle seems endemic to the human experience.

---

(May 1991): 11. See also Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

23. James S. Brown, *Life of a Pioneer* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon and Sons, 1900), 122–23, cited in Larsen, “Beware Lest Thou Forget,” 11.

Mormons are by no means alone among Christians in the view that an abundance of earthly possessions can be both a blessing and a curse, depending on the way these things are viewed and used. David W. Miller has created a three-part rubric that presents attitudes toward wealth among Protestants as (1) an offense to Christian faith; (2) an obstacle to faith; and (3) an outcome of faith.<sup>24</sup> We associate number 3 on this list—that wealth creation can be viewed as an outcome of faith—with the Protestant Reformation, thanks to Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.<sup>25</sup>

As Miller observes:

Weber and others have suggested that ascetic Protestantism was the dominant form preached by the Puritan and Calvinist influenced communities during America’s colonial days and early life as a nation. This form of Protestant theology argued that the pursuit of wealth was not only acceptable but was almost a religious duty, as part of the Protestant doctrine of calling. Some held that receipt of material success was itself a sign of God’s providence and being part of the elect. In this Calvinist interpretation, hard work and frugal lifestyles were not just a means to an end, but they were a spiritual act in themselves. This impulse, or Protestant ethic as Weber called it, coupled with new industrial technologies, rationalization, and specialization of tasks became the spirit of capitalism, and was one of the contributing factors that led to unimaginable wealth creation.

Miller continues:

Later Protestants went even further than Luther and Calvin regarding the objectives of hard work. John Wesley, the peripatetic preacher and founder of the Methodist Church, was unabashed in his support of wealth creation. However, to avoid the theological problems [associated with] . . . wealth creation as an obstacle to faith, he proposes a system of internal checks and controls. In his famous sermon, “The Use of Money” (reportedly preached dozens of times by him), he argues that people should earn all they can, save all they can, and give away all they can.<sup>26</sup>

---

24. David W. Miller, “Wealth Creation as Integrated with Faith: A Protestant Reflection,” paper presented at a conference on Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Views on the Creation of Wealth, April 23–24, 2007, University of Notre Dame, 2.

25. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Kindle edition.

26. Cited in Miller, “Wealth Creation,” 5.

Mormons emphatically reject, as a matter of doctrine, the Calvinist notion that material success is evidence of predestined salvation. This principle was taught powerfully by Elder Boyd K. Packer in the October 1980 general conference. He shared a message, written to his children and grandchildren, to be opened in a jubilee box fifty years in the future. He told this story:

Three weeks ago I spent a day with Sister Packer in the record office in London. We were looking for Mary Haley. Like missionaries looking for living souls, we tracted through the pages of old record books. Some of them, I am sure, had not been opened for a hundred years.

I spent most of the day reading the minutes of the overseers of the workhouse—which was really the poorhouse. . . .

We found Mary Haley! She married Edward Sayers, and they had eleven children. Six of them died before they were seven years of age, one from burns. To our knowledge, only one of the eleven grew to maturity.

That was Eleanor Sayers, my wife's great-grandmother. She was born at Pullham, Norfolk, in the Depwade Union Workhouse and was the first of her family to join the Church. She died of cancer in a dismal London hospital.

The lives of those souls, our forebears, were characterized from beginning to end by both poverty and obscurity.

Before Eleanor Sayers Harman died, she gave all of her funds to her daughter Edith and counseled her to go to America.

Edith had been cast out by her husband when she joined the Church. She and eight-year-old Nellie left England with the flimsy assurance that a missionary *thought* his family in Idaho *might* take them in until they could be located.

Nellie was my wife's mother; Edith, her grandmother. I knew them well. They were women of special nobility.

Our lineage runs also to the stately manor houses of England, well-connected with the courts of kings, where culture and plenty were much in evidence.

But the dignity and worth of those forebears is not more, and may well be less, than that of Eleanor Sayers.

. . . Eleanor, Edith and Nellie—all were women of a special nobility—the royalty of righteousness. We want our children to remember that their lineage runs to the poorhouse in Pullham, Norfolk, and to remember this: It is the misapprehension of most people that if you are good, really good, at what you do, you will eventually be both widely known and well compensated.

It is the understanding of almost everyone that success, to be complete, must include a generous portion of both fame and fortune as essential ingredients.

The world seems to work on that premise. The premise is false. It is not true. The Lord taught otherwise. . . .

You need not be either rich or hold high position to be completely successful and truly happy.

In fact, if these things come to you, and they may, true success must be achieved in spite of them, not because of them.<sup>27</sup>

As demonstrated by this conference address of Elder Packer, Mormons differ from those who preach the so-called Gospel of Prosperity.<sup>28</sup> But we share the work ethic articulated by Weber: hard work and frugality are virtues. We glorify God by devoting our time, talents, energy, and everything with which the Lord has blessed us to the building up of his kingdom and to serving our fellowmen. Committed Latter-day Saints take seriously the counsel of Jacob in the Book of Mormon: “Before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God. And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted” (Jacob 2:18–19).

Commenting on this passage, Elder L. Tom Perry has said, “So often it is the order of things that is fundamental in the Lord’s instructions to us. The Lord is not telling us that we should not be prosperous. This would be inconsistent with the many records we have of Him blessing His people with prosperity. But He is telling us that we should seek prosperity only after we have sought and found Him. Then, because our hearts are right, because we love Him first and foremost, we will choose to invest the riches we obtain in building His kingdom.”<sup>29</sup>

---

27. Boyd K. Packer, “The Choice,” *Ensign* 10 (November 1980): 20–21.

28. See, for example, Cathleen Falsani, “The Prosperity Gospel,” *Washington Post*, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/opinions/outlook/worst-ideas/prosperity-gospel.html>; Rick Henderson, “The False Promise of the Prosperity Gospel: Why I Called Out Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyer,” *Huffington Post*, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/pastor-rick-henderson/osteen-meyer-prosperity-gospel\\_b\\_3790384.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/pastor-rick-henderson/osteen-meyer-prosperity-gospel_b_3790384.html); “Prosperity Theology,” *Wikipedia*, [http://http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prosperity\\_theology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prosperity_theology).

29. L. Tom Perry, “United in Building the Kingdom of God,” *Ensign* 17 (May 1987): 34.

## Tradition and Culture

I believe one cannot understand Mormons as economic actors without also understanding this commitment to build the Lord's kingdom. It has a profound effect on those who accept it. Hard work, honesty, persistence, and a focus on contribution driven by this sense of purpose and mission have become "hard wired" as part of Mormon culture. Elements of this culture are not unique to Mormons, of course, but the depth of the commitment to "live in the world, but not of the world" and the way this is manifested in behavior may be. In my view, there are three factors in Mormon history, leadership practice, and doctrine that are particularly salient in giving rise to this characteristic way of being. The first has to do with our orientation toward the past—the Mormon exodus from New York to Ohio to Missouri to Illinois, and finally to the Great Basin; the second has to do with the Mormon capacity for concerted action; and the third has to do with the Mormon orientation toward the future. I will discuss each briefly in turn.

**The Mormon Exodus as a Cultural Determinant.** As a child and young man in my parents' home, I could not leave the house for any kind of activity without my father saying to me, "Remember who you are and who you represent!" I am not alone. Generations of Mormon boys and girls have received this same admonition. I say it to my own children and grandchildren. When he spoke to graduating students on commencement day as dean of the Harvard Business School, my friend Kim Clark would regularly share his mother's counsel: "Kim, you remember who you are. Every day. Remember all those people who worked and sacrificed to make it possible for you to be where you are."<sup>30</sup>

LDS Church President Spencer W. Kimball was fond of saying that the word "remember" should be the most important word in our vocabulary.<sup>31</sup> And what is it that we are to remember? We are to remember the Lord and his great atoning sacrifice. We are to remember that we, like the ancient Israelites, are a covenant people of the Lord and that we have a responsibility to him for our thoughts and deeds. No doubt this is a claim that gets us in trouble with our friends and neighbors, just as it

---

30. Kim B. Clark, *Armor: Divine Protection in a Darkening World* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2007), 75.

31. Spencer W. Kimball, "Circles of Exaltation," address to religious educators at seminary and institute summer school, June 28, 1968, Brigham Young University, 8.

has the Jews. “Mormon exceptionalism” reinforces and is reinforced by “American exceptionalism.” America is the promised land. It has been preserved to play a special role in history. The people of God have been led by the spirit of God to this hemisphere. Just as ancient Israel was led out of Egypt to the Holy Land, an American Moses led a persecuted people from Nauvoo to the Great Basin in the aftermath of the martyrdom of Joseph Smith, in an American exodus of biblical proportions.<sup>32</sup>

The story of that exodus lies deep within the Mormon consciousness. In a sense, all Mormon missionaries called into service in the mission field set out on their own pioneer trek and pursue what Joseph Campbell has called “The Hero’s Journey.”<sup>33</sup> If they serve faithfully, they return home empowered and empowering.

Pioneer stories, like this one from Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, are told and retold in general conference and in local sacrament meetings:

Amidst the terrible hostilities in Missouri that would put the Prophet in Liberty Jail and see thousands of Latter-day Saints driven from their homes, Sister Drusilla Hendricks and her invalid husband, James, who had been shot by enemies of the Church in the Battle of Crooked River, arrived with their children at a hastily shaped dugout in Quincy, Illinois, to live out the spring of that harrowing year.

Within two weeks the Hendrickses were on the verge of starvation, having only one spoonful of sugar and a saucer full of cornmeal remaining in their possession. In the great tradition of LDS women, Drusilla made mush out of it for James and the children, thus stretching its contents as far as she could make it go. When that small offering was consumed by her famished family, she washed everything, cleaned their little dugout as thoroughly as she could, and quietly waited to die.

Not long thereafter the sound of a wagon brought Drusilla to her feet. It was their neighbor Reuben Allred. He said he had a feeling they were out of food, so on his way into town he’d had a sack of grain ground into meal for them.

Shortly thereafter Alexander Williams arrived with two bushels of meal on his shoulder. He told Drusilla that he’d been extremely busy

---

32. For a critical view, see Harold Bloom, *The American Religion* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 40, 115–17.

33. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1949), cited in Robert E. Quinn, *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996), 44–45.

but the Spirit had whispered to him that “Brother Hendricks’ family is suffering, so I dropped everything and came [running].”<sup>34</sup>

Drusilla Dorris Hendricks is my great-great-great-grandmother. But she belongs to the Church. The stories of the exodus and the pioneers are every Mormon’s story. Those who accept the message of the missionaries and embrace the faith are shaped by it, whether in North America or South Africa. Each of them is also a pioneer and a pilgrim. Each is being led in his journey through life back to the Promised Land where our Father in Heaven resides. Through stories and songs and pageants and reenactments, the pioneer heritage from 1830 to 1869 becomes the shared experience of each member of the Church throughout the world. New members fashion their own pioneer stories from the inspiration of the trek west from Nauvoo to the Great Salt Lake. In song and verse and rhyme, Mormons are taught from the time they are children in Primary to remember the past and to have it always before them:

Dare to be a Mormon;  
Dare to stand alone.  
Dare to have a purpose firm;  
Dare to make it known.<sup>35</sup>

As I mentioned earlier in this talk, I have known and admired Mitt Romney since 1974. That was the year I entered Harvard University for graduate studies. Not since Brigham Young has any living Mormon faced the kind of scrutiny that Mitt Romney has been subjected to. Even before I met Mitt, when I was a freshman at Stanford, I had heard about him. Mitt had spent one year at Stanford in 1965–66 before leaving for a mission to France. I followed in 1968–69 and then left for a mission to Germany. I remember one day an upperclassman whom I barely knew came up to me and said, “You’re a Mormon, right?” When I answered in the affirmative, he asked me if I knew Mitt Romney. Everyone knew George Romney, who had just dropped out of the presidential race. I was aware that his son, Mitt, had been a student at Stanford, but I responded that I had never met him. He then said something I have

---

34. Drusilla Dorris Hendricks, “Historical Sketch of James Hendricks and Drusilla Dorris Hendricks,” typescript, 14–15, Church History Library, told by Jeffrey R. Holland, “A Handful of Meal and a Little Oil,” *Ensign* 26 (May 1996): 31.

35. Thomas S. Monson, “Dare to Stand Alone,” *Ensign* 41 (November 2011): 61.



never forgotten: “Mitt Romney is the finest person I have ever met,” and then he walked away.

It was so heartfelt, and so random, that it simply stunned me. Years later, Mitt would become my bishop and then stake president, and I had the privilege of serving as his family’s home teacher. Mitt’s career at Bain and the Olympics has been examined under a microscope and is one of the reasons why the question of Mormons in the marketplace has such special currency. People the world over have asked the questions: “To what extent is Romney’s character shaped by his Mormon religion and heritage? Is there anything in Mormon theology, Mormon history, and Mormon practice that can explain Mitt Romney? And, can one generalize from his experience?”

I think David Brooks has come close to the mark. Writing in the *New York Times*, Brooks tells the story of Mitt Romney’s great-grandfather, Miles P. Romney, and his journey to northern Mexico; of his son, Gaskell, who built up the “Colonies” and then was forced by the Mexican Revolution to return to the United States with his son, George, Mitt’s father, the most famous Mormon of his generation. Brooks argues that it is this history, and not Mitt Romney’s wealth, that so many commentators focus on, that has explanatory power. Jews, he argues, are still shaped by their exodus, and so are Mormons: “Mitt Romney is a rich man, but is Mitt Romney’s character formed by his wealth?” asks Brooks.

He then answers his own question:

The notion is preposterous. All his life, Romney has been a worker and a grinder. . . . [His] salient quality is not wealth. It is, for better and worse, his tenacious drive—the sort of relentlessness that we associate with striving immigrants, not rich scions.

Where did this persistence come from? It’s plausible to think that it came from his family history. The philosopher Michael Oakeshott once observed that it takes several generations to make a career. Interests, habits and lore accrue in families and shape those born into them.

The Romney family history . . . is a story of tenacious work, setbacks, and recovery. People who analyze how Mormonism may have shaped Romney generally look to theology. But the Mormon history, the exodus, matters most.<sup>36</sup>

---

36. David Brooks, “The Wealth Issue,” *New York Times*, January 19, 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/20/opinion/brooks-the-wealth-issue.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/20/opinion/brooks-the-wealth-issue.html?_r=0).

**Concerted Action.** Mormon history of the nineteenth century gives rise to the second factor that shapes the behavior of Mormons in today's markets: the capacity for concerted action. In a revelation given to Joseph Smith on January 2, 1831, the Saints were enjoined to practice unity as the foundation principle upon which the Church was to be built: "I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine" (D&C 38:27). This revelation formed the cornerstone doctrine of cooperative behavior by which "migrations were effected, forts erected, ditches dug, and mills constructed. . . . Cooperation meant that everyman's labor was subject to call by church authority to work under supervised direction in a cause deemed essential to the prosperity of the Kingdom."<sup>37</sup> In the words of Leonard Arrington, "The symbols of unity were a strong central organization and self-forgetting group solidarity: The participants in the sublime task of building the Kingdom were to submit themselves to the direction of God's leaders and to display a spirit of willing cooperation."<sup>38</sup>

Today, that unhesitating cooperation and followership is a hallmark of priesthood leadership in the LDS Church. By itself it is not so distinctive. We can think of many examples of "salute and say yes" organizations. But when this willingness to take direction is combined with a deep sense of individual leadership and personal accountability to "do the right thing," it is a distinctive characteristic of Mormon culture and leadership style. (Think of Jon Huntsman saying no to Bob Haldeman.) The theological roots of this personal leadership mandate are found in D&C 58:26–29:

For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward. Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; for the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward. But he that doeth not anything until he is commanded, and receiveth a commandment with doubtful heart, and keepeth it with slothfulness, the same is damned.

---

37. Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 27.

38. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 27.

Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen has made the point that this duality of individual initiative and strong guidance from central authority can be a powerful force for innovation and is unusual in the way in which it is balanced and practiced in the LDS Church.<sup>39</sup>

The uniqueness of the Mormon associational leadership style has long drawn the curiosity (and sometimes admiration) of political sociologists and economists.<sup>40</sup> In the 1950s, in his classic study *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, Edward C. Banfield described poor Montegrano (a fictitious name for a real town in Italy) as a society incapable of generating the social capital necessary for economic growth and development. He wrote, “The extreme poverty and backwardness of [Montegrano] . . . is explained largely (but not entirely) by the inability of the villagers to act together for their common good.”<sup>41</sup>

Banfield then contrasted Montegrano with relatively prosperous St. George, Utah, a hive of associational activity:

Americans are used to a buzz of activity having as its purpose at least in part, the advancement of community welfare. For example, a single issue of the weekly newspaper published in St. George, Utah (population 4,562), reports a variety of public-spirited undertakings. The Red Cross is conducting a membership drive. The Business and Professional Women’s Club is raising funds to build an additional dormitory for the local junior college by putting on a circus in which the members will be both clowns and animals. The Future Farmers of America (whose purpose is “to develop agricultural leadership, cooperation, and citizenship through individual and group leadership”) are holding a father-son banquet. A local business firm has given an encyclopedia to the school district. The Chamber of Commerce is discussing the feasibility of building an all-weather road between two nearby towns. “Skywatch” volunteers are being signed up. A local church has collected \$1393.11 in pennies for a children’s hospital 350 miles away. The County Farm Bureau is flying one of its members to Washington, 2,000 miles away, to

---

39. Clayton Christensen, “How Mitt Romney’s Mormonism May Shape the U.S. Economy,” *Washington Post*, October 5, 2011, <http://www.faithstreet.com/onfaith/2011/10/05/how-mitt-romneys-mormonism-may-shape-the-us-economy/11404>.

40. See Adolf A. Berle, *The American Economic Republic* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963), 199–202, cited in Brady and Woodworth, “Mormon Perspective on Business,” 185.

41. Edward C. Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1958), 10.

participate in discussions of farm policy. Meetings of the Parent Teachers Associations are being held in the schools. “As a responsible citizen of our community,” the notice says, “you belong in the PTA.” Montegrano, a commune of 3,400 persons, most of them poor farmers and laborers, in the province of Potenza in southern Italy, presents a striking contrast.<sup>42</sup>

Banfield concluded, “Except as people can create and maintain corporate organization, they cannot have a modern economy. To put the matter positively: the higher the level of living to be attained, the greater the need for organization.”<sup>43</sup>

Mormons have organization in spades! I once heard a prominent LDS university president observe, “We are like the Chinese. If our leaders put the call out to have a bridge built the next day, we will show up in the morning, dressed, ready, willing, organized, and possessing architectural designs.” Where does this “associational vigor” in Mormon communal life come from? Francis Fukuyama speculates that it is the result of the demanding moral code and extremely high entry costs required to become Mormon.<sup>44</sup>

This willingness to sacrifice to build Zion and make the desert “blossom as the rose” (Isa. 35:1) combines with a lay priesthood and auxiliaries for men, women, youth, and children, in which everyone learns to take their turn in servant leadership roles. Leadership is also part of the Mormon brand. Mormon youth are trained from childhood to take on increasingly complex administrative tasks. An affirmation of the value of such training comes from Jim Quigley, formerly chief executive officer of the world’s largest professional service firm, Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu: “There’s no question in my mind—none—that I wouldn’t have the position [as CEO] had it not been for much of the training that I obtained in an ecclesiastical setting.”<sup>45</sup>

Priesthood leadership training is not about aspiring to become “the boss.” Mormons are taught to “lift where they stand,”<sup>46</sup> and that God

---

42. Banfield, *Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, 15–16.

43. Banfield, *Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, 7.

44. Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and The Creation of Prosperity* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 290–93.

45. See Benedict, *Mormon Way of Doing Business*, 46–47; quotation from “The Mormon Way of Doing Business,” *YouTube*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-GllaD4FEM>.

46. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Lift Where You Stand,” *Ensign* 38 (November 2008): 53.

honors the contribution of the most humble worker in the vineyard. A bishop of my acquaintance who had served for five years was released one Sunday from his calling as the “father of the ward” and found himself serving seven days later as the pianist for the children’s singing time. No one thought the less of him or his service. No one really even thought about it. It was not remarkable. It is common in the ward Relief Societies and priesthood quorums for periodic assignments to be handed out to cover relatively mundane tasks, such as cleaning the meetinghouse, sorting clothing at Deseret Industries, packaging bread at the Church bakery, or working at the Church farm. All are encouraged to join in. Worldly rank and status play no role. The service is rendered as an offering to the Lord, and service trumps productivity. President Henry B. Eyring tells of his father, the famous chemist and university professor, who took an assignment to weed the onion field at the Church welfare farm when he was nearly eighty years of age and suffering severely from bone cancer. When told at the end of a painful day of arduous labor that he had pulled weeds that had already been sprayed and would die anyway, he roared in laughter, thinking it a great joke on himself. Later, telling his son about the experience, he said philosophically, “I wasn’t there for the weeds.”<sup>47</sup>

**Orientation toward the Future.** A shared and honored historical experience and a unique leadership model are powerful contributors to the distinctive culture that helps shape the behavior of Mormons in the marketplace. But it is the faith’s orientation toward the future that gives rise to the sharpest contrast between Mormons and others. This focus on the future is rooted in the understanding of the nature of God, and of man as a perfectible creature, capable of eternal progression, and is captured in the well-known, epigrammatic expression of Lorenzo Snow, fifth President of the Church: “As man is, God once was; and as God is, man may become.”<sup>48</sup> The concept of eternal life has a particular meaning to members of the Church. It is life with God and

---

47. Henry B. Eyring, “Waiting upon the Lord,” fireside address given September 30, 1990, at Brigham Young University, <http://speeches.byu.edu/?act=viewitem&id=775>. Eyring was the first counselor in the Presiding Bishopric of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this address was given.

48. Lorenzo Snow, “The Grand Destiny of Man,” *Deseret Evening News*, July 20, 1901, 22. This doctrine was taught by Joseph Smith in the “King Follett Discourse,” delivered in Nauvoo, Illinois, April 7, 1844, and first published in the *Times and Seasons* on August 15, 1844. See Stan Larson, “The King Follett Discourse: A Newly Amalgamated Text,” *BYU Studies* 18, no. 2 (1978): 193–208.

life as God leads it.<sup>49</sup> Elder Dallin Oaks expanded on this theme in a 1993 conference address entitled “The Great Plan of Happiness”: “The gospel teaches us that we are the spirit children of heavenly parents. Before our mortal birth we had ‘a pre-existent, spiritual personality, as the sons and daughters of the Eternal Father.’ We were placed here on earth to progress toward our destiny of eternal life. These truths give us a unique perspective and different values to guide our decisions from those who doubt the existence of God and believe that life is the result of random processes.”<sup>50</sup>

How does this knowledge of eternal life shape Mormon behavior in the here and now? For one, it has us looking back as well as forward—back to our ancestors, without whom we cannot be perfected (see Heb. 11:40),<sup>51</sup> as well as forward to descendants, who are our legacy. Every child in Primary knows that “fam’lies can be together forever through Heav’nly Father’s plan.”<sup>52</sup>

In graduate school at Harvard, I was privileged to study under the great political scientist James Q. Wilson, who died last month. Wilson was famous for his thinking about crime, among other things. The columnist George Will once referred to Wilson as “the most accomplished social scientist of the last half century.”<sup>53</sup> One day Wilson and I were talking about the influence of cultural factors in economic development and personal behavior. He advanced the idea that traditional social science notions of “class” as an explanatory variable miss an important dimension. What really differentiates, he explained, is not so much poverty or wealth as an individual’s “orientation toward the future.” Under this definition, the lower class, he explained, consists of those who demonstrate little or no ability to defer gratification. At the extreme, the criminal class takes from others what it desires through force or stealth.

---

49. See Catherine Corman Parry, “Eternal Life,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:464–65.

50. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Great Plan of Happiness,” *Ensign* 23 (November 1993): 72, quoting a statement of the First Presidency, “Pre-existent States,” *Improvement Era* 15 (March 1912): 417.

51. See Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, comps. and eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Books, 1991), 346, 353, 360.

52. Ruth Muir Gardner, “Families Can Be Together Forever,” *Children’s Songbook* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 188.

53. George F. Will, “James Q. Wilson, Honored Prophet,” *Washington Post*, March 2, 2012.

By contrast, members of the middle class are able to plan for their children's future. They sacrifice current desires for a better future by saving for such things as their children's education, or to pay off a mortgage. Finally, the upper class in this taxonomy dreams and enacts plans for generations yet unborn.<sup>54</sup>

I invite you to consider how Wilson's concept of "orientation toward the future" might be applied to the theme of this conference. I suspect that most Mormons would agree with Elder Oaks: "In light of the ultimate purpose of the great plan of happiness, I believe that the ultimate treasures on earth and in heaven are our children and our posterity."<sup>55</sup>

### CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Our attempts to generalize or fully to explain the market behavior of adherents to a global Church of more than fourteen million people will inevitably fall short. Culture, tradition, leadership, and theology all play a role, but so does personality, context, and opportunity. I would like to close with a personal anecdote that suggests how I have been shaped by Mormon doctrine, history, and practice. It is a true story, and it happened to me now nearly twenty-five years ago.

The smoke detector was the first warning we had. A fire had broken out in the basement of our home in Belmont, Massachusetts, right below the study where my then fourteen-year-old daughter, the oldest of our four children, and I were discussing a passage of scripture on a Sunday in January 1989. We were literally sitting on top of the fire. I was down the stairs and face to face with the fire within seconds. The blaze was roaring out of control from under a ping pong table where we had temporarily stored wrapping paper and boxes from the previous Christmas.

---

54. Wilson was certainly influenced in his thinking in this regard by his great mentor, Edward C. Banfield. In his book, *The Unheavenly City Revisited* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), 53–54, Banfield makes the following point in reference to the concept of social class: "Various principles have been advanced by which to rationalize or explain the association of the many, heterogeneous traits that have been found to constitute each 'distinct patterning.' Probably no one of these is best for all purposes. For the purpose here—namely, analysis of social problems from a policy standpoint—the most promising principle seems to be that of psychological orientation toward the future. Consequently, in what follows in this and later chapters much will be made of the concepts 'present-' and 'future-orientation.'"

55. Oaks, "Great Plan of Happiness," 75.

My first instinct was to drop to my knees and to try to pull the burning boxes out from under the table. It was to no avail; the fire was much too hot. Next, I turned to the tap in the wash basin. At full blast the water seemed a mere trickle compared to the power of the blaze. Had I had a fire extinguisher, I might have been able to knock the fire down, but we did not have one in the house. For a moment, I paused and just stared at the fire. I knew it was much more powerful than I. I had only one thought: Get the kids to safety. All other ideas, the scenarios that you imagine in advance of a crisis like this—save this heirloom or that photo album—drained from my consciousness. Nothing else mattered. Get the kids out.

We never moved back into that house. It was a very significant financial setback. Many of our possessions were lost. But not all. Before the fire department arrived, my stake president showed up—a man who is now well known to the world—and organized my neighbors. They dashed into the burning house and began pulling out our possessions until the fire department ordered everyone out. How Mitt Romney learned about the fire, I don't know. I do know that he and his wife, Ann, opened their home to me and my family and provided shelter, comfort, and friendship until we were able to get reoriented and find an apartment to rent.

Most importantly, our children were safe. No one suffered physical harm. What could easily have ended in death or serious disability to one or more did not occur. In the months and years since, I have never seriously grieved over the loss of the earthly possessions that were destroyed that day. But there has never been a day that has gone by that I have not been grateful that our children were spared.

I have a crystal-clear memory of the events of that afternoon, and I have often thought about this experience since. It has taken on deep meaning for me. What would I give to know that my children are safe, now and always? What would I give to know that they would never be crippled, physically or spiritually? What would I give to know that they (and I) will always be free to learn, to serve, to achieve, and to create?

Without a knowledge of the Savior and a testimony of his victory over death, suffering, sorrow, and sin, we cannot have that assurance. There is nothing we can offer, there is no price that we can pay, that can bring us that peace and understanding. But with that faith, there is no trial that cannot be turned to our benefit. In this connection, let me now share the scripture that my daughter and I were discussing at the time the alarm went off. It is from the Doctrine and Covenants and reads as



follows: “Search diligently, pray always, and be believing, and all things shall work together for your good, if ye walk uprightly and *remember* the covenant wherewith ye have covenanted one with another” (D&C 90:24, emphasis added).

Was there irony in the fact that it was this scripture that we were discussing as the fire broke out? Perhaps. But I choose to see meaning instead. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Neither poverty nor prosperity. His power is sufficient to turn any sorrow, any hardship, any trial—any adversity—into goodness. For me this is the essence of godliness.

---

Douglas D. Anderson was born in Logan, Utah, and grew up in Southern California. He began his undergraduate studies at Stanford University. After a two-year LDS mission to northern Germany, he transferred to Utah State University, from which he graduated with BA and MA degrees. His PhD from Harvard University is in political economy and government. He joined the Harvard Business School faculty in 1978, and in 1987 cofounded the Center for Executive Development, a Boston-based consulting firm, with three other former Harvard Business School professors. In 2006, he became the dean of the college of business at USU.

# A Study in Seven

## Hebrew Numerology in the Book of Mormon

*Corbin Volluz*

*Behind the wall, the gods play;  
They play with numbers, of which the universe is made up.*<sup>1</sup>

The subject of Hebrew numerology in the Book of Mormon has been identified as a promising field of study still open to fruitful exploration. Meaning is found in many ways, and one way is in the symbolism of numbers. Significant uses of the numbers ten, twenty-four, and fifty in the Book of Mormon have been discussed previously, beginning with explanations of the symbolic importance of such numbers in ancient literatures, and then pointing out similar usages in the Nephite record.<sup>2</sup> This article adds to those discussions by drawing attention to the number seven and things that occur seven times in the narratives in the Book of Mormon. As will be seen, seven is an important number in the Book of Mormon, just as it was in the biblical world and also among Mesoamerican peoples who traced their origins to seven tribes.<sup>3</sup>

---

1. Le Corbusier, quoted in Annemarie Schimmel, "Numbers: An Overview," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2d ed., ed. Lindsay Jones, 15 vols. (Detroit, Mich.: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 10:6751.

2. John W. Welch, "Counting to Ten," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 2 (2003): 42–57; John W. Welch, "Number 24," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992), 272–74.

3. See Diane E. Wirth, "Revisiting the Seven Lineages of the Book of Mormon and the Seven Tribes of Mesoamerica," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (2013): 77–88.

## Corbin Volluz

My Bible studies over the years have brought to my attention the pervasive influence of ancient Hebrew numerology in both the Old and New Testaments and how the use of culturally significant numbers serves to structure the text in many instances. This led to my wondering whether the Book of Mormon, which claims to derive from the same Old World influences, would show similar characteristics. This paper is the result.



Not only does the Book of Mormon contain numerous examples of such ancient Hebrew numerology, but viewing the Nephite record through this lens helps resolve a number of “wrinkles” in the text. For example, why does the Book of Mormon insist on numbering the Lehite tribes as seven, when the text itself demonstrates there were actually eight? Sam’s descendants are combined with those of Nephi in an apparent effort to modify the historical number of Lehite tribes to a symbolically significant number of tribes.

This textual anomaly may be explained by the use of numerology or, in other words, the practice of commemorating an important event by use of a symbolically significant number. This type of instance is, to my mind, the most persuasive evidence that the person or persons who authored and compiled the Book of Mormon used numerology to structure the text; that is, the recasting of real-world information into a number with symbolic power. The Book of Mormon provides several such examples.

This study has percolated for many years. I would like to thank Don Bradley for his encouragement and keen insights from its inception in 2008. I would also like to thank John Welch for his enthusiastic reception of early drafts, as well as his numerous important contributions to the final product. Last but by no means least, I wish to acknowledge the unflagging inspiration of my wife, Dee.

## Methodological Observations

This study is immediately confronted with a number of methodological difficulties, which I willingly recognize before proceeding.

This paper will employ a comparative approach to identify and unpack meaning from occurrences of the number seven, or of series containing seven elements, in the Book of Mormon. Since the symbolic use of the number seven was prevalent among the ancient Hebrews, as reflected in the Old Testament, it will be assumed that the Nephites brought this religious and cultural predilection with them from the Old World as part of their scriptural and cultural heritage.

As used in this paper, numerology refers to a literary device common among ancient Hebrews (as well as later Jewish and other cultures) in which significant events or textual features were emphasized by presenting them a symbolic number of times. Such numerology should not be confused with attempts to divine by mystical means the influence of numbers on a person's character or to suggest optimum future choices in a manner similar to astrology.

Though imbuing numbers with symbolic significance has little import in modern society, it will be seen that the Book of Mormon shows signs of being written by one or more authors familiar with numerology as practiced by the ancient Hebrews, specifically the repeated usage of the emblematic number seven and its multiples, and that such numerology is used to emphasize significant events among the Nephites. I proceed by taking the English text of the Book of Mormon at face value. While evidence exists that the translation dictated by Joseph Smith was tightly controlled, we do not have access to the book in its source language, so the resultant text is what we have to work with. The more often these numerical repetitions appear in that text, the more reasonably, I will assume, one may conclude that these patterns may be in some way significant.

I take encouragement from the fact that the significance of numerology is universally recognized in the pages of the Old and New Testaments, although one must always be careful not to impose numerological significance to every countable feature of a text. Whereas the usage and symbolism of Hebrew numerology is well established, there is always the potential of ascribing too much purposeful meaning or intentional structure to cases that may be simple coincidence. Any list must contain a certain number of elements, and any period of time must contain a certain number of hours, days, weeks, and years. The application of Hebrew numerology is flexible by its very nature, and it is likely some

tallies will reach a number with symbolic meaning, even if no such meaning was originally intended by the author. One must always be careful not to ascribe too much weight to such numbers unless the text indicates significant usage.

While any such exercise has a high degree of subjectivity built into it, reasons can often be advanced to explain these occurrences and increase the plausibility that they were more than incidental. With this caveat in mind, one should still probably not shy away from at least mentioning some numerically significant instances simply because they could be coincidental, especially since an aggregate of solid examples lends strength to any theory.

Additionally, any such study must necessarily focus on those numbers with relevance to the matter being explored, leaving instances of other numbers for later examination. Thus, the intent of this paper is to proceed cautiously, setting forth the evidence for invocations of numerical significance in the text of the Book of Mormon, and allowing the readers to draw their own conclusions and assign whatever weight they feel appropriate to the evidence adduced.

### Significance of the Number Seven

Many numbers are imbued with significance in cultures of the ancient world, including the Hebrew culture. “The symbolic significance of numbers (gematria) is important in much Jewish writing.”<sup>4</sup> Not least of these is the highly symbolic number seven. As Gordon McConville has recognized: “The use of seven (and multiples) in religious texts is a feature not only of the [Old Testament] . . . but also of the ancient world. In the literature of Ugarit epic events often occur in seven-day cycles, with the climax on the seventh day. . . . The literary and theological character of the account means that no firm answer can be given to the question as to what actually happened. Yet it is by no means impossible that an actual event, remarkable in some way, might have come to be memorialized in this particular way.”<sup>5</sup>

According to Udo Becker, “7 is a particularly important number in Judaism. In the Bible, 7 often appears, in positive as well as negative

---

4. J. K. Elliott, “Early Christian Literature,” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, ed. John Barton and John Muddiman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1312–13.

5. Gordon McConville, “Joshua,” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 163–64.

portents, yet also as an expression of totality.”<sup>6</sup> And Didier Colin observes that the ancient “Jews and the first authors of the Bible felt [that the number seven] symbolized a sense of perfection and completeness in the holy Scriptures.”<sup>7</sup>

Though the origins of this view are shrouded in the past, it is believed that one prime reason the number seven gained this particular symbolism of “perfection and completeness” is that it combines the number three and the number four. The number three symbolized heaven (or the masculine) and the number four represented the earth (or the feminine). As is commonly explained, “Seven symbolizes wholeness in many cultures, being the union of the divinity (three) and the material earth (four).”<sup>8</sup> Seven was regarded as “a holy number yielded by adding the basic number of the masculine, 3, and the basic number of the feminine, 4.”<sup>9</sup> “Because the number seven (the septenary) combines the ternary and quaternary—heaven or divinity and earth or humanity—it unifies the macrocosm and microcosm and signifies cosmic order.”<sup>10</sup>

It appears that the association of the number four with the earth in early Judaism came about because “it was thought that the world rested on four pillars, four columns, four sacred trees supporting the temple of the manifest world. It goes without saying that the four so-called bases of the world can also be compared to the four cardinal points.”<sup>11</sup> These connections of the number four with the earth, together “with the four seasons” became “a manifestation of Mother Earth.”<sup>12</sup>

Instances of the emblematic usage of the number seven abound in the Old Testament, and so firmly engrafted was the practice in ancient Hebrew culture that it survived into the New Testament. Many of these instances are well known. To name just a few: God rested and sanctified

---

6. Udo Becker, *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Symbols*, trans. Lance W. Garmer (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1994), 266.

7. Didier Colin, *Dictionary of Symbols, Myths and Legends* (London: Hatchette Livre, 2000), 382.

8. Kathryn Wilkinson, ed., *Signs & Symbols: An Illustrated Guide to Their Origins and Meanings* (New York: DK Publishing, 2008), 295.

9. Becker, *Continuum Encyclopedia of Symbols*, 266.

10. Clare Gibson, *Signs and Symbols: An Illustrated Guide to Their Meaning* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2001), 87.

11. Colin, *Dictionary of Symbols, Myths and Legends*, 372.

12. Becker, *Continuum Encyclopedia of Symbols*, 122. The connection between the sky as masculine and the earth as feminine may be reflected in the ancient Greek creation myth. As Hesiod tells it in the *Theogony*, Uranus (the sky) came every night to mate with Gaia (the earth).

the seventh day after the Creation (Gen. 2:3). The Sabbatical year is every seventh year (Lev. 25:4). Jacob served Laban seven years for Leah, his first wife, whom he thought was Rachel, and then another seven years for Rachel (Gen. 29:18, 30). Joseph prophesied seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine (Gen. 41:26–30). God commanded Moses to displace the seven nations of the land of Canaan (Deut. 7:1). The Israelites took Jericho by circling the walls seven times on the seventh day, the ark being led by seven priests bearing seven ram's horns (Josh. 6:1–16). Elisha commanded Naaman to wash (or dip) himself seven times in the Jordan River to be cured of his leprosy (2 Kgs. 5:10–14). In the New Testament, seven baskets of surplus food were taken up after Jesus's miraculous multiplication of the loaves (Matt. 15:32–37); and the book of Revelation abounds with sevens, including seven churches (Rev. 1:4), seven golden candlesticks (1:12), seven stars (1:20), seven lamps of fire (4:5), seven seals (5:5), seven angels with seven trumpets (8:6), seven thunders (10:3), seven last plagues (15:1), and seven vials (17:1).

The significance of the number seven (or any other number) can be stressed by doubling or multiplying.<sup>13</sup> Thus, Passover is held on the fourteenth day of the first month of each year (Lev. 23:5). In general, “the higher the number, the more complex its significance, because the addition or multiplication of primary numbers incorporates and intensifies their original meaning.”<sup>14</sup> Reflecting this, “multiples of seven are common [in the Bible]. Seven is doubled for good measure (Gen. 46:22; Lev. 12:5; Num. 29:13; 1 Kings 8:65; Tob.<sup>15</sup> 8:19),” and 14, 49, and 70 take on cumulative or exponentially increased emphasis. As J. H. Sorenson has said, “The number 7 is especially significant as indicating a complete cycle or series, and multiples of 7 emphasize the extent of the series [Gen. 4:15, 24; Prov. 24:16; Matt. 18:21–22; Mark 16:9]. . . . In general, as a number of perfection (3 plus 4), seven and its multiples, and even its half [Luke 4:25] . . . , occur frequently as symbolic numbers.”<sup>16</sup> For example,

---

13. Jay A. Parry and Donald W. Parry, *Understanding the Book of Revelation* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998), 46, give the example of doubling the number 12 to arrive at 24 elders surrounding God's throne in the book of Revelation. Multiplying 12 by itself (and then again by 1,000) yields the 144,000 high priests.

14. Gibson, *Signs and Symbols*, 87.

15. The book of Tobit, or Tobias in the Vulgate, is a book of scripture included in the Catholic and Orthodox biblical canon.

16. J. H. Sorenson, “Numerology (in the Bible),” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2d ed., ed. Berard L. Marthaler, 15 vols. (Farmington Hills, Mich.: Thomson-Gale, 2003), 10:477.

whereas God promised to avenge Cain's murderer seven times, Lamech believed he would be avenged "seventy and sevenfold" (Gen. 4:24), and Jesus instructed Peter to forgive "seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:22).

Some scriptural authors go to great lengths to compose textual structures that accord with the number seven. Famously, Matthew's genealogy of Jesus "stresses the numerological significance of Jesus's ancestry. From Abraham to David, Israel's greatest king, there were fourteen generations; from David to the destruction of Judah by the Babylonians, Israel's greatest disaster, there were fourteen generations; and from the Babylonian disaster to the birth of Jesus, fourteen generations (1:17). Fourteen, fourteen, and fourteen—it is almost as if God had planned it this way. In fact, for Matthew, he had. After every fourteen generations, an enormously significant event occurs. This must mean that Jesus—the fourteenth generation—is someone of very great importance to God."<sup>17</sup> Likewise, it has fascinated some exegetes that the Gospel of John can be read as containing "seven miracles, seven discourses, seven similes used by Jesus, seven titles in chapter I, seven days in chapters I–II," and so on, although one must be cautious not to impose too much exegetical ingenuity onto such texts.<sup>18</sup>

The neat division of time between Abraham and Christ into three periods of fourteen generations as stated in Matthew 1:17 has been described as "clearly artificial,"<sup>19</sup> but this artificiality may signal all the more its intentionality. For, in Matthew's third set of "fourteen," there are actually only thirteen names listed (it is Matthew who insists that there are fourteen); and additionally, Matthew's genealogy does not match the Old Testament. Indeed,

it turns out that Matthew left out some names in the fourteen generations from David to the Babylonian disaster. In 1:8 he indicates that Joram is the father of Uzziah. But we know from 1 Chronicles 3:10–12 that Joram was not Uzziah's father, but his great-great-grandfather. In other words, Matthew has dropped three generations from the genealogy. Why? The answer should be obvious. If he included *all* the

---

17. Bart D. Erhman, *Jesus, Interrupted* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 57–58.

18. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John, I–XII*, 2 vols., Anchor Bible Series 29 (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966), 1:cxlii.

19. M. H. Pope, "Seven, Seventh, Seventy," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick, John Knox, Herbert Gordon May, Samuel Terrien, and Emory Stevens Bucke, 4 vols. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 4:294.



generations, he would not be able to claim that something significant happened at every fourteenth generation.

But why does he stress the number fourteen in particular? Why not seventeen, or eleven? Scholars have given several explanations over the years. Some have pointed out that in the Bible seven is the perfect number. If so, then what is fourteen? Twice seven. This could be a “doubly perfect” genealogy.<sup>20</sup>

Additionally, some ancients structured their seven-based narratives in such a way as to break it down into its component parts of four and three. This may have been a literary flourish reminding the reader that seven is composed of a four (representing the earth) and a three (representing the heavens), thereby emphasizing the fullness and completeness of their total. Examples of this abound in the book of Revelation. “The first (of the seven) seals are linked together into a unified group of four (four seals, four horses, four horsemen, four statements from four beasts), while the final three seals belong to a second group. This pattern of one group of four and one group of three parallels that pattern set forth for the seven trumpets (Rev. 8–9) and the seven vials (Rev. 16).”<sup>21</sup>

Having reviewed the symbolic meaning of the number seven, together with its component parts of four and three, as well as the strengthening effect of its symbolic power by doubling it to fourteen, we are prepared to examine the Book of Mormon through this particular lens of ancient Judaism. It will be seen that a similar literary and numerological technique is observable at several locations in the Book of Mormon, and especially so in the book of Alma.

### Seven Rebellions in the Wilderness in 1 Nephi

Heptads, or units of seven, are sometimes latent in the text, spread out over long stretches of narrative. These depend on the reader to detect and understand their significance.

---

20. Pope, “Seven, Seventh, Seventy,” 4:294. It should also be noted that, whereas the author of Luke departs from Matthew in the ordering of Jesus’s genealogy, he nevertheless makes Jesus the seventy-seventh generation in a direct line back to God (Luke 3:23–38).

21. Parry and Parry, *Understanding the Book of Revelation*, 76. This combination of three and four may lie behind the familiar Old Testament curse of God upon those that hate him “unto the third and fourth generation” (see Exodus 20:5; 34:7; Numbers 14:18; Deut. 5:9).

Besides the numerous explicit heptads in the OT and the NT, there are also many latent cases where one may count several items—e.g., the seven characteristics of the Lord’s spirit in man (Isa. 11:2); the seven petitions of Solomon’s prayer (1 Kings 8:29–53) and the Lord’s prayer (Matt 6:9–13); the seven parables of Matt. 13; the seven woes of Matt. 23; the seven utterances of Christ on the cross; a postresurrection appearance to seven disciples (John 21:2); seven afflictions (Rom. 8:35) and seven gifts (Rom. 12:6–8); seven qualities of heavenly wisdom (Jas. 3:17); seven virtues that supplement faith (II Peter 1:5–8).<sup>22</sup>

Instances of “latent heptads” may also be seen in the Book of Mormon.

First Nephi recounts seven episodes of rebellious conflict by Laman and Lemuel against Nephi. The responses to those murmurings are different each time and seem to grow in severity.

1. Laman and Lemuel will not hearken to Nephi’s words, and Nephi cries unto the Lord for them (2:18). In response, the Lord speaks consoling words to Nephi (2:19–24).

2. After the first unsuccessful attempt to get the brass plates from Laban, Laman and Lemuel are about to abandon the mission and turn back to the Valley of Lemuel (3:14). In response, Nephi speaks encouraging words to them (3:21).

3. After the second unsuccessful attempt to get the brass plates, Laman and Lemuel beat Nephi with a rod (3:28). In response, an angel appears, upbraids Laman and Lemuel, and promises them success on their third attempt (3:29).

4. While returning with Ishmael, Laman and Lemuel (together with members of Ishmael’s family) rebel against Nephi (7:6). In response, Nephi speaks to them, reminds them of the angel and so forth, but nothing resolves the rebellion until Ishmael’s daughters and wife plead with Laman and Lemuel (7:19–20).

5. Ishmael’s death provokes a new rebellion by Laman, Lemuel, and others (16:35). In response, God himself speaks to them (16:39).

6. When Nephi attempts to build a ship, Laman and Lemuel murmur against Nephi (17:18). In response, after preaching a sermon, Nephi touches them and “shakes” them by the power of God (17:53–54).

7. On the voyage, Laman and Lemuel exhibit much “rudeness” and tie up Nephi (18:9). In response, a storm drives them back for four days and threatens to drown them (18:20).

---

22. Pope, “Seven, Seventh, Seventy,” 4:294–95.

## Seven Tribes throughout the Book of Mormon

Early on in the Book of Mormon, the Lehite tribes are numbered at seven, consisting of the “Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites” (Jacob 1:13), as has been frequently noted.<sup>23</sup> The fact that the descendants of Sam are not included in this list evinces an authorial intent to make the number of tribes equal seven, presumably because of a preexisting significance in the mind of the author attached to the number seven.

Lehi’s blessing indicates Sam did, in fact, have descendants.

A Blessed art thou,  
B and thy seed;  
C for thou shalt inherit the land like unto thy brother Nephi.  
D And thy seed  
E shall be numbered  
D’ with his seed  
C’ and thou shalt be even like unto thy brother,  
B’ and thy seed like unto his seed;  
A’ and thou shalt be blessed in all thy days. (2 Ne. 4:11)

The focal point of this chiasmic blessing is on the phrase “numbered with,” meaning that Sam’s seed shall be joined with Nephi’s seed. Hugh Nibley long ago noted that *Sam* is an authentic ancient Egyptian name, likening it to Sam Tawi (or Tau), it being a name title taken by Tehutimos III after his accession, and translated as “Uniter of the two worlds.”<sup>24</sup> The name Sam can also be translated as “united,” for “he (Amon) has united (sam) the countries (taui) of all the gods in this my name, THUTMES SAM-TA.”<sup>25</sup> Virtually the only information given us in the Book of Mormon about Sam is that his seed will be “numbered with” or “united to” Nephi’s seed. Thus, it is possible to see here an intentional

---

23. John L. Sorenson, John A. Tvedtnes, and John W. Welch, *Seven Tribes: An Aspect of Lehi’s Legacy*, in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. and comp. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992), ch. 24; see also Ross T. Christensen, “The Seven Lineages of Lehi,” *New Era* 5, no. 5 (1975): 50–51.

24. Hugh W. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert/The World of the Jaredites/There Were Jaredites*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, vol. 5 (Salt Lake City: Desert Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1988), 42.

25. Heinrich Brugsch-Bey, *Egypt under the Pharaohs: History Derived Entirely from the Monuments*, cond. and rev. M. Brodrick (1902; repr., UK: Bracken Books, 1996), 1:425, emphasis in original.

word play on the Egyptian name *Sam*, and by numbering or uniting Sam's posterity with that of Nephi, Lehi arrived at a desired number of seven for the tribal total.<sup>26</sup>

Such a move is not without precedent. Something similar occurs in the Old Testament with the twelve tribes of Israel. (Whereas the number seven gained its significance by adding 3 and 4, the number twelve may have risen to prominence through multiplying 3 and 4). Jacob had twelve sons, and each son had a tribe, making twelve tribes. But the numbering became more difficult when Joseph had two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, both of whom were given tribal land shares in Canaan, thus effectively raising the total number of tribes from twelve to thirteen (omitting Joseph from the total and substituting his two sons). In order to maintain the number of tribes at the symbolically significant tally of twelve, however, the tribe of Levi was excluded when Ephraim and Manasseh were mentioned as separate tribes (see Num. 1:32–34; Josh. 17:14–17; 1 Chr. 7:20). This was justified by the fact that Levi's descendants did not receive a land inheritance because they served at the temple as the priestly tribe. It appears the Old Testament modifies the figure of thirteen tribes to twelve in order to maintain this important number, and the Book of Mormon similarly modifies the figure of eight tribes to seven, omitting the tribe of Sam, which the Book of Mormon goes out of its way to draw special attention to by pointing out that Sam's seed is being numbered with Nephi's.

This tribal division seems to have endured (or if ceased, later resumed) over a period of hundreds of years, inasmuch as the same seven tribes are listed after the visitation of the resurrected Savior among the Nephites.<sup>27</sup> “Therefore the true believers in Christ, and the true worshipers of Christ, (among whom were the three disciples of Jesus who should tarry) were called Nephites, and Jacobites, and Josephites, and

---

26. It has also been suggested that Lehi puts Sam and Nephi together so that Nephi gets a “double blessing” to balance out Laman, who, as the oldest son, would have been entitled to the double portion under the Law of Moses in Deuteronomy. John W. Welch, “Lehi's Last Will and Testament: A Legal Approach,” in *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 1989), 61–82.

27. Especially during the nearly two hundred years after the Savior's appearance, there had certainly been much intermarriage among the descendants of the original tribes, so this later tribal delineation may have divided the people in more of a symbolic than a literal way.

Zoramites. And it came to pass that they who rejected the gospel were called Lamanites, and Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites” (4 Ne. 1:37, 38). Here, the seven tribes are divided into their component parts of four and three; with four tribes on the side of Christ and three tribes opposed.

The same seven tribes, with the same divisions of four and three, are mentioned at the end of the Nephite record as well, reflecting a threefold iteration of the seven Lehte tribes (Morm. 1:8–9).<sup>28</sup>

### Seven Churches and Seven Groups of Converted Lamanites

In addition to tribal numbers, it is widely known that Mosiah 25:23 explicitly notes the existence of “seven churches in the land of Zarahemla.” This may call to mind the seven-candlestick menorah of the Apocalypse, denoting the seven churches to whom the letters mentioned at the beginning of this revelation were written (Rev. 1:20).

Less obvious, and unnoticed by most readers, the cities and lands of the Lamanites converted through the mission of the sons of Mosiah listed in Alma 23 happen also to total seven:

For they became a righteous people; they did lay down the weapons of their rebellion, that they did not fight against God any more, neither against any of their brethren. Now, these are they who were converted unto the Lord: The people of the Lamanites who were in [1] the land of Ishmael; and also of the people of the Lamanites who were in [2] the land of Middoni; and also of the people of the Lamanites who were in [3] the city of Nephi; and also of the people of the Lamanites who were in [4] the land of Shilom, and who were in [5] the land of Shemlon, and in [6] the city of Lemuel, and in [7] the city of Shimnilom. And these are the names of the cities of the Lamanites which were converted unto the Lord; and these are they that laid down the weapons of their rebellion, yea, all their weapons of war; and they were all Lamanites. (Alma 23:7–13)

The fact that Mormon lists Lamanite cities and lands together in order to arrive at the number seven suggests a numerically based authorial intent.

---

28. Attaching significance to the number of tribes calls to mind the seven nations God commanded Moses to displace from the land of Canaan (Deut. 7:1). The threefold iteration is similar to the three sets of seven plagues in Revelation associated with the seven seals, trumpets, and vials, as well as Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus, which repeats three times the doubled number of seven, or fourteen.

As with the seven Lehite tribes, the seven converted Lamanite locations are divided into a group of four and a group of three, this being accomplished in more than one way. The first four cities or lands (Ishmael, Middoni, Nephi, and Shilom) are introduced with the repeated clause “the people of the Lamanites who were in . . .” The last three cities or lands (Shemlon, Lemuel, and Shimnilom) are lumped together as a group without the introductory clause, thereby setting the final three apart from the first four. Additionally, four of the geographical locations of converted Lamanites are denominated “lands” (Ishmael, Middoni, Shilom, and Shemlon), while three others are denominated “cities” (Nephi, Lemuel, and Shimnilom).

It appears that not only was the total number of seven important to the author, but also that the reader should understand that the component parts of this number were four and three, as in the division of the seven Lehite tribes into four aligned with Nephi and three with Laman (see 2 Ne. 5:6; Jacob 1:13–14). This may reflect not only a repeated recognition of the symbolic significance of the number seven, but also of its component parts of four (representing the earth) and three (representing the heavens), with the total number seven representing a fullness of things in heaven and earth.<sup>29</sup>

The juxtaposition of the seven churches of the Nephites in Zarahemla with the seven cities or lands of converted Lamanites may be intended to suggest a parity between the Nephites and Lamanites, and that once converted, all are equally acceptable with God, the number seven symbolizing perfection and fullness. Additionally, adding the seven Nephite churches to the seven Lamanite cities or lands totals fourteen such convert clusters, emphasizing and reinforcing their symbolic significance.

### **The Nephite Monetary System in Alma 11**

One of the most intriguing manifestations of the number seven is in Alma 11, which shows one way in which the number seven was used on a daily basis in Nephite culture during the days of Alma. The narrative of Alma and Amulek’s troubles in the city of Ammonihah is inexplicably

---

29. Making the numeric symbolism more complex is the fact that, after the seven Lamanite tribes are listed, the author writes “these are the names of the cities of the Lamanites” (23:13), and shortly thereafter writes again, “we have named all the cities of the Lamanites in which they . . . were converted” (23:15). This otherwise needless repetition may be due to the author’s desire to emphasize this significant number three times—another significant number.

interrupted in Alma 11 to give the reader a rather in-depth introduction to the Nephite monetary system. This system, based on the number seven, converted both gold and silver into grain and other measures.<sup>30</sup>

The Nephite gold standard was based on the senine as the primary unit. A seon of gold was twice the value of a senine; a shum of gold twice that of a seon; and a limnah of gold was the value of all three combined. The first thing to note is that the largest “denomination” in the Nephite gold system, the limnah, equals seven senines.

The Nephite silver standard follows the same order as the gold standard, using different names for the units. In the silver standard, the basic unit of value is a senum (which is pegged at the same value as the basic gold unit, the senine). A senum (1) is doubled to arrive at an amnor (2); the amnor is doubled to arrive at an ezrom (4); and all three are totaled to arrive at an onti ( $1 + 2 + 4 = 7$ ). Here, we have the seven-based gold standard duplicated in silver. The largest value of the gold standard is the limnah (equaling seven senines), while the largest value of the silver standard is the onti (equaling seven senums). Once more we seem to have an intentional tally not only of seven for the largest unit within each standard, but doubled in the text for a total of fourteen.

Unlike the gold standard, the silver standard sets forth the lesser units of reckoning, which constitute three subgroups of the one-unit senum, each of which are half the preceding unit. Half a senum of silver is a shiblon; half a shiblon is a shiblum; and half a shiblum is the smallest unit, a leah. The silver standard thus made use of seven measures, divided into a group of three small measures (the shiblon, shiblum, and leah) and a group of the four major measures (the senum, amnor, ezrom, and onti).<sup>31</sup> This may once more set forth seven as a number of fullness and completeness, arrived at by adding the number of the earth (4) with the number of the heavens (3).

---

30. See Robert F. Smith, “Weights and Measure in the Time of Mosiah II” (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1983), 1–14, available in L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; for a useful diagram of this monetary system, see John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, “50 Questions of Alma 5,” *Charting the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999), chart 110.

31. The gold standard includes one additional unit, the antion (Alma 11:19), which is equal to three shiblons of silver, or one and one-half senines or senums, bringing the total of gold pieces to five.

## Seven Killed by Ammon at the Waters of Sebus in Alma 17

Other than two symbolic uses of seven in Isaiah, speaking of “seven women taking hold of one man” (2 Ne. 14:1, quoting Isa. 4:1) and the Lord smiting the sea into “seven streams” (2 Ne. 21:15), the number seven appears only three other places in the Book of Mormon. One of these comes in the account of the fourteen-year<sup>32</sup> mission of Mosiah’s four sons among the Lamanites, when one of those sons, Ammon, defends the Lamanite king’s flocks at the waters of Sebus. According to the text he slew seven marauders: “Now six of them had fallen by the sling, but he slew none save it were their leader with his sword; and he smote off as many of their arms as were lifted against him, and they were not a few” (Alma 17:38). Going out of its way to be specific on this detail, the narrative first points out that he had killed “a certain number of them” with the sling, which caused them to “be astonished” (Alma 17:36). Two verses later, the reader learns that the certain number was six, the number of bad luck or wickedness; added to this was one more, their leader, who was killed by the sword, for a phenomenal total of seven. Ammon himself, when approached by the king, numbers those whom he slew: “I defended thy servants and thy flocks, and slew seven of their brethren with the sling and with the sword” (Alma 18:16).

## Seven Prophetic Witnesses of Christ

Elsewhere in the Book of Mormon, lists of seven occur, and this number seems to be intentional. For example, in Helaman 8:13–20, Nephi, the son of Helaman, identifies seven witnesses who spoke “concerning the coming of the Messiah”: Moses, Abraham, Zenos, Zenock, Ezias, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. These seven witnesses are drawn from the brass plates, a closed record to the Nephites, and constitute a discrete set. It should be noted, however, that many other prophets might have been mentioned, including Joseph in Egypt, David in the Psalms, and several others, suggesting that the list of seven was designed to represent symbolically what the Nephite records elsewhere stated clearly, namely that “all the holy prophets which were before us” had known of Christ (Jacob 4:4) and that “so many have spoken concerning him” (Jacob 6:8).

---

32. Alma 17:4, “they had been teaching the word of God for the space of fourteen years.” This is the only place in the Book of Mormon where the number fourteen is used, except when counting “the fourteenth year” in Alma 16 and 3 Nephi 2.



Moreover, a few verses later, Lehi and Nephi are also mentioned as witnesses (Hel. 8:22). These additional two named witnesses are separated from the previous seven not only by a couple of verses, but also by the fact that the words of Nephi and Lehi are not found on the brass plates brought with the Nephites from the Old World, are in the separate record of the Nephites, and may also be seen as having special personal meaning for Helaman's son Nephi, who, along with his brother Lehi, had been named after the original founders of the Lehite colony in the promised land (Hel. 5:6–7).

### **The Seven-Year Food Supply in 3 Nephi**

Another explicit mention of the number seven is found in the early chapters of 3 Nephi when the Gadianton robbers became so dire a threat that the Nephites and Lamanites joined forces and gathered themselves together in one location in order to protect themselves, “having reserved for themselves provisions, and horses and cattle, and flocks of every kind, that they might subsist for the space of seven years” (3 Ne. 4:4). This plan may have been adopted consciously to follow the pattern of the grain stored by the Egyptians at Joseph's direction during seven years of plenty in preparation for the coming seven years of famine (Gen. 41:36).

Of special interest is the fact that, though the text informs us the provisions were to last for seven years, they lasted longer. In 3 Nephi 3:22, we read that the gathering together in one body occurred in the “latter end” of the “seventeenth year,” but 3 Nephi 6:1 informs us that the Nephites did not return to their own lands until “the twenty and sixth year.” This means they were gathered together, living off their provisions, for eight to nine years, and even then they still “had not eaten up all their provisions” (3 Ne. 6:2).

Numerous possibilities could account for this anomaly, such as a miscalculation on the Nephites' part of how much they would need by way of provisions, or perhaps a higher death rate among them than they imagined, requiring less food for the remaining Nephites; or possibly the reproductive rate of the animals they gathered for food was greater than expected.

One possibility, however, that should not be overlooked is a clash in the text between the symbolic number of seven, which would denote a fullness of provisions to sustain the Nephites during the time of their self-imposed siege, and the literal chronological number of years they

were actually sustained by the provisions, being between eight and nine years according to the historical record, with provisions to spare.

In other words, both accounts may be seen as correct, but the former is accurate symbolically in the context of a command to gather a fullness of provisions, and the latter is accurate chronologically. It is just such a contradiction in the text that may indicate the intentional symbolic usage of the number seven. This and other possible examples<sup>33</sup> of information being adjusted to arrive at a number of symbolic significance evince authorial intent to manipulate real-world information to portray incidents of importance in terms of numerological consequence.

### **Seven-Year Time Gaps in 4 Nephi**

Brant Gardner has noted a three-fold repetition of a seven-year gap of time in 4 Nephi, verses 6 and 14. “This repeating pattern occurs 3 times in 4 Nephi and never anywhere else in the Book of Mormon. The triple repetition confirms that it is not random information and not associated with Mormon’s source. Mormon is telling us something. . . . He has moved from ‘real time’ into ‘symbolic time,’ or from history into story. The repetition of seven-year gaps (42–49, 52–59, 72–79) suggests that he is deliberately using the spacing symbolically, likely to mark a ‘week of years.’”<sup>34</sup> Applying the tools of ancient Jewish numerology, and remembering the adage that no news is good news, it is also possible to see this as a heavenly (3) dispensation of a fullness (7) of peace among the Nephites, the single theme for which 4 Nephi is most famous.

### **Sevens in the Macrostructure of the Book of Alma**

Perhaps most interestingly, the book of Alma appears to be structured around the number seven and, more specifically, around double the number of seven. This may be particularly appropriate in the book named for

---

33. A similar adjustment of the total number of years in Nephite history may be at work behind the naming of the six hundred years from the time of Lehi until the birth of Christ and then the four hundred years from the coming of Christ until the dwindling of the people in unbelief, rounding to multiples of 4 and 6 to obtain the desired overall number of 1,000, or  $10 \times 10 \times 10$ , the dimensions of the Holy of Holies in the Temple of Solomon.

34. Brant Gardner, “Mormon’s Editorial Message and Meta-Message,” FAIR Conference Address, 2008, <http://www.fairlds.org/fair-conferences/2008-fair-conference/2008-mormons-editorial-method-and-meta-message>.

Alma, the high priest in the land of Zarahemla, for seven is featured prominently in aspects of the law of Moses with which Alma would have been intimately acquainted (see Alma 30:3). The priestly manual contained in the book of Leviticus is replete with instances of the number seven and its multiples, calling for seven sprinklings or anointings (Lev. 4:6, 17; 8:11; 14:51) and marking off heptadic periods of times of impurity (Lev. 12:2; 13:5, 31), of purification or consecration (Lev. 8:33; 15:19; 16:14, 19), or of sacred time. The spring grain harvest began on the Wave Sheaf Day and continued for seven weeks until the Feast of Weeks (Lev. 23:15–21). The first day of the seventh month (Tishri) commenced the ancient Jewish New Year and was a holy day celebrated by the blowing of trumpets. The Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated for seven days (Lev. 23:34). Leviticus 25 describes two yearlong observances: the seventh or sabbatical year in verses 2–7, and the jubilee year in verses 8–25. The later Jewish book of Jubilees reconstructs world history based on a recurring cycle of jubilees of forty-nine years, showing that the “fiftieth year” might have been counted inclusively (including both the starting and finishing years in the calculation).<sup>35</sup> Elsewhere, the Jubilee year is described as the “final year in a cycle of fifty years, consisting of seven sabbatical year periods, or forty-nine years, plus this fiftieth year.” The number seven has a “manifestly basic role . . . in this reckoning of years.”<sup>36</sup>

Here it may be worthy of note that Alma gave his first high priestly sermon and call to repentance (Alma 5) after stepping down from his joint position as chief judge in the commencement of the ninth year of the reign of judges (Alma 4:20), which was the beginning of the forty-second year, or sixth sabbatical year, after King Benjamin’s speech,<sup>37</sup> Mosiah having reigned for thirty-three full years (Mosiah 29:46) and

35. Lester L. Grabbe, *Leviticus*, in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 92, 105–7.

36. J. Morgenstern, “Jubilee, Year of,” in Buttrick and others, *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 3:1001–2.

37. A relatable structural case has been made that King Benjamin’s speech divides into seven segments, the beginnings of which are “demarcated either by intervening ceremony or by abrupt shifts in subject matter.” Those sections are structurally configured as seven chiasmically related sections. John W. Welch, “Parallelism and Chiasmus in Benjamin’s Speech,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: That Ye May Learn Wisdom*, ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 325. Such seven-part chiasmic structures have been spoken of as following a “menorah pattern,” echoing the seven-lamped menorah in the Temple of Solomon. See Duane L. Christensen, *The Unity of the Bible: Exploring the Beauty and Structure of the Bible* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 2003), identifying numerous menorah patterns throughout the Bible.

Alma eight more. It may be more than happenstance that Alma then used about fifty questions—a perfect sabbatical number—in this call for rebirth and renewal,<sup>38</sup> given the fact that with this speech he first turned his public attention exclusively to his role as high priest (Alma 5:18), drawing perhaps on his familiarity with the numerical rhythms of the priestly law.<sup>39</sup> Carrying on with this high priestly orientation, the entire book of Alma, covering the times of Alma and Helaman (Alma's oldest son, Helaman, successor as high priest), often features seven-part lists or structures.

*Sevenfold Structure of the Whole Book of Alma.* It has been observed by Grant Hardy that the book of Alma “divides fairly neatly into seven sections: the Amlicite Rebellion (Alma 2:1–3:19), the Nephite Reformation (4:6–16:21), the Missionary Journeys of the Sons of Mosiah (17:5–27:15), the Mission to the Zoramites (31:1–35:14), Alma's Testimony to His Sons (35:15–42:31), the Zoramite War (43:1–44:24), and the Amalickiahite Wars (46:1–62:41).”<sup>40</sup> Within this sevenfold architecture, additional seven-based structures may be seen.

*Alma the Younger's Fourteen-Year Nephite Reformation.* The book of Alma begins with the first year of the reign of the judges. Alma has just assumed the offices of both chief judge and high priest (Mosiah 29:42), while the four sons of Mosiah have headed off to preach the gospel to the Lamanites (Mosiah 28:9). The first part of the book of Alma (Alma 1–16) is devoted to the fourteen-year ministry of Alma the Younger (with a brief interruption for the Amlicite rebellion).

*The Concurrent Fourteen-Year Mission of the Sons of Mosiah.* At the end of Alma's fourteen-year ministry, he happens to encounter the sons of Mosiah, at which point the text specifically notes the fourteen-year duration of their mission: “And [the sons of Mosiah] had been teaching the word of God for the space of fourteen years among the Lamanites” (Alma 17:4). Immediately after their meeting, the narrative backtracks to

---

38. Welch and Welch, “50 Questions of Alma 5,” *Charting the Book of Mormon*, charts 61–65.

39. In a similar vein, Duane L. Christensen has proposed numerous “menorah patterns” in the pages of the Old and New Testaments, consisting primarily of various stories told in structured, chiasmic segments of seven with the emphasis on the middle (or fourth) element. Although Christensen sees these throughout the Bible, a number of them deal with the Levitical law, as well. See generally, Christensen, *Unity of the Bible*.

40. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon* (Oxford, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2010), 106.

the point when the sons of Mosiah left Zarahemla to preach to the Lamanites and recounts their exploits during the same fourteen-year period, concluding with the same meeting with Alma (Alma 17:5–27:16).<sup>41</sup> In this way, the text portrays these two concurrent fourteen-year periods of significance—the first being Alma’s ministry and reformation and the second being this same period of fourteen years spent by the sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites.

*The War Chapters in the Second Part of Alma.* The book of Alma concludes with an account of a protracted period of war between the Nephites and the Lamanites. This period begins in “the commencement of the eighteenth year” of the reign of the judges (Alma 43:4) and continues through to the end of “the thirty and first year of the reign of the judges” (Alma 62:39), making a total of fourteen years. Although several battles are described, Hugh Nibley saw this period as a unit, “fourteen years of gory war.”<sup>42</sup> John Welch divided the conflicts during this fourteen-year period into three campaigns: (1) the Zoramite War (Alma 43–44), (2) the First Amalickiahite War (Alma 46:1–50:11), and (3) the Second Amalickiahite War (Alma 51–62), referring to this last as a “Seven Years’ War,” running from the twenty-fifth through the thirty-first year of the reign of judges.<sup>43</sup>

And so it appears that the book of Alma is structured around three sets of fourteen years: (1) Alma’s fourteen-year ministry among the Nephites (Alma 1–17:4), (2) the concurrent fourteen-year ministry of the sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites (Alma 17:5–27:16), and (3) the fourteen years of war between the Nephites and the Lamanites (Alma 43:4–62:39). These main blocks of text are separated only by a brief but crucial three-year interval, from the fifteenth (Alma 28:9) to the eighteenth year (Alma 43:4), explaining how the Ammonites were given the land of Jershon, how the Zoramites dissented to the land of Antionum, and how Alma tried to prevent the Zoramites from forming an alliance with the Lamanites, which would eventually happen, with the Zoramite

---

41. The seven cities or lands of converted Lamanites mentioned above (Alma 23:7–13) are the direct result of the fourteen-year mission of the sons of Mosiah.

42. Hugh W. Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1993), 2:453.

43. John W. Welch, “Why Study Warfare in the Book of Mormon?” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. William J. Hamblin (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1989), 9–11.

warriors, Amalickiah and Ammoron, leading the attack. In the middle of the book of Alma, two years of peace are briefly but notably mentioned: “the people did have no disturbance in all the sixteenth year;” and in the seventeenth year “there was continual peace” (Alma 30:4–5). In these years “they were strict in observing the ordinances of God, according to the law of Moses” (Alma 30:3), and those seventeenth and eighteenth years of the reign of the judges were the forty-ninth and fiftieth years from the year of King Benjamin’s speech, perhaps marking some jubilee significance.

*Alma’s Seven Companions to the Zoramites.* The accounts of ministry and warfare in the book of Alma are further laden with instances of the number seven. When Alma goes to preach the word of the Lord to the Zoramites in Alma 31, he takes with him seven companions:

Therefore he took [1] Ammon, and [2] Aaron, and [3] Omner; and Himni he did leave in the church in Zarahemla; but the former three he took with him, and also [4] Amulek and [5] Zeezrom, who were at Melek; and he also took two of his sons. Now the eldest of his sons he took not with him, and his name was Helaman; but the names of those whom he took with him were [6] Shiblon and [7] Corianton; and these are the names of those who went with him among the Zoramites, to preach unto them the word. (Alma 31:6–7)

Individuals the reader might expect to be taken along but whose addition would surpass the number of seven (Himni and Helaman) are duly noted and their absence from the company explained.

*Realignment of Tribal Affiliations.* At the beginning of the fourteen years of war, the book of Alma designates the tribal affiliation of the opposing armies and does so by once again listing seven tribes, though not the same listing of seven tribes of the Lehites discussed above: “And the people of Ammon did give unto the Nephites a large portion of their substance to support their armies; and thus [1] the Nephites were compelled, alone, to withstand against the Lamanites, who were a compound of [2] Laman and [3] Lemuel, and the [4] sons of Ishmael, and all those who had dissented from the Nephites, who were [5] Amalekites and [6] Zoramites, and the [7] descendants of the priests of Noah” (Alma 43:13).

Once more the text manipulates the tribes in order to come up with the number seven. We know the Nephites originally consisted of Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, and Zoramites, and by this time there were “Mulekites” as well; those who supported and identified themselves as Nephites were all lumped together as one, with the apparent intent

of arriving at the number seven.<sup>44</sup> The result emphasizes the contrast between the original ideal of Nephite unity and the ensuing disunity among the Lamanites, six being numerologically associated with evil, incompleteness, and deficiency. The author breaks down the Lamanites into two halves of three each: three of their traditional tribes (Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites), with the dissenters also configured into three groups (Amalekites, Zoramites,<sup>45</sup> and priests of Noah), further making this schematic seem to have been deliberate.

*Seven Nephite Cities Taken by the Lamanites.* During the course of the fourteen-year war, the Amalickiah-led Lamanite army takes a series of seven Nephite cities along the east coast—Moroni, Nephiah, Lehi, Morianton, Omner, Gid, and Mulek.

And it came to pass that the Nephites were not sufficiently strong in the city of Moroni; therefore Amalickiah did drive them, slaying many. And it came to pass that Amalickiah took possession of [1] the city [of Moroni], yea, possession of all their fortifications. And those who fled out of the city of Moroni came to the city of Nephiah; and also the people of the city of Lehi gathered themselves together, and made preparations and were ready to receive the Lamanites to battle. But it came to pass that Amalickiah would not suffer the Lamanites to go against the city of Nephiah to battle, but kept them down by the seashore, leaving men in every city to maintain and defend it. And thus he went on, taking possession of many cities, [2] the city of Nephiah, and [3] the city of Lehi, and [4] the city of Morianton, and [5] the city of Omner, and [6] the city of Gid, and [7] the city of Mulek, all of which were on the east borders by the seashore. (Alma 51:23–26)

It is possible the author's desire to arrive at the number of seven cities in this passage accounts for the anomalous textual feature that Amalickiah will not allow his Lamanites to go against the city of Nephiah in verse 25 but nevertheless does so in the very next verse without

---

44. Never are the "Mulekites" added into this mix. In fact, the Book of Mormon makes a point of never referring to the people of Zarahemla as "Mulekites," a designation so obvious that generations of Latter-day Saints have supplied it by tradition.

45. The original Zoramites, descendants of Laban's servant Zoram, a group Jacob identified as part of the broader classification Nephites (Jacob 1:13–14), should not be confused with these later Zoramites who separated themselves from the Nephites at the time of Alma. This group consisted of followers of a man named Zoram (Alma 30:59) and became dissenters who joined with the Lamanites (Alma 43:4).

any explanation as to why he changed his mind. Indeed, the city of Nephihah was not actually captured by the Lamanites until five years later when Ammoron, brother of Amalickiah, sent his armies against the city (Alma 59:5–12).<sup>46</sup> We might ask why the author would include in this list of conquered cities a seventh that was not taken for a number of years unless there was some overriding authorial intent to make the total number seven.

*Seven Costly Sins.* Mormon, the abridger of the Nephite record, ultimately lays the reason for the wars at the feet of the Nephites, and does so by blaming their troubles on seven specific sins: “And we see that these promises have been verified to the people of Nephi; for it has been [1] their quarrelings and [2] their contentions, yea, [3] their murderings, and [4] their plunderings, [5] their idolatry, [6] their whoredoms, and [7] their abominations, which were among themselves, which brought upon them their wars and their destructions” (Alma 50:21).<sup>47</sup>

### Sevens at the Verbal Level in Embedded Book of Mormon Texts

Not only may certain things (such as tribes, years, and rebellions, as seen above) be repeated in ancient Hebrew texts a symbolically significant number of times, but this type of ancient authorial practice is also sometimes extended into the number of words or phrases used in a particular passage. For instance, “In the creation story of Gen. 1 the clauses ‘and God said,’ ‘and God saw,’ ‘and God blessed,’ occur ten, seven, and three times respectively, and it seems unlikely that this is pure accident.”<sup>48</sup> Although one cannot be sure in all such cases, it is possible a similar type of symbolic word counting is at play in the Book of Mormon as well. Sensitized readers may notice the repetition of certain key words appearing in various documents embedded in the Book of Mormon and wonder if the number of these occurrences might have been intended to signal some meaning often associated with that number.

*Lehi’s Blessing to Joseph in 2 Nephi 3.* Perhaps setting a precedent for subsequent Nephite speech, Lehi’s blessing in 2 Nephi 3 to his youngest son, Joseph, repeats the word “loins” twenty-one times, three times

46. As noted in Grant Hardy, *The Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Edition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 399 n. 26.

47. See John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 2008), 149 n. 15.

48. M. H. Pope, “Number, Numbering, Numbers,” in Buttrick and others, *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 3:566.



seven. Lehi found the phrase “fruit of [my, thy, the, his] loins” nineteen times in the prophecies of Joseph of old, a phrase used only one other time in the Book of Mormon or Bible.<sup>49</sup> To those nineteen, Lehi added two more instances (“fruit of my/his loins,” 2 Ne. 3:4, 5) to total twenty-one: 2 Nephi 3:4, 5, 6, 7 (3 times), 11 (2 times), 12 (5 times), 14, 18 (4 times), 19 (2 times), and 21. The number seven representing the number of a complete cycle, its appearance here might signify the complete fulfillment of the promise of the Lord given to Joseph of old that the Lord’s promises would be fulfilled and his covenant remembered (2 Ne. 3:5). The multiplier three in the schema of Lehi’s blessing could accommodate the three Josephs involved here: Joseph the son of Jacob, Joseph the son of Lehi, and Joseph the Seer in the latter days.

*Uses of Wo and O by Jacob and Nephi in 2 Nephi.* A sermon by Nephi’s brother Jacob is recorded in chapter 9 of 2 Nephi. As has been previously noted, Jacob emphatically lists ten uses of the word *wo* in 2 Nephi 9:27–38, a perfect number, mirroring the Ten Commandments and reflecting the “broad preexilic and general Israelite sense of tenfold testing,” as well as consecration and supplication to God.<sup>50</sup> To this observation may be added the fact that Jacob also uses the word *O* fourteen times in this chapter (2 Ne. 9:8, 10, 13, 17, 19, 20, 28 [2 times], 39, 40, 41, 44, 45, and 46). Six of these exclamations come before the ten woes, and six of them come after, with two being found in verse 28 in the midst of those woes, which associate these curses with “the cunning plan of the evil one” and “the vainness and frailties, and the foolishness of men,” the root causes of those woes. Jacob thereby increases the textual complexity of his sermon by framing and overlaying his ten instances of *wo* with these fourteen cries of *O*, which deal at first with the completeness of the wisdom, goodness, plan, justice, mercy, and holiness of God (2 Ne. 9:8, 10, 13, 17,

---

49. Jacob 2:25 is the only other Book of Mormon reference to “fruit of loins.” The only appearance of this phrase in the King James Bible is Acts 2:30, “*karpou tēs osphuos*,” quoting Psalms 132:11 “the fruit of thy body will I set upon my throne” (KJV, following the Hebrew for body). However, LXX reads *koilias*, belly or reproductive organs; in Acts 2:30, Luke used the synonym *osphuos* (loins, used frequently elsewhere in the LXX referring to the place of one’s seed).

50. Welch, “Counting to Ten,” 42–57. Beyond the scope of this paper are the numerous instances of significant words and phrases being used ten times in discrete Book of Mormon passages, but one such would include the tenfold use of the word “faith” in the book of Enos, a short and compact narrative structured around Enos’s increasing development of faith (Enos 1:8 [2 times], 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18 [2 times], and 20).

19, 20) and with his five merciful pleadings (“O, my beloved brethren,” 9:39, 40, 41, 44, 45), punctuated by his finishing exclamation, “Holy, holy are thy judgments, O Lord God Almighty” (9:46).

Additionally, when Nephi in 2 Nephi 28 echoes Jacob’s ten imprecations of woe, he does so with seven uses of the word *wo* instead of Jacob’s ten (2 Ne. 28:24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29 and 32). These reappearing patterns seem to be something more than accident.<sup>51</sup>

*Swords and Stains in King Anti-Nephi-Lehi’s Covenant Text in Alma 24.* King Anti-Nephi-Lehi gave a brief but poignant address to his people (Alma 24:7–16), in which he dwelt upon the theme of burying their swords in order to take away the staining blood-guilt that came from having committed so many murders. In so doing, this new king uses the word *stain* or its variants seven times and the term *our swords* seven times (*stain*—24:11, 12, 13; *stained*—24:13, 15; *stains*—24:12, 15; *our swords*—24:12 [2 times], 13 [2 times], 15 [2 times], 16). Because this speech led directly to the people being assembled, their making a covenant with God to retain their purity, and as a testimony burying their swords deep in the earth (24:17), this text must be understood in a ceremonial context. The sevenfold repetition of these words in these five verses invokes the memory of the sevenfold blood sacrifices, dippings, and sprinklings that accompanied purification and cleansing rituals and covenants under the law of Moses, which these Ammonites were especially careful to keep as they looked forward to the coming of Christ (Alma 25:15).

*The Sevenfold Joy of Alma in Alma 29.* The devotion of these Ammonites, who had covenanted by oath never to take up the sword again, became the cause of the death of many thousands of Nephites who defended them as they deserted the land of Nephi and took refuge in the land of Zarahemla (Alma 28:1–11). Paralleling the great sorrow that Alma felt over this death and destruction, he also found equally great cause to rejoice “because of the light of Christ unto life” (Alma 28:12). His famous psalm of atoning jubilation, which begins with “O that I were an angel,” mentions several words twice (namely *wish*, *angel*, *speak*, *allotted*, *called*, *wisdom*), or four times (*repent* or *repentance*, *good from evil*, *brethren*, *soul*, *grant* or *granteth*, *remember*, *deliver* or *delivered*, *success*), or six

---

51. See also Nephi’s use of the words *Lord* and *O* ten times each in his “exquisitely phrased psalm” in 2 Nephi 4, and the ten-fold “O Lord” petition by Nephi, the son of Helaman, in Helaman 11:4, 10–16, discussed in Welch, “Counting to Ten,” 50–51, 54–55.

times (*I know, desire* or *desires*), but only one word appears seven times. That word emphatically is *joy* (Alma 29:5, 9, 10, 13, 14 [2 times], and 16). At this time of deepest sorrow caused by this Ammonite conversion and migration, Alma's sevenfold rejoicing answers their sevenfold covenant to overcoming their blood stains. He rejoices in God's gift of joy or remorse depending on our desires (29:5), in the joy of bringing souls to repentance (29:9–10), of God working through him to establish the church (29:13–14), but even more so in the success of his brethren in bringing these Ammonite converts to Zarahemla (29:14–16).

*Amulek's Injunction to "Cry" unto the Lord in Alma 34.* As a final example—and there may be many more—Amulek enjoins the Zoramites to “cry” unto the Lord with seven consecutive imperatives: “Cry unto him for mercy, . . . cry unto him when ye are in your fields, . . . cry unto him in your houses, . . . cry unto him against the power of your enemies, . . . cry unto him against the devil, . . . cry unto him over the crops of your fields, . . . cry over the flocks of your fields” (Alma 34:18–25). The use of the word *cry* in describing prayer to the Lord is a significant and persistent theme throughout the Book of Mormon,<sup>52</sup> constituting one of the main parts of the priestly and religious practices of the Nephites, making the number seven once again appropriate and significant here. With these seven injunctions, Amulek wants the Zoramite poor to know especially that they have the complete right to pray unto God over their salvation and well-being, without needing to pray on the Rameumptom in Antionum. This overriding point would have been conveyed by the commonly understood sense of completion that was symbolically associated with the number seven.

## Conclusion

The number seven held religious symbolic meaning in many ancient cultures, not least among Israelites and Jews, and was frequently incorporated into the text of the Hebrew Bible, adding emphasis, structure, and meaning for those in their culture who understood the symbolism. Deriving from this same culture, the ancient Nephites appear to have taken this numerical symbolism with them on their journey to the promised land and incorporated the number seven and its multiples over the years into the warp and woof of their own set of scriptures.

---

52. Corbin T. Volluz, “Cry Redemption: The Plan of Redemption as Taught in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no. 1 (1994), 148–69.

Applying the tools of ancient Hebrew numerology to the Book of Mormon in general and the book of Alma in particular reveals frequently occurring but rarely noticed seven-based architectural elements in the text that shape and mold many parts of this narrative. In various ways, Nephite writers, including Nephi, Jacob, Benjamin, Alma, King Anti-Lehi-Nephi, Amulek, Nephi the son of Helaman, Mormon, and probably others, made effectively meaningful use of the symbolism of the number seven. Seeing this increases modern readers' appreciation for the beauty and complexity of the Nephite record and allows them to identify passages and words of special importance and symbolic significance to its authors.

Four hundred years ago, Edmund Spencer wrote of "wise words taught in numbers,"<sup>53</sup> an appellation that more and more may be seen as applicable to the Book of Mormon.

---

Corbin Volluz received his law degree from the University of Texas at Austin in 1989. He worked at the Skagit County Prosecutor's Office in Washington State from 1990 to 1998 and currently is in private practice. His publications include "Lehi's Dream of the Tree of Life: Springboard to Prophecy," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 2 (Fall 1993); "Cry Redemption: The Plan of Redemption as Taught in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1994); and "Jesus Christ as Elder Brother," *BYU Studies* 45, no. 2 (2006).

---

53. Justin Kaplan, ed., *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1992), 154, citing *The Ruines of Time* by Edmund Spencer (1591).

## Horizon

*A girl puts her head on a boy's shoulder; they are driving west.*

—Gallway Kinnell

The cool tangerine sky.  
Outside Wells, Nevada, a belt blows.  
They have their whole lives ahead of them.

At the garage, the mechanic listens to classical music.  
5 hours to kill in the killing heat.  
She will have a bout with breast cancer at 58.

They walk around town, game for adventure.  
Storage units, Check-n-Loan, acupuncture.  
One of their children will break their hearts.

He could get a tattoo while she gets her nails done.  
A boy throwing a rubber ball against the parking-lot barrier.  
Dog pens in the trailer park.

Hardware store: drawer-pulls and doorbells. Beef jerky, car air fresheners.  
He tries on cowboy hats.  
At 72, he will begin his slide into Alzheimer's. She will brush his teeth.

Somewhere, someone is practicing a clarinet.  
The mechanic offers them tomatoes from his garden.  
They pull out at dusk, her hand out the window, arcing and diving.

The stars, the sage. They could be anywhere.  
Their carpet will turn powdery and dank. There will be grandbabies.  
The cool of the earth, tangerine.

—Darlene Young

---

This poem won third place in the BYU Studies 2014 poetry contest.

# Mossy Pools, Unkempt Paths, and Living Memory

*Patrick Moran*

*“I suppose it’s a bit hard to us to think anything’s over and gone in our lives;  
and there’s a parting at the root of all our joys.”*

*—George Eliot, Adam Bede, chapter 53*

A few years ago I visited the house in which I grew up. My parents had long since moved away, and the place had been abandoned—a result, no doubt, of the recession and the spate of foreclosures that had plagued the area. There was a somberness about the place, born of the contrast between my happy memories of it and the state of disrepair into which it had obviously fallen. After having ascertained that there were no residents—a fact made plain enough by a quick peek in the living room window—I made bold to hop over the fence and explore the backyard in which I had spent a joyful childhood and youth.

The trees were overgrown, and the lawn—which I had grudgingly mowed every Saturday for years—appeared to have claimed the victory in a battle with the patio and the walkways. I felt a pit in my stomach as I realized that the flowerbeds on which my mother had lavished so much careful attention had become the preserve of weeds and wildness.

Most disconcerting, though, was the state of the swimming pool. Far from being the pleasant suburban oasis of memory in which I had spent the better part of every summer—especially after the arduous lawn mowings—it was now a disused watery version of the house itself. Instead of the clear, chlorinated liquid that my father had always labored assiduously to preserve in prime condition for would-be swimmers, it was now filled with a mossy, deep-green water so thick with algae that I couldn’t

see to the bottom. It was hard to believe that so many childhood hours had been wasted gloriously away in what now looked more like some sort of primeval swamp than a suburban swimming hole. Not waiting for a six-foot-long dragonfly or some monstrous crocodilian creature to emerge from the depths and confirm that the Jurassic period had conquered my childhood, I hightailed it out of the yard, more than a little spooked and glad to get back to the well-ordered world of the present.

My encounter with the physical remnants of my past and their own disappointing present, though, had been intriguingly enlightening. As hard as I struggle to intellectually accept the fact, the houses or streets or cities where I've lived over the years apparently do remain in existence without my being there to occupy them. Places are brought into existence—at least as far as our personal experience with them is concerned—as we encounter them. And to suddenly realize, as I did seeing my moss-infested swimming pool, that they've gone on without us can be disconcerting and strange, a weird reminder that although our experience brings the world into existence anew with each encounter, the world is also capable of getting along very well without us, thank you very much.

I sometimes wonder whether Adam, after being expelled from the Garden, didn't feel the same sort of thing that I have often felt when I reflect back on the memories of my youth. He was well aware, I'm sure, that the plodding, workaday world of the present was the path leading to greater happiness and more lasting fulfillment, but I imagine him nevertheless looking back longingly at Eden and letting his thoughts run to the joy of innocence and a life free of care. Was he sometimes permitted to wander back through the Garden, only to find it overgrown and bereft of its former glory? If so, I can't help but imagine that he felt the pang, known to all his children whenever they've reflected on the disappearance of childhood and youth, that says, "You've lost something that you won't get back. No matter how bright the future, the past is gone forever except in your recollection of it, and the dimmer that becomes, the less you are able to conjure it using your will to memory, until at last it has faded away forever from every canvas except the mind of God."

And yet the question remains, how useful is memory anyway? If it only serves to draw me back into a time that has ceased to exist, to prevent me from making real headway on the roads of the present, maybe the personalized past of memory is a hindrance rather than a help.

I once decided to walk a mountain path that I had walked frequently as a boy and a young man. When my cousins and parents and siblings

and aunts and uncles and grandparents and I used to hike there, it was a well-defined trail (defined mainly by us, I later came to discover) on which we could identify every turn, every craggy and oversized rock, every little stream crossing. I could have walked the path in my sleep, I knew its ins and outs and its peculiarities so well.

When I returned years later, though, not only did the major landmarks of childhood memory prove woefully inadequate to orient me, but I soon discovered that the trail itself had completely disappeared. Where I had once been able to run ahead and wait for the others to catch up, it was now nearly impossible to even determine where our original path had run. It frequently disappeared completely in the thick undergrowth and could be recovered only by treading gingerly through stinging nettle plants and climbing over fallen logs and relying on a great deal of guesswork. In other places, it was clear that the shape of the landscape had changed dramatically enough that wherever my path lay before, it was not to be found anymore.

On this attempted walk down what was, for me, a literal memory lane, it became clear that despite the static nature of the mental pictures we retain like hangings on a gallery wall, the real, natural, ongoing, living world refuses to be kept at bay so as to conform to our recollections. The places I knew as a child are no longer, even when I am able to stand in the physical space I inhabited in years gone by. And sure as I am that this forced migration from the glorious Eden of the past to the ambiguous world of the present is undoubtedly for the best, there is an ache that accompanies the fact of its existence, and in quiet times I think that the death of *then* is a necessary part of its labor to give birth to *now*.

The ache is a divinely installed one, though—I'm confident of that. For all the righteous action that contemplation of a glorious future inspires, there is an equivalent portion of thoughtful meditation, of reflection brought on by the conviction that things are not as they were in youth or childhood or in a premortal realm where the march of time had not yet managed to create conflicts between memory and consciousness. As we think of the way things were, we (hopefully) are struck by the need to make the present into the paths for which we will hunt in some future foray into memory.

Maybe, after all, it's not just our guilt of which we will have a bright recollection after this life (see Alma 11:43). Maybe part of what awaits us, for better or for worse, depending on how we've prepared for it, is a perfect recollection of our whole mortal experience—the great moments, yes, but not those primarily, since they're what we would remember



anyway. Primarily, I think, a perfect recollection hereafter, a knowing (ourselves) as we are known, is going to be not so much a highlights reel as a collection of the minutiae—the million little moments that are so easily forgotten but that make up, much more than the “defining” times, the reality of life and experience, sorrow and joy, humanity and peace.

The flip side of this coin, the great fear that memory threatens, is of course the fear of loss and of failure to remember, or even of that which we hope *not* to remember. Recollection is not just enjoyment of past bliss and glory; for us, as it was for Adam, it can also be confrontation with evil and recognition of competing claims to our allegiance and, almost always, eventual expulsion. But here, too, the processes that make up our experience with memory are working in our favor—the appearance of undergrowth and fallen logs and randomly strewn branches will often give shape, context, and form to what was incomprehensible before in the immediacy that was the past’s *now*.

There are ways to look at the grown-over path or the mossy swimming pool, recognize them for what they are today (sometimes beautiful in their own ways), and still appreciate what they were before. Every Thanksgiving I make a pan of candied sweet potatoes using exactly the recipe that my grandma used to use. It is a very American version of Proust’s famous *madeleine* moment, and eating them invariably places me near those who have left me but who continue to bring me joy and solace. There are books I read with my children that simultaneously transport me to times listening to the same stories with my parents and to times when my own children will read them to their kids. Concrete action and tradition thus provides present shape for the past and allows me to project it happily into the future.

Memory, when it can forge such a union of the past, present, and future, the three great realities that can be always before me, is more precious to me than any childhood home or beloved mountain trail—it is the very glue that keeps me bound to what I have been, what I am, and what I will become.

---

This essay by Patrick Moran received an honorable mention in the BYU Studies 2014 personal essay contest.

## Be It unto Me

*Rebecca Clarke*

I glance at the high chair on my way to the laundry room, half hoping God will answer my petitioning prayers in that way I've mentally mocked so many times: *I envisioned a little blonde girl and so I knew we were supposed to have one more, . . .* but God continues to remain silent on the subject. I'm getting desperate to hear this particular answer; I am pushing forty.

Some say that you have to approach death to give birth, and I believe that. The dread of a misstep has been at the forefront of every birth experience for me, feeling I've had to retrieve the baby from somewhere or someone else and bring it stealthily over that precarious threshold from water to air. The four times I've given birth have all been on the operating table, with arms outstretched and tethered down, making me always think of the crucifix, the white sheet obscuring the birth from my view. Last time my heart rate dropped so low during the surgery that I wanted to ask the doctor if I was dying, but I lacked sufficient breath to speak the words. With every shallow breath I rehearsed what became a prayer in my mind: *The baby*, inhale, breathe out, *the baby*, inhale, breathe out, *the baby*.

When Mary is told by the angel that she will be a mother, she asks one question about the mechanics of it all, and then responds without any evidence of hesitation. I marvel at her unflinching willingness in the face of sacrifice, both in the certain present and unknowable future: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me, according to thy word" (Luke 1:38).

I haven't always been as willing to offer that sacrifice as Mary was. I went six years proclaiming flatly to anyone who dared ask if we would have more, "Two kids is a lot of kids." But then my youngest went to kindergarten, and my husband's quiet petitioning fell into place for me, and I prayed and eased myself back into the idea of another pregnancy and then—even eagerly—into yet another. I've been more than blessed with four babies, more than filled, more than overflowing. My husband is certainly as kind as Mary's was, for the most part leaving it to me to let him know about my plans. Who am I to ask for more?

My reasons for wanting another in the short term are flimsy—the sweet thoughts of naming, the announcement, the chubby arms, the tiny clothes, even the hospital stay that is muddled with morphine and staples-as-stitches for me. In the long-term I still want, but who can tell what it would mean? Would it upset our perfect symmetry of four, two girls and two boys? But all doubts circle me back to thinking about the parent-teacher conferences, the prolific paper-and-tape creations, and the child who makes his way to our bed in the nighttime. All fleeting things, but the things that give me joy. The desire for life in the face of death.

I sometimes picture an almost giddy God telling Adam and Eve to multiply and replenish the earth, his own most recent feats of creation having gone so very well. These babies in so many ways are the ultimate move—for a brief space in time anyway—away from entropy. That organizing and giving of life has such a stunning pull on me, even when there's no human way of knowing what giving life might mean.

A thoughtful friend explained my dilemma back to me this way, "It's like when you decide to have a child, you change the world. And the world rejoices with you. But when you decide you're done, where's the poetry in that?" Case in point: at no time in scripture does an angel come in glory to an aging woman to proclaim, "Hallelujah! Plenty enough now with the childbearing!" But some aging women are still left pondering in their hearts these absent events. I teeter between poetry and reality. Between the thought of a baby and the facts that the depths of my C-section scar never healed correctly after the second birth, that I couldn't raise my right arm for months after my third, and that nagging feeling that I might not get away with the baby so stealthily this next time. If there is to be that next go-round I ache for, I decide, I am going to need God's clear urging.



The crisp feeling comes to me in the temple, but not because I am in the temple. I count it a real answer to my prayer because it comes once I finally let go of my own agenda, once I've finally given up. My extended family and I are in the celestial room hugging my soon-to-be-missionary niece, and I whisper to Sam that it's okay for us to try again. I step aside from the group, bow my head, and bargain with God in a way that makes me feel certain that whatever happens will be his will: we'll try for two months and then let wisdom put a stop to things; after all, I am now forty-one.

I hold hands with Sam one evening four weeks later, walking up the street so we can have the quiet our full little home doesn't often provide. It's simpler and sweeter to tell him this time, this way: no gifts of baby clothes, no wrapped positive pregnancy test or other preplanned announcement. "You are?" He's elated. We stand at the edge of the road and hug, and I cry. Maybe we can use the name I've saved and savored for so long: Hazel, and June after my mom's middle name. We'll set the crib up. We'll get the car seat down. The plans start to fall into place, and we turn and head for home.

The next morning I assess my maternity clothes situation and start quietly mapping out dates. We'll be on our long-anticipated trip to Paris at twelve weeks. We'll tell the kids then, which will blunt the sharp edges of the announcement for fourteen-year-old Eliza. No one else will need cajoling. Six-year-old Owen has inexplicably written on his summer fun list, "Have a new baby." Emme is twelve, the perfect nurturing age, and Christian is three and fascinated with anything that can move on its own. I figure out the date of the C-section, a magical and rhythmic 11/12/13. I submit my request to take fall semester off from teaching.

One Sunday at the beginning of sacrament meeting I have a moment's hesitation when we sit behind a young new mother (all new mothers are so very young—how did I miss it before?) holding her baby. My back is so stiff I can't even bend down to pick up the fruit snack wrapper dropped by my three-year-old. Why am I asking my body to do all of this again? This flash of fear actually takes my breath away. Then during the sacrament I receive one of the clearest answers I have ever felt, and it comes in words: "This pregnancy for you? This is nothing but a blessing."

Six weeks later I end my morning writing class early. As I drive to the hospital for a blood test per the nurse's instructions, I wonder as I cramp whether this is a moment that won't need to be remembered, or

if it's something that will stay forever frozen in my mind. I know the numbers aren't on my side—my age, my C-sections—and I start a different repetitive prayer: *Please*. Sam meets me at the hospital, and things look blessedly fine. Spotting is normal. I head home and lie down, even though the nurse says that lying down won't change things. But in my heart it will. By that afternoon, though, I can't really call the spotting just spotting any longer, and I call my mom to tell her that I was expecting her thirteenth grandchild in 2013 and that it will likely not be born after all. She brings me soup and bread, and rubs my feet while I lie on my bed, holding still, still, still, all the while willing this to turn out the way I have envisioned and becoming more deeply amazed than I've ever been that this has turned out so flawlessly for us four times in a row.

The next morning tears slick down my cheeks as I roll up my sleeve for another blood test. The nurse looks at me kindly and explains that he is good at this—I needn't be so worried. I almost laugh, and then bungle out an explanation that I don't want the finality this test will provide. I look away from the needle and think about the fact that babies' cells can remain in their mothers' bodies even into old age, and I turn back to watch the slim vial fill with deep red. I wonder if my baby's cells are in that mix. I think about the fact that those cells have been found to heal mothers' damaged hearts. That drive home I don't remember. Except I know that I did not pray, because I did not pray for days.

It's been months now. The date we would have found out the gender has come and gone. I took fall off, my first semester off ever except to have my babies, in order to read to Christian, be there for Owen at the bus stop, and listen to Emme and Eliza tell tales of the newness of junior high and high school. Last night I headed up our street, on my own this time, in the wind and deep dark, because I needed the quiet (four kids is a lot of kids). I went to a boulder where I knew I could sit just off the edge of the road, and intended to sit there until I could stop looking back at this last failed chance in my mind, and stop blaming everyone else for not looking back with me.

When Mary visits her cousin Elisabeth after the beginning of her pregnancy, she recites a poem of praise for the blessing of wishes fulfilled: "He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away" (Luke 1:53). My focus is intent on my emptiness; others gently point out to me the good things. I sit on that rock and wonder. I think about the red gerbera daisies from a friend who didn't know they matched the flowers in the bouquet at my wedding, I think

about the sincerity in the voices of the people waiting for me in my overflowing little house, I think about my older friend who hugged me and said that sometimes it's about our willingness. *Be it unto me*. I teeter on that threshold for a long time. *Be it unto me*. I head back in the dark toward home, beginning to accept in my heart that I will never have five children, *be it unto me*, and that I am nothing if not blessed.

---

This essay by Rebecca Clarke won second place in the BYU Studies 2014 personal essay contest.



The first four Mormon missionaries to Japan at a missionary benefit dinner in Salt Lake City in summer 1901. Standing (*left to right*): Horace S. Ensign, Alma O. Taylor. Seated (*left to right*): Heber J. Grant, Louis A. Kelsch. Courtesy Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

# A Mormon and a Buddhist Debate Plural Marriage

The Letters of Elder Alma O. Taylor and  
the Reverend Nishijima Kakuryo, 1901

*Reid L. Neilson*

Christian missionaries began evangelizing in Japan in 1873,<sup>1</sup> but missionaries of one denomination, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, waited nearly three decades—until 1901—to commence proselyting among the Japanese. Moreover, Mormon leaders made no attempt to missionize the East Asians, including a small number of Japanese, living in their midst in the American West during the nineteenth century. While social, linguistic, and political realities all seemingly factored into this decision, so did Mormon theological conceptions of race and lineage. It took a dramatic drop-off in missionary success in the North American and Western European mission fields, coupled with a renewed sense of millenarian urgency, to persuade LDS leaders to finally look to the East instead of the West at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

Following the death of President Wilford Woodruff, Apostle Lorenzo Snow was sustained as the Church's fifth prophet-president in September

---

1. Christianity was introduced to Japan in the sixteenth century but was essentially obliterated by feudal rulers in the seventeenth century. Commodore Perry's two trips to Japan in 1853 and 1854 started the process of opening the country. It was not until 1873 that sanctions against Christianity were formally lifted. Even then, though persecutions ceased, "freedom of religion" was not granted to the Japanese people until the Constitution of 1889.

2. For a history of the nineteenth-century Mormon encounter with Asia and the early LDS Japan Mission, see Reid L. Neilson, *Early Mormon Missionary Activities in Japan, 1901–1924* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010); and Reid L. Neilson and Van C. Gessel, eds., *Taking the Gospel to the Japanese, 1901–2001* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2006).



1898.<sup>3</sup> During his short administration (1898–1901), the Church’s financial crisis concluded,<sup>4</sup> and Church leaders began thinking about new international evangelistic opportunities. Under President Snow’s direction, the Church entered the twentieth century with 283,765 members, 967 wards and branches, 43 stakes, and 4 temples.<sup>5</sup> In addition, nearly a thousand men and women were evangelizing in over a dozen mission fields.<sup>6</sup> However, the vast majority of these members, congregations, and edifices were located in North America, and they did not represent the world’s population. Up to this point, Mormon missionary work and resources were focused mainly on the nations of North America and Western Europe, while the countries of Asia, for example, languished in spiritual darkness, in the Mormon mind.

Unsatisfied with the status quo, President Snow determined to shift the Church’s attention to East Asia, South America, and Eastern Europe. Church authorities felt an urgent need to fulfill the Great Commission in lands untouched by Mormon missionaries. They had not sent missionaries on an evangelical errand to Asia, the world’s most populous continent, since the 1850s. In President Snow’s mind, the central responsibility of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles was “to warn the nations of the earth and prepare the world for the coming of the Savior”;<sup>7</sup> it was not to busy themselves unduly with stake and ward duties, which were

---

3. Davis Bitton, *George Q. Cannon: A Biography* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999), 423; Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Paul Thomas Smith, “Lorenzo Snow,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 3:1369–70.

4. Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 3–6; Boyd Payne, ed., “Rudger Clawson’s Report on LDS Church Finances at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 31 (Winter 1998): 165–79.

5. *Our Heritage: A Brief History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1996), 104.

6. During 1900, there were 438 missionaries in the US and Canada, 289 in Europe, and 63 in Australia and the Pacific. Gordon Irving, *Numerical Strength and Geographical Distribution of the LDS Missionary Force, 1830–1974* (Salt Lake City: Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1975), 14–15.

7. Joseph F. Smith, “The Last Days of President Snow,” *Juvenile Instructor* 36 (November 15, 1901): 689–90.

the responsibilities of stake presidents and bishops.<sup>8</sup> Mormon Apostles had been much more involved in foreign missionary work before external and internal stresses forced them to retreat to the Great Basin during the 1880s and 1890s. President Snow believed that to fulfill their errand to the world, the Apostles needed to refocus their energies outward, not inward, just as their apostolic predecessors had done for much of the nineteenth century.

Japan loomed on the horizon of new evangelizing possibilities for Mormons during the year 1900. Rather than organizing missionary efforts to take the gospel to hundreds of Chinese and Japanese immigrants living within miles of their offices at Church headquarters in Salt Lake City, however, Snow's First Presidency determined to take the gospel directly to East Asia. A series of nineteenth-century encounters with East Asians both at home and abroad convinced Mormon authorities that Japan, not China, should be the Church's Eastern priority. Accordingly, on February 14, 1901, during a weekly meeting of the Council of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, President George Q. Cannon announced the establishment of the Japan Mission and called Heber J. Grant, an Apostle and second-generation Latter-day Saint, as its president.<sup>9</sup>

Over the next several months, Elder Grant selected three missionary companions: Horace S. Ensign, Louis A. Kelsch, and eighteen-year-old Alma O. Taylor. The Mormon errand to the Asian world had commenced. Even before leaving for Japan, the mission's youngest elder, Taylor, began a sobering correspondence with a Japanese Buddhist priest that foreshadowed the challenges he and his companions would face once they arrived in Tokyo Bay. The Mormon practice of plural marriage would become the sticking point between the two missionaries, one a Mormon and the other a Buddhist. Their letters expose the lack of knowledge both men had regarding the other's religion and showed the passionate defense but also limited understanding Taylor, still a teenager, had of his

---

8. B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century One*, 6 vols. (Provo, Utah: Corporation of the President, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1965), 6:375–79; Rudger Clawson, Diary, June 26, 1901, in *A Ministry of Meetings: The Apostolic Diaries of Rudger Clawson*, ed. Stan Larson (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1993), 287–89; “A Farewell Reception,” *Improvement Era* 4 (August 1901): 795–97.

9. See Heber J. Grant, *A Japanese Journal*, comp. Gordon A. Madsen (n.p., 1970), 5; Rudger Clawson, Diary, February 14, 1901, 247.

own faith's history and theology. The letters document the defenses of polygamy circulating in Mormon society in 1901.

### **A Mormon-Buddhist Encounter**

Alma Owen Taylor was born on August 1, 1882, in Salt Lake City. He was the second of two children born to Joseph Edward Taylor, a British convert and well-to-do undertaker, and Lisadore Williams, a school-teacher from Illinois. He served in the Salt Lake Temple with his mother and followed his father into the undertaking business, graduating first in a class of apprentice morticians who studied in Chicago, Illinois, in the summer of 1899. Educated at the Eighteenth Ward Seminary and at Latter-day Saints College, Taylor was an attractive candidate for a mission. Alma's call to serve in the Japan Mission came the following year. Heber J. Grant, the Apostle who issued the call to serve in Japan, seems to have been aware of Taylor for some time. Elder Grant and the Taylor family lived in the same ward. Joseph Taylor was a counselor in the Salt Lake Stake presidency, and he and Elder Grant were close friends. Alma Taylor had socialized with Elder Grant's daughters for many years. By the time Elder Grant called Taylor to serve in Japan, he knew the kind of missionary the young man would be.<sup>10</sup>

Determined to familiarize himself with Japanese before arriving in the Land of the Rising Sun, Taylor contacted Paul Carus, a Buddhist sympathizer and founder of Open Court Publishing, whom he had met the previous year while studying in Chicago to be a mortician. Carus had been instrumental in introducing many Americans to Eastern faiths like Buddhism and Hinduism through his publications. Carus encouraged Taylor to contact the Reverend Nishijima Kakuryo, a leader of the recently created Buddhist Mission of North America, who was then living in San Francisco. Nishijima and his mentor, Sonoda Shuye, had arrived in northern California in September 1899 as missionaries for their Jōdo Shinshū Buddhist faith, opening the Hongwanji Branch Office on 807 Polk Street in San Francisco. Over the next several months,

---

10. For more on Alma O. Taylor, his mission preparations, and his feelings about Asia, see Reid L. Neilson, *The Japanese Missionary Journals of Elder Alma O. Taylor, 1901–1910* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies and Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History, 2001); Reid L. Neilson, "A Priceless Pearl: Alma O. Taylor's Mission to Japan," *Ensign* 32 (June 2002): 56–59; and Reid L. Neilson, "Alma O. Taylor's Fact-Finding Mission to China," *BYU Studies* 40, no. 1 (2000): 176–203.

the two Japanese priests offered study classes and public lectures on Buddhism, eventually organizing Young Men's Buddhist Associations in nearby Sacramento, Fresno, and Vacaville and issuing a newsletter. For their efforts, Nishijima and Sonoda are regarded as the founders of the Buddhist Churches of America.<sup>11</sup>

On June 14, 1901, Taylor followed Carus's suggestion and wrote to Nishijima, hoping that the Buddhist priest might help him locate some Japanese study materials.<sup>12</sup> The young Mormon missionary explained that neither he nor Carus could locate suitable Asian language primers in Salt Lake City or Chicago. Could Nishijima help? Taylor made clear why he needed to learn Japanese—so that he and his missionary companions could teach the Mormon message of salvation to Nishijima's Buddhist countrymen once they arrived in Japan. This was the first of five letters that Taylor and Nishijima exchanged during the summer of 1901.

A few days later, Nishijima responded to Taylor's first missive by first apologizing that he was unable to provide the requested language study materials from San Francisco. The Buddhist priest then discussed Taylor's pending missionary assignment to his fellow Japanese. Nishijima expressed concern that the Church, widely despised by Christians in America, "teaches men the unlawful life of polygamy which will debase them instead of lifting." He warned Taylor that if he and his Mormon missionary companions were to advocate plural marriage in Japan, both Christians and Buddhists alike would meet them with "severe condemnation." Nishijima enclosed a copy of his periodical, *Bukkyō Seinenkai Kaihō* (Young Men's Buddhist Association Newsletter), in his first letter to Taylor.<sup>13</sup>

---

11. "Shuye Sonoda, Buddhism in the Kingdom of Liberty (1899)," in "East to America: Immigrant Landings," in *Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History*, ed. Thomas A. Tweed and Stephen Prothero (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 78–82; *Buddhist Churches of America*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Nobart, 1974), 1:43–48; Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Boston: Shambhala, 1986), 143–45.

12. Alma O. Taylor to Nishijima Kakuryo, June 14, 1901, as found in Alma O. Taylor, *Diary*, July 28, 1901, pp. 40–41, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (see letter 1 herein), [available online through the BYU library website](#). Unfortunately, Taylor did not copy this initial letter to Nishijima into his journal as he did with their subsequent correspondence.

13. Nishijima Kakuryo to Alma O. Taylor, June 24, 1901, as found in Taylor, *Diary*, book A, July 28, 1901, pp. 41–44 (see letter 2 herein).

Taylor and Nishijima's letter exchange is the first documented debate between a Buddhist and a Mormon on the divisive theological and social issue of polygamy. Anti-Mormon antipolygamy sentiments were not novel for the early twentieth century. Long after the public practice of polygamy ended,<sup>14</sup> it continued to capture the imaginations of other sectarians Mormons encountered, inevitably causing friction between competing religious understandings.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Latter-day Saints summoned moral, theological, and sociological defenses of polygamy. Historian Davis Bitton summarizes these nineteenth-century justifications as follows:

1. "There was nothing inherently evil about polygamy; prejudice against it was the result of tradition."
2. "Plural marriage was the simplest, most realistic way of providing fulfillment of man's natural instincts within proper bounds."
3. "Plural marriage was a practical, honorable means of providing marriage and motherhood for thousands of deserving women who would otherwise be condemned to a life of spinsterhood."
4. "Plural marriage was an excellent means of improving the race, a program of practical eugenics."
5. "Plural marriage led to larger families."
6. "Plural marriage harmed no one."
7. "Plural marriage was an alternative to prostitution and other social evils."
8. "Plural marriage was part of Mormon religious belief."
  - a. "Polygamy was sanctioned by the Bible."
  - b. "Plural marriage was authorized by a divine revelation to Joseph Smith."
  - c. "Plural marriage was consistent with if not implied by Mormon theology."<sup>15</sup>

---

14. In 1852, Mormon Apostle Orson Pratt publicly acknowledged the practice of plural marriage, while the 1890 Manifesto issued by President Wilford Woodruff was the beginning of the end of plural marriage, which continued into the early twentieth century.

15. Davis Bitton, "Polygamy Defended: One Side of a Nineteenth-Century Polemic," in *The Ritualization of Mormon History and Other Essays* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 35–40.

In fact, these eight standard defenses of polygamy were seemingly so ingrained in the collective LDS mind that Taylor, an eighteen-year-old prospective missionary, used seven of them in his correspondence with Nishijima in 1901, eleven years after the Manifesto.<sup>16</sup>

In his second letter to Nishijima, dated June 28, Taylor replied to the Buddhist's concerns in typical missionary fashion: "I respond cheerfully to your question as to how the religion of 'Mormonism' will be a benefit to the people of your fatherland."<sup>17</sup> He then extolled the basic tenets of the Latter-day Saints, including the sanctity of Mormon homes, the loving leadership of faithful parents, and the industrious, pioneering nature of his fellow Church members. After offering a general history of the LDS faith, Taylor addressed Nishijima's concerns about plural marriage. With his second letter mailed to California and his departure to Japan at hand, Taylor likely assumed his correspondence with Nishijima had come to an end.

Nishijima, however, sought further clarification on polygamy after receiving Taylor's apologetic defense of its practice. In his second letter, dated July 7, the Buddhist leader responded to Taylor's spirited defense of his faith.<sup>18</sup> He thanked the young Mormon elder for sending along the newspaper clippings, Articles of Faith card, and *Improvement Era* issues and complimented him on his faith and discussion of the Mormon faith. Nishijima pointed out to Taylor that many "sincere and earnest" Westerners had found truth in the "so called heathenism of the Orient," resulting in greater tolerance and open-mindedness towards Buddhism. The Buddhist priest suggested to Taylor that a similar softening would occur for Latter-day Saints. Nevertheless, Nishijima confessed to Taylor that he did still not understand or appreciate plural marriage. He concluded his letter by asking Taylor to continue to send him issues of the *Improvement Era* on a regular basis so that he could "investigate" the Mormon religion, and he offered to do the same with his Buddhist publication if Taylor would kindly provide him with an updated mailing address when he arrived in Japan.

---

16. Of Bitton's eight documented defenses of Mormon polygamy, Taylor failed to employ only one—the pro-Mormon polemic that plural marriage increased family size.

17. Alma O. Taylor to Nishijima Kakuryo, June 28, 1901, as found in Taylor, Diary, July 28, 1901, pp. 45–67 (see letter 3 herein).

18. Nishijima Kakuryo to Alma O. Taylor, July 7, 1901, as transcribed in Taylor, Diary, July 28, 1901, pp. 22–26 (see letter 4 herein).

Back in Salt Lake City, Taylor and his three missionary companions were busy preparing for their departure to Asia. Taylor received Nishijima's second letter just days before he left Utah for Japan in late July 1901. They had purposefully scheduled their departure to coincide with Pioneer Day (July 24), a popular holiday in Utah commemorating the vanguard company of Mormon pioneers entering the Salt Lake Valley in 1847. That evening, after the Pioneer Day parades and fireworks, the missionaries and their families and friends assembled at the Salt Lake train depot to say their final goodbyes. Then the elders boarded the Oregon Short Line train bound for the Pacific coast. "It was quite an auspicious day to make a start; it being the 54th Anniversary of the pioneers entering the Salt Lake Valley. I felt that inasmuch as the Gospel had never been preached in Japan and that we were to be the first to sound the Gospel cry to that nation; that we were indeed going pioneering on pioneer day," Taylor noted.<sup>19</sup> The train pulled out of the Salt Lake City depot at 11:10 p.m. The missionaries traveled north by train to Ogden, Utah, where they caught their rail connection to the deep-water port of Vancouver, British Columbia. The twentieth-century Mormon errand to the East had begun.

While Taylor and his three missionary companions waited for their trans-Pacific Ocean steamer in a Vancouver, Canada, hotel, Taylor replied to his Asian correspondent's missive on July 28.<sup>20</sup> He assured Nishijima that he would forward his address in Japan once he was settled so he could continue to receive Nishijima's Buddhist periodical. He also informed Nishijima that he had ordered a subscription of the *Improvement Era* to be sent to Nishijima's new address in Sacramento, California. Taylor then spent the bulk of his third letter to Nishijima responding to his query about plural marriage and about how the Latter-day Saints could have justified its practice in the "enlightened" nineteenth century: he offered five additional reasons for plural marriage that correspond with those listed in Bitton's article. As outlined in his letters to Nishijima, Taylor accepted the prevailing Mormon theological and social worldview, that plural marriage, as practiced both anciently in Hebrew Israel and recently in Mormon Utah, was an exalted religious principle. He ended with this note to Nishijima: "Should you have any further questions to ask about the 'Mormons' an[d] their doctrine I shall be pleased

---

19. Taylor, Diary, July 24, 1901, 5–6.

20. Alma O. Taylor to Nishijima Kakuryo, July 28, 1901, as transcribed in Taylor, Diary, July 28, 1901, pp. 27–40 (see letter 5 herein).

to answer them. If all that I have written is not plain to you I will try and make it so." There is no record in Taylor's journals or correspondence that the Mormon elder and the Buddhist reverend ever exchanged letters again.

### **The Mormons' Reception in Buddhist Japan**

Within days of sending his third and final letter to Nishijima, Taylor and his three Mormon companions continued across the Pacific Ocean to begin missionary work in Japan. From Vancouver, British Columbia, the quartet boarded the *Empress of India*, a six-thousand-ton steamship operated by the Canadian Pacific Railway Company. This steamer, together with the *Empress of Japan* and the *Empress of China*, sailed routes connecting Vancouver to Hong Kong, Yokohama, Kobe, Nagasaki, and Shanghai. After two weeks at sea, the elders finally saw the Japanese coastline on August 12, 1901. The new sights and sounds they encountered dazzled the men. Taylor captured a number of observations in his journal that first day. From the veranda of his hotel he looked out over the Tokyo Bay and was entranced by his surroundings. "Seeing also the apparel and manners of the people, I indeed felt 'A Stranger in a strange land.'"<sup>21</sup> Fellow missionary Louis A. Kelsch likewise recalled his first observations of Japan. "It seemed to us when we arrived that we were indeed strangers in a strange land, for everything was strange unto us. The people, their customs, their habits, their food—all were strange. We could not speak to the people, only through interpreters, except to those who were able to understand the English language."<sup>22</sup> But the elders were excited to be on Japanese soil; they were poised to preach the gospel in a new land.

Missionary work among the Japanese, however, would prove difficult and frustrating to Taylor and his companions. The four Latter-day Saints were stunned by the controversy their arrival in Japan stirred up in the Japanese press. Nishijima had predicted this exact kind of response. A number of magazine and newspaper articles had already been written in opposition to the Church in the decade before missionaries arrived in Japan. As Japanese studies scholar Sarah Cox Smith documents, the LDS faith "was portrayed as ridiculous and indeed

---

21. Taylor, Diary, August 12, 1901, 95.

22. Louis A. Kelsch, in *Seventy-third Semi-annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1902), 35.



laughable in its doctrine but with an uncanny, almost eerie, power to attract believers. Many perceived it to be a threat to Japanese culture. In a sense, the Latter-day Saint doctrines had been translated—or rather, mistranslated—by Japanese and resident Christian writers long before the missionaries ever set foot on Japanese soil.” Some Japanese were afraid that the Church, specifically its teachings and practice of plural marriage, would set back the recent social advancements of Japanese women and threaten Meiji enlightenment.<sup>23</sup>

Printed pieces on the Latter-day Saint missionaries formed a trickle in the summer of 1901. Following the missionaries’ arrival in Yokohama, the trickle became a flash flood of editorials and essays opposing and supporting them and their religion. “More than a dozen newspapers in the capital city of Tokyo, two nationally influential newspapers in the dominant commercial city of Osaka, and no less than twenty major regional newspapers throughout the country devoted considerable space—often on front pages—to articles and editorials reporting or otherwise commenting on the arrival of this new Christian sect with unusual doctrines,” scholar Shinji Takagi chronicles. Between August 13 and September 10, 1901, at least 160 newspaper pieces were written about the Latter-day Saint elders boarding in Yokohama and evangelizing in the surrounding neighborhoods.<sup>24</sup> Taylor and his companions were surprised by the level of attention. Although most newspapers cast the Mormons in a very negative light and focused on the oddities of the Church, especially plural marriage, the missionaries “felt to thank God for the prospect of persecution for we felt that it would be the means of bringing us to the front and attracting many who otherwise would not take enough interest in us to investigate the cause which we represented.”<sup>25</sup>

American history is replete with fascinating encounters between the religious majority, members of an astounding variety of Christian sects, and the religious minority, members of numerically smaller faiths like Judaism, Hinduism, and Islam. Scholars have documented and analyzed these historical relationships in countless articles, dissertations,

---

23. Sarah Cox Smith, “Translator or Translated? The Portrayal of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Print in Meiji Japan,” in Neilson and Gessel, *Taking the Gospel to the Japanese*, 129.

24. Shinji Takagi, “Mormons in the Press: Reactions to the 1901 Opening of the Japan Mission,” in Neilson and Gessel, *Taking the Gospel to the Japanese*, 179, and *BYU Studies* 40, no. 1 (2001): 141.

25. Taylor, *Diary*, August 13, 1901, 98–99.

and monographs.<sup>26</sup> The 1901 correspondence of Taylor and Nishijima represents a different kind of religious encounter—that of the representatives of two minority faiths meeting each other in the heyday of the Protestant Establishment. Neither Latter-day Saints nor Buddhists occupied a position of social power or authority in America at that time. The great majority of Christians viewed both groups with suspicion and distrust through the exoticizing lens of orientalism—the disciples of Buddha because they were from the Orient and the followers of Joseph Smith because they embraced polygamy.<sup>27</sup> Protestants and Catholics saw both religions as outsider faiths. Both Buddhism and Mormonism tested the limits of dissent and difference in American religions; neither religion emerged from the predominantly held Protestant national narrative of faith that was familiar to citizens of the republic. As a result, both men felt free to share their religious beliefs and questions with remarkable openness and curiosity. From their correspondence we learn that the two men had a basic grasp of each other’s spiritual tradition but lacked real understanding. Fortunately, Taylor and Nishijima sought to learn from each other while still wearing their respective missionary hats.

### **Correspondence between Alma O. Taylor and Nishijima Kakuryo**

Mormon missionary Alma O. Taylor began corresponding with Buddhist priest Nishijima Kakuryo on June 14, 1901, as described above. Unfortunately, neither his original letter nor a transcription of its content exists. Taylor likely did not fully appreciate the historical importance of their forthcoming letter exchange. It was not until their fourth letter exchange (Nishijima to Taylor) that Taylor determined to copy his entire extant correspondence with Nishijima into his handwritten journal. On July 28, four days after departing from Utah for Japan, the young Mormon elder recorded, “Most of the day was spent in writing letters to my friends.

---

26. For example, see Jonathan D. Sarna, ed., *Minority Faiths and the American Protestant Mainstream* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), especially Jan Shippo, “Difference and Otherness: Mormonism and the American Religious Mainstream,” 81–109.

27. Terryl Givens writes about Western fiction writers casting Mormons in the role of Asian oddity. Terryl L. Givens, “Caricature as Containment: Orientalism, Bondage, and the Construction of Mormon Ethnicity in Nineteenth-Century American Popular Fiction,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 18, no. 4 (1995): 385–403. See also Timothy Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

One or two days before leaving home [July 22 or 23], I received the following letter from the president of the Buddhist Mission in America.”<sup>28</sup> Taylor then transcribed the missive from Nishijima (dated July 7) as context for his response to the Buddhist priest. He also then copied his response into his journal, along with their previous correspondence.

Since none of their original letters have survived, I have relied upon Taylor’s journal transcriptions of their letters. Thankfully, the young Mormon missionary was a conscientious journal keeper. Taylor began his regular, generally daily, record of events and feelings with honesty and surprising maturity on July 24, 1901—the very day that he and his three missionary companions departed from Salt Lake City to open the Japan Mission. For the next eight years and eight months, Taylor wrote regularly in his ever-expanding collection of missionary journals. He often recorded events that his companions failed to note. No other set of personal, mission, or Church records documents the events of the LDS Japan Mission between 1901 and 1910 with Taylor’s consistency, thoroughness, and insight.<sup>29</sup> Thus, Taylor’s records can be trusted and appreciated by historians.

Although the vast majority of Taylor’s journal writings are very legible, occasionally the original ink has faded, or Taylor complicated the text by inserting editorial corrections. I determined to stay true to Taylor’s original journal entries and letters and have therefore retained all Taylor’s spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. This involves preserving his emphasis on certain words or letters (such as underlining); enclosing his insertions above the normal text in forward slashes in the body of the text where it makes grammatical sense; and placing in brackets and crossing out underlying words that Taylor wrote over with other

---

28. Taylor, Diary, July 28, 1901.

29. Taylor’s thirteen journals vary in physical size. With the exception of his Journal B (typescript), all the volumes are holographic journals. Fortunately, he had excellent penmanship and wrote in beautiful cursive characters. Thanks to Taylor’s family and the staff at the L. Tom Perry Special Collections, all thirteen journals are well preserved. Journal A (July 24 to August 31, 1901) measures 6½ x 4½ inches. It is written in a blue-lined cardboard-bound notebook that opens vertically and numbers 186 red-edged pages. The cover is textured and light brown, with a navy blue border design and red corner protectors. The back cover continues the border design but is blank. The handwriting in Journal A is especially large and clear.

My Brigham Young University master’s thesis on Alma Taylor and his record-keeping efforts was published as *The Japanese Missionary Journals of Elder Alma O. Taylor*. However, I excluded the 1901 Taylor-Nishijima correspondence from this earlier publication of his diaries.

words, following them in plain text with the revisions. I have occasionally placed in brackets an interpretation of a distracting word. Interested readers may view the complete Taylor-Nishijima correspondence [online](#) or in person at the L. Tom Perry Special Collections at Brigham Young University's Harold B. Lee Library in Provo, Utah.

**Letter 1: Alma O. Taylor to Nishijima Kakuryo, June 14, 1901<sup>30</sup>**

[*Editor's note:* Although Taylor never copied his initial letter to Nishijima into his journal, he did summarize its content in this entry.]

In my search for text books in the Japanese /language/ I was finally recommended by Dr. Paul Carus of Chicago to write to the Rev. K. Nishijima who then lived in San Francisco Cal. whom he thought would be able to find some for me, if there were any in the United States. I did so and after putting Mr. Nishijima to considerable trouble, which ended in a failure to find the books I concluded to tell him why I was so anxious to secure them. I wrote him a letter on June 14<sup>th</sup> telling him that myself in company with three others were going to Japan as representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints commonly called "Mormons" and that we were desirous of doing what studying /of the language/ we could while on our journey.

**Letter 2: Nishijima Kakuryo to Alma O. Taylor, June 24, 1901<sup>31</sup>**

807 Polk. St  
San Francisco Cal

June 24" 1901

Mr. Alma O. Taylor  
Salt Lake City, Utah

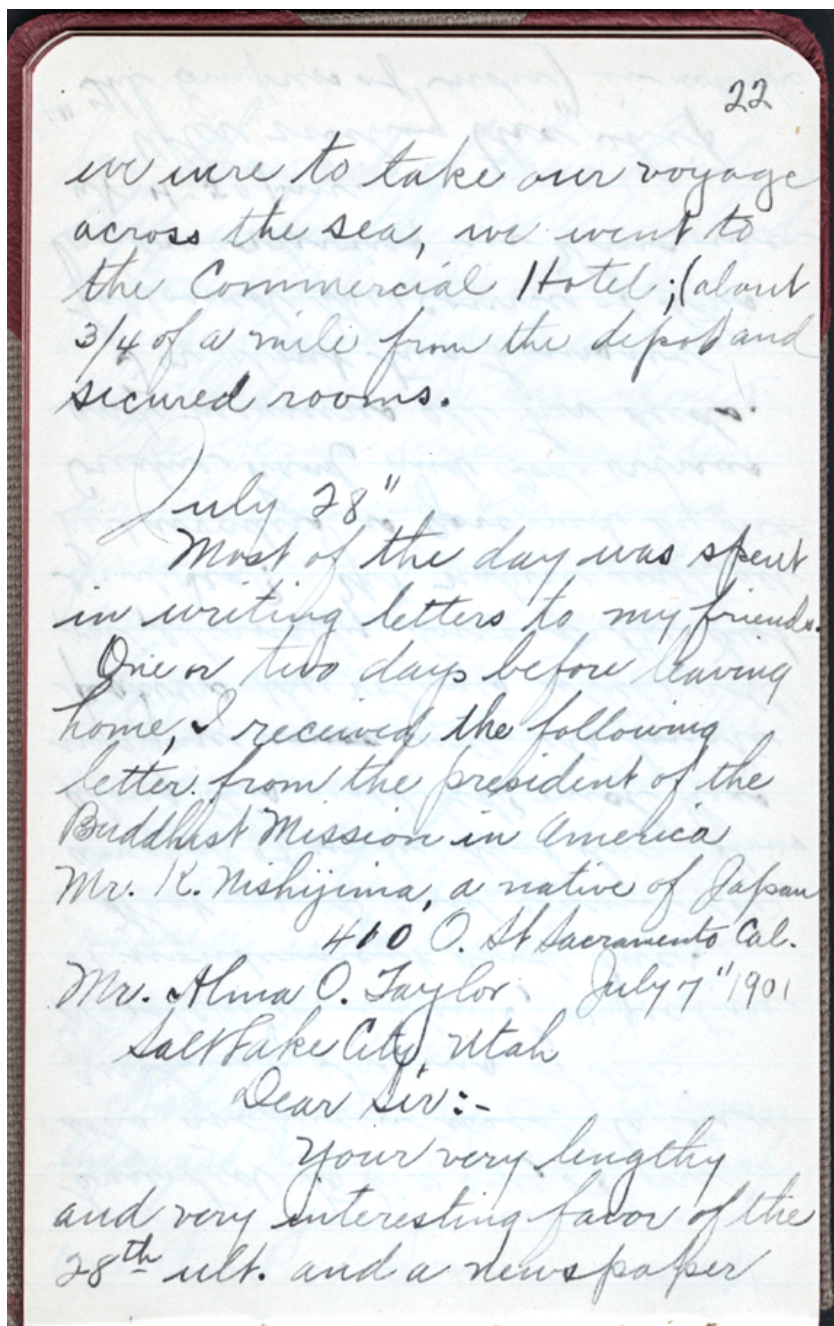
Dear Sir:—

Your letter of the 14<sup>th</sup> inst. was received and I feel very, very sorry for my being unable to get for you and your friends the text-book of the Japanese Language. If there were plenty of time before you left this country I would have sent to some book store in Tokyo for the books.

---

30. Taylor, Diary, July 28, 1901, 40–41.

31. Taylor, Diary, July 28, 1901, 41–44.



Page 22 of the diary of Alma O. Taylor, on which he begins his record of correspondence with Nishijima Kakuryo. Courtesy L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University.

You say in your letter that you are about to go to Japan to teach our people with the true Spirit of Christianity which is not taught by the hundreds of so called Christian sects upon the earth to-day; and I am very glad for it. I have no prejudice toward other religions, and I think that all the religions in the world should be just as brothers and sisters, and be in harmony and peace, since they all have to lead mankind to a better state and condition by the teachings of love and righteousness equally for all beings.

I have heard very often of Mormonism which is always despised and condemned by all other Christian sects in this country; simply on this point, as far as I know, that it teaches men the unlawful life of polygamy which will debase them instead of lifting. It being so, it is quite certain that any one who intends to introduce this Mormonism to Japan will meet with the severe condemnation, not only of the Christians, but the Buddhists there. I, myself, have not yet /thoroughly/ studied the principles of Mormonism; of its real influence upon the people, and I don't know at all what is the beauty and excellency of it.

If you really belong to this sect and intend to teach it to our people, I wish you would be so kind as to tell me how you will benefit our people who are in the state of dullness and ignorance, by your own way of living of which all other Christian sects are so much dispising?

I have sent you a copy of our journal and I need not say that I shall be very pleased to hear from you

With best wishes, I remain,

K. Nishijima

### **Letter 3: Alma O. Taylor to Nishijima Kakuryo, June 28, 1901<sup>32</sup>**

Rev. K. Nishijima

My Dear Sir:—

Your letter of the 24th inst. was duly received and read with pleasure. I respond cheerefully to your question as to how the religion of “Mormonism” will be a benefit to the people of your fatherland.

“Mormons” is a nick-name given to our people because of their belief in the Book of Mormon, but it makes no difference what the enemies of our church desire to call us; we still proudly lay claim to being the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and while we accept the term “Mormons” as it is thrust upon us, yet we refuse to sail under any banner

---

32. Taylor, Diary, July 28, 1901, 45–67.

of man-made fabric; repudiating the name of mortals as part of our title, differing therefore from the Weslyans, Calvinists and others, all of whom, though perhaps worthy organizations, declare themselves the followers of men. Ours is not the church of Moses Paul, John, Joseph Smith (though he was its founder) or Brigham Young (though he was its leader during its trying exodus to the west), but it is the church of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God. And being the Church of Christ it should and does /in its creed and practice/ follow strictly the teachings of the Savior. The “Mormon” church claims and proves from the Bible that Christ taught the following doctrines: Faith in God and Jesus Christ; Repentance from sin; baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; the Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Spirit which Spirit leadeth into all truth and enables man to live the higher principles of Christianity which are; virtue, knowledge, temperence, patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness and finally charity and love which principles are exhaulting in their character and which will revolutionize the world, establishing peace on earth and good-will in the hearts of all men, and will hasten on the day spoken of by Isaiah a prophet of the Old Testament: “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the Kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and the little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the cocatrice’s den.” “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all God’s holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the mighty deep.” Nor is it our belief that this condition of peace can come as long as there are so many creeds professing to teach the plan of salvation, yet at the same time warring with each other. Unity cannot exist in confusion; neither can there be more than one Christian road to Eternal Life, and that is the one straight and narrow way which leadeth to the final goal and Christ commanded us to walk therein, for it was the way prepared by him for all mankind. Whether the Latter-day Saints (Mormons) are walking in that path or not, let their teachings and their actions answer.

Step into any “Mormon” home where lives a faithful Latter-day Saint, and you will find a peaceful spirit there; a love existing between every member of the family; never will they partake of a meal, without first thanking God for it and asking his blessing thereon. Always before retiring to rest for the night and before entering upon the labors of the day the family will be brought together in a circle and upon bended

knees they will express their gratitude to the Lord for his blessings and solicit a continuation of his kindness and mercy; praying for power to be humble and true, virtuous and pure, walking in all holiness before their God. You will see the mother teaching her children from their infancy to their majority to be kind and gentle, loving all mankind and exhibiting charity to their companions. Chastity and virtue are the greatest lessons taught. How well do I remember my mother telling me when I was a little boy, to value my virtue more than my life. How often have I thanked God for such a mother and such a father for he is an exemplary man teaching his children by precept and example to be men, true men; refraining from the use of tobacco and all intoxicating liquors; dealing honestly with our fellows in all things. The “Mormon” children and people are taught to love God and remember the Sabbath Day; to put forth every effort and to use every talent with which they have been blessed in endeavoring to do good to their fellow men and in assisting others to actions of righteousness.

The Latter-day Saints are a frugal and industrious people who in spite of persecution, mobbings, and drivings, have built up beautiful homes and have made the desert places blossom as the rose. The marvelous growth of our fair State of Utah is an imperishable monument to the industry and honesty of the “Mormons” who were the pioneers of the Rocky Mountain Country. The governors and leading men of Wyoming, Arizona, and other surrounding States are sending requests for our people (the despised “Mormons”) to come and colonize in the unoccupied valleys of their States. Why are they doing this? Are not the “Mormons” a licentious, dishonest, thieving, and murderous set? Have they not plundered many a peaceful home and ravished many a virtuous maiden? These are the reports which are given out concerning us, but it is well to remember the words of Shakespeare “Rumor hath many tongues but most of them lie.” No! the world is beginning to understand the “Mormon” people and recognizing them to be honest, true, industrious, peace-loving and God-fearing men and women; possessing ability to build beautiful homes and establish hamlets, towns, cities, and states wherein lives a people as true as ever lived upon the earth. I do not desire to convey to you the idea that there is no transgression on the part of the “Mormon” people, for it is with us as with all others; some who profess to be Latter-day Saints do not keep the commandments of God, but do wickedly, yet you can be assured of this fact, that when wickedness is discovered and he who has sinned does not repent he will be excommunicated from the church, for our teachings



do not tolerate men in sin. It is because of the evil actions of professed “Mormons” that we have been harshly judged, but any candid mind will recognize the truth, that a creed or community cannot be judged by the actions of transgressors. “Mormonism” is true, Christianity is true, truth is truth and /will ever remain so/ no matter what man may do. Moses desired to give unto the people of Israel the law which he received from the Lord on Mt. Sinai but the people chose to worship the golden calf. Their actions, however, did not destroy the law nor prove it to be a myth or a falsehood; the law remained but the people were cut off.

It seems to be the general idea that “Mormonism” has but one doctrine—the doctrine of polygamy. The people of the world who are not thoroughly acquainted with the “Mormon” idea of polygamy; and know of it only from circulated reports (which are mostly rumors) have the horrifying thought, that the “Mormons” are eaten up with passion; and that their homes are worse than the brothels of harlots; that their girls are given to men to satisfy their fiendish lust; indeed, that they are more like beasts than human beings.

It is true that the Latter-day Saints believe in polygamy but they hold it as a sacred principle revealed from God, not only in this day but anciently. While they believe it to be a true principle, yet there has been no polygamous marriages contracted with the sanction of the church since 1890, when the law against polygamy was declared constitutional.<sup>33</sup> The “Mormons” being a law abiding people, conformed to the law of the land; sacrificing the law which they held as true; leaving the result in the hands of their God. So if at this date or at any time since /1890 when/ the “manifesto” against polygamus marriages was issued by the President of the “Mormon” church, a man takes a second wife while the first is living he not only breaks the law of the land, but of the Church also. The opponents of our Church claim that polygamus

---

33. Taylor is mistaken on two points here. First, the U.S. law against polygamy was declared constitutional in 1879 (*Reynolds v. United States*), not 1890. Second, when Church President Wilford Woodruff announced the “Manifesto” (Official Declaration 1) in 1890, it marked the beginning of the end of plural marriage within the Church. But it would take several decades to completely end the practice by Latter-day Saints, who, following the “Second Manifesto” in 1904, faced ecclesiastical discipline if they entered into new plural marriages. As secrecy surrounded the post-Manifesto plural marriages performed between 1890 and 1904, it is not surprising that Taylor believed that no more marriages had been conducted.

relations have not ceased among our people, and that children are being born to the plural wives. What else could they expect? Let me ask you Mr. Nishijima as a liberal thinking man, would my father (who has more than one wife) be justified or be acting like a man if he were to throw off his plural wives like dirty rags and make orphans of his children; treating them as some rich man might do, by sending food to them, yet at the same time kicking them from off his path? He took his wives before any law was enacted against polygamy and he did so feeling that he was keeping the law of God.<sup>34</sup> The fact that the men in our church continue to honor those sacred covenants is, to me, a very strong evidence that the marriage relations are considered in the “Mormon” Church as the most sacred of ties and an evidence that the plural wives are loved and cherished as dearly as the wife of any man in the world. No man with charity or love in his heart could ask that those wives and their children be thrown off and those sacred ties be broken, because the law of society demanded it. We may be beasts, but not so brutal as to stifle and kill the natural affections between husband and wives, and parents and children. I question whether the men who criticise the marriage relations of the “Mormons” would go to prison and suffer confinement for 6 months, one year, yes two and three years rather than sacrifice their wives and children. The very fact that the men of “Mormondom” have thus suffered for their plural wives and families is an evidence that they are sincere in their belief and true in their devotion far beyond that devotion which passion would create.

We are not going to Japan to preach polygamy, for it is a dead issue, and new polygamus relations are not being entered into among the “Mormons.” The only agitation which this subject has is from the “Anti-Mormons,” and it is used by them as a weapon against us. But Christendom must hold her peace for the standard which she presents to the world—the Bible must be thrown away if polygamy is not a true principle. If you have read the Bible you will understand the following passages: Genesis 16:1–3, 17:1–8, 29:16–29, 36:1–5, Exodus 2:21, 22, Numbers 12:1, I Samuel 1:2, II Samuel 12:8, 11, Isaiah 4:1. The Bible

---

34. Actually, the U.S. Congress passed the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act, providing heavy fines and prison terms for polygamy, in July 1862, more than a decade before Taylor’s father married his mother. But the Latter-day Saints felt that this law was unconstitutional and disregarded its provisions, and the law was not generally enforced.

tells us that David was a man after the Lords own heart, who would fulfill all his will. All Bible students know that Christ the Savior of the world came through the lineage of this man—David—yet he was a polygamist. Again, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets were to be in the Kingdom of God (Luke 13:28) and yet most of them according to the Bible were polygamists. Now if polygamy is such a terrible sin why should these polygamist prophets be so favored of the Lord. I quote you these Biblical passages that you might know that the Christians who may criticise the “Mormons” for believing in polygamy, are unconsciously trampling on their own scriptures. Again let me say to you, that while we believe the principle of polygamy to be true, yet it is not practiced, and to form new polygamus relations would be violating the laws of the church as well as of the land.

Mr. Nishijima, as a polygamus child, being born of a woman who is a plural wife to my father, I testify that the virtue of the “Mormon” people is held most sacred; and as thousands can bare me witness, I say that the “Mormon” boys and girls are as pure youths and maidens as ever crossed the threshold of a mother’s home. In going to your countrymen with the message of “Mormonism” we go representing a virtuous, temterate [temperate], honest, kind, and industurious people; carrying a message characterized by charity and love—the message of the Gospel of Salvation as it is taught by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and which labors for the exhaltation of mankind, irrespective of color or race.

I have this day sent to you five copies of the “Improvement Era” a monthly periodical published by the Young Men of our Church. In these magazines you will find articles which I have marked. If you will read them as I have marked them you will get a systemic outline of the “Story of Mormonism,” Philosophy of Mormonism,” and “Evidences of the divinity of the mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

After you have read this letter and the articles refered to you may answer for yourself the question, whether “Mormonism will benefit your people or not.

I bare my testimony to you that it is the truth, and that it will elevate man to the highest possible standard. I also know that he who will seek with a prayerful heart and with a desire to understand its principles, shall know for themselves that the doctrines are true; for the Savior hath said: “He who will do the will of my Father in Heaven shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God,” or whether it be of man. To all who knock with earnestness, it shall be opened to them.

Enclosed you will find a newspaper clipping which may interest you also a card containing the Articles of our Faith. These Articles are not a complete code of our faith for as you will see by one of them (9) we accept the principle of /continuous/ revelation by which we receive new light /and further truth/ as a characteristic feature of our belief.

The headquarters of the California Mission of our Church is located in San Francisco at number 938 Golden Gate Ave. Joseph Robinson is the President of the mission and he or any of the Elders traveling in California whom you may chance to meet will be glad to answer any question or give any information concerning the “Mormons” or their doctrine.

Thanking you for all the kindness you have shown me, I remain,  
Yours truly  
Alma O. Taylor

**Letter 4: Nishijima Kakuryo to Alma O. Taylor, July 7, 1901<sup>35</sup>**

One or two days before leaving home, I received the following letter from the president of the Buddhist Mission in American Mr. K. Nishijima, a native of Japan

410 O. St Sacramento Cal.  
Mr. Alma O. Taylor July 7<sup>th</sup> 1901  
Salt Lake City, Utah  
Dear Sir:—

Your very lengthy and very interesting favor of the 28th ult. and a newspaper clipping and a card of the Articles of your faith enclosed in it, were duly received; and also the copies of “Improvement Era” which you so kindly sent me. I thank you very much for the same.

My friend, I am greatly impressed to learn from your letter that there are so many similarities between the warm and pious “home” of the Buddhists and the Mormons. And I found really many misunderstandings and misrepresentations by the opponents of your faith concerning the life of your people as is also the same case with our own faith and people. Our faith, as you know, with all other religious systems of the Orient, was classed by the Western people in one group that they termed heathenism; and all the Asaitic races as heathen. But now, by

---

35. This letter is the first one that Taylor recorded in his journal. Taylor, *Diary*, July 28, 1901, 22–26.

the indefatigable zeal and industry of the most prominent scholars of Europe and America, the Sacred Books of the East are made accessible to the Western world and those who become familiar with them are very deeply interested in the Oriental teachings—especially Buddhism.

The people who were sincere and earnest in their search after truth, found the truth they sought for, in the so called heathenism of the Orient and consequently their minds became much broader and impartial towards heathens

I believe that the time will come ere long, when the people who are used now to despise your faith and its followers, will fully understand them, and appreciate highly the beauty and excellency of “Mormonism” There is one thing, however, that I could not understand after all your explanation of your faith and it is the principle of polygamy which your people deem a sacred covenant.

I wish to comprehend clearly from pure ethical and phylosophical point of view, instead of theologically, why the principle of polygamy should be deemed sacred for us, mankind.

My friend don't think me a man who has a cross intention to criticise your faith, but think me as a student, and kindly give information when it will not inconvenience you.

I shall be very pleased if you send me the copy of “Improvement Era” regularly, so that I may have an opportunity to investigate your faith, and I shall send you regularly the copy of our journal, if you only let me know your address.

Hoping you good health, I remain,  
Yours fraternally,  
K. Nishijima

**Letter 5: Alma O. Taylor to Nishijima Kakuryo, July 28, 1901<sup>36</sup>**

Vancouver, B.C.

July 28"

Rev. K. Nishijima  
Sacramento, Cal.

My Dear Sir:-

---

36. Taylor, Diary, July 28, 1901, 26–40.

Your favor of the 7th came duly to hand, but owing to the great amount of work I had to do preparatory to leaving on my trip to Japan, I have been unable to answer it before. I am[e] now in the hotel at Vancouver awaiting the departure of the steamer.

I shall be pleased to have you send me your journal and I will send you the address of the mission when it [we] becomes permanently established. In the last number which you sent me, I found an article on Mahayana and Hinayana<sup>37</sup> Texts which was very interesting. I have always been impressed with the principles of temperance, peace, and good-will that are the themes of many articles written by the disciples of Buddha. When I realize that I am going to preach the Gospel plan of Salvation to a people having in their creed many of the virtues of true Christianity, it becomes indeed a pleasant thought and gives encouragement, which, in itself, is inspiring.

Regarding the doctrine of polygamy from an ethical and philosophical standpoint, I will say; that like all the other laws of God, polygamy is both moral and natural.

Let me ask you why man and woman were created? Why was it necessary for there to be more than one sex? Why did not the human family consist of males, alone or of females alone? The answer is unmistakably this; because it would have been impossible for the human race to have been perpetuated. Man in himself, could not have produced his kind; woman in herself, could not have produced her kind; and the laws of nature which regulate all animal life would have been perverted and annulled. Therefore, man and woman were created for the purpose of producing their kind and in peopling the earth with an honest and a righteous seed. Unto them was given a law, governing their relationship to each other. What is that law? It is a law which has contained in it, resolutions, making the marriage covenant sacred and divine. The general assent of mankind, ever since the earliest history of his race, unto this law is an evidence that a marriage ceremony is in harmony with the feelings of humility [humanity?] and absolutely necessary in obeying the social law, (which in this instance is a law of God). But the question of marriage

---

37. Mahayana, one of the main Buddhist traditions, began in the first century and is widely practiced in the East Asian countries of China, Japan, and Korea. It is the more liberal branch of modern Buddhism, as opposed to more conservative Hinayana Buddhism, popular in the Southeast Asian nations of Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar.

being a moral and ethical law is so generally accepted in all the world, that it may need no further comment.

If marriage in itself is ethical, moral, natural, devine, and proper from every standpoint; where can you find an ethical law which would make a plural marriage immoral so long as the ceremony is performed in exactly the same manner as when the first ties were made, and where a perfect love and devotion exists between the parties concerned? It cannot be called adultery, because the parties are married just the same as any other man and woman might be. It cannot be called brutal or for the sake of gratifying passion, for there exists a perfect mutual love just as perfect as exists between any husband and wife. It is true, that society has a great deal to do with the establishment of moral law, and society has said that polygamists are guilty of the crime of bigamy. Let us see which is the productive of the more good and the greater morality—society or polygamy.

Is it an uncommon thing for a man who commands a high position in social circles and who has a wife and family, to have also a mistress with whom he is associating in adulterous relations, regularly? Which is the more honorable and the more moral, for a man to have /two/ wives whom he loves and recognizes as the mother's of his children, or to have one wife whom he recognizes, and a mistress with whom he is secretly committing sin? The polygamist takes unto himself women to whom he gives children for the purpose of perpetuating his seed, (for which he was created), but the mistress keeper takes unto himself harlots who cause abhorptions [abortions] and the extinction of human life. Which, Mr. Nishijima of the two, the lover of his families or the betrayer of his family (for any one who will turn from virtue, wife, and children, unto harlots is a betrayer of his family), is the best able to establish the moral laws?

Let us look at polygamy from another standpoint, that of nature.

As you will undoubtedly concede, it is the destiny of woman to be a mother of children. The census of the United States shows nearly one fourth more unmarried women than men. Three years ago, quite an agitation was created by the question as to how these maidens were going to get husbands. In the eyes of the world this still remains an perplexing problem with no hope of its being solved. But in the eyes of the "Mormon" people and nature there is a solution, and it is this: nature has so formed woman that she cannot develop the germ of life as rapidly as it is formed by man, therefore, in spite of the much larger number of

women than there are men, there are sufficient to supply the germ of life as rapidly as /the/ women can develop it; hence, "Mormonism" presents to the world, polygamy, a system of honorable marriage and family raising, as a solution to the problem and claim it to be better than to allow virtuous maidens to grow old and die barren and fruitless, or that they should be driven in despair into some brothel to become the mistresses of men instead of their honorable and lawful wives.

While I was in Chicago two years ago, I studied under Dr. Carl A. Barnes the Sanitary Physician of that city and Prof in the Harvey Medical College. One evening after a long talk on the doctrine of polygamy, as viewed by the "Mormon" people he said: "Mr. Taylor, I am much impressed with your statements of the "Mormon" idea of marriage, and as a Doctor of Medicine /knowing the laws of health/ I must confess that if two thirds, yes three fourths of the men in this city had more than one wife they would be better off physically, say nothing of the improvement it would make morally." Dr. Barnes is not the only man to see the virtue of this doctrine, but any who will look with an unbiased mind, from either a scientific or theological standpoint, will discover as Dr. Barnes did, that polygamy cannot be dismissed as a beastly practice, used only to satisfy the lusts of men, but that it demands the respect and carefull invistigation of all.

It is true that the tradition of the age is opposed to polygamy but such opposition has been raised against practically all truth when first proclaimed. When Gallaleo announced that the world was round the people with one united voice pronounced him insane and he was forced to lie on the ground at the foot of the steps leading into the church and allow the people as they came out to step on him, but after the last man had stepped on him he jumped to his feet and cried: "The earth is round all the same." So the "Mormons" though persecuted for their belief in the doctrine of polygamy will in some future day be honored for the sacredness of their marriage relations, as Galleleo is now honored with the admiration of the civilized world.

Polygamy is natural, hence, phylosophical; when lived with earnestness and truth it is moral, hence, ethical; and as you can see by my last letter it is Biblical, hence, theological.

Before leaving home I subscribed for the "Era" in your name and had it sent to #410 O. St. Sacramento, Cal. As a great many articles which will appear in that magazine will be written to believers and from a believers standpoint you may not be able to understand them perfectly



but there will undoubtedly be many articles which will interest you in an investigation of "Mormonism."

Should you have any further questions to ask about the "Mormons" an[d] their doctrine I shall be pleased to answer them. If all that I have written is not plain to you I will try and make it so.

Yours respectfully

Alma O. Taylor

---

Reid L. Neilson received a bachelor's (international relations) and two master's degrees (business management and American history) from Brigham Young University and a PhD in Religious Studies (American religions) from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In 2006, he became Assistant Professor of Church History and Doctrine in Religious Education at BYU, where he received the University Young Scholar Award.

Neilson is the author and editor of over twenty books, including *Exhibiting Mormonism: The Latter-day Saints and the 1893 Chicago World's Fair*, published by Oxford University Press; *Early Mormon Missionary Activities in Japan, 1901–1924*, published by University of Utah Press and reviewed in *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 3; and *Taking the Gospel to the Japanese, 1901–2001*, published by BYU Press. He published Alma Taylor's 1910 report to the First Presidency in "Alma Taylor's Fact-Finding Mission to China," *BYU Studies* 40, no. 1 (2001): 176–203. He and Terryl Givens are coeditors of the recently published university textbook *The Columbia Sourcebook of Mormons in the United States* (Columbia University Press).

Neilson was named the managing director of the Church History Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 2010. He oversees all department operations, including the Church History Library, the Church History Museum, and the Granite Mountain Records Vault. He serves on the editorial boards of the Joseph Smith Papers Project and Deseret Book Company.

# Sidney Rigdon's Plea to the Saints

## Transcription of Thomas Bullock's Shorthand Notes from the August 8, 1844, Morning Meeting

*Transcribed and Introduced by  
LaJean Purcell Carruth and Robin Scott Jensen*

At meetings held on August 8, 1844, Sidney Rigdon and Brigham Young each asserted their claims to succeed Joseph Smith as leader of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. These meetings proved a central event in the 1844 succession crisis following the deaths of Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum. Of the many sources consulted to reconstruct the events of August 8, 1844, one crucial source has heretofore been unavailable to scholars. Thomas Bullock, the clerk for the Church Historian's Office, recorded notes of the morning meeting, including speeches by Rigdon and Young, in Taylor shorthand.<sup>1</sup> Until recently, Bullock's notes have not been deciphered and transcribed. What follows is the transcription of this source and an introduction to establish the context.<sup>2</sup> A detailed description of the transcription process immediately precedes the transcription.

---

1. Thomas Bullock's shorthand notes of the morning meeting are archived in the Historian's Office General Church Minutes, CR 100 318, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as CHL). The document is also available in *Selected Collections from the Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2 vols. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), vol. 1, DVD 18.

2. While labeled "Minutes" on the manuscript itself, the source is more properly a report of Rigdon's oral sermon.

## Events in Nauvoo after the Martyrdom

Following the death of Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum on June 27, 1844, word quickly spread through national and Church networks. Many missionaries sent throughout the United States to campaign for Joseph Smith's presidential bid learned of their leader's fate through the unsympathetic voice of newspapers. Most prominent among these missionaries were most members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles as well as the longest-standing member of the First Presidency, Sidney Rigdon. Only two of the members of the Twelve—Willard Richards and John Taylor—had remained in Nauvoo, and both were with the Smith brothers in Carthage Jail on that fateful day in June. About a month and a half before his death, Joseph Smith instructed Rigdon to move to Pennsylvania, in part to act as his running mate for the presidency. Upon hearing of his associate's death, Rigdon rushed back to Nauvoo, arriving on August 3, 1844, to comfort a bereaved people. Though Rigdon had been a trusted confidant and counselor to Smith for much of the Church's existence, the two had recently grown distant.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, the rocky relationship that had at times existed between Smith and the Quorum of the Twelve through much of the later part of the 1830s had smoothed over, and the quorum, with Brigham Young as its head, enjoyed a close association with Smith in the years before his death.<sup>4</sup>

---

3. Joseph Smith had called Sidney Rigdon's loyalty into question at an October 1843 conference. Smith expressed dissatisfaction with Rigdon's management of the post office, collusion with former First Presidency member and anti-Mormon John C. Bennett and several key Missourians, and "endeavoring to defraud the innocent." Smith also criticized Rigdon's role as counselor, "not having received any material benefit from his labors or counsels since their escape from Missouri" in 1839. Rigdon and others defended his character and offered evidence to his faithfulness, causing Smith to express an "entire willingness to have elder Sidney Rigdon retain his station, provided he would magnify his office, and walk and conduct himself in all honesty, righteousness, and integrity." "Minutes of a Special Conference," *Times and Seasons* 4 (September 15, 1843 [*sic*; actually published October 14, 1843]): 330.

4. The most detailed overview of this period and of Rigdon's involvement is Ronald W. Walker, "Six Days in August: Brigham Young and the Succession Crisis of 1844," in *A Firm Foundation: Church Organization and Administration*, ed. David J. Whittaker and Arnold K. Garr (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 2011): 161–96. For a history of the relationship between Joseph Smith and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, see Ronald K. Esplin, "The Emergence of Brigham Young and the Twelve to

Events immediately following Joseph Smith's death—often termed the succession crisis—are often simplified by historians who focus solely on the actions or motivations of the competitors who wished to fill Smith's role. The vacuum of leadership in the summer of 1844 created a complicated power setting in Nauvoo. For instance, Emma Smith, Joseph's widow, sought the help of William Clayton to manage outstanding financial considerations pressing upon Smith's personal finances. Clayton complained in his diary of the several individuals who attempted to place themselves as trustee-in-trust over the Church.<sup>5</sup> Some individuals looked to Samuel Smith, one of the two last surviving brothers of the Smith family, to step into some leadership function.<sup>6</sup> Samuel, however, died on July 30, 1844. William Marks, stake president of Nauvoo, also sought to understand what would become of the leadership structure of the Church and sympathized with Emma Smith and Rigdon.<sup>7</sup>

When Rigdon returned to Nauvoo on August 3, he found many looking to him for counsel, comfort, and direction. Rigdon's immediate actions in Nauvoo signaled his apparent desire to quickly fill the leadership void. His actions also spoke to the necessity of not alienating himself from influential individuals or groups, including the Quorum of the Twelve. The day after his arrival in Nauvoo, he preached a Sabbath sermon to the Saints, still mourning the loss of their fallen prophet and patriarch. Perhaps anticipating the Church's transition to new leadership, Rigdon preached his sermon using the scripture "my ways are not as your ways."<sup>8</sup> He related to the Saints "a vision which the Lord had shown him concerning the situation of the Church and said there

---

Mormon Leadership, 1830–1841" (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1981; Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 2006).

5. See the several journal entries from William Clayton, Journal, mid-July 1844, as published in George D. Smith, ed. *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 139. See also James B. Allen, *No Toil nor Labor Fear: The Story of William Clayton* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), 157–59. For more on the financial concern of Emma, see Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith, Prophet's Wife, "Elect Lady," Polygamy's Foe* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), 200–202.

6. Clayton, Journal, July 12, 1844, as quoted in Smith, *Intimate Chronicle*, 138.

7. See Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, a People of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 2002).

8. The text comes from Isaiah 55:8: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord."

must be a Guardian appointed to build the Church up to Joseph as he has begun it.”<sup>9</sup> That evening, stake president William Marks appointed a meeting later that week where Rigdon would propose his concept of the future leadership of the Church, including a vote on Rigdon’s guardianship proposal.<sup>10</sup> Some, including Willard Richards, one of the Apostles, wondered whether the meeting should not wait for “the Elders” to return, including Brigham Young and the Twelve, who were en route to Nauvoo.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, Rigdon, who “was some distance from his family & wanted to know if this people had any thing for him to do,” acted quickly.<sup>12</sup> He originally wished the meeting to be scheduled for Tuesday, August 6, but even sympathetic Marks must have felt the haste unwarranted and postponed the meeting until Thursday, August 8.<sup>13</sup> William Phelps asked Rigdon “why he [Rigdon] was so much disposed to hurry matters.”<sup>14</sup>

The following day, Monday, August 5, 1844, a council met at John Taylor’s home. This Monday morning meeting provided the first chance for four members of the Quorum of the Twelve then in Nauvoo—Parley P. Pratt, who had arrived in Nauvoo on July 10; George A. Smith, who had arrived in the city on July 28; Willard Richards; and John Taylor—to discuss matters, including the Thursday meeting, with Rigdon.<sup>15</sup> According to Richards, Rigdon softened his plans and “said he [Rigdon] did not expect the people to choose a guardian on Thursday—but have a prayer meeting—but he wanted to se[e] the brethren have a season of prayer, & interchange of thought— & feeling &c.—and warm up Each others hearts.”<sup>16</sup> Whether Rigdon had truly backed away from his previously stated purpose for the meeting is unknown, but he recognized the need to approach the matter with the finesse necessary to maintain his position within the Church.

Those impatient for the remainder of the Twelve’s arrival had to wait only a little longer. When news of the martyrdom reached members of the Quorum of the Twelve who had been preaching in the eastern

---

9. Clayton, Journal, August 4, 1844, as quoted in Smith, *Intimate Chronicle*, 140.

10. Clayton, Journal, August 4, 1844, as quoted in Smith, *Intimate Chronicle*, 140; Willard Richards, Diary, August 4, 1844, CHL.

11. Richards, Diary, August 4, 1844.

12. Richards, Diary, August 4, 1844.

13. Richards, Diary, August 4, 1844.

14. Clayton, Journal, August 6, 1844, as quoted in Smith, *Intimate Chronicle*, 140.

15. Richards, Diary, July 10, July 28, August 5, 1844.

16. Richards, Diary, August 5, 1844.

cities of New England and New York, quorum president Brigham Young assembled quorum members who were in close proximity and left for Nauvoo. At 8 o'clock in the evening on Tuesday, August 6, Young, Heber C. Kimball, Orson Pratt, Lyman Wight, and Wilford Woodruff arrived in Nauvoo. Meetings the next day occupied much of the leaders' attention as Rigdon made his case to various Church leaders, including the Apostles, in Nauvoo the day before he preached his sermon. A council convened at the Seventies Hall at 4 o'clock in the afternoon of August 7, consisting of the Quorum of the Twelve, the Nauvoo high council, the Nauvoo stake president, and Rigdon. Rigdon spoke of a continuation of the vision he and Joseph Smith had received over a decade earlier.<sup>17</sup> The vision showed him that "this Church must be built up to Joseph and that all the blessings we receive must come through Joseph."<sup>18</sup> Willard Richards reported Rigdon saying that "Joseph sustains the same relation to this kingdom as he had ever done.—no man could be the successor of Joseph. [The] Kingdom [is] to be built up to Jesus Christ through Joseph."<sup>19</sup> Rigdon felt that "every Quorum should stand as they had stood"<sup>20</sup> and believed that "the people could please themselves whether they accepted him or not."<sup>21</sup> Young's rejoinder echoed that language. Young told the assembly that "he did not care who lead the Church if God said so . . . but he must know that God said so."<sup>22</sup> Young argued that they "must have the voice of the church in conference."<sup>23</sup> He called for such a conference on Tuesday the 13th, which allowed for enough time to notify some of the closer branches.

The following day, August 8, the Saints gathered in the Nauvoo grove at the appointed time for the prayer meeting. Whereas the discussion points of the previous day's meeting were well documented in several diaries, information about the morning meeting was not. For years, historians have looked to the sparse diary entries to reconstruct that

---

17. "Not an open vision, but rather a continuation of the one mentioned in the Book of Covenants." Clayton, Journal, August 7, 1844, as quoted in Smith, *Intimate Chronicle*, 141. On February 16, 1832, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon recorded a vision they jointly shared of the afterlife. This document was later canonized as section 76 of the Church's Doctrine and Covenants.

18. Clayton, Journal, August 7, 1844, as quoted in Smith, *Intimate Chronicle*, 141.

19. Richards, Diary, August 7, 1844.

20. Richards, Diary, August 7, 1844.

21. Clayton, Journal, August 7, 1844, as quoted in Smith, *Intimate Chronicle*, 141.

22. Clayton, Journal, August 7, 1844, as quoted in Smith, *Intimate Chronicle*, 141.

23. Richards, Diary, August 7, 1844.

morning's meeting, along with reminiscences of Church members who later supported the Twelve. Due to the dearth of records, some later-reconstructed accounts confused the number of meetings and when they were held. Willard Richards, one of the Apostles, recorded a short entry for the morning of August 8, 1844: "Sidney Rigdon Preached in the A.M." Fellow quorum member Wilford Woodruff recorded that day that "their [*sic*] was a meeting appointed at the grove for the Church to come together for prayer But in consequence of some excitement among the People and a dispositions by some spirits to try to divide the Church, it was thought best to attend to the business of the Church in the afternoon that was to be attended to on Tuesday."<sup>24</sup> Clayton's normally detailed journal failed to even mention the morning sermon by Rigdon. As early as a year later, the morning meeting and the afternoon meeting became conflated in accounts of the day's events.<sup>25</sup>

Rigdon's actions that day, however, as well as his later actions, influenced the way participants remembered the events. The morning meeting set up the more famous afternoon meeting where Young and other members of the Twelve presented their own view of future leadership within the Church. The vast majority of the Church members in attendance voted to accept the Quorum of the Twelve as leaders of the Church. Rigdon did not ask that his name be submitted for vote and committed himself to fully support the decision of the Church by following the Twelve.<sup>26</sup> The Church meeting voted to support Rigdon as counselor to the Twelve. Less than a month later, however, Rigdon was disfellowshipped from the Church by the Twelve for actions they considered rebellious and disharmonious to the order of the Church.<sup>27</sup> Due in part

---

24. Wilford Woodruff, Journal, August 8, 1844, CHL.

25. Orson Hyde, for instance, conflated Rigdon's effort to win over the Saints (in the morning) with Brigham Young's "laying open the true principles on which the church was to act" and the vote of support for the Twelve by the Church (in the afternoon). See Orson Hyde, *Speech of Elder Orson Hyde, Delivered before the High Priest's Quorum, in Nauvoo* (Liverpool, 1845), 13–14.

26. See notes of the afternoon speeches by Brigham Young, Amasa Lyman, W. W. Phelps, and Parley P. Pratt in "Special Meeting," *Times and Seasons* 5 (September 2, 1844): 637–38.

27. The Twelve disfellowshipped Rigdon on September 1, 1844, and cut him off from the Church on September 8. See "Notice," *Times and Seasons* 5 (September 2, 1844): 639; "Trial of Elder Rigdon," *Times and Seasons* 5 (September 15, 1844), 647–55; and "Continuation of Elder Rigdon's Trial," *Times and Seasons* 5 (October 1, 1844), 660–67.

to these later activities, Rigdon became increasingly marginalized and vilified in the narrative surrounding the death of Smith and the Twelve's assumption of authority over the Church. For instance, Orson Hyde observed to a gathering of high priests in Nauvoo that "Mr. Rigdon professes to be the true shepherd, and the Twelve Apostles are regarded by him as wolves. . . . The wolf will run away when he hears the shepherd's voice, just as Mr. Rigdon ran away to Pittsburgh when the voice of the Twelve proclaimed his true character."<sup>28</sup> A late-nineteenth-century published biography of Jacob Hamblin recounting the August 8 meeting stated that Brigham Young entered the meeting and took control, telling the Church, "'I will manage this voting for Elder Rigdon. He does not preside here. This child' (meaning himself) 'will manage this flock for a season.'"<sup>29</sup>

Brigham Young's own memories of the morning sermon indicate that he was actually not present at the beginning of the meeting. Reminiscing in 1865, Young made the point that he was "a good hand to keep dogs out of the flock." He continued by recalling his thought when he saw Rigdon on the wagon: "My good fellow if I don't hunt you until you are out of this flock of sheep I am mistaken."<sup>30</sup> Young's antagonism to Rigdon in his memory likely reflects the difficulty the Twelve had with Rigdon as well as Young's understanding of the resulting events. In a council meeting of the Quorum of the Twelve a little over three years after the event, Young recalled that following the death of Joseph, the Twelve were duty-bound to do what they did: "The 12 had to step forward to lead the church & I felt then as now . . . when duty prompts me I mean to do it let consequences be what they may."<sup>31</sup> On another occasion, Young, reminiscing with members of the Quorum of the Twelve in 1860, spoke of his purpose and drive at the meeting: "When I preached on the stand there [with] Sidney before me I knew [then]

---

28. Hyde, *Speech of Elder Orson Hyde*, 14.

29. James A. Little, *Jacob Hamblin: A Narrative of His Personal Experience, as a Frontiersman, Missionary to the Indians and Explorer* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1881), 20.

30. Brigham Young, Sermon, September 23, 1865, at Beaver, Utah, in Papers of George D. Watt, CHL, transcribed from George D. Watt's Pitman shorthand notes by LaJean Purcell Carruth.

31. Thomas Bullock, Minutes of meeting, December 5, 1847, CHL; abbreviated words expanded in this quote.



there [must] be a First Presidency as well as now,” meaning he knew that the First Presidency needed to be reconstituted.<sup>32</sup>

### **Value and Limitations of the Document**

As a result of the later vilification and marginalization, firsthand reports of Rigdon’s activities, thoughts, and private and public proclamations are paramount in understanding Rigdon’s actions in August 1844. The shorthand sermon featured below provides the critical primary source of Rigdon’s effort to assume leadership and the authority under which he acted. The report also shows the way he presented himself to the Church, sharing the important and eventful fourteen-year history he had with the Church. Documents such as this provide the snapshot needed to capture events at times confused by later (mis)interpretation. But the sermon below should not be seen as a straightforward or uncomplicated source. For unknown reasons (perhaps due to the weather?), Bullock had difficulty in capturing this sermon.<sup>33</sup> Deciphering this shorthand proved more problematic than his other sermon notes from July through August 1844. While all sermons in Taylor shorthand reported by Bullock are difficult to read, his notes for Rigdon’s morning sermon present a significant challenge. Due to the fragmentary nature of Bullock’s shorthand notes and the difficulty in transcribing what he did record, the transcript contains only part of what happened that morning. Still, they are the only known notes to have been taken during the meeting itself, and the best extant record of what actually occurred there.

### **Overview of the Document**

Rigdon’s sermon illustrates an attempt to balance support of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and place himself as one to hold influence over the Church. He was careful to argue that Joseph established the Church and its structure and that although their prophet was dead, the Church still had the authority the Lord bestowed upon the Church through Smith.

---

32. Minutes, April 4, 1860, Papers of George D. Watt, CHL, transcribed from George D. Watt’s Pitman shorthand notes by LaJean Purcell Carruth.

33. Those of the Church in attendance at the prayer meeting were met with inclement weather—particularly windy conditions.

The mob who killed Joseph had “no power to take away the authority.”<sup>34</sup> In fact, according to Rigdon, the Smiths maintained a semblance of their authority, since they “ever on have their priesthood and will hold it to all eternity.” Rigdon spoke of the potential of the Church, being “one grand kingdom. . . . To put an end to strifes and bloodshed and war.” Though robbed of their leader, “he conferred every power that was necessary to carry [the kingdom] on and place it precisely on the tenets that Jehovah had given him.”

Rigdon expected Joseph's influence from beyond the grave. “I view [Joseph] as sitting in heaven with . . . power to make himself known to any one.” The work Joseph undertook was incomplete, waiting for the Saints to finish the work. And the authority to do so, according to Rigdon, “is in the church.” Rigdon fully supported these authorities as they existed before Joseph's death. “I have the fullest belief . . . that every man will stand in his own place and stand in his own calling.” Speaking of the tension with non-Mormon neighbors in Hancock County, Illinois, Rigdon offered a promise that the mobs “have not the power nor the means to” destroy Nauvoo. Rigdon's promise of peace “for a season” came with his final summary of his position: “I should be a spokesman for our prophet who has been taken from us.” What is known is that Young accelerated the decision. Young instructed the gathered Saints to decide that afternoon. He did not urge them to choose who would take Joseph's place, for “he keeps it himself.” Young wished to curtail the “spirit [of] who shall be greatest in our midst.” But Young continued the unifying language preached by Rigdon: he wished “Brother Rigdon [to] come and take his seat at our right hand . . . and we can do the business in 5 minutes.”

### The Shorthand

Thomas Bullock captured Rigdon's sermon in a shorthand system published by Samuel Taylor in his 1786 book *A Universal System of Stenography, or Short-Hand Writing*.<sup>35</sup> Taylor shorthand is a phonetic shorthand: words are written according to their sounds, not according to conventional orthography. A shorthand symbol represents one or possibly two

---

34. All quotes come from the sermon below, with some of the unclear wording simplified.

35. Samuel Taylor, *An Essay Intended to Establish a Standard for an Universal System of Stenography* (London: n.p., 1786). This book has been scanned by

related consonant sounds (f and v, g and j, k and q); some sounds written by two letters in conventional English orthography have a distinct symbol (ch, sh, th, ious). Single letters are also used to represent words, prefixes, and suffixes.

In Taylor shorthand, a writer may use a dot in order to indicate the presence of a vowel, but this is optional. There is no means for identifying vowels: the dot only indicates the presence of a vowel, which at times includes *w* and *y*. This lack of vowels makes it virtually impossible at times to differentiate between two or more possible words. For example, the symbol *fr* or *vr* could represent *fear*, *for*, *every*, *fire*, *very*, *ever*, *over*, *fir*, *fur*, *fore*, *far*, *fairy*, *vary*, *ferry*, *fiery*, *furry*, *fair*, *four*, *fare*, *free*, *fry*, *fray*, *veer*, *afar*, *affair*, *afore*, or *offer*. The symbol *n* could represent *no*, *any*, *in*, *on*, *know*, *nigh*, *an*, or *new*. In some cases context offers significant clues, but often it does not, and sometimes several words are equally possible. Punctuation is implied by spaces between characters; these spaces are preserved here.

Several early Latter-day Saints, including Wilford Woodruff, Willard Richards, William Clayton, and Thomas Bullock, wrote in Taylor shorthand, though their use of it appears to have been limited largely to occasional words or phrases. The earliest Mormon sermons recorded in Taylor shorthand—or any shorthand system—are those given in Nauvoo shortly after Joseph Smith's death. The afternoon meeting of August 8 was also recorded by Bullock—in longhand rather than shorthand.<sup>36</sup>

As Taylor shorthand captured only the consonants, the editors have supplied the vowels to the transcription below. When the reading is unclear, a presumed word is in brackets with a question mark; when no word can be properly surmised, the actual shorthand sounds have been provided in brackets. The rare instance Bullock used longhand is transcribed in bold typeface. Bullock used lengthy spaces to indicate ends of

---

and is available at Google books, [http://books.google.com/books?id=7hEIAAAQAQAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=o#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=7hEIAAAQAQAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=o#v=onepage&q&f=false).

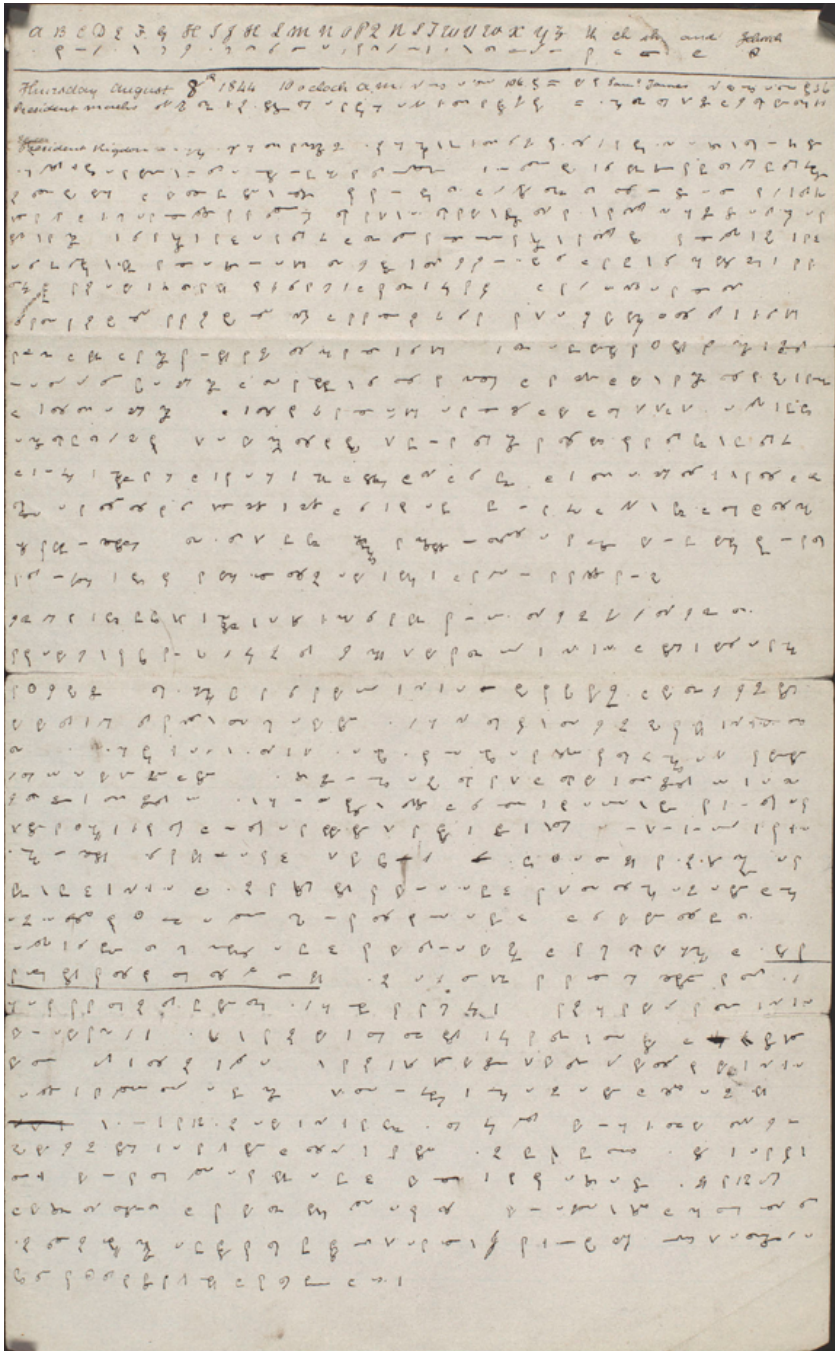
36. Thomas Bullock's notes of the afternoon meeting are archived in the Historian's Office General Church Minutes, CR 100 318, CHL; also available in *Selected Collections from the Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, vol. 1, DVD 18, and at [https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps\\_pid=IE534383&pds\\_handle=205201411173212755486036785659128](https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE534383&pds_handle=205201411173212755486036785659128). His revised version is at [https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps\\_pid=IE532802&pds\\_handle=205201411173212755486036785659128](https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE532802&pds_handle=205201411173212755486036785659128).

thoughts, and this transcription has preserved these spaces. Line breaks, which may have indicated ends of thoughts, are also preserved with a “[].”

---

LaJean Purcell Carruth, PhD, is a Church History Specialist at the LDS Church History Department with over forty years' experience transcribing Pitman shorthand, Taylor shorthand, and Deseret Alphabet documents. She published a transcript of George D. Watt's notes of an important speech, introduced by Mark Lyman Staker, "John Taylor's June 27, 1854, Account of the Martyrdom," *BYU Studies* 50, no. 3 (2011): 25–62. Her work was featured in Matthew S. McBride, "Lost Sermons," *Ensign* 43 (December 2013): 54–57.

Robin Scott Jensen is the associate managing historian and project archivist for the Joseph Smith Papers Project and coedited the first two volumes in the Revelations and Translations series (published 2009 and 2011). He specializes in document and transcription analysis. In 2005, he earned an MA degree in American history from Brigham Young University, and in 2009 he earned a second MA in library and information science with an archival concentration from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. He is now pursuing a PhD in history at the University of Utah. He completed training at the Institute for the Editing of Historical Documents in 2007. He has published several articles and edited documents, including "A Witness in England: Martin Harris and the Strangite Mission," *BYU Studies* 44, no. 3 (2005): 78–98.



Thomas Bullock's shorthand notes of the morning meeting on August 8, 1844, page 1 of 2. Courtesy Church History Library. © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

Thursday August 8th 1844 10 oclock A.M. choir sang an hymn 106 page<sup>37</sup> = prayer by Sam<sup>l</sup> James<sup>38</sup> choir again sang an hymn page 36<sup>39</sup> | President [William] Marks Elder Rigdon wants to have a platform made on the opposite side in order to make the people hear better = a stand was made for him and<sup>40</sup> he would [thrs?] wind [—?]<sup>41</sup> | [blank line]

<Elder><sup>42</sup> President Rigdon = I understand I would<sup>43</sup> not make the congregation hear I have not strength of voice to make all hear but I will do the best I can in view of what has took place | I [can] not recollect of being in the presence of so large an assembly as this under the late circumstance it has always been at all previous times that those who raised this last dispensation | have always been present through whom this plan of salvation but they is passed away and [in] our earthly meetings we shall see them no more they are at late taken | from the earth and to act in the same relation that they always stood without the fear of any with the power of position where they of the world can not harm them any late engaged in the | building of the kingdom to lay the foundation of the church in the last days and was always the same since the foundation of the world began the same relation to heaven to the church | in all its respect

---

37. The hymn on page 106 of the 1841 LDS hymnbook is “The Lord my pasture shall prepare.” Emma Smith, ed., *A Collection of Sacred Hymns, for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* [Nauvoo, Ill., 1841], 106–7.

38. Samuel James, born in 1814, was baptized into the Church and served several months on the Kirtland high council. After Joseph Smith’s death, he followed Sidney Rigdon, where he eventually served as a member of Rigdon’s First Presidency. He moved to Ohio, where he died in 1876. “Samuel James,” on Church Historian’s Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/person/samuel-james> (accessed January 2014); *History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Lamoni, Iowa, 1904), 8.

39. The first stanza of hymn number 26, found on page 36 of the 1841 edition of the LDS hymnbook, reads: “Praise ye the Lord! ’tis good to raise / Your hearts and voices in his praise / His nature and his works invite / To make this duty our delight.” Emma Smith, *Collection of Sacred Hymns*, 36–37.

40. Symbol written as longhand C is identified at top of page as symbol for *and*. Used throughout.

41. Nonstandard shorthand character; possibly *d* vowel vowel *d*.

42. Word is above line; it appears to have been wiped out.

43. Bullock originally wrote *wl*, will, then added a *d* to change the word to *wd*, would.

of authorities the same in time as in eternity when he begins to work he [had/head/ahead?] is beyond all and the gates of hell can not prevail against it though they | may destroy bodies they have no power to take away the authority they<sup>44</sup> did all they could do and that was to destroy the body and they<sup>45</sup> are now carrying on the same work | all the men that have been slain<sup>46</sup> though they have been slain crucified<sup>47</sup> and though the enemies have done all they they ever on have their priesthood and will hold it to all eternity | the [—?]<sup>48</sup> keys and authorities and the kingdom that is built up here will continue the same to all eternity it was on this principle that Jehovah built up [the] kingdom to himself | [it] is no more nor less than one grand kingdom and when the purpose of Lord shall be consummated and the guardians and power of the kingdom shall be given to the saints | and it will make one grand kingdom and it will be done the same in eternity in the same glory and power and might for ever and ever in relation to this being | one kingdom with those who are gone above for now their kingdom will be [above/beyond?]<sup>49</sup> for this is the last kingdom that will bring about the last things of these last days | and it is designed to establish the end and to put an end to strifes and bloodshed and war and all things and to make one grand wall out of the wall and the | watchmen on the walls will be all from generation to generation and all to be in peace this is the design and order of things and must and will continue | until that purpose is accomplished when I look over these things<sup>50</sup> notwithstanding the contemplation is melancholy in the extreme there is this prospect [before?] us that what | the Lord is determined to bring about the present enemy will have no power to prevent it and the reason is that the revelation that is given [remainder of line blank] | he<sup>51</sup> was raised up to bring this thing forth to establish it in full [and] to confer all the authorities that is necessary whether he him[self] [is] here or whether he goes away [remainder of line blank] | they [have/had?] [any?] power could [of/it/have?] that thing that is [—/tn?] [it/t/d/r?] [tst/dst?] have [late/let/lt/ld?] he conferred

---

44. Meaning enemies to Joseph Smith.

45. Meaning Joseph and Hyrum Smith.

46. A short space follows *slain*; this space may or may not be intentional.

47. Written *krsfd*.

48. Word appears to be crossed out.

49. Word written over.

50. Possible space after *things*.

51. This appears to imply Joseph Smith.

every power that was necessary to carry it on and placed it precisely on the [stands/tenets?]<sup>52</sup> | that Jehovah had given him what I understand then [is] that all that power necessary to carry it on has been put upon their heads and power where e'er he has placed | power there let it rest let that quorum<sup>53</sup> of men act in their place I do not care what body of men he has given that authority to carry it on among | [men/one?] I one I can't point out any [—/r?]<sup>54</sup> if I were to try I know nothing I had seen nothing in the revelations but would [leave?] standing in order the principles | are made known in their force [—?]<sup>55</sup> and place I view him as sitting in heaven with the [fr/vr?] and with power to make himself known to any one | he may choose to make himself known I do not see any particle of alteration and all seems to be in unison of opinions that it is left in that | very place that Jehovah intended it to be left and is left in the proper place for the people to push it forward on as far as it is necessary to put it on | a [restoration?]<sup>56</sup> is complete all the authority is in the church every other thing is ready [so?]<sup>57</sup> I thank Jehovah in my heart that I have full countenance in the | authorities of this church to carry it on and I have the fullest belief that there is [in any/any in?] this church that every man will stand in his own place and stand | in his own calling<sup>58</sup> before Jehovah [such?] one remains [action?]<sup>59</sup> is that will be seen in this church and all other powers will pass away [remainder of line blank] | in relation to all business we act conspicuously in this church that their life is in their hands and they act with their understanding and I believe that | the next bullet that will be shot will reach my heart<sup>60</sup> I have<sup>61</sup> you are my friends that the enemy could accomplish the work I do | not know but that they might have laid this place waste I do not suppose that they could destroy it they have not the power nor the means to carry it on | there is no power that

---

52. Initial *s* may be a stray ink mark.

53. While this could imply the Quorum of the Twelve, Rigdon may have other quorums in mind.

54. Short symbol; does not appear to be a word. Likely an implied deletion.

55. Word written over; illegible.

56. Written *stntn/stntion/strtion*.

57. *S* written over illegible shorthand.

58. *K* written over wiped out *l*.

59. Written *ktn* or *ktion*.

60. Underlined in original.

61. Possible space after *have*.



can do it [I?] [fear/for?]<sup>62</sup> if they have power to shed much blood to [dst/destroy?] the lives of many people and [ink blot] drive<sup>63</sup> them from | their homes yet it will have to roll on if they have to flee from their homes for their lives [y/yet?] there will be power to carry it<sup>64</sup> on<sup>65</sup> | in relation to the [rmns?] manner in this kingdom every man is disposed to stand in his own place and calling in his authority | [three words crossed out; illegible] if I say to the 12 I have no<sup>66</sup> power to carry out their thinkings I would<sup>67</sup> decide result there is not too much power whenever he<sup>68</sup> has | given power he has placed it in the right place and will carry out the plan I have this faith this morning I believe it in the [pd?] of | my [head?] [power/there?] is that must remain in the authorities in this church there seems to be but one view in them I heard the 12 yesterday | and their views were [shtl/mstl/mostly] [m?]<sup>69</sup> with<sup>70</sup> and that there was perfect harmony in that call there is no harmony of feeling and can't exist anywhere else | I have [lm/William?] have unbounded confidence in this people that what this people ask for in the name of J[esus] that it has been granted asking for any wisdom or any | thing else that Jehovah would give them the right spirit and they would possess and enjoy it [remainder of line blank; end of page]

my [mouth?] is not tickling but I may become weak and may not able to make much effort so that the church may understand clearly

---

62. *Fr* written over illegible shorthand, or vice versa.

63. *Drv* written over *dv*.

64. Meaning church, kingdom, work, etc.

65. Tensions between Mormons and their non-Mormon neighbors, which had led to the violent death of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, would continue after their death, resulting in the expulsion of the Mormons from Nauvoo in 1846. Sidney Rigdon was speaking to a concern still felt by inhabitants of Nauvoo. The editors of the *Times and Seasons* spoke to these same concerns when they published several letters and reports of meetings speaking to the desire Mormons had for peace. "To the People of the State of Illinois," *Times and Seasons* 5 (July 1, 1844): 564-67.

66. Written *n*; no vowels are given. Word could also be read *any*.

67. Word could possibly be read *might*. First character could be *m* or *w*; second character is clearly *d*.

68. Referring to Joseph Smith or God?

69. Character likely indicates a strong terminal vowel on previous word; it could also be a small *m* inserted between words on either side; as such, it could be read *me*, *my*, or *many*, or could be the suffix *-ment*.

70. [*M?*] *with* could also be read *my way*.

what I | understand in this matter      the grand object in that address  
 and I have [—?] summed it up in a few words      but I have not much  
 [strength?] to tell | oh it is my faith and my belief about it that there is no  
 power to compel      I do believe that this church shall exist here that the  
 [—?]<sup>71</sup> to | plot will cease      there may be some loom in the outskirts  
 but they will not have power to come in and destroy here      I believe  
 it any way | I say it for the comforting of the saints      I do<sup>72</sup> it without  
 fear      that they<sup>73</sup> will have rest for a season any way<sup>74</sup> so that they  
 may enjoy | peace      I say it's my faith      all that I have said      I do  
 believe that we can come and go in [quiet?] at least for a season and that  
 the Lord | will grant us that peace for a season      I [do] not believe that  
 Satan has power to [them?] in his power [—?]      I believe that there is  
 too much power for any | such course      I do believe that Satan can't  
 do it      there is another meeting for [ngt/next?] Tuesday and I say for  
 [my?] satisfaction and being far from my | family<sup>75</sup>      the thing that I  
 am going to say is      I present it as an individual where I might act in  
 my calling of my own will I should be | a spokesman for our prophet<sup>76</sup>  
 who has been taken from us      I present to assembly for myself      I  
 understand the policy to be this      this [house?] is | bound to establish  
 for forever and thing that has been established in their full extent of their  
 ministry and power      that this is the [purest?]<sup>77</sup> way of | [doing?]<sup>78</sup> it  
 in the same way as it was established      and to sustain it in the same  
 way as it was begun      I do not seek any | action upon it<sup>79</sup>      but I  
 offer it for my own satisfaction [remainder of line blank]

---

71. Written *tsn/fsn/vsn/trn/frn*.

72. *D* written over wiped-out *f* or *v*; the difference is the direction of the line.

73. Meaning the Saints.

74. Written over illegible shorthand symbol, which may be wiped out.

75. Orson Hyde recalled a year later, "Mr. Marks observed, that Mr. Rigdon wished the meeting called on Tuesday, to attend to the choosing of a guardian, as his domestic or family concerns were left in such a condition as to require his immediate return." Hyde, *Speech of Elder Orson Hyde*, 13.

76. Written *pr*.

77. Written *prs*.

78. Word written over illegible shorthand; another possible reading is *offer*.

79. Meaning that Rigdon is not calling for a vote on this motion but simply presenting it to the people.

Pres Young<sup>80</sup> If I can make the people hear I want their attention a few moments be perfectly still [—?]<sup>81</sup> you can't hear [remainder of line blank] | in the first place I have not asked any man or woman for their following I feel much better than a shiprat I can refrain from | weeping I have not I rise to set to this congregation that there [is] a spirit of being in a hurry to transact business here [where?] are any | laboring under a mistake I am sorry [—?]<sup>82</sup> that the [LLS/LDS?] should be in a hurry and as there has been a meeting called for this day to [choose?] | for themselves an agent not knowing what has been [—?] we have [—?] a meeting for next T[uesday] I wanted to sit and weep 30 days before [the/a?] priesthood do business | but there is a spirit who shall be greatest in our midst and it will be foiled by that Jehovah and all things will be made right [remainder of line blank] | we are surrounded by enemies come [tkr?] this afternoon at 2 and there will [be] no meeting on T[uesday]. It is not the feelings of my | brethren<sup>83</sup> in the name of the people<sup>84</sup> I say we will have a meeting [—?]<sup>85</sup> 2 a show of hands<sup>86</sup> my private feelings | must always bend for public good the [kmstrts/kmdrds] [must?] be in that [ltr/letter/later] for the general good of all and in regard to the [question?] | with poor J[oseph] S[mith] has been in a hurry I know now for myself [—?]<sup>87</sup> and I wish I would hear from every E[lder] H[igh] P[riest]<sup>88</sup> and all [—?]<sup>89</sup> I want to know where | every brother<sup>90</sup> is sister whether they will submit to the organization it is [illegible] a plan the [question?] is asked who will take J[oseph's] place | he keeps it himself let every man stand in his own place and all will be peace

---

80. This transcription improves the earlier transcription, also by LaJean Purcell Carruth, in summer 1997, of this same excerpted sermon of Brigham Young, published in John W. Welch, ed., *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 478–80.

81. Unidentified vowel; possible intent is *or*.

82. Unidentified vowel; could possibly be the terminal *y* on *sorry*.

83. Meaning the Twelve do not wish to meet so soon, but, as explained, Young will acquiesce to the will of the people.

84. Meaning by order or desire of the people, a meeting will be held.

85. Unidentified vowel; possibly *a*, representing @, *at*.

86. Young possibly asked for a vote from the people.

87. Unidentified vowel.

88. Perhaps there is a period after the E.

89. Unidentified vowel.

90. Written *br*.

and harmony = gather together all men | and there we can transact  
 business right and when we can get all things right we can tell  
 you all about it I want to know what | is in them I will [now?]  
 want every man in his [trntl/trntion?] awake up at his post and all things  
 will be right [remainder of line blank] | I will say to our brethren the  
 H[igh]C[ouncil] take their seats by themselves PM<sup>91</sup> take his  
 seat here in this seat it will be proper | and right for every man be  
 in his place Br[other] R[igdon] come and take his seat at our right  
 hand then other H[igh] C[ouncil] **then the L.B.**<sup>92</sup> | the other persons  
 in their place this will be the right way [—?]<sup>93</sup> resolves  
 and we can do the business in 5 minutes and then [—?]<sup>94</sup> | [you?] as  
 well as we are we are not going to act against [each?] other and every  
 man and woman will say **Amen** so must it be [end of document]

[Notation on side of paper by Bullock:] **August 8. 1844**  
**Minutes of meeting a.m.**

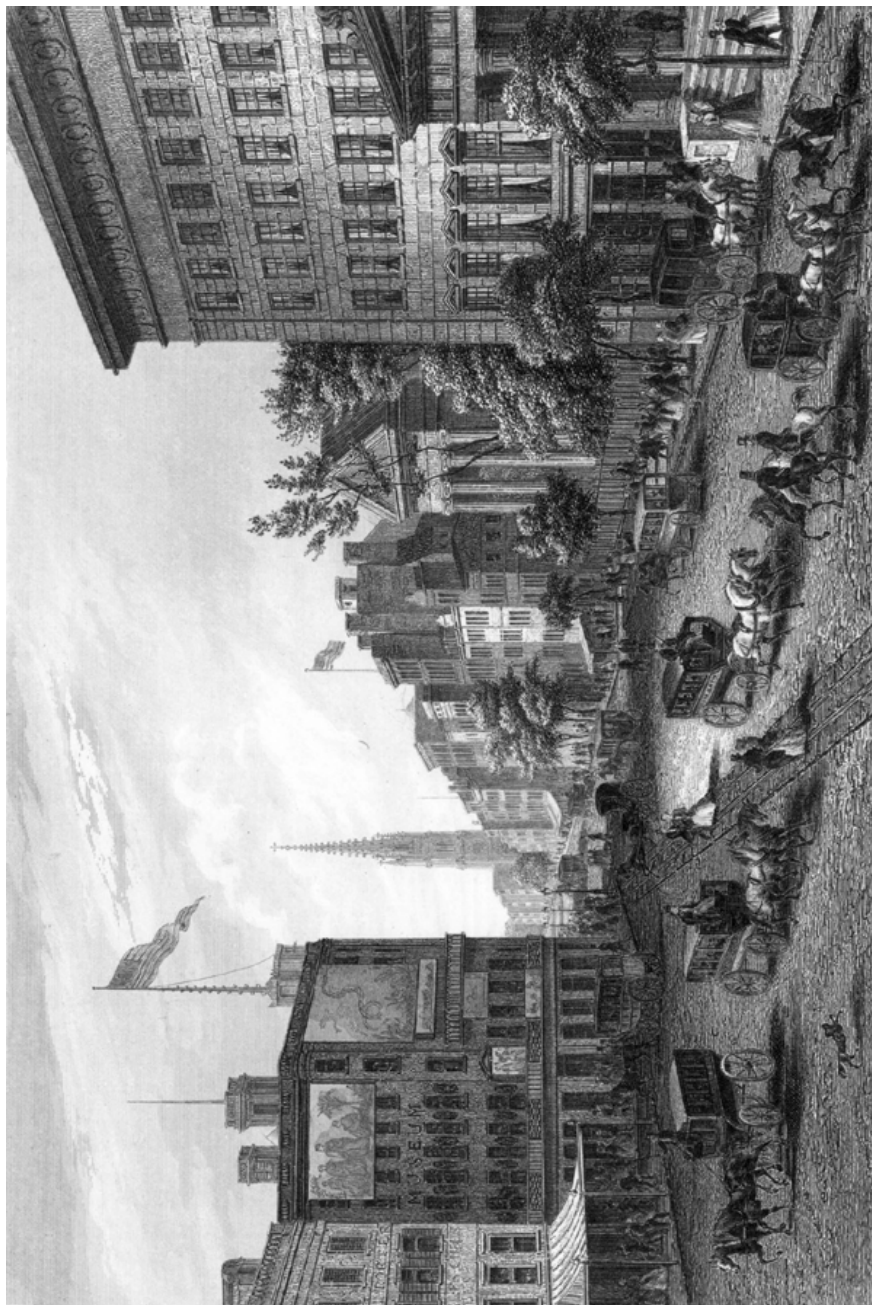
---

91. Apparently President Marks.

92. Possibly *lower brethren*.

93. Words are on the fold of the page; worn and illegible.

94. Words are on the fold of the page; worn and illegible.



“Broadway,” fine steel engraving by Ahrens for Bibliographische Institut in Hildburghausen, ca. 1845. *The Prophet’s* office at No. 7 Spruce Street was a short distance from Broadway. Courtesy Philographikon—Galerie Rauhut.

## *The Prophet*

### The Latter-day Saint Experience in the East, 1844–1845

*Susan Easton Black*

*The Prophet* is the key to understanding the Latter-day Saint experience in the eastern United States from 1844 to 1845. Although only one volume of newsprint, the newspaper contains fifty-two issues, spanning four pages in length, with each page divided into five columns. This translates into approximately twenty-five hundred single-spaced pages on 8½" x 11" paper. The masthead of the first weekly issue<sup>1</sup> on Saturday, May 18, 1844, proudly proclaimed, "We Contend for the Truth." From the eighth issue on Saturday, July 6, 1844, to the final issue on Saturday, May 24, 1845, the proclamation was revised to include "Devoted to the Dissemination of Truth, Moral, Religious, Political, and Scientific."<sup>2</sup> *The Best of The Prophet* and the accompanying searchable DVD-ROM of all fifty-two issues are filled with news of Mormonism and the spread of the Latter-day Saint faith in New York, Pennsylvania, and other eastern states in the mid-1840s. Local news of interest to Latter-day Saint historians is presented against a backdrop of historical events, such as the United States presidential election of 1844, the martyrdom of Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum, and the ongoing wrestle between Sidney Rigdon and Latter-day Saint leadership as they vied for converts in the East.

Editors of *The Prophet* printed an unrelenting defense of Mormonism to counteract exaggerated reports and slanderous claims stemming from Hancock County, Illinois, and printed in eastern newspapers. Editors George T. Leach, William Smith, Samuel Brannan, and Parley P. Pratt confronted politicians, newspaper columnists, and even the governor of Illinois on statements that misrepresented Mormon faith and vilified discipleship. In contrast, they wrote in glowing terms of Joseph

Smith and thousands of Mormons gathered on the banks of the Mississippi in the Zion-like society of Nauvoo. They wrote words of encouragement to fellow believers in the East who were planning to migrate to the Illinois capital of Mormonism.

### Editors of *The Prophet*

**George T. Leach and William Smith.** William Smith<sup>3</sup> had an interest in the print business that can be traced to a proposed weekly newspaper titled the *Nauvoo Ensign and Zarahemla Standard*. Although the *Ensign and Standard* never became newsprint due to the untimely death in August 1841 of Smith's brother Don Carlos, proposed editor of the publication, the decision to halt the paper before it commenced was fraught with complications. The largest issue was what to do about subscribers who had prepaid for copies of the *Ensign and Zarahemla*. The strong solicitation of subscribers or friends, as William Smith called them, "induced [him] to publish" a new paper in Nauvoo.<sup>4</sup> *The Wasp*, first printed on April 16, 1842, was begun to appease disgruntled subscribers of the *Ensign and Zarahemla*.

From the first issue to the last, the masthead of *The Wasp* proudly displayed the saying of William Cullen Bryant (1794–1878), editor of the *New York Evening Post*, "Truth Crushed to Earth Will Rise Again." Smith envisioned the *Wasp* as a journal that published news of local and general interest. He did not see the *Wasp* as a vehicle for disseminating truths on religious matters, contending that such matters were the domain of the *Times and Seasons*, the official Latter-day Saint newspaper in Nauvoo.<sup>5</sup> As editor in chief, Smith saw his role as directing the editorial staff to write with a "spirit of boldness and determination that shall become our station and be worthy of our cause" and to report "local and general news of the day."<sup>6</sup> In December 1842, Smith resigned as editor in chief to serve in the Illinois state legislature, a position he had been elected to on the Democratic ticket.<sup>7</sup> John Taylor succeeded Smith as editor in chief for issues thirty-two through fifty-two (December 10, 1842, to April 26, 1843).

William Smith's next foray in newsprint was *The Prophet*, a newspaper that had been first published in May 1844 under the direction of Elder George T. Leach, president of the Board of Controls of the Society for the Diffusion of Truth in New York City.<sup>8</sup> In the first issue of *The Prophet*, Leach informed readers that the newspaper would advocate "the faith of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints [and] . . . be devoted to Agriculture, Commerce and Manufactures, as well as to the

Foreign and Domestic News of the Day.” Leach promised readers that *The Prophet* would also defend the Constitution of the United States and not neglect “Arts and Sciences—Sketches, Narratives, Biographies, Moral Essays, and Poems.”<sup>9</sup>

In the very month that *The Prophet* made its inauspicious appearance in New York City, William Smith wrote to Leach on June 3, 1844, “I mentioned to them [Church leaders in Nauvoo] concerning your publishing a paper in New York, and the Prophet bid it God speed: the council also sanctioned it by a loud and general vote, so ‘go ahead’ and do the best you can—which I have no doubt you will do—and the rest I will tell you when I get there. Remember what I said in conference:—Hang out the banner for Gen. Joseph Smith, and let the world know that we are not afraid to advocate his claims to the Presidential Chair.” Upon reading Smith’s letter, Leach assumed that *The Prophet* was considered by Church leaders an official Latter-day Saint newspaper and on equal footing with the *Times and Seasons*.<sup>10</sup>

Convinced that his assumption was correct, Leach and the Board of Controls rented office space on the second floor of No. 7 Spruce Street in New York City. Leach sent notice to subscribers and merchants that all business letters, news, and communications were to be addressed to *The Prophet* at the Spruce Street address.<sup>11</sup> As to the cost of a single copy of *The Prophet*, Leach and the Board of Controls set the rate at three cents. For a year’s subscription, the rate was one dollar per annum, to be paid in advance. It was anticipated that sales of newsprint would cover expenses, such as renting space on Spruce Street, paper and ink, and staff needed to run the printing press.

What Leach and the Board of Controls did not fathom was that Church leaders in Nauvoo were planning to remove Leach from his “hands-on” association with *The Prophet*. With John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff engaged in publishing the *Times and Seasons*, Church leaders believed that a man equal to their apostolic status was needed to fill the editorship of *The Prophet*. Since William Smith was already serving a mission in the East, having been called on April 19, 1843, the choice seemed obvious. Church leaders met with Smith in May 1844 to ascertain his interest in being named editor in chief of *The Prophet*.<sup>12</sup> With the approbation of his brother Joseph and fellow members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Smith agreed to take the helm of *The Prophet* and assume leadership of the Board of Controls.

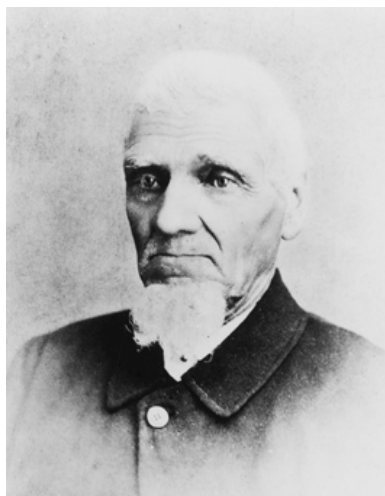
Smith left Nauvoo on May 12, 1844, for the eastern states. Three days later, the *Nauvoo Neighbor* printed, “Elder Smith (late representative)



wishes to say to the friends and voters of Hancock county, that in consequence of the sickness of his family, now in the hands of a doctor in the city of Philadelphia, he relinquishes the idea of offering himself as a candidate for a seat in the next Legislature of Illinois.”<sup>13</sup> When Smith reached New York City, he summarily told Leach to step down as editor of *The Prophet* and president of the Board of Controls. Leach relinquished his role with the newspaper and the board. He then hurried to Nauvoo, hoping to understand the motives behind his dismissal.

Curiously, Leach was never mentioned directly as editor in *The Prophet* before a notice buried on page two of the June 29, 1844, issue announced his resignation: “Elder G. T. Leach has resigned the editorship of the *Prophet*. Any communications for him to be addressed to 187 Twentieth street.” Notice was then given that “Elder Wm. Smith, of the ‘Quorum of the Twelve’ having accepted of the Editorship of the *Prophet* all letters or communications appertaining to the business of said paper must be addressed to him (post paid).”<sup>14</sup>

Beginning with issue eight of *The Prophet*, Smith is listed in the newspaper as editor in chief. Under his editorship, the purpose of *The Prophet* was to promote “the cause of truth” and to advance “the kingdom of God upon the earth; . . . to be the comfort of the Saints in the East, and to bear an occasional Olive Branch to the far-distant West.”<sup>15</sup> During his tenure with the newspaper, Smith visited LDS branches in the East and reported in *The Prophet*, “Boston contains a noble, and a beautiful branch of the church” and the Saints in New Bedford are “strong in the faith of the new and everlasting covenant; they contributed liberally for the temple and other purposes.”<sup>16</sup> He rejoiced that the Saints in Brooklyn were “getting along so well.”<sup>17</sup> As part of his visits to LDS branches, Smith solicited subscribers for *The Prophet*. He wrote from Bordertown, New Jersey, “*The Prophet* is still gaining ground in these parts, and is considered a useful paper among the Saints. I can say for my part, I am very much pleased with it.”<sup>18</sup>



William Smith, photograph. Courtesy Church History Library.

In the meantime, the editorial staff extended an urgent invitation to W. Waterman Phelps<sup>19</sup> of Nauvoo to accept the post of editor and “come on immediately” to take the place of Smith, who seemed content to be gone for long periods from the Spruce Street office.<sup>20</sup> Phelps ignored their invitation and remained in Nauvoo, knowing that Smith had been appointed editor in chief of *The Prophet* by Church leaders. Smith learned of the invitation extended to Phelps but spent little time smarting, for more pressing matters awaited him. News of the assassination of his brothers in Carthage led Smith to abruptly leave the East to console the grieving widows and his mother, Lucy Mack Smith, in Nauvoo.

When Smith returned to New York City in August 1844, he appeared resigned to remain in the East until a September 28, 1844, letter from Brigham Young led him to reevaluate his importance in the Church: “As it regards a Patriarch for the whole Church, there has not been any appointed yet in the place of brother Hyrum, and I do not calculate to do any thing but what is strictly according to the mind and will of God; the right rests upon your head, there is no doubt, and all will remain as it is until we have further communications from you; but if you feel disposed . . . to have it yourself, we wish you to come to Nauvoo as soon as possible, and receive your ordination of Patriarch by the proper authorities so that you may officiate in giving the Saints their patriarchal blessings.”<sup>21</sup>

**Samuel Brannan.** By November 23, 1844, Smith had made his decision and announced in *The Prophet*, “God has seen fit in his good pleasure to place upon my head in this ‘dispensation of the fulness of times’ the office of Patriarch of the Church.”<sup>22</sup> Smith resigned as editor in chief of *The Prophet* and announced Samuel Brannan, a member of the editorial staff, as the new editor in chief. Smith assured subscribers that Brannan was “a worthy man of God, true to his trust in defense of the plan of salvation, and to whose perseverance and untiring exertion we must credit the present existence of the Prophet.”<sup>23</sup> Smith praised Brannan as “not only a man of faith but a man of works” and promised that “if the Saints rally to the support of the Prophet [under the editorship of Elder Brannan] it will yet be the means of breaking down some of the strong holds of the enemy, and become a ‘flashing torch light’ of truth and intelligence to this generation.”<sup>24</sup> Smith summarized his work as editor in chief: “[*The Prophet*] has been the means . . . for the success of our cause in the Eastern land . . . to protect the church from devouring wolves, it has stood as a faithful servant upon the watch tower of Zion, and as a flaming torch light to point the way to the tree of life—to the haven of eternal rest.” Smith assured subscribers, “I do not speak thus

for flattery, egotism or boast of its merits undeservingly. Yet with confidence I assert, that no other periodical in the same length of time has done more good for this Church than the Prophet.”<sup>25</sup>

Having concluded his service with *The Prophet*, Smith departed with his family for Nauvoo, where he gave notice that “as to my presidency over the eastern churches, I am confident that my precept and example have been unexceptionable in the eyes of all good Saints.” He counseled Latter-day Saints to “support and uphold the proper authorities of the church—when I say authorities, I mean the whole, and not a part; the *Twelve*, and not one, two, six, eight, ten, or eleven, but the whole *Twelve*;—follow me as I follow Christ.”<sup>26</sup> As for his editorial staff in the East, they printed in *The Prophet*, “We truly feel to regret the departure of Elder Smith—his straight forward course, firmness, and decision of character, (that has ever been so characteristic of his family,) has won the heart of every saint that was engaged in the warfare against apostates.” The staff summarized Smith’s service by printing, “He surely proved himself a servant of God, in reproof and rebuke, in teaching and example.”<sup>27</sup>

Under the editorial leadership of Samuel Brannan, issues 27 to 50 rolled off the press. Like Smith, Brannan published the newspaper at No. 7 Spruce Street in New York City. Unlike Smith, Brannan added a second office at 386 Washington Street in Boston, placing agent E. Turner in charge of the Boston publication.<sup>28</sup> In addition, he doubled the price of the newspaper per annum from one to two dollars and the price of a single copy from three to six cents. In so doing, Brannan assured subscribers that “those who have taken the Prophet from its commencement, will receive their numbers up to the expiration of the year without any further remittance.”<sup>29</sup>

While acting as editor in chief, Brannan also presided over the LDS branch in New York City, as authorized by William Smith. Without authorization, Brannan interviewed local Church leaders in the state of New York and visited LDS branches in Boston, Lowell, Petersboro, Salem, and New Bedford, Massachusetts. During his visits to these LDS branches and others, Brannan touted himself as the presiding authority in the eastern states and referred to his visits as “missions.” Because Brannan was often away from the Spruce Street office on mission affairs, he asked subscribers for their prayers in his behalf. After months of fulfilling unauthorized administrative duties in LDS branches throughout the eastern states, Brannan learned that “charges have been preferred against me [in Nauvoo], and the testimony has been deemed sufficient by the Presidency of the church, for my excommunication.”<sup>30</sup>

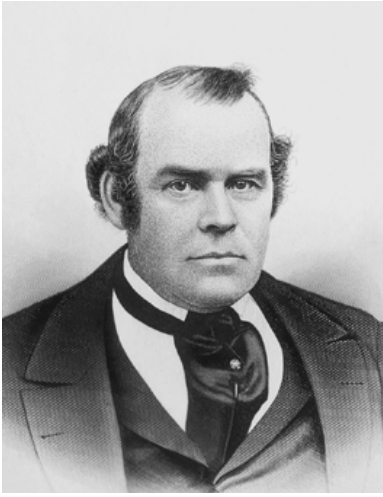
Over the signatures of Brigham Young and Willard Richards, Brannan was “disfellowshipped and cut off” for conduct that was a disgrace “in the eyes of justice and virtue.” The charges against Brannan went beyond overreaching his stewardship. As Young and Richards saw the situation, Brannan, “under the sacred garb of religion, [had] been practising the most disgraceful and diabolical conduct.”<sup>31</sup>



Samuel Brannan. Courtesy Church History Library.

A clue to Brannan’s misconduct is contained in a July 18, 1844, Orson Hyde letter: “Strange doctrines have been taught and practised in Boston and elsewhere by men claiming higher authority than the Twelve.”<sup>32</sup> One such “strange doctrine” was “spiritual wifery.” Parley P. Pratt denounced this doctrine “as foreign from the real principles of the church as the devil is from God, or as sectarianism is from christianity. . . . It is but another name for whoredom, wicked and unlawful connection, and every kind of confusion, corruption, and abomination.”<sup>33</sup> Reacting to the charge of “conduct that was a disgrace,” Brannan printed in *The Prophet*, “The blow is truly a severe one, but I feel to bear it patiently, and even more if it is required. If I have deviated from the path of rectitude—violated the commandments of God, or been the means of bringing a reproach upon his cause, I look upon myself as being bound to make restitution for the same.” He confessed, “It has ever been during my ministry in the church, my desire to do the will of my God, and heavenly Father. . . . On to-morrow I shall start for Nauvoo, there to meet my accusers face to face, and abide the decision of the council of God.”<sup>34</sup> The confession of Brannan was more of an expression than a fact, for he tarried in the East.<sup>35</sup>

**Parley P. Pratt.** Meanwhile, on November 30, 1844, Parley P. Pratt<sup>36</sup> was “appointed by the spirit of the living God through his brethren of the quorum of the Twelve to take charge and presidency of all the churches in the eastern cities.” In a letter addressed to Latter-day Saints residing in the East, Brigham Young announced Pratt’s appointment to preside over “matters in temporal and spiritual things to take charge of the printing and



Parley P. Pratt, engraving. Courtesy Church History Library.

emigrating business in the city of New York, to advise, to counsel and direct the labours of all the officers of the church, and in fine to set all things in proper order in the eastern countries pertaining to the church.”<sup>37</sup>

Although subscribers anticipated *The Prophet* would be “more interesting, being fed occasionally with valuable productions” from the pen of Parley P. Pratt, not all were willing to accept his appointment as editor in chief or the sanctions pronounced against Brannan.<sup>38</sup> When a protest was held in Newark, New Jersey, Pratt declared the protest as “uncalled for, and entirely out of order.”<sup>39</sup> To appease protestors,

however, Pratt met with Brannan to discuss his presumption of administrative duties and the issue of misconduct. After their meeting, Pratt informed Church leaders in Nauvoo that Brannan has “aimed to do right of late, and has manifested a humble and willing obedience to my advice and council. . . . He is about to repair to the west, on this and other business, and we feel confident that full satisfaction will be given, and confidence will be restored, in which case we hope he will speedily return to this place and assist us in the office [of *The Prophet*].”<sup>40</sup>

During Brannan’s absence, Pratt spent the winter of 1845 visiting LDS branches in Boston, Philadelphia, and Long Island and preaching true doctrines of the kingdom, for he “found that Elders William Smith, G. J. Adams, S. Brannan and others, had been corrupting the Saints by introducing among them all manner of false doctrine and immoral practices, by which many of them had stumbled and been seduced from virtue and truth.”<sup>41</sup> As for his editorship of *The Prophet*, Pratt wrote on January 1, 1845, “We have now three departments, duly appointed by the presidency of the church, viz., the Nauvoo office, under the management of Mr. J. Taylor, the English department, under Br. W. Woodruff, and the New York publishing department now committed to my charge. . . . The church, therefore, is hereby instructed not to patronize, purchase, or support any publication pertaining to our cause, except they emanate from one of these three offices.”<sup>42</sup>

## Subscription Woes

No matter who acted as editor in chief—George T. Leach, William Smith, Samuel Brannan, or Parley P. Pratt—each issue of *The Prophet* informed readers “of the progress of the great work of God in this last dispensation.”<sup>43</sup> Although the message was clear that the work of God was moving forward, the newspaper did not attract many Latter-day Saint subscribers. Editor Brannan wrote, “If the Saints would only resolve in their hearts before God, that the Prophet shall live, and pursue [*sic*] that course necessary to sustain it that is needful, there will be no danger of us being called to mourn for the death of the New York Prophet.”<sup>44</sup> Brannan encouraged all interested parties to “send in their names, whether they are able to remit now the price of subscription or not, and we will send them the paper—and we would request the Elders throughout the country to send us in the names of all who wish our paper.”<sup>45</sup> As subscriptions trickled in to the Spruce Street office, names of subscribers and the LDS branches they attended were printed in the paper, followed by such comments as “we would say if every branch of the church would lay hold of the cause of the Prophet, as the Waynesville branch has done, there would be no difficulty in sustaining a paper in the city of New York.”<sup>46</sup>

With the hope of increasing subscriptions, the editors requested traveling elders, canvassers, and postmasters “to act as Agents” for *The Prophet*.<sup>47</sup> Traveling elders were promised that editors would “fully reward them for their labor and toil.”<sup>48</sup> Canvassers and postmasters were assured that “a liberal arrangement will be made” for each subscription forwarded to the Spruce Street office.<sup>49</sup> Due to the solicitations of elders, canvassers, and postmasters, the editors wrote on November 9, 1844, “Our subscription list is daily increasing in numbers, which is truly encouraging [*sic*] and we still hope before the expiration of the first vol. that our income will be sufficiently large to pay our expenses in publication.”<sup>50</sup> The editorial staff not only hoped to pay publication expenses but to forego advertising, which cost “50 cts. per square of six lines for one insertion, and 25 cts. for every subsequent insertion.”<sup>51</sup> In place of advertisements, editors planned to “devote the whole of our paper to interesting subjects.”<sup>52</sup> When William D. Pratt wrote to *The Prophet* that he “expected to get us from fifty to one hundred subscribers, and Elder Brown, twice that amount, besides what Elder Appleby and others will get,” the editorial staff foresaw the day when advertisements would not appear in the second volume.<sup>53</sup> When their expectations failed to materialize, the imminent demise of *The Prophet* was all too apparent.

Other issues contributed to the death knell of *The Prophet*. Newspapers were lost in the mail, necessary paper for printing weekly editions was delayed, correspondents failed to forward news, and subscribers refused to make payments. The most grievous of these issues to the editors was backsliding subscribers. “We have many names on our list that have not paid in their subscription,” wrote the editorial staff. “We hope they will not forget us; it requires paper, ink, and labor to publish a paper. They only have to hand it to the Post Master, with their name and residence, and it reaches us without any expense on their part or ours either.”<sup>54</sup> In frustration, the staff printed on February 8, 1845, “We shall discontinue all papers that were subscribed for when the paper was first published after this number, that have not paid in their subscriptions.”<sup>55</sup> The staff reported, “We still have on our books a hundred or two of names that have not paid up their subscription. What a great help a couple of hundred dollars would be to us at this time. Brethren, do not forget us.”<sup>56</sup> A bigger frustration for the staff was knowing “the saints are at the present time numerous enough to circulate five thousand copies of the Prophet every week, if they would only clip those strings of covetousness.” Editors pled with Latter-day Saints to subscribe to “the cheapest publication ever issued in this society, and if it is now suffered to go down for the want of support, the good that it would have done, will certainly be required of every one that can pay two cents per week for to sustain it.”<sup>57</sup>

Subscriber G. B. Wallace wrote, “Me thinks I hear you say, what! is the Prophet going down? No! no! not yet for if it should go down it will be very hard to start another here in the East, and, as you are aware, it is very difficult to get a paper from the West.” Wallace suggested, “Every one can use his influence and secure one subscriber for six months or one year, and that would relieve the Prophet at once and support it hereafter—and be sure to send in the money immediately.”<sup>58</sup> Editor Brannan was more direct in his solicitation: “Wanted—Some person that feels an interest for the cause of God, in the building up of His kingdom, that has five or six hundred dollars to invest, to take an interest in the publication of the Prophet.”<sup>59</sup> Yet sustaining funds were not forthcoming. *The Prophet* operated in the red for several months until Brannan stepped forward and covered publication expenses with personal funds. On June 22, 1844, the Board of Controls for the Society for the Diffusion of Truth met on “business of importance, at the ‘Prophet’ office” to discuss ways to save *The Prophet* and Brannan from financial ruin.<sup>60</sup> The Board of Controls concluded to sell capital stock in *The Prophet* for five dollars a share, which would entitle each shareholder

to “a dividend of the profits of the concern in proportion to the amount invested.” Shareholders were promised “a matter of pecuniary benefit to those who invest in stock.”<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately, the “pecuniary benefit” was never realized.

### Joseph Smith’s Presidential Campaign and Martyrdom

*The Prophet* promoted Joseph Smith’s run for the United States presidency more than any other newspaper in the East. Until editors received word of his martyrdom, they trumpeted the virtues of “General Joseph Smith” as the most able man for the highest office in the land. In so doing, editors followed the lead of the *Nauvoo Neighbor* editorial staff, who encouraged the faithful to promote the Prophet’s presidential bid. “It becomes us, as Latter Day Saints, to be wise, prudent, and energetic, in the cause that we pursue,” wrote editors of the *Neighbor*. After all, to editors and faithful Latter-day Saints alike, Joseph was “the most competent, the best qualified, and would fill the Presidential Chair with greater dignity to the nation” than other presidential hopefuls.<sup>62</sup> Editors of *The Prophet* pledged “to use [their] utmost endeavors to ensure his election, being satisfied that he will administer the laws of his country without reference to party, sect or local prejudice.” Unabashedly, editors touted “Gen. Joseph Smith, of Nauvoo, Illinois” as “a Western man, with American principles.”<sup>63</sup>

In hopes of furthering Joseph’s candidacy, *The Prophet* presented lengthy summaries of Jeffersonian Democratic meetings held under the direction of William Smith. At the meetings held in New York City and Philadelphia, discussions centered on securing General Joseph Smith’s “election to the highest office.”<sup>64</sup> These meetings adjourned with “nine cheers for Gen. Smith and Sidney Rigdon.”<sup>65</sup> One subscriber, who attended a rousing Jeffersonian meeting, wrote to *The Prophet*, “It is now a matter of considerable doubt who stands the best chance of being elected, Joe Smith, the Mormon prophet or Martin Van Buren.”<sup>66</sup> His words and those of other supporters of General Joseph Smith led the editorial staff to conclude, “We feel confident that if the intelligence of the American people prevail over their prejudices, [General Joseph Smith] will be elected by a large majority.”<sup>67</sup>

But there was one hurdle to his election that seemed impossible for editors to set aside—rumors about Joseph Smith and Mormonism that appeared in New York papers under the captions “Mormon Troubles,” “The Mormon War,” “Latest from Nauvoo,” and “Joe. Smith in a Fix!”<sup>68</sup> Editors of *The Prophet* contended, “If the Mormons have no one to speak



for them, they must speak out for themselves and tell the tale of their outraged rights.”<sup>69</sup> Editors requested that Church leaders in Nauvoo send “all the information respecting the persecutions of the Saints and forward such papers as notice them, so that we may be enabled to collate matter for the ‘History of the Persecution of the People of God in the 19th Century.’”<sup>70</sup> In this way, editors hoped to stem the tide of unfounded rumors and secure the presidential election for Joseph.

Although all was in readiness to further Joseph’s bid for the presidency, a June 29, 1844, letter of Lyman O. Littlefield of Nauvoo changed everything. Littlefield wrote, “I hasten to inform your readers of the blackest crime that has ever darkened the pages of the history of the world. Gen. Joseph and Hiram Smith have been massacred, by ruthless, damnable, hellish hands!!” Littlefield gave a descriptive account of the martyrdom, concluding, “Alas! how can the vacuum ever be filled! O America, put on thy garb of mourning, the blood of these martyred saints cries to Omnipotence for redress and a restoration of trampled rights. We are determined that this matter shall not rest here, we will look to the law, to the arm of the judiciary of the American jurisprudence for redress.”<sup>71</sup> When news of Littlefield’s letter reached LDS branches in the East, branch members “voted unanimously that the Brethren wear a crape on their left arm for thirty days, and the Sisters use such mourning as they deem suitable, as a token of their respect for the departed Prophet and Patriarch of the church.”<sup>72</sup>

What the editors wanted more than wearing crape on their left arm was detailed information about the Martyrdom. Any news of the Martyrdom was given full coverage in *The Prophet*, no matter the source. Editors printed details about the *Expositor* affair and the text of Joseph’s executive order to halt the publication of the newspaper. Editors gave full-column space to testimonials that decried the brutality and illegality of events that led to the Martyrdom. Editors didn’t hesitate to print, “The floor of Carthage Jail is still stained with the blood of the martyred Prophets. There are yet seven balls in the floor where the head of Hiram lay when he fell.”<sup>73</sup> Editors also printed details of a grand jury proceeding held “against ten of those engaged in the murder of the Prophet & Patriarch,” in hopes of soon announcing the indicted were convicted of murder in the first degree.<sup>74</sup>

### **Sidney Rigdon and Succession in Church Leadership**

When a conviction was not forthcoming, editors denounced the legal system in Hancock County, Illinois, before turning their attention to discrediting Sidney Rigdon’s claim to Church leadership. The turn proved

essential to the future of the Church in the eastern states, for Rigdon had set up his headquarters in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and had sent disciples throughout the eastern states to convert Latter-day Saints to Rigdonism. Editors warned subscribers, “We hear of several Rigdonians about the country: as they pretend to hold the keys of Conquest, it may be well to look out for fires.”<sup>75</sup> The fires were not mere “drossy sparks flying from under the refiner’s hammer, and can only shine for a moment,” but flames that threatened to undermine the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the eastern states.<sup>76</sup> Editors expressed concern that in LDS branches in New Jersey “some of the apostates [Rigdonites]” had entered branch meetings “where they [we]re not known and palm[ed] themselves off as Latter Day Saints, and den[ied] their Rigdon origin.” Editors advised, “We give this notice that the Saints may be aware who they receive, for many of them hold licances [*sic*] which they will not deliver up, and some of the more corrupt may make use of them to deceive the churches.”<sup>77</sup> In gratitude, editors reported that in Boston, “Rigdonism is treated with silent contempt, just what it deserves!”<sup>78</sup>

Details of Rigdon’s follies and criticism of the premise on which he based his leadership soon became regular features in *The Prophet*. A reprinted Orson Hyde letter of September 24, 1844, was the most conclusive evidence subscribers had of Rigdon’s excommunication: “I have to communicate to you the sad intelligence of Brother Rigdon’s excommunication from the Church. It was no pleasant thing to us to sever this branch from the vine; but duty to the Church required us to raise our hands and our voices against him for privately and secretly sowing the seeds of division and strife among the Saints, when openly and publicly he disavowed every such thing.” Hyde concluded his letter by penning, “When a man gets so high that he cannot take counsel or reproof, rest assured that his downfall is near, and the Devil will always tell him that it is not he that is fallen, but somebody else has done wrong.”<sup>79</sup> Hyde’s letter was followed by an October 11, 1844, Wilford Woodruff letter: “I heard the said Joseph Smith declare that Elder Rigdon had become like a millstone upon his back—a dead weight—and he had carried him long enough, and must throw him off. . . . Elder Rigdon attended some of the councils that president Smith held with the Twelve and others, before his death, while giving them instructions; but I heard President Smith say, that he came in without his wish or invitation, as he had no confidence in him.”<sup>80</sup>

These apostolic remembrances of Rigdon’s disfavor with the Prophet Joseph Smith were followed by accusations that “while in Missouri,

[Rigdon] stood up and cursed God to his face, and pronounced Mormonism to be a delusion.”<sup>81</sup> The editorial staff could not be restrained from presenting and musing over such antics or Rigdon’s belief that “Joseph Smith is the servant Christ spoken of in the parable of the ten talents in the 25th Chap. of Matthew. Joseph having but one talent it was to be taken from him and given to Sidney Rigdon who has ten, and he (Joseph) cast ‘into utter darkness’ as an ‘unprofitable servant.’”<sup>82</sup> But there was no musing by editor Parley P. Pratt, who printed on March 29, 1845, “We frequently hear of debates, and conversations between the saints and apostates on the subject of who should lead the church, whether the Apostles who still survive the massacre, or Mr. Sidney Rigdon who is not a member of the church at all; having been regularly excommunicated by its highest authorities, for falsehood, deception, and hipocrisy [*sic*] of the grocest [*sic*] kind. Who would have thought that a question would ever have arisen among the saints, whether a man who was not a member of the church at all, should be their leader and head, or whether they would be led by some of their own members.”<sup>83</sup>

Sidney Rigdon countered accusations made against him by sending letters to the office of *The Prophet*. In one letter, Rigdon professed his innocence and decried the editorial staff’s depiction of his followers “as mobocrats, as murderers, conspirators: and many other epithets of like character.”<sup>84</sup> In the same letter, Rigdon concluded, “As to any attack they [LDS leaders] can make upon my character, I fear them not.”<sup>85</sup> The impasse between Rigdon and Latter-day Saint leadership in the East was real, and Rigdonism was an ongoing threat to Mormons who were faithful to the Apostles.

### Other Content in *The Prophet*

Like other Latter-day Saint newspapers of the 1840s, *The Prophet* was a composite of newsworthy entries with deference given to articles that favored Mormonism. In addition to coverage of major events in the expanding world of Mormonism, *The Prophet* included a variety of other newsworthy items, including

- an epistle from the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles informing the Latter-day Saints about the martyrdom of Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum;
- news, proceedings, and minutes of local Church conferences held in the eastern states;
- local Church news, including dates, times, and locations of specific prayer meetings;

- exchanges, clippings, and telegraph dispatches, often reprinted with editorial comments if the sentiments expressed in the clipping did not match those of the editors;
- poetry, usually expressions of doctrinal significance to Latter-day Saints;
- marriage and death announcements;
- pithy sayings such as were common in nineteenth-century newspapers;
- humorous anecdotes and adages; and
- advertisements, which were printed on the last page of each issue.

## Conclusion

Although subscribers were notified as early as January 25, 1845, that arrangements were being made “for the publication of the second [volume]” of *The Prophet*,<sup>86</sup> by issue fifty-two, editors announced a lapse in printing for lack of subscribers, concluding, “[*The Prophet*] will now be discontinued a few weeks, to wait for subscriptions sufficient to warrant its further publication.” Weeks turned into months, for subscriptions were not forthcoming. Even though the second volume was to be published under the direct sanction and supervision of the twelve Apostles, it never materialized. However, the office at No. 7 Spruce Street in New York City remained open with a clerk ready to “attend to all business, communications and calls connected with the office, or publishing department.”<sup>87</sup> The second office, on Washington Street in Boston, closed its doors.

Pratt lamented the demise of *The Prophet*, and after struggling “through one year, notwithstanding its many disadvantages”<sup>88</sup> and misfortunes, Pratt permanently closed the Spruce Street office in the summer of 1845.

---

Susan Easton Black is an emeritus Professor of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University. She is currently serving a mission with her husband at the Nauvoo Temple. She has authored, edited, or compiled over a hundred books during her career. This article is excerpted and adapted from *The Best of The Prophet*, published by BYU Studies with an accompanying DVD containing a searchable library of all fifty-two issues of *The Prophet*.

1. Two weekly printings of *The Prophet* were missed—October 26, 1844, and May 17, 1845. ^

2. “Masthead,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 1 (May 18, 1844): p. 1, col. 1. Editors William Smith and Samuel Brannan added a scriptural caveat to the masthead: “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the

Prophets” (Amos 3:7). See “Surely the Lord God . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 8 (July 6, 1844): p. 1, col. 1. <sup>^</sup>

3. William Smith, son of Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack, was born on March 13, 1811, in Royalton, Windsor County, Vermont. William was baptized on June 9, 1830, in Seneca Lake by David Whitmer. William labored as a missionary in New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. In 1835, he was called to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and on May 24, 1845, the day on which the last issue of *The Prophet* appeared, he was ordained to the office of patriarch. He asserted that his ordination to patriarch entitled him to be President of the Church. On October 5, 1845, the apostolic calling of William was revoked. One week later, on October 12, 1845, William was excommunicated. See *The History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, 4 vols. (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1903), 4:212. William died on November 13, 1893, in Osterdock, Clayton County, Iowa. <sup>^</sup>

4. William Smith, “Proposals for Publishing the Wasp,” *The Wasp* 1, no. 1 (April 16, 1842): p. 4, col. 3. <sup>^</sup>

5. Smith, “Proposals for Publishing the Wasp,” *The Wasp* 1, no. 1 (April 16, 1842): p. 4, col. 3. <sup>^</sup>

6. “Introductory,” *The Wasp* 1, no. 1 (April 16, 1842): p. 2, cols. 2–3. <sup>^</sup>

7. William was serving in the state legislature of Illinois when bills were introduced to repeal the Nauvoo Charter. On December 9, 1842, William argued for the Nauvoo Charter before the Illinois House of Representatives, claiming that “it granted privileges no different from those of five other cities in the state and that Nauvoo’s charter was singled out because of religious intolerance.” Kyle Walker, *United by Faith* (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 2005), 268. <sup>^</sup>

8. Little is known of George T. Leach except that he was mentioned on the Continuing Church Record at Nauvoo and that he participated in baptisms for the dead in Nauvoo. See Susan Easton Black and Harvey Bischoff Black, *Annotated Record of Baptisms for the Dead, 1840–1845, Nauvoo, Hancock County, Illinois*, 7 vols. (Provo, Utah: BYU Center for Family History and Genealogy, 2002), 4:2163. <sup>^</sup>

9. “Prospectus of a Weekly Newspaper. To be Entitled The Prophet,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 1 (May 18, 1844): p. 1, col. 1. <sup>^</sup>

10. William Smith, “We would apologize for our omission of Eld. Wm Smith’s letter . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 6 (June 22, 1844): p. 2, col. 3. <sup>^</sup>

11. “To prevent mistakes, all letters on business . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 8 (July 6, 1844): p. 2, col. 3. <sup>^</sup>

12. William Smith to Joseph Smith, October 28, 1843, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Joseph Smith Collection, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. <sup>^</sup>

13. William Smith suggested his brother Hyrum as a “suitable and capable person” to serve in the Illinois state legislature. See “For the Neighbor,” *Nauvoo Neighbor* 2, no. 3 (May 15, 1844): p. 2, col. 6. <sup>^</sup>

14. “The ‘Prophet’ for next week will be issued on Thursday . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 7 (June 29, 1844): p. 2, col. 1. <sup>^</sup>

15. William Smith, “The following is the substance of a letter which was written by Elder Wm. Smith to Elder Miles . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 25 (November 9, 1844): p. 1, col. 5. <sup>^</sup>

16. William Smith, “The following is the substance of a letter which was written by Elder Wm. Smith to Elder Miles . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 25 (November 9, 1844): p. 1, col. 4. <sup>^</sup>

17. William Smith, “The following is the substance of a letter which was written by Elder Wm. Smith to Elder Miles . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 25 (November 9, 1844): p. 1, col. 5. <sup>^</sup>

18. William Smith, “Elder Brannan. I have perused your several notes with pleasure, and I hope your promised visit, to this place this winter will not be forgotten . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 30 (December 14, 1844): p. 3, col. 5. <sup>^</sup>

19. W. Waterman Phelps was the son of William Wines Phelps and Sally Waterman, born in 1823. <sup>^</sup>

20. “W. Waterman Phelps of Nauvoo, is solicited to accept of a situation in the Prophet Office . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 15 (August 24, 1844): p. 2, col. 3. <sup>^</sup>

21. Brigham Young, “Beloved Br. William. I embrace the present opportunity . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 25 (November 9, 1844): p. 2, col. 3. <sup>^</sup>

22. Wm. Smith, “To Our Patrons,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 27 (November 23, 1844): p. 2, col. 1. <sup>^</sup>

23. Samuel Brannan was born on March 2, 1819, in Saco, Maine. In his biographical remembrances dictated in his 63rd year, Brannan said of his newspaper career, “In company with his sister arrived in Lake County Ohio in the spring of 1833. There he undertook to learn the printing trade. . . . The knowledge he had acquired of the printing business proved a great lever for his advancement and enabled him to travel as an independent man only can. . . . His fondness for his business led him to New York City,” where he edited *The Prophet* and from there traveled aboard the ship *Brooklyn* to California. “What seemed to him the most important article was that he brought with him [aboard the *Brooklyn*] an improved printing press, paper, type and all that was needed to start a newspaper on the shores of the Western World. . . . He set up his printing press and issued the ‘California Star.’” See A Biographical Sketch Based on a Dictation, by Samuel Brannan, written by one of Hubert H. Bancroft’s assistants, dated 1882, ms., C–D 805, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California. <sup>^</sup>

24. Wm. Smith, “To Our Patrons,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 27 (November 23, 1844): p. 2, col. 1. <sup>^</sup>

25. Wm. Smith, “Three Days in New York,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 30 (December 14, 1844): p. 3, col. 3. <sup>^</sup>

26. Wm. Smith, “Patriarchal,” *Times and Seasons* 6, no. 9 (May 15, 1845): 904. William Smith and his family temporarily stayed with Emma Smith until the brick home on Water Street, formerly occupied by William Marks, became available. Unfortunately, in that home Caroline’s health worsened. She died on May 22, 1845. See “Funeral of Mrs. Caroline Smith,” *Times and Seasons* 6, no. 10 (June 1, 1845): 918–20. <sup>^</sup>

27. “Elder Smith,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 49 (April 26, 1845): p. 2, col. 2. <sup>^</sup>

28. “New Arrangement,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 48 (April 19, 1845): p. 2, col. 3. <sup>^</sup>

29. "Our Future Course," *The Prophet* 1, no. 35 (January 18, 1845): p. 2, col. 3. <sup>^</sup>
30. S. Brannan, "Brethren and Friends," *The Prophet* 1, no. 51 (May 10, 1845): p. 2, cols. 1–2. <sup>^</sup>
31. Brigham Young and Willard Richards, "Notice to the Churches Abroad," *The Prophet* 1, no. 51 (May 10, 1845): p. 2, col. 1. <sup>^</sup>
32. Orson Hyde, "Mr. Editor.—I am requested to say to the Saints . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 11 (July 27, 1844): p. 2, col. 3. <sup>^</sup>
33. P. P. Pratt, "This number closes the first volume of the 'Prophet,'" *The Prophet* 1, no. 52 (May 24, 1845): p. 2, cols. 1–2. <sup>^</sup>
34. S. Brannan, "Brethren and Friends," *The Prophet* 1, no. 51 (May 10, 1845): p. 2, col. 2. <sup>^</sup>
35. Pratt urged Samuel Brannan to "repair immediately" to Nauvoo and "acknowledge and frankly repent of his faults" before Church leaders. Pratt was confident that if Brannan humbled himself in this manner, he would receive a "restoration to his standing." Parley P. Pratt Jr., ed., *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 422. <sup>^</sup>
36. Parley P. Pratt, son of Jared Pratt and Charity Dickinson, was born on April 12, 1807, in Burlington, Otsego County, New York. After gaining a testimony of the Book of Mormon, Pratt was baptized in early September 1830 by Oliver Cowdery and ordained an elder shortly thereafter. After being ordained an Apostle on February 21, 1835, he served successive missions to Pennsylvania, New York, New England, and Canada before settling in Missouri in 1838. In the 1840s Pratt served as editor and publisher of the *Millennial Star*. On his final mission, Pratt was murdered in May 1857 near Van Buren, Arkansas. See Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*. <sup>^</sup>
37. Orson Hyde and Brigham Young, "Elder P. P. Pratt, has arrived in this city . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 32 (December 28, 1844): p. 2, col. 2. <sup>^</sup>
38. "As Elder Pratt has arrived in this city . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 32 (December 28, 1844): p. 2, col. 2. <sup>^</sup>
39. "In our thirty-third number we published an epistle . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 35 (January 18, 1845): p. 2, col. 4. <sup>^</sup>
40. Brigham Young and Willard Richards, "Notice to the Churches Abroad," *The Prophet* 1, no. 51 (May 10, 1845): p. 2, col. 1. <sup>^</sup>
41. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, 421. <sup>^</sup>
42. P. P. Pratt, "Regulations. For the Publishing Department of the Latter Day Saints in the East," *The Prophet* 1, no. 33 (January 4, 1845): p. 2, col. 5. <sup>^</sup>
43. "To the Saints Scattered Abroad," *The Prophet* 1, no. 22 (October 12, 1844): p. 2, col. 1. <sup>^</sup>
44. "A Zeal according to Knowledge," *The Prophet* 1, no. 30 (December 14, 1844): p. 2, col. 4. <sup>^</sup>
45. "To the Saints Scattered Abroad," *The Prophet* 1, no. 21 (October 5, 1844): p. 2, col. 4. <sup>^</sup>
46. "Welcome," *The Prophet* 1, no. 32 (December 28, 1844): p. 2, col. 2. <sup>^</sup>
47. "Terms of the Prophet," *The Prophet* 1, no. 6 (June 22, 1844): p. 1, col. 1. <sup>^</sup>
48. "To the Elders," *The Prophet* 1, no. 34 (January 11, 1845): p. 2, col. 5. <sup>^</sup>

49. “Canvassers Wanted,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 2 (May 25, 1844): p. 2, col. 4. <sup>^</sup>
50. “Our Cause,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 25 (November 9, 1844): p. 2, col. 2. <sup>^</sup>
51. “Terms of the Prophet,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 36 (January 25, 1845): p. 1, col. 1. <sup>^</sup>
52. “To the Saints Scattered Abroad,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 22 (October 12, 1844): p. 2, col. 1. <sup>^</sup>
53. P. P. Pratt, “Appointments, Etc.,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 51 (May 10, 1845): p. 2, col. 3. <sup>^</sup>
54. “To Patrons,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 35 (January 18, 1845): p. 2, col. 3. <sup>^</sup>
55. “We shall discontinue all papers . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 38 (February 8, 1845): p. 2, col. 3. <sup>^</sup>
56. “We still have on our books a hundred or two of names . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 42 (March 8, 1845): p. 2, col. 2. <sup>^</sup>
57. “To the Saints,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 26 (November 16, 1844): p. 2, col. 2. <sup>^</sup>
58. G. B. Wallace, “Brother Brannan, Permit a subscriber to appeal to the saints . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 32 (December 28, 1844): p. 1, col. 4. <sup>^</sup>
59. “Wanted,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 29 (December 7, 1844): p. 2, col. 3. <sup>^</sup>
60. “A special meeting of Share holders will be held . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 6 (June 22, 1844): p. 2, col. 1. <sup>^</sup>
61. “To the Brethren,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 8 (July 6, 1844): p. 2, col. 3. <sup>^</sup>
62. “Having now raised the name of our General and Prophet . . .” *Nauvoo Neighbor* 1, no. 44 (February 28, 1844): p. 2, col. 3. <sup>^</sup>
63. “For President, Gen. Joseph Smith, of Nauvoo, Illinois,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 2 (May 25, 1844): p. 2, col. 4; “For President, Gen. Joseph Smith, of Nauvoo, Illinois,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 2 (May 25, 1844): p. 2, col. 4. <sup>^</sup>
64. “Jeffersonians Attend!!” *The Prophet* 1, no. 4 (June 8, 1844): p. 2, col. 3. <sup>^</sup>
65. Wm. Smith and Wm. H. Miles, “Great Jeffersonian Meeting,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 6 (June 22, 1844): p. 3, col. 5. <sup>^</sup>
66. “A Curiosity,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 7 (June 29, 1844): p. 2, col. 1. <sup>^</sup>
67. “For President, Gen. Joseph Smith, of Nauvoo, Illinois,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 2 (May 25, 1844): p. 2, col. 4. <sup>^</sup>
68. “Our Situation,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 8 (July 6, 1844): p. 2, col. 3. <sup>^</sup>
69. “We have delayed our paper, with the expectation . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 9 (July 13, 1844): p. 2, col. 1. <sup>^</sup>
70. “The Brethren are requested to send us through mail . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 10 (July 20, 1844): p. 2, col. 1. <sup>^</sup>
71. L. O. Littlefield, “Communications. Mr. Editor.—I hasten to inform your readers of the blackest crime . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 11 (July 27, 1844): p. 1, col. 5. <sup>^</sup>
72. “Token of Respect,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 10 (July 20, 1844): p. 2, col. 1. <sup>^</sup>
73. “The floor of Carthage Jail is still stained . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 29 (December 7, 1844): p. 2, col. 3. <sup>^</sup>
74. “Justice,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 29 (December 7, 1844): p. 2, col. 4. <sup>^</sup>
75. “Look out!” *The Prophet* 1, no. 52 (May 24, 1845): p. 3, col. 5. <sup>^</sup>
76. Fred Von Holstein, “Since the fire has whispered so close about Sidney Rigdon . . .” *The Prophet* 1, no. 52 (May 24, 1845): p. 1, col. 4. <sup>^</sup>
77. “To the Saints,” *The Prophet* 1, no. 36 (January 25, 1845): p. 2, col. 3. <sup>^</sup>



78. "Boston," *The Prophet* 1, no. 27 (November 23, 1844): p. 2, col. 2. <sup>^</sup>
79. Orson Hyde, "Epistle to the Saints," *The Prophet* 1, no. 21 (October 5, 1844): p. 2, col. 4. <sup>^</sup>
80. W. Woodruff, "To the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Greeting . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 23 (October 19, 1844): p. 3, col. 1. <sup>^</sup>
81. "What Does It Mean," *The Prophet* 1, no. 26 (November 16, 1844): p. 2, col. 2. <sup>^</sup>
82. "The Man of Eleven Talents," *The Prophet* 1, no. 27 (November 23, 1844): p. 2, col. 2. <sup>^</sup>
83. P. P. Pratt, "Strange Inconsistency," *The Prophet* 1, no. 45 (March 29, 1845): p. 2, col. 3. <sup>^</sup>
84. Sidney Rigdon, "Letter of Sidney Rigdon, Esq.," *The Prophet* 1, no. 24 (November 2, 1844): p. 1, cols. 4-5. <sup>^</sup>
85. Sidney Rigdon, "Letter of Sidney Rigdon, Esq.," *The Prophet* 1, no. 24 (November 2, 1844): p. 1, cols. 4-5. <sup>^</sup>
86. "We are now drawing to the close of our first volume . . ." *The Prophet* 1, no. 36 (January 25, 1845): p. 2, col. 2. <sup>^</sup>
87. P. P. Pratt, "This number closes the first volume of the 'Prophet,'" *The Prophet* 1, no. 52 (May 24, 1845): p. 2, col. 1. <sup>^</sup>
88. P. P. Pratt, "Shall the Prophet be sustained another year, or not?" *The Prophet* 1, no. 49 (April 26, 1845): p. 3, col. 4. <sup>^</sup>

# Jean Valjean, the Prodigal Son

## Review Essay on Regional Productions of *Les Misérables*

*Bradley Moss and Shawnda Moss*

In 2003, *Les Misérables* closed its sixteen-year run as one of the most successful musicals Broadway had ever seen. An eager audience welcomed the show back to New York as a Broadway revival just over three years later. It was expected that the show would be equally successful as it moved into regional theatres around the country, but few expected that the 2007 production of the musical by Pioneer Theatre Company in Salt Lake City, Utah, would run for ten weeks and sell out a record-breaking eighty-two performances. Since then, interest in the musical has not waned, as the three professional productions of *Les Misérables* produced in Utah over the past three years continued to play to packed houses.

The 2012 Utah Shakespeare Festival production in Cedar City, directed by Brad Carroll, garnered thirty-five sold-out performances and added shows to meet demand, and the 2013 Pioneer Theatre Company staging, directed by Charles Morey, added two weeks of performances to its initial run to accommodate audiences desirous to follow the story of Jean Valjean. This success was equaled in the most recent production of *Les Misérables* at the Hale Center Theatre in West Valley City, which sold nearly every seat during its run of over one hundred performances. The stage version of Victor Hugo's masterpiece *Les Misérables* features music by Claude-Michel Schönberg, with original French lyrics by Alain Boublil and Jean-Marc Natel and an English-language libretto by Herbert Kretzmer, has clearly sparked something in American audiences and particularly, it seems, in Latter-day Saint audiences.

The LDS community has not only been entertained by various productions of the musical but has also been reminded of its messages and morals from the pulpit. In September 1991, Elder M. Russell Ballard referenced the musical in his address at the general women's meeting, focusing on Jean Valjean's oft-repeated lyric "Who am I?" Elder Ballard remarked that Valjean, having committed his life to God, had to ask this question before deciding whether to falsify testimony and let an innocent man go to prison in his place, or to admit the truth and face the consequences of his past. President Thomas S. Monson is an admirer of the story and the musical and quoted the lyrics of the song "Bring Him Home" to close his address in the October 2003 priesthood session of general conference. This song was later performed for President Monson at his eighty-fifth birthday celebration in 2012.

The commercial success of the musical, as well its success among Mormon audiences, is a bit surprising because it does not follow popular themes or typical story structure. First of all, anyone who did not study revolutionary France may not understand the antiquated political sparring. Second, the story sprawls across decades, involving possibly too many central characters. Characters' ages and their stories intersect; they take on new identities and relationships. Add to these things the sparse conceptual set and staging that requires quick transitions between scenes as the years pass. The Pioneer Theatre Company used a turntable to help transition between scenes, whereas the Utah Shakespeare Festival had a unit set that remained on stage throughout the show.

And yet, despite this epic scale, the musical's action is internally driven, focusing on the question, What kind of man will Valjean choose to be? No traditional villain opposes Valjean; the chief antagonist, Javert, pursues Valjean, but is often absent from the action, becoming less consequential as the play proceeds. As foes, Valjean and Javert are driven apart rather than driven together into a classic confrontation. Meanwhile, the student revolutionaries fight an unseen militia, and though these forces slay beloved characters, their anonymity renders them easily forgotten. Finally, the Thénardiens contribute as comedic foils and so are never truly seen as a danger.

So what holds this sprawling collection of characters and actions together? We decided to examine *Les Misérables* closely to better understand its particular appeal to LDS audiences. We attended productions at the aforementioned Utah Shakespeare Festival and Pioneer Theatre Company to discover what in this story, beyond the obvious redemptive elements of Valjean's journey, speaks so strongly to the sensibilities of

LDS audiences. We observed that LDS audiences, in lieu of considering the traditional story line of conflict and resolution between hero and villain, contemplated how characters face adversity, accept God, forgive, and repent. They saw how *Les Misérables* demonstrates the grace received through repentance and reinforces the truth that people are ultimately responsible to each other. During our journey, we also examined ourselves and discovered why the musical appeals to us. We suppose our insights will appeal to Latter-day Saints as well.

In the New Testament, Christ expounded on the nature of the gospel using the narrative approach of parables. In reviewing the play, we noticed the story of *Les Misérables* resonating with and echoing these parables. While there are many ways to interpret the musical, we found these parables often mirroring its content and meaning in remarkable ways. How clearly that reflection shines is not as important as the exercise of comparing and intently observing. We are not arguing here whether Victor Hugo intended his story to be a direct reimagining of Christian parables; ours is a comparative exercise, sometimes correlative and sometimes imaginative, intended to bring insight into the play and life itself. Through this exercise, we ask readers not to see things our way but to see things in a deeper way.

Audiences that do not have the desire or ability to look deeply into the thematic elements of the musical could marvel at the quickly passing scenes, listen to the music, and be satisfied. As with parables, audiences might miss essential and profound truths and still be engaged by the surface narrative. They could focus simply on the parts of the story that they comprehend. However, notice how the inspector Javert cannot comprehend the parables, so to speak, before him. In this way, Javert is like the Pharisees of ancient Jerusalem, tied to the letter of the law and unable to see or accept a penitent man. He is like the misguided “natural man” of Mosiah 3:19—the proud hypocrite. He outwardly shows his devotion to what is right but is unable to recognize the divinity in others. As a result, he is burdened by a hidden sorrow. In both productions we attended, the actor playing Javert adopted a melancholy disposition, Brian Vaughn of the Utah Shakespeare Festival especially so, often staged as if an invisible bubble surrounded him, highlighting his isolation and profoundly communicating his lack of joy. Javert finds no comfort in the truth and beauty around him but instead sees misery and evil everywhere he goes. Javert solely expects the law to rule and does not see the meaning of Valjean’s journey. Audiences generally understand that Javert is unyielding and Valjean is merciful; Mormon

audiences have opportunity to see a deeper significance in this part of story because they are familiar with many parables, object lessons, and metaphors relating to justice and mercy.

In the opening moments of the musical, Valjean is seen in an act of theft and deception; he is a criminal. He does, however, return from this path and thus illustrates the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32). To connect the musical to this parable, we cast Javert as the faithful son who envies the attention his father gives to his brother. We see Valjean as the prodigal, figuratively eating with swine (see Luke 15:16) as he is turned away from every door he approaches. He learns humility, repents of his past mistakes, and becomes a wealthy, free man, which symbolizes living again in his father's house.

The familiarity of this and other redemptive parables may be a reason why Mormon audiences resonate with the play, so much so that they are willing to negotiate watching the coarse and bawdy scenes in the production. Efforts were not made by either the Utah Shakespeare Festival or the Pioneer Theatre Company to mask the squalor of prison, the abuse of the Thénardiens, or even the working conditions of prostitutes as examined in the song “Lovely Ladies.” It appears that Mormon audiences are prepared to look past the baser elements of the characters and stories to see the enlightened messages, a task they are not always willing to do while considering more secularly themed works. When Mormon audiences read these “sins” through the contextual lens of redemption or parable, the staging moves from prurient to instructive: a necessary evil to establish the need for repentance and forgiveness.

In the parable of the mustard seed (Matt. 13:31–32), Christ taught that small things bring about great things, that the smallest mustard seed can grow to a tree “so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof” (Matt. 13:32). Similarly, the small act of the bishop early in the musical has tremendous impact. It transforms Valjean and, consequently, the many characters that rely on his strength and example, including Fantine, Cosette, and Marius. Many of our favorite moments in both productions were surrounding these characters and their one-on-one interactions with Valjean: his promise to Fantine at her deathbed, staged so beautifully as Fantine reaches in her imagination for her daughter; his fervent demand that he and Cosette must leave Paris in order to be safe; and his plea to heaven to preserve Marius's life all led us to appreciate Valjean's selfless regard and love for others. As theatre practitioners, we could see the artistic choices that led to these powerful moments; as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day

Saints, these moments also caused us to reflect on our own lives and the expressions of our Christianity.

The musical also works as a variation on the parable of the sower and the seeds (see Luke 8:4–15). In this story, a sower spreads seeds; some are eaten by birds, some take shallow root to eventually burn in the sun, some fall among thorns and are choked out, and some land in good soil. In our conception, Valjean represents the good soil on which the seed falls. According to the parable, the seed is the word of God, and therefore the sower is ultimately God himself. When Valjean sings in prayer—when he makes covenants, pleads, or asks for guidance—he is delivering his words not to a generalized beyond but directly to God. In both productions, light (spotlights, ambient warm light, or candles) was used in these moments of communion with God. J. Michael Bailey as Valjean consistently focused his eyes on a set point when addressing God. This was especially seen in the signature song “Bring Him Home.” We appreciated these details and assume that Mormon audiences likewise recognized that the God of Victor Hugo is similar to the God they envision.

While these enlightened moments were powerful in Valjean’s story and at Fantine’s deathbed, they were purposely lacking with other characters, notably in the Utah Shakespeare Festival production. Javert’s conversation with Deity is not direct, and the lighting suggested no reciprocation of love and connection. The production’s lighting choices helped attune us to the parable, where some do not receive the word.

For example, the Thénardiens have the chance to be taught by a kind and merciful Valjean, but they reject him. Everything about them suggests they have no inclination toward goodness and are callous in their interactions with others. The design choices, especially for the Pioneer Theater Company production, showed the rough nature of these characters. There, the couple wore earth tones and were coarse in their appearance, while the Utah Shakespeare Festival couple was costumed to be quite garish. Either way, in parable terms, we would say the Thénardiens represent the rocky ground where the seed is devoured by Satan.

To extend this metaphor, Javert also sees the gospel light in Valjean, but the message is choked by his limited vision and his unwillingness to admit any error that would weaken his mantle of power. He is choked by the thorns of his own pride (see Luke 8:7). Javert believes he has taken full root in righteousness, and in the end he is surprised to discover that he is not who he envisioned himself to be. He cannot continue to grow with the weeds that have wrapped around his heart. His pride leads to his ultimate destruction.

Fantine appears at first to be the shallow soil, lacking the strength or depth to sustain roots. However, as the parable and musical suggest to us, some only need a little added nourishing. We were impressed by her performance in the Pioneer Theatre Company production; her final decline and degradation powerfully contrasted with her reminiscence of joy in former days. While she believes that she has failed in life, Fantine's heart is deep and rich, and her final scene is one of light and salvation.

Valjean's journey to help others is by no means a direct or easy path. In addition to the prodigal son, Valjean can also be seen as the unprofitable servant in the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14–30). In this parable, Christ tells of three servants who are given talents. Two use their talents to gain additional ones, but the last, in fear, hides his sole talent in the earth. In the musical, once Valjean has decided to reach out to the young Cosette, he takes her and hides for several years. These years pass with merely a supertitle, but we get a glimpse of Valjean's life as we see him fortified in his house and anxious when traversing the streets of Paris. Where once he had joy, now he has fear. To his credit, he is worried only because he knows he will lose Cosette and fail in his promise to Fantine should he be discovered by Javert. However, by taking out our comparative lens, we see that hiding in fear is contrary to Christ's message in the parable. Upon the master's return, the profitable servants, those who went into the world with their gift, are praised as "good and faithful" and told, "Enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matt. 25:21). But the servant who hides his talent is called "slothful" and "wicked" (Matt. 25:26). Of course, our reading is a broad one; Valjean is not intended to be seen as unprofitable or slothful or wicked. However, it is only when he comes out of hiding that he is able to save Marius and find redemption for himself.

In the Utah Shakespeare Festival production, J. Michael Bailey's characterization of Jean Valjean was a bit jarring at first. In the opening moments of the production, he came across as a rock star, with a physicality and vocalization that felt too contemporary and loose. His approach to the character was not what we had expected; wearing passion on his sleeve and filling the house with energy, he was not a broken-down, pious, and humbled Valjean displaying constraint. While it seemed too much at first, he eventually won us over with his vitality. In the end, we considered his performance a vibrant characterization of the energy that comes from living a Christian life. Bailey's acting choices played nicely off the control and stoicism displayed by Brian Vaughn as Javert. We saw the difference between the hypocrite who professes devotion to Christ and the man who truly lives it. Bailey was the hard-living

prodigal son, and his willingness to commit fully to fixing his mistakes meant that he later had the energy to commit fully to God. Future performers in the role would do well to celebrate and emulate the passion and fervor of his interpretation.

We left both of these performances having absorbed a message of Christlike love, not only because it is part of the story but also because we as Mormons come from a tradition of interpreting parables. We learned about selfishness and pride; we learned about forgiveness and repentance; and most of all we learned, through the Bishop, Fantine, Eponine, Marius, and of course Valjean, how to better reach out in love.

We enjoyed both performances of this musical and will seek out others in the future. (In fact, Shawnda was a cast member in the 2014 Hale Center Theatre production.) We are clearly not alone; LDS audiences return again and again to *Les Misérables* on screen, on stage, and even in church talks. We believe they return for the same reason that they continue to search the scriptures: they continually find new truths and deeper understandings in the story. In reading *Les Misérables* as a parable, Mormon audiences will, at different times in their lives, recognize new resonances with Valjean and his journey back to God as the prodigal son.

---

Bradley Moss and Shawnda Moss both received their undergraduate degrees in theatre education at Brigham Young University and went on to earn graduate degrees at BYU in theatre for young audiences and media arts literacy. Bradley is currently serving on the board of the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards (NCCAS). Shawnda is the conference administrator for the Utah Theatre Association. Both teach theatre to young people and educators, on the secondary and university levels locally as well as nationally. Both are actors and directors on local stages.



Blake T. Ostler. *Exploring Mormon Thought:  
Of God and Gods*. Volume 3.  
Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2008.

Reviewed by James Morse McLachlan

Blake T. Ostler's monumental systematic work, *Exploring Mormon Thought*, continues to be a major event in the development of Mormon philosophical theology. Over the last fifteen years, work on Mormonism in the general field of religious studies has exploded. There are far too many works to give even a partial list here, but I will highlight a few of the notable authors. Terryl L. Givens publishes thoughtful and nuanced work in such books as *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought*; Stephen H. Webb memorably discusses Mormon "materialism" from the perspective of a philosophical theologian outside Mormonism in *Jesus Christ, Eternal God: Heavenly Flesh and the Metaphysics of Matter*; Adam S. Miller's *Rube Goldberg Machines: Essays in Mormon Theology* gives a postmodern take on the whole project of Mormon theology; and editor David L. Paulsen's volume *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christian Theologies* tops a group of impressive collections on Mormon theology.<sup>1</sup> However, nothing equals Ostler's projected five-volume opus in scope or completeness. Volume 3, *Of God and Gods*, focuses on the LDS understanding of deification. It consists of twelve chapters and is as massive as the first two volumes—some 425 pages, excluding the bibliography and index.

In reviewing Ostler's newest book, I feel somewhat like the poor German philosopher who was asked to review Georg W. F. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Both books are incredibly rich and defy short

---

1. Other recent theological articles from this journal include Stephen H. Webb, "Godbodyed: The Matter of the Latter-day Saints," 50, no. 3 (2011): 83–100; Joseph M. Spencer, "The Four Discourses of Mormonism," 50, no. 1 (2011): 4–24; and David L. Paulsen, "Are Christians Mormon? Reassessing Joseph Smith's Theology in His Bicentennial," 45, no. 1 (2006): 35–128.

summary. In the preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel talks about the inadequacies of reviews and excoriates those armchair thinkers who just read reviews but never read books. That is not to say that Ostler's book is as dense as Hegel's; in fact, it is his most accessible volume so far. But if readers really want to know what Ostler says in *Of God and Gods*, they will have to read it. They may disagree, as I do, with some of his major claims about the relation between God and gods. But this book says a lot that is important and will be a welcome challenge to any interested in Mormon theology.

Much of the oversight in the contemporary analytic philosophy of religion, besides the fact that it often ignores world religions except Christianity and Judaism, is that it almost never considers biblical scholarship. Rather, it accepts the concept of God bequeathed to it by the church councils and by tradition. While Ostler's book does not consider other traditions beyond the biblical one, he does spend considerable time in a discussion of biblical scholarship and the history of the scripture. This discussion takes up about half the text and establishes the Mormon claims about divinity and deification as a possible, if not a better, reading of the scriptural tradition. Chapters 1–5 discuss divine councils and the plurality of God and gods from Genesis through Deuteronomy and from Psalms, through Isaiah and the prophets, to the Second Temple and finally to the New Testament, with special attention to the Christology of “indwelling unity” in the Gospel of John.<sup>2</sup>

Ostler recognizes the poetic character of the writings of the prophets. He does not see monotheistic-sounding passages like Isaiah's as conflicting with the more pluralist council passages of Psalms, Genesis, and Deuteronomy. The prophets, he says, are not “playing the language game of propositional assertion in the context of systematic theology” (65). Rather, they write like poets, using imagery, hyperbole, and other standard literary techniques. “Thus, such hyperbolic statements about the other gods cannot be inconsistent for the simple reason that logical consistency is not the language game underlying their poetic allusions” (65). Ostler discusses a variety of Apocalyptic Second Temple and early Christian writings, including, among others, Enoch, Revelation, and

---

2. There are some unfortunate scriptural citation errors in the book. For example, in Ostler's very interesting discussion about the logos as made manifest and the John 1:18 assertion that no one has seen God, Ostler cites Exodus 33:1 and Deuteronomy 34:20, noting that Moses has seen God face to face (172). The actual references are 33:11 and 34:10.

Justin Martyr. Opposed to claims that Second Temple Judaism moved from “species identity” that Yahweh shared with other gods of the divine council to Yahweh’s unique identity as Creator and Ruler of All, Ostler argues that such “‘vestigial forms’ of species identity shared by Yahweh with others” permeate the books of this period, including the New Testament (118–19).

In chapter 4, “The Relation of the Father and the Son: Kingship Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament,” Ostler takes up his major theological contention for this volume, *kingship monotheism*. His aim is to show that there is what he will later call a “weak . . . ontological difference” (326) between the three members of the Godhead—particularly the Father—and the gods of the council.

I think Ostler assumes a consistency in the scriptural traditions of the advantages of the Davidic kingship that is, to say the least, controversial. The Old Testament writers do not speak with one voice on the advantages of kingship. Ostler also assumes that patronage in the ancient Mediterranean is a good model for the relation of the Father and the Son (128–30, 190), which is not undisputed. John Dominic Crossin, for example, not an uncontroversial figure himself, argues that Jesus teaches against the patronage structure of the ancient world. I mention this because Ostler thinks that his model of kingship monotheism explains Mormon ideas of deification, it being more in line with New Testament understanding of deification.

While Ostler often reiterates that Mormonism repudiates creation *ex nihilo* and thus argues that there is no ontological dividing between God and creation, and especially between God and other persons, he preserves the “hierarchy of being” while at the same time insisting on the community and sociality of persons with God (185). He refers to the glorification of Christ and sees the disciples given the same glory. The Father, the Son, and the disciples are all “one” by virtue of the glory that they all share (188). But this is not to claim absolute equality. God is king from eternity, whereas humans have been deified and participate in divinity. Perhaps inconsistently, Ostler does not see God’s kingship as an example of the poetic hyperbole that he attributes earlier to the poetic utterances in Isaiah and elsewhere in the prophets (188).

*Of God and Gods* makes many other important contributions to Mormon theology, notably its critique of the traditional Western Christian understanding of the Trinity, which has been greatly influenced by the Neoplatonic doctrine of divine simplicity. In chapter 6, “Latin Trinity, Logic, and Scripture,” Ostler claims that to assert that God is

metaphysically simple is in tension with the view that in God are distinct divine persons. “Such a way of construing the New Testament claims is simply not sustainable in good faith” (205).

Ostler has an obvious sympathy for the subject of chapter 7, “Social Trinitarianism.” This view starts with the Trinity’s threeness as basic—rather than a oneness—and attempts to explain how three distinct centers of will and cognitive and conative faculties can yet be one God. This idea fits better with the LDS emphasis on the oneness of the Will. But how do three distinct centers become one will? This leads Ostler into a discussion with such analytic and evangelical philosophers of religion as Richard Swinburne, William Lane Craig, and J. P. Moreland (219–37). He prefers Stephen Davis’s “perichoretic” view of Social Trinitarianism (237–39), in which Davis emphasizes that “God is like a community” (239), an idea also found extensively in David L. Paulsen’s work.<sup>3</sup>

The final five chapters deal with the stated subject of the book from an LDS point of view: God and gods. In chapter 8, “The Godhead in Mormon Thought,” Ostler claims that in Mormon thought, the members of the Godhead are truly “other” to each other, and each is to the other a “Thou.” Ostler argues that both the biblical and Mormon scriptures consistently adopt kingship monotheism, which says that “humans are eternally subordinate to and dependent on their relationship of loving unity with the divine persons for their status as *gods*” (261). This subordination is an important part of Mormon tradition, but it seems to me that other parts of the tradition are in tension with it. Notable examples include teachings by Brigham Young and later B. H. Roberts, and more recently Richard Bushman’s reading of Joseph Smith’s King Follett Sermon. Still, I think Ostler’s position is well argued and very well supported. It is a position that many Mormons have taken in the past and will continue to take in the future, until either further revelation or the coming of Christ sorts this one out for us.

Chapter 10, “Logical Problems of Deification,” argues for a “weak but not a strong ontological difference” between God and man, because “it is not possible for humans to be gods or to realize inherent divinity unless there is a physical change actuated by entering into a relationship of indwelling unity with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; but there is no logical impossibility in such a change” (326). Still, there seems to be

---

3. See Donald W. Musser and David L. Paulsen, ed., *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christian Theologies* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2007), 508–9, 538–41, 546–47.

a problem here. Ontological differences are differences of kind, or in the kind of being that one possesses, and therefore his argument is difficult to understand. It's like the old saying about being a "little bit pregnant." In his quest to assure kingship, Ostler seems to slide back into a kind of supernaturalism in which God's being is different from any other and can somehow change the creature's being from human to divine. Perhaps Ostler's vision of deification is closer to Eastern Orthodox notions of *theosis* than most Mormon versions of the divinization of humanity.

Ostler's understanding of kingship monotheism should become an important discussion in LDS theology. Ostler makes claims about deification because he thinks it is the heart of both the Bible and the scripture of the Restoration. He thus closes this volume with a final chapter, "The Scriptural Basis for the Doctrine of Deification." Whether readers agree or disagree with him about kingship monotheism, *Exploring Mormon Thought: Of God and Gods*, as well as Ostler's entire project, is very important for LDS theology.

---

James Morse McLachlan is Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Western Carolina University. He earned his BA from Brigham Young University, his MA from Indiana University, and his PhD from the University of Toronto. He has served as co-chair of the Mormon Studies Group under the American Academy of Religion and as a board member and then president of the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology.

Michael E. Stone. *Armenian Apocrypha Relating to Abraham*.

Early Judaism and Its Literature vol. 37.  
Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012.

*Reviewed by E. Douglas Clark*

Over a decade ago while attending an annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, I heard Professor Michael Stone mention he was working on a group of medieval Armenian texts containing traditions about the Patriarch Abraham. Having spent considerable time gathering every Abrahamic tradition I could find, I was excited at this news and asked when the work would be published. Professor Stone replied that it would not be soon. Since then, I have eagerly looked forward to this volume.

As one of Stone's many publications on Armenian apocrypha, and a sequel to two of those in particular (*Armenian Apocrypha Relating to Adam and Eve* and *Armenian Apocrypha Relating to the Patriarchs and Prophets*<sup>1</sup>), this new tome takes its respected place in the field of biblical studies. It offers transcriptions and translations of fifteen previously unpublished<sup>2</sup> late medieval Armenian manuscripts recounting stories about the man revered as the forefather of Jews, Muslims, and Christians. Of immediate interest to scholars, students, and lay readers alike, this material holds special significance for Latter-day Saints, to whom this review is primarily directed.

The highly credentialed and prolific Professor Stone,<sup>3</sup> now emeritus at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, is a leading authority on early Jewish and Christian writings of the Second Temple period, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, and is the doyen of scholars of Armenian apocryphal studies. His array of publications, which has been described as "dazzling in both its depth and breadth,"<sup>4</sup> encompasses over 250 articles and approximately sixty books, including such landmark works as his *Fourth Ezra* (in the Hermeneia commentary series),<sup>5</sup> *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* (in the Compendia series),<sup>6</sup> and *Selected Studies in Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha: With Special Reference to the Armenian Tradition* (in the Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha series).<sup>7</sup>

Much of his career has concentrated on a body of ancient and medieval literature that narrates, sometimes in first person, events in the lives of prominent biblical personalities. Many of these texts were once prized as authoritative by early Jewish and Christian communities but over time were laid aside, forgotten, and lost. Their recent emergence has astounded and revolutionized the world of biblical scholarship. “By the strangest quirk of fate respecting literature that I know of,” wrote Samuel Sandmel in 1983, “large numbers of writings by Jews were completely lost from the transmitted Jewish heritage. . . . Now . . . a door is being opened anew to treasures that are very old.”<sup>8</sup>

Among the biblical personalities who have been the focus of Stone’s research are Adam and Eve, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, the Twelve Patriarchs, and Moses—individuals who happen also to figure prominently in the expanded canon of Mormon scripture brought forth by Joseph Smith decades before the appearance of most of the apocryphal literature. Still relatively unknown outside of Mormon circles, the Mormon texts purport to be translations of ancient and authentic records, including a brief autobiography of Abraham.

The striking similarity between the Mormon material and some aspects of the recently discovered apocryphal works has caught the attention of no less a scholar than Yale professor and literary critic Harold Bloom, a non-Mormon who concluded that when Joseph Smith brought forth additional scripture, he somehow “broke through all the orthodoxies—Protestant, Catholic, Judaic— . . . back to elements that Smith rightly intuited had been censored out of the stories of the archaic Jewish religion.” Bloom marveled at the Mormon founder’s “uncanny recovery of elements in ancient Jewish theurgy that had ceased to be available either to normative Judaism or to Christianity, and that had survived only in esoteric traditions unlikely to have touched Smith directly.”<sup>9</sup>

No wonder Hugh Nibley called the apocryphal texts an “astonishing outpouring of ancient writings that is the peculiar blessing of our generation,” for although they are “copies of copies,” yet “when we compare them we cannot escape the impression that they have a real model behind them, more faithfully represented in some than in others.”<sup>10</sup> For example, in Armenian works about Adam and Eve previously published by Stone, Latter-day Saints find parallels to several Mormon beliefs not mentioned in the Bible.<sup>11</sup>

Traditions about Abraham are particularly significant for Latter-day Saints, who honor him not only as forefather but also as exemplar and

recipient of the covenant to which they are heirs. “Do the works of Abraham,” the Lord declared in modern revelation (D&C 132:29–32) and then provided through Joseph Smith an autobiographical account of the Patriarch describing some of his most important works. Called the book of Abraham, it was instantly recognized by early Church leaders as a divine gift of inestimable value. Parley Pratt admitted to being “lost in astonishment and admiration” at its contents, and Wilford Woodruff esteemed it as “great and glorious,” part of the “rich treasures that are revealed unto us in the last days.”<sup>12</sup>

With the conviction that authentic Abrahamic traditions survived outside the Bible, Latter-day Saints welcome the multitude of newly discovered ancient writings containing additional material about their illustrious forefather. Such texts hail from diverse times and places as his admiring descendants handed down stories about him and commented on their significance. And notwithstanding the inevitable embellishments and speculations and improvisations that accrued along the way, there remains an impressively consistent core, according to Nibley: “After viewing many texts from many times and places, all telling the same story, one emerges with the conviction that there was indeed one Abraham story.”<sup>13</sup>

Stone’s *Armenian Apocrypha Relating to Abraham* adds a welcome dimension to the corpus of Abrahamic tradition. More than merely providing translations, the book features helpful explanations, charts, notes, and comments, including a general introduction discussing the various narratives and their possible sources and dates. In addition, each of the fifteen texts has its own brief introduction, followed by a transcription of the original Armenian and its English translation, along with footnotes commenting on textual issues and similarities to other sources. Also included are two appendices, a bibliography, an index of sources, and an index of names and select subjects. The facets of Abraham’s life and times addressed by the texts include:

- Mankind’s rampant immorality and a divinely sent famine: “And they did not cease sinning and fornication. God became angry and gave them famine” (41). These same elements are emphasized in the book of Abraham (see Abr. 1:29–30).
- Divine retribution in the form of ravenous ravens: “And in that time, a punishment of birds came, of a multitude of black ravens which were gathering up the autumn seed and eating the green fields. It had not ever been like this” (223). The ravens are mentioned also



in the ancient book of Jubilees, which has strong connections with the book of Abraham.

- Young Abraham’s courageous opposition to idolatry at the peril of his life: “Abraham, taking fire, went to the idolatrous temple and set fire to it. . . . Then his father and all his relatives wished to kill Abraham” (149). Abraham’s iconoclasm and the attempt by his father and relatives to kill him (see Abr. 1:7–15) are similarly chronicled in the book of Abraham and numerous other ancient sources.
- Abraham’s faith in departing from his homeland: “Because you believed in me,” God tells him, “do not dwell with the unbelievers” (194). While Genesis fails to mention young Abraham’s belief, his faith in the Almighty is a conspicuous part of the story told in the book of Abraham.
- Abraham’s age when he left Haran: Referring to a line in one of the texts about Abraham’s departure from Haran, Stone notes, “The sentence may be construed to mean that Abraham went forth in his sixtieth year” (81, n. 13). Genesis says Abraham was seventy-five when he left Haran (Gen. 12:4), while the book of Abraham insists he was sixty-two (Abr. 2:14).
- Chronological and genealogical data relevant to the identity of Melchizedek: From the Flood to Abraham, says one text (53), was 942 years (similar to most other ancient chronologies but over three times longer than in the Masoretic text from which the King James Version was translated)—rendering impossible the late rabbinic identification of Noah’s son Shem with Melchizedek, who in another Armenian text is said to be in the fifth generation from Shem and the son of a man named Melk’I or “my king” (97). Mormon scripture portrays Melchizedek not as Shem but as his descendant (D&C 84:14–16) who, in the land of Salem, “did reign under his father” (Alma 13:18).
- God’s protection of Sarah in Egypt: Pharaoh is warned by an angel regarding Abraham, “He is a father of God; God is going to be born of his family. If you do any unexpected evil to them, know that I will kill you with this sabre and all this city of yours will be put to the sword” (115). God’s protection of Sarah is implied in the book of Abraham and expressed in various ancient sources, such as the *Genesis Apocryphon* of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which insists

that when Abraham asked Sarah to say she was his sister, he had been divinely directed to do so (Abr. 2:22–25).

- A miraculous blessing by the laying on of hands: After Abraham's generous servant Mamre extended kindness to a mysterious visitor, the visitor "placed his hands upon his head" and pronounced a blessing that resulted in a miracle (117). Another instance of a miraculous blessing by the laying on of hands in the Abraham story occurs in the *Genesis Apocryphon*, when Abraham relates what he performed for the ailing Pharaoh: "I prayed over [hi]m, that I might heal him, and I laid my hands upon his [h]ead. Thus, the affliction was removed from him. . . . The king recovered, rose up."<sup>14</sup> Pharaoh's recognition of Abraham's priesthood is mentioned in the book of Abraham (Abr. 1:26–27).
- Abraham's exemplary hospitality to strangers and the needy: "And having seen this," one text admonishes its readers, "learn too to do mercy to the poor and hospitality to strangers, if you wish to enter the kingdom of God" (160). The Book of Mormon attests to an ancient Israelite teaching—undoubtedly harking back to Abraham—that to qualify for the kingdom of God, one must not "turn away the needy, and the naked" or fail to "visit . . . the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance, if ye have, to those who stand in need" (Alma 34:28).
- The impressive language used by Abraham's three guests who promise the birth of Isaac: During the course of their visit, they speak "wondrous words" (170). Mormon scripture describes the three guests as "angels which were holy men . . . sent forth after the order of God" (JST Gen. 18:23) and tells that "angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost" (2 Ne. 32:3).
- The cataclysmic destruction that overwhelmed Sodom: "Fire and sulphur descended upon the city, and the deeps were split and water flowed forth. The storm of smoke boiled as it dripped down, cry and rumbling, terrible and fearsome" (93). The description is reminiscent of the fate that befell the wicked Nephite cities at the time of the terrible destruction described in the Book of Mormon (3 Ne. 9:1–12).
- The symbolic significance of the binding of Isaac—"a more terrible and greater trial than all" the others (212)—as a type of Christ's sacrifice: "Abraham, Abraham," the voice out of heaven declares,

“just as you did not withhold your son for my name’s sake, just so I too will not withhold my Son for your sake” (162). The Book of Mormon likewise describes Abraham’s offering as “a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son” (Jacob 4:5).

In assessing what might have been improved in the book, the translations occasionally employ words that may give American readers pause, as when Lot’s daughters are said to be “affianced” (171), or when, speaking of idolaters, it is reported that God was angry and gave them famine and “exiguity” (193). But such words appear only rarely, and overall, the issue is negligible in this valuable new contribution to the literature of Abrahamic lore and legend.

Latter-day Saints seeking to do the works of Abraham, who began his momentous journey of faith by seeking ever “greater knowledge” (Abr. 1:2), will welcome the opportunity to do exactly that by perusing this treasure trove of material about Abraham himself. For this opportunity we owe a substantial debt of gratitude to Professor Michael Stone.

---

E. Douglas Clark is an attorney and the director of UN Affairs for the Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society. He is the author of, among other works, *The Blessings of Abraham: Becoming a Zion People* (2005); *Echoes of Eden: Eternal Lessons from Our First Parents* (2010); “A Prologue to Genesis: Moses 1 in Light of Jewish Traditions,” in *BYU Studies* 45, no. 1 (2006); “Cedars and Stars: Enduring Symbols of Cosmic Kingship in Abraham’s Encounter with Pharaoh,” in Gee and Hauglid, eds., *Astronomy, Papyrus and Covenant* (2005); foreword to Hugh W. Nibley’s *Abraham in Egypt*, 2d ed. (2000); and “Abraham,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (1991).

1. Michael E. Stone, *Armenian Apocrypha Relating to Adam and Eve*, *Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha* vol. 14 (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Michael E. Stone, *Armenian Apocrypha Relating to the Patriarchs and Prophets* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1982). ^

2. All of the Armenian texts transcribed in this volume are here published for the first time, except for two that were made available in an eighteenth-century Armenian printing. None of the fifteen texts had previously been translated into English. ^

3. After earning his PhD under Frank Moore Cross at Harvard University, Michael E. Stone joined the faculty at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1966, where he founded the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and served for many years as Professor of Religious Studies and Professor of Armenian Studies. He has also taught and conducted research at other leading universities and institutes worldwide, including the University of Melbourne, Leiden University, Netherlands Institute of Advanced Studies, Harvard Divinity

School, Yale University, University of Pennsylvania, University of Virginia, and University of Richmond, where he was the Distinguished National Endowment for the Humanities Visiting Professor. He is a recipient of the Landau Prize for lifetime achievement in research in the humanities and has served on the editorial boards of *Dead Sea Discoveries*, the *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*, and the *Society of Biblical Literature, Pseudepigrapha Series*. ^

4. Esther G. Chazon, David Satran, and Ruth A. Clements, eds., *Things Revealed: Studies in Early Jewish and Christian Literature in Honor of Michael E. Stone*, Supplements to the *Journal for the Study of Judaism* vol. 89 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), xvii. ^

5. Michael Edward Stone, *Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra*, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990). ^

6. Michael E. Stone, ed., *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus*, Compendia Rerum Judaicarum ad Novum Testamentum, Section Two: The Literature of the Jewish People in the Period of the Second Temple and the Talmud, vol. 2 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1984). ^

7. Michael E. Stone, *Selected Studies in Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha: With Special Reference to the Armenian Tradition*, *Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha* vol. 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1991). ^

8. James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983, 1985), 2:xi, xiii. ^

9. Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 82–85, 101. ^

10. Hugh Nibley, *Enoch the Prophet*, *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1986), 95. ^

11. See instances cited in E. Douglas Clark, *Echoes of Eden: Eternal Lessons from Our First Parents* (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 2010), 33–63. ^

12. Parley P. Pratt, “Editorial Remarks,” *Millennial Star* 3, no. 4 (August 1842): 70–71; Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal: 1833–1893, Typescript*, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983), 2:159. ^

13. Hugh W. Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, 2d ed., *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* vol. 14 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2000), 30. ^

14. 1QapGen xx.28–29, in Daniel A. Machiela, *The Dead Sea Genesis Apocryphon: A New Text and Translation with Introduction and Special Treatment of Columns 13–17*, *Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah* vol. 79 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 76–77. ^

Dennis B. Horne, with material prepared in 1890 by Orson F. Whitney. *Latter Leaves in the Life of Lorenzo Snow*. Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 2012.

*Reviewed by William G. Hartley*

In this important study, Dennis B. Horne provides a biographical treatment of Lorenzo Snow's nine years as President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and his three years as President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Horne is no stranger to writing about Church history. He has authored a book about the life and teachings of Bruce R. McConkie, an edition of Abraham H. Cannon's journals, as well as a devotional and anecdotal history entitled *Faith to Heal and Be Healed*. He has also worked in television broadcasting and as a technical writer for the Church's Materials Management Department.

Lorenzo Snow's life is certainly long overdue for an in-depth analysis. Born in Mantua, Ohio, on April 3, 1814, Lorenzo Snow embraced Mormonism in 1836, filled several missions, entered into plural marriage in 1845, emigrated to Utah in 1848, and was ordained an Apostle in February 1849. From 1849 to 1852, he served missions in Italy, Switzerland, and England. In 1853, he began serving as the church and community leader in Brigham City, Utah, a duty he held many years. He toured Europe and the Middle East from 1872 to 1873. In 1886 and 1887, he was imprisoned for practicing plural marriage. He became the President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in 1889, served as the first president of the Salt Lake Temple, and succeeded Wilford Woodruff as Church President in the fall of 1898. During travels to St. George, Utah, in early 1899, he received inspiration to promote the paying of tithes by the Saints. On October 10, 1901, he died at age eighty-seven. In short, his life intersected with nearly every major development in nineteenth-century Church history. Historians and lay readers alike should find this study to be of great value.

Previous work about Lorenzo Snow is limited. In 1884, five years before he became President of the Twelve, his sister Eliza R. Snow published *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow*. Five years later, Elder Snow, upon release from prison, employed close friend and noted historian Orson F. Whitney to write a biographical sequel to the Eliza Snow book, extending to when Lorenzo became President of the Quorum of Twelve. From 1889 to 1890, Whitney took up pen and ink and wrote a manuscript, "Later Leaves in the Life of Lorenzo Snow." Years later, Snow's teenage grandson LeRoi C. Snow typed the Whitney manuscript. The complete manuscript remains unpublished.

Previous biographies of Snow are by Thomas C. Romney, who treats Snow's presiding years in a limited measure, and by Francis M. Gibbons, whose work lacks references to any sources and has no bibliography. Part of the difficulty is that there is less source material about Lorenzo Snow than any other LDS prophet (14). Family tradition says that a Snow descendant burned a trunk-load of his papers, diaries, and correspondence. Therefore, for Snow's presidency years, Horne found that the best available sources are journals of Snow's close associates, newspaper reports, and the *Journal History of the Church*.

Horne's book is the most definitive work on the leader and prophet who brought the Mormon faith into the twentieth century. In particular, Horne's book examines Snow's twelve presiding years in greater detail than any previous study. He first provides Orson Whitney's material that covers from 1885 to 1889, comprising nine chapters of the book; Horne adds a few endnotes that comment or clarify. He uses about one-third of the Whitney manuscript, excluding material copied from others and excising long discussions about the antipolygamy crusade, which, Horne explains, the Manifesto made superfluous (14). Horne then takes up where Whitney left off and provides a thorough biographical treatment of Snow's presiding years. Those years involved difficult issues and situations: disunity among some of the Twelve; succession in the Presidency; the Manifesto; Church sugar enterprising; Utah adopting national political parties; the "Political Manifesto"; chafing by leaders like Moses Thatcher, B. H. Roberts, and Charles Penrose; the Salt Lake Temple's completion; financial crises in the early 1890s; Utah statehood; oppressive Church debt; and the Spanish-American War.

Horne starts the book with a substantial biographical look at Orson F. Whitney and his association with Lorenzo Snow. The first chapter summarizes Snow's life up to his call to the apostleship in 1849, and the

second chapter covers his apostolic ministry. Chapters 3 through 11 are from Whitney's manuscript, as mentioned, and deal with Snow's plural marriages, including his exile, arrest, incarceration, and release. The next nine chapters by Horne explore new territory. The first three deal with Snow's experiences as President of the Quorum of the Twelve and then with problems he inherited upon becoming Church President. The next three chapters are about the Church's financial distress and President Snow's tithe-paying campaign. The final three chapters concern the end of President Snow's ministry, his passing, and his legacy. Seven appendices enrich the study, including one dealing with the "As Man now is, God once was" couplet attributed to Snow. Another looks at his St. George tithing discourse.

This book is meat, not milk. Horne deals forthrightly with difficult and controversial issues, many of which most Latter-day Saints know little about. For example, in a section called "The Windows of Heaven Revisited," Horne values Jay Bell's revisionist, critical assessment and lays out the "unsubstantiated elements" in the "promised rain" story (325–27). Horne also looks at the period of intense transition after the 1890 Manifesto, claiming that the Quorum of the Twelve was a body of men "in disarray and disunity." While "disarray" might be an overstatement, this period, Horne acknowledges, is "of such importance that it requires appropriate notice here and at later key points" in the book (201). He devotes full attention to the Woodruff-to-Snow succession delay and does not avoid the touchy Bullion-Beck mine controversy.

The book offers new information that is faith-affirming as well. For example, Snow was informed through a dream while he slept in the temple that he (age 82) and his wife Minnie (age 42) were to have another child. Despite their advancing years, Minnie was expecting a few months later (231–32). Other examples include Snow's experience raising the dead (233) and additional documentation of Christ's visitation in the Salt Lake Temple, where he instructed Snow to immediately reorganize the First Presidency (233, 261–66 and endnotes).

The author highlights a number of Snow's initiatives that powerfully influenced the Church, and of those, Horne says, two were Snow's most important achievements. First, as President of the Twelve, his peace-making skills brought unity, often settling difficulties between his brethren who held strong, opposing positions. Second, as Church President, he put in motion needed measures to resolve the Church's massive debt problems.

The book incorporates fine scholarship by historians like Ron Walker and Tom Alexander, and it draws heavily from journals and studies of “insiders” Wilford Woodruff, Anthon H. Lund, Rudger Clawson, Francis M. Lyman, L. John Nuttall, John Henry Smith, and George Q. and Abraham H. Cannon. As happens in most thoughtfully crafted histories, Horne’s commentary endnotes often are rich and merit close reading.

While some readers might find the separate narratives distracting, Horne tackles well his double task of presenting Whitney’s 130-year-old history and then producing new history of Snow’s presiding years. Latter-day Saints will appreciate Horne’s faithful treatment of Lorenzo Snow’s prophetic impact, and readers of any persuasion will find here an excellently researched, documented, structured, and argued history.

---

William G. Hartley is Emeritus Professor of History at Brigham Young University and has served as president of the Mormon History Association. His areas of expertise are the historical development of the LDS Church’s priesthood and organizations, nineteenth-century LDS emigration, and biography writing. He is the history consultant for the KSL-TV weekly documentary series *History of the Saints*.



Robert S. McPherson, Jim Dandy, and Sarah E. Burak.  
*Navajo Tradition, Mormon Life:  
The Autobiography and Teachings of Jim Dandy.*  
Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2012.

*Reviewed by Jessie L. Embry*

*Navajo Tradition, Mormon Life* shows how Jim Dandy—a Mormon Navajo who participated in the Indian Student Placement Program, attended Brigham Young University, and taught school in San Juan County, Utah—combines his Navajo and Mormon lifestyles. He asked his Anglo neighbor Robert S. McPherson, a professor at Utah State University Eastern–San Juan Center, to help him record his history. McPherson has written many books on Navajo culture and history, including *Navajo Land, Navajo Culture: The Utah Experience in the Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001) and *A Navajo Legacy: The Life and Teachings of John Holiday* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005). His research is well respected by the academic community and Native American tribes. Sarah E. Burak was an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer in Utah and helped McPherson with the Dandy interviews.

Before I read the book, I was acquainted with Jim Dandy's story because I had interviewed him in October 1990 for the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies' LDS Native American Oral History Project. The interview took place shortly after George P. Lee of the Seventy was excommunicated from the LDS Church. After discussing his experiences as a Latter-day Saint and as the son of a medicine man, Dandy, who had served as a mission companion with Lee, expressed his feeling that Lee had moved away from Church teachings even though he was a General Authority. At the end of the interview, Dandy graciously thanked me for the opportunity to share his experiences, leaving me with the impression that he was a well-spoken, forthright, kind, and courteous man who focused on his convictions as a Latter-day Saint.

Dandy had wanted to share his story in more detail for years. McPherson explains in the book that he met Dandy in 1976 when they were neighbors in Blanding, Utah. At that time, Dandy asked McPherson

if he would write his story. McPherson, who took an oral history class from me, always had many projects going and did not find the time to talk to Dandy until Burak worked for VISTA in the area. With her help, McPherson was able to interview Dandy. Then Dandy, McPherson, and Burak conducted other interviews with Dandy's relatives to add background and depth to his stories.

McPherson carefully spells out in the introduction how he combines Dandy's stories with other Navajo voices. He also uses the monthly publication *Leading the Way*, where Navajo elders share their views. This information is in the endnotes, so I read the book with my finger in the back so I could learn more about Dandy's experiences, and the quotes from the elders helped me understand and appreciate Navajo traditions.

The book is divided into three parts. First, McPherson uses his extensive research to carefully describe Mormon and Navajo history and then discuss similarities and differences in their beliefs. He points out that he is not trying to establish that the two traditions are inter-related, but he shows common beliefs that help foster understanding that Dandy can be both a practicing Mormon and a medicine man. McPherson explains, "A medicine man, familiar with ceremonial knowledge, stories, and language, would be more at ease" with discussing the two beliefs "than many Navajo people unfamiliar with traditional teachings. In Jim Dandy's circumstance, where he is conversant with both worlds, he has no problem going between the two" (49). When I start reading about the Navajo worlds and creation stories, they are usually so foreign to me that my mind fogs out. McPherson's introduction explains how these stories are not that much different than my own beliefs, which gives me a frame of reference to focus on and understand what Navajos believe.

The second part of the book is Dandy's life story, but it reads very differently than the interview I did with him. As McPherson explains, "This book will not sound like a straight oral interview" (xiii). McPherson interweaves Dandy's story with background information on Navajo life and quotes from other interviews. To distinguish the difference, Dandy's and the other interviewees' stories are printed in italics. For the most part, the shift from contextual information to oral history interviews flows smoothly. There are some places where the transfer is a little awkward and repetitive. As an oral historian, I would have preferred just having Dandy's story. Such a format, however, would have made it difficult for someone who does not understand how Dandy fits into the broader Navajo and Mormon story.

The final section of the book includes Dandy's own teachings. He discusses the place of the Holy People, creation stories, animals, and traditional ceremonies in the Navajo worldview. He explains the "light and dark sides" of life and how Navajos avoid and cure evil. McPherson explains why Dandy wanted to tell the story of both Mormon and Navajo influences in his life. "Conversant in both worlds, he has shared his teachings from the past to help people in the future. Wisely, his grandfather and father steered him on a course that allowed him to be successful in both. . . . Now it is Jim's turn to point the way for future generations of young Navajos interested in traditional teachings. That is why he had this book written" (248).

I enjoyed reading McPherson and Dandy's cooperative work and learned much that will help in my own research with Navajo Farina King about Mormon Navajos, which research is based on Redd Center and LDS Church History Department interviews. Dandy's story is a valuable microcosm of what we are writing in our study. Not all the interviewees agree with Dandy's combination of Navajo traditions and Mormon practices, but as I read Dandy's teachings, I better understand those who do believe such worldviews can be combined.

*Navajo Tradition, Mormon Life* is a creative combination of personal narrative and scholarly work. For the most part, McPherson has developed a nice balance so that people interested in Navajo beliefs in general, Mormons wanting to learn more about Navajos, and Navajos wanting to see how their beliefs might connect with Mormonism will find much of benefit. I do wish for more of Dandy's own words in the second section, and more context for his beliefs in section three. However, for the most part, McPherson and Dandy have successfully forged the difficult path of balancing between two narrative approaches. They have created a landmark study for finding a common ground between Mormon and Navajo teachings.

---

Jessie L. Embry is the associate director of the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at Brigham Young University. She has written and edited numerous books about the American West and Mormon history, including *Black Saints in a White Church* and *"In His Own Language": Mormon Spanish Speaking Congregations in the United States*.

*Ephraim's Rescue*. Written and directed by T. C. Christensen.  
DVD. Excel Entertainment and Remember Films, 2013.

*Reviewed by John Hilton III*

A mark of good historical fiction is that it motivates people to study more about the original historical events. While academic history books are the most in-depth and accurate, some lay readers may find them difficult to digest without some impetus. Novels and films based on real-life experiences can pique the curiosity of audiences and motivate them to tackle more difficult material. In the quest to determine what “really” happened, the record of the events, the interpretation of the events, and the dialogue about the events can enrich lifelong learning when using a variety of media, especially in these times of such new-media enthusiasm.

*Ephraim's Rescue* motivated me to learn more about Ephraim Hanks and the experiences portrayed in the movie. The film begins with an account of an elderly Ephraim Hanks racing to the Johnson home to heal Sister Johnson, who is seriously ill. When Hanks arrives, Brother Johnson informs him that he is too late—his wife passed away two hours previously. Nevertheless, Ephraim washes his hands and proceeds to administer to Sister Johnson, who is raised from the dead. In the blessing, Ephraim promises her that she will yet give birth to seven daughters, who will stand by her in future times. While watching the movie, I wondered to myself, did this sequence really happen, or is it an exaggeration made for dramatic purposes? So I did some research.

In many instances, I found some corroboration in the book *Scouting for the Mormons on the Great Frontier*, such as the account of a heavenly message inviting Hanks to help the handcart companies.<sup>1</sup> This book, written by Ephraim's son and grandson, presents many events recounted in *Ephraim's Rescue*. As with most historical retellings, *Scouting for the Mormons* is not an unbiased account; nevertheless, it represents some of the historical materials available to Christensen as he made the film and

to those interested in other ways of framing this particular historical narrative. Perhaps a more historically rigorous source, which also verifies many of the details of the movie, is Richard K. Hanks's master thesis, "Eph Hanks, Pioneer Scout."<sup>2</sup>

On some occasions, I was disappointed to learn that a scene had stretched the truth. A particular blessing from Hanks has incredible verbiage that I felt was quite faith-promoting. Alas, upon further investigation, I learned that the specific words depicted in the blessing were an instance of dramatic license. This highlights a potential pitfall of historical fiction, namely that fictionalized events are too often assumed to be true. That history and narrative are intimately connected is not a new idea; however, the complicated relationship between event and record is especially brought to the foreground in this film.

There are also some events portrayed in this movie that we know *did not* happen (for example, a blessing stating that at some future time, through means unknown, people would hear of a certain miracle). These examples of dramatic license are represented alongside events that we know *did* happen and can be verified through a historical record. However, one cannot fault T. C. Christensen, the director of *Ephraim's Rescue*, for adding in details where few are known; in fact, he works magic with the materials available to him. Part of the work of filmmakers is to dramatize the past in such a way that it becomes present to viewers. Christensen has done so, further establishing his mastery of faith-promoting narrative.

Known also for his cinematographic expertise in films such as *The Testaments*, *Joseph Smith: Prophet of the Restoration*, and *17 Miracles*, Christensen has again found success in weaving together the stories of Ephraim Hanks and Thomas Dobson of the Martin Handcart Company in an outstanding film for the whole family, although small children may be troubled by the disturbing elements of pioneers in distress. As with *17 Miracles*, the cinematography is aesthetically pleasing and the musical score is moving. These cinematographic details draw viewers into the storyline and invite them to imagine being present for the events portrayed.

While the narrative structure sometimes demands a departure from historical events, I was impressed by the detail with which Christensen portrays Hanks. For example, after Hanks shaves off his beard, he refers to himself as a "peeled onion," a line that is attributed to Hanks in *Scouting for Mormons*. Later in the movie, Hanks spends the night at the home of a couple in Draper, Utah. Viewers overhear a few seconds of

conversation before they all retire; the conversation portrays Hanks recounting a story in which Brigham Young instructed him to tear down the foundation of the house he was building and make it twice as thick. While this story is not a focal point, it is an illustration of the faithfulness with which Christensen attempts to render the film; even a small side-conversation uses words that Hanks is purported to have said.

Memorializing the stories of the pioneers is not an easy or insignificant feat. President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “Stories of the beleaguered Saints and of their suffering and death . . . [and] of their rescue need to be repeated again and again. They speak of the very essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”<sup>3</sup> With *Ephraim's Rescue*, Christensen provides motivation for many to learn more about these stalwart Saints. Perhaps most importantly, this film can instill, as it did in me, a desire to be a more faithful Latter-day Saint, which is a goal worthy of both history and narrative.

---

John Hilton III is Assistant Professor of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University. He received his MA from Harvard and his PhD from BYU, both degrees in education. He worked in the Church Educational System for eleven years and also managed their social media and public internet sites.

1. Sidney Alvarus Hanks and Ephraim K. Hanks, *Scouting for the Mormons on the Great Frontier* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1948). ^
2. Richard K. Hanks, “Eph Hanks, Pioneer Scout” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1973). ^
3. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Reach with a Rescuing Hand,” *Ensign* 26 (November 1996): 86. ^

NOTICES

*Izapa Sacred Space: Sculpture Calendar Codes*, by V. Garth Norman (Sunhew Press, 2012).

This book is the culmination of fifty years of research by one of the foremost scholars in the field of Pre-Classical Mesoamerican studies, particularly focusing on the important site of Izapa, located on the southern Pacific coast of Mexico near the border of Guatemala. Archaeologist V. Garth Norman began his work at Izapa in 1962 and continued to work at the site for two decades on behalf of the New World Archaeological Foundation, resulting in the publication of his *Izapa Sculpture: Album* in 1973, *Izapa Sculpture: Text* in 1976, and *Astronomical Orientations of Izapa Sculptures* in 1980, a pioneering contribution to the important field of archaeoastronomy.

Izapa is the largest and most important Late Formative (500 BC–AD 200) center in the region, with large pyramidal structures constructed around a number of plazas dotted with sculpted monuments placed at key points. More than eighty carved monuments are known from the site, an unprecedented wealth of art and a key resource to our understanding of ancient Mesoamerican society and theology. Norman begins with the premise, first proposed by Vincent Malmström in 1973, that Izapa’s latitude makes it the perfect candidate for the origin of the two most important ancient Mesoamerican calendars.

But Norman goes well beyond this important finding by asserting that the positions of the Izapa monuments constitute a massive system for calendric interpretation. In so doing, he convincingly asserts that these monuments must be studied and interpreted as a whole, rather than to read them individually or out of context. In addition, he masterfully demonstrates that the

complex artistic symbolism of the Izapa monuments is just as highly developed a system of communication as the hieroglyphic texts of the Maya. Norman’s profound understanding of the underlying Mesoamerican theology of Izapa and related cultures adds much-needed blood and flesh to what otherwise would be a lifeless corpse of mathematical and astronomical data. He uses the myth narratives of the Popol Vuh and ethnographic sources creatively, showing that the Izapans were not just interested in the dance of planets and stars in the heavens but also in what these movements say about the cycles of life itself.

This book will surely prove to be of great interest to anyone interested in the art, science, and culture of ancient Mesoamerica.

—Allen J. Christenson

*Exploring the First Vision*, edited by Samuel Alonzo Dodge and Steven C. Harper (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 2012).

This book sets out to do exactly what the title says it does—explore the First Vision. For most readers, that exploration will take them places they have not yet seen. Writings by many well-known Church scholars are brought together to give a broader and deeper meaning to the genesis event of the Restoration. Contributors include scholars such as James B. Allen, Richard Lloyd Anderson, Milton V. Backman Jr., Steven C. Harper, Dean C. Jessee, Larry C. Porter, and John W. Welch. Their qualifications, research, and insights are impressive, and they have strived, in an evenhanded and rigorous way, to achieve the “coupling [of] historical study with faith” (xviii).

This volume includes foundational, classic scholarship in previously published articles, such as “The Earliest

Documented Accounts of the First Vision” by Jesse and “Emergence of a Fundamental: The Expanding Role of Joseph Smith’s First Vision in Mormon Religious Thought” by Allen. Newer scholarship is also included, such as Anderson’s chapter on the historical setting of the First Vision, a chapter by Allen and Welch comparing the multiple accounts of the First Vision, and Harper’s response to three common arguments made by those who dispute the First Vision narrative.

Each chapter of this book works together to create a sharper picture of the First Vision. The previous scholarship enriching this volume acts as a foundation on which the new First Vision scholarship stands. Together they make this volume the most thorough approach to date for studying this axial gospel event.

While *Exploring the First Vision* is valuable because it brings the best scholarship, once diffused in sundry books and journals, into a single volume, the book is especially valuable for Latter-day Saints who have struggled to make sense of the different accounts of the First Vision. For instance, the evidence in the chapter by Allen and Welch demonstrates that the multiple accounts of Joseph’s First Vision consistently harmonize, and moreover they possess a casual quality to them that lends credence to their authenticity. As the studies in this book show, these are honest accounts, hardly the writings of one bent on perpetrating any kind of fraud.

All who are interested in the spiritual roots of Latter-day Saint historical and religious experience can welcome this book as an enlightening and up-to-date resource. It takes Joseph’s prophetic calling far beyond its basic details and opens valuable pathways to new vistas of understanding.

—James T. Summerhays

*Villages on Wheels: A Social History of the Gathering to Zion*, by Stanley B. Kimball and Violet T. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011).

With all that has been said and written of the pioneer heroes of early Mormonism, *Villages on Wheels* beats down the partition of dates and facts to channel the voices of those who were “called to pass through it.” Uniquely organized to attract both the scholar and lay reader, *Villages on Wheels* presents the unadulterated history of the pioneers through hundreds of diaries, journal entries, and poems written by those who blazed the trail. Unlike other works on the exodus, *Villages* is a social history—a history of the common man told by the common man—independent of the political and economic approach that is more commonly discussed in academia. This characteristic makes the book accessible, educating and entertaining readers of all interest levels and disciplines.

*Villages* is clearly not a devotional work; the Kimballs include the good, the bad, and the ugly to honor the reality of the journey and give human dimension to the experience. The authors realize such human dimension in the book’s focal point: the daily life of those on the trail. The title itself encapsulates the development of community identity that grew among the Saints during the period of the migration. No longer were these early members of the Church defined by their individual heritage or nationality, but rather as a traveling faith-culture united in purpose and eternal inheritance—a concept that is key to the book’s thesis.

A distinguishing feature of *Villages on Wheels* is its chapter entirely dedicated to the lives of the unsung heroes of the trek—the draft animals that paved the trail with their hooves. Explaining journal entries of those who



owned and cared for the animals, the Kimballs pay homage to the grit and resilience of these animals.

Featuring thousands of firsthand records never before compiled, *Villages* reaches beyond the Sunday School stories, strips away the romanticism, and sinks the reader deep into the day-to-day experiences of the Saints. With copious references to these personal accounts, the Kimballs step back and allow the Saints to tell their own tales of suffering, love, humor, tragedy, and joy. *Villages on Wheels* is a riveting compilation for any reader looking to discover this monumental and defining experience in Mormon history through the accounts of the common people who lived it.

—Haleigh Cole

Scripture Bibliography: A Database for Scholarly Research of Topics in the LDS Scriptures, compiled by Ryan Combs (<http://guides.lib.byu.edu/scripture>).

This new scripture bibliography database, compiled by Brigham Young University Religion and Ancient Studies librarian Ryan Combs, allows users to access bibliographic entries for over seven thousand books, book reviews, pamphlets, tracts, speeches, talks, journal articles, and other media. These publications span 1830–1996, and the database is not yet complete; materials leading up to the present are still being added and eventually will give users ready access to an even greater library of resources.

Users can make good use of the scripture bibliography database in many

ways. Researchers can search a specific publication for materials related to a given topic, thus accessing the relevant contents in each of these resources. Included titles are the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, the *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, *BYU Studies*, *FARMS Review*, and the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, among others.

In addition, a useful feature of this database is its reverse scripture index, which allows users to search the standard works by book, chapter, or verse. Results will show what specifically has been said about a certain scripture or where citations to verses appear in the different materials. Users can also search by author, title, keyword, and range of years.

Other reverse scripture indexes are available, though they differ in scope and format. Perhaps the best known of these is the LDS Scripture Citation Index. That database, created by two BYU professors, draws solely from the *Journal of Discourses*, general conference talks, and *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. That citation index also has a mobile app for iOS and Android.

Though not yet designed for mobile devices, the Scripture Bibliography compiled by Ryan Combs is more expansive and much of its material is academic in nature. This database is available to all and will be especially helpful to researchers, seminary and institute teachers, Gospel Doctrine teachers, and anyone wanting to engage in a serious study of scholarly research on topics found in the LDS scriptures.

—Mark Melville