Introduction

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The Book of Mormon presents itself as the work, principally, of three men.

The book is of course named after its chief architect, Mormon, a military captain and prophet-historian who witnessed the collapse of a thousand-year-old civilization. Mormon saw the need to tell his people's story in a sweeping one-volume narrative, brilliant but tortured in its execution. But as he came to the end of his literary efforts, he apparently felt that his book remained incomplete, and so he left the record to his son Moroni to finish off. Moroni at first seems to have felt content just to supplement his father's book with a brief epilogue, but he eventually found himself driven to add substantially to the volume. The Book of Mormon is thus, in its final form, as much the work of Moroni as of Mormon. Although the book takes its name from Mormon, it was Moroni who brought the book to the attention of Joseph Smith and who is said to hold the keys over the record.

Due to a complicated series of events, however, readers of the Book of Mormon encounter another major voice long before they become acquainted with either Mormon or Moroni. The volume opens with the lengthy record of Nephi, writings originally assembled some nine or ten centuries before Mormon and Moroni began their work on the book. And thanks to his larger-than-life presence, Nephi has become, in Mormon culture, the book's most recognizable hero. His story is interesting and inspiring, and his prophecies are the most compelling in the whole book. Although the inclusion of his writings in the Book of Mormon was ultimately the result of an afterthought, Nephi clearly joins Mormon and Moroni as a major contributor to the project. Mormon's discovery of Nephi's writings seems to have altered the direction of his own project, and there is substantial evidence that Moroni became especially familiar with Nephi's writings. Undeniably rich though the distinct but intertwined projects of Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni are, it is too easy to allow them to crowd out another important contributor to the Book of Mormon. Far too little attention has been given to the prophet Jacob, Nephi's younger brother, and his importance to the Book of Mormon as a project has consequently often been overlooked.

Jacob was arguably the first great Nephite theologian. It was to him that his father, Lehi, directed what readers encounter as the first substantive treatment of grand theological themes (see 2 Nephi 2), and it was Jacob who first developed those themes in what remains one of the richest chapters in the whole of the Book of Mormon (see 2 Nephi 9). Jacob's teachings on atonement and grace clearly influenced his older brother's thinking (compare 2 Nephi 10:23–25 and 2 Nephi 25:23), just as they influenced much later Book of Mormon prophets like Benjamin and Abinadi, Alma and Amulek (see Mosiah 3; 15–16; Alma 12; 34; 42). His careful work on the interpretation of Isaiah also deeply informed his older brother's understanding of that prophet (compare 1 Nephi 22 with 2 Nephi 25, mediated by 2 Nephi 6 and 2 Nephi 10), and he quite uniquely gave detailed attention to a prophet the Book of Mormon presents as having been an influence on Isaiah himself (see Jacob 4–6). Jacob was the first Nephite prophet to defend cultural minorities (see Jacob 1–3), and his willingness to speak truth to power provided a model for some of the most important prophetic interventions in later Lehite history (see especially Mosiah 11–12 and Helaman 13–16). Further, Jacob's confrontation with an enemy of Nephite Christian religion (see Jacob 7) set the tone for similar confrontations later in Nephite history (see Alma 1; 30). Although the book that bears his name is rather short, comparatively, Jacob's imprint on the Book of Mormon is impressive.

With these considerations in mind, the second annual Summer Seminar in Mormon Theology, co-sponsored by the Mormon Theology Seminar and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship and generously funded by the Laura F. Willes Center for Book of Mormon Studies, convened in 2015 in New York City to study the seventh

and final chapter of the Book of Jacob. Graciously hosted for two weeks by Union Theological Seminary, eight scholars from a variety of disciplines and with a variety of interests sat down to read, with great care and a great many questions, the story of Jacob's confrontation with Sherem, the notorious critic of Christianity. We hoped to learn from the story itself, as well as from theological statements embedded in the narrative. We hoped to see how the story relates itself literarily to other stories in Mormon scripture, as well as to understand the philosophical implications of the rival conceptions of law and the messianic on display in the text. And of course, we hoped to experience the sense of camaraderie that attends collaborative reading of a sacred text.

It is impossible to reproduce in writing the depth and richness of the seminar as an experience. Mornings were dedicated to individual preparation for our collaborative work, with each participant producing notes and a short essay on just a few verses of Jacob 7. Early each afternoon, we met as a group to discuss the text and to share our essays with one another. We spent between four and six hours each afternoon working together on the details of the scriptural text—trying to understand the determinations and the ambiguities of the narrative, teasing out the theological and philosophical presuppositions of the text, and raising many more questions than we could possibly hope to answer. After just a few days, however, a set of identifiable questions emerged as central to our collaborative reading, and our several interests in the text began to take clearer shape. As our first week of work came to an end, we began to turn our attention from working directly on the text to formulating both our shared and our private conclusions. The papers that make up this volume were written, in their first form, over the course of our second week together. We worked on each other's ideas, listened to each other's papers, and tried to organize our thoughts about the questions that had come to interest us all. And at the end of the second week, we hosted a public symposium to present our preliminary conclusions.

This volume collects our conclusions in a somewhat more finalized form than that in which they were presented in New York. It opens with a summary of our findings, written collaboratively and meant to outline a few of the things we came to focus on over the course of our work together. The Summary Report presents these findings in the form of complex answers to apparently straightforward questions. Nonetheless, the conclusions drawn in these summary findings are anything but conclusive. They summarize our discussions and our shared interests, but they don't come even close to exhausting the virtuosity of the text. If there's anything to be learned from sitting down for two weeks to read a chapter of the Book of Mormon together, it's that at least a year of such work would be needed to feel like the basic implications of the text have been decently addressed. The conclusions shared in the Summary Report, then, are merely provisional, meant more to serve as an invitation than to decide on the meaning of the text. We hope others will see these points of possible interpretation as a spur to provide better and closer readings, richer and more poignant readings. Indeed, we hope that each of these seminars—this is one of many—helps just to begin a longer conversation about the richness of Mormon scripture.

Of course, once the seminar had come to a conclusion, each of its participants had time to develop her or his own private interests in Jacob 7 somewhat further. This is what makes up the bulk of this volume, more mature versions of the papers presented at the conclusion of the seminar in 2015. In the several chapters that follow, then, several themes within the story of Jacob's encounter with Sherem find fuller articulation. They deserve some introduction here, if only to prepare the reader to appreciate them better.

The book opens with Jana Riess's "'There Came a Man': Sherem, Scapegoating, and the Inversion of Prophetic Tradition." Riess discusses the importance of the formulaic opening words of Jacob's story—"and there came a man among the people"—which ironically borrows a trope from stories of prophetic intervention in the Hebrew Bible. In scripture, the formula almost universally introduces a story about a nameless "man of God" who appears from nowhere to deliver an uncomfortable message to those in power, usually with rather drastic consequences. In

Jacob 7, oddly, the formula introduces Sherem, the man who demands a sign rather than delivers one. To develop this reversal of expectations, Riess draws on the literary and anthropological theory of René Girard, exploring the uncomfortable outcome of Sherem's intervention. Sherem is struck dead, but in such a way that Nephite society turns its collective attention in a new and perhaps unprecedented way to their responsibility for (as well as their antipathy toward) the estranged Lamanites, their brothers and sisters. Riess's study asks readers to confront deep ambiguities in Jacob 7, including the possibility that a deeply inspired and inspiring narrative bears within it ethically troubling details. Adam Miller, in "Reading Signs or Repeating Symptoms," further explores suggestions in the text of the Sherem story that its moral lessons are fraught and ambiguous. On Miller's reading, Jacob tells a story that's at once triumphalistic and tragic. The prophet triumphs over true doctrine's foe, yet the prophet clearly mispredicts the behavior of that foe. Jacob tells Sherem he would deny any sign granted because of the devil's influence, but Sherem, after seeing a sign, genuinely seeks repentance and helps launch a large-scale Nephite return to true religion. Jacob has apparently fallen into the trap of viewing Sherem through a lens colored by his difficult experiences with his older brothers, brothers who were, like Sherem, committed to the Mosaic regime and unsure about Nephi and Jacob and their "doctrine of Christ." Beautifully, however, Miller notes that the story ends with Jacob's surprise at the turn of events—and with his leading his people in a new attempt to reach out to the children of his older brothers. Kim Berkey also finds in Jacob 7 a story of development and maturation. In "The Lord's Prayer(s) in Jacob 7," she looks carefully at the way the most dramatic parts of the Sherem story—his being struck down, his subsequent confession, and his eventual spectacular death—are organized around two prayers offered by Jacob. Further, Berkey shows, each of the two prayers contains within it an allusion to an important prayer spoken by Jesus Christ in the New Testament's synoptic gospels: the Lord's Prayer from the Sermon on the Mount and Christ's desperate prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Strikingly, the earlier of Jacob's two prayers, uttered in close connection with his misprediction of Sherem's response to the divinely granted sign, finds him struggling to reconcile his will to God's, while the later of the two prayers, offered after Jacob has been surprised by the turn of events, shows him simply requesting something of his Father in heaven and seeing it granted. In the place of a kind of tortured asceticism, in imitation of Christ's suffering in the Garden, Jacob's more mature prayer exhibits a deep intimacy with God that simply follows the prayer the Lord recommends to his followers in his most famous sermon. The larger story of Jacob 7 can thus be read, Berkey argues, as outlining a theology of right and proper prayer. Jacob Rennaker's "Divine Dream Time: The Hope and Hazard of Revelation" argues that a theology of time accompanies any theology of prayer on offer in Jacob 7. Rennaker takes his cue, interestingly, from Jacob's famously melancholy farewell, included only once the Sherem story has come to its conclusion. For Rennaker, Jacob's talk of the dreamlike passage of time provides a useful metaphor for Jacob's messianic experience of time. Sherem's defense of the law of Moses is rooted in a linear conception of time, uninterruptable by any messianic surprise. Jacob, on the other hand, lives a life of hope that draws the future into the present, interrupting the smooth flow of time, causing him to experience time in a fundamentally distinct way. The hazard of revelation thus lies in the tortured sense of time that accompanies it, and Rennaker goes so far as to suggest that Sherem's stroke might well have been a direct consequence of his being granted, for a moment at least, a glimpse into messianic time. Unable to reorient the present to a messianic future, Sherem collapses in fear. By contrast, Jacob continues his ministry in hope. Joseph Spencer's contribution to the volume also takes its orientation from Jacob's concluding farewell. But where Rennaker draws from the farewell a key metaphor for making sense of the Sherem story, Spencer's "Weeping for Zion" gives detailed attention just to the farewell itself, largely setting the Sherem story aside in order to ask what might be learned from Jacob's melancholy words. Spencer shows that the structure of Jacob's farewell focuses the Nephite experience in a peculiar way on the inaccessibility of their lost homeland, the land of Jerusalem. Drawing on psychology and philosophy to distinguish between distressingly pathological and spiritually productive forms of sadness, he argues that Jacob's farewell can be interpreted as modeling the latter. Because what Jacob's people mourned was Jerusalem's loss, moreover, his poignant farewell brings into a focus his clear interest throughout his

sermons and writings in Israel's covenantal destiny. Jacob's tragic tenor, on Spencer's account, exhibits itself in its most concentrated form in the prophet's consecrated weeping for Zion. Sharon Harris's "Reauthoring Our Covenant Obligation to Scripture and Family" focuses, like Spencer does, on the way Jacob's story helps to frame the Abrahamic covenant that's so central to Mormonism. Tracing priestly and temple themes that organize the narrative of the Sherem encounter, Harris asks about the importance of the fact that the story culminates in a renewed emphasis on scripture. She notes that the closure of Jacob's book is followed in the Book of Mormon by Enos's report of the sacred event during which Jacob gave him charge of the scriptural record. The transmission of the record is passed within the family, from generation to generation, and using language deeply suggestive of covenant. These are significant details in such close connection with a story that's primarily about how to read scripture—about whether it is or isn't appropriate to read the canonical law of Moses as messianic in nature. On Harris's reading, Jacob inherits a tradition but must for that very reason reauthor the meaning of the covenant that obligates him. The difficulties attending Jacob's encounter with Sherem thus help to outline the complex nature of covenantal inheritance. Like Harris, Jenny Webb gives her attention to the role played in Jacob 7 by family and covenant. In "Formed by Family: Jacob 7 as a Site for Sealing," however, Webb roots her reading in the easily-overlooked theme of flesh and family that often draws Jacob's attention in his preaching and writing. Reviewing in great detail Jacob's most intimate relations, Webb helps to reveal how all of Jacob's family are implicitly woven into the story of the prophet's encounter with Sherem. Distressingly, Jacob's experience with Sherem takes place long after Jacob's loved ones have disappeared or been estranged, adding poignancy to his self-understanding as a wanderer, at odds with his errant brothers and cousins. Yet in a way, they all live again in his present experience. And importantly, Webb argues that Jacob's experience with Sherem finds echoes in the record of the child of his own flesh, Enos. Jacob 7 thus becomes the heart of a larger network of family relations, binding together the people Jacob could not keep close to him in life. Jacob 7 is an excessively rich text. These papers only scratch the surface. We hope that readers of this volume can glimpse some of that same depth as they work through our reflections and begin to formulate some of their own.