

# A STEADY STREAM OF SIGNIFICANT RECOGNITIONS

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People of all kinds have read the Book of Mormon over and over, from various points of view and in many different times and places. The words of this timeless record speak to people in numerous ways, even from one reading to the next. The search for significant archaic details embedded in this record that were in all probability unknown and most likely even unknowable to Joseph Smith or anyone else in the early nineteenth century is not intended to detract from other kinds of readings, but rather to bring to light a stream of significant and interesting details that are part of the fabric of this complex and yet simple book. It is especially intriguing to me how these nuances have often caught my attention when I was least expecting to find them.

For example, in reading the Book of Mormon with a class of honors students at Brigham Young University recently, I was rewarded with yet another round of ideas that I had not previously noticed. Several years ago I had noticed that the word *Lord* appears in an expanded form

ten times (seven times as “Lord God,” three times as “Lord Omnipotent”) in King Benjamin’s speech, perhaps reflecting an old liturgical requirement for showing respect and tenfold perfection in calling upon the divine name, especially when seeking atonement.<sup>1</sup> Thus I was impressed to notice that the word *Lord* also appears exactly ten times in the psalm of Nephi, which also deals with the atoning embrace of God (see 2 Nephi 4:16–35), and that the words *Lord* and *Son* are both mentioned precisely ten times in Alma’s powerfully articulate speech on the plan of redemption and atonement in Alma 12–13. Remarkably, the phrase *O Lord* is found exactly ten times in Alma’s prayer in Antionum, when he called upon God for strength in bringing souls to Christ (see Alma 31:26–35). Standing behind this tenfold repetitive practice may be the ancient poem of Zenos quoted in Alma 33:4–11 (which Alma apparently knew well enough to recite spontaneously from memory), for it contains ten times the word *hear*, in various tenses, affirming that the Lord has heard and will hear the prayers of those who call upon his name. Could all this have something to do with the ten commandments, which date to preexilic Israel, or with the need for ten men to form a Jewish minyan for prayer or marriage, a practice traceable to the time of Ruth 4:2?

My reason for mentioning this particular case is not so much to draw attention to this single phenomenon but rather to illustrate the steady flow of new ideas that has come forth from the text of the Book of Mormon in recent years. We cannot be sure that Zenos, Nephi, Benjamin, or Alma were aware of this numerological character of their texts, and we cannot conclude with certainty that all preexilic Israelites placed religious importance on counting to

ten, especially in connection with prayer and atonement (even though several textual and liturgical factors point in that direction), but elements such as these raise interesting questions and open doors for detailed examination and reexamination of the text itself. Moreover, I doubt that Joseph Smith was aware of these tenfold occurrences in the Book of Mormon or that anyone in 1829 would have sensed the significant place that the number ten may have held in ancient minds or would have been able to work them so subtly into the text of the Book of Mormon.

What follows are a few similar examples of details that I have spotted in researching the language, law, and literature of the Book of Mormon. This selection focuses on easily overlooked details that both specialists and nonspecialists will readily understand. In each case the significance of the details involved could hardly have been recognized, let alone fully appreciated, in the early nineteenth century, when the Book of Mormon was translated and published.

### **The Absence of *Without a Cause* from the Savior's Words in 3 Nephi 12:22**

While studying at Oxford in the early 1970s, I became aware of an interesting textual variant in the New Testament. In a well-known passage in the Sermon on the Mount, the King James translation of Matthew 5:22 reads, "Whosoever is angry with his brother *without a cause* [eikēi] shall be in danger of the judgment" (emphasis added). Yet the phrase *without a cause* is absent in most of the best and earliest Greek manuscripts of the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> Joseph Smith could hardly have guessed that this phrase did not originally belong in this passage, because textual criticism of the Bible was scarcely in its infancy in America in 1829. And yet,



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"WITHOUT  
A CAUSE"  
3 NEPHI 12:22

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significantly, the parallel text in the Sermon at the Temple in the Book of Mormon agrees with those early manuscripts, precisely lacking the phrase *without a cause* (3 Nephi 12:22).<sup>3</sup>

While lacking unanimous consensus among the manuscripts of the Sermon on the Mount (a situation not unusual), the absence of the phrase *without a cause* is notably evidenced by the following manuscripts of Matthew: the papyrus fragment known as *p67*, Codex Sinaiticus (original hand), Codex Vaticanus, some Greek minuscules (scriptural texts written in lowercase Greek letters), the Latin Vulgate (Jerome mentions that the phrase was not found in the oldest manuscripts known to him), the Ethiopic texts, and the Gospel of the Nazarenes. Moreover, the phrase is missing in writings of Justin, Tertullian, Origen, and other early church fathers who quoted the New Testament scriptures as they knew them. In the field of New Testament textual criticism, one may generally count as compelling any reading that is supported by “the best Greek MSS—by the A.D. 200 *p64* (where it is extant) and by at least the two oldest uncials, as well as some minuscules, [especially if] it also has some Latin, Syriac, Coptic, and early patristic support.”<sup>4</sup> A survey of the manuscripts supporting the original absence of the phrase *without a cause* in Matthew 5:22 shows that the shorter reading meets that criterion. Yet Sinaiticus and the most important manuscripts of the New Testament were not discovered until after Joseph Smith was dead.

I also find it interesting that this textual difference in the Greek manuscripts of the Sermon on the Mount has a significant impact on this verse’s meaning. It is much more severe to say, “*Whoever is angry* is in danger of the judgment,” than to say, “*Whoever is angry without a cause* is

in danger of the judgment.” The first discourages all anger; the second permits anger as long as it is justifiable. The former is more like the demanding sayings of Jesus regarding committing adultery in one’s heart (see Matthew 5:28) and loving one’s enemies (see v. 44), neither of which offers the disciple a convenient loophole of self-justification or rationalization. Indeed, as Wernberg-Møller points out, the word *eikēi* may have been added to Matthew 5:22 in an effort to reflect a Semitic idiom that does not invite allowance for “just” anger in certain circumstances at all, but actually “echoes some Aramaic phrase, condemning anger as sinful in any case” and “alluding to . . . the harbouring of angry feelings for any length of time.”<sup>5</sup> If correct, Wernberg-Møller’s interpretation offers a second reason supporting the claim that the Book of Mormon accurately reflects the original sense of Matthew 5:22.

In my estimation, this original reading preserved in the Book of Mormon since 1830 is very meaningful. The absence of *without a cause* has important moral, behavioral, psychological, and religious ramifications. Moreover, 3 Nephi 12:22 is the main place in the account of the Sermon at the Temple (3 Nephi 12–14) where a significant textual change from the parallel account in the King James Version of Matthew 5–7 was needed and delivered by Joseph Smith. As far as I have been able to determine, no copy of the Greek New Testament present in the United States before 1830 made any reference to this variant reading. No scholars in the world of Joseph Smith seem to have been even remotely aware of this apparently late insertion in the Greek that actually weakens the text of the Bible. Yet in the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith offered the world this stronger wording, reflecting the original meaning of the Savior.

## The Lord's Requirement of Secrecy in Matthew 7 and 3 Nephi 14



SACRED  
SECRECY

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In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord required his hearers to keep some holy things secret: “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you” (Matthew 7:6; 3 Nephi 14:6). For most readers “the original meaning [of this saying] is puzzling.”<sup>6</sup> One renowned scholar has concluded in frustration, “The logion [saying of Jesus] is a riddle.”<sup>7</sup> For virtually all interpreters of the Sermon on the Mount, this requirement of secrecy seems badly out of place in the narrative or is hard to explain.<sup>8</sup>

The emphasis in these parallel passages is clearly on withholding and protecting certain things because of their sacred nature. Drawing on Logion 93 in the *Gospel of Thomas*, which was first discovered in 1945 at Nag Hammadi, Egypt, Georg Strecker identifies the holy thing in Matthew 7:6 as “gnostic secret knowledge.”<sup>9</sup> If this is correct, the implication is that Jesus gave his hearers something that he required them to keep sacred and confidential—an implication consistent with some other interesting conclusions of Joachim Jeremias regarding the existence of sacred, secret teachings and practices in primitive Christianity.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Professor Hans Dieter Betz finds it most likely that Matthew 7:6 refers to

an esoteric saying that the uninformed will never be able to figure out. Finding the explanation is not a matter of natural intelligence but of initiation into secrets. . . . In other words, we are dealing with some kind of secret (*arcanum*). Indeed, the language reminds us of arcane teaching (*Arkandisziplin*) as it was

used in the Greek mystery religions and in philosophy. . . . Originally, then, the [Sermon on the Mount] was meant to be insiders' literature, not to be divulged to the uninitiated outsiders. . . . Remarkably, Elchasai used the same language: "Inasmuch as he considers that it would be an insult to reason that these great and ineffable mysteries should be trampled under foot or that they should be handed down to many, he advises that they should be preserved as valuable pearls saying this: Do not read this word to all men and guard carefully these precepts because all men are not faithful nor are all women straightforward."<sup>11</sup>

Such a requirement of secrecy is a common feature of rituals and temple ordinances.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the first-century Christian *Didache*, discovered in 1873, associates the saying in Matthew 7:6 with a requirement of exclusivity, specifically the prohibition not to let anyone "eat or drink of the Eucharist with you except for those baptized in the name of the Lord" (see *Didache* 9:5 and 14:1–2, which connect Matthew 5:23–25 and the observance of the sacrament). Accordingly, Betz concludes that "the 'holy' [mentioned in Matthew 7:6] could be a ritual."<sup>13</sup> Whenever sacred knowledge is given to recipients, it becomes a string of precious pearls of great price, revelations for which one will sell all that one has in order to obtain, and one keeps this knowledge hidden to protect it (see Matthew 13:44–46). Indeed, the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible confirms that Matthew 7:6 is exactly concerned with the requirement of keeping certain sacred things secret. It adds: "The mysteries of the kingdom ye shall keep within yourselves. . . . For the world cannot receive that which ye, yourselves, are not able to bear" (Matthew 7:10–11 JST; on the plural, "holy things," compare the *Gospel of Thomas* 93).



It is significant that only in recent decades have biblical scholars begun to appreciate the likely setting of this cryptic saying in the Sermon on the Mount, seeing in it some reference to holy things imparted by Jesus to his faithful followers. Yet this is precisely the setting in which these words had already appeared in 1829 in 3 Nephi 14, namely, when the glorious Son of God appeared to a righteous body of saints, bestowed upon their leaders priesthood powers, taught the people exalting principles, gave them commandments, and put them under covenant to keep those commandments, all of which was conducted in a sacred temple precinct.<sup>14</sup> A sense of awe and holy silence surrounds much of the account of the glorious events on these occasions (see, for example, 3 Nephi 28:14). Thus the new understanding of the ancient meaning of Matthew 7:6 makes its explicit appearance in a temple context in the Book of Mormon perfectly but unexpectedly appropriate.

### **The Words of Benjamin as a Classic Ancient Farewell Address**

Scholars have recently taken an interest in similarities in the farewell speeches of many ancient religious and political leaders. Certain themes appear consistently in these addresses given by people such as Moses and Socrates at the end of their lives. It almost seems as if these ancient speakers were following a customary pattern. Interestingly, these themes are found to an equal or greater extent in the farewell speeches of the Book of Mormon.

William S. Kurz has published a detailed study comparing twenty-two addresses from the classical and biblical traditions.<sup>15</sup> He has identified twenty elements common to farewell addresses in general. Of course, no single speech



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CLASSIC  
FAREWELL  
ADDRESS

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contains all twenty, and some contain more than others. Moses' farewell speech, for example, contains sixteen such elements (see Deuteronomy 31–34); Paul's, fourteen (see Acts 20); and Socrates', eleven.

It is remarkable that King Benjamin's oration contains at least as many elements of the ancient farewell address as any of Kurz's examples do. Fortunately, Benjamin's speech was recorded in full and was precisely preserved, and the report of his final address is even more detailed than such addresses in the Bible, allowing for rigorous scrutiny. Sixteen elements of the ideal ancient farewell address appear directly in Benjamin's speech, and others may be implied.

Kurz has also found that in Greek or Roman writings, the dying speaker, usually a philosopher or statesman, was concerned with suicide, the meaning of death, and life after death. However, in biblical farewell addresses, the speaker, typically a man of God, focused on God's plan, his people, and covenants, or on theological interpretations of history. Kurz signals four of the elements as particularly common to Hebrew farewell addresses: the speaker (1) proposes tasks for successors, (2) reviews theological history, (3) reveals future events, and (4) declares his innocence and fulfillment of his mission. These elements all appear in the Benjamin account. Furthermore, the emphasis in Benjamin's address, as in the Israelite tradition, is on God's relationship to man, the speech ending with a covenant renewal. At the same time, no trace of the prominent Greek or Roman preoccupation with death occurs in Benjamin's remarks. Benjamin's speech thus fits illustriously into the Israelite tradition of farewell addresses. Indeed, it is the most complete example of this speech typology yet found anywhere in world

literature. Yet the profile of this ancient Hebrew literary genre remained unrecognized and unanalyzed until only a few years ago.

### **Chiasmus in Alma 36 and Helaman 6:7–13**

Chiasmus is a style of writing known in antiquity and used by many ancient and some modern writers. It consists of arranging a series of words or ideas in one order and then repeating it in reverse order. In the hands of a skillful writer, this literary form can serve several literary and structural purposes. In the 1820s, two British scholars (John Jebb in 1820 and Thomas Boys in 1824 and 1825) published books about their new recognition of this form of parallelism in the Bible, and the 1825 edition of Horne's encyclopedic guide to the critical study of the Bible, printed in London and Philadelphia, discussed the main arguments and gave a few examples from Jebb.<sup>16</sup> But I see little reason to believe that the young and unlettered Joseph Smith was aware of these books or, even if he were, that he would have been sufficiently equipped to create elaborate and meaningful passages utilizing a form rather foreign to his own culture's way of thinking and writing.

Not all chiasms, of course, are created equal. They differ in significance, precision, and artistic achievement. Some are very clear; others are not. Some are very long; others are short. Of all the examples of chiasmus I have studied in world literature, I wish to highlight two:

1. Alma 36 is, in my opinion, the very best chiasm in the Book of Mormon, if not in all of world literature. Alma 36 was one of the first chiasms I discovered while serving as a missionary in Regensburg, Germany, in 1967.<sup>17</sup> Many



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CHIASMUS

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years later, it still remains my favorite. It is a masterpiece of composition on several levels.

*Level 1: The overall structure.* This text features at least seventeen key elements, each repeated twice (italics identify repeated elements, and verse numbers are indicated in parentheses):

- a My son, give ear to my *words* (1)
- b Keep the commandments and ye shall prosper in the land (1)
- c Do *as I* have done (2)
- d *Remember the captivity* of our fathers (2)
- e They were in *bondage* (2)
- f He surely did *deliver* them (2)
- g *Trust* in God (3)
- h Supported in *trials, troubles, and afflictions* (3)
- i Lifted up at the *last day* (3)
- j *I know* this not of myself but *of God* (4)
- k *Born of God* (5)
- l I sought to destroy the church (6)
- m My *limbs* were paralyzed (7–11)
- n Fear of being in the *presence of God* (14–15)
- o *Pains* of a damned soul (16)
- p *Harrowed up by the memory of sins* (17)
- q I remembered *Jesus Christ, a Son of God* (17)
- q' I cried, *Jesus, Son of God* (18)
- p' *Harrowed up by the memory of sins* no more (19)
- o' Joy as exceeding as was the *pain* (20)
- n' Long to be in the *presence of God* (22)
- m' My *limbs* received strength again (23)
- l' I labored to bring souls to repentance (24)
- k' *Born of God* (26)
- j' Therefore *my knowledge is of God* (26)
- h' Supported under *trials, troubles, and afflictions* (27)

- g' *Trust in him* (27)
- f' He will *deliver me* (27)
- i' and *raise me up at the last day* (28)
- e' As God brought our fathers out of *bondage* and captivity  
(28–29)
- d' Retain in *remembrance their captivity* (28–29)
- c' Know *as I do know* (30)
- b' *Keep the commandments* and ye shall *prosper in the land* (30)
- a' This according to his *word* (30)

The structural design of this text is amazing. I am especially impressed with the repetition of Jesus Christ as the Son of God at the precise center of the chapter.

*Level 2: The full text.* At a more detailed, literary level, we are able to detect how individual panels of text fill in the gaps between the main elements. There is no simple way to display these segments here, but they have been discussed in previous publications noted above. As has been shown, virtually every word serves to enhance the chapter's overall structure. Sometimes they skillfully bridge from one section to the next. Other times they strengthen individual segments. Altogether, they work in masterful harmony.

*Level 3: Detailed relations between the paired sections.* The impressive overall structure of the full text of this complex passage becomes even more evident as pairs of sections are examined. For example, elements *a* and *a'* introduce and conclude the chapter by referring to Alma's "words" and the "word" of God (see 36:1, 30), and *d-e-f* and *f'-e'-d'* speak reciprocally of bondage and deliverance. Indeed, the elements in *d-e* themselves constitute a small chiasm:

for they were *in bondage*,  
and none could *deliver them*  
except it was the God of Abraham,

and the God of Isaac,  
and the God of Jacob;  
and he surely did *deliver them*  
*in their afflictions* (36:2; see 36:29)

Elements *h* and *h'* are both marked by the same triplet “supported under trials, troubles, and afflictions” (36:3, 27). In *h'* the third member is stressed (“yea, and in all manner of afflictions”) to make the repetition clear (36:27).

Sections *l* and *l'* draw the contrast between Alma’s persecution of the church on the one hand and his work to bring souls to repentance on the other. In *m* and *m'* the comparison is between being stricken by the angel of the Lord and then recovering and regaining strength; both of these sections speak of “limbs,” “feet,” and falling down or standing up (36:7–11, 23).

Most dramatically, *n* and *n'* contrast the agony of Alma’s suffering (36:12) with his joy following his conversion (36:20). Indeed, the contrast is made explicit: “Yea, my soul was filled with joy *as exceeding as was my pain*” (Alma 36:20, emphasis added). This overt comparison strongly supports the idea that Alma consciously created the chiasmic structure of this chapter in order to strengthen these linkages.

A remarkable thing about Alma 36:22 is that Lehi’s words are not just summarized but precisely quoted. These twenty-one words are a verbatim quote of 1 Nephi 1:8. Such exactness cannot be explained by thinking that Joseph turned to 1 Nephi and copied the words of Lehi from what Oliver Cowdery had already recorded from Joseph’s dictation, for 1 Nephi may not yet even have been translated at the time when Joseph and Oliver were translating Alma 36.<sup>18</sup> Evidently, Alma was very meticulous in quoting

Lehi's words from the small plates of Nephi when he composed Alma 36, and Joseph Smith's dictated translation preserved that exactitude.

Elements *q* and *q'* stand at the epicenter of this composition, twice mentioning the Savior by name: "Jesus Christ, a Son of God," and "Jesus, thou Son of God" (36:17, 18). Only when Alma called upon Jesus Christ after remembering that his father had spoken of the atonement of Christ did his tormented condition change. At the absolute center stand the words *atone*, *mind*, and *heart*, bordered by the name of Jesus Christ (36:18, 19). The message is clear: Christ's atonement and man's responding sacrifice of a broken heart and willing mind are central to receiving forgiveness from God.

*Level 4: Weaving factors.* The fact that each segment flows smoothly into the next adds another dimension to the textual complexity of this chapter. No awkwardness, no sharp breaks are found here. Bridges connect each section to the one that follows it. These linkages are accomplished largely by introducing a minor item in one section that anticipates ideas in the next. For example, the phrase *my words*, which appears at the end of the first section, blends into the beginning of the next, which begins with the phrase *for I swear* (36:1). *Captivity* at the end of the third compositional section blends directly into *bondage* at the beginning of the fourth (36:2). These weaving links are subtle but effective. They make the transitions from section to section smooth and flowing. This reflects a highly polished literary product. If an author uses chiasmus mechanically, it can produce rigid, stilted writing (a poor result from misusing or poorly implementing any artistic device). Alma, however, does not simply stick a list

of ideas together in one order and then awkwardly and slavishly retrace his steps through that list in the opposite order. His work has the markings of a skillful, painstaking writer, one completely comfortable with using this difficult mode of expression well.

*Degree of chiasticity.* Overall, the degree of chiasmus in this text is exceptionally high. Chiasmus can occur in any literature, but it only becomes meaningful when its degree of chiasticity, to coin a phrase, is high. When the chiastic format is truly complex and concise, we are most justified in supposing that the author intentionally followed the pattern. At least fifteen criteria, including objectivity, purposefulness, climax, centrality, boundaries, length, density, and balance, as described here, demonstrate that the chiasmus in Alma 36 can best be explained only if Alma learned it as part of a long literary tradition extending back to Old Testament prophets.

2. Another fine example of chiasmus is found in Helaman 6:7–13, the annual record for the sixty-fourth year of the reign of the judges. Its main features are as follows:

- a “And behold, there was *peace* in all the land” (7).
- b [Freedom of travel and trade in *both lands* is discussed (7–8)]
- c “And it came to pass that they became exceedingly *rich*, both the Lamanites and the Nephites;
- d and they did have an exceeding *plenty* of . . . *precious metals*, both in the *land south* and in the *land north*” (9).
- e “Now the land *south*  
was called *Lehi*, and  
the land *north*  
was called *Mulek*,  
which was after the son of *Zedekiah*;  
for the *Lord*<sup>19</sup>



did bring *Mulek*  
into the land *north*,  
and *Lehi*  
into the land *south*” (10).

d' “And behold, there was *all manner* of *gold* in *both* these  
*lands*, and of *silver*, and of *precious ore* of *every kind*;

c' and there were also curious workmen, who did  
work all kinds of ore and did refine it; and thus  
they did become *rich*” (11).

b' [Economic prosperity in *both lands* is discussed (12–13)]

a' “And thus the sixty and fourth year did pass away in  
*peace*” (13).

This composition is remarkable in several ways. First, the report itself is beautifully executed. The overall structure is concentrically organized, and individual words, phrases, and ideas that appear in the first half are repeated with precision and balance in the second half. This entry exhibits both fine quality and admirable length.

Second, since the chiasm encompasses the entire report for the year, this unifying structure strongly suggests that the account was written as a single literary unit that Mormon found on the large plates of Nephi. If the contemporary historian used chiasmus to record the events of the sixty-fourth year of the reign of the judges, the form draws attention to the fact that it was an extraordinary year in the annals of his people. Indeed, this report documents the great changes that occurred during that year involving prosperity, free travel, and peace between the Nephites and Lamanites. Significant trade and peace treaties must have been entered into in order for this kind of peace and prosperity to occur, since before this time, limited travel was the norm in Nephite society, as is evidenced by Mo-

siah 7:1; 8:7; 28:1; Alma 23:2; 50:25; and Helaman 4:12. In addition to marking an unprecedented turning point in Nephite history, using chiasmus would insure against additions to or deletions from the text, since any alteration would be strikingly apparent.

Third, and most remarkable, is the way in which the center of this chiasm involves two individual words. Just as divine names often appear at the center of biblical chiasms, at the very apex of this passage in Helaman 6, the words *Zedekiah* and *Lord* stand parallel to each other. The parallelism between these two names is intriguing not only because Zedekiah was the king and adoptive royal son of Yahweh, the Lord, but also because the Hebrew word for *Lord* (*YHWH*) constitutes the final syllable, or theophoric suffix, *-yah*, at the end of the name *Zedekiah*. Thus the central chiastic structure in Helaman 6:10 actually would have worked better and would have been more obvious in Hebrew (or its related Nephite dialect) than in the English translation. Joseph Smith would have had no way of consciously concocting this parallelism on his own.

Finally, it may be that other reports from antiquity were written in chiastic form. The Mesoamerican *Chilam Balam of Chumayel*, like Helaman 6, not only focuses chiastically on the migration of the people into the land they now occupy, but also similarly features, at the center, a wordplay on the land's name, as J. E. S. Thompson has noted.<sup>20</sup>

Helaman 6:7–13 deserves to take its place among the finest examples of chiasmus found in the Book of Mormon. Through understanding this masterful composition, we can better appreciate the precision and richness of an Old World literary legacy in the Nephite records.

## Ancient Parallels for Mosiah's System of Weights and Measures



COMPARABLE  
WEIGHTS  
AND  
MEASURES

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In 1981 I began teaching a course in BYU's J. Reuben Clark Law School on ancient Near Eastern law in the world of the Bible and Book of Mormon. One of the earliest collections of laws that we study is the Code of Eshnunna. In order for ancient economies to work effectively, kings had to spell out the value of various commodities and establish exchange ratios, especially between consumable goods and precious metals. Thus, the laws of Eshnunna, promulgated in Babylonia probably during the early eighteenth century B.C. but not discovered until the mid-twentieth century A.D., instituted an elaborate system of weights and measures. The following initial provisions stand at the head of this ancient law code:

1 kor of barley [*she'um*] is (priced) at [*ana*] 1 shekel of silver;

3 *qa* of "best oil" are (priced) at 1 shekel of silver;

1 seah (and) 2 *qa* of sesame oil are (priced) at 1 shekel of silver [and so on]. . . .

The hire for a wagon together with its oxen and its driver is 1 *massiktum* (and) 4 seah of barley. If it is (paid in) silver, the hire is one third of a shekel. He shall drive it the whole day.<sup>21</sup>

On their first reading of this text, my law students are readily impressed with several parallels between these laws and the economic system decreed by King Mosiah and found in Alma 11:3–19, especially since any evidence of this ancient pattern of establishing a commercial economy was unknown in Joseph Smith's day. Consider these parallels:

First, the basic legal form of these two texts is consistent. The standard phrasing “1 kor of barley is (priced) at 1 shekel of silver” resembles that in the Book of Mormon, “A senum of silver was equal to a senine of gold” (Alma 11:7).

Second, the primary conversion in Babylonia was between barley and silver. Nine other Babylonian provisions converted various additional commodities into silver values, followed by three more provisions that converted others into measures of barley. Thus, precious metal and grain measures were convertible into each other. The law of Mosiah featured precisely the same conversion capability: the basic measure for either gold or silver was equated with “a measure of barley” (Alma 11:7).

Third, in Babylonia the basic commodity valuation system allowed traders to deal in a variety of items, all convertible into silver or barley. Similarly, Mosiah’s system covered transactions from silver into “a measure of every kind of grain” (Alma 11:7).

Fourth, both economic systems were announced by kings to have been instituted for similar reasons. The laws of Eshnunna began with a royal superscription that proclaimed this standardization as instrumental in establishing justice, eliminating enmity, and protecting the weak. Likewise, King Mosiah enacted his laws expressly to establish peace and equality in the land (see Mosiah 29:38, 40).

Fifth, the ideal, practical motivation behind the laws of Eshnunna seems to have been to undergird the rental market and to standardize values on daily wages and the computation of various damages and penalties. Similarly, a motivation for the economic part of King Mosiah’s reforms was to provide a standard system under the new reign of

judges for the payment of judges on a daily basis: “a senine of gold for a day, or a senum of silver” (Alma 11:3).

In enacting his law, as the Book of Mormon takes pains to tell us, King Mosiah “did not reckon after the manner of the Jews who were at Jerusalem” (Alma 11:4). Evidently he drew on some other system of weights and measures. Perhaps Mosiah obtained the legal form of his economic decree from the Mulekites, who had had contact with the Jaredites, who had left from Mesopotamia not long before the time of Eshnunna.

Moreover, Mosiah’s system is distinctively binary: each unit of measure is half the size of the next larger unit. Perhaps Mosiah found this binary manner of reckoning somewhere on the plates of brass, which, after all, were written in a type of Egyptian text. Indeed, as became known in the early twentieth century, the units in the ancient Egyptian grain measure were also binary in ratio.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, we cannot be sure how to explain the similarities between the laws of Mosiah and Eshnunna or between the Nephite and Egyptian grain measures, but this much can be said: Such similarities between the laws of Mosiah and Eshnunna and the Egyptian mathematical papyri (which were unknown in Joseph Smith’s day) show yet another way in which the Book of Mormon presents specific details whose roots run unexpectedly deep in ancient societies.

### **Cursing an Opposing Litigant with Speechlessness**

While browsing through the BYU Bookstore a few years ago, I came across a book that described the ancient legal practice of invoking a curse on one’s opponents. This study was based on recently discovered Greek epigrams



and inscriptions. I was intrigued. While I read these texts, it dawned on me that Alma's curse on Korihor in Alma 30:49—"In the name of God, ye shall be struck dumb, that ye shall no more have utterance"—closely resembles an ancient Greek practice of cursing a litigant with speechlessness. When Alma's curse materialized, God's disapproval of Korihor was so clearly manifested that he was compelled to yield the case and concede legal defeat.

Such curses were common in the ancient Mediterranean world, especially in the legal sphere. In recent decades more than a hundred ancient Greek and Roman binding spells—curses inscribed on small lead sheets that were folded up and pierced with a nail—have been recovered from tombs, temples, and especially wells near the law courts, where they were placed in hopes that a deity from the underworld would receive and act upon them. These spells are known as *defixiones* because their words and powers were intended to "defix" (restrain or hinder) an opponent. In ancient Greece those targeted by these spells could be commercial, athletic, or romantic rivals, or adversaries in litigation.<sup>23</sup>

The largest body of Greek binding spells deals with litigation, with sixty-seven different *defixiones* invoking curses on legal opponents. The earliest of these date to the fifth century B.C., not far from the time of Lehi. Eleven of them ask the gods to bind the tongue of a legal opponent so the opponent would lose the lawsuit.<sup>24</sup> One third-century B.C. inscribed stone slab from the Greek island of Delos expresses the gratitude of a victorious litigant who believed he had been helped in court by a god: "For you bound the sinful men who had prepared the lawsuit, secretly making the tongue silent in the mouth, from which [tongue] no one heard a word or an

accusation, which is the helpmate in a trial. But as it turned out by divine providence, they confessed themselves to be like god-stricken statues or stones.”<sup>25</sup>

The speechlessness of Korihor, and the stunning of Sherem, was precisely the kind of sign or restraint that people in the ancient Mediterranean world expected a god to manifest in a judicial setting when false accusations or unfair ploys placed an innocent party at a distinct disadvantage. The stricken litigant would sometimes then confess his guilt, exposed by a god through “illness or accident.”<sup>26</sup> In hopes of appeasing the offended god, a punished litigant would inscribe in stone a clear profession of his newly admitted faith and would warn others not to disdain the gods.

Similarly, God was seen as an active participant in the courts of Hebrew law in biblical times,<sup>27</sup> and the trials of Sherem and Korihor show the same use of confession. Sherem recanted his public teachings, confessed the truth of the god who had intervened against him, admitted his error, and expressed concern that he would never be able to appease that god (see Jacob 7:17–19). Korihor’s confession acknowledged the power of God, probably to assure those concerned in Zarahemla that the curse would not afflict any others, as well as to terminate the dispute (see Alma 30:51). Such reactions are very similar to the responses of others in the ancient world whose judicial perfidy had been exposed by the intervention of a god responding to the restraining curse of a beleaguered litigant.

Although not mentioning the curse of speechlessness explicitly (and thus leaving it unknown to Joseph Smith), Hebrew law in Lehi’s day made frequent use of other curses to anathematize and to invoke divine punishment



upon those who transgressed the law. In Deuteronomy 27:15–26 one finds a string of twelve curses, and in Numbers 5:21–22 one encounters the curse imposed in the trial of a suspected adulteress. Yet until recent archaeological discoveries were made, one would not have suspected that placing a curse of speechlessness upon an opposing litigant was common practice not far from Lehi’s world itself and, by implication, perhaps right in Jerusalem as well.

### **Hebrew Terms for *Law, Statutes, Judgments, Ordinances, and Commandments***

In 2 Nephi 5:10, Nephi records that his people were strict to observe “the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments of the Lord in all things, according to the law of Moses.” Why did he use so many words to convey what seems to us the simple idea that they kept the law? Part of the answer comes from Hebrew, which uses several words to express different semantic aspects and subtle nuances of our word *law*.<sup>28</sup> Those Hebrew words appear to match the Book of Mormon usage of comparable English terms.<sup>29</sup>

*Torah*. In Hebrew the law of Moses is always referred to as the *torah* of Moses. It means more than “law” in any modern sense. *Torah* derives from the verb *yarah*, whose many meanings include “to show, to instruct, to teach.” The *torah* thus embodies all God’s instructions given to his people, implemented and taught through his priests. Only a rebellious people would fail to listen to the *torah* of the Lord (see Isaiah 30:9). These ideas fit the frequently mentioned priestly function of teaching in the Book of Mormon (see, for example, Jacob 1:17–19; Jarom 1:11; Mosiah 6:3; 12:25; Alma 8:24; Moroni 3:3).



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CORRESPONDENCE  
OF FIVE  
HEBREW TERMS

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*Mishpat*. Usually translated “judgment,” this Hebrew word not only means “to pronounce a verdict,” but it also embraces most phases of a legal trial. It usually has something to do with the rules of governing properly. Likewise, in the Book of Mormon, when the term *judgments* appears by itself, it is in the context of judges who “judge righteous judgments” (Mosiah 29:29, 43), or it refers to the outcome of a court procedure (see Alma 30:57) or to God’s judgments upon his people.

*Mitzvah*. This broad term has no technical meaning and is usually translated “commandment” or “precept.” It is found frequently in Deuteronomy to signify divine commandments in general. Similarly, the use of the word *commandments* in relation to God is extensive in the Book of Mormon (see, for example, 1 Nephi 3:7; Jacob 1:12).

*Edut*. Less common is this word, meaning “testimony, witness, or monument.” Especially in the early biblical period, the law was thought of as a testimony or witness that God had established. The book of the “law” (*edut*, Deuteronomy 31:26) witnessed that God had established his law, by which mankind will be judged (see Psalm 78:5). In the Book of Mormon similar ideas are found, for example, in Benjamin’s farewell speech (see Mosiah 3:23–24) and in Moroni’s words concluding the monumental Nephite record (see Moroni 10:27).

Most interesting are the words *hoq* and *huqqah*. In this pair, the first is masculine, the second feminine, though both have substantially the same meanings, basically “custom, manner, decree, portion, order, prescription, limit,” and so on. Thus when the word *ordinance* is used to translate these terms from an ancient text, we should understand that it includes more than priesthood rites, ceremonies, or sacra-

## HOW DO YOU SAY “LAW” IN HEBREW?

HEBREW	USUAL TRANSLATION	MEANINGS AND CONTEXTS
<i>torah</i>	law, law of Moses	teachings, instructions
<i>mishpat</i>	judgment	pronouncement of a verdict, standards of behavior
<i>ḥuqqah</i> or <i>ḥoq</i>	statute, ordinance	custom, manner, decree, portion, order, prescription, limit
<i>mitzvah</i>	commandment	frequently signifies divine commandments, <i>bar mitzvah</i> = “son of the commandment”
<i>edut</i>	testimony, witness	often a monument, stela, or book of the law

ments. Indeed, when the Book of Mormon speaks of ordinances in a priesthood sense, the term *performances* is often included (see 2 Nephi 25:30; Mosiah 13:30).

Moreover, Hebrew usage of *ḥoq* and *ḥuqqah* may correspond quite precisely with the Book of Mormon terms *ordinances* and *statutes*. Due to the near identity of these two Hebrew words, finding them both in the same pleonastic list would be odd. In fact, no Hebrew pleonastic list has been found containing both *ḥoq* and *ḥuqqah* (when the English words *statute* and *ordinance* occur together in such a list in the King James translation, the Hebrew word translated as *statute* is either *ḥoq* or *ḥuqqah*, but the word

for *ordinance* is *mishpat*).<sup>30</sup> Thus I find it quite significant that the English words *ordinance* and *statute* never appear as companions in the pleonastic lists in the Book of Mormon. Indeed, they are the only two English equivalents of the Hebrew terms for “law” that never appear in the Book of Mormon in combination with each other.

### “Better That One Man Should Perish”

For many years I have studied Nephi’s slaying of Laban from a legal point of view based on the law as it existed around 600 B.C. In directing Nephi to slay Laban, the Spirit gave the sober justification that “it is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief” (1 Nephi 4:13). Five hundred years later, Alma would invoke this same justification in reluctantly subjecting Korihor to divine punishment (see Alma 30:47).

This principle, of course, runs sharply contrary to American jurisprudence. But because a similar sentiment was expressed by Caiaphas in John 11:50, I once asked a prominent biblical scholar at Duke University, while I was there receiving my legal education, if he knew where this idea had originated. That scholar, who should have known if anyone did, was at a loss to give an answer. Thus, twenty years later, as I was updating my *Biblical Law Bibliography*, I was immediately drawn to a recent article by David Aus entitled “The Death of One for All in John 11:45–54 in Light of Judaic Traditions.”<sup>31</sup> Aus demonstrates that this principle prevailed in certain cases under biblical law, and more than coincidentally, around 600 B.C.<sup>32</sup>

A pivotal precedent was found by the ancients in 2 Samuel 20, which recounts how King David had sought the life of Sheba, a rebel guilty of treason. When Sheba took refuge



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SLAYING OF  
LABAN

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in the city of Abel, Joab, the leader of David's army, demanded that Sheba be released to him or he would destroy the city. The people of Abel beheaded Sheba instead, and Joab retreated. This episode became an important legal precedent justifying the killing of one person in order to preserve an entire group.

Most strikingly, another Old Testament case, one preserved more fully only in oral Jewish traditions, involved Jehoiakim, the king of Judah.<sup>33</sup> He rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar at the very time of Lehi and Nephi. In response, Nebuchadnezzar went to Antioch and demanded that the great Jewish council surrender Jehoiakim or the nation would be destroyed. Jehoiakim protested, "Can ye sacrifice one life for another?" Unmoved, the council replied, "Thus did your ancestors do to Sheba the son of Bichri." Based on this legal ruling, Jehoiakim was released to Nebuchadnezzar, who took him to Babylon (see 2 Chronicles 36:6), where presumably he was executed. Because Zedekiah became king less than four months later (see vv. 9–10), at the time the Book of Mormon account begins (see 1 Nephi 1:4), Nephi was probably keenly aware of how the "one for many" principle was used to justify Jehoiakim's death. Clearly, the cases of Laban and Korihor fit within this tradition, although even the best of scholars have not been aware of this obscure principle of Jewish law until recently.

### **A Legal Exemption from Military Duty**

The only Book of Mormon group given an exemption from military service were the famous converts of Ammon. In repenting of their previous shedding of blood, they swore an oath that they would never again take up



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EXEMPTION  
FROM  
MILITARY  
SERVICE

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arms (see Alma 24:11–13). After arriving in Zarahemla, they were granted an extraordinary exemption from active military duty if they would help to sustain the Nephite armies with provisions (see Alma 27:23–24). Surprisingly, this grant of exceptional privilege was consistent with ancient Israelite law.<sup>34</sup>

Normally, ancient peoples were absolutely obligated to take up arms in defense of their tribe or nation: “Among nomads there is no distinction between the army and the people: every able-bodied man can join in a raid and must be prepared to defend the tribe’s property and rights against an enemy. . . . This was probably true of Israel also.”<sup>35</sup> Saul called upon “all Israel” to take up arms against the Ammonites and the Amalekites (see 1 Samuel 11:1–11; 15:4). Threats and curses were pronounced upon anyone who would not join in the battle. Saul once sent messengers to marshal the troops after he symbolically cut a yoke of oxen into pieces in view of the people and proclaimed, “Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen” (1 Samuel 11:7). Yaqim-Addu, governor of Sagaratum, executed a criminal in prison and paraded his head among the villages in a similar type of warning of what would happen if the men did not assemble quickly for battle.<sup>36</sup>

The same basic duty to serve in the army existed in Nephite law and society. Indeed, Moroni had power to punish any person in the land of Zarahemla who would not “defend [his] country” (Alma 51:15; see 46:35). Like Saul and Yaqim-Addu, he symbolically portrayed the brutal fate of those who would not fight (see Alma 46:21–22). Under extreme and desperate circumstances, this duty fell even upon old men, women, and children (see Mosiah 10:9; Alma 54:12).

How, then, could the able-bodied Ammonites be granted exemption? There may be several reasons. Their reasons for not fighting were obviously righteous and bona fide. But beyond that, the justification of their military exemption may have been based on four specific provisions in the law of Moses, especially as they were interpreted in an obscure section of Jewish law.

1. The absolute duty to go to war applied only in fighting against an *enemy*. Deuteronomy 20:1–2, which instructs the Israelite leader to speak to his troops in a holy tongue when they go up to battle against an *enemy*, was interpreted in the Talmud as not applying in a conflict against other Israelites, for as the scripture says, “Against your enemies’ but *not against your brethren*, not Judah against Simeon nor Simeon against Benjamin.”<sup>37</sup> A similar understanding may be reflected in the Ammonites’ reluctance to “take up arms against their *brethren*” (see Alma 24:6, 18; 27:23). Of course, the Talmud was written long after Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem, yet it often reflected older oral material, especially from Deuteronomy. Although the wars reported in Judges 12 and 19–20 clearly show Israelite tribes fighting against each other, the book of Deuteronomy was not followed assiduously until the reign of Josiah, precisely during the time of Lehi. Thus it seems that the Nephites interpreted Deuteronomy 20:1–2 (which was known to them on the plates of brass) the same way the rabbis did, even though this interpretation would not have been obvious from a casual reading of the Old Testament. And it almost goes without saying that the Talmud was not translated into English until long after the Book of Mormon was in print.



2. The laws of Deuteronomy also afforded humanitarian exemptions for those who had recently married, built a new house, planted a new vineyard, or were “fearful and fainthearted” (see Deuteronomy 20:5–9; 24:5; compare Judges 7:3). Since everyone going into battle was likely “fearful and fainthearted,” the exemption undoubtedly had a narrower meaning in actual practice; otherwise nearly everyone would have been exempt. Indeed, as the Talmud explains, this expression in Deuteronomy “alludes to one who is afraid *because of the transgressions he had committed*.”<sup>38</sup> If a soldier would cower in the face of enemy battle because of his previous sins (fearing that his sins prevented God from defending him or that he might die a sinner), he was deemed unfit for battle. Certainly the Nephites would have recognized that the profound fears of the Ammonites who were afraid to break their oath rendered them unsuitable for military duty under such a rule.

3. The rabbis further limited the exemption for the fearful and fainthearted to voluntary exploits of the king. In a compulsory war of national defense, however, even the fainthearted were obligated to go into battle. A similar distinction may have contributed to the Ammonites’ feeling, several years later, that they could no longer claim their exemption in the face of the extreme compulsory war then threatening the Nephites’ entire existence. Moved by compassion and no longer afraid, they were willing to take up arms (see Alma 53:13). Only Helaman’s fear that they might lose their souls if they were to violate their oath stopped them. So they sent their sons into battle instead (see vv. 15–17).

4. The men who remained at home, however, continued to support the war behind the lines. Their exemption was granted only “on condition that they will give us [the

Nephites] a portion of their substance to assist us that we may maintain our armies” (Alma 27:24). This arrangement is especially noteworthy because the Talmud likewise holds that those who are exempted from military service under the law of Moses are “*only* released from actual fighting, *but not from serving in the rear*: ‘They must furnish water and food and repair the roads.’”<sup>39</sup>

The rare exemption granted to the Ammonites was logical, religiously motivated, and consistent with ancient Israelite law, as embedded in Deuteronomy and elsewhere, which placed a high civic obligation on all citizens to contribute, as appropriate, to the defense of their country, their God, their religion, and their people.

### **Handling a Case of an Unobserved Murder**

The account of the obscure trial of Seantum in Helaman 7–8 raises some interesting points of Nephite and Israelite law, details that only an ancient lawyer or judge could fully appreciate. The Book of Mormon story describes how Nephi spoke from his garden tower (see Helaman 7:10), was threatened with a lawsuit for “reviling” against the government, but in the end revealed that the chief judge had been “murdered, and he [lay] in his blood; and he [had] been murdered by his brother, who [sought] to sit in the judgment-seat” (Helaman 8:27). Five men ran and found things to be as Nephi had said. A public proclamation was then sent out by heralds announcing the murder and calling a day of fasting, mourning, and burial (see Helaman 9:10). Incidentally, in ancient Israel the day after the death of a political leader was traditionally a day of fasting, mourning, and burial (see 1 Samuel 31:13; 2 Samuel 1:12).



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RULE OF  
EVIDENCE IN AN  
UNOBSERVED  
MURDER

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Following the burial, five suspects (the men who had been sent to investigate) were brought to the judges. They could not be convicted, however, on circumstantial evidence, for such was ruled out under Israelite law, which required every fact to be substantiated by the testimony of two eyewitnesses (see Deuteronomy 19:15). This presented a serious legal problem in this particular case, for no one had witnessed the killing of the chief judge. Seantum had killed his brother “by a garb of secrecy” (Helaman 9:6).

Cases of unwitnessed murders presented special problems under the law of Moses. While the two-witness rule would seem to stand insurmountably in the way of ever obtaining a conviction in these cases, such slayings could not simply be ignored. If a person was found slain in the land and the murderer could not be found, solemn rituals, oaths of innocence, and special purification of all the men in the village had to be performed (see Deuteronomy 21:1–9). Things turned out differently in Seantum’s case, however, for he was soon exposed in a way that opened the door to an exceptional rule of evidence that justified his conviction.

Nephi first revealed to the people that Seantum was the murderer, that they would find blood on the skirts of his cloak, and that he would say certain things to them when they told him, “We know that thou are guilty” (Helaman 9:34). Indeed, Seantum was soon detected and immediately confessed his guilt (see vv. 37–38).

Seantum’s self-incriminating admission would not normally be admissible in a Jewish court of law. Under the Talmud, no man could be put to death on his own testimony: “No man may call himself a wrongdoer,” especially in a capital case.<sup>40</sup> But from earlier times came four episodes that gave rise to a narrow exception to that policy.

Those four precedents, each of which involved convictions or punishments based on confessions, were the executions of Achan (see Joshua 7), of the man who admitted that he had killed Saul (see 2 Samuel 1:10–16), and of the two assassins of Ishbosheth, the son of Saul (see 2 Samuel 4:8–12), as well as the voluntary confession of Micah, the son who stole from his mother (see Judges 17:1–4).

The ancients reconciled these four cases with their normally rigid two-witness rule by explaining that these episodes involved confessions *before* trial (or else were proceedings before kings or rulers instead of judges).<sup>41</sup> In addition, an exception was especially granted when the confession was “corroborated [1] by an ordeal as well as [2] by the production of the *corpus delicti* [the material substance or evidence upon which or by which a crime is committed].”<sup>42</sup> This occurred in the case of Achan, who was detected (1) through the divine ordeal of casting lots and whose confession (2) was corroborated when the illegal goods were found under his tent floor (Joshua 7:22).

Thus one can conclude with reasonable confidence that in the biblical period the normal two-witness rule could be overridden in the special case of a self-incriminating confession if the confession occurred outside of court; if God’s will was evidenced in the matter by ordeal, lots, or otherwise in the detection of the offender; and if corroborating physical evidence of the crime could be produced.

Seantum’s self-incriminating confession satisfies all three of these requirements completely and precisely, and thus his conviction was ensured. His confession was spontaneous and before trial. The evidence of God’s will was supplied through Nephi’s prophecy. Tangible evidence was present in the blood found on Seantum’s cloak. These

factors, under biblical law, would override the normal Jewish concerns about the use of self-incriminating confessions to obtain a conviction.

Given the complicated and important ancient legal issues uniquely presented by the case of Seantum (the two-witness rule would easily have been satisfied in the cases of Abinadi, Nehor, and others, whose actions were witnessed by many people who arrested them; see Mosiah 12:9; Alma 1:10), it is little wonder that the Book of Mormon makes special note of the fact that Seantum himself was legitimately “brought to prove that he himself was the very murderer” (Helaman 9:38). No further evidence was legally needed to convict him under these circumstances.<sup>43</sup>

### **Legal Terminology for Theft and Robbery**

Although there is only little difference between a thief and a robber in most modern minds, there were considerable differences between the two under ancient Near Eastern and biblical law. A thief (*ganab*) was usually a local person who stole from his neighbor. He was dealt with judicially, and he was tried and punished civilly, most often by a court composed of his fellow townspeople. A robber (*gedud*), on the other hand, was treated as an outsider, as a brigand or highwayman. He was dealt with militarily, and he could be executed summarily.

The legal distinctions between theft and robbery, especially under the laws of ancient Israel, have been analyzed thoroughly by Bernard S. Jackson, an English barrister, professor of law, and former editor of the *Jewish Law Annual*. In his treatise *Theft in Early Jewish Law*, Jackson shows, for example, how robbers usually acted in organized groups rivaling local governments and attack-



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DISTINCTION  
BETWEEN  
THEFT AND  
ROBBERY

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ing towns and how they swore oaths and extorted ransom, a menace worse than outright war. Thieves, however, were a much less serious threat to society.<sup>44</sup> Precisely the same thing can be said of the Gadiation robbers.

In my own research, I have shown in detail how these ancient legal and linguistic distinctions are also observable in the Book of Mormon.<sup>45</sup> For example, this ancient factor explains how Laban could call the sons of Lehi “robbers” and threaten to execute them on the spot without a trial, for that is how a military officer like Laban no doubt would have dealt with a robber. It also explains why the Lamanites are always said to “rob” from the Nephites but never from their own brethren—that would be *theft*, not *robbery*. Furthermore, it explains the rise and fearful menace of the Gadianton society, whose members are always called “robbers” in the Book of Mormon, never “thieves.”

Other significant details also emerge. It is probably no coincidence that the Hebrew word for “band” or “bandits” is *gedud*, and the most famous Book of Mormon robbers were known as Gadianton’s “band.”

The importance of this ancient legal tradition in the Book of Mormon is further enhanced by the fact that Anglo-American common law would have provided Joseph Smith with quite a different understanding of the legal definitions of the terms *theft* and *robbery*, inconsistent in many ways with the dominant usages found in the Book of Mormon. In ordinary American usage, the two terms are nearly synonymous.

Moreover, if Joseph Smith had relied on the language of his King James Bible for legal definitions of these terms, he would have stumbled into error, for that translation uses the English words *thief* and *robber* indiscriminately. For

example, the same phrase is translated inconsistently from the Hebrew or Greek of Jeremiah 7:11 as “den of robbers” and yet from the identical Greek in Matthew 21:13 as “den of thieves,” even though Jesus was quoting Jeremiah on that occasion, to say nothing of the fact that thieves do not have dens. In addition, the same word for robbers in the Greek New Testament (*lestai*) is sometimes translated as “thieves” (crucified next to Jesus in Matthew 27:38) and other times as “robber” (describing Barabbas in John 18:40). Nevertheless, there was indeed an important ancient distinction between thieves and robbers that no translator should neglect, and over which Joseph Smith did not blunder.<sup>46</sup>

### **The Execution of Zemnarihah**

In 3 Nephi 4:28–33 we find a detailed account of the execution of Zemnarihah, the captured leader of the defeated Gadianton robbers. This public execution followed ancient ceremony and law in a way that is out of character in European law. The Book of Mormon text reads:

Their leader, Zemnarihah, was taken and hanged upon a tree, yea, even upon the top thereof until he was dead. And when they had hanged him until he was dead they did fell the tree to the earth, and did cry with a loud voice, saying: May the Lord preserve his people in righteousness and in holiness of heart, that they may cause to be felled to the earth all who shall seek to slay them because of power and secret combinations, even as this man hath been felled to the earth. (3 Nephi 4:28–29)

After the Nephites chopped down the tree on which Zemnarihah was hanged, they all cried out “with one voice” for God to protect them. Then they sang out “all as one” in praise of God (see 3 Nephi 4:30–33). It certainly



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PROCEDURE IN  
ZEMNARIHAH'S  
EXECUTION

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appears that some kind of ritual or legal procedure was involved here, and several evidences point to an ancient and previously unknown background for this form of execution.<sup>47</sup> Consider the following points.

First, notice that the tree used in carrying out the execution was felled. Was this ever done in antiquity? Apparently it was. For one thing, Jewish practice required that the tree upon which the culprit was hanged should be buried with the body, so the tree had to be chopped down. Since the rabbis understood that this burial should take place immediately, the Talmud recommended hanging the culprit on a precut tree or post so that, in the words of Maimonides, “no felling is needed.”<sup>48</sup>

Second, consider why the tree was chopped down and buried. As Maimonides explains: “In order that it should not serve as a sad reminder, people saying: ‘This is the tree on which so-and-so was hanged.’”<sup>49</sup> In this way the tree became associated with the person being executed; it came to symbolize the culprit and the desire to forget him or her. By way of comparison, the Nephites identified the tree with Zemnah and all those like him, that his infamy might not be forgotten, when they cried out: “May [the Lord] cause to be felled to the earth all who shall seek to slay them, . . . even as this man hath been felled to the earth.”

Third, the text suggests that the Nephites understood Deuteronomy 21:22 as allowing execution by hanging—a reading that the rabbis saw as possible. While they generally viewed hanging as a means only of exposing the dead body after a person was stoned, the rabbis were aware of a Jewish penalty of “hanging until death occurs.” For example, there were rare Jewish instances of hanging: Seventy women were “hung” in Ashkelon.<sup>50</sup> Eight hundred

Pharisees were crucified by Alexander Jannaeus the High Priest,<sup>51</sup> but the rabbis rejected that means of execution because it was “as the government does”<sup>52</sup> and the rabbis at that time wanted to keep as much distance as possible between Jewish and Roman practices.

Fourth, observe that the ancient idea of fashioning a punishment that fits the crime was carried out in the execution of Zemnarihah. For example, if a thief broke into a house, he was to be put to death and “hung in front of the place where he broke in.”<sup>53</sup> Under both biblical and ancient Near Eastern law, ancient punishments called “talionic punishments” were often related symbolically to the offense. Thus the punishment for a false accuser was to make him suffer whatever would have happened to the person he had falsely accused (see Deuteronomy 19:19). In Zemnarihah’s case this widely recognized principle of ancient jurisprudence was followed when he was hanged in front of the very nation he had tried to destroy and when he was felled to the earth just as he had tried to bring that nation down.

Finally, the people all chanted loudly, proclaiming the wickedness of Zemnarihah, which may be reminiscent of the ancient practice of heralding a notorious execution. Deuteronomy 19:20 says that “those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you.” How was this to be accomplished? Rabbi Jehudah explained: “I say that he is executed immediately and messengers are sent out to notify the people.”<sup>54</sup> Indeed, public matters, such as the execution of a rebelling judge (see 3 Nephi 6:22–28), had to be heralded.<sup>55</sup> An even clearer example of heralding in the Book of Mormon is found in Alma 30:57, where the results in Korihor’s case

were heralded abroad. In both these cases, the apparent requirement of publishing the wickedness of the culprit was satisfied, so that all who remained would “hear and fear” and the evil would be removed from among God’s people.

### **The Destruction of Ammonihah and the Law of Apostate Cities**

Alma 16:9–11 records the utter destruction of the wicked city of Ammonihah by Lamanite soldiers following Alma’s stern warning and call to repentance. Once while I was reading the account of Alma’s daring mission into Nehorite territory, it dawned on me why Alma had to go to Ammonihah, as unpleasant as that surely would have been. Several striking but obscure affinities exist between that account and the ancient Israelite law regarding the annihilation of apostate cities.<sup>56</sup> That law is found in Deuteronomy 13:12–16, which would have been well known to Alma, the chief judge over the land of Zarahemla and keeper of the plates of brass on which this law was found:

If thou shalt hear say in one of thy cities, . . . Certain men, the children of Belial, are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which we have not known; then shalt thou enquire, and make search, and ask diligently; and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought among you; thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly. . . . And thou shalt gather all the spoil of it into the midst of the street thereof, and shalt burn with fire the city, and all the spoil thereof every whit . . . : and it shall be an heap for ever; it shall not be built again.



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FOLLOWING  
THE LAW OF  
APOSTATE  
CITIES

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Because Alma would have known this law (after all, he had served for eight years as the Nephite chief judge, and he was the custodian of the plates of brass, which contained this text), his concept of justice would have included the idea that an apostate city should be destroyed and anathematized in the specific way set forth in the governing law.

Alma clearly lacked both the desire and the power to have the city of Ammonihah destroyed by a Nephite military force (and certainly no legal decree was ever issued calling for the extermination of the city), but he did carefully record and document the fact that the city's inhabitants had satisfied every element of the crime of being an apostate city. When the justice of God destroyed that city, Alma effectively showed in the record that this fate befell them in accordance with divine law. Consider the following elements:

1. The deuteronomic law pertains to "certain men [who] are gone out from among you." Alma clearly states that the leaders in Ammonihah were Nephite apostates: "If this people, who have received so many blessings from the hand of the Lord, should transgress contrary to the light and knowledge which they do have, . . . it would be far more tolerable for the Lamanites than for them" (Alma 9:23).

2. The law applies when men have led a city to withdraw from God to serve other gods. Alma explains that certain men in Ammonihah, the followers of Nehor, had undertaken to pervert their people, to turn them away from the statutes, judgments, and commandments of the Lord (see Alma 8:17).

3. Deuteronomy describes the offenders as "the children of Belial." Likewise, Alma made it a matter of record

that “Satan had gotten great hold upon the hearts of the people of the city of Ammonihah” (Alma 8:9).

4. The law required officers to investigate the situation thoroughly, to inquire, search, and ask, to be sure that the offensive condition in fact existed. Alma did this too. After being rejected, Alma was instructed to return to preach in the city, to give the inhabitants the necessary warning that they would be destroyed if they did not repent (see Alma 8:16). Then, acting as the two required eyewitnesses (see Deuteronomy 17:6), Alma and Amulek stood and witnessed the abominable scene of the burning of the faithful, innocent wives and children of their followers (see Alma 14:9). This was a revolting experience, but it completed the case against the city and sealed its fate (see Alma 14:11).

5. The prescribed mode of execution for an apostate city was by “the sword, destroying it utterly.” This is the only place in the law of Moses where slaying by the sword is required. When the day of judgment came upon Ammonihah, the Lamanites did “slay the people and destroy the city” (Alma 16:2), presumably by the sword, their primary weapon of hand-to-hand combat (see, for example, Alma 44:12, 17; 58:18).

6. The law demanded that the city should be destroyed completely by fire, “and it shall be a heap for ever.” Alma records, “Every living soul of the Ammonihahites was destroyed, and also their great city, . . . [and] their dead bodies were heaped up upon the face of the earth” (Alma 16:9, 11). Alma does not say how Ammonihah was destroyed, but that fire was involved would have been normal.

7. Finally, the law stated that the ruins “shall not be built again.” In the case of Ammonihah, “the people did not go in to possess the land of Ammonihah for many years.

... And their lands remained desolate” (Alma 16:11). What Joseph Smith probably never realized is that the land of Ammonihah was deemed untouchable for just over seven years, a likely ritual cleansing period in the Israelite or Nephite worlds (notice that there are eight years, nine months, and five days between Alma 16:1 and Alma 49:1). Apparently, the Nephites understood that the deuteronomic prohibition against reinhabitation could expire or be revoked. In a similar fashion, an early Christian synod removed a ban on the resettlement of Cypress, which had remained unoccupied for seven years following the annihilation of its inhabitants.<sup>57</sup>

Thus the destruction of Ammonihah conforms quite thoroughly with the legal provision of Deuteronomy 13, making this a remarkable case of the falling of the vengeful sword of God’s justice (see Alma 54:6; compare Joshua 6:26).

### **Concrete Evidence for the Book of Mormon**

Evidence for the Nephite record extends tangibly beyond the words in the record itself. Helaman 3:7–11 reports that Nephite dissenters moved from the land of Zarahemla into the land northward and began building with cement: “The people . . . who went forth became exceedingly expert in the working of cement; therefore they did build houses of cement,” “all manner of their buildings,” and many cities “both of wood and of cement.” The Book of Mormon dates this significant technological advance to the year 46 B.C.

Here we have several testable facts: the Book of Mormon tells us that people in ancient America became very skillful in the use of cement at a precise historical time. No one in the nineteenth century could have known that cement, in



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MESOAMERICAN  
STRUCTURAL  
CEMENT

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fact, was extensively used in Mesoamerica beginning largely at this time, the middle of the first century B.C.<sup>58</sup>

One of the most notable uses of cement is in the temple complex at Teotihuacán, north of present-day Mexico City. According to David S. Hyman, the structural use of cement appears suddenly in the archaeological record. And yet its earliest sample “is a fully developed product.” The cement floor slabs at this site “were remarkably high in structural quality.” Although exposed to the elements for nearly two thousand years, they still “exceed many present-day building code requirements.”<sup>59</sup> This is consistent with the Book of Mormon record, which treats this invention as an important new development involving great skill and becoming something of a sensation.

After this important technological breakthrough, cement was used at many sites in the Valley of Mexico and in the Maya regions of southern Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras, which very well may have been close to the Nephite heartlands. Cement was used in the later construction of buildings at such sites as Cerro de Texcotzingo, Tula, Palenque, Tikal, Copán, Uxmal, and Chichen Itza. Further, the use of cement is “a Maya habit, *absent* from non-Maya examples of corbelled vaulting from the southeastern United States to southern South America.”<sup>60</sup>

Mesoamerican cement was almost exclusively lime cement. The limestone was purified on a “cylindrical pile of timber, which requires a vast amount of labor to cut and considerable skill to construct in such a way that combustion of the stone and wood is complete and a minimum of impurities remains in the product.”<sup>61</sup> The fact that very little carbon is found in this cement once again “attests to the ability of these ancient peoples.”<sup>62</sup>



John Sorenson has further noted the expert sophistication in the use of cement at El Tajín, east of Mexico City, in the centuries following Book of Mormon times. Cement roofs covered sizable areas: “Sometimes the builders filled a room with stones and mud, smoothed the surface on top to receive the concrete, then removed the interior fill when the [slab] on top had dried.”<sup>63</sup>

The presence of expert cement technology in pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica is a noteworthy archaeological fact inviting further research. Cement seems to take on significant new roles in Mesoamerican architecture close to the time when the Book of Mormon mentions the importance of this apparently new mode of building. The dating by archaeologists of this technological advance to the precise time mentioned in the book of Helaman seems far from knowable to anyone in the world in 1829.

### **Doubled, Sealed, Witnessed Documents**

A final example of a distinctive practice employed in Israel around 600 B.C. and only recently understood through archaeological discoveries was the use of doubled, sealed, and witnessed documents. These documents had two parts: one was left open for ready access while the other was sealed up for later consultation by the parties or for the conclusive use of a judge in court. This practice may illuminate the way in which the plates of Mormon themselves were constructed.

In an intriguing but opaque Old Testament passage, the prophet Jeremiah relates an event that occurred about 590 B.C. Pursuant to his right of redemption within the family and with prophetic foreknowledge of the transaction, Jeremiah bought from his cousin a field located at



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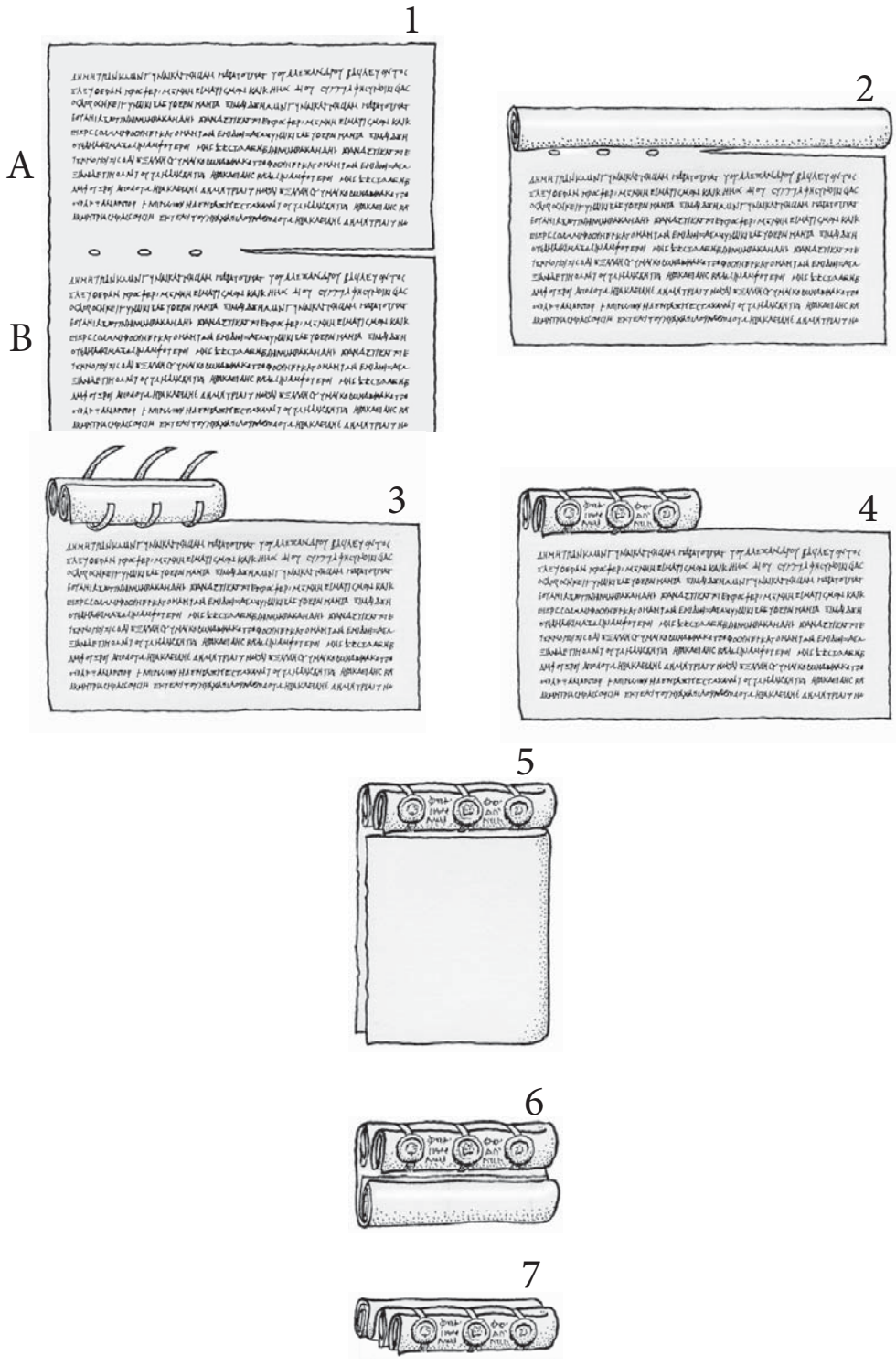
FORM OF  
IMPORTANT  
DOCUMENTS

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Anathoth in the lands of Benjamin. His willingness to make this long-term investment was supportive of God’s enduring promise that “houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land” (Jeremiah 32:15), notwithstanding the prophecy that Jerusalem would also soon fall to the invading Babylonians (see v. 3). In order to memorialize his purchase as impressively and as permanently as possible, Jeremiah as purchaser drafted and executed not just a single document but a two-part deed. One part of its text “was sealed according to the law [*mitzvah*] and custom [*huqqim*],” and the other part of the document “was open” (v. 11; compare v. 14). Jeremiah signed this double document and sealed it, as did several other people who witnessed the transaction and subscribed the text (see vv. 10, 12). Moreover, in order to preserve this evidence of his purchase, Jeremiah took his doubled, sealed document and, in the presence of his witnesses, securely deposited it with both of its parts in a clay jar, “that they may continue many days” (v. 14).

Jeremiah’s detailed account reflects many interesting legal technicalities that were evidently well known and customary in his day.<sup>64</sup> As John Bright says of Jeremiah’s text, “Technical legal terminology is no doubt involved,” even though the precise nature of this practice cannot be ascertained from the Hebrew text alone, let alone the ordinary English translations.<sup>65</sup> Only because of several archaeological discoveries in the twentieth century can we now understand this interesting form of ancient legal documentation.<sup>66</sup>

When written on parchment or papyrus, legal documents were written on a single sheet, but the text was written twice, once at the top and again at the bottom of the sheet. The repeated text could be either a verbatim copy



Depicted here are the stages in folding a typical double document used by Hellenistic scribes in Egypt. The text of the document was stated (A) and then repeated or abridged (B), with one version remaining open, the other being sealed. Drawing by Michael Lyon.

or an abridgment of the full text. The document was then folded so that one part was open for inspection and use, while the other part was protected and sealed.

A similar procedure was followed when important records were written on metal. In that case two or more metal plates were used. For example, two bronze tablets of the Roman emperor Trajan, with a Roman date equivalent to A.D. October 103, present the full text of an official decree neatly lettered on the open side of the first bronze plate and then repeated exactly in more hurried lettering on the inside faces of the two plates.<sup>67</sup> Having an open version and also a sealed iteration of important documents served several purposes, and in some cases following this convention was legally mandated.

Sealing (closing) the document was also essential, and the manner of sealing papyrus or parchment documents was relatively standard. Typically, these documents have a horizontal slit from the edge of the papyrus to the middle, between the two texts. The top half was rolled to the middle and then folded across the slit. Three holes were punched from the slit to the other side, thin papyrus bands were threaded through these holes and wrapped around the rolled-up and folded-over upper portion of the document, and on these bands the seals (wax or clay impressions) of the participants were affixed.<sup>68</sup> The manner of sealing metal documents was functionally the same.

Witnesses were necessary, and their number could vary. In one Assyrian agreement on a clay tablet from 651 B.C. that documented the sale of a property, twelve witnesses were listed.<sup>69</sup> The Babylonian Talmud stipulated that “at least three witnesses were required by law.”<sup>70</sup> Accordingly, in most Jewish texts three witnesses were common,

and it appears that normally not more than seven were used,<sup>71</sup> although in principle one witness was required to sign on each fold and “if there are more than three folds more witnesses must be added, one for each fold.”<sup>72</sup>

When and by whom could these seals be opened? It appears that only a judge or some other duly authorized official could break the seals and open the document. In Babylonia, if a dispute ever arose concerning the correct wording of the contract, a judge could remove the outer envelope and reveal the original tablet.<sup>73</sup> John the Revelator, seeing the book sealed with seven seals, “wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book” that he beheld, until “the Lion of the tribe of Judah . . . prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof” (Revelation 5:4–5; compare Isaiah 29:11).

The legal use of doubled, sealed, witnessed documents during Jeremiah’s (and Lehi’s) lifetime in Jerusalem, together with the secular use of such instruments throughout much of the ancient world and the religious utilization of this formalism in biblical and intertestamental literature, raises the distinct possibility that Lehi knew of this practice and that Nephi and his successors had this form of double documentation in mind when they contemplated the preservation of their own records, constructed and assembled their written texts, and ultimately sealed and deposited the Book of Mormon plates (see 1 Nephi 1:17; 19:1; 3 Nephi 5:18). The Book of Mormon prophets, like Jeremiah, saw the final Nephite record as having two parts, one sealed and the other not (see Mormon 6:6; Words of Mormon 1:3, 6). Consistent with the ancient practices and requirements, witnesses were promised; in particular, at least three witnesses were stipulated. Others would be pro-

vided for, according to God's will: "as many witnesses as seemeth him good" (2 Nephi 27:14) to "testify to the truth of the book and the things therein" (v. 12).

Yet this widespread ancient legal practice was unknown until long after the Book of Mormon was published. In the summer of 1995, I visited several curators in famous museums in London and Oxford in an effort to locate examples of such doubled documents, but none of the curators had taken any notice of these artifacts. Soon I found myself at a seminar in the library of the Papyrological Institute in Leiden, Holland, where quite by good fortune a large collection of sources on this very subject stood right before me.

From this research I conclude that Nephi was familiar with the Israelite legal practice of using double documents or deeds and that he instructed his posterity to construct the Nephite record in a fashion that would comply with that tradition.<sup>74</sup> In conformance with the concepts of the double deed, the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon will confirm the truth of the open and available portion. Moroni himself indicated that the final judgment will have legal elements, that we will see him "at the bar of God," and that God will verify the truth of the words "declare[d] . . . unto you" and "written by this man" (Moroni 10:27).

Nothing could reflect the ancient form of doubled legal documentation more genuinely.

## Conclusion

Many other points of a similar nature could readily be added to this steadily growing list of impressive details about the Book of Mormon. I hope that the foregoing selection of previous recognitions draws together an



interesting and convenient sample of facts about ancient language, law, and literature that were unknown to Joseph Smith and, in all likelihood, were completely unknowable to the young prophet or any of his peers as he set to work in bringing forth the text of the Book of Mormon in 1829. I present these points simply as evidence that the Book of Mormon is what it claims to be. People may make of this evidence what they will,<sup>75</sup> but at a minimum these points show how dismissing that book as a clever forgery leaves much of it unexplained and inexplicable.

People may not be able to account for the existence of the Book of Mormon on normal, rational grounds. But then neither could they account for Elijah's miraculous victory over the priests of Baal or Jesus' healing of the ten lepers or his feeding of the five thousand. The main purpose of those miracles was to invite or even impel people to ask God if those wonders came from him or from some other source. For Latter-day Saints the Book of Mormon serves a similar function. This book is seen as the miraculous, wondrous work foreseen in Isaiah 29. And just as were the miracles in ages past, so it is a manifestation to the world of God's continuing power and love in the world today, inviting all to come unto Christ and to ask God with a sincere heart whether the book is true. The promise is that its truth will be manifest through the power of the Holy Ghost as a living stream that will continuously gush forth in many good and unexpected ways.



## NOTES

1. See Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 179.

2. For a discussion of this text, see David A. Black, “Jesus on Anger: The Text of Matthew 5:22a Revisited,” *Novum Testamentum* 30/1 (1988): 1–8. While arguing that the longer reading “should at least be reconsidered in scholarly discussions of this passage,” Black acknowledges that “the shorter text undoubtedly has impressive manuscript support,” and scholarly opinion clearly favors excluding the word *eikēi*. See Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 219.

3. This point was first published in John W. Welch, “A Book You Can Respect,” *Ensign*, September 1977, 45–48. See further discussion in John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and Sermon on the Mount* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999), 200–201.

4. Stanley R. Larson, “The Sermon on the Mount: What Its Textual Transformation Discloses concerning the Historicity of the Book of Mormon,” *Trinity Journal* 7 (spring 1986): 43.

5. P. Wernberg-Møller, “A Semitic Idiom in Matt. v. 22,” *New Testament Studies* 3 (1956): 72–73; italics omitted.

6. Georg Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Exegetical Commentary*, trans. O. C. Dean Jr. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 146; and Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, 494–95.

7. Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 418.

8. H. C. van Zyl, in “N Moontlike Verklaring vir Matteus 7:6” (A Possible Explanation of Matthew 7:6), *Theologia*

*Evangelica* 15 (1982): 67–82, collapses this saying into Matthew 7:1–5 as a possible solution to the problem.

9. Strecker, *Sermon on the Mount*, 147.

10. Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1966), 125–37. P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, in "Do Not Give What Is Holy to the Dogs," *Expository Times* 90 (1979): 341, argues that *dogs* has a nonliteral, metaphorical sense of "those who are unbaptized and therefore impure, . . . without shame," and that *holy* might originally have meant "what is precious, what is valuable."

11. Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, 495–96; citations and footnotes omitted.

12. See Stephen D. Ricks, "Temples through the Ages," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 4:1463–65; and Hugh W. Nibley, "On the Sacred and the Symbolic," in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 553–54, 569–72.

13. Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, 496.

14. A discussion of the temple context of the Sermon on the Mount first appeared in a FARMS Update, "The Sermon at the Temple," March 1988; also in John W. Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 253–56.

15. See William S. Kurz, "Luke 22:14–38 and Greco-Roman and Biblical Farewell Addresses," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104 (1985): 251–68. A discussion of the relevance of this study to King Benjamin's speech was first published as a FARMS Update, "Benjamin's Speech: A Classic Ancient Farewell Address," in June 1987 and later included in Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 120–22, and in a fully developed form in *King Benjamin's Speech*, ed. Welch and Ricks, 88–117.

16. See John Jebb, *Sacred Literature* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1820), cited in John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 10/1 (1969): 72 n. 3; Thomas

Boys, *Tactica Sacra* (London: Seely, 1824) and *Key to the Book of Psalms* (London: Seely, 1825); and Thomas H. Horne, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia: Littell, 1825), 2:446–73.

17. First published in Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” 83. For the most extensive published discussions, see John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in Alma 36,” FARMS Paper 1989, and “Alma 36: A Masterpiece,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 114.

18. See John W. Welch, “How long did it take Joseph Smith to translate the Book of Mormon?” I Have a Question, *Ensign*, January 1988, 46–47.

19. In Hebrew the theophoric suffix (the use of God’s name as the last syllable of a human personal name) is *yah* = *iah*. Hence, the name *Zedekiah* parallels the name *Yahweh* (Lord). This analysis was first detected by John W. Welch and published as “Was Helaman 7–8 an Allegorical Sermon?” FARMS Update, May 1986; and reprinted in Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 232.

20. Personal correspondence to John L. Sorenson, 13 June 1970, referring to pp. 4–6 of Ralph Roys’s translation of *Chilam Balam of Chumayel* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973).

21. James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 161; see Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 59. This analysis was first published by John W. Welch as “The Laws of Eshnunna and Nephite Economics,” FARMS Update, *Insights* (December 1998): 2; also in John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne, eds., *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999), 147–49.

22. See John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999), chart 113.

23. See Christopher A. Faraone, “The Agonistic Context of Early Greek Binding Spells,” in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 11.

24. See A. Audollent, *Defixionum Tabellae* (Paris: n.p., 1904), nos. 22–24, 26–29, 31, 33–34, 37.

25. Faraone, “Early Greek Binding Spells,” 19. First reported as “Cursing a Litigant with Speechlessness,” FARMS Update, *Insights* (October 1998): 2; also in Welch and Thorne, eds., *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, 154–56.

26. H. S. Versnel, “Beyond Cursing: The Appeal to Justice in Judicial Prayers,” in *Magika Hiera*, 75.

27. See Ze’ev W. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times* (Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1964; reprint, Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 2001), 50–56.

28. See J. van der Ploeg, “Studies in Hebrew Law: The Terms,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 12 (1950): 248–59; and Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times*, 8.

29. First published as a FARMS Update, “Statutes, Judgment, Ordinances, and Commandments,” in June 1988; reprinted in Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 62–65.

30. In Leviticus 18:4–5, which does not involve a pleonastic list, an a-b-b-a chiasm (mishpatim-ḥuqqot-ḥuqqot-mishpatim) has been translated as judgments-ordinances-statutes-judgments. This does not pose a counterexample.

31. In his volume *Barabbas and Esther and Other Studies in the Judaic Illumination of Earliest Christianity* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 29–63.

32. This point was first observed by John W. Welch and law student assistant Heidi Harkness Parker in an article originally published as “Better That One Man Perish,” FARMS Update, *Insights* (June 1998): 2; also in Welch and Thorne, eds., *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, 17–19.

33. *Genesis Rabbah* 94:9, vol. 2 of *Midrash Rabbah*, ed. and trans. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon (London: Soncino, 1939), 879.

34. As first observed in a FARMS Update, “Exemption from Military Duty,” in June 1989; reprinted with minor changes in Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 189–92.

35. Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1965), 1:2.

36. From the royal archive in Mari, II, 48:15–20; cited in Victor H. Matthews, “Legal Aspects of Military Service in Ancient Mesopotamia,” *Military Law Review* 94 (1981): 143.

37. Babylonian Talmud, *Sotah* VIII, 1, 42a.

38. *Ibid.*, 3, 4a, emphasis added.

39. *Ibid.*, 2, 43a, emphasis added.

40. Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 9b.

41. See Menachem Elom, *The Principles of Jewish Law* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1975), 614.

42. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times*, 60.

43. This point was first explained in a FARMS Update, “The Case of an Unobserved Murder,” February 1990; also in an edited form in Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 242–44.

44. See Bernard S. Jackson, *Theft in Early Jewish Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).

45. See John W. Welch, “Theft and Robbery in the Book of Mormon and in Ancient Near Eastern Law” (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1985); “Thieves and Robbers,” *Insights* (July 1985): 2; and Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 248–49. See also my “Legal and Social Perspectives on Robbers in First-Century Judea,” in *Masada and the World of the New Testament*, ed. John F. Hall and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1997), 141–53.

46. This point was explained in a FARMS Update, February 1990; also in Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 248–49.

47. As first observed in “The Execution of Zemnarihah,” FARMS Update, November 1984; reprinted in Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 250–52.

48. Maimonides, *Sanhedrin* XV, 9; see also Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* VI, 6.

49. Maimonides, *Sanhedrin* XV, 9.
50. Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 45b–46a.
51. See Josephus, *War* 1.97.
52. Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 45b–46a.
53. Code of Hammurabi, sec. 21.
54. Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* X.6.
55. *Ibid.*
56. See FARMS Update, July 1987.
57. Constantinus Prophyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio* 47, in *Patrologia Graeca* 113:366.
58. See Matthew G. Wells and John W. Welch, “Concrete Evidence for the Book of Mormon,” *Insights* (May 1991): 2.
59. David S. Hyman, *A Study of the Calcareous Cements in Prehispanic Mesoamerican Building Construction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1970), ii, sec. 6, p. 7.
60. George Kubler, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient America*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Penguin, 1975), 201, emphasis added.
61. Tatiana Proskouriakoff, *An Album of Maya Architecture* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), xv.
62. Hyman, *A Study of the Calcareous Cements*, sec. 6, p. 5.
63. John L. Sorenson, “Digging into the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, October 1984, 19.
64. See Leopold Wenger, “Über Stempel und Siegel,” *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung* 42 (1921): 626, in which Wenger correlates Jeremiah’s double deed to Assyrian double deeds while noting the difference in material.
65. John Bright, ed., *Jeremiah*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 21 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965), 237 n. 11.
66. See especially Leopold Fischer, “Die Urkunden in Jer 32 11–14 nach den Ausgrabungen und dem Talmud,” *Zeitschrift der Altertums Wissenschaft* 30 (1910): 136–42; and Wenger, “Über Stempel und Siegel,” 611–38.
67. See Alfred v. Domaszewski, “Ein neues Militärdiplom,” in *Die Altertümer unserer heidnischen Vorzeit* (Mainz: Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, 1911), 5:181.



68. See Otto B. Rubensohn, *Elephantine-Papyri* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1907), 6–8; Fischer, “Die Urkunden in Jer 32 11–14,” 138; and Friedrich Preisigke, *Griechische Papyrus* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1912), 1:221.

69. See E. Hammershaimb, “Some Observations on the Aramaic Elephantine Papyri,” *Vetus Testamentum* 7 (January 1957): 24.

70. Elizabeth Koffmahn, *Die Doppelurkunden aus der Wüste Juda: Recht und Praxis der jüdischen Papyri des 1. und 2. Jahrhunderts n. chr. samt Übertragung der Texte und deutscher Übersetzung* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 12.

71. See Fischer, “Die Urkunden in Jer 32 11–14,” 139; Hans J. Wolff, “Die hellenistische Zeugen-Hüterurkunde,” in *Das Recht der griechischen Papyri Ägyptens* (Munich: Beck, 1978), 2:63 n. 39.

72. Babylonian Talmud, *Gittin* 81b.

73. See *ibid.*

74. This point was initially developed in John W. Welch, “Doubled, Sealed, Witnessed Documents: From the Ancient World to the Book of Mormon,” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 391–444.

75. For a discussion of what counts as evidence and how evidence is relevant to faith, see my chapter on “The Power of Evidence in the Nurturing of Faith,” in *Nurturing Faith through the Book of Mormon: The Twenty-Fourth Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 149–86; reprinted in condensed form in chapter 2 herein.