

To Remember and Keep: On the Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book

Louis Midgley

How much history do we require? What kind of history? What should we remember, what can we afford to forget, what must we forget?

Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi¹

The Book of Mormon must be read as an ancient, not as a modern book. Its mission, as described by the book itself, depends in great measure for its efficacy on its genuine antiquity.

Hugh W. Nibley²

I am fond of the idea that communities “are constituted by their past—and for this reason we can speak of a real community as a ‘community of memory,’ one that does not forget its past.”³ Hence, according to Robert Bellah, a genuine “community is involved in retelling its story, its constitutive narrative, and in so doing, it offers examples of the men and women who have embodied and exemplified the meaning of the community.”⁴ Bellah also holds that “the communities of memory that tie us to the past also turn us toward the future as communities of hope.”⁵

On this issue one would do well to consider Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi’s passionate and troubling book, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*.⁶ The subtitle of this book points to Yerushalmi’s remarkable illustrations of the power of biblical narratives to constitute Jewish identity and community. Yerushalmi also tells a cautionary tale for those interested in the preservation and prospering of communities of faith and memory, since he sketches the impact on Jewish identity of the emergence of a sophisticated, secularized Jewish historiography whose content and assumptions expand the scope of Jewish history, question the veracity of biblical history, and thereby challenge the foundations of Jewish faith. Of all the modern forms of learning, the least consistent with Jewish faith are those on which modern historiography have been made to rest.⁷

History, Memory, and Faith

Yerushalmi argues that the Jews were the first to assign a “decisive significance” to history.⁸ In so doing they forged a “new world-view whose essential premises were eventually appropriated by Christianity and Islam as well.”⁹ The Hebrew Bible contains a divine injunction for the faithful to remember the past. Yerushalmi has to account for the fact that with the closing of the Jewish canon of scripture, interest in writing history soon languished and disappeared. Here was a people whose existence and identity depended upon history, but who were essentially uninterested in history outside of their sacred texts.

Instead, according to Yerushalmi, biblical Israel was absorbed with God’s mighty actions in history and hence looked to memory of a slice of the past as “crucial to its faith and, ultimately, to its very existence.”¹⁰ So the authors of the biblical texts were anxious to render faithfully the reality of what had taken place. Yerushalmi points out that

Not only is Israel under no obligation whatever to remember the entire past, but its principle of selection is unique unto itself. It is above all God's acts of intervention in history, and man's responses to them, be they positive or negative, that must be recalled. Nor is the invocation of memory actuated by the normal and praiseworthy desire to preserve heroic national deeds from oblivion. Ironically, many of the biblical narratives seem almost calculated to deflate national pride.¹¹

Thus God, and not Israel, is made the hero of biblical stories intended to show the terrible consequences of forgetting the terms of the covenant that bound a people to God, as well as the blessings that flowed from obedience to the covenant.

Even though the rabbis ceased to write history after the close of the biblical canon, their attention remained focused on the understanding of a meaningful history in which God blesses the obedient and curses the disobedient. Yerushalmi puts it this way:

For the rabbis the Bible was not only a repository of past history, but a revealed pattern of the whole of history, and they had learned their scriptures well. They knew that history has a purpose, the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth, and that the Jewish people has a central role to play in the process. They were convinced that the covenant between God and Israel was eternal, though the Jews had often rebelled and suffered the consequences. Above all, they had learned from the Bible that the true pulse of history often beats beneath its manifest surfaces, an invisible history that was more real than what the world, deceived by the more strident outward rhythms of power, could recognize.¹²

The Rise of a Secularized History and Its Impact on Jewish Faith

But with the emergence of a modern historiography grounded in secular assumptions, often radically challenging the assumptions that stand behind the account of the past found in the Bible, we see, according to Yerushalmi, "a decisive break with the past." What takes its place is an amorphous and shifting set of secular premises that form the basis for the modern historical outlook and sooner or later set the Jew working on the Jewish past in conflict with what had been taken for granted in all previous conceptions thereof.

Yerushalmi argues that the "belief that divine providence is not only an ultimate but an active causal factor in Jewish history, and the related belief in the uniqueness of Jewish history itself," soon disappeared among those writing the new Jewish history:¹³ hence what Harold Bloom calls "a troubling and possibly irreconcilable split between Jewish memory and Jewish historiography."¹⁴ Yerushalmi is not convinced that the new Jewish history, based as it is on the secular assumptions of modern historiography, can do much to preserve and even less to restore the integrity of either Jewish memory or faith. From his perspective, in the quest for a "usable past," it is unwise to rely on a highly secularized professional historiography for the needed light. This explains the melancholy, bittersweet tone of his book, since he is a gifted professional historian.

According to Harold Bloom, modern secular "historiography, of all the modern disciplines practiced by Jewish scholars, is necessarily the most Gentile."¹⁵ The ultimate consequence is that "scripture has been replaced by history as the validating arbiter of Jewish ideologies, and the replacement, [Yerushalmi] believes, has yielded chaos."¹⁶

The Analogy with Revisionist Readings of the Book of Mormon

I first remember encountering the language of remembrance, and the suggestive reflections on the place of memory in forming and grounding Jewish identity, when in 1983 I noticed a review of Yerushalmi's book in *Commentary*.¹⁷ My initial interest in Yerushalmi's book was in the light it could throw on the role of the Bible in grounding Jewish history and Jewish memory. But I also saw a possible analogy between his reflections on the secularization of Jewish history and the subsequent decline of Jewish faith and what seemed to me to be taking shape among a few cultural Mormons.

As is rather well-known, some cultural Mormons have brushed aside the Book of Mormon. In one bizarre instance a prominent savant boasted of "not having read the entire Book of Mormon."¹⁸ He flatly rejected the Book of Mormon because, among other reasons, an angel was involved in its recovery.¹⁹ But in 1980, when I started a careful examination of a few Mormon historians and their secular assumptions, I found those with revisionist proclivities generally not quite this blatant—rather more shy and retiring than bold and adventuresome. In the early eighties I discovered only a few cultural Mormons who were cautiously advancing naturalistic explanations of the Book of Mormon and the story of its recovery.²⁰ However, since the mid-eighties it has become fashionable to advance revisionist readings of the Book of Mormon. Elsewhere I have identified a number of former Latter-day Saints, RLDS "liberals," and various cultural Mormons who seem anxious to turn the Book of Mormon into nineteenth-century frontier fiction, inspired or otherwise, and Joseph Smith into a bizarre impostor, an imaginative religious "genius," or a combination of the two.²¹

Put bluntly, when I discovered Yerushalmi's book in 1983, what he described as having taken place since the early 1800s among assimilated, cultural Jews was suggestive of problems I then suspected would become fashionable, full-scale efforts to advance naturalistic accounts of the Book of Mormon and of the Mormon past generally. Why would we not expect the more corrosive ideologies flowing from Enlightenment rationalism—of modernity—eventually to have an impact on at least those on the fringes of the Mormon intellectual community? Since I first became interested in what was taking place among a few so-called Mormon intellectuals, many have sought to alter radically the way the Saints understand their founding stories and especially how they ought to read the Book of Mormon.

The Faith and Memory of Latter-day Saints

And so we must ask whether it is only Jewish faith that depends on the memory of a past that includes the mighty acts of God and the halting responses of his people. We do not have to look far for an answer. Martin Marty, the distinguished Lutheran church historian, argues that both individuals and communities base their identity on stories.²² He argues that religious communities with roots in the Bible are more or less sustained by sharing a common story with a recognizable plot. We should be able to assess the vitality of religious communities by determining how closely they remain tied to their founding stories. Why? He insists that

Life is not only lived one-on-one, or by one's self: we are social beings, born in and destined for some sort of social, communal, and corporate existence. And here story, and history, come in in even more suggestive ways. We have no access to a past beyond our own memory unless someone has taken pains to tell or write stories about it, to make it thus accessible.²³

Without texts we have no past other than our own or shared communal memories. But Marty also argues that communities are not grounded in what we find in modern, secular historiography. Why? Because we do not really live by what is produced by either antiquarians or professional historians, for "religious communities are not made

up of antique-collectors. For instance, the Christian church is not a memorial society," because "the church is not a 'keeper of the city of the dead.' While tradition keeps it healthy, when it loves tradition it is not a community of traditionalists." Instead, "it lives by stories. These can engender doctrines."²⁴ Religious communities are thus grounded on a network of stories which constitutes the link with the past that forms their identity.²⁵

But the stories that ground both individuals and communities, according to Marty, are not what is often meant by "history" in secular, academic circles. Communities of faith and memory do not depend on historiography as currently understood in the academic world. In addition, the fashions and fads of professional historiography often compete with the understandings of the past on which communities of faith depend.

According to Marty, excluding those who have reduced the content of faith to some currently fashionable moral sentiments or to mere advice about how to live, communities of believing Jews, Muslims, and Christians—including especially Latter-day Saints—in one way or another are constituted by a rich network of stories. In the case of Christians, accounts of the past allow the believer to "see God's activity in the events, words, works, circumstances, and effects of Jesus Christ and tell the story of his death and resurrection as constitutive of the faith that forms their community."²⁶ Some "extend the sense of story through the ages," while others may repudiate intervening Christian history and strive to live off their own understanding of the original story.²⁷

Marty notes that Latter-day Saints have little interest in what is known in Christian and Jewish circles as "theology."²⁸ Thus the Latter-day Saints, according to Marty, "especially live as chosen and covenanted people in part of a developing history," and therefore "much is at stake when the story is threatened, as it potentially could have been when forged documents concerning Mormon origins agitated the community and led to tragedy a few years ago."²⁹ He has in mind Mark Hofmann's bizarre forgeries of what initially appeared to be texts that challenged the traditional account of the restoration. Marty claims that the faith and hence identity of Latter-day Saints is in important ways even more history-grounded than for Christians generally.

Why do attacks by cultural Mormons and others on the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon and the story of its recovery generate concern among the Saints? Put another way: why is it crucial for the Saints to give close attention to the Book of Mormon, as well as defend it from its critics? The answer is that for the Saints to begin to see the Book of Mormon as frontier fiction, as the product of a trance by a magic or occult-saturated, dissociative (manic-depressive) "genius," or whatever the latest fashionable naturalistic explanation might be, fundamentally transforms the crucial founding story of the restored gospel. For this reason the Saints hold that the Book of Mormon must be read as an ancient rather than a modern book. And this is also why much is at stake when these matters are debated.

Marty correctly senses that the faith of Latter-day Saints has always "been characterized by its thoroughly historical mode and mold." He sees the faith of the Saints as "historically classical" in its tradition.³⁰ "When Latter-day Saints argue," according to Marty, "they argue about morals based on history, or about historical events and their meaning—about how the contemporary community acquires its identity and its sense of 'what to do and how to do it' from the assessment of the character, quality, content, and impetus of that story."³¹

It is therefore crucial for the faith of the Saints that the story of the generative or founding events remains essentially in place in the hearts and minds of the Saints. This does not, of course, preclude but actually demands competent, better-documented, more accurate, finely nuanced, and richly detailed accounts of the restoration, as

well as continued thoughtful attention to the rich treasures found in the Book of Mormon when read as an authentic, ancient text.

The Saints thus have their own distinctive ties to the past. A story fills their memory and forms the identity that melds them into a community of faith and memory. That which disputes, dilutes, or transforms the distinctive Mormon past will also alter and erode the community that rests on those accounts. And that which refines, or tells more fully and accurately the story of the restoration, will preserve and build the kingdom. Hence the Book of Mormon and the related story of Joseph Smith's encounters with the divine must remain in place, or the faith of the Saints will languish or be radically transformed. Why? Those who either are or who become Saints do so because they find meaning in the Book of Mormon and the related account of its recovery. And their own story and the story of the restoration of the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ are thus linked. This is why we can speak of a Latter-day Saint community of faith and memory. Those who cease being or who never become Latter-day Saints do so because the basic story no longer has power to regulate and give meaning to their lives or because it never came to define their identity.

Marty has described what he considers a crisis of faith taking place among Latter-day Saints; he sees this dilemma as somewhat analogous to similar crises experienced by other Christian communities when they were confronted with certain corrosive intellectual elements of modernity as manifest in a radical relativism about all truth claims, including statements about the past—especially those in which the divine is said to be encountered—as well as Enlightenment skepticism about the miraculous, attacks on natural theology, historical-critical studies of the Bible, and so forth.

To the degree that Marty is correct, he is able to identify a crisis within a dissident element on the fringes of the Mormon intellectual community, which he claims has undergone a crisis even “more profound than that which Roman Catholicism recognized around the time of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65).”³² Although I believe that Marty has somewhat overestimated the extent of the crisis he describes, I am interested in what he believes is the source of the crisis.

Challenges to the Memory (and Faith) of the Saints

Marty refers to the “acids of modernity,” which are the works of those he labels “God-killers,”³³ whose ideologies have corroded the faith of many Christians, Muslims, and Jews. The resulting crises of faith in each of these traditions have come in waves and degrees, and with different effects in each case. For the Saints, the crisis is not one that centers on abstruse philosophical issues or on questions of natural science, including scientific cosmology, or even on systematic or dogmatic theology, but essentially on historical issues—on how the Saints understand the past, and especially on how the Book of Mormon is read and the story of the restoration is to be told and understood. The primary source of this crisis is the emergence of a “historical consciousness” that creates problems for a faith grounded in historical events because history no longer seems to contain any certainties, or because it is assumed that history must be written in such a way that the divine is removed, except as a product of illusion or delusion.

Marty is clearly correct in his assessment of the crucial importance of history for Latter-day Saints, for it is in accounts of the past that we find access to the content of faith. The history that is crucial to the faith of the Saints includes—indeed is grounded on—the Book of Mormon and the story of its recovery, as well as the Bible. It is exactly at this point that Latter-day Saints are distinguished from all sectarian forms of Christian faith, including currently fashionable factions of Protestant evangelical religiosity. Latter-day Saints have their own version of the

Christian story. And it is this story of the Book of Mormon, its prophetic message, and the account of its recovery, rather than the murky details of sectarian dogmatic theology, that distinguishes Latter-day Saints from various brands of Christian faith. The history crucial to the faith of the Saints includes, among other things, the Book of Mormon and other ancient texts through which the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ and much other additional information was restored after an apostasy from the faith of the original disciples. Hence the Saints reject both the ecumenical creeds and sectarian confessions. And even though some Protestants formally spurn creeds, they are still more or less beholden to their related theology, which the Saints reject as uninspired, corrupting speculation drawn from and dependent on a pagan philosophical culture.

But are the Saints really undergoing a “crisis of historiography” that threatens to challenge and transform their faith? One can, of course, find some support for this view, if one focuses on essays and books being promoted on the fringes of the Mormon intellectual community. But what is publicized in the popular press or promoted by a few dissidents is not the whole story, for the understanding of the generative events for the most part seems not to have been eroded or transformed, not even or especially among the most thoughtful and mature Mormon historians. Instead, attention to the Book of Mormon and the story of its coming forth has been deepened and refined among the Saints since World War II. And this has partly been the result of efforts of those refining the founding stories and looking more deeply into and defending the Book of Mormon, as well as of increased attention to such matters by the leaders of the church.³⁴

Since the faith of Latter-day Saints has always been characterized by “its thoroughly historical mode and mold,” the current crisis, to the degree that it is accurate to speak of such a thing, was unavoidable. Why? Because a new historical consciousness, according to Marty, has yielded “what some might regard as a dramatic and traumatic shift among Mormon intellectuals.”³⁵ For most Saints, including most historians, no crisis has arisen, or they have passed through it with a more refined and even stronger faith. Or, for various reasons, they remain quite unconcerned by or oblivious to the quarrels of self-important pedants.

The primary challenge generated by the more corrosive elements of modernity to the faith of the Saints has not arisen from a skepticism concerning natural or systematic theology, since that sort of thing has played virtually no role in forming Mormon identity. Skepticism concerning miracles has only minimal impact on Latter-day Saints, since the miraculous has been understood by the Saints in ways that have diverted or blunted most of the traditional criticisms. Instead, from the beginning, the primary criticism of the restoration has been focused on the Book of Mormon and how it was brought forth. The crisis stems from attacks on the network of texts and stories that form the identity of the Saints. Hence, part of what seems necessary to maintain Latter-day Saint identity includes maintaining the viability of the network of stories that ground their faith, since challenges to these clearly threaten to weaken or destroy both individual and group identity and thereby undermine genuine trust in Jesus as the Christ.

Marty argues that the challenge to communities of faith by modernity (and he has in mind the fruit of Enlightenment rationalism and its aftermath), if not met in some effective way, tends to dilute, modify, or destroy faith. If religious communities, that is, in the larger sense Muslims, Jews, and Christians, each in their own way, depend for their identity on stories they more or less share within their own communities and that form both the content and grounding of their particular faith, the life and health of those communities depends at least to some extent on whether they manage to find ways of meeting challenges to their stories. Hence, we can speak of communities of faith and memory, and we can begin to sort out what generates, perpetuates, and threatens such communities.

Of course, what Marty labels the “acids of modernity”³⁶ (and I would also include some aberrations associated with various postmodernisms) may not threaten individual or group identity when believers exist in a condition of “primitive naiveté”—Marty borrows that label from Paul Ricoeur.³⁷ This label merely describes the understanding of the world held by those who have not confronted the possibility that the world can be understood differently by those outside a community of faith. When alternative explanations and competing stories or interpretations of the past are encountered, individuals must find some way to avoid the challenge, reach an accommodation with the competing view, or abandon their faith. In a general sense, the same is true of all communities who find their founding story challenged.

The Saints cannot avoid the impact of the cultures that surround them and hence have often found themselves confronted with sometimes attractive, competing, and contradictory understandings of reality. Many Saints at some point have experienced a crisis of faith, which they have had to resolve in some way. This is especially the case when they have experienced the allure of different, competing, and alien worlds made available through entertainment or advertising, or even through secular education. The Saints have managed such crises in a number of ways, with some ceasing to believe. When compared with other religious communities, however, the number of dissidents seems to me to be remarkably low. The current debate in the fringes of the Mormon intellectual community over the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon³⁸ is thus an indication that some Saints have adopted assumptions and fashioned explanations grounded in secular modernity.³⁹

It should not, therefore, be surprising that revisionist accounts of the Book of Mormon and the related story told by Joseph Smith are clearly recognized as “naturalistic explanations of Joseph Smith’s theophanies” rendered in entirely “secular” terms.⁴⁰ Even the most ardent apologist for what is vaguely labeled a “New Mormon History” grants that such naturalistic explanations end up denying “the possibility of genuine individual creativity or inspiration.”⁴¹ However, it is exactly this kind of revisionist history that some apologists for a secularized account of the Book of Mormon and the Mormon past defend by claiming that it approaches what they quaintly label “objectivity” precisely because they boast that they are not at all subservient to or genuinely involved in the faith of the Saints. And it is precisely those accounts, if they were to become popular, that would transform or destroy the Latter-day Saint community of faith and memory.

By drawing attention to these currently fashionable revisionist accounts of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s prophetic charisms,⁴² which obviously interdict the story that forms the community of faith and memory, I do not in any way question the need for accurate, profound, and fruitful accounts of the Mormon past by Latter-day Saints (or sympathetic, better-informed accounts of others), nor do I deny that important advancements have taken place in writing about the Mormon past in the last thirty years. Furthermore, I deplore pictures of the Saints as faultless heroes. Attempts to conceal frailties or shortcomings among the Saints are simply silly. Recognizing that historical accounts—as well as understanding certain texts on which they rest and by which they are transmitted—have a crucial role in the perpetuation of communities of faith and memory, I am concerned with the way artifacts such as the Book of Mormon and the related prophetic truth claims of Joseph Smith are understood.

To this point at least, Marty’s acids of modernity for the most part have not corroded the faith of the Saints as they have the faith of many others whose identity was once linked to biblical stories. But what must be a cautionary tale for Latter-day Saints is still to be found in Yerushalmi’s examination of the links between Jewish faith and an understanding of God’s mighty acts in the past, and then of the weakening of both under the impact of a highly secularized historiography. We may be witnessing some of the same corrosive effects on the memory and identity of the Saints in the recent highly publicized instances of dissidents openly challenging the Book of Mormon.

The “Ways of Remembrance” in the Scriptures

In addition to warning about the potential impact on Mormon history and memory from highly secularized accounts of the restoration, Yerushalmi’s book also contains useful references to careful, detailed studies of the meaning and function of *zakher*—the Hebrew verb meaning “to remember”—in the Old Testament. Among the studies mentioned is an important work by Brevard Childs.⁴³ With this work in mind, it is possible to examine the frequent use of the language of remembrance in the Book of Mormon. Yerushalmi’s book led me to the work of Childs and others and alerted me to the possibilities for understanding an important concept in the Book of Mormon. This eventually helped me formulate a brief exegesis of what I called “the ways of remembrance” in the Book of Mormon.⁴⁴

I will attempt to demonstrate some remarkable parallels between deep structures in the teachings of the Book of Mormon and the Bible. It thus turns out that faith and memory are linked in even more profound ways than in the formation of identity. These links were clearly not known in 1830; they have only recently been discovered. Though I do not wish to stress this point, it seems that the presence in the Book of Mormon of deep structures of meaning unknown in 1830 may stand as a witness to Joseph Smith’s remarkable prophetic powers. Be that as it may, I will focus on language found in both texts that articulates the ways of remembrance.

Understanding the Ways of Remembrance

Nephi concluded his account of Lehi’s prophecies by saying, “Therefore, *remember*, O man, for all thy doing shall be brought into judgment” (1 Nephi 10:20, emphasis added here and in subsequent passages quoted from the scriptures). King Benjamin punctuated his covenantal speech with the plea, “O *remember, remember* that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it” (Mosiah 2:41). Jesus himself placed the Nephites in ancient Bountiful under covenant to “always *remember*” him and to keep the commandments that he, as their new lawgiver, had just given them (see 3 Nephi 18:7, 11; and Moroni 4–5, where we find preserved the memorial prayers for renewing the new covenant, which constitutes the people of God as the seed of Christ).

Several recent scholarly studies have analyzed the meanings of remembrance in the Bible, and some of this research can help us better understand and appreciate the important meanings of remembrance in the Book of Mormon. By placing emphasis on the concept of “remembering” and its correlate “keeping,” the Book of Mormon significantly captures one of the most significant and distinctive aspects of Israelite mentality.

Brevard Childs demonstrates that more than two hundred instances of the various forms of the Hebrew verb *zakher* occur in the Old Testament.⁴⁵ He shows that what is understood in the Old Testament by memory and remembrance goes far beyond the mere mental recall of information. Of course, recalling information is part of the meaning of the Hebrew verb and its various other forms. *To remember* often means to be attentive, to consider, to keep divine commandment, or to act.⁴⁶ The word in Hebrew thus carries a wider range of meaning than is recognized in English. Indeed, *to remember* in Hebrew involves turning to God, repenting, acting in accordance with divine injunctions.

Not only man, but also God, “remembers.” He remembers the covenants he has made with his prophets and his people: with Noah (see Genesis 9:15–16); Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (see Exodus 2:24; Leviticus 26:42); Moses (see Deuteronomy 31:16; Judges 2:1); all of Israel (see Ezekiel 16:60; Luke 1:72); and Lehi and his people (see Moroni 5:21; 8:21).

Conversely, the antonym of the verb *to remember* in Hebrew—*shachach*, to forget—does not merely describe the passing of a thought from the mind, but involves a failure to act or to do something, most often and significantly the covenant promise to keep the commandments of God. Hence, failing to remember God, his mighty acts, and his statutes and judgments is the equivalent of apostasy. For Israel to forget the covenant and therefore to fail to keep the commandments is to negate the blessings promised the obedient and to call down the cursings promised the disobedient. “Wherefore ye shall do my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and ye shall dwell in the land in safety. And the land shall yield her fruit, and ye shall eat your fill, and dwell therein in safety” (Leviticus 25:18–19).

The high density of words for memory and remembrance in the Book of Mormon remains unnoticed by casual readers. Though the range of uses of remembering in the Book of Mormon is perhaps not quite as extensive as that identifiable in the Old Testament, the idiom of remembrance in both books includes warnings, promises (especially those found in the blessings and cursings that accompany covenant making and renewals), threats, pleas, and complaints, and also the same deep connection between memory and action that is so prominent in the Old Testament. For example, to remember is to hearken (see, for example, Jacob 3:9–11), to awaken, to see, to hear, to believe, to trust.

One demonstrates remembrance through a faithful response to the terms of the covenant—in strict obedience to the statutes and ordinances, by keeping the commandments. But rebellious Israel has always been “quick to do iniquity, and slow to *remember* the Lord their God” (Mosiah 13:29).

Careful attention to the language found in the Book of Mormon—even or especially to one particular word like *remember*—may yield surprising dividends. For example, Lehi pled with his sons to remember his words: “My sons, I would that ye would *remember*; yea, I would that ye would hearken unto my words” (2 Nephi 1:12). Such language may go virtually unnoticed, or it may seem to be merely a request to recall some teachings. The word *remember* seems rather inconsequential—plain and straightforward. But when examined more closely, the language about remembrance in the Book of Mormon turns out to be rich and complex and conveys important, subtle, and even hidden meanings.

Considerable stress is placed on the virtue of remembrance and the vice of forgetfulness in the Book of Mormon. The inherent meaning of this language is significant. By examining closely what the Book of Mormon says about “the ways of *remembrance*” (1 Nephi 2:24), we can better understand the book’s overall message. In addition, we have available to us a rather good test of the advantages to be gained by reading the Book of Mormon as an ancient rather than a modern text.

Nephi was told by the Lord that the Lamanites “shall be a scourge unto thy seed, to stir them up in *remembrance* of me; and inasmuch as they will not *remember* me, and hearken unto my words, they shall scourge them even unto destruction” (2 Nephi 5:25). Since the Book of Mormon ends with the destruction of the Nephites, it seems that the choice between remembering and forgetting the terms of the covenant were crucial, even decisive, for the Lehite colony.

Later, King Benjamin “appointed priests to teach the people, that thereby they might hear and know the commandments of God, and to stir them up in *remembrance* of the oath which they had made” (Mosiah 6:3). This occurred after he had indicated that the original members of the Lehite colony had failed to prosper precisely because some of them had “incurred the displeasure of God upon them; and therefore they were smitten with famine and sore afflictions, to stir them up in *remembrance* of their duty” (Mosiah 1:17).

The first thing to note is that the “ways of *remembrance*” are not simply inner reflections, or merely an awareness of or curiosity about the past, or even detailed information to be recalled. Of course, in a number of instances the language of remembrance in the Book of Mormon seems to carry the meaning of recalling information about the past (see, for example, Ether 4:16 and Alma 33:3). More commonly, however, the language of remembrance identifies action that springs from an encounter with the meaning of past events. Thus, in the Book of Mormon, remembrance results in action.

The call to remember is often a passionate plea to recognize God’s hand in delivering his people from bondage and captivity. The exodus theme works at two levels in the Book of Mormon: the covenant people, when penitent—when they approach the altar with a broken heart and a contrite spirit and when they remember and keep the commandments—are delivered by God, but so are individuals who turn to God for mercy. For example, Alma pled with one of his sons: “I would that ye should do as I have done, in *remembering* the captivity of our fathers; for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it was the God of Abraham” (Alma 36:2; compare Alma 36:29). But Alma also linked the two levels in recounting his own experience with the mercy of God, as in the following:

And behold, when I see many of my brethren truly penitent, and coming to the Lord their God, then is my soul filled with joy; then do I *remember* what the Lord has done for me, yea, even that he hath heard my prayer; yea, then do I *remember* his merciful arm which he extended towards me. Yea, and I also *remember* the captivity of my fathers; for I surely do know that the Lord did deliver them out of bondage. . . . Yea, I have always *remembered* the captivity of my fathers; and that same God who delivered them out of the hands of the Egyptians did deliver them out of bondage. (Alma 29:10–12)

Because the Nephites are removed in time and space from past acts of deliverance and future redemptive events and because they have to rely on the words of prophets, the visions of seers, and what is recorded in the sacred texts, the ways of remembrance take on a crucial significance, in much the same way as they did for ancient Israel. The act of remembering makes it possible for the covenant people to participate in the crucial redemptive events of the past and also to look forward to vindication in the future. Remembering even helps them look forward to events that have not yet taken place. Through remembering the bondage and captivity and then the deliverance of their fathers, the Nephites view themselves as having access to those same gifts of deliverance and redemption—from Egypt and from wicked Jerusalem, as well as from the desert wilderness in the Old World, and from the terrors of their ocean voyage. These redemptive acts are all likened by the Nephite prophets to the ultimate redemption from death and sin made available through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The early Nephites thus had their hearts turned ahead to the great atoning sacrifice of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ or Messiah, which they saw as the central event in the divine plan of redemption from bondage to both sin and death.

From the perspective of the Nephites, remembrance included active participation in some form. For them it meant recalling not merely or simply with the mind but also with the heart (the heart being the seat of will, cognition, and memory for biblical peoples). For the Nephites, as for ancient Israel, to remember was to place the event upon the heart, or to turn the heart toward God—to repent or return to him and his ways as their righteous forefathers had done. As in the Hebrew Bible, remembering often carries the meaning of acting in obedience to God’s commands. Remembering God and thereby prospering so as to be lifted up at the last day (as in 3 Nephi 15:1 and Alma 38:5) are contrasted with forgetting and perishing, or being cut off from God’s presence (as in Alma 37:13 and 42:11). These contrasts remind us of Lehi’s description of the grand opposition between obedience and eternal life, which includes the possibility of a liberation from sin through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus and the ultimate bondage of the second death (see 2 Nephi 2).

Since remembering is not merely recalling something, but rather an action of the soul, what specific actions were the Nephites admonished by their prophets to take? The Book of Mormon tells us that they were to hearken (see, for example, Jacob 3:11), soften the heart, awaken, see, hear, believe, or trust, as the examples below demonstrate. Overall these actions involved turning to God. The covenant people showed their repentance by contrition, offering sacrifice, and especially by steadfastly keeping the commandments: “They did *remember* his words; and therefore they went forth, *keeping* [his] commandments” (Helaman 5:14).

On the other hand, when the covenant people forget, “they do harden their hearts, . . . and do trample under their feet the Holy One” (Helaman 12:2). Forgetfulness is also pictured as a dreadful sleep from which one needs to awaken (see 2 Nephi 1:12–13). The one who does not remember (and hence keep) is said to suffer from blindness and disbelief (see 3 Nephi 2:1–2) or from a hardness of heart (see 2 Nephi 1:16–17). To forget is also to fasten one’s heart on or worship riches (see Helaman 13:22). It also means to engage in wickedness and to wax strong in iniquity (see Helaman 11:36). Being “cut off and destroyed forever” (2 Nephi 1:17) is the ultimate and dreadful fruit of forgetfulness.

The Book of Mormon links remembrance with covenants and their renewals. Remembering means to keep the terms of the covenant between God and his people; it is faithful response to God’s commandments. At the same time, strictly keeping the commandments leads to remembering. Thus rebellious Israel, the prophet Abinadi tells us, was always “quick to do iniquity, and slow to *remember* the Lord their God; Therefore there was a law given them [by covenant at Sinai], yea, a law of performances and of ordinances, a law which they were to observe strictly from day to day, to *keep* them in *remembrance* of God and their duty towards him” (Mosiah 13:29–30).

Like the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Mormon uses the expressions *keep* and *remember* interchangeably. For example, in Deuteronomy 5:12 the injunction is given to “*keep* the sabbath,” while in Exodus 20:8 Israel is required to “*remember* the sabbath day, to *keep* it holy.” This same connection is found in Jarom 1:5 and Mosiah 18:23, where the expression is to “*keep*,” and in Mosiah 13:16–19, where it is to “*remember*.” Occasionally “*remember to keep*” combines both expressions. Thus Nephi pleads with his hearers to “give heed to the word of God and *remember to keep* his commandments always in all things” (1 Nephi 15:25). Again, remembering is an action, not merely recalling the past out of idle curiosity or for any other reason than to serve God.

In the Book of Mormon we see festivals and performances involving either an initial covenant making (see, for example, 3 Nephi 11–22, where Jesus of Nazareth himself—in his role as the Messiah or Christ—replaces for the Nephites the burnt offerings or holocaust of their original Mosaic covenant) or covenant renewals (see Mosiah 1:18–6:3). These festivals and performances are said to have been observed in order to remember and hence “*keep* the commandments.” (This expression occurs eighty-five times in the Book of Mormon, often in conjunction with remembrance, as in Alma 36:1, 30.) From the perspective of the Book of Mormon, one does not act only in order to remember. The two ideas are connected in both directions: a person remembers in the deepest sense only by acting in conformity with the will of God, and such deeds then stir remembrance of God’s divine mercy to his people in times past and present, as Abinadi indicates.

Genuine memory or remembrance occurs in the faithful response to God’s covenant with Israel to make them his people. Much like the teaching found in Deuteronomy 8:18–19, remembering God, keeping his commandments, and prospering are linked; then these notions are contrasted with forgetting him and perishing (see 2 Nephi 9:39; 10:22–23). Memory and covenants are thus consistently linked in the Book of Mormon. “*Rememberest* thou the covenants of the Father with the house of Israel?” (1 Nephi 14:8; compare, for example, 1 Nephi 17:40; 19:15; and 2 Nephi 3:5, 21; 29:1–2, 5, 14).

It is therefore not surprising to find in certain instances the concept of *remembrance* as part of the covenant blessing and cursing formula (see Alma 37:13; 36:1–2, 29–30; Mosiah 1:5–7; and 2:40–41). The Book of Mormon is not a secular but a covenant history, that is, one written from the perspective of the promised blessings for keeping the commandments and also the cursings that result from their neglect.

God's demands on Israel, as set forth both in the Bible and also in the Book of Mormon, cannot be fully or properly understood apart from the ways of remembrance. The mighty acts of God—including redemptive acts and the deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt and, finally, the sacrifice of his Son—are the crucial events of the past. Without his dramatic acts on their behalf, they would have been nothing but another little, obscure Near Eastern tribe. The commandments he gave them recall and are based in his powerful actions on their behalf. Therefore the commandments are not just an expression of nice moral sentiments or even abstract law but are grounded in the key events in their history which form the substance of God's redemptive history.

According to the Book of Mormon, God is carrying out a plan⁴⁷ that includes the testing of his people—they are on probation.⁴⁸ A way has been provided for their redemption from darkness and sin (see 1 Nephi 10:18; 13:27; 2 Nephi 2:4; 9:10–11, 41; 28:10; and Alma 37:46), but they must trust God and repent; they must remember and keep the commandments. The importance of memory, in the Book of Mormon sense, is to keep before their eyes both the law and the lawgiver to bring about obedience and thus to allow them to claim the promised blessings and avoid the cursings that flow from disobedience.

As in the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Mormon language of remembrance provides a clear link between the commandments and covenant history. It is a special brand of historical memory that establishes the continuity of Israel as God's people. God's plan sets the stage for the history of Israel, a history dominated by the dialectic between obedience and rebellion, remembrance and forgetfulness, blessings and cursings, liberty and captivity, and eventually eternal life and death (see 2 Nephi 2:27). Remembrance thus makes Israel aware of her sins, God's mercy and love, and her own covenant pledge to keep the commandments.

In addition, the language of remembrance, as in the Hebrew Bible, includes warnings, promises, threats, pleas, complaints, and so forth. Often the language of the Book of Mormon takes the form of what appear to be stereotyped formulas. "O man, *remember*, and perish not" (Mosiah 4:30) is an example of one such formula that joins together memory and action. Furthermore, remembering the covenant is sometimes equivalent to possessing a land promised to the descendants of the one who first entered into the covenant with God, or to those who might be "grafted in" (see 1 Nephi 10:14; 15:16; Jacob 5; and Alma 16:17) or "numbered among" that seed (see 1 Nephi 14:2; 2 Nephi 10:18–19; Alma 5:57; 45:13; Helaman 15:13; 3 Nephi 2:14; 15:24; 16:3, 13; 21:6, 22; and 30:2). In that regard, Lehi's dealings with God are presented on the model provided by Abraham (see 1 Nephi 4:14–15; 17:40), and much attention is given in the Book of Mormon to the promise connected to the land.

To this point little has been said about God's remembering. God is portrayed as remembering, or forgetting, because of a covenant he once made with his people. By forgetting (or not remembering) the sins of his people, God grants a blessing or gives a gift in accordance with his covenant, which includes mercy or forgiveness (see Mosiah 26:22, 29–31). When God remembers, he does something, just as he expects his people to act when they remember him. He may punish, deliver, preserve, heal, sustain, warn, forgive, or otherwise intervene in human affairs by remembering or forgetting. For God to remember always involves or at least implies his working through real events, molding situations and circumstances to further his "eternal plan of deliverance" (2 Nephi 11:5) or

“plan of redemption” (Jacob 6:8; Alma 12; 17:16; 18:39; and 34:9, 16, 31). God’s remembering is much more than a mere recall of something in his thoughts—it rather involves action, the giving of life or death.

The close links between thought and action can be seen in the way in which remembering in the Book of Mormon is linked to the heart of man (see, for example, Alma 1:24; 10:30; and 32:22). Such links are also demonstrated in the giving of names. To remember someone is to know or believe on his name. “And I would that ye should *remember* also, that this is the name that I said I should give unto you that never should be blotted out, except it be through transgression; therefore, take heed that ye do not transgress, that the name be not blotted out of your hearts. I say unto you, I would that ye should *remember* to retain the name written always in your hearts” (Mosiah 5:11–12). To remember is to awaken, hearken, heed, pray, obey, know, and ponder.

The Book of Mormon emphasizes the need to have and keep sacred records (such as the plates of brass) and to preserve them. In this we may see the kind of connection found in the Hebrew (and in Arabic) language between the very meaning “to remember” and the word which means “record.” A “book of *remembrance*” is mentioned in the Book of Mormon (see 3 Nephi 24:16), as well as a “book of life” that records the names of the righteous (see Alma 5:58; compare 2 Nephi 29:11; 3 Nephi 27:26). To record is to make a memorial of deeds or sayings, to inscribe in a book (see Exodus 17:14).

In the Book of Mormon, remembering is clearly dependent on the possession of records (see 1 Nephi 4:14; and especially Mosiah 1:3–4). This connection is part of the obsession with records prevalent among the Nephite prophets. Throughout the Book of Mormon, the fate of the people of God depends on their memory of the past. The existence of historical records and careful attention to their contents and message are stressed throughout. Without such attention, the people would fail to fulfill their role in the plan of salvation.

King Benjamin taught his sons

concerning the records which were engraven on the plates of brass, saying: My Sons, I would that ye should *remember* that were it not for these plates, which contain these records and these commandments, we must have suffered in ignorance, even at this present time, not knowing the mysteries of God. For it were not possible that our father, Lehi, could have *remembered* all these things, to have taught them to his children, except it were for the help of these plates. . . . Were it not for these [records], which have been kept and preserved by the hand of God, that we might read and understand of his mysteries, and have his commandments always before our eyes, that even our fathers would have dwindled in unbelief, and we should have been like unto our brethren, the Lamanites. (Mosiah 1:3–5)

King Benjamin, employing a common formula for the instruction of sons in the Book of Mormon, enjoins them:

I would that ye should *remember* that these sayings are true, and also that these records are true. And behold, also the plates of Nephi, which contain the records and the sayings of our fathers from the time they left Jerusalem until now, and they are true. . . . Now, my sons, I would that ye should *remember* to search them diligently, that ye may profit thereby; and I would that ye should *keep* the commandments of God, that ye may prosper in the land according to the promises which the Lord made unto our fathers. (Mosiah 1:6–7)

Clearly the remembering expected of the people of God in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon is not mere curiosity; neither is it a matter of simple recall. Rather, the key lies in righteous deeds.

The covenant God made with Lehi was renewed from time to time through rituals involving the entire community. Those rituals were a medium of instruction and constituted the “ways of *remembrance*,” as they did with ancient Israel. Remembering the terms of the covenant made with God includes the constant stressing of the blessings and cursings that flow from keeping or breaking the commandments, from the broken-hearted and contrite offering of sacrifices as memorials (or fruits) of repentance.

The Historical Setting—Does the 1830 Audience Determine It?

One of the more ambitious efforts to read the Book of Mormon as a modern book is currently being made by Mark Thomas;⁴⁹ he focuses on what he assumes to be a simple idea borrowed by Joseph Smith from the immediate sectarian religious environment of nineteenth-century New England. What he does not notice is that the language of remembrance in the Book of Mormon reflects in detail a sensitivity on the part of its prophets that mirrors that of other Israelite prophets. In one of his recent essays, Thomas reports that some of those who read the Book of Mormon as a nineteenth-century composition—Joseph Smith’s effort at frontier fiction—reach the conclusion that “the theology of the Book of Mormon as a whole can be characterized as a theology of mediation between opposing positions.”⁵⁰ Thomas notes that some even feel “that its theological stance regarding human nature is a middling position between Calvinism and Arminianism, and its view of the godhead is a cross between belief in one and many gods.”⁵¹

But Thomas does not entirely agree with the stance taken by other fashionable revisionists on these matters. For example, he reports that he has “argued elsewhere that the Book of Mormon advocates conservative Arminianism and defends a trinitarian position on the godhead.”⁵² But Thomas does not indicate what he means by “a trinitarian position.” The word *trinity* means three and not one, as is so often assumed by those involved in polemics directed at the restored gospel. Except for the very early Sabellian or modalist heresy, which pictured the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as merely the way in which one deity appears to human beings, and the Unitarian movement started by William Ellery Channing, early Christians seem to have insisted on the existence of three separate and distinct entities in the Godhead. But, with the loss of prophetic guidance, the early church tried to figure out how three divine beings could also be one. Out of debates over this question, a variety of explanations were fashioned which employed categories borrowed from pagan Greek philosophy to try to explain how it is possible to have three separate beings and yet also only one God. The Book of Mormon obviously does not contain the kinds of language found in the creeds, which attempt to turn three separate and distinct beings into one God by “neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance,” as it was expressed in the Athanasian Creed, borrowing categories from pagan philosophy.

Those who are anxious to read the Book of Mormon as a nineteenth-century composition struggle to find ways of linking its message and teachings to the controversies going on in the sectarian world. Ironically they end up quarreling with each other on exactly which strand of sectarian religious ideology they see in the Book of Mormon. And they also resort to rather clumsy proof texting to support their efforts to read strands of this and that sectarian ideology into the Book of Mormon.

Like a number of other cultural Mormons, Mark Thomas strives to read the Book of Mormon as a modern book. And yet some of his language is equivocal. For example, after arguing at length that the covenant renewal (or sacrament) prayers in the Book of Mormon (see Moroni 4–5) were drawn by Joseph Smith from contemporary quarrels over liturgical matters in his own immediate sectarian religious environment, Thomas surmises that “some readers may conclude that this points to a nineteenth-century historical setting for the writing of the Book

of Mormon. Others may conclude that rhetoric was such a central concern of the ancient authors and/or Joseph Smith that they shaped both form and content of the book to address nineteenth-century issues.⁵³ If these are the only alternatives, where does Thomas position himself? Put another way: what exactly is the assumption on which Thomas himself operates when he attempts to explicate the meaning of language in the Book of Mormon?

Thomas begins with the assumption that “the Book of Mormon utilizes nineteenth-century literary forms and theological categories.”⁵⁴ This is obvious. Why? No one ever claimed that Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon into Maori, Persian, or Russian. So it will necessarily contain nineteenth-century English. One must assume that Thomas has more than this in mind. And he clearly does, for he also insists, and perhaps correctly, that the Book of Mormon message “finds expression in an idiom that cannot be fully interpreted outside of history.” He then suggests a link “between textual interpretation and historical setting.”⁵⁵ And I agree. But what historical setting should be attributed to the Book of Mormon? Should it be read as a modern rather than an ancient book?

Thomas holds that “interpretative theory demands some historical setting.”⁵⁶ Thomas has only two choices: either he can read the Book of Mormon as an ancient text, which he steadfastly refuses to do, or he can read it as set in Joseph Smith’s immediate environment. For Thomas the Book of Mormon must be read as frontier fiction composed by Joseph Smith in an effort to present his version of the sectarian religious opinions floating around western New York. So Thomas wishes “to appeal to history as an interpretive aid. The historical setting to which I will appeal,” he admits, “is the original 1830 audience.”⁵⁷ Hence Thomas suggests that this audience somehow provides the proper historical setting for understanding the Book of Mormon. For Thomas, the Book of Mormon must be read as a nineteenth-century composition—not as an authentic ancient history. I disagree.

The way in which an audience can begin to grasp the meaning contained and sometimes hidden in a text is by reading it. And if it is an ancient text, obviously understanding something of the historical setting in which it was composed will materially assist in grasping that meaning. This is especially the case with texts translated from another language. Hence, if one has any reason to believe, as the Saints have always done, that Joseph Smith somehow “translated” through the gift and power of God an authentic ancient text into English, then its nineteenth-century audience does not somehow fix its meaning; its modern audience merely attempts to grasp its meaning as far as that is possible. And ancient texts, especially in translation, are often strange to a modern audience. The stance taken by Thomas is much like claiming that the twentieth-century audience for Thomas L. Pangle’s translation of Plato’s *Laws* or Allan Bloom’s translation of Plato’s *Republic* is somehow the historical setting in which those dialogues were composed.

What Thomas has to say about remembrance in the sacrament prayers (he identifies them as eucharistic prayers) found in Moroni 4–5 provides an opportunity to test the thesis that the proper avenue for interpreting the Book of Mormon is the assumption that Joseph Smith was its author and hence that he was merely borrowing ideas from his immediate sectarian environment. Thomas argues that nineteenth-century literary forms and theological categories are found in the sacrament prayers and are a key to understanding them. And he specifically identifies as one of these nineteenth-century notions the call for remembrance in the blessing to be offered on the bread and wine. He announces that “obedience is promised in taking the wine, and the bread signifies remembrance only.”⁵⁸ What can be said with some certainty is that, if Thomas had looked into the question of how the language of remembrance is used in the Book of Mormon, he would have noticed that it follows rather closely its use in the Old Testament. He would have discovered a linguistic and hence conceptual link in the Book of Mormon (and the Old Testament) between remembering and keeping the commandments. And he could not have maintained his

notion that the sacrament prayers involve some effort to generate a subjective, emotional “religious experience,” whatever that might be.

Misunderstanding the Ways of Remembrance—Seeing Emotion Rather Than Deeds as the Crux

The covenant people of God are constantly urged in the Book of Mormon to remember. It is not just in the blessing on the bread and wine found in Moroni 4–5 that remembrance is enjoined on the faithful. Thomas grants that “the importance of remembering comes up frequently in the Book of Mormon.”⁵⁹ He then claims that “to ‘remember’ is to grasp the significance of one’s position before God.”⁶⁰ As I will demonstrate, this is at least intolerably vague. He opines that nothing resembling the Roman Catholic notion of a real presence of God exists in the communal partaking of the bread and wine set forth in the Book of Mormon. These are, he claims, “but a memorial to be taken ‘in remembrance.’”⁶¹ A memorial? This formulation seems tautological and hence empty. Thomas struggles to develop his explanation: he holds that “this experiential memorial is expressed in the theme of ‘remembrance’ in the Mormon prayers. Understanding the concept of remembrance helps clarify its use in the eucharistic prayers.”⁶² He is, of course, right in holding that getting clear on the ways of remembrance would assist in understanding those prayers.

But exactly how does Thomas understand what he calls “the concept of remembrance” in the Book of Mormon? He correctly notes that the sacrament or eucharistic prayer “exhorts remembrance of God’s commandments or covenants.”⁶³ Without following up this insight, Thomas also announces that “‘remembrance’ or memory implies a state of being, a religious experience which conduces to righteous behavior.”⁶⁴ A “state of being”? An “experience” or “religious experience”? Such vague language only obscures the meaning contained in the text he attempts to interpret. He describes remembrance rather vaguely or wrongly as both “a religious and emotional experience.”⁶⁵ These are categories foreign to the Book of Mormon. What exactly does Thomas have in mind when he uses such vague expressions? On the basis of what he has located in sectarian sources, he announces that one ought to acknowledge the fact that sacramental prayers involving “remembrance and covenant obedience were in frontier worship of western New York.”⁶⁶ What he does not sense is that similar language does not demonstrate that the same meaning is present. Obviously various forms of the verb “to remember” would be found in sectarian liturgies in western New York at or near the time of Joseph Smith. But would that language be used as it is in the Book of Mormon (or in the Bible)? Thomas neglects to ask such questions and hence never gets beyond noting what are some trivial linguistic similarities.

It turns out that Thomas thinks that partaking of the bread and wine involves what he calls “a state of being,” which seems to be merely a subjective emotion. He also describes the presence of the spirit as “a state of being.”⁶⁷ Thomas seems to have found this kind of language in some of his sectarian sources in western New York. Hence he claims, and perhaps correctly, that somehow remembrance “as experiential memorial appealed to evangelicals in the early nineteenth century. These evangelicals believed in subjective religion. They described their religion as ‘experiential religion.’ What they meant by this was a religion the individual experienced.”⁶⁸ And to experience religion meant to experience or manifest an emotion,⁶⁹ perhaps to bark or shout or fall in a camp meeting. Such revivals may be an example of what Thomas is getting at. All this may or may not be true. But it is certainly not helpful in understanding the ways of remembrance as actually found in the Book of Mormon. Instead of depicting remembrance as an emotional experience, the Book of Mormon clearly links remembering with doing something, specifically with keeping the commandments of God.

Conclusion

Though the entire range of uses of the language of remembrance in the Book of Mormon is not as extensive as that identifiable in the Old Testament, words for memory and remembrance occur in the Nephite record well over two hundred times. This high density is not noticed by casual readers, but it vividly reflects a sensitivity on the part of Book of Mormon prophets that is remarkably similar to that of other Israelite prophets.

The prophetic, redemptive history found in the Book of Mormon, which stresses God's continuous effort to save or deliver his covenant people, is given to enlarge their memory (see Alma 37:8). Many passages in the Book of Mormon manifest a passion for preserving the crucial story of God's dealings with his people and also stress their halting responses. The heart of that story is the conflict between obedience and rebellion, liberty and bondage, prosperity and suffering, having the influence of the spirit or being cut off from God's presence. Remembrance thus teaches and warns Israel, although it does not inflate reputations or generate pride. The people of God need to know how they came to be a covenant people; they also need to know how they have strayed, both as a people and as individuals, from the correct path or way, and how they might regain favor in God's sight by turning away from sin and returning to God. Here we find the deeper meaning of the covenant renewal that takes place in the sacrament.

We are enjoined to remember, as the Nephites of old remembered. We are to remember the curses brought on the Nephites, which they inflicted on themselves by forgetting the terms of the covenant. We must understand that to the extent that we fail to remember and keep our covenants with God we are or will be cut off from his presence. Without God's mercy we remain carnal, sensual, and devilish, chained in bondage and captivity.

The sacred records translated as the Book of Mormon provide us with prophetic direction and warning by preserving and enlarging our own memory of God's mighty deeds and of the terms of the covenant that make us the people of God. These records teach us that we must neither forget what God has done nor what we have covenanted to do. The result of such a forgetting is to turn onto an alien way or path into darkness and sin. Instead, the people of God must "always *remember* him, and *keep* his commandments," as they take upon themselves the name of Jesus Christ (Moroni 4:3), for to forget the sacrifice offered by our Lord for our sins by not keeping the commandments is to offend God and fall from his grace.

Notes

1. Yosef H. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, 2nd ed., with a new preface and postscript by the author and a foreword by Harold Bloom (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), 107.
2. Hugh W. Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 3.
3. Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 153.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

6. Among other things, Yerushalmi is the Salo Wittmayer Baron Professor of Jewish History, Culture, and Society at Columbia University.
7. Bloom makes this point forcefully in the first part of his foreword to the paperback edition, in Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, xix.
8. *Ibid.*, 8.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, 9.
11. *Ibid.*, 11.
12. *Ibid.*, 21.
13. *Ibid.*, 89.
14. *Ibid.*, xiv.
15. *Ibid.*, xix.
16. *Ibid.*
17. See David Singer, “Testimony,” *Commentary* 76/1 (July 1983): 72–75, reviewing the original 1982 hardback edition of *Zakhor*, first issued by the University of Washington Press.
18. L. Jackson Newell, ed., *Matters of Conscience: Conversations with Sterling M. McMurrin on Philosophy, Education, and Religion* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 114.
19. McMurrin has become famous for the secular dogmatism that “we don’t get books from angels and translate them by miracles.” *Ibid.*, 368; and cf. 24, 108, 190, 194, 210–11.
20. Specifically Marvin S. Hill and Klaus J. Hansen. Subsequently I discovered that they had allies among the “liberal” RLDS faction currently in control of that movement.
21. I have provided a reasonably full description of and response to this literature in various essays. See, for example, my essay entitled “The Current Battle over the Book of Mormon: ‘Is Modernity Itself Somehow Canonical?’” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 200–254; or my essay entitled “Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon? The Critics and Their Theories,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1997), 101–39.
22. See Martin E. Marty, *We Might Know What to Do and How to Do It: On the Usefulness of the Religious Past* (Salt Lake City: Westminster College, 1989), 3–21.
23. *Ibid.*, 8.
24. *Ibid.*, 9–10.

25. See *ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*, 11.
27. See *ibid.*
28. For an account of how and why Latter-day Saints have given little or no attention to what is traditionally known as “theology,” but have grounded their faith in texts like the Book of Mormon, which they believe constitute an authentic his-tory, see Midgley, “Theology,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4:1475–76. The Saints have a particular antipathy toward the kind of theology that is made to rest on categories borrowed from pagan philosophical traditions. I have dealt with this issue in detail in an essay entitled, “Directions that Diverge: ‘Jerusalem and Athens’ Revisited,” *FARMS Review of Books* 11/1 (1999): 27–87, esp. pp. 58–72.
29. Marty, *We Might Know What to Do*, 11–12.
30. *Ibid.*; see also Martin E. Marty, “Two Integrities: An Address to the Crisis in Mormon Historiography,” in *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History*, ed. George D. Smith (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 170, which was reprinted from the *Journal of Mormon History* 10 (1983): 3–19, and also from Marty’s *Religion and Republic* (Boston: Beacon, 1987), 303–25.
31. Marty, *We Might Know What to Do*, 12; quoting his “Two Integrities,” 170.
32. Marty, “Two Integrities,” 169.
33. Martin E. Marty, *A Short History of Christianity* (New York: Meridian, 1959), 298–301. He has in mind the likes of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud.
34. See Noel B. Reynolds’s essay, “The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon in the Twentieth Century,” *BYU Studies* 38/2 (1999): 6–47, which shows the increased and increasingly sophisticated attention given to the Book of Mormon since 1945.
35. Marty, “Two Integrities,” 170.
36. Marty, *A Short History*, 296.
37. Marty, “Two Integrities,” 171.
38. For an example of the recent attack on the Book of Mormon, see the ten essays included in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993). But compare these attacks on the Book of Mormon with the thirteen responses found in the *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994). In subsequent numbers of this journal additional responses to Metcalfe have appeared.
39. See Louis Midgley, “The Acids of Modernity and the Crisis in Mormon Historiography,” in *Faithful History*, 189–225.

40. Thomas G. Alexander, "Historiography and the New Mormon History: A Historian's Perspective," *Dialogue* 19/3 (1986): 30.
41. *Ibid.*, 46.
42. See Midgley, "The Current Battle over the Book of Mormon," 200–225.
43. For this richly detailed study in English of memory in the Old Testament, see Brevard S. Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel* (London: SCM, 1962). Yerushalmi also cites other studies in German. See his *Zakhor*, 119 n. 1.
44. See Louis Midgley, "The Ways of Remembrance," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 168–76.
45. Childs, *Memory and Tradition*, 9, lists the numbers for the various forms of the word.
46. See *ibid.*, 9–10, 50–54.
47. See 2 Nephi 9:6, 13; Jacob 6:8; Jarom 1:2; Alma 12:25–26, 30, 32–33; 17:16; 18:39; 22:13; 24:14; 29:2; 34:9, 16; 39:18; 41:2; and 42:5, 8, 11, 13, 15, 31.
48. See 1 Nephi 10:21; 15:31–32; 2 Nephi 2:21, 30; 9:27; 33:9; Helaman 13:38; and Mormon 9:28.
49. See Mark Thomas, "Was Joseph Smith for Real? How He Lied, Perhaps Even to Himself," *Free Inquiry* 20/1 (1999): 37–39; "A Mosaic for a Religious Counterculture: The Bible in the Book of Mormon," *Dialogue* 29/4 (1996): 47–68; "Moroni 8 as Rhetoric," *Sunstone* 4/1 (January–February 1979): 22–24; "Scholarship and the Future of the Book of Mormon," *Sunstone* 5/3 (May–June 1980): 24–29; "Lehi's Dream: An American Apocalypse," in *Proceedings of the Symposia of the Association for Mormon Letters: 1979–1982* (Salt Lake City: Association for Mormon Letters, 1983), 91–98; "The Meaning of Revival Language in the Book of Mormon," *Sunstone* 8/3 (May–June 1983): 19–25; "Scholarship and the Book of Mormon," in *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture*, ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 63–79, reprinted with editorial changes from "Scholarship and the Future of the Book of Mormon"; Mark D. Thomas, *Digging in Cumorah: Reclaiming Book of Mormon Narratives* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2000); and finally "A Rhetorical Approach to the Book of Mormon: Rediscovering Nephite Sacramental Language," in *New Approaches*, 53–80.
50. Thomas, "Rhetorical Approach," 57.
51. *Ibid.*, 57–58. Thomas cites Marvin S. Hill, *Quest for Refuge: The Mormon Flight from American Pluralism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 21–22. Hill asserts that "theologically the Book of Mormon was a mediating text standing between orthodox Calvinists and emerging Arminians" (p. 21). Hill's illustrations seem puerile. For example, "the scripture was to provide a second witness to a disbelieving world" (p. 21). What this has to do with mediating between Calvinist and Arminian theology is anyone's guess. What Marvin Hill says is that for him the Book of Mormon appears to have an "ambivalent position on the trinity." Why? "It is true," Hill opines, "that some passages blur the distinctions between the Father and the Son" (p. 22). Hill apparently does not seem to realize that the word trinity means three. And the Book of Mormon clearly identifies Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What it does not do is picture their unity in terms of an Aristotelian category such as substance, which is what is commonly done in the formulations advanced by those drawing either knowingly or unknowingly on pagan philosophical

traditions in an effort to have the three separate and distinct beings, which are at the same time also one, in order to avoid charges of polytheism. Hill adds that “another category where the treatment seems mediatory is the scripture’s view of man and mortality. At one point the text sounds Calvinistic.” Why? Hill reasons that, “according to the Book of Mormon salvation comes only through grace” (p. 22). For Hill, this is Calvinism. But, then again, “men and women are capable of faith and repentance and have the will to believe” (p. 22), and this sounds Arminian to Hill. What he does not seem to recognize is that the position advanced in the Book of Mormon on these matters is substantially the same as that found in the New Testament and the early church fathers, though it is radically unlike that advanced later by Augustine and taken up much later by Calvin.

52. Thomas, “Rhetorical Approach,” 58. He cites his remarks from the “Readers Forum,” *Sunstone* 13/6 (December 1989): 4–5; and his “Scholarship and the Book of Mormon,” in *The Word of God*, 63–79.

53. Thomas, “Rhetorical Approach,” 77.

54. *Ibid.*, 54.

55. *Ibid.*, 53.

56. *Ibid.*, 54.

57. *Ibid.*, 53.

58. *Ibid.*, 56.

59. *Ibid.*, 69.

60. *Ibid.*

61. *Ibid.*, 68.

62. *Ibid.*, 69.

63. *Ibid.*, 70.

64. *Ibid.*

65. *Ibid.*

66. *Ibid.*, 73.

67. *Ibid.*, 69.

68. *Ibid.*, 70.

69. See *ibid.*