The Book of Mormon in Latter-day Saint Hymnody

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A church member who has loved the Book of Mormon since childhood and who takes it for granted that the Book of Mormon is central to LDS class instruction, general conference addresses, and missionary discussions is likely to be surprised that we have only six Book of Mormon hymns in our 1985 hymnbook. Early hymn writers turned to the Book of Mormon itself for their texts. Twelve Book of Mormon hymns were introduced into Mormon hymnody by Emma Smith’s first hymnal, but the Book of Mormon as a theme almost disappeared from later hymnals. Only one hymn relating to the Book of Mormon was among the forty-nine new hymns added to the 1985 hymnal. In this article, Book of Mormon hymns are listed, discussed, and categorized. Most of the Book of Mormon hymns that have been written are narrative, rather than devotional. Each new hymnbook must meet the needs of its age. Devotional hymns are likely to be more forthcoming as literary appreciation of the Book of Mormon continues to grow.
THE BOOK OF MORMON IN

LATTER-DAY SAINT HYMNODY

KAREN LYNN DAVIDSON
Primary children love to sing about the Book of Mormon. A short while ago, our Primary chorister polled the children in our ward as to their favorite Primary songs. Leading the Top Ten list, outranking even “I Am a Child of God,” was “We’ll Bring the World His Truth”; “We are as the army of Helaman.

/ We have been taught in our youth.” Three more Book of Mormon songs—“Nephi’s Courage,” “Book of Mormon Stories,” and the adult hymn “The Iron Rod”—also made the list.1 The children sing these songs with enthusiastic voices and glowing faces, and it seems certain that their warm feelings for the Book of Mormon are likely to linger long after Primary graduation. When I asked our chorister why she thought the Book of Mormon songs were such favorites, she replied, “I guess the children just love heroes.”
Her comment is, I think, the key to the popularity of these songs. Although their appealing tunes also do a lot to catch the hearts and imaginations of the children, the real secret is that they are based on beloved stories and on the heroes in those stories. In “Nephi’s Courage,” the children repeat the story and then vow to follow the example:

The Lord commanded Nephi to go and get the plates
From the wicked Laban inside the city gates. . . .
I will go; I will do the thing the Lord commands.
I know the Lord provides a way; he wants me to obey.  

Unfortunately, most “story hymns,” including Latter-day Saint hymns based on Book of Mormon narrative, do not turn out to be first-rate texts. Although two Book of Mormon narrative hymns—“The Iron Rod,” #274, and “An Angel from on High,” #13—are part of our 1985 hymnbook, most of the others now seem dated and quaint, and they have long since been dropped. However successful the Book of Mormon Primary songs are, the best adult hymns tend not to be those that celebrate specific people and events.

Then what about the Book of Mormon as the inspiration for hymns of another type? Even though the writer’s first impulse may be to name the names and tell the stories, Christian hymn tradition, including that of the Latter-day Saints, offers other kinds of hymns. Robert D. Hawkins of the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary lists four hymn categories: narrative hymns, those written “primarily to give voice to a particular biblical passage”; catechetical hymns, those whose aim is “to lay out various tenets of faith and biblical teaching”; doctrinal hymns, those that “state or imply what the tradition does not believe as well”; and the highest hymnic expression, devotional hymns. Dr. Hawkins characterizes the devotional hymns as follows:
Many of the devotional hymns provide some of the most eloquent reflections on the gift of communion with God. Rather than perpetrating a type of emotion-laden tableau, the best of these hymns address the transforming, renewing, and sanctifying work of God within the minds and hearts of the faithful. Devotional hymns are set apart by their reflection on the meaning of Christ's Passion and death as well as on the Eucharist, on the life and practice of the believer. They do not merely describe events in Christ's life, nor do they merely set forth doctrinal positions. Rather, the language of prayer and meditation comes to the fore as the faithful meditate on the unfathomable mercy and love of God.⁵

Within Latter-day Saint hymnody, all four hymn types are represented by popular examples. We have already mentioned two narrative hymns; another important example is “Joseph Smith’s First Prayer,” #26.⁶ For Latter-day Saint writers, the catechetical and doctrinal have often overlapped; the two types, singly or in combination, would include “What Was Witnessed in the Heavens?” #11; “We Thank Thee, O the gold from this rich new poetic source; surely someone, or several someones, should have vowed, “If this is a latter-day Bible, then I will be its Isaac Watts;” I will take the most energetic lyrical declamations, the most inspiring exhortations, the most memorable metaphors and promises, and give them new form, with rhyme and meter, so that Latter-day Saints can sing these glorious messages.”

Yet this did not happen. Although hymn writers loved to retell the stories of the Book of Mormon, they ignored its lyric scripture, those passages that express the personal thoughts and feelings of the Book of Mormon writer. And while a dozen or so narrative hymns have appeared in our hymnbooks (only to disappear with the next edition), devotional hymns—the kind of hymn more likely to survive from one hymnal to the next because they focus on God's love and mercy—have been few in number. This distinction helps to explain a paradox: while the Book of Mormon itself has become far more central to Latter-day Saint thinking in the last four decades or so, the number of hymns related to the Book of Mormon has not increased accordingly. Latter-day Saint writers have written Book of

WE NEED DEVOTIONAL HYMNS OF TIMELESS AND UNIVERSAL DIGNITY, PERSONAL MEDITATIONS UPON BOOK OF MORMON TEXTS, HYMNS THAT POUR FORTH THE GRATITUDE AND TESTIMONY OF THE WRITER, INVITING THE CONGREGATION TO DO THE SAME.

God, for a Prophet,” #19; “Home Can Be a Heaven on Earth,” #298; and many others. Among our finest devotional texts are “As the Dew from Heaven Distilling,” #149; “Our Savior’s Love,” #113; and “How Great the Wisdom and the Love,” #195.

It is in this last category that we are so lacking in texts inspired by the Book of Mormon. We need devotional hymns of timeless and universal dignity, personal meditations upon Book of Mormon texts, hymns that pour forth the gratitude and testimony of the writer, inviting the congregation to do the same. The Book of Mormon is as rich in personal poetic outpourings as it is in stories. Surely one of Zion’s early poets should have been eager to mine Mormon hymns, but in terms of artistic merit and lasting significance, they have not written the kinds of hymns that are likely to endure.⁸

Book of Mormon Hymns: The List

What makes a hymn a "Book of Mormon hymn"? Of course, hymns by Latter-day Saint authors do not always have a distinctively Mormon flavor; a Latter-day Saint poet may write a hymn based on shared Christian sentiments, with the language and emphasis of the Book of Mormon playing only a subconscious role at most. Compiling a list of more specifically Book of Mormon hymns—those that make direct, identifiable use of the Book of
Mormon—is an interesting task. Sometimes there is no question: a particular hymn may focus exclusively on the Book of Mormon, reflecting beliefs unique to Latter-day Saints—the coming forth of the plates from the Hill Cumorah, or the Lamanite heritage of Native Americans, for example. In a less prominent but still unmistakable way, the Book of Mormon stamp may be present in just one stanza or even a single phrase.

In tracing the influence of the Book of Mormon through more than a century and a half of Mormon hymnody, it is important to remember that the distinction of “official hymnbook” did not pass down through the generations of Latter-day Saint hymnals in a tidy unbroken sequence. Several of the privately printed hymnals were used widely. Official hymnals were published in England as well as in the United States. However, if we start with Emma Smith’s 1835 hymnbook and identify all hymns with Book of Mormon content that have appeared in what might be termed official hymnbooks, we have nineteen hymns.

In order to create an exhaustive list of those songs that qualify as legitimate Book of Mormon hymns, we must identify the elements that such hymns contain. After identifying those that fall under the umbrella of Book of Mormon hymns, it is then important to separate them into their respective categories (narrative and devotional). The list that follows will give us the ratio of narrative hymns to devotional hymns among Book of Mormon texts in Latter-day Saint hymnody. This distinction of narrative versus devotional is a convenient one and will be used throughout this discussion. However, it is not totally satisfactory. First, it leaves out the catechetical and doctrinal hymns, and second, it contrasts a subject matter choice (narrative) with what is basically a choice of style or tone (devotional). However, our Book of Mormon hymns tend to fall in these two categories, and it is helpful to sort out the kind of Book of Mormon hymn our poets have traditionally written—the narrative—from the kind I believe we need more of—the devotional.

To appear on our list, then, a hymn must include wording or subject matter that is unlikely to have come from any other source than the Book of Mormon, or it must refer to the origins or translation of the Book of Mormon. A hymn about the Second Coming, the gathering to Zion, or missionary labors may qualify as a “hymn of the restoration” or a “hymn of Zion,” but other denominations singing about these topics as well. Even if the author of such a text is a Latter-day Saint, unless the text specifically echoes the language or doctrine of the Book of Mormon, it will not appear on our list of Book of Mormon hymns.9

Even a brief Book of Mormon reference is enough to qualify a hymn for this list. Nevertheless, I believe most Latter-day Saints will be surprised that the list is so short. Furthermore, we have already said goodbye in our 1985 hymnal to all but six of these hymns. A look at the contents of seven important hymnals, from 1835 to 1985, will give us an overview of these hymns and the extent of their popularity.

Containing a total of ninety hymns, Emma Smith’s first hymnal, A Collection of Sacred Hymns for the Church of the Latter Day Saints,10 includes five of the nineteen Book of Mormon hymns on my list:11

1. “An angel came down from the mansions of glory” (William W. Phelps); last printed in 1927.
2. “Now we’ll sing with one accord” (Phelps); remains as a selection in our 1985 hymnal.
3. “What wondrous things we now behold” (author unknown; not to be confused with #17 on this list, a hymn of similar title and
content); dropped in 1927.

4. “O stop and tell me, Red Man” (Phelps); last printed in 1927.

5. “Before this earth from chaos sprung” (author unknown); dropped after 1856.

A Collection of Sacred Hymns for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Europe, popularly referred to as the Manchester Hymnal, had eleven Book of Mormon hymns; they were hymns 1, 2, 3, and 5 listed above, plus the following seven:

6. “An holy Angel from on high” (Parley P. Pratt; hereafter Pratt); dropped in 1927.

7. “An angel from on high” (Pratt); remains as a selection in our 1985 hymnal.

8. “Ye wond’ring nations, now give ear” (author unknown); last printed in 1927.

9. “When earth in bondage long had lain” (Pratt); last printed in 1927.

10. “The solid rocks were rent in twain” (Pratt); last printed in 1927.

11. “O who that has search’d in the records of old” (Pratt); dropped in 1927.

12. “I have no home, where shall I go?” (Lucy Smith); last printed in 1927.

In 1889 the church published The Latter Day Saints’ Psalmody, which was intended to serve as a musical supplement to the Manchester Hymnal. It printed both tunes and texts, and its Book of Mormon hymns included 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 from the list above, as well as two additional Book of Mormon hymns (to correlate with subsequent editions of the Manchester Hymnal):

13. “Great Spirit, listen to the red man’s wail!” (Charles W. Penrose); first printed in 1856, dropped after 1927.

14. “Hark! ye mortals” (Pratt); first printed in 1851, dropped after 1927.

Out of 296 hymns and songs in Deseret Sunday School Songs, only two were Book of Mormon hymns:


16. “The Savior at Jerusalem” (Louisa L. Greene Richards); printed only in the 1909 book.

The 1927 hymnal included among its 421 selections ten Book of Mormon hymns from previous hymnals: 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, and 14 from the list above. It also printed an additional Book of Mormon hymn:

17. “What Glorious Scenes Mine Eyes Behold” (authorship unknown); first printed in 1890; remains as a selection in our 1985 hymnal.

The 1950 hymnal included 2, 7, 15, and 17 from the list above, plus a new Book of Mormon hymn in the choir section:


The 1985 hymnbook retains 2, 7, 15, 17, and 18 and offers a new Book of Mormon hymn:


With regard to our distinction of narrative versus devotional, hymns 13, 17, 18, and 19 are more devotional in their spirit, whereas the other fifteen hymns tend more toward the narrative. The characterization of an individual hymn is often not clear-cut; a typical pattern, as in “To Nephi, Seer of Olden Time,” is to begin with a narrative verse or two and then move to admonition or a description of future events.

Another person compiling this list would very possibly come up with different selections. Some would agree, for example, that “What Was Witnessed in the Heavens?” is a Book of Mormon hymn. But the nineteen hymns listed above are those that clearly would have taken a different form, or would not have been written at all, if the authors had not known the Book of Mormon.

Narrative Hymns and Scripture Sources

It is difficult for any story-hymn to rise to a high artistic level. In The Stories of Our Mormon Hymns, J. Spencer Cornwall dismisses in two terse sentences a text that was part of the 1950 hymnal: “‘Hushed Was the Evening Hymn’ is a versification of the second and third chapters of 1st Samuel. With its narrative type of subject matter, it can hardly be classified in the category of hymn literature.” Yet this dignified hymn, by Scottish writer James D. Burns, is one of the best of its type, and it has the added advantage of a musical setting by Sir Arthur Sullivan. So what does it take for a hymn with “a narrative type of subject matter” to be “classified in the category of hymn literature”?

The question is whether it is even possible. With the exception (an important one) of Christmas carols, it just does not work very well for a hymn to
retell a scripture story. Because the author leaps directly to a well-known hero or incident in order to take advantage of already-existing responses, the text strikes us as a poetic shortcut; the poet, whose job it is to write words that in themselves stir devotional feelings, has handed that job off to someone or something else. In addition, these specific references are distracting; to lift Ruth, the Red Sea, or the disciples from the Bible and slot them into a hymn text is sort of like product placement in a movie: it fragments our attention and weakens the theme.

Mindful that the two great categories of classic hymnody are prayer and praise, a skilled poet who has been moved by the story of Ruth or the story of Cumorah will seek to inspire others through a personal yet broadly meaningful text, one that offers the congregation new insights and fresh language. What that poet will _not_ do is merely retell and comment on the story. And if a hymn's allusion is to Nephi or Cumorah or Zarahemla, then of course the reference serves also to narrow the hymn's communal significance, since the text is useful only to Latter-day Saints.

Even in a non-narrative context, a sensitive writer will usually avoid proper-noun references. The best new Latter-day Saint contributions to our hymnody do not usually include names of Book of Mormon (or biblical) places or people, or references to Book of Mormon events. In our 1985 hymnal, for example, “As I Search the Holy Scriptures” is a better hymn (hypothetically) than “As I Search the Book of Mormon.” And when Ruth Gardner wrote “Go Forth with Faith” she could have easily juggled the rhymes and syntax to use the words “Book of Mormon” in any one of several four-syllable openings; the occasion for which she wrote the text was her son’s missionary farewell, after all, and the Book of Mormon is key to any missionary’s message. Instead, she chose to refer to her son’s calling in terms of the divinity of Christ, the restoration of the
gospel, and the universal brotherhood of all human beings as children of God. The more general choices make these texts better, not just more ecumenical.

Devotional Hymns and Scriptural Sources

Although stories are not usually the germ of first-rate hymns, the Book of Mormon abounds in lyric set-pieces, those that express the testimonies and convictions of the speaker, often in highly personal terms. Everyone has favorites; 2 Nephi 4, Jacob 2, Mosiah 2–5, Alma 5 and 7, Helaman 12, and 3 Nephi 11 come to mind as just a few of the possibilities, as well as the wonderful metaphor inherent in the symbolism of the Liahona. The Book of Mormon’s remarkable personal testimonies and stirring oratory, thought-provoking figures of speech and distinctive turns of phrase offer plenty of grist for the hymn-writer’s mill.

In writing a hymn based on a scriptural source, a hymn writer may decide on a close paraphrase, even quoting words and phrases where rhyme and meter allow. Although our 1985 hymnbook includes only one new Book of Mormon hymn, this hymn is in fact—at long last—a devotional hymn, a fine example of a hymn that is a fresh poetic creation yet closely based on scripture.18 In a sense, the original passage is already a devotional hymn. A careful look at this hymn and its source provides a fine example of the potential hymnic inspiration of a scriptural passage that in its original form is not a story but rather a personal meditation on the goodness of God and the blessing of knowing him.

Marvin Gardner’s text is very much his own, yet within the framework of rhyme and meter he closely reflects Nephi’s message and language, even using Nephi’s words when they fit the poetic syntax and structure. His source is 2 Nephi 31:20: “Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.”

The author’s first important artistic decision was to choose this particular scripture. It is not a story but a strongly worded admonition, one that leads to a glorious concluding promise; it also offers an intrigu-
ing metaphor ("feasting upon the word of Christ").

Once the choice had been made, the versification of this scripture then required many complex poetic decisions. For reasons of focus, the author decided to keep the words God and Christ at consistent points in the three stanzas. The emphatic, repeated "press forward" comes directly from the (also repeated) original, as do several other words and phrases. Marvin Gardner also sensed that the verse invited a three-stanza division, the first stanza centering on faith-hope-love, the second on feasting, and the third on enduring.

Press forward, Saints, with steadfast faith in Christ,
With hope's bright flame alight in heart and mind,
With love of God and love of all mankind.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Press forward, feasting on the word of Christ.
Receive his name, rejoicing in his might.
Come unto God; find everlasting light.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Press on, enduring in the ways of Christ.
His love proclaim thru days of mortal strife.
Thus saith our God: "Ye have eternal life!"
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!19

It is a wonderfully successful text; in addition, this hymn is proof that a Book of Mormon hymn need not necessarily be marooned on an island of Latter-day Saint hymnody without any possible meaning to other denominations.20

Marvin Gardner’s hymn is a fairly close paraphrase of scripture. More frequently, a poet will use a scriptural metaphor or phrase as a point of departure for an original devotional text. A fine early Latter-day Saint text by Parley P. Pratt grows from a single metaphor: Deuteronomy 32:2, “My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew” becomes “As the Dew from Heaven Distilling.” The classics of Christian hymnody, those hymns that reappear through the decades in most Christian hymnals, including ours, provide many additional examples. “O God, Our Help in Ages Past” reflects its psalmic sources but does not closely follow them. “Abide with Me!” takes only its first line from scripture and then builds a hymn of prayer upon this line.

The Book of Mormon in the First Hymnbook
Apparently the Lord’s plan for the restoration of his church gave high priority to the production of a distinctively Mormon hymnbook. His commandment to Emma Smith to “make a selection of sacred hymns, as it shall be given thee, which is pleasing unto me, to be had in my church” (D&C 25:11) came only three months after the organization of the church and four months after the publication of the Book of Mormon.

During the five years that passed before the hymnbook was published, many of Zion’s poets began to write with an unmistakably Mormon voice. When the hymnal finally appeared in 1835, almost half its ninety hymns were by Latter-day Saint authors.21 Furthermore, the hymnbook’s brief preface implied that Emma Smith and her coeditor, William W. Phelps, expected future hymnals to be mostly—or even entirely—the product of Mormon pens: the editors modestly expressed their hope that the book could “answer every purpose till more are composed, or till we are blessed with a copious variety of the songs of Zion.” LDS hymnody had only begun. As the Saints were determined to be unique in their doctrine, their social organization, and their sense of destiny, so they were with their hymnal.

Of the five Book of Mormon hymns in Emma Smith’s hymnal, two make only brief reference to the Book of Mormon. One of these, a fourteen-verse
hymn of unknown authorship beginning “Before
this earth from chaos sprung,” devotes a single stan-
za to the prophecy in 2 Nephi 3 concerning a latter-
day seer named Joseph. The second hymn, begin-
ning “What wondrous things we now behold,” is a
general hymn about the gathering of Israel, but its
reference to “Ephraim’s sons, a warlike race” marks
its writer as a Latter-day Saint who was familiar with
the Book of Mormon.

The three remaining Book of Mormon hymns
are all narrative hymns by William W. Phelps. Two
of them retell the coming forth of the Book of
Mormon. Phelps loved the dramatic story of the
angel who revealed the hiding place of ancient gold
records, thereby establishing the prophetic calling of
Joseph Smith and the destiny of the Saints, the
Lord’s people. One of these coming-forth hymns
appears in the 1985 hymnal (#25) in slightly adapted
form as “Now We’ll Sing with One Accord.” After
mentioning an angel, as was typical of the hymns
about the advent of the Book of Mormon, this
hymn is unusual in that it highlights Joseph Smith’s
role as a translator. The verses specifically relating to
the Book of Mormon are verses 3, 4, and 5:

And an angel surely, then,
For a blessing unto men,
Brought the priesthood back again.
In its ancient purity.
Even Joseph he inspires:
Yea, his heart he truly fires,
With the light that he desires.
For the work of righteousness.
And the Book of Mormon, true,
With its cov’nant ever new,
For the Gentile and the Jew,
He translated sacredly.22

Phelps’s second coming-forth hymn, “An angel
came down from the mansions of glory,” will
remind Latter-day Saints of Parley P. Pratt’s “An
Angel from on High,” a more skillful hymn text but
one that would not enter our hymnody until 1840
when it appeared in the Manchester Hymnal. This
second Phelps hymn is actually more applicable to
the millennium than the Book of Mormon; the first
two verses that follow serve as a bridge to a third
verse and repeated four-line chorus about the gath-
ering of Israel:

An angel came down from the mansions of glory,
And told that a record was hid in Cumorah,
Containing the fulness of Jesus’s gospel;
And also the cov’nant to gather his people.

A heavenly treasure: a book full of merit:
It speaks from the dust by the pow’r of the
Spirit;
A voice from the Savior that saints can rely on,
To watch for the day when he brings again
Zion.23

These coming-forth hymns are about the Book
of Mormon; they are not from the Book of Mormon.
When early hymn writers turned to the Book of
Mormon itself, the most exciting teachings they
found were about the Lamanite forebears of the
American Indians. These revelations reached back-
ward, to explain the Indians’ origins, and forward, to
toretell their glorious destiny. The noble Indian, for-
lorn and dispossessed, was already a familiar subject
in nineteenth-century poetry,24 and the message of
the Book of Mormon correlated beautifully with this
popular tradition; now the noble savage had noble
ancestors as well. Emma Smith’s hymnal included
the first printed Latter-day Saint hymn to deal with this
subject, Phelps’s “O stop and tell me, Red Man.” This
hymn is included in its entirety with this article (see
page 21. Because Emma Smith’s hymnal printed only
the hymn texts, without music, this hymn as well as
those on pages 20 and 22 are taken from the 1927
hymnal in order to show the musical settings pro-
vided by Latter-day Saint composers at a later time).
In Phelps’s imaginative treatment, it is the Indian
spokesman himself who utters the Book of Mormon
message. With “native pride” the Indian admits that
“our fathers fell in darkness”; yet he somehow
knows, “as if the Spirit spoke,” that the Indians will
be redeemed and the gentile yoke be broken.

This first hymnbook had no devotional hymns
based on the Book of Mormon. The early Saints
understood the significance of the coming forth of
the gold plates, and they understood the history and
prophecies as they applied to the American Indian.
But as Grant Underwood has pointed out in his
study “Book of Mormon Usage in Early LDS
Theology,” Bible study still held priority for the early
Saints, who would have had no opportunity for “for-
mal instruction or catechization in the Book of
Mormon”; it would take “a generation or more for
the Book of Mormon to fully permeate the doctrinal consciousness of the Latter-day Saints. An appreciation of the Book of Mormon's poetic and rhetorical powers, however, was destined to take much longer.

**The Manchester Hymnal and The Latter Day Saints’ Psalmody**

The Manchester Hymnal, printed in England in 1840, had eleven hymns specific to the Book of Mormon. The two narrative topics that attracted Latter-day Saint poets continued to be the Indians and Cumorah. As noted in the lists above, four of these eleven Manchester hymns had appeared in Emma Smith's hymnal: "An angel came down from the mansions of glory," "Now we'll sing with one accord," "What wondrous things we now behold," and "Before this earth from chaos sprung."

The Manchester Hymnal was the first to include "An angel from on high," a beloved Book of Mormon text still important in our hymnody today. This is the first of five Book of Mormon hymns in the Manchester Hymnal by Parley P. Pratt, who was also one of its editors. Although the second of Pratt's hymns, a five-stanza text beginning "A holy angel from on high," resembles "An angel from on high" in its opening line, it is actually a hymn about the second coming; four and a half stanzas focus on the gathering of Israel and the separation of the wicked from the righteous. Only its first two lines are about the Book of Mormon:

> A holy angel from on high
> The joyful message has made known.

Pratt's "When earth in bondage long had lain," though not exclusively a hymn about the Book of Mormon, gives a more central place to the Hill Cumorah and the Angel Moroni. Pratt also alludes, as did William W. Phelps in "Now we'll sing with one accord," to Joseph Smith's sacred task of translation. Stanzas 2, 3, and 4 from "When earth in bondage long had lain" refer to the Book of Mormon:

> A voice commissioned from on high;
> Hark, hark, it is the angel's cry,
> Descending from the throne of light,
> His garments shining clear and white.
> He comes the gospel to reveal
> In fullness, to the sons of men;
> Lo! from Cumorah's lonely hill,

There comes a record of God's will.
Translated by the power of God,
His voice bears record to his word;
Again an angel did appear,
As witnesses do record bear.26

The fourth of the Pratt hymns, "The solid rocks were rent in twain," develops a different Book of Mormon topic: Christ's appearance on the American continent following his crucifixion. Its sixteen stanzas recount 3 Nephi 8–26. Here are stanzas 5, 6, and 11:

> With joy and wonder all amazed,
> Upon their glorious Lord they gazed,
> And wist not what the vision meant,
> But thought it was an angel sent.
> While in their midst he smiling stood,
> Proclaimed himself the son of God;
> He said, Come forth and feel and see,
> That you may witness bear of me.

> Four generations all not pass
> Until they'd turn from righteousness,
> The Nephite nation be destroyed,
> The Lamanites reject his word.27

The last of the Book of Mormon hymns by Parley P. Pratt is "O who that has search'd in the records of old." Its nine stanzas focus mainly on the coming of the millennium, but verse 3 makes use of the image of the dispossessed Indian:

> O who that has seen o'er the wide spreading plain
> The Lamanites wander forlorn,
> While the Gentiles in pride and oppression divide
> The land they could once call their own.28

One of the two remaining Book of Mormon hymns, "Ye wonder nations, now give ear," a competent five-stanza text of unknown authorship, must have been fairly popular; Evan Stephens provided two different musical settings for it. It tells of an angel who "brought the ancient records forth," and it emphasizes the prophetic role of the Book of Mormon. The third stanza is

> The things of worth in ages gone
> From slumber it unfolds;
> And things to come, now rolling on,
The wise may well behold,
Its opening wonders burst to view,
All glorious and divine;
Point out the path that men pursue,
Down to the end of time.39

The last Book of Mormon text from the Manchester Hymnal is reproduced here (as it was printed later, with its musical setting, in the 1927 hymnal) on page 22. “I have no home; where shall I go?” by Lucy Smith, wrings the last drop of sentiment out of the plight of the dispossessed Lamanite, this time in the form of an eight-stanza lament spoken by Moroni.30 With no promise of heavenly comfort or future redemption to soften the tone, it is starkly and melodramatically tragic. Verse 6 is interesting in its quotation of Mormon 6:17.

As already indicated in the list of Book of Mormon hymns, a total of twelve Book of Mormon hymns were introduced into Mormon hymnody by Emma Smith’s first hymnal and the Manchester Hymnal that followed it five years later. Of these twelve hymns, eleven (all but “Before this earth from chaos sprung”) were included in The Latter Day Saints’ Psalmody, as well as two additional hymns that had appeared in later editions of the Manchester Hymnal. The angel who answers the Indian speaker in “Great Spirit, listen to the red man’s wail” (on page 20 taken from the 1927 hymnal to show Evan Stephens’s musical setting) foretells a bright future for the Indian people. The speaker heaps great condemnation on the “cheating paleface” with his “curs’d firewater,” but in the last seven verses an angelic messenger promises the Red Man that, with the help of his “Mormon brothers,” all will be restored. The Latter-day Saints’ Psalmody had provided a Mendelssohn tune, “Consolation,”31 as the setting for Charles Penrose’s text, but Evan Stephens later composed the dramatic music for baritone solo and four-part voices that is printed here.

Also found in the Psalmody is Parley P. Pratt’s “Hark! ye mortals,” a hymn principally about the millennium. However, Pratt uses the story of Cumorah as a dramatic opening for his hymn:

Hark! ye mortals. Hist! be still,
Voices from Cumorah’s hill
Break the silence of the tomb,
Penetrate the dreadful gloom,
Gently whisper, All is well!
Now’s the day of Israel!32
The Book of Mormon in Twentieth-Century Hymnody

The 1909 Deseret Sunday School Songs served most English-speaking congregations as their general hymnal for almost twenty years. In their preface to this book, the Deseret Sunday School Union describes having asked “upwards of one thousand Sunday School Stake and Ward Choiristers” each to “submit a list of their ten favorite songs.” Maybe the choristers didn’t vote for Book of Mormon hymns; “Hark! ye mortals,” and “An angel from on high” have all been previously mentioned. “What Glorious Scenes Mine Eyes Behold” had entered our hymnody in 1890 and remains to this day. The only phrase that identifies it as a Book of Mormon hymn is “When Ephraim’s records I unfold,” yet this reference is unmistakable, and it is the fifth of the hymns listed under “Book of Mormon (Truth from Earth).” Included in the hymnal but not listed as Book of Mormon hymns are “Great Spirit, Listen to the Red

A church member who has loved the Book of Mormon since childhood, who takes it for granted that the Book of Mormon is central to LDS class instruction, general conference addresses, and missionary discussions, is likely to be surprised that we have only six Book of Mormon hymns in our 1985 hymnbook.

maybe poets weren’t writing new ones; maybe the editors just didn’t choose Book of Mormon hymns for this book; we have no way of knowing. Whatever the reason, the Book of Mormon almost disappears from this volume. “To Nephi, Seer of Olden Time,” a favorite still today (re-titled “The Iron Rod” in the 1985 hymnal), is included in this hymn collection for the first time, but otherwise the sole Book of Mormon allusion is the second verse of a sacrament hymn, “The Savior at Jerusalem” by Louisa L. Greene Richards:

And on this favored, promised land
He to the Nephites came,
And blessed, and gave, with His own hand,
His Sacrament, the same;
And we, as Saints, employ today
These sacred rites in His own way.33

Latter-day Saint Hymns, published in 1927, listed five hymns under the interesting topical heading “Book of Mormon (Truth from Earth).” “The Morning Breaks, the Shadows Flee” is justified more by the “Truth from Earth” refinement on the topical listing; it is not listed in any other hymnal as a Book of Mormon hymn. “O stop and tell me, Red Man,” Man’s Wail!” “I Have No Home, Where Shall I Go?” and “Now We’ll Sing with One Accord.”

In the 1950 hymnal, only three hymns appear under the Book of Mormon heading in the topical index: “A Voice Hath Spoken from the Dust” (titled “Men Are That They Might Have Joy” in the 1985 hymnbook), “An Angel from on High,” and “What Glorious Scenes Mine Eyes Behold.” It is difficult to understand why two additional hymns, Phelps’s “Now We’ll Sing with One Accord” and “To Nephi, Seer of Olden Time” were not also indexed under the Book of Mormon heading.

For “A Voice Hath Spoken from the Dust,” the one new Book of Mormon hymn in the 1950 hymnal, J. Marinus Jensen drew from 2 Nephi. He combined two passages: the teaching that “men are, that they might have joy” in 2 Nephi 2:25 and the metaphor in 2 Nephi 26:15–16 that states that “those who shall be destroyed shall speak unto them out of the ground, and their speech shall be low out of the dust.” Both these allusions occur in the first verse:

A voice hath spoken from the dust,
Its message pure, without alloy,
Of treasured hope and sacred trust:
Oh, “men are that they might have joy.”34
In the same pattern we have seen in other hymns, the Book of Mormon reference opens the hymn and then the remaining verses move on to general words of conviction and resolution.

All five of the Book of Mormon hymns in the 1950 hymnal are retained in the 1985 hymnal, and all appear under the Book of Mormon heading in the topical index. No Book of Mormon hymns were among the seventy-seven texts dropped from the 1950 hymnal in preparation for the new volume. Out of forty-nine new Latter-day Saint texts added, however, only one—“Press Forward, Saints,” discussed above—relates to the Book of Mormon.35

A church member who has loved the Book of Mormon since childhood, who takes it for granted that the Book of Mormon is central to LDS class instruction, general conference addresses, and missionary discussions, is likely to be surprised that we have only six Book of Mormon hymns in our 1985 hymnbook.36 Furthermore, even though the Book of Mormon accounts for almost one quarter of the “footnotes” from the standard works that appear below the hymns, these references are not really evidence of a strong Book of Mormon presence in our hymnal. A few of these citations refer to direct sources, but most of the time they indicate a scripture that reinforces the message of the respective hymn. Many Book of Mormon citations, in fact, appear below non-Latter-day Saint hymns. Under Tennyson’s “Ring Out, Wild Bells,”37 for example, is a reference to 2 Nephi 2:27–28, a scripture reminding us, in harmony with this hymn of resolution and renewal, that men are “free to choose liberty and eternal life.”

Of the dozen or so Book of Mormon narrative hymns that have come and gone, why have Parley P. Pratt’s “An Angel from on High” and Joseph L. Townsend’s “To Nephi, Seer of Olden Time” (“The Iron Rod”) endured as part of our modern hymnody? The Pratt text is particularly satisfying in its own right, but I believe the explanation of the survival of both these hymns lies more with their tunes than the texts. (As any opera fan knows, glorious melodies can insure the immortality of even a wretched libretto!) Although the first hymnbooks printed texts only, each of these texts had the good fortune to be paired at an early point with an engaging tune. Pratt’s 1840 text was sung to various tunes, but in 1857 John Tullidge’s fine musical setting was published. This musical setting is particularly artful in the way in which it reflects the two contrasting sections of the text, especially of the first stanza; the first two lines of both verse and music are more tranquil, and lines three and four are more declamatory and energetic. In the case of “The Iron Rod,” words and music came into being as a joint creative effort between Townsend and William Clayson; printed as a Sunday School music card in 1878, they were published again in the 1892 Deseret Sunday School Song Book.38

As Noel Reynolds notes in a 1999 article in BYU Studies, the Book of Mormon was “largely overlooked throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries”; in our own day, he comments, we have seen a “phenomenal increase in appreciation and study that has occurred in the last three to four decades in mainstream LDS circles.”39 This new appreciation includes a study of the Book of Mormon as literature. Writers such as John W. Welch and Marilyn Arnold offer insights not only into poetic technique in the Book of Mormon but also into the ways in which poetic technique can serve the cause of truth and conviction. Devotional hymns are likely to be more forthcoming as literary appreciation of the Book of Mormon continues to grow.

Each new hymnbook must meet the needs of the age. In our 1985 hymnbook we have increased the number of hymns about missionary work and family, for example, and have added new headings (Reactivation, Sisterhood) to the topical index. These changes underline the church’s greater emphasis on these subjects and reflect the thinking of the membership as a whole. Perhaps we are on the threshold of an outpouring of fine, lasting Book of Mormon hymns. Michael Moody, chairman of the General Music Committee, reports that a sizeable number of the fifty or so hymn texts sent each year to the Church Music Submission Department are Book of Mormon hymns.40 Perhaps some fine new Book of Mormon hymns will form part of our next hymnal, giving added voice to the central role that the Book of Mormon plays in the lives and testimonies of church members in our day.
ENDNOTES

Syagogues in the Book of Mormon
William J. Adams Jr.


3. Y. Aharoni, ed., Bein-Shela et Tird (Tel Aviv: Tird University, 1973), Plate 8 shows the bench around one of the gate chambers.


5. Oliver H. Offner, "The Iron Age (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), Figure 4 on page 15 shows a gate chamber with two tiers of benches and a niche in the wall.

6. Robert S. Lamon and Geoffrey M. Shipton, Megiddo: Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1932 Figure 88 shows a gate chamber with benches.

7. In contrast to such centers for local activity, in some cases the temple was where priests and Levites performed sacrifices. On special occasions, such as the birth of a child or holy day, worshippers would leave their local town or city and travel to the temple to make their offerings.

8. The discovery was reported by Nelson Glueck, "Dated from Elath," Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research 82 (April 1941): 7-11. The dating was done by Dr. Elazar Glueck's "Excavation No. 6043 from Elat-Gebel," ibid., 14. And the translation was reported by Charles C. Terry, Jr., "Synagogues at Elath?" BASOR 85 (December 1941): 4-5. Elath and Ezbet-Gebel are two names for the same location.


10. Ibid., 1447.

11. Ibid., no. 432.

12. See Meluhah, Tractate Meluhah 1.8.


19. An example of this speculation is outlined in Eric M. Meyers, "Synagogue," in Anchor Bible Dictionary, 6529.

20. Other passages that refer to synagogues as buildings are Alma 3:24; 20:3:12; 13:32-3; 3:5, 9, 11, 12; Nehemiah 12:5, 18; and Moroni 7:14.

21. Good examples of this theory are Meyers, "Synagogue," 2521-6; Samuel Sandmel, Judaism and Christian Beginnings (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 153-53. Since this theory sees no synagogues until after the time that Lehi left Jerusalem, a new book of Mormon critics has cited this view in order to denounce the Book of Mormon. Three of these authors are Latone C. Scott, The Mormon Mirage (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1970), 89; William D. Russell, "A Further Inquiry into the History of the Book of Mormon," Sunstone, Sept.-Oct., 1982, 23; James R. White, Letter to a Mormon Elder (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1993). 145. But if it takes into account Levine's argument that before the Babylonian captivity of 586 BCE, only city-gate chambers served as synagogues and also were the prototype for the first-century r.c. synagogues, (2) city gates were the social center of a town or city, and (3) Sabbath services at that time were called a motzi, the theory expressed by Meyers and Sandmel is far from demonstrating that synagogues did not come into existence until after Lehi's day. As things stand now, Book of Mormon critics lack a formal textural connection to the mention of synagogues in the Book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon in Latter-day Saint Hymnody
Karen Lynn Davidson

1. Thanks to Sarah Workman for sharing this data. Her list of Principal First Ward Primary favorites is as follows:


2. "Blackbird" and "Weathered" were both written by the late Gary Charles and were first aired in 1959 and 1960, respectively. Gary Charles was a prominent member of the Latter-day Saints and was known for his contributions to LDS music.


4. The decline in LDS music in the 1970s and 1980s can be attributed to various factors, including a shift in musical styles and cultural shifts within the LDS community. However, there has been a resurgence of LDS music in recent years, with many musicians and composers creating new works that are faithful to the tenets of the LDS faith.

5. The letter was written to the LDS Supplement, and it was published in the LDS Church's official magazine, "Deseret News," on August 28, 1985.

6. The LDS Church's musical tradition is rich and diverse, with a history that dates back to the early days of the church. The Church has produced many notable musicians and composers, and it continues to support and encourage the creation of music that is faithful to the tenets of the faith.

constitute verse 2 and the first half of verse 3.


24 See, for example, "The Indian Hunter," "The day does my path follow my path / Like the hound on the tiger's track?" by the English poet Eliza Cook (1818-1869), one of three cook poems anthologized in Hazel Sellenman, comp., The Best Loved Poems of the American People (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 626; or "Metamora" by John Greenleaf Whittier: "My father loved the white men, when / They were but children, shelterless, / Nor was it given him to know / That children whom he cherished then / Would rise to length, like arm'd men, / To work his people's overthrow," in The Complete Poetical Works of John Greenleaf Whittier (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1894), 489.

25 Elias R. Snow was also fond of this tradition. One of her first published poems (in 1830, five years before she became a Latter-day Saint) was "The Red Man of the West," The Great Pacific Plaguehouse, LP 14457 (1978). In addition, popular vocal music written for the Mormon market has used the Book of Mormon with great success; as fairly free-form works, without the strict requirements of meter and rhyme found in a hymn stanza, these songs often use unparaphrased examples. Another example familiar to many English-speaking LDS people is "Oh, That I Were an Angel" (Alma 29:11; music by Wanda West Palmer).


27 The tune paired with this text in the Psalmody (#212) is "See, the conqu'ring hero" from George Frideric Handel's Judas Maccabaeus (New York: Vanguard, 1957) with high expectations indeed from a congregation!


30 This hymn is not listed under the Book of Mormon heading in the topical index. The text is aesthetically satisfying because of the inclusive, emotive use it makes of the Book of Mormon, but apparently its connection with its source is therefore more abstract.

36 Although the Book of Mormon presence in our modern hymnbooks is rather mod- ers, other kinds of music make rich use of Book of Mormon materials. The impor- tance of Book of Mormon songs for the Primary organization has already been mentioned; although the Book of Mormon heading in Children's Songs lists only twelve songs, many of these are immensely popular, and they play a crucial role in familiarizing young Latter-day Saints with the Book of Mormon. A great deal could be written about the significant role of the Book of Mormon in the works of serious Latter-day Saint composers, including Leroy Robertson's Cantata from the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Lyric Robertson, 1933) and Crawford Gaines's score for the Hill Cumorah Pantomime, Music from the Hill Cumorah: Pantomime: America's Witness for Christ, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, VCOT 4188 (1988). Other examples are numerous. K. Newell Dayley has provided a musical setting for 3 Nephi 13-14, "I Come unto My Own," Ralph G. Rodgers Jr. (lyric), A. Nip Li (music), "The Greatest Gift," Plane Houseweav, LP 14457 (1978). In addition, popular vocal music written for the Mormon market has used the Book of Mormon with great success; as fairly free-form works, without the strict requirements of meter and rhyme found in a hymn stanza, these songs often use unparaphrased examples. Another example familiar to many English-speaking LDS people is "Oh, That I Were an Angel" (Alma 29:11; music by Wanda West Palmer).


38 Deseret Sunday School Song Book (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1889).


40 Conversation with the author, 30 November 1999.

Lehi and Sarah
Paul Y. Hoskisson
1 See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, 3rd ed., rev. Walter Bauernfeind, Johann Jakob Stüber, and Benedikt Hartmann (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 53. See for example the "Name List" in Appendix 3 of Jeanne D. Fowler, Thesaurus Personalium in Ancient Hebrew (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988), 334ff; for this reference I wish to thank my colleague Dana M. Pike of Religious Education at BYU. The bibil- ical personal name Oseni and its generic, Osirite (see Numbers 26:16) and Aminah (see Nehemiah 10, though related to the word for "ear," are probably denomina- tive verbal forms. See Koehler and Baumgartner, Hebrews and Aramaics Lexicon, 37. For a listing of other possibly local terms used in the text, see Fowler, Thesaurus Personalium, Appendix 3, sub teb, ybn, qd, yd, and many more.
2 Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, I:1591. I would like to thank Jonathan Gammel for finding this rather obscure example.
3 Paul Haupt, A German-American scholar working around the turn of the last cen- tury, was one of the first to derive the personal name Ely from "och" or "yow- bone." Hugh Nibley downplayed this interpretation, preferring Nelson Glueck's reading of "Lahai," thus suggesting for the bibilical place name Lahai-roi in Genesis 24:62 and 25:11. See Hugh N. Nibley, An Approach to the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMs, 1988), 239.
6 See the similar construction in Ramban, Bem ha-bIuli, Psalms (Hebrew: Feasters, 1986), 61, "La'l (W) O de God/ Lur (PE) O Nuy (my light)."

Lehi and Sarah—Language and Meaning
Jeffrey R. Chadwick
1 Nahnah Avigad and Benjamin Sass, Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1997), cols. 8, 174, 175, #1, 41, #702. The name also appears in LachChi Letter #1.
2 End, seal #145 and p. 496.
3 If "Abrahamus the Elder" were implied, the word ye (zaphen) would need to be included. It (the representing direct ob- ject he and would need to appear in a position following the name Abrahah, as an adjectival title.

4 Paul Y. Hoskisson, "Lehi and Sarah," in ibid., 59. See Genesis 17:17-19 (Isaac); Genesis 30:8 (Naphele); 1 Samuel 4:21-22 (Ishah).

Response to Paul Hoskisson's "Lehi and Sarah"
Dana M. Pike
2 E.g., Nahman Avigad and Benjamin Sass, Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1997), 136, #390.

Lehi and Sarah Comments
John A. Tvedtnes


Ibid.