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Editors’ Introduction

Since its inaugural appearance in 1992, the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies has consistently provided members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with leading-edge scholarship on the Book of Mormon that has deftly explored its historical, theological, linguistic, literary, and cultural contexts in most interesting and compelling ways. We are sincerely grateful to each of the previous editors of the Journal, who have added their distinctive contributions to what has long been recognized as the most consistent publication of quality research on the Book of Mormon. We take this rich past very seriously and know that we have big shoes to fill as we move forward.

In deciding how to proceed, we feel there is much to learn from what has happened in the past ten years in the burgeoning field of Mormon studies, where an important emphasis on bringing Mormonism into conversation with the wider academy has emerged. Hundreds of articles and dozens of books have appeared under the imprimatur of a variety of scholarly institutions and academic publishers, all of them helping to clarify how the study of Mormonism can enrich the study of other religious and historical traditions, as well as how the study of other religious and historical traditions can enrich the study of Mormonism. Institutional support for these developments has come in the form of the Joseph Smith Papers Project, published by the Church Historian’s Press. Each volume of the Prophet’s papers that has been published adheres to the highest standards of acceptable practices in documentary editing and historical research, and each is written for both Latter-day Saint and non–Latter-day Saint scholars interested in the writings of Joseph Smith.

How close the study of the Book of Mormon relates to these developments has been somewhat unclear. Nonetheless, the study of
Editors' Introduction

Mormonism’s sacred texts is beginning to move beyond the confines of the Latter-day Saint audience and into the realm of interested non–Latter-day Saint scholars. Examples of works published in academic presses by Mormon scholars such as Royal Skousen (The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text, published by Yale University Press), Grant Hardy (Understanding the Book of Mormon, published by Oxford University Press), and Terryl Givens (By the Hand of Mormon, also published by Oxford University Press) attest to this fact. We also see growing interest in the Book of Mormon from non-Mormon scholars such as Laurie Maffly-Kipp (who edited the Penguin Classics edition of the Book of Mormon), Paul Gutjahr (whose The Book of Mormon: A Biography was published by Princeton University Press), and Elizabeth Fenton (who is currently preparing, with Jared Hickman, a collection of literary essays on the Book of Mormon for Oxford University Press).

We believe that the sacredness, richness, and depth of the Book of Mormon warrants its inclusion alongside other world scriptures—such as the Bible, the Qur’ān, the Tao Te Ching, or the Bhagavad Gita—that receive serious study in the larger academy. We, therefore, believe it is time to increase the academic focus and broaden the intended audience of the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies (restoring both its original name and, in many ways, the vision of its first editor, Stephen D. Ricks). Our hope is that this will bring the Book of Mormon into larger conversations related to sacred texts going on in both Mormon studies and religious studies. In accordance with this vision, we have begun to make a concerted effort to include more non–Latter-day Saint scholars in the Journal as contributors, reviewers, and editorial board members. We have already begun to publish material that will be of interest to both believing and nonbelieving scholars, as well to educated nonspecialists. Certainly, we invite those willing to contribute this sort of material to submit academic work on the Book of Mormon for possible future publication in the Journal.

We are aware that the approach to Book of Mormon studies on which we have settled may not please both believers and nonbelievers at the same time. It is, of course, inevitable that both will be coming
to the Book of Mormon with differing assumptions and expectations, especially in light of the way that discussion of this volume of scripture has traditionally been governed by debates about the volume’s claims to describe ancient American history. We expect that both some believers and some nonbelievers will therefore experience some discomfort in joining the conversation. In the long run, however, we feel strongly that this is the best way to gather into one place serious research that will speak both to believers interested in investigating their own sacred text with genuine rigor and to nonbelievers interested in investigating how the Book of Mormon works as a religious volume meant to speak to the modern world.

In this issue we have six full-length essays, two review essays, and two shorter notes. In the lead article, “The Word and the Seed: The Theological Use of Biblical Creation in Alma 32,” David Bokovoy argues that creation motifs from Genesis 1–3 are reflected in Alma’s discourse on faith. Bokovoy reveals a fascinating theological intersection in that sermon between motifs drawn respectively from the Priestly and Yahwistic creation narratives in Genesis, showing striking artistry in the Book of Mormon’s handling of biblical traditions and texts. Through a direct comparison between the Yahwistic image of a seed and the Priestly motif of God’s creative word, Alma weaves a jointly Yahwistic and Priestly theology of creation’s relevance to believers. Bokovoy’s article beautifully exemplifies close reading of the Book of Mormon in connection with the larger body of biblical studies, modeling a methodology that deeply enriches and illuminates the meaning of the Book of Mormon as a theological text.

Heather Hardy is the author of the second article, “‘Saving Christianity’: The Nephite Fulfillment of Jesus’s Eschatological Prophecies.” Hardy begins with New Testament critical scholarship, stretching from Albert Schweitzer to Bart Ehrman, in which it is proposed that Jesus’s eschatological prophecies, because they were originally intended to be understood as predicting fulfillment within a single generation, should be regarded as essentially failed prophecies. Hardy, however, argues that the Book of Mormon presents itself as a record of the surprising temporary
fulfillment of Jesus’s eschatological prophecies within a generation of their first utterance—fulfillment that took place in the New rather than in the Old World. Hardy further clarifies that the Book of Mormon anticipates a second fulfillment of such eschatological predictions at Christ’s second coming, giving the New Testament’s apocalyptic anticipations a double application. Hardy’s approach to the text strongly underscores how the Book of Mormon speaks—and intentionally so—in surprising and instructive ways to deep concerns about the foundations of the Christian tradition.

In the third essay, “Christ and Krishna: The Visions of Arjuna and the Brother of Jared,” Joseph Spencer takes a more phenomenological approach in looking at three intersections between the respective visions of Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita and the brother of Jared in the Book of Mormon. The first two interconnecting points advance similarities: (1) that both narratives within which the visions take place exhibit the literary features of the epic and (2) that both visions are presented as launching religious revolutions, with Arjuna’s vision introducing into Hinduism the principle of devotion and the brother of Jared’s vision modeling a pertinent sort of faith for gentile readers of the Book of Mormon. The third intersection shifts from similarities to significant differences: the distinct role played in each vision by the notion of divine incarnation. Spencer’s examination represents a unique and needed approach in illuminating the value of studying the Book of Mormon alongside religious texts from other traditions.

Paul Owen provides a theological and literary analysis of 1 Nephi 13–14 in the fourth contribution, “Theological Apostasy and the Role of Canonical Scripture: A Thematic Analysis of 1 Nephi 13–14.” He examines three particularly significant visions among the thirteen given to Nephi in 1 Nephi 11–14. These three represent the specifically apocalyptic portion of Nephi’s overall visionary experience: (1) the vision of the great and abominable church, (2) the vision of the mother of harlots, and (3) the vision of John the apostle. In conversation with other interpreters, Owen provides detailed textual exegesis of these visions, constructing an illuminating interpretation of the great and abominable
church as politicized Christianity, of the complex relationship between Mormonism and the wider Christian tradition, and of the influential role apocalypticism may have played in the writing of the Book of Mormon. Owen’s approach models the kind of close exegetical attention the Book of Mormon has seldom received, combined with inventive and suggestive interpretations about the larger implications of the Book of Mormon’s key texts.

The fifth article in this issue of the *Journal* is the work of Dan Belnap. In “‘And It Came to Pass . . . ‘: The Sociopolitical Events in the Book of Mormon Leading to the Eighteenth Year of the Reign of the Judges,” Belnap reads the books of Mosiah and Alma from the Book of Mormon to see what can be learned about the sociopolitical dynamics of the complex events they narrate. Noting that an inordinate amount of the Book of Mormon’s thousand-year narrative is dedicated to the events of just one year of history—the eighteenth year of the reign of the Nephite judges—Belnap suggests that understanding the narrator’s principal purposes in this major portion of the Book of Mormon requires close scrutiny of the historical setting established for the events of that year. He argues that the events of that apparently crucial year in Nephite history are predicated on the confluence of a number of complicated narrative developments recounted in the text, which can only be properly understood if the book is read critically. Belnap powerfully underscores the immense complexity of the sociopolitical narrative of the central part of the Book of Mormon and the virtues of reading the text with a historical-critical eye.

In the sixth and final article, “The Deliberate Use of Hebrew Parallels in the Book of Mormon,” Carl Cranney draws on an ongoing debate concerning the presence of Hebrew poetic patterns in the Book of Mormon. Rather than defending or contesting the presence of such textual structures in the book, however, Cranney asks what can be learned from where apparent parallelistic structures are to be found. By performing a statistical analysis of the frequency of parallelistic poetic patterns (as cataloged by Donald Parry) within the distinct genres of texts that make up the Book of Mormon, he demonstrates that poetic
parallelisms appear systematically in specific contexts through the text. His findings strongly indicate that, whatever their original source, parallelistic poetic forms were included in the Book of Mormon intentionally rather than occurring by happenstance. Cranney’s work points to the importance of investigating more closely the variety of genres making up the Book of Mormon and what they suggest about how the content of the book should be read.

In every issue of the Journal, we plan to include review essays focused on influential books that relate to Book of Mormon studies. In this issue Ben Park reviews two particularly relevant works of history, David E. Holland’s Sacred Borders: Continuing Revelation and Canonical Restraint in Early America and Eran Shalev’s American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War, both of which deal with the Book of Mormon in the larger context of religious writing in America in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Finally, Roger Terry looks at Brant A. Gardner’s The Gift and Power of God: Translating the Book of Mormon, in which Gardner—the author of the most substantial commentary on the Book of Mormon published to date—provides a detailed defense of some of his exegetical and interpretive presuppositions.

In the future, we also plan to include shorter notes in the Journal that briefly introduce research on various topics related to the Book of Mormon. Some notes may develop into full-length articles and some may remain as is. Two such notes are included in this issue. In the first, Kimberly M. Berkey, a promising young Book of Mormon scholar, argues for a discernible structure in Alma 13 that problematizes standard interpretations of that text. In the second note, Brad Kramer, a trained anthropologist, notes the anthropological significance of parallels between the resurrection narratives of the New Testament and the folklore surrounding the Three Nephites.

We should also note that with this new direction, the Journal is returning to the smaller 6 × 9 format (the common size of academic journals) and fewer images.
Finally, the new editorial team consists of Brian M. Hauglid, editor; Mark Alan Wright, associate editor; and Joseph M. Spencer, associate editor. An editorial advisory board has also been formed with both Latter-day Saint and non–Latter-day Saint scholars.

We thank the inestimable Shirley Ricks, the production editor, who has worked with the *Journal* since its inception, Andrew Heiss for typesetting this issue, Joe Bonyata for his oversight, and Angela Barrionuevo and Don Brugger for their proofreading.
The Word and the Seed: The Theological Use of Biblical Creation in Alma 32

David E. Bokovoy

Alma 32 is a learned text. It is a highly sophisticated sermon on the principle of faith. The discourse is presented as the words of Alma, a Book of Mormon prophet who taught his people many profound truths concerning this foundational gospel principle. “Faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things,” he reasons, therefore, if you have faith, you will have hope “for things which are not seen, which are true” (v. 21). Alma illustrates the correlation between hope and faith through metaphor, comparing the word of God to a seed (v. 28). Just as one must exercise faith in planting a seed that will eventually develop into a fruit-yielding tree, so must a person exercise faith by applying God’s word before experiencing spiritual transformation. The analogy relies upon a series of highly calculated literary allusions to the biblical stories of creation. As impressive as Alma’s sermon is at inspiring audiences to live in accordance with the divine will, as readers we can appreciate this learned text at an even deeper level by identifying the ways in which Alma’s discourse invokes biblical creation to encourage audiences to develop the type of faith that brings everlasting life.

To illustrate the attestation of biblical creation motifs in Alma 32, I will begin by offering a brief literary analysis of the opening chapters of Genesis. This analysis relies upon textual insights gained through
higher criticism.¹ I will then proceed with a consideration of the manner in which biblical authors used creation as a theological construct to encourage audiences to exercise faith in the present by considering God’s creation in the primordial past. I will then show that Book of Mormon sermons generally invoke creation motifs in a parallel manner. Using this observation, I will conceptually lay the groundwork not only for recognizing the extensive use of creation imagery throughout Alma 32 but also for identifying one of the possible reasons this Book of Mormon sermon incorporates such imagery in a discourse on faith.

Creation in the Bible

Creation appears as a prominently explored religious theme throughout the Hebrew Bible. It is the first topic addressed in the Bible’s account of prehistory.² Genesis, in fact, begins with two separate creation narratives. The first account commences with the line: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). It concludes with a summary statement in Genesis 2:4a: “these are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.” The second creation story commences in the subsequent line: “In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens” (Genesis 2:4b). Many biblical scholars believe that these were originally two separate creation accounts brought together by an editor into a single literary unit.³ This suggests

¹. Higher criticism refers to a scholarly attempt to explain inconsistencies in the Bible by identifying its original sources. As an interpretive tool, higher criticism constitutes a central part of the “historical-critical method.” See David Bokovoy, Authoring the Old Testament: Genesis–Deuteronomy (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2014), 15–16.

². The term prehistory is sometimes used to discuss the biblical stories that describe people and events prior to the rise of the “historical” era when the world operated according to the rules and standards of the authors of Genesis; see, for example, Tzvi Abush, “Biblical Accounts of Prehistory: Their Meaning and Formation,” in Bringing the Hidden to Light: The Process of Interpretation: Studies in Honor of Stephen A. Geller, ed. Kathryn Kravitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns/Jewish Theological Seminary, 2007), 1–17.

³. For a basic history and discussion of views, see Antony F. Campbell and Mark A. O’Brien, Sources of the Pentateuch: Texts, Introductions, Annotations (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 1–9.
the existence of multiple versions of the story of divine creation in ancient Judah, the kingdom responsible for the scribal production of the book of Genesis.  

From a historical perspective, the story in Genesis 1 may have been written by a priestly author in response to the earlier Judean creation narrative in Genesis 2–3. Both accounts begin with a reference to God creating “the heaven and the earth,” but the narratives place the two words in an opposite sequence:

1:1: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth . . .”
2:4b: “In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens . . .”

Comparing the two opening lines, we see that by reversing the sequence in 2:4b, “earth” and “heaven,” the first account focuses the reader’s attention on heaven as the place of God’s initial creation. The first creation story of Genesis is therefore cosmic or heavenly in its primary focus, in contrast to the second narrative, which is much more earthly in its tone. Therefore, reading the two texts synchronically gives readers the impression that the biblical God is to be credited with a fullness of both heavenly and earthly creation.

In the story told in Genesis 1, God creates through his divine word. Each creative act appears described with the phrase “And God said . . .” In contrast, Genesis 2–3 depicts creation as a planting process. God works directly with the muddy soil in order to create the first man (2:7), and he physically plants seeds that produce a garden eastward in Eden (2:8). In this study, I will follow the academic trend of referring to the first creation narrative in Genesis as P (for Priestly) and the second as J (after the divine name Yahweh or Jehovah). Even though

6. Though the scholarly consensus holds that Genesis 2–3 belongs to a separate documentary tradition that scholars refer to as J, over the years, some source critics have suggested that rather than a document that told the entire story of creation and the rise of Israel, these chapters were a supplement to the Priestly story. Explaining why this
they appear linked in our current version of Genesis, these two stories present separate Israelite traditions regarding the primordial past and the beginnings of life.

To anticipate at this point what this study will show, the sermon in Alma 32 about faith combines these two dissonant ideas concerning creation. This sermon therefore functions somewhat like the redacted form of P and J in treating the two narratives (one cosmic and the other earthly) as a literary whole. Alma places the divine word (Genesis 1) into the context of planting as a creative act (Genesis 2), which allows the seed/word to develop into a tree of life. By invoking this dual imagery, Alma encourages his audience to exercise faith in God’s word (as reflected, for example, in the opening chapters of Genesis and other scriptural texts) by pondering a past that can be experienced, even though not literally seen.

For biblical authors, “the beginning” was a time that merited careful consideration. Throughout its sources, the Bible features considerable diversity on this topic. God creates through speech, planting, and even divine combat with the sea. Yet the beginning consistently appears conceptualized as the moment when God put into place an impressive cosmic effort to establish himself as the sovereign power over the cosmos. Creation, therefore, served a significant theological purpose. Biblical authors used creation to persuade audiences to exercise faith during the historical era. “If God could subdue primeval chaos in the past,” they

view is problematic from my perspective extends beyond the focus of the present essay. The so-called fragmentary hypothesis was inaugurated by Johann Severin Vater in his work Commentar über den Pentateuch: Mit Einleitungen zu den einzelnen Abschnitten, der eingeschalteten Übersetzung von Dr. Alexander Geddes’s merkwürdigeren critischen und exegetischen Anmerkungen, und einer Abhandlung über Moses und Verfasser des Pentateuchs (Halle: Waisenhaus-Buchhandlung, 1802–5), see especially 393–94. For a study that suggests that Genesis 1–11 was originally conceived as a distinct composition with its own structure and that J is an addition to P, see Joseph Blenkinsopp, Creation Uncreation Recreation (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2011). For a classic, although problematic, critique of the documentary hypothesis arguing that pre-Priestly material was added by a subsequent redactor, see Konrad Schmid, Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel’s Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible, trans. James Nogalski (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010).
reasoned, “why not grant deity the opportunity to manage the affairs in your everyday life?”

Biblical authors did not view creation in the same way most modern people conceptualize the act. “The kernel of ancient Eastern creation thought,” writes Stefan Paas, “does not lie in the (historically motivated) interest in the origins of being but, rather, in the concern for the present.” To quote Michael Fishbane, through creation the author “projects a certain continuity of divine power upon which humans can rely.”

One of the famous biblical texts that illustrates this trend is Job 38:4–7:

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

These verses are designed to encourage readers to accept that on the complicated subject of theodicy, those questioning the ways of the Lord should simply put their trust in him since humans cannot possibly comprehend, much less duplicate, God’s impressive creative feats.

This use of creation imagery to promote faith in Deity also parallels ideas found in the second half of the book of Isaiah. “I have made the earth, and created man upon it,” states God in Isaiah 45:12. “I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded.” This verse presents the God of Israel speaking comforting words to the exilic community regarding the restoration of the Jews and the rebuilding of Jerusalem. According to the passage, this community

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could exercise faith that God would honor his promise regarding restoration since the Lord had demonstrated his ability to work mighty miracles in the beginning of time.

These biblical texts illustrate the fundamental way in which Israelite and later Judean authors used creation as a theological construct. Since Israel’s God had assumed ownership over the unorganized primordial earth and miraculously provided that chaotic base with the structure manifested in the historical era, those encountering biblical references to creation should follow the example of chaos and obey the divine will.

Creation imagery in the Book of Mormon

As a religious heir to this tradition, the Book of Mormon relies heavily on the same thematic paradigm. For example, in an editorial statement in the book of Helaman, the author uses the biblical notion that man was created from the “dust of the earth” to illustrate humanity’s constant need to obey Deity:

> Behold, [the children of men] do not desire that the Lord their God, who hath created them, should rule and reign over them. . . . O how great is the nothingness of the children of men; yea, even they are less than the dust of the earth. For behold, the dust of the earth moveth hither and thither, to the dividing asunder, at the command of our great and everlasting God. (Helaman 12:6–8; see also Mosiah 2:25; 4:2)

A similar use of creation imagery appears in King Benjamin’s sermon found earlier in the Book of Mormon:

> Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend. And again, believe that ye must repent of your sins and forsake them. (Mosiah 4:9–10)
Benjamin’s religious message is clear: since God created all things in heaven and earth, God possesses all wisdom and power. Therefore, humanity should not only believe in God, but more importantly act upon that belief by forsaking their sins.

In addition to using creation to sustain the thesis that humans should exercise faith in the present by remembering the past, Benjamin’s link between creation and God possessing wisdom parallels a prominent theme in Near Eastern literature. Humanity should have faith in Deity since from the primordial age, God “possessed” or “created” wisdom. Proverbs 8, for instance, depicts a personified Wisdom referring to Yahweh’s act of creation/possession in a way that parallels Benjamin’s assertion that God has created “all things in heaven and earth” and therefore possesses “all wisdom”: “The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was” (Proverbs 8:22–23). Ultimately, these texts make the same basic argument: since God created even wisdom


12. For the connotation “create,” see the Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, 2:112.
itself, people would obviously be wise to hearken unto his voice and obey his commandments.

While some Book of Mormon passages draw in a relatively vague manner on this broad biblical trend, certain Book of Mormon sermons can be shown to allude specifically to the creation stories in Genesis and to do so in a manner much more intricate in nature than what appears in comparable biblical sources. For instance, in the same Book of Mormon sermon cited above, King Benjamin presents a statement that features several detailed literary allusions to the Genesis stories of creation:

I say unto you that if ye should serve him who has created you from the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move and do according to your own will, and even supporting you from one moment to another—I say, if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants. (Mosiah 2:21)

13. Even though the Book of Mormon depicts its sermons as oratory addresses, oftentimes given spontaneously by their speakers, in my mind, the sophisticated allusions to biblical texts witnessed throughout these discourses suggest that they are literary sermons—that is, texts intended to be read by a learned audience familiar with these biblical motifs; on the issue of interpreting religious texts from this perspective, see Marc Zvi Brettler, “A Literary Sermon in Deuteronomy 4,” in A Wise and Discerning Mind: Essays in Honor of Burke O. Long, ed. S. M. Olyan and R. C. Culley (Providence, RI: Brown University, 2000), 33–50. At minimum, however, Book of Mormon sermons indicate that the author(s) was/were extremely familiar with the Bible and that biblical motifs appear both intentionally, and perhaps unintentionally, all throughout the work. As Israeli scholar Moshe Seidel explains regarding the incorporation of scriptural imagery into a text, “The words a person reads and hears and repeats become his own, enter his verbal storehouse. When needed they become, even if he does not know it, the clothing for the thoughts to which he gives birth. Sacred literature, the inheritance of earlier generations, is incised on the heart of the prophets and sacred poets; it is their fount and the object of their musing, something they have contemplated many a day. Therefore the idea which appeared to them through the holy spirit finds expression in the same linguistic forms and phrases that were impressed in their hearts, became habitual on their lips and were made a part of the prophets themselves.” Moshe Seidel, “Parallels between the Book of Isaiah and the Book of Psalms [in Hebrew],” Sinai 38 (1955–56): 149.
Benjamin’s statement encouraging his people to serve God alludes to both of the creation stories in Genesis, P and J. References to the verb created and the prepositional phrase from the beginning reflect the opening verse of P’s narrative: “In the beginning, God created heaven and earth” (Genesis 1:1). Moreover, Benjamin’s reference to “day to day” reminds readers of the “day to day” creative sequence that provides the basic outline for P’s creation drama. References to “lending breath” and man “serving” God draw upon J’s creation story, in which the Lord breathed into man’s nostrils “the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7), and man was created to “serve” God by “dressing” and “keeping” the garden (Genesis 2:15).

Thus Benjamin’s use of creation imagery illustrates how subtle, yet detailed, the Book of Mormon echoes the biblical creation stories. Ultimately, these types of sophisticated literary allusions to the opening chapters of Genesis in texts such as Mosiah 2:21 still serve the same basic theological objective as their biblical counterparts. Benjamin’s use of creation imagery was clearly designed to inspire faith in the present by remembering the past. In other words, God is a god of extraordinary power. He has given order to the primordial chaos that in the beginning existed in cosmic disarray, and his word, therefore, should be accepted and obeyed.

Similar theological reasoning can be seen in various Book of Mormon texts, including Alma 30:44, where Alma teaches the anti-Christ Korihor that pondering the creation creates testimony since “all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form.” Moreover, from a literary perspective, this statement prepares readers for Alma’s theological use of creation imagery in his subsequent discourse on faith. Alma’s sermon in chapter 30 references creation in an explicit manner. Readers are therefore

conceptually prepared to recognize the more implicit allusions to creation in the subsequent sermon.

After his encounter with Korihor (and an explicit biblical-like invocation of creation motifs), Alma appeals to a series of subtle allusions to the opening chapters of Genesis in an effort to encourage the Zoramites, an apostate Book of Mormon people, to believe in God. Like those witnessed in Mosiah 2:21, these allusions to creation suggest a highly sophisticated authorial intent to invoke creation imagery from the Bible directly into the Book of Mormon sermon. And, like Mosiah 2:21, Alma 32 adapts themes from the Bible’s two opening creation stories (P and J) to present this lesson. I will now show that in so doing, the sermon in Alma 32 blends the two separate views concerning creation in Genesis 1–2 (one cosmic and the other earthly) into one harmonious construct designed to promote faith in Deity.

P themes in Alma 32

In terms of a religious message, Alma 32 teaches audiences the significance of strengthening their testimony of the “word of God” (v. 29). Though often overlooked by readers, Alma’s sermon on faith and the word contains a variety of advanced literary allusions to the Genesis creation accounts. In this sense, Alma’s connection between word and creation parallels a long historical tradition witnessed in both Jewish and early Christian texts, which draw upon the Priestly creation formula in Genesis 1:1–2:4—that is, “and God said, ‘Let there be X . . .’” In P, God speaks, and by his word, creation is brought into being.

A first example of an ancient religious text linking word with creation (because of the formula in Genesis 1:1–2:4a) can be found in the prologue to John’s New Testament Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” As has long been noted by commentators, John’s prologue draws upon the commencement to the book of Genesis by mentioning both beginning and
Reference to the Word or *logos* in this passage reflects traditional Wisdom terminology in both the Hebrew Bible and later Jewish tradition. As one Jewish commentator has written regarding John 1:1, “The word signifies God’s power of creation and redemption; as a means of expression, reason (or truth), and grace it is identified with Jesus (vv. 9, 14, 17).” Therefore, by combining word with allusions to biblical creation imagery, Alma’s sermon follows an ancient venerable tradition.

Like the prologue to John’s Gospel, Alma 32 is structured around the term *word*. Alma 32 begins with an editorial statement that prepares readers for Alma’s sermon concerning the word of God:

And it came to pass that they did go forth, and began to preach the *word of God* unto the people, entering into their synagogues, and into their houses; yea, and even they did preach the *word* in their streets. (Alma 32:1)

The narrator’s two references to the term *word* in this passage, together with repeated mention of *word* later in Alma’s sermon, suggest the attestation of a biblical-like theme word or *leitwort*. Following the repetition of *word* in the introduction, the chapter continues with this theme. We learn that the people were prepared to hear the word (v. 6); that those who truly humble themselves because of the word are more

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15. See the discussion provided by George R. Beasley-Murray in *John* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 10–11.
16. See Psalm 33:6; Proverbs 8:7–30; Wisdom of Solomon 9:1–9; 18:15; and Sirach 24:9; 43:26. This reminds us, of course, of the link between wisdom and creation identified earlier in this study in Mosiah 4:9 and Proverbs 8.
18. For an introduction to this important literary technique, see Martin Buber, “Leitwort Style in Pentateuch Narrative,” in *Scripture and Translation*, ed. Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig; trans. Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 114–28. As literary scholar Robert Alter notes in his analysis of the convention, “This kind of word-motif, as a good many commentators have recognized, is one of the most common features of the narrative art of the Bible.” Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 92.
blessed (v. 14); that the people were invited to experiment upon Alma’s word and then “give place” to a portion of it (v. 27); that Alma compared the word unto a seed (v. 28); and that in the conclusion of the sermon, Alma twice invited the people to nourish the word (vv. 40–41). The entire sermon, therefore, is structured by repetition of the leitwort word, a significant theme both in P proper and the later Jewish and Christian texts P has influenced.

In Biblical Hebrew, the term word is expressed through the triliteral root *dbr*.[19] As a noun, *dbr* carries a dual nuance, meaning both “word” and “thing.”[20] Therefore, if translated into Hebrew, a text such as Alma 32:21, which uses the English word things, would feature a biblical-like word play between Alma comparing the “word (in Hebrew *dābār*) unto a seed” (v. 28), and statements such as “faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things/words [in Hebrew *dĕbārim*]”:

And now as I said concerning faith—faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things [words, *dĕbārim*]; wherefore if ye have faith

19. At the conclusion of the Book of Mormon, Moroni tells his readers that if the plates had been sufficiently large, Nephite authors would have written in Hebrew (Mor 9:33). From this and other evidence, most LDS scholars have assumed that Nephite characters were examples of Egyptian symbols used to transliterate Hebrew words and vice versa; see, for example, the discussion provided by Terryl Givens in *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 132–33. Recently, however, LDS scholar Brant Gardner has called this reading into question, theorizing that the underlying plate text was a Mesoamerican language, such as Zoque, rather than Hebrew; see Brant Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2011), 157–63, 165–76, 239. The arguments for or against Hebrew as the original language of the text are beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice it to say that in the present study, I am not arguing for Hebrew as the underlying language of the script. No matter what position a person holds regarding the language of the Book of Mormon—including the argument that it is simply nineteenth-century American apocrypha written in English—since Book of Mormon sermons draw upon the Bible as a source of inspiration, connecting Book of Mormon words and phrases with Biblical Hebrew can draw out hidden literary connections between the Book of Mormon and the Hebrew Bible, even if these links were not the author’s original intent.

20. *Brown Driver and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 182–84. The word *dābār*, for example, is translated as “word” in Genesis 15:1, 4, and “thing” in Genesis 18:14.
ye hope for things [words, dēbārim] which are not seen, which are true. (Alma 32:21)

Another interesting biblical theme might be noted in connection with the passage just discussed (Alma 32:21). Because “things” can be read as “words,” it would seem that Alma speaks of words as things that can be seen. That might seem odd, but it is a venerable biblical tradition as well. Seeing words appears on occasion in biblical prophetic texts, including the superscription to Isaiah 2:1 (cited in the Book of Mormon in 2 Nephi 12:1): “The word that Isaiah, son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.” While as contemporary readers, we might typically associate words with the physical act of hearing rather than seeing, as illustrated via Isaiah 2:1, it was not uncommon for Israelite and later Jewish sources to conceptualize a prophetic word as something that could, in fact, be seen.

This same trend is witnessed in the writings of the Hellenized Jew Philo of Alexandria. Concerning the Israelites’ experience at Mount Sinai, Philo wrote:

Whereas the voice of mortals is judged by hearing, the sacred oracles intimate that the words of God (logi, the plural) are seen as light is seen, for we are told that all of the people saw the Voice (Ex 20:18), not that they heard it; for what was happening was not an impact of air made by the organs of mouth and tongue, but the radiating splendor of virtue indistinguishable from a fountain of reason. . . . But the voice of God which is not that of verbs and names yet seen by the eye of the soul, he [Moses] rightly introduces as “visible.” (On the Migration of Abraham 47–48)

In his theological exploration of the Sinai experience, Philo produces a connection between word and light. Without light, the human eye cannot see; yet light, from Philo’s perspective, allows humans not only to discern physical objects, but also facilitates human ability to see that which is spiritual (cf. D&C 88:11). Thus, in Philo’s conceptualization, the word of God is seen “as light is seen.” Readers familiar with the Priestly version of creation will recognize a connection, therefore,
between God speaking the words “let there be light” and God seeing the light, declaring it “good” (Genesis 1:3).

Returning to a consideration of John’s prologue from the New Testament, clearly Philo’s connection between seeing, light, and word parallels the conceptual use of word and light featured in John 1:1–5:

In the beginning was the Word [logos], and the Word [logos] was with God, and the Word [logos] was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. (John 1:1–5)

The relationship between seeing the word and discerning spiritual light in ancient Jewish and Christian texts such as Philo’s On the Migration of Abraham and the Gospel of John also appears in Alma’s sermon:

O then, is not this [the enlightening of your understanding and the expansion of your mind] real? I say unto you, Yea because it [the seed/word] is light; and whatsoever is light, is good, because it [light] is discernible, therefore ye must know that it is good. (Alma 32:35)

Alma’s statement that a testimony is “light” and that “whatsoever is light, is good” clearly reflects God’s initial act of creation in Genesis 1:3–4: “And God said let there be light, and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good.”

Additional Priestly creation motifs appear linked with word in Alma’s discourse through a repetition of the term beginneth (vv. 28, 30, 33, 37, 41; compare Genesis 1:1), a depiction of the seed/word as “good” (vv. 28, 30, 32, 33, 39; compare creation statements as “good” in Genesis 1), and Alma’s statement that “every seed bringeth forth unto its own likeness” (v. 31), which parallels the fact that in P’s creation narrative, God commanded the earth to “bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed,

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21. Note, however, that Hebrew verbal constructions translated with “begin[neth]” in the KJV do not derive from the word rēʾšît “beginning” in Genesis 1:1.
and the fruit tree yielding fruit *after its kind*" (Genesis 1:11), as well as statements that God himself created man in his own “likeness” and “image” (Genesis 1:26–27).

Continuing this pattern, Alma states that as a testimony begins to develop in our lives, we will eventually say, “*Let us* nourish it with great care . . . that it may grow up and bring forth fruit unto us” (Alma 32:37). In view of Alma’s invocation of Priestly creation imagery throughout the entire course of his sermon, this grammatical form of speaking in the first person plural cohortative, that is, “let us . . . ,” seems to parallel the divine language of creation in Genesis 1:26: “*Let us* make man in our image . . .” In Genesis 1, the “word” of God performs the nourishing acts of creation through the formulaic expression: “*God said . . .*” (vv. 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29). Alma appears to invoke this creation imagery through a reversal, “if ye will nourish the *word*.” Again, through these textual allusions, Alma appears to be saying that man was created to act like God (tending the earth’s vegetation; Genesis 2:5, 15), and he can therefore fulfill the measure of his creation by exercising faith in God’s word.

**J themes in Alma 32**

Alma’s discourse relies on the themes of knowledge, tree of life, and seed, all of which appear as prominent motifs in the two Genesis accounts of creation. The creation story in Genesis 1 presents God speaking his word, which allows the “herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is upon the earth” (v. 11). It also states that the earth brought forth “herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind” (v. 12). The story in Genesis 2–3 speaks of a “tree of knowledge” and a “tree of life” (2:9).

Theologically, Alma’s invitation to begin the planting process of God’s word creates a type of *imitatio Dei* since God himself appears directly linked with planting imagery in Genesis 2:8. In J’s creation story, God is a gardener who literally “plants a garden eastward in Eden” and who causes “to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good
for food” (Genesis 2:8–9). According to J’s creation story, humans were created to fulfill a similar, albeit lesser, role as God by “working” and “preserving” the garden paradise (Genesis 2:15). The Hebrew verbs ēḥābd “work/dress” and šāmar “keep/preserve” are defined by later usage in the story of the man’s “working” the cursed ground and the lesser divinities (cherubim) “guarding” the tree of life (Genesis 3:23–24). Alma’s sermon, therefore, ties thematically to these conceptions in Genesis 2 regarding the very purpose of human creation as “gardening servant” through Alma’s invitation to “give place that a seed [as word] may be planted in your heart” (v. 28).

In addition to these observations, Alma 32 seems to contain at least two subtle references to the J story of creation that are apparent only in Hebrew. As a result of eating from the tree of knowledge, Genesis reports that even though the man could originally enjoy the fruit of the garden with modest effort, henceforth, “thorns also and thistles shall [the ground] bring forth” (Genesis 3:18). In light of the other more explicit allusions to the biblical creation accounts, when read in Hebrew, Alma 32:41 also echoes Genesis 3:18. According to the Brown Driver and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, the verb šāmah translated in the KJV “to bring forth” literally means “to spring up.” This Genesis passage seems to be echoed in Alma’s invitation to his audience to nourish the seed, so that it may become a tree “springing up unto everlasting life” (Alma 32:41). As a verb, šāmah initially appears in Genesis 2:5: “And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb

22. For additional examples of Yahweh portrayed in the role of gardener, see Numbers 24:6; Psalm 104:16; and Isaiah 44:14.
24. The feminine suffixes attached to the verbs would appear to correspond with either Eden or perhaps the “land” (ʾādāmāh) in Genesis 2:9, 19.
25. Brown Driver and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, 855.
of the field before it grew (ṣāmaḥ).” The term to grow, like the theme of the word discussed above, appears as a leitwort throughout Alma’s discourse, surrounded by allusions to words or expressions that appear in the biblical stories of creation (marked in the following quotations by italics; instances of the verb “to grow” are in bold):

But behold, as the seed swelleth, and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow, then you must needs say that the seed is good; for behold it swelleth, and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow. And now, behold, will not this strengthen your faith? Yea, it will strengthen your faith: for ye will say I know that this is a good seed; for behold it sprouteth and beginneth to grow. (Alma 32:30)

And behold, as the tree beginneth to grow, ye will say: Let us nourish it with great care, that it may get root, that it may grow up, and bring forth fruit unto us. And now behold, if ye nourish it with much care it will get root, and grow up, and bring forth fruit. (Alma 32:37)

From a literary perspective, the repetition of this imagery of gardening conceptually associates Alma’s discourse on faith with the original purpose of human creation. In essence Alma is saying we were created to cultivate faith.

This image of the purpose of human creation reflects the ideas conveyed in J’s creation narrative in which both man and woman were created to plant and tend God’s garden. In the account, the humans begin their planting efforts inside Eden, thus imitating God’s work. They eventually take those same skills into the wilderness where “thorns and thistles” appear together with the “herbs of the field” (Genesis 3:18). In portraying this transition from planting seeds inside the garden to planting in the wilderness, J’s story concludes with the terse statement, “[God] drove out the man” (Genesis 3:24). In Hebrew, the verb translated as “drove out” (gāraš) literally means “to cast out” (the verb appears in the King James Version as “to cast out” in Genesis 21:10).  

Contextually, Alma's discourse appears to play intentionally upon this subtle biblical theme, particularly through literary repetition: “I say unto you, it is well that ye are cast out of your synagogues” (Alma 32:12); “it is because that ye are cast out, that ye are despised of your brethren” (v. 12); “because ye are afflicted and cast out” (v. 24); “if it be a good seed, if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief” (v. 28); “ye pluck it up and cast it out” (v. 38). Thus, J’s theme of casting out in its creation narrative functions as a key literary motif throughout Alma's sermon. It provides closure to Alma’s discourse as he invokes the tree of paradise theme that the first humans were told in J they could no longer enjoy because of their fallen condition. In some sense, Alma suggests that planting the seed of faith reverses the effects of the fall. For Alma, the planting and tending of God’s word prevents one from being cast out and allows one to freely partake of the “fruit of the tree of life” (v. 40).

The comparison of word and seed

Returning to observations made at the beginning of this study, we saw that Genesis opens with two very distinct views concerning creation. The first account draws attention to God creating heaven and earth through the power of the word. It then presents a creation story that is highly structured. Creation occurs over a six-day, formulaic period arranged by the constant literary refrain “God said, ‘Let there be X.”’ By reading P’s account, men and women could have confidence in God’s word, that it is “good,” and that it would always be fulfilled. In contrast, J’s opening narrative depicts the creation of “earth and heaven” (Genesis 3:4b). It lacks that same highly developed literary structure found in P. In J, there is no formulaic pattern emphasizing the theological view that God is a God of order. Instead, J depicts God as a gardener planting

seeds, one who creates humans to assist in his divine labor. As a tale of etiology, J explains why humans and not animals have the unique ability to plant seeds that grow into food. P and J represent very different views concerning God and creation. Both are now found within the opening chapters of the Hebrew Bible. But readers can relate to and have faith in J’s Deity in a manner that differs from P’s message. For J, God is very much like one of us, and we were created to care for his creation.

In his sermon on faith, Alma wagers a “comparison” that brings the P word into direct relation with the J seed. For Alma, the word of God gives structure and meaning to human existence. We should have faith in God’s word. He speaks and it is so. This parallels the theological view in P’s creation story. Drawing upon themes from Genesis 1, Alma specifically compares the “word of God” unto a seed, telling his audience that they are to be involved with “planting.” Thus, Alma’s sermon combines the two distinct creation views in the Genesis narratives, for God speaks the divine word in order to create in Genesis 1, and he plants seeds and trees to create his garden paradise in Genesis 2–3. In a sermon filled with allusions to the two creation narratives in Genesis, Alma’s combination of planting a seed with the divine word is quite profound.

Through metaphor, Alma invites his audience to ponder the miraculous way in which the power of creation (as depicted through his word in the Bible’s opening stories) appears reenacted every time a seed develops into a fruit-bearing tree. He uses biblical creation imagery from Genesis 1 (the divine word) with imitatio Dei planting (Genesis 2–3) to encourage his audience to cultivate the type of faith that brings everlasting life. God’s word is powerful from Alma’s perspective. We should take that word and plant it in our hearts. By invoking the miracle of creation in the past in a present context of seed growth and re-creation, Alma encourages his readers to fulfill the measure of their own creation by experimenting upon the divine word. In other words, obtaining the type of faith Alma describes is the very purpose of human existence. And it has been, from the beginning.
Conclusion

In view of the way creation functions in biblical texts as a construct designed to inspire ancient audiences to exercise faith in their historical age by remembering God’s primordial acts, allusions to creation in one of the Book of Mormon’s greatest didactic sermons concerning faith should come as no surprise. After all, the Book of Mormon is an heir to biblical literary forms and theological paradigms. When taken as a whole, the connections between Alma 32 and the opening chapters of the Bible reveal that this Book of Mormon sermon is a learned text, steeped in biblical formulas.28

By connecting the act of developing Christian conviction with the Bible’s opening creation narratives, Alma defines nourishing the word of God in one’s life as the very purpose of creation. In this effort, he combines the two separate perspectives concerning creation in Genesis 1 and in Genesis 2–3 and links them as a unified theological whole. Through metaphor, Alma places the divine word directly into the context of planting as a creative act that allows the seed/word to develop into a tree of life. The miracle of primordial creation is therefore brought into the present world every time a seed develops into a fruit-bearing tree. The same could be said for the process of spiritual rebirth/creation through experimentation on the divine word. Alma uses both forms of creation in the Bible’s opening chapters, word and planting, to encourage his audience to exercise faith in the present through reflections upon the primordial past. Using this process, Alma instructs his audience to develop the type of faith that leads to everlasting life, thus fulfilling the measure of their creation.

28. This trend continues in the subsequent portion of the narrative. Following Alma’s lead, Amulek’s subsequent sermon shows allusions to biblical creation imagery. The following motifs appear in Alma 34: “humble yourselves even to the dust” (v. 38); “led away by the temptations of the devil” (v. 39); “no good thing” (v. 39); “one day rest” (v. 41).
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As presented in the synoptic Gospels, Jesus’s central teaching consisted of a call to prepare for the coming kingdom of God.¹ His message was about the arrival of this kingdom rather than a detailed portrayal of its nature. While he addressed the latter indirectly, through parables and miracles that suggested the radical reversals that the kingdom of God would bring,² Jesus spoke directly of its imminence, repeatedly

1. Each of the synoptic Gospel writers summarized Jesus’s message in terms of the kingdom of God. In Luke’s account, Jesus explains that proclaiming the kingdom was the very purpose for which he had been sent (Luke 4:43). Matthew similarly identifies “the gospel of the kingdom” as Jesus’s essential message, framing his five-chapter narrative of the Sermon on the Mount and earliest miracles with a near-verbatim repetition: “And Jesus went about . . . teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people” (Matthew 4:23; 9:35, emphasis added). Mark likewise explains: “Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God” and adds Jesus’s own injunction, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:14–15, emphasis added).

Norman Perrin emphatically affirmed the scholarly consensus behind this conclusion in Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 54: “The central aspect of the teaching of Jesus was that concerning the Kingdom of God. On this there can be no doubt and today no scholar does, in fact, doubt it. Jesus appeared as the one who proclaimed the Kingdom; all else in his message and ministry serves as a function in relation to that proclamation and derives its meaning from it.”


“Saving Christianity”: The Nephite Fulfillment of Jesus’s Eschatological Prophecies

Heather Hardy
declaring that the kingdom would come within the lifetime of his hearers.\(^3\) It was to arrive by an act of divine judgment, following which the Son of man would gloriously descend from heaven, gather the righteous around him, and usher in an entirely new order of reality.

These widely recognized and commonly repeated observations were brought to the fore a century ago in Albert Schweitzer’s groundbreaking book, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, which featured a review of the work of several German academics seeking to understand Jesus’s ministry in the cultural and religious context of first-century Jewish messianic expectations.\(^4\) Although subsequent scholars have disputed

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3. Jesus’s most explicit sayings regarding the imminent coming of the kingdom include: Matthew 16:28//Mark 9:1//Luke 9:27, which assert that some of those standing before Jesus will not taste of death until they have seen the arrival of the kingdom, and Matthew 24:34//Mark 13:30//Luke 21:32, which state that “this generation shall not pass” until all of Jesus’s eschatological predictions about the coming of the kingdom are fulfilled. Additional passages generally considered to imply an imminent coming of the kingdom include Mark 8:38, which suggests that “this generation” shall witness the Son of man coming in glory; Matthew 10:23, which indicates that the Son of man will come before the apostles complete their mission to the cities of Israel; and Matthew 26:29//Mark 14:25//Luke 22:18, which assert that Jesus will not drink wine again until he does so in the kingdom.

Modern biblical scholarship likewise affirms Jesus’s teaching of the kingdom’s imminence. Werner Georg Kümmel summarized the position of mid-twentieth-century scholarship in *Promise and Fulfilment*, trans. Dorothea M. Barton (German orig., 1953; London: SCM Press, 1966): “Jesus expected the eschatological consummation in the near future and knew its imminent coming to be announced by premonitory signs in the present” (p. 21); and later, “Jesus does not only proclaim in quite general terms the future coming of the Kingdom of God, but also its imminence . . . he emphasized this so concretely that he limited it to the lifetime of his hearers’ generation” (p. 149).

4. Albert Schweitzer published *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung* (“History of Life-of-Jesus Research”) in 1906; it was translated into English by William Montgomery
many of the details of his analysis (as scholars are wont to do), few now contend with his assertion that Jesus’s teachings were dominated by a culturally conditioned belief in the imminence of end-times. In establishing the centrality of eschatology to Jesus’s gospel message, Schweitzer also made evident a serious problem at the heart of the New Testament account—namely, the imminent events that Jesus proclaimed seem never to have materialized, at least not in the public manner that a plain-sense interpretation of his words predict.

The indisputability of this realization has also been widely acknowledged in scholarly circles. Echoing Schweitzer’s observations, for example, Bart Ehrman articulated their brusque and uncomfortable conclusion:

Jesus anticipated that the end was coming within his own generation. God would soon send a cosmic judge from heaven to right all the wrongs of this world, to overthrow the wicked and oppressive powers that opposed God and his people, and to bring in a perfect kingdom in which there would be no hatred, war, disease, calamity, despair, sin or death. People needed to repent in view of the oncoming day of judgment, for it was about here. If


Historical Jesus scholarship began with the prolific publication of the lives of Jesus in nineteenth-century Germany and spread to the English-speaking world with the publication of a translation of Schweitzer’s book in 1910. Broadly speaking, the historical Jesus movement encompasses academic inquiry into the life and death of Jesus, with an emphasis on uncovering his objectives and message within the background of Second Temple Judaism (400 BC–AD 100) as verifiable by historical methods, and to identify continuities and discontinuities between his teachings, Jewish tradition, and the aims of the early church. It recognizes the source priority of the synoptic Gospels and has established criteria for assessing the authenticity of Jesus’s purported sayings. For overviews, see Benedict T. Viviano’s “Eschatology and the Quest for the Historical Jesus,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry L. Walls (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 73–90; and N. T. Wright’s “Quest for Historical Jesus,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:796–802.
Jesus were to be taken literally—that is, if he really meant that the Son of man was to arrive in the lifetime of his disciples—he was obviously wrong.\(^5\)

Neither was the apparent nonfulfillment of Jesus’s eschatological prophecies lost on his contemporaries. F. E. Peters, for example, considers it to be one of the two principal reasons why Jews were not convinced of his messiahship:

There was, in the first instance, the ignominious execution suffered by Jesus, which was not one envisioned by most Jews who were expecting a Messiah. . . . But a more powerfully transparent counterargument was the fact that none of the signs and portents of the End-Time had occurred, the cataclysmic events and the cosmic upheaval that everyone, including Jesus’ followers, and Jesus himself, had expected.\(^6\)

Jesus could hardly be considered Israel’s Messiah if he could not pass the Deuteronomic test for being a legitimate prophet of Israel’s God (see Deuteronomy 18:20–22).

While each of the New Testament writers presupposed the impending fulfillment of Jesus’s eschatological prophecies, as time went on, the delay of the Lord’s coming became increasingly problematic for early Christians as well.\(^7\) Paul, writing to the Thessalonians in the earliest New Testament document, expected to personally witness the glorious return of the resurrected Christ:

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The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17, emphasis added)

Writing a couple of decades later, Mark likewise depicted a clear belief in the nearness and literalness of the coming of the Son of man. Here, for example, he has Jesus conclude an extended prophecy regarding the calamities preceding his coming in glory within an explicit time frame: “Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done” (Mark 13:30).

But as Jesus’s generation began dying off, later writers softened the urgency of Jesus’s eschatological message. Paula Fredricksen traces subtle alterations by Matthew and Luke, including the possibility of both a present and future kingdom of God, and highlights the very different nature of John’s Gospel that “gives way to moral and metaphysical eschatology” in place of the temporal eschatology so prominent in the earlier synoptics.8 By the second epistle of Peter, one of the last New Testament compositions, we read that scoffers are taunting, “Where is the promise of his coming?” Peter urges the church to withstand the skepticism by assuring them that “the Lord is not slack concerning his coming” and by offering two justifications—first, that time itself might be a relative notion: “One day is with the Lord as a thousand years”; and second, that the Lord might be graciously postponing his return in order to prolong the opportunity for repentance (2 Peter 3:1–9). Fredricksen neatly summarizes this diminishing emphasis on Jesus’s eschatological teachings within the New Testament itself. “The later the writing,” she explains, “the lower its level of commitment to an imminent Apocalypse.”9

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8. Paula Fredricksen, Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews (New York: Knopf, 1999), 89.
Twentieth-century exegetes renewed the efforts to reconcile the dissonance of unmet expectations after Schweitzer gave such prominent and undeniable place to Jesus’s unfulfilled eschatological promises. Their basic approaches have included stretching the language of Jesus’s prophecies to accommodate metaphorical interpretations; extending the time frame and separating the elements of the eschatological package (with only the destructive judgment coming “soon” in the overthrow of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the rest following in a far distant second coming); shifting expectations from literal, publicly witnessed, historical events to spiritual, individually perceived, or existential ones; and proposing that much of Jesus’s eschatology had already been realized—in his mortal ministry, in the bestowal of the Holy Spirit, and in the establishment of the church. Each of these interpretations, though, has


Latter-day Saint apostle James E. Talmage was clearly aware of the controversy sparked by Schweitzer’s work, and he repeated a range of popular (though largely unsatisfying) solutions to the apparent nonfulfillment of several of Jesus’s “this generation” prophecies in *Jesus the Christ* (1st ed., 1915; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1956). See his explanations of “the prolongation of the life of John the apostle” (p. 369); the possibility of separate time frames for the fulfillment of the “little apocalypse” of Mark 13 and parallels (p. 572); and the proposed redefinition of “this generation” as referring to “the whole Jewish race” (p. 590). For the latter he cites an apologetic work of his day that solved the problem of the parousia’s delay only by appeal to a thoroughly untextual interpretation.

In the last hundred years, the effort to account for inconsistencies and tensions in the Bible, including those regarding the delayed parousia, has largely been a Protestant endeavor, stemming from concern for the foundations of their own religious legitimacy that traditionally has been derived solely from scripture. Latter-day Saints, by contrast, who claim to be guided by continuing revelation in addition to the Bible, need not fear scholarship that reads early Christian writings in critical-historical ways. Adopting only those exegetical methods that have been developed to sustain biblical inerrancy may, in fact, diminish the significance of the Book of Mormon’s witness.
been found lacking in one sense or another and does not fully satisfy the concerns that the nonfulfillment of Jesus’s prophecies cast on the reliability of God’s word, on Jesus as its messenger, and ultimately on the validity of the entire Christian tradition. As Schweitzer famously put it:

Inasmuch as the non-fulfillment of its eschatology is not admitted, our Christianity rests upon a fraud. . . . The sole argument which could save Christianity would be a proof that the parousia [Christ’s postresurrection return] had really taken place at the time for which it was announced; and obviously no such proof can be produced.  

Many have no doubt joined Schweitzer in conceding the inescapability of this troubling conclusion, but the Book of Mormon, published seventy-five years before Schweitzer’s work, makes a startling assertion to the contrary. The words of 3 Nephi testify precisely that Jesus’s Palestinian prophecies about a great day of judgment, the coming of the Lord, and the inauguration of the kingdom of God were fulfilled, in full eschatological detail and in strict accordance with the timetable he had assigned. An Israelite remnant, prepared to receive him, recognized the resurrected Jesus as the promised Messiah, and he established God’s kingdom among them within the lifetime of the generation that had rejected him a hemisphere away. If its account is true, the Book of Mormon, as another testament of Jesus Christ, provides the very witness Schweitzer demanded to “save Christianity.” And whether or not one believes its account is true, the book can be understood as attempting such a saving gesture.

A clarification about the meaning of eschatology is perhaps in order before proceeding, since it might seem strange to say that the coming of God’s kingdom has already taken place but that the end of times has nonetheless not definitively arrived. Coined from the Greek by Protestant theologians in the nineteenth century, the word eschatology means the study of end-times and originally referred to a cluster of Christian doctrines concerning the second coming, the resurrection of the dead,

and the last judgment. Over time, its scholarly usage has broadened to include related Old Testament expectations of God’s future action in history to judge and save his people in order, as E. P. Sanders has explained, to “create an ideal world . . . [where] peace and justice would prevail.” R. E. Clements has similarly clarified that, broadly speaking, “Eschatology is the study of ideas and beliefs concerning the end of the present world order, and the introduction of a new order.” In this wider sense, eschatology is not necessarily synonymous with the ultimate consummation of history. Its key elements, instead, include God’s definitive intervention, a context of judgment, and the dramatic transformation of a degenerate world for the purpose of ushering in a new era of blessing.

It is likewise important to recognize that the Book of Mormon text explicitly states that eschatological fulfillment among the Nephites, marked by Jesus’s twice-repeated proclamation that “old things are done away and all things have become new” (3 Nephi 12:47; 15:2–7), in no way precludes the reenactment of many of the same prophecies at a later date. The Jesus of the Book of Mormon anticipates such multiple fulfillments when he indicates to the Nephites—his New World audience—that the fruition of many events prophesied by Isaiah and others both “have been and shall be” (3 Nephi 23:3). Indeed, the resurrected Lord reveals to his New World faithful that the time when he would return in glory—when “the elements should melt with fervent heat, and the earth should be wrapt together as a scroll, and the heavens and the earth should pass away” (3 Nephi 26:3; cf. Isaiah 34:4; 2 Peter 3:10)—is still many generations in the future (3 Nephi 28:7–8). Yet the events surrounding the coming of Christ to the Nephites so closely prefigure those of his final appearance

13. R. E. Clements, Prophecy and Covenant (London: SCM Press, 1965), 105. Clements goes on to explain that this broad definition “leaves room for two important features which generally persist in Israel’s hope. These are that Yahweh’s purpose with the world is bound up inextricably with his unique covenant relationship to Israel, and that his dealings with Israel take place in the arena of history” (p. 105).
that, as Latter-day Saint President Ezra Taft Benson once noted, “In the Book of Mormon we find a pattern for preparing for the Second Coming.”

The overwhelming significance of the Nephite eschaton can hardly be overstated. In answer to both Schweitzer’s and Ehrman’s concerns, the Nephite eschaton does, in fact, “save Christianity” by vindicating Jesus as a prophet. Even if misunderstood by his original audience, he was not “wrong”; the grand events that he predicted did indeed occur as he described them, in literal detail and within the generation of his hearers, regardless of the fact that some of them would be fulfilled again, many centuries later, on an even larger scale, and even though they did not occur to or for his original audience. As far as we know, Jesus’s postresurrection ministry to the Nephites is the only reported incident that comprehensively fits the description of “eschaton,” a concept that has otherwise been pieced together from prophetic expectation rather than from actual enactment. Presented in greater clarity than in the prophecies offered by either the mortal Jesus or by others, the narrative of Christ’s coming to the Nephites provides a type for each of the components of his still-future, universal, and glory-filled second coming:


15. There remains at least one problematic, apparently unfulfilled prophecy, and that is at Matthew 16:28//Luke 9:27: “there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.” It does not seem that anyone in Jesus’s original audience actually saw his descent among the Nephites. Various rationalizations might be advanced—some of Jesus’s followers in Palestine might have seen the events at Bountiful in a vision, or there may have been a transmission problem from the original Aramaic to the Greek of the New Testament (note that Luke softens the impact by changing “see the Son of man coming in his kingdom” to “see the kingdom of God,” a much more ambiguous expression)—but these sorts of explanations are much like those put forward by Christians through the centuries to account for the apparent nonfulfillment of prophecy. Perhaps it is better to simply acknowledge that the hypothesis of this paper does not explain every verse in the Gospels. But it does provide a coherent reading of almost everything concerning the imminent coming of the kingdom.
the calamitous judgment of the wicked, the descent of the risen Lord from heaven, and the establishment of the kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{16}

It may seem a strange claim that Jesus's Old World prophecies were fulfilled on the other side of the world, in a manner that would have been impossible for his original audience to verify; but Jesus speaks in the Book of Mormon of a similar misunderstanding when he tells his Nephite disciples that “ye are they of whom I said, ‘Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd’” (3 Nephi 15:21;\textsuperscript{17} cf. John 10:16). This identification of the Nephites as Jesus’s “other sheep” demonstrates that, so far as the Book of Mormon is concerned, Jesus prophesied on at least one occasion in Jerusalem of events that would transpire in the New World, even though his original hearers could neither understand nor even imagine the prophecy being fulfilled in such a manner. Jesus continues:

“And they understood me not, for they supposed [the other sheep] had been the Gentiles; for they understood not that the Gentiles should be converted through their preaching. And they understood me not that I said they shall hear my voice; and... the Gentiles should not at any time hear my voice—... But behold, ye have both heard my voice, and seen me; and ye are my sheep.” (3 Nephi 15:22–24)

While acknowledging the difficulty of the prophecy as given, the Jesus of the Book of Mormon here indicates that his words in the New

\textsuperscript{16} Latter-day Saints sometimes refer to the church as “the kingdom of God” because therein can be found the “power and authority from God to administer in the ordinances of the gospel and officiate in the priesthood of God,” as Joseph Smith taught; see \textit{Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith}, selected and arranged by Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 271. But Latter-day Saints also believe that, as will again be the case after the second coming, the Nephites enjoyed the kingdom of God in a fuller form, as “both an ecclesiastical and a political kingdom”; see Bruce R. McConkie, \textit{Mormon Doctrine}, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 415.

\textsuperscript{17} Book of Mormon quotations are punctuated according to Grant Hardy, \textit{The Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Edition} (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2005).
Testament can only be understood if taken in their plain sense: his sheep include those who have actually, physically, heard his voice. Earlier in the text, he explains that stiffneckedness and unbelief kept his Old World hearers from this truth (3 Nephi 15:18), and in 3 Nephi 16:4 he offers two different methods whereby those at Jerusalem could still receive knowledge about these “other sheep”—and by extension about the timely fulfillment of his eschatological prophecies as well—either by asking the Father in Jesus’s name or by eventually receiving the Nephite record of his postresurrection visit to them.

The day of judgment

Third Nephi 8, the beginning of the account of Jesus’s visit to the New World, opens with a reference to Samuel the Lamanite’s then-forty-year-old prophecy about three days of darkness at the time of Jesus’s death in Jerusalem. The faithful among Book of Mormon peoples are waiting for the sign to be given. In the intervening decades, a combined body of Nephites and Lamanites has engaged in protracted conflict with subversive robber bands, followed by several years of prosperity, the rise of pride, and sudden social disintegration. Both the church and government have collapsed (3 Nephi 6:20–24; 7:14), and many prophets have preached repentance and been persecuted and slain. And then, in the thirty-fourth year following Jesus’s birth, a great storm arises, “such an one as never had been known in all the land” (3 Nephi 8:5).

In the subsequent account of the Nephites’ eschatological day of judgment, Mormon—the narrator at this point in the book that bears his name—narrates events with an eye to the fulfillment of prophecy, both vindicating the truthfulness of God’s word and also justifying the truly horrific extent of the destruction. Mormon integrates the words of several prophets unique to the Book of Mormon—those especially of Nephi, Zenos, and Samuel—in his description of the ruin: thunderings and lightnings (3 Nephi 8:12; 1 Nephi 12:4; 19:11; Helaman 14:21); quaking of the earth (3 Nephi 8:17; 1 Nephi 12:4); vapor of darkness (3 Nephi 8:20; 1 Nephi 12:5; 19:11); tumultuous noises (3 Nephi 10:9;
1 Nephi 12:4); highways broken up (3 Nephi 8:13; Helaman 14:24); many cities sunk and burned (3 Nephi 8:14; 1 Nephi 12:4) or otherwise left desolate (3 Nephi 8:14; Helaman 14:24); and rocks rent and found in broken fragments and in seams and cracks upon all the face of the land (3 Nephi 8:18; Helaman 14:22; cf. 1 Nephi 12:4).

Perhaps even more terrifying than the three hours of “great and terrible destruction” are the three days of complete darkness, so thick that fires cannot be kindled. Mormon tells of great mourning and reports the specific cause of the destruction as perceived by the survivors. He again demonstrates the precise fulfillment of Samuel’s predictions by incorporating the Lamanite prophet’s words:

And there was . . . howling and weeping among all the people continually; . . . and in another place they were heard to cry and mourn, saying, “O that we had repented before this great and terrible day, and had not killed and stoned the prophets, and cast them out.” (3 Nephi 8:23, 25; cf. Helaman 13:32–33)

A voice is then heard from heaven, in the midst of the darkness, proclaiming the extent of the damage—sixteen cities burned with fire, sunk in the sea, or covered with earth—and claiming responsibility for the destruction, in each case “to hide their iniquities and abominations from before my face, that the blood of the prophets and the saints shall not come up any more unto me against them” (3 Nephi 9:5, 7, 8, 9, 11). To the spared, the voice then declares itself to be that of “Jesus Christ the Son of God” (3 Nephi 9:15) and invites the Nephites to repent and return, offering a preview of his forthcoming ministry (3 Nephi 9:13–22; cf. Helaman 13:11).

Mormon, the reader must assume, does not know of the prophecies Jesus gave in Galilee and Judea concerning the events that would precede the arrival of the kingdom of God. Consistent with this, he does not include in his account distinctive phrases from Jesus’s mortal preaching, as he does from the writings of the Nephite prophets. Instead, he tells us that it is up to his latter-day readers to “search the scriptures” and recognize the fulfillment of Jesus’s words (known to them from the
Christian scriptures) in light of their correspondence with the events depicted in 3 Nephi:

And now, whoso readeth, let him understand; he that hath the scriptures, let him search them, and see and behold if . . . all these things are not unto the fulfilling of the prophecies of many of the holy prophets. (3 Nephi 10:14)

When Jesus spoke in the Old World of end-times, he emphasized forthcoming tribulation. His most extended and explicit statement of the woes of the coming judgment is found in Mark 13 and its synoptic parallels in Matthew 24 and Luke 17 and 21. The connections between these accounts and Mormon’s narrative are substantial. For example, we read in the Gospels that the coming of the Lord would be preceded by wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines and pestilences, the preaching and persecution of prophets, and signs from heaven, all of which are vividly depicted in Helaman and the early chapters of 3 Nephi.

Jesus’s most harrowing and decisive prophecy, echoing Old Testament teachings that “the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light” (Mark 13:24; cf. Isaiah 13:10; Joel 3:15), is fulfilled in the “thick darkness” that Mormon reports, wherein “there was not any light seen, . . . neither the sun, nor the moon, nor the stars” (3 Nephi 8:20, 22). In Matthew 24 this verse is immediately followed by an additional prophecy: “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn” (v. 30). This can be read as particular support for a Nephite fulfillment if we consider the “sign” here to be the three days of New World darkness (as noted by both Zenos and Samuel, prophets known to the Nephites) and the “tribes” to refer specifically to remnants of the house of Israel. Finally, to the Jews, Jesus

18. While Mormon clearly indicates the mourning among the people “because of the darkness and the great destruction which had come upon them” (3 Nephi 8:23), he also quotes Jesus explicitly addressing the Nephites as members of the scattered tribes of Israel (3 Nephi 10:4–6; 15:21–16:3) and alludes to the fulfillment of Zenos’s and Samuel’s prophecies of a sign of Jesus’s death “concerning the three days of darkness, which should be . . . more especially given to those who are of the house of Israel”
promises that in the midst of the affliction the righteous will be spared (Mark 13:20, 27 and parallels).

Despite the impressive correspondences, it should be noted that Mormon gives no mention of events to fulfill two of Jesus’s other predictions reported in Mark 13, namely the arrival of false Christs (vv. 6, 21–22) and the sign of the “abomination of desolation,” following which the righteous are to flee for safety (vv. 14–19; cf. Daniel 11:31). Many New Testament scholars have bracketed off these same two prophecies as being fulfilled at the time of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70 while clustering the remaining predictions for fulfillment at the time of the second coming.¹⁹ But as noted above, Jesus ends the discourse with a time limit that seems to apply to the totality, emphatically declaring, “Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done” (Mark 13:30, emphasis added).

A few other teachings reported in the Gospels bear mentioning in connection with the destruction reported in 3 Nephi. John the Baptist clearly preached of the imminence of the coming of the Lord, the need to prepare, and the fiery destruction awaiting those who failed to repent: “The axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire” (Matthew 3:10//Luke 3:9).²⁰ Jesus likewise indicated a fiery annihilation soon to come upon the wicked, to which he added a prophecy of destruction by drowning. He predicted a massive loss of life and emphasized the righteousness of the ensuing judgment by alluding to both the great flood

¹⁹. According to W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, Matthew (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 287–88, “from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards it has been generally agreed that the material [of Mark 13 and its parallels] is [a] composite” of thematically collecting sayings of Jesus given on different occasions. Many have suggested that three distinct matters are addressed in the chapter, including the persecution of the early church, the destruction of Jerusalem, and Christ’s second coming.

²⁰. Notably, the Baptist’s teachings are echoed by Samuel as the Lamanite prophet assumes the New World role of Elias (see Helaman 14:9, 18).
of Noah’s day and the destruction of Sodom: “And the flood came, and destroyed them all. . . . It rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed” (Luke 17:27, 29–30). Interestingly, the resurrected Jesus in 3 Nephi also alludes to both the flood and Sodom when he claims responsibility for the Nephite destruction: “Waters have I caused to come up in the stead thereof. . . . And because . . . there were none righteous among them, I did send down fire and destroy them” (3 Nephi 9:7, 11; cf. Genesis 7:18–23; 19:23–25).

Another of Jesus’s prophecies that finds direct fulfillment in the Nephite eschaton is found in Luke 11:49–51. Recall that the resurrected Jesus declares in the darkness the cause of his judgment against sixteen cities, repeating five times that their inhabitants were destroyed “that the blood of the prophets . . . should not come up unto me any more against them” (3 Nephi 9:5, 7, 8, 9, 11). Compare this with Jesus’s pronouncement in Luke 11:49–51:

I will send them prophets, . . . and some of them they shall slay and persecute: That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias: . . . verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation. (emphasis added)

With the great and terrible destruction that Jesus sends on the prophet-slaying Nephites, this prediction is fulfilled precisely and on schedule.

A final piece of evidence for the fulfillment of Jesus’s own Old World prophecies among the Nephites is a suggestion to that effect made by the resurrected Lord himself via situational irony. Although readers of the Book of Mormon must assume that the Nephites did not have access to Jesus’s mortal teachings, those readers themselves have such access through the New Testament. By quoting or alluding to these earlier words in the Book of Mormon text, Jesus is able to communicate more to his modern readers than he does to the Nephites on two counts. First, the words Jesus speaks have a double context for latter-day readers—that is, a Palestinian context and a Nephite one, which at times
can play off each other. And second, any differences between the two renditions—additions, omissions, or other changes in wording—are potentially fraught with meaning for those who are able to recognize the variations, all the more so if there is an indication that they were intended by Jesus himself.

Consider, for example, the passage in 3 Nephi 10:4–7. Jesus is here lamenting the judgment he has just executed by poignantly directing to the Nephite dead the same rhetorical question he had previously posed to the Pharisees: “How oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, . . . and ye would not” (3 Nephi 10:5; cf. Matthew 23:37//Luke 13:34). He explicitly likens the two groups under the identity of their common heritage: “O ye people of the House of Israel, ye that dwell at Jerusalem, as ye that have fallen” (3 Nephi 10:5), thereby connecting the stiffneckedness of both who, in their respective ways, have chosen death over life, contrary to the final exhortation of the Mosaic law (Deuteronomy 30:19; cf. Helaman 14:31). For the Nephite fallen, cursing rather than blessing has inevitably followed.

A conspicuous phrasal variation from Matthew to 3 Nephi is Jesus’s substitution of addressee from “O Jerusalem” to “O ye people of the House of Israel.” By repeating the term five times in four verses, Jesus demonstrates that he is not merely adjusting for particular geography, but is instead emphasizing the unity between the Nephites and the Jews and the continuity of his mission and ministries to both. By verse six, when he shifts his twice-rejected plea of “how oft would I have gathered you” to the one audience that can respond positively, we sense that the spared Nephites are standing in for collective Israel. They are one embodiment of the Israelite remnant, oft foretold by Isaiah, positioned here to accept the Lord’s invitation to repent and return that he might offer to Israel its promised blessing by establishing the kingdom of God among them.21

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21. Isaiah prophesied that “in that day . . . the remnant of Israel, . . . such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall . . . stay upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God. For though [the] people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall
Mormon closes his account of the Nephite destruction by making an explicit argument for belief on the basis of the fulfillment of several previously given prophecies. In doing so, he offers some inadvertent situational irony of his own as he admonishes:

Whoso readeth, let him understand; he that hath the scriptures, let him search them, and see and behold if all these deaths and destructions . . . are not unto the fulfilling of the prophecies of many of the holy prophets. . . . Yea, many have testified of these things at the coming of Christ, and were slain because they testified of these things. (3 Nephi 10:14–15)

Since readers have access to more scriptures than Mormon is supposed to have had, they can recognize here what he presumably could not—namely, that Jesus Christ himself was one of these holy prophets, slain, in some measure, because he too had “testified of these things.”

The coming of the Lord

As we have already noted, Jesus’s most pronounced eschatological teaching about the coming of the Lord is found in the thirteenth chapter of Mark (and its parallels), following his prophecy of forthcoming judgments:

But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with power and great glory. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather return . . . [and] shall overflow with righteousness” (Isaiah 10:20–22). Paul alludes to this scripture in describing the saving activity for all Israel of those Jews who believed in Christ in the Old World (Romans 9:27; cf. 11:5), and the resurrected Jesus suggests that the Nephite survivors constitute this righteous remnant when he invites them, in the darkness, to repent and return unto him (3 Nephi 9:13; cf. 15:12; 20:10; 21:2; echoed by Mormon at 3 Nephi 5:23–24 and 10:16–17).
together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of
the earth to the uttermost part of heaven. (Mark 13:24–27)

It is in the same discourse that Jesus provides the much-discussed time
frame for this advent: “Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall
not pass, till all these things be done” (Mark 13:30).

Sometime after the terrifying earthly and heavenly portents subside in
the New World, but “soon after the ascension of Christ into heaven” in the
Old World (3 Nephi 10:18), a multitude of righteous survivors assemble
at the temple in Bountiful and marvel over what has transpired among
them when they hear another voice from heaven.22 This one is hushed
and they strain to listen, only understanding upon the third iteration
the utterance that pierces the souls of all who hear: “Behold my Beloved
Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name”
(3 Nephi 11:7). The multitude cast their eyes upward, and, in Mormon’s
understated description, see “a Man descending out of heaven . . . clothed
in a white robe; and he came down and stood in the midst of them” (v. 8).

Despite the Father’s explicit introduction, the Nephites are genu-
inely puzzled when the resurrected Lord descends from the skies: “And
the eyes of the whole multitude were turned upon him, and they durst
not open their mouths, even one to another, and wist not what it meant,
for they thought it was an angel that had appeared unto them” (3 Nephi
11:8).23 It is only after Jesus identifies himself that they “remembered
that it had been prophesied among them that Christ would show him-
self unto them” (v. 12) and recognize that the voice that addressed them

22. From a careful reading of internal evidence in 3 Nephi, S. Kent Brown con-
cludes that Jesus’s visit to the Nephites occurred several months after his resurrection—
still well within Jesus’s “this generation” horizon. See “When Did Jesus Visit the Ameri-
cas?” in From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of

23. This unexpected detail may function as a fulfillment marker in at least two
ways. First, in providing an oblique reference to Jesus’s prophecy about angels gather-
ing the elect from “the uttermost part of the earth” as we have just read (Mark 13:27);
and second, in providing a typological connection between this account of the Lord’s
coming and the episode of the prison-converted Lamanites in Helaman 5 (see below).
in the darkness belongs to the same divine personage now standing in their midst.

It appears that the Nephite survivors were not expecting a divine manifestation beyond Jesus’s voice from heaven. Their experience had already transcended that of the Israelites at Sinai who, when terrified that the Lord himself might speak to them directly, pled for Moses’s mediation (see Exodus 20:18–21). Their bewilderment is also explained by the expectations they would have derived from a prophecy given long before by Zenos, an Israelite prophet uniquely known among the Nephites:

“The Lord God shall surely visit all the House of Israel at that day, some with his voice, because of their righteousness, unto their great joy and salvation; and others with the thunderings and the lightnings of his power, by tempest, by fire, and by smoke, and vapor of darkness, and by the opening of the earth, and by mountains which shall be carried up.” (1 Nephi 19:11; cf. 3 Nephi 9:13).

Although six hundred years prior to the devastation, Book of Mormon prophet Nephi had clearly taught that the resurrected Lord would visit Lehi’s posterity (“and after Christ shall have risen from the dead he shall show himself unto you, my children, and my beloved brethren” [2 Nephi 26:1]), the fact that Samuel the Lamanite, just a generation before, had not mentioned a postresurrection visit may have led the Nephites to forget the earlier prophecy or to interpret it other than literally.24 Prophecy is always clearer in the hindsight of its fulfillment.

24. This may come as a surprise to many Latter-day Saints who have conflated Nephi’s explicit prophecies with those of Samuel’s, but a review of Helaman 13–15 easily confirms that Samuel did not, in fact, prophesy that the resurrected Jesus would appear among the Nephites. It can be surmised from the text that Samuel had intended to bring these good tidings (cf. Helaman 13:6–7) but because the people cast him out, he returned instead with predictions of judgment. Mormon does indicate that he has edited out many of Samuel’s prophecies (14:1), but given both the significance of a prediction concerning a visit from Christ and Mormon’s repeated use of the argument from fulfillment, it is doubtful that he would have targeted this sort of prophecy for deletion. Additionally, given the people’s specific complaint mentioned in Helaman 16:19
The unprecedented event of the resurrected Lord visibly and publicly descending from the sky was without doubt glory filled—how could it have been otherwise?—but on an initial reading, Mormon’s rendition pales in comparison to Jesus’s more poetic prophecies. In composing this narrative, Mormon continues to integrate prior scriptural texts into an eyewitness account, and admittedly, the result is a little flat. He does not use the “Son of man” designation so prevalent in the Gospels (which Jesus borrowed from the seventh chapter of Daniel, a text with which the Nephites are unfamiliar), nor does he mention the evocative “clouds of heaven,” host of angels, or heralding trumpets included in Matthew’s account (see Matthew 24:30–31).

Mormon’s description relies instead on Nephi’s intentionally plain wording of his own apocalyptic vision.25 Nephi, Mormon’s distant ancestor, was shown a sweeping panorama of world history only after the Spirit ascertained his belief in “the Son of the most high God” and promised Nephi that he would be shown “a man descending out of heaven,” whom he then identified as this very Son. Nephi later witnessed vapors of darkness and “great and terrible judgments” that would befall the Lehites’ land of promise following the mortal death of the Redeemer. He then reported: “I saw the heavens open, and the Lamb of God descending out of heaven; and he came down and showed himself unto them” (1 Nephi 11:6–7; 12:5–6). Mormon incorporates several of these key but rather nondescript terms, including “a man descending out of heaven,” “came down,” and “did show himself unto them” (see 3 Nephi 11 headnote and v. 8). At first glance, the result seems far less distinctive than the grandeur that the long-awaited coming of Israel’s Messiah warrants.

Mormon’s account becomes a bit more interesting, however, when we realize that he is simultaneously interweaving allusions to at least one other scriptural text in his account of the Lord’s arrival at Bountiful.

of “Why will [Jesus] not show himself in this land as well as in the land of Jerusalem?” it is highly unlikely that Samuel had actually foretold Jesus’s Nephite ministry while preaching in Zarahemla.

25. For Nephi’s repeated articulation of his commitment to write and prophesy in “plain” language, see 2 Nephi 25:4, 7, 20, 28; 31:2–3; 33:6.
Several of the distinctive words that do show up in the opening verses of 3 Nephi 11 have their origins in a particular pericope in Nephite scripture. The fact that Jesus refers to the same story while speaking from heaven during the three days of darkness significantly increases the likelihood of Mormon’s intentional employment of this cluster of borrowed phrases.

In 3 Nephi 9:20, Jesus enjoins the Nephites to come unto him (an invitation he repeats five times in the darkness discourse) and recommends that they emulate the faith of some Lamanites who were “baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost” at the time of their conversion. The full account to which he is alluding is related in Helaman 5. In the story recounted in that text, the prophet brothers Nephi and Lehi have been cast into a Lamanite prison where they are mistreated and then protected from harm—first, by a miraculous pillar of fire that encircles them, and second, by repeated tremors of the earth and a cloud of darkness. An “awful solemn fear” comes upon their captors and fellow prisoners, and a voice pierces the darkness calling the Lamanites to repentance and bidding them twice to “seek no more to destroy my servants” (vv. 28, 32). When the Lamanites inquire among themselves how they might have the darkness removed, a Nephite dissenter in the group suggests that they “cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith in Christ” (v. 41), as they had been taught previously by Nephite missionaries. When they do so, the cloud is swept away; they too are surrounded by a pillar of fire and filled with the Holy Spirit; they hear the voice of the Father blessing them with peace because of their faith in his “Well Beloved” (v. 47); and angels come and minister to them.

The narrative and verbal connections between this story and Mormon’s account of the coming of the resurrected Jesus are substantial. Both begin with menacing darkness and the discomforting shaking of the earth (Helaman 5:27; 3 Nephi 8:6). While encompassed by the mysterious darkness, a large group of people who have once been taught about Jesus Christ are emphatically invited to repent (Helaman 5:29, 32; 3 Nephi 9:13, 22). They hear a penetrating voice, described as “still” or “small,” which “did pierce even to the very soul” (Helaman 5:30; 3 Nephi
11:3). The “darkness” is “dispersed” (Helaman 5:42–43; 3 Nephi 10:9), and both groups “cast their eyes about” (Helaman 5:43; 3 Nephi 11:3) and look “from whence the voice came” (Helaman 5:48; 3 Nephi 11:5). The voice speaks three times, the third time commending the “Beloved” to its audience (Helaman 5:47; 3 Nephi 11:7). There is a pregnant moment of misapprehension (3 Nephi 9:20; 11:4, 8). When they “cast up their eyes again,” heavenly emissaries “come down out of heaven” and minister to them (Helaman 5:48; 3 Nephi 11:8).

It is noteworthy that Mormon here chooses to undergird his composition with a proleptic narrative rather than with his more customary use of prophecy. But his employment of allusions to the Lamanite prison episode demonstrates (albeit subtly) that the Nephite survivors took to heart both Jesus’s invitation and the historical example he proffered. Jesus offers this “more righteous” Nephite remnant a real choice, just as Samuel, the Lamanite prophet, had offered the people of Zarahemla a generation before (see Helaman 14:30–31). Surrounded by divinely dispatched darkness and destruction, they can repent of their sins and “choose life” by spiritually coming unto him as the Lamanites had before them. By doing so, they would be blessed not only with the forgiveness, healing, gathering, salvation, and community in the kingdom of God that the Redeemer’s mission entailed but also with the extraordinary blessings that the converted Lamanites had received: the dispersion of darkness, the change of mourning into joy, hearing the voice of the Father, being baptized with fire and the Holy Spirit, and being ministered to by angels. “But if not,” the Savior tells them, “the places of your dwellings shall become desolate” (3 Nephi 10:7; see Helaman 15:1), and the Lord’s physical coming to the Nephites would be forestalled.

Moroni, Mormon’s son and the last contributor to the Book of Mormon record, later articulates what is perhaps the most significant connection between the two episodes:

For it was by faith that Christ showed himself unto our fathers, after he had risen from the dead; and he showed not himself unto them until after they had faith in him. . . . But because of the faith of
men he has shown himself unto the world and glorified the name of the Father. (Ether 12:7–8)

Moroni continues, drawing his evidence from explicit statements of both the Father and the Son: “It was the faith of Nephi and Lehi that wrought the change upon the Lamanites, that they were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost” (Ether 12:14). For the argument here, however, the divine voices (more generously than Moroni’s summary) attribute the bestowal of the Holy Ghost to the faith of the converted Lamanites rather than to that of the Nephite prophets. Just as the Father commends the three hundred participants: “Peace, peace be unto you, because of your faith in my Well Beloved” (Helaman 5:47), Jesus’s voice in the darkness likewise explains that the Lamanites were blessed “because of their faith in me at the time of their conversion” (3 Nephi 9:20).

The coming of the resurrected Lord, then, to the righteous Nephites was the result of an interplay between divine action and human agency. The judgments that came upon the Nephites at the time of Jesus’s death, as well as the Lord’s subsequent offer of salvation, were unconditional, but whether this salvation would be brought to fruition was dependent on the Nephites’ faith in Christ. Mormon’s extended allusion to the Lamanite prison conversion teaches that Christ’s physical coming to the Nephites was necessarily preceded by their first spiritually coming unto him.

Interestingly, Mormon’s account of the coming of the Lord to the Nephites also includes verbal connections to New Testament accounts of two of Jesus’s postresurrection appearances in Jerusalem. The first, in 3 Nephi 11:5, indicates that just prior to Jesus’s descent, the Nephites “did look steadfastly towards heaven,” a clear echo of the ascension account of Acts 1:10–11, which reports that the disciples “looked steadfastly toward heaven” as Jesus was taken up, at which point two angels tell them, “This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.” The use of identical wording to describe Jesus’s subsequent Nephite descent bears witness to the fulfillment of the angels’ words.
Finally, in 3 Nephi 11:8, we learn that Jesus came down and “stood in the midst” of the Nephite multitude, a phrase that appears in a rare parallel between Luke’s and John’s Gospels describing Jesus’s first post-resurrection appearance to his assembled apostles. In both Luke 24:36 and John 20:19 we read that “Jesus . . . stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, ‘Peace be unto you,’” following which he showed them his wounds, inviting his closest associates to allay any doubts about his identity. He does the same for the Nephite multitude, first declaring that he is Jesus Christ, the voice who had spoken to them in the darkness (compare 3 Nephi 9:15, 18 and 11:10–11), and then bidding them again, one by one this time, to come unto him and know (in words that again parallel Nephi’s vision account) that he is the God of Israel and “the whole earth” (3 Nephi 11:14; cf. 1 Nephi 11:6 and Isaiah 54:5 quoted at 3 Nephi 22:5). Brant Gardner has aptly commented on the Old and New World connections of these scenes: “In the Old World, Jesus’s death was known and his display of his wounds verified that it was indeed he who was again alive. In a contrasting parallel, in the New World he was obviously alive, while the wounds showed that he had truly died.”

The Nephites are convinced of the divinity of the resurrected Jesus by the power of his destructive judgment, by the pronouncement of God the Father, by his glorious descent, by beholding the marks of his crucifixion, and by recognizing in him the fulfillment of prophecy. It is the Savior’s own voice in the darkness that first introduces him and his mission and issues an invitation to the people: “I have come into the world to bring redemption unto the world, to save the world from sin” (3 Nephi 9:21). After he descends, Jesus repeats his introduction, “I am Jesus Christ; . . . I am the light and life of the world,” and the multitude

26. This is the identical blessing the Father bestowed on the prison-converted Lamanites in Helaman 5:47 (and the only use of this invocation in the Book of Mormon).


falls to the earth. They cry “Hosanna,” demonstrating their recognition that he alone can bring salvation, and again fall at his feet in worship, thereby acknowledging him as their king (3 Nephi 11:10–11, 17).29

The inauguration of the kingdom of God

According to Mormon’s account, the Lord dramatically intervenes in the Nephites’ affairs to both judge and save his people; and with the arrival of the resurrected Jesus at the temple in Bountiful, God’s kingdom is inaugurated upon the earth. Among the faithful, the resurrected Jesus brings into being the object of Israel’s eschatological hope. Israel’s God has returned as king in the midst of the Nephite remnant; he has defeated their enemies in the destructions of the “great storm”; and he has offered this righteous branch a return from its six-hundred-year exile by reminding his New World hearers repeatedly and emphatically of their covenant lineage and by conferring upon them a promised land for their inheritance.30

29. Matthew L. Bowen identifies the Lord’s postresurrection advent to the Nephites as an enactment of Lehi’s dream. He focuses on the importance of worshipful prostration in each and also recognizes the dependence of Mormon’s account on Nephi’s wording. See “‘They Came Forth and Fell Down and Partook of the Fruit of the Tree’: Proskynesis in 3 Nephi 11:12–19 and 17:9–10 and Its Significance,” in Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute and Deseret Book, 2012), 107–29.

30. The themes of this paragraph follow the repeated thesis of N. T. Wright’s Jesus and the Victory of God (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), expressed here in one of its many iterations: “The most important thing to recognize about the first-century Jewish use of kingdom-language is that it was bound up with the hopes and expectations of Israel. ‘Kingdom of god’ was not a vague phrase, or a cipher with a general religious aura; . . . it was simply a Jewish way of talking about Israel’s god becoming king. . . . If, then, someone were to speak to Jesus’s contemporaries of YHWH’s becoming king, we may safely assume that they would have in mind, in some form or other, [a] two-sided story concerning the double reality of exile. Israel would ‘really’ return from exile; YHWH would finally return to Zion. But if these were to happen there would have to be a third element as well: evil, usually in the form of Israel’s enemies, must be defeated. Together these three themes form the meta-narrative implicit in the language of the kingdom” (pp. 202, 206).
New Testament scholar Norman Perrin indicates that in his mortal ministry Jesus employed kingdom terminology in referring to two related eschatological expectations: “He uses it in reference to God’s decisive intervention in history and human experience, and he uses it in reference to the state secured for the redeemed by that intervention.”31 The synoptic Gospels report few details about this latter expectation. Again from Perrin, “Jesus gives no systematic account of the state of things in the glorious future,”32 and elsewhere, “Jesus looked for a future consummation of that which was begun in his ministry, but he tells nothing about the form that such a consummation would take.”33 In Christ’s Nephite ministry, many of the particulars of such a consummation of God’s kingdom are made manifest.

God the Father, in announcing Jesus’s advent to the Nephites, is presented in 3 Nephi as implicitly recognizing his Son’s sovereign relationship with this far-flung remnant of Israel. The words with which he introduces Jesus, “Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (3 Nephi 11:7), draw on two Old Testament texts, Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1; and as John P. Meier has explained in connection with the similar pronouncement made at Christ’s baptism, both passages point to the kingship of Jesus. The enthronement context of the first allusion implies that the Son of God is the promised Davidic Messiah, while the second reference suggests that he is the servant who has been appointed to “reestablish the covenant community of Israel.”34 Likewise, Jesus identifies himself to the Nephites as Israel’s shepherd (3 Nephi 15:17–16:3; 18:31; cf. Mormon 5:17), a royal symbol that N. T. Wright explains as having “deep roots in the ancient Israelite tradition of monarchy.”35 As such, he assumes the role of the Nephites’ sovereign,

31. Perrin, Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus, 60.
33. Perrin, Kingdom of God, 188.
35. Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, 645; see also pp. 533–34 for a review of Old Testament passages that include shepherd/king imagery.
claiming and blessing them as his people. He declares the fulfillment of
the law of Moses, instituting new commandments and ordinances in its
place. He establishes a church and authorizes its leaders. He bequeathes
inheritances of land. In the vacuum created by the recent disintegration
of church and government, Jesus inaugurates the kingdom of God, a po-
litical and religious realm in which his will is to be done. This new order
results in two hundred years of peace, prosperity, and social harmony
(4 Nephi 1:1–22).

But Jesus is a divine king, “the God of the whole earth,” and his
kingdom is not merely a temporal one. Among the Nephites he also
establishes his spiritual dominion, welcoming the righteous into his
presence and imparting to them the blessings of salvation. The nature
and extent of the Nephite theophany is unprecedented: here, as Lord,
Jesus personally visits thousands of the faithful, not just a single prophet
as at Sinai or indirectly via the Holy Spirit as at the Pentecost. For the
several days he is with the Nephites, he teaches, heals, and ministers. He
explicitly and repeatedly invites the multitude to enter into a relation-
ship with him, one that is characterized simultaneously by his tender
nearness and his majestic distance.36

“Come unto me” is the catchphrase with which Christ beckons the
New World faithful.37 He first issues this invitation in the darkness,
compassionately reaching out to the traumatized survivors even as he
declares his glory. He repeats the phrase when inviting the multitude
to verify the wounds of his crucifixion. Alluding to both of these un-
forgettable occasions, Jesus adds their common phrase to the Nephite
version of the Beatitudes, reiterating the centrality of a relationship with
him to the new order he has brought: “Blessed are the poor in spirit
who come unto me, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (3 Nephi 12:3;
cf. Matthew 5:3).

36. In a similar vein, Rudolf Bultmann speaks at some length about the simul-
taneous remoteness and nearness of God in Jesus and the Word (German orig., 1926;
Although “come unto me” does not appear in the Matthean Sermon on the Mount (but see Matthew 11:28), Jesus incorporates the phrase five more times in his Nephite rendition, emphasizing his sovereign invitation to the Israelite remnant and providing latter-day readers with another instance of situational irony. These additional words highlight the shift in context between two nearly identical sermons: when first given, Jesus was an itinerant preacher at the beginning of his mortal ministry speaking to an assembly of the curious; among the Nephites he speaks as Lord to an audience humbly prepared to receive him as such. As Jesus explains to the Nephite multitude the requirements of discipleship in consequence of the fulfillment of the law of Moses, he points neither to the commandments nor to the code of ethics he has just given (3 Nephi 11–14) but again to their new relationship with him. Suggesting that salvation was always to be found in his own personhood, Jesus informs them not only that “I am he that gave the law,” but “I am the law. . . . Look unto me, . . . and ye shall live” (3 Nephi 15:5, 9; cf. Mosiah 13:27–35).

After judging the wicked, Jesus’s entire Nephite ministry is one of blessing the righteous whom he has spared, who, as Mormon reports, had “great favors shown unto them, and great blessings poured out upon their heads” (3 Nephi 10:18). Jesus likewise confirms the beatific purpose of his mission: “The Father . . . sent me to bless you” (3 Nephi 20:26; cf. 4 Nephi 1:17–18). From Mormon’s narrative, the reader gathers that the following blessings are integral to Jesus’s inauguration of the kingdom, emanating from his sovereign presence among them:

- the light of his example (3 Nephi 9:18; 11:11; 15:9; 18:16)
- baptism by fire and the gift of the Holy Ghost (3 Nephi 9:20; 12:1; 19:13–14; 27:20)
- forgiveness of sin (3 Nephi 9:21; 12:2)
- prophecy and the interpretation of scripture (3 Nephi 16; 20–26)
healing (3 Nephi 9:13; 17:7–10; 26:15; cf. Isaiah 35:4–6)
mediation with the Father (3 Nephi 17:17; 19:22–24)
the blessing of children (3 Nephi 17:21–24)
the ministering of angels (3 Nephi 17:24; 19:14–15)
the unveiling of God's mysteries, especially how his covenant plan for Israel will be accomplished (3 Nephi 16:4–20; 20:10–26:5, 9–10)
redemption from death, as evidenced in the resurrection of deceased saints (3 Nephi 23:9–11); the raising of the dead (26:15); the transfiguration of the three disciples (3 Nephi 28:12–15, 37–40); and the promise of eternal life (9:14; 15:9)
and ultimately, salvation itself, as Jesus pronounces that none of those present would be lost (3 Nephi 9:22; 11:33; 27:6, 30–31)

Among the Nephites Jesus brings to fulfillment the promises left unfinished in his Palestinian ministry, revealing to these followers the content and contours of his salvific blessing. Mormon's narrative, for example, describes the realization of such messages from Jesus's kingdom parables as readiness, reconciliation, and the procurement of inestimable treasure. It also depicts the enactment of the Beatitudes, considered by many to be Jesus's clearest teaching about how things will be different in this kingdom, marked most notably—as Meier has explained—by “the reversal of sorrowing with eschatological joy and comfort.”38 In the course of his three-day ministry, Jesus acts as a just and beneficent king, bestowing quite literally upon the Nephites all of the Beatitudes’ assurances: being comforted, inheriting the earth, being filled with the Holy Ghost, obtaining mercy, seeing God, being called his children, and experiencing great joy (3 Nephi 12:3–12).

38. Meier, Marginal Jew, 330. He sees in the Beatitudes the manifestation of God as “the truly just king of the covenant community of Israel,” acting in continuity with the monarchical duties enumerated in Psalm 146:5–10—that is, defending widows and orphans, securing relief for the oppressed, and seeing that justice is done.
The resurrected Jesus explicitly reenacts in the New World many of the teachings and performances he first presented in his mortal ministry (3 Nephi 15:1; 17:8), but the Nephite enactment is more than mere repetition. The faith he encounters there stands in sharp contrast to the Jews’ prior scorn (3 Nephi 9:16), enabling him to offer the Nephite community his surpassing favor:

So great faith have I never seen among all the Jews; wherefore I could not show unto them so great miracles, because of their unbelief. Verily I say unto you, there are none of them that have seen so great things as ye have seen; neither have they heard so great things as ye have heard. (3 Nephi 19:35–36)

And now, behold, my joy is great, even unto fulness, because of you, and also this generation. (3 Nephi 27:30)

To the Nephites, the kingdom of God is indeed an entirely new state of reality—a complete legal, ecclesiastical, economic, societal, and cultural system established among them by the resurrected Lord. It is the realization of Jesus’s Old World prophecies about the imminent inauguration of a new order, and although the Nephites’ realm is ultimately an earthbound kingdom of limited duration, God’s eternal kingdom remains the object of prophetic hope, to be universally ushered in when Christ shall again “come in [his] glory with the powers of heaven” (3 Nephi 28:7). It is the good news of Isaiah 52:7, 10: “Thy God reigneth . . . and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God,” a hope that Jesus tells the Nephites both “[has] been and shall be” fulfilled (3 Nephi 23:3; cf. 16:20; 20:35). The kingdom’s final denouement will come, as Perrin has noted, “in a manner and at a time of God’s choosing,” and will include, like its Nephite precedent, “judgment, the vindication of Jesus himself, the establishment of the values of God, and the enjoyment of all the blessings to be associated with a perfect relationship with God.”

The most striking evidence, however, that the eschatological kingdom of God is to be understood as having indeed been inaugurated

among the Nephites comes again from situational irony. In altering
the version of the Sermon on the Mount taught in Galilee, the Jesus of
3 Nephi is able to communicate more to his latter-day audience than
to the assembled Nephites, by way of comparison. After instructing his
listeners on the manner of prayer, Jesus offers the following example:
“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven” (3 Nephi 13:9–10). As anyone familiar with
Matthew’s version of the Lord’s Prayer will recognize, missing from the
middle of this passage is the petition “Thy kingdom come,” presumably
because for the Nephites it already has.40

Prophecy, fulfillment, and faith
The Book of Mormon presents itself as solving a problem that has long
been troublesome to many faithful Christians. As Schweitzer informed
the world, the nonfulfillment of Jesus’s prophecies concerning the im-
minent coming of the Lord and his kingdom seemed to imply that the
Bible’s witness had left Christianity on shaky ground. We have seen, in
contrast, the firm foundation for prophecy that the Book of Mormon is
meant to supply, since many of Jesus’s eschatological predictions were
fulfilled point by point among the Nephites: from famines, wars, and
earthquakes, to the persecution of prophets, signs in the heavens, fiery
judgment, the darkening of the sun and moon, the coming of the Son of
man in glory, and the establishment of God’s kingdom upon the earth.
On the Book of Mormon’s account, all this happened within Jesus’s
own generation, just as he said it would; and it is all clearly recorded,

40. Several Book of Mormon scholars have noted the deletion of “Thy Kingdom
come” from the Nephite rendition of the Lord’s Prayer and linked it to the notion that
the kingdom was already present among the Nephites, including George Reynolds and
Janne M. Sjodahl, Commentary on the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book,
1961), 7:154; Hyrum L. Andrus, Principles of Perfection (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft,
(Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 267; Robert J. Matthews, A Bible! A Bible! (Salt
Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990), 242; and Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet,
Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992), 4:82.
despite the fact that the original prophecies are supposed to have been unknown to 3 Nephi’s editor, Mormon, and despite the fact that their fulfillment in the Book of Mormon was apparently unrecognized by its translator, Joseph Smith.\footnote{In this paper I have dealt with the New Testament on its own terms, on the assumption that the Book of Mormon has something to say to all Christians who accept the New Testament in its current form as scripture. Latter-day Saints can also look for insights to the so-called Joseph Smith Translation (a revision of the Christian Bible undertaken by Joseph Smith between 1830 and 1833), but there are serious questions as to how that revision should be interpreted. As Robert Matthews pointed out in his groundbreaking work, “A Plainer Translation”: Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible—A History and Commentary (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 273, the Joseph Smith Translation seems to be best understood as an eclectic compilation of a variety of proposed revisions: textual restorations, revealed additions, inspired commentary, and doctrinal harmonization.

From that project, however, it becomes clear that Joseph Smith was concerned about many of the same unfulfilled prophecies that have bothered other readers of the New Testament. As he made revisions to the Bible, he adjusted some of the statements concerning the generation that would witness the coming of the Son of man. He shifted the order of verses in Matthew 24, and in verse 34 he changed “this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled” to “this generation, \textit{in which these things shall be shown forth}, shall not pass away until all I have told you shall be fulfilled.” A similar revision, with language obviously borrowed from Matthew, was made at Mark 13:30, and a new phrase with a comparable harmonizing function (“\textit{this generation, the generation when the times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled, shall not pass away}”) was added to Luke 21:32. He also changed 1 Thessalonians 4:15 from “we which are alive and remain at the coming of the Lord” to “they who are alive at the coming of the Lord,” and he revised 1 Corinthians 7:29–31 so that references to the imminent end of the world are reinterpreted as advice for missionaries (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:11). Yet these changes seem somewhat ad hoc and are inconsistent with other passages that Joseph left unchanged, such as Romans 9:28; 16:20; 1 Corinthians 1:7; 4:5; 11:26; and 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 5:23.

Because the revisions just noted respond to the same theological conundrum in divergent ways, with no corroboration from Greek manuscripts, and in the end do not eliminate the difficulties (whatever Jesus may have actually said on those particular occasions, there is ample evidence that the first generation of Christians fully expected his return within their own lifetimes), I suspect that Joseph Smith was drawing in his revision upon a combination of creativity and his own prophetic sensibilities to make sense of these eschatological passages. To my mind, though, this suggests that Joseph Smith was \textit{not} the author of the Book of Mormon since his proposed revisions make it evident that he himself did not realize that 3 Nephi had already provided a solution to the problem.}
Mormon’s truth, this fulfillment does indeed, in Schweitzer’s memorable expression, “save Christianity” by confirming the validity of Jesus’s prophetic words. Jesus was not wrong, his coming was not delayed, and Christianity does not, in fact, “rest upon a fraud.”

Both Mormon and Jesus urge readers of the Book of Mormon to search the scriptures diligently in order to be assured in their faith as they recognize prophecies already fulfilled and those that will yet come to pass (3 Nephi 10:14; 23:1–5). We are shown in the narrative the fulfillment of many prophecies, both those familiar to the Nephite audience (Zenos’s, Nephi’s, and Samuel’s) and also others of which they were unaware—particularly the eschatological predictions of Jesus himself given during his mortal ministry. We are shown that prophecies are fulfilled in their literal detail (rocks “found in seams and broken fragments,” or the weeping and howling: “O that we had repented and not killed and stoned the prophets”). Some prophecies may seem contradictory (Zenos’s and Nephi’s predictions concerning precisely how the Lord would visit the Israelite remnant following his resurrection), and others appear to be genuinely unverifiable to those to whom they were given (Jesus’s “other sheep”). The 3 Nephi account of the New World eschaton repeatedly demonstrates the ultimate reliability of divine disclosure, something Wright has described as particularly characteristic of end-times, when it will be acknowledged that “God has done what he said he would do, even though it doesn’t look like what anyone had thought it would.”

Jesus tells the Nephites that answers to all kinds of questions could be forthcoming had his followers only inquired. “They understood me not,” he repeats four times when recalling the reaction of the Jews to his reference to “other sheep.” They were content with their erroneous

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42. N. T. Wright, Paul in Fresh Perspective (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 53.
assumptions, even though Jesus had a clear explanation ready. The Lord subsequently urges the Nephites not to make the same mistake: “Ponder upon the things which I have said, and ask of the Father in my name, that ye may understand” (3 Nephi 17:3). The implicit message to modern readers is to not be satisfied with superficial interpretations based on unexamined assumptions; there is much more that God is inviting people to see.

Remarkably, Mormon anticipates in his readers the very skepticism that Schweitzer voiced, foreseeing the modern age as one in which many “shall say the Lord no longer worketh by revelation or by prophecy” (3 Nephi 29:6). But he also recognizes the force of the Nephite witness in countering such latter-day skepticism, with its proclamation that the resurrected Jesus had indeed established his Messianic kingdom among Israel’s lost sheep. Latter-day readers need no longer imagine that Jesus prophesied in vain; he did not delay his coming to his generation, nor will he delay his second coming in their own times. Mormon in fact closes his account of Christ’s visit to the Nephites by prophesying of the role his own writings will play in reasserting the Lord’s faithfulness in fulfilling his promises:

When . . . these sayings shall come unto [you], . . . then ye may know that the words of the Lord, which have been spoken by his holy prophets, shall all be fulfilled; and ye need not say that the Lord delays his coming unto the children of Israel. And ye need not imagine in your hearts that the words which have been spoken are vain, for behold, the Lord will remember his covenant which he hath made. . . . And when ye shall see these sayings coming forth among you, then ye need not any longer spurn at the doings of the Lord. (3 Nephi 29:1–4)

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Christ and Krishna: The Visions of Arjuna and the Brother of Jared

Joseph M. Spencer

The Bhagavad Gita, generally regarded as the chief volume of Hindu scripture, culminates in a revelatory vision. Arjuna, hero of the Kurukshetra war, sees the true nature of his companion and fellow hero, Krishna, who, Arjuna has just learned, is actually the “birthless one,” “the Lord of all beings,” albeit manifest in human form (BhG 4.6). As the vision comes to its close, Krishna explains the unique nature of what Arjuna has seen: “By my grace toward you, Arjuna, this supreme form has been manifested through my own power . . . which has never before been seen by other than you” (BhG 11.47). Those words have a familiar ring for the reader of the Book of Mormon. In the book of Ether, included almost as an afterthought in the Nephite volume of scripture, the brother of Jared has a remarkable vision of the premortal Christ, in the course of which he is told: “And never hath I shewed myself unto

1. A shorter, preliminary version of this paper, “Introducing Comparative Scripture to Mormonism: Preliminary Thoughts,” was delivered at the meetings of the Association of Mormon Scholars in the Humanities on 15–16 March 2013. I owe thanks to two anonymous reviewers whose remarks have been helpful in shaping this paper in final form, as well—especially—to Adam Miller, who first encouraged me to look at the Gita.

man, whom I have created, for never hath man believed in me as thou hast” (Ether 3:15).³

If, as Grant Hardy has recently suggested, “the Book of Mormon belongs in the library of world scripture,” and if there are therefore “engaging comparative questions to be addressed,”⁴ there may be good reason to investigate the apparent point of contact just identified between the visions of Arjuna and of the brother of Jared. My aim here is to use a comparative framework to ask a set of questions about the Book of Mormon.⁵ My hypothesis is that when the Book of Mormon is set side by side with volumes of world scripture drawn from other religious traditions, the mainsprings and inner workings of the Book of Mormon become visible in a way they seldom are when the book is read with an eye only to the sorts of questions commonly asked in primarily studying the Book of Mormon (the sorts of questions asked when seeking spiritual guidance, attempting to decide doctrine, or hoping to establish historical facts). I am convinced that whatever can be done to allow the Book of Mormon to display not only what it says but also how it works will prove fruitful for theological reflection.⁶

In what follows, I work through three interrelated points of contact between the visions of Arjuna and the brother of Jared. In the first section of this study, I look at the way both vision narratives are presented in epic

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³. All quotations from the Book of Mormon are taken from Royal Skousen’s Yale edition, The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), which incorporates the findings of his critical text project.

⁴. See Grant Hardy, introduction to Skousen, Earliest Text, xxv–xxvi.

⁵. It is worth emphasizing that my intention in this paper is not to contribute to the literature on Hinduism. Nothing I say about the Bhagavad Gita is original, nor is it meant to be. My intention is solely to see how work in comparative scripture can bring out aspects of the Book of Mormon that might otherwise be missed.

⁶. I have preliminarily outlined what I take to be the aims and strengths of the method of comparative scripture in my unpublished paper, “Introducing Comparative Scripture to Mormonism.” The paper was written largely as an analysis and review of Jad Hatem, Postponing Heaven: The Three Nephites, the Mahdi, and the Bodhisattva, which was translated from the French by Jonathon Penny and is forthcoming from the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship. Hatem’s book is arguably the first work of comparative scripture that deals with the Book of Mormon in a substantive way.
contexts, contexts that provide conditions for the possibility of religious revolution. In the second section, I investigate in greater detail the broad similarity between the two religious revolutions in question—the Hindu turn to devotion, modeled by Arjuna, and the Jaredite/gentile turn to faith, modeled by the brother of Jared. Finally, having dealt principally with similarities, I turn in the last section to the principal difference such similarities bring into focus: the difference between the conceptions of incarnation at work in Hinduism’s Krishna and Mormonism’s Christ. Thus, along the path this study travels, I move from the aspect of the visions’ closest similarity to the point of their deepest difference. Progressively clearer as the discussion proceeds is the way the Book of Mormon presents, through Moroni’s editorial work on the record of the Jaredites, a startling message meant specifically for the book’s gentile readers—a message ultimately bound up with a certain understanding of the relationship between the divine and the flesh.7

Epic contexts and revolutionary visions

Only recently, unfortunately, have Western scholars begun to take seriously the epic context of the Bhagavad Gita.8 The Gita is not, after all,

7. As the apocalyptic vision in 1 Nephi 11–14 makes clear, by “Gentiles” the Book of Mormon understands something like “peoples of (especially Western) European descent,” regardless of whether they might have certain genealogical connections with Israel. Traditionally, Latter-day Saints—following hints in section 86 of the Doctrine and Covenants—have regarded most members of the church who claim European descent to be direct descendents of the biblical Jacob or Israel (generally through Jacob’s grandson Ephraim), but it must be recognized that the Book of Mormon makes no such accommodations. (Indeed, even though one Book of Mormon passage—2 Nephi 3:6–16—asserts the Josephite lineage of its latter-day translator, others—in particular the very title page of the book—suggest that the same translator is a Gentile.) For a helpful discussion of the development of Latter-day Saint thinking about the identity of Israel, see Rex E. Cooper, Promises Made to the Fathers: Mormon Covenant Organization (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990), 67–78.

a stand-alone text, but an excerpt from the staggeringly lengthy epic of the Mahabharata. That context is interpretively important in at least two ways. First, although statements within the Gita suggest that its primary purpose is to elucidate for the first time in the Hindu tradition the idea of religious devotion (bhakti), the force of this religious revolution is far more visible only when the Gita is read alongside other “doctrinal” conversations that take place elsewhere in the Mahabharata. Second and more directly connected with the Mahabharata’s status as epic, it is only in the context of the larger story within which the Gita appears—that the full significance of Krishna’s self-revelation can be appreciated. Bringing these two points together, it might be said that the epic context of the Gita uniquely reveals the latter for what it is: a text whose focal point is the vision of Krishna’s true nature, a vision uniquely made possible by Arjuna’s strong sense of devotion. Stripped of its epic context, however, the Gita is likely to be read reductively as a beautiful encapsulation of the teachings of earlier Hindu texts (the Upanishads in particular) that are unfortunately interrupted by the distracting account of a vision with a disappointingly popular emphasis on devotion.

It is not only Arjuna’s vision, though, that deserves to be set within its larger epic context. The same, I would argue, is true of the brother of Jared’s vision in the book of Ether. Of course, it is necessary to clarify in what sense, if any, it is appropriate to regard the book of Ether as an

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11. This is how the Gita seems to have been read by its earliest American devotees (incidentally contemporary with the appearance in America of the Book of Mormon), for example, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. See Barbara S. Miller, “Why Did Henry David Thoreau Take the Bhagavad-Gita to Walden Pond?” in The Bhagavad-Gita, trans. Barbara S. Miller (New York: Bantam, 1986), 147–54.
At first glance, it seems impossible or at least irresponsible to compare the book of Ether to epic literature, at the very least because it occupies no more than about thirty pages of text. Nonetheless, Hugh Nibley has argued with characteristic audacity that the source behind the book of Ether is in fact an epic, although it has been “divested of its epic form” by its editor-abridger. As Nibley explains, “All we have now is Moroni’s brief summary, made from a translation and interlarded with his own notes and comments. That means that all that is left to us is the gist of the [original] epic material.” The strength of this approach to the book of Ether can be seen in the way it allows Nibley to make sense of otherwise curious textual details, such as the presentation of

12. This question can, of course, be asked in two rather different registers. The scholars I discuss in this section have almost universally assumed the ancient historicity of the Book of Mormon and so have staged their arguments regarding the genre of the book of Ether by drawing on its ancient bearings. It is just as possible, of course, for the reader committed to nineteenth-century authorship of the Book of Mormon to ask whether the book of Ether is presented to its readers as an abridged epic. Indeed, the epic nature of the book of Ether would be all the more apparent to those uninterested in the Book of Mormon’s claims to an ancient origin.


14. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 408. He further explains, “Our editor, Moroni, admits the damage. . . . He says that the men of his day were conspicuously lacking in the peculiar literary gifts of those who wrote the original book of Ether: ‘Behold, thou hast not made us mighty in writing like unto the brother of Jared;’ he says, for thou madest him that the things which he wrote were mighty even as thou art, unto the overpowering of man to read them’ (Ether 12:24). . . . Moroni in editing Ether is keenly aware of his inability to do justice to the writing before him.” Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 406. Brant Gardner has highlighted the potential importance of the fact that Moroni would have been working with an already-extant translation of the Jaredite story (that was produced, according to Mosiah 28:11–19, by King Mosiah, son of Benjamin). See Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2007), 6:152–54, 159–63, 170, and so forth. In a similar vein, Grant Hardy has shown that Moroni’s editorial hand was relatively heavy in his treatment of the Jaredites. See Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 235–40.
the brother of Jared as “a large and a mighty man” and “a man highly favored of the Lord” (Ether 1:34). Explaining this passage, Nibley notes that the epic hero “has almost superhuman, but never supernatural, strength, and yet from time to time he receives supernatural aid.”

15 On Nibley’s reading of the book of Ether, the brother of Jared is as much a hero whose constant companion is a god as is Arjuna in the Gita.

Nibley’s interpretation is not without potential problems, of course. David Honey has raised important criticisms about whether the genre of epic is really applicable to the book of Ether. To this end, he quotes Robert Alter as saying that “there could be no proper epic poetry, with its larger-than-life human figures and its deities conceived in essentially human terms,” in properly biblical literature (and the Book of Mormon would presumably constitute properly biblical literature, given its claim to have originated in sixth-century Jerusalem). This criticism, however, fails to meet its mark, given Hardy’s remarkable and entirely convincing argument regarding the ultimately nonbiblical, even non–Judeo-Christian flavor of the book of Ether, except where Moroni as the narrative’s editor explicitly interrupts the abridgment with his own, Christian concerns. At any rate, I have already pointed out that the


16. This constancy is interrupted in the Jaredite narrative for the significant period of four years, during which the brother of Jared “remembered not to call upon the name of the Lord” (Ether 2:14), and one might suggest that this interruption renders problematic any claim that the brother of Jared had a god as his constant companion. In response, however, it might be observed that the period of noncontact is reported in the text only in passing—in fact, only in the subordinate clause of a sentence primarily meant to indicate the Lord’s reinitiation of contact with the brother of Jared. Since to claim that the story of the brother of Jared is an epic is to say something about the way the text presents its story (rather than about what lay historically behind that story), the brevity with which the narrator reports the period of noncontact makes the constancy of contact between the brother of Jared and the Lord a real motif of the story.


strength of Nibley’s interpretation lies in the way it helps to account precisely for the “larger-than-life” nature of the brother of Jared as a character, and it should be said that what is so remarkable about the brother of Jared’s vision is in part the fact that in it the Lord is presented as “essentially human,” albeit only in form.²⁰ It thus seems best to follow Nibley’s interpretation, assuming that especially the first chapters of the book of Ether—the story of the brother of Jared—should be read as a highly condensed epic, an epic “divested of its epic form.”

As it turns out, epic context is just as important to the interpretation of the book of Ether as it is to that of the Bhagavad Gita. It is only when Krishna’s revelations to Arjuna in the Gita are compared to his other revelations in the Mahabharata that the uniqueness of his emphasis on devotion in the Gita becomes clear. Similarly, it is only when the words of the Lord to the brother of Jared in Ether 3 are compared with the remainder of the book of Ether that one can recognize the startlingly unique nature of the brother of Jared’s experience.²¹ It is this point of connection between the visions of Arjuna and the brother of Jared that I will investigate in the second part of this study. Further, the shock of Krishna’s true identity and nature can only be felt when one considers his (relatively) this-worldly nature before that point in the story recounted in the Mahabharata. Similarly, the shock the brother of Jared experiences when seeing the finger and then the body of the Lord—as of flesh and bone—derives its force from the self-presentation of the Lord before that point in the story of the Jaredites. I will investigate this point

²⁰ Honey’s other two major criticisms—(1) that Nibley wrongly argues that epics “tell the truth” and (2) that Nibley fails to recognize that epics focus on the story of only one great hero, not on a succession of heroes like that in the book of Ether—also fail to call Nibley’s interpretation seriously into question, at least as I am appropriating it here. Honey, it seems to me, simply misunderstands the nature of Nibley’s claim about how epics “tell the truth,” and while his point about the difference between the singular focus of the epic and the plural focus of the book of Ether is well taken, there is nothing in his argument to suggest that the book of Ether does not open with an epic: the story of the brother of Jared.

²¹ See Hardy, Understanding the Book of Mormon, 235–40.
of connection (and divergence) between the visions of Arjuna and the brother of Jared in the third part of this study.

Before turning to these details, however, I might draw a general principle that could be culled from the shared importance of epic context to the two scriptural texts I am here considering. In each case, it is only because the vision takes place in a larger narrative in which the hero has a divine figure as his constant companion that what is revealed in the hero’s vision can have the kind of forceful impact it does. The sustained length and wealth of detail characteristic of the epic (however truncated in the case of the abridged book of Ether), combined with the almost-casual companionship with deity typical of epic heroes, establish a generally stable order that is always ready to be overturned by a self-revelation of the divine. The epic is thus uniquely suited to present a vision as the start of a revolution (an overturning of an established and generally stable order) in religion. Even if the book of Ether is an epic “divested of its epic form,” enough traces of the original remain to convey the transformative force of what takes place during the brother of Jared’s vision.

Devotion and faith

I have pointed out that it is only when Krishna’s teachings to Arjuna in the Gita are compared to his other teachings in the Mahabharata that the uniqueness of his emphasis on devotion in the Gita becomes clear. I have suggested that something not unlike this phenomenon is also at work in the narrative of the brother of Jared’s vision from the book of Ether. But where the Gita employs the visionary experience to introduce the practice of devotion as a hitherto generally unrecognized approach to God, the book of Ether employs the visionary experience to introduce faith as a hitherto generally unrecognized approach to God.

22. Of course, there is a sense in which it would be inappropriate to speak of an almost-casual relationship between the brother of Jared and the Lord. The significance of the book of Ether’s transformation of this feature is analyzed in the third section of this study.
In each case, what takes place in the course of the hero’s vision is an event that renders possible a kind of religious revolution—the explicit recognition and subsequent promulgation of a religious practice that provides a novel means of access to the divine.\textsuperscript{23} In each instance, the religious practice in question both leads to the vision’s occurrence in the first place (the figure in question approaches the divine in a unique way) and subsequently establishes a model for others (the story of the vision’s occurrence is to be repeated so that others will follow the approach of the figure in question).

This “revolutionary” aspect of the Bhagavad Gita is generally recognized. The purpose of Arjuna’s vision is to reveal his already-existent devotion (\textit{bhakti}), to clarify that devotion is the key to approaching Krishna, and to encourage acting without attachment to the fruits of action.\textsuperscript{24} The way this unfolds over the course of the Gita, however, deserves some exposition.

In the first half of the Gita, Krishna expounds to Arjuna through a philosophical dialogue the two hitherto recognized (and therefore traditional) paths that lead to the Hindu ideal of detachment: the path of action (\textit{karmayoga}) and the path of knowledge (\textit{jñānayoga}). This dialogue is, however, interrupted at key points by subtle hints on Krishna’s part that he is not exactly human, as follows: (1) In the fourth teaching, Krishna mentions almost in passing that he had delivered his doctrine (his “ancient yoga”) to Vivasvat long before he ever delivered it to Arjuna (BhG 4.1–3). When Arjuna, confused, points out that Krishna’s “birth was later, the birth of Vivasvat earlier” (BhG 4.4), Krishna explains for the first time in the epic that he is “birthless” and his nature “imperishable” since he is “the Lord of all beings” (BhG 4.6). (2) In the

\textsuperscript{23} By the term \textit{religious revolution}, I mean to refer to a transformation of religious practice or belief, internal to a particular religious tradition, that begins from the singular experience of an individual but that subsequently spreads widely among adherents to the religion in question.

seventh teaching, Krishna returns to this theme, explaining further the complex distinction between his “material” or “inferior nature” on display to Arjuna throughout the Mahabharata, and his “higher nature,” which Arjuna would subsequently witness in his vision (BhG 7.4–5).

(3) In the ninth teaching, Krishna goes on to say more about his two natures, explaining how the relation (or nonrelation) between them allows him to act (to intervene in human affairs) without attachment (see BhG 9.5–9), thus providing a model for those who would approach him in devotion.

These increasingly insistent interruptions eventually spark Arjuna’s devoted desire to ask for the vision he receives: “You have spoken about the highest secret known as the supreme Self. . . . Thus, as you have described yourself, O supreme Lord, I desire to see your divine form, O supreme spirit. If you think it possible for me to see this, O Lord of yogins, then show me your imperishable Self” (BhG 11.1, 3–4).

After the remarkable experience concludes, Krishna explains the role that devotion has played in the granting of the vision: “Not through study of the Vedas, not through austerity, not through gifts, and not through sacrifice can I be seen in this form as you have beheld me. By undistracted devotion alone can I be known, and be truly seen in this form, and be entered into, Arjuna. He who . . . is devoted to me, . . . comes to me, Arjuna” (BhG 11.53–55). Here, as Krishna states, it is uniquely because of Arjuna’s devotion that he has been granted his vision and so has come to know the true nature of the divine. Moreover, Krishna stresses the remarkable power of devotion, which can apparently transform even the reprobate: “If even the evil doer worships me with undivided devotion, he is to be thought of as righteous, for he has indeed rightly resolved. Quickly he becomes virtuous and goes to

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everlasting peace” (BhG 9.30–31). Thus, if Arjuna is the first in his age to see Krishna’s true form, it is apparently because he is the first in his age to fully exemplify devotion. In this sense, Arjuna’s vision marks a religious revolution.

Moreover, the exemplary nature of Arjuna’s experience must not be missed. The point of the Gita’s recounting Arjuna’s vision is unmistakably didactic: to ensure that hearers or readers of the Gita will see in Arjuna a model of devotion, which all who wish to achieve the ideal of detachment must pursue if they are to purge the two already-known paths (of action and knowledge) of every trace of egoism. Religious revolution is, after all, really possible only if the force of a revolutionizing revelatory event is communicated to those who did not witness its original occurrence. It is thus significant that, in the whole of the Gita, it is only in the telling of Arjuna’s vision that the narrator interrupts the dialogue. The sudden (and unique) reminder that this event is being recounted helps the hearer or reader to recognize the importance of recounting the story, of ensuring that it is told again and again. The Gita presents not merely a story to be enjoyed, but a model to be followed.

The model to be followed is a model that expands the scope of Hindu religion. The paths of action and knowledge seem, for the most part, to make detachment possible only for ascetics and philosophers, for those who could renounce life as it is usually lived. Krishna, however, is quick to emphasize in his conversation with Arjuna that devotion marks the universality of the Hindu ideal: “They who take refuge in me [through devotion], Arjuna, even if they are born of those whose wombs are evil (i.e., those of low origin), women, Vaishyas, even

27. Ithamar Theodore nonetheless argues that, contrary to certain widespread interpretations, this turn to devotion is not a turn to populism or vulgar religion, but rather a raising of the stakes of the traditional paths of action and knowledge. See Ithamar Theodore, Exploring the “Bhagavad-Gītā”: Philosophy, Structure and Meaning (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 85–86.

28. Perhaps importantly, the narrator is described in the Gita as having the same gift of “divine sight” granted to Arjuna in the course of his vision. See Malinar, “Bhagavadgītā,” 166–67.
Shudras, also go to the highest goal” (BhG 9.32).29 In Angelika Malinar’s words, “Rarely considered social sectors like women, traders, and servants are invited to practice bhakti and gain liberation. Regardless of status and achievements, this god [Krishna] cares for everyone.”30 Arjuna’s vision thus introduces an approach to God that uniquely expanded the possibilities of religion to those formerly excluded. Detachment is not the prerogative only of those who experience a kind of call; it is open to all who would approach the divine in devotion.

Such is the development of the theme of devotion in the Bhagavad Gita. How does all this compare to the role faith plays in the vision of the brother of Jared? Although commentators generally overlook the point, Moroni explicitly presents the brother of Jared’s vision as introducing or illustrating—as Hardy puts it—“a particular path to religious knowledge.”31 The significance of this introduction or illustration to the larger project of the Book of Mormon is crucial, even if it is universally missed.32 Like the development of the theme of devotion in the Gita, it calls for detailed comment.

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29. Vaishyas are members of the third caste in the Hindu caste system. Shudras are members of the fourth, or lowest, caste.

30. See Malinar, “Bhagavadgītā,” 155. Malinar goes on: “However, this does not mean that one has to strive less, since devotion has to be enacted in a practice demanding a high degree of self-control and detachment.” Malinar, “Bhagavadgītā,” 155–56. See also Theodore, Exploring the “Bhagavad-Gītā,” 85–86; and Doniger, Hindus, 360. Doniger, in one passage, goes still further than others, suggesting that the rise of devotion marked less a universalization than a reversal: “The gender stereotype of women as gentle, sacrificing, and loving became the new model for the natural worshiper, replacing the gender stereotype of men as intelligent, able to understand arcane matters, and responsible for handing down the lineage of the texts. The stereotypes remained the same but were valued differently. And so men imitated women in bhakti, and women took charge of most of the family’s religious observances. At the same time, a new image, perhaps even a new stereotype, arose of a woman who defied conventional society in order to pursue her personal religious calling.” Doniger, Hindus, 353.

31. Hardy, Understanding the Book of Mormon, 241. In my view, Hardy’s emphasis on knowledge is too narrow, as my own reading will show.

32. So far as I have been able to find, only Hardy recognizes the possibility that there is something of real significance at work in the brother of Jared’s exemplary
According to a reading I have worked out at great length elsewhere, Mormon, chief editor of the book called by his name, appears to have constructed his history of Lehi’s children with the aim of revealing the importance that should be granted to their rootedness in the covenant given to Abraham and Sarah in the biblical book of Genesis.\textsuperscript{33} Beginning with Nephi’s apocalyptic version of his father’s dream of the tree of life (see especially 1 Nephi 13–14) and culminating in the visiting Christ’s complicated midrashim on texts from Micah and Isaiah (see especially 3 Nephi 20–21), the Book of Mormon is from start to finish meant “to shew unto the remnant of the house of Israel how great things the Lord hath done for their fathers, and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever.”\textsuperscript{34} From the very start of the Book of Mormon, moreover, the prayers of its prophetic figures are that “if it should so be that . . . the Nephites should fall into transgression and by any means be destroyed and the Lamanites should not be destroyed that the Lord God would preserve a record of . . . the Nephites, . . . that it might be brought forth some future day unto the Lamanites, that perhaps they might be brought unto salvation” (Enos 1:13).\textsuperscript{35}

The Book of Mormon thus presents itself as a kind of letter written by an ancient covenant people and addressed to a modern covenant people, from the Nephites to the Lamanites. And the letter carriers, the

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\textsuperscript{34} These words come from the title page of the Book of Mormon, here quoted from Skousen’s edition.

\textsuperscript{35} The Lord’s response to this particular prayer in Enos 1:18 makes clear that this was the desire quite generally of the prophets of the first generations of Nephites: “Thy fathers have also required of me this thing. And it shall be done unto them according to their faith, for their faith was like unto thine.” The collective prayers referred to here are what are called in Nephi’s writings “the prayers of the faithful” (see, for instance, 2 Nephi 26:15). Importantly, this particular vision of things continues—however marginally and however disconnected from its original covenantal bearings—throughout the whole of the Nephite record, as can be seen from sermons like those of Alma the Younger in Alma 9 and Samuel the Lamanite in Helaman 15.
people assigned to ensure that the book arrives at its destination, are the Gentiles—specifically, it seems, those of European descent situated in the Americas and profoundly shaped by the terrifically complicated history of Christianity in Europe. This last detail, the role to be played by the Gentiles in the historical unfolding of the Abrahamic covenant, is one Mormon seems to have been content to make known through his abridgment and arrangement of the Nephite record. His son, Moroni, however, appears to have been a good deal more concerned about this particular detail—worried, at his most anxious moments, that the Gentiles were as likely as not to prevent the delivery of the letter to its rightful addressees. This anxiety seems to have motivated Moroni’s interest in the story of the Jaredites, as well as to have determined his (heavy-handed) editorial style in abridging and annotating that story. What seems to have interested—if not obsessed—him is the fact that the Jaredites, in Hardy’s words, “were not even of the House of Israel and thus had no part in the covenants and promises that were so central to the Nephites’ conception of themselves and their role in God’s plan for human history.” In other words, what seems to have interested Moroni in the story of the Jaredites is what they had in common with the Gentiles: their noncovenantal status.

36. See especially 1 Nephi 13, as well as note 7 above. 37. See on this point Hardy’s crucial discussion in Understanding the Book of Mormon, 217–47. On the theological stakes of Moroni’s eventual overcoming of this anxiety, see Adam S. Miller, “A Hermeneutics of Weakness,” in Rube Goldberg Machines: Essays in Mormon Theology (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2012), 99–105. 38. Hardy, Understanding the Book of Mormon, 229. That the Book of Mormon does not present the Jaredites as Israelites is clear from the fact that it traces their origins to the confounding of languages at Babel, that is, to an event that the biblical narrative presents as having preceded the calling of Abraham and the election of his children. 39. William Hamblin has suggested to me that certain details in Ether 1 suggest that the Jaredites were Sethites and so would have fallen within what other Mormon scripture presents as the covenant lineage stretching from Adam to Abraham. This is an entirely viable reading of the text. At the same time, however, it must be noted that the Book of Mormon generally does not recognize a pre-Abrahamic covenant (the only possible exception is Helaman 8:18) and that Moroni is remarkably explicit about comparing the Jaredites of the ancient world to the Gentiles of the modern world.
The story of the brother of Jared has to be seen through the lens of the covenant. Moroni presents the brother of Jared as, one might say, the non-Israelite, the exemplary non-Israelite, and thus the model for every Gentile. This presentation becomes particularly clear when Moroni explains the absence in the published record of most of what the brother of Jared saw in his vision. Moroni did indeed “write them” in the plates, but, he says, he was “commanded” to “seal them up” (Ether 4:5). He then explains:

The Lord saith unto me: They shall not go forth unto the Gentiles until the day that they shall repent of their iniquity and become clean before the Lord. And in that day that they [the Gentiles] shall exercise faith in me, saith the Lord, even as the brother of Jared did, that they may become sanctified in me, then will I manifest unto them the things which the brother of Jared saw, even to the unfolding unto them all my revelations, saith Jesus Christ. (Ether 4:6–7)

Here the link between the Gentiles more generally—those who might potentially keep the Book of Mormon from its intended audience by ignoring its covenantal foundation—and the brother of Jared is made perfectly clear. If the Gentiles would develop the appropriate sort of relationship to God, they must follow the example of the non-Israelite, the brother of Jared. His model of approaching God, his way of “exercis[ing] faith,” is apparently the properly non-Israelite approach to God, the properly non-Israelite exercise of faith.

This, the reader of the Book of Mormon is meant to understand, is why Moroni decided to give his attention to the brother of Jared. Like the Bhagavad Gita’s narrator, Moroni carefully interrupts his narrative of an unprecedented vision to ensure that his audience would recognize how the story is meant to model a particular approach to the divine. This intent is highlighted in the passage of Ether that most clearly mirrors the account of Arjuna’s vision, cited at the outset of this paper: “And never hath I shewed myself unto man, whom I have created, for never hath man believed in me as thou hast” (Ether 3:15). It is the stark uniqueness of the brother of Jared’s faith that makes his approach to God exemplary.
Interpretation of Ether 3:15 in the literature has largely focused on the apparent contradiction between the Lord’s claim in this passage that he had never “shewed [him]self unto man” and passages elsewhere in uniquely Mormon scripture that refer to antediluvian (and therefore pre-Jaredite) appearances of the Lord to mortal human beings.40 Primarily concerned to reconcile passages from distinct scriptural texts in the name of doctrinal consistency, interpreters have largely overlooked what seems to be the primary point of the Lord’s words—namely, that his appearance was unique in responding to a unique sort of faith. This latter interpretation has, however, been set forth by at least two readers of the Book of Mormon: Daniel Ludlow and Jeffrey Holland. The latter makes the case especially forcefully, paraphrasing Ether 3:15 as follows: “Never have I showed myself unto man in this manner, without my volition, driven solely by the faith of the beholder.” Holland explains:

As a rule, prophets are invited into the presence of the Lord, are bidden to enter his presence by him and only with his sanction. The brother of Jared, on the other hand, seems to have thrust himself through the veil, not as an unwelcome guest but perhaps technically as an uninvited one. . . . The only way that faith could be so remarkable was its ability to take the prophet, uninvited, where others had been able to go only with God’s bidding.41


This interpretation helps reveal the stark contrast between the brother of Jared, the father of the noncovenant people to which Moroni would draw the attention of his gentile readers, and Abraham, the father of the covenant people on which the rest of the Book of Mormon focuses. Where Abraham is definitively the called one, the one who—unlike Adam before him—responded to God’s call with “Here am I!” (see especially Genesis 22:1, 7, 11), the brother of Jared is the uncalled or unbidden but nonetheless faithful one. As a model for the similarly uncalled Gentiles, the brother of Jared displays a sort of non-Abrahamic faith that, if imitated by Gentiles generally, can result in “the unfolding [of] all [of God’s] revelations” (Ether 4:7).

According to Moroni, it might be noted, the prospects are bleak for the Gentiles if they refuse to follow the revolutionary religious pattern established by the brother of Jared. While a remnant of covenant Israel remains at the end of Nephite history—the remnant to which the Book of Mormon itself is to be delivered to inform them of their covenantal status—nothing of the noncovenantal Jaredites remains at the end of their sad history. For the Gentiles, it seems, Moroni sees two options: faith like the brother of Jared or annihilation without survivors. Indeed, Moroni states this point straightforwardly at the outset of his abridgment of the Jaredite record: “This cometh unto you, O ye Gentiles, . . . that ye may not bring down the fulness of the wrath of God upon you as the inhabitants of the land hath hitherto done” (Ether 2:11).42

The parallels between Arjuna’s devotion and the brother of Jared’s faith are striking. Each in its epic setting essentially produces a startling revelation of the divine, a situation in which the divine figure responds favorably to a request to reveal his true nature. And each is then confirmed as exemplary and presented as a model to be followed. Both mark a kind of revolution in religion, linked in each case with an expansion of the possibility of approaching the divine—in the case

42. Don Bradley suggested to me that this message would have been all the more stark had the book of Moroni not been—unexpectedly, according to the text (see Moroni 1:1)—added at the end of the volume. Had the original plan been followed, the Book of Mormon would have concluded with the utter annihilation of the gentile Jaredites.
of devotion, from ascetics and philosophers to all who would achieve detachment, and in the case of faith, from the covenant people of God to all peoples. To a remarkable extent, then, Arjuna’s devotion and the brother of Jared’s faith, as each is connected to the self-revelation of the divine, run parallel to each other. It would, however, be a mistake to regard the two texts as identical. Indeed, their broad similarity is precisely what allows their significant—and fascinating—differences to become quite clear. I turn, then, to what seems to me the starkest difference between the visions of Arjuna and the brother of Jared.

Krishna and Christ

I pointed out earlier in this paper that the shock of Krishna’s true identity and nature can only be felt when one considers his appearing as fully human in the Mahabharata before his self-revelation to Arjuna. I further suggested that something similar to this is also at work in the narrative of the brother of Jared’s vision from the book of Ether. All the similarities I have traced thus far in this paper—along with other similarities that might yet be culled from comparing the texts—culminate in this most startling similarity of all: that both transformative visions, set in their respective epic contexts, turn on the question of incarnation. That the similarity between the two texts goes even that far is surprising. And yet it is at this point in each story—Krishna’s self-revelation to Arjuna and Christ’s self-revelation to the brother of Jared—that the differences between the book of Ether and the Bhagavad Gita, and perhaps between Mormonism and Hinduism more generally, can most clearly be seen. These differences are centered, first and foremost, in the radical difference or even opposition between each scriptural text’s conception of divine incarnation. There is, of course, a large literature comparing the incarnational doctrines of the New Testament and the Bhagavad Gita.43

My interest, however, is in the unique contribution that might be made to that discussion when Mormonism is introduced into the mix.

Relatively early in the Gita—specifically at the moment when Arjuna first begins to realize that Krishna is no mere mortal—Krishna explains his reasons for taking on human form: “Whenever a decrease of social order exists, Arjuna, and there is a rising up of social disorder, then I manifest myself. For the protection of the good and the destruction of evil doers, for the sake of establishing social order, I am born in every age” (BhG 4.7–8). In order to intervene among human beings, always with an eye to establishing or restoring social order, Krishna assumes the flesh. Importantly, he apparently always does so in a way that entirely obscures his divine nature. Krishna thus comes among human beings as a human being, but in order, somewhat craftily, to establish a devoted friendship with a choice person (in this case, Arjuna) and then to await the appropriate moment for revealing his eternal nature to this devotee—thereby making clear for all the best way to approach the divine. His incarnation has to obscure his true nature so that his plan to revolutionize religion, if such it might be called, can come to fruition.

How, though, does Krishna go about assuming the flesh? This is a difficult question, given the complicated details Krishna himself outlines concerning the relationship between his two natures, his material or inferior nature and his eternal or higher nature. Helpfully, though, Malinar explains that incarnation

is possible because [Krishna] makes the power of creation (prakṛti, 4.6) act according to his will and produce an outward form for him. . . . The already detached self [of Krishna] deliberately turns to the realm of prakṛti, activates it and yet manages to stay in control. When in this position, a god, like a successful yogin, is

44. I have slightly modified Sargeant’s translation here, replacing “righteousness” with “social order” and “unrighteousness” with “social disorder” to reflect better the scope of the Sanskrit dharma and adharma. See the discussion in Malinar, “Bhagavadgītā,” 99.
still connected to prakṛti, but already “liberated” from any egoistic appropriation of its manifestations.  

In other words, in his self-manifestation, Krishna’s “apparitional body (māyā) . . . is not connected to his eternal self, which remains forever unborn and detached.” Consequently, Krishna’s incarnation is occasional rather than programmatic, contingent and local rather than necessary and global. His incarnation is a means to an end—specifically, to establishing or restoring social order through a well-timed self-revelation to one who has developed devotion—an end from which he nonetheless remains constitutively detached.

Because being incarnated, or veiled in flesh, is for Krishna a means to an end, in particular because the end in question has to be said to be a drawing aside of the veil of flesh assumed in incarnation, the heaviest emphasis in Arjuna’s vision lies not on incarnation as such, but on the nonincarnational reality the incarnation allows Krishna to reveal to his devotee. The emphasis, in other words, is not on the immanence of the embodied divine so much as on the transcendence of the unembodied divine. The miracle of Arjuna’s relationship with Krishna is not that a mere human is, thanks to the mystery of incarnation, unwittingly accompanied by a divine figure. Rather, the miracle is that that relationship, because it rises to the level of devotion, allows a mere human to witness the true nature of his divine companion. Incarnation is more the setting of the miracle of the Gita than the miracle itself. Certainly, what Krishna aims to reveal to Arjuna is not the fact of incarnation, remarkable as that fact may be, but the divine model of detachment, the

45. Malinar, “Bhagavadgītā,” 95–96; see also the discussion at 148: “This distinction is the basis of the theological doctrine of the god’s simultaneous presence in and distance from the world. This distinction demonstrates the specific character of Kṛṣṇa’s power, which is referred to as the yoga that is ‘majestic,’ mighty, indicative of his being both the sovereign of all beings and the master of prakṛti. While the existence of the world depends on him, his ‘self’ and thus he himself does not depend on the world.”

46. Malinar, “Bhagavadgītā,” 128. Krishna is himself careful to distinguish this form of incarnation from other forms offered in the Hindu tradition. See BhG 7.24–25, as well as the helpful commentary in Malinar, “Bhagavadgītā,” 134.
absolute transcendence of the divine self. Krishna's assumption of the flesh is, it seems, a condition for the possibility of that revelation taking place, but it is not what that revelation is actually intended to reveal.

Incarnation is equally essential to the brother of Jared's experience, but in an almost inverse manner. The epic of the Mahabharata provides the larger setting in which Krishna can fully conceal his divine nature until the right moment, nonetheless accompanying Arjuna as his devoted friend throughout the story. The first chapters of the book of Ether, however, provide the epic setting in which the Lord accompanies the brother of Jared (and his kin) as the transcendent Lord until he, when the moment is right, reveals his nature as enfleshed (albeit through what he calls “the body of [his] spirit”; Ether 3:16). Where Arjuna's companion is an unmistakably flesh-and-blood human being who eventually reveals himself to be a kind of mask for the entirely nonhuman transcendent, the brother of Jared's companion is the unmistakably nonhuman transcendent that eventually reveals himself to be (destined to become) a flesh-and-blood human being. If incarnation is a means to the end of revealing the transcendent in the Gita, transcendence is a means to the end of revealing the incarnate in the book of Ether. Obviously, the details deserve attention.

Throughout the opening narrative of the book of Ether, as I have just said, it is the Lord in his transcendence who is the brother of Jared's companion. Early in the brother of Jared's travels, “the Lord came down and talked with [him],” but only “in a cloud and the brother of Jared saw him not” (Ether 2:4). From that point in the narrative, the Lord “did go before” Jared and his fellow travelers as they journeyed, always “talk[ing] with them as he stood in a cloud” (Ether 2:5). Later, when the brother of Jared earns a rebuke from the Lord, the Lord “came again unto the brother of Jared and stood in a cloud and talked with him” (Ether 2:14). Although the brother of Jared seems to be in constant contact with the Lord throughout this narrative, it is always with the Lord as a disembodied figure from the beyond, an invisible being whose presence can only be figured as a cloud. Perhaps the text's constant references to the Lord's standing in the cloud suggest something of his
corporeal nature, but there is no indication that the brother of Jared saw in the cloud anything other than the mark of divine transcendence. And, as will be seen, the report of the brother of Jared’s vision indicates unawareness of any immanent corporeality on God’s part.

At any rate, the shock of the brother of Jared’s vision comes when he sees the Lord (as if) enfleshed: “And the veil was taken from off the eyes of the brother of Jared, and he saw the finger of the Lord. And it was as the finger of a man, like unto flesh and blood, and the brother of Jared fell down before the Lord, for he was struck with fear” (Ether 3:6). When the vision comes to its culmination and the veil—here, apparently, the veil of transcendence—is entirely removed for the brother of Jared, the Lord reveals to him his body: “Behold, this body which ye now behold is the body of my spirit. . . . And even as I appear unto thee to be in the spirit will I appear unto my people in the flesh” (Ether 3:16). Where Arjuna is given to see beyond the veil of the visible and corporeal into the transcendent unimaginable, the brother of Jared is given to see beyond the veil of the transcendent unimaginable and so to come face-to-face with the visible and corporeal.

Particularly revealing here is the difference between what Arjuna and the brother of Jared respectively see with their own eyes. When Krishna prepares Arjuna to see his higher nature, he explains: “But you are not able to see me with your own eyes. I give to you a divine eye” (BhG 11.8). Fascinatingly, even this divine eye is not enough to make Arjuna comfortable with the experience; it is not long before he begs to be released from the vision: “Having seen that which has never been seen before, I am delighted, and yet my mind trembles with fear. Show me that form, O God, in which you originally appeared. Have mercy” (BhG 11.45). Even with the divine sight, Arjuna can only look upon Krishna’s true nature for a short time. Things could not be more different with the brother of Jared. There is no mention at all in Ether 3 of the brother of Jared receiving some kind of borrowed divine power to see what he sees, which is all the more striking given the fact that other uniquely Mormon scriptural texts suggest that others had to have
some kind of divine assistance in order to endure the presence of God.\textsuperscript{47} What sets the climactic moment of the brother of Jared’s vision in motion is the mortal’s almost irreverent (because almost insultingly banal) command to Christ, “Shew thyself unto me” (Ether 3:10).

This reversal of Arjuna’s experience in the brother of Jared’s vision is most suggestive. Indeed, it is here that all the similarities between the Bhagavad Gita and the book of Ether highlight what might be their starkest point of contrast. Although there are, as many scholars have argued, striking parallels between the incarnation of Krishna in the Gita and the incarnation of Christ in the New Testament (particularly as it is understood in the Gospel of John), Mormonism, at least as it is represented by the book of Ether, complicates things.\textsuperscript{48} For Mormonism, Christ’s incarnation might be said to be something more like the full realization of Christ’s nature than his willing condescension from that nature. That is, the Christ of the book of Ether does not only temporarily take on flesh and bone; it is his aim and his intention to take on flesh and bone from the beginning, long before his birth as Jesus of Nazareth. A certain orthodox Christianity might thus be said to be more akin to the Hinduism of the Gita than is Mormonism because of the way in which Mormonism uniquely dispenses with the ultimate

\textsuperscript{47} See, for instance, Moses 1:11. A passage from the pseudepigraphical \textit{Apocalypse of Abraham}, which work Hugh Nibley cited frequently, contains a Judeo-Christian parallel to Arjuna’s inability to endure the vision for long, despite divine assistance. See the \textit{Apocalypse of Abraham} 16:1–4, in \textit{The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha}, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1983–85), 1:696. For references in Nibley’s writings, see Hugh Nibley, \textit{Temple and Cosmos: Beyond This Ignorant Present} (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 279, 522–23.

\textsuperscript{48} It may be important to limit the scope of this complicating of things to the book of Ether. I have already noted that other uniquely Mormon scripture suggests parallels with Arjuna’s visionary experience that are absent from the brother of Jared’s experience. Still, it is important to recognize that the Book of Mormon seems in striking ways to share the Christology of especially the Gospel of John. See, in this regard, Krister Stendahl, “The Sermon on the Mount and Third Nephi,” in \textit{Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian Parallels}, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978), 139–54; and, more recently, Nicholas J. Frederick, “Line within Line: An Intertextual Analysis of Mormon Scripture and the Prologue of the Gospel of John” (PhD dissertation, Claremont Graduate University, 2013).
unimaginability of the divine in itself. Mormonism’s God, since Joseph Smith at least, and perhaps since the brother of Jared, is a God with “toes, fingers, and all that stuff.”

Conclusion

It is necessary to put the brakes on too-quick systematization, however, as well as on overly premature theologizing. Before too many conclusions can be drawn, there remains a good deal more to learn from and about the vision of the brother of Jared. What I have developed in the course of this analysis is, I hope, at least preparatory to further study. The remarkable similarities between the accounts of the visions of Arjuna and of the brother of Jared help to bring out what seems to be their starkest point of contrast—distinct notions of divine incarnation. But to do serious justice to the differences between these notions of divine incarnation, especially by comparing them with the notions of divine incarnation in the New Testament, requires much more work. Not only is it necessary to look more closely at the relevant Hindu and Christian texts, it is necessary to look at relevant passages throughout the Book of Mormon, particularly Ether 3, which I have really only touched on here. Indeed, the comparison I have drawn in this paper is perhaps just enough to reveal where attention in further interpretive work ought to be focused: Exactly what is the relationship between Jesus Christ and his body in the few verses that outline the vision of the brother of Jared?

What conclusions might be drawn, then? I believe I have established a certain inverse relationship between Arjuna’s vision and that of the brother of Jared—an inverse relationship that is only visible when the profound similarities between the two texts are fully acknowledged. Those similarities are real and essential: both visions have their setting in larger texts presented as epics, parallel contexts that allow each narrative

to present a religiously revolutionary approach to the divine through the self-revelation of a hero’s heavenly companion. However striking these similarities are, it is perhaps the inverse relationship that serves as the real motivation to mobilize serious work on the text of Ether 3, exegetical and theological. If the brother of Jared’s experience with the divine, as recounted in the Book of Mormon, is at once so remarkably similar to and so remarkably different from Arjuna’s experience with the divine in the Gita, how might the uniqueness of the Latter-day Saint conception of the body be brought out more clearly by close study of Ether 3? What treasures the vision of the brother of Jared holds for its readers remain to be discovered.

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Theological Apostasy and the Role of Canonical Scripture: A Thematic Analysis of 1 Nephi 13–14

Paul Owen

Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written. (2 Nephi 29:10)

First Nephi 11–14 contains a collection of thirteen apocalyptic visions in which the future mysteries pertaining to the Lamb and his church are disclosed to Nephi, first through the direct agency of the Spirit (11:8–11) and then through an angelic mediator (11:14–14:30). A clear structural marker delineates the consecutively revealed contents of this apocalyptic section (with minor variations): “And he said unto me: Look! And I looked.” The boundaries of Nephi’s visions are as follows:

11:8–11 Vision of the tree of life
11:13–19 Vision of the virgin mother
11:20–23 Vision of the virgin with child
11:24–25 Vision of the Son of God
11:26–29 Vision of the prophet, the Lamb and the Twelve
11:30 Vision of ministering angels
11:31 Vision of the healed multitudes
11:32–36 Vision of the world’s conflict with the Lamb

1. 1 Nephi 11:8, 12, 19–20, 24, 26, 30–32; 12:1, 11; 13:1; 14:9, 11, 18–19.
12:1–10 Vision of Nephi’s seed in the land of promise
12:11–23 Vision of conflict in the land of promise
13:1–14:8 Vision of the abominable church and the book
14:9–17 Vision of the mother of harlots
14:18–30 Vision of John the apostle

For the purposes of this study, I will focus on the final three visions of this collection. As we will see, this final set of materials within the overall collection shares an interest in the struggle between true and false religion and the collection of books of scripture (13:20, 38–39; 14:23). What follows is a thematic analysis of the contents of these three visions. After analyzing this material, I will attempt to make the following arguments and contributions to the discussion of 1 Nephi.

- The great and abominable church is not hellenized Christianity, but politicized Christianity.
- The chief role of the false church that 1 Nephi highlights is the corruption of the Old Testament.
- First Nephi supports the notion of a wider corpus of canonical writings than is presently found in the Old Testament (including both public and esoteric texts).
- The Jew whose role is highlighted in 1 Nephi 13–14 is Ezra the scribe.
- In all likelihood some sort of literary relationship exists between 1 Nephi and 2 Esdras in the Apocrypha.
- First Nephi shows familiarity with the apocalyptic custom of editing and reusing previous divine disclosures for new audiences.
- This apocalyptic custom could have implications for the sources and literary history of the Book of Mormon, which have thus far been given little attention by scholars of ancient scripture.
In making these proposals, I hope to broaden the discussion of the Book of Mormon in relation to the following issues:

- The relationship between the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the wider catholic Christian tradition.
- The importance of Anabaptist ecclesiology for Joseph Smith’s theological vision.
- Consideration of the deep influence of apocalypticism upon the author(s) of the Book of Mormon.²
- The possibility of alternative models for the literary history of the Book of Mormon that break the boundaries of typical divisions between liberal/fictional vs. conservative/historical in the analysis of the contents of this text of ancient scripture.

Vision of the great and abominable church (1 Nephi 13:1–14:8)

Nephi’s eleventh vision opens with the appearance of “many [gentile] nations and kingdoms” (1 Nephi 13:1–3). These kingdoms set the stage for the “formation of a great church” (13:4). There then follows a description of this church, which has four primary characteristics: (1) it does great harm to the “saints of God” (13:5), (2) it has the devil as its founder (13:6), (3) it enjoys financial prosperity (13:7–8), and (4) it desires the “praise of the world” (13:9). The precise identity of this church is never disclosed to Nephi.³

First Nephi 13:10–14:8 then shifts the focus of this vision from the false church among the Gentiles to the seed of Nephi’s brethren on the other side of “many waters” (13:10). After an ominous reference to the divine wrath that will visit this seed (13:11), Nephi is then enabled to see a man

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² Typically, apocalyptic texts have complicated histories, with earlier traditions taken over, reused, edited, augmented, and renewed for subsequent Jewish and Christian audiences. For a general introduction to this body of literature, see John J. Collins, The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

³ It is never identified with any particular denomination, or branch, of Christendom.
(Christopher Columbus)\(^4\) who travels across the waters from among the Gentiles to the promised land (13:12). This is followed by the journey of other Gentiles (the British colonists) to the Americas (13:13–15); they will serve as the agent of God’s wrath on those native inhabitants of the land. Nephi also sees the Revolutionary War that will break out in those days (13:16–19) and learns that God will be on the side of (what we know to be) the American Revolutionaries against the British Empire.\(^5\)

These events set the stage for the appearance of new books in the New World. The Americans will prosper in the land and have in their possession an important “book.” The nature of this book and its literary elaboration is explained in 1 Nephi 13:21–42. It is obvious enough that, in some general sense, the book that is “carried forth among” the new inhabitants of America is the Christian Bible (13:20), but the specific description of this book has several features. The angel tells Nephi that it “proceedeth out of the mouth of a Jew,” is a “record of the Jews,” and contains “the covenants of the Lord” and “the prophecies of the holy prophets” (13:23). This cluster of characteristics indicates that the book that is shown to Nephi materially consists of the contents of the Protestant Old Testament, which contains records that are “of great worth unto the Gentiles.”\(^6\)


\(^6\) Here I differ with Stephen E. Robinson, who identifies the book of the Jew with the New Testament. See “Early Christianity and 1 Nephi 13–14,” in *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, the Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988), 186–87. So also Kent P. Jackson, “Asking Restoration Questions in New Testament Scholarship,” in *How the New Testament Came to Be*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Frank F. Judd (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2006), 34–37. Both Robinson and Jackson seem to presume that “the Jew” is merely a way of speaking of the culture of Palestinian Judaism that gave birth to the literature and theology of earliest Christianity prior to its hellenization and capitulation to Greek philosophy. I reject their proposals, not only because they fail to identify “the Jew” as a specific individual who dictated the contents of the Bible with his mouth (see below), but because Christianity was already a hellenized religion when it sprang up from the
However, the angel goes on to explain that this book has been altered before it comes into the possession of Americans. Initially, the book contained “the fulness of the gospel of the Lord, of whom the twelve apostles bear record” (1 Nephi 13:24). This description might seem to suggest that the book is not the Old Testament, but it seems plain that, within the theological perspective of this vision, the Old Testament originally contained the fulness of the gospel. It is only after the Old Testament was altered by nefarious hands that such fulness was removed. The twelve apostles originally bore record of a gospel that they already found in the version of the Old Testament that was still available to them. Verses 24–25 refer to the dissemination of the scriptures among the Gentiles, which echoes the reference to the “great church” formed among “the nations and kingdoms of the Gentiles” at the beginning of this vision (13:3–4). We are therefore to understand that the “great and abominable church,” which has the devil as its founder (13:6), is responsible for the removal of the fulness of the gospel from the scriptures: “for behold, they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious” (13:26). The effects of the activity of the false church upon the form and content of scripture is elaborated in verses 27–29: God’s people lose their divine guidance, the Bible is passed on in a defective form, and many people in America fall into Satan’s hands because the defective version of the scriptures is passed on to those settled in the New World.

However, according to the vision, there are limits to what God will allow the devil to accomplish. The harmful activity of the abominable church will be curtailed by the operation of God’s mercy, such that the seed of Nephi and his brethren (the Nephites and Lamanites) will not be entirely wiped out, despite the destruction that the Gentiles (the British colonists) shall mete out upon their offspring (1 Nephi 13:30–31). In addition, after rendering judgment upon the “remnant of the house of Israel” (the Lamanites), God will visit the Gentiles in such a way that “I will bring forth unto them, in mine own power, much of my gospel,

which shall be plain and most precious, saith the Lamb” (13:34). This second point is crucial: God will restore the knowledge that was removed from the book by the great and abominable church. This will involve the disclosure of other books of scripture. This topic occupies the remainder of Nephi’s eleventh vision in 1 Nephi 13–14, which might be outlined as follows:

1. Nephi’s seed will make sacred records that will be “hid up, to come forth unto the Gentiles” (13:35).
2. These records will contain the gospel of the Lamb (v. 36).
3. The gift of the Holy Ghost shall empower preachers of this newly discovered gospel who will “seek to bring forth my Zion” (v. 37).
4. The “book of the Lamb of God, which had proceeded forth from the mouth of the Jew” (the Bible) will be made known to the “seed” of Nephi’s brethren (the Lamanites) by the Gentiles (v. 38).
5. Subsequently, “other books” will come forth from the Gentiles “by the power of the Lamb,” which will convince Gentiles, Lamanites, and the Jews who are “scattered upon all the face of the earth, that the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true” (v. 39). This clearly refers to the contents of the Book of Mormon, though it probably alludes to other books as well (cf. 14:26).
6. The purpose of these “last records” will be to establish the truth of the former records (the Old and New Testaments), and furthermore they “shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them” (13:40).
7. The earlier and latter records will contain the words of the same Lamb of God, “for there is one God and one Shepherd over all the earth” (v. 41).
8. Thus, just as God used the Jews to bring divine revelation to the Gentiles (through the Bible), God will also use the Gentiles to bring God’s latter-day revelation to the Jews (both
among the Lamanites and the scattered tribes of Israel on earth; v. 42).

9. The vision concludes with a general exhortation to the Gentiles not to harden their hearts (14:2), but instead to “hearken unto the Lamb of God” (14:1), so as to be numbered among the children of Israel (14:2) and delivered from the destruction of hell (14:3–5) and “the captivity of the devil” (14:7).

Vision of the mother of harlots (1 Nephi 14:9–17)

Nephi’s twelfth vision offers another depiction of the great and abominable church, this time represented with feminine imagery as the “mother of abominations” (1 Nephi 14:9), the “whore of all the earth” (14:10), and the “mother of harlots” (14:16). The dominant point seems to be that the false church is seductive and alluring, leading people into the path of false religion. The angel informs Nephi that ultimately only two churches are on the earth: “the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil; wherefore, whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church” (14:10). The apocalyptic imagery employed here also emphasizes the worldwide influence of this false religion: “she sat upon many waters; and she had dominion over all the earth, among all nations, kindreds, tongues and people” (14:11).7

Clearly anticipating the conflict between good and evil that will intensify as the end of the world approaches, Nephi sees a battle unfolding: “And it came to pass that I beheld that the great mother of abominations did gather together multitudes upon the face of all the earth, among all the nations of the Gentiles, to fight against the Lamb of God” (1 Nephi 14:13). But the false church will be defeated through the agency of the true church of the Lamb (14:14) and the historical unfolding of God’s wrath upon the wicked on earth (14:15–17). When this unfolding of divine wrath nears its pinnacle in the last days, “then,

at that day, the work of the Father shall commence, in preparing the way for the fulfilling of his covenants, which he hath made to his people who are of the house of Israel” (14:17). Although the meaning of this promise is open-ended, it appears related to the earlier prediction of 1 Nephi 13:39 that after the settlement of America by the Gentiles, “other books” will be produced “by the power of the Lamb,” which will bring about the conversion of the Lamanites and also “the Jews who were scattered upon all the face of the earth.” This is the “work of the Father,” which “shall commence, in preparing the way for the fulfilling of his covenants” in the last days (14:17).

**Vision of John the apostle (1 Nephi 14:18–30)**

The final vision of Nephi in this collection centers on the character of the apostle John. He is specifically identified with the name of John (1 Nephi 14:27) and is designated as one of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (14:20, 24–25, 27). He is described as wearing a “white robe” (14:19), which is indicative of his purity of character and blameless testimony (cf. Revelation 3:4). The angel announces that John will write “concerning the end of the world” (1 Nephi 14:22), and his writing will be “written in the book which thou beheld proceeding out of the mouth of the Jew” (14:23). This ties back to the earlier description of the Bible in 1 Nephi 13:20–24, 38. Earlier, we saw that the fundamental identity of the book that proceeds out of the mouth of the Jew is the Old Testament in the Christian Bible. This is clearly the case in 13:23; however, the record is not a static collection, for it is open to augmentation and expansion. First Nephi 13:39 anticipates latter-day records (found in the Book of Mormon) that shall convince the Jews that the “records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” are true. Furthermore, these “last records, which thou hast seen among the Gentiles, shall establish the truth of the first, which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, and shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them” (13:40). Clearly the characteristics of the Old Testament (which proceeds out of the mouth of “the Jew”) transfer to the writings
of the apostles because their writings are viewed as one piece with the earlier prophetic collections they augment. In other words, supplementary books that are added to the canon of Jewish books bear witness to the same body of plain and precious truths and hence are viewed as one “book of the Lamb of God” in a synthetic unity (13:38).

Another interesting feature of this last vision is the importance of repeated revelations. In the future, John the apostle will see the things that had already been shown to Nephi (1 Nephi 14:24–25). Furthermore, the things revealed to Nephi and John have already been seen by prophets before them (14:26). And finally, Nephi reminds his readers, “I bear record that I saw the things which my father saw, and the angel of the Lord did make them known unto me” (14:29; cf. 11:1–3). This is an important point for understanding the literary complexity of the Book of Mormon and one to which I will return below.

Theological and literary implications of Nephi’s visions

*The identity of the great and abominable church*

Plainly the author of 1 Nephi employs apocalyptic conventions in relaying the content of these visions. As is typical of that genre, the symbols employed are open to historical interpretations but also contain symbolic or mythical overtones that are subject to repeated application. So it is with the great and abominable church. In 1 Nephi 13 we are introduced to an entity that is first entitled a “great church” (v. 4), then “a church which is most abominable above all other churches, which slayeth the saints of God, yea, and tortureth them and bindeth them down, and yoketh them with a yoke of iron, and bringeth them down to captivity” (v. 5). In light of 14:1–7, this descriptive imagery should likely be understood in terms of spiritual destruction and the effects of bondage to the devil in the realm of religious piety and practice.⁸

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⁸ Contra Robinson, “Early Christianity,” 185–86, who highlights the idea of physical persecution and martyrdom.
The key to the identity of this church is found in the characterizing features of 1 Nephi 13:7–9. These verses emphasize the financial power and worldly prosperity of the great church, which destroys the saints “for the praise of the world” (v. 9). Religion as the expression of gentile power is the essence of this symbolism: “These are the nations and kingdoms of the Gentiles” (13:3). The saints are destroyed when they are allured and attracted by the visible pomp and circumstance of the worldly church. This is especially clear in 14:2–3, where Nephi is told that the captivity of the church and the destruction of God’s saints are a spiritual continuation of the Babylonian exile of the Jews. In other words, it represents Christendom’s captivity to worldly power and her subjection to the control of any state-sponsored and state-supported form of religion. This is why one of the titles of the false church is “Babylon” ( Doctrine and Covenants 86:3).

This church is charged with responsibility for corrupting the canonical scriptures in 1 Nephi 13:26–28. Obviously a historical timetable is at work here, for this corruption takes place only “after they go forth by the hand of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (v. 26). This is the church that will take away “from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away” (v. 26). The book that contained these plain and precious parts, as we have seen above, is the canonical Old Testament, which is transmitted intact, with all purity, by the twelve apostles.

What, then, is the identity of the false church that engages in this nefarious activity? It is a postapostolic church that exercises gradual control over the contents of the earlier Jewish canon within the Christian community. This suggests that the great and abominable church, an open-ended apocalyptic symbol in 1 Nephi 14, has a specific historical (though still apocalyptic) expression in 1 Nephi 13—visible Christendom in the Roman Empire after the time of Constantine (AD 313).

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9. This surely is the “captivity” of 1 Nephi 13:9.

10. Robinson considers this option, only to reject it, in “Early Christianity,” 185–86. Robinson’s main reason for rejecting post-Constantinian Christendom as the “great and abominable” church is because (he argues) the contents of the New Testament
Repetedly, the angel tells Nephi that the book of scripture, which will be altered and corrupted by the false church, comes out of the mouth of a/the “Jew” (1 Nephi 13:23, 24, 38; 14:23). But who is the Jew? Why does the angel always speak of the mouth of this Jew when making reference to written records? And why are the words mouth and Jew always in the singular if this is just a generic reference to the role of the Jews in producing the Bible before its corruption? The following points should be kept in mind. First, from the description of this book (13:21) as one that “proceedeth out of the mouth of a Jew” (13:23), it is evidently “a record of the Jews” and hence (as we saw above) at least initially consisted of the Hebrew scriptures. Second, apparently “the Jew” is an individual. The indefinite article a (13:23, 24) is replaced with the in subsequent references to this Jew (13:38; 14:23). So the cannot be taken as a generic article (Jews as a category), given the fact that it finds its original antecedent in “a Jew.” Finally, this Jew’s primary role is that of an oral dictator of scripture. There is simply no other reason to emphasize the activity of his mouth as opposed to his hand.

But what is the identity of this Jew who transmitted an authoritative version of the Old Testament by reading the text out loud? Certainly the role of Ezra the scribe, who reads aloud for seven days from the law of God in Nehemiah 8, comes to mind. More specifically, these references in 1 Nephi 13–14 appear to bear some connection (whether prophetic, literary, or merely thematic) to the contents of 2 Esdras 14 in the Apocrypha.\(^1\) The following links between Ezra’s revelation and the visions of Nephi (and the Book of Mormon more generally) seem fairly transparent:

1. The background of the theophanic epiphany to Ezra is the destruction of the Bible (the books of the Old Testament) and the necessity of its restoration (2 Esdras 14:21–22; cf. 1 Nephi 13:26, 28).

2. This destruction of scripture has caused God’s people to lose their way (2 Esdras 14:22; cf. 1 Nephi 13:27, 29).

3. The restoration of scripture will be accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit (2 Esdras 14:22, 40; cf. 1 Nephi 13:37, 39).

4. The books that are revealed to and dictated by Ezra are first written down on “writing tablets” (2 Esdras 14:24 NRSV; “box trees” KJV). So also the Book of Mormon (cf. 1 Nephi 13:23; Mosiah 1:3).

5. Ezra (the recipient of the revelation) is to dictate the contents of these books to chosen scribes (2 Esdras 14:24). So also Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon (cf. 2 Nephi 3:17; 27:9–10).

6. Only some of what is revealed to Ezra and written down is to be made public; the rest is reserved for the wise (2 Esdras 14:26, 45–46; cf. 1 Nephi 14:26, 28).

7. In order for God’s people to have all the wisdom they need, they must have access both to the public and the esoteric texts dictated by Ezra: “For in them is the spring of understanding, the fountain of wisdom, and the stream of knowledge” (2 Esdras 14:47; cf. 1 Nephi 13:40–41).

8. The scribes who wrote on the tablets “wrote what was dictated, using characters that they did not know” (2 Esdras 14:42 NRSV; “they wrote the wonderful visions of the night that were told, which they knew not” KJV). So also the Book of Mormon (cf. 1 Nephi 1:2; Mosiah 1:2; Mormon 9:32).

9. There is a repeated emphasis on the mouth of Ezra (2 Esdras 14:38, 39, 41; cf. 1 Nephi 13:23, 24, 38; 14:23).
10. What was previously revealed to Moses is now freshly disclosed to Ezra (2 Esdras 14:5–6, 21–22; cf. 1 Nephi 14:24–26, 29).

Notably, the distinction between public and hidden books correlates with the distinction between the contents of the Palestinian Jewish canon on the one hand (also the Protestant Old Testament) and an additional collection of apocalyptic and apocryphal books on the other: “Make public the twenty-four books that you wrote first, and let the worthy and the unworthy read them; but keep the seventy that were written last, in order to give them to the wise among your people” (2 Esdras 14:45–46 NRSV). Ezra’s community has access to the public canon, but only the “wise” are given additional access to a broader collection of inspired texts.

This passage seems to correlate with 1 Nephi 13:39–40: “I beheld other books, which came forth by the power of the Lamb. . . . These last records, which thou hast seen among the Gentiles, shall establish the truth of the first, which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, and shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them.” This clear allusion to the Book of Mormon (and other texts also) is all the more striking in light of the way Ezra’s esoteric revelation is described in 2 Esdras: “Therefore write all these things that you have seen in a book, put it in a hidden place; and you shall teach them to the wise among your people, whose hearts you know are able to comprehend and keep these secrets” (2 Esdras 12:37–38 NRSV; cf. 1 Nephi 13:35).

The correspondence between these texts enables us to see the latter-day revelations alluded to in 1 Nephi 13 (which certainly include the Book of Mormon) as a restoration of the contents of esoteric texts that were passed on to the “wise” in times past, at least until the death of the apostles. Subsequently, in the centuries following the writing of the New Testament, when the Roman Empire became a patron of worldly Christendom, these texts were suppressed by the false church (through destruction and corruption), leaving the saints without that ancient collection of apocryphal wisdom necessary to see the plain and precious
things in the Hebrew scriptures with adequate clarity (1 Nephi 13:40–41; 14:23).  

The apocalyptic reuse of previous revelations

These suggestive parallels between 2 Esdras 14 and 1 Nephi 13–14 could be explained in a number of ways: (1) they could be coincidental; (2) Nephi could have been given a prophetic glimpse of the future role of Ezra, as accurately described in 2 Esdras; (3) Joseph Smith (or someone in his circle) could have read 2 Esdras in the King James Version of the Apocrypha and perhaps had access to commentary on its meaning through libraries and cultural knowledge; or (4) the Book of Mormon could be viewed as a restoration of an ancient Christian apocryphal text, which itself made use of earlier Jewish sources.

Choosing among these options is a highly subjective matter, to be sure. In my opinion, the parallels between the two texts are simply too numerous and too compactly gathered within confined, corresponding sections of 2 Esdras and 1 Nephi to be a pure coincidence. And most important, the first solution leaves us with no adequate identification of “the Jew” in 1 Nephi 13–14. So I think we can safely exclude the first option.

But should we then see Nephi as being given a prophetic vision of the future role of Ezra (option 2) to account for the similarities? A number of factors could point in this direction: (1) The text of 1 Nephi

12. Note that we are not identifying the false church in 1 Nephi with any particular denomination, whether the Roman Catholic Church or any other. Rather, it is the willingness of the church to accommodate to the power of the state, or the state’s direct involvement in the affairs of the church, that constitutes the essence of false religion in 1 Nephi 13–14. It is the unholy marriage between the church and the state. Roman patronage of Christendom beginning in the fourth century is merely one historical application of that symbolism within the Book of Mormon. What is expressed here in Nephi’s vision is a quintessentially Radical Reformation ecclesiology.

13. It should be noted that options 2 and 3 could be combined if one were to adopt something like Blake Ostler’s “expansion” theory of the Book of Mormon. See Blake T. Ostler, “The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source,” Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 20/1 (1987): 66–123. For a more recent proposal along the same lines, see Brant A. Gardner, The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011).
never names Ezra, but merely describes “the Jew” in a manner that would suggest this identification. If this were a case of prophecy “after the fact,” the author would presumably have named Ezra more explicitly. (2) If Joseph Smith, rather than relying on the printed text of 2 Esdras, was exposed by divine encounter and inspiration to a body of ancient lore that eventually found its way into Jewish-Christian apocalyptic works (cf. 2 Esdras 13:41–42), this would explain why we find those curious references to Jews writing on “tablets” (2 Esdras 14:24) in obscure characters (2 Esdras 14:42)—both of which details were only cryptically expressed in the English language of the rendition of the Apocrypha to which the prophet had ready access.

This second option should thus be kept in play as a real possibility. However, it would seem that the primary reason one might view this as a case of prophetic prediction (rather than the influence of 2 Esdras on the author of 1 Nephi) is because of a prior commitment to the historicity of the narrative of the Book of Mormon. Only if there really was a historical family of Lehi that actually traveled to the Americas in the buildup of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem; only if a historical Jew named Nephi really was granted a vision of Christopher Columbus, the Revolutionary War, the settlement of the British colonists in America, and their defeat of the Native American populations; and only if these populations really did contain the actual genetic remnants of the seed of the Lamanites—only then would there be a prevailing reason to favor this second option.14 Furthermore, while divine inspiration might explain how Nephi could be aware of the future role of Ezra in dictating and restoring the lost contents of the Jewish scriptures (setting aside for the moment questions about the historicity of that account), it would not have the explanatory power to account for the cluster of shared features that link the two confined sections of text. This cluster of shared features points to (but does not secure) a literary connection of dependence. If such dependence is granted, since the author of 2 Esdras could not have

had access to the contents of the Book of Mormon, the influence would have to go in the other direction. This would imply that the historical setting for the writing of 1 Nephi 13–14 cannot be any earlier than at least the end of the first century AD (which is when the Jewish core of 2 Esdras is typically dated).  

This leaves us with options 3 and 4 (or some combination of the two) as, in my view, the most likely solutions. Those who view the Book of Mormon as a work of nineteenth-century religious fiction (whether divinely inspired or merely human-produced) will naturally gravitate toward option 3. And there can be no doubt that Joseph Smith's access to 2 Esdras provides a simple, straightforward explanation of the textual evidence—with the exception of one point. The references in the text of 2 Esdras to Jews writing on “tablets” in “obscure characters” are unclear in the King James translation available to Joseph Smith. While a bit mysterious, this could potentially be explained in several ways: (1) Smith (or someone in his circle) could have intuitively surmised (based on the context) the underlying meaning of the King James renderings “box trees” (2 Esdras 14:24) and “which they knew not” (14:42) in a way that happens to correspond to modern English translations. (2) Smith (or someone in his circle) could have had access to annotations on the Apocrypha through various sources (libraries, local ministers, bookstores) that clarified the meaning. (3) These particular parallels between 1 Nephi 13–14 and 2 Esdras 14 could be coincidental, parallels of which Smith and his associates actually had no awareness prior to the publication of the Book of Mormon. It should be noted, however, that even if these two features on the list of parallels are removed entirely from consideration, the remaining eight points still constitute a striking cluster of shared characteristics that tend to support a literary dependence on the text of 2 Esdras on the part of the author of 1 Nephi (whoever he was).

But what are we to say of option 4? Certainly, an apocryphal Christian text, written subsequent to the death of the apostles (and the

publication of 2 Esdras), could account for the literary dependence we have noted. As we saw above, the apocalyptic rhetoric of 1 Nephi 13–14 seems to find its setting in a critique of worldly, state-sponsored Christendom, which has suppressed plain and precious parts of the Bible. Such a critique could not have been warranted prior to AD 313, when Constantine began to give Christianity protection and patronage.\(^\text{16}\) It is also interesting to note that by this time, 2 Esdras had already been taken over, edited, augmented, and utilized in Christian circles. Might Joseph Smith, by means of divine inspiration and angelic assistance, have “restored” (with expansions reflective of his own nineteenth-century setting) an ancient Christian apocryphal text—itself based on earlier Jewish apocalyptic sources—in the dictation of the Book of Mormon? Were such to be the case, it certainly would not be surprising for it to reflect the influence of 2 Esdras. Perhaps 1 Nephi 13–14 provides us some important hints as to the complex documentary history of the Book of Mormon as a whole.

Such a proposal has some significant advantages, in my opinion:

1. It would allow traditional Latter-day Saints to continue to maintain that the gold plates that were shown to Joseph Smith by the angel Moroni—though not necessarily historical artifacts from the history of the Americas—were nonetheless factual objects (albeit of heavenly origin).
2. It would allow Latter-day Saints to maintain that Joseph Smith’s claims of heavenly visitation and divine revelation had an objective and factual content.
3. It would retain the integrity of the Book of Mormon as an authentically ancient text, albeit originating in a different time and place.

\(^{16}\text{The state church was formally established in AD 380 with the edict of Theodosius I, which made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire.}\)
4. It could explain the date of the *terminus ad quem* of the Book of Mormon narrative (ca. AD 421).  

5. It would allow for the subsequent augmentation and updating of this ancient apocryphal text (which could have utilized earlier Jewish sources and traditions) by Joseph Smith when its contents were passed on to him by the angel Moroni.

6. It would allow for a better explanation of the curious parallels between the general storyline of the Book of Mormon and the *History of the Rechabites* (since the traditional core of the Book of Mormon narrative remained in the Old World).  

7. It would allow the Book of Mormon to be taken as simultaneously modern and fictional, on the one hand, and miraculous and inclusive of authentic ancient material on the other. It would thus bring the manner of the production of the Book of Mormon more in line with the restoration of other ancient texts (e.g., the Book of Abraham, the Book of Moses, Doctrine and Covenants 7).  

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17. Interestingly, AD 421 is the traditional Catholic date of the death of Saint Mary of Egypt (the patron saint of penitents). She was one of the most prominent of the Desert Mothers and a close associate of St. Zosimus of Palestine (see note 18). Others however, date her death at 522 or 530.

18. See John W. Welch, “The Narrative of Zosimus (History of the Rechabites) and the Book of Mormon,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 323–74. St. Zosimus was a Palestinian monk who lived in a desert location near the Jordan River, and his biography is found in the *Life of St. Mary of Egypt*, attributed to St. Sophronius of Jerusalem, Patriarch of Jerusalem from AD 634 through 638. He could be (and in my view probably is) the Zosimus named in the *History of the Rechabites*.

19. For different views as to the origins of the Book of Abraham and its relationship to the Joseph Smith Papyri, see John Gee, *A Guide to the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 19–30. Gee notes that "a handful of Latter-day Saints think that the Book of Abraham was written by an unknown individual in Greco-Roman Egypt (fourth century BC through the fifth century AD) and that it is an ancient pseudepigraphon translated by Joseph Smith" (p. 25). This bears a close resemblance to the view of the Book of Mormon being considered here. In any event, all scholars agree that the
8. It would relieve modern apologists of the difficult burden of establishing a determinate New World setting for the Book of Mormon.²⁰
9. It would cohere with the repeated message within 1 Nephi that apocalyptic revelation typically repeats and amplifies the content of previous divine disclosures (1 Nephi 11:1–3; 14:24–26, 29).

What I am suggesting, in essence, is that the Book of Mormon could be taken as a genuinely restored ancient text with a fictional narrative that originated in the Old World, an account that bore some connection to the mysterious (and probably later) History of the Rechabites. Sometime after AD 421, a Christian apocryphal book was penned in the deserts of Palestine. I will call it the History of the Lehites. This book told a story (set in the days prior to the fall of Jerusalem in the sixth century BC) of the voyage of a Jew named Lehi, who traveled with his family to a new promised land found on the other side of a great body of water, their settlement in that land, their wars and subsequent history, and the visitation of the resurrected Savior among them. Perhaps due to its antiestablishment ecclesiology, or its small circle of exposure in the Christian world, the History of the Lehites was soon lost to the sands of time. Maybe its influence was eclipsed and replaced by the more widely known History of the Rechabites. However, its valuable contents reappeared through Moroni’s apocalyptic disclosure to Joseph Smith (now with updates and expansions appropriate to the religious and cultural concerns of nineteenth-century America). Moroni’s words to Joseph, indicating that the Book of Mormon contained “an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from whence

Book of Abraham is not a literal “translation” of the Joseph Smith Papyri (or at least any of the papyri we now have access to). Likewise, the Book of Moses is viewed as the direct product of heavenly inspiration and not the translation of any ancient textual artifacts preserved on earth (even if it does restore a text actually written by Moses). The same is true of the restored “parchment” of John in Doctrine and Covenants 7.

²⁰ It has long been recognized that the case for Old World contacts in the Book of Mormon is much easier to defend than any hypothetical New World setting.
they sprang” (Joseph Smith—History 1:34), in this view, would still be an accurate summary of the fictional (though ancient) narrative as Joseph received it from the angel, though such a detailed application to the Americas specifically would no doubt have been expressed in more cryptic terms in the original History of the Lehites. The broad outlines of this apocalyptic approach to the Book of Mormon is one that has significant explanatory scope and one that I think should be given more consideration on both sides of the debate over the origins of this fascinating text of scripture.²¹


“And it came to pass . . .”: The Sociopolitical Events in the Book of Mormon Leading to the Eighteenth Year of the Reign of the Judges

Dan Belnap

One of the significant factors in shaping the Book of Mormon’s content is the editorial hand of its principal narrator, Mormon. A particularly subtle but significant editorial decision was determining how much text was to be allocated to any given narrative. For instance, Mormon devotes 36 pages just to the five days described in 3 Nephi concerning the death of Christ and his appearance in the New World. This detail may not seem particularly noteworthy, but the Book of Mormon overall has only 531 pages. Thus almost 6.8 percent of the book is dedicated specifically to the events and teachings pertaining to Christ’s appearance in the New World, a percentage that increases to 8 percent if one includes all text associated with the whole year in which Christ makes his visit. Or, to put it another way, in a record encompassing a thousand years of history, almost 7 percent of the text covers only five days of events.1

1. This is based on the assumption that the English translation reflects, to some degree, the original text in terms of length—i.e., that the number of English pages, according to the current pagination of the text, reflects roughly the amount of text, not number of pages or leaves, devoted to the event on the gold plates Joseph Smith received from Mormon. Percentages would naturally be lower (approximately 5%) if one included in the calculation the 116 manuscript pages lost and never reproduced by Joseph Smith. Similarly, the presumed sealed portion of the plates, if revealed, would also reduce the percentage.
No doubt many will understand why so much text is dedicated to this particular event since the entire Book of Mormon, from beginning to end, focuses on Christ’s appearance. Yet these five days are not the only example of a specific time period being given particular emphasis in the Book of Mormon. The block of text beginning with Alma 30 and ending with Alma 46 encompasses the pivotal period from the latter end of the seventeenth year of the reign of the judges to the beginning of the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges and comprises 45 pages of text (approximately 8.5 percent of the book), suggesting that the narrator viewed the events described therein as highly significant.

While Mormon as narrator does not always provide explicit reasoning behind his editorial decisions, this particular block of scripture must be regarded as meaningful since it introduces us to Korihor (the

2. The five days mentioned here do not necessarily correspond to five consecutive days but represent the total number of days explicitly associated with the visitation of Christ: the day of the destruction (the 4th day of the 1st month of the 34th year following the new calendar described in 3 Nephi 1), the two other days of darkness that immediately follow, the day of Christ’s actual appearance (see 3 Nephi 11–18), and the second day of his visitation (see 3 Nephi 19–26).

3. This number increases substantially when one adds in the entire nineteenth year of the reign of the judges. This three-year period comprises a total of 52 pages of the Book of Mormon (approximately 10 percent of the total Book of Mormon as currently configured) and makes up a sizeable portion (38 percent) of the text reporting on the first 40 years of the reign of the judges. Making this still more impressive is the fact that, according to the Book of Mormon, only 126 years pass from the changes instituted by Mosiah 2 to AD 34 and the visit of Christ. That entire period covers just over half of the Book of Mormon (51.6 percent). (If one discounts the small plates, which make up 142 pages, this 126-year period covers a staggering 70.6 percent of the Book of Mormon.) This emphasis has not gone unnoticed; see Matthew M. F. Hilton and Neil J. Flinders, “The Impact of Shifting Cultural Assumptions on the Military Policies Directing Armed Conflict Reported in the Book of Alma,” in Warfare in the Book of Mormon, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 237: “In the midst of his accounts of military encounters described in the book of Alma, Mormon inserts an extended explanation of the ‘iniquity of the people’ (Alma 31:1). Thirteen chapters (Alma 29–42) are devoted to reporting a contest of ideas and activities that affected both individuals and groups, describing problems and strategies to remedy these problems. Apparently the content of these chapters is significant to understanding Mormon’s interest in the military events (see Alma 30:1–6; 43:1–3).”
only individual in the book designated as “Anti-Christ”; Alma 30:12), describes the Zoramite secession, outlines the emergence of the political dissenter Amalickiah and the related Nephite civil war, and includes the highly personal instruction from Alma to his sons during this chaotic period of Nephite history.

The narratives in Alma 30–46 themselves do not arise out of a vacuum. Although it appears that Mormon’s primary concern is the Nephite relationship with God (or the lack thereof), he also includes information concerning the status of society as a whole—political, economic, and otherwise.4 This paper does not seek to answer the question of why Mormon devoted so much text to the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges as much as it seeks to describe the environment from which the events of the eighteenth year arose. In this case, it is necessary to explore Mormon’s descriptions of the immediate years preceding the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges, along with the major sociopolitical movements associated with those years, to gain a full appreciation of his editorial decisions concerning this emphasized portion of his narrative. With that in mind, this paper seeks to explore the emergence of three such sociopolitical dynamics: (1) the creation of a new political system (judgeship rather than kingship), along with its relationship to the church, (2) the reemergence of political and social power among the

4. Grant Hardy, in his study Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 119, notes this feature of Mormon’s editorial decisions: “We can see the tensions implicit in Mormon’s historiographical project. He tries to portray himself as a careful editor who pays close attention to sources, accuracy, and historical details. Yet the situation is complicated by his ambition to write literature—to create complex, interlocking narratives that invite us to see more than he explicitly comments on, that are open to multiple interpretations, and that will repay repeated readings. At the same time, he wants his readers to draw particular moral lessons from his work. To that end, he guides them step by step through a much abbreviated account, deliberately choosing which facts to include or omit, suggesting appropriate emotional responses, and even occasionally telling them exactly how they should interpret specific events. Balancing his three agendas can be a delicate enterprise.” As Hardy says elsewhere, “what [Mormon] leaves out is often as important as what he chooses to include” (107).
Mulekite majority, and (3) the immigration of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies and the effects they had on the greater Nephite community.  

“There should be no persecutions” (Mosiah 27:3)

The first of the three dynamics mentioned above was the creation of a new political system. Just seventeen years prior to the events beginning in Alma 30, the Nephites underwent a massive political transformation from a monarchy to a representational form of government, with all the instability that such a change would engender. For the preceding five hundred years, a monarch had governed the Nephites, with all final decision making—legislative, judicial, and executive—resting in one individual. Such a system certainly has its drawbacks, as the last Nephite king, Mosiah₂, makes clear in his defense of his proposal to replace it. Because one individual formerly held so much power, the greater society was more or less dependent on that individual. When the individual was morally and ethically good, then society reflected his goodwill; conversely, if the individual was corrupt, then the community suffered, both at his hand and by emulating his unethical behavior (see Mosiah 29:13–24; see also Mosiah 11).

But the Nephite shift described in Mosiah 29 resulted from more immediate concerns, namely the succession after Mosiah₂. With the rightful heir, Mosiah's son Aaron, proselyting among the Lamanites, the king was concerned that if he appointed someone else as his successor, Aaron might return and lay claim to the throne, resulting in civil strife. No doubt his heightened awareness of the problems of royal succession

5. See Brant Gardner’s six-volume series on the Book of Mormon—Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007)—for an excellent example of a contextual, historical approach to the Book of Mormon. It should be noted, though, that Gardner admits his approach is colored by his personal belief that the Book of Mormon is situated in Mesoamerica. While this location may represent the current consensus, it is not universally agreed upon, and valid criticisms both for and against that viewpoint continue to be expressed.
in the Jaredite writings (see Ether 7–15), along with the unfortunate events surrounding King Noah (see Mosiah 11–19), influenced his decision to end the monarchy and forestall calamity.

In any case, Mosiah suggested a governmental reform in which the community would “appoint judges, to judge this people according to our law” (Mosiah 29:11). These judges would be selected “by the voice of this people” (Mosiah 29:25). There would be a ranking of judges, with higher and lower ones, and the judges would regulate each other. If a lower judge did not follow the law, then a higher judge would judge the matter; if a higher judge became corrupt, then a “small number” of lower judges would judge him, “according to the voice of the people” (Mosiah 29:29). Mosiah desired to rectify the inequality that can occur

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6. Although the Book of Mormon refers about twenty-two times to the “voice of the people,” its exact function within the political structure is not clear. At times this process appears similar to our concept of direct democratic assembly (such as in Mosiah 22:1 and Alma 2:2–7) or as a synonym for common consent (see Mosiah 29:26–27; Helaman 1:8; 5:2), but elsewhere it sounds almost like an office within the political structure. For instance, in Alma 46:34 Captain Moroni is appointed as such by “judges and the voice of the people.” In at least two instances, the explicit, verbal decisions made by the voice of the people are provided (see Mosiah 29:2 and Alma 27:22–24). In the latter verses, the language of the voice of the people is the actual treaty text between the Nephites and the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. Although we are told that the chief judge sent a proclamation throughout all the land “desiring the voice of the people concerning the admitting” of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, the specificity and brevity of the written agreement suggest that it is not just a document cobbled together by multiple assemblies but rather the final product of a much smaller committee. In other words, it appears that while the “voice of the people” may in fact be represented in democratic assemblies, the results of their deliberations are then collated and organized into a final form by others (perhaps by certain judges; see again Alma 2:7). Finally, in Alma 51:15 we read of Captain Moroni sending a petition “with the voice of the people, unto the governor of the land, desiring that he should read it,” asking that he (Moroni) be granted emergency powers to conscript dissenters if they capitulated or to execute them if they did not. The text suggests that Moroni had public support, but how exactly the petition represents the voice of the people is unclear. To confuse matters even more, even though the petition was written to the governor of the land in conjunction with the voice of the people, we are told in verse 16 that “it came to pass that it was granted according to the voice of the people.” Thus, a petition was sent by the voice of the people to be approved by the voice of the people. See Gardner, *Second Witness*, 3:486–90, who also discusses the role of the voice of the people.
when one man exerts such excessive control over the lives and actions of his fellow men and to establish instead a land in which “every man may enjoy his rights and privileges alike” (Mosiah 29:32).

As simple and elegant as the new system of judges may appear, what is striking is how little information the text itself provides on its intended function. For example, no mention is made of enforcement. Who is to enforce the new system or legitimize the elections? What about those who break the law? Does the military, whose primary function is to enforce the borders against outside forces, also act as the internal police force? Who is to gather taxes? (Are there to be taxes?) Who is responsible for infrastructure maintenance? These questions may seem mundane, but they reflect the basic, administrative responsibilities of any government. In a monarchy, the king ultimately bears the sole responsibility for maintaining the state. In a representative system, such responsibilities need to be decided upon and enacted by group acceptance, which, just by virtue of including others, leads to greater indecision as well as to potentially harmful compromise.

7. While nothing in Mosiah 29 refers to any office other than the judgeships, it appears that some flexibility was built into the system for other positions. For instance, the chief captain Moroni, we are told, was appointed by “the chief judges and the voice of the people” (Alma 46:34). See John W. Welch, “Law and War in the Book of Mormon,” in Warfare in the Book of Mormon, 53: “The change from kingship to judgeship was put into effect by the law of Mosiah promulgated and acknowledged in Mosiah 29. It appears from the record that the law of Mosiah did not contain any concrete provision establishing the office of a military leader, but rather the law anticipated that the chief judge would assume military leadership as occasions demanded. Over time, the position of chief captain evolved among the Nephites. . . . This office was legally constituted as a result of the division of governmental powers that resulted when Alma relinquished the judgment seat.”

8. A. Brent Merrill, “Nephite Captains and Armies,” in Warfare in the Book of Mormon, 271, writes: “The only type of standing army or police force mentioned in the Book of Mormon appears to have been the elite guards assigned to protect key political-religious-military leaders.”

9. John W. Welch also explores the ramifications of the ambiguity in the new political system in his study The Legal Cases of the Book of Mormon (Provo, UT: The Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008), 233: “The provisions in Mosiah’s reforms that guaranteed equality (Mosiah 29:38) and freedom of belief (Alma 1:17)
As for the judges themselves, Mosiah suggests that “wise men ought to be appointed as the judges,” wise men who would judge “according to the commandments of God” (Mosiah 29:11). As with the problem of administrative responsibilities laid out above, we are not told what constituted a “wise man,” although the context suggests that on at least one level a wise man was one who was familiar with the religious tenets of the Mosiac law and accepted them. In Mosiah 29:39, we are told that following the acceptance of the reforms, the different Nephite communities “assembled themselves together in bodies . . . to cast in their voices concerning who should be their judges,” suggesting that the lower judges were from the local communities.

As we shall explore in greater detail in the second section of this paper, these local communities were most likely based on affinities: Nephites associated with and lived near other Nephites, Mulekites associated with and lived near other Mulekites, church members associated with and lived next to church members, and so on. Thus a Mulekite community would likely have appointed a Mulekite as a judge rather than a Nephite outsider. Such a system would lead to greater communal responsibility in terms of governance, but it also had the potential to create special interests that would run counter to the needs of the overall state. Moreover, these judges probably already had a certain standing within their respective communities. While possible, it is

had the potential of being interpreted very broadly to expand the powers of the diffuse democratic factions in the land of Zarahemla.”

10. See Gardner, Second Witness, 3:482, who suggests that secondary affiliations may not have played important roles in judge selection. Yet it appears that religious affiliation was part of, and meant to be a part of, the selection process (see Mosiah 29:11–12). The possibility that church members would live next to other church members reflects the role of religious affiliation that, along with tribal affiliation, appears to have governed the sociological structure of Nephite society. As Alma 1 makes clear, religious social divisions included Christians, followers of Nehor, and those of neither group (see Mosiah 26:1–4). Settlement patterns would have reflected this element of social organization as well as differences in religious affiliation and tribal groups, which are not necessarily secondary to tribal or kin-based organizations. One example of this pattern is the largely Nephite community of Ammonihah, which is separated from other Nephite communities by the religious belief of the people and a rentention of their own
doubtful that an average Nephite would become a judge. Instead, the new system probably strengthened the already existing social hierarchy of elites without the overarching dominance of the monarchy to keep such elites in line.

Another challenge to this new system was its relationship to the church. Under Mosiah, the church held a special status, evidenced by a royal proclamation prohibiting persecution by unbelievers of those who belonged to the church of God (see Mosiah 27:2). With the dissolution of the monarchy, this patronage no longer existed, but if the judges were wise men who knew the law of God, as suggested by Mosiah, the church’s influence on the new governmental system would have been significant. This certainly was the case when one considers the highest office of the land—the chief judgeship. In fact, the first two chief judges were both explicitly ecclesiastical leaders as well as political officers. Alma the Younger was already high priest and head of the church when he was appointed as the first chief judge. Eight years later, when Alma
abdicated his seat as chief judge, he selected “a wise man [Nephihah] who was among the elders of the church, and gave him power according to the voice of the people, that he might have power to enact laws according to the laws which had been given, and to put them in force” (Alma 4:16). Nephihah remained chief judge until the twenty-fourth year of the reign of the judges, meaning he was chief judge for sixteen years. Thus for the first twenty-four years of the reign of the judges, the chief judges, Alma and Nephihah, were both believers and church officials.\(^\text{13}\)

Concern that an individual might become too powerful appears to have prompted internal changes within the church’s ecclesiastical structure. In the ninth year of the reign of the judges, Alma stepped down from the chief judgeship to concentrate solely on his role as high priest, whereupon he immediately reordered the church personnel, installing new ecclesiastical leadership in several Nephite cities: Zarahemla, Gideon, Melek, and Ammonihah. A decade later, Helaman, the next high priest and one of Alma’s sons, instituted another “regulation” in the church, which included the appointing of new priests and teachers.

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Alma 54:23, the Nephite apostate Ammoron is a descendant of Zoram (which means his brother Amalickiah is as well). One interesting case appears in Alma 55:4, where a descendant of Laman is sought. A former servant of the Lamanite king who was falsely accused by Amalickiah of killing the king is found. If the Book of Mormon cultures are similar to other ancient cultures, then a monarch’s servants most likely came from high-ranking families or lower-ranking members of the royal family. Assuming this is the case, then Amalickiah’s murder of the Lamanite king and subsequent accusation against the attending servants may have served not only to get rid of the current monarch but also to do away with any members of the court loyal to the now-deceased king (see Alma 47:20–28). The fact that the servant was found in Zarahemla suggests that the servants fled not just from the murder but also from the accusation of treason, perhaps seeking political asylum in Zarahemla. See Kyle P. McCarter Jr., *1 Samuel* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 158: “The title ‘servant of the king’ referred not to a menial functionary, but to a ranking member of the court. This is clear not only from the biblical evidence (e.g. 2 Kings 22:12; 25:8), but also from surviving Israelite (and other Northwest Semitic) seals inscribed with the title after the proper names.”

\(^{13}\) Of the ten judges mentioned in the text between Alma’s inaugural appointment and the assassination of Lachoneus, 120 years later, at least six were believers, four of these serving as church officials.
throughout the land “over all the churches” (Alma 45:22). This regula-
tion and the events that follow it are described in detail, thus meriting a
closer review.

Following the installment of new ecclesiastical leaders, “there arose a
dissension among them, and they would not give heed to the words of Helaman” (Alma 45:23), suggesting that it was specifically a change in leadership that caused the dissension. It is difficult to know to whom the pronoun them in this passage refers. It may be the specific assemblies affected by Helaman’s regulations, or it may be the newly released teachers and priests (some of whom no doubt resented the changes). If this is the case, the text’s reference to “them” being exceedingly rich (“they grew proud, being lifted up in their hearts, because of their exceedingly great riches” [v. 24]) may refer just to the priests and teachers, rather than to the church in general (as the text might also be read). How did this wealth originate? Only a few years earlier, the Nephites had confronted Nehor, who contended that the people should financially support the priests (see Alma 1:3). The Nephite church condemned this doctrine as a general practice. Yet the text reports that the church took care of those priests who “stood in need” (Mosiah 18:28). Moreover, in the Old Testament, although priests did not own individual property, they were allotted certain economic privileges—a right abused more than once in biblical narratives. Thus, it is possible that Nephite priests, like their ancient Israelite counterparts, took advantage of their position to build their personal wealth. It is also possible that some priests were themselves of high-ranking Nephite lineages and served as judges.

14. The term regulation is found six times in the Book of Mormon and refers to new institutional principles. While it may refer to both ecclesiastical and political changes, most of them are political. Captain Moroni is described as “making regulations to prepare for war against the Lamanites” (Alma 51:22). Possibly these regulations were meant to be short term, for following the conclusion of the war led by Captain Moroni, “regulations were made concerning the law. And their judges, and their chief judges were chosen” (Alma 62:47). Later, 3 Nephi 7:6 reports that “the regulations of the government were destroyed, because of the secret combination of the friends and kindreds of those who murdered the prophets.”
That this may be the case is indicated by the text’s description of Amalickiah’s followers in their dissension against Helaman: “the greater part of them [were] the lower judges of the land” (Alma 46:4). Only six years later, a group known—because of their promonarchical stance—as king-men emerged and were described as those who were of “high birth” (Alma 51:8). The record does not specify whether the king-men and the original followers of Amalickiah overlapped in terms of social makeup, but their presence does reveal a strong monarchical movement in the first twenty years of the new political system. Moreover, their description in Alma 46:1–10, immediately following the narrative of Helaman’s regulation, suggests that some of Amalickiah’s followers were either the newly deposed ecclesiastical leadership or members of those leaders’ congregations. If the two groups did overlap, the conjunction between lower judges, ecclesiastical leaders, and social elites would have justified concern.

In light of the close relationship between church leadership and the new political structure, the tension between those belonging and those not belonging to the Nephite church, particularly in the early years of the reign of the judges, is unsurprising. In fact, from the very first year of the judges’ reign, “whosoever did not belong to the church of God began to persecute those that did belong to the church” (Alma 1:19). This persecution followed the execution of Nehor, who, having killed Gideon (an elder of the church and possibly a newly appointed judge) in a heated confrontation, was seized by church members and taken before Alma. Although Alma decried Nehor’s endorsement of priestcraft, it was rather the enforcement of religious beliefs by the sword that condemned Nehor: “Behold, thou art not only guilty of priestcraft, but hast endeavored to enforce it by the sword; and were priestcraft to be enforced [presumably by the sword or threat of violence] among this people it would prove their entire destruction” (Alma 1:12).15

15. Contra Gardner, Second Witness, 4:26, who suggests that priestcraft is the crime for which Nehor is punished. In Alma 30 Mormon explicitly states that the legal system was based on performance rather than belief. What one believed, as well as the verbal expression of such belief, was not liable to legal action, but the actual
Although Alma stresses the legal nature of this event (“thou art condemned to die, according to the law which has been given us by Mosiah, our last king, acknowledged by this people” [Alma 1:14]), this event may have appeared to nonbelievers as an attempt to consolidate and institutionalize the church’s newly established political influence at the expense of other religious traditions. Certainly, the fact that Nehor was taken not by individuals representing the civic leadership but by “people of the church” and judged by the high priest of the church, regardless of his protestations of legal precept, would have been troubling to those of other belief systems. In any case, the antipathy between those inside and outside the church, the latter perhaps feeling sympathetic to the case of Nehor’s followers, generally resulted in verbal and physical confrontation (see Alma 1:22).

That said, not all interactions between those belonging and not belonging to the church were necessarily confrontational. For instance, in the fifth year of the reign of the judges, the people were confronted with the threat of Amlici, a follower of Nehor who sought to reinstitute a monarchy. According to Alma 2:3, his growing popularity increased his followers’ desire to install him as king, which alarmed the people of the church as well as all those “who had not been drawn away after the performance of wrongdoing was punishable by law. While priestcraft or Nehorism was morally destructive, it was not necessarily illegal since it was a belief. But enforcing one’s religious beliefs by battery was illegal (being a “performance”) and thus Nehor was taken and tried accordingly.

16. Welch, *Legal Cases*, 234, writes: “The trial of Nehor tended to disable Nehor’s followers and to alienate them from the new reign of judges; . . . the fact that Alma went out of his way to exculpate and exonerate Gideon from any wrongdoing in this case must have emboldened the members of the church to perform their duty to prevent people in other religious groups from trespassing the laws of God or of the state. Nevertheless, it seems likely that these legal developments and attitudes contributed to the polarization of segments of Nephite society that quickly ensued. . . . Almost certainly as a result of this verdict and execution, the rift between the people of Christ and members of other groups within the community deepened in the second year of the reign of judges.”
persuasions of Amlici.” By that point, the Nephite population included at least three political affiliations: Amlici’s followers, likely made up in part of Nehor’s followers; members of the Nephite church, who were antimonarchical; and those who were neither church members nor followers of Amlici. Apparently the latter two groups were large enough to represent a majority of the people, as witnessed by the “voice of the people” deciding against Amlici.

Yet such alliances were rare and short lived. By the eighth year of the reign of the judges, persecution had begun again, this time instigated by members of the church. The reasons for this persecution are outlined in Alma 4:6–9 with the increase in the overall prosperity of the church as one of the major contributing factors. Whether the prosperity was a direct result of the new governmental system is not clear. What we do know is that the new prosperity led some to become “scornful, one towards another” and to “persecute those that did not believe according to their own will and pleasure” (Alma 4:8), constituting a “great stumbling-block” to those not belonging to the church (Alma 4:10).

17. Welch, *Legal Cases*, 234, describes the situation: “Amlici’s reaction constituted a rejection of everything that Alma and the reforms of Mosiah stood for. Political support for this opposition movement must have gathered momentum from several sectors in Zarahemla: more than ever, the Mulekites would likely have wanted to see the return of the kingship.”

18. J. Christopher Conkling, “Alma’s Enemies: The Case of the Lamanites, Amlificites, and Mysterious Amalekites,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14/1 (2005): 114: “The problems with both Nehor and Amlici must have come to a climax in the years recorded in Alma 1–2, but they had apparently been going on for several years before (see Alma 1:16–23). It is highly unlikely that Amlici could rise to prominence with almost half the population’s support, undertake a lively national election, receive an illegitimate coronation, raise a huge army, move major parts of the Nephite population, form alliances with the Lamanites, and manage three major battles all in one year (Alma 2:2–3:25). . . . Alma tells us specifically that much of it did indeed happen in one year—at least ‘all these wars and contentions’ (Alma 3:25). But the slow building up of a power base and the forging of foreign alliances may have been going on for years before.”

19. Part of the problem may have been specific patronage, as happened 121 years later. According to 3 Nephi 6, there were secret collusions among the judges, lawyers, and priests who conspired, using their kinship relationships, to destroy “the people of
The consequence of this persecution was Alma’s before-mentioned abdication from the chief judgeship to concentrate solely on the office of high priest. Yet ill feelings persisted, best exemplified in Alma’s interaction with the city of Ammonihah.

In the tenth year of the reign of the judges, as part of his ministerial itinerary, Alma entered the city of Ammonihah and was immediately confronted with the following sentiment:

> Behold, we know that thou art Alma; and we know that thou art high priest over the church which thou hast established in many parts of the land, according to your tradition; and we are not of thy church, and we do not believe in such foolish traditions. And now we know that because we are not of thy church we know that thou hast no power over us; and thou hast delivered up the judgment-seat unto Nephihah; therefore thou art not the chief judge over us. (Alma 8:11–12)

As these verses make clear, the people of Ammonihah did not believe that Alma held any political authority over them. While they recognized his ecclesiastical authority as leader of the church, they were not of the same faith and therefore unaccountable to him regarding spiritual matters. The people promptly reviled Alma, spitting on him and eventually driving him from the city. Although it is easy to condemn the inhospitable behavior of the Ammonihahites, their reaction may be more understandable when put into the context of general church persecution of nonmembers just two years earlier. The fact that Ammonihah was made up of Nehorites only accentuated any already existing animosity.

Alma 8–16 recounts Alma’s confrontation with the people of Ammonihah, who eventually took him and his preaching companion, the Lord” (3 Nephi 6:27–28), setting at “defiance the law and the rights of their country” (3 Nephi 6:29–30). This led to the collapse of Nephite government: “Now it came to pass that those judges had many friends and kindreds; and the remainder, yea, even almost all the lawyers and the high priests, did gather themselves together, and unite with the kindreds of those judges who were to be tried according to the law” (3 Nephi 6:27). Following the collapse, society degenerated into large tribal groups that probably furthered the role of patronage in social interaction (see 3 Nephi 7:1–14).
Amulek, before the chief judge of the territory. Although they had spoken predominantly on religious matters, the case made against them was that “they had reviled against the law, and their lawyers and judges of the land” (Alma 14:5). The political and legal thrust of this accusation was perhaps fair from their point of view since the political nature of Alma’s ministry was clear. Alma was persuaded to return to Ammonihah because, as the angel told him, “they do study at this time that they may destroy the liberty of thy people, (for thus saith the Lord) which is contrary to the statutes, and judgments, and commandments which he has given unto his people” (Alma 8:17).

Although lacking evidence that the people were actively planning to rebel or overthrow the new political system, Amulek accused them of threatening to destroy liberty by abusing the law and choosing improper leadership (see Alma 10:17–21, 26–27). Unsurprisingly, the people responded to Amulek as they did to Alma: “This man doth revile against our laws which are just and our wise lawyers whom we have selected” (Alma 10:24; cf. 14:20). It is unclear which laws Amulek supposedly reviled, although it seems likely that the Ammonihahites viewed Alma’s and Amulek’s ministry as a threat to their community’s right to choose their own judges. Moreover, they likely took umbrage at Amulek’s declaration that only the prayers of the righteous, presumably church members, kept the city of Ammonihah from destruction. As for the original angelic warning that prompted Alma’s second visit, it may have referred to what appears to be an Ammonihahite innovation: the employment of lawyers.

Ostensibly appointed to administer the law on behalf of the people, Mormon indicates that Ammonihah’s unique political class of lawyers “did stir up the people to riotings, and all manner of disturbances and wickedness” in order to “have more employ” since their “sole purpose [was] to get gain” (Alma 11:20). This class was not a part of the original structure outlined by Mosiah₂, but developed during the first eight years of the reign of the judges. If Mormon’s account is accurate, this group often escalated disputes. If the ideal purpose of the new government was to provide means for all to enjoy their rights and privileges, the introduction of these lawyers had the potential of destroying that
liberty by lionizing or demonizing those on the other side of a dispute, actually inflaming the problem rather than alleviating it. Yet this class appeared to have become an essential part of the political-legal system of Ammonihah.20

The condemnation and imprisonment of Alma and Amulek revealed another challenge to the new system. This third concern arose as early as the first year of the reign of the judges, when, following the execution of Nehor, “the law was put in force upon all those who did transgress it, inasmuch as it was possible” (Alma 1:32). Following the trial of Alma and Amulek in Ammonihah, those who had believed in their words were punished by those in power in the city, either through execution or exile. This was blatantly illegal since one’s personal belief was not punishable. Possibly, citing the Nehor case as an ironic precedent, Alma’s converts could be accused of threatening the laws and judges of the land, but even if this were the case, clearly execution was still not the appropriate response. What the Ammonihahites did was illegal but unpunishable under the system of judges. What the Ammonihah episode demonstrated was that one could get away with breaking the law under the new system. This problem may have posed the biggest threat to the city.

In light of all this chaos, it is not surprising that in the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges Korihor—a man who proclaimed that “ancient priests” had usurped the “power and authority” of the people and had kept the people in virtual bondage, that “they durst not look up with boldness, and that they durst not enjoy their rights and privileges” (Alma 30:23, 27)—became popular so quickly. By tapping into this populist turmoil, Korihor threatened the social, political, economic,

20. One may notice the adjectival designation of their lawyers as “wise,” perhaps alluding to the Mosiah reforms and the “wise men” chosen by the population. Gardner suggests that the Book of Mormon’s use of the term lawyer likely reflected the New Testament’s use of the term because of Joseph Smith’s familiarity with the King James Version of the New Testament and thus carried a more specific meaning of scribe (see Gardner, Second Witness, 4:171–72). This is certainly possible, though Mormon’s description suggests that the Ammonihahite lawyers represented a social innovation following the legal changes of the Mosiah reforms.
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and certainly spiritual foundation of Nephite civilization, a consequence Mosiah had sought to forestall with his reforms. Ironically, Mosiah’s desire that each enjoy “his rights and privileges” would come to haunt the Nephites.

“They were gathered together in two bodies” (Mosiah 25:4)

Religious affiliation and its intersection with the new political system were not the only challenges facing Nephite society. Social and cultural distinctions also had the potential of causing conflict, particularly between the Nephites and the Mulekites (Zarahemla’s original settlers), the latter of which represented the majority of the population in Zarahemla. While little is said about interactions between the Mulekites and the Nephites, what does appear in the record is revealing. During the reigns of both Benjamin and Mosiah, the Mulekites and the Nephites apparently viewed themselves as separate peoples. In fact, the

21. For the complexity of “Nephite” and “Mulekite” designations, see John L. Sorenson, “When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?” Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 1/1 (1992): 12: “But every rule-of-thumb we construct that treats the Nephites as a thoroughly homogeneous unit ends up violated by details in the text. Variety shows through the common label, culturally (e.g., Mosiah 7:15; Alma 8:11–12), religiously (e.g., Mosiah 26:4–5 and 27:1; Alma 8:11), linguistically (e.g., Omni 1:17–18), and biologically (e.g., Alma 55:4; note the statement concerning Nephi’s seed ‘and whomsoever shall be called thy seed,’ Alma 3:17). ‘Nephites’ should then be read as the generic name designating the nation (see Alma 9:20) ideally unified in a political structure headed by one direct descendant of Nephi at a time. Even more indicative of social and cultural variation among the Nephites is the usage by their historians of the expression ‘people of the Nephites.’ It connotes that there existed a social stratum called ‘the Nephites’ while another category was ‘people’ who were ‘of,’ that is, subordinate to, those ‘Nephites,’ even while they all were under the same central government and within the same broad society. Limhi was ready to accept such a second-class status for his people, the Zeniffites, and assumed that the dependent category still existed as it apparently had when his grandfather had left Zarahemla (see Mosiah 7:15).”

reconciliation of these two groups was likely one of the primary objectives of Benjamin’s well-known discourse (see Mosiah 1–6).

According to Mosiah 1, Benjamin instructed his son Mosiah 2 “to make a proclamation throughout all this land among all this people, or the people of Zarahemla [the Mulekites], and the people of Mosiah [the Nephites] who dwell in the land” (Mosiah 1:10), thus revealing that a full generation after the two peoples joined together in the land of Zarahemla, they still distinguished themselves as separate entities. Following his admission that there were two distinct communities, Benjamin described his hope to give the two communities a new, common name that would erase former distinctions: “And moreover, I shall give this people a name, that thereby they may be distinguished above all the people which the Lord God hath brought out of the land of Jerusalem, . . . a name that never shall be blotted out” (Mosiah 1:11–12).

Unfortunately, this specific purpose seems not to have been fully accomplished. A generation after Benjamin’s speech, when Mosiah 2 called his people together to read the account of Alma and the record of Zeniff, “the people of Nephi were assembled together, and also all the people of Zarahemla, and they were gathered together in two bodies” (Mosiah 25:4). The text further reports that the people of Zarahemla were “numbered with the Nephites” because “the kingdom had been the descendants of the four tribes who constituted the original broad Nephite faction referred to in Jacob 1:14 (see Mosiah 25:2). These ‘Mulekites’ were also linguistically separate (see Omni 1:17–18). They constituted a population whose social distinctness and political power became so submerged under Nephite rulership that little is heard of them as a group throughout the Nephite record. It is obvious, however, that no majority population simply disappears from a social scene; what must have happened is that the people of Zarahemla, the majority, became socially and politically invisible to the eyes of the Nephite elite record keepers in the capital city. No doubt those ‘Mulekites’ maintained cultural distinctness in their ethnic strongholds, like the Anglo-Saxons under Norman governance.”

23. This purpose for the speech may also explain why Ammon delivered Benjamin’s discourse to the Nephite colonists in the land of Nephi in Mosiah 8:3. Having been separated from the main Nephi society, the colonists had become somewhat estranged, and the speech, with its talk of one people using one name, may have served to let the colonists know they were welcome in Zarahemla.
confferred upon none but those who were descendants of Nephi” (Mosiah 25:13). Thus for at least two or three generations following assimilation, the two primary cultural designations in Zarahemla remained separate and distinct from one another, even after a direct attempt to unite them.24

The explicit recognition of cultural or social distinctions would have been reflected not only in public gatherings but also in other culturally significant exchanges. One such exchange would have been language usage. Although the two groups originally emigrated from the same area (ancient Jerusalem immediately prior to the Babylonian exile; see Omni 1:12–19), the intervening five hundred years of independent development had led to significant changes in their language. Upon meeting, they could not understand one another since the Mulekites’ language “had become corrupted”; Mosiah thus “caused that [the native people of Zarahemla] should be taught in his language” (Omni 1:17–18). Yet despite these obstacles, the groups established effective communication within a very short period of time.25

24. Nothing in the text indicates that this situation changes. In the sixty-third year of the reign of the judges, the lands are still designated as follows: “Now the land south was called Lehi, and the land north was Mulek, which was after the son of Zedekiah” (Helaman 6:10). Thus almost one hundred years after Benjamin’s speech, the differences between the two communities in Zarahemla were still represented, at least in geographical designations. As Gardner rightfully points out, “The two groups initially had different religions, cultures and languages. Those are tremendous obstacles to overcome” (Gardner, Second Witness, 3:418).

25. “Mulekite” was probably a Semitic language since the original Mulekites claimed that one of their ancestors was Mulek, a son of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah. Unfortunately, little evidence of Mulekite as a spoken language exists, a situation complicated by the fact that we do not have the original text and are thus reliant, in any attempt at reconstructing the language using Mulekite names, on transliterations within the Book of Mormon and thus on the spelling of the translators. But the presence of the terms Mulek and Melek are a tantalizing possibility as to the nature of the Mulekite language. The designation of Mulek is found seventeen times in the Book of Mormon and refers to the name of an individual person, a city, and a larger geographical area. The city Mulek was in the north near Bountiful, but on the eastern seashore. As already pointed out, Helaman 6 informs us that the “land north”—apparently everything north of where the Nephites originally settled (the land of Nephi)—“was called Mulek, . . . for the Lord did bring Mulek into the land north” (Helaman 6:10). Finally, the book also mentions the individual named Mulek, Zedekiah’s son. This individual is associated with the royal family
The text’s designation of the Mulekite language as “corrupted” is problematic, particularly as it may reveal a long-standing Nephite bias of cultural superiority attested early in their history. In the second and third chapters of his book, Jacob notes with dismay the Nephite elite’s sense of superiority, both in terms of socioeconomic status and physical characteristics, in comparison with less advantaged Nephites and the Lamanites. Approximately five centuries later, this same sense of cultural superiority was displayed when the Nephites encountered another independent culture. The use of the term corrupted and Mosiah’s directive for the Mulekites to learn Nephite and not the other away around suggests that, at least to the Nephite community, the Nephite language had remained pure to the mother tongue.

of Judah, although one should note that this information stems from a five-hundred-year-old oral history (see Omni 1:18). The designation may well be a proper name. The Bible mentions, at least once, a certain Melek, son of Hosea. Though no individual is called Melek, a territory near Zarahemla is named Melek. Elsewhere mlk is found in conjunction with other nominal elements (Melchizedek, etc).

Both Melek and Mulek appear to reflect the West Semitic root mlk, which means “king.” The noun mlk is a segolate noun, meaning that its original pronunciation followed a consonant-vowel-consonant-consonant(-vowel) as opposed to the consonant-vowel-consonant-vowel-consonant(-vowel) pattern common to many Semitic words. Both Book of Mormon terms follow the second pattern, in which a secondary vowel is placed between the second and third consonants, even though originally this secondary vowel was not present. In biblical Hebrew, this secondary vowel is pronounced with an e, or schwa sound. What subsequently happened in the Hebrew development of segolates was the harmonization of the first vowel sound with the second, thus mVlek becomes melek. (In other West Semitic languages, the segolate noun retained its original vowel sound—a long u, a long a, or short i.) All this suggests that at the very least two different Semitic language patterns were present among Book of Mormon peoples, one reflecting an older West Semitic vowel pattern. Moreover, if the “noncorrupted” Nephite language resulted from having a biblical text, then Melek is a Nephite term (biblical Hebrew) while Mulek, the Mulekite term, stems from a nonbiblical but related West Semitic language. With that said, Royal Skousen has argued that, based on the printer’s manuscript, mulek should be read as muloch, which may reflect the Hebrew as well since the final letter of king in Hebrew is a soft k sound (kh) rather than a hard k sound; see Royal Skousen, Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon: Volume 4, Part 3, Mosiah 17–Alma 20 (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 1466; see also Gardner, Second Witness, 3:416.
It may well be that the Mulekite language diverged more radically from the Semitic mother tongue (presumably biblical Hebrew), but the Nephite tongue no doubt changed as well, particularly since the written form appears to have employed ideograms rather than the Hebrew alphabet. The designation of “corrupt” for the Mulekite language was only relative. Yet the Book of Mormon never questions the idea that Nephite should be the dominant language, and Mosiah’s insistence on its usage suggests a political purpose. In fact, the restriction

26. The text states that Nephi made his record in “the language of [his] father which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians” (1 Nephi 1:1). What is meant by “language” is unclear, though it is often assumed to be Egyptian writing forms. We are told in Mormon 9:32–33 that at least Mormon and Moroni wrote with characters known as “reformed Egyptian,” which Moroni then tells us were “altered by us, according to our manner of speech.” Moroni goes on to say that, had the plates been larger, he would have written in Hebrew, but that the Hebrew had been “altered” as well. Thus, at least a thousand years after the founding of the Nephite community, both the written and spoken languages of origin appear to have been “corrupted.” As for the brass plates, the text claims that they too were in some form of Egyptian: “were it not possible that our father, Lehi, could have remembered all these things . . . except it were for the help of these plates; for he having been taught in the language of the Egyptians therefore he could read these engravings” (Mosiah 1:3–4). Thus, while evidence suggests that the Nephites spoke a Hebrew variant, the written form was apparently an Egyptian variant. Consequently, written Nephite does not appear to have been “pure” to the original Hebrew, in either written or spoken form.

27. Barbara Loester has noted a similar relationship between subordinate cultures and the designation of their languages as “corrupt” in Scotland, England, Bavaria, and greater Germany. See Barbara Loester, “Scotland and Bavaria: Regional Affiliation and Linguistic Identity in ‘Peripheral’ Communities,” in Identity through a Language Lens, ed. Kamila Ciepiela (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), 63: “From a linguistic point of view, their regional varieties (or languages) are distinctly different from the national standard languages. These regional varieties are often considered ‘bad,’ ‘incorrect,’ or are perceived to indicate a lack of formal education as they deviate phonetically, lexically, and, to some extent, grammatically, from the standard variety. Out of these differences, linguistic, historical and cultural, we can observe a development of stereotypes, such as the tight-fisted Scot or the slow-witted Bavarian.” Note that in Mormon 9:33, Moroni states that the Nephites had altered the original Hebrew. Gardner points out the difference between “altered” and “corrupted,” noting: “The connotations suggest an insider/outsider perspective. For the insider, changes are simply alterations. For the outsider, who must confront ‘alterations’—particularly alterations of such magnitude that the other group cannot be understood—it is a case of ‘corruption’” (Gardner, Second Witness, 3:60).
or enforcement of language use often manifests the tension between dominant and minority cultures, particularly since language is used by each society to retain cultural distinctiveness. In the case of the Nephites and the Mulekites, their interaction began with the Nephites as a population minority that quickly established political and religious supremacy through controlling the dominant language. The Nephite policy may have been enforced partially because of fear. For the Nephites, their language and texts were instrumental in the retention of their cultural significance and were thus potentially threatened by the presence of the larger, preexisting culture of the Mulekites.

This concern may manifest itself in explicit textual references to the Nephite elite being taught the Nephite language. Approximately one generation following the Mulekite-Nephite convergence, Benjamin “caused that [his sons] should be taught in all the language of his fathers” (Mosiah 1:2). Zeniff, a contemporary of Benjamin who attempted a permanent reclamation of the ancestral land of Nephi, made a similar declaration: “I, Zeniff, having been taught in all the language of the Nephites . . .” (Mosiah 9:1). These texts suggest that full immersion in the Nephite language was unique enough to deserve written recognition, which in turn indicates an apparent need to receive formal training. The curious phrase “in all the language” suggests that the Nephite language may have been threatened by another robust language tradition, thus necessitating complete linguistic immersion. And it was not only Nephite elites who apparently learned the Nephite language. Zarahemla, the last Mulekite ruler, apparently learned Nephite as well. This last

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detail highlights another policy concern—what to do with the pre-existing Mulekite elite.

Though quickly forgotten, the Mulekite people had viable political leadership prior to the immigration of the Nephites, which was based on lineage connected to the last Judahite king, Zedekiah. No official policy concerning Mulekite royalty is made explicit in the text, but Nephite leaders no doubt had guidelines in place for handling them. Apparently they did not implement, like the biblical David, a policy of extermination. (Much of Saul’s clan was executed to eliminate the threat of Saulid pretenders.) Instead, it seems the Nephite leadership sought to incorporate the Mulekite elite into the new system of judges, hoping that assimilation would align this group with the new Nephite elite.

Such a policy would explain the curious decision by Mosiah, to place Ammon, a descendant of Zarahemla, at the head of an embassy to the estranged Nephite colony in the ancestral land of Nephi. According to the text, sometime during Benjamin’s reign a group of Nephites left the land of Zarahemla to reclaim the former Nephite territory known as the land of Nephi, what the text calls “the land of their inheritance” (Omni 1:27). Zeniff, one of the survivors of the original party, explicitly stated their desire to possess the “land of their fathers” (Mosiah 9:3). It thus appears that some Nephites felt uneasy living in a territory not technically their own (perhaps revealing again the perceived cultural superiority exhibited earlier). In any case, the colonization effort was beset with challenges from the beginning. The first attempt at reclamation failed because of internal dissension, while the second successful attempt lasted only three generations, resulting in conflict with and eventual subjugation to the Lamanites.29

29. Gardner, tentatively associating two Mesoamerican sites with the Book of Mormon cities of Zarahemla and Nephi, suggests that the land of Nephi was bigger and wealthier than Zarahemla and that this group of Nephites therefore desired to return and partake of this prosperity. While this may help confirm his Mesoamerican placement for the Book of Mormon, it does not take into account the explicit reasons demonstrated above for the group’s return, which appear much more purposive and ominous than simply becoming more prosperous (see Gardner, Second Witness, 3:228).
Three years into his reign, Mosiah_2, “wearied” by constant requests from his people, sent sixteen Nephite “strong men” on an expedition with the purpose of finding and reconciling the Nephite colonists. The designation of “strong man” is found elsewhere in both the Book of Mormon and the Old Testament, seemingly denoting those who held high military or social office. A party of Nephite elites indicates the delicacy of the mission and the strong emotions surrounding the whole affair. Upon arriving in the land of Nephi, Ammon reports the recent history of the Nephites in Zarahemla to the colonists, shares with them Benjamin’s discourse with its distinct political overtones concerning reconciliation, and helps them plan their escape from Lamanite subjugation. It appears he represented Mosiah_2’s interests in each case; certainly, he never stepped outside of those boundaries. When asked if he could baptize the estranged group, his response was that he was unworthy of doing so. While readers may assume this was because he felt himself spiritually unworthy, his words may rather have been a recognition that such an act would be outside the scope of his diplomatic mission. In any case, Mosiah’s designation of Ammon as ambassador reflected his apparent hope to assimilate the Mulekite elite into the Nephite political spectrum.

30. McCarter, _1 Samuel_, 173: “The title gibbôr hayil [strong man or mighty man] often carries a military connotation (Josh 1:14; 8:3; 10:7, etc.), but this does not exhaust its meaning, as is sometimes assumed. Basically the expression describes social standing and implies economic power. It may be used in reference to a nobleman or wealthy citizen, such as Jeroboam (I Kings 11:28) or Boaz (Ruth 2:1). The gibbôrê hayil are the taxable gentry (II Kings 15:20), who in the feudal hierarchy of the monarchy are associated closely with the court (II Kings 24:14; I Chron 28:1), where the feudatory obligation of military service is especially important. Thus while the expression may have referred originally to military prowess (though to be sure hayil may mean ‘wealth’ as well as ‘[physical] strength’), it became applicable to any high-ranking citizen.” In 1 Nephi 3:31 Laban is also described as a “mighty man.” His responsibilities match up to those of other mighty men. He is the military commander of fifty men, he is one of the city elders who counsel with the king, and he is the possessor of the tribal record of Manasseh.

31. Sorenson, “When Lehi’s Party Arrived,” 10: “Why were Ammon and company not recognized immediately as Nephites? Was their costume and tongue or accent so much different than what Limhi’s people expected of a Nephite that this put them off?
Yet with the seismic political shift from monarchy to judgeship, Mosiah’s original intentions regarding the Mulekite cultural elite were upended. As explained earlier, the new system relied on a hierarchy of judges, from lesser judges representing small localities to higher judges representing greater geographical areas. Just as adherents or sympathizers represented religious communities, so too would Mulekites represent their own cultural communities. I have already suggested that during the entire period of Nephite leadership, the Mulekites retained their cultural identity. With the creation of the judgeship system, the Mulekites would have regained direct political influence. Just as Nephite elites appear to have been chosen as judges, Mulekite elites would likely have been chosen to represent their communities.

While the Nephite kings were largely moral, effective leaders, it is intriguing that with Mosiah’s announcement of the new political system, the text reports that the people in the land “assembled themselves together in bodies throughout the land, . . . and they were exceedingly rejoiced because of the liberty which had been granted unto them” (Mosiah 29:39). Because of the reform, Mosiah actually increased in popularity: “Yea, they did esteem him more than any other man; for they did not look upon him as a tyrant who was seeking for gain, . . . but he had established peace in the land, and he had granted unto his people that they should be delivered from all manner of bondage” (Mosiah 29:40). In light of the implicit Nephite sense of superiority reflected in the text,

Ammon was a ‘descendant of Zarahemla’ (Mosiah 7:13), a point that he emphasized in his introduction to the king. Does this mean that he somehow looked different than a ‘typical’ Nephite? Or had the Zeniffites had encounters with other non-Nephite types in their area which might have prompted Limhi’s cautious reception? And what personal relationship had Ammon to the Zeniffites, after all? As a person descended from Zarahemla, that is, a ‘Mulekite,’ why did he refer to Zeniff’s presumably Nephite party as ‘our brethren’ and show them so much concern that he would lead this arduous expedition to find out their fate? The social, political, ethnic, and language relationships involved in this business are not straightforward, to say the least.”
part of this appreciation may have been in recognition that Mosiah had reinstalled some Mulekite political identity.  

Of course, this new freedom had the potential of highlighting or exacerbating latent social divisions kept under relative control during the monarchy’s rule. Nevertheless, such tension appears infrequently in the Book of Mormon. The conflict with the king-men, beginning in the nineteenth year of the reign of judges, possibly reflected tensions between the Mulekites and the Nephites, but the text does not clarify who the king-men were beyond their being “lower judges” and those “of high birth.” Interestingly, these individuals coalesced around Amalickiah and his brother Ammoron, descendants of Zoram—a man who, in their own words, was “pressed and brought out of Jerusalem” by the Nephite forefathers (Alma 54:23). Those who sought for kingship were not simply greedy individuals but were also representatives of groups who believed they had real historical and political grievances with Nephite dominance. Certainly, during the reign of Ammoron’s son, the Zoramite-Mulekite connection became very apparent. In the forty-first year of the reign of the judges, the city of Zarahemla was overrun by the Lamanite chief captain, Coriantumr, a “large and mighty man” who was

32. Gardner believes this to be Mormon’s eulogy and not necessarily a reflection of the people’s actual reaction to the reforms (see Second Witness, 3:482). This is possible, but the language suggests that Mormon is emphasizing the people’s response to the reforms. Thus “they assembled, . . . they were exceedingly rejoiced, . . . they did esteem him more, . . . for . . . he had granted unto his people that they should be delivered” (Mosiah 29:39–40).

33. John A. Tvednes, “Book of Mormon Tribal Affiliation and Military Castes,” in Warfare in the Book of Mormon, 299, describes the status of the king-men: “The text informs us that these were people of ‘high birth’ (Alma 51:8), ‘who professed the blood of nobility’ (Alma 51:21), and who felt that they should rule—perhaps because of descent from King Zarahemla or King Zedekiah of Judah. The passage in question dates from the twentieth year of the reign of judges; hence, twenty-five years after Mosiah announced his retirement and therefore four generations after the agreement made between the earlier Mosiah and Zarahemla, uniting the two peoples. Moroni was able to crush the rebellion. . . . The king-men who survived the war ‘were compelled to hoist the title of liberty upon their towers, and in their cities’ (Alma 51:20; italics added). If this means that they were settled in specific cities, then they are more likely a tribal group than a political faction with representation throughout the Nephite lands.”
“a descendant of Zarahemla; and he was a dissenter from among the Nephites” (Helaman 1:15). Tubaloath, Ammoron’s son, had appointed him to his military post. Unlike earlier Lamanite military excursions that targeted outlying areas, Coriantumr bypassed remote cities and marched straight to Zarahemla, the old Mulekite capital. Thus this military incursion by a Mulekite of elite lineage, promoted by a Lamanite king who descended from Zoram, brings to focus a number of sociological challenges within Nephite society. All the groups represented in this event—the Mulekites, the Lamanites, and the Zoramites—seem to have harbored resentment against the Nephite disdainful dominance.

“They were called by the Nephites the people of Ammon” (Alma 27:26)

The third element challenging the Nephites in the years leading up to the eighteenth year of the judges’ reign was the immigration of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies into the land of Zarahemla. The first five centuries of Nephite history were punctuated by frequent conflicts with the Nephites’ rivals, the Lamanites. Yet in the fifteenth year of the reign of the judges, that defining antagonistic relationship underwent a radical change that affected the Nephites for at least the next century. As Alma the high priest was traveling that year among the Nephite communities in the south (near the Nephite-Lamanite border), he encountered the four sons of Mosiah, who had left years earlier to preach to the Lamanites in the land of Nephi (the same territory where Ammon the Mulekite and his “strong men” had gone to find the estranged Nephite colonists). Upon their meeting, Mosiah’s sons acted as emissaries for the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, a community of Lamanite converts who sought religious asylum.

The narrative describing the formation of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies consists of Alma 17–28. This detailed account suggests that the missionary work of Mosiah’s sons is one of the more significant narratives in the Book of Mormon. More than a decade of preaching by Ammon2, along with his three brothers and their associates, proves instrumental in the conversion of “many thousands” of Lamanites (Alma 26:13), including the Lamanite king and two of his sons (one of whom was
next in line for the throne). By the tenth year of the Nephite mission, the converted king had died and his son Anti-Nephi-Lehi assumed his throne. The unconverted chose this time to rebel and attack the converted. The converts, meanwhile, had entered into an oath never again to shed blood. In the ensuing battle, over a thousand converted Lamanites were killed without offering any resistance. Yet their example led to more than a thousand further conversions among the Lamanites. As a result of this second conversion, the remaining unconverted Lamanites took vengeance directly on the Nephites, whom, it appears, they blamed for the disruption of the greater Lamanite society. A lightning-quick strike deep in Nephite territory resulted in the utter annihilation of Ammonihah in the eleventh year of the reign of the judges. For the Nephites, this attack appeared to come out of the blue. Preceding it, there had been six years of peace. The Lamanite reprisal was in fact so unexpected that there was insufficient time to raise an army before

34. The invasion may be understood as one in which the Lamanites felt themselves besieged by Nephites. The failed Nephite attempt at reclaiming the land of Nephi had been just a few years earlier. Moreover, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies began to “open a correspondence” with the Nephites (Alma 23:18). Thus the unconverted may have seen the conversion effort as an attempt by the Nephites to foment unrest. This situation was repeated a few years later, only that time it was the Nephites who feared open correspondence between a segment of Nephite population and the Lamanites; it too generated military conflict (see Alma 31:2–4).

35. An intriguing side note concerns the supposed instrumentality of the order of Nehor in the destruction of Ammonihah. According to the text, Nephite dissenters (Amalekites or Amulonites) and those of the order of Nehor encouraged the Lamanites to attack the Nephite city Ammonihah (see Alma 24:28–29), the Nehorite stronghold. Either this represents one of the most bitterly ironic passages in the Book of Mormon, or the presence of “Nehor” had become the Nephite explanation behind any and every misfortune, whether historically accurate or not.

36. The most recent conflict had been the conjoining of the Lamanite army with that of Amlici following his push to become monarch in the fifth year of the reign of the judges (see Alma 2–3). The conjoining suggests prior coordination on the part of Amlici and whoever the Lamanite king was at the time. Intriguingly, this battle was concurrent with the ministry of the sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites in the land of Nephi. This may suggest that semi-independent city-states rather than a unified nation characterized the Lamanites (and perhaps the Nephites as well). While some may believe this merely confirms the Mesoamerican location hypothesis, it should not be
Ammonihah was totally destroyed. Although the Nephites were ultimately successful in repelling the invasion, disposal of the Ammonihahite dead took days, and the resulting smell apparently kept others from reinhabiting the city for years (see Alma 16:11).37

Unfortunately, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies were the direct cause of the next military conflict as well. In the fourteenth year of the reign of the judges, Lamanite animosity against the Anti-Nephi-Lehies resulted in a terrible, bloody battle following the decision of the converted Lamanites to remove to the land of Zarahemla, which they did with all of their “flocks and herds” (Alma 27:14). As noted earlier, the sons of Mosiah

37. Conkling, “Alma’s Enemies,” 116: “As S. Kent Brown has noted, the incident contains different information from two different narrations, from the ‘northern’ Nephite perspective and from inside the ‘southern’ Lamanite milieu. The traditional Nephite perspective shows only Lamanites as aggressors (see Alma 16:2–11). But the second narration points out that the Lamanites who attacked and destroyed Ammonihah were those Lamanites who were ‘more angry because they had slain their [own] brethren’ (Alma 25:1), who, as is just seen three verses earlier, were primarily Amalekites (Amlichites) and Amulonites (see Alma 24:28–29).” See S. Kent Brown, From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1998), 105–6. See also Hardy, Understanding the Book of Mormon, 117–18: “Alma 16 also provides an intriguing example of multiple lines of causation, where we can see Mormon thinking through historical incidents both spiritually and politically. The first verse is remarkable for Mormon’s insistence that this Lamanite raid was absolutely unexpected and unprovoked. . . . The meaning is clear: an act of God destroyed the Ammonihahites in retribution for their arrogance, brutality, and rejection of the prophets. . . . However, a little later in the book of Alma, chapter 25 offers another narrative unit, one that relates the missionary adventures of the sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites (Alma 17–27). It turns out that the city of Ammonihah was not destroyed as if by lightning from heaven. There was a perfectly natural sequence of causes and effects that led to the Lamanite raid, and this series of events was set in motion by Ammon and his brothers. . . . So in Alma 8–18 and 17–25, we find two separate narrative strands that culminate in the destruction of Ammonihah, but the explanations given in each version are different. One is spiritual (due to God’s justice) and one political (due to Lamanite aggressions in the aftermath of Anti-Nephi-Lehi conversions). Nevertheless, both seem equally valid; apparently God’s will is sometimes manifest through ordinary historical means, and Mormon, as a historian as well as a moral guide, is interested in promoting both perspectives.”
went ahead of the converts and consulted with the Nephite leadership. A treaty was established, and the people of Ammon settled in the land of Jershon. They were followed by a Lamanite army who engaged in a confrontation with the Nephite armies that Mormon described as the worst military conflict experienced by the Nephites to that point in their history:

There was a tremendous battle; yea, even such an one as never had been known among all the people in the land from the time Lehi left Jerusalem; yea, and tens of thousands of the Lamanites were slain and scattered abroad. Yea, and also there was a tremendous slaughter among the people of Nephi. (Alma 28:2–3)

Of the dead, we are simply told that Lamanite casualties “were not numbered because of the greatness of their numbers; neither were the dead of the Nephites numbered” (Alma 30:2).

The effect these events had on the Nephite population is difficult to judge exactly, but one cannot experience the worst battle in one’s history and not have it affect the society at some level—especially when it was an influx of one’s former enemies that precipitated the attack. The loss of so many family and kindred because of a people who formerly were “wild” and “ferocious” (Alma 17:14) and would not fight on their own behalf was no doubt galling to some. And the Nephite disdain for Lamanites in general would likely have played a role.

Much has been made of Lamanite animosity toward the Nephites, but the Lamanite reasons for this animosity have not been noted in any great detail. With the death of Lehi, father of both the Nephites and the Lamanites, and the subsequent exodus of the Nephites’ eponymous ancestor and his followers into the wilderness, the bitterness and ill feelings never resolved in the original colony but became the foundation of each community’s perception of the other. From the Lamanite perspective, the conflict arose over Nephi usurping the leadership position of Laman, his oldest brother. Although written by a Nephite king a little over four hundred years following the original exodus, a passage in Mosiah 10 summarizes well the Lamanite traditional belief that
they were driven out of the land of Jerusalem because of the iniquities of their fathers, and that they were wronged in the wilderness by their brethren, and they were also wronged while crossing the sea; And again, that they were wronged while in the land of their first inheritance, after they had crossed the sea; . . . And again, they were wroth with [Nephi] when they had arrived in the promised land, because they said that he had taken the ruling of the people out of their hands; . . . And again, they were wroth with him because he departed into the wilderness . . . and took the records which were engraven on the plates of brass, for they said that he robbed them. And thus they have taught their children that they should hate them, and that they should murder them, and that they should rob and plunder them, and do all they could do to destroy them; therefore they have an eternal hatred towards the children of Nephi. (Mosiah 10:12, 15–17)

Similar language is used a century later when the king over the Lamanites encountered Ammon, the son of King Mosiah, traveling with his (the king’s) son Lamoni, a converted lesser Lamanite ruler:

His father was angry with him, and said: Lamoni, thou art going to deliver these Nephites, who are sons of a liar. Behold, he robbed our fathers; and now his children are also come amongst us that they may, by their cunning and their lyings, deceive us, that they again may rob us of our property. (Alma 20:13)

Thus Lamanite animosity had its roots in political and social divisions through which the Lamanites were “wronged of their rightful inheritance,” and the Nephites were viewed as deceitful usurpers. 

38. It appears that the Nephites may have had similar feelings. In the twenty-ninth year of the reign of the judges, and in a moment of annoyance, Captain Moroni, in a letter to the Lamanite king, Ammoron, threatened: “Behold, I am in my anger, . . . if ye seek to destroy us more we will seek to destroy you; yea, and we will seek our land, the land of our first inheritance” (Alma 54:13). His outburst reveals one layer of Nephite animosity, which contrasts with the Lamanite tradition concerning what happened in the land of first inheritance. Whereas the Lamanites believed they had been tricked and cheated out of their proper place of authority, the Nephites believed they had been
Unfortunately, the Nephites themselves harbored negative stereotypes that demonstrated contempt toward the Lamanites. Where the Lamanites viewed their relationship with the Nephites in terms of grievances for perceived historical slights, the Nephites held disdain for the Lamanite people and culture in general. The prophet Jacob addressed this prejudice early in Nephite history, accusing the Nephites:

> Behold, the Lamanites your brethren, whom ye hate because their filthiness and the cursing which hath come upon their skins; . . . Wherefore a commandment I give unto you, which is the word of God, that you revile no more against them because of the darkness of their skins; neither shall you revile against them because of their filthiness. (Jacob 3:5, 9)

Jacob’s reference to the “darkness of their skins” does not define this term, but its later equation with filthiness is similar to racist equivalents found elsewhere historically. Thus it seems we find the Nephites exhibiting racist prejudices against the Lamanites, a behavior that required remonstration from a prophet.

In addition to explicit racism, the Nephites demonstrated implicit contempt through their lack of empathy for cultural differences. We have already seen that the Nephites claimed cultural superiority when interacting with the Mulekites. The Nephites also exhibited disdain for Lamanite cultural practices. For instance, in one text the Lamanites are described as

> wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people, full of idolatry and filthiness; feeding upon beasts of prey; dwelling in tents, and wandering about in the wilderness with a short skin girdle about their loins and their heads shaven. . . . And many of them did eat nothing save it was raw meat; and they were continually seeking to destroy us. (Enos 1:20)

forced out of the land of first inheritance. Incidentally, this provides further support that Zeniff’s return had a more serious purpose than simply seeking for a place of greater prosperity.
Leading a nomadic lifestyle or eating raw meat is not inherently wrong, but the above description makes it clear that it was not the “Nephite” way and thus was something Nephites understood as inappropriate or improper.\(^39\) Significantly, the context for these Lamanite behaviors is missing from such descriptions, and its lack allows the emphasis to fall on negative characterizations. For instance, Gardner points out that while “beasts of prey” were most likely herbivorous like sheep and goats, they were wild and thus could be contrasted with Nephite consumption of domesticated animals. The distinction thus served to suggest the animalistic nature of the Lamanites.\(^40\) Similarly, we read elsewhere that the Lamanites “loved murder and would drink the blood of beasts” (Jarom 1:6). Again the context for these acts is missing, allowing such descriptions to maintain and even enhance negative stereotypes. Some Lamanites in some specific contexts likely drank blood, but the implication that all Lamanites drank blood and that doing so was associated with a love of murder is most likely inaccurate. Certainly this characterization is a common trope found in historical polemics used to demonize others.\(^41\) Another problem appears to be the imputing of motives. Whether the writers of the above passages actually interacted with Lamanites to understand their intentions is unknown. However,

\(^{39}\) One might argue that eating raw meat violates the law of Moses, normative for Book of Mormon peoples before the resurrection of Christ. However, earlier in the Book of Mormon, the Nephites apparently understood the eating of raw meat as acceptable, at least in certain circumstances (see 1 Nephi 17:2). Gardner, making this same case, points out in Second Witness, 3:16, that “this information is more a value judgment than a cultural description. It is intended to contrast the uncivilized Lamanite with the civilized Nephite. Lamanites and Nephites are not just enemies, they are opposites. The Nephites are not just religiously superior, they are culturally superior.”

\(^{40}\) See Gardner, Second Witness, 3:16, who contrasts this description of Lamanite hunting with Enos’s own hunting earlier in Enos 1:3–5.

\(^{41}\) For more on the sensationalism of the “other” via descriptions of their ritual practice, see David Frankfurter, Evil Incarnate: Rumors of Demonic Conspiracy and Satanic Abuse in History (Princeton: Oxford University Press, 2006), 73–128.
these writers still claim that the Lamanites’ only motive is to continually destroy the Nephites (see Jacob 7:24; Enos 1:20).42

The representation of the Lamanites as less than human is particularly apparent in Mosiah. Zeniff, the founding leader of the Nephite colony discussed before (see Mosiah 7–24), describes the Lamanites as a “wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people” possessing a “cunning, and lying craftiness,” concluding that “for this very cause has king Laman . . . deceived me, that I have brought this my people up into this land, that they may destroy them” (Mosiah 10:18). As elsewhere, both negative stereotypes and insidious motives were assigned to Lamanite behavior, although this particular instance is especially problematic. It appears in the middle of a motivational speech meant to “stimulate” a Nephite army to go “to battle with their might” against the Lamanites (Mosiah 10:19). As it turns out, however, the reason for this particular military conflict is quite complicated. According to Zeniff, the territory he and his people had come to hold had been controlled by the Lamanites but was turned over to the Nephite colonists by an agreement with the Lamanite king (see Mosiah 9:6–7). The treaty remained in force until the thirteenth year of Zeniff’s reign, at which time the Lamanites

42. Conkling suggests that this discrepancy—what is said about the Lamanites compared to what they do—may be one of the central messages of the Book of Mormon: “What makes the Book of Mormon stand out is not how much blame is put on ‘them,’ the Lamanites, but rather how little. This is surprisingly true even in the book of Alma, the book with the longest treatment of wars and contentions with the Lamanites. An understanding of this requires a close reading of the record, distinguishing at times between what is said and what is shown. For instance, when the story of Ammon and his companions is introduced, the Lamanites are called a ‘wild and a hardened and a ferocious people; a people who delighted in murdering the Nephites, and robbing and plundering them. . . . They were a very indolent people, . . . and the curse of God had fallen upon them because of the traditions of their fathers’ (Alma 17:14–15). Later, the Lamanites are said to be ‘in the darkest abyss’ (Alma 26:3). However, . . . what the records show is that the Lamanites were almost as civilized, decent, receptive, and, yes, hostile, dishonest, murdering, and persecuting as Alma’s Nephites. They had highways, transportation, government, religious buildings, planned cities, various religious customs, government officials, soldiers, outlaws and renegades, and kings and subkings (or ‘chiefs’), just as the Nephites had, and were not quite as uncivilized as the Nephites originally feared” (Conkling, “Alma’s Enemies,” 115).
came up to battle. Responding to the impending attack, Zeniff attributed the aforementioned motives to his Lamanite enemies: “they were a lazy and an idolatrous people; therefore they were desirous to bring us into bondage, that they might glut themselves with the labors of our hands” (Mosiah 9:12). Yet just one verse earlier, Zeniff admitted “that after we had dwelt in the land for the space of twelve years that king Laman began to grow uneasy, lest by any means my people should wax strong in the land, and that they could not overpower them and bring them into bondage” (Mosiah 9:11). Although the last part of this verse makes accusations similar to the subsequent verse, the earlier part suggests that Lamanite rulers had become understandably uneasy about a growing Nephite presence in their territory. That the Lamanite concern was justified may be evidenced by the fact that prior to the treaty, there were conflicts within Zeniff’s own Nephite community over whether they should enter into the treaty or simply slaughter the Lamanites outright (see Mosiah 9:1–2). This antipathy among a group of Nephites toward the Lamanites, as well as the defensive rebuilding of these Nephite cities (see Mosiah 9:8), may have provided the impetus for the preemptive attack by the Lamanites.

Following this first conflict in which Zeniff’s people successfully defended themselves, another decade of peace passed before the second battle described in Mosiah 10. In this case, King Laman had died and his son had been enthroned, although, like other new kings whose power is not yet established in the first year, he may have believed that the Nephites represented a direct threat to his nascent reign. What seems problematic is Zeniff’s reasoning that the attack reflected the “cunning, and lying craftiness, and fair promises” of the then-deceased King Laman, who supposedly allowed the Nephites to grow and prosper

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43. Gardner, using Mesoamerican history as a model, suggests that the Lamanite attack is a result of their desire to pull in Zeniff’s people as tributaries and that twelve years was insufficient time to “wax strong” enough to overthrow Lamanite hegemony (see Second Witness, 3:235–26).
while fully intending to have them destroyed twenty-two years later, even after his own death.44

One last example may not be as blatant in its stereotyping as others, but it is just as negative. During the reign of Noah, Zeniff’s son, the Lamanites attacked again, perhaps in response to an ostentatious building program that included an observation tower built expressly to spy on the surrounding Lamanites (see Mosiah 11:12). Upon seeing the Lamanites approach, Noah fled, leaving behind many of his people to counter the attack. Those left behind sent forth their daughters to plead for them. “The Lamanites [then] had compassion on them, for they were charmed with the beauty of their women” (Mosiah 19:14). In this familiar literary trope, the unsophisticated “wild man” appears to be tamed by the beauty of a woman—not just any woman, but a cultured, sophisticated woman who represents the refined (and therefore better) nature of a particular culture. While such stories often end positively, with the wild man becoming a productive member of the refined community, the scenario could also be used to draw lines of demarcation. The woman might not agree to charm the wild man, or the wild man’s inordinate fixation on the woman’s beauty may demonstrate that he

44. Others have noted the apparent Nephite discrimination here. Again, see Conkling, “Alma’s Enemies,” 131n21: “The closest we come to the purely evil Lamanite individual is King Laman in the book of Mosiah (see Mosiah 7:21–22; 9:10–12) and his son (see Mosiah 10:6, 11–20). Even here Zeniff’s first opinion was that ‘when I saw that which was good among them I was desirous that they should not be destroyed’ (Mosiah 9:1). Zeniff even relates that it was his ‘blood-thirsty’ Nephites who planned the first aggression against the Lamanites in an effort to regain land abandoned less than a dozen years earlier (see Mosiah 9:1–6). Upon entering their city unmolested, Zeniff finds the king willing to move his own population to give the land to the Nephites, whom he left in peace for 12 years until a war broke out. Only then did Zeniff start to describe them negatively (see Mosiah 9:10–14). Compared to secular despot and warmongers, Laman does not initially come off so badly. What’s interesting about Mosiah 9:1–9 is that the original, positive description of the Lamanites changes so drastically to their being described as ‘lazy and idolatrous’ and practicing ‘cunning and craftiness’ (Mosiah 9:10, 12). If King Laman had been so cunning from the start in giving up choice lands for 12 years, he was indeed a long-term strategist, for that was probably a fourth to a third of the average life span in that era. Even here the Lamanite hatred of Nephites is attributed to the false traditions of their fathers (see Mosiah 10:11–18).”
should not be a part of the community. In this case, though, the text presents the Lamanites as country rubes awed by the physical beauty of the Nephites’ daughters.

The immigration of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies into Nephite territory occurred within this cultural and political environment of prejudice and hostility. Not only was there a five-hundred-year history of Lamanite-Nephite distrust and animosity, but just three years prior to their arrival, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies had indirectly caused the annihilation of an entire Nephite city. Their later settlement in Nephite territory then led to the worst military event in Nephite history up to that time. These factors were well known to the people involved. The Anti-Nephi-Lehies were sensitive to the challenges their presence would present to the Nephites “because of the many murders and sins [they had] committed against them” (Alma 27:6). In light of this, their leader suggested they become slaves to the Nephites “until we repair unto them the many murders and sins” (Alma 27:8). Although the incoming community did not expect such reparations, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies were willing to appease the inevitable tensions that would arise from their presence by voluntarily submitting themselves to such a state. Moreover, it would also have at least implied their acquiescence to Nephite cultural/social/religious superiority.

Of course, such an act of submission was unacceptable to the sons of Mosiah, who in response reiterated their father’s injunction against slavery. Instead, they proposed to meet with the Nephite leadership to plead their case. Alma 2, the high priest and former chief judge, acted as their sponsor before the chief judge. After hearing the case, the “chief judge sent a proclamation throughout all the land, desiring the voice of the people concerning the admitting their brethren, who were the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi” (Alma 27:21). Although this was not the first time the voice of the people had weighed in on a large-scale sociopolitical issue, a decade had passed since the last time. Even though the text is not clear on how the judges acquired the voice of the people, the result

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45. For an example of the former, see the Enkidu in the Epic of Gilgamesh. For an example of the latter, see the familiar European folktale Rumplestiltskin.
was a treaty (outlined in Alma 27:22–24) with stipulations for both the Nephites and the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. The latter were to receive the land of Jershon by the east shore. The Nephites agreed to place military forces in the territory to “protect our brethren in the land Jershon . . . on account of their fear to take up arms against their brethren lest they should commit sin . . . that they may inherit the land of Jershon” (Alma 27:23–24).

Though readers often focus on the apparent goodwill behind the agreement, indications in the text suggest they reflected lingering Nephite concerns. For instance, the land of Jershon given to the Anti-Nephi-Lehies was situated on the other side of the river Sidon from Zarahemla, meaning that there was no direct geographical contact between the newly installed Anti-Nephi-Lehies and the Nephite capital. Moreover, a Nephite military presence was established with the official understanding that the Anti-Nephi-Lehies would not pick up a weapon in the newly provided territory because of their “great fear,” which arose from their “sore repentance . . . on account of their many murders and their awful wickedness” (Alma 27:23). Finally, the treaty clarified that the Anti-Nephi-Lehies were expected to provide physical sustenance for the military force stationed among them.

While these conditions may seem reasonable, even just, they were remarkably similar to the stipulations of the Lamanite-Nephite agreement established during the reign of King Laman and King Zeniff in the land of Nephi, including the stationing of a military force among the Nephites and the required provision of sustenance for the military force. In that case, the agreement was made to alleviate security concerns on the Lamanites’ part regarding an overzealous Nephite community living in their midst. Of course, on that occasion the agreement served as evidence to the Nephites for why they had been treated wrongly by the native Lamanite people. The treaty between the Nephites and the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, on the other hand, received no such negative assessment, even though one can identify the same security concerns behind it. In any case, the immigration of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies and the ensuing, horrific battle would affect the Nephites for generations to come.
Conclusion

As all the above circumstances suggest, the first seventeen years of the reign of the judges were a challenging time. Continued fallout from a massive political restructuring, reemerging native population powers, and the influx of new immigrant groups who did not fully assimilate deeply challenged their society. When experienced simultaneously among the Nephites, these challenges created a sociopolitical environment in which individuals or events could threaten the social fabric by exacerbating the tensions already present. The resulting crises defined the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges and the few months prior to and following it.

For the discerning reader, the above historical factors and their subsequent consequences may seem similar to modern circumstances. If so, then it would appear that Mormon deliberately framed the crises within their historical framework with his audience in mind, for there is no question that we are his intended audience (see Mormon 8:34–35). And if this is the case, then the necessity of seeing the larger picture—recognizing that political, social, and religious crises do not arise out of a vacuum but emerge from larger sociopolitical challenges set in motion years earlier—may be one of the more important lessons that Mormon provides.

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The Deliberate Use of Hebrew Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon

Carl J. Cranney

The study of Hebrew poetry is a rich and productive field. Robert Alter’s popular Art of Biblical Poetry gives readers a profound understanding of the poetic techniques biblical authors used to make their writings more engaging. In addition, the historical development of Hebrew poetry has been used to date certain texts. The presence of poetry has been used as evidence of the careful construction of particular texts. Poetic structures have clued scholars into the possibility that entire books of the Bible were meant for use in public worship. As these studies suggest, scholars have proposed many styles and functions of Hebrew poetry.

In this paper I will focus on one particular kind of Hebrew poetry—that of parallelisms—as it appears in the Book of Mormon. A quick example of this form of poetry, drawn from the book of Proverbs, will suffice to make its nature clear. Proverbs 11:1 reads: “A false balance is abomination to the Lord: but a just weight is his delight.” There are two

5. I draw this example from Alter, Art of Biblical Poetry, 211.
elements at work here, a simple ABAB parallelism and an antithetical parallelism. Reformatted, the passage appears as follows:

A A false balance
B is an abomination to the Lord
A but a just weight
B is his delight.\(^6\)

This visual reformatting highlights the antithetical elements. The two A lines represent the thing discussed, and the B lines describe the Lord’s reaction to them. Indeed, the rest of Proverbs 11 contains nothing but such antithetical pairings. Anciently, parallelisms were used in many ways, but perhaps the most significant was to aid memorization of complex texts. A significant percentage of parallelisms could aid a speaker in memorizing a text. The more parallelisms and the more patterns, the easier memorization would be.

This study focuses on the presence of poetic parallelisms in the Book of Mormon and argues that these parallelisms appear consistently in Book of Mormon texts intended for oral recitation (where poetic structure would presumably aid memorization and oral delivery), while they remain consistently absent in Book of Mormon texts intended to be circulated in written form.

Background

Before proceeding to my discussion of poetic parallelisms in the Book of Mormon, a review of related scholarship on the book’s poetic structures should prove helpful. The literature on poetic structures in the Book of Mormon most often focuses on chiasmus.\(^7\) More than forty-five years

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6. I am using a formatting technique used by Donald Parry that will be introduced in more detail later in this paper.

7. A good primer on the concept of chiasmus can be found in John W. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1981), 9–15. Summarily put, chiasmus is reverse parallelism. Instead of the ABAB structure found in the proverb
have passed since John Welch first discovered chiasmus in the Book of Mormon.\textsuperscript{8} Since that time, doubters and believers have debated the validity and meaning of his arguments. Believers have seen the presence of chiasmus as an indication of the Book of Mormon’s ancient origins. Doubters have assailed the strength of specific examples of chiasmus, as well as of its usefulness in determining whether a text exhibits ancient Near Eastern influences.\textsuperscript{9}

An exemplary moment in this debate was an exchange between Earl Wunderli and Boyd and Farrell Edwards. Wunderli critiques Welch’s argument that Alma 36 contains a masterful example of chiasmus,\textsuperscript{10} arguing that the chiasm is forced onto the text and that Welch relies too much on parallels that do not hold up under close scrutiny.\textsuperscript{11} Edwards and Edwards respond that using statistically relevant criteria (drawn from Welch’s own criteria for identification of chiasmus)\textsuperscript{12} allows them to fix the probability of Alma 36 being an accidentally generated chiasm at 0.00018 (making it clearly intentional)\textsuperscript{13} and that Wunderli’s critique of their results is the consequence of using literary criteria to counter mathematical criteria.

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\textsuperscript{9} This back and forth on the intentionality of chiasmus is by far the largest portion of the previous related literature on the Book of Mormon and is simultaneously the most relevant for my project.


They state that “meaningful statistical results do not require adherence to the literary standards devised by Welch or Wunderli.”

Others have similarly cast doubt on identified Book of Mormon chiasms; they argue that it is possible to accidentally generate chiasms and point out that chiasms can be found in unlikely (and definitely modern) places. Brent Metcalfe, for instance, finds chiasmus in several revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants, in Joseph Smith’s diary, and in a passage from John Taylor. A letter from Joseph Smith to Emma Smith has also been identified as containing a chiasm, and one critic has even pointed out that he can find chiasmus in the INFORMIX-OnLine Database Administrator’s Guide. Perhaps most astonishingly, chiasmus appears to be replete in Dr. Seuss’s Green Eggs and Ham.

From such examples, one could well conclude that the mere presence of chiasmus does not necessarily determine the antiquity of a text. However, no scholar has suggested that just because one can accidentally generate chiasms that all chiasms are accidentally generated. What must be shown is whether or not a particular chiasm is intentional. As Welch states:

If, on the one hand, one should view Smith himself as being responsible for the book, this would initially imply that even extremely complex chiastic patterns have occurred here completely

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unintentionally and accidentally. Perhaps such chiastic incidences should then be explained as a product of something such as a general human literary sense of balance or symmetry. This, of course, would have broad implications with respect to one’s understanding of the many chiastic passages observed elsewhere in the Bible and in other ancient writings. It would not, however, explain why chiasmus is not, then, more universally observable and why it seems to occur in certain periods of a culture’s literary development but not in others.  

Additionally, even though it is easy to see how one might accidentally generate simple chiasms (such as an ABBA-patterned chiasm), it is difficult to see how one might accidentally generate a chiasm of much greater complexity, such as that Welch claims to have found in Alma 36. Edwards and Edwards grant that “short chiasms are not uncommon in literature. In some cases, the authors undoubtedly intended to use that form for literary effect (that is, by design); in other cases, the elements fell into that form without author intent (that is, by chance).” They also point out that the examples of chiasmus put forward by critics (including many of those listed above) do not demonstrate intentionality, though the Book of Mormon’s chiasms do demonstrate intentionality.

Although much has been written about chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, chiasmus is not the only Hebrew poetic pattern found therein.


20. Welch’s analysis of Alma 36 indicates that, more than just a simple two-element ABBA chiasm, it is an eleven-element chiasm. Other scholars have attempted to revise Welch’s work. For example, Joseph Spencer argues that it “seems best to not force a chiasm onto the whole of Alma 36, but rather just to take verses 1–5 and 26–30 as a tightly structured chiastic framing that sets off the distinctly structured central conversion narrative of verses 6–25.” Joseph Spencer, An Other Testament: On Typology (Salem, OR: Salt Press, 2012), 5.


Donald Parry, taking a cue from Welch’s discoveries, has scoured the Book of Mormon for all kinds of Hebrew poetic parallelisms. His Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon: The Complete Text Reformatted lists twenty-five different types of poetic parallelism in the Book of Mormon. Hugh Pinnock lists twenty-seven forms of parallelism in his Finding Biblical Hebrew and Other Ancient Literary Forms in the Book of Mormon, some of which overlap Parry’s categories. Between incredibly complex chiastic patterns and a proliferating variety of parallelistic structures, there appears to be more going on poetically in the Book of Mormon than just a few possibly accidental chiasms.

Parry’s work is useful not only for its exhaustive scope, but because of the visual nature of the reformatted text that allows readers to easily see where parallelisms appear. Two quick examples will suffice. First, I present an extended alternate from 1 Nephi 12:9:

And he said unto me

A Thou rememberest the twelve apostles of the Lamb?
B Behold they are they who shall judge
C the twelve tribes of Israel;
A wherefore, the twelve ministers of thy seed
B shall be judged of them;
C for ye are of the house of Israel.

23. For a richer discussion of such parallelisms by Parry, see Donald W. Parry, “Hebraisms and Other Ancient Peculiarities in the Book of Mormon,” in Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 155–89.
26. I find Parry’s work on the variety of poetic parallelisms in the Book of Mormon compelling, so much so that the previous literature’s almost myopic focus on chiasmus seems lopsided to me.
Second, here is a chiasm from 2 Nephi 9:28:

O that cunning plan of the evil one!
A  O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men!
  B  When they are learned they think they are wise,
  C  And they hearken not unto the counsel of God,
  C  for they set it aside,
  B  supposing they know of themselves,
A  wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not.

Such visual reformatting exists for the twenty-three other kinds of parallelisms Parry discusses.

Parry’s formatting makes it easier to tell when sections frequently use parallelism and when such poetic structures are absent for long stretches of the text. A quick skim through Parry’s work shows that some pages exhibit many parallelisms, while others starkly lack such patterns and simply display a normal page of text. However else such reformatting can serve readers of the Book of Mormon, I want to show that we can statistically demonstrate that certain portions of the Book of Mormon are more likely to have Hebrew poetic parallelisms than not—mathematically demonstrating what the reader’s eye can take in at a glance. More precisely, if we take self-contained blocks of text that can be separated from the larger narratives in which they appear and then analyze the frequency of poetic parallelisms in those texts, we can show not only that the parallelisms exist (as Parry’s reformatting already makes clear), but also that they show up in texts apparently intended for oral recitation and are absent in texts intended primarily for written circulation. Much like the debates over whether or not a particular instance of chiasmus is accidental or deliberate, this paper seeks to answer the question of whether parallelisms themselves are accidental or deliberate throughout the entire Book of Mormon. Regardless of who authored the text, if poetic parallelisms—whether simple or complex—were accidental rather than intentional, we might expect them to be randomly strewn across the text of the Book of Mormon. But they are not.
Methodology

This section explains my methods for selecting the texts to analyze, dividing those texts into genres and categories, determining the percentage of parallelization of those texts, and concluding that the parallelisms are not accidentally generated based on their frequency in the different categories of texts.

Text selection

To select the texts for this analysis, I propose three rigorous criteria:

1. The texts are clearly self-contained relative to the larger narrative.
2. The texts are explicitly included in a larger narrative as an embedded document.
3. The authorship of the texts is clearly stated or implied.

These criteria separate a limited number of texts to analyze from the many available texts in the Book of Mormon. I will analyze the following twenty texts totaling 884 verses (according to the current version of the Book of Mormon):

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27. Doubtless some will think that these criteria are too stringent. After all, this means that we will not be including the psalm in 2 Nephi 4:15–35, Benjamin’s address in Mosiah 3–5, or Alma’s lament in Alma 29. These three texts are probably the most prominent texts that do not meet the rigid criteria, so I address their exclusion in the appendix with hopes that the reader can extend my logic to other texts from the Book of Mormon that might, at first glance, warrant inclusion. The idea of selecting only the embedded documents for analysis comes from Grant Hardy’s discussion of such texts in his *Understanding the Book of Mormon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 121–51. Hardy lists fifteen documents embedded by Mormon and ten speeches likely reworked by Mormon; he also briefly discusses Jacob’s sermons and Mormon’s single recorded sermon and letters to Moroni. See Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 122, 47, 81, 100. My criteria for determining which documents are embedded are more stringent than Hardy’s because our projects differ: mine is to analyze poetic parallelisms, while his is to discuss their use by the three major contributors to the Book of Mormon (Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni).
• 2 Nephi 6:2–10:25 (not including verses quoting Isaiah). “The words of Jacob, the brother of Nephi, which he spake unto the people of Nephi” (2 Nephi 6:1).

• Jacob 2:2–3:11. “The words which Jacob, the brother of Nephi, spake unto the people of Nephi, after the death of Nephi” (Jacob 2:1)."

• Mosiah 9–10. Zeniff’s personal record, the first part of “the record of Zeniff—An account of his people, from the time they left the land of Zarahemla until the time that they were delivered out of the hands of the Lamanites” (headnote to Mosiah 9–22).

• Mosiah 29:5–32. “Therefore king Mosiah sent again among the people; yea, even a written word sent he among the people. And these were the words that were written” (Mosiah 29:4).

• Alma 5:3–62. “The words which Alma, the High Priest according to the holy order of God, delivered to the people in their cities and villages throughout the land. . . . And these are the words which he spake to the people in the church which was established in the city of Zarahemla, according to his own record” (headnote to Alma 5; Alma 5:2).

• Alma 7. “The words of Alma which he delivered to the people in Gideon, according to his own record” (headnote to Alma 7).


• Alma 38. “The commandments of Alma to his son Shiblon” (headnote to Alma 38).

• Alma 39–42. “The commandments of Alma to his son Cion” (headnote to Alma 39–42).

28. From this point on, I will use the standard way of differentiating individuals in the Book of Mormon if they share a common name. The first individual mentioned in the Book of Mormon will have his name marked with a subscript 1, the next with a subscript 2, etc. A list of individuals in the Book of Mormon can be found in appendix 8 of Grant Hardy’s The Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 690–706, or in the more unwieldy index found in the standard-issued LDS scriptures triple combination.
• Alma 54:5–14. “Now these are the words which [Moroni₁] wrote unto Ammoron” (Alma 54:4).
• Alma 54:16–24. “[Ammoron] wrote another epistle unto Moroni₁, and these are the words which he wrote” (Alma 54:15).
• Alma 56:2–58:41. “Moroni₁ received an epistle from Helaman₂, stating the affairs of the people in that quarter of the land. And these are the words which he wrote” (Alma 56:1–2).
• Alma 60. “[Moroni₁] wrote again to the governor of the land, who was Pahoran₁, and these are the words which he wrote” (Alma 60:1).
• Alma 61:2–21. “[Moroni₁] received an epistle from Pahoran₁, the chief governor. And these are the words which he received” (Alma 61:1).
• Helaman 5:6–12. “For [Nephi₂ and Lehi₄] remembered the words which their father Helaman₃ spake unto them. And these are the words which he spake” (Helaman 5:5).
• 3 Nephi 3:2–10. “Lachoneus₁, the governor of the land, received an epistle from the leader and the governor of this band of robbers; and these were the words which were written” (3 Nephi 3:1).
• Moroni 7:2–48. “And now I, Moroni₂, write a few of the words of my father, Mormon₂, which he spake concerning faith, hope, and charity; for after this manner did he speak unto the people, as he taught them in the synagogue which they had built for the place of worship” (Moroni 7:1).
• Moroni 8:2–30. “An epistle of my father Mormon₂, written to me, Moroni₂” (Moroni 8:1).
• Moroni 9. “The second epistle of Mormon₂ to his son Moroni₂” (headnote to Moroni 9).

²⁹ Third Nephi 23:9–13 indicates that this is an embedded text that Mormon₂ worked into the narrative. The author is likely Nephi₃ or someone under Nephi₃’s direction working from memory.
Determining the presence of parallelisms

The criterion for determining the presence of intentional parallelism is simple: I take Parry’s findings at face value. Critics might assert that Parry is forcing the text to fit his criteria, attributing certain parallelisms to the text that are not there. However, it is implicitly an ad hominem attack against Parry to suggest that he forces nonexistent parallelisms onto the Book of Mormon text just to make a case that the Book of Mormon is an ancient document containing Hebrew poetry. Parry’s motivations are not relevant to the discussion, but whether the parallelisms he points out appear in significant patterns is. It is possible that he forced parallelisms where none were actually intended, sometimes simply assuming that his guess was close enough. It is just as possible, though, that he missed intended parallelisms. Given that we have roughly twenty texts to work with, for the purposes of this paper I will assume that Parry is accidentally forcing and missing parallelisms at a similar rate text by text—that any errors he has made in ascribing parallelisms to the text are statistically uniform and will not affect my calculations.30

Another criticism, more literary in nature, is that Parry overlooks certain nonparallelistic literary techniques. While Parry does discuss less mechanistic literary forms—metaphors, for instance—he does so in the context of their usefulness in discovering the more mechanistic literary features he attempts to uncover in the Book of Mormon.31 He also does not analyze characteristics unique to particular passages. For example, Parry does not treat the often-noted series of rhetorical questions in Alma 5 as an instance of Hebrew poetic form, yet the presence of such a series of rhetorical questions indicates that Alma2 carefully worked out the entirety of the text ahead of its public delivery, likely with oral

30. It is possible that Parry unconsciously attempts to find parallelisms in texts where one would expect to find them: texts for oral recitation. I find this unlikely. The process I have gone through in the development of this project required much consideration, discussion with others, and changing of initial ideas. To think that Parry uniformly, without deliberately trying, created this pattern accidentally might be true, but it seems a stretch to assume so.

31. See Parry, Poetic Parallelisms, xiv–xvi.
recitation in mind.\textsuperscript{32} However, although this is a valid criticism of the limits of Parry’s work, his focus is intentionally narrow and specific to the more mechanistic literary forms, and he does his job well. This paper’s focus will be similarly narrow and specific. I will concern myself only with those same mechanistic literary forms since they can most easily be dealt with in a statistical analysis.\textsuperscript{33}

\textit{Percentage of text with parallelisms}

In order to statistically demonstrate what the reader’s eye can intuitively detect while reading Parry’s reformatted text of the Book of Mormon, it will be necessary to determine how much of each particular text is in parallelistic form. But how does one determine just how much of a text is parallelized? I am unaware of any precedent-setting analysis in this area. When analyzing biblical texts that use poetic parallelisms, I have not encountered a single scholar who considers the percentage of parallelisms in a text.\textsuperscript{34} This paper, then, attempts something new. Shall we go verse by verse (that is, asking whether a verse contains a parallelism, or perhaps is entirely parallelized)? Shall we go sentence by sentence (that is, asking whether a sentence contains a parallelism, or perhaps is entirely parallelized)? Shall we just count the number of different kinds of parallelisms present in the texts (that is, a simple alternate counts as one parallelism, as does one chiasm, regardless of its size or complexity)? And then how do we calculate frequency or percentages based on the determined criteria?

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{32} This rhetorical pattern of questions and its uselessness in analyzing Parry was pointed out to me by Grant Hardy. My thanks go to him for his thoughtful critique of Parry and for his help in selecting texts to analyze.

\textsuperscript{33} It would be ideal if there were a similar piece of scholarship from which to draw poetic structures in the text, but Parry is the only Book of Mormon scholar who has done such exhaustive work. The closest parallel would be Pinnock, but because he relies on Parry’s work they overlap substantially, though not entirely. For example, Pinnock thinks that Helaman 3:14 is a good example of polysyndeton—that is, the verse uses many “ands”—though Parry structures it as a chiasm (Pinnock, \textit{Finding Biblical Hebrew}, 21–27; Parry, \textit{Poetic Parallelisms}, 395).

\textsuperscript{34} Heil, already cited, might be the closest example. See Heil, \textit{Hebrews}.
In the end, a simple test is sufficient. I perform a basic comparison-of-means test using the percentage of the passage that is parallelized as the dependent variable of interest. I determine the percentage according to whether or not Parry identifies a particular verse as having any portion of a parallelism in it. The score derives from the percentage of verses in the individual passage that have parallelized structures in them. In order to avoid potential problems with the (relatively) arbitrary versification (introduced into the text late in the nineteenth century), it would be prudent to use more than one way to determine the frequency of parallelisms in the text. Therefore, in the appendix I offer the results of a second calculation in which I track the frequency of parallelistic elements against the number of sense lines, which Royal Skousen breaks up “according to phrases and clauses” in his The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text, rather than compare verses with parallelisms against verses without.\(^{35}\)

I also spot-checked to verify that the elements Parry uses to draw out the parallelisms are present in the original text according to Skousen.

**Calculations**

I have grouped the texts that meet the criteria into four genres: letters (8), proclamations (1), narratives (1), and sermons (10). The one proclamation (Mosiah 29:5–32) and the one narrative (Mosiah 9–10) have no comparative texts in their same genre, but both seem intuitively to fall, along with the letters, into a category of texts primarily composed to be circulated in written form (rather than delivered orally). It is thus possible to divide the selected texts into two broad categories: written texts (letters, proclamations, and narratives) and oral texts (sermons). This allows us, finally, to address several questions through statistical calculation. First, is there a relationship between the different genres of texts and the percentage of parallelized material in them? Second,\(^{35}\)

\(^{35}\) Royal Skousen, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). Skousen’s project is “to reconstruct in large degree the original text of the Book of Mormon using the standard techniques of critical scholarship” (p. xvi). Sense lines are a way of breaking up the text “according to phrases and clauses,” which has various advantages for a project like Skousen’s (xlii–xliv).
looking at the percentages of parallelized verses, can we learn anything about the individual texts themselves? Third, can this help us determine intentionality concerning these parallel patterns at the level of the whole Book of Mormon?

I use a basic comparison-of-means test (or *t*-test) to determine whether texts intended for oral presentation have a statistically higher percentage of parallelized (that is, poetic) material than do texts meant to be read. (The *t*-test is a simple test that takes into account the averages of the scores and the variation in those scores between items within a single category.) The appendix includes results from a sensitivity analysis in which I repeated this test while including the three additional texts mentioned in note 27 above. A chart containing the results for the calculation using Skousen’s *Earliest Text* will also appear in the appendix, showing that the major findings are identical to those of the primary calculation.

**Statistical results**

The results of my calculation can be found in table 1. The mean represents the average percentage of parallelized verses, the standard error and standard deviation provide measures of the variation in the scores, and the 95% confidence interval indicates the range of likely values for the group mean (i.e., 95% of the time an oral text will have between 39% and 64.7% of its verses parallelized). The Pr(*T* > *t*) value shown below the table represents the probability that the difference between the two groups is attributable to chance.

I find a relationship that is statistically significant to the 0.000016 level. In other words, there is less than a 1 in 50,000 chance that this relationship occurred by chance. The oral texts have 38 percentage points more parallelized material than the written texts, with a 95% confidence
interval of 22 percent and 53 percent (that is, there is a 95% chance that the strength of the effect lies between 22 and 53 percent). Regarding the percentage of parallelized verses, the results appear in table 2, in order of lowest percentage of parallelisms to highest.

Findings

A few observations stand out immediately from the data in table 2. First, letters contain the lowest percentages of parallelisms (averaging 10.4% parallelized verses). It would make sense that letters back and forth that existed as written documents of some kind would have been quickly written with little regard to poetry and likely little need for memorization (which would be facilitated by parallelistic patterns). One would therefore expect to find that letters exhibit parallelistic structures less frequently than other genres. This is borne out by the data.

Second, it is fascinating that the two texts with 0% parallelisms come from Lamanite/Gadianton robber leaders—Ammoron (although he was raised among the Nephites) and Giddianhi specifically. However, other letter writers—Moroni¹ and Helaman²—fare little better. In fact, of all the letters contained in the Book of Mormon, Pahoran¹’s in Alma 61 stands out as the most poetic, although it still has only 25% parallelized verses—comparatively underwhelming when set side by side with texts meant to be oral. (Besides, in context it seems reasonable that Pahoran¹ would have carefully crafted his reply to Moroni¹, as the latter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard error</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>95% confidence interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oral Texts</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.519</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>0.179</td>
<td>0.390–0.647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Texts</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.135</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>0.105</td>
<td>0.061–0.210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.327</td>
<td>0.054</td>
<td>0.243</td>
<td>0.213–0.440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.383</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Difference = mean(0) – mean(1), t = 5.835; degrees of freedom = 18; Pr(T > t) < 0.001
had just threatened him with a coup d'état!) But even Pahoran’s very politic response does not have the marks of a carefully crafted poetic text intended for oral delivery. For this, we must turn to those texts I have labeled sermons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Percentage of parallelized verses</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 Nephi 3:2–10</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Giddianhi</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 54:16–24</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Ammoron</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 56:2–58:44</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Helaman_2</td>
<td>5.26%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 54:5–14</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Moroni_1</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroni 9</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Mormon_2</td>
<td>11.54%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroni 8:2–30</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Mormon_2</td>
<td>13.79%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 60</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Moroni_1</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosiah 29:5–32</td>
<td>Proclamation</td>
<td>Mosiah_2</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 61:2–21</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Pahoran_2</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 38</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Alma_2</td>
<td>26.67%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 39–42</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Alma_2</td>
<td>27.47%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosiah 9–10</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Zeniff</td>
<td>31.71%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob 2:2–3:11</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Jacob_2</td>
<td>35.56%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroni 7:2–48</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Mormon_2</td>
<td>42.55%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helaman 13:5–15:17</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Samuel_1 (Nephi_1?)</td>
<td>54.88%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 5:3–62</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Alma_2</td>
<td>56.67%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 6:2–5, 8–15; 9:1–10:25</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>60.22%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 7</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Alma_2</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helaman 5:6–12</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Helaman_3</td>
<td>71.43%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 36–37</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Alma_2</td>
<td>76.62%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Third, it is clear that the sermons, as a whole, are remarkably diverse in frequency of parallelistic structures, but every one of them contains a higher percentage than any of the letters. (Some may be statistical outliers because of their brevity. This is surely the case with Helaman 5:6–12: a little bit of parallelism goes a long way in such short texts, which is why this seven-verse sermon is 71% parallelized.) Simply put: Book of Mormon sermons contain a greater percentage of verses with parallelisms than do the other genres. This makes intuitive sense since one major reason for poetic parallelism is to facilitate memorization for oral delivery—such as would be needed to deliver a sermon as well as to ensure that it would be memorable.

Fourth, Alma 2 apparently wrote very different sermons for his three children, as evidenced by the fact that the speech to Helaman 2 has a much higher percentage of parallelized verses. (Alma 38 might be an anomaly because of the brevity of the text, but Alma 39–42 does not have that excuse.) Alma 2 apparently worked much harder to parallelize his speech to Helaman 2 (77% parallelized verses) than to either of his other sons (26% for Shiblon and 27% for Corianton). Though the speech to Corianton arguably contains some of Alma 2’s greatest teachings on justice, atonement, resurrection, and other doctrines, Alma 2 reserved the parallelized sermon for Helaman 2, the future record keeper. Perhaps the handing over of the records is to be taken as more of a public ritual than a simple father-to-son discussion with one of his children. Or maybe we are to understand that Alma 2 worked harder at crafting his own personal narrative, which figures more prominently in the speech to Helaman 2, than either of the speeches to Shiblon or Corianton. Or perhaps Alma 2 simply enjoyed using poetry more when telling a narrative than when discussing theology. Speculation aside, it is clear that Alma 2 crafted very different sermons for his three sons.

Fifth, because we have only one example each from the genres of proclamation and narrative, we cannot draw definitive conclusions about those genres. The proclamation in Mosiah 29:5–32 was written down and distributed among the people, explicitly as “a written word” (verse 4). There would presumably have been no reason to include many parallelisms if it were written down, as it would not need to be memorized.
With 21% parallelized verses, it fits in with other texts explicitly created for readers. As we have no other proclamations that meet the rigid criteria to compare it to, it might just be that Mosiah, himself didn’t include many parallelisms in his official proclamations or that Nephite kingly proclamations as a genre didn’t tend to include many parallelisms. Thus the beginning of Zeniff’s narrative in Mosiah 9–10 is the only one of these written texts that overlaps with the sermons. Again, since we have no others of its genre for comparison and no other writings of Zeniff, we cannot perform a more exhaustive comparative analysis.37

Sixth, again with the exception of Zeniff’s record, all the texts that were primarily to be circulated in written form contain a lower percentage of parallelized verses than any of the texts intended mainly for oral delivery. A substantial statistical difference exists in the percentage of parallelized material between the different genres of which we have more than one example. The texts for oral delivery, in which we would intuitively expect to find higher percentages of parallelisms, are precisely where we find them. This strongly suggests that these parallelisms are not being generated accidentally.

Conclusion and future projects

The truth or authenticity of the Book of Mormon does not rest on the presence of any statement, Hebrew poetic pattern, or scholarly finding. The debate concerning Hebrew poetic patterns will continue. This paper has demonstrated only the following: not only do parallelistic structures exist in the Book of Mormon (deliberate or not, Parry has demonstrated their existence), they also significantly occur precisely where they contextually should occur and are absent where their presence would be surprising. The results of this analysis clearly indicate

37. Though we cannot perform a more exhaustive analysis, one quick note about Zeniff’s writings may be important. In his two chapters he uses “many ands” (3x), “synonymous words” (3x), “like sentence beginnings” (1x), and “like sentence endings” (1x), parallelisms that lend themselves to long lists (Parry, Poetic Parallelisms, 178–82). Perhaps we are to understand that Zeniff simply had a penchant for using lists, and that might account for the slightly higher frequency of parallelisms in his writing.
that these parallelisms are not accidental. If the parallelisms were accidentally generated, we would expect them to show up randomly. They do not.

This paper, however, takes only a first, tentative step toward a thorough analysis of the types of Hebrew poetic parallelisms Parry has found in the Book of Mormon. Indeed, even without statistical data, John Welch has suggested that the Book of Mormon displays a real variety of poetic skill: “Compared to the high chiastic style used by writers such as Benjamin and Alma during the flowering of Nephite culture during the late Second and early First Centuries B.C., the literary achievement of subsequent Book of Mormon authors pales noticeably.” Welch calls the two centuries before Christ in Nephite history a “renaissance” and speculates about why the frequency of chiasmus drops beginning with the book of Helaman.38 It might be fruitful to study the usage of parallelistic patterns by individual writers. Does Alma 2 favor chiasmus? Does Mormon 2 favor synonymy? These avenues are also worth exploring.39

The questions I have raised here do not apply solely to the Book of Mormon. Although I am unaware of any exhaustive study of the Bible (or even of any of the individual books of the Bible) similar to Parry’s study of the Book of Mormon, similar studies could be done with biblical texts as well. Surely some insight into the frequency of Hebrew poetic patterns could be gained by such studies, insight that would in turn help to clarify the nature of the Book of Mormon text. What insights could be gleaned from a thorough study of Isaiah’s parallelisms?40 Could such a study indicate whether the Gospels were meant to be read out loud in worship services or perhaps in more private settings?

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39. It should again be noted that this paper has focused only on the Hebrew poetic patterns Parry discusses in his Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon. Other criteria would have to be established for the more literary and less mechanistic devices employed in the rhetoric and writings of Book of Mormon authors.
40. Parry has already given us much to work with since he has already parallelized the twenty-one chapters of Isaiah that the Book of Mormon quotes—though obviously there are differences between the Book of Mormon text of Isaiah and the King James Version of the same. Parry’s work is nonetheless a significant start.
Regardless, this paper has demonstrated that valuable insights into the text of the Book of Mormon can be gained by taking Parry’s work at face value.

Appendix

By using the rigorous criteria for text selection outlined earlier, some seemingly embedded texts from the Book of Mormon have been excluded from this study. In this appendix I discuss three such excluded texts with the intent of clarifying those criteria more fully. I also perform a sensitivity analysis with these three texts (using the test from the body of the paper—that of percentage of verses parallelized) to demonstrate that, even taking a less rigid approach to which texts to analyze, the statistical findings between the different genres still exist. At the conclusion of the appendix, I include the cross-check I also mentioned in the body of the paper—that of tracking the frequency of parallel elements against Skousen’s sense lines.

Nephi₁’s psalm (2 Nephi 4:15–35) “constitutes one of the great lyric outbursts in the Book of Mormon.” Matthew Nickerson has used form-critical analysis to compare it to similar psalms of the Bible. At first glance, the scholarship surrounding this particular text seems to indicate that it is self-contained and that Nephi₁ has intentionally attempted to write his own psalm. However, nothing directly indicates where the psalm begins, although it seems clear that it begins somewhere in the course of verses 15 through 17. In other words, no explicit or contextual marker

43. Grant Hardy has the psalm beginning in verse 15, Matthew Nickerson and John Tanner in verse 16, and Royal Skousen in verse 17, strengthening the argument that the beginning of the psalm is contextually unclear since different scholars have different opinions on the matter. See Hardy, Understanding the Book of Mormon, 56; Tanner, “Two Hymns Based on Nephi’s Psalm,” 34; Nickerson, “Nephi’s Psalm,” 26; Skousen, Earliest Text, xlv.
in the text indicates which verse marks the beginning of a self-contained
text, so Nephi’s psalm fails to meet the second criterion for selecting
texts. For purposes of the sensitivity analysis, I have labeled this text the
one instance of the psalm genre, assuming therefore that it was meant
to be orally delivered. I will assume it begins in verse 15.

Benjamin’s sermon (parts of Mosiah 3–5) is another text that would
naturally seem to deserve inclusion but does not meet the criteria out-
lined in the paper. Contextually, it appears that the speech was written
out beforehand (see Mosiah 1:10–12, where Benjamin outlines the basic
goals of the speech to his son, Mosiah 2). Scholars indicate that Benja-
min’s speech should be understood as a year-rite festival with ties to
Israelite coronation rituals and even the biblical Day of Atonement.44
If such an event were the occasion of Benjamin’s speech, it would be
odd if the speech had not been prepared in advance in some form or
another. But while there are textual clues that Benjamin’s speech was
prepared previously, it is not clearly an embedded document in a sur-
rounding narrative. Mosiah 2:9 does include a headnote (“and these are
the words which he spake and caused to be written, saying . . .”), but
there are third-person breaks in the speech at Mosiah 4:1, 3–4 and 5:1
and (perhaps ritualized) responses from the gathered crowd in Mosiah
4:2; 5:2–5. These interruptions blend Benjamin’s speech into the larger
narrative flow of the opening chapters of the book of Mosiah, distin-
guishing it from the other documents I analyzed. It is thus problematic
to discuss authorship and the self-contained nature of the text itself.
Should one reconstruct a text from just the first-person portions of the

44. See John A. Tvedtnes, “King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles,” in By
Study and Also by Faith, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City:
Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 2:197–221; Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch,
“King Benjamin’s Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals,” in King Benja-
min’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,” ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks
Right or Left: Benjamin and the Scapegoat,” Insights (January 1995): 2; John W. Welch,
“The Temple in the Book of Mormon: The Temples at the Cities of Nephi, Zarahemla,
and Bountiful,” in Temples of the Ancient World, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City:
speech? Should one rather include all the intervening verses, assuming that they come from the same author? Although there are strong reasons to believe that Benjamin’s speech is a very carefully crafted text, it is not technically embedded as a self-contained document: there is not one clear author, and the speech is not self-contained relative to the larger narrative. For the sensitivity analysis here, however, it will be classified as a sermon. I use only the verses in the first-person voice of Benjamin (Mosiah 2:9–3:27; 4:4–30; 5:6–15).

Alma₂’s lament (Alma 29) is perhaps the one excluded text that comes closest to meeting the criteria for inclusion. Alma 29:1 is markedly different in tone and style from Alma 28:14 (the preceding verse), and the entire chapter is distinct in tone and style from what follows it (in Alma 30). It is clearly a self-contained text. The authorship is also contextually clear—it is written by Alma₂. Again, however, nothing clearly sets apart chapter 29 from the rest of the text. It seems as if Mormon₂ wanted to include this little lament from Alma₂ but didn’t include a headnote (something like “a prayer by Alma₂, according to his own record”). If Mormon₂ had included such a headnote, Alma 29 would have been included in the list of texts; however, since Mormon₂ did not include a headnote, the text is not definitively an embedded document. Concerning its classification, it is difficult to know what genre Alma 29 is. Is it a sermon? Was it intended as an oral recitation? Is it a written prayer? I will provisionally classify it as a lament because it is unclear textually whether this was meant primarily to be delivered orally or to be read. It therefore represents the only instance of its genre.

The preceding discussion should help clarify the criteria used in the body of the paper and therefore the reasons for excluding texts that might otherwise seem worthy of consideration. Still other texts that

45. John Welch says, “In my opinion, Benjamin prepared for many months or maybe even years to deliver this speech.” John W. Welch, “A Masterful Oration,” in King Benjamin’s Speech, 66.

46. There are no parallelisms that overlap both verses in the first-person voice of Benjamin and either the third-person breaks or the crowd’s responses. Parry does find one parallelism in Mosiah 5:2, an antithetical, but it is the only one in the verses that are not in Benjamin’s voice.
Table 3. Texts by percentage of parallelized verses, including the three additional texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Percentage of parallelized verses</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 Nephi 3:2–10</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Giddianhi</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 54:16–24</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Ammoron</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 56:2–58:41</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Helaman</td>
<td>5.26%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 54:5–14</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Moroni1</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroni 9</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Moroni2</td>
<td>11.54%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroni 8:2–30</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Moroni2</td>
<td>13.79%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 60</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Moroni1</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosiah 29:5–32</td>
<td>Proclamation</td>
<td>Mosiah2</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 61:2–21</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Pahoran1</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 38</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Alma2</td>
<td>26.67%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 39–42</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Alma2</td>
<td>27.47%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosiah 9–10</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Zeniff</td>
<td>31.71%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob 2:2–3:11</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Jacob2</td>
<td>35.56%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroni 7:2–48</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Moroni2</td>
<td>42.55%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helaman 13:5–15:17</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Samuel1, (Nephi3?)</td>
<td>54.88%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 5:3–62</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Alma2</td>
<td>56.67%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 4:15–35</td>
<td>Psalm</td>
<td>Nephi1</td>
<td>57.14%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 6:2–5, 8–15; 9:1–10:25</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Jacob2</td>
<td>60.22%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 7</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Alma2</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helaman 5:6–12</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Helaman3</td>
<td>71.43%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 36–37</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Alma2</td>
<td>76.62%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 29</td>
<td>Lament</td>
<td>Alma2</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>Unclear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
might be considered similarly fail to meet the rigorous criteria—for instance, Mosiah 13–15 (its authorship is unclear, and it is clearly not an embedded document), Alma 32–33 (its authorship is similarly unclear), and 2 Nephi 31, Helaman 12, or Ether 12 (none of these last three are identifiably self-contained documents).

Table 3 shows the results of including the three additional texts in the study, with the new texts indicated by italics.

Importantly, Benjamin’s speech fits appropriately with the other Book of Mormon sermons, and Nephi’s psalm fits well with other texts intended for oral delivery. Alma’s lament, however, is curious. It is, significantly, the sole text with 100% parallelized verses. If one were to regard it as a text intended for oral delivery, it follows the patterns already established. If, however, one were to decide that it was intended primarily to be circulated in written form, it turns out to be a (major) statistical outlier, along with, but even more drastically than, King Zeniff’s narrative. Perhaps this finding indicates that Alma’s lament was originally written for oral delivery. Or perhaps it was written in such a manner yet was never actually delivered in a public setting, a personal journal entry filled to overflowing with poetry and thus deemed worthy of inclusion by Mormon in his abridgment.

Table 4 includes the results of the sensitivity analysis, including the additional three texts. (For purposes of this test I include Alma 29 in the category of written texts, so as to give a worst-case scenario calculation.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard error</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>95% confidence interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oral Texts</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.531</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>0.165</td>
<td>0.426– 0.636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Texts</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.213</td>
<td>0.084</td>
<td>0.278</td>
<td>0.026– 0.401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.380</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>0.274</td>
<td>0.261– 0.498</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Difference = mean(0) – mean(1), \( t = 3.355 \); degrees of freedom = 21; \( Pr(T > t) = 0.0015 \)
The results here are slightly different. I find a relationship that is statistically significant to the .0015 level. In other words, there is a chance of less than 3 in 2,000 that this relationship would have occurred accidentally. Even including these three additional texts and placing Alma 29 in a worst-case scenario category, we discover that texts originally intended for oral delivery still have a substantially higher percentage of verses with parallelisms than those texts originally intended to circulate primarily as written texts.

A second, simpler issue needs addressing in this appendix. As mentioned in the body of this essay, I cross-checked my calculations of percentage of parallelized verses against a second way of determining the frequency of parallelisms in a text. In table 5, I compared the number of parallel elements with the number of Royal Skousen’s sense lines in his *Earliest Text* rather than with the sometimes arbitrarily divided verses.

My methodology for this additional test might be clarified by a quick analysis of the two examples given early in the background section of this paper (1 Nephi 12:9 and 2 Nephi 9:28). For 1 Nephi 12:9 (an extended alternate), the parallel elements are “twelve apostles,” “judge,” “twelve tribes of Israel,” “twelve ministers,” “judge,” and “house of Israel”—for a total of six elements. For 2 Nephi 9:28 (a chiasm), the parallel elements are “foolishness,” “think they are wise,” “they hearken not,” “they set it aside,” “supposing they know,” and “foolishness”—also for a total of six elements. Skousen has broken up 1 Nephi 12:9 into five sense lines. With six parallel elements and five sense lines the ratio is 120% for the single verse. Skousen has broken up 2 Nephi 9:28 into seven sense lines. With six parallel elements and seven sense lines the ratio is 85.7% for this single verse. This method is applied across all the texts discussed in the body of the paper.

The results are remarkably consistent, almost exactly identical with the test used in the body of the paper, where the percentage of the total number of verses in each text in which some parallelized element appears is calculated (see table 2). Again, the proclamation and the letters group together, and the sole narrative finds itself among the sermons.
### Table 5. Texts by ratio of parallel elements to sense lines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Ratio of parallel elements to sense lines</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 Nephi 3:2–10</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Giddianhi</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 54:16–24</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Ammoron</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroni 9</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Mormon</td>
<td>4.80%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 56:2–58:44</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Helaman</td>
<td>7.04%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 54:5–14</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Moroni</td>
<td>7.55%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 60</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Moroni</td>
<td>15.51%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 61:2–21</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Pahoran</td>
<td>15.91%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroni 8:2–30</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Mormon</td>
<td>18.64%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosiah 29:5–32</td>
<td>Proclamation</td>
<td>Mormon</td>
<td>21.14%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 38</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Alma</td>
<td>25.35%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroni 7:2–48</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Mormon</td>
<td>33.03%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 39–42</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Alma</td>
<td>33.12%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helaman 13:5–15:17</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Samuel (Nephi?)</td>
<td>39.23%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob 2:2–3:11</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>41.51%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 5:3–62</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Alma</td>
<td>44.13%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 6:2–5, 8–15; 9:1–10:25</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>46.81%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosiah 9–10</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Zeniff</td>
<td>46.86%</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 7</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Alma</td>
<td>51.23%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helaman 5:6–12</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Helaman</td>
<td>55.10%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma 36–37</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Alma</td>
<td>67.36%</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The Book of Mormon and Early America’s Political and Intellectual Tradition

Benjamin E. Park


For a book that claims an epic scope and cosmological depth, the Book of Mormon has mostly received a rather parochial academic framework. What does the text tell us about Mormon conceptions of scripture? What does it reveal concerning Joseph Smith’s religious genius? How did Mormons use the book during the church’s first few decades? These are certainly important questions, and they have received—and will receive—the responses they deserve. But what if scholars took a page from Mormon and Moroni’s own approach and placed the narrative’s importance on a much broader scale—demographically, geographically, and chronologically?

1. Terryl Givens talks about how Mormon and Moroni had a much broader vision of audience—that the Nephite record was more than just a familial and tribal record—than
Two books have recently and profitably embarked on such a cause by using the Book of Mormon as a crucial text in their broader narrative of American intellectual and social history during the early republic. David Holland, in his *Sacred Borders: Continuing Revelation and Canonical Restraint in Early America*, places the text within his sweeping overview of America’s canonical experimentations between the early Puritans and the antebellum Transcendentalists. Similarly, Eran Shalev, in his *American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War*, posits the Book of Mormon as a prime example for what he calls pseudobiblical writings that shaped antebellum political culture. Together, these two books demonstrate the potential of examining Mormonism’s keystone document in light of larger historiographical concerns, as well as the future for Book of Mormon studies within the early Americanist field.

In *Sacred Borders*, Holland, an associate professor of North American religious history at Harvard Divinity School, argues that the tension between an established scriptural canon—which he identifies as “a basic mental structure of the early modern era” (p. 8)—and the desire for new and expanded definitions for scriptural authority shaped much of intellectual life in America between colonization and the Civil War. On the one hand, a closed canon served many cultural purposes: in periods where cultural, social, and religious change was constant, a consistent notion of authorized boundaries brought stability and validated authority. Whenever orthodoxy was challenged, the closed limits of a scriptural canon provided the most strident defense. Yet at the same time, there was an acute yearning for a more culturally relevant deity—a God who could speak in modern times and was not just found in the records of an ancient world. This anxiety was especially acute in early America, where notions of antiquated authority were being overthrown from many angles.

The ambivalence caused by an ancient law and an active Lawgiver could be found throughout American history. Indeed, Holland makes a point to examine the tension within the mainstream of the nation’s

religious tradition (including the Puritans and the Founding Fathers) as well as those on the fringes (including the Shakers and, of course, the Mormons). In an important sense, Holland traces the intellectual genealogy for Mormonism’s vision of the open canon; rather than Joseph Smith appearing as a revelatory oasis in the midst of a spiritual desert that was opposed to new scriptural texts, as has often been depicted, the Mormon prophet is instead seen as the climax of a profound cultural tradition found at the heart of America’s quest for a new prophetic voice. While this might chop away at Mormonism’s distinctive message, it adds significance to the particulars of Mormonism’s revelatory claims. The Book of Mormon was not the only medium decrying America’s tendency to bemoan, “A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible” (2 Nephi 29:3) but rather just another voice in a rancorous chorus that had been filling the American religious amphitheater since the nation’s founding.

Holland’s treatment of the Book of Mormon is brief, with only a portion of his limited section dedicated to Mormonism, but he includes several important points that challenge superficial readings of the text. First, he emphasizes the populist message of the text by claiming that Mormon’s book and Methodist Lorenzo Dow’s message were “two American manifestations of the same outraged populism” (p. 142). Second, the Book of Mormon was a rejoinder to the Deist argument against particular providence—an oppositional message that not only incited much debate throughout America but even animated discussion in Joseph Smith’s own home. The text did not challenge, or even correct, the Bible (as most rationalist arguments sought) but rather reaffirmed its importance and validated its significance for modern readers. “Repeatedly,” Holland explains, “the Book of Mormon declared itself as material evidence of a good and global God” (p. 147). Though many critics feared it undermined the Bible’s authority, Mormons believed it reinforced the Bible’s chief claims. In an age where skepticism seemed to shake the very foundations of religious authority, the Book of Mormon invoked that very ambivalence in order to restore Christianity’s core message.
But the third, and most important, theme Holland found within the Book of Mormon was the importance of God’s voice: not only does the text itself emphasize the significance of continual revelation, but its very presence underscores the perpetual significance of modern scriptural pronouncements. While the revealed text is important, it is not as important as the revelation process. Thus while the Shakers’ Sacred Roll appeared long after the movement’s inception and served as the climax of its revelatory development, the Book of Mormon predated the official institution and announced its initiation.

Yet the divine sovereignty reaffirmed in the Book of Mormon did not always echo the progressive God of most other modern scriptural texts. While other extracanonical works, like the Shakers’ Sacred Roll, “promised that new revelation would never sanction bigamy or violence or other violations of accepted morality, the Mormon God offered no such safeguards” (p. 148). This was the God of the Old Testament unwilling to bend his commands for the people of the New World. Polygamy was not out of the realm of possibility, murder and war were not denounced as ancient, and civilizations declined just as often as they progressed. Indeed, within the first few chapters of the text, readers encounter the protagonist beheading a drunk and defenseless ruler in order to preserve a family record. While other contemporary scriptural books removed “the most challenging aspect of a continuously revealed religion,” Holland explains, “the Book of Mormon unapologetically opens with it” (p. 149).

In one way, Sacred Borders merely offers intellectual context for the Book of Mormon’s message and environment. In another, equally important way, the book also embodies the benefits of using a single text as a sign for deeper cultural anxieties. The Nephite people’s insistence for a prophetic voice to adapt God’s commandments to new circumstances coexisted with their persistent desire to keep the law of Moses—a paradoxical tension that mirrored early America’s simultaneous quest for progressive reform and authoritative originalism, both in religious and political contexts. “This intense convergence of two countervailing ideas gave Mormonism a distinctive shape, and even Mormons themselves
had difficulty wrapping their minds and hearts around the resulting stresses” (pp. 156–57). Mormons were not unique in their attempt to solve this cultural riddle. Indeed, approaching the Book of Mormon as a way to examine an American problem, rather than merely a Mormon problem, makes the text much more relevant to students of American religious and intellectual history.

In *American Zion*, Eran Shalev, a senior lecturer at the University of Haifa, uses the same methodological approach to answer a different question: what does the Book of Mormon tell us about why Americans were so attached to the Old Testament during the century preceding the Civil War? During the decades between America’s founding and the Union’s near dissolution, the Hebrew scriptures played a vital role in the nation’s political tradition. Americans identified their country as a new Israel, which gave them religious and political legitimacy in an age of democratic tumult. But how could such an ancient and seemingly archaic text be so relevant to modern times? How could a record detailing a people led by a king hold lessons for a society that had torn down monarchy? The answers were complex and multifaceted but demonstrate the tensions and anxieties that plagued a culture striving to reaffirm authority while at the same time providing the social opportunities that republicanism promised.

The book’s third chapter attempts to, as announced in its title, chart the “cultural origins of the Book of Mormon.” More particularly, the chapter examines the growth of what Shalev calls “pseudobiblical literature,” which used Elizabethan English and a biblical message in order to add a divine grounding to the nation’s message. During the early republic, Shalev explains, a preponderance of texts sought to imitate the Bible’s language and message while validating America’s destiny and purpose. “By imposing the Bible and its intellectual and cultural landscapes on America,” *American Zion* explains, “those texts placed the United States in a biblical time and frame, describing the new nation and its history as occurring in a distant, revered, and mythic dimension” (p. 100). These texts sought to collapse the distance between past and present—making both the Israelite story relevant as well as the ancient
language accessible. This republicanism of the Bible possessed significant implications for American political culture. Beyond merely expanding their historical consciousness and placing America within an epic narrative of divine progress, the Old Testament added a pretext for such actions as those supposedly provoked by manifest destiny.

Ironically, the Book of Mormon appeared after the apex of this literary tradition. By the time Joseph Smith's scriptural record was published, texts written in the Elizabethan style were on the decline, and most works were presented in a more modern, democratic style. On the one hand, this made the Book of Mormon the climax of the pseudobiblical tradition; on the other hand, the book acts as something of a puzzle. Shalev writes that the text “has been able to survive and flourish for almost two centuries not because, but in spite of, the literary ecology of the mid-nineteenth century and after” (p. 104). While this may be true—and Shalev is persuasive in showing how the Book of Mormon appeared at the most opportune time to take advantage of its linguistic flair—his framework overlooks the continued potential for creating a sacred time and message through the use of archaic language. Not only did other religious texts replicate King James verbiage throughout the nineteenth century, but so did varied authors like the antislavery writer James Branagan, who used antiquated language in order to provoke careful readings of his political pamphlets. Yet despite this potential oversight, Shalev’s use of the linguistic environment in order to contextualize the Book of Mormon is an underexplored angle that adds much to our understanding of the text.

Shalev is at his best when comparing the Book of Mormon to other pseudobiblical texts from the period, such as “The First Book of Chronicles, Chapter the 5th,” which was published in South Carolina’s Investigator only a few years before the Book of Mormon, as well as “A Fragment of the Prophecy of Tobias,” published serially in the American Mercury. The latter text is especially fascinating for Book of Mormon scholars, as the editor claims to have found this work that was hidden away in past centuries and that required a designated translator to reveal its important meaning for an American audience. These contemporary
accounts are not meant to serve as potential sources for the Book of Mormon’s narrative—indeed, Shalev admits such an endeavor would be impossible—but they reaffirm the important lesson that the Book of Mormon is best seen as one of many examples that embody the same cultural strains and that its importance for American intellectual historians is best seen as part of a tapestry of scriptural voices that speak to a culture’s anxieties, hopes, and fears.

But Shalev’s examination of pseudobiblical texts is meant to engage early America’s political culture. “The pseudobiblical language was, after all, essentially political (and often ironic and polemic), making secular use of a sacred language,” he explains (p. 114). In this regard, though, Shalev holds back on the Book of Mormon’s political message, perhaps because its insistence on the importance of kings appears quixotic to the populist message found in the rest of the literary tradition. The Old Testament, from many pseudobiblical texts, needed to be democratized in order to be useful for the new context. The sovereignty of God was to remain—the text was, after all, primarily used to reaffirm religious orthodoxy—but the ecclesiastical organization was to be disregarded for republican government. Yet in the Book of Mormon, the two elements, God’s sovereignty and kingly rule, seemed intimately intertwined. And as seen in Holland’s book, the God of the Book of Mormon was no less frightening than the God of the Old Testament—how does that square with the democratic God of other pseudobiblical literature? Regardless, Shalev’s book offers a new context and asks new questions concerning the Book of Mormon’s linguistic and political context—issues that will certainly be taken up by future scholars.

To a certain extent, Holland’s and Shalev’s arguments are convincing, and their push to contextualize the Book of Mormon within America’s revelatory heritage is to be lauded. But their conclusions concerning the scriptural text may not be definitive. (Nor should they be, given that the Book of Mormon was not the central focus of either book.) Yes, many elements found within the Book of Mormon are consonant with cultural trends, but there are other, equally important facets that dissent from those same strains. Nearly every other example found within Sacred
Borders and American Zion that challenged American notions of scriptural and political authority did so through blurring the boundaries and tinkering with the fringes of the scriptural canon. The Book of Mormon, on the other hand, was an outright assault on the limits of scriptural literature and political orthodoxy. It was not merely a supplement for, or a commentary on, the accepted holy texts, but an open challenge to their relevancy, coherence, adaptability, and comprehensiveness. While many movements in Holland’s and Shalev’s narratives yearned for new “scripture” in the generic sense of novel inspiration and immediate revelation, the Mormons produced scripture in the much more literal and limited sense of adding an actual text to the Christian canon.

And further, what does it mean that the Book of Mormon appeared decades later than the contemporary examples these authors think provide the most powerful comparisons—in Holland’s case, the Shakers; in Shalev’s case, the pseudobiblical works? Similar to Susan Juster’s Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), Joseph Smith’s scriptural text appears as a book out of time, better fit for a century before than in the Age of Jackson. Does this merely reinforce the importance of primitivism to the Mormon movement or perhaps add credibility to the proposed superficiality of Mormonism’s earliest converts? The answer is probably much more nuanced and complex. Most importantly, it likely calls into question the chronological narratives and cultural compartmentalization invoked by historians of American religion. The Book of Mormon should serve as a reminder that religious innovation ebbs and flows in the way that it relates to cultural evolution and reaffirms the paradoxical nature of America’s intellectual tradition. That lesson, in itself, makes Mormonism’s unique scriptural text all the more important.

That said, this does not mean that scholars of the Book of Mormon should return to the parochial and exceptionalist framework that has so plagued Mormon studies in the past—far from it. Holland’s and Shalev’s arguments provide context for new, novel, and noteworthy insights concerning the book that previous studies could hardly fathom; they introduce new vistas that previous critics could hardly have envisioned. But
what this impressive cultural backdrop does is to provide the starting point for understanding what, exactly, does make the Book of Mormon unique. Now that the shackles of Mormon historiography’s exclusive nature have been shed, the real work of contextualization and interpretation can begin. The broad narratives and sophisticated analysis of *Sacred Borders* and *American Zion* are not only indicative of this change, but they also lay the groundwork and pose important questions for the scholarship to follow.

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The Book of Mormon Translation Puzzle

Roger Terry


Emerging approaches to academic study of the Book of Mormon, especially in the context of the secular discipline of Mormon studies, pay less and less attention to the actual process by which the book was produced. Such scholars worry that these kinds of questions leave academic study behind to trespass on the territory of faith, and they rightly recognize that much remains to be learned about what the Book of Mormon says and how it has been and might yet be received, regardless of questions concerning its authenticity. In the meantime, however, the academically inclined among believing Latter-day Saints must continue to wrestle with the process by which the English text of the Book of Mormon was produced. Any in-depth study of the book is bound to unearth questions that demand some sort of reasonable explanation for someone who confesses the book’s historicity. Many such questions inevitably lead to inquiries about the process of translation. Indeed, it is almost impossible for believers to separate the content of this book from the process by which it was produced because belief in the content is dependent on the validity of its origins.

Brant Gardner has taken these questions seriously and has written an impressive volume that attempts to account for much of the seemingly contradictory evidence swirling around this cornerstone of the Latter-day Saint faith. First and foremost, let me say that I can
wholeheartedly recommend this book to anyone interested in thinking carefully, from the perspective of a believer, about how the Book of Mormon found its way into English. The book (and my review of it) will most naturally appeal to believing Latter-day Saints troubled by apparent nineteenth-century features of the Book of Mormon. Gardner writes as a believer in the book’s divine origin. His study may also be of interest to nonbelievers, however, since it concedes that anachronisms populate the Book of Mormon even as it defends the ancient historicity of the book. The breadth of Gardner’s research is remarkable, and he even handedly deals with most of the troubling incongruities both within and surrounding the book. *The Gift and Power* is a thorough introduction to the Book of Mormon translation conundrum. Along with such praise, however, let me confess that I disagree with Gardner’s ultimate conclusions regarding the translation process. Of course, that does not negate the value of what he has attempted.

The more I study the Book of Mormon, the more I come to view it as a million-piece jigsaw puzzle. Many people are working on this puzzle, and some have assembled small corners of it that suggest the contours of the larger picture; however, so far nobody has put the whole thing together, and some of the pieces have obviously been placed in the wrong position. Some of the pieces haven’t even been looked at yet. But anyone who wants to work on the translation puzzle ought to at least be aware of and account for the following:

- the presence of grammatical errors in the translated text
- second- and thirdhand accounts of the translation from scribes and observers who report that Joseph Smith used a seer stone to read text with his face buried in a hat
- Joseph correcting the scribe’s spelling while looking in the hat
- historical anachronisms in the text
- whole chapters of text repeated almost verbatim from the King James Version of the Bible (KJV), despite the fact that witnesses, including Emma, insisted that Joseph never referred to outside sources
specific terms and quotations from Protestant clergy and publications
Royal Skousen’s numerous discoveries from a quarter century of studying the original and printer’s manuscripts, as well as various printed editions
claims regarding the presence of Hebraisms in the English translation
intertextual quotations
modern vocabulary and idioms
inconsistent usage of second-person pronouns and third-person verb conjugations
a vocabulary apparently far beyond Joseph’s at that point in his life (an unlettered young man who, according to his wife, could not even pronounce names such as Sarah)
complex sentence and textual structures in a dictated document
New Testament–influenced text

Accounting for all these items and more has eluded every translation theorist to some degree. Some of these puzzle pieces do not seem to fit together. But the more we learn, the more accurate the connections, and sooner or later we may get enough of the pieces in place to have a clearer view of this magnificent and perplexing book and its translation process. So I welcome Gardner’s efforts. Even where I disagree with his conclusions, his analysis helps illuminate important points and raises new questions.

Surprisingly, Gardner spends the first twelve chapters—132 pages—of his book examining Joseph Smith’s experience with folk magic and establishing how a village seer was transformed into a prophetic seer. Joseph’s use of seer stones is of course relevant to the translation process, but this portion of the book seemed excessive. Others have addressed Joseph’s involvement in folk magic, and much of what Gardner discusses could have been significantly shortened.
In part 2 of the book, “What Kind of Translation Is the Book of Mormon?,” Gardner hits his stride. After a helpful chapter on what it means to translate, he reviews theories of Book of Mormon translation, including early inerrant theories and B. H. Roberts’s less-than-inerrant scheme. He then briefly introduces Royal Skousen’s impressive work. Skousen proposes three possibilities for how the Book of Mormon may have been translated: loose control (in which ideas were revealed to Joseph Smith, who then had to put them into his own language), tight control (in which Joseph saw specific words in English and read them to a scribe), and ironclad control (in which the interpreters—later called the Urim and Thummim—would not allow any error, even in spelling common words). Skousen’s textual analysis easily dispatches the third possibility since spelling errors and inconsistencies abound in the handwritten manuscripts. But he also refutes the loose-control theory, leaving him with no other alternative than tight control.

While Gardner agrees with Skousen on tight control over the spelling of names and accounting for the presence of apparent Hebraisms in the English text, he does not find Skousen’s framework useful in evaluating the translation itself. Skousen’s idea of tight control “refers to the transmission of the text from Joseph to Oliver, not from the plate text to English” (p. 155). Gardner suggests a different three-option framework for analyzing the translation: literalist equivalence, functional equivalence, and conceptual equivalence. A literal equivalence would be a word-for-word translation, a practical impossibility given the vagaries of language, so Gardner uses the term literalist, meaning a rendering of the text in the target language that “closely adheres to the vocabulary and structure of the source language” (p. 156). Skousen’s tight control is roughly synonymous with Gardner’s literalist equivalence. Conceptual equivalence falls on the other end of the translation continuum. It preserves meaning without regard to specific grammatical structures or vocabulary. Functional equivalence falls between the extremes; it adheres “to the organization and structures of the original but is more flexible in the vocabulary” and allows “the target language to use words
that are not direct equivalents of the source words, but which attempt to preserve the intent of the source text” (p. 156).

Gardner first presents evidence supporting a literalist equivalence, much of it from Skousen’s work, and he agrees that the evidence does support a literalist equivalence in some regards. But he argues that a functional equivalence better explains the larger part of the translation. Significantly, though, Gardner bases a fair portion of his evidence for functional equivalence (roughly a third of this chapter) on an assumption that is far from settled—namely, a Mesoamerican setting for the book. He asserts that Book of Mormon references to asses, lions, goats, sheep, harrowing, chaff, vessels with sails, land ownership, a monetized economy, debts, and swords had to originate in Joseph Smith’s time and culture because they did not exist in Mesoamerica. However, the Mesoamerican geographical model is far from proven and does not always harmonize with the Book of Mormon text. So it should be acknowledged that although there may be no archaeological evidence for lions or goats in ancient Mesoamerica, there is no evidence for Nephites or Lamanites either.

Gardner provides another support for functional or conceptual equivalence—the obvious influence of the King James Version on the text. Words such as jot and tittle (3 Nephi 1:25) come directly from the KJV, not from the Nephite language. A tittle, for instance, “is a visual coding for vowels [in Hebrew], a system developed after Lehi and his family left Jerusalem” (p. 193). These terms and others cannot be accounted for by a literalist equivalence. They must, therefore, represent expressions from Joseph’s cultural environment that replace whatever...
Nephite idioms Mormon actually used. I will suggest another explanation later in this essay, but let me first use the presence of KJV language in the Book of Mormon as a jumping-off point for discussing Gardner’s rather complex theory on how the Book of Mormon was translated.

The presence of long chapters in the Book of Mormon that contain King James language with a few notable and fascinating deviations poses a serious obstacle for anyone trying to reconcile this evidence with the testimony of Emma Smith and others that Joseph did not consult any other book or manuscript (including the Bible) while translating. Since it is obvious that whoever was translating the text had direct access to a printed King James Bible, this obstacle leaves only two possible explanations: either Joseph was receiving the translation word for word, as Skousen has concluded, or he was somehow able to reproduce from memory or from his subconscious mind a very close replica of certain KJV chapters. In his attempt to deal with this obstacle and many other pieces of the translation puzzle, Gardner devises a rather complicated and, ultimately, unsatisfying explanation based on biology, psychology, and revelation.

In a nutshell, Gardner’s theory involves accepting the accounts that indicate Joseph was reading English text through the seer stone buried in the crown of his hat. But most of that English text did not come from an outside source. It came from Joseph’s own brain. “Vision,” Gardner explains, “happens in the brain. Additionally, the brain does not passively see; it creates vision” (p. 265). So, although the ideas behind the text originated from a divine source, the English text itself did not. Gardner borrows the term *mentalese* from Steven Pinker to describe “the language of thought . . . , or the prelanguage of the brain” (p. 274). So Joseph received through revelation the content of the Book of Mormon in this form of prelanguage thought. It was then converted in Joseph’s brain into an approximation of King James English, the religious idiom of his day. And Joseph’s brain produced what he then “saw” with his eyes. In this way, Joseph was not a passive reader but an active participant in the translation process. Much like an ordinary translator who understands the source language and culture and must render a close approximation of a particular text in the target language, Joseph
understood at a subconscious level the Nephite language and culture (through revelation) and then had to find English words to express those prelanguage ideas.

Gardner does, however, add two caveats to this theory. The Book of Mormon translation, he claims, was not entirely a product of functional equivalence. Certain pieces of the translation—names in particular—represented literalist equivalence, and at least two elements of the translation denoted conceptual equivalence. These were the connecting text in Words of Mormon 1:9–18 and Martin Harris’s visit to Charles Anthon as reflected in 2 Nephi 27:15–20. Gardner considers these and perhaps other sections of text “prophetic expansion” of the plate text.

As indicated earlier, I find several problems with this elaborate theory. Let me briefly discuss four.

First, Joseph’s ability to craft (or dictate) an extensive and intricate English document was rather limited. According to Gardner’s theory, Joseph was receiving ideas that he had to formulate in coherent English sentences. But Joseph’s formal language abilities at this point in his life were limited. According to his wife, Emma, he could not even pronounce names like Sarah and had to spell them out. According to Gardner’s theory, “As the generation of language moved from Joseph’s subconscious to his conscious awareness, it accessed Joseph’s available vocabulary and grammar” (p. 308). I would argue, however, that the vocabulary of the Book of Mormon was far beyond Joseph’s “available vocabulary” in 1829. Consider the following list of words that appear in the Book of Mormon, most of which do not appear in the Bible: abhorrence, abridgment, affrighted, anxiety, arraigned, breastwork, cimeters, commencement, condescension, consignation, delightsome, depravity, derangement, discernible, disposition, distinguished, embassy, encompassed, enumerated, frenzied, hinderment, ignominious, impenetrable, iniquitous, insensibility, interposition, loftiness, management, nothingness, overbearance, petition, priestcraft, probationary, proclamation, provocation, regulation, relinquished,

repugnant, scantiness, serviceable, stratagem, typifying, unquenchable, and unweariness. I find it unlikely that Joseph would be able to conjure up this level of vocabulary and use these words correctly in context as he dictated the Book of Mormon.

Second, the Book of Mormon’s sentence structure is quite complex, with long, convoluted sentences that sometimes employ multiple layers of parenthetical statements and relative clauses (see, for instance, 3 Nephi 5:14). Putting mentalese into concrete language at this level of complexity would have exceeded the capabilities of a young man whose wife claimed he “could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter; let alone dictating a book like the Book of Mormon.” Consider the fact that Joseph dictated an unpunctuated text, and this task stretches far beyond his ability to convert prelanguage concepts into the lengthy and layered sentence structure of the Book of Mormon. Without the guidance of punctuation to separate embedded clauses, this feat would have been mind-boggling. The Book of Mormon translation was not an on-the-fly translation. In many ways it exhibits the hallmarks of a text someone labored over with abundant support texts at hand (such as a dictionary, thesaurus, the King James Bible, and perhaps some Protestant writings).

Third, according to Emma, “When my husband was translating the Book of Mormon, I wrote a part of it, as he dictated each sentence, word for word, and when he came to proper names he could not pronounce, or long words, he spelled them out.” Other witnesses, including Oliver Cowdery, indicated that if the scribe misspelled a word, Joseph would correct it. Gardner agrees that the translation was a literalist equivalence in the case of proper names and perhaps long words that Joseph was unacquainted with but insists that the bulk of the translation represented functional equivalence. But this makes the process rather

3. “Emma Smith Bidamon, as interviewed by Joseph Smith III (1879),” in Opening the Heavens, 131.
4. “Emma Smith Bidamon, as interviewed by Edmund C. Briggs (1856),” in Opening the Heavens, 129.
5. See, for instance, “Oliver Cowdery, as Interviewed by Samuel Whitney Richards (1907),” in Opening the Heavens, 144.
chaotic. If Joseph was receiving exact spelling for proper names and some longer words but not for the rest of the text, that means he was receiving exact revelation for parts of sentences but having to come up with text to express revealed ideas for the remainder of those sentences.

The spelling itself is also problematic. Anyone who has read documents handwritten by Joseph knows he struggled with spelling throughout his life. If his brain was responsible for the English text he was reading to his scribes, the very idea of Joseph correcting anyone’s spelling based on words his mind was producing is implausible.

Fourth, Joseph would have been incapable of reconstructing whole chapters of the KJV from memory, even if assisted by some form of revealed mentalese. Joseph was so famously unacquainted with the Bible that he was unaware Jerusalem had walls; it is therefore untenable that he could have reproduced many difficult chapters of Isaiah from memory and with significant alteration, often involving words that were italicized in the KJV. Gardner admits this is a problem for his theory: “Although the alterations associated with italicized words suggest that Joseph was working with a visual text, the chapter breaks [which were different in the Book of Mormon than in the KJV] tell us that he was not seeing the KJV with its current chapter divisions. Therefore what Joseph saw may have reproduced the page with the italics, but did not reproduce the chapter divisions. It is at this point that we invoke the divine” (p. 306). In other words, at times the “divine” revealed the basic idea of the text in mentalese; at other times, exact wording was revealed. This explanation is far from satisfactory.

When examined carefully, Gardner’s proposed translation methodology does not hold up well. It becomes far too complex an operation, with too many pieces of the puzzle seemingly out of place. There may be simpler explanations.

So how was the Book of Mormon translated? Royal Skousen looks at this question through the lens of control—loose, tight, or ironclad.

Gardner chooses a different lens, equivalence, which yields three different possibilities: literalist, functional, and conceptual. Elsewhere, I have proposed a different lens that may shed some light on this question. I see three different types of possible translation for the Book of Mormon. It was either a human translation, a divine translation, or a machine translation. By machine translation, I mean that the “interpreters” [Urim and Thummim or seer stone] were some sort of heavenly translation device that automatically converted text from the source language to the target language, similar to our computer translation programs but obviously more advanced. When we view the Book of Mormon through this lens, it becomes obvious that the translation is not a machine translation. Even our crude computer translation programs would never make the sort of random errors in second-person pronoun and third-person verb conjugation usage that we find in the Book of Mormon. Nor is it a divine translation. I agree with B. H. Roberts that “to assign responsibility for errors in language to a divine instrumentality, which amounts to assigning such error to God . . . is unthinkable, not to say blasphemous.” That means the Book of Mormon must be a human translation, albeit one aided by divine inspiration. But who, then, was the translator? The bulk of the evidence, in my view, does not point to Joseph Smith. He was the human conduit through which the translation was delivered, but the translation doesn’t appear to be his. Gardner quotes Skousen on this point: “These new findings argue that Joseph Smith was not the author of the English-language translation of the Book of Mormon. Not only was the text revealed to him word for word, but the words themselves sometimes had meanings that he and his scribes would not have known, which occasionally led to a misinterpretation. The Book of Mormon is not a 19th-century text, nor is it Joseph Smith’s. The English-language

text was revealed through him, but it was not precisely in his language or ours” (p. 164).

So, in whose language was it written? I want to conclude with a speculative suggestion about an answer that, while it could never satisfy nonbelievers, might satisfy believing readers attempting to complete the translation puzzle. Interestingly, Gardner briefly mentions the same speculative suggestion, which I find more convincing than his own theory. He cites a paper written by LDS member Carl T. Cox, who proposes Moroni as being responsible for the English-language translation. (Gardner quickly dismisses this possibility and moves on to other topics.) After conducting an editorial examination of the Book of Mormon and looking at a good deal of other evidence, I independently came to a conclusion similar to Cox’s. I find that the Moroni-as-translator theory explains many of the difficult problems regarding the translation of the Book of Mormon that other theories struggle with, and there may be something quintessentially Mormon about imagining an angel wrestling with the concrete situation of learning a foreign language and struggling to express ideas in that language. Of course, this model may also fall short, but it may also fit together a few more pieces of the puzzle, as Gardner’s theory has done.

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11. For a more extensive discussion of this theory, see Terry, “Archaic Pronouns and Verbs,” 53–80.
Notes

Untangling Alma 13:3

Kimberly M. Berkey

The short sermon on priesthood contained in Alma 13 is among the most topically unique and theologically significant chapters in the Book of Mormon. This chapter is practically the only explicit discourse on the topic of priesthood to be found in the Book of Mormon, and it contains a number of additional concepts important to Mormon theology—including, for instance, extrabiblical information about the priest Melchizedek (Alma 13:14–19)1 and the missional task of angels (Alma 13:21–26). On close inspection, however, Alma 13 also proves remarkably dense and confusing, and many of its complexities seem to stem from a single verse. In this brief note, I will provide a preliminary analysis that clarifies the organization and terminology of Alma 13:3 and propose a corollary implication for a common Latter-day Saint interpretation of this verse.

Alma 13 contains a portion of Alma’s words to the people of Ammonihah, primarily part of his response to the question raised by a “chief ruler” named Antionah (see Alma 12:20–21). Attempting to correct certain misunderstandings about the fall of Adam and Eve and the possibility of resurrection, Alma begins to outline God’s “plan for

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redemption,” a crucial component of which involves communicating commandments to humankind (see Alma 12:22–34). Priests, Alma indicates, were chosen early on as the means for “teach[ing] these things unto the people” (Alma 13:1) in order that “the children of men . . . might enter into [God’s] rest” (Alma 13:6).

As part of his exposition of this point, Alma dwells briefly on the nature of the priestly office and the characteristics of the individuals who occupy it, initially stating that “they were called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works” (Alma 13:3). But as Alma continues, he appears to introduce unnecessary redundancies. Although this repetition initially seems to be a rhetorical gesture intended simply to emphasize the claims in the first part of verse 3, further inspection reveals that Alma may be clarifying his previous statement. In fact, examined closely, verse 3 divides cleanly into two halves, and each of the key words and phrases from the first half of the verse are repositioned and developed in the second half of the verse,2 with two exceptions (to be discussed below) whose clarification is postponed until verse 7. These are laid out in table 1.

Table 1. Comparing Alma 13:3a and 3b

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial phrase from verse 3a</th>
<th>Subsequent clarification in verse 3b</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“being called”</td>
<td>“called with a holy calling”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“[the priests were] prepared”</td>
<td>“[the calling was] prepared with . . . a preparatory redemption”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“foundation of the world”</td>
<td>clarification delayed until verse 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“according to the foreknowledge of God”</td>
<td>“according to a preparatory redemption”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“foreknowledge of God”</td>
<td>clarification delayed until verse 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“exceeding faith”</td>
<td>“exercising exceedingly great faith”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“good works”</td>
<td>“left to choose good or evil . . . they have chosen good”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The repetition of so many phrases, each time reworked with clarifying details, suggests that Alma may be distancing himself in certain ways from his initial formulation. After stating his basic point in verse 3a, it is as if Alma realizes that he has unintentionally obscured his message about priesthood and feels it necessary to introduce some nuances before moving on. It seems, in fact, that all of verses 3b–9 constitute a lengthy aside meant to clarify the first half of verse 3.

Consider, for example, the following points of clarification. Alma states in verse 3a that priests were both “called and prepared,” but verse 3b clarifies that the preparation in question refers less to individual priests than to the calling itself; it was, in fact, “that holy calling which was prepared.” Similarly, although Alma initially refers in verse 3a only briefly to the “good works” of these priests, verse 3b expands this reference to further develop the theme of agency addressed earlier in the sermon, explaining that individual priests chose good and became qualified for their calling only after “being left to choose good and evil.”

As these examples illustrate, it seems Alma, in verse 3b, systematically clarifies each of the terms introduced in verse 3a, correcting potential misunderstandings that might result from his initial brevity.

If Alma thus quickly distances himself in certain ways from his too-compact presentation of priesthood in Alma 13:3a, there is reason to be wary of overinterpreting what Alma says there, as Latter-day Saints often do. When verse 3a states that priests were “called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God,” some Latter-day Saint commentators hear a reference to premortal foreordination to priesthood office, with the prefix “fore-” in both “foreordain” and “foreknowledge” etymologically cementing

3. Brant Gardner makes much of this reference to agency, arguing that it provides the key difference between Nephite priesthood and the Israelite priesthood Lehi and his family inherited from biblical tradition: “The Hebrew priesthood known from the post-Mosaic religion was lineage based, not the agency-based priesthood Alma is describing. . . . Alma implies that the Nephites functioned under this agency-based priesthood, a sound argument since the Nephites had no lineal connection to the Levites.” See Brant A. Gardner, Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 4:214.
the connection. The idea of premortal ordination originated with Joseph Smith himself, who first articulated the doctrine as follows: “Every man who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world was ordained to that very purpose in the Grand Council of heaven before this world was. I suppose that I was ordained to this very office in that Grand Council.” Although the doctrine of foreordination is thus found in the words of Joseph Smith and consequently stakes a legitimate claim in Latter-day Saint theology, in my view there is good reason to doubt that foreordination is taught or referred to in Alma 13.

This is made especially evident when Alma continues his clarification of verse 3a, which appears later in verse 7. Verse 3a introduces two phrases that are both crucial to the standard Latter-day Saint interpretation of this verse: “from the foundation of the world” and “the foreknowledge of God.” Like every key phrase in Alma 13:3a, however, these two phrases are also repeated and developed later in the chapter, albeit in verse 7 rather than in verse 3b. Crucially, the grammatical subject of verse 7 is “this high priesthood,” and when the verse is quoted in full, it is clear that God’s premortal preparation and foreknowledge, so far as Alma is concerned, center not on individual priests but on the priesthood itself: “This high priesthood being after the order of his Son, which order was from the foundation of the world; or in other words, being without beginning of days or end of years, being prepared from eternity to all eternity, according to his foreknowledge of all things.” Thus, although the doctrine of foreordination has a legitimate place in Mormon theology, it appears


5. History of the Church, 6:364.

6. David Wright comes to the same conclusion regarding the clarifying role verse 7 plays with respect to verse 3a, but he nonetheless insists, unconvincingly, that there is a pre-creational ordination of priests at issue in Alma 13. See David P. Wright, “‘In Plain Terms That We May Understand’: Joseph Smith’s Transformation of Hebrews in Alma
that some Latter-day Saint commentators may have misread the text in finding justification for this doctrine in the Book of Mormon. Because Alma 13:3a introduces several key terms to Alma’s discussion of priesthood only to further elaborate, clarify, and develop them, anything verse 3a says regarding God’s foreknowledge must be read in conjunction with the reformulations to be found throughout verses 3b–9. It seems clear, at any rate, that Alma intended to connect God’s foreknowledge not with individual priests but with the “order of the Son” (Alma 13:9), painting a picture in which God prepared the priesthood in conjunction with the plan of redemption as one of the plan’s key mechanisms for salvation.7

Because of the obvious care with which it addresses the topic of priesthood, this chapter clearly deserves further sustained attention. Although Alma 13 does not outline foreordination as clearly or simply as many Latter-day Saints have assumed, what this chapter has to say about priesthood is still of key theological importance to Mormonism. When Alma 13:3b is understood as a preliminary clarification and expansion of the terminology introduced in verse 3a, we not only gain a greater appreciation for Alma’s exceptional care and precision in this sermon, but also lay key groundwork for continuing interpretive work on Alma 13.

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7. Brant Gardner arrives at a similar conclusion; see *Second Witness*, 4:214.
Three-Nephite Lore and Observing the Sacred:
Some Observations

Brad Kramer

Late in the Book of Mormon’s account of the resurrected Christ’s visit to the ancient Americas, the record describes three disciples whose deaths were postponed until the end of human history (see 3 Nephi 27–28). This dispensation, the text reports, was granted them so that they would be free to do the work of Christian preaching—among Jews, Gentiles, and the scattered remnants of Israel—until God’s purposes are entirely accomplished. Unsurprisingly, stories of encounters with these “Three Nephites” have circulated among Latter-day Saints with varying levels of frequency from quite early in Mormon history. But it is widely recognized among Mormons that, whatever their credibility or incredibility, such stories, fables, beliefs, folktales, rumors, histories, and myths about modern appearances of and interactions with the Three Nephites are not in any sense “central” to the Mormon gospel. They are minutiae, folklore, the inessential, “culture” rather than doctrine, theologically and salvifically inconsequential. Whether any or all of these accounts are historically factual or accurate doesn’t matter. So far as Latter-day Saints are consciously concerned, no one’s salvation or exaltation is at stake. A closer look at Mormon discourse, however, through the lens of anthropological description rather than normative theology, suggests that this conscious claim about the inessential nature of Three Nephites stories is in certain ways misleading.

Let’s imagine two Venn circles overlapping (as Venn circles tend to do). In one circle, we have “stuff that is sacred.” In the other, we have...
“stuff that is unique to Mormonism.” The categories, like the circles, partially overlap. Belief in Christ, guidance by the Holy Ghost, the ritual of the sacrament of the Lord’s supper, and so on, are not unique to Mormonism, yet are sacred. Jell-O and funeral potatoes are unique parts of Mormonism, well-known features in the Mormon culture region, yet they are not sacred. The Mormon temple and its complicated rituals, however, are both sacred and unique to Mormonism, positioned within the overlap of the two circles. Now, consider the role that humor plays in defining the parameters of the three spaces: the two nonoverlapping Venn spaces, and the overlapping center. I rely here on anthropological observations of Mormon social life, features that, I’m quite confident, would be recognized by most Mormons. Latter-day Saints make jokes about uniquely Mormon but nonsacred things with regularity. They also use humor in connection with uniquely Mormon sacred things, but in a different way. Unlike humor about nonsacred but distinctly Mormon things, humor with regard to sacred things unique to Latter-day Saints demonstrates, enacts, and even reinforces a reverence for the sacred by gently—but in socially acceptable and even socially regulated ways—skewering Mormons’ own perhaps overearnest preoccupation with their veneration of it.

Latter-day Saints make jokes about the Three Nephites, but not in a way that mocks or demeans them. Instead, they chide themselves over the possibility that they too seriously or earnestly expect to see them. By contrast, Mormons do not make (or at least they consider inappropriate) jokes about sacred things that are not also distinctively Mormon. This subtle distinction applies even to the temple (which is both sacred and quintessentially Mormon), where playful humor is saturated with a kind of hyperawareness and vigilante observance of the holiness and sacred status of temple rituals and temple language. The point is that humor helps to code stories and quips about Three Nephite sightings as more similar to temple rites than to *Napolean Dynamite*, which exploits many peculiarities of the Mormon culture region. The Three Nephites comprise a part of the discursive territory Latter-day Saints observe and experience as holy. This is significant, given the widespread
acknowledgment among Mormons that stories about encountering the Three Nephites are allegedly irrelevant to weightier, eternal matters.

The significance of Three Nephite stories for Mormon enactment and experience of the sacred can be further excavated by comparing them to the accounts of the resurrection narratives of the Savior in the New Testament. Anonymity figures centrally in both. There are three separate stories in the Gospels of disciples who, although they were intimately acquainted with Jesus during his ministry, encounter the risen Messiah without recognizing him. These stories might seem quaint now, as if Jesus were testing his disciples. But reflect on this detail from the perspective of the disciples themselves: men and women who not only encountered the risen Christ as an ordinary, anonymous person who walked and spoke and ate, but who encountered him in this way after having heard him relate the parable of the goats and sheep, with its potent image of those at Christ’s right hand who served “one of the least of these” and thereby served him (see Matthew 25:31–46).

It is one thing to understand the moral imperatives of the parable in metaphorical terms, such as Jesus telling you that feeding the hungry or giving drink to the thirsty or visiting the sick or imprisoned is like doing those things to him. It is quite another thing to realize that it is not a metaphor at all or that the metaphor is also real. The stranger you just spoke with in the garden, that you just walked with to Emmaus, is actually the Christ. He could be anyone, anywhere. This association of the very person of Jesus with the actual bodies of those most in need acquires a new, and perhaps even intimidating or frightening, significance in light of the postresurrection encounters because the parable becomes so shockingly literal. The homeless veteran on the freeway onramp, or the pathetic rehabbing junkie going through agonizing withdrawals, or the hardened prisoner—Christians are to encounter these people and minister to them as if to the Messiah because they are the Messiah, not just figuratively but in the sense that any or all of them could literally be the anonymous Christ memorialized in “A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief,” the hymn famously sung to the Prophet Joseph in his prison cell.
The Three Nephites are similarly anonymous. They “will be among the Gentiles” and “the Jews,” but all these “shall know them not” (3 Nephi 28:27–28). Moreover, their mission is scripturally associated with the resurrection of Christ. Their transfiguration occurs as the result of an encounter with the (at-first-misrecognized) resurrected Jesus (see 3 Nephi 11:1–8) who, as in the Gospel accounts, assures complete recognition by having all witnesses physically handle the scars of his crucifixion (see 3 Nephi 11:13–17 and John 20:26–29). The Three Nephites’ immortality—though qualitatively different from Christ’s—is a kind of extension of his resurrection, especially in light of the role anonymity plays: they live forever, they are unrecognized, and they could be anyone and anywhere (indeed are in some sense both), and stories of encounters with them in their immortal state crucially involve acts of Christian service.

Moreover, both Christ’s resurrection and the transformation of the Three Nephites figure centrally in apocalyptic expectation and narratives of the eschaton. In fact, the Three Nephites’ transfigured condition prefigures the transformation of the earth and humanity (both in terms of immortality and freedom from Satan’s influence) more closely and explicitly than does Christ’s immortal condition, and the text of the Book of Mormon posits a role for the Three Nephites to play in the unfolding of history’s end (see 3 Nephi 28:27–32 for suggestive passages regarding their participation in the gathering of the lost tribes, their preaching to the Jews, and their performing a “great and marvelous” work before “the great and coming day” of judgment).

Interestingly, however, it is this last point—the close relationship between the Three Nephites and Mormon apocalyptic expectation—that may help to explain an important anthropological observation. Latter-day Saints are still familiar with folklore surrounding the Three Nephites: such folklore, however, plays a smaller role in Mormon culture today than in the past. It seems likely that this decline in preoccupation with the Three Nephites is connected to Latter-day Saints’ diminished anticipation of an any-moment-now second coming. Imminent apocalyptic expectation has waned in both official and popular Mormon discourse.
My conclusion to this brief note, however, is not about the Three Nephites per se—who or where they are supposed to be, whether their stories are true, or what direct role they might play in Mormonism’s rendering of God’s plan for humanity. My more narrowly anthropological conclusion deals rather with who Latter-day Saints are as a people, with how the stuff of everyday life often mixes with the strange or the surreal to organize Latter-day Saints’ experience of the sacred and the holy, their movement in and out of sacred time and space, back and forth across sacred thresholds, and in and out of contact with sacred materials. That which on the surface does not seem to matter can actually matter a great deal. Looking closely at the things that Latter-day Saints insist are not really central or essential to Mormonism—the folkloric bits of idiosyncratic tradition or speculation more commonly associated with a Sunday School lesson run amok—might in fact tell us some rather interesting, useful, and important things about who they are.

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