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INVOLVING READERS
IN THE LATTER-DAY SAINT
ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

ARTICLES

- 4** From the Editor
- 7** Kingship, Democracy, and the Message of the Book of Mormon
Gregory Steven Dundas
- 59** Reading Competency in the Book of Mormon:
Abish and Other Model Readers
Michael J. Call
- 71** The Latter-day Saint Reimaging of “the Breath of Life”
(Genesis 2:7)
Dana M. Pike
- 105** Ann Booth’s Vision and Early Conceptions of Redeeming the Dead
among Latter-day Saints
Christopher James Blythe
- 123** Pieces of April: From the Life and Journal of Lance Larsen
Lance Larsen and Casualene Meyer

ESSAY

- 147** Aviophobia
Kim Webb Reid

BOOK REVIEWS

- 153** *America 1844: Religious Fervor, Westward Expansion, and the Presidential Election That Transformed the Nation*
by John Bicknell
Reviewed by Benjamin E. Park
- 156** *Geology of the Book of Mormon* by Jerry D. Grover Jr.
Reviewed by Benjamin R. Jordan
- 160** *Eighth Witness: The Biography of John Whitmer*
by Ronald E. Romig
Reviewed by Kyle R. Walker
- 164** *William B. Smith: In the Shadow of a Prophet* by Kyle R. Walker
Reviewed By Richard Neitzel Holzapfel
- 168** *Mormons in the Piazza: History of the Latter-day Saints in Italy*
by James A. Toronto, Eric R. Dursteler, and Michael W. Homer
Reviewed by Mauro Properzi
- 172** *Hammerhead Six: How Green Berets Waged an Unconventional War against the Taliban to Win in Afghanistan's Deadly Pech Valley*
by Captain Ronald Fry, with Tad Tuleja
Reviewed by Cless Young

BOOK NOTICE

- 176** *The Awkward State of Utah*

From the Editor

John W. Welch



The front and back covers of this issue of *BYU Studies Quarterly* feature a unique stained glass window. It is found in the chapel of the La Cañada Ward meetinghouse in Southern California. Since I grew up in that ward, where my parents lived and served for fifty years, I have many special personal reasons for wanting to share these pictures with all who enjoy this journal.

A few old-timers still remember laying bricks and working together on the construction of this distinctive building in 1949–50, but none of them can remember who designed or made this impressive window. The anonymity of this window's maker only enhances its value to every member of this LDS congregation. And for almost seventy years now, this window's tender messages and distinctively LDS symbols have inspired, consoled, taught, and strengthened the many who have worshiped in this chapel with the window in view.

Integral to the architecture of this building, the window is positioned directly behind the pulpit from which Church leaders and members have taught and testified, all in the name of Jesus Christ. From the audience's perspective, this Christ-centered illumination stands behind everything that is said and done, every ordinance that is administered, and every musical number that is performed in this sacred space.

The expression on the face of Jesus is calm and reassuring. He wears a red cloak over his shoulders, and his head tilts kindly toward the door that he hopes will be opened by those inside in response to his inviting knock. His right arm is raised, and at his waist his open left hand holds a golden lamp, offering to light our way as we follow him, the light and

the life of the world. The lamp's purple top gives the impression that this vessel is topped off with grapes. All of this symbolizes many things in the mission of Christ and our relationship to him at his impending arrival.

On each side of this central figure of the Savior are two conspicuous circular stained-glass medallions. The one on the viewer's left depicts the Bible, subtitled as the "Stick of Judah." On the right is the Book of Mormon, with its subtitle on the scroll behind it as the "Stick of Joseph." There is no mistaking that this is a Mormon window. These two books of scripture lie open, ready to read. They bring to constant memory the two sticks mentioned in Ezekiel 37, which appear here as two witnesses and testaments of Jesus Christ. Positioned near the head of Jesus, these two scriptures portray the word of Christ, containing the messages by which we can recognize that it is he who knocks as our friend and mentor.

Four additional single-pane images are placed toward the bottom of the left and right sides of this triptych.

Underneath the stick of Judah, on the far left side, a dove of peace, with a leafy branch in its beak, represents God's gift of his covenantal reconciliation with Noah and all mankind. That dove also foreshadows the sign of the dove falling upon Christ at his baptism as well as the gift of the Holy Ghost. The dove of peace also bespeaks the promise of comfort given by Jesus the night of his Last Supper, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you" (John 14:27).

Beside it, two gold keys may represent the keys of the Aaronic and Melchizedek orders of the priesthood, mentioned in the stick of Judah, especially in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Images of keys such as these often appear in Catholic depictions of Jesus giving to Peter in Matthew 16 the keys of the kingdom and the power to bind temporally and spiritually, on earth as it is in heaven. In the restoration of these keys by John the Baptist and Peter, James, and John, Latter-day Saints find assurances that the same organization that existed in biblical times is efficacious once again upon the earth.

Underneath the Book of Mormon and on the inside edge of the right side, two hands are shown gripping one another, in parity. The hand-clasp was a common symbol in ancient classical art for marriage. Close inspection of the cuffs on these two white sleeves reveals that the husband's hand is on the right, while the wife's fancier lace cuff is on the left. The two are united as one for time and for all eternity by the culminating ordinance of the temple, which epitomizes the new and everlasting covenant of the dispensation of the gospel of Jesus Christ that was opened by the coming forth of the stick of Joseph in 1830.

Above and to the right of that emblem of marriage, the all-seeing eye of God looks down from heaven and out toward the center of the overall window, carefully mindful of all that the Father's eternal plan is bringing to pass. The piercing glance of the all-knowing eye both chastens and reassures. God's omniscience, symbolized here, also reminds the viewer of his unsurpassed intelligence, which is his glory. The equilateral triangle around this all-seeing eye has three streams of glory brightly beaming forth from each of its sides. This is an apt depiction of the Latter-day Saint understanding of the Godhead, revealed by the Book of Mormon and by the Prophet Joseph, of three perfect beings unified in bringing to pass the eternal life of all who will receive the love, the atonement, the ordinances, and the blessings of Jesus Christ.

Little wonder that this window is a cherished treasure of light. Its meaningful details reward close introspection, while its overall composition warms even the passing glance. I hope that this Latter-day Saint masterpiece will help students and scholars, young and old, to follow the Master in all that we say, do, and think. We are, after all, accountable for our words, deeds, and thoughts, as Alma 12:14 makes unmistakably clear.

Perhaps it was my seeing this window every week as a teenager that engendered in me the principles that I and my colleagues have tried to follow in editing and publishing *BYU Studies Quarterly*, including the pages of this issue.

While it is good to be learned, we strive concurrently to hearken unto the inspired words of revealed scripture, both of Judah and of Joseph.

While we yearn for peace, we also recognize that it is ultimately only God's descending doves that will establish lasting peace.

While we cite scholarly authorities, we also keep in sight the keys of priesthood authority.

While valuing individuality, we also cling tenaciously to the hopes and promises of the indivisible unions of holy matrimony and joyous bonds of eternal lives.

And to accomplish all this, we strive to keep Christ prominently central in our lives, to deny not his gifts, to hear his knocking on our door, and to go forth, loving him and all things that are of him, with all our hearts, with all our many strengths, and with all the capacities of our less-than-all-seeing brains and intellects. With all this in mind, I hope you will enjoy all the content of this issue.

Kingship, Democracy, and the Message of the Book of Mormon

Gregory Steven Dundas

Chapter 29 of the book of Mosiah, in which the people of Zarahemla transform their government from a monarchy to a rule of judges, is a crucial—indeed, pivotal—chapter in the Book of Mormon.¹ Modern readers of the book, particularly those of us raised in Western

1. G. Homer Durham, in his neglected study *Joseph Smith, Prophet-Statesman: Readings in American Political Thought* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1944), 3, notes that studies on the Book of Mormon have all too often focused on the question of its historicity, whereas it “contains a unique account of the rise and fall of political institutions and a comprehensive social message for the Mormon faith. Institutional transition, and social and political change in general, are explained in terms of a theory of righteous social contentment.” Hugh Nibley also, for all his untiring labors aimed at demonstrating that the book is what it claims to be, advocated that the really important thing (and therefore the more important matter for study) was the underlying *message* of the work. In *The World and the Prophets*, ed. John W. Welch, Gary P. Gillum, and Don E. Norton, vol. 3 of *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1987), 125, Nibley observed that “with every passing year this great and portentous story becomes more and more familiar and more frighteningly like our own. It is an exciting thing to discover that the man Lehi was a real historical character, . . . but it is far more important and significant to find oneself in this twentieth century standing as it were in his very shoes. The events and situations of the Book of Mormon that not many years ago seemed wildly improbable to some and greatly overdrawn have suddenly become the story of our own times.” The present study is given in the spirit of these remarks, as a small contribution aimed at achieving a better understanding of the underlying message of the Book of Mormon to the Latter-day Saints and to the world at large.

nations, are prone to react very positively to this story, viewing it as the creation of a free, democratic system, and we are inclined to read this account with something of the same thrill with which we observed the freedom-loving, democratic urges of peoples worldwide, most notably in Eastern Europe in 1989 and in more recent years during the so-called Arab Spring.²

But this natural modern reaction is entirely out of place as a response to an ancient text. Most ancient peoples had a very different view of democracy, to the extent that they considered it at all. We usually think of democracy as the crowning creation of the ancient Greeks, but many Greeks did not admire it as a political system. Plato and Aristotle, among many others, saw it as a highly problematic form of governance.³ Indeed, we can speculate that if the ancient Greeks had possessed the Book of

2. It is worth noting that, in light of subsequent developments in both Europe and the Arab world, it has become obvious that a passion for freedom and democracy, no matter how fervidly held, is insufficient to create an effective democratic system. What is necessary is the expenditure of a great deal of hard work (and patience!) to bring people of differing views together to create effective and strong *institutions*. The British historian Niall Ferguson has argued that modern, stable Western society was brought about over much time through the development of ideas “about the way people should govern themselves. Some people make the mistake of calling that idea ‘democracy’ and imagining that any country can adopt it merely by holding elections. In reality, democracy was the capstone of an edifice that had as its foundation the rule of law—to be precise, the sanctity of individual freedom and the security of private property rights, ensured by representative, constitutional government.” Niall Ferguson, *Civilization: The West and the Rest* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 97.

3. Plato acknowledged that a democratic state has the greatest degree of liberty and free speech: “Everyone in it is allowed to do what he likes; . . . each man in it could plan his own life as he pleases.” Plato, *Republic* 8.557b, as quoted in A. H. M. Jones, *Athenian Democracy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957), 44. Plato also declared that a citizen in a democracy is neither required to hold office (as in Athens) nor to submit to authority “if you do not like it; you need not fight when your fellow citizens are at war, nor remain at peace when they do, unless you want peace.” He calls it “an agreeable form of anarchy.” *Republic* 8.558, in *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Francis MacDonalld Cornford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), 282–83. According to Paul Rahe, Plato argued in his later years that Athenian democracy suffered “a decline in reverence and fear,” which gave rise to “an excess of freedom and to a shamelessness that had undermined the friendship that was the foundation of the city’s moral unity and its strength.” Paul A. Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern: Classical Republicanism and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 190. Plato’s emphasis on *friendship* as the foundation for the success of a

Mormon, many of them would have found its account of the Nephite decline clear evidence of the inferiority of democracy, or “popular rule,” as a form of government. It can be argued that the change from kingship to a weaker government of “judges” was a key contributor to the ultimate corruption and disintegration of the Nephite state.⁴

KINGSHIP IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

Kingship was the most common system of government in the ancient world and probably even in the modern world prior to the twentieth century.⁵ It can even be said that kingship was broadly considered the most *natural* form of government throughout most of the ancient and medieval periods. Other types of governance either were not considered at all or were typically rejected. The very idea of a democratic government was felt to be akin to mob rule—unwieldy, impractical, and downright dangerous to the common weal. Among Greek intellectuals, in particular, a principal reason for this critique was the belief that the purpose of government was moral—it was intended to train or shape

polis is reminiscent of Mormon’s emphasis on *unity* and *dissension* as the keys for the success and failure of the Nephite state.

4. A similar message can easily be inferred from Thucydides’ *Peloponnesian Wars*. Thucydides, in contrast to Mormon’s moralizing style of history (for example, the repeated use of “And thus we see that . . .”), mostly avoided keeping a running commentary on the events of his narration. Hence his personal views of the events of his history are not always apparent. Nonetheless, it seems clear that he was no friend to Athenian democracy and viewed the popular rule in Athens at the end of the fifth century BC as a root cause of the missteps and blunders that led to the loss of the war against the Spartans and the virtual collapse of the state. See the discussion in Maurice Pope, “Thucydides and Democracy,” *Historia: Zeitschrift für alte Geschichte* 37 (3d qtr., 1988): 276–96. Pope observes that Thucydides clearly approved of the “nominal” democracy under Pericles, when “power was really in the hands of the first citizen.” Pericles’ successors, on the other hand, he viewed as demagogues, whose populist approach to politics “resulted in their losing control over the actual conduct of affairs. Such a policy . . . naturally led to a number of mistakes, amongst which was the Sicilian expedition. . . . In the end it was only because they had destroyed themselves by their own internal strife that finally they were forced to surrender.” See *Peloponnesian War* 2.65, in *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Penguin, 1972), 164.

5. The ubiquity of kingship—indeed, of sacral kingship—throughout the history of mankind is one of the major themes of Francis Oakley, *Kingship* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006). See, for example, pages 4–5.

its people according to notions of virtue, to give them moral guidance toward the best life, and so on. Democracy could not do this.⁶

Most kings prior to 1800 (and even beyond) were regarded either as gods or, more frequently, as semidivine representatives of the gods.⁷ In ancient Egypt, where the kingship can be viewed as the monarchical system *par excellence*, any alternate form of governance was simply unthinkable.⁸ The king, or pharaoh, was typically referred to as a god himself or as the son of a particular deity—for example, Re or Amun. In theological terms, Pharaoh acted as the principal intercessor between

6. “The philosophers held that the State ought to mould and train the citizens in virtue and assumed that the average man was naturally evil or at least foolish. Political power must therefore be given to a select group of wise good men, who would impose a good way of life on the rest by a rigid system of education and control. The Athenian democrats, on the other hand, took an optimistic view of human nature, and believed that every citizen should be allowed to live his own life in his own way, within the broad limits laid down by the law, and that all citizens could be trusted to take their part in the government of the city, whether by voting and speaking in the assembly, judging in the juries, carrying on the routine administration as magistrates, or selecting the men to hold high political office.” Jones, *Athenian Democracy*, 61. See also Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern*.

7. On the semidivine power of kings in general, see G. Van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 1:117–20. The literature on sacral kingship is voluminous. As convenient introductions into this massive subject, see Oakley, *Kingship*; Jean Hani, *Sacred Royalty: From the Pharaoh to the Most Christian King* (London: Matheson Trust for the Study of Comparative Religion, 2011); Jean-Paul Roux, *Le Roi: Mythes et symboles* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1995). With regard to the Ancient Near East, the classic work is Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948). A more up-to-date summary is found in Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008), 1–24. Stephen D. Ricks provides a convenient summary of numerous aspects of the sacral kingship as relating to the Book of Mormon in “Kingship, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998), 233–75. See also Todd R. Kerr, “Ancient Aspects of Nephite Kingship in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1 (Fall 1992): 85–118.

8. Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 16. In the Ancient Near East it was generally believed that “only savages could live without a king.” See Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 3.

deity and the people. As chief priest, he represented the Egyptian people before the gods. Countless temple depictions of pious offerings made to the gods invariably show the king himself making the offering in person. The Egyptian priesthood played the decidedly secondary role of merely acting in the king's stead out of practical necessity. Yet Pharaoh also represented the gods among the people, and he was just as frequently depicted in close association with the gods as he was in giving service to them.

The kingship was essential to the entire notion of maintaining cosmic order, or *Maat*, a fundamental concept that comprised such matters as justice, truth, and law. *Maat* was the universal order established by the sun god Re in the time of creation when primordial chaos had been overcome.⁹ But its divine creation at the beginning of the world did not mean that it could be passively maintained thereafter. *Maat* had to be actively established again and again through right behavior. And while this applied to all mankind, the Pharaoh was directly responsible for maintaining *Maat* by ruling justly and also by carrying out the required service to the gods, that is, in both the practical and the religious aspects of his reign.¹⁰ In particular, for the king and other public officials, doing *Maat* demanded the protection of the needs of the socially underprivileged, maintaining a proper balance between the protection of ownership rights and the needs of the poor.

The Pharaoh, at least in theory, had absolute power over all the people of Egypt. Yet he was typically portrayed not as a tyrant, but as a

9. *Maat* was of such fundamental importance that even the gods were subject to it. See A. Broadie and J. Macdonald, "The Concept of Cosmic Order in Ancient Egypt in Dynastic and Roman Times," *L'Antiquité Classique* 47 (1978): 123 n. 48.

10. It was necessary not just for the king, but for all human beings to "do" and to "speak" *Maat*—that is, to do what is correct and reasonable. Rudolf Anthes has provided this particularly expansive definition of *Maat*: "Maat holds this small world together and makes it into a constitutive part of world order. She is the bringing home of the harvest; she is human integrity in thought, word, and deed; she is the loyal leadership of government; she is the prayer and offering of the king to the god. Maat encompasses all of creation, human beings, the king, the god; she permeates the economy, the administration, religious services, the law. All flows together in a single point of convergence: the king. He lives Maat and passes her on, not only to the sun god above but also to his subjects below." Quoted in Erik Hornung, *Idea into Image: Essays on Ancient Egyptian Thought*, trans. Elizabeth Bredeck (N.p., Timken Publishers, 1992), 131–45.

shepherd or caretaker of the people whose duty it was to do the works of the gods and thus restore the Golden Age of happiness and plenty.

His Majesty was one beloved of god,
 he spent day and night
 seeking good works for the gods,
 rebuilding temples that had crumbled,
 restoring their images as they were,
 building their storehouses and equipping their offering tables,
 bringing them offerings of all things
 and making them offering tables of electrum and silver.
 The heart of his Majesty was now content
 doing good works for them day by day.
 The land was bounteous in his time
 as it had been at the time of the All-Lord.¹¹

As suggested by the last two lines of the inscription, the welfare of the people was directly dependent on the behavior of the king, specifically on his proper care for the gods. The death of a king was described as a time of chaos on earth—the loss of *Maat*—and the accession of his successor was portrayed as the recovery of proper order not only in the political sphere, but in nature itself. This cosmic drama was declared in stark language at the beginning of each king's reign, as seen in the following hymn written for the coronation of Merneptah:

Be glad of heart, the entire land! The goodly times are come! A lord—life, prosperity, health!—is given in all lands, and *normality* has come down (again) into its place. . . . All ye righteous, come that ye may see! Right has banished wrong. Evildoers have fallen (upon) their faces. All the rapacious are ignored. The water stands and is not dried up; the Nile lifts high. Days are long, nights have hours, and the moon comes normally. The gods are satisfied and content of heart. [One] lives *in* laughter and wonder.¹²

Like the Egyptian Pharaoh, Mesopotamian kings were seen, despite their absolute power, as shepherds of the people. The ideology of the king as having been appointed by the gods to protect his people as a shepherd protects the flocks is best illustrated by a passage from the conclusion to Hammurabi's famous inscription:

11. Stele of Taharqa, quoted in Assmann, *Mind of Egypt*, 358.

12. James Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts: Relating to the Old Testament*, 2d ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 378. Also, see Pritchard for a similar declaration at the accession of Ramses IV.

I, Hammurabi, the perfect king, was not careless (or) neglectful of the black-headed (people), whom Enlil had presented to me, (and) whose shepherding Marduk had committed to me; I sought out peaceful regions for them; I overcame grievous difficulties; I caused light to rise on them. With the mighty weapon which Zababa and Inanna entrusted to me, with the insight that Enki allotted to me, with the ability that Marduk gave me, I rooted out the enemy above and below; I made an end of war; I promoted the welfare of the land; I made the peoples rest in friendly habitations; I did not let them have anyone to terrorize them. The great gods called me, so I became the beneficent shepherd whose scepter is righteous; my benign shadow is spread over my city. In my bosom I carried the peoples of the land of Sumer and Akkad; they prospered under my protection; I always governed them in peace; I sheltered them in my wisdom. In order that the strong might not oppress the weak, that justice might be dealt the orphan (and) the widow, . . . I wrote my precious words on my stela.¹³

And like the Egyptians, the Mesopotamians also viewed the good king as not only causing prosperity in the human sphere but as having a direct beneficial effect in the natural world. One correspondent emphasizes this in a letter to the king Ashurbanipal of Assyria:

Ashur, [king of the gods], nominated [the king] my lord to kingship over Assyria, and Shamash and Adad by their reliable extispicy have confirmed the king my lord as king of the world. There is a fine reign: days of security, years of justice, very heavy rains, massive floods, low prices. The gods are propitious, religion abounds, temples are well provided for, the great gods of heaven and netherworld are exalted in the time of the king my lord. Old men dance, young men sing. Women and girls are happy and rejoice. Women are married and provided with (ear)rings. Sons and daughters are born, procreation flourishes. The king my lord pardons him whose crimes condemned to death. You have released the prisoner sentenced to many years. Those who have been ill for many days have recovered. The hungry have been satisfied, parched ones have been anointed with oil, the naked have been clothed with garments.¹⁴

13. Quoted in Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 177–78, reformatted for continuity. Compare also the prologues to the laws of Lipit-Ishtar and of Ur-Nammu.

14. Quoted in W. G. Lambert, “Kingship in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. John Day (Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 69–70.

This “sacral kingship” can also be detected in the records of the Hebrew civilization of the Old Testament, though in a somewhat diluted form.¹⁵ In ancient Israel, God (YHWH or Yahweh) was held to be the actual king, and the prophets decried the treatment of a human king as divine.¹⁶ Nevertheless, kings clearly possessed certain elements of sacrality. The Davidic king was considered to be the son of God (Ps 2:7). God tells Nathan regarding David, “I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me” (2 Sam. 7:14). Yahweh, of course, was for the Israelites

15. There has been and continues to be much debate among scholars relative to the status of the Israelite king and the degree to which the Hebrews shared their neighbors’ beliefs in the sacredness of kingship. Those who concentrate their attention on the so-called “royal Psalms” (for example, Psalms 2, 20, 21, 110) have tended to see the king as an exalted figure who sits on God’s throne at the right hand of God and is on occasion even equated with God. The classic study is Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*, 2 vols. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962). For a recent discussion, see Shirley Lucass, *The Concept of the Messiah in the Scriptures of Judaism and Christianity* (New York: T and T Clark International, 2011). Another school of thought focuses more on biblical verses that emphasize the *humanness* of the king. For example, Deuteronomy 17:14–20, often referred to as the “law of the king,” seems to place strict limits on the acceptable power of kings and to greatly emphasize the king’s total subordination to the law and will of God. There may be no way to entirely reconcile the variety of views toward kingship as found in our current Old Testament. One’s view depends very much on how one reconstructs the history of the various texts, especially Deuteronomy and Samuel. For example, it is widely agreed by scholars that there are at least two interwoven strands of tradition in the account of Saul and the origin of the kingship (1 Sam. 8–12), an earlier strand that viewed the kingship in a positive light and a later strand, probably influenced by Deuteronomy and the “law of the king,” which was highly critical of the entire institution of the kingship. See, for example, P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *1 Samuel: A New Translation* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), 161–62. See also Christophe Nihan, “1 Samuel 8 and 12 and the Deuteronomistic Edition of Samuel,” in *Is Samuel Among the Deuteronomists? Current Views on the Place of Samuel in a Deuteronomistic History*, ed. Cynthia Edenburg and Juha Pakkala (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 225–73. As Garrett Galvin has written, “The belief in sacral kingship seems to become stronger the further we move from Deuteronomy 17. It is minimal in 1 Samuel, a little stronger in 1–2 Kings, stronger still in 1–2 Chronicles, and robust in the Psalms.” *David’s Successors: Kingship in the Old Testament* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2016), 5.

16. See Ezekiel 28:2: “Mortal, say to the prince of Tyre, Thus says the Lord God: Because your heart is proud and you have said, ‘I am a god; I sit in the seat of the gods, in heart of the seas,’ yet you are but a mortal and no god.” (All quotations from the Old Testament are from the NRSV, except as otherwise noted.)

the Shepherd *par excellence*, as illustrated in the famous Psalm 23: “The Lord is my shepherd . . .” (see also Isaiah 40:11; Jer. 31:10). But kings were also referred to as “shepherd.” In 2 Samuel 5:2, the Lord addresses David: “It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel.”

In Ezekiel 34, the prophet reprimands the “shepherd-kings” of Israel for not living up to their duties, describing in some detail the ideology of a king’s stewardship as shepherd of his people.

The word of the Lord came to me: Mortal, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel: prophesy, and say to them—to the shepherds: Thus says the Lord God: Ah, you shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep. You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd; and scattered, they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep were scattered, they wandered all over the mountains and on every high hill; my sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with no one to search or seek for them. (Ezek. 34:1–6; compare Matt. 9:36)

For Israel, although all the people were direct participants in the covenant with God and the welfare of the people was dependent upon everyone’s obedience to his commands, the king’s behavior was by far the most crucial. The success of the nation as a whole relied directly on the fulfillment of the king’s responsibilities toward the people and toward God. His sin was their sin, his righteousness their righteousness.

In 2 Samuel 21:1–2, David laments a famine in the land, which has lasted for three years. When he inquires of the Lord regarding the cause, the Lord replies: “There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death.”

The narrator in 2 Kings 13:10–11 relates that “Jehoash son of Jehoahaz . . . reigned sixteen years. He also did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, *which he caused Israel to sin*; but he walked in them.”¹⁷

And in 2 Kings 21:11–12 the reader is told: “Because King Manasseh of Judah . . . has done things more wicked than all that the Amorites did, who were before him, and *has caused Judah also to sin* with his idols;

17. All italics in scriptural quotations are mine. See also 2 Kings 14:24; 15:9.

therefore thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, I am bringing upon Jerusalem and Judah such evil that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle.”

Keith Whitelam describes Psalm 72 as “a testimony to the importance of the ideal” of judicial administration by the king, which guaranteed not only the smooth functioning of the nation, but also its fertility and prosperity, indeed the harmony of the cosmos itself.¹⁸

Give the king your justice, O God,
 And your righteousness to a king's son.
 May he judge your people with righteousness,
 And your poor with justice.
 May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,
 And the hills, in righteousness. (Psalm 72:1–3)

Aubrey Johnson summarizes the position of the king as follows:

[Under the Davidic covenant,] the king becomes the trustee of Yahweh's chosen people. Henceforth it is his responsibility to defend the nation from internal corruption and external attack; and success in the latter connexion is conditioned by his success in the former. In other words, it is the king's function to ensure the “righteousness” or right relationship within the borders of his territory which will ensure the economic well-being of his people and at the same time will safeguard them from foreign interference. There can be no prosperity and no assurance of continuity for the nation without righteousness; and there can be no righteousness without the fidelity to Yahweh and His laws to which the tribal brotherhood of Israel was pledged under the terms of the Sinaitic covenant. In the ultimate, therefore, the righteousness of the nation is dependent upon the righteousness of the king.¹⁹

18. Keith W. Whitelam, *The Just King: Monarchical Judicial Authority in Ancient Israel* (Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield University Press, 1979), 29.

19. Aubrey R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967), 136–37. It should be noted that in Israel, compared to such societies as Egypt and Babylon, the king did not bear quite the same degree of responsibility for the welfare of the people as the kings of Egypt and Babylonia. This is clear because, in addition to the royal covenant between David and Yahweh, which is similar to the relationships between the deities and kings of other Ancient Near Eastern polities, the Israelite people had entered into their own covenant with the Lord before entering the holy land. See Joshua 24:14–28. See also Gerald Eddie Gerbrandt, *Kingship according to the Deuteronomistic History* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 96–102. Gerbrandt observes that “for the Deuteronomist the law had been given to Israel by Yahweh, and all Israelites,

And perhaps the most fundamental responsibility of the king is to make sure that justice is carried out: “The king [must] watch carefully over the rights of his subjects, and so ensure, in particular, that the weaker members of society may enjoy his protection and thus have justice done to them according to their need.”²⁰

Of course, the king was not born a king, but became one at the time of his coronation. The coronation was the means by which a new king assumed this responsibility for the community. In Israel, the central element of the coronation was the anointing of the new king with oil. Anointing did not merely indicate that God had chosen him for this special role, but also that God’s spirit had descended upon him, raising him to a level that was above normal humanity.²¹

including the king, were expected to follow it. In this sense the king’s identity as an Israelite was more significant than his identity as king” (pp. 100–101).

20. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship*, 8. Moshe Weinfeld has demonstrated at great length that under Old Testament law the king bore the primary responsibility of the establishment of a just society. The key phrase is “justice and righteousness” (*mishpat* and *tsedaqah*), which he describes as a *hendiadys* (a figure of speech that uses two words joined by “and” that expresses a single idea) for what today we would call “social justice,” seeing to the needs of the underprivileged and less fortunate. Examples of this word pair are ubiquitous in the Old Testament, particularly the Psalms and the prophets. Psalm 72:1–2, for example, reads: “Give the king your *justice*, O God, and your *righteousness* to a king’s son. May he *judge* your people with *righteousness*, and your poor with *justice*.” Isaiah declares in 11:3–4: “He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with *righteousness* he shall *judge* the poor, and decide with equity (*meshar*) for the meek of the earth.” And in 1 Kings 10:9, the Queen of Sheba declares to Solomon, “Because the Lord loved Israel forever, he has made you king to execute *justice* and *righteousness*.” See Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

21. The relationship between the anointing and the spirit is clear from 1 Sam. 16:13: “Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed [David] in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward.” Compare 1 Samuel 10:6. On the exaltation of the king above the remainder of the people, Psalm 45:7: “Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.” See also Psalm 89:19–21; 1 Samuel 9:16, 10:1–13. See the discussion of royal anointing in Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), 63–65. An exhaustive discussion is found in Trygve N. D. Mettinger, *King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1976), 185–232. See also Z. Weisman, “Anointing as a Motif in the Making of the Charismatic King,” *Biblica* 57 (1976): 378–98.

It is thus in the context of the king as shepherd and protector of his people that we should understand the plea of the Israelites to Samuel to “make us a king to judge us like all the nations.” As we will see below, the word “judge” includes, but is not limited to, the judicial function of kings. “We will have a king over us; that we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles” (1 Sam. 8:5, 19–20, KJV).

KINGSHIP IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

In light of this relationship between king and people, it should come as no surprise when the people of the Book of Mormon repeatedly beg for a king to rule them. They were simply acting like a typical ancient people. Kingship was naturally the system with which they were most comfortable, which resulted in repeated attempts to establish kings throughout their history. In the very beginning, following the death of Lehi, when Nephi and his followers separated themselves from their brethren, there was apparently a universal desire to make Nephi their king. “And it came to pass that they would that I should be their king. But I, Nephi, was desirous that they should have no king; nevertheless, I did for them according to that which was in my power” (2 Ne. 5:18).

Nephi, like many of the Book of Mormon leaders, had a fundamental opposition to the rule of kings. There was in Hebrew thought a tradition that opposed kingship as an unnecessary intrusion between the people and their God, and Nephi seems to tap into that tradition.²² Nevertheless, despite Nephi’s refusal to assume the kingship, the people consistently looked to him “as a king or a protector” and depended on him “for safety” (2 Ne. 6:2).²³

22. See, for example, 1 Samuel 7:7–8:22. Mowinckel suggests that this hostility towards kingship emerged from the “desert ideals” of the early seminomadic Israelites. The kingship was viewed as a foreign importation from the decadent Canaanites. See *He That Cometh*, 60–62.

23. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 47, suggests that Nephi is simply being modest in refusing to identify himself as king of the Nephites. This is a plausible but unlikely reading. Nephi goes on to declare that, in fulfillment of the words of the Lord, he had (briefly) been the “ruler” and “teacher” of his brothers. See 2 Nephi 5:19, 1 Nephi 16:37. It is clear that while Nephi may briefly have been the “ruler” of his entire family, he was not their king. See Noel B. Reynolds, “Nephite Kingship Reconsidered,” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 1998), available online at <http://publications>

Nephi, despite his aversion to holding the kingship himself, ultimately gave in to popular demand prior to his death and “*anointed* a man to be a king and a ruler over his people now, according to the reigns of the kings” (Jacob 1:9). The mention of anointing a king is key here, because it indicates that the institution of the “sacral kingship” from the old world persisted into Nephite society. The king, as we have already seen, typically possessed, as a result of his anointing, a special status that placed him in a special relationship with the divine.²⁴ This conclusion is supported by the speech of King Benjamin when he tells the people not to view him as more than human, suggesting that the people did just that (Mosiah 2:10).²⁵

.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1085&index=8. Reynolds argues convincingly that Nephi saw himself in the tradition of Moses, the prophet-ruler who filled the role of a king but was never made king. One major distinction of the kingship was that its conferral required anointing and consecration. Not all rulers were kings. Note the constant use of the phrase “king and ruler” throughout the Book of Mormon. See 1 Nephi 16:37; Jacob 1:9; Mosiah 1:10, 2:11, 2:30, 6:3, 23:39, 29:2. There is no indication that Nephi was ever anointed or consecrated, although Jacob indicates that Nephi was beloved of his people for his leadership and considered very much *like* a king (2 Ne. 6:2). In any case, the important point here is that the people demanded someone to fulfill the function of a king, whether that person was officially set apart as such or not. For an in-depth discussion of the portrayal of Moses as a virtual king, see Danny Mathews, *Royal Motifs in the Pentateuchal Portrayal of Moses* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012).

24. Note that kings in the Book of Mormon are *anointed* and *consecrated*, unlike judges. Royal anointing is consistently mentioned among the Jaredites (Ether 6:22, 27; 9:14–15, 21, 22; 10:10, 16). It is only referred to once with respect to Nephite kings, Jacob 1:9. However, there are repeated references to kings being *consecrated*: Mosiah 2:11; 6:3; Alma 2:9. Although we cannot be absolutely certain that consecration necessarily included anointing, it is reasonable to infer that the practice of anointing was continued even after the Nephites migrated to Zarahemla. Consecration is otherwise referred to repeatedly with respect to priests and teachers (2 Ne. 5:26; 6:2; Jacob 1:18; Mosiah 11:5; 23:17; Alma 4:4, 7; 5:3; 15:3). As we shall see, judges were never said to be consecrated or anointed. The concept of inviolability of the Lord’s anointed (see 1 Sam. 24:6) was so powerful that it endured through hundreds of years of kingship in the medieval era. Even in seventeenth-century England, Queen Elizabeth refused to authorize the execution of Mary Queen of Scots for almost twenty years, because it was a crime against God. Stephen D. Ricks finds numerous indications of sacral kingship in King Benjamin’s speech. See “Kingship, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998), 233–75.

25. Benjamin insists that while the people call him king, their *true* king is God (Mosiah 2:19).

This dichotomy between the pro-king attitude of the Nephite people and the opposition to kingship of their rulers persists throughout the book. One of the most consistent patterns in the Book of Mormon, as we shall see, is that of various attempts to restore or reintroduce the kingship into Nephite society during the period of the judgeship.

Indeed, this pattern is ubiquitous throughout the entire history of the Nephites. We have already discussed the importance of the kingship for the very first followers of Nephi. In the book of Omni, we are told that Mosiah I was warned in a dream and left the land of the Nephites' inheritance; he migrated with an apparently large group of people to the land of Zarahemla, where he was promptly appointed king over the union of his own followers and the people of Zarahemla (descendants of Mulek and his followers, see Omni 1:19). We know very little about the reign of Mosiah I, and only slightly more about that of his son and successor, Benjamin. There were apparently numerous wars with the Lamanites, in which the Nephites were generally successful (Omni 1:24; W of M 1:14). LDS scholars have written at some length about the ritual in which King Benjamin, son of Mosiah I, presented his son (Mosiah II) as his successor.²⁶ Naturally, the kingship is a prominent theme of the oration. But apart from that ceremony we know relatively little about his deeds while in office.

Omni goes on to tell us of the expedition under Zeniff, and we learn somewhat later that when Zeniff and his followers arrived in the land of their old inheritance, the first thing they did was to make Zeniff a king "by the voice of the people" (Mosiah 7:9; see also 19:26). Similarly, the people of Alma, after they had fled into the wilderness from the men of King Noah, want him to be their king (Mosiah 23:6). But Alma refuses, just like Nephi before him, citing the example of the oppressive King Noah. In the case of Amulon, we are told only that the king of the Lamanites granted that Amulon "should be a king and a ruler over his people" (Mosiah 23:39), without indicating clearly with whom the idea originated.

After the peoples of Limhi and Alma had arrived in Zarahemla, Mosiah held a grand assembly in which these various groups were united into a

26. See, for example, Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), ch. 23: "Old World Ritual in the New World"; John A. Tvedtnes, "King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles," in *By Study and By Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh Nibley*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 2:197–237; various articles in Welch and Ricks, *King Benjamin's Speech*.

single people. Even the people of Mulek, who long ago had joined together with the Nephites, but had maintained a separate identity (Mosiah 25:4), now became fully unified as one people under one ruler.²⁷

This was clearly a momentous occasion, which included a lengthy ceremonial reading of the records of Zeniff and of Alma. It was followed, however, by an increase in dissensions among the people. This should not be surprising. Whenever two corporations merge, there is typically a lengthy adjustment period for the two companies to adapt to a new business “culture,” and sometimes the cultural conflicts can scuttle a merger that seemed quite advantageous on paper. The merger of two governments or peoples is naturally much more complex, and we would expect to see considerable growing pains in the new polity for a number of years as the different groups of people struggle to overcome their differences in customs and attitudes.²⁸ Even more would this be the case where the majority group (the people of Zarahemla) had lost knowledge of God, had perhaps become illiterate, and had suffered many “serious contentions” prior to their union with the Nephites (Omni 1:17). Similarly, the people of Alma and Limhi had each passed through a multitude of challenging experiences that would have deeply shaped their attitudes and their behaviors.

In discussing the rise of contentions among the people, Mormon focuses on the “generation gap” between those Nephites who had been old enough to understand the words of King Benjamin at the time of the great covenant making and those who were too young to remember (Mosiah 26:1–5). In any case, we are told that during the reign of Mosiah a significant movement arose among those who rejected the church of Alma and the traditional teachings of the Nephites. Mormon describes them as “a separate people” and quite numerous. Although at one point they constituted well under 50 percent of the population, he tells us that the faction continued to grow in size. For the most part, the differences between the groups seem to have been limited to religious matters. Mosiah at first declines to judge the transgressors and leaves things

27. It is curious, however, that Mormon continues to refer to “King Limhi” (Mosiah 25:17). I take this to be a purely honorary reference, rather than an indication that he retained his title or his power as a subsidiary ruler to Mosiah.

28. We might think in recent memory of the political unification in 1990 between East and West Germany. In addition to the formal political reunification, there was also the much more subtle and complex process of “inner reunification.” See Andreas Staab, *National Identity in Eastern Germany: Inner Unification or Continued Separation* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1998).

to Alma, the high priest of the newly established church. It was only when persecutions of church members became increasingly intense that Mosiah sent out a proclamation prohibiting persecution of members of the church, which seemed at least partially effective in establishing peace among the people (Mosiah 27:2–6).

Mormon goes on to emphasize the actions of the younger Alma and his cohorts, the sons of King Mosiah. Following their spiritual conversions, they attempted to repair the damage they had done to the church, at which point many chose to accept the message of Christ. Undoubtedly, however, many did not, since the group of those who rejected the church was very large.

CHANGES TO NEPHITE SOCIETY IN THE DAYS OF MOSIAH

During his reign, Mosiah II (the son of Benjamin) carried out numerous reforms. We know nothing about the chronology of these structural modifications, but most likely they were done at different times during his reign rather than all at once. How the reforms might have been related to each other, if at all, is difficult to know. In all likelihood, there were many other related changes about which we know nothing. In addition, the reforms were related in certain ways to the unification of the peoples, but again Mormon leaves us in the dark about such things—first, because he was not a modern-day analytical historian, and, second, because his primary concern was with spiritual things rather than sociopolitical matters. In any case, we do know enough about the reforms to discern that they were transformational and undoubtedly had profound effects upon the people.²⁹

Political Unification

In the days of Mosiah I (the father of King Benjamin), the Nephite refugees and the people of Zarahemla had resolved to live together under one ruler (Omni 1:19). Yet they continued to view themselves as two separate nations (Mosiah 25:4). As already noted above, Mosiah held a grand assembly whose purpose was the unification of the two peoples into one (25:12–13), together with the people of Limhi, the followers of Alma.³⁰

29. Many of these reforms are touched on by John W. Welch, “The Law of Mosiah,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 158–61.

30. As a partial parallel to this, one might think of the Scots and the English, who were ruled by a single monarch from 1603 to 1707, at which point they were formally united as the Kingdom of Great Britain.

Establishment of a Church

Prior to the reign of Mosiah II, there is no mention in the Book of Mormon of the existence of a church or churches.³¹ Alma had created the “church” while in the wilderness at the waters of Mormon (Mosiah 18). The question of what exactly was meant by “church” in the newer sense is an interesting one, but I will not attempt to develop it here at length. It is best described as a *covenant community*, one that places great emphasis on *unity* and absence of contention (Mosiah 18:10, 13, and esp. 21).³² Following the unification, Mosiah granted Alma specific authorization to “establish churches throughout all the land of Zarahemla,” along with authority to ordain officers for each church (Mosiah 25:18–19; 26:8). At that time, at least, there were specifically seven churches organized in the land of Zarahemla (Mosiah 25:23).

Establishment of Laws

As discussed above, the chief responsibility of a traditional king was to provide justice. Kings might also act as lawgivers, thereby establishing proper rules of justice. In later Hellenistic thought, the just king was conceived of as embodying law or justice.³³ The roots of this doctrine can be found in the early Near East. Thus, while Hammurabi had been appointed by the god Marduk to dispense justice, the decisions and laws were the king’s, rather than specifically revealed by deity.³⁴ In Israel, the

31. The only mentions of the word *church* prior to Alma 18 are from the small plates of Nephi and refer to such abstract entities as “the church of God” and “the church of the devil” rather than to an actual human community of believers.

32. Strong parallels exist between Alma’s church and the “*yahad*” [unity] as described in Michael Wise, Martin Abegg Jr., and Edward Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 123–26. According to the Qumran “Manual of Discipline,” the Instructor was to teach the “Holy Ones . . . to seek God with all their heart and with all their soul, to do that which is good and upright before Him . . . to distance themselves from all evil and to hold fast to all good deeds; to practice truth, justice, and righteousness in the land” and “to bring the full measure of their knowledge, strength, and wealth into the ‘*yahad*.’” Wise, Abegg, and Cook, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 126–27. Note that Frank Cross referred to the “*yahad*” as a *church* of anticipation. Frank M. Cross Jr., “Dead Sea Scrolls: Overview,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 1:362–63.

33. See Christine Hayes, *What’s Divine about Divine Law? Early Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 66–67.

34. Whitelam, *Just King*, 207–8.

king was more strictly constrained by the belief in divinely revealed law, and it is debatable the extent to which the Israelite king was able to promulgate law at all beyond the law of God.³⁵ Be that as it may, we are told specifically in the Book of Mormon that Mosiah established laws that “were acknowledged by the people” at the beginning of the new government (Alma 1:1).³⁶ To be sure, these laws were presumed to be established “according to the laws which have been given you by our fathers, which are correct, and which were given them by the hand of the Lord” (Mosiah 29:25). Having such laws would have provided a strong and divinely sanctioned basis on which the new established government could function.

Establishment of Reckoning and Measures

One of the most curious sections of the Book of Mormon is Alma 11, which discusses such seemingly mundane matters as the wages of judges and the monetary system. But we are told specifically that Mosiah set in order the system, because previously the people “altered their reckoning and their measure, according to the minds and the circumstances of the people, in every generation” (Alma 11:4).

Weights and measures, which we in the modern world take for granted, along with the monetary system, were an important part of the responsibility of ancient rulers.³⁷ Why? The standardization and

35. See the discussion in Whitelam, *Just King*, 207–18. He suggests that any “later royal promulgations of law” were likely “retrojected to the Mosaic period in order to provide legitimation for such laws and to conform to the general Deuteronomic theological assumption of the divine origin of all Israelite law” (p. 218).

36. Helaman 4:22 refers to “the laws of Mosiah,” which had been “trampled” and “corrupted.”

37. Readers of the Book of Mormon tend to assume that the Nephites had a system of coinage (see editorial heading to Alma 11 referring to “Nephite coinage”). This is unlikely, since the first true coins are generally believed to have been created in Lydia (western Asia Minor) in the early sixth century BC and did not spread to the area of Palestine until more than a century later. Nevertheless, it would be equally incorrect to assume that because they did not have coins, they did not have money! Money, including the standardized use of precious metals, is of much more ancient origin than coinage. A coin, simply put, is a certain weight of a given precious metal, stamped and certified by the state. Money, on the other hand, that is, the use of standardized weights of precious metals, was established in Mesopotamia by the later third millennium

regulation of weights and measures, including monetary weights, is a fundamental aspect of establishing justice and stability among the people. Fudging with weights was an easy and common way of carrying out deceit in commercial transactions, and in light of the number of times it was denounced by the prophets, it was apparently all too common a practice in Ancient Israel.³⁸

Establishment of Wages for Judges and Officers

Along with the setting of monetary values, Mosiah set specific wages for judges, and perhaps other officers as well: “Now it was in the law of Mosiah that every man who was a judge of the law, or those who were appointed to be judges, should receive wages according to the time which they labored to judge those who were brought before them to be judged” (Alma 11:1). The reason for this change is difficult to verify. As far as our evidence allows us to determine, judges in ancient Israel and among the Nephites prior to Mosiah did not receive any type of pay for their services.³⁹ But the most reasonable conjecture is that Mosiah believed that in order for the new government to succeed, the new judges would have to be paid in some way. There would no longer be a king to act as patron. One alternative would be for the parties involved in judgment to pay the judge, but the opportunities for bribery under such an arrangement would be only too obvious. Instead, he set up a wage-based system in which the judges were paid handsomely for the actual time they spent in judgment. A good wage would, at least in theory, help to guard against bribery, which was illegal under Exodus 23:8.

(for example, the talent, mina, and shekel). Most Near Eastern kingdoms had officially designated monetary units (for purposes of fines, taxes, and exchange generally) by the early iron age. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3d ed., 994, s.v. “money.” There is a delightful article on ancient money in *Discover* magazine. See Heather Pringle, “The Cradle of Cash,” *Discover* (October 1998), available online at <http://discovermagazine.com/1998/oct/thecradleofcash1518>. See also Karen Rhea Nemet-Nejat, *Daily Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1998), 267–69; for an in-depth discussion, see Christopher M. Monroe, “Money and Trade,” in *A Companion to the Ancient Near East* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005), 155–68.

38. “A false balance is an abomination to the Lord: but an accurate weight is his delight” (Prov. 11:1). See also Deuteronomy 25:13, 15; Micah 6:11.

39. See John W. Welch, “Weighing and Measuring in the Worlds of the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 2 (1999): 36–45, 86.

Rule of Judges

By far the most radical aspect of the reforms of Mosiah was the abolition of the monarchy and the creation of a judge-based system of rule. This drastic change was prompted by Mosiah's inability to persuade any of his sons to accept the kingship. Aaron, perhaps the eldest son, was selected as Mosiah's successor by the "voice of the people" (Mosiah 29:1), but he was apparently unwilling to return from his mission to the Lamanites to accept the throne (29:3). All of his brothers were equally adamant in not accepting the succession. Mosiah considered the possibility of choosing another person not of royal descent but concluded that such a decision could easily result in "wars and contentions" among the people, along with much bloodshed and "perverting the way of the Lord" (29:7).

Therefore, he sent out a royal directive, proposing an entirely new form of government. He discussed additional reasons for this massive change, principally the example of Noah as the quintessential wicked king. It was not that the judgeship was inherently superior to kingship. Indeed, he insisted that if one could always ensure that future kings would be like King Benjamin, "then it would be expedient that ye should always have kings to rule over you" (Mosiah 29:13), an idea with which Alma agreed explicitly (see 23:8). However, because the succession in any kingship always created the risk of instability, it was preferable to have a more formal system of selecting new leaders based on the will of the majority.

Contrary to what we might easily assume, this proposal does not seem to have been laid before the people for their approval. Rather, the king *commanded* "that ye have no king" (Mosiah 29:30), and we are told that the people were "convinced of the truth of his words" (29:37), and began implementing the new system immediately. Even after the fact, they continued to maintain that the system was an excellent one: "They were exceedingly rejoiced because of the liberty which had been granted unto them" (29:39).

Powers of the Chief Judge

There are many things about this new system of government that seem strange to a contemporary reader. For example, how could a "king" be replaced by "judges"? We moderns are accustomed to viewing governments in terms of the separation of powers. The United States government is designed as a strict tripartite system, in which the executive, legislative,

and judicial branches of government are mostly independent and act as a mutual system of checks and balances. In modern parliamentary systems, by contrast, the legislative and executive branches are mostly fused, while the judiciary maintains its independence. But this tripartite system was essentially an invention of early modern Europeans, namely the Baron de Montesquieu, and the American Founding Fathers, most notably James Madison. Ancient governments knew nothing of this pattern; indeed, as we have already seen, the traditional office of kingship in the Ancient Near East and elsewhere entailed at least as much judging as executing of the laws.⁴⁰ Similarly, the judgeship in ancient Zarahemla did not merely entail judicial powers but fused together judicial, legislative, and executive powers.

How did this new Nephite system actually function in practice? How much power did the chief judge actually have, and how did his power differ from that of a king? Mosiah 29 outlines a system of higher and lower judges, in which the higher judges have the power to judge the lesser judges (v. 28) and a panel of lower judges can be specially appointed with the power to judge the higher judges (v. 29). We know little of how any of this worked in practice. Mostly what we know about is the office of chief judge, which is not specifically mentioned in Mosiah's proclamation. But we are told that Alma the Younger "was appointed to be the first chief judge, he being also the high priest, his father having conferred the office upon him, and having given him the charge concerning all the affairs of the church" (29:42). What powers did Alma have as chief judge?

He was clearly empowered to judge legal cases. In the very first year of Alma's "reign," a man named Nehor was brought before him to be judged for the murder of Gideon. The trial of Korihor was also held before the "chief judge who was governor over all the land" as well as the high priest, Alma (Alma 30:29). But as this last description indicates, the chief judge's powers did not stop with actual judicial decisions. We are repeatedly told that the chief judge was "governor" of the land

40. Of course, Montesquieu's tripartite division was based in part on the ancient idea of the "mixed constitution," a combination of democracy, kingship, and aristocracy, particularly as presented by Polybius in book 6 of his history of the Roman Republic. A convenient discussion of the theory of "mixed government" can be found in Carl J. Richard, *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994). Aristotle did distinguish the three sections, or powers, of government in *Politics* 1297b–98a.

(Alma 2:16; 4:17; 50:39; 60:1–2; Hel. 1:5, 13; 3 Ne. 1:1.) This seems to be the principal reason why we always hear about the “reign” of the chief judge. He was in fact the ruler of the land. On assuming office, Pahoran, son of Nephiah, took “an oath and sacred ordinance to judge righteously, and to keep the peace and the freedom of the people, and to grant unto them their sacred privileges to worship the Lord their God, yea, to support and maintain the cause of God all his days, and to bring the wicked to justice according to their crime” (Alma 50:39).

The chief judge was also commander-in-chief: “Now Alma, being the chief judge and the governor of the people of Nephi, therefore he went up with his people, yea, with his captains, and chief captains, yea, at the head of his armies” (Alma 2:16). The chief judge did not always act in this role, of course, most notably when Moroni was *appointed* chief captain and “took all the command, and the government of their wars” (Alma 43:17; see also Alma 62).

With respect to term of office, it seems clear that the chief judge was appointed for life. Except in the case of Alma, who deliberately gave up his chief judgeship to focus on the affairs of the church (see Alma 4:16–18), there is no indication that judges did not hold life tenure.

It is clear that the governor/chief judge was a powerful figure. How did his power differ from that of his predecessors, the kings? Most notably, he did not possess immunity from judgment. Mosiah stresses in his description of the new system that higher judges (presumably including the chief judge himself) could be called to account for any judgments he made which were not deemed righteous judgments “according to the law which has been given” (Mosiah 29:28). In such a case “a small number of your lower judges should be gathered together, and they shall judge your higher judges, according to the voice of the people” (Mosiah 29:29).

This passage suggests another limitation on the power of the chief judge, namely that he did not possess the ability to alter the established laws. We are told in the first chapter of Alma that Mosiah had “established laws,” which were “acknowledged by the people; therefore they were obliged to abide by the laws which he had made” (Alma 1:1). These two passages suggest that the chief judge did not have legislative powers; the laws were already established, and the people—even the chief judge himself—did not have the power to alter them. There is an interesting exception to this rule, however. Nephiah, when he was placed in the judgment seat, was given the power “to enact *laws according to the laws which had been given*” and “to put them in force according to the

wickedness and the crimes of the people” (Alma 4:16). This limited legislative power seems to have been an exception to the established power of a chief judge and was given him “according to the voice of the people” (4:16). And it contrasts with the overall power of a king to alter the fundamental laws of the land. According to Mosiah, although a righteous king would enact laws and rule in accordance with the laws and commandments of God (Mosiah 29:13), a wicked king, on the other hand, had the ability to tear up the laws of his righteous predecessors and enact laws “after the manner of his own wickedness” (Mosiah 29:22–23).

Above all, the fundamental difference between a king and a chief judge was that the chief judge lacked the sacral anointing and all the sacral connotations that accompanied it. Thus, judges lacked the “supernatural status” of the king. They were never identified as God’s son. Never once is a chief judge “consecrated” like kings and priests. They were always *appointed*.⁴¹

A DEMOCRACY OR SOMETHING ELSE?

How then should we classify this new government? Does it make any sense to identify it as a type of democracy? To be sure, it bears little resemblance to modern conceptions of democracy, which are distinguished above all by the principle of representation.⁴² But before rejecting the category altogether, we should consider the judgeship in light of ancient democracies, which is a somewhat larger and more diverse group than one might initially suppose. In particular, we can view it in the context of what is sometimes referred to as “primitive democracy.” And indeed, when viewed in such a light, it becomes much more plausible to locate it among a broader class of democratic governments.

As noted above, ancient peoples almost universally embraced kingship as the most natural and even the best form of government. The Nephites, we are told, had to *relinquish* “their desires for a king” before acceding to Mosiah’s wishes (Mosiah 29:38). So why did Mosiah, a man of the archaic world, opt for a more democratic-style government over

41. See note 24 above.

42. An earlier standard edition of the Book of Mormon included an editorial headnote to Mosiah 29 incorrectly stating that Mosiah was recommending “a representative form of government.” See Richard Bushman, “The Book of Mormon and the American Revolution,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1982), 210 n. 21.

kingship? Some critics of the Book of Mormon have of course argued that the book's strong embrace of democracy and the repeated references to love of "freedom" are one of Joseph Smith's greatest "gaffes," in which he allowed his nineteenth-century sympathies to invade his account of an ancient society. However, Richard Bushman, in a seminal essay, demonstrated that in fact a close reading of Mosiah 29 shows little affinity to post-Revolutionary War thought.⁴³ Part of the problem with such criticisms of the Book of Mormon is that they are based on a conventional, but erroneous and misleading, reading of history.

According to the time-honored version of the "history of democracy," the Greeks can claim sole responsibility for the creation of a new, previously unheard-of form of government, known as "demo-kratia," in which the *kratos* (power) was in the hands of the *demos*, the people. Prior to the Greeks, it is almost universally believed, democracy simply did not exist.⁴⁴ Ancient Near Eastern societies, from early Mesopotamia and Egypt down to the time of Alexander the Great, were under the control of absolute monarchies and empires, which were totally incompatible with any form of democracy. By contrast, beginning in the Greek city-state of Athens in the sixth century BC, under leaders such as Solon and Cleisthenes, new institutions were created that granted increasing power to the common people, and the Athenian democracy reached its apogee under the famous Pericles and began spreading to other Greek city-states. However, following the conquest of Greece by Alexander the Great in 335 BC, democracy essentially disappeared from history until the fourteenth century in England, where it was fundamentally reinvented, beginning with the rise of Parliament and, in particular, the House of Commons. From there, it took a great leap forward in the eighteenth century with the conscious and deliberate creation of an entirely new form of republican government under the U.S. Constitution, which included a carefully crafted system of representation of the citizens by Congress.

This "western civilization" version of events makes a neat, compact story, but the historical reality is more complex. It turns out upon closer inspection that Ancient Near Eastern peoples were not as cut off from political power as the category of "kingship" tends to imply. Numerous scholars have argued that, in fact, there is considerable evidence for

43. Bushman, "Book of Mormon and the American Revolution," 189–212.

44. See, for example, John Dunn, *Democracy: A History* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006).

the existence of “primitive democracy” in the Ancient Near East, particularly for the earlier periods (third millennium BC and the first half of the second millennium). This evidence primarily has reference to the sovereignty of the “assembly” of the people, who, even where there were kings, had the ultimate say over at least certain issues, for example whether or not to go to war. At times, they may have had the right to express their will concerning the acceptance of a new ruler. Acceptance may have been expressed through acclamation, but there may have also been opportunities for any man to express his opinion openly, though doubtless the opinions of certain highly regarded individuals would have carried the most weight. In certain instances, these assemblies give the appearance of consisting of two “houses,” an upper house of nobility and a lower house of commoners.⁴⁵

After considering this issue at length, a pair of Assyriologists conclude: “In spite of the general tendency of Mesopotamian history to increased centralization of political power, assemblies appeared to be the ultimate seats of sovereignty and even to elect monarchs or decide on war and peace in times of crisis. There was a tendency to make the officers of the assembly, including the war leader, permanent, and this tended over time to favor the growth of the power of the king, who may have originated as the war leader.”⁴⁶

45. For example, the town of Sippar, north of Babylon, from 1890 to 1590 BC. See A. L. Oppenheim, “Mesopotamia—Land of Many Cities,” in *Middle Eastern Cities: A Symposium of Ancient Islamic and Contemporary Middle Eastern Urbanism*, ed. Ira M. Lapidus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 3–18. See further Daniel E. Fleming, *Democracy’s Ancient Ancestors: Mari and Early Collective Governance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), esp. xi–xv; Thorkild Jacobsen, “Primitive Democracy in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in Jacobsen, *Toward the Image of Tammuz and Other Essays on Mesopotamian History and Culture* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 1970), 157–62; Benjamin Isakhan, “What Is So ‘Primitive’ about ‘Primitive Democracy’? Comparing the Ancient Middle East and Classical Athens,” in *The Secret History of Democracy*, ed. Benjamin Isakhan and Stephen Stockwell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 19–34; Benjamin Isakhan, “The Assyrians,” in *The Edinburgh Companion to the History of Democracy*, ed. Benjamin Isakhan and Stephen Stockwell (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 40–49. For “primitive democracy” in ancient Israel, see p. 32 below.

46. Matthew Martin III and Daniel C. Snell, “Democracy and Freedom,” in *A Companion to the Ancient Near East*, ed. Daniel C. Snell (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 399.

As far as the presence of democratic elements in ancient Israelite society is concerned, scholars have pointed out that the “people” act in various situations. The assembly of the people is frequently seen approving monarchs, either before or after the fact (see, for example, Judg. 8:22–25; 1 Sam. 8:4–7, 19, 21; 10:17–24; 2 Sam. 5:1–3; 1 Kgs. 12:20; 2 Kgs. 11:12). They also served judicial functions in matters involving capital punishment (see Num. 35:12, 24–25; 15:33) as well as in other matters (for example, Judg. 20). It is generally assumed that there was no actual voting in the assembly but that the assembly acted after reaching a consensus, which would have been expressed by acclamation.⁴⁷

The Nephite chief judge was selected, according to Mosiah 29, by the “voice of the people.” The people “assembled themselves together in bodies throughout the land, to cast in their voices concerning who should be their judges” (29:39; compare Alma 2:5). They would “cast in their voices,” and the matter was “laid before the judges” (Alma 2:6) to determine the outcome. The exact mechanism of voting is not clear. Given our modern notions of “one person, one vote,” we are inclined to assume that a tally was kept of individual votes town by town, then the votes from each town were sent in to the capital, where the total was calculated. Such a model is possible but not necessarily the correct one. In the first place, the phrase “cast in their voices” suggests that some sort of oral system was used. Written ballots were not common even in Athens.⁴⁸ It is certainly conceivable that individual oral votes were

47. See C. U. Wolf, “Traces of Primitive Democracy in Israel,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 6 (1947): 98–108; R. Gordis makes a strong argument that the Hebrew *‘ēdāh* did not mean “congregation” or “religious fellowship” but “was the people’s ‘assembly,’ the supreme arbiter in all phases of the national life.” Specifically, it sat in judgment on capital cases and the declaration of war. Although it declined in power and influence beginning with the kingship, it was “uniquely characteristic of Israel that, unlike other Semitic peoples, it retained the strong democratic impulse derived from the nomadic stage” of their existence as a people. Gordis, “Primitive Democracy in Ancient Israel—The Biblical *‘Ēdāh*,” in *Alexander Marx: Jubilee Volume* (New York: Jewish Theological Society of America, 1950), 369–88.

48. Voting in the general assembly (*ecclesia*) was by show of hands, and generally the vote was estimated rather than accurately counted. When the citizens assembled as an appellate court (*heliaia*), they did vote secretly by casting pebbles (in later years, pebbles made of bronze) into an urn. See Paul Cartledge, *Democracy: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 68. The Roman Republic in 139 BC began voting using a secret written ballot on a small wax tablet known as a *tabella*. Prior to that, voters would declare their vote orally

counted, but it is also quite possible that voting was by general outcry or by consensus.⁴⁹

Note that the same process of “casting in voices” was carried out over questions outside of the selection of judges. In both instances of votes over the restoration of the kingship, regarding the Amlicites (Alma 2:5–7) and the king-men (Alma 51:7), the matter was settled by the voice of the people. Such consultation was also made in one instance regarding a decision of capital punishment (Hel. 1:8) and even in matters that apparently required complex discussion beyond a simple up-or-down vote. For example, the decision to grant land to the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi came about through consultation with the “voice of the people” (Alma 27:21–24), while Ammon and King Limhi sought the will of their people regarding “how they should deliver themselves out of bondage” under the Lamanites (Mosiah 22:1). Finally, there are two curious mentions of the “voice” of the people that seemingly involved no actual voting at all. In Alma 51:3, protesters who wanted to change a few points of the law “had sent in their voices with their petitions.” Later that same year, after the king-men refused to take up arms to defend their country, Moroni sent Pahoran a petition, “with the voice of the people” (Alma 51:15). The second instance took place during a time of chaos and war, when there had not even been time for trials, let alone for voting assemblies (Alma 51:19).

Who was eligible to vote under this system and to “run” for office? Because of limited evidence, it is impossible to know with any certainty who was eligible to attend such assemblies, who could vote, who was eligible to speak, or exactly how decisions were made. It would not be surprising if participation were limited by age, wealth, or ownership of

to a recorder. See E. S. Staveley, *Greek and Roman Voting and Elections* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1972). Note that the word “vote” does not appear in the Book of Mormon, nor is “election” or “elect(ed)” ever used in a political context.

49. Plutarch describes a curious method of voting by outcry in connection with election to the senate (*gerousia*) of Sparta, in which the assembled people shouted *en masse* for each candidate. During this process, a small group of officials was kept locked in a nearby room where they could hear the shouts, and they would record the loudness of each shout for each candidate in order. The recorders were kept ignorant of the specific order in which the candidates were presented in order to avoid biased results. The candidate who was perceived as receiving the loudest outcry was the winner. Aristotle described this procedure as “childish.” See Plutarch, *Life of Lycurgus* 25; Aristotle, *Politics* 2.9, 1271a (10).

land. Above all, one would automatically assume that all women were excluded from the decision-making process, but the story of Deborah, to whom “the Israelites came up . . . for judgment” (see Judg. 4:4–5) is at least enough to give one pause.

What type of limitations were there on who could “run” for office? When Alma gave up his judgment seat, he “*selected* a wise man who was among the elders of the church, and gave him power according to the voice of the people” (Alma 4:16). This passage suggests that the voting, however it took place, did not necessarily involve a choice among a slate of candidates, as in modern elections. It is possible that there may have been only a single “candidate” for the chief judgeship, and the people in their assemblies merely expressed their support or lack of support. Note that even in the old system of kingship, when it came to the selection of a successor, Mosiah “sent out throughout all the land, among all the people, desiring to know their will concerning who should be their king,” and “the voice of the people came, saying: We are desirous that Aaron thy son should be our king” (Mosiah 29:1–2). Even Benjamin, who otherwise seemed to have inherited the throne, declared that he was “chosen by this people.”⁵⁰

Finally, it seems clear that inheritance and bloodline played an important role in succession to the judgeship. In the first chapter of Helaman, following the death of Pahoran, we are presented with the only account in the Book of Mormon of a competition for the judgment seat. We are told that, following the death of Pahoran, three individuals each sought the position. The surprising thing is that the three were brothers and that they were all sons of Pahoran, the chief judge. Was that mere coincidence? Apparently not. When the younger Pahoran was appointed chief judge by the voice of the people, his brother Pacumeni acquiesced in the outcome, but the third brother, Paanchi, did not. He had a number of followers, who hired an assassin (Kishkumen) to kill Pahoran. Paanchi was condemned to death, leaving only Pacumeni, who was then “appointed, according to the voice of the people, to be a chief judge and a governor over the people, to reign in the stead of his brother Pahoran; *and it was according to his right*” (Hel. 1:13). It is difficult to be sure what exactly that last phrase means, but the most obvious reading is that sons of a chief judge had a right to succeed their father, and that since his two brothers were either dead or in a state of rebellion,

50. Note that the English Act of Succession (1707) declares that monarchs rule by consent of the people (which was usually carried out by acclamation).

Pacumeni was the next in line. At the very least, given the context that the only three contenders for the judgment seat in the first place were sons of the prior judge, it seems certain that family played a significant role in who could be appointed as chief judge.

We now come back to the broader question of whether this system should be described as a democracy. The answer to that question depends, naturally enough, on how one defines democracy, and there are many definitions even among political scientists. As previously noted, the Nephite system bears little resemblance to any modern-day democratic government. There was no legislature, no congress, and no parliament, whereas the election of “representatives” of different divisions of the population is generally considered the hallmark of modern-day democracy. Ancient Athenian democracy, in contrast, had an assembly that possessed legislative power, but it consisted not of elected representatives but of citizens themselves, chosen by lot, who took turns serving. The principle of representation was not invented anywhere, so far as we know, prior to the gradual development of the English parliamentary system beginning in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

On the other hand, the people themselves considered their new system a government of “liberty” (Mosiah 29:39) and rejoiced greatly because of it. Exactly what they meant by “liberty” will be considered below. But I think that, given the variety of forms of democracy and partial democracy throughout history, it is not unreasonable to include the Nephite system within the overall class of democracies.

WHY JUDGES?

Given that the judgeship was a weaker office than the kingship that preceded it, why did Mosiah choose to set up a system of “judges”? And why did he argue so strongly in favor of judgeships? Again, our modern intuition is misleading. We are apt to conclude that Mosiah was inspired by God to convert the government to the best possible government, namely democracy. But we have seen that the system that Mosiah established bore only a broad resemblance to modern democratic governments. Moreover, Mosiah himself declared that the best possible system (at least on paper) was not judgeship, but rather kingship (Mosiah 29:13); Alma agreed with him (Mosiah 23:8). He implies that to have a king as judge is tantamount to being judged by God, which corresponds to the idea of the sacral kingship—the king was the direct representative of God. It was only because a people could not guarantee that the royal throne would always be held by a righteous man that he resorted to the judgeship.

We have already recognized that judging was often one of a monarch's primary responsibilities. The Code of Hammurabi emphasizes this, as does the story of Moses, who is depicted in countless ways as a virtual king.⁵¹ Established as the leader of the Israelites, Moses had a constant stream of judicial decisions to make, and ultimately had to appoint lesser judges to handle the caseload (Ex. 18:13–26).

Many years ago, Hugh Nibley suggested that the ease with which the Nephites embraced the new system of judges indicates that it was not an entirely new idea.⁵² As to where they obtained the idea of rule by judges we can only speculate. Of course, we hear of judges in the Old Testament, most notably in the book of Judges, and the Nephites presumably had access to this record in some form on the brass plates of Laban. One of the ironies of the book of Judges for the modern reader is that it seems to have very little to do with judges or judging. Instead, it presents a rather disconnected narrative—or, rather, a series of disconnected accounts—of various dramatic deeds of derring-do performed

51. See Danny Mathews, *Royal Motifs in the Pentateuchal Portrayal of Moses* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012).

52. Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert and the World of the Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952), 20–22. Nibley's suggestion regarding the basis for their familiarity is weak on several grounds. He refers to the seizure of popular law courts by the priests of Amon in eleventh-century Egypt, led by the strikingly named Herihor (compare Korihor). But his arguments and evidence for the connection with the Nephite judge-led government are surprisingly weak. There was never any voting for such judges in Egypt, while in Zarahemla there is no real indication that judges were typically priests, although they could be on occasion. Alma 30:21 indicates that chief judge and high priest in Gideon were two people. The only known instance in which the chief priesthood and chief judgeship were held by the same person is that of Alma, who was chosen as chief judge because of his great prestige (see Mosiah 29:42). Nibley also notes that later on Korihor accuses the authorities (Alma 30:23) of adopting “the foolish ordinances and performances [that were] laid down by ancient priests to usurp power and authority over them,” and so forth, but this has nothing clearly to do with judgeship. And again, in Alma 30:31, he “did revile against the priests and teachers,” but there is no mention of any connection with the judges. John W. Welch contends that King Benjamin's speech helped prepare the way for the “remarkably smooth transition” from kingship to judgeship among the ruling Nephites. Welch, “Democratizing Forces in King Benjamin's Speech,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 1999), 110–26, available online at <http://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1121&index=30>.

by men who had individually been summoned by the Spirit of God to defend the early Israelites and to deliver them from their enemies. This was in the days, as the book reminds us repeatedly, before there was any king of Israel, when “the people did what was right in their own eyes” (Judg. 17:6; see also Judg. 18:1, 19:1, 21:25).⁵³

In other words, it seems to have been a period in which there was little central governance of any kind. And although many of these defenders, such as Othniel, Ehud, the prophetess Deborah, Gideon, Abimelech, and Samson, were successful deliverers, the people grew impatient with the absence of a king and went to Samuel, repeatedly importuning that they be granted “a king to govern us” (1 Sam. 8:6). Samuel resisted this demand at first, concluding quite rightly that the people were rejecting both the Lord and Samuel himself. But in response to Samuel’s prayer, the Lord instructed him to grant the people’s wish: “Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me. . . . Now then, listen to their voice; only—you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them” (1 Sam. 8:7–9).

So, is there any possible connection between the judges of the book of Judges and the judgeship of Mosiah 29? Many Bible commentaries argue that Old Testament “judges” (Heb. *shopet*, pl. *shopetim*) were simply charismatic military leaders and war heroes and did little, if any, judging of legal disputes.⁵⁴ Some have even argued that the book of “Judges” should more properly be called “Saviors” or “Deliverers.”

Such a conclusion, however, is probably shaped too much by the dramatic stories that happened to be included in the text of the book. Naturally, such dramatic accounts as those of the battles led by Deborah, Abimelech, Gideon, and Samson draw our attention to the military

53. Byron Merrill has argued that this phrase “implies that each individual made personal choices and accepted the consequences rather than being compelled to act according to the desires of a monarch.” See Byron Merrill, “Government by the Voice of the People: A Witness and a Warning,” in *The Book of Mormon: Mosiah—Salvation Only through Christ*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr., vol. 5 (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1991), 113–37. This is an unlikely interpretation, given that the book of Judges describes an era of apostasy, chaos, and disaster and not a time of productive liberty. The “judges” were repeatedly called upon to deliver the people from the disastrous results of their own disobedience.

54. For example, see J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 1–4.

exploits of the “judges” in “saving” Israel from external threats. But we should not conclude too readily from this that the “judges” were simply warriors who had nothing to do with judging.

Numerous studies of the words deriving from the Hebrew root *sh-p-t*, primarily the noun *shophet* and the verb *shaphat*, have reached a variety of conclusions as to their most fundamental meanings, without attaining any clear consensus. Some scholars insist that the most basic meanings are “judge/to judge,” while others argue that “governor (ruler) /to govern (to rule)” are the root meanings.⁵⁵ Such a clear-cut disagreement is evidence that the question itself may be based on a false assumption, namely that there is a clear distinction between the two offices of judge and governor or the actions of judging and governing.

Besides the charismatic military saviors such as Gideon, Abimelech, and Samson, there were other individuals mentioned as “judges” in this period. These figures are known in modern scholarship as the “lesser judges,” since there are no dramatic stories about them in the book of Judges, and in fact we know little about them except for their names and the number of years they “judged Israel” (see Judg. 3:9, 3:15, 4:4, 10:1–10). Regarding Elon the Zebulunite, for example, we are merely told that he judged Israel for ten years (Judg. 12:11). However, one of these “lesser” judges named Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, “rose to deliver Israel” and “judged Israel twenty-three years” (Judg. 10:1–2), suggesting that “delivering” Israel through war and “judging Israel” in peacetime were not mutually exclusive activities. There is no fundamental difference between the lesser judges and those about whom the great stories are told, and there is no reason to regard them as separate. Tola was undoubtedly a military leader, but the statement that he “judged” Israel for twenty-three years suggests that he did more than simply lead an army in battle. He must have exercised during that period a broader type of leadership, which is supported by the earlier general statement that “the Lord raised up judges, who delivered them out of the power of those that spoiled them. Yet *they did not listen even to their judges*” (Judg. 2:16). This seems to suggest that they ruled in some way and were not merely military saviors. The author of Judges is lamenting that, although the victories of the judges clearly demonstrated that they had the Spirit of the Lord with them, the people did not give proper heed to their declarations in times of peace.

55. See the useful survey of the evidence in Whitelam, *Just King*, 48–59.

At the end of the period of the judges, the prophet Samuel is also described as having “judged Israel all the days of his life,” exercising his duties as he traveled “on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah” (1 Sam. 7:15–16), where he judged Israel, as well as in Ramah, where he lived. That he actually engaged in the act of judging is confirmed in the following chapter, when Samuel makes his sons Joel and Abiah judges over Israel. We are told that those sons refused to follow in their father’s footsteps and unfortunately “turned aside after gain; they took bribes and perverted justice” (1 Sam. 8:3).

All these verses taken together suggest that the word *shophet* referred first and foremost to judicial activity but had other connotations as well, most notably ruling or governing.⁵⁶ It is quite possible that the same individuals acted as military leader, judge, and perhaps ruler all in one. Note that after we are told that Samuel’s sons perverted judgment, the narrative relates that the elders of Israel came to Samuel and demanded that he “appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations” (1 Sam. 8:5). The king, naturally enough, acted as governor or ruler, but the elders’ primary concern at that point was that they expected better quality justice from their king acting as judge. A later verse, however, relates that the Israelites had another concern as well: “Nay; but we will have a king over us; that we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may *judge* us, and go out before us, and *fight our battles*” (1 Sam. 8:19–20, KJV).⁵⁷

In our analysis so far, we have noted that ancient kings often held multiple roles, of ruler, commander, and supreme judge. Our modern insistence on distinguishing between these roles is misguided when examining institutions in the ancient world. We have also seen this shared duty portrayed in the Book of Mormon throughout the account of the “reign” (or rule) of the “judges.” The titles of chief judge and governor were interchangeable. Indeed, it is even conceivable that the English translation is based on a single word in the original text. If (for example) the Nephites used a derivative of the Hebrew word *shaphat*, it is possible that two English words were used to translate one Hebrew (Nephite) word when the text states that Nephiah, as chief *judge*, sat in the judgment-seat “to judge and to govern” (Alma 4:17) the people. It seems clear that *governing* and *judging* among the Nephites were two aspects of the same thing. That is why the two offices are consistently

56. See Whitelam, *Just King*, 47–69.

57. The NRSV has “govern us” in place of “judge us.”

used interchangeably, depending on the context. When the context is judicial, he is identified as the *chief judge*. In other contexts, he is called the governor.

An intriguing parallel to this idea of judges acting as governors comes to us by way of Phoenicia. The Jewish Hellenistic historian Josephus relates that following the thirteen-year siege of the Phoenician city of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia and a ten-year reign of a king named Baal, there followed an interregnum of seven to eight years during which a series of five “judges” (Gr. *dikastai*) were appointed in succession and ruled the city.⁵⁸ We know very little about what this reign by judges consisted of. Josephus tells us only that they were “appointed” (καθέστησαν) and that they “judged” (εδίκασαν) for a certain number of months or years. One of those judges was also high priest. While we cannot know with certainty the original Phoenician term behind Josephus’s use of the Greek *dikastai*, it is highly likely that these five judges were known as “suffetes,” the Latin version of a Phoenician word that derives from the root *sh-p-t* and is cognate with the Hebrew *shophetim*.⁵⁹ Thus, we have an example of “judges,” contemporary with the life of Lehi, who governed the state for a period of time in the place of kings. Sandro Filippo Bondi supposed that Tyre was governed during this period as a “republic” with “elective magistrates.”⁶⁰ He provides no justification for this interpretation, but his reasoning may be based on the later Carthaginian usage of the title “suffetes” for elective magistrates. Again, Josephus tells us only that the Tyrian judges were “appointed,” but not how they were selected or by whom. Interestingly, as we have already noted, the Nephite judges are similarly always described as “appointed,” never “elected.”

I am certainly not arguing that Mosiah’s plan for a reign of judges was in any way a direct restoration of a political system that existed in eleventh-century BC Israel. The era of the *shophetim* we see in the book

58. Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1.21 (154). See the discussion in Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 189.

59. The word *suffes* (pl. *suffetes*) is actually a Latin rendition of the Carthaginian term and comes to us from Livy.

60. Sandro Filippo Bondi, “Political and Administrative Organization,” in *The Phoenicians*, ed. Sabino Moscati (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), 126. See also Stephen Stockwell, “Before Athens: Early Popular Government in Phoenician and Greek City States,” *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations* 2, no. 2 (2010): 123–35.

of Judges was one of a much more loosely organized tribal society without any strong central government, perhaps without any central government at all, whereas the Nephite system had a clear center and periphery manifested by the chief judge and lesser judges. But what the evidence clearly shows is that the term “judge,” both in an Israelite context and in a broader context of the Ancient Near East, comprised not only judging in the narrow sense, but also governance in a broader sense, frequently including military leadership as well. It also seems reasonable to suppose that the era of the *shophetim* served as part of the background from which Mosiah and his contemporaries drew in their understanding of the “reign” of judges.

WEAKNESSES IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT

Mosiah introduced his decision to abolish the monarchy and introduce the reign of judges by expressing his wish to avoid wars and contentions: “And now if there should be another appointed in his [Aaron’s] stead, behold I fear there would rise contentions among you. And who knoweth but what my son, to whom the kingdom doth belong, should turn to be angry and draw away a part of this people after him, which would cause wars and contentions among you, which would be the cause of shedding much blood and perverting the way of the Lord, yea, and destroy the souls of many people” (Mosiah 29:7).

If this was Mosiah’s primary motive for the change of government, however, his decision turned out to be a dismal failure. What the Nephites got instead of peace was an unending series of wars, contentions, and rebellions, just the opposite of Mosiah’s profound wishes. Most strikingly, these rebellions, in great measure, amounted to a series of attempts to *restore the kingship* that Mosiah had abolished. An account of the major events following the institution of the judgeship shows just how true this was.

Following the selection and appointment of the first judges, we are told that the people “were exceedingly rejoiced” (Mosiah 29:39). Mormon then assures us that “there was continual peace through the land” (Mosiah 29:43). It is thus easy for the casual reader (especially one who is already inclined to be prodemocracy) to conclude that the new government was a marvelous success.

The unfortunate reality, however, is that the very opposite soon became true. In the very first year of the new government, immediately following the deaths of Alma the Elder and King Mosiah, a man named Nehor began practicing priestcraft and committed a murder (Alma 1:2–10). Lamentably,

this was not an isolated case, but rather was the first in a long series of events that ultimately led to the virtual destruction of the Nephite polity in just over a century. A civil war broke out in the fifth year of the judges over the restoration of the monarchy, followed by a long series of wars and contentions, each of them driven not by the Lamanites (as might seem to be the case on a superficial reading) but by Nephite dissenters. The ensuing century was filled with rebellions, wars, and contentions, during which several chief judges were assassinated, and the capital city of Zarahemla was taken captive. At least when judged by the sequence of events during the tenure of the judgeship, the new government could reasonably be described as an unmitigated disaster.

The following survey of Nephite history during the reign of the judges will help put the events of this period into perspective, to remind us of the nature, frequency, and intensity of the conflicts that took place after the beginning of the fledgling judgeship. To provide a basis for comparison, we will begin with the earlier period of the kings. Prior to the institution of the judgeship, one finds numerous references to wars and contentions with the Lamanites, but there are virtually no indications of any internal political turmoil among the Nephites. Jarom refers in the briefest way to “contentions and dissensions” (v. 13) among his people. Amaleki mentions “many wars and serious contentions” among the Mulekites prior to the arrival of Mosiah and his appointment as their king (Omni 1:17). Of course, we know virtually nothing of the reasons behind the Lord’s warning to Mosiah to “flee out of the land of Nephi” along with a certain (unknown) number of fellow Nephites, “as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord” (Omni 1:12). Some type of internal conflict can easily be imagined, but it is likely that they fled to escape from Lamanite domination.

During the reign of King Benjamin, there were “somewhat of contentions” among the Nephites (now joined with the Mulekites), which involved the appearance of “false Christs, . . . false prophets, and false preachers and teachers,” as well as “much contention and many dissensions away to the Lamanites” (W of M 1:12, 15–16). The cause or basis of such dissensions is again unspoken, but that it was a serious matter is clear from the record. It required extensive preaching by “holy men” with “much sharpness,” and Benjamin was forced to labor “with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul” to “establish peace in the land” (W of M 1:17–18). Despite these challenges to the society, the overall impression we get from the extant record is one of a strong central government, where “the laws of the land were exceedingly strict”

(Jarom 1:5), and transgressors were “punished according to their crimes” (W of M 1:16). In Benjamin’s great speech, he reminds the people that he has not permitted anyone in his kingdom to “murder, or plunder, or steal, or commit adultery; nor even have I suffered that ye should commit *any manner of wickedness*” (Mosiah 2:13). In such an environment, it is not surprising that contentions were kept to a minimum. Accordingly, we are told that “there was no more contention in all the land of Zarahemla . . . so that king Benjamin had continual peace all the remainder of his days” (Mosiah 1:1).

After the accession of the younger Mosiah to the throne (Mosiah 6:3), “there was no contention among all his people for the space of three years” (Mosiah 6:7). But this blessed state did not last. Indeed, when we examine all the evidence for Mosiah’s reign, it is clear that it was an era of dramatic change, even of revolutionary transformation, which is a condition that is not conducive to calmness and peace. Change is nearly always difficult to accept. No doubt many of their problems arose as a result of the merger with the Mulekites, who were much greater in number than the Nephites, and who had spent several hundred years in the new land without benefit of revelation or scriptures.

Upon consideration of the extent of the reforms carried out by Mosiah—and there were doubtless many things that did not make it into Mormon’s record—one can hardly doubt that the fact that Mosiah saw the need for such restructurings indicates the existence of deep-seated problems in Nephite society, or that those radical reforms, in turn, served as the *cause* of further disruptions. Notoriously, “many of the rising generation” (Mosiah 26:1), ultimately including the son of Alma and the sons of King Mosiah himself, began to dissent from the “church” that Alma had established in the land. The exact status of this “church” vis-à-vis the government is not entirely clear from the record; it seems to have been independent of the royal government, but it was closely allied with that government and was established with full endorsement by the king (Mosiah 25:19, 26:8). Alma, as high priest over the church, ruled humbly but firmly, issuing “a strict command throughout all the churches that there should be no persecutions among them, that there should be an equality among all men” and judging the members of the church “according to the commandments of God” (Mosiah 27:3; 26:33).

Thus, while dissensions occurred during the reigns of the two Mosiahs and King Benjamin, the overall impression we get is one of strict laws, firm execution, orderliness, and a government that worked actively and powerfully to suppress any troubles before they got completely out of hand.

Immediately following the institution of the new government of judges, however, much more serious troubles began. In the very first year of the reign of the judges, as noted already, the newly established laws underwent a serious test. At first blush, Nehor was simply another Sherem (see Jacob 7)—a man who preached false doctrine, which it was feared might subvert the people spiritually, but which had only a minimal impact on the people as a whole (see Jacob 7:23). But, in fact, this new dissenter was a sign of a much larger problem. We are told that Nehor preached against the church of God, “declaring . . . that every priest and teacher ought to become popular; and they ought not to labor with their hands, but that they ought to be supported by the people” (Alma 1:3). He also taught that “in the end, all men should have eternal life” (1:4). These doctrines, while they might well be objectionable from a spiritual perspective as tending to undermine the feeling for a need for repentance, do not appear on their face to have had any political import. To be sure, when Gideon “withstood” Nehor “with the words of God,” the dispute ended in Gideon’s murder (1:9). Nonetheless, this brief episode seems at first to be merely a brief scenario in which a personal dispute over correct doctrine got way out of hand and resulted in the violent death of one of the disputants. For this murder, Nehor was arrested and brought before Alma, the chief judge, who ultimately condemned him to death (1:4).

However, several hints in the text concerning the Nehor incident suggest that something much more complex and even more sinister was developing than Mormon’s narration tells us directly. In the first place, Mormon has an odd habit of avoiding naming Nehor by name. Prior to verse 15, he instead refers to him several times by circumlocution. At first, we are told only that Nehor was “a man who was large, and was noted for his much strength” (Alma 1:2). In verse 10, Mormon identifies him merely as “the man who slew [Gideon].” The circumstances of his death are also described with evasive language, as though Mormon were deliberately avoiding a description of what actually happened: “And there he was caused, or rather did acknowledge, between the heavens and the earth, that what he had taught to the people was contrary to the word of God; and there he suffered an ignominious death” (1:15).

More importantly, we are told immediately after Nehor’s execution that his death in no way put an end to his teachings (Alma 1:16), which provides an interesting contrast to the statement regarding Sherem in Jacob 7:23. Nehor’s teachings seem to have caught on very quickly and become quite popular despite Nehor’s execution. We are told that

relations between these followers of Nehor and the members of the church became warm to the point of physical blows (Alma 1:22), yet there were no further deaths nor, it seems, any immediate broader political ramifications.

This picture changes dramatically in chapter 2. At the very beginning of the fifth year of the judges, a certain Amlici, a “very cunning man,” who was “after the order of the man that slew Gideon by the sword” (again, note Mormon’s strange reluctance to name Nehor), “began to be very powerful” and his followers “began to endeavor to establish Amlici to be a king over the people” (Alma 2:1–2). In other words, there was a movement among the people to reestablish the kingship. This movement became quite large and led quickly to a major civil war. How did Nehor’s philosophy become so popular in four years following his death that it seems to have been embraced by close to half the population?

Is this the full story? It would appear not. In fact, Nehor appears to have been part of a much greater movement from the very beginning. Chapter 21 of Alma tells the brief story of Aaron’s missionary labors in the land of Jerusalem in Lamanite territory. When the sons of Mosiah, having rejected the royal succession, insisted on fulfilling a mission to the land of Nephi to preach among the Lamanites, they split up and each went his separate way. Aaron journeyed first to a region known as Jerusalem, to a “great city” of the same name. Surprisingly, the city was populated not only with Lamanites, but also with “Amalekites” and the “people of Amulon” (Alma 21:1–3). The latter group were the remnant of the priests of Noah who had made friends with the Lamanites and settled in Lamanite territory (see Mosiah 24). The Amalekites, on the other hand, seem to appear in the story out of nowhere.⁶¹ We are told, however, that “they had built synagogues after the order of the Nehors; for many of the Amalekites and the Amulonites were after the order of the Nehors” (Alma 21:4). The meaning of the term “order of the Nehors” is never fully explained, although Mormon had referred previously to Amlici as “being after the order of the man that slew Gideon by the sword” (Alma 2:1).

It is important to note that Aaron’s encounter with the Amalekites took place in the first year of the reign of the judges—*the same year that*

61. The detailed *Commentary on the Book of Mormon* by Reynolds and Sjodahl concludes that “the Amalekites were a sect of Nephite apostates whose origin is not given.” George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1955), 3:290.

Nehor himself appeared in Zarahemla and met his death (see Alma 17:6, with 21:1 and 17:13). This suggests that the “order of the Nehors” was not something that sprang up in Zarahemla following the death of Nehor, but had already been in existence prior to that time. Indeed, it seems likely that Nehor himself may have been a resident of the city of Jerusalem, and it seems likely that he first propagated a following among the people there before journeying to Zarahemla.

But what about the Amalekites? We are told that they, like Nehor, believed that “God will save all men” (Alma 21:6; compare 1:4). They also rejected the prophecies of the coming of Christ (21:8). It was typical of the Nephites to create political sects and name them, like their cities, after the name of the founder of the sect (see Alma 8:7). If that was the case with the Amalekites, who indeed was Amaleki? The answer to this mystery, and to the mystery of the origin of the Amalekites themselves, appears to be found in the story of Amlici in Alma, chapter 2. J. Christopher Conkling has made a convincing case that the “mysterious Amalekites” were in fact the same as the Amlicites, the difference in name being attributable merely to alternate spellings in the original manuscript.⁶² Amlici must have been an associate of Nehor’s, and a member of his “order” (keep in mind that the Amulonites were descendants of the old priests of Noah). He and his associates had built up their movement and “order” over several years, both before and after the death of Nehor.

This solution to the mystery of the Amalekites also helps solve, among other things, the question of how Amlici, in chapter 2 of Alma, seems to have built up a huge following for himself in less than one year (Alma 2:2). It appears that it was not merely a question of Amlici himself

62. For example, the original manuscript at Alma 24:28 has *Amelicites* instead of the current spelling *Amalekites*. Alma 43:6 has two different spellings in the same verse: *Amalekites* and *Amelekites*. See J. Christopher Conkling, “Alma’s Enemies: The Case of the Lamanites, Amlicites, and the Mysterious Amalekites,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005): 108–17. Conkling based his discussion on the textual analysis of Royal Skousen. See Royal Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2001) 245; and Royal Skousen, ed., *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2001), 2:396–97, 514. Skousen also explores this possibility and accepts it as a correct reading in *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon: Part Three, Mosiah 14–Alma 17*, vol. 4 of *The Critical Text of the Book of Mormon*, 2d ed. (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2017), 1666–70.

building upon the work of Nehor, but that he had a movement behind him from the beginning, with his primary base in the city of Jerusalem in the land of Nephi.

In any case, there is no doubt that Amlici was able to build up a large following of tens of thousands in a very few years, perhaps in part through his own skills at demagoguery, but also in part because of the deep-seated desire of the people for a king. The degree of emotional attachment to the monarchy in Great Britain, even today, gives us an inkling into the feelings of despair, frustration, insecurity, or disinheritance that may have been felt among the people of Nephi when the kingship was abolished.⁶³ The royalist movement was so great that the question of restoring the monarchy was put up to a vote, which suggests that there was no other way to be sure whether the supporters of Amlici made up a majority of the people or not.

As it turned out, the followers of Amlici lost the vote, but they did not give up their aspirations. Instead, they split themselves into a separate polity, consecrating Amlici as their own king, and attempted to take the city by force. This rebellion quickly grew into a major insurrection—or, better said, a small civil war. The people of Nephi armed themselves with “weapons of war, of every kind” (Alma 2:12) and the rebels did likewise. Amlici appointed many “rulers and leaders over his people, to lead them to war against their brethren” (2:14). The army had to be called up, with the chief judge and governor at its head (2:16). Thousands on both sides were killed. The Amlicites ultimately joined together with an army of Lamanites, which seems quite natural once we are aware of their base in the land of Jerusalem. They both attacked, driving the government forces back toward Zarahemla (2:26). Alma, as governor and chief commander, confronted Amlici personally and slew him in combat, and the Nephite forces ultimately succeeded in driving back the Lamanites as well.

The popularity of Amlici and his ideas was so widespread that even following his death and the end of the civil war, the threat did not disappear. Alma decided the following year to take the drastic step of

63. Even in the newly created United States, following a bloody revolution to cast off what the colonists viewed as the unjust rule of King George III, there was considerable sentiment in favor of “monarchy, or something like it, seeing and dreading the evils of democracy.” For a while, many supposed that Washington might hold office for life—in effect, an elective kingship. See ch. 2, “A Monarchical Republic,” of Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 53–94.

resigning from the office of chief judge and turning it over to Nephihah (Alma 4:16–17). His belief was that the only way to maintain order in society was to get people to repent of their sins and turn to God.⁶⁴ He found a measure of success in several cities through his powerful preaching, but his message was completely rejected by the people of Ammonihah. He naturally left that city to go elsewhere, but an angel appeared to him and commanded him to return to Ammonihah (see Alma 8). This was now the tenth year of the new government. Ammonihah, it turns out, was a hotbed of revolutionary activity, possibly having become the preserve of many of the remaining Amlicites. Not surprisingly, many of them were “after the order and faith of Nehor,” their spiritual father (Alma 14:16; compare 14:18; 15:15). They had previously failed at their attempts to seize power both politically and militarily, and they were now attempting a type of legal strategy, for we are told that the people in Ammonihah “do study at this time that they may destroy the liberty of thy people” (10:14). Many of these men were learned, working as lawyers. These lawyers had “much business to do among the people,” their primary object being to “get gain . . . according to their employ” (10:31–32), much like Nehor and the practitioners of priestcraft (see 1:5; 15:15). Amulek, preaching alongside Alma, accused their lawyers and judges of attempting to lay “the foundation of the destruction of this people,” suggesting that there were legal schemes afoot to undermine the government (10:27).

Ammonihah was notoriously annihilated the following year by the Lamanites, in fulfillment of prophecy (Alma 9:18; 16:9), although Zeezrom and certain others were able to repent in time (15:1). But this was by no means the last attempt to restore the monarchy. The Zoramites, though they are never identified as followers of Nehor, were clearly cut from the same cloth as the Amalekites and the people of Ammonihah, and indeed they were closely associated with the Amalekites. Zerahemnah made use of both Amalekites and Zoramites—and them alone—as his chief captains (Alma 43:6, 13; compare 48:5). We are never told whether Zerahemnah himself was a Nephite “dissenter” or a native Lamanite, but it is interesting that Mormon mentions that the Zoramites

64. This is one of the peculiarities of righteous Nephite society, namely, the assumption that the best way to put an end to political dissension was to preach repentance. See especially Enos 1:23. The idea of repentance was politically unacceptable to some, for it assumes the existence of sin, the reality of accountability, and a need for submissiveness.

became Lamanites just prior to the war with Zerahemnah, and the distinctions among Lamanites, Amalekites, and Zoramite dissenters became less pronounced (Alma 43:13). In any case, the Nephite dissenters were the primary inspiration for the whole effort (Alma 43:44).

Zerahemnah's goal in attacking the Nephites was to bring them "into bondage" (Alma 43:8, 29, 48, 49), presumably by making himself king (see Alma 43:45). In the year following his defeat by Moroni (a mere fourteen years after the suppression of the Amlicites), a new insurrection arose, with Amalickiah at the head of a movement overtly seeking once again to restore the kingship and "to destroy the foundation of liberty which God had granted unto them" (Alma 46:10). This movement was, if anything, on a larger scale than that of Amlici. Many of the lesser judges of the land were allied with him (46:4), and even many who were members of the church supported him, so that matters became "exceedingly precarious and dangerous" (46:7).

In accordance with the standard pattern of behavior, the rebels who escaped arrest at the hands of Moroni ran off and allied with Lamanites, with the expectation that they would return with much larger forces. Amalickiah succeeded in his stratagem to become king of the Lamanites, but he was unsuccessful in his larger scheme to conquer and become king of the Nephites, in large part because of the defensive skills of Captain Moroni. Peace then ensued for several years following the defeat of Amalickiah, but in the twenty-fifth year of the judges a new monarchist movement arose, the so-called king-men. At first, the movement consisted merely of legal attempts to have certain laws changed through petition.⁶⁵ But when Pahoran refused to acknowledge their petition, they attempted to "dethrone" Pahoran and restore the kingship (51:3-5). We are told that many of these dissenters were men "of high birth," a natural constituency for a royalist movement. Some of them may have also been the judges who had earlier supported Amalickiah. Once again, this severe challenge to the new government had to be decided by the "voice of the people," and the king-men were compelled to be silent. When the Lamanites threatened to attack again, the king-men, rather

65. The right of petition to the high priest was undoubtedly legal, although the request to alter "a few particular points of the law" might have been considered completely inappropriate by Pahoran. In ancient states, the notion of changing the law was viewed in an entirely different light than it is in the modern world. It is tempting to see this (semi-) legal approach to change the government as associated with the attempt, discussed above, by the lawyers in Ammonihah to use the law to undermine the government.

than join with them, merely threatened to remain passive and stay out of the conflict. But Moroni felt that the situation was so risky that he needed to obtain authority from the chief judge/governor to execute all those who would not take up arms in defense of their people. We are told that four thousand such rebels were put to the sword, and many others were thrown into prison, there being no opportunity to hold formal trials (51:19).

Amalickiah attacked again with his army composed of Lamanites and Nephite dissenters, and a war raged on for six years. During the war, the king-men, seeing their chance, stirred up a huge rebellion and were able to take control of the governorship and drive Pahoran and his supporters into exile. Now in power, the king-men naturally appointed a king (61:8), who attempted to ally himself with the king of the Lamanites. Eventually the rebellion was quelled and the Lamanites were subdued and, finally, peace settled over the Nephite realms (Alma 62:29–42).

Yet only nine years later a new contention arose over who was to hold the chief judge's seat. This situation was all too reminiscent of the very kind of contention that King Mosiah had hoped to prevent by abolishing the kingship. As discussed earlier, three sons of Pahoran, each with their supporters, contended for the governorship (Hel. 1:2–5). When the younger Pahoran was chosen by the normal procedure, one brother, Paanchi, rose up in open rebellion and was condemned to death. As a result, Kishkumen was hired by the rebels to assassinate Pahoran. Pacumeni, the new chief judge, was killed during an invasion of the city of Zarahemla by Coriantumr, a dissenter from the Nephites who led the Lamanite armies (Hel. 1:7–9, 21).

The following year, yet another contention arose over who should fill the empty judgment seat (Hel. 2:1). With the aid of a servant, the new governor, Helaman, escaped assassination and was able to drive the rest of the rebels into the wilderness, after which calm ensued for a good six years. From that point on, internal corruption, dissensions, and wars became so frequent and were so interlaced that I cannot even outline them here, but I will note a few events. The “works of darkness” sponsored originally by the followers of Gadianton became more widespread (6:28). In the sixty-sixth year of the judges, the chief judge Cezoram was assassinated (6:15), as well as his son who had succeeded him. And several years later Seezoram, another chief judge, was also found murdered (9:3). In the seventy-second year, there was an increase in “contentions . . . insomuch that there were wars throughout all the land among all the people of Nephi” (11:1).

Some of the people repented briefly under the preaching of Nephi and Lehi, but their resolve lasted only a few years, and the band of Gadianton was revived and began to spread their mayhem and destruction (Hel. 11). At one point the robbers made a general attack on the people, but they were defeated and driven off following a massive loss of life on both sides (3 Ne. 4:11). The people repented on several occasions, but each time their dark impulses got the better of them, resulting in the threatened disintegration of both the society and the government.

In the twenty-ninth year after the prophesied birth of the Messiah, distinctions of wealth and social class once again reared their head, so that “the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning,” resulting in persecutions, “great inequality,” and the destruction of the church (3 Ne. 6:12–14). Once again a monarchist movement arose, and the followers of this new movement succeeded in appointing a king over themselves, at least, who was named Jacob (6:30, 7:9–10). Yet another chief judge was murdered (7:1). So far had Nephite government and society deteriorated by this point that Mormon tells us:

The people were divided one against another; and they did separate one from another into tribes, every man according to his family and his kindred and friends; and thus they did destroy the government of the land. And every tribe did appoint a chief or a leader over them; and thus they became tribes and leaders of tribes. . . . And the regulations of the government were destroyed. . . . They were divided into tribes, every man according to his family, kindred and friends; nevertheless they had come to an agreement that they would not go to war one with another; but they were not united as to their laws, and their manner of government, for they were established according to the minds of those who were their chiefs and their leaders (3 Ne. 7:2–3, 6, 14).

By this point, the only thing the various tribes could agree on was their “hatred of those who had entered into a covenant to destroy the government”—what little was left of it (3 Ne. 7:11). Indeed, as we have just seen, there was no general government at all; the society was completely fragmented, although they apparently honored an agreement among the tribes—“very strict laws that one tribe should not trespass against another” (3 Ne. 7:14), which was the only barrier against out-and-out civil war. It was at this point, we are told, that nature wreaked its terrible havoc on the land, with the most extreme natural upheavals, including massive storms, earthquakes, and possibly volcanic eruptions. Most of the major cities of the land, including Zarahemla, were destroyed by fire

or upheaval. The grand culmination of this, of course, was the appearance of Christ, which brought over 150 years of peace and prosperity, during which time we know nothing of the nature of the government.

I will not attempt to narrate the story of the final decline of the Nephites during the last two centuries, for our focus has been on the political disruptions during the judgeship, which ended at this point. I will only note that the social and political corruption seemed to pick up exactly where it left off nearly 200 years previously, with the division of the people once again into their sociopolitical groupings which they called Lamanites and Nephites, but which had nothing to do with the original groupings based on tribal descent (see 4 Ne. 1:20, 26, 36). The primary difference with the period prior to the appearance of Christ is that there were no longer any periods of repentance and recovery, but only one long, dramatic slide into total anarchy and war. Of government during this period we read absolutely nothing.

It was thus that the noble experiment of Mosiah and the Nephites to establish a government of “liberty” had come to an ignoble end. During the 120 or so years that the judgeship was in existence, there were approximately forty-three years of war and bloodshed. This does not include many other years in which there were contentions “but not unto bloodshed” (Alma 51:4). Some of these contentions were strictly domestic in nature (for example, the Amlicites) but, in addition, the vast majority of the wars with the Lamanites were stirred up and led by Nephite dissenters, especially Zoramites—Nephites fighting Nephites.

MORMON AND DEMOCRACY

It may seem unfair to blame the judgeship for this instability. And I am certainly not arguing that the abandonment of the kingship was the sole cause of the ultimate collapse, nor that the successes of the dissenting movements were necessarily due to weak or incompetent administration of the government. I do suggest, however, that as an institution the judgeship was *structurally* weaker than a government controlled by a king. We have seen that judges had less power than kings (for example, they were unable to alter the basic laws) and less symbolic legitimacy (they were not consecrated by God). The contrast in the amount of dissension and violence between the eras of kingship and judgeship, as we have seen above, is striking. The constantly recurring desire on the part of many Nephites to restore the kingship after its abolition under Mosiah is the thread that runs through this entire account. These monarchist movements were always defeated when the matter was put to a vote,

but the record gives every indication that the years of the innovative judgeship allowed for much greater instability than did the established institution of kingship.

Mormon, as always, presents the causes of the Nephite collapse in stark moral terms, in terms of lovers of wickedness and lovers of righteousness, the proud versus the humble. The “cycle of pride” is well known to students of the Book of Mormon. In Helaman, chapter 3, Mormon outlines in a few verses how this cycle impacted the political aspect of their world. Beginning in verse 33, he tells us that there was peace, “save it were the pride which began to enter into the . . . hearts of the people who professed to belong to the church of God—and they were lifted up in pride, even to the persecution of many of their brethren.” And in the following year, great pride “had gotten into the hearts of the people; and it was because of their exceedingly great riches and their prosperity in the land” (Hel. 3:36). A mere two years later, “there were many dissensions in the church, and there was also a contention among the people, insomuch that there was much bloodshed” (4:1). Pride, as the Latter-day Saints were famously warned in 1989, is having a sense of superiority toward others. This, in turn, leads to enmity toward those to whom one feels superior, which manifests itself as arrogance, persecution, and ultimately bloodshed.⁶⁶

The same cycle is equally visible in chapter 6 of 3 Nephi. At first there were “some disputings among the people,” some people who were “lifted up unto pride and boastings because of their exceedingly great riches, yea, even unto great persecutions” (3 Ne. 6:10). One of the main grounds for men’s pride was their “great learning,” which they had been able to obtain because of their “great riches” (6:12). The great inequality that arose in the land as a result of this pride led to the breaking up of the church in all the land, except among a few Lamanites (6:14). In very short order, this situation led to the destruction of the government, the assassination of the chief judge, and the complete fragmentation of the people into families and tribes (3 Ne. 7:1–2).

Alma the Elder had taught his people at the waters of Mormon that the key to remaining in “this liberty wherewith you have been made free”

66. “The central feature of pride is enmity—enmity toward God and enmity toward our fellowmen. *Enmity* means ‘hatred toward, hostility to, or a state of opposition.’ It is the power by which Satan wishes to reign over us. Pride is essentially competitive in nature.” Ezra Taft Benson, “Beware of Pride,” *Ensign* 29 (May 1989): 4.

was to “trust no man to be a king over you” and “that every man should love his neighbor as himself, that there should be no contention among [you]” (Mosiah 23:13, 15). Christ similarly taught that “there shall be no disputations among you as there hath hitherto been” and that “he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another” (3 Ne. 11:28–29).

Finally, we can take another look at the book of 4 Nephi. Mormon tells us again and again that, in contrast to the century and a half preceding the visit of Christ and the century and a half leading up the final catastrophe, during the more than 150 years of Zion-like society following the visit of Christ “there was no contention among all the people, in all the land” (4 Ne. 1:15; see 1:2, 12) and that “there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults” (v. 16). Nevertheless, once again, in the years following AD 200 or so, the peace was disrupted as people began to divide themselves into social groups (“Lamanites” and “Nephites”), into economic classes, and ultimately into tribes. Hugh Nibley once described the Nephites and Lamanites as living in a polarized world.⁶⁷ But it was not merely a polarization between the two nations. The Nephites were frequently and repeatedly polarized among themselves, and it was those divisions that led to their ultimate destruction.

Moroni described his vision of our modern situation in similar terms:

Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing. And I know that ye do walk in the pride of your hearts; and there are none save a few only who do not lift themselves up in the pride of their hearts, unto the wearing of very fine apparel, unto envying, and strifes, and malice, and persecutions, and all manner of iniquities; and your churches, yea even every one, have become polluted because of the pride of your hearts. For behold, ye do love money, and your substance and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches, more than ye love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted. . . . Why do ye adorn yourselves with that which hath no life, and yet suffer the hungry, and the needy, and the naked, and the sick and the afflicted to pass by you, and notice them not? . . . Behold, the sword of vengeance hangeth over you; and the time soon cometh that he avengeth the blood of the saints upon you, for he will not suffer their cries any longer. (Morm. 8:35–37, 39, 41)

67. Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah: The Book of Mormon in the Modern World* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967), 375–78.

THE ANCIENT LAW OF LIBERTY

One of the great tragic ironies of the Book of Mormon, as already noted, is the failure of King Mosiah's hopes for peace and stability through a change in governments. From this perspective, his experiment was an abject failure. The historical record shows clearly that instead of leading to an absence of contention, the new government seemingly spawned an endless series of political dissensions, rebellions, assassinations, and civil wars. Many Nephites longed for the good old days of the kingship, but instead they ended up with an utterly broken government, a fragmented society reduced to tribalism.

So, with this array of weaknesses and failures, are we to conclude that the experiment with "free government" was a failure? Not necessarily. Despite Mosiah's hope that contentions could be avoided, he had more substantial reasons for persuading the people to give up their beloved kingship. At the end of his proclamation to the people, he declared:

And I command you to do these things in the fear of the Lord; and I command you to do these things, and that ye have no king; that if these people commit sins and iniquities they shall be answered upon their own heads. For behold I say unto you, the sins of many people have been caused by the iniquities of their kings; therefore their iniquities are answered upon the heads of their kings. And now I desire that this inequality should be no more in this land, especially among this my people; but I desire that this land be a land of liberty, and every man may enjoy his rights and privileges alike, so long as the Lord sees fit that we may live and inherit the land. . . . And he told them that . . . the burden should come upon all the people, that every man might bear his part. (Mosiah 29:30–32, 34)

The people clearly understood what Mosiah was telling them, for they echoed these sentiments in their response. "And now it came to pass, after king Mosiah had sent these things forth among the people they were convinced of the truth of his words. Therefore they relinquished their desires for a king, and became exceedingly anxious that every man should have an equal chance throughout all the land; yea, and *every man expressed a willingness to answer for his own sins*" (Mosiah 29:37–38).

What is going on here? Clearly, Mosiah and the people were working from the basis of the sacral kingship. Because the king was both the representative of God to the people, and of the people before God, he was typically held responsible for the acts of the people, and effectively got the principal "credit" for both the good and bad that happened in

his kingdom and to his people. As we already observed in the Old Testament, “Because King Manasseh Judah has committed these abominations, has done things more wicked than all that the Amorites did, who were before him, and has *caused Judah also to sin* with his idols; therefore thus saith the Lord, God of Israel, I am bringing upon Jerusalem and Judah such evil that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle” (2 Kgs. 21:11–12).

Under such circumstances, Judah is going to be punished for its sins, but they are the sins that the king had *caused* them to commit, for which the people were not truly responsible. In contrast, under Mosiah’s judgeship, because there would be no royal intercessor, each person would be held responsible by God for his own sins. Thus, whatever evil was committed by the people would be “answered upon their own heads” (Mosiah 29:30) rather than upon the head of the king (v. 31).

Note that there is never any mention of freedom, or the pursuit of happiness, as the natural right of a people. These are modern doctrines that would be out of place in an ancient document. Liberty, to the Book of Mormon writers, is not the right to act however one wishes, let alone the right to seek self-fulfillment, but the freedom to be righteous, particularly the right to worship God and his truths. More broadly, it is the right to choose for oneself between good and evil and to be held responsible for that choice.

This doctrine is comparable to what the early Christians called the Ancient Law of Liberty, which is the freedom God has given mankind so that they can be judged for both their righteousness and their wickedness. The early bishop Irenaeus taught that if some men had been made evil by nature, and some good, the latter could not be rightly praised for their righteousness, and the former could not be justly condemned, for they were simply following their God-given nature.⁶⁸ Similarly, if the Nephites were merely following the commands of a wicked monarch, they could scarcely be held guilty by God. (A righteous king, by contrast, would not *force* men to be good, but rather guide them to righteousness.)

68. See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.37.1–2, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A. D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1903), 519; compare *Clementine Recognitions* 3.26, in *ANF*, 121. See ch. 21, “The Ancient Law of Liberty,” in Nibley, *World and the Prophets*, 182–90.

As a general rule, then, good kings are the best, but in light of the tendency of kings to turn wicked (especially from one generation to the next), Mosiah endorses a system of liberty, that is, democracy. The value of freedom is not, however, because it necessarily leads to greater individual self-fulfillment, as moderns would have it. Rather, it is because freedom permits mankind to be held responsible for their actions—even when, on occasion, it leads to utter disaster. As the Lord declared in 1833: “[I have suffered the U.S. Constitution to be established] that every man may act . . . according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment. Therefore, it is not right that any man should be in bondage one to another. And *for this purpose* have I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose, and redeemed the land by the shedding of blood” (D&C 101:78–80; see also D&C 134:1).

The Book of Mormon was given to us today, specifically to the United States, the mother of modern democracies, as a warning. Is the book predicting the failure of modern democracies, specifically the American democracy? Yes and no. The story of the Book of Mormon, as we have seen, is hardly a tract for the efficacy of democracy or “free government” in achieving a stable society. As if making a prophecy, Mosiah observes specifically that “if the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, then is the time that the judgments of God will come upon you; yea, then is the time he will visit you with great destruction even as he has hitherto visited this land” (Mosiah 29:27).⁶⁹

The last phrase, of course, is an allusion to the fate of the Jaredites, whose history had been translated by Mosiah himself. The Jaredites had disintegrated even though they had not a hint of democratic governance. Although there “never could be a people more blessed than they” (Ether 10:28), their civilization perished, instead, because of their “wars and contentions” (Ether 11:7), their bloodthirstiness, and above all their desire to “get power and gain” (Ether 11:15). And yet it is notable that the

69. Mosiah knows of the destruction of the Jaredites from his translation of the twenty-four gold plates of Ether (Mosiah 28:11–18). Mormon echoes these words in his account of Nephi, son of Nephi, when he delivered up the judgment seat to Cezoram: “For as their laws and their governments were established by the voice of the people, and they who chose evil were more than they who chose good, therefore they were ripening for destruction, for the laws had become corrupted” (Hel. 5:2). See also Alma 46:18.

book of Ether is entirely a story about kings. We know virtually nothing about the righteousness or unrighteousness of the Jaredite people. This may be a factor of the abbreviated nature of Moroni's account, but it is more likely because the Jaredite kings were the only moral actors in the story. As noted above, the anointing of kings, and thus the sacral nature of the Jaredite kingship, is particularly prominent in the book of Ether. Hence, as I have argued repeatedly, the kings bore the ultimate responsibility for everything that took place.

So, to be sure, the Book of Mormon is not a political tract for any particular form of governance. The Jaredites collapsed under kingship, the Nephites under a more democratic type of government. The crucial point for Mormon is not that democracy is unstable or that kingship is evil, but that it is only under a "free government"—or, alternatively, a righteous kingship—that individual men and women can exercise their free agency to be righteous. As my mission president once said, to allow a missionary to be a great missionary, you have to give him enough freedom to be a lousy one. Freedom necessarily comes with risks. But it is only when we undertake those risks that we will have the ability to show who we really are.

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Reading Competency in the Book of Mormon

Abish and Other Model Readers

Michael J. Call

In chapter 19 of the book of Alma, we are introduced to Abish, described in the narrative as one of the “Lamanitish women” serving in King Lamoni’s court (Alma 19:16). Mormon’s account of her experience on the day of the king’s conversion is compelling for many reasons, but I would like to explore here how Abish and other important figures in the text function as model readers, exhibiting the traits and competencies that the Book of Mormon authors expected the future reader of their text to bring to the reading act. In fact, a careful analysis of important reading acts described throughout the Book of Mormon leads to a clear understanding of the several authors’ definition of an ideal or competent reader of their record. For though the authors are several, they seem to share a common conviction about competency. As the narrative progresses, it becomes more and more evident that the competent or ideal reader possesses one vital skill—something we might call spiritual sensitivity—that separates her or him from all the rest. Through their juxtaposition of various types of readers, the Book of Mormon chroniclers invite us to compare and contrast competing textual interpretations, a process that is meant to lead us, as actual readers, to evaluate our own particular competencies in deciphering the text before our eyes. The reading act itself is indeed among the book’s core themes.

As a theoretical basis for this study, I draw from the work of such reception theorists as Gerald Prince, who propose that embedded in every narrative are examples of the very act in which the actual reader is engaged at every moment of the reading process, that is, the assimilation

Michael J. Call

Many years ago, I happened to read Abish's story in my morning scripture study the very week I was discussing reception theory in my interdisciplinary humanities interpretive theory class, and the episode fairly leapt off the page as a perfect example of the "nonreading reading act" I had been trying to explain to my students. I shared my discovery with them the next class period, and their reaction was so positive, I decided to include it in further iterations of the course, which I did over the remaining years of my teaching career at BYU. This article owes much to those bright students, their encouragement, and their enthusiasm for learning, both sacred and secular.



and interpretation of observed phenomena.¹ The reader's experience with the text is, they argue, the central—and perhaps only—theme of the text. Prince explains, "Every author, provided he is writing for someone other than himself, develops his narrative as a function of a certain type of reader whom he bestows with certain qualities, faculties, and inclinations according to his opinion of men in general (or in particular) and according to the obligations he feels should be respected."² Prince and other reception theorists suggest that the observant reader should therefore pay particular attention to descriptions of reading acts occurring in a text because, first, they provide important clues about the optimal relationship the author hopes to create between text and reader; second, they mirror the challenges and pitfalls associated with textual reception itself; and, third, they showcase examples of characters whose

1. For a general overview of reception theory, see Jane P. Tompkins, ed., *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

2. Gerald Prince, "Introduction to the Study of the Narratee," in Tompkins, *Reader-Response Criticism*, 9.

flaws produce misreadings that compete directly with those of more reliable readers. After all, as in the real world, not all readers are equally competent.

For our study here, it is useful to remember that, in their analysis of reading acts, reception theorists do not limit themselves only to descriptions of characters actually reading written material. Equally worthy of our attention should be any narrative event that imitates closely the reading act's process of assimilating and interpreting observed phenomena. Thus, any act that incorporates looking, watching, or observing is also deserving of our attention. The Book of Mormon text is especially rich in this regard, and Abish's story is one of the most fruitful.

Interestingly, it is a reading act that initiates the long sequence of events composing the Book of Mormon narrative. In the very first chapter of his record, Nephi recounts that his father, Lehi, receiving a book from the hands of an angel, is instructed to read it. The book contains prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem, the coming of a Messiah, and the redemption of the world (1 Ne. 1:18–19). But when Lehi tries to share his “reading” with his neighbors, he is mocked and ridiculed and his life threatened. From the outset, then, we are presented with a world divided into those who interpret the book correctly and those who resist. The consequences of misreading are dire: the competent readers escape the predicted destruction, and the incompetent are either killed or taken into slavery. Merely possessing the book or record does not guarantee success. Laban had evidently possessed the brass plates for some time but had either not read them or had chosen to ignore their teachings, since he appears to have been driven by greed and love of power to seek the lives of Lehi's children.

There is no substitute for a competent reader. Once in the promised land, Nephi begins to teach his brethren from the records that had been so jealously guarded by Laban:

And it came to pass that I did read many things to them, which were engraven upon the plates of brass, that they might know concerning the doings of the Lord in other lands, among people of old. And I did read many things unto them which were written in the books of Moses; but that I might more fully persuade them to believe in the Lord their Redeemer I did read unto them that which was written by the prophet Isaiah; for I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning.” (1 Ne. 19:22–23)

We assume that Nephi was not required to read the scriptures to them simply because no one else in the family could read. It is unlikely

that he, as the younger brother of Laman and Lemuel, would have been singled out to be “taught somewhat in all the learning of [his] father” (1 Ne. 1:1). That access to learning would have been granted the elder sons as well, perhaps even to a greater degree based on practices of the day.³ But would Nephi’s brethren, confronted with the same passages as readers and left to their own devices, have discovered for themselves the truths contained therein about the “Lord their Redeemer” (1 Ne. 19:23)? Obviously not, for Nephi records that, after hearing the passages read, they came to him and asked for an explanation of their meaning (compare 1 Ne. 22:1). And this gifted interpreter then reveals the key: “By the Spirit are all things made known unto the prophets” (1 Ne. 22:2). Nephi models competent reading for other potential readers, but he brings something to the reading act his older brothers evidently lack, a key component that transforms him from actual reader to ideal reader for the text at hand.

This critical competency will be emphasized repeatedly in the succeeding pages of the narrative. An early example is the confrontation between Jacob, Nephi’s younger brother, and Sherem, a learned anti-Christ. In answer to Jacob’s question, Sherem declares that he believes the scriptures, suggesting that he has read them, to which Jacob replies: “Then ye do not understand them” (Jacob 7:11). Jacob is essentially calling Sherem an incompetent reader. Jacob understands the scriptures because of “the power of the Holy Ghost” (Jacob 7:12). When Sherem demands that he be shown a sign “by the power of the Holy Ghost,” he is admitting that he is entirely unfamiliar with—or willingly ignorant of—the concept of the Holy Spirit’s role and function. Only after being struck down and on his deathbed does he acknowledge that he has learned for himself of its power. The irony of the sign itself is its ambiguity: as Christ taught, signs in and of themselves have no convincing power (see Matt. 16:4). All is in the reading, in what we can call the deciphering. The wicked and adulterous, like Sherem, seek for signs but are incapable of reading them, for they lack the very thing required to decode them.

3. Alternatively, Brant A. Gardner, “Nephi as Scribe,” *Mormon Studies Review* 23, no. 1 (2011): 45–55, proposed that Nephi, as a younger son, received a scribal education that his older brothers, inheritors of their father’s business, did not receive, to prepare him for an alternative career.

A striking example of this kind of misreading is the story of Abish, a servant to King Lamoni.⁴ As a result of the powerful teaching of Ammon, Lamoni had come to a realization of his sins and, having begged for mercy from God, “fell unto the earth, as if he were dead” (Alma 18:42). His wife, the queen, is convinced he is not dead, in spite of the opinions of many around her, and summons Ammon, who assures her that Lamoni will rise the following day. When Lamoni does, he declares, “I have seen my Redeemer;” and, overcome with joy, he sinks down again and this time, his wife with him, is “overpowered by the Spirit” (Alma 19:13). Ammon too, overcome with joy, sinks to the earth, as then do all the king’s servants. That is, all but one: Abish, who “having been converted unto the Lord for many years, on account of a remarkable vision of her father” (Alma 19:16),⁵ remains standing. We can only imagine the scene: perhaps ten people lie prostrate on the floor, unconscious, with Abish as the lone observer. The record tells us that, because she had been converted, “she knew that it was the power of God” that had created this unique event (Alma 19:17). Then an idea comes to her: she will put this magnificent manifestation of God’s power to good use “by making known unto the people what had happened among them, that by beholding this scene it would cause them to believe in the power of God” (Alma 19:17). And so our well-intentioned, missionary-minded Abish runs out to call her neighbors in to “read” the scene that she, a believer, has already correctly interpreted.

What follows is a wonderful description of the vast range of potential misreadings incompetent readers can derive from a set of signs. The crowd sees the king, the queen, and their servants all lying on the

4. For previous discussion of this story, see Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 4:298–310; Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987–92), 3:137–42; Monte S. Nyman, *The Record of Alma*, vol. 3 of Book of Mormon Commentary series (Orem, Utah: Granite, 2004), 250–58; Hugh Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Transcripts of Lectures Presented to an Honors Book of Mormon Class at Brigham Young University, 1988–1990*, 4 vols. (Provo, Utah: FARMS; American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 2004), 2:305–9; Matthew L. Bowen, “Father Is a Man: The Remarkable Mention of the Name Abish in Alma 19:16 and Its Narrative Context,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 14 (2015): 77–93.

5. On the conversion of Abish and her father’s vision, see Book of Mormon Central, “Why Was Abish Mentioned by Name?” June 22, 2016, <https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/why-was-abish-mentioned-by-name>.

ground “as though they were dead” (v. 18). Then they notice that in this group of bodies is also someone not like the others—a Nephite, in fact—noticeable perhaps by his different dress or color of skin or some other distinguishing factor.

Three separate interpretations are proposed. One group associates the Nephite with the evident tragedy: he is the cause of the deaths. But they are refuted by another group who claim it is a punishment the king has brought upon himself for his cruelty to his own servants, whom he had had executed for failure to protect his flocks against bandits (see Alma 17:28). This theory is opposed in turn by relatives of the very bandits who had taken the flocks, one of whom draws his sword in anger to attack the prostrate Ammon. When, in the very act of lifting his sword, he suddenly falls down dead, the stunned crowd is now confronted with a new sign to decipher, and “they began to marvel again among themselves what . . . these things could mean” (Alma 19:24).

The narrative beautifully captures for us the tumult of competing readings that follow. To the original three interpretations, the group now adds four new variations: (1) Ammon is the Great Spirit or (2) not really the Great Spirit but someone sent by the Great Spirit or (3) a monster sent by the Nephites to torment them or (4) a monster sent not by the Nephites but by the Great Spirit to afflict them. The seven various readings bring to mind the famous poem of the six blind men who, upon encountering an elephant for the first time, propose six opposing and equally ludicrous descriptions of the wondrous animal (see sidebar).⁶ Abish, who had started with such high hopes, is driven to tears by this show of incompetence. But then she, the competent reader, resolves the whole issue by taking the hand of the queen and raising her up. When Lamoni is raised up in turn, he rebukes the crowd of onlookers. Some are converted by his words, but “there were many among them who would not hear his words; therefore they went their way” (Alma 19:32). So even when the sign gets up and tells you exactly what it means, you can still refuse to believe it.

No better description of this kind of willing blindness appears in the Book of Mormon than that of Korihor, the philosophical successor to Sherem. In the classic confrontation between Alma and the anti-Christ, the argument turns on competent reading. Korihor declares that he will believe in God if shown a sign. Alma rejoins: “Thou hast had signs

6. John Godfrey Saxe, “The Blind Men and the Elephant,” in *The Poems of John Godfrey Saxe* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1872), 259–60.

The Blind Men and the Elephant

John Godfrey Saxe (1816–1887)

I

It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.

II

The *First* approached the Elephant
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
“God bless me—but the Elephant
Is very like a wall!”

III

The *Second*, feeling of the tusk,
Cried: “Ho, what have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me ’t is mighty clear
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a spear!”

IV

The *Third* approached the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up and spake:
“I see,” quoth he, “the Elephant
Is very like a snake!”

V

The *Fourth* reached out an eager hand,
And felt about the knee.
“What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain,” quoth he;
“’T is clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a tree!”

VI

The *Fifth*, who chanced to touch then ear,
Said: E’en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a fan!”

VII

The *Sixth* no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Than, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
“I see,” quoth he, the Elephant
Is very like a rope!”

VIII

And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly right,
And all were in the wrong!

enough” (Alma 30:44). He then lists the various texts to which Korihor has already had access: (1) “the testimony of all these thy brethren, and also all the holy prophets,” (2) “the scriptures,” (3) “the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it,” and (4) “[the earth’s] motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form.” In much the same way as other Christians like Anthony of Egypt would declare after him, Alma suggests that the cosmos—its forms, its movements, and its order—is as much a text to be read as the written words of the prophets. But, Alma maintains, not all readers of these various texts are equally competent at “making sense” of what they see; to many, like Korihor, the signs are illegible because they lack a key skill factor. And as we, the actual readers, assimilate this story, we are simultaneously challenged to evaluate our own reading skills.

Shortly after the episode with Korihor, Alma has occasion to quiz another group of readers, this time the poor living among the Zoramites, about their reading proficiency. Because of their poverty, they have been cast out of the synagogue. Mistakenly they consider this interdiction from formal worship services as having a serious impact on their relationship with God. Alma, however, teaches them that worship takes many forms and may be practiced anywhere. Reading the scriptures, for instance, plays a major role in spiritual growth, and this group, in spite of being barred from entering the church structure, obviously has access to them outside the synagogue walls, for Alma asks: “Now behold, my brethren, I would ask if ye have read the scriptures?” His next question seems to presume that they read with the same competency as he, the ideal reader: “If ye have, how can ye disbelieve on the Son of God?” (Alma 33:14). This assumption, however, as Alma surely knew from his experiences with Korihor and other unbelievers, is highly problematic, leading us to speculate that Alma meant his question to be rhetorical. Essentially, Alma says to them: “If you have read the scriptures as I have, you will have arrived at the same conclusions as I have about the Savior.” Here again, by including the details of this discussion of reading competency, the abridger of the record, Mormon, appears to target us directly, challenging us to evaluate the outcome of our personal experience with his record.

As we saw in the case of Abish, historical events too are subject to misreading, even when one has experienced them personally, for the motivations for human behavior and therefore the causes of the events are not often clear to the participants themselves. But as human beings seem to be obsessed with the problem of causation, retelling the past

becomes a competition between alternative narratives, each attempting to explain the causal agents that have precipitated certain events. Emblematic of this problem is the story of Nephi (son of Helaman) and the assassinated chief judge. After scolding his people about rejecting the testimonies of the prophets—Moses, Abraham, Zenos, Zenock, Ezias, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lehi, Nephi, and “almost all of our fathers, even down to this time”—Nephi concludes by saying: “Ye have rejected all these things, notwithstanding so many evidences which ye have received; yea, even ye have received all things, both things in heaven, and all things which are in the earth, as a witness that they are true” (Hel. 8:22, 24).

Wishing to give them a sign or hard evidence of the level of wickedness and anarchy to which their civilization has sunk, he informs them that their chief judge has at that very moment been assassinated. Five listeners run to verify his statement and, shocked at the sight of the murdered judge lying in his blood, collapse on the spot, unconscious. A crowd then gathers and immediately proves itself as incompetent at deciphering signs as Abish’s compatriots: they conclude that the five unconscious men are not only the perpetrators of the crime but that “God has smitten them that they could not flee” (Hel. 9:8). It is always interesting to see how often the wicked claim the capacity to interpret the mind and will of God for others. Christ referred to such as “blind leaders of the blind,” with the result that “both shall fall into the ditch” (Matt. 15:14).

Fortunately, the five innocent men are exonerated, but in the process of explaining the real sequence of events, they only succeed in implicating Nephi, who had given them their first clue. Questioned by the mob, Nephi declares, “Because I showed unto you this sign ye are angry with me, and seek to destroy my life,” after which he then gives them “another sign” through revelation, which leads to the unmasking of the real perpetrator (Hel. 9:24–25). At the conclusion of these events, the narrative enumerates the various interpretations of these signs arrived at by the disparate reading communities: “There were some of the Nephites who believed on the words of Nephi; and there were some also, who believed because of the testimony of the five, for they had been converted while they were in prison. And now there were some among the people, who said that Nephi was a prophet. And there were others who said: Behold, he is a god, for except he was a god he could not know of all things” (Hel. 9:39–41). The debate over which of these interpretations is correct becomes so heated that the people refuse to continue the discussion and divide up “hither and thither,” leaving Nephi, the prophet of

God, standing alone (Hel. 10:1). Disheartened by this divisiveness in the face of what should have created unity among believers, Nephi begins walking home, the narrative tells us, “much cast down” (Hel. 10:3). Like Abish before him, he cannot help but be disappointed at the outcome.

The debate over historical causation is in fact the very basis of the Nephite-Lamanite rift. At the outset of his record, Nephi (son of Lehi) states forthrightly, “I know that the record which I make is true; and I make it with mine own hand; and I make it according to my knowledge” (1 Ne. 1:3). We must remember that he begins the small plates record toward the end of his life, many years after the arrival in the promised land and the subsequent split with his brethren. He is obviously concerned that the right story be told about the events that led to the split, for indeed there is an alternate version floating around and very popular among his enemies.⁷ This alternate version became a staple of Lamanite mythology and was used as justification for the incessant warfare between the two peoples. Zeniff, who heard it straight from the mouths of the descendants of Laman and Lemuel, gave its general outline as follows: “[They believed] 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. . . . 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 as the Lord had commanded him, 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 to destroy them” (Mosiah 10:12, 15–17).

Later, Ammoron repeats the same story as justification for his invasion of Nephite lands in approximately 63 BC: “Your fathers did wrong their brethren, insomuch that they did rob them of their right to the government when it rightly belonged unto them. . . . I am Ammoron,

7. See Richard L. Bushman, “The Lamanite View of Book of Mormon History,” in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo: FARMS, 1990), 2:52–72.

and a descendant of Zoram, whom your fathers pressed and brought out of Jerusalem. And behold now, I am a bold Lamanite; behold, this war hath been waged to avenge their wrongs, and to maintain and to obtain their rights to the government” (Alma 54:17, 23–24).

These radically opposed historical narratives thus compete for the minds of Lehi’s descendants. When Captain Moroni’s troops have the Lamanite army cornered and threaten to annihilate them, Moroni sends a message to the opposing general, Zarahemnah, and tells him, “Ye behold that the Lord is with us; and ye behold that he has delivered you into our hands. . . . Now ye see that this is the true faith of God; yea, ye see that God will support, and keep, and preserve us, so long as we are faithful unto him, and unto our faith, and our religion” (Alma 44:3–4). Zarahemnah, however, does not “read” it in that way: “Behold, we are not of your faith; we do not believe that it is God that has delivered us into your hands; but we believe that it is your cunning that has preserved you from our swords. Behold, it is your breastplates and your shields that have preserved you” (Alma 44:9). So the Book of Mormon narrative in Alma offers us two competing and contradictory readings of the events and leaves us to decide which side we will believe.

We see then that Mormon’s record repeatedly brings us, the actual readers, face-to-face with situations that mirror our very own. We cannot help but measure ourselves against the varying degrees of incompetency manifested in these stories. The possession of one crucial skill separates the ideal readers portrayed in the text—Nephi, Alma, Abish, Captain Moroni and others—from their less-able colleagues. It is no surprise then to find the last of the record’s contributors, Mormon’s son, Moroni, including the following admonition as he concludes his part of the narrative:

Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, . . . and ponder it in your hearts. And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things. (Moro. 10:3–5)

The multiple examples of misreadings in the text emphasize the fact that there is only one way to make sense of the record we hold in our

hands. All other methods to arrive at a knowledge of its claim as the revealed word of God will only lead to unsatisfying, unconvincing, and perhaps even incorrect conclusions. The record itself shows us that only competent readers like Abish, endowed with the companionship of the Holy Spirit, will see “things as they are” (D&C 93:24); all other sorts of readers are condemned to an endless war of words about possible origins, causes, and motives.

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The Latter-day Saint Reimaging of “the Breath of Life” (Genesis 2:7)

Dana M. Pike

The creation and flood accounts in Genesis in the Hebrew Bible (the Christian Old Testament) contain variations on a phrase commonly translated “the breath of life.” This phrase additionally occurs in some uniquely Latter-day Saint materials relating to creation. After overviewing and analyzing this phrase and its meaning in the Bible, this paper then examines the occurrences of the phrase “the breath of life” in important early Latter-day Saint texts.¹ The purpose of this study is to illustrate and explain how and why many Latter-day Saints have come to often employ the phrase “the breath of life,” transforming its traditional biblical meaning into a new, Restoration-oriented use referencing the embodiment of the first human’s premortal spirit and, by extension, the embodiment of all other people’s spirits.

Therefore, this is not a broad study of the all the issues related to the creation of the first humans on this earth. Rather, my effort is to make sense of one phrase, “the breath of life,” and of what seems to be a conflicting understanding and usage of this phrase. Foundational to the analysis that follows, I contend that: (1) many Latter-day Saints, like others, sometimes apply meaning to biblical texts, rather than finding meaning by

1. I originally intended to deal with the “breath of life” as an excursus in a paper on Ecclesiastes 12:7; see Dana M. Pike, “The ‘Spirit’ That Returns to God in Ecclesiastes 12:7,” in *Let Us Reason Together: Essays in Honor of the Life’s Work of Robert L. Millet*, ed. J. Spencer Fluhman and Brent L. Top (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2016), 189–204. However, such a treatment turned out to be too long to include there, so my thinking on this matter is published separately here.

interpreting the text in its own context; (2) the meaning that is applied or extended to a biblical passage by Latter-day Saints in such cases is typically uniquely Restoration-derived;² and (3), to the point of this paper, this practice is exhibited in a common Latter-day Saint interpretation of the phrase “the breath of life,” resulting in the reimagining of the biblical meaning of this phrase. Furthermore, this reimagining diminishes consideration of the life-generating and life-sustaining power of God manifest in humans and our dependence upon it.

“The Breath of Life” in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament³

The majority of biblical scholars assert that Genesis chapters 1 and 2 present two originally distinct creation accounts from two different sources that were brought together in the redaction of Genesis, although Latter-day Saints usually view this juxtaposition differently.⁴ Whatever one’s approach to what lies behind the “received text” of Genesis, the focus and tone of Genesis 1 and 2 are noticeably different from each other.

2. See, for support of the claims made in points 1 and 2, Dana M. Pike, “The Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord: The Anatomy of an Expression,” *BYU Studies* 41, no. 2 (2002): 149–60 (on Mal. 4:5), my paper on Ecclesiastes 12:7 (see the previous note), and my forthcoming paper on Obadiah 1:21 (2017). These provide other good illustrations of this practice of applying meaning to a biblical passage. This process often involves the language of the KJV, although that is a separate topic. I do not address the *why* of this phenomenon in this paper, but I believe this situation is due, at least in part, (1) to the lay clergy utilized in the Latter-day Saint church (as opposed to a trained clergy with divinity and/or graduate school experience), and (2) to the understandable impulse to find important Restoration perspectives evidenced in the Bible.

3. The discussion that follows takes a canonical approach to the analysis of this phrase, utilizing passages and perspectives from throughout the books of the Hebrew scriptures collectively, while recognizing that these scriptures contain various sources, perspectives, and emphases.

4. For introductory comments on the source critical division between Genesis 1:1–2:4a and the rest of Genesis 2–3, see, for example, Michael D. Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 38–41. For brief observations from Latter-day Saints on approaching this situation, see, for example, Richard D. Draper, S. Kent Brown, and Michael D. Rhodes, *The Pearl of Great Price: A Verse by Verse Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 189–90, 224; and David Bokovoy, *Authoring the Old Testament: Genesis–Deuteronomy* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014), 1–4. Neither further discussion about nor analysis of the Documentary Hypothesis or other source division schema are necessary for the assertions presented in this paper.

Genesis 1 does not refer to “the breath of life” when recounting the creation of the first humans (1:26–28), but shortly thereafter God’s instructions to the first man and woman read, “God [’*ēlohîm*] said, ‘See, I have given you [plural] every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, . . . And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to . . . everything that has the breath of life [*nepeš ḥayyâ*], I have given every green plant for food’” (1:29–30, NRSV⁵). The Hebrew phrase *nepeš ḥayyâ* in this verse is often rendered “breath of life” in modern translations of Genesis (for example, NRSV, NET, ESV, NIV⁶). The noun *nepeš* has a range of related meanings in the Hebrew Bible, including “throat, breath, life, one’s inner self, and soul.”⁷

For this study, it is sufficient to note that the KJV renders *nepeš ḥayyâ* in Genesis 1:30 simply as “life,” that this Hebrew phrase also occurs in Genesis 1:20 and 24 designating animals as “living creatures” (see also Gen. 2:19), and that it occurs at the end of Genesis 2:7 in reference to the first human, where it is regularly translated “living soul” or “living being.”⁸ Although I am wary of the current rendering of the phrase *nepeš ḥayyâ* as “breath of life” in Genesis 1:30, this difference of opinion does not impact the results of this study.

5. All Bible quotations in this paper are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) unless otherwise indicated.

6. These abbreviations designate the following translations: NRSV, New Revised Standard Version (1989); NET, New English Translation (2005); ESV, English Standard Version (2001/2011); NIV, New International Version (1978/2011); KJV, King James Version (1611/1769).

7. The following passages illustrate some of this variety of use and meaning: Ex. 21:23 (“you shall give life for life [*nepeš taḥat nepeš*]”); Ex. 23:12 (“so that your ox and your donkey may have relief, and your homeborn slave and the resident alien may be refreshed [*yinapeš*]”); and Ezek. 24:25 (“their joy and glory, the delight of their eyes and their heart’s [*napšām*; KJV, “minds”] affection, and also their sons and their daughters”). For a convenient overview of the range of meanings with which *nepeš* and its cognates occur in the Hebrew Bible and in Akkadian texts, see Hayim ben Yosef Tawil, *An Akkadian Lexical Companion for Biblical Hebrew: Etymological and Idiomatic Equivalence with Supplement on Biblical Aramaic* (Jersey City, N.J.: KTAV, 2009), 244–46.

8. This same phrase, *nepeš ḥayyâ*, also occurs in Genesis 2:19; 9:12, 15–16; and Ezekiel 47:9, where it is routinely translated “living creatures” in the NRSV and several other modern English translations. In the last of these attestations, it appears that this phrase refers to humans and to animals. See similarly Job 12:10, which contains the phrase *nepeš kol-ḥāy*, “the life of every living thing” (NRSV; “soul of every living thing,” in KJV).

In recounting the creation of the first human (singular), Genesis 2:7 reads, “Then the LORD God [*yhwh ’ēlohîm*] formed [the] man from the dust of the ground, and breathed [*yippaḥ*] into his nostrils the breath of life [*nišmat ḥayyîm*]; and the man became a living being [*nepeš ḥayyâ*; KJV, ‘living soul’].”⁹ The phrase translated “breath of life” employs the Hebrew noun *něšāmâ*, which means “breath, life-force.” This concept is also found in Job 33:4b, “the breath of the Almighty [*nišmat šadday*] gives me life,” which is in harmony with, if not an outright allusion to, Genesis 2:7.

A Hebrew phrase translated “the breath of life” next occurs in Genesis 6:17, where God (*’ēlohîm*) states to Noah, “I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life [*rûaḥ ḥayyîm*]; everything that is on the earth shall die” (KJV). Here the Hebrew term *rûaḥ* is used in place of *něšāmâ*, which, as indicated above, occurs in Genesis 2:7.

The noun *rûaḥ* occurs in the Hebrew Bible with a variety of related meanings. Depending on the context, it can be translated “wind, breath, or spirit.” When “spirit” is intended, *rûaḥ* can designate the internal human life force, the “spirit of the LORD,” the “spirit of God,” the “holy Spirit,” an evil spirit or influence, and a heavenly spirit personage, although this last usage is rare in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁰ Understandably, this situation has occasionally led to differences of opinion as to what is intended by the noun *rûaḥ* in certain passages (see below).

A phrase translated “the breath of life” occurs only twice more in the Hebrew Bible: Genesis 7:15, which reads *rûaḥ ḥayyîm*, and Genesis 7:22, which has the combination *nišmat-rûaḥ ḥayyîm*; this latter phrase could be translated “the breath of the spirit of life,” but is usually just rendered as “the breath of life.” These two passages in Genesis 7 refer, respectively, to living creatures boarding Noah’s ark and to the death of “all flesh” not safely on the ark when the floodwaters came. As in Genesis 6:17, “the

9. The affirmation that human flesh will return to the dust at death is first announced by deity to humans in Genesis 3:19 (“you are dust, and to dust you shall return”); however, that passage does not say anything about “the breath of life” at death.

10. See 1 Kings 22:21 and 2 Chronicles 18:20 for a reference to a “spirit” among the heavenly host: “a spirit [*hārûaḥ*, literally “the spirit”] came forward and stood before the LORD.” Although this *rûaḥ* may have been a premortal spirit designated to eventually come to earth, there is nothing in the passage itself that suggests this. In the case of the phrase “an evil spirit,” the Bible appears to be using *rûaḥ* as an influence or power, not in reference to a personage, although that is a possible reading as well; see, for example, 1 Samuel 16:14, 23; 18:10.

breath of life” was found in “all flesh,” both animals and humans, which indicates that the first man (Gen. 2:7) was not the only being to ever possess this divine animating power (it is, after all, the breath of *life*).

The translation of *rûah* as “breath” in the phrase “the breath of life” helps inform the interpretation of Ecclesiastes 12:7, that at death “the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath [*rûah*; ‘life’s breath’ in the NET Bible] returns to God who gave it” (NRSV). Contrast the KJV rendering of this verse (“and the spirit [*rûah*] shall return unto God who gave it”), which some Latter-day Saints have used as support for a premortal spirit returning to God at death. As I have argued elsewhere, neither Ecclesiastes 12:7 nor 3:19 (“For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath [*rûah*]”) supports the Restoration view of the embodiment of premortal spirits and must be carefully distinguished from the distinctly different context and wording of Alma 40:11 (“the spirits of all men . . . are taken home to that God who gave them life”), which has the plural form “spirits.”¹¹

That the terms *něšāmâ* and *rûah* overlap in meaning, including in the phrase translated “the breath of life,” is illustrated not only by their combined use in Genesis 7:22 (cited above), but also by other biblical passages in which they occur together.¹² For example, in Isaiah 42:5 these two words could be viewed as poetically parallel: “Thus says God, the LORD . . . who spread out the earth and . . . who gives breath [*něšāmâ*] to the people upon it and spirit [*rûah*] to those who walk in it.”¹³ Similarly, Job 27:3 reads: “as long as my breath [*nišmāti*] is in me and the spirit [*rûah*] of God is in my nostrils.” The claim of having “the spirit [*rûah*] of God . . . in my nostrils” plainly points toward “breath.” To appreciate the variability that can occur in translating the nouns *něšāmâ* and *rûah*, contrast the NET Bible’s rendition of Job 27:3: “for while my spirit [*nišmāti*] is still in me, and the breath [*rûah*] from God is in my nostrils,” reversing the NRSV’s rendition of “breath . . . spirit” (see also Gen. 7:22;

11. Pike, “The ‘Spirit’ That Returns to God.” Of course, the Book of Mormon is available to us only in translation, so we do not know for certain what words, Hebrew or Egyptian, were used originally.

12. See, similarly, Karin Schöpflin, “Breath,” in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, ed. Hans-Josef Klauck and others, vol. 4 (Boston: de Gruyter, 2012), 458: “Obviously, *něšāmâ* and *rûah* have become synonymous as they are sometimes set in parallel in poetic texts.”

13. Compare the NET Bible, which renders the last phrase in Isaiah 42:5 as “the one who gives breath to the people on it [the earth], and life to those who live on it.”

2 Sam. 22:16; Job 32:8; 33:4).¹⁴ And lastly, Elihu declares to Job and others, “If he [God/`ēl] set his heart upon man, if he [God] gather unto himself his spirit [*rûah*] and his breath [*něšāmâ*]; All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust” (KJV, Job 34:14–15; similarly rendered in the NRSV and NET Bible). The phrase “his spirit and his breath” is routinely understood to refer to God’s spirit and breath, the life force he imparts to humans to enliven them.

The interchange of *něšāmâ* and *rûah* in the phrases translated “the breath of life,” plus the overlapping use of both these terms in other poetic passages, supports the understanding that “the breath of life” is a concept and power greater than humans and animals merely breathing and that when they no longer respire they die (although such breathing is mentioned in some biblical passages, such as Psalm 104:29). According to the passages quoted above, the Bible depicts Yahweh (the LORD/Jehovah) breathing life into the first human, and that deity gives “breath [*něšāmâ*] to the people,” so that Job, for example, can claim that in addition to his own breath being in him, “the spirit/breath [*rûah*] of God [is also] . . . in my nostrils.” Thus, “the breath of life” seems to be more than just human or animal breath, although breathing is an obvious sign of life, and the lack thereof occurs at death.

The question naturally arises then, what *is* “the breath of life”? Non-Latter-day Saint scholars have traditionally and consistently viewed the phrase “the breath of life” in all the Genesis passages (2:7 [with *něšāmâ*]; 6:17 and 7:15 [with *rûah*]; and 7:22 [with *nišmat-rûah*]) as designating a universal, God-given, animating power or life-breath—“the essence of life”—that provides and sustains life in all flesh, people and animals, during their earthly existence, and which they forfeit at death (compare Ps. 104:29; Eccl. 12:7).¹⁵ Although this “breath” comes to represent life

14. Similarly, the flexibility of the nouns *rûah* and *nepes* (“throat, life, human, soul”) are evident when they occasionally occur in poetic parallel. For example, Job 12:10 reads, “In his [the LORD’s] hand is the life [*nepes*; KJV translates “soul”] of every living thing and the breath [*rûah*] of every human being.”

15. See, as a recent example, Ed Noort, “Taken from the Soil, Gifted with the Breath of Life: The Anthropology of Gen 2:7 in Context,” in *Dust of the Ground and Breath of Life (Gen 2:7): The Problem of a Dualistic Anthropology in Early Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Jacques T. A. G. M. van Ruiten and George H. van Kooten (Brill: Boston, 2016), 1–15, who states, “I understand *nšmt hyym* in the classical way as the intangible life force which animates the body” (9).

The phrase “essence of life” is from Richard Whitekettle, “A Study in Scarlet: The Physiology and Treatment of Blood, Breath, and Fish in Ancient Israel,”

itself and is evident in all people as they inhale and exhale, the emphasis in creating the first human is on the power and action of Yahweh, who “breathed [*yippah*] into his nostrils the breath of life [*nišmat ḥayyim*]” (Gen. 2:7).¹⁶ This figurative representation of Deity instilling life into the first created human thus powerfully conveys the notion that divine power is necessary for human life to exist, illustrates that this divine input is beyond human capacity to replicate without divine assistance, and intimately connects the Creator and the created.

Significantly, not only the first man lived by receiving “the breath of life” from Yahweh (Gen. 2:7), but “all flesh”—human and animal—was animated by this “breath” (Gen. 6:17; 7:15, 22). And all flesh on land with this “breath” (except for those on the Ark) died when waters covered the earth (Gen. 7:21–22). Genesis thus represents a distinction between human and animal flesh on the one hand and vegetation on the other; the latter is never said to have “the breath of life.”

Some non-Latter-day Saint scholars, such as D. H. Johnson, have emphasized that in Genesis 2:7 “God breathes into humans the breath [*nišmat*] of life,” but “the same is not said of animals, cf. Gen. 2:19.”¹⁷ Similarly, Nahum M. Sarna has claimed, “The uniqueness of the Hebrew phrase *nishmat ḥayyim* [in Gen 2:7] matches the singular nature of the human body, which, unlike the creatures of the animal world, is directly inspirited by God Himself.”¹⁸ However, Genesis 7:21–22 indicates humans *and* animals—all flesh—have “the breath [*nišmat-rûah*] of life.” And for Latter-day Saints, Moses 3:7 and 3:19 explicitly indicate that both

Journal of Biblical Literature 135, no. 4 (2016): 703. Whitekettle assesses the difference between humans and land animals, identified in the Bible as having the “breath of life,” and fish, which are not so identified.

See my comments in relation to the “breath of life” and the light of Christ and Doctrine and Covenants 88:13 at the end of this study.

16. In addition to the “breath of life,” all humans and animals also have “life blood” (for example, Gen. 9:4–5: “Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. For your own lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning,” and Deut. 12:23, “only be sure that you do not eat the blood; for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the meat;” compare Lev. 17:11, 14; Prov. 1:18). In the received text of the Old Testament, it is these two components, “breath” and “blood,” that animate “flesh,” and thus represent and sustain life.

17. D. H. Johnson, “Life,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity and Diversity of Scripture*, ed. Brian S. Rosner and others (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 641.

18. Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary, Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 17.

man and animals were given “the breath of life” in creation (mentioned again further below).

This assessment of “the breath of life” in Genesis as a divinely originating life force is in harmony with Ezekiel 37, in which Ezekiel saw a valley full of dead bones and was commanded to prophesy, saying, “Thus says the LORD God to these bones: I will cause breath [*rûah*] to enter you, and you shall live.”¹⁹ After the bones and sinews and flesh came together, there was still “no breath [*rûah*] in them.” But after Ezekiel commanded “the breath [*rûah*]” to “breathe [*pehiy*] upon these slain,” they lived and rose to their feet. By way of explanation, and using the reconstitution of human bodies to symbolize the future gathering of Israelites back to their land, Yahweh said, “I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And . . . bring you up from your graves. . . . I will put my spirit [or, breath; *rûhî*] within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil” (Ezek. 37:5, 8–10, 12–14). Significantly, Yahweh does *not* say he will put “your spirits within you,” but rather, “I will put *my spirit* [or, breath; *rûhî*] within you, and you shall live.” This use of “my spirit” likely draws on, or at least resonates with, Genesis 6:3: “Then the LORD said, ‘My spirit [*rûhî*] shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh.’”²⁰ The biblical emphasis is therefore on the *divine* spirit or breath that gives and sustains human life. Presumably, this spirit or breath is the same as the divine “breath of life,” which animates all flesh.

Despite the less-than-precise variety of related meanings with which *rûah* and *něšāmâ* are employed in the Hebrew Bible, it is evident that in the form we have received them, the Hebrew scriptures do not support the idea that “the breath of life” is anything other than a figurative representation of a divinely originating power that animates all earthly human and animal flesh. The notion of figurative elements in

19. Interestingly, but not authoritatively, the LDS Topical Guide includes this verse, Ezekiel 37:5, under the heading “Breath of Life.” Nine other verses in the Old Testament are also listed under this entry, although some are less relevant. On the unusual form “LORD GOD,” here and elsewhere in the Old Testament, see Dana M. Pike, “The Name and Titles of God in the Old Testament,” *Religious Educator* 11, no. 1 (2010): 17–32, especially 25.

20. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), 266–69, provides an overview of the challenges inherent in this verse, including the first phrase, and various suggestions to make sense of it. The traditional translation seems preferable, but due to textual uncertainties, Genesis 6:3 can be used only as qualified support for the claims made in this study.

the biblical account of creation is nothing new for Latter-day Saints, who accept, among other things, that the account of Eve’s creation from Adam’s rib is figurative.²¹

Worth noting in passing is that the Hebrew words translated as “breath of life” are rendered in the Greek Septuagint (LXX) as *pnoēn zōēs*, “wind/breath of life,” in Genesis 2:7 and 7:22, and as *pneuma zōēs*, “wind/breath/spirit of life,” in Genesis 6:17 and 7:15.²² In the Greek New Testament, Paul taught the Athenians that God “himself gives to all mortals life and breath [*pnoēn*] and all things” (Acts 17:25). And the phrase *pneuma zōēs*, “the breath of life,” occurs in Revelation 11:11 in the prophecy of the reanimation of two “prophets” of God whose dead bodies lie in the streets of Jerusalem for three and a half days.²³ These attestations exemplify the similar use and meaning of this phrase as just reviewed in the Hebrew scriptures.

Also worth noting is that when discussing the biblical concept of “the breath of life,” commentators sometimes refer to the Mesopotamian rituals that were performed to animate and thus initiate the functioning of statues of deities, particularly the *mis pi*, “washing of the mouth,” and the *pit pi*, “opening of the mouth.”²⁴ An Egyptian ritual used with

21. Spencer W. Kimball, “The Blessings and Responsibilities of Womanhood,” *Ensign* 6 (March 1976): 71, taught, “The story of the rib, of course, is figurative.” See similarly, Bruce R. McConkie, “Christ and the Creation,” *Ensign* 12 (June 1982): 15. In the same article, after referencing Moses 3:16–17, which relates the prohibition on eating the fruit of the “tree of knowledge of good and evil,” McConkie asserted, “Again the account is speaking figuratively” (15).

22. The Septuagint is the early Greek translation of Hebrew scriptures produced by Jews living in Egypt in the third through second centuries BC. See, for example, Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, eds., *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (New York: Oxford, 2009), in which Robert J. V. Hiebert rendered Genesis 2:7 as “And God formed man, dust from the earth, and breathed into his face a breath of life, and the man became a living being” (7). For a recent discussion of the translation of Genesis 2:7 in the Septuagint, see Michaël N. van der Meer, “Anthropology in the Ancient Greek Versions of Gen 2:7,” in van Ruiten and van Kooten, *Dust of the Ground and Breath of Life*, 36–57. Van der Meer observes that despite some minor variations, “the Greek translation [of Gen 2:7] seems to render the Hebrew in the same literal way as we find throughout the Greek Pentateuch” (41).

23. See also “the breath of life” in relation to the creation of Adam in 2 Esdras 3:5 (Latin, *spiritum uitae*, in the Apocrypha) and in the Apocalypse of Adam 2:5 (Coptic).

24. Catherine L. McDowell’s recent volume, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden: The Creation of Humankind in Genesis 2:5–3:24 in Light of the mis pi*

divine images, the *wpt-r*3, “opening of the mouth,” has also been cited in relation to Genesis 2:7.²⁵ And there are occasional references to a divine “breath of life” in other Mesopotamian and Egyptian sources. However, these attestations from the greater ancient Near East and their potential value for understanding the biblical “breath of life” require a separate study and will not be further discussed here.²⁶

Latter-day Saints and “the Breath of Life”

Latter-day Saint commentaries from the past century often present a different and fairly consistent approach to the phrase “the breath of life” as found in Genesis 2:7 and its counterparts in Restoration scripture. For example, Milton Hunter (1951) observed, “The preceding scriptures (Abraham 5:7; Moses 3:7) make it clear that man’s mortal body is composed of the elements of the earth and in that mortal body God placed man’s spirit and thereby ‘man became a living soul.’”²⁷ Since

pīt pī and the wpt-r Rituals of Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2015), reviews and adds to this discussion, and includes references to important earlier studies, such as C. Walker and M. Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia: The Mesopotamian Miš Pi Ritual* (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2001). Little wonder that Israelite prophets reproved the worship of lifeless idols: “goldsmiths are all put to shame by their idols; for their images are false, and there is no breath in them” (Jer. 10:14; compare Hab. 2:19).

25. See, for example, McDowell, *Image of God in the Garden of Eden*, 85–93; and Emily Teeter, *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), 59–66, 139–43 (the latter focusing on the ritual animation of mummies).

26. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw is one of the few Latter-day Saint commentators who has published at least a few remarks on the ancient Near Eastern context of this topic. See his *In God’s Image and Likeness: Ancient and Modern Perspectives on the Book of Moses* (Salt Lake City: Eborn Publishing, 2010), 158, where he briefly mentions the *miš pi* and *pīt pi* rituals.

27. Milton R. Hunter, *Pearl of Great Price Commentary* (1951; repr. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), 105. See also H. Donl Peterson, *The Pearl of Great Price: A History and Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 133, 291, who after quoting Moses 3:7 and Abraham 5:7 only provides quotes from Latter-day Saint Church leaders on the creation of Adam’s body and the embodiment of Adam’s premortal spirit.

I remind readers again that I am not dealing with the larger issues of the actual creation of Adam and Eve in this paper. For important statements on the Latter-day Saint understanding of the creation of Adam and Eve, see Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund (First Presidency of The

Moses 3:7 says nothing about Adam’s spirit, this raises the question of whether Hunter was implying that “the breath of life” is spirit embodiment or whether he was merely extending to Moses 3:7 the additional information found in Abraham 5:7 (discussed below); unfortunately, he did not explicate his thinking on the matter. Likewise, Ellis Rasmussen (1994) wrote concerning Genesis 2:7, “the spiritual being [Adam’s premortal spirit] who had previously been created was at this point put into a tabernacle of flesh constituted of elements of the earth,” but Rasmussen did not provide any specific comment on “the breath of life.”²⁸ More explicitly, D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner claim in regard to Genesis 2:7, “From other sources, it is evident that the term ‘breath of life’ refers to the [premort] spirit, for it is the spirit combined with the body that constitutes ‘a living soul’ (D&C 88:15).”²⁹ These “other sources” are not specified by the authors, but presumably include uniquely Latter-day Saint scripture and temple language.

In none of these three examples of Latter-day Saint commentaries is the phrase “the breath of life” really discussed as figurative or interpreted *in its context*, but rather the Restoration doctrine of premortal spirit-beings inhabiting physical bodies on this earth is *applied* to the phrase and the verse in which it occurs.³⁰ So, it is to this type of application that I now turn attention by reviewing, in chronological order, the most important points of evidence bearing on the Latter-day Saint

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), “The Origin of Man,” *Improvement Era* 13 (November 1909): 75–81 (reprinted in *Ensign* 32 [February 2002]: 26–30), and the follow-up statement in *Improvement Era* 13 (April 10, 1910): 570.

28. Ellis T. Rasmussen, *A Latter-day Saint Commentary on the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 10. Rasmussen further stated, “and this body was energized through breathing the atmosphere of this earth.” He did not indicate the basis for his last claim (about breathing the atmosphere), although we can confidently assume that the newly created human *did* need to breathe. However, scripture focuses on the act of *God* breathing into the first human the breath of life, not on humans breathing the air.

29. D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner, *Verse by Verse: The Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013), 1:32. This is their only real comment on the phrase in question. The bulk of their comments on Genesis 2:7 (pages 32–36), relate to Adam’s physical body not having evolved from lower life forms.

30. I consider the act of applying meaning to scripture passages to be one form of “eisegesis,” which means reading one’s views or beliefs into a text. This is routinely contrasted with “exegesis,” which means finding meaning by reading out of the text, by allowing the text and its context to guide the interpretation.

understanding of “the breath of life.” Readers will note that although it appears midway through this review, special emphasis is given to Abraham 5:7. Lastly, a few comments on “breath” in the Book of Mormon precede my review of “the breath of life” in Latter-day Saint sources. Brief comments of assessment are provided for each of these, after which synthesizing remarks conclude this study.

The Book of Mormon (1830). The Book of Mormon was primarily translated in 1829 and was printed and ready for distribution in March 1830. This thus qualifies as the earliest evidence for a Latter-day Saint contribution to understanding “the breath of life,” even though that phrase does not actually occur therein. However, two passages include the word “breath” that are reminiscent of Genesis 2:7 and “the breath of life.”³¹

Nephi’s brother Jacob, in preaching the plan of the “great Creator,” emphasizes that “the paradise of God must deliver up the spirits of the righteous, and the grave deliver up the body of the righteous; and the spirit and the body is restored to itself again, and all men become incorruptible, and immortal, and they are living souls” (2 Ne. 9:12–13). The “spirits” referenced in this passage are individual spirit personages that inhabited mortal bodies on this earth and that will inhabit immortal bodies through the resurrection (see also Alma 11:45; D&C 88:15). However, a few verses later, Jacob also refers to people being “restored to that God who gave them breath” during mortality (9:26). This harks back to Genesis 2:7 (as does the phrase “living souls” at the end of 9:13) and God’s breathing “the breath of life” into the first human. Jacob’s use of “breath” in the Book of Mormon translation as we have it is distinct from the “spirits of men” referenced previously. It is thus plausible that Jacob understood the “breath” given by God as separate from spirit personages that inhabited bodies in mortality.³²

31. Of course, “breath” occurs in other contexts in the Book of Mormon. See, for instance, Ether 15:31, in which Shiz, “after that he had struggled for breath, he died.” And 2 Nephi 21:4 and 30:9 teach about God that “with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.” This imagery is also found in the Bible, for example, Exodus 15:10; Psalm 18:15.

32. Note that 2 Nephi 9:26 footnote “g” references Genesis 2:7 and 6:17, which both mention “the breath of life.” But Doctrine and Covenants 77:2 is also cited, which states, “the spirit of man in the likeness of his person, as also the spirit of the beast, and every other creature which God has created.” This seems to clearly refer to spirit personages. It is thus not clear to me whether or not those responsible for these particular scripture citations considered Jacob’s

Similarly, Benjamin encourages his people to “serve him [God] 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” (Mosiah 2:21). Although it could be argued that Jacob and Benjamin are merely referring to God giving us life in general and thus allowing us to breathe, Benjamin’s mention that God “has created” people and lends them “breath” can plausibly be connected with the concept of “the breath of life,” the life force depicted in the Bible as given by God to the first and all subsequent humans.³³

There is nothing in these Book of Mormon passages to suggest that “breath” is equivalent to the embodying of a spirit personage in a mortal body, and what does occur is suggestive of seeing the God-given “breath [of life]” as distinct from spirit personages.

Moses 3:7 (1830–1833). The Selections from the Book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price were originally scribed onto what is now designated Old Testament Manuscript 1 (OT1) from June 1830 to February 1831 as part of what has become known as the Joseph Smith Translation (JST). Later copied onto Old Testament Manuscript 2 (OT2) in March 1831, this latter manuscript exhibits subsequent revisions, perhaps made through 1833. OT2 is thus considered the final manuscript text of Moses, although no changes were made to Moses 3:7 on OT2 as compared to its occurrence on OT1.³⁴

Again, quoting Genesis 2:7: “the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath [*nišmat*] of life; and the man became a living being.” Creation of the first human is presented in Genesis 2:7 as combining the dust of the earth and “the breath [*nišmat*] of life.” The parallel passage in Moses 3:7, as attested in OT2 and all printed editions of Moses, contains additional wording at the end of the verse, but the first portion of the verse essentially matches

reference to “breath” as synonymous with “spirit personage.” Footnote “g” also cites Mosiah 2:21 and Doctrine and Covenants 93:33.

33. I thank Michael Biggerstaff for suggesting to me a potential connection between or dependence on “the breath of life” and the content of Mosiah 2:21. Also, I thank Jack Welch for wondering out loud about the report that Jesus “breathed [*enephusēsen*] on them [his apostles] and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit [*pneuma*]’” (John 20:22) and how that passage may or may not draw upon the phrase “the breath of life,” although I do not explore this latter passage further herein.

34. Kent P. Jackson, *The Book of Moses and the Joseph Smith Translation Manuscripts* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2005), 3, 6–7, 9, 53.

the KJV rendition of Genesis 2:7, with the exception of the personal pronoun: “And I, the Lord God, formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul, the first flesh upon the earth, the first man also” (see also Moses 3:19, in which the animals are created and animated with “the breath of life”).³⁵ Thus, Joseph Smith’s New Translation of Genesis 2:7 in Moses 3:7 makes no change to the phrase under consideration, in spite of the fact that the latter portion of the verse was expanded.³⁶

The fact that Joseph Smith did *not* revise Genesis 2:7 to provide a further or different meaning of “the breath of life” could be cited as early Latter-day Saint prophetic acceptance of the traditional biblically based understanding of this phrase as it occurs in Restoration scripture. This is further reinforced by the fact that Joseph Smith did *not* revise or expand on the phrase “the breath of life” in Genesis 6:17; 7:15, 22, in the JST process.³⁷ However, one could argue that the Book of Moses was produced early in Joseph Smith’s ministry, before he had gained a complete understanding of the doctrine of premortality, which seems to have impacted his use of the phrase “the breath of life” (discussed below).³⁸

The 1835 Edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. The 1835 Doctrine and Covenants was published in Kirtland, Ohio, under the direction of Joseph Smith and with the assistance of Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon, and Frederick G. Williams (see the preface). Section 2 of part 1 in that edition is now known as Lecture Two of the Lectures on Faith. It contains this reference to “the breath of life” in paragraph 20: “Having

35. Jackson, *Book of Moses*, 74.

36. For clarification, Joseph Smith and his contemporaries referred to his efforts as the New Translation. Latter-day Saints began to refer to this as the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) in the 1970s. Historically, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (now Community of Christ) has published this work as *The Holy Scriptures: Inspired Version*. For comments on this, see Scott H. Fahrling, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2004), 3.

37. This claim can be verified by checking the appropriate verses in Fahrling, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible*, 598, 627–28.

38. For a brief overview of Joseph Smith’s growing understanding of the concept of premortal existence, see Terryl L. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 152–56. See also Charles H. Harrell, “The Development of the Doctrine of Preexistence, 1830–1844,” *BYU Studies* 28, no. 2 (1988): 75–96.

shown, then, in the first instance, that God began to converse with man, immediately after he ‘breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,’ and that he did not cease to manifest himself to him, even after his fall.”³⁹ As with Moses 3:7, “the breath of life” is here presented matter-of-factly as an integral part of God’s creative activity without further explanation or interpretation. This same lecture was reprinted with no change to the paragraph in question in the 1844 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants.⁴⁰

Abraham 5:7 (1842). Abraham 5:7 provides a significant twist on the claim that “the breath of life” represents the embodying of a premortal spirit. This is because in reporting the creation of the first human, Abraham 5:7 explicitly mentions three factors: “And the Gods formed man from the dust of the ground, and took his spirit (that is, the man’s spirit), and put it into him; and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.” The parenthetical explanation, “that is, the man’s spirit,” clarifies the meaning of “his spirit” by distinguishing that “spirit” from the divine “breath of life,” which was “breathed into his [the man’s] nostrils” *after* the embodiment of his premortal spirit.⁴¹ There is nothing in the grammar or wording of this verse that suggests the second component, “the man’s spirit,” and the third component, “the breath of life,” are equivalent (that is, it does *not* read, “this was the breath of life”). Taken solely on its own, this verse appears to

39. There is no extant preprinting manuscript of these lectures. Thus, this 1835 text is the earliest attestation of these lectures and their wording. “Lecture Second,” in *Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of the Latter Day Saints* (Kirtland, Ohio: F. G. Williams & Co., 1835), [12], available online at Church Historian’s Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/doctrine-and-covenants-1835/20> (accessed April 15, 2016).

40. For a discussion of the authorship of these lectures, see, for example, Noel B. Reynolds, “The Case for Sidney Rigdon as Author of the Lectures on Faith,” *Journal of Mormon History* 31, no. 3 (2005): 1–41 [the title page mistakenly identifies this issue as volume 32]; and Larry E. Dahl, “Authorship and History of the Lectures on Faith,” in *The Lectures on Faith in Historical Perspective*, ed. Larry E. Dahl and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1990), 1–21. Even though it appears that there may be less from Joseph Smith and more from Sidney Rigdon in these lectures, they were published by the Church in early editions of the Doctrine and Covenants and thus constitute evidence worth considering in this review of “the breath of life.”

41. To explicitly reiterate, according to *my* reading of the verse, the putting of Adam’s [premortally] spirit into his physical body is not and cannot be in this particular verse the same as God breathing “into his nostrils the breath of life.”

mention three distinct factors or components in the creation of this earth's first human.

The modern history of the book of Abraham began when Joseph Smith acquired Egyptian papyri and mummies in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1835. His journal entry of July 6, 1835, reads, "I, with W[illiam] W. Phelps and O[liver] Cowdery, as scribes, commenced . . . the translation of some of the characters or hieroglyphics, and much to our joy found that one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham."⁴² But Abraham 5 was not published until March 15, 1842, in Nauvoo in *Times and Seasons*. No preprinting manuscript survives, so we are dependent upon that first published edition for the text of 5:7. The words of this verse have not been altered in any subsequent edition of the Book of Abraham, although parentheses were added in place of commas around the phrase "that is, the man's spirit."⁴³

Some Latter-day Saint commentators have specifically equated the embodying of Adam's premortal spirit with "the breath of life" in Abraham 5:7. For example, after quoting this verse, Ehat and Cook claimed, "As shown in the last note, Joseph Smith interpreted the phrase *breath of life* in Genesis 2:7 to mean *Adam's [premortals] spirit*, which spirit (ruwach [*sic*]) was put into the body to form a living soul" (italics in original).⁴⁴ However, according to my reading, Joseph Smith was *not*

42. "History, 1838–1856, Volume B-1 [1 September 1834–2 November 1838]," 596, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, on Church Historian's Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-b-1-1-september-1834-2-november-1838/50>.

43. On these matters, see Brian M. Hauglid, *A Textual History of the Book of Abraham: Manuscripts and Editions* (Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship and Brigham Young University, 2010), 4–6, 14, 43, 222. This explicit indication of a premortal spirit continues on into 5:8—"And the Gods planted a garden, eastward in Eden, and there they put the man, whose spirit they had put into the body which they had formed"—although this does not detract from the fact that "the breath of life" was also and separately mentioned in verse 7. The designation "whose spirit" in verse 8 must refer back to the premortal spirit of this first man, as mentioned in verse 7.

44. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980), 281 n. 4. Abraham 5:7 was quoted in n. 3 on the same page. I do not know which one of the editors was primarily responsible for this note. Furthermore, the word "ruwach [*ruah*]," *spirit*, does not occur in Genesis 2:7 (see discussion above). See similar claims about

equating “breath of life” with spirit embodiment. The plain sense of Abraham 5:7 is that after a physical body was made, a premortal spirit entered it, *and then* the Gods “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,” which presumably somehow enlivened and synergized the component parts of this new creation. Thus, in *this* scripture passage, “the breath of life” does *not* appear to be the same as a premortal spirit personage entering a mortal body, since they are mentioned separately.

The content of Abraham 5:7 is an obvious expansion on Genesis 2:7. And while in and of itself this verse does not explain what “the breath of life” is, it does distinguish between the breath of life and the embodying of a premortal spirit. It thereby affirms the reading of Genesis 2:7 and Moses 3:7 and further adds the Restoration knowledge of the premortal existence of spirits *without conflating or equating* spirit embodiment and “the breath of life.” Draper, Brown, and Rhodes concur. Following their comment on Moses 3:7, they state, “The Abrahamic account is more detailed: . . . [quotes 5:7]. Adam’s preexistent spirit was placed in his body; *then it was animated with the breath of life* to become a living soul.”⁴⁵ Likewise, Kent Jackson has affirmed the distinction between the embodiment of Adam’s spirit and the animating “breath of life” in Abraham 5:7: “next a divine act brought the body-spirit combination to life.”⁴⁶ As further support for this assertion, Bruce R. McConkie, after referencing Ezekiel 37:5–10, stated, “Actually, as Abraham’s account of the creation points out, *there is a distinction between the spirit [personage] and the breath of life,*” after which he quoted Abraham 5:7.⁴⁷

Therefore, Abraham 5:7 provides the most official, straightforward Latter-day Saint indication of *and* the best canonical support for understanding that the “breath of life” given by God to the first human and, by extension, to all other humans and animals, is different and distinct from the embodying of premortal spirits. As indicated above, “the breath of life” appears to designate a separate, figuratively expressed divine power or animating influence that helps a physical body and a premortal spirit “click” and exist together in mortality.

Abraham 5:7 made by Milton Hunter, cited previously, and David J. Ridges, *Your Study of the Old Testament Made Easier*, 3 vols. (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 2009), 1:158, 175.

45. Draper, Brown, and Rhodes, *Pearl of Great Price*, 223; italics added.

46. Kent P. Jackson, *The Restored Gospel and the Book of Genesis* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001), 83.

47. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 105, s.v. “Breath of Life”; italics added.

Comment in *Times and Seasons* (1842). Two weeks after the publication of Abraham 5, an editorial appeared in the April 1, 1842, edition of *Times and Seasons*, entitled “Try the Spirits”; it was signed “Ed.,” which was presumably Joseph Smith.⁴⁸ He begins by noting, “Recent occurrences that have transpired amongst us render it an imperative duty devolving upon me to say something in relation to the spirits by which men are actuated. It is evident from the apostle’s writings that many false spirits existed in their day.”

Partway through his discussion of false spirits, past and present, he references Jemima Wilkinson (1752–1819), who had claimed a powerful, illness-induced (near-) death experience after which she became a well-known preacher.⁴⁹ Her claims, as understood by Joseph Smith, provided the context for him to make the following statement:

Jemimah Wilkinson was another prophetess that figured largely in America in the last century. She stated that she was taken sick and died, and that her soul [spirit personage] went to heaven where it still continues. Soon after her body was reanimated with the spirit and power of Christ. . . . But Jemimah, according to her testimony died, and rose again before the time mentioned in the scriptures. The idea of her soul being in heaven while her body was on earth is also preposterous; when God breathed into man’s nostrils he became a living soul, before that he did not live, and when that was taken away his body died; and so did our Saviour when the spirit left his body; nor did his body live until his spirit returned in the power of his resurrection.⁵⁰

Joseph Smith’s statement that “when God breathed into man’s nostrils he became a living soul,” clearly draws on Genesis 2:7. Interestingly, this statement is fronted by his reference to Wilkinson’s body and “soul” (spirit), and followed by the statement that Jesus’s dead body did not live

48. “Try the Spirits,” *Times and Seasons* 3 (April 1, 1842): 743–48, available online at “Mormon Publications: 19th and 20th Centuries,” *BYU Harold B. Lee Library Digital Collections*, <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/NCMP1820-1846/id/9200/rec/4> (accessed May 20, 2016). This editorial was later included in *History of the Church*. See now “History, 1838–1856, Volume C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842],” 1303, Church History Library, on Church Historian’s Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/477>.

49. See, for example, Herbert A. Wisbey, Jr., *Pioneer Prophetess: Jemima Wilkinson, the Publick Universal Friend* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1964).

50. “Try the Spirits,” 746.

again until “his spirit returned” into it at his resurrection. This could potentially be construed to indicate that Joseph Smith thought God “breathed” our premortal spirits into Adam and the rest of us. However, following his comment on God breathing life into “man,” without which we die, Joseph Smith observed that “so did our Savior when *the spirit* left his body” (emphasis added). “The spirit” does not appear to be equivalent to “his spirit,” which follows later in the sentence. God’s breath and “the spirit” are mentioned in conjunction with a person’s spirit, but it does not appear they are intended by Joseph Smith as synonymous.

Comment in *History of the Church* (1843). According to the entry in William Clayton’s journal for May 17, 1843, “In the evening we went to hear a Methodist preacher lecture. After he got through Pres. J. [Joseph Smith] offered some corrections as follows. The 7th verse of C 2 of Genesis ought to read God breathed into Adam his spirit or breath of life, but when the word ‘ruach’ applies to Eve it should be translated lives.”⁵¹ This journal entry appeared in revised form in *History of the Church* (published 1858) as follows: “In the evening went to hear a Methodist preacher lecture, after he got thro’ I offered some corrections as follows, the 7th verse of 2 ch of Genesis ought to read God breathed into Adam his Spirit or breath of life, but when the word ‘ruach’ applies to Eve it should be translated lives.”⁵²

It would certainly not be surprising that Joseph Smith was connecting the embodying of Adam’s premortal spirit with the creation account in Genesis 2, since this journal entry is recorded a year following the publication of the Book of Abraham. However, besides the question of how accurately Clayton captured what Joseph Smith actually said, there are multiple challenges with this entry as it exists, not the least of which is what was intended by “his spirit” (or “his Spirit” in *History of the Church*). Without further qualification, this phrase does not confidently reveal whether the intended “spirit” is God’s spirit (presumably what the editors of *History of the Church* understood by capitalizing “Spirit”) and thus analogous with “the breath of life,” or whether “s/Spirit” is intended to communicate Adam’s premortal spirit, equating spirit embodiment

51. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 203.

52. “History, 1838–1856, Volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” 1552, Church History Library, on Church Historian’s Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/195> (accessed April 15, 2016). For comments on the compilation and publication of the *History of the Church*, see comments provided at the web address just cited.

with “the breath of life.” The former option seems more plausible, given the fuller expression that “God breathed into Adam his spirit”; however, it does not reveal what particularly new insight was intended by Joseph Smith in the first part of his comment to the pastor, at least as it has been preserved (*if* a new insight was even intended in that portion of his comments⁵³). Additionally, this journal entry could plausibly be read to imply that the Hebrew word *rûah* occurs in Genesis 2:7. It does not.

53. On Joseph Smith’s 1843 statement quoted above, see also the brief comments of Bradshaw, *In God’s Image and Likeness*, 158, and the comments of Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 281 nn. 3, 4. I presume this is another example of Joseph Smith doing theologically expansive “translation.” See more fully my comments on this activity in regards to the King Follett sermon, in the next subsection.

Although off-topic here, the second portion of Joseph Smith’s comment, as we have it, is very challenging, but may be the context in which his new insight was expressed. Challenges include the fact that no form of the Hebrew noun *rûah* occurs in association with “Eve” in the Hebrew Bible, nor does the concept of “lives,” as in eternal lives, occur in the Bible as we have received it. I thank my colleague, Matthew J. Grey, for discussing this journal entry with me. Matt also drew my attention to published comments from W. W. Phelps that seem to provide some background to Joseph Smith’s statement just quoted about Eve and “lives” (presented here as originally published): “And again, the expression of Eve, after the birth of Seth, mentioned in the same chapter, goes to show the continuation of the priesthood. For God hath *appointed* me another seed instead of Abel whom Cain slew. The Hebrew word ‘*zarang* [*zara*’]; translated *seed* would come nearer the truth, rendered *power of lives*, as will appear by reading (Gen. 1:12, and Gal. 3:16,) for Christ is the power of life in trees, animals and man, as well as the priesthood. Instead of translating *Habal* (Abel greek) ‘*breathe*,’ it should be ‘*breath of lives*,’ for God breathed into him the breath of life and he became a living soul: Then Eve’s language would be: *For God hath appointed* another power of life instead of the breath of life whom Cain slew. Literally a priest for souls, I mean to be liberal and not warp an old language into national notions. My translation of a dead language is as apt to be good, as a sophomore of Oxford, or a sacerdotal tunic of St. James.” W. W. Phelps, “Despise Not Prophesying,” *Times and Seasons* 2 (February 1, 1841): 298b. It appears that the limited knowledge of Hebrew the early Church members had was being employed in their consideration of theological principles that were unfolding through the Restoration. See more fully on the use of Hebrew in that period, Matthew J. Grey, “‘The Word of the Lord in the Original’: Joseph Smith’s Study of Hebrew in Kirtland,” in *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World*, ed. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 249–302.

The King Follett Sermon (1844). On April 7, 1844, two years after the publication of the book of Abraham, Joseph Smith delivered a sermon at a Church conference in Nauvoo that is now commonly called the “King Follett sermon” (his remarks followed the recent death of a Church member named King Follett). The first printed report of this sermon appeared on August 15, 1844, in *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo), about six weeks after Joseph Smith’s martyrdom. Well into his remarks, Joseph Smith is reported to have said (the original spelling and punctuation have been preserved):

I have another subject to dwell upon and it is impossible for me to say much, but . . . I must come to the resurrection of the dead, the soul, the mind of man, the immortal spirit. All men say God created it in the beginning. The very idea lessens man in my estimation; I do not believe the doctrine. . . . I am going to tell of things more noble—we say that God himself is a self existing God. . . . Who told you that man did not exist in like manner upon the same principles? (refers to the old Bible,) how does it read in the Hebrew? It dont say so in the Hebrew, it says God made man out of the earth, and put into him Adam’s spirit, and so became a living body.⁵⁴

The somewhat revised and long-time standard text of the pertinent portion of this speech, as printed in volume 6 of *History of the Church*, reads: “God made a tabernacle and put a spirit into it, and it became a living soul. (Refers to the Bible.) How does it read in the Hebrew? It does not say in the Hebrew that God created the spirit of man. It says, ‘God made man out of the earth and put into him Adam’s spirit, and so became a living body.’”⁵⁵ Given the similarity of this statement to

54. Joseph Smith, Discourse, Nauvoo, Ill., April 7, 1844, as reported in “Conference Minutes,” *Times and Seasons* 5, no. 15 (1844): 615, available online as “Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by *Times and Seasons*,” on Church Historian’s Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-7-april-1844-as-reported-by-times-and-seasons/4>. The sermon is presented under “Conference Minutes,” with no scribe’s or reporter’s name indicated.

55. Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 6:310 (hereafter cited as *History of the Church*). As is evident, the version of this sermon printed in *History of the Church* was smoothed out and expanded compared to the version in *Times and Seasons*, which itself was created from the report of four scribes (discussed below). For example, the sentence “God made a tabernacle and put a spirit into it, and it became a living soul,” included in the

Genesis 2:7, it is hard to miss the use of “Adam’s spirit” and the omission of the phrase “the breath of life,” suggesting perhaps they should be viewed as synonymous.⁵⁶

However, at least three major challenges arise in dealing with Joseph Smith’s reported statement. First, he was clearly emphasizing the concept of premortal spirits and their eternal properties and nature. So, even though Joseph Smith’s comments imply a connection with Genesis 2:7, it does not appear that his intent was to interpret that verse *per se*.

Second, the Hebrew Bible does *not* read according to how this report indicates Joseph Smith rendered it. For example, the proper name “Adam” does not occur in Genesis 2:7 (even in the KJV), although the Hebrew *hā’ādām*, “the man/human,” is there.⁵⁷ Nor does the Hebrew word *rûah*, “spirit,” occur in the verse. And this reported translation from “the Hebrew” does not mention “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life [*nišmat hayyim*],” which *is* found in the received Hebrew text of Genesis 2:7.⁵⁸

Despite these first two challenges, one might argue that the embodying of Adam’s spirit is Joseph Smith’s interpretation of the meaning of “the breath of life.” However, *if* Joseph Smith did say what is reported in this version of this sermon, and *if* he was saying that this teaching was

quotation above, does *not* appear in the *Times and Seasons*, but does occur in the *History of the Church* account.

56. Daniel Ludlow and Hyrum Andrus each cited Joseph Smith’s comments in his King Follett sermon in their own comments on Adam’s creation, as support for the Restoration doctrine that this included the embodying of Adam’s premortal spirit. They both used the standardized version of this statement in *History of the Church* (but, see below). And in parallel with Joseph Smith’s comments, neither of them actually discussed the phrase “the breath of life,” so it is not clear whether they understood embodiment of a premortal spirit as equivalent with “the breath of life” or not. See Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 109 (“Concerning the process of becoming a ‘living soul,’ Joseph Smith has stated . . .”); and Hyrum L. Andrus, *God, Man, and the Universe* (1968; repr., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999), 361, 364–65.

57. The received Hebrew text of Genesis 2:7 begins with the phrase, “And the LORD God formed man [*hā’ādām*, “the human”] of the dust of the ground [*’ādāmâ*].” The name Adam is essentially the Hebrew term *’ādām*, “person, people, humankind,” but in Genesis 2:7, as elsewhere in this chapter, it is written with the definite article, literally, “God formed the man.” This displays wordplay with the Hebrew term for “earth, ground” earlier in the verse, which is *’ādāmâ*.

58. Nor does an obvious Hebrew word for “body” appear in this Genesis 2:7, although one might argue he derived this from the Hebrew word *nepēš*.

contained in the Hebrew Bible, he was engaging in theologically expansive translation, rendering what he thought the Bible used to say or what it should say based on his current Restoration knowledge, rather than what the traditional Hebrew biblical text actually does say (see similarly his 1843 comment in *History of the Church*, just above).

Based on this view, the Hebrew Bible provided Joseph Smith with a basis, a springboard, for an expanded rendition that went beyond the actual Hebrew text in front of him. Others, including Philip L. Barlow, Grant Underwood, and Kent P. Jackson have made similar observations.⁵⁹ For example, Jackson has commented on “how freely the [biblical] commentary flowed from his [Joseph Smith’s] own consciousness, even if it might not seem to others to flow freely from the text. . . . Joseph Smith believed that he understood the Bible as it was meant to be understood, independent of any earthly source.”⁶⁰ Thus, it does not appear that Joseph Smith was trying to literally translate or interpret the whole of Genesis 2:7 in his April 7, 1844, discourse, nor can his comment be seen as an interpretation of the phrase “the breath of life.”

The third major challenge with utilizing this particular statement as well as the King Follett sermon in general is, what did Joseph Smith actually say? Our earliest knowledge of this sermon derives from handwritten reports scribed by four men who heard Joseph Smith preach: Thomas Bullock, William Clayton, Willard Richards, and Wilford Woodruff. This is not the place to review the multifaceted publication history of this sermon. The important point here is that the four recorders were not completely consistent in their report of the particular statement in question, which is not all that surprising, given the task of recording what was a long, extemporaneous, passionately delivered sermon; the windy conditions of the day; and the capabilities each scribe brought to this task.⁶¹ However, there is a certain amount of overlap on

59. See Kent P. Jackson, “Joseph Smith’s Biblical Antiquity,” in Blumell, Grey, and Hedges, *Approaching Antiquity*, 166–67, 180–81. See Jackson, “Joseph Smith’s Biblical Antiquity,” 185–86 n. 6, for references to the comments of Underwood and Barlow.

60. Jackson, “Joseph Smith’s Biblical Antiquity,” 181.

61. As reported in the *Times and Seasons*, Joseph Smith commented “the wind blows very hard” in the context of expressing concern that some might not be able to hear him speak. Smith, Discourse, April 7, 1844, as reported in “Conference Minutes,” 612. For general comments on this sermon, see, for example, Robert L. Millet, “King Follett Sermon,” in *LDS Beliefs: A Doctrinal Reference*, ed. Robert L. Millet and others (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 363–66.

the general gist of their reports (again, original spelling and punctuation have been preserved in what follows). In their handwritten accounts of Joseph Smith's statement,

- Bullock reported: "how does it read in the Heb. that God made man & put into it Adams Spirit & so became a living Spirit."
- Clayton reported: "(refer to the bible) Don't say so in the old Hebrew—God made man out of the earth and put into him his spirit and then it became a living body."
- Richards reported: "= in hebrew put into him his spirit.—which was created before."
- Woodruff reported: "God made a tabernacle & put a spirit in it and it became a Human Soul."⁶²

Several observations can be made on these scribes' reports of what Joseph Smith said. First, Woodruff makes no mention of the Bible or Hebrew, but since the other three do, Joseph Smith likely mentioned these in some form. Second, two reports clearly indicate Joseph Smith taught that the "spirit" God put into the first human was the man's premortal spirit (Bullock and Richards), although only one report, Bullock's, mentions the name "Adam." Third, Richards's report, which mentions "in Hebrew," and recounts "put into him his spirit.—which was created before," suggests that Adam's premortal spirit was intended, not God's animating spirit (the breath of life). This can be seen as the implication of Woodruff's report as well. Contrast Clayton's report, "put into him his spirit," which without further clarification or contextualization could theoretically refer to God's animating spirit or to Adam's premortal spirit, although, given the other reports, the latter option seems preferable. Fourth, none of these four reports has the phrase, "became a living soul," which is the concluding phrase in Genesis 2:7 in the KJV, although three of them report variations on this phrase. Lastly, as noted above, none of these reports mention "breathed into his nostrils" or "the breath of life."

62. These four quotations are from "Accounts of the 'King Follett Sermon,'" on Church Historian's Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/site/accounts-of-the-king-follett-sermon>. See also the earlier publication of Donald Q. Cannon and Larry E. Dahl, *The Prophet Joseph Smith's King Follett Discourse: A Six Column Comparison of Original Notes and Amalgamations, with Introduction and Commentary* (Provo, Utah: BYU Printing Service, 1983), 48–49.

We can only therefore presume that Joseph Smith made no specific comment on this concept, nor did he use that biblical phrasing.

The versions of this speech in *Times and Seasons* and *History of the Church* may accurately reflect the gist of what Joseph Smith taught, but given the availability of the scribes’ actual written notes of Joseph Smith’s remarks in his King Follett sermon, it is difficult to see the report of Joseph Smith’s remark as providing an authoritative statement on “the breath of life.” Furthermore, it is problematic to use the standardized version of the four scribes’ reports of what Joseph Smith taught as representing a prophetic pronouncement that has greater weight than Abraham 5:7, a verse in Latter-day Saint canonical scripture that he helped produce. Assuming that Joseph Smith did in 1844 teach that Adam’s creation involved the combination of a physical body and Adam’s premortal spirit, the larger context of his comments appears to have influenced his implicit reference to Genesis 2:7. As mentioned above, this is best seen as theological expansion to emphasize the Restoration doctrine of premortality, not as an actual translation of the received Hebrew text, and not as an automatic equation of spirit embodiment and “the breath of life,” especially since neither in this context nor in his reported comments from 1843 is the phrase “the breath of life” discussed or even mentioned.

The Latter-day Saint Temple Endowment (1843–1877). Without inappropriately discussing the sacred contents of the Mormon temple endowment ceremony, it is sufficient to note that the wording used therein, in the context of symbolically presenting the creation of this earth’s first human, seems to equate “the breath of life” with the entering of Adam’s premortal spirit into his physical body.⁶³ While this wording seems to provide support for seeing Joseph Smith representing the embodying of Adam’s spirit as “the breath of life,” the situation, again, is more complex than it first appears.

After instituting a preparatory endowment in 1835 in Kirtland, Ohio, Joseph Smith began providing a full “endowment” for the living in 1843 in Nauvoo, Illinois, first in his red brick store and then in the unfinished temple.⁶⁴ However, with the martyrdom of Joseph Smith, the exodus of

63. Latter-day Saints who have experienced the temple endowment are in a position to confirm this assertion.

64. Richard E. Bennett, “‘Line upon Line, Precept upon Precept’: Reflections on the 1877 Commencement of the Performance of Endowments and

many Mormons to Utah, and the challenges of settling into the Rocky Mountain West, the text of the endowment ceremony was not standardized or written down at that time.

Prior to 1877, the temple endowment was performed only for the living (including in Salt Lake City's Council House and Endowment House).⁶⁵ Vicarious endowment ceremonies for the dead were first performed in January 1877, in the then recently dedicated St. George temple.⁶⁶ Brigham Young had appointed Wilford Woodruff as its first temple president. Documents indicate that under the direction of and with direct input from Brigham Young, Woodruff was responsible for transcribing and refining the temple endowment ceremony between January and April 1877.⁶⁷ This is the first known written record of the endowment ceremony.

Thus, there are at least two relevant considerations concerning the phrase "the breath of life" in the temple endowment ceremony. First, the absence of earlier textual evidence does not allow certainty as to whether the wording of the phrase in question really goes back to Joseph Smith, whether it represents the later efforts of Young and Woodruff to capture what they thought Joseph Smith had taught, or whether they themselves were newly inspired to state the concept as it is.⁶⁸ Whatever

Sealings of the Dead," *BYU Studies* 44, no. 3 (2005): 41, 44; and Richard E. Bennett, "Which Is the Wisest Course? The Transformation in Mormon Temple Consciousness, 1870–1898," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2013): 19. See also Devery S. Anderson, ed., *The Development of LDS Temple Worship, 1846–2000: A Documentary History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2011), xxiv–xxv.

65. Overviewed by Anderson, *Development of LDS Temple Worship*, xxvi–xxx. Bennett, "Which Is the Wisest Course?" 11, 20, has claimed that "the period from 1847 to 1877 witnessed a comparative wilderness retreat from temple labors."

66. Blaine M. Yorgason, *All That Was Promised: The St. George Temple and the Unfolding of the Restoration* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013), 280; Bennett, "Which Is the Wisest Course?" 19.

67. Yorgason, *All That Was Promised*, 282–85. As Yorgason indicates, a few other men were also involved in this process. See also Bennett, "Line upon Line, Precept upon Precept," 59, 61–62. Terryl L. Givens, referencing L. John Nuttall's journal, observes that Joseph Smith had instructed "Brigham Young to more fully 'organize and systematize all these ceremonies,' which he did as they moved into the Nauvoo Temple." Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 113, 343 n. 8.

68. This latter option is a real possibility if the following statement accurately reflects what Joseph Smith told Brigham Young a few months before his death: "Brother Brigham, this [endowment ceremony] is not arranged perfectly; however we have done the best we could under the circumstances in

the case, the wording of the current temple endowment ceremony does seem to equate “the breath of life” with the embodying of Adam’s premortal spirit.

The second and more important consideration is that the endowment by its very nature is an enacted ritual that embeds covenant-making opportunities into a symbolically and cosmically oriented presentation of aspects of the plan of salvation. It builds and expands upon truths taught elsewhere but does not necessarily supersede what is taught in scripture; that is, it is not automatically normative.⁶⁹ So, as with certain statements from Joseph Smith, it is not clear that the wording of the endowment is really intended to interpret or explain “the breath of life” as spirit embodiment or whether it is to emphasize a significant Restoration principle, the doctrine of premortal spirits inhabiting physical mortal bodies. If the former option is preferred—that “the breath of life” *is* spirit embodiment, then one must consider this view in conjunction with Abraham 5:7, which seems to separate spirit embodiment from “the breath of life.”⁷⁰

Synthesis and Conclusion

This survey of biblical and early Latter-day Saint evidence relating to “the breath of life” illustrates a number of points:

1. The phrase “the breath of life” as found in Genesis seems to best be understood as a figurative designation for a divinely originating animating “breath” or life-force that enlivens all human and animal flesh, and is

which we are placed. I wish you to take this matter in hand: organize and systematize all these ceremonies.” Quoted in Yorgason, *All That Was Promised*, 14 (see also Givens in the previous note).

69. I thank Richard E. Bennett for discussing this concept with me. An easy example of differences between scripture (Gen. 1, Moses 2, Abr. 4) and the language of the endowment involves the recounting of what activity took place on each of the earth’s days/times of creative activity. For summary comments on the nature of the endowment, see Andrew C. Skinner, “Endowment,” in Millet and others, *LDS Beliefs*, 182–86.

70. It could conceivably be argued that this endowment language represents an ancient temple teaching and is not the result of Restoration-influenced emphasis on premortal spirits tabernacled in flesh as part of their mortal existence. However, there is no way to analyze or prove this, and if one does take this approach, one is still left with the need to harmonize this view with the content of Abraham 5:7, as I have argued herein. I have presented what I think is the most likely reason for the language of the temple endowment on this point.

something beyond mere respiration. Such a divine breath/spirit is also referenced elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, especially in poetic passages. It is no surprise that this is not depicted as or in association with the embodying of premortal spirits, since that doctrine is so rarely and so obtusely evident in the Hebrew Bible as it has come down to us.

2. The Book of Mormon explicitly affirmed to Joseph Smith that spirit beings inhabited peoples' mortal and resurrected bodies but also seems to have separated these from the "breath" by which God enlivens mortal bodies (2 Ne. 9:26).⁷¹ Furthermore, Joseph Smith left the language of Genesis 2:7 essentially unchanged in Moses 3:7, his 1830 inspired revision of that text (although he expanded the latter part of the verse, and although the premortality of Jesus and Satan is taught in Moses 4:1–4). Similarly, the second section in the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants (now Lecture on Faith 2, paragraph 20) uses the phrase "the breath of life" with no additional explanation. Abraham 5:7 includes a reference to the embodying of Adam's premortal spirit *and* retains as separate the concept represented by the phrase "the breath of life." Thus, Latter-day Saint scriptures can be seen as consistent in their portrayal of "the breath of life," not explicitly defining what it is, but never equating it with spirit embodiment.

3. Whatever Joseph Smith's earlier understanding of premortal spirits may have been, it is clear that as his prophetic ministry progressed he had greater understanding of people's premortal existence and its significance, including what he learned from his 1842 rendition of the contents of Abraham 3.

4. Between the publication of the book of Abraham (1842) and the end of his life (1844), Joseph Smith is reported to have prominently mentioned premortal spirit embodiment when referencing the creation of Adam, a concept also found in the temple endowment. He does not appear, however, to have intentionally or explicitly equated the embodying of a spirit with "the breath of life." As reviewed above, there appears to be no official statement from Joseph Smith or his successors on what "the breath of life" is or is not.

This paper cannot include an exhaustive survey of all the occurrences of the phrase "the breath of life" in Latter-day Saint conference addresses, manuals, and other officially published sources. However,

71. Ether 3:12–16 does recount Jehovah's/Jesus's appearance as a premortal spirit to the brother of Jared, but Jesus's premortal existence was already evident from the New Testament, although variously interpreted.

summarily, this phrase has infrequently occurred in general conference addresses during the past seventy-five years, and then is only quoted in passing, not explained, with one exception.⁷² This comes in the 1975 remarks of Marion G. Romney, who quoted Genesis 2:7 with these bracketed interpretive interjections: “And the Lord . . . formed man [that is, his physical body out] of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life [that was his spirit]; and man became a living soul.”⁷³ The explanation “his spirit” presumably refers to Adam’s pre-mortal spirit, not God’s spiritual power. So, in this instance, President Romney appears to have reiterated the concept as seemingly taught in the temple endowment, that “the breath of life” is essentially equivalent to the embodiment of Adam’s premortal spirit.

Occurrences of the phrase “the breath of life” in an earlier collection of sermons known as the *Journal of Discourses* demonstrate it was used to express regular respiration or God-given life in a person and, by extension, in an organization,⁷⁴ either with little or no explanation (it is not often clear what explicitly is intended) or in a manner contrary to

72. For mention without explanation, see, for example, George Albert Smith, “The Origin of Man and Prophecy Fulfilled,” in *Official Report of the 115th Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1945), 135 (hereafter *Conference Report*); Thomas S. Monson, “I Know That My Redeemer Lives,” in *Conference Report*, April 1966, 60–63; David O. McKay, “The True Purpose of Life,” in *Conference Report*, October 1963, 5; and Donald L. Hallstrom, “Cultivate Righteous Traditions,” *Ensign* 30 (November 2000): 27–28.

73. Marion G. Romney, “Easter Thoughts,” *Ensign* 5 (May 1975): 82. A few lines earlier, he taught, “The book of Genesis teaches that there was a spiritual creation of the earth and everything that was to be placed upon it, including man, whose spirit God created ‘in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them’ (Gen. 1:27).”

74. See, for example, Wilford Woodruff, “there is not an Apostle or Latter-day Saint on the face of the earth but would have to seal his testimony with his blood, as has almost every other Apostle that ever breathed the breath of life” in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 18:116 (September 12, 1875); and John Taylor, “Our organizations are very good; but we need, I think sometimes, the breath of life from God breathing into them all through, that the Spirit and power of the Most High may be in our midst,” in *Journal of Discourses*, 20:176 (April 8, 1879). This latter usage also occurs occasionally in later general conference addresses, such as LeGrand Richards, “Our Historic Tabernacle,” in *Conference Report*, October 1960, 69–71, “The Lord has put into this Church the breath of life.”

premortal spirit embodiment.⁷⁵ Illustrative is a statement from Charles Penrose, “In a moment He could withdraw the breath of life from among them, and they would perish.”⁷⁶ The withdrawing of “the breath” from “among them” (people, plural) does not sound like the withdrawing of individual spirit personages. Additionally, John Taylor taught, “We breathe what we call the breath of life; is it by any action of ours? God made us and planted that principle within us,” and “God has made us and he is our Father. He has planted within us the breath of life and we continue to inhale and breathe day after day.”⁷⁷ Even if John Taylor was merely saying God causes us to live by our own breathing, it is difficult to construe this “planting” of the “principle” of “the breath of life” in humans as the embodying of premortal spirits.

Again, although not exhaustive, the occurrence of the phrase “the breath of life” in sermons given by early and later Latter-day Saint Church leaders illustrates that what statements have been made about “the breath of life” provide various perspectives, with only one sermon giving support to the view that “the breath of life” is analogous to spirit embodiment, and then in only the briefest of comments, with no discussion. I assume this latter perspective is based primarily on the language of the temple endowment (discussed above), which superficially appears to be out of harmony with Abraham 5:7 (at least according to my and others’ interpretation of it, cited previously).

Latter-day Saint scripture *does* teach that a premortal spirit combined with a physical body constitutes “the soul of man” (D&C 88:15; see also 2 Ne. 9:13). The text of section 88 was produced late in December 1832 through January 3, 1833. Some Latter-day Saints have applied this view to the phrase at the end of Genesis 2:7—“man became a living soul”

75. I recognize the challenges in utilizing the *Journal of Discourses* as a source, since these are transcriptions of what was said over the pulpit. On these challenges, see, more fully, Gerrit Dirkmaat and LaJean Purcell Carruth, “The Prophets Have Spoken, but What Did They Say? Examining the Differences between George D. Watt’s Original Shorthand Notes and the Sermons Published in the *Journal of Discourses*,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (2015): 24–118.

76. Charles Penrose, in *Journal of Discourses*, 25:338 (November 4, 1882).

77. John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 17:371 (April 8, 1875); and *Journal of Discourses*, 20:132 (December 1, 1878), respectively.

(KJV)—which of necessity in Latter-day Saint doctrine requires a body *and* a spirit.⁷⁸

According to my assessment, this unique Latter-day Saint conception of a “soul,”⁷⁹ the phrase “a living soul” at the end of Genesis 2:7, the standardized language of the King Follett sermon, and the language of the temple endowment have collectively contributed to a common Latter-day Saint perception that “the breath of life” is the embodying of a premortal spirit required to create a living “soul.” This is illustrated not only in the Latter-day Saint commentaries quoted above, but also by this claim in the current LDS Institute manual on the Pearl of Great Price: “Moses 3:7 states that God ‘formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.’ Abraham 5:7 helps us understand that the breath of life was ‘the man’s spirit.’ . . . Man is a dual being, made up of mortal flesh and an immortal spirit (see D&C 88:15).”⁸⁰ However, as outlined above, Abraham 5:7 clearly mentions three factors, indicating that “the breath of life” and spirit embodiment are *not* the same.

78. See, for example, the commentaries by Hunter and by Ogden and Skinner, cited previously.

79. Most Christians now consider a “soul” to be an individual spirit entity, although the biblical and early Christian picture is variegated; thus, a typical definition is, “the spiritual part of a human, distinct from the physical or as an ontologically separate entity constitutive of the human person.” Joel B. Green, “Soul,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Katherine Doob Sakenfield and others, vol. 5 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 358.

Somewhat off topic for this paper, the idea that a plant is also a “living soul” comes from Moses 3:9. See support for this view in Ridges, *Your Study of the Old Testament Made Easier*, 1:32. See the caution about this view in Bradshaw, *In God’s Image and Likeness*, 159.

80. *The Pearl of Great Price Student Manual* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000), 41, s.v., “Abraham 5:7. The Breath of Life.” The ellipsis in the quotation replaces this text, “(see also *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 301),” which relates the standardized version of what William Clayton reported Joseph Smith taught to a Methodist pastor in 1843, as discussed above. I admit to being surprised and confused by this manual’s claim regarding Abraham 5:7. Surprisingly, the phrase “the breath of life” receives no discussion in the LDS Institute *Old Testament Student Manual, Genesis—2 Samuel*, 3d ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003) in relation to anything in Genesis. The phrase appears only once in that manual, in a quote from Bruce R. McConkie about Jesus (p. 314).

Based on all this evidence, I assume that after Joseph Smith received several revelations referring to premortal existence (for example, D&C 29:36–37; 49:17; 93:29; as well as Moses 4:1–4; 6:36) and after he produced and published Abraham chapters 3 through 5, the fuller understanding and importance of premortal existence so powerfully impacted Joseph Smith’s thinking that it became a focal point in the Nauvoo period when he taught about the eternal nature of each person’s spirit and the creation of human life on this earth. However, the maintenance of the phrase “the breath of life” in Moses 3:7 and especially in Abraham 5:7, the latter of which was published during the Nauvoo period and which includes a separate reference to Adam’s premortal spirit, should be seen as strong evidence that Joseph Smith did not simply equate “the breath of life” with the embodying of a premortal spirit, nor that this was his interpretation of what “the breath of life” is. I therefore disagree with Latter-day Saint commentators who make this connection.

Rather, some Latter-day Saint commentators and Church leaders seem to be *applying* true, additional Restoration knowledge about premortality to Genesis 2:7/Moses 3:7/Abraham 5:7 in a way that reimages the concept of “the breath of life” itself. This is not an argument against the authority of latter-day prophets to interpret biblical passages differently than scholars or other faith traditions. There just appears to be no official Latter-day Saint prophetic pronouncement on the topic of “the breath of life,” and there are differing ways in which the phrase has been employed in scripture and by Church leaders in the nearly two centuries of LDS Church history.

Indeed, Moses 3:7 and Abraham 5:7 (Restoration scriptures associated with ancient Hebrew prophets) do nothing to overturn the biblical depiction of “the breath of life” as found in Genesis. And Abraham 5:7, which was published during the doctrinally dynamic Nauvoo period of Church history, indicates most clearly three creation components—dust, breath, and a premortal spirit.

I am thus asserting that the Bible accurately depicts deity’s “breath” as a key animating force separate from spirit embodiment, and that Genesis 2:7 and Moses 3:7 each contain only two of the three components or factors that scripture mentions in connection with the Lord’s creation of the first man (and all other humans by extension): “the dust of the ground” and “the breath of life.” Latter-day Saints can thus read these passages and mentally supply what they understand is missing—the embodiment of a premortal spirit.

As a result of increased understanding about premortality and the embodiment of spirits into mortal bodies, Joseph Smith chose during the final years of his life (1842–1844) to emphasize this new knowledge when commenting on the eternal nature of humans and the creation of Adam. The language of the temple endowment draws on such teachings, focusing on a Restoration doctrine and emphasizing only two components of creation—“the dust of the ground” and the premortal spirit—rather than all three of them as preserved in Abraham 5:7. I am therefore suggesting that Latter-day Saints can mentally supply “the breath of life” as a separate, animating power, when encountering these other creation teachings. In this way, a fuller and more accurate understanding of the role of all three components is obtained, and due recognition is given to the divinely originating, animating force figuratively called in scripture “the breath of life,” by which God instills life in all animals and humans.

Throughout this study my focus has been to demonstrate that “the breath of life” is not simply to be equated with the embodiment of premortal spirits, since Abraham 5:7 removes this interpretive possibility. However, there is no unambiguous Latter-day Saint prophetic statement on what “the breath of life” actually is. At the very least, it is one of several factors emphasizing “the nature of humanity’s divinity.”⁸¹ Although we do not currently know exactly how to define it, this figurative “breath,” this animating power, is of divine origin, is essential to our mortal existence, enables the coexistence of a spirit and mortal body, and evidences God’s great and beneficial creative and sustaining power.⁸²

81. This phrase comes from Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, “The Divinity of Humankind in the Bible and the Ancient Near East: A New Mesopotamian Parallel,” in *Mishneh Todah: Studies in Deuteronomy and Its Cultural Environment in Honor of Jeffrey H. Tigay*, ed. Nili Sacher Fox, David A. Glatt-Gilad, and Michael J. Williams (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 265.

82. After having personally wondered if “the breath of life” was one way of referring to, or at least had some connection with, the Light of Christ and its role in sparking and sustaining mortal life, I was interested to find this possibility also expressed by Draper, Brown, and Rhodes, *The Pearl of Great Price*, 223, drawing on Doctrine and Covenants 88:13 (“the light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things”); and in Bruce R. McConkie’s *Mormon Doctrine*, 447, s.v. “Light of Life,” where he has stated, “Life exists in and through and because of the light of Christ. . . . Without this light of life, planets would not stay in their orbits, vegetation would not grow, men and animals would be devoid of ‘the breath of life’ (Gen. 2:7), and life would cease to exist (D&C 88:50).” The

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phrase "the light of Christ" does not appear in the KJV of the Bible, although it does appear in Alma 28:14; Moroni 7:18–19; and Doctrine and Covenants 88:7. However, it does not appear that Joseph Smith ever used the phrases "the breath of life" and "light of Christ" in conjunction with each other. Of course, "breath" and "light" draw on differing images and symbolism to emphasize essential aspects of and requirements for mortal life, so perhaps light should be understood as additional to "the breath of life." Doctrine and Covenants 45:1, for example, expresses a more generalized approach: "give ear to him who laid the foundation of the earth . . . and by whom all things were made which live, and move, and have a being."

Ann Booth's Vision and Early Conceptions of Redeeming the Dead among Latter-day Saints

Christopher James Blythe

On October 5, 1840, Joseph Smith addressed the general church body in Nauvoo on the subject of baptism for the dead,¹ an ordinance he had introduced less than two months previously.² On this historic occasion, the Prophet referenced a vision or dream that has until now escaped thorough study by Church historians. The vision was received by Ann Booth, a recent convert in Great Britain, and included images of John Wesley accepting the restored gospel and being baptized in the spirit world through the administration of David W. Patten. Booth's revelation had garnered attention of missionaries in England and among

1. The official minutes state only that Joseph "delivered a discourse on the subject of baptism for the dead, which was listened to with considerable interest, by the vast multitude assembled." "Minutes of the General Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Held in Nauvoo, Hancock County, Ill., Oct., 3rd 1840," *Times and Seasons* 1 (October 1840): 186. The details of this sermon have been pulled from unofficial reports in contemporary correspondence.

2. Joseph first introduced the doctrine on August 15, 1840, in a sermon preached at Seymour Brunson's funeral. Journal History of the Church, August 15, 1840, page 171, CR 100 137/v0012, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, available online at https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE492736. See also "Letter to Quorum of the Twelve, 15 December 1840," Church History Library, available online at Church Historian's Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-quorum-of-the-twelve-15-december-1840/6>. However, this general conference was likely the first time that many of the Saints learned of the ordinance.

some of their families and friends in Nauvoo. According to Vilate Kimball, Joseph explained during his October 5 sermon that the dead “will have the Gospel preached to them in Prison but there is no such thing as spirrits being baptised. He does not wholly discard sisters Booths Vishon; says it was to show her the necessity of being Baptised.”³ Phebe Woodruff quoted the Prophet as stating that “John Wesley can receive this work but how can his spirit be baptize[d] in water[?]”⁴

Thus, Joseph used the vision to articulate truth—the dead may receive the gospel—and to correct error—spirits will not be baptized but must depend upon vicarious ordinances. This article contributes to the growing literature on the early history of baptism for the dead by documenting a vision that preceded Smith’s teaching on baptism for the dead and awakened interest in the topic.⁵ Latter-day Saints were prepared for the new revelation of vicarious ordinances by a preexisting optimism concerning the redemption of the dead. Members of the Church, like Joseph himself, were already wrestling with how people could meet the Savior’s mandate to be baptized if they had not had the opportunity to embrace the restored gospel in the flesh, a conflict that the Prophet had already articulated.

3. Vilate Kimball to Heber C. Kimball, October 11, 1840, Vilate M. Kimball Letters, Church History Library, available online at https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE1960774, image 3.

4. Phebe Woodruff to Wilford Woodruff, October 6, 1840, Wilford Woodruff Collection, Church History Library.

5. This growing literature includes Alexander L. Baugh, “‘For This Ordinance Belongeth to My House’: The Practice of Baptism for the Dead Outside the Nauvoo Temple,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 3 (Spring 2002): 47–58; Alexander L. Baugh, “‘Blessed Is the First Man Baptised in This Font,’” *Mormon Historical Studies* 3 (Fall 2002): 253–61; Richard E. Bennett, “‘I Mean to Be Baptized for Scores More’: Baptisms for the Dead among the Latter-day Saints, 1846–1867,” in *An Eye of Faith: Essays Written in Honor of Richard O. Cowan*, ed. Kenneth L. Alford and Richard E. Bennett (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 2015), 139–57; M. Guy Bishop, “‘What Has Become of Our Fathers’: Baptism for the Dead in Nauvoo,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 23 (Summer 1990): 85–97; David L. Paulsen, Kendel J. Christensen, and Martin Pulido, “Redeeming the Dead: Tender Mercies, Turning of Hearts, and Restoration of Authority,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 20, no. 1 (2011): 28–51; Ryan G. Tobler, “‘Saviors on Mount Zion’: Mormon Sacramentalism, Mortality, and the Baptism for the Dead,” *Journal of Mormon History* 39 (Fall 2013): 182–238.

The “Remarkable Vision”

The earliest extant recording of Ann Booth's vision is in a letter Brigham Young penned in Manchester, England, to his wife, Mary Ann, in Nauvoo, dated May 26, 1840. Young wrote that he had personally heard Booth recount the vision “in company with Brothers [Heber C.] Kimball, P[arley] P. Pratt, and J[ohn] Taylor.” Yet while he acknowledged that she shared “much that I can not wright in this letter,” he transcribed the vision from a manuscript copy, rather than an oral account. The document was titled “Remarkable Vision” and began with a sentence describing the author. “I Ann Booth, Wife of Robert Booth of the Town of Manchester, England, had the following vision of the 12 day of march in the year of our Lord one thousand and forty <1840>.”⁶

Young added only a brief note from his interview with Booth, “Sister Booth sayes she heard a voice saying she must goe to Paridice. then she was cared away in the vision.”⁷ Continuing from his transcription:

6. Brigham Young to Mary Ann Young, May 26, 1840, in Ronald O. Barney, “Letters of a Missionary Apostle to His Wife: Brigham Young to Mary Ann Angell Young, 1839–1841,” *BYU Studies* 38, no. 2 (1999): 178. I have used Barney's published transcript throughout. Brigham Young's original letters are available at the Church History Library. Both the record of the vision in Brigham Young's letter and the record in Wilford Woodruff's journal, cited in note 18 below, give the title “Remarkable Vision.”

7. Brigham Young to Mary Ann Young, May 26, 1840, in Barney, “Letters of a Missionary Apostle to His Wife,” 178. Here the subsequent vision of imprisoned spirits was correlated with “paradise.” This word appeared as a reference to a realm in the afterlife in Christ's promise to the thief while on the cross, that “to day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). Three years later, on June 11, 1843, Joseph Smith would explain that “the commentators make or translators make it out to say Paradise but what is Paradise it is a modern word it does not answer at all to the original that Jesus made use of, their [*sic*] is nothing in the original in any language that signifies Paradise, But it was this day I will be with thee in the world of spirits & will teach thee or answer thy inquiries.” Wilford Woodruff, Journal, June 11, 1843, cited in *Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 1980), 213; compare “History, 1838–1856, Volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” 1573, Church History Library, available online at Church Historian's Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/218>.

Being caried away in a vision to the Place of departed spirits I saw 12 Prisons, one abova nother, verry large, and builded of soled stone. on ariveing at the <dore of the> upermost Prison I behe[l]d one of the 12 apostles of the Lamb who had ben martered in America, standing at the dore of the Prison holding a key in his hand with which he opned unlocked the dore and went in and I fol[low]ed him. he appeard to be of large sise, thick set, darke hare, darke eyes, and eyebrows of a smiling count[e]nan[c]e, and on <his> head was a crown of gold or somthing brighter. he was dresed in a long, white robe, with the sleeves plated from the sholder down to the hand. upon his brest ware fore [four] stares [stars] apparently like gold <or briter> and a golden girdle about his Loins. his feet was bare from above the Ancles down<w>ard and his hands were also bare. as he entred the prison he seemed to stand about 3 feet from the floor (which was of Marble) as if the place was not worthy for him to stand upon. a verry brilient and glorie<u>s light surrounded him, while the res[t] of the prison was dark. but his light was peculiar to him self and did not reflect upon others who was in the prison who ware surounded with a gloom of darkness.⁸

In the vision, John Wesley greeted the angelic messenger with a shout of praise and announced to those surrounding him that “Deliverance has Com.” With the attention of the entire assembly, Patten proceeded to preach baptism and confirmation. Hearing the good news, hundreds followed Wesley’s lead in shouting praise. “The marble floor was then removed and a River of watter clere as Cristall seemed to f[l]ow in it[s] place.” Patten and Wesley entered the pool together, and the father of Methodism was the first to be baptized. Then Patten ordained him to the Aaronic Priesthood, and Wesley baptized the rest of the prisoners. Booth identified the initial baptisms as those of Methodist ministers she had known and then her grandfather, an uncle, a sister, and her mother. “All these had lived and died Methodest.” Following their baptisms, Patten confirmed them members of the Church and bestowed the gift of the Holy Ghost. “Then instantly the darkeness dispersed and they ware all surrounded & envelopd in a Brilint light, such as surround’d the Apostle at the first.”⁹

The vision concluded with a brief reunion between Booth and her departed loved ones. Her grandfather blessed her and asked, “Art thou

8. Brigham Young to Mary Ann Young, May 26, 1840, in Barney, “Letters of a Missionary Apostle to His Wife,” 178–79.

9. Brigham Young to Mary Ann Young, May 26, 1840, in Barney, “Letters of a Missionary Apostle to His Wife,” 179.

come to see us deliverd?" Then, just before she "awoke out of [the] vision," her mother embraced her, kissed her three times, and offered her a blessing similar to her grandfather's, "The Lord Almighty Bless the[e] for ever and ever."¹⁰

Once awake, Booth roused her husband and together they "provedenically" opened the Bible three times, each time discovering a passage related to her revelation. The first was Isaiah 24:22, "And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited." The second passage was John 1:5, "And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." Finally, she turned to 1 Peter 3:18–20, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water."¹¹ This series of references narrated her experience and served as a set of proof texts of the doctrine the vision imparted.

In her written statement, Booth testified that the information from the dream extended beyond her own knowledge, specifically that "at the time I had the vision I had never hered of the deth of David Patten whome I have sence lerned was one of the twelve Apostles of the Later day Saynts in America and was martered in the late percution in the fall of 1838. but in <the> vision I knew it was an Apostle who had ben slane in America." Closing her account, she wrote, "I here by sollemly testfy that I actually saw and hered in the vision what I have related and I give my name and set my seal in witness to same, well know[ing] that I must stand before the Judgment seet of Christ and ancer to this testimony, amen & amen."¹²

The Vision's Appeal and Circulation

In the nineteenth century, believing Christians often shared revelatory experiences and visions with one another and even published them for

10. Brigham Young to Mary Ann Young, May 26, 1840, in Barney, "Letters of a Missionary Apostle to His Wife," 179–80.

11. Brigham Young to Mary Ann Young, May 26, 1840, in Barney, "Letters of a Missionary Apostle to His Wife," 180.

12. Brigham Young to Mary Ann Young, May 26, 1840, in Barney, "Letters of a Missionary Apostle to His Wife," 180.

public edification.¹³ It was not uncommon for early Latter-day Saints, including men and women of all ecclesiastical positions, to share what they believed to be revelatory dreams and visions. Often Saints found comfort in hearing their fellow members' experiences with the gifts of the Spirit.¹⁴ On the other hand, sharing personal revelations occasionally led to problems with Saints wondering if they were bound to accept another's vision as authoritative. In 1833, Joseph explained that when Church members "<have a vision> heavenly or a visitation from an heavenly messenger it must be for their own benefit and instruction."¹⁵ Such manifestations took on no official status, and Joseph would make clear at various points in his ministry that Church members could be deceived when assuming a revelation came from a divine source.¹⁶ However, when a vision did not oppose a revealed doctrine or attempt to direct the Church, early Saints found no reason to see the manifestation as threatening. It is significant that, in the case of Booth's vision, even Apostles considered a manifestation received by a member of no ecclesiastical rank meaningful enough to record and share with others.

Word of the vision traveled to Nauvoo through Young's May 26 letter to his wife. The Saints often treated letters and news from missionaries as quasi-public documents and shared them throughout the community. On this occasion, Young specifically requested that Ann Bentley, Patten's widow, be shown the letter as soon as possible.¹⁷ How wide

13. Richard Lyman Bushman, "The Visionary World of Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies* 37, no. 1 (1997–98): 183–204.

14. Early Church history is replete with personal visions, including Lyman Wight seeing the Savior in 1831 (Ezra Booth to Reverend Ira Eddy, October 31, 1831, in *Ohio Star* 2 [November 3, 1831]); Heber C. Kimball and Orson Hyde seeing evil spirits in Preston, England, in 1836 (Joseph Fielding, Journal, 23, Church History Library); and Orson Hyde seeing the sites of his future mission across Europe and Jerusalem in March 1840 ("Letter from Elder O. Hyde," *Times and Seasons*, vol. 2 [October 1, 1841]: 553).

15. "Letter to John S. Carter, 13 April 1833," Church History Library, available online at Church Historian's Press, *Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-john-s-carter-13-april-1833/2>; Gerrit J. Dirkmaat and others, *Documents, Volume 3: February 1833–March 1834*, vol. 3 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Ronald K. Esplin and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2014), 61.

16. See, for example, D&C 28; "Try the Spirits," *Times and Seasons* 3 (April 1, 1842): 743–48.

17. Brigham Young to Mary Ann Young, May 26, 1840, in Barney, "Letters of a Missionary Apostle to His Wife," 180–81.



Brigham and Mary Ann Angell Young and Their Children, by William Warner Major. Oil on board, circa 1845–51, Church History Museum. Brigham left his wife and six children behind while he served his 1839–41 mission in England, where he met Ann Booth.

the vision spread by word of mouth is unknown. The sole hint at its influence in Nauvoo is that Joseph spoke of it in his October 5, 1840, sermon. In England, the Apostles who listened to the experience firsthand shared its contents with others. Wilford Woodruff learned of the document after meeting with Young, Pratt, and Kimball on July 1, 1840. He spent the next day recording a personal transcript of the “Remarkable Vision” in his journal.¹⁸

18. Wilford Woodruff, Journal, July 2, 1840, Wilford Woodruff Journals and Papers, 1828–1898, Church History Library; Wilford Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833–1898, Typescript*, ed. Scott G. Kenney, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983–84), 1:475–77. It is also possible that Parley P. Pratt's conception of the spirit world may have been influenced by the content of Booth's vision. In an April 7, 1853, sermon, Pratt presented the image of a spirit prison in which only portions would be opened at a time. There were those who “have

Ann Booth's vision proposed one possibility about the fate of the dead. Young was impressed with the image of the righteous continuing their work in the afterlife, as well as the salvation of his departed kin. "I <think> Brother David [W. Patten] has as much to doe as thou[gh] he had steded [stayed] here along with us. it is glorious to me to think that our fore Fathers who have lived according to the light they had. I think I shall see my Dear Mother ther and my sister that died about 1808 for they boath lived and died in full faith of a glorus rescercion in and thru the name of Jesus Christ. ther is menny things that causes me to rejoic<ce> in the last days."¹⁹ While the vision's message encouraged hope, it was not the first time Latter-day Saints would have considered redemption for the dead. The appeal of the "Remarkable Vision" was likely based on its intersections with conversations that were already occurring among the Latter-day Saints and Christians more generally about postmortal salvation. In the next section, we will position Booth's vision in this larger milieu of Christian theology on the state of the soul previous to the resurrection.

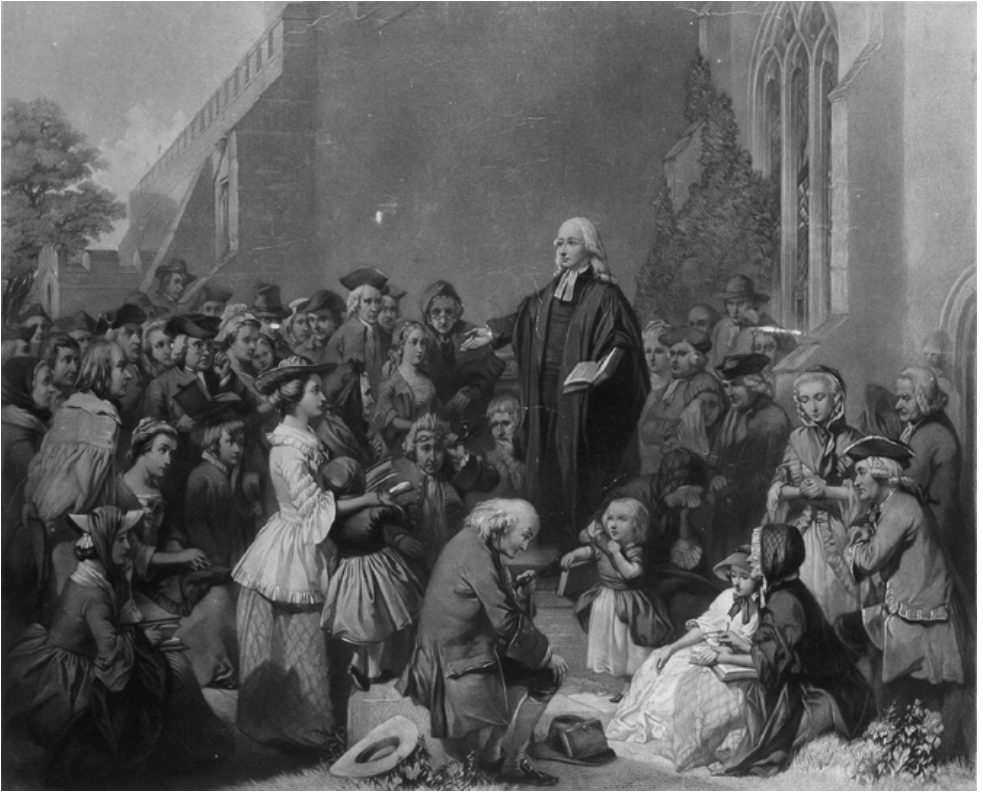
Preaching to the Spirits in Prison and the Redemption of the Dead

Theological disputes over the fate of the nonbeliever and the possibility of postmortal redemption have a long history.²⁰ By the time of the Protestant Reformation, the conflict centered on the concept of purgatory, a state in between death and the entrance to heaven in which souls could be purged of their sins. Theologians disagreed on the nature of

lived in parts of the spirit world . . . where the key has not yet been turned nor the gospel preached . . . being left in their darkness . . . without even a clear hope of resurrection." The image of a series of prisons opened individually could have had its origin in Booth's vision. Parley P. Pratt, sermon, April 7, 1853, transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth from the shorthand, George D. Watt Papers, Church History Library, quoted in Terryl Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 251. The transcripts from which Givens quotes are restricted at the Church History Library; however, a version of this sermon appears in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 2:43–47 (April 6, 1853). (The George D. Watt document dates the sermon April 7, 1853, but the *Journal of Discourses* states it was given April 6, 1853.)

19. Brigham Young to Mary Ann Young, May 26, 1840, in Barney, "Letters of a Missionary Apostle to His Wife," 180.

20. Jeffrey A. Trumbower, *Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).



John Wesley preaching outside a church. Engraving. Wellcome Library, London, at <http://catalogue.wellcomelibrary.org/record=b1546309>.

this middle state, presenting it both as a location of punishment and suffering or of opportunity and instruction for the redemption of the sinner. Eventually, as scholar Jerry Walls has argued, the concept went through a process of “infernalization,” in which it was almost exclusively portrayed as a temporary hell—a place of fear rather than hope.²¹

21. “Some theologians saw it as closer to hell, and accordingly emphasized the pain and terrors of purgatory as administered by demons, with the apparent motive of frightening sinners into reforming their lives while still alive in this world. By contrast, others represented purgatory as closer to heaven, and the element of hope comes to the forefront, with good angels serving as guides. That is, purgatory represents the hope of salvation for a broader range of sinners and emphasizes the glory that ultimately may be achieved by those consigned to it.” Jerry L. Walls, *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 24.

Recognizing that the belief in purgatory was connected with the sale of indulgences and the authority of the papacy, most Protestants rejected the notion, preferring the idea that one was immediately consigned to heaven or hell upon death. A minority maintained the concept of an intermediate state based on a belief in the immortality of the human soul and the future resurrection of the dead (Rev. 20:11–15). Often this temporary abode, referred to as Hades, was divided into distinct regions based on a reading of the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man.²² John Wesley, for example, held that Hades was separated into the “region of hades where the souls of wicked men reside” and paradise, or “the ante-chamber of heaven.”²³ Yet Wesley rejected the idea that the wicked dead who suffered in prison could eventually find their way to paradise or heaven. Almost universally, Protestant ministers declared, as did Presbyterian Heman Humphrey, “You cannot alter the condition of the dead. It is too late. Their account is sealed up to the day of judgment.”²⁴

Skeptics of the intermediate state disregarded the surface reading of 1 Peter 3:19—that Christ literally preached to the spirits in prison—even while they sometimes admitted the scripture’s difficulty. Martin Luther suggested that the passage should “be understood spiritually.”²⁵ After his death, Christ was not in his body and therefore preached through the ministry of his Apostles to the spiritually captive. This was a fairly common explanation, with some, such as Methodist Adam Clarke,

22. For example, “The Sermons of John Wesley—Sermon 112, The Rich Man and Lazarus,” on Northwest Nazarene University, *Wesley Center Online*, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-112-the-rich-man-and-lazarus/> (accessed July 28, 2015).

23. “The Sermons of John Wesley—Sermon 112, The Rich Man and Lazarus.”

24. Quoted in Kathryn Gin Lum, *Damned Nation: Hell in America from the Revolution to Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 55.

25. Martin Luther confessed, “A wonderful text is this, and a more obscure passage perhaps than any other in the New Testament, so that I do not know for a certainty just what Peter means. At first sight, the words read as though Christ had preached to the spirits, that is, the souls who were formerly unbelieving at the time Noah was building the ark; but that I cannot understand and I cannot explain it. And there has been no one who has explained it. Yet if anyone is disposed to maintain that Christ, after he had suffered on the cross, descended to these souls and preached to them, I will not dispute it. It might bear such a rendering. But I am not confident that Peter meant to say this.” Martin Luther, *Commentary on Peter and Jude*, trans. and ed. John Nichols Lenker (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 2005), 166, 167.

arguing that Peter referred to Christ's ministry through Noah.²⁶ Even John Wesley had shared this viewpoint, acknowledging the middle state but refuting this passage as a proof text presumably because it implied a message of salvation to those consigned already to eventually spend eternity in hell.²⁷

Universalism, a theological position that rejected notions of eternal punishment, stood in contrast to these orthodox positions. For Universalist thinkers, hell was no longer a permanent location where its inhabitants were eternally consigned. Instead, the Universalist hell had much in common with the Catholic purgatory. Sinners would suffer, but they would also eventually be welcomed into heaven. George de Benneville, an eighteenth-century Universalist, published an account of a vision or "trance" he experienced while lying in his sickbed. Accompanied by two angels, he toured "seven habitations of the damned" and "five celestial mansions." In the paradisiacal portion of his vision, he witnessed spirits in the act of praising Jesus because they had been "lately delivered from the infernal prisons."²⁸ Thus, he saw that imprisoned spirits could eventually be redeemed and join the happy spirits of paradise.

Another eighteenth-century visionary, in this case an anonymous woman who may have been affiliated with Methodism,²⁹ recorded a vision that she received in response to her long-held anxiety "relating to the spiritual state of the Indian nations," who had died without a knowledge of Christ. Her guardian angel led her to paradise, which, mirroring the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, was partitioned into two regions by a great gulf. Once taken to the other side, she witnessed Indians being instructed in Christianity. When the visionary asked her angel who it was that served as teachers of the deceased, she was told that they were "the Saints who are redeemed in time and such as are set apart for

26. Adam Clarke, *The New Testament . . . with a Commentary and Critical Notes*, vol. 2 (New York: J. Emory and B. Waugh, 1831), 823.

27. John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, new ed., vol. 2 (London: Thomas Cordeux, 1813), 314. For a further discussion of this and the two previous references, as well as many others on the subject, see Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 240–55.

28. George de Benneville, *Life and Trance of George de Benneville* (Schwenksville, Penn.: N. Bertolet Grubb, 1882), 26, 30, 42.

29. Although Methodists after the age of John Wesley, and especially American Methodists, placed credence in visions, Wesley himself would likely have been more circumspect.

the work take it in their turns for Three Months (that is Angels Months).” By the end of the vision, she had taken her turn behind a pulpit preaching to the Native dead. While this vision embraced Universalist notions of posthumous redemption, it did not reestablish Catholicism’s purgatory in which the living could benefit the dead with the performance of masses or prayers. Although the visionary performed a brief service of spiritual preaching, the angel made it clear that this evangelism was primarily the work of the already departed.³⁰

Ann Lee, the Shaker prophetess and a contemporary of the above visionary, shared many of the same ideas but suggested mortals could also participate in the work of postmortal redemption. Lee once professed to have seen “an angel [understood as the righteous deceased] go out of heaven, and release souls who had been confined in prison for a long time.”³¹ One Shaker recounted his experience of spiritually spending six hours in “the belly of hell,” while he physically spent the evening in “excessive sufferings.”³² On another occasion, Ann Lee saw “a number of the dead who were willing to hear” this same Shaker deliver a discourse before an assembly of non-Shakers.³³

Whether Ann Booth was influenced by these earlier theologians and visionaries is unknown, but her vision was a part of this broader conversation on eschatology, universalism, and angelic ministries to the departed. Raised Methodist, she would have already been familiar with the concept of a middle state. Rejecting Wesley’s claim that judgment would have taken place before a person entered the middle state, her vision echoed Universalist sentiments that redemption was still available to the departed. As in other examples of contemporary visionary literature, Booth’s vision showcased an angelic ministry present to make this possible. Although a recent convert to the LDS Church, Booth would have also likely been aware of these discussions occurring among Church members.

30. Rachel Cope and Bradley Kime, “‘The Vision’: A Dream Account Collected and Preserved by Mary Bosanquet Fletcher,” *Wesley and Methodist Studies* 8, no. 1 (2016): 52–66.

31. *Testimonies of the Life, Character, Revelations and Doctrines of Mother Ann Lee . . .* (Albany, N.Y.: Weed, Parsons and Co., 1888), 187.

32. *Testimonies of the Life, Character, Revelations and Doctrines of Mother Ann Lee*, 192.

33. *Testimonies of the Life, Character, Revelations and Doctrines of Mother Ann Lee*, 190.

From the beginning of the Restoration, Joseph Smith had gradually revealed teachings on the state of the unconverted dead.³⁴ The Book of Mormon acknowledged a spiritual state between death and the final judgment, including both a paradise and “outer darkness” or hell, yet, as in Wesley’s theology, there was no discussion of redeeming the dead or of the wicked moving from hell to paradise (see Alma 40:9–14). However, one of Smith’s earliest revelations, dictated in 1829, explained that the scriptural phrase “endless torment” did not mean “that there shall be no end to this torment, but it is written *endless torment*,” suggesting the possibility that this would not be a permanent state of being (D&C 19:6, 10–12; italics in original). In 1832, as part of Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon’s open vision of the three degrees of glory, this concept was fleshed out when the Saints learned that “the spirits of men kept in prison, whom the Son visited, and preached the gospel” would be resurrected in a “terrestrial world.”³⁵

In 1836, prior to the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, Joseph saw another vision in which his deceased brother, Alvin, was present with the righteous in the celestial kingdom. Joseph was confused because Alvin had not been alive at the organization of the restored Church. It was then that Joseph heard the Lord explain, “All who have died without a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God” (D&C 137:6–7). Thus, by 1836, Joseph had developed an understanding that somehow the righteous who were prevented from hearing the gospel in this life would have the same opportunity as those who had. It is less clear when the Prophet came to understand how this would happen. It seems unlikely that Joseph had articulated the particulars of his later teachings on this matter before 1840.

In 1838, Joseph Smith had explained that “all those who have not had an opportunity of hearing the gospel, and being administered to by an inspired man in the flesh, must have it hereafter, before they can

34. For a detailed discussion of the unfolding of this doctrine, see the chapter “Salvation for the Dead,” in Charles R. Harrell, *“This Is My Doctrine”: The Development of Mormon Theology* (Sandy, Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 343–71.

35. D&C 76:71, 73. This vision also presented a novel piece of eschatology when it separated spirit prison from hell or outer darkness. Thus, the limited hell was not the residence of those who were in prison and simply ignorant of the gospel but of more committed sinners who rejected Christ. Even their hell would eventually lead to a degree of heaven. See D&C 76:81–84, 103–5.

be finally judged.”³⁶ While Joseph may have meant that there would be ministers in the spirit world or even that ordinances could be performed for the dead,³⁷ there is no corroborative evidence to suggest that the Saints understood this was the case. Rather, the Saints were still left without a clear idea of how salvation of the dead would come to pass.

Booth’s vision was deeply entrenched with questions of the time—questions shared by Latter-day Saints and broader Christianity. For her Mormon audience, her vision introduced two new components to what Joseph had already revealed. First, she personalized the redemption of the dead in the spirit world by suggesting that a latter-day Apostle had opened this work, which will be discussed in more detail below. Second, she included the image of spiritual baptisms taking place on the other side of the veil. The idea that the dead could be redeemed—even admitted into the celestial kingdom—had been explained, but the Saints lacked an explanation for how they could get around the requirement for baptism. Thus, one of the reasons that Booth’s vision was so attractive was that it fleshed out a solution to what must have been a common concern at the time.

David W. Patten: A Portrait of a Martyr

Brigham Young experienced “joy inexpressible” at Booth’s vision’s portrayal of “David W. Patten’s ministry in the world where he has gone.”³⁸ Patten was already given the reverence due a martyr. His death was portrayed as a holy scene in which he willingly embraced his fate.³⁹ Yet Patten’s afterlife had yet to be envisioned by the Latter-day Saint faithful.

While Latter-day Saints had an awareness of the continuing ministries of the righteous dead in the form of Moroni or John the Baptist, they had yet to think of one of their own in such an exalted status. In fact, in Booth’s vision, the martyr performed a role traditionally played by Christ. The narrative opened with Patten entering his own “harrowing of hell,” as the scene in 1 Peter 3:19 has been termed, to announce the gospel message to the spirits in prison. The key Patten holds reminds

36. Joseph Smith, “In Obedience to Our Promise . . .,” *Elder’s Journal* 1 (July 1838): 43.

37. Baugh, “For This Ordinance Belongeth to My House,” 47.

38. Brigham Young to Mary Ann Young, May 26, 1840, in Barney, “Letters of a Missionary Apostle to His Wife,” 178.

39. See, for example, Parley P. Pratt, *Late Persecution of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (New York, N.Y.: J. W. Harrison, 1840), 73–74.

us both of his position as an Apostle and Christ's appearance to John the Revelator while bearing the "keys of hell and of death" (Rev. 1:18). Patten also wears a similar white robe and golden girdle as the Savior in this scene (Rev. 1:13).

It is interesting that the death of Seymour Brunson, whose funeral sermon would be the setting for introducing baptism for the dead, was a scene in which these same teachings of postmortal ministry were displayed. In his dying moments, Brunson announced that he saw David Patten in the room. The martyr acted as psychopomp, beckoning Brunson to the other side.⁴⁰ Vilate Kimball reported that Brunson turned to Joseph and asked him "not to hold me any longer," because, speaking of Patten, "he wants me and the Lord wants me and I want to go."⁴¹

The image of Patten in the spirit world touched Latter-day Saints, as it did Brigham Young, because it was a glimpse of their beloved leader who died too soon. A twentieth-century commentator speculated that Booth's vision was also a message to the Apostles about a prophecy that seemed unfulfilled. In 1838, Joseph had dictated a revelation that urged Patten to prepare for his journey with the Apostles to England (D&C 114:1-2). Historian Douglas R. Patten speculated that the vision illustrates that "Elder Patten really did go to England or rather the England in the spirit world."⁴² Whether the Apostles had made this connection is unknown.

As noted above, the early Church had already embraced angelomorphism as one element of their views on the afterlife. Humans would continue to serve God throughout the eternities. Yet Booth's vision was the first image of a Latter-day Saint priesthood leader's service in the spirit world, presenting specific expectations of what that postmortal work might look like. Although Joseph likely first contemplated this idea before reading Booth's vision, the Prophet would not articulate the concept until after introducing baptism for the dead. When he finally wrote the Twelve Apostles about baptism for the dead on December 15, 1840, he explained, "The Saints have the priviledge of being baptized for those of their relatives who are dead, who they feel to believe would have

40. Phebe Woodruff wrote, "He said that David Patten was calling him and desired brother Joseph to let him go for he needed him." Phebe Woodruff to Wilford Woodruff, October 6, 1840, Church History Library.

41. Vilate Kimball to Heber C. Kimball, [September?] 6, 1840, Church History Library.

42. Douglas R. Patten to Linda Shelley Whiting, January 12, 1999, in Linda Shelley Whiting, *David W. Patten: Apostle and Martyr* (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 2003), 125 n. 23.

embraced the gospel if they had been privileged with hearing it, and who have received the gospel in the spirit through the instrumentality of those who may have been commissioned to preach to them while in the prison.”⁴³ A belief that the righteous would serve missions in the spirit world has become a common tenet in contemporary Mormonism, but it had rarely appeared before the summer of 1840.

The Conversion of John Wesley

One aspect of this vision that should not be overlooked is its emphasis on John Wesley. The founder of Methodism was not simply the first to be baptized in this portrayal of spirit prison, but, as Latter-day Saint readers will have noted, the appearance of David Patten to John Wesley in Booth’s vision bears close similarities with the 1829 appearance of John the Baptist to Joseph Smith. Both Patten and John the Baptist bestowed the Aaronic Priesthood and charged the newly ordained priests to proceed with baptizing their flocks. Wesley was held in high esteem in both Great Britain and the United States. While Protestants did not add to the canon of ancient saints, there is little question that for many Wesley stood as the most prominent of a pantheon of revered religious dead.⁴⁴ Brigham Young recalled that while on missions, he was frequently asked the question “Do you believe that such a man as John Wesley will be damned?”⁴⁵ On another occasion, Young said that honest people would frequently object to the gospel based on the Saints’ insistence that the true church was only restored with Joseph Smith. They would ask, in sincerity, “I wish I knew the truth about this. Our beloved brother and father in the Gospel, the father of the Methodist Episcopal Church, John Wesley, was he not a good man? Tell me that he is not saved!”⁴⁶

43. “Letter to Quorum of the Twelve, 15 December 1840.”

44. In addition to the vast influence of his teachings and publication of his sermons and diaries, relics associated with Wesley’s life were increasingly popular during the nineteenth century. See Frederick Hockin, *John Wesley and Modern Wesleyanism*, 3d ed. (London: Swift and Co., 1876), 80; Christopher M. B. Allison, “Holy Man, Holy Head: John Wesley’s Busts in the Atlantic World,” *Common-place: The Interactive Journal of Early American Life* 15 (Spring 2015), <http://www.common-place-archives.org/vol-15/no-03/lessons/#.VcoXzvLH8fg> (accessed August 8, 2015).

45. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 7:288 (October 9, 1859).

46. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 17:55 (May 3, 1874).

Latter-day Saints also held Wesley in high regard.⁴⁷ Several historians have begun to emphasize early Mormonism's prominent Methodist roots. While similarities between the two faiths led to conflict as is the case with many closely related religious movements, many Mormon converts were drawn to the Restoration in part out of a nostalgia for an earlier era of Methodism. Historian Christopher Jones has documented how Methodists-turned-Mormons often presented a positive view of Wesley even while sometimes disparaging the present incarnation of the faith.⁴⁸ It made sense for such individuals to view Wesley as "a Latter-day Saint," as Parley P. Pratt did, when publishing one of Wesley's sermons in June 1841.⁴⁹ Wesley was revered as a great reformer who paved the way for the light of the Restoration.

Conclusion

Ann Booth's vision was one of several known visions received by early Church members. It stands out because it was shared and considered respectfully among Church members and leaders. It was also part of a larger conversation in Christianity that asked not only if the unconverted could be saved, but how they would be saved. While Joseph Smith was aware of Booth's experience and its propagation among his flock, there is no evidence he was influenced by the vision. Instead, the

47. Young's own views on Wesley are interesting given that they seem as if they are in conversation with Booth's vision and Wesley's reception of the priesthood. "I never passed John Wesley's church in London without stopping to look at it. Was he a good man? Yes; I suppose him to have been, by all accounts, as good as ever walked on this earth, according to his knowledge. Has he obtained a rest? Yes, and greater than ever entered his mind to expect; and so have thousands of others of the various religious denominations. Why could he not build up the kingdom of God on the earth? He had not the Priesthood; that was all the difficulty he laboured under. Had the Priesthood been conferred upon him, he would have built up the kingdom of God in his day as it is now being built up. He would have introduced the ordinances, powers, grades, and quorums of the Priesthood: but, not holding the Priesthood, he could not do it. Did the Spirit of God rest upon him? Yes, and does, more or less, at times, upon all people." Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 7:5 (July 3, 1859).

48. Christopher C. Jones, "We Latter-day Saints Are Methodists: The Influence of Methodism on Early Mormon Religiosity" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 2009).

49. "John Wesley, a Latter-day Saint, in Regard to the Spiritual Gifts and the Apostasy of the Church," *Millennial Star* 2 (June 1841): 23.

importance of this obscure vision is that Joseph used it rhetorically as a means of clarifying his own revelation. The vision was likely a comfort to David Patten's family and the many Saints who were saddened by his death.

Long after Latter-day Saints were fully conversant with the doctrines of the redemption of the dead and three degrees of glory, Brigham Young's sermons employed the image of Wesley in the spirit world just as Joseph pointed to him in his first conference sermon on the subject of baptism for the dead. While Ann Booth's vision found appeal largely for its propositions on theological questions about the redemption of the dead and the work of deceased Saints, its description of the baptism and ordination of John Wesley would have pleased those who pondered the status of pre-Restoration reformers. Echoes of this concern with Wesley's eternal destiny and also his place as one of a revered group of forerunners to the Restoration is evident in the vicarious ordinances that Wilford Woodruff arranged to be performed in 1877.⁵⁰

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50. Wilford Woodruff, Journal, August 21, 1877. Historian Stephen Fleming has noted that John Wesley was also one of only three of these prominent men to be ordained a high priest, suggesting that "the special distinction granted to Columbus, Franklin, and Wesley suggests that they perhaps played a particularly important role." Stephen J. Fleming, "John Wesley: A Methodist Foundation for the Restoration," *Religious Educator* 9, no. 3 (2008): 131–50.

Pieces of April

From the Life and Journal of Lance Larsen

Lance Larsen and Casualene Meyer

Lance Larsen, BYU professor of English, completed in May 2017 a five-year appointment as Utah's poet laureate. BYU Studies is pleased to present a series of journal entries from Professor Larsen, preceded by a conversation between Larsen and BYU Studies poetry editor, Casualene Meyer.

Poetic Authenticity and Lived Experience: A Conversation with Lance Larsen

Casualene Meyer: Let's start with a question about your interest in journal entries. One rarely thinks of them as a medium for public consumption. Yet here you are publishing a selection in *BYU Studies*. What do they have to offer?

Lance Larsen: That's a question I've been asking myself ever since I submitted them. In fact, I still have misgivings. What happened was this: I was thumbing through my journal, which I rarely do, when I came across a sequence that held together better than most. Together, these entries had the look and feel of an extended collage. We almost never see journal entries until someone is either dead or famous. I happen to be neither. Why not change up the nonfiction one finds in an academic journal? So I submitted them.

CM: Have you always kept a journal?

LL: In junior high, my older sister gave me one as a Christmas gift, and I've been keeping one ever since, often erratically, with months

between entries. I have students who are much more consistent. In fact, one has written every day for eight or nine years. She puts me to shame. Still, I feel an impulse, maybe even a mild compulsion, to account for my days on this planet.

CM: Do you have any favorite journal writers?

LL: Too many to name, though I'll mention a few. Virginia Woolf, Thoreau, St. Paul of Tarsus (I'm counting his epistles as a kind of journal writing), an Austrian writer named Peter Handke. I was especially taken by the journals of John Cheever, which I first read when they were excerpted in *The New Yorker* in the early nineties. Cheever was a wildly successful short story writer and novelist in his day. He was also a conflicted Catholic, alcoholic, and suffered through a mostly unhappy marriage. All of which comes out in the journals—such brutal honesty. But at the same time, he wrote movingly about his buried and conflicted religious life. I found the entries both exhilarating and immensely sad.

I also have a soft spot for more documentary journals. Take for instance the day-to-day perspective of Samuel Pepys living in seventeenth-century London. Or the harrowing account of Mary Goble Pay (Marjorie Pay Hinckley's grandmother), who crossed the plains with the fated Martin Handcart Company. She was thirteen years old. And she lost her mother and two siblings and had to have her toes amputated because of frostbite. Journal entries tend not to be as pithy as poetry or as ruminative as essays, but they capture the *nowness* of human experience like no other genre.

CM: What's the relationship between your journal entries and your poems?

LL: I wish I could say something dramatic here, like journals are the rough draft of everything I write. The relationship is much more glancing and accidental than that. Sometimes I'll get lucky and find a journal entry that I can "English" into a poem after numerous drafts. More often than not, journal entries provide a window into the importance of noticing. They provide a glimpse into the inner life, a lived perspective that clarifies the creative process—sometimes obliquely, sometimes in a direct way. For instance, John Steinbeck kept a journal while writing *The Grapes of Wrath*. His insights make the novel richer and more human and the man himself much more appealing. He captures perfectly the self-doubt one has to overcome to tackle and keep tackling such a mammoth undertaking as a novel.

- CM:** If journal entries only rarely result in viable poems, what do you do to keep the poetry coming?
- LL:** Besides trying to read myself silly and learn from other arts, especially the visual arts, I try to “make it new” formally. I’ve fallen in love with the ode and pantoum and triolet. And during downtime, that is during piano recitals and bus rides and sitting in waiting rooms, I constantly fiddle with aphorisms. If poetry teaches one to think in image and metaphor, aphorism adds to the mix paradox and reversal and extreme distillation. To paraphrase Allen Grossman, an aphorism is a genesis and apocalypse in the same helping.
- CM:** What do you find most appealing in aphorisms? I mean, most people, if they know the word at all, think of aphorisms as a little stuffy—what you might find in a tattered quote book. Or as cute sayings on a mug.
- LL:** I get that reaction frequently, sometimes from very good students. I like to point out that some of our best minds couldn’t leave them alone—not only Bacon and Nietzsche, but also Dickinson, Oscar Wilde, and Walter Benjamin. Once you dip into aphorisms with some regularity, it’s hard to stay away. They have bite, and they endure.
- CM:** Care to share some examples?
- LL:** One of my sassy favorites comes from Cicero, which has immediate relevance today: “Politicians are not born; they are excreted.” I’ll leave it to the reader to name names. In a similar vein, contemporary aphorists expose foibles that have always been with us, as in these lines by a youngish Canadian poet: “The bushier the moustache, the more clichéd the pick-up line.” The local detail might change in an aphorism, but not the essence. And here’s one of my own: “In climbing a new mountain, wear old shoes.” I’m quite sure I wrote it, but it feels as if it has always existed, as if I was lucky enough to pluck it from some mythic wisdom tree. The centuries get erased more quickly in aphorism than perhaps in any other literary form.
- CM:** Let’s back up a bit now: when did you decide you wanted to be a poet?
- LL:** I took a poetry class my last semester as a graduating college senior and quickly realized I was better in lines than sentences, in image and metaphor than in plot. I loved the tweezers-and-magnifying-glass aspect of poetry, everything concentrated and up close. Still, it took me a couple years and a master’s degree to move decisively from fiction into poetry.

CM: It was Leslie Norris you studied with, right?

LL: Yes, which I still count as a serendipitous blessing. He was Welsh and had a gorgeous voice, epic and musical but very intimate, a voice that could turn the Yellow Pages into poetry. Not only was he personally acquainted with towering twentieth-century poets like Dylan Thomas and Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath, but at the same time he represented a direct line back to the vatic tradition of poet-prophets in British Romanticism. Going to class was intoxicating. At any given moment, Leslie might be channeling Wordsworth or Keats or Blake.

CM: Are there any other poets you especially admire?

LL: Pablo Neruda, among many. He's on my mind right now, because I had the chance to visit his former homes in Chile over Christmas break, all three of which have been converted into museums. In Valparaiso, one of the workers was wearing a T-shirt that read, "Confieso que he vivido." Translation: "I confess that I lived." Which is the title of one of Neruda's later books. I love the rich open-endedness of that sentence—simple but very packed. Every successful poem—whether his or someone else's—is a confession of what it means to live, what it means to occupy a body and mind in language at a particular moment of time. I love Neruda's amplitude and gusto, his fearlessness.

CM: By my count, Adam and Eve appear in at least three of your poems, including "Denouement": "But what could one flesh / mean to Eve?—who believed the breath / of life was a gift, and herself already whole." Any thoughts about why you keep returning to this first couple?

LL: I have no idea, except to say that their story is our story and has somehow gotten under my skin. Not only is Adam and Eve's fall the foundational story for three world religions, but it's a fascinating archetype as well—lots of mysteries to plumb. I'm particularly interested in the gaps in the story, how for instance Eve seems to be the wiser of the two, or at least the one with the most initiative, but Adam is assigned to do the naming. That seems an irresistible contradiction. I'm also intrigued by the Fall as a love story. Adam and Eve are estranged from each other, but their vulnerability is what throws them into each other's arms, both literally and figuratively. That's what I had in mind, I suppose, when I wrote these lines in "This World, Not the Next":

. . . God folded the garden and hid it
Deep inside the woman, but commanded
The man to tend it. And in due season the man
Eved, and the woman Adamed back.

- CM:** While we're on the subject of husband-and-wife pairs, your domestic poems resist the anger and angst that so often beset marriages. How does your experience with real-world married life inform the vision found in your poems? Would there be a Lance without a Jacqui?
- LL:** Not much of one. Most of my work has some autobiographical dimension to it, though I'm perfectly comfortable enhancing, distilling, grafting together, or even inventing detail for the sake of a poem. That said, the beloved my readers encounter on the page bears a noticeable resemblance, at least in some respects, to the beloved to whom I happen to be married. I want the authenticity of lived experience to inform everything I write.
- CM:** I wonder if you could say something about Jacqui's painting and collage. Her work is featured on the covers of your last three poetry collections, and you have a poem titled "On Being Asked, Have you ever written about Jacqui's paintings?" How does Jacqui's work influence yours and yours hers?
- LL:** I can say that the painterly lens through which I see the world has been largely shaped by Jacqui—not just her art work but her sensibility. I love the work of Vermeer, Joseph Cornell, the Abstract Expressionists, and Squeak Carnwath partly because I've seen these artists through her eyes. At the same time, she's picked up on the tone and cadences of poetry, and she's starting to include snippets of poems in recent paintings. Most importantly, we talk art all the time, whether it be theater, jazz, art happenings, or the recently discovered street photography of Vivian Maier. What a luxury to be able to talk shop with the one you love, and to sometimes collaborate.
- CM:** Recently, you've taken this spirit of collaboration one step further, with your joint show at the Springville Museum of Art. How did that exhibition come together?
- LL:** After collaborating on a show at BYU, we wanted to do a second exhibition somewhere but hadn't settled down and proposed anything. Then one Sunday, on a morning walk in the foothills above Springville, Jacqui noticed two things. First, how richly panoramic

the views were. Second, hardly anyone was outside. I mean no one. Not walking, not strolling, not sitting in their yards, not even in cars. It looked like an abandoned city.

Jacqui decided she wanted to get to know Springville even better than she already knew it, get to know it one street, one quirky house at a time, and to create a body of work documenting her rambles. That's how the title came about—Three Mile Radius—which meant everything within three miles of her basement studio was fair game. Jacqui also decided to include lines of poetry. That's how the collaboration got started. Then we put together a proposal to the director of the museum, and she said yes.

- CM:** Flannery O'Connor once said, "A story really isn't any good unless it successfully resists paraphrase." I feel the same applies to successful poems. Nevertheless, if I were to distill my personal experience with your poetry into a statement, I would say your work is intellectual, humble, humorous, and often documents a fallen world. How would you say this applies to a poem, such as "Winter Takeout," which tells a story about perilous winter driving, a large cinnamon roll, and a moment of accidental contact with a food server?
- LL:** You're right about the "fallen world." It's a clear leitmotif in my work, but I often treat it as if it were a *felix culpa* of sorts—a "lucky fall." Temporary estrangement from God and each other provides an opportunity for loneliness and growth and sometimes ironic celebration. In "Winter Takeout," the fallen world expresses itself in a winter snowstorm and the isolation and danger of driving through it. The narrator pulls into a truck stop for a cinnamon roll. The autobiographical trigger was a waitress touching my waist, as she stepped past me at the counter. This gesture on her part was purely pragmatic—I was in the way, and this space belonged to her—but because I was alone on a long drive in the middle of winter, it registered as something like tenderness.
- CM:** O'Connor has also said that "belief, in [her] case anyway, is the engine that makes perception operate." Talk about how your own beliefs—however you wish to define them—help your poetic perception to operate.
- LL:** If I didn't believe in God, the Fall, Christ's redemption, and an after-life, I would still write poems, but they would be different poems. In summing up what drives my work, a reviewer of my first collection referred to "the gravitational pull of the Divine." That strikes

me as right. He later quotes from my poem “Errand,” which introduces fairly directly the constitutive binary of here versus there: “Your errand, tongue, to know / the exact savor of the world’s flesh / Then to translate beyond it.” That balancing of these overlapping realities, though often camouflaged, operates in all my books and remains a force I feel incapable of ignoring, even if I wanted to.

CM: What role does devotional poetry by other writers play in carrying you forward?

LL: A huge role. You know how you carry around quotes like little lamps? Here’s one by Andrew Hudgins, who writes about growing up in a southern Baptist tradition he no longer practices. He embraces a pluralistic inclusiveness I find illuminating: “I don’t read or write like a Christian. I read as a reader, one who responds to a book or poem—and there is just as much pleasure in being swept away by a humanity that is embodied in a faith one doesn’t share as being swept away by humanity embodied in a faith you do share.”

I read Mormon poets with sympathy and a certain élan—many are friends or at least acquaintances, sometimes former students—but I certainly don’t limit myself to the tribe. Right now I’m teaching a capstone course in which we’re reading Catholics and Protestants, a Jewish writer, a Buddhist, and a sort of secular ventriloquist who sometimes speaks in the voice of God. What remarkable perspectives they bring to the table. One of my favorite poets is Pulitzer Prize winner Charles Wright, who at a reading in Salt Lake referred to himself as “a God-fearing nonbeliever.” And yet his poems are shot through with rich devotional glimmerings. In looking for authentic poetry, you have to trust the poem first, not what the poet says about it.

CM: You are not only a poet but a teacher, which suggests you believe in the value of teaching the art of writing poetry. Your poem “Adding a Ghost-like Hum to Your Inner Life” makes a generous statement: “In this waiting room called Planet Earth, / We are all stenographers of the sublime.” How do students of creative writing and all people who have the desire to write fulfill the measure of their poetic ability?

LL: By writing. I know this sounds like a cop-out answer, but I mean it sincerely. Writers write, and I’m sad to report that many students I’ve taught, including the most talented, simply stop. There aren’t a

lot of social or monetary incentives to keep doing this difficult art, especially when the art doesn't line up with how you put bread on the table. Of course, I think one's art is always worth fighting for. If you continue to read seriously and write with some frequency, the writing itself will guide you. Writing teaches you what you don't know but need to know. Writing will guide you into finding communities that value the words you put on the page.

CM: I understand your current project is a collection of prose poems. Talk about that for a minute or two.

LL: Even seven years ago, I couldn't have predicted my fascination with them. But I found myself wanting to experiment and found some wiggle room in prose poems that I didn't perceive in lineated verse—a more flexible voice, a chance to add to rather than constantly pare away. I'm not saying one can't do all those things in poetry, but I felt I needed to try something new. I call them prose poems, but they're perhaps more accurately lyric paragraphs. Some are essayistic, a handful lean toward fiction, and four follow a strict Q&A format. One piece I submitted to a magazine as a poem but the editor accepted it as a story. Another editor insisted on publishing a piece as an essay, against my (not very vehement) objections. I can't tell you how delighted I am by confusions of genre like this.

CM: Do you find yourself addressing the fallen world in these poems as well? And are any of them religious in tone?

LL: An independent reader probably wouldn't call the collection predominately religious, but I address my usual concerns, perhaps under the radar. Still, some of the titles strike a devotional tone, often in a humorous way: "My Lord Of," "In Toledo, the Sequestered Brides of Christ," "Sad Jar of Atoms," and "Mother Teresa This, Mother Teresa That." My favorite title I lifted straight from the mouth of a kid in my ward who was describing how he imagined heaven: "All Puffy and White, Goldish, Harpy, and Angelonic." Unfortunately, you're not going to find that in any Bible dictionary. Most of these poems are more recent than the journal entries, but I think they ask some of the same questions: how do we make our way through the "wobbly splendor" (that's a phrase from Czesław Miłosz) of this world.

CM: What do you feel you owe your art and what do you feel you owe your readers?

- LL:** To the art, I owe the attempt to not dishonor the tradition. It's hard to imagine a place at the table with the greats, but when my work sits down to supper with poems by Elaine Equi or Phil Levine—that is, when we show up in the same magazine—I hope I wouldn't embarrass myself. What I owe my reader is fresh eyes, new wheels, an immersion in language that ends up changing the way the world looks for twenty-four hours, which was Elizabeth Bishop's litmus test for successful poetry.
- CM:** You're finishing up your five-year appointment as Utah's poet laureate. Any particular impressions? What have you learned?
- LL:** That poetry is alive and kicking in the Beehive State. This is true of K-12 writers, college students, professors, even hobbyists who pour an immense amount of time into the making of poems. There's no shortage of talent in this state. I'm especially heartened by the heavy involvement of Utah high school students in Poetry Out Loud. This is a national recitation competition sponsored by the NEA. I've been lucky enough to be involved in the finals the last several years. No way did I possess the confidence to do that as a high schooler.
- CM:** So poetry isn't going away?
- LL:** Not anytime soon. Someone once asked the poet Richard Howard, who was a member of the Academy of American Poets at the time, what could be done to increase poetry's readership. His answer went something like this: "Poetry has always been a private pleasure. Let's just keep it a secret." Though a little flip, he was celebrating the fact that poetry will survive our puny efforts to promote it. It's not going to compete with blockbuster movies (thank goodness), certainly not in explosions per minute, but it will continue to carry out its secret ministry.

I once read an article that argued that T. S. Eliot's *The Waste-land*, first published in 1922, had a significant influence on British punk bands in the late 1970s. How was such a thing possible? Trickle-down aesthetics. What was edgy and obscure in the '20s entered the mainstream some fifty years later. I love the fact that poetry is both avant-garde and profoundly communal at the same time. When Yeats died in 1939, W. H. Auden wrote a moving elegy, celebrating not just the man but the art itself. The last stanza sums up nicely the rejuvenating potential of poetry:

In the deserts of the heart
 Let the healing fountain start,
 In the prison of his days
 Teach the free man how to praise.

That's what poetry has always done, praise the world and God,
 and ask questions.

Pieces of April: Selected Journal Entries

1 April 2013

Springville

We celebrated Mom's 90th last night in Bountiful at Kris and Carl's—a dessert open house that drew over twenty friends and family. We sang to Jeane, ate cake, buried her in cards, potted mums, and congratulations. All four of our kids were on hand—five if you count Chase, our soon-to-be son-in-law, which we do. A few days ago, after lamenting yet another thing she had forgotten, Mom said, “My mind is like crumbly cheese.”

I'm a day late for channeling Easter properly, but here's C. S. Lewis extrapolating from a line by Thomas More: “If you have not chosen the kingdom of God, it will make in the end no difference, what you have chosen instead.’ These are hard words to take. Will it really make no difference whether it was women or patriotism, cocaine or art, whisky or a seat in the Cabinet, money or science? Well, surely no difference that matters. We shall have missed the end for which we are formed and rejected the only thing that satisfies. Does it matter to a man dying in a desert, by which choice of route he missed the only well?”

We certainly Eastered up the Sabbath: dinner of pulled pork, roasted asparagus, fruit salad, and trifle for eleven; birthday celebrations for Lance and Jewelee;¹ an Easter egg hunt in the backyard; a spiritual thought compliments of Jeff Holland. On top of all that, Jacqui spoke in church, which I missed by ten minutes since I was busy with releasings and callings in two YSA wards in Provo. Her linchpin story was the Paris chocolate caper,² which I intend to roll out myself one of these Sundays.

1. Jewelee is Lance's sister-in-law.

2. The Paris chocolate caper refers to responding with an apology and a gift of chocolate. Lance and Jacqui gave this response to an upstairs neighbor who, they assumed, had sent a harsh note about their being noisy at night in their apartment. The neighbor responded with a gift of exquisite Belgian chocolate, far better than their gift, and told them the management regularly distributed

The strangest thing that happened yesterday was Tessa's³ encounter with the remarkable Honda Odyssey cinch-me-in-for-eternity seat belt. Somehow thanks to her waif-thin skinnyness and contortionist flexibility, she ended up with the belt twisted around her twice. When she released the catch, she was still inside the loop, which cinched tighter and tighter and wouldn't let her go. We tried everything to no avail, and now her ribs were hurting and she couldn't breathe all that well. In the end, I had to rescue her with a hacksaw!

I may as well end in celebration with a passage from Jack Gilbert, whose poems I'm teaching today. From "The Forgotten Dialects of the Heart" sans line breaks: "When the thousands of mysterious Sumerian tablets were translated, they seemed to be business records. But what if they are poems or psalms? . . . O Lord, thou art slabs of slate and ingots of copper as grand as ripe barley lithe under the wind's labor. Her breasts are six white oxen loaded with bolts of long fibered Egyptian cotton. My love is a hundred pitchers of honey. Shiploads of thuya are what my body wants to say to your body. Giraffes are this desire in the dark. Perhaps the spiral Minoan script is not a language but a map. What we feel most has no name but amber, archers, cinnamon, horses, and birds."

6 April 2013

Springville

Conference Saturday. Jacqui and Tessa are in Lehi for a soccer game. I'm on the stage of the stake center listening to Robert D. Hales. Beside me, Dylan⁴ is nodding off, more like a bobbing toy you put on your dashboard than a priesthood holder. He seems to have survived orchestra tour in California, though clearly he doesn't want to be here tonight. Before, between, and after conference sessions, I was outside taming chaos: pruning the privet hedge, raking, tidying up messy beds.

Tad Callister quoting someone: "Do not die with your music still in you."

Later the same evening. Like everyone else in the stake, Dylan and I sealed our spiritual feast with a physical one. Sonic seems to be the venue of choice, so we ventured further afield—Me Kong Café. There's nothing like massaman curry to heal rifts and lubricate the talk—chicken for me, tofu for Dylan, who is three weeks a vegetarian. We talked about Disney, long road trips, gossip girls, sushi, astronomy, etc. How relaxed and off the cuff

those notes and that they hadn't disturbed her at all. The moral being that responding with kindness rather than anger makes for sweeter relationships.

3. Tessa is Lance's younger daughter.

4. Dylan is one of Lance's sons.

he was at dinner, how passionate and genuine. I paid the bill, tipping generously, and we headed into the dark. Never mind that we forgot our box of delicious leftovers at the table. In the parking lot, we found an unopened bag of sour cream and onion potato chips. When the front door closes on you, you can usually find a window cracked open in the back.

14 April 2013

Provo

The downside of unmatched Sunday schedules: I'm sometimes finished with meetings as early as 11:30, Jacqui and the kids stagger home at 2:00. The upside of our Sunday schedules, exactly the same thing. Usually it's hunger that hurries me home. Today, because I'm fasting, I have my feet up on my desk here in the JFSB, having vowed to scribble whatever floats across my radar. Think of me as an oversized piece of fly paper greedy for stories, hungry for unclaimed syllables.

Thanks to my daily commute between Springville and Provo, I've managed to keep Benjamin Franklin's career afloat. I'm listening to the last of fourteen lectures by a professor at Texas A&M. Poor Ben, he's still in Paris widowed, in his eighties, having successfully negotiated treaties first with France and now with England. What to do now? He wants to go home, but he has suitors and supporters in Paris. He wants to go home, but he has kidney stones and believes the trip by coach to the coast will do him in. He isn't long for this world. Goodbye to Silence Dogood, goodbye to his tyrant brother in Boston, goodbye to the swimming lessons he gave in London as a teenager, goodbye to *Poor Richard's Almanac*, goodbye to kites and electricity and honorary doctorates, goodbye to a career as diplomat and gadfly and his face on a special line of French chamber pots, goodbye to a fistful of aphorisms that will never go out of style:

"He that lies down with Dogs, shall rise up with fleas."

"Where there's Marriage without Love, there will be Love without Marriage."

"Three may keep a secret, if two of them are dead."

"Poverty, poetry, and new Titles of Honour, make men ridiculous."

I was hoping for a trifecta in death by burying Indie's three victims in one grave—what a cat!—but I couldn't find the snake when I needed it, so I laid out the baby robin and mouse, and I'm waiting for the deceased serpent to turn up again.

How jealous I am of young fathers. All of them, even the short ones, are as tall as mountains, none having suffered the pangs of failing their own flesh and blood.

Is reading aphorisms in the shade beside a fountain with a family of quail soft-toeing it behind me decadence or prayer?

Here's a passage from Elder Holland's conference talk last weekend: "When problems come and questions arise, do not start your quest for faith by saying how much you do not have, leading as it were with your 'unbelief.' This is like trying to stuff a turkey through the beak! Let me be clear on this point: I am not asking you to pretend to faith you do not have. I am asking you to be true to the faith you do have. Sometimes we act as if an honest declaration of doubt is a higher manifestation of moral courage than an honest declaration of faith."

Shaving is like writing a poem. You have a mirror, good light, and your blade is reasonably sharp. You make calculated passes till the lather disappears. You think you're finished. Then you touch your face, that new creation, and realize what a shoddy, barbaric job you've done. More swipes, more touching. In the end, all you get is close to close.

15 April 2013

Springville

Dream: I found myself at an art colony which was little more than an open-sided refugee camp with palm leaves as the roof. Too many people crammed into too little space with not enough ideas. Where were the bathrooms and running water? What was I supposed to eat? Was I a collage artist without materials? A poet without a Muse? I kept wandering around trying to find a private spot without any flies.

Six sneezes, new snow, Dylan off to orchestra at 6:30 a.m., taxes paid but Roth IRAs to figure out, Esther and Mordecai saved and all the Jews in the kingdom of Ahasuerus. But what of Haman who plotted against Mordecai and company? He's hung from the gallows along with his ten sons. Oh, and by the way, by official decree the Jews, who have now found favor with Ahasuerus, "slew of their foes seventy and five thousand," which must be acceptable behavior since "they laid not their hands on the plunder." All this followed by feasting. Clearly, I'm missing the point of this story. Wouldn't it be better to be dead than have the blood of seventy-five thousand on your hands?

16 April 2013

Springville

The death toll in Boston has inched up from two to three, with well over a hundred injured, many with their legs blown off. The source of the blasts: a pair of pressure cookers filled with explosives along with ball bearings and nails. All agree this is an act of terrorism, but foreign

Aphorisms for a Lonely Planet

1

Great journeys begin not with a first step but a door left ajar.

2

Wonder is the yeast of the imagination.

3

Gesundheit!—as close as I've come to Nietzsche and Heidegger in months.

4

Can you hear the angels singing? Me neither.

5

Rome wasn't built in a day but that's all it takes an American tourist to see the good parts.

6

Theory is a leaky cup.

7

To climb a new mountain, wear old shoes.

8

One doesn't read Paul Celan so much as consent to be interviewed by darkness.

9

Look at that celebrity soar!—like a worm in the beak of a hungry bird.

10

Attendant at the animal shelter showing me a six-toed cat: "That Hemingway character bred them," she said. "I think he was a writer or something."

11

Fraud or Freud: for seven drafts not even my spell check could tell the difference.

12

Astonish the gods: return that borrowed hammer.

13

One need not be Catholic to have a soft spot for religious vows. Take a certain *chocolateria* in Toledo, Spain: nuns labor behind kitchen partitions where no one sees them, not even the waitresses. Meanwhile, I sit by the window, tasting something ineffable in the hot chocolate, a cloistered wholesomeness lacing the churros. Feed me again Lord with your unseen hands.

14

The older I get the higher I rise—on the Grim Reaper's to-do list.

15

Foolish reader, still trying to use this poem as a mirror?

16

One of those epiphanic moments when I'm so certain the rolling field is my body and the sky is my breathing that I refuse to answer to any epithet but Infinity. Then someone calls my name and I turn.

17

We measure grief not as the crow flies but as the buzzard circles.

18

The womb never forgets.

19

In his nineteenth-century nest-and-egg engravings, the good reverend F. O. Morris always follows the same formatting: nest like a catcher's mitt, egg floating above. But is the egg homing to the mitt or lifting into the sky?

20

Even Rembrandt tried to avoid painting hands.

21

I fill the teapot not to slake my thirst but to be summoned by singing.

22

In triumph or despair, pet a cat.

(Originally appeared in *Southern Review*, *Hanging Loose*, *Great River Review*, and elsewhere)

or domestic? I'm naive enough to prefer domestic, which would make the devastation seem more random and less sinister—lowercase crazy rather than Crazy with a manifesto attached. One of my students, Catherine Bramble, was five hundred feet away when the bombs went off. Safe but no doubt shaken. An eye witness, whatever that means. She should be writing this entry.

Which Naomi should we trust? The Naomi of Ruth 1:20–21: “Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty.” Or the Naomi of Ruth 4:15–16: “And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life . . . for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better than seven sons, hath born him. And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it.” We always trust chronology, we always trust the way the story seems to end. But for most of our minutes we inch along, our stories deliciously unfinished. Which of these Naomis and 10,000 others not mentioned in scripture is me?

According to the history of England I'm listening to, Joseph of Arimathea may have been Mary's uncle and may have wandered 5,000 miles to England and may have planted a hawthorn bush to prove he was there and may have brought Christ along for the ride. Folklore and wishful thinking, of course, which doesn't make the stories less true. What is beyond dispute is that the Romans did set up shop in England roughly two millennia ago and that both *Kaiser* and *Czar* are modern etymological derivations of *Caesar*. Also, the term Caesarian delivery comes from Caesar, who had to be cut from his mother's womb. No mention made of what became of his mother.

Yesterday's snow melted but was followed by a frieze of wetter stuff that takes us back to February rather than forward into spring.

I must be turning into an old man: I found not one pair of reading glasses on top of my head during a recent grading session but two.

Fresh from the shower, cleanliness levels restored to acceptable levels, I felt a crushing need for an infusion of melancholy, so I found Fleetwood Mac via YouTube, more specifically Stevie Nicks crooning “. . . and what you had and what you lost, and what you had . . .” Where do I end the quote, what story do the ellipses tell?

What I jotted down a few weeks ago in response to the prompt “Why do you write?” Because ink on lined paper smells almost as good as a

By Road and Sky

Hit and left for dead, this porcupine. A mess of flesh and entrails in a smear of blood. It jerked a little, then tried dragging itself away. My father pulled over and rummaged in the trunk for something to finish it off. My father was coolness that night. Or was he grace? He straddled that twitching porcupine and raised a tire iron above his head. I watched. Still is was my mother I loved. My mother in the front seat, with her pill box hat and apricot skirt. My mother, with a sleek armada of moles above her collarbone and her left front tooth overlapping the right. She turned away from the slash of high beams across asphalt and the valley opening below.

I was not her first son, or favorite. But the one lucky enough to ride in the backseat that night. The one whose face she used as a mirror to watch my father rain down three shivering blows. She reached for me across the seat, then turned to the radio, as if I or the evening needed serenading. The wedding reception we were late for could wait. And the city juggling its neon promises. And my father explaining that bad driving is to accidents as a tire iron is to mercy. My mother held me. The ghost of the porcupine hovered over its remains, then rose with the moon and drifted south. And the road said *never* and the sky said *always* and both told the truth.

(Originally appeared in *In All Their Animal Brilliance*)

burned match. Because at 5:45 a.m. I'm an empty chalice and words lick like blood. Because writing is less expensive than primal scream therapy. Because I don't have the luxury of marking the world like Sundance, my neighbor's exuberant yellow lab, and thus claiming it as his own. Because palimpsests are truer than birthmarks. Because to erase, one first has to write.

And what do the famous have to say about writing? Katherine Paterson: "I want to be a spy for hope." Mario Vargas Llosa: "The writer is an exorcist of his own demons."

And May, May is waiting off stage, fidgety, with a certain fragrant beauty, like new poems.

"Inventory in a thimble"—my phrase or someone else's? I have no idea.

Nakedness—a garment of skin we put on each time we disrobe.

Today at noon, while I was bidding goodbye to my poetry class in pitas and hummus and pasta salad, Jacqui was up in Bountiful saying goodbye to her Uncle Stan in sackcloth and ashes and a veil. Or at least a dark skirt. If we die piecemeal, Stan had already shed a majority of himself months ago, so his final gesture of stilled breath was closer to confirmation than expiration. Aunt Maren seemed nonplussed by the whole affair. The most memorable part of the funeral, according to Jacqui, was the closing prayer given by a family friend and longtime neighbor. You expect second person in a prayer, but rather than address God, the neighbor gave advice to Stan about how to pass to the other side, then advice to Maren, then to Stan's son, Kevin. Advice that bordered on reprimand. How I wish I had a transcript.

What is the wind but a promiscuous stenographer writing in disappearing ink?

28 April 2013

Springville

Five or six weeks and Dylan is still vegetarian. I thought the decision came largely out of the blue, but today during our Sunday walk I learned otherwise. Just off the trail up Hobblecreek Canyon, we came across a deer carcass likely dead since fall. "This is where I decided," Dylan said. "Cody Woolsey and I shook hands over this dead deer and vowed never to eat meat again." I looked down—bone and hoof, fur, desiccated organs. More the idea of a deer than an actual deer. Symbolically, did the deer represent all the creatures Dylan has eaten during his life?

My Lord Of

My lord of March in Madrid and a desultory stroll through Paseo Park. My lord of buying sweet yams from a vendor and devouring them in their skins, even the burned parts. My lord of green grass springy so I throw myself down. My lord of my daughter reading Jules Verne beside me. My lord of a single feather on the grass, which I send aloft, a numinous novel of the air. My lord of Picasso's *Guernica* in the Reina Sophia Museum four blocks from here. My lord of the wall opposite the painting turning blue every six months, a mystery like statues weeping. My lord of the mystery solved: visitors sliding their jeans against the wall to get a wider perspective on fire raining down on hooved animals and the peasants who feed them. My lord of three million glorious bodies in this city, but all I need is my beloved's. Until she arrives, my lord of impatient waiting, and after, my lord of hugging her like a lost lover, just a few layers of decorum between her electric skin and mine. My lord of a bike thrown down in sand like a gored horse, of cigarette smoke rising ragged and holy. My lord of who feeds these feral cats slinking and where do all the feathers of the world end up? My lord of my achy left leg growing achier on account of my daughter leaning. My lord of fourteen years ago she didn't exist on this planet, neither 20,000 leagues below or above. My lord of right now and not yesterday and maybe not tomorrow—therefore let her lean. My lord of sun and desire, of green and again green, of feathers I can't see floating like petitions borne by the breeze. My lord of here I am, where, where are you? My lord of thank you. My lord of my endless Lord.

(Originally appeared in *Portland Magazine*)

Two metal chairs and a table set up in the front yard so that Jacqui can spray paint them a snowy blue: a tableau from a Raymond Carver short story?

“100 Days.” What Jacqui has christened her latest workout regime: just do something physical every day. Nine days in and she’s perfect. Tag-along Lance is slogging along at 67%.

Indie’s latest trick: climb our Austrian black pine to the roof of our neighbor’s shed, then daintily her way down their nectarine tree, pad across the backyard, then meow at the back door till someone, usually Ashley, fusses over her.

After finals some students load up their cars and drive home for the summer, others begin internships, still others celebrate and take road trips across the bleak gorgeousness of America. Derek⁵ and friends go dumpster diving. So far he has netted a couch, a mostly useable laptop with lots of memory, a lamp, a couple pairs of shoes, and tons of unopened pasta and ramen. Also a juicer.

The Fred Ouchi⁶ watercolor is packed up and ready to send to my brother, Jon. After anchoring three houses—in Pocatello, Lakewood, and Sandy—it begins its journey to Seattle. No room for it in Mom’s new quarters at the rest home. My Aunt Mimi gave it to Dad as a thank-you gift in 1968, a few months after her husband (my mom’s brother) died in a terrible car accident during a trip to Montana. Where does the thank you come in? Aunt Mimi was living in Pocatello at the time. When she got the news, Uncle Don was in intensive care and fading fast. There were no flights to Bozeman, and she was in no condition to drive by herself, so my dad drove her. Uncle Don lasted just long enough for Mimi to squeeze his hand and for him to say his final goodbyes. What a drive that must have been. Seven hours there and seven hours back. What did Mimi and my dad talk about, especially now that she was a widow? Or rather what didn’t they talk about? Unfortunately, the painting became for me a kind of memento mori. I’d look at it and not see smudged hills or dusky greens but my uncle’s casket—where could you hide it in the painting? Plenty of room in the tumbledown barn or a certain stand of trees, perhaps even room in the ditch, right there close to the road.

5. Derek is one of Lance’s sons.

6. Fred Ouchi was a highly regarded Idaho watercolorist of the 1950s and ’60s.

What an unpredictable game soccer is. In Friday's contest, Tessa's team was down by one at the half but roared back to win 7-1, which doesn't count an eighth goal that was called back for an alleged offside.

The Brooke-and-Chase⁷ courtship continues to heat up. Chase hasn't proposed, but they're deciding whether to get married this summer, over Christmas break, or the summer of 2014. We keep looking for reasons to say no but can't find any.

I've been brainstorming a book-length memoir about growing up in Idaho. May as well jot down what I wanted way back when in junior high. Make the year 1975:

- *my own Datsun 240 Z
- *a color TV and a subscription to HBO, like my friend Donald Coons
- *a beard, or at least the beginnings of one
- *the chance to see Bigfoot
- *proof that the Bermuda Triangle was real
- *better Spanish—so I wouldn't have to cram for exams
- *plenty of moola
- *an unending supply of bottle rockets and a dad who would let me shoot them off
- *a guardian angel who knew me by name
- *Lori Butikofer, whom I had a crush on
- *an upside-down Curtis Jenny airmail stamp worth at least \$35,000
- *to be a starting guard for Franklin Junior High
- *the chance to break any commandment I wanted without feeling guilty
- *to levitate from my bed while meditating and float out my window

Mark Twain: "The man who is a pessimist before he's 48 knows too much; the man who is an optimist after he is 48 knows too little."

Jeff Holland: "[Twain] named his house cats, rather apocalyptically, Famine, Pestilence, Satan, and Sin."

Advice to myself: Re-read Bede's remarkable description of mortality, like a bird flying in through one monastery window and out through another, then use it in a talk. Before is eternity, and after is eternity, but the flight in the middle—that's mortal life.

7. Brooke is one of Lance's daughters.

Aperture

Poor pigeon—looking for further meadows
of blue, it took a wrong turn into cool
glass
and entered eternity, a miscalculation
that won't wash off. Rain has tried.
Each time I glance up from my desk,

a smudged breast under a slash
of wings keeping worlds separate.
The *out there* of frisbees and quick wristed
boys constellating a fall morning.
The *in here* of paper and filtered air

and a machine that croons I'm not in
even when I am. Some would call
this a window—fire plus melted sand
equals glass—a paradox, a brittle liquid
that holds still, sometimes for centuries.

A secret the Romans took with them
when they pulled out of Britannia,
leaving
the Saxons or Angles or whoever they were
to use strips of horn as windowpanes.

For centuries, then, they looked through
cow the way I look through pigeon,
 darkly, waiting to be transformed,
trickles
of light warming my face. I pick up the phone
 and my mouth pulls from my cranium
sentences uncomposed that compose me.

I take down a book: yesterday plus
 800 years. In this case, *Hymn of*
Caedmon,
in which a sparrow flies through an abbey—
 from one eternity to another through a
slice
of now. Lucky for that sparrow, the apertures

were unglassed. I look out again.
 In the courtyard a couple prepares to
part,
first by moving their mouths in words,
 then bringing their mouths together
to elegize *now* and thus make room

for future *now*. A kind of work we call pleasure.
 He closes his eyes to see more clearly.
Past windows open all over my body.
 She holds her finger in a Victorian
novel
to help her find her way by getting lost.

(Originally appeared in *Backyard Alchemy*)

What I found in my father's bottom bedroom drawer when I got to snooping around in grade school:

- *a swimsuit I'd never seen
- *a jar of Wheatie pennies and a few silver dollars
- *three arrowheads, one nearly perfect
- *a geologist's magnifying glass on an adjustable neck cord
- *a pick ax
- *several bandanas, most of them red.
- *five or six pocket knives
- *a tube of contraceptive foam, along with instructions, which were both sexy and impossible to understand
- *a stamp collection, including a duck stamp signed by my grandfather, Ershel Larsen

On top of that set of drawers a pair of matching photographs of my grandparents—my mother's parents. In black and white of course. McKay went by Mac and walked with a glittery cane and was very much alive. Helga went by Elgie and died a few months before my first birthday. Did they tell each other secrets over the great divide? And how did they hold hands? The living and the dead watching my every move.

Lance Larsen is the author of five poetry collections, most recently *What the Body Knows* (Tampa, 2017). His poetry and prose appear widely, in such venues as *Southern Review*, *Georgia Review*, *APR*, *Brevity*, *Poetry*, *New York Review of Books*, and *Best American Poetry 2009*. He has received a number of awards, including a Pushcart Prize and a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. With his artist wife, Jacqui, he recently collaborated on *Three-Mile Radius*, an exhibition at the Springville Museum of Art celebrating making art where you are. He teaches writing and literature at BYU.

Casualene Meyer received bachelor's and master's degrees from Brigham Young University in 1992 and 1994, respectively, and received a PhD in 1996 from the University of Southern Mississippi. She is poetry editor for *BYU Studies* and an adjunct instructor of English at Dakota State University. She lives with her family in Madison, South Dakota.

Aviophobia

Kim Webb Reid

I

The January day SkyWest Flight 1834 smashed into a private two-seater plane midair over my elementary school, I was at recess. Some of us snatched at clothes drifting down from the sky because we thought they should be handed over to the school's lost and found. We didn't know yet of all the lost things that could never be returned: a jagged wing blocking my friend's front door; a pilot's black leather seat perched on my neighbor's roof; the lives of ten passengers, captains, and crew. Grown-ups spoke in whispers about the carnage found in backyards and closed roads and the porch of St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church.

When the disaster crew finished combing our neighborhood and the reporters left, I drew pictures of angels, their waxy Crayon smiles indifferent to the broken baggage and bodies I drew along the bottom of the page. Those angels were safe now, and happy, my parents said. I knew God wanted me to believe it.

Months after the plane crash, I found a rusting metal fragment in the sodden schoolyard, a piece of a gear or an oil pump or some other engineering artifact. I couldn't shake the knowledge that people who dared take their feet off solid ground sometimes flew to pieces.

II

My family moved away from our lower-middle-class neighborhood near Salt Lake International and ended up in a small country house with a view of Russ McDonald Field beyond the cow pasture. World

War II-era stunt planes lumbered off McDonald's runway and barrel-rolled over my house while I counted each second the engines stalled.

My senior year, I met BeckyAnn, a swimmer with serious blue eyes darker than the deep end. She wasn't like me, bracing for impact every time one of those acrobatic planes sputtered overhead. She'd moved eight hundred miles from her coastal home because her parents were going through a nasty divorce, and she wasn't worried. She had to babysit her younger sisters while her mom went back to school, and she couldn't go to college herself next year with the rest of us, and she wasn't worried. She moved through life with the steadiness of an early morning lap swim like she was slicing through the county pool instead of a riptide.

Sometimes she invited friends to swim after hours at the pool where she worked as an instructor. When she dove in headfirst, the water lapped against me bobbing along in the shallow end, my feet safely touching the floor.

III

A pilot once suggested that to conquer fear of flying, I should imagine the airplane swimming. Air and water are both fluids, both buoyant. Just as a cruise liner won't sink under normal conditions, planes rarely fall out of the sky.

But sometimes they do. The problem with phobias is you can always find a reason to justify them.

On another January day, one of the rickety planes I'd watched with such suspicion nose-dived into the snowy pasture and exploded, leaving a black crater in the ground.

Pilot error, the reports often say when there's an air disaster, as if that should make the public feel safer—as if piloting errors don't occur for me on a daily basis while I navigate through this life with anxiety.

IV

I come from a family who expresses great faith and believes in the divine purpose of death, all while going to extreme lengths to stay alive. For me, the friction between the need for spiritual surrender and physical survival is constant.

I wonder if my grandmother felt the same tension. For most of her life, she didn't have a driver's license, and she never owned the deadliest of modern machines—a microwave oven. She knew it would cause cancer.

In her defense, her socioeconomic demographic included many women who didn't drive cars or own microwaves, but to hear Mom tell the story, avoidance probably played a part in her choices. My grandmother put a dent in her dad's car the first time she took the wheel, so she decided driving wasn't for her. Living in the suburbs without public transit, with a husband not sober enough to drive, did little to change her mind.

Grandma succumbed to cancer at age fifty-six. Her brothers died at forty-seven and almost fifty-seven. The beginnings of disease were probably lurking in their cells since long before microwave ovens became popular, since the day they were born with unlucky genes or began eating food grown in contaminated soil. The military had engaged in open air nuclear testing, and no one can say if my grandma's family was affected by living downwind.

It's hard to feel peace when logic tells you you're never safe, even when you don't fly, even when you stay home and don't drive cars or use microwave ovens.

That's probably the biggest reason I'm on earth, to learn the hardest lesson. I must surrender my trust to God without him promising my physical preservation in return.

V

The first time I mustered the faith to board an aircraft, a budget airline that didn't assign seats, I prayed for my life. I also prayed I'd get a window seat. If I was going to compromise my safety on a fast ride home, I wanted to make sure I got the full experience. As runway peeled away from wing, I laughed nervously, startling the passengers around me. I was twenty-two the first time I saw the earth bend and twist like warped photographs in the sun as the airplane banked.

I felt I'd cleared a huge personal hurdle by flying without passing out. I didn't know it was only the beginning. Each time I fly, fainting becomes a real possibility. The fear grows worse each year, as if I can sense the odds getting stacked higher against me each time I'm reckless enough to leave the earth's crust.

For six years, I had a job requiring international travel. I put up with frightening aborted landings and turbulent lightning storms because keeping my job seemed more responsible than staying home. But the final straw came. On my last work trip, I got stranded during a layover in London. The ticketing agent claimed the air traffic control software was on the fritz, so all transatlantic travel was delayed indefinitely. In a

moment of panic, I envisioned staying in Britain forever, eating strange pickled sandwiches I was fed on the flight from America.

It was only a few months after the 2006 London plot to blow up planes over the ocean came to light that I sat at my Heathrow gate watching airline employees check the passports of three Middle Eastern men sitting beside me. I worried and wondered why different airline employees checked their passports four times while no one approached me. Racial profiling? Or extra caution for passengers resembling those on the terror watch list?

The crew finally said that the technical problems had been resolved and allowed the suspect passengers, and me, to board. I didn't have room in my racing heart to feel guilty for my blatant biases. I only had room in my chest to keep breathing, fearing someone might find a way to blow up the plane. The airline employees must have feared it too, I reasoned, or they wouldn't have tried to cancel our flight in the first place by blaming a supposed software problem.

I prayed in the panicked way a child cries over its mother's soothing voice, too worked up to hear the comfort. I knew full well God might not intervene since he didn't seem to mind welcoming his children home.

After we landed, a coworker on the same flight told me that a few rows behind me, airline attendants had sat on either side of the three men, taking up a center row. The men had stood and gone to use the loo much more often than seemed normal, two loitering outside the door while one went in. The flight attendants had hung around the men like straitjackets for eight transatlantic hours.

Before I had time to kiss the ground and vow to never fly again, my boyfriend called with two important things to tell me. He was sure he wanted to marry me and hoped I'd feel the same, and BeckyAnn was dying.

VI

I'd visited BeckyAnn in the hospital after her first surgery six months before.

On my way to her intensive care unit room, I passed an old roommate in the hall, a nurse who was now married and wearing maternity scrubs over her swelling belly. She beamed like she was happy to carry her growing child through her rotations among the critically ill.

In BeckyAnn's dimmed room, she was swollen, too. Her swimmer's figure had turned round like the grapefruit-sized tumor just removed from her abdomen. Her skin was pallid against the pillow, but her eyes were deep and clear when she said, "They found nodules on my liver. Which means I have cancer."

Not just Cushing's disease, usually caused by a benign tumor of the adrenal gland pumping the body full of cortisol and stretching the skin like a too-full water balloon. BeckyAnn had adrenocortical carcinoma, a rare cancer with a five-year survival rate of less than twenty percent.

We were only twenty-six. Less than three years ago, I'd been maid of honor at her wedding, and I'd teased her about how she was finally going to have to kick her childhood friend Beardog—a ratty pillow-sized stuffed animal—out of her bed. Chris and BeckyAnn weren't married long when her teenage sister asked them to adopt her baby.

I knew what was coming from the minute BeckyAnn said *cancer*.

The beeping oxygen monitor supporting her recovery had as much power to save her as masks dropping from an overhead panel on a plane spiraling to the ground.

VII

BeckyAnn wondered if the cancer were somehow her fault, if she'd allowed subconscious stress to generate the deadly tumors taking over her body. But she still did what I'm afraid to do. She let go. Lifting her aching her feet off solid ground, she willingly surrendered to a current no one but God could see.

By the end, she had a strong feeling there was something else she was meant to do, and it wasn't here. She felt spiritually buoyed up even as her body stalled.

The day of her funeral, Beardog lay in the casket, his face so ragged he didn't seem to have a nose anymore.

"Oh, good. Beardog is finally being laid to rest," I said to our mutual friend, Melissa.

"Yeah, I think that's a very good idea," Melissa said. It felt good to be a little irreverent on this worst day.

As we joked, I felt a ripple in the atmosphere. Like the times I'd been standing in the shallow end of the county pool and BeckyAnn dove in, the air seemed to splash against me—moving with her laughter.

She was here. I felt sure of it.

And she was safe now, and happy. I knew God wanted me to believe it, even as I watched her lost husband and child circling the room like they would never be found.

VIII

The winter day I left Washington, D.C., in a freezing rainstorm to take my family home for Christmas, I tried to believe I was doing the right

thing by dragging an innocent five-year-old onto the deadliest of modern machines, a Boeing 777.

On takeoff, I gripped my husband's hand and appealed to his mechanical engineering expertise. He explained to me—again—how flying is routine; how lift works; how 775,000 pounds can stay in the sky.

I tried gratitude and listened to “Come, Come, Ye Saints” on my iPod, imagining my pioneer ancestors having to walk across the barren flatlands, dragging their luggage in handcarts below, while I'd most likely arrive in under four hours.

I looked for comfort in comparison. I watched a documentary about astronauts blasting off to the moon, hoping I'd feel closer to earth at a mere 35,000 feet.

My fears and prayers thrummed in the background with the noise of jet engine turbines.

For me, it seems trust and fear will never be mutually exclusive.

Spiritual surrender. Physical survival. The impulses cling to each other like flesh to spirit.

Though I can't seem to stop fearing the day I die, I also paradoxically choose to trust it won't be so frightful then. I imagine myself smiling down from the clouds like those happy crayon angels, free of the broken baggage I'll leave scattered here below.

This essay by Kim Webb Reid won first place in the 2017 Richard H. Cracroft Personal Essay Contest.

John Bicknell. *America 1844: Religious Fervor, Westward Expansion, and the Presidential Election That Transformed the Nation.*

Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2015.

Reviewed by Benjamin E. Park

When Joseph Smith declared his candidacy for the American presidency in 1844, he was only one of many hoping to change the entire nation. At this moment of societal transformation, the Whig Party, who just four years earlier achieved their first presidential victory, concluded that they needed a new candidate to replace their incumbent. The Democratic Party was divided over the future direction of their platform, most especially over what to do with the potential annexation of Texas. And those pushing for transformation were not secluded to the electoral realm. The tens of thousands of Americans who believed millenarian preacher William Miller concluded that both political parties were worthless, given that the world was going to end that year anyway. Reformers, inventors, and explorers all tried to set their mark on the still-young nation. Yet all seemed to remain in discord. While Samuel Morse's invention of the telegraph promised to shrink the distance between the expanding empire, it appeared that the American people could not be further apart.

John Bicknell, in his book *America 1844: Religious Fervor, Westward Expansion, and the Presidential Election That Transformed the Nation*, attempts to tell the story of this momentous year. Main characters like politicians John Tyler, James Polk, and Henry Clay are placed along with cultural figures like William Miller and Joseph Smith to demonstrate both the breadth of this cultural transition and the depth of its influence. Though a majority of the content is focused on the key players in the election itself, enough attention is given to wider tumult to demonstrate that this was indeed a society in transition. Innovations in communication, transportation, and technology seemed to summon a new stage of modernity. The hope of annexing Texas and Oregon promised to expand the nation's border. Yet the persistence of

internal battles made it impossible for America to enjoy these momentous developments.

Readers of *BYU Studies Quarterly* will likely be most interested in Bicknell's treatment of Joseph Smith, but they will not find much that is new. Smith is mostly an ancillary figure, adding color to the political picture, and he pops in and out of the narrative only a few times. There are moments of insightful analysis—I enjoyed the author's summation that “if [Smith's presidential] campaign was symbolic, it was a symbol filled with substance” (47)—but the book primarily relies on secondary work with which readers here are familiar. Yet Bicknell's book provides a different resource for Mormon readers: it is a reminder that as momentous as 1844 was for the Mormon community, the year was simultaneously significant for the entire nation. This is a good lesson that LDS history did not happen in a vacuum.

In many ways, this book reflects the fact that its author, Bicknell, is a journalist rather than a trained historian. There are often strengths with the ever-expanding genre of journalistic history, and those strengths are on full display here: the prose is well crafted, the temptation to fall into historiographical debates is avoided, and the desire to reach a broad audience is firmly in view. But the pitfalls of journalistic history are also present: there is more synthesis than original interpretation, engagement with primary sources is often limited, and analysis can at times be superficial. At the same time, Bicknell's tale sometimes breaks free from the traditional journalistic mold in ways that are both refreshing and stifling. He is to be commended for his desire to get historical details right—it is evident that he spent a lot of time researching the political debates of 1844—but ironically, his meticulous eye for detail weighs down the narrative. For instance, chapter 4, which details both the Philadelphia nativist riots and the Democratic Party's national convention, is so committed to parse out particulars that it becomes repetitive and tiring. He is also prone to detailed and plodding tangents, like his overview of Charles Goodyear's invention of rubber (118–22). Rather than committing himself to telling an engaging and important story, Bicknell is more often drawn to telling as many stories as possible, sometimes with superfluous justification.

America 1844 is at its best when teasing out the political developments in a year where Congress and the White House were facing crucial national issues: a presidential campaign, the Texas annexation, and the future threat of war. Subtler anxieties included the decline of the

Whig Party only four years after its first presidential victory, the bubbling controversy over slavery, and the Machiavellian machinations of politicians attempting to save their careers. Yet Bicknell struggles when he attempts to connect these activities to broader cultural evolutions like William Miller's millennialism and Joseph Smith's prophecies. Mere chronological overlap, geographic proximity, and occasional correspondence do not narrative connections make. As a result, the book is often more a scrapbook of events taking place throughout a momentous year, while the interpretive overlap is more assumed than proven.

There are a number of books that give a detailed and exhaustive overview of the years surrounding Mormonism's Nauvoo sojourn and make contextual sense of Joseph Smith's presidential run. John Bicknell's work will now be added to that group, but it might not be near the top of that list. Those looking for a well-written overview of political events in Joseph Smith's final year will be rewarded with the volume; those looking for a novel interpretation of Smith's relevance to that context will likely be frustrated and have to turn somewhere else.

Benjamin E. Park, who received his doctorate in history from the University of Cambridge, is Assistant Professor of history at Sam Houston State University. He is currently an associate editor with the *Mormon Studies Review*.

Jerry D. Grover Jr. *Geology of the Book of Mormon*.

Provo, Utah: By the author, 2014.

Reviewed by Benjamin R. Jordan

Since the earliest days of the publication of the Book of Mormon, there have been several studies, scholarly and otherwise, on the geography of the regions and events described within that book. Until now, most of those discussions and arguments over the possible locations and arrangement of its cities and regions have been based on geographical relationships described in the Book of Mormon itself and modern archaeological research within the Americas. Most current models favor Mesoamerica as the geographic region of Nephite and Lamanite lands. The recent publication of Jerry D. Grover Jr.'s *Geology of the Book of Mormon*¹ adds significant strength to these models.

Today, while some individuals still argue for a Book of Mormon setting in the Great Lakes region of the United States and Canada,² most Latter-day Saint scholars acknowledge Mesoamerica as the most likely region that matches descriptions found within the book. The likelihood of such a setting was greatly strengthened by John L. Sorenson's groundbreaking book, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, published in 1985.³ Jerry Grover's book, which uses geological principles to explain the occurrence of natural events in the Book of Mormon,

1. Jerry D. Grover Jr., *Geology of the Book of Mormon* (Vineyard, Utah: By the author, 2014). A free digital copy of the book can be found online at <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/geology-book-mormon>.

2. See, for example, Delbert W. Curtis, *Christ in North America* (Tigard, Oregon: Resource Communications, 1993). My edition, which lists Delbert W. Curtis as the publisher, does not credit Resource Communication, but they are the original printer and binder of the book.

3. John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985).

is not as widely known. This is most likely because it is new and self-published. However, the self-published nature of the book should not dissuade readers from using it as a valuable contribution to Book of Mormon studies. Grover has done an admirable job of setting forth his sound scientific analysis and interpretations, providing a new perspective on the settings and locations of Book of Mormon lands.

The focus of the book is mostly on the destructive events associated with Christ's death, as described in 3 Nephi (see 3 Ne. 8–10). Grover applies his training as a geologist and an engineer to fit the descriptions of destruction into the paradigm of modern geologic understanding. As he lays out in his introduction, "I have long waited for an in-depth inquiry into the implications of geology as applied to the Book of Mormon setting, but . . . it has not received much scientific scrutiny, nor has there been much of an attempt to actually look at the potential geologic locations in Mesoamerica" (x). Since no such studies have been done, he decided to do one himself. Using the geology of Mesoamerica, he tests some of the more popular geographic models, such as Sorenson's, to see if the geography matches the geologic settings that would have been necessary to cause the events described within the Book of Mormon. Grover focuses mostly on the events of 3 Nephi, but he expands the discussion to include all of the events within the Book of Mormon that may have had a geological connection, such as the earthquake that freed Alma and Amulek from prison (Alma 14:25–29).

In the first part of the book, Grover summarizes the "Sorenson Model" and then gives a basic introduction to applicable geologic principles that might apply, such as plate tectonics, volcanic processes, and earthquake generation. I found his use of modern disaster scales to classify various geologic events especially useful (such as eruptions, earthquakes, or storms). He uses these in order to create the standards that he applies later in his discussion of whether certain model locations have the proper proximity to hazard sources to match Book of Mormon descriptions. For example, was the sunken city of Moroni close enough to water and earthquake hazards to support its method of destruction? This makes his book more analytical and applicable than general descriptions or comparisons. The overall summaries of processes, with the exception of a few jargon terms ("blocks" and "bombs" for instance), are enough to help the nongeologist reader understand his arguments and interpretations in the latter part of the book.

The rest of the chapters, covering the majority of the book, use the principles presented earlier to test some of the geographic models

suggested for the Book of Mormon. Grover shows, clearly, that the geology of the Great Lakes region does meet the requirements of certain events, such as the mist of darkness (3 Ne. 8:19–22). Using Sorenson’s Mesoamerican model, however, he is able to argue that there are geographic and geologic model locations for the city of Bountiful that would have made it possible for the city to have survived most of the destruction while its inhabitants, gathered at the temple, would still be close enough to see and discuss other areas of catastrophic change. I found this proposal especially thought-provoking.

Various geologic scenarios are presented and evaluated in a step-by-step progression, beginning with a volcano-only event and then progressing to the possibility of multiple events, such as a volcanic eruption and a major earthquake acting concurrently. His application of the causes and effects of these processes, based on their potential magnitudes, within the context of multiple geographic models (not just Sorenson’s) is the real strength and value of the book. I went into the book with a rather critical eye, which, I think, made me sensitive to some of the imperfections, but by the time I reached chapter 12, “Best Fits for Locations and Events,” I found myself intrigued by Grover’s interpretations.

In my opinion, the book does have some weaknesses. The most significant one is in its layout and editing. Likely because it was self-published, the book has a significant number of typos, and the figures (and their placement within the text) lack a uniformity and consistency in appearance. The other weakness is that, although Grover references some earlier work on the relationship between geology and the Book of Mormon, such as Bart J. Kowallis’s popular article on the destruction in 3 Nephi,⁴ his bibliography is not as extensive as I would have liked and expected.⁵ These are minor criticisms, however, when considering the work as a whole.

4. Bart J. Kowallis, “In the Thirty and Fourth Year: A Geologist’s View of the Great Destruction in 3 Nephi,” *BYU Studies* 37, no. 3 (1997): 136–90.

5. Full disclosure: two suggested articles not referenced are mine (Benjamin R. Jordan, “‘Many Great and Notable Cities Were Sunk’: Liquefaction in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 38, no. 3 [1999]: 119–22; and Benjamin R. Jordan, “Volcanic Destruction in the Book of Mormon: Possible Evidence from Ice Cores,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 1 [2003]: 78–87).

Jerry Grover has laid an important foundation for understanding some of the critical events in the Book of Mormon within the context of the geography and geology of potential Book of Mormon lands in Mesoamerica. The great strength of the book is that it provides a well-argued perspective based on the geology of natural disasters that is new to the analysis of the Book of Mormon—one that adds to the reality of Book of Mormon events and opens new doors for potential research and understanding of the geography of the Book of Mormon.

Benjamin R. Jordan received his PhD in geological oceanography from the University of Rhode Island's Graduate School of Oceanography after earning his BS in geology, with university honors, from Brigham Young University. His graduate work focused on the correlation and geochemical evolution of volcanic deposits in Central America. He is a first or contributing author of more than a dozen peer-reviewed articles and is the author of three books. He has also served as a reviewer for multiple academic journals. He is currently an associate professor at Brigham Young University–Hawaii and is an active member of the American Geophysical Union, the Geological Society of America, the Tsunami Society, and the International Association of Volcanology and Chemistry of the Earth's Interior.

Ronald E. Romig. *Eighth Witness:
The Biography of John Whitmer.*
Independence, Mo.: John Whitmer Books, 2014.

Reviewed by Kyle R. Walker

Ronald E. Romig is the former archivist for the Community of Christ, and past president of the Mormon History Association and the John Whitmer Historical Association. He has recently been appointed one of three world church historians for the Community of Christ. He is the editor of a brief series of illustrated documentary histories, including *Emma's Nauvoo* and *Martin Harris's Kirtland*.

As the Whitmers were one of the three most prominent families in early Mormon history (the others being the Smiths and the extended Knight clan), a volume about their family is long overdue. Some readers initially might wonder why Romig did not focus on John Whitmer's better-known younger brother, David, but that thought is quickly put to rest as Romig documents early on in the volume the vast contributions John made to early Mormonism. During the earliest years from 1828 to 1833, John acted as a scribe for both the Book of Mormon and Bible translations and served as one of the eight witnesses of the Book of Mormon plates. John was designated an elder, an apostle (prior to the more formal Quorum of Twelve being established), and labored as one of the most trusted confidants of Joseph Smith. Following the mission to the Lamanites and the success in Kirtland, Ohio, it was John who was sent to provide important leadership to those early converts prior to Joseph Smith's arrival.

Perhaps John's most important and notorious role came with his appointment as Church historian on March 8, 1831. Although John was initially reluctant to accept such an assignment, recording in his history that he "would rather not do it" (122), he accepted the responsibility and produced one of the earliest, albeit sparse, historical records of Church events. Romig does a good job of documenting the importance and provenance of the history, as well as some criticism surrounding the

volume—recounting how John’s interpretation of the Saints’ experience in Missouri, which made up the final chapters of his history, was written after those events and was colored by the fact that he was expelled from the Church in 1838. His signature upon the preaching licenses of missionaries and at the conclusion of the minutes of early Church meetings confirms his contributions during these early years. Later, John served as a member of the Church’s literary firm and edited the Church’s newspaper *Messenger and Advocate*. Romig also notes that John perceived his role as Church historian as more expansive than simply keeping a history of early Church meetings, but that it extended to scribal duties in preparing Joseph Smith’s revelations for publication as the Book of Commandments, as well as the proposed publication of Joseph’s Bible translation.

Romig does an excellent job of documenting what is known about the extended Whitmer family, including limited but important information on the Whitmers’ German heritage. He also recounts the clannish nature of the family and how they remained supportive and in close proximity to one another throughout their lives, especially after they migrated to Missouri. Many rich sources regarding Oliver Cowdery and Hiram Page, both of whom married Whitmer sisters, are cited throughout the book, along with extensive research on David Whitmer’s life and movements during and after his affiliation with Mormonism. In a sense, this volume is a two-for-one; the history of David’s life parallels that of his brother John, and Romig included much of David’s history throughout the book. Romig also includes a brief summary of David’s “Whitmerite” church, which he established toward the end of his life but which never really expanded much beyond the extended family.

While Romig recounts known reasons why the Whitmers ultimately broke with Mormonism in 1838 (including not wanting to be governed in financial matters and a desire to return to a more primitive form of Mormonism), I was left wanting to know more about what led to the greater Whitmer family separating themselves from Joseph Smith and the main body of the Saints. The abrupt transition from admiring loyalty to disillusionment with Joseph Smith seemed too sudden of a break, which raised in my mind too many unanswered questions. Most of what was documented came from much later sources, which were insightful, but still felt like an insufficient explanation about what led to their ultimate separation. Part of that may be due to the lack of contemporary sources available during the turbulent Missouri period of Church history.

Interestingly, Romig does recount how the Whitmer clan, unlike many others who left the Church during this time, did not participate in persecuting or driving the Saints from the state. For example, though ordered to participate with the state militia at one point during the crisis, David Whitmer recounted that he refused to take a gun and later recorded that “God knows that I did not encourage the militia in the least to persecute the Saints” (368). John would not engage in persecution, though he did testify before the law in Richmond, the substance of which did not necessarily reflect favorably on Joseph (371–73).

John was one of the few remaining Saints who resided in Far West, Missouri, after the Mormons were driven from the state in the winter of 1838–39. He ultimately accumulated great wealth, built a large two-story home, and farmed hundreds of acres in the isolated community. Romig cites several little-known accounts about the appearance of Far West in the decades after the Saints were driven from the state. John and David remained close, despite living thirty miles apart in later life. David, who removed to Richmond, Missouri, similarly found success as a freighter and livery stable operator, and both men were greatly respected in the communities where they resided. The author documents a number of accounts in which both John and David were questioned about their views of early Mormonism during their final years, recounting how both brothers repeatedly confirmed their respective testimonies as contained in the Book of Mormon.

There were places in the text where I felt the author relied too heavily upon secondary sources, including frequently citing the *LDS History of the Church*, which has largely been supplanted by the *Joseph Smith Papers* volumes; but in other sections of the book, Romig brings to light previously unknown primary sources that were helpful in reconstructing the Whitmer story. The book is supplemented with many photographs, including many never-before-seen photos housed in the Community of Christ Archives, as well as photographs of documents that greatly contribute to the value of the book. An interesting chapter at the end of the volume, entitled the “The Whitmer Documents and Artifacts,” traces the provenance of John’s history, several family seer stones (including photographs), and the printer’s manuscript of the Book of Mormon. Several maps throughout the book, along with a Whitmer genealogy chart, were also helpful in understanding family relationships and the movements and location of the extended Whitmer family properties. Romig also adds nearly a hundred pages of text in

twenty-five appendices—some of which seemed appropriate, while others seemed somewhat superfluous.

Romig has completed an important study on the extended Whitmer family and has done an admirable job in bringing together in one volume their intersection with Mormonism among multiple generations, as well recounting the family's essential contributions to the building up of early Mormonism.

Kyle R. Walker received his PhD in marriage and family therapy from Brigham Young University and is the author of several books on Mormon history, including *William Smith: In the Shadow of a Prophet* (Draper, Utah: Kofford Books, 2015). He currently serves as a faculty member in the counseling center at BYU–Idaho.

Kyle R. Walker. *William B. Smith: In the Shadow of a Prophet*.
Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2015.

Reviewed By Richard Neitzel Holzapfel

Kyle R. Walker is a faculty member at BYU–Idaho and is the editor of *United by Faith: The Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith Family* (2005) and the author of *The Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith Family: A Family Process Analysis of a Nineteenth-Century Household* (2002), part of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute and BYU Studies Dissertations in Latter-day Saint History series. Additionally, Walker is the author a *BYU Studies* article, “Katharine Smith Salisbury’s Recollections of Joseph’s Meetings with Moroni” (41, no. 3:4–17).

With Walker’s interest in the Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith family, it is not surprising that he has turned his attention to William B. Smith, one of the Prophet Joseph Smith’s younger brothers, in his latest book project.

Ironically, given his importance in the story of the Latter-day Saints, William is often no more than a footnote in most LDS history narratives and virtually forgotten among LDS lay members. If he is remembered, William is usually remembered for his struggle with Church leaders, including with the Prophet himself.

Walker seeks here to challenge the status quo, so he has provided a comprehensive biography of William, useful for historians but intended primarily for nonspecialists.

Walker argues that William deserves a nearly 640-page biography, not only because William was the Prophet’s younger brother, but also because he was one of his earliest supporters and a witness to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and the founding of the Church of Christ (1830); an active and successful missionary (1832–45); a member of the original quorum of the Twelve Apostles (1835); a member of the “Quorum of the Anointed,” the small circle of endowed Church leaders

that met together regularly before the Nauvoo Temple was completed (1843); and the Church's presiding patriarch (1845).

Following the Prophet's death in 1844, tensions between William and his fellow Apostles led to his excommunication in 1845. For the next three decades, William supported a number of individuals who attempted to take control of the Church. Eventually, in 1878, William accepted his nephew, Joseph Smith III, as the legal successor to his older brother. Sadly, William died in a small, obscure farm hamlet in north-eastern Iowa in 1893 without realizing his ambitions of leadership and influence in a movement begun by his older brother.

Walker is a careful researcher, and his command of the primary and secondary literature is impressive. The footnotes highlight his research skills and efforts. The bibliography (595–628) will provide anyone interested in studying early Mormonism (1820–45) and the turbulent years following Joseph Smith's death (1844–65) a place to begin.

Unfortunately, the publisher created an inadequate index (629–39). Indexes are an important part of a finished publication, and this one is more often than not insufficient to help researchers find specific details or even to provide a reasonable idea of what is to be found in the biography itself.

One of the appendixes, "Wives and Children of William B. Smith" (565–81) is particularly helpful in providing a more complete view of William's life as readers consider his wives and children. Thankfully, this appendix is footnoted—full of important information and references to pertinent sources.

In another appendix, "'The Elders' Pocket Companion' By William Smith," Walker reconstructs a booklet that once belonged to William (583–93). William's original "pocket companion" has not survived, but much of it was preserved in a book published in 1889. Similar pocket companions were kept by other members of the Twelve, including Willard Richards. These pocket companions are important sources that often contain Joseph Smith's teachings. In this case, William's pocket companion is an early source for plural marriage teachings—providing a clearer lens on William's understanding and defense of plural marriage in the 1840s and 1850s.

In writing the biography, Walker seeks to "probe the depths of [William's] complex personality" (xii) while avoiding the "pitfalls in attempting to 'diagnose the dead'" (xii). Additionally, Walker wants to "sort out the complexities of his enigmatic personality. Despite the abrupt discontinuities, reversals, disappearances, and spectacular public comeback, this biography bridges those gaps in the life of William B. Smith" (xii).

Unlike a traditional biographer, Walker also sets out to provide a perspective on William and the Smith family informed by his own work as a mental health specialist. Reading the preface is essential to understand Walker's purpose and contributions in this regard (see especially xiii). Walker notes, "Due to my clinical training, I began to pick up on something that previous historians had missed as they attempted to capture [William's] personality—his emotional instability as a critical factor in understanding his personality and behavior" (xiii).

Whereas some reviews have questioned the value of chapter 1, "Uncle Jesse" (1–20), which establishes a connection between William and his father's unyielding brother, Walker believes this chapter is critical in helping us to understand William. Mental health issues run in families, and even though Jesse and William never met, Walker argues, "the similarities between the two were rather remarkable, and the course of their lives would closely parallel one another" (20).

Walker's biography makes several other significant contributions:

First, the book helps answer more fully the question of why the Smith family remained in the Midwest instead of going to Utah under Brigham Young's leadership.

Second, the book demonstrates persuasively that William was the single most important person in laying the theological foundation for the Smith family claim to leadership in the movement begun by Joseph Smith. This theological idea of lineal descent became a major tenet of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (known today as the Community of Christ). Throughout Illinois, William articulated the Smith family claim to leadership within the Church, and his arguments kept this idea alive during the 1840s and 1850s. He most likely influenced Lucy Mack Smith's ideas on the subject as well.

Third, William's recollections of early Mormonism are a gold mine for historians. Even though caution must be taken when using reminiscence—memories recorded many years after an event are often shaped by the current issues and challenges in which they were recorded—William's recollections add significant details to the early Church narrative about the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and the persecutions suffered by the Smith family and the young church. He provides another source beyond Joseph Smith's and Lucy Mack Smith's reconstruction of these events.

Finally, the fact that William (1811–93) lived a long time—only his sister Katharine (1813–1900) lived longer—gave him an opportunity to produce a vast array of material, including written editorials and a large

number of letters, as well as being the subject of numerous interviews. These documents are sure to give readers new insights into the Mormon experience during its first four decades.

Walker's biography is an important addition to the growing literature on the rise of Mormonism in the nineteenth century and the Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith family. Walker opines, "William remains for me one of the most fascinating characters in nineteenth-century Mormon history" (xiii). This biography goes a long way in supporting that view.

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel received his PhD at the University of California at Irvine and is Professor of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University. His professional work includes studies on the New Testament as well as Christian and Latter-day Saint art depicting biblical stories, especially images of Christ.

James A. Toronto, Eric R. Dursteler, and Michael W. Homer.
Mormons in the Piazza: History of the Latter-day Saints in Italy.
Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017.

Reviewed by Mauro Properzi

Every so often, the publication of a book functions as a milestone in a particular area of study. The book is recognized either as the first, most comprehensive, or most distinctive treatment of a subject, with which all later researchers will need to familiarize themselves in order to be considered credible. When it comes to the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Italy, *Mormons in the Piazza* is such a book, and for all three of these reasons. James Toronto, BYU professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies; Eric Dursteler, BYU professor of history and chair of the same department; and Michael Homer, attorney, independent historian, and honorary Italian Consul in Salt Lake City, have produced a volume that is rigorously researched, beautifully written, and nicely illustrated. It is certainly a first in its area, since no comparable publication of this size is available in the English language. It is also the most comprehensive treatment on the presence of the LDS Church in Italy, ranging from the day the first missionary set foot on Italian soil to the recent announcement of the Rome temple's construction. Finally, it is distinctive in being both broadly accessible and academically solid, a combination that is difficult for any writer to achieve. It brings engaging historical narrative, cultural contextualization, and firsthand observation and analysis into one coherent picture that captures the reader's interest at both affective and intellectual levels.

The authors served LDS missions in Italy (Toronto also served a second time as president of the Catania mission) and are conversant in Italian, which allowed them to access and interpret the many archival, primary, and secondary sources in Italian that appear in the rich bibliography. Furthermore, their friendship or acquaintance with Church members and leaders likely facilitated opportunities for interviews, discussions, and the frank sharing of experiences that fill the later chapters

of the book. The narrative centers around places, people, and events that are familiar to those who have served missions in Italy, have lived in Italy as LDS members of the U.S. military, or are Italian Latter-day Saints. These groups will undoubtedly represent the bulk of the book's readership, but the volume's contribution to Mormon missiology at large is not to be underestimated. Toronto, Dursteler, and Homer raise questions, draw connections, and analyze patterns that will trigger attentiveness and reflections in those who do not necessarily share a direct interest in Italy, but whose focus may be the general history of the Church or LDS missionary work in a different area of the world. Indeed, the authors spend significant time examining the factors, both internal and external to the Church, that may facilitate or hinder growth in "the mission field." They also do not hesitate to highlight potential conflicts that emerge when American cultural expectations meet their foreign counterparts.

In about 600 pages, divided into fifteen chapters, the authors cover an impressive amount of historical terrain. The first four chapters explore what is often labeled "the first Italian mission," with missionary efforts centered on the Piedmont valleys inhabited by Protestant Waldensians. Initially led by Apostle Lorenzo Snow, the mission remained open for seventeen years through the service of twelve missionaries and resulted in the conversion of about 180 souls. The next chapter explores these converts' emigration to Utah and their contribution to the faith and industry of the new land, primarily in Weber County. Chapters 6 and 7 are dedicated to the interim period of almost one century when the Church was not officially present in Italy except for small branches of American LDS servicemen stationed in the country. The four chapters that follow turn their focus to the "second mission," which began with the rededication of the land by Elder Ezra Taft Benson and continued through increasing evangelization and public relation efforts, which eventually led to the creation of ten stakes, greater visibility in public life, the announcement of a temple, and the first Italian general authority. Chapters 12 and 13 break from the historical progression by offering an analysis that addresses possible reasons and factors that affect conversions to and disaffiliations from the Church among the Italians. Chapter 14, which describes the long and fascinating process that led to the official recognition of the Church by the Italian government, is followed by the authors' concluding reflections. An appendix with useful data on Church membership and historical growth in Italy wraps up the volume.

A book of this scope and quality is not prone to dissection for highlights, themes, or key arguments, since it contains so many. In briefly reviewing it, one can simply attempt to summarize its core message and generally examine its effectiveness in delivering it. In the final chapter, the authors explicitly articulate a broad conclusion of their extensive study. They claim that

the transformation of Mormonism from a marginalized spiritual movement into a major religion of global presence has resulted from a complex interplay of historical forces, political imperatives, socioeconomic conditions, intrinsic spiritual appeal, internal institutional tensions, capacity for redefinition and adaptation, and individual religious proclivities. This shifting constellation of factors must be taken into account if one wishes to understand the rise, expansion, and impact of the church and of new religious movements in general. (541)

At the micro level, their study highlights the interplay of cultural forces and ecclesiastical policies at the American core of Mormonism, along with similar factors in the Italian milieu. This dialectic shows “benefits and costs” as well as “challenges and opportunities” by pointing to “some of the reasons for individual conversion and overall growth in Italy. It also helps to explain the relatively slow pace of growth and the limited attraction of Mormonism among Italians” (541). In this context, the authors assess *real* Church growth as “a complex process that unfolds across a long trajectory of time and effort marked by fits and starts, advances and retreats, times of feast and famine, periods of expansion but also of stagnation and contraction, and even extinction” (542). The book is an exciting journey through the roller coaster of this very history.

As an Italian member of the Church who directly experienced a portion of this story, I have found the historical account and associated analysis to be both honest and insightful. As a scholar of Mormonism with an interest in ecclesiology and comparative religions, I am captivated by the perceptive sociocultural contextualization and analysis provided by the authors. As a general reader, I am simply happy to have read such a deeply entertaining book. Still, I would offer one criticism about the two chapters on the factors that led to the conversion and disaffiliation of Church members in Italy. Here the authors quote the perspectives of several Italian Latter-day Saints who are neither identified nor consistently grouped in particular demographic categories. While the omission of names can be easily justified, information on the interviewees, such as regional provenance, number of years in the

Church, gender, and age group, could have provided some support to the authors' implied claim that these perspectives are representative of Italian members. From a socioscientific methodological perspective, without any information of this kind the possibility of sampling bias looms large. This is particularly true in the diversified regional realities of Italy where the cultural differences between north and south can naturally give rise to some variety in members' expectations and perceptions. This criticism notwithstanding, *Mormons in the Piazza* is a foundational scholarly work of Mormon missiology and Church history alike, as well as a beautiful story of faith, sacrifice, and growth to be told and retold for years to come.

Mauro Properzi holds a PhD in Mormon Studies from Durham University in the U.K., a Master's of Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School, an M.Phil in Psychology and Religion from Cambridge University, and a BS in Social Work from Brigham Young University. He also received a postdoctoral certificate in interfaith dialogue from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Italy. A native of Gorizia, Italy, Properzi is Assistant Professor of Religion at Brigham Young University, where he teaches classes on world religions and Christianity. His research interests focus on the theological and historical interface of Mormonism and Catholicism, the theology of religions, and religion and emotions. He has published in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, the *Religious Educator*, the *Journal of Mormon History*, *Brigham Young University Studies*, the *International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society*, and in *Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy*. His first monograph, *Mormonism and the Emotions: An Analysis of LDS Scriptural Texts*, was published in May 2015 by Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.

Captain Ronald Fry, with Tad Tuleja. *Hammerhead Six: How Green Berets Waged an Unconventional War against the Taliban to Win in Afghanistan's Deadly Pech Valley.*

New York: Hachette Books, 2016.

Reviewed by Cless Young

Hammerhead Six tells the story of U.S. Army Captain Ronald Fry and his elite team of Special Forces soldiers tasked with the difficult 2003 mission of tracking high-value targets in one of the most dangerous regions of Afghanistan, the Pech Valley. But this is not a typical blood-and-guts, Rambo-like war story. Although the mission called for these soldiers to seize weapons caches, hunt down hardened Al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders, and avoid IED booby traps, it was their maturity, cultural sensitivity, and humility (a trait not often associated with Special Forces personnel) that made it possible for them to fulfill their military objectives while winning the trust of the locals.

A major theme of the book is the tension between two missions undertaken by Fry and his team: they were primarily a fighting unit, tasked to track down and destroy the enemy, but they were also committed to winning the hearts and minds of local villagers. Like the combat conditions in Vietnam, it was often difficult to distinguish friend from foe. A Taliban could detonate an IED and then return immediately to herding his goats, appearing to be an innocent bystander. The skilled Hammerhead Six team had no problem using their considerable firepower and Special Forces training to hunt down and destroy terrorists in their area of operation, but they were also motivated by their own deeply held moral convictions and the Green Beret motto, "To Free the Oppressed." The background and values Captain Fry brought to his command made it possible for his unit to succeed with both objectives.

Captain Fry comes from a military family. His grandfather fought in World War II, his father in Vietnam. He grew up in a patriotic home, was an Eagle Scout, and entered Brigham Young University on a ROTC scholarship. Following his LDS mission to Switzerland, he visited

Normandy on the fiftieth anniversary of the D-Day landings. This emotional experience reinforced his commitment to serve in uniform.

Upon graduation from BYU, he entered Special Forces training. It was during this time that the 9-11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon occurred, and he had a premonition that his Green Beret training might at some point land him in Afghanistan. Soon Fry and his wife decided to transition to the National Guard (reserve component), so he could spend more time with his young family. But as the war on terror intensified, his Special Forces unit was activated, and he was assigned to command Operational Detachment Alpha, code-named "Hammerhead Six." Their mission was to enter the wild terrain of the Kunar Province on the border with Pakistan and attempt to "eliminate, neutralize, and reduce terrorist forces" (12).

What he and his team accomplished in the short nine months of their mission was remarkable. Many of his tactics and methods flew in the face of traditional military protocol and, in fact, incurred the wrath of his superiors. But his unit's unorthodox approach, which was based on sensitivity to and respect for the values of the local Muslim culture, was effective.

Fry says that it took him over ten years to finally write the book because the events they lived through "seemed too personal. . . . Several chapters were written painfully, reluctantly and with trembling hands," he noted (xiii). A particularly poignant example was the accidental death of an innocent villager when a bullet meant for an attacking dog ricocheted and hit a man in the head. In another incident, the team hauled away a man suspected of planting an IED. Fry sensed that the man might not have been guilty. He writes, "We packed him into the back of a truck, a gunny sack over his head. . . . I saw his wife with her face in her hands and his kids crying. . . . I felt less like an American protector than the Gestapo, intent on disappearing troublesome civilians to parts unknown" (51).

Fry was a dedicated and loyal U.S. Army officer, but he didn't hesitate to point out "boneheaded" and counterproductive decisions made by the military and other government agencies. He understood that the Army is a huge bureaucracy with a top-down organizational structure where "junior officers [which he was] have no strategic responsibility and therefore no way to influence decisions made sometimes thousands of miles away at the top of the chain. They must carry out orders someone else has devised" (27). But Special Forces, operating in the wild and remote areas along the Pakistan border, of necessity had to "do

things differently” (21). Fry was impatient and disgusted with some of the shortsighted and harmful orders that came from his superiors miles away in safe compounds with little or no feel for the local conditions and culture.

Once, to protect his men while they were engaged in a firefight, Fry abandoned a military vehicle and moved them to safety. Senior officers accused him of disobeying orders by leaving a disabled Humvee. At one point, they told him he would have to pay the Army back the \$250,000 cost of the vehicle from his personal account and face the possibility of a court-martial. Although neither of these things actually happened, such examples were typical of the frustrations he dealt with; he was fighting an unconventional war while bound by rules made by traditional, conventional superiors, unfamiliar with the mission of Green Berets.

The best military commanders recognize the strengths and abilities of those under their command. They allow their command to carry out their assignments and take suggestions and feedback. Captain Fry operated in this way. He sought advice and implemented suggestions from his chaplain, his senior medics, and his communications, training, and weapons expert.

The members of his team also helped implement his vision of gaining the support of the indigenous populations. Over their nine-month assignment, Fry’s unit provided services badly needed but absent in the villages, contributed to the local economy with U.S. funds that were responsibly used for projects deemed necessary by the locals themselves, and established training programs for the local army that supported Afghan democracy. They also opened a clinic where locals, primarily women and children, could get needed medical attention without cost. This care was otherwise not available in the region, and the medical staff were kept busy. The unit’s chaplain showed profound respect for Islam by training a local Imam to act as a chaplain for the indigenous soldiers. He also took note of the run-down conditions of village mosques and organized a program to use U.S. money earmarked for improving conditions in the area. Local contractors and materials were used to enhance these religious centers, so important for worship and community activities.

The team also abandoned the standard U.S. military dress and appearance and adopted Afghan attire. They grew beards and wore Afghan Pakol headgear whenever they met with village elders. They regularly socialized with locals, sitting cross-legged and eating Afghan food with their fingers.

Under Fry's command, Hammerhead Six showed respect for Afghan religion and culture, humility and willingness to learn, professionalism and maturity coupled with treating the people as friends, even brothers. This respect paid huge dividends. Not one American soldier was killed during their tour of duty—and this in one of the most dangerous regions of Afghanistan. Later on, under new and arguably less enlightened American forces, over a hundred U.S. troops lost their lives in this same region.

Anyone with a military background should find this book particularly interesting. Others will be informed and even inspired as well. Lay readers will encounter a number of military acronyms, and not all of them are explained in the glossary, although they are defined when they first appear (but not thereafter). Two detailed maps are also provided, which are helpful when trying to get a spatial perspective of the areas of operation. Overall, readers will appreciate *Hammerhead Six* as, among other things, an enlightening account of how Captain Fry and his team did much in Afghanistan to dispel the notion of the ugly American.

Cless Young is retired after twenty-three years as an Army and Air Force chaplain in the Utah and Hawaii National Guard. He also is retired as Associate Professor of Geography at Snow College in Ephraim, Utah.

The Awkward State of Utah: Coming of Age in the Nation, 1896–1945, by Charles S. Peterson and Brian Q. Cannon (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2015)

The authors describe the era 1896 to 1945 as the “awkward adolescence” of Utah history. This period saw the pivotal change from an agrarian and inward-focused society to one that embraced mainstream America and global modernity. While historians such as Leonard Arrington, Thomas Alexander, and Ethan Yorgason have focused on the years 1890 to 1920 as the era of greatest change, Charles Peterson and Brian Cannon show that this discussion needs to include 1920 to 1945 because of the many social shifts that continued to reshape the state. During this time, democratization and efficiency through centralization of authority increased. Peterson and Cannon use Alan Trachtenberg’s term *incorporation* to encapsulate the many types of changes, including cultural, economic, technological, political, and religious factors (2).

With statehood, Utahns enlisted in American armed forces and signed up for the Spanish American War and the World Wars in large numbers. Enlisted men thus came into contact with diverse cultures and races and saw the ways in which some nationalities and minorities were excluded from voting and other basic rights, leading them to civil rights activism. The authors include discussions of labor violence, the Latino movement of the 1920s and ’30s, development of the Navajo reservation, women’s suffrage, and women entering the labor market.

During the depression, federal funding flowed into Utah via the Civilian Conservation Corps (although this entity

brought in most of its workers from the East) and the Works Progress Administration (which employed more Utah residents). The LDS First Presidency tried to wean Utah from federal welfare programs (the dole) and work welfare by introducing their own program of cooperative enterprises.

These years saw a shift from subsistence to commercial farming, leading to the use of technology for selling dairy products, wheat, and especially sugar from beets. Farmers became incorporated into the national economy, and they brought in workers from Japan, Sikhs from India, Native Americans (primarily Shoshone), and others to labor on the farms. The unintended effects of agricultural growth included pollution, greater division between rich and poor, and profits going out of state. Mining capacity also grew as mechanical technology advanced.

The authors look in detail at thousands of ordinary people whose lives spanned this era. The information they gleaned from many oral histories adds life and personality to the book. This era’s people were the generation that drove oxen and milked cows in their youth but flew in airplanes and traveled the world as adults, and they recognized the value of documenting their own lives.

Charles Peterson, who passed away in 2017, was a professor emeritus of Utah State University where he taught history, and Brian Cannon is a professor of history at Brigham Young University and also directs the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies there. This book can be seen as a final capstone on Peterson’s many distinguished contributions to Western American history. The writing style is clear and simple, making this book an understandable and enjoyable read for all.

—BYU Studies Staff