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Money and Prices in the Book of Mormon
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In Memoriam,
Orrin Glenn Hatch (1934–2022)

At the passing of Senator Orrin G. Hatch on April 23, 2022, BYU Studies joins in honoring this outstanding public servant, who has been called “the most important Utah politician since Brigham Young.” Senator Hatch served seven terms in the United States Senate (1977 to 2019), the longest period in office of any Republican. During his tenure, he presided over three major Senate committees: Labor and Human Resources, Judiciary, and Finance. In 2017, he also was elected to the position of president pro tempore of the Senate.

Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell called Senator Hatch “a focused and diligent senator,” and former Oregon senator Gordon H. Smith explained Hatch fought for what he believed in for the country but never considered those of the other party enemies. Hatch sought to accommodate perspectives different from his own. “He mastered the art of finding the commonsense center that is necessary to the making of laws,” Smith said. Working with, rather than against, the other party, he saw over 750 bills into law, more than any other senator in history.

Because of his impoverished childhood and youth, Hatch understood the difficulties faced by the disadvantaged. To support them, he authored such legislation as the State Children’s Health Insurance Program; the Americans with Disabilities Act; and the Drug Price Competition and Patent Term Restoration Act (known as Hatch-Waxman), which created the modern generic drug industry. He also authored the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

Hatch was a devoted member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who knelt in prayer early each morning in his Senate office, asking the Lord for inspiration. At Hatch’s funeral, President Dallin H. Oaks read a tribute from the First Presidency praising Senator Hatch for “his life of significant achievement,” his “remarkable commitment to protecting religious freedom and unity,” and his “service to the Church.”

Family members noted their father’s deep love of their mother, Elaine Hatch; his infectious laugh; his pride in his six children; his delight in his grandchildren and great grandchildren; his thrift; his love of all Utah sports and especially BYU’s; and his song writing. BYU Studies also recognizes this gifted leader and his exemplary life.
Gold, Silver, and Grain
Money and Prices in the Book of Mormon

Shinji Takagi

In this paper, I discuss, from the perspective of a monetary economist, the operational aspects of the system of fixed prices for gold, silver, and all kinds of grain described in the Book of Mormon (Alma 11:3–19), based on internal evidence, economic logic, and historical precedents from antiquity. Previous authors have noted several unique features of the Nephite system, which was purportedly created by king Mosiah in the early first century BC. For example, John Welch, approaching the system strictly as one of weights and measures, argued that, in this otherwise binary system (in which denomination increases by a multiple of 2), the addition of nonbinary denominations (antion for 1.5; limnah and onti for 7) facilitated dealings in fractional weights.\(^1\) Richard Smith, approaching the Nephite 1-2-4-7 system as one of coinage, noted its efficiency in terms of economizing on the number of coins required for a purchase.\(^2\) Irrespective of the intrinsic merits of such arguments,\(^3\)

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2. Smith further observed that the same numerical system was used for a common type of punched card. Richard Pearson Smith, “The Nephite Monetary System,” *Improvement Era* 57, no. 5 (1954): 316–17.

3. My own speculation is that the addition of limnah (senine × 7) and onti (senum × 7) was a response to the need to create a standard small-denomination loan contract in which annual interest was 14.3 percent (a large-denomination loan contract whose interest payment exceeded the smallest denomination coin did not necessarily require a special coin). The interest rate of 14.3 percent is in line with what is well attested in known
for the purposes of this paper, I instead focus more on how the system might have worked in practice.

An aspect of how the system may have worked relates to whether it involved coinage. The extant Latter-day Saint literature has reached a consensus, not by examination but by assertion, that no coinage was involved because it is supposed that coinage was unknown during Lehi’s lifetime. In part motivated by a desire to preempt a potential accusation of anachronism, the consensus view has held that the reference to precious metals in Alma 11 is a description of weighted but uncoined metals and that the word “coinage” in the chapter heading was not part of the original text of the Book of Mormon. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints evidently accepted this argument and subsequently replaced the heading “Nephite coinage” in the 1981 edition with “The Nephite monetary system” in the current online and print editions. I will argue that such a change was not warranted. It is extremely unlikely that coinage was unknown in Lehi’s time; even if it had been unknown, it would not follow that something akin to coinage did not develop over the first four centuries of Nephite civilization.

Another aspect of how the system might have worked relates to the economic viability of a system in which the relative prices of gold, silver, and all kinds of grain are fixed. There cannot be any disagreement that such a system would not work in a capitalistic, market economy. A centrally planned economy, with pervasive government intervention, might


be able to operate such a system for a while, but distortions will inevitably emerge as economic agents find it against their nature to give up willingly what, in their estimation, is more valuable for what is less. Economic anthropologists may argue that ancients did not have the same profit motives as their contemporary counterparts, but, as the following discussion will demonstrate, recent scholarship has all but refuted such a characterization of ancient economies. Irrespective of any short-term viability, a system of fixed prices across a group of goods could not have persisted for a long time. I will argue below that the Nephite system can best be described not as an economic institution, but as an accounting framework in which agricultural products were assessed for tax, census, or other administrative purposes.

Finally, the fixed relative price of gold and silver must be evaluated separately. The monetary use of two metals was the dominant standard from antiquity to the early nineteenth century AD (when Britain adopted the gold standard), including in the United States of the early nineteenth century where Joseph Smith lived. The Nephite system is therefore in line with historical experience. What is unique was the fixed “parity” (or “mint ratio”) between gold and silver. Rarely do we find in ancient societies a bimetallic standard in which the mint ratio was fixed. When the mint ratio is fixed, the simultaneous use of two metals as money becomes highly unstable because the market price is bound to move away from the fixed parity. If, for example, the market price of gold increases relative to silver, gold becomes undervalued as money, and it may either go out of circulation (a phenomenon known as Gresham’s Law) or circulate at a premium over silver. Debasement of gold has historically been the most common response to such a situation. I will argue that Nephite bimetallism probably did not last very long while at the same time exploring conditions under which such a monetary standard may have been more durable.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section I addresses the question of whether coinage was known during Lehi’s lifetime. Section II considers the question of whether the Nephite system of weights (used for gold and silver) was unitary or double, while section III assesses whether the Nephite metallic weights were small enough to be carried by hand. Sections IV and V move to the question of how the Nephite system might have worked in practice, focusing, respectively, on the system of fixed prices for precious metals and various kinds of grain and on the bimetallic monetary standard based on the use of gold and silver. Finally, section VI presents a conclusion.
I. Was Coinage Known in Lehi’s Time?

The investigation of whether coinage was known in Lehi’s time (that is, the seventh century BC) must be informed by the following two considerations. First, the English word *coin* and its contemporary foreign equivalents are of relatively recent origin and do not have counterparts in ancient languages, including biblical Hebrew, classical Greek, and Latin. It would therefore be an anachronism indeed to find the word *coin* in the Book of Mormon, but no anachronism would be present even if we find a reference to coin-like money, because what we now call coins were used in antiquity. Second, an economist would define coinage differently than might a numismatist. To an economist, any state-authenticated metallic object that is standardized in weight and whose value is determined by counting (as opposed to weighing) would qualify as a coin. For this metallic object to meet the numismatist’s definition, however, it may have to go further. Typically, the numismatist would consider an *ancient* coin to be flat and roundish, generally produced by a process of striking with a die placed or hammered forcefully on either side. It is according to this numismatic definition that most history books date the invention of coinage to the mid-to-late seventh century BC, when coins were first struck in Lydia in western Asia Minor. According to this narrative, coinage then quickly spread throughout the Aegean from the early sixth century BC and then to the Persian Empire. The supposition that coins were likely unknown to Lehi is based on this standard narrative of Western numismatic history.

Such a narrative does not sufficiently acknowledge the invention of coinage in China, which had likely predated the Lydian invention, possibly by hundreds of years. To be sure, ancient Chinese coins were not struck but cast (in a mold) and used almost exclusively base metals (such as bronze, copper, or even iron). Neither did they use royal inscriptions, which makes it difficult to date them. This explains why a wide range

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5. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the English noun “coin” (with a meaning of corner, cornerstone, quoin) is not attested before the fourteenth century AD.
6. The Hebrew word (כּסף) and the Greek word (ἀργὐρίον) that are typically translated as money in English simply meant silver without specifying whether it was coined. Likewise, *argentum* (also in the sense of silver), *pecunia* (property or wealth), and *moneta* were Latin words meaning money without specifying whether it was coined.
of dates has been suggested for the invention of coinage in China, from the seventh century BC (roughly contemporaneous with the Anatolian invention) to the twelfth century BC. A virtual scholarly consensus appears to be that, in any case, China was the first civilization to use coins.\(^9\) The ancient world was connected through trade and migration, making it difficult to believe that the *numismatic* idea of coinage did not spread to the rest of the world for hundreds of years. But the *economic* idea of coinage may have developed even earlier.

Miriam Balmuth conceptualizes the invention of coinage as a natural merging of two ancient conventions. First, metal by weight had been used in the ancient Mediterranean and Near East, both as a means of payment and as a store of value, going back perhaps to the second or third millennium BC. It is not difficult to imagine that, at some point, smaller, more standardized pieces began to appear as money, though they were still weighed on each occasion. In ancient Israel, for example, there was common use of pieces of silver of equal size even during the pre-exilic period.\(^10\) Second, stone seals had long been used as a means of making marks of identification. When such seals were applied to metallic pieces serving as money, coinage was born. According to Balmuth, an eighth-century BC cash hoard has been found in northern Syria, containing silver bullion, silver ingots, and silver discs inscribed in Aramaic with the name of a local magistrate.\(^11\) The appearance of such stamped ingots in Babylonia (silver) and Assyria (lead) might have been even earlier, in the late third and the late second millennium BC, respectively.\(^12\)

Authentication of weight (or monetary value) is what makes a coin. In a world of metallic money circulating at (close to) intrinsic value, the authentication of weight must be credible if a piece of metal is to pass as a coin. Weight might credibly be authenticated, to varying degrees, by a royal palace, a religious sanctuary, or even a merchant of wealth and renown. Understandably, the most common certifier in antiquity was a sovereign or a polis. Coins issued under such authority generally did

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not circulate beyond the issuer’s own borders because its credibility usually did not travel very far. Conversely, any coin could circulate freely within the issuer’s own borders as legal tender at the specified value by decree or fiat. In some cases, a sovereign or a polis could develop sufficient credibility to give its coins wider acceptance. In the classical period of Greek history, the Athenian tetradrachm (known as the “Owl”) circulated throughout the Aegean and beyond, because the Athenian mint had established the reputation of its coinage as being of consistent weight and exceptional fineness.

These considerations suggest that all coins—even metallic ones circulating at intrinsic value—are fundamentally fiduciary. Metallic monetary pieces become coins when they are used in commercial trans- action by counting, and not by weighing, by virtue of the credibility of the authentication by the issuer. Weight matters only to the extent that it helps establish that credibility, but coins’ metallic content is always less than their notional metallic value (for example, in fifth-century BC Athens, the difference was on average about 5 percent). The difference, necessary given the costs of production and the need to accommodate measuring error, incidental variation, and the like, represents the fidu- ciary value of the coin. If the Nephite economy indeed possessed coinage, whatever type it may have been, it implies the existence of a credible government capable of governing its own territory.

II. Was the Nephite Weight Standard Unitary?

In considering ancient metallic money, it is important to understand that its weight simultaneously carried the function of a denomination. For example, a drachm (a weight denomination widely used throughout

13. The fiduciary nature of coinage is well illustrated by the very first coins struck in Asia Minor, the electrum coins of Lydia. Electrum is an alloy of gold and silver, which existed in abundance in that part of the world. Because the proportions of gold and silver varied in the natural alloy (as well as in the coins), and the proportions could not easily be ascertained, these coins could not have circulated at metallic value. The only way to ensure their acceptance as money under these circumstances was for the sovereign to certify their value. Remarkably, but also understandably, these coins were in fact diluted with additional silver in the minting process to make sure that their metallic value remained well below their notional value. The highly fiduciary nature of electrum coins generally limited the geographical area of their circulation to the boundaries of the issuer. Robert W. Wallace, “The Origin of Electrum Coinage,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 91, no. 3 (1987): 385–95. See also Thomas Figueira, *The Power of Money: Coinage and Politics in the Athenian Empire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 93–96.

the Aegean) was a weight of about 4.3 grams, but it was also a denomina-
tion—the price of a clay jar might be expressed as two gold drachms or
equivalently (at the market ratio of 14:1) 28 silver drachms, requiring the
buyer to hand over to the seller a right combination of coins to make up
that value (for example, two gold drachm coins; seven silver tetradrachm
coins). This was quite different from how prices are quoted in contem-
porary economies. For example, the dollar is an abstract unit of account
and does not serve as money; it is only the unit with which the values
of monetary instruments (for example, demand deposits, stocks, bonds,
electronic transfers) are expressed. Hence, a gold dollar is equivalent to
a silver dollar (because the dollar is not a weight, but a unit of account).
Anciently, the unit of account function did not exist separately from the
other functions of a monetary instrument, though it is important for us
to make a conceptual separation between them.

In the Nephite system, it appears as though, unlike the situation in
ancient Greece (that is, a drachm was used for both gold and silver), gold
and silver carried separate denominational names. For example, Alma
11:3 seems to imply that a senine was a gold denomination and a gold
weight; and a senum was a silver denomination and a silver weight of
equivalent value. Are we then to understand, as the extant LDS literature
implicitly assumes,¹⁵ that gold and silver were on different weight scales?
This is not necessarily the case for two reasons. First, gold was likely
much more valuable than silver, so the silver weights were much heavier
than the gold weights. That is to say, the value of a senum of gold was a
multiple of a senum of silver, and a senum of gold was therefore too valu-
able to circulate, at least for everyday transactions. This made the senum
practically the exclusive weight for silver. In this interpretation, certain
denominational names appear only for gold (or silver), not because they
are weights specific to gold (or silver), but because they are lighter (or
heavier) weights typically used for gold (or silver). Second, alternatively,
gold and silver might have earlier been on different scales, but the fixed
mint ratio virtually dictates that they were now on the same weight scale
(or, at least, gold and silver denominations could be placed on the same
scale). Mosiah’s reform, by fixing the mint ratio, may have unified the
weight standard for gold and silver, as Welch seems to intimate.¹⁶

¹⁵. Robert F. Smith, “Table of Relative Values,” Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 8,
¹⁶. Welch’s point is more general. By observing the changing standards of the previ-
ous generations, he argues that Mosiah brought stability to “this fluid condition” through
A standard of weights and measures need not be unitary to be viable. The United States is a prosperous economy in which (at least) two incompatible systems, imperial and metric, are used simultaneously. In fact, it was quite common in ancient societies to employ multiple standards. In ancient Israel, for example, there were no fewer than three weight systems in concurrent use, including the Egyptian system, the Babylonian system, and a binary system (in which denomination increases by a multiple of 2) that may have originated in the Aegean. In fourth-century BC Macedonia, under Philip II, gold and silver were on two separate weight standards (it was Alexander the Great who unified the standard for both gold and silver). During the Hellenistic period, a number of polities issued coinage for domestic circulation and for international commerce on separate standards. Not only were there multiple standards in concurrent use, but standards could also change from time to time, for political and economic reasons. Several poleis abandoned the Attic standard, for example, when the Athenian empire collapsed; Philip II switched to the Corinthian standard in part because it was adopted by the Chalcidian League.

Ease of exchange appears to be the dominant economic reason when it comes to the adoption of multiple standards for coinage. If the gold-silver ratio was an integer, a unitary standard might work perfectly (a gold coin could be easily divisible into an integer number of silver coins). But if the gold-silver ratio involved a fraction, having multiple standards could under certain situations facilitate an exchange of silver coinage for gold. For example, if the gold-silver ratio was $13\frac{1}{3}:1$, the number of silver drachms exchangeable for a gold stater would be $26\frac{2}{3}$

21. For large-value transactions involving different coinages, the choice of standards made little difference. Traders and merchants knew very well their relative values, and it was only a matter of exchanging one type of coin for another through money changers upon payment of a commission. Hoard evidence suggests that coins of various weight standards in reality circulated freely throughout the ancient world. Sitta von Reden, *Money in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 67.
if both were on the same Attic standard; the same Attic gold coin would exchange for an even 8 silver pentadrachms if silver was on the Corinthian standard. But if the gold-silver ratio declined to 12:1, it would make more sense to place both gold and silver coinages on the Attic standard, because that would make a gold stater equal to an even 6 tetradrachms. In like manner, the Nephites too must have altered their weights and measures “according to the minds and the circumstances of the people, in every generation” (Alma 11:4).

If we assume that the weight standard was unitary, it becomes straightforward to reconstruct the Nephite weight scale (table 1, columns 1 and 2). Here, I have additionally assumed that the gold denominations (senine, seon, shum) were on the lower end, and the silver denominations (senum, amnor, ezrom) were on the higher end, of the relevant weight scale, given the likely higher value of gold per weight; leah, shiblium, and shiblon were fractional silver denominations; denominations were continuous, unbroken, and exhaustive on the relevant range of the scale; and the system was binary (that is, denomination increased by a multiple of 2), except for the add-on, nonbinary denominations (antion, limnah, and onti), at least over this range. A remarkable revelation from this exercise is that the implied gold-silver mint ratio of 16:1 falls within the well-attested range observed during much of the several millennia of recorded human history: 13⅓:1 (Persia) and 14:1–10:1 (Aegean), 7th–5th centuries BC; 23 12:1 (Rome), 1st–3rd centuries AD; 24 10.5:1–12.3:1 (Japan), early 16th to early 18th centuries AD; 25 and 16:1–15:1 (United States), 19th century AD. 26

### Table 1. The Nephite Binary Metallic Weight Scale
(With the implied gold-silver mint ratio of 16:1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denominations</th>
<th>In units of senine</th>
<th>Gold senine as equivalent in weight to Attic one-twelfth stater</th>
<th>Silver senum as equivalent in weight to Attic tetradrachm</th>
<th>Silver senum as equivalent in weight to Persian siglos</th>
<th>Silver weights in gold equivalents, where relevant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seon (=Leah)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shum (=Shiblum)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiblon</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senum</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Senine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amnor</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>Seon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezrom</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>Shum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Memorandum: nonbinary, add-on denominations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denominations</th>
<th>In units of senine</th>
<th>Gold senine as equivalent in weight to Attic one-twelfth stater</th>
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<th>Silver senum as equivalent in weight to Persian siglos</th>
<th>Silver weights in gold equivalents, where relevant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antion</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limnah</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onti</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>120.4</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>Limnah</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Weights are all approximate, given as an illustration. They are hypothetically constructed by assuming alternatively that (1) the smallest gold coin (senine) is similar in function and weight to the Attic one-twelfth stater and (2) the silver senum is the standard coinage similar in function and weight to either the Attic tetradrachm or the Persian siglos.*

*Source: Author's conjecture based on Alma 11:3–19.*
In this section, I address the question of whether the Nephites used coinage by considering, rather convolutedly, whether at least some of the metallic weights mentioned were light enough to be carried by hand, irrespective of their shape or inscriptive features. To do so, I make a series of conjectures, starting with where on the weight scale the metallic weights of Alma 11 may have been located. In the ancient Near East, going back to the late Bronze Age, the largest weight denomination was known as the talent, which, while differing somewhat from place to place, roughly amounted to 28–30 kg, the maximum load an adult male could carry.\(^{27}\) If we assume that the Nephites inherited a similar convention, it would be untenable to argue that the metallic weights in Alma 11 were located on the higher end of the weight scale. To do so would imply that those weights were not fine enough to be useful for most human activities (for example, the scale from senine to ezrom might then correspond to 0.469, 0.938, 1.875, 3.75, 7.5, 15, 30 kg).\(^{28}\)

Moreover, if the ezrom was the equivalent of the talent, why did the Nephites invent the onti, which is heavier by 1.75 times? On the other hand, if the onti was the equivalent of the talent, the whole binary system would break down. Further, if the ezrom or the onti was the largest denomination, the smallest weight would have been 234–469 grams for gold, and 469–938 grams for silver. At the recent prices of around $60 and $1 per gram, these would be now worth $14,040–$28,140 and $469–$938, respectively. Irrespective of Nephite society’s prevailing wage, income, or price level, these weights, even as ingots, were likely too large a denomination, not just for everyday transactions but also for high-value transactions. The only reasonable conclusion is that the metallic weights described in Alma 11 represented the lower end of the scale. Binary denominational progression likely applied only to this range.\(^{29}\)

\(^{27}\) Hendin, “Current Viewpoints, 247.

\(^{28}\) We could make a less extreme argument by replacing the talent with the mina, the next largest weight denomination of about 500 g. Weight progression on an upper range, for example, from 125 g to 250 g, and then to 500 g, is again not very useful for most human activities.

\(^{29}\) This conjecture is based on the widely observed ancient convention in the Near East where the talent was divided into 60 minae, and the mina into 60 shekels. It is possible that the Nephite scale was formally sexagesimal and that the weight denominations in Alma 11 were the conventional names for metallic money and used only for convenience (for example, dime or penny for U.S. coinage). Binary denominational progression makes sense only for lighter weights.
What might have been the actual weights of these metallic pieces? If we assume that ancients shared similar lifestyles and technologies, in my view, we can think of two possible approaches to anchoring the range of the weights. First, ancient technology and the intrinsic value of gold likely dictated the size of the smallest gold coin, in this case, the gold senine. In ancient Greece, even though the precise weight differed from polis to polis depending on the particular standard in use, the smallest gold coin in the fourth century BC was not far different from the Attic one-twelfth stater of about 0.72 g. Any smaller coin, even if technically feasible, would have been impractical, given the risk of loss. Second, given that anything below the senum was likely a fractional weight, we may consider the senum as the standard silver coin, similar in function and weight to the Attic tetradrachm (about 17.2 g) or the Persian siglos (about 5.4 g), two of the most widely circulating coinages for international trade in antiquity. Whichever coinage we use as the benchmark, we come up with a broadly similar order of magnitude for the metallic weights (see table 1, columns 3, 4, and 5). If this exercise is accepted as valid, the six onties of silver Zeezrom offered to tempt Amulek to deny the existence of a Supreme Being in the Book of Mormon (Alma 11:22) weighed something like 225–720 grams (approximately 0.5–1.6 pounds), not an implausible quantity under such circumstances.

These conjectures would lead to a further conjecture on which of these metallic weights represented circulating coinage (table 2). From this table, silver amnor, ezron, and onti denominations are excluded because, weighing up to 120 g, they were probably too heavy to be circulating widely (by comparison, the U.S. quarter weighs 5.67 grams; the U.S. nickel 5 grams; the U.S. dime 2.268 grams). The ezron and the onti may well have been denominations for ingots used mainly to store value. Rather, larger-value transactions were the domain of lighter gold coinage. It is well attested in the ancient Near East that, even after the invention of coinage, heavier bullion continued to be used side by side with lighter coinage.

30. In ancient Athens, a silver tetradrachm was sufficient to support a man for twelve days. According to Alma 11:3, a judge was paid one senum of silver for one day of work. If the rough equivalence of the tetradrachm and the senum is accepted, this was not an unreasonable sum of money a professional might make in a day. See chapter 1, “The King’s Money,” in Alfred R. Bellinger, Essays on the Coinage of Alexander the Great (New York: American Numismatic Society, 1963).


Persian silver siglos. Initially weighing about 5.4 g, the weight was later increased to about 5.6 g. It mainly circulated in Asia Minor. “PER-SIA, Achaemenid Empire. temp. Darios I. Circa 520–505 BC,” by Classical Numismatic Group, Inc., https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PERSIA,_Achaemenid_Empire._temp._Darios_I._Circa_520-505_BC.jpg, licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license. Desaturated.

### Table 2. Circulating Nephite Coinage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denominations</th>
<th>Illustrative weights (in grams)</th>
<th>Values in units of senine/senum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gold</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>0.7–2.2</td>
<td>⅛</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiblum</td>
<td>1.4–4.3</td>
<td>¼</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiblon</td>
<td>2.7–8.6</td>
<td>½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Silver</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senine</td>
<td>0.3–1.1 (gold)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senum</td>
<td>5.4–17.2 (silver)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Antion** 0.5–1.6 1½

**Seon** 0.7–2.2 2

**Shum** 1.4–4.3 4

**Limnah** 2.4–7.5 7

*Source:* author’s conjecture based on Alma 11:3–19.
On the other hand, the weights on the lower end (such as the senine and the leah), likely weighing around or less than 2 g, were clearly meant to be carried by hand. The Book of Mormon, describing the possessions people carried with them as they traveled, mentions “all their grain of every kind, and their gold, and their silver, and all their precious things” (3 Ne. 6:2). If by precious things are meant jewelries, bullion, and ingots, gold and silver must mean coinage, suggesting that coinage was held commonly, if not widely, among households. Further, the 1-2-4-7 system itself implies that gold and silver were exchanged by counting, not by weighing. Use of bullion and ingots as money would not have required a special provision for dealing with fractional weights or economizing on the number of pieces to be used. It is then unreasonable not to designate such small metallic pieces of uniform weight as coins.

IV. How Did Fixed Prices for Grain Work?

Alma 11:7 describes an unusual feature of the Nephite system in which a weight of precious metal was set equal in value to a measure of every kind of grain. That is to say, the monetary values of all sorts of grain, perhaps including wheat, barley, and corn, were somehow fixed by decree. As strange as such a system may appear to contemporary readers, it is well attested that ancient societies often instituted an accounting system in which the valuation of typically grain, but also cattle, was fixed in relation to a weight of metal. Welch mentions the law code of Mesopotamia (Eshmunna) in the early second millennium BC, in which one kor of barley was set equal to one shekel of silver.32 There are many other examples. Under Hittite law, the price of a plough ox was set at 12 shekels of silver. In ancient Egypt, a worker’s monthly wage was 5½ sacks of cereal or 11 debens of copper,33 and an ox was purchased for 120 debens of copper.34 In ancient Athens, several laws ascribed to Solon in the early sixth century BC contained a provision under which one medimnos of grain was set equivalent to one sheep or one drachma of silver.35

The prominence given to grain in Alma 11 is in line with ancient practice. At least from the third millennium BC, metal and grain both served side by side as a medium of exchange and as a unit of account. Paul Einzig, observing that the Babylonians defined the shekel weight

34. Einzig, Primitive Money, 203, 206.
35. Von Reden, Money in Classical Antiquity, 37.
of silver as 180 grains of barley, speculated that barley might have preceded silver as money. Copper, gold, and silver were long used as units of account, for sure, but some scholars question if they were used as widely as media of exchange. Far more common as monetary media was grain, even after the introduction of coinage, including in first millennium AD Southeast Asia where rice served such a role. In ancient Babylon and Egypt, the monetary role of grain derived from the centralization of grain harvest in state granaries, and banking involved taking grain as deposits and using deposit receipts to make payments to third parties. It is likely that Nephite society was highly agrarian, and similar granaries possibly existed as the royal treasury to store grain collected as tax.

That such a system was attested in antiquity is one thing, but how such a system might have operated is a different matter. One does not have to be an economist to wonder how the government could fix the prices of all goods against each other and expect the economy to function at all. A centrally planned economy under an autocratic government may be able to maintain fixed prices with a threat of penalty. During the twentieth century, the socialist experiment by the Soviet Union and its satellite states seemed to work for some time but eventually failed. If a system of administered prices deviates (as it inevitably does) from what is dictated by society’s preferences and technology, distortions begin to develop until the system collapses—as it fails to deliver what people want to buy in the desired quantities. A system of fixed prices cannot be a viable economic institution in the long run.

A group of economic anthropologists, known as substantivists, may object to such a neoclassical view of the possible working of administered prices in primitive societies by appealing to the importance of social institutions (such as status and customs) in determining economic behavior. Substantivism was first articulated in its current form by Karl Polanyi in 1944 as a reaction to the formalist position that had

37. Robert Wicks speculates that “rice, or some other uniform commodity” was used as an everyday medium of exchange in the marketplace, with silver and gold coinages reserved for large-value ritualistic purposes, in the ninth-century Java. Robert S. Wicks, “Monetary Developments in Java between the Ninth and Sixteenth Centuries: A Numismatic Perspective,” *Indonesia* 42 (1986): 64–65.
become the dominant paradigm of the first half of the twentieth century; it was then eloquently advanced by Moses Finley in his seminal 1973 work, *The Ancient Economy*. The formalist position considers that ancient economies can be approached in essentially the same way as modern economies, with the analytical tools of modern economics. In contrast, the substantivist position, based largely on literary (and not material) evidence, considers ancient economies to be primitive in their operations, lacking functioning markets, work incentives, and profit motives. Since economic behavior was embedded in social conventions, they might claim that, in our context, ancients would be perfectly willing to live with prices determined by their monarch, magistrate, or tribal leader.

While substantivism must contain some element of truth, recent scholarship in economic history and classical studies, supported by increasing archaeological and other scientific evidence, has virtually refuted the notion that functioning markets and profit motives were absent in ancient economies. For the Near East, for example, against the substantivist view that trade was entirely conducted by the state at fixed prices and private-sector activity was almost nonexistent, Assyriologists have found trade to be a private affair, aimed at private profits; the role of private enterprise was especially relevant during the Middle Bronze Age. The Book of Mormon itself describes the activities of the people in the late first century BC as enjoying “free intercourse one with another, to buy and to sell, and to get gain, according to their desire” (Hel. 6:8), while attesting to the presence of “many merchants in the land” who evidently were boasting of “their exceedingly great riches” (3 Ne. 6:10–11). And, as a result of great prosperity, the people began to


“set their hearts upon their riches . . . [and] to seek to get gain” (Hel. 6:17; see also 3 Ne. 6:15).

The nature of the Nephite system of fixed prices may be surmised from the fact that quality considerations played no role: a measure of one kind of grain was set equal to the same measure of another kind of grain. This indicates that exchange was not the system's purpose. The system was likely meant to assign a legal or accounting value to agricultural products. The function of monetary values in such a system is not unlike that of monetary values assigned to wrongful acts by casuistic laws in the Covenant Code—for example, thirty shekels of silver for a manservant or a maidservant accidentally killed by an ox (Ex. 21:32). Obviously, the purpose of such a code could not have been to stipulate the prices at which market transactions in slaves should take place. A male slave and a female slave (irrespective of their gender, age, health condition, physical strength, or intellectual capacity) command the same value in the Covenant Code, just as a measure of barley had the same value as the same measure of wheat in the Nephite system; barley is barley, whether the quality is high or low. It must be clear that the system was not meant to perform the economic function of allocating scarce resources among competing ends.

What was the purpose of such a system, if not economic? A number of possibilities can be inferred from ancient precedents. Welch, speaking of the laws of Eshmunna, states that one of the motives was to “set the penalties for damages or the daily rates for renting different means of transport” and perhaps also to set “a standard daily wage” in the public sector. Likewise, one of the purposes of the Solonic legislation may have been to assess agrarian wealth in metallic terms; a similar system in

43. The price of a slave, when there is a market, must be related to the present discounted value of the future streams of surpluses the owner expects to claim over subsistence. In twenty-first-century BC Mesopotamia, for example, even though the average price of a male slave was 10 shekels of silver (and 5–6 shekels for a female), extant records indicate that he could command as much as 55 shekels, depending on the skill he possessed. Male slaves generally commanded higher market prices than female slaves in Imperial Rome as well, but the relative price of male to female slaves may have reversed during the Middle Ages. Hans Neumann, “Slavery in Private Households toward the End of the Third Millennium B.C.,” in Slaves and Households in the Near East, ed. Laura Culbertson (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2011), 23, 26; Kyle Harper, “Slave Prices in Late Antiquity (and in the Very Long Term),” Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte 59, no. 2 (2010): 219, 236.

Rome might have been to convert agricultural products into monetary census qualifications upon which army recruitment was based.\textsuperscript{45} It is well attested in ancient societies where coinage was being introduced that the first payments to be monetized were typically religious (“ritualistic”) and tax (“redistributive”).\textsuperscript{46}

Such a system, however, did not prevent the formation of market prices for the commodities involved for exchange purposes. Ancient sources suggest that the prices of cattle and grain fluctuated in market transactions despite their supposed fixed values. Examples include the Hittite system in which the price of an ox was set equal to a weight of silver,\textsuperscript{47} the Ptolemaic system in which the prices of grain were fixed in relation to precious metals,\textsuperscript{48} and the Babylonian system in which a weight of silver was set equal to a measure of grain. In Babylonia, the market price of grain in terms of silver rose by more than 150 percent through the course of the third millennium BC, while the increase was as much as 600–1,400 percent from the mid-seventh to the fifth century BC.\textsuperscript{49} In like manner, the Nephite administrative system must have been separate from the functioning markets where various kinds of grain were traded based on fluctuating prices. Otherwise, how can we explain the people buying and selling evidently in many markets across the land, with “the chief market” in the city of Zarahemla (Hel. 6:8; 7:10)?

\textsuperscript{45} Von Reden, \textit{Money in Classical Antiquity}, 49.
\textsuperscript{46} Wicks, “Monetary Developments in Java,” 46, 64–65.
\textsuperscript{47} Hendin, “Current Viewpoints,” 248.
\textsuperscript{48} Von Reden, \textit{Money in Classical Antiquity}, 46.
\textsuperscript{49} Einzig, \textit{Primitive Money}, 213. Noteworthy in this context is paragraph 108 of the code of Hammurabi, which states, “If a woman innkeeper should refuse to accept grain for the price of beer but accepts (only) silver . . . , they shall charge and convict the woman innkeeper” (trans. Martha Tobi Roth). This should not be interpreted as suggesting that parity between a measure of grain and a weight of silver was somehow enforced subject to the penalty of law. Mesopotamian law codes were not authoritative sources of law by which judges ruled on cases but were instead scholastic “idealizations of . . . wrongs and penalties in social behavior” used as a “pedagogical tool” in scribal schools. The Hammurabi code only shows how difficult it was for individuals to accept a relative price of two goods that was out of line with economic reality. Martha Tobi Roth, \textit{Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor} (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 101; Norman Yoffee, “The Meanings of Law in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in \textit{Wissenskultur im Alten Orient: Weltanschauung, Wissenschaften, Techniken, Technologien}, ed. H. Neumann (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012), 88; and Raymond Westbrook, \textit{Laws from the Tigris to the Tiber: The Writings of Raymond Westbrook, Volume 2: Cuneiform and Biblical Sources}, ed. Bruce Wells and Rachel Magdalene (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 306.
V. How Did Nephite Bimetallism Work?

The fixed mint ratio between gold and silver has a modern counterpart in nineteenth-century American and French bimetallism. Disagreement exists on the precise definition of bimetallism, which is a monetary standard based on the use of two metals, usually gold and silver. Some view bimetallism loosely as any monetary standard involving the legal use of two metals, while others see it strictly as a standard involving two metals plus a fixed mint ratio between the two. My preferred definition is the second because if the mint ratio is not fixed, the price of either metal seen from the other behaves like any other good, rendering the operation of such a monetary standard no different from that of monometalism (such as the gold standard). Even though bimetallism, loosely defined, has been the most dominant monetary standard throughout several millennia of recorded history, rarely do we find in antiquity a monetary standard in which the price of gold was fixed in terms of silver.50 In this respect, the Nephite system was unique.

It is both by design and by logic that the mint ratio between gold and silver is fixed under modern bimetallism. As discussed earlier in some detail, in a modern economy, a monetary instrument does not serve as a unit of account because this function has been separated out of its other functions. This separation, and the creation of a common unit of account, occurred in the West sometime between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries AD.51 As a result, the dollar is not money but a

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50. Milton Friedman’s statement in his celebrated article on bimetallism (that “a legal rate of exchange between silver and gold” was “sometimes” not specified) not only is inaccurate and misleading but also fails to recognize the fundamental difference in the nature and operation of the two alternative versions of “bimetallism.” Friedman, “Bimetallism Revisited,” 85.

51. According to Angela Redish, the unit of account function became fully separated (at least in Europe) in the seventeenth century AD. Angela Redish, Bimetallism: An Economic and Historical Analysis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 7–8. Gilles Bransbourg, on the other hand, argues that a common value system developed in Europe in the later eighteenth century AD. Gilles Bransbourg, “Fides et Pecunia Numerata Part II: The Currencies of the Roman Republic,” American Journal of Numismatics 25 (2013): 183–85. While neither of these authors provides a basis for her or his assertion, the ambiguity of the dating is likely related to the fluidity of the European monetary conditions in the early modern era when a variety of debased coins circulated widely. In Britain, for example, a mint ratio was established for the guinea (2/89 of a troy pound of gold) at 20 shillings of silver in 1663, but it was not acted upon or enforced. It was only with a proclamation of December 1717 that a mint ratio for the guinea (at 21 shillings of silver) began to be enforced. Walker, International Bimetallism, 66–67, 77.
unit of account in which a monetary instrument is denominated. In an economy like this, a gold dollar can only be equivalent to a silver dollar, implying that the mint ratio is fixed by logic.

This was not the case in ancient economies. Lacking a common unit of account, ancient economies expressed prices in terms of alternative media of exchange. Suppose that a plow is priced as 2 gold drachms or 30 silver drachms (at the prevailing market exchange rate of 15:1), and that the price of gold falls to 10:1. The same merchant might then reprice the plow as 20 silver drachms (by keeping the same gold price) or 3 gold drachms (by keeping the silver price), among other possibilities. Because one unit of account is allowed to fluctuate against the other, fluctuations in the relative price of gold and silver are easily accommodated in such a system. No instability emerges.

Once a common and independent unit of account is introduced (and the mint ratio is thus fixed by logic), bimetallism can become a highly unstable monetary standard. Suppose that, when the mint ratio is fixed at 10:1, the market price moves to 15:1. That is, gold appreciates relative to silver by a third. Because the mint ratio undervalues (overvalues) the market valuation of gold (silver), one of the following three things might happen. First, gold would cease to circulate as money because it is more valuable as a commodity than as money, and only silver would circulate as money. This is known as Gresham’s Law, whereby “bad money drives out good” (bad money refers to the overvalued metal). Second, both would remain in circulation, but gold (silver) would command a premium (discount) when used as money (a seller of goods demands more units when the payment is made in silver than when it is made in gold). Third, some combination of the two outcomes may ensue, with the undervalued metal both commanding a premium and partially going out of circulation.

Which one of these outcomes prevails would depend on (1) the extent to which the mint ratio is binding in private transactions, (2) the costs of paying a premium for using the undervalued money, and (3) the share of the undervalued coinage in the total supply of money. If the mint ratio is enforced, Gresham’s Law is more likely to be the outcome. If the mint ratio is not enforced, on the other hand, gold is more likely to circulate at a premium provided that the costs of paying the premium are sufficiently small.\(^{52}\) Finally, when there is a shortage of coinage, it is more likely that

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\(^{52}\) If the costs of paying a premium are larger for small denomination coins, they may go out of circulation while large denomination coins remain in circulation at a
both overvalued and undervalued coins will circulate, though with a
premium (discount) for the undervalued (overvalued) metal.\(^{53}\) Early
U.S. monetary history has been subject to various interpretations,\(^{54}\) but
nineteenth-century American bimetallism was undoubtedly a highly
unstable monetary standard in which the composition of the money
supply moved in response to the changing market prices of gold and sil-
ver, as explained below.

The instability of bimetallism is intrinsic to the inevitable incom-
patibility of a mint ratio with a market ratio when the monetary val-
ues of gold and silver are fixed in terms of a common unit of account.
In the United States, when the market price of gold rose from the 1791
mint ratio of 15:1, silver became the dominant coinage and remained so
until 1834 when the mint ratio was revised to 16:1. Yet at the prevail-
ing market price of 15½:1, a difference remained, which caused gold to
become the dominant coinage (though both silver and gold continued
to circulate).\(^{55}\) In the early 1850s, the scarcity of silver coinage led to a
premium on silver and caused an increasing number of fractional notes
to circulate. In 1853, this forced the U.S. government to reduce the stan-
dard weight of fractional silver coins and limited their legal tender status,
an action generally considered to be the beginning of the end of Ameri-
can bimetallism.\(^{56}\)

Given the fixed mint ratio, how did Nephite bimetallism work? Two
possibilities may be conjectured from ancient and modern monetary
history. First, as was the case with its modern counterparts, the Nephite

\(^{53}\) Frank Whitson Fetter argues that only an excess supply of money (and not the
badness of money) determines if any money goes out of circulation. Gresham’s Law sim-
ply explains which money is taken out of circulation when there are two or more mon-
ies of different commodity values. Frank Whitson Fetter, “Some Neglected Aspects of

\(^{54}\) For example, paper notes (“greenbacks”) issued during 1862–1879 to help finance
the Civil War have been interpreted either as having caused a premium on gold or as
having driven gold coins out of circulation. Which of these alternative interpretations is
correct hinges on what is meant by a premium on gold (coins or bullion). Rolnick and
Weber, “Gresham’s Law,” 187–90, 193; Robert L. Greenfield and Hugh Rockoff, “Gresh-
am’s Law in Nineteenth-Century America,” Journal of Money, Credit, and Banking 27,

\(^{55}\) Friedman, “Bimetallism Revisited,” 88; Greenfield and Rockoff, “Gresham’s
Law,” 1092.

\(^{56}\) David A. Martin, “1853: The End of Bimetallism in the United States,” Journal of
Economic History 33, no. 4 (1973): 825–44.
bimetallic standard may have exhibited frequent instability and may have collapsed relatively quickly, perhaps degrading into a monometallic standard (over a sufficiently long period of time, it is almost a truism that any system would ultimately collapse—so the question is not whether but how soon). The alignment of the mint ratio with the market price needed for bimetallic stability is not “knife-edge,” given the costs of converting the undervalued coins into specie and selling the specie on the market. These costs define the upper and lower “gold-silver price ratio points” between which the market ratio could vary without causing instability.57 Bimetallism comes under strain only when the change in the market price of gold relative to silver becomes sufficiently large to create an exploitable difference.

My reading of the Book of Mormon suggests two possible triggering events that might have led to the collapse of Nephite bimetallism (other than the war and the natural calamities that destroyed much of the civilization). One is the apparent abundance of gold relative to silver, if Helaman 6:11 (“there was all manner of gold in both these lands, and of silver”) can be read as indicating the predominance in production of gold over silver. Another possible triggering event might have been the expanding trade (“free intercourse one with another”) between the Nephites and the Lamanites (Hel. 6:8). The prosperity described in these passages must mean that, given the likely absence of significant technological progress, the two economies that had previously been relatively closed to each other integrated to form a larger market, allowing a greater specialization of labor (what economists call Smithian growth, as opposed to Promethean growth, which requires continuing technological improvement). When two economies with different gold-silver ratios integrate, bimetallism is bound to undergo profound change.

The Book of Mormon states that some fifty years after the reign of Mosiah, his laws “had become corrupted” (Hel. 4:22). If we set aside the moral aspect of this statement, one of the many possible meanings of this passage may be that the market price had deviated so far from the mint ratio that the monetary standard created by Mosiah collapsed. In the realm of economics, this must have had more to do with the natural working of economic laws than moral decay. The singular reference to the senine (which is a gold denomination) in 3 Nephi 12:26, in contrast to the earlier conjoint reference to the senine and the senum (a silver

denomination) in Alma 11:3, may be an indication that, with a fall in the relative price of gold, the Nephite monetary standard had transformed by this time from bimetallism to monometalism based on gold.

Second, as an alternative scenario of Nephite monetary history, bimetallism may have lasted for a sustained period of time. A rare example of bona fide bimetallism from antiquity can be used to explore such possibilities. The Persian (Achaemenid) Empire fixed and maintained its gold-silver mint ratio at 13⅓:1 from sometime between the early 510s and circa 490 until its defeat at the hands of Alexander the Great in 330 BC. The question is how Persia could maintain the same mint ratio for so long. It may be that bimetallism degenerated into a gold standard, such that the fixed mint ratio was only notional and not effectively enforced. During the fourth century BC, the relative price in the Aegean declined in favor of silver to 12:1 (and further down to 10:1). This kept the gold coins within Persia and may have created pressure on the silver coins to go out of circulation. Persia’s principal silver coin, the siglos, never became dominant in the western territory in Asia Minor, where poleis continued to mint their own silver coinage.

As another possibility, Persia’s royal palace may have acted as the residual buyer and supplier of precious metals to maintain the official parity. That the Persian treasury held a massive inventory of precious metals is well attested. C. C. Patterson estimates that the amount of silver Alexander plundered from the Persian treasury from 333 to 330 BC and subsequently released into circulation was about 2,200 metric tons (that is, about twice the size of world silver stocks at the beginning of the seventh century BC). François de Callataÿ places the estimate at some 180,000 Attic talents, the equivalent of 468 tons of gold or 4,680 tons

58. That is, 40 units of silver for 3 units of gold in weight. The initial relative price, when coinage was first introduced from Asia Minor, was 13:1. Michael Vickers, “Early Greek Coinage, a Reassessment,” Numismatic Chronicle 145 (1985): 8–9.

59. Such was the case, for example, in Edo-period Japan, where the mint ratio of one gold ryō to 60 silver momme was nominally maintained from the early eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries AD. This was never enforced, however, allowing the conversion rate to be determined in the market. E. S. Crawcour and Kozo Yamamura, “The Tokugawa Monetary System: 1787–1868,” Economic Development and Cultural Change 18, no. 4 (1970): 492.


of silver.\(^{62}\) Between 333 and 290 BCE, Alexander’s royal mint may have produced some 60 million tetradrachms, 66 million drachms, and 12 million gold staters, a little more than the aggregate revenue of the fifth-century Athenian empire throughout its entire seventy-three-year existence.\(^{63}\) With an inventory like this, it is conceivable that Persia could maintain its official gold-silver parity for a long time.

In the case of the Nephite economy, other factors may have contributed to the long-term sustainability of its bimetallic standard by limiting the development or effective functioning of the private market for precious metals. First, gold and silver production might have been a government monopoly, as was the case in a number of ancient societies,\(^{64}\) which may have helped stabilize market prices. This may explain why the Romans could maintain their fixed mint ratio for a long time, during the republic period (one silver denarius for ten bronze asses),\(^{65}\) as well as during the imperial period (one gold aureus to 25 silver denarii).\(^{66}\) Second, precious metals might have been so valuable as to make the market too thin for efficient price discovery and formation. In such a market, the official mint ratio could have served to anchor market prices. A thin market for precious metals would be consistent with a possibly limited monetization of the agrarian economy, as intimated by the apparent absence of base metal subsidiary coinage (typically used for small-denomination transactions) and the existence of an elaborate grain accounting system.\(^{67}\) Most transactions may have taken place not by coinage but by grain receipts or even by barter.

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67. Anciendy, the introduction of fiduciary, subsidiary coinage typically occurred several centuries after the introduction of silver or gold coinage, when monetization of the economy was sufficiently advanced. In ancient Greece, small-denomination, fiduciary bronze coins (actually made of copper alloys), first introduced from the late fifth to the early fourth centuries, began to circulate widely during the Hellenistic period. Gary Reger, “Hellenistic Greece and Western Asia Minor,” in *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World*, ed. Walter Scheidel, Ian Morris, and Richard Saller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 470. In Java, silver and gold coinages remained high-valued and were mainly used for ritualized transactions, and broad
VI. Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed the operational aspects of the Nephite system of fixed prices for gold, silver, and all kinds of grain (Alma 11:3–19), based on internal evidence, economic logic, and historical precedents from antiquity. I have argued, among other things, that most of the metallic weights described in Alma 11 were sufficiently light and were clearly intended for handling by hand. These weighted metals therefore had all the economic characteristics of coinage, making it appropriate to designate them as coins. Further, once it is accepted that denominations were binary and the weight scale was unitary for both gold and silver, internal logic implies that the gold-silver mint ratio was 16:1. Remarkably, this falls within the well-attested range of gold-silver prices observed over several millennia of recorded human history.

The Nephite system appears unusual in fixing the relative prices for precious metals and all kinds of grain, but it has a number of historical precedents in ancient societies. The clue to its noneconomic nature can be surmised from the lack of any role quality considerations play in the valuation of agricultural products. I have argued, based on similar systems from antiquity, that the system of fixed prices was likely not an economic institution but an accounting framework in which the monetary values of agricultural products were assessed for tax, census, or other administrative purposes. The Nephite system was also unusual in fixing the relative price of gold against silver. Rarely do we find a bimetallic monetary standard with a fixed gold-silver parity in antiquity. Such a system is known to be unstable, and I am inclined to think that it soon degenerated into monometalism based on gold. If such a bimetallic standard was durable at all, it must be that the market for precious metals was limited either by a government monopoly over production or by thin trading attributable to the society’s agrarian and largely nonmoneitized nature.

Given these informed albeit speculative conjectures about the operation of the secular institution described in Alma 11, one must be careful not to be hasty in concluding that it did not involve coinage. It is extremely unlikely that the economic, if not numismatic, concept of coinage was unknown during Lehi’s lifetime, and even if coinage had been unknown, it would not necessarily follow that monetary metals monetization of everyday transactions did not take place until the turn of the fourteenth century AD, when Chinese base metal coins began to circulate. Wicks, “Monetary Developments in Java,” 44, 63.
did not assume the economic functions of coinage over the first four centuries of Nephite civilization. The heading change made in Alma 11 from “Nephite coinage” to “The Nephite monetary system” was not only unwarranted but also inappropriate from the standpoint of the generally accepted nomenclature of monetary economics. The term “monetary system,” which usually refers to a set of laws, regulations, and institutions involved in a nation’s payment system, is too elaborate a concept to apply to an ancient society with primitive institutions, especially when so little information is provided.

An objection may be lodged to considering Alma 11 as the description of a coinage system on the basis of scanty archaeological evidence that coinage existed in ancient America. But such an objection is equally applicable to considering the same passage as a description of bullion and ingots as money. Ancient cash hoards in the eastern Mediterranean and Near East typically contain both coins and ingots. It is almost certain that precious metals were used as money in ancient American civilizations, whatever form they took. When the Spanish conquistadores arrived, they found Mexicans regularly using gold dust as money. It may well be that, in the future, ancient hoards containing coins and ingots will be excavated somewhere in the Americas. For the time being, the best answer I can give is that the Nephite economy was agrarian and largely nonmonetized, restricting the circulation of coins, if any, and limiting their use largely to urban, commercial transactions.

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As Latter-day Saints, we are fortunate to have the Book of Mormon, which consists of writings of prophets from around 600 BC to AD 400 and of Christ’s teachings to inhabitants of the New World. The last of these New World prophets was named Moroni. As the lone faithful Nephite survivor of a genocidal war, Moroni spoke directly to us in our day, prophesying the conditions that would ultimately prevail: “Yea, it shall come in a day when there shall be heard of fires, and tempests, and vapors of smoke in foreign lands; And there shall also be heard of wars, rumors of wars, and earthquakes in divers places. Yea, it shall come in a day when there shall be great pollutions upon the face of the earth” (Morm. 8:29–31).

Our days and times are truly marked by wars, rumors of wars, vapors of smoke, and great pollutions. It is interesting that Moroni links smoke, fire, and pollution to warfare in these verses, because modern warfare has serious environmental consequences. Although climate change, rain forest destruction, species extinction, and degradation of clean air and clean water all represent formidable environmental challenges, these threats pale compared to the environmental consequences of modern warfare in its most vicious and destructive form—detonation of nuclear weapons.

MX: A Nuclear Shell Game

During the Cold War, both the United States and the Soviet Union aspired to maintain a rough parity in nuclear capabilities to deter provocative behavior from either side. RAND corporation strategist Herman Kahn termed this view of reciprocal deterrence “automatic mutual
annihilation.”\(^1\) However, in the late 1970s, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) feared that the United States would face an extended period of strategic vulnerability beginning in the 1980s due to technological advances in Soviet weapon systems. The Soviet Union had recently deployed the SS-18 intercontinental ballistic missile. The total warhead mass of 8,800 kg it could deliver to its target was more than twice that of any comparable American missile. Furthermore, each SS-18 was armed with ten multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles (MIRV), a technology originally pioneered by the United States for use on the Minuteman III missile system. Because of the greater throw weight of the SS-18, more MIRVs could be dispatched toward targets in the United States from a single missile launch. The Soviets had also produced a medium-range missile, the SS-20, mounted on mobile launchers, which potentially could evade U.S. surveillance and preemptive or retaliatory strikes during a time of crisis. The DOD believed that there could be a one- to two-decade period of risk in which U.S. Minuteman and Titan missiles in their fixed silos could potentially succumb to a sneak Soviet first strike.

To redress this perceived strategic vulnerability, the United States proposed to produce a new category of missile named the MX, equipped with ten multiple reentry vehicles (figs. 1, 2). Each of these MIRVs would contain a three-hundred-kiloton W-87 thermonuclear warhead with the explosive power of about twenty times that of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. While the number of missiles or launchers each side possessed was limited by treaty, there was no agreed limitation on the number of silos. Therefore, in a sort of nuclear shell game, the DOD proposed shuttling missiles in specially built trucks among multiple silos to be constructed in vast regions of western Utah and eastern Nevada. The theory was that the Soviets could never know which silo contained the actual missile, so that they would not be able to destroy all the U.S. retaliatory capabilities in a sneak attack.

**MX—A Defensive or First-Strike Weapon System?**

As a PhD student listening to seminars at Harvard by nuclear strategists such as IBM Fellow Richard Garwin, I became concerned about the MX missile system, which appeared to me to be deeply destabilizing to

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Figure 1 (left). The MX missile carried ten multiple reentry vehicles, each of which could be independently targeted. Courtesy U.S. Air Force.

Figure 2 (below). An early MX test at Kwajalein Atoll in the Pacific Ocean; tracks are from ten reentry vehicles carried by a single missile. Courtesy U.S. Air Force.
the strategic balance. First, unlike the United States, the Soviet Union’s nuclear deterrent was largely dependent on fixed, land-based missiles that were inherently much more vulnerable to a first strike than U.S. systems since the U.S. nuclear deterrent included B-52 bombers and Polaris submarines. Since a portion of these were always in the air or out at sea, they were not as vulnerable to a Soviet first strike as U.S. land-based missiles such as the Titan and Minuteman III. In addition, significant U.S. advances in guidance systems resulted in unprecedented accuracy for the MX. Unlike the large Soviet warheads, the W-87 and submarine-borne W-88 thermonuclear warheads were miniaturized, being about the size of a large footlocker. Although they were of significantly less explosive yield than the Soviet warheads, the MX missile’s accuracy, rumored to be within three hundred feet, guaranteed destruction of hardened targets housing Soviet command and control centers as well as Soviet missile silos.

What the U.S. defense community termed a counterforce strategy based on the MX system—allowing the U.S. president the option of retaliating against Soviet command and control facilities rather than civilian populations—could from Soviet eyes be perceived as a first-strike system. At the time, I wondered why we would want to threaten destruction of the very Soviet leaders the United States would need to negotiate with to prevent or curtail nuclear exchanges during a crisis. I could not find good answers to these concerns and wondered if more thought had been given by U.S. military planners to launching a nuclear war than in stopping one if we got into trouble with the Soviet Union. I feared that the MX system would paradoxically reduce the national security of the United States, since during a crisis it would encourage Soviet leadership to be the first to launch their missiles on a “use them or lose them” basis. The U.S. nuclear arsenal had successfully deterred nuclear war since the Soviets tested their first atomic weapon at the Semipalatinsk test site in Kazakhstan on August 29, 1949, including during periods of tension between the two superpowers such as the Cuban missile crisis or the installation of the Berlin Wall. The United States had never officially renounced first use of nuclear weapons during a conflict with the Soviets. Not only did our strategic nuclear deterrent threaten the Soviet Union’s survival, but our defense of Western Europe against the numerically superior Warsaw Pact forces depended on advanced deployment of smaller tactical nuclear weapons to our European allies. It did not seem to me to be in our national interest to indirectly threaten the Soviets with an American first strike by developing the MX missile system.
Nuclear Weapons and the Restored Church of Jesus Christ

Like most Latter-day Saints, I pay close attention to statements from modern-day apostles and prophets of the Church. There seemed to me to be a strong historical sentiment of Church leaders against total warfare\(^2\) in general, especially the use of nuclear weapons.

“Of one thing I am sure,” the prophet Brigham Young said. “God never institutes war; God is not the author of confusion or of war; they are the results of the acts of children of men. Confusion and war necessarily come as the results of the foolish acts and policy of men; but they do not come because God desires they should come.”\(^3\)

“When the nations have for years turned much of their attention to manufacturing instruments of death,” Brigham Young said on another occasion, “they have sooner or later used those instruments. . . . From the authority of all history, the deadly weapons now stored up and being manufactured will be used.”\(^4\)

A later prophet, Joseph F. Smith, said that the gospel “is being preached in power to all nations, kindreds, tongues and peoples of the world, by the Latter-day Saints, and the day is not far distant when its message of salvation shall sink deep into the hearts of the common people, who, in sincerity and earnestness, when the time comes, will not only surely register their judgment against a false Christianity, but against war and the makers of war as crimes against the human race.”\(^5\)

“We are a warlike people,” President Spencer W. Kimball warned, easily distracted from our assignment of preparing for the coming of the Lord. When enemies rise up, we commit vast resources to the fabrication of gods of stone and steel—ships, planes, missiles, fortifications—and depend on them for protection and deliverance. When threatened, we become antienemy instead of pro-kingdom of God; we train a man in the art of war and call him a patriot, thus, in the manner of Satan’s counterfeit of true patriotism, perverting the Savior’s teaching: “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and

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2. Total warfare is a military conflict in which a nation mobilizes all available resources in an effort to destroy another nation’s ability to wage war. It may involve means considered unethical or immoral and may not distinguish between military and civilian targets.


pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:44–45).  

Most Latter-day Saints Favored the MX Project

With a few notable exceptions, such as University of Utah law professor Edwin Firmage, it appeared that most Latter-day Saints along the Wasatch front initially favored the MX project. The Great Basin deserts of Utah and Nevada, where the MX was to be implemented (fig. 3), consist of what John McPhee would subsequently refer to as “basin and range” topography: uplifted mountains on the east of each valley with alluvial fans. The DOD intended to use the flat playas in a number of valleys to construct a vast network of silos for the newly proposed MX missile system. In 1978, DOD anticipated total construction costs, excluding the costs of the two hundred MX missiles and their two thousand W-87 warheads, to be $40 billion—about $179 billion in 2022 dollars. This would have made the MX missile system the largest single construction project in modern history, an endeavor on scale with the ancient pyramids of Egypt.

Real estate speculators throughout Utah and Nevada were thrilled. The Milford, Utah, barbershop regularly received calls from New York offering to buy any nearby land at any price. The prospect of new jobs and the injection of massive amounts of money into desert areas limping by on meager ranching and mining operations was irresistible, as I had previously discovered during my efforts to stop the construction of a 600-megawatt coal-burning power plant on the Kaiparowits Plateau in southern Utah.

As a devout Latter-day Saint, I felt somewhat distanced from my fellow members who equated unwavering support for DOD initiatives with patriotic support for the United States of America. Although a committed conservationist, I tend to be quiet about my environmental views in church settings because I go there to worship and not to share my political views with others. Still, it is difficult to overstate the popular support within Utah and Nevada for the MX project in 1979–81. In Utah, where Latter-day Saints constituted a majority of the populace, public ire was directed at the hippies, peaceniks, fellow travelers, and a few ranching families that

The Orchid and the Missile
dared to publicly voice opposition against the MX system. After all, the
MX project enjoyed strong bipartisan support. The MX initiative was pro-
posed in 1979 by the Democratic Jimmy Carter administration and then
championed by Republican officials who would rise to power in the newly
elected Reagan administration. The MX missile would be good for the
United States, would be good for the Utah and Nevada economies, and
would protect our nation from Soviet attack. What was there to oppose?

Philip Morrison and the Boston Study Group
I had just finished writing my PhD dissertation in biology and so had
time to attend seminars of the Boston Study Group organized by Philip
Morrison, a renowned professor of physics at MIT. As one of the original

Figure 3. Map of proposed MX missile basing in Utah and Nevada. Courtesy
Library of Congress.
Manhattan Project scientists during World War II, Morrison had carried in the backseat of a Dodge from Los Alamos to the Trinity test site the plutonium core for a prototype plutonium implosion weapon. That device, the first atomic bomb, was successfully tested on July 16, 1945. On Tinian Island in the Pacific, he was in charge of the pit crew tasked with loading the atomic bombs into specially modified B-29 aircraft, which had honed their bombing strategies for Japan out of a base in Wendenver, Utah. Morrison was one of the first American scientists to subsequently visit the devastated remains of Hiroshima. He knew the horrors of nuclear war firsthand.

At one evening seminar at MIT, during a question-and-answer period, I asked the visiting U.S. undersecretary of defense, “What is to stop the Soviet Union from simply fielding more missiles or equipping them with more MIRVs to overwhelm the fake MX silos?”

He replied with a shrug that Utah and Nevada were basically wasteland areas and so it would be easy to simply construct more silos in response to more Soviet missiles. I responded, “Sir, what you call wasteland, I call home.”

With my PhD dissertation filed, I wrote Utah Governor Scott M. Matheson to offer my assistance in assessing the environmental impact of the MX missile. Within a week, Kenneth Olson, appointed by Matheson to direct the response to the project, hired me as staff ecologist for the Utah MX Coordination Office. In our offices in Salt Lake City, I worked with MX technical specialists John Roach, Ann Keegan, and Bob McMains to make a complete analysis of the environmental and economic impacts of the proposed MX missile program on the states of Utah and Nevada.

The Prophets Speak in an Unexpected Way

Before I could leave Cambridge for Salt Lake City, the First Presidency of the Church made a surprise announcement on May 5, 1981, concerning the MX missile:

We repeat our warnings against the terrifying arms race in which the nations of the earth are presently engaged. We deplore in particular the building of vast arsenals of nuclear weaponry. We are advised that there is already enough such weaponry to destroy in large measure our civilization, with consequent suffering and misery of incalculable extent. . . . With reference to the presently proposed MX basing in Utah and Nevada, we are told that if this goes forward as planned, it will involve the construction of thousands of miles of heavy-duty roads,
with the building of some 4,600 shelters in which will be hidden some 200 missiles, each armed with ten warheads. Each one of these ten nuclear warheads will have far greater destructive potential than did the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. . . . History indicates that men have seldom created armaments that eventually were not put to use. . . . Our fathers came to this western area to establish a base from which to carry the gospel of peace to the peoples of the earth. It is ironic, and a denial of the very essence of that gospel, that in this same general area there should be constructed a mammoth weapons system potentially capable of destroying much of civilization.9

I was stunned by this statement, which had apparently been developed by Church leaders over several months.10 Such strong opposition from the First Presidency slowly began to turn the tide of public opinion—at least among my fellow members of the Church—from strongly in favor of the MX missile project to a more equivocal position. However, the MX economic and political juggernaut had a momentum of its own, with immense support from the national defense industry, so I felt I still needed to do my part to stop the project.

A Fourteen-Volume Environmental Impact Statement

I arrived at the Utah MX Coordination Office in Salt Lake City to face a fourteen-volume draft environmental impact statement (EIS), which had been completed by DOD contractors at a cost of $45 million. For several days, I read through the EIS volumes, which were filled with reams of data, studies, and graphs. As a young twenty-eight-year-old scientist, I really didn’t know how to respond to such a mass of data. Out of desperation, I took maps of the missile silos, my compass (this was before GPS systems were available), a quadrat, and a four-wheel-drive Suburban and went into the west desert of Utah to resample the data.

Alone, driving through the west desert—although my dad once or twice volunteered to sleep under the stars with me on my research trips—I felt overwhelmed. Privately, Governor Matheson had made it quite clear that he opposed the MX project, as did Nevada Governor Robert List, but I feared that the EIS, assembled by hundreds of highly paid experts, would prove to be unassailable. Perhaps I might stumble on a few technical

issues that could require resampling of the data, but I feared that, with strong local political support for the MX in rural Utah and Nevada, anything I came up with could at best only delay, but not stop, the MX project. My goal was simple. I would shoot compass bearings to locate every missile site proposed by the DOD and then use my quadrat to sample the plant communities present at the proposed missile sites. Perhaps I might discover some small difference in the data that would require the DOD to resample.

A Desert Orchid Saves the Day

The first inkling I had that something might be seriously flawed with the MX draft EIS came on July 9, 1981, during my field trip to Tule Valley between the House mountain range on the east and the Confusion range on the west. There I sighted in the compass bearings for an MX missile silo about a kilometer west of Notch Peak, a prominent granite outcrop in the west desert of Utah. As I walked the proposed missile site, I was stunned to see terrestrial orchids that I recognized as *Epipactis gigantea* growing along a small stream coming from a granite canyon. The stream appeared from a spring and then soon disappeared back into the desert sand. The beautiful orange and yellow orchids (fig. 4) were produced from spikes that were one to two feet tall, arising from the large parallel veined green leaves. The draft EIS said nothing about the stream or any orchids, although some enterprising rancher had piped part of the stream to fill a cattle guzzler further down in the valley. I rechecked the compass bearings and found that the orchids were positioned exactly above the missile site. How could a large team of scientists miss such a prominent and extraordinary biological feature? Even a nonbotanist would realize that there was something unusual in this stand of beautiful orchids surrounded by miles of arid desert. I wrote in my trip report to Ken Olson, “On July 9, I visited Painter Spring in eastern Tule Valley, and found, what I believe will prove to be threatened or endangered species of terrestrial orchids, Indian Paintbrush, and Columbines as well as evidence of cougar visitation.”

I returned to my Salt Lake City office and pored through the vegetation reports in the draft EIS. I did not find any mention of orchids, but I found a very interesting survey of annual plants. The draft EIS included data on cover—basically the area of the shadow cast on the ground—by a variety of annual plants. Such cover data, recorded along a transect with a quadrat, are important to ranchers and land managers determining grazing potential and to plant ecologists surveying ecosystem composition. What caught my attention was the date of the EIS survey: mid-February 1979.
I called up the Utah state meteorologists and asked what the weather was at a proposed missile site on the sample date. An hour later, I got a call back. The state meteorologists were not sure what the weather was at that exact spot, but a weather station in Milford, Utah, about sixty miles away, recorded a meter of snow on the ground on that date. As I hung up the phone, I realized that the situation with the MX EIS was far more serious than I had ever assumed. The MX vegetation data had been faked.

A Defense Contractor Seeks Redemption

I went through the list of scientists who had authored the draft EIS, looking for any familiar names. I found a scientist I knew who had graduated from an Ivy League institution and rang him up at the defense contractors’ office in California. After chatting for a few minutes, I mentioned that I had found cover data of annual plant species—species that flower in the spring and then die away in the fall—in the EIS recorded from midwinter. Would he like to explain to me how those data were obtained? There was a long silence on the phone. I told him how sorry I was that his career was probably now over and that his PhD from a prestigious eastern university would now be of little use. “As you know, fabricating data is an unforgivable sin for a scientist,” I told him. I let those words sink in.
But I then held out a lifeline. “I know that you are a good person, and I am sorry that you have had to accept a job under such a terrible employer. But perhaps there is a way that you can redeem yourself.”

The Department of Defense Goes on the Defensive

Soon, the pace of work really picked up at the MX office. I continued to find more problems with the missile silo sightings. “The town of Garrison, Utah, is probably the major community in the area,” I wrote to Ken Olson on August 10, 1981, about my field trip to Snake Valley during the week of August 4, 1981.

It has a highly developed agricultural base consisting of irrigated farming; the major crops appear to be corn and alfalfa. This high agricultural development is possible due to the presence of Pruess Lake, a reservoir formed by a dam across Lake Creek. Plastic PVC pipes carry water from Pruess Lake three miles to Garrison. . . . As proposed, the DTN [missile access road] would go right through the residence of the Wheeler family and through the center of several agricultural fields. . . . I was mystified by the proposed siting of the southern half of [missile] cluster #9 [which] appear[s] to straddle a high-voltage power line that traverses the valley in an east-west direction. The location of this power line is not even shown on the Air Force maps. . . . [Missile] cluster #11 also severely impacts water developments and agricultural areas for the Robinson Ranch. Fate must be against these people as the intersection of the DTN coming north from Milford and the DTN coming west from Tule is proposed by the Air Force to be built exactly on top of their house.

Several silos would have required complete realignment of the electrical power corridor from the Intermountain Power Plant in Delta, Utah, clear into Nevada. When I informed the Intermountain Power Agency that they would have to reroute hundreds of miles of powerlines, they were not pleased. The DOD immediately dispatched a team from Norton Air Base to Salt Lake City to try to calm them down. I discovered similar conflicts with access to Getty mining roads in the Great Basin, and again a team from Norton Air Base was sent to Salt Lake City to deal with the controversy. I spent a lot of time with ranchers staring at missile silo maps spread out on the hood of my four-wheel drive. They pointed out to me how the proposed missile silos would require them to stop ranching. Things reached a crescendo when Governor Matheson sent the DOD a memo I had prepared for him about the West Desert High School in Trout Creek, Utah.

I wrote to Ken Olson:
Perhaps one of the most odious siting proposals, is that of [missile] cluster #16 which is sited upon the West Desert School, the major educational facility in the area. Cluster site 16-5 appears to be placed directly on top of the school building. The school children would be within a one-mile radius of [missile] shelters 16-4, 16-35, 16-6, 16-31, and 16-5. This will, no doubt, add to their appreciation for the nation’s commitment to defense. However, for purposes of safety of the school children and with respect to the tremendous distance which children are bused to this school, I suggest that all of cluster #11 south of the CMF be completely eliminated.

The governor had that year been the invited speaker for the graduating class of four students. My memo to the DOD stated, “Although we appreciate the efforts of the Department of Defense to inculcate patriotism among our Utah students, could the MX silo be moved sufficiently away from the school so they could at least play half-court basketball?”

That memo generated a direct call to me from General Lamb at Norton Air Force Base. “Dr. Cox, you won’t take this to the press, will you?” I told him that he need not worry, that I would of course not go to the press because I was merely a scientist working on technical topics. If anybody took it to the press, it would be Governor Matheson. I mentioned that perhaps a nice fade-in of the governor’s graduation speech at the school to stock footage from an H-bomb test in Bikini Atoll would make for an interesting segment on the evening news.

Many of the proposed missile sites violated technical design features for the MX missile as determined by the Air Force. “The Douglas ranch would be severely impacted by shelters 16-22 and 16-23. Trout Creek would be severely impacted by 16-29, which, for some mysterious reason is sited in the middle of the creek,” I wrote to my superiors.

**DOD: Defending My Fourth Amendment Rights?**

Governor Matheson, through Ken Olsen, warned me that my office phone and home phone were being tapped. I should henceforth make important calls from public telephones. I dismissed his warnings. The Air Force invited me to spend a weekend at the underground Strategic Air Command headquarters in Omaha, but my mother told me not to go. “Paul, they are going to do something to you down there, and you won’t come back the same boy.” I thought that this was all overreaction, but then one morning I came into my office and noticed that a few security measures I had instituted, such as my pencil pointing at a certain word in an open
book on my desk or a hair placed strategically on a file cabinet drawer, had been disturbed. Clearly my office had been thoroughly and professionally searched.

I invited my United States Air Force liaison officer into my office. “Major, I just wanted to let you know even though we are on different sides of the MX issue, how grateful I am that you are willing to risk your life to protect my constitutional rights.” I paused and stared at him.

“Who told you? How did you know? This happened on orders from the Pentagon.”

“We don’t have any secrets here. If you need to see something in my desk or file cabinet, just ask me and I’ll give it to you.”

“They just can’t figure out how every time we announce a new environmental study, Governor Matheson responds in a few hours with a detailed critique including thirty to forty footnotes.”

“Governor Matheson is a brilliant and capable individual who is totally conversant with the applicable technical issues and environmental laws. The Department of Defense should never underestimate his intellectual abilities.”

After this, Air Force officials dropped a few comments about my former personal life and activities in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and my upcoming appointment at the University of California, Berkeley. I found the Air Force comments more amusing than creepy and shrugged them off.

On August 19, 1981, I was flying in the State plane over the MX area and asked the pilot to stop at the small airstrip in Delta, Utah, where I knew there was a public phone booth. Once on the ground, I called my wife, Barbara, who was staying with my mom and dad—then superintendent of Deer Creek State Park—at their ranger home. Barbara told me that she had felt some contractions. I raced back to the plane and asked the pilot to fly me straight to Midway, Utah. Early the next morning, Barbara gave birth to our third child, Mary.

A Party at Norton Air Force Base

The entire summer was filled with nearly weekly flights dispatched from Norton Air Force Base to Salt Lake City to deal with Governor Matheson’s continuing barrage of erudite and technically accurate critiques of DOD environmental reports. I succeeded in having the Utah Attorney General declare excavating a missile silo as being a mining activity and therefore subject to the 1977 U.S. Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act. The DOD would therefore be required to submit a reclamation plan for each of the silos. I found evidence that a golden eagle nest had been disturbed during environmental surveys, which was a clear violation of the
1973 Endangered Species Act. Working with the Utah State Geological Survey, I found that DOD contractors had gone onto Utah State land sections in the Great Basin without prior permission and reminded the DOD that the citizens and State of Utah took trespass laws very seriously. I asked the DOD where they were going to get the water to irrigate the aspen trees surrounded by graceful deer that they had portrayed in the conceptual drawings of the MX silos. The DOD contractor’s consultant, who appeared to be a graduate student, said he planned to pump water from the Colorado River (three hundred miles distant) to the MX project. I met with him and Air Force representatives in Carson City, Nevada, with all of the desert experts I could load onto the State plane, including reclamation pioneers Professor Neil West, Professor Bertrand Harrison, Dr. Neil Frischknecht, Ralph Holmgren, and Perry Plummer. These experts told the DOD and their consultant that the proposed reclamation plan was fanciful at best.

As my departure for UC Berkeley approached, I issued a final report to the State of Utah in which I said, “The environmental documents produced by the Air Force and its contractors which I have read this summer, have been almost universally devoid of scientific merit.”

The Utah governor indicated to the DOD that the draft EIS was so deeply flawed that it violated the 1970 National Environmental Policy Act and would have to be completely rewritten, a process that would likely take two years.

On my last day at the MX office in Salt Lake City before I left for my new job at the University of California, Berkeley, I received a phone call from General Lamb at Norton Air Force Base. “Dr. Cox, do you hear that noise in the background?”

I could hear loud laughter, the sounds of joviality. I told him that it sounded like a party. “Correct. Do you know why we are having a party?”

“No,” I responded.

“Because it’s your last day at the MX office! Have fun at Berkeley,” he said.

However, two months later, I received a very different message from General Lamb. He wrote, “In all seriousness, I thank you for your candid comments. . . . I appreciate comments concerning the good or bad performance of our contractors, particularly from persons with credentials like yours. We, too, are concerned with the quality of our contract work efforts.” I was later told that the FBI had been asked to investigate one of the contractors for fraud.

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The Cold War Is Over, So Why Worry?

The environmental impacts of nuclear weapon detonation represent the most serious environmental threat known. Since the Castle Bravo test at Bikini Atoll on March 1, 1954, to the present, indigenous inhabitants of neighboring atolls have not been able to return to their home islands because of residual radiation from the distant H-bomb tests.

Detonation of even a small thirty-kiloton thermonuclear device would generate lasting environmental consequences greatly exceeding the costs of the losses from Hurricane Katrina, which reached $125 billion. Loss of life would of course be far greater. Seventy thousand Japanese civilians instantly died in Hiroshima at 8:16 a.m. on August 6, 1945. We could expect many more Americans to perish from a large Soviet hydrogen bomb with explosive force measured in the megatons. A limited nuclear exchange between the United States and Russia, even consisting of the launch of a single R-S intercontinental ballistic missile (successor to the Soviet SS-18) with its ten independently deployable warheads, would kill millions of Americans and reduce the economy of the United States to Third World status.

Although strategic nuclear exchanges between the United States and the Soviet Union were successfully deterred during the Cold War, use of nuclear weapons has been threatened by President Vladimir Putin of Russia in the aftermath of his February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, particularly if Russia stands to lose the conflict or if Putin believes that there is an existential threat to his regime. Furthermore, China has been rapidly increasing its strategic nuclear arsenal beyond its former deterrent posture in response to emerging regional conflicts with the USA. Proliferation of nuclear weapons to smaller states has tremendously increased the probability of future nuclear warfare. Pakistan and India have only five minutes to respond to launch warnings; during periods of tension,

either side might find themselves in a “use it or lose it” situation. Pakistani physicist and engineer A. Q. Khan transmitted Chinese language blueprints for atom bomb design to Libya and is believed to be the source for the design of the 4,500 ultra-high-performance centrifuges that are isolating weapons-grade uranium in the Islamic Republic of Iran.\textsuperscript{15} North Korea has conducted nuclear weapons tests culminating in a successful hydrogen bomb and has launched three-stage intercontinental missiles of sufficient range to strike the United States. Only their current inability to protect missile warheads from the heat and pressure of reentry stands as a barrier to the North Korean leadership from directly threatening cities in the United States. Israel has a nuclear arsenal estimated at one hundred warheads and the ability to quickly deliver them to their adversaries.

Nonstate actors including Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and other terrorist groups have demonstrated their desire to obtain nuclear weapons. Since 1993, there have been 419 cases of smuggled nuclear materials worldwide with about 1.6 million kilograms of highly enriched uranium and 500,000 kilograms of plutonium available in nations around the world, an amount estimated sufficient to manufacture numerous nuclear bombs.\textsuperscript{16}

Loss of biodiversity, climate change, and all other known environmental threats pale compared to the environmental consequences of nuclear war. I do not think that Latter-day Saints should forget the 1981 words of the First Presidency, who told us that if a nuclear attack occurred, “the result would be near annihilation of most of what we have striven to build since our pioneer forebears first came to these western valleys. Furthermore, we are told that in the event of a first-strike attack, deadly fallout would be carried by prevailing winds across much of the nation, maiming and destroying wherever its pervasive cloud touched.”\textsuperscript{17}

President Gordon B. Hinckley quoted General Omar Bradley: “We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. . . . Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living.”\textsuperscript{18} But we are not without hope. Here are three concrete steps the United States can take to reduce the peril of nuclear war:

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{15} Gordon Corera, \textit{Shopping for Bombs: Nuclear Proliferation, Global Insecurity, and the Rise and Fall of the A. Q. Khan Network} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
\item\textsuperscript{17} “First Presidency Statement on Basing of MX Missile,” \textit{Ensign} 11, no. 6 (June 1981): 76.
\item\textsuperscript{18} Gordon B. Hinckley, “Reach Out in Love and Kindness,” \textit{Ensign} 12, no. 11 (November 1982): 77.
\end{itemize}
1. Make the nuclear nonproliferation treaty (NPT) a major foreign policy priority. The NPT is one of the most well-supported international treaties, with 191 signatory nations. The United States should take the lead on implementing the disarmament portions of the treaty.

2. Decline to install smaller nuclear warheads on cruise missiles and to enter a new arms race to develop hypersonic weapons, which offer little if no advantages over ballistic missiles in delivery times of payloads.¹⁹

3. Reenter the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty while simplifying and strengthening the triad of the U.S. nuclear deterrent (land-based missiles, airborne bombers, and submarines).

My youngest daughter, Jane, called to serve in the Japan Fukuoka Mission, sent me a picture her companion had taken of her standing in front of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial, which was ground zero for the first detonation of a nuclear weapon in warfare (fig. 5). As a Latter-day Saint, I believe that sharing the restored gospel with the world is more likely to lead to world peace than any number of nuclear missiles. As President Ezra Taft Benson said, “The spectacle of a nation praying is more awe-inspiring, more powerful, than the explosion of an atomic bomb.”²⁰

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Paul Alan Cox was awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize, sometimes known as the Nobel Prize of the Environment, and was named one of *TIME* magazine's eleven “Heroes of Medicine.” His conservation foundation, Seacology, has set aside over 1.5 million acres of rain forest and coral reef in sixty-six countries around the world. After serving as professor and dean at Brigham Young University, he became the first King Carl XVI Gustaf Professor of Environmental Science in Sweden. Currently, he serves as director of the Brain Chemistry Labs in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. This article is based on a talk presented at BYU’s David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies on January 18, 2017. He thanks the Utah State Archives for retrieving memos he had written at the Utah MX Coordination Office.

**Appendix**

**First Presidency Statement on Basing of MX Missile**

The First Presidency issued on Tuesday, May 5, 1981, the following statement\(^{21}\) on the proposal to base the MX missile in Utah and Nevada:

> We have received many inquiries concerning our feelings on the proposed basing of the MX missile system in Utah and Nevada. After assessing in great detail information recently available, and after the most careful and prayerful consideration, we make the following statement, aware of the response our words are likely to evoke from both proponents and opponents of the system.

> First, by way of general observation we repeat our warnings against the terrifying arms race in which the nations of the earth are presently engaged. We deplore in particular the building of vast arsenals of nuclear weaponry. We are advised that there is already enough such weaponry to destroy in large measure our civilization, with consequent suffering and misery of incalculable extent.

> Secondly, with reference to the presently proposed MX basing in Utah and Nevada, we are told that if this goes forward as planned, it will involve the construction of thousands of miles of heavy-duty roads, with the building of some 4,600 shelters in which will be hidden some 200 missiles, each armed with ten warheads. Each one of these ten nuclear warheads will have far greater destructive potential than did the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

> We understand that this concept is based on the provisions of a treaty which has never been ratified, and that absent such a treaty, the proposed installation could be expanded indefinitely. Its planners state that the system is strictly defensive in concept and that the chances are extremely remote that it will ever be actually employed. However,

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history indicates that men have seldom created armaments that eventually were not put to use.

We are most gravely concerned over the proposed concentration in a relatively restricted area of the West. Our feelings would be the same about concentration in any part of the nation, just as we assume those in any other area so selected would have similar feelings. With such concentration, one segment of the population would bear a highly disproportionate share of the burden, in lives lost and property destroyed, in case of an attack, particularly if such were to be a saturation attack.

Such concentration, we are informed, may even invite attack under a first-strike strategy on the part of an aggressor. If such occurred the result would be near annihilation of most of what we have striven to build since our pioneer forebears first came to these western valleys.

Furthermore, we are told that in the event of a first-strike attack, deadly fallout would be carried by prevailing winds across much of the nation, maiming and destroying wherever its pervasive cloud touched.

Inevitably so large a construction project would have an adverse impact on water resources, as well as sociological and ecological factors in the area. Water has always been woefully short in this part of the West. We might expect that in meeting this additional demand for water there could be serious long term consequences.

We are not adverse to consistent and stable population growth, but the influx of tens of thousands of temporary workers and their families, together with those involved in support services, would create grave sociological problems, particularly when coupled with an influx incident to the anticipated emphasis on energy development.

Published studies indicate that the fragile ecology of the area would likewise be adversely affected.

We may predict that with so many billions of dollars at stake we will hear much talk designed to minimize the problems that might be expected and to maximize the economic benefits that might accrue. The reasons for such portrayals will be obvious.

Our fathers came to this western area to establish a base from which to carry the gospel of peace to the peoples of the earth. It is ironic, and a denial of the very essence of that gospel, that in this same general area there should be constructed a mammoth weapons system potentially capable of destroying much of civilization.

With the most serious concern over the pressing moral question of possible nuclear conflict, we plead with our national leaders to marshal the genius of the nation to find viable alternatives which will secure at an earlier date and with fewer hazards the protection from possible enemy aggression, which is our common concern.
Religion and Sexual Orientation as Predictors of Utah Youth Suicidality

W. Justin Dyer, Michael A. Goodman, and David S. Wood

Adolescent suicide rates have increased substantially over the last two decades; suicide has become the second leading cause of death for adolescents and young adults since 2017. Some areas in the U.S. have experienced particularly large rises in suicide. For example, according to the Utah Department of Health, there was a 136.2 percent increase in suicides among Utah youth age 10–17 from 2011 to 2015, compared to an increase of 24 percent nationally.

It is important to view Utah’s suicide rates within the context of its region. Utah sits in the middle of a band of states with higher suicide rates sometimes called the “suicide belt.” The states considered to make up the suicide belt varies, but it usually includes Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico. These states all have higher rates of suicide than the nation and share characteristics that are related to greater suicide rates, including higher altitude, lower

population density, and high gun ownership.\textsuperscript{4} Utah sits in the middle of the suicide belt both geographically and in its suicide rate. In 2019, four of the surrounding states had higher suicide rates,\textsuperscript{5} and the large increase in Utah suicide rates was average among the suicide belt states.\textsuperscript{6}

Utah does, however, stand out in its religious profile with 68.6 percent of its population being members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.\textsuperscript{7} Despite having an average suicide rate for its region, some have suggested Utah’s higher rates may be due to the Church of Jesus Christ’s conservative stance on sexuality. Some have argued the dissonance gay, lesbian, bisexual, and questioning (LGBQ)\textsuperscript{8} individuals may feel contributes to Utah’s suicide rate.\textsuperscript{9} Across the nation, suicide rates for nonheterosexual youth are tragically high,\textsuperscript{10} and our best efforts are required to better understand the reasons behind these numbers. While research suggests that religion in general decreases suicide risk,\textsuperscript{11}

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{5} U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “CDC WONDER,” accessed July 12, 2021, https://wonder.cdc.gov/.
\item\textsuperscript{8} While transgender individuals are often included when discussing sexual orientation, they are not a focus of this study. Gender identity is distinct from sexual orientation, requiring unique research attention. Given small numbers of transgender individuals in the SHARP data, had they been included in the analyses, any unique characteristics would have been lost. We therefore focus on LGBQ individuals for this study, recognizing the importance of studying transgender individuals in future research.
\item\textsuperscript{11} See Steven Stack and Augustine J. Kposowa, “Religion and Suicide: Integrating Four Theories Cross-Nationally,” in \textit{International Handbook of Suicide Prevention: Research, Policy and Practice}, ed. Rory C. O’Connor and others (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell,
few studies have examined whether Latter-day Saints are different from those of other religions or no religion in their suicide rates or suicidal thoughts and actions (often referred to as “suicidality”). Additionally, no research has examined whether LGBQ Latter-day Saints are different in their suicide rates or suicidal thoughts and actions from those of other religions or no religion.

In this study, we examined whether Latter-day Saint youth in Utah were at more or less risk for suicidality than those of other religions or no religion. We also examined rates of suicidality for LGBQ Latter-day Saint youth and compared them to other religions. If there were differences between religions, we were interested in understanding why those differences may exist. For example, we tested whether family connections, drug use, and feeling socially connected to the community may be reasons for any differences in suicidality across religions. This is the first study examining how members of the Church of Jesus Christ, including those who identify as LGBQ, may differ from other religions in their suicidality.

**Religion and Suicide**

In 1897, Émile Durkheim asked the question of whether an individual’s religion was predictive of their likelihood to die by suicide.\(^\text{12}\) Since then, theorists and researchers have examined this question, generally finding religious affiliation, behaviors, and beliefs related to lower rates of suicide. Summarizing the research, Stack and Kposowa find religion protective against suicide, given it can provide, among other things, feelings of connection in a community, social networks to draw upon in times of need, and direction and meaning for one’s life and meaning in suffering.\(^\text{13}\)

On average, religious service attendance is a long-term protective factor against suicidality.\(^\text{14}\) Regarding religious affiliation (that is, what religion a

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\(^{14}\) Evan M. Kleiman and Richard T. Liu, “Prospective Prediction of Suicide in a Nationally Representative Sample: Religious Service Attendance as a Protective Factor,”
person belongs to), Dervic and coauthors found religious affiliation protective against suicide,\textsuperscript{15} though O’Reilly and Rosato found affiliation had no relationship to suicidality.\textsuperscript{16} Others have looked at the relationships between religious beliefs and suicidality,\textsuperscript{17} with most finding religious beliefs generally protective\textsuperscript{18} given they can provide meaning in suffering such that individuals can better cope with difficulties.

Religion may also help reduce suicidality through its influence on family connections. Research has found positive family relationships to be related to lower suicidality,\textsuperscript{19} and other research suggests those who are more religious have better family relationships, including happier marriages and better parenting.\textsuperscript{20} Some research has shown parental divorce related to greater child suicidality\textsuperscript{21} and individual religious experience...


\textsuperscript{20} See, for example, Emily Padgett and others, “Marital Sanctification and Spiritual Intimacy Predicting Married Couples’ Observed Intimacy Skills across the Transition to Parenthood,” Religions 10, no. 3 (2019): 177, https://doi.org/10.3390/rell0100177.

connected to greater marital stability. Thus, one way religion may be related to lower suicidality is because it supports positive family relationships and greater marital stability.

Although research suggests religion is, in general, protective against suicide, it is also possible religion may increase suicide risk if it creates feelings of disconnect from others. For instance, being part of a minority religion may create feelings of not belonging and result in fewer social opportunities compared to those of the dominant religion. One study found that in countries with low support for religion, religiosity was related to greater suicidality. Regarding religion and family, parents and children who “triangulate” God into their disagreements are more hostile with their children. This may, in turn, lead to feelings of disconnect from others. Further, believing that God is indifferent or hostile has been connected with greater suicidality.

In the last few years, questions have arisen as to whether LGBQ individuals derive benefit from religion. Some theorize that given religion’s historical and often contemporary nonacceptance of same-sex sexual relations, LGBQ individuals would feel a sense of disconnect and shame from their religious participation. Although some studies of the general population (not Latter-day Saint specific) suggest religious LGBQ individuals may be at higher risk for suicidality, the overall research suggests religion is, on average, protective for LGBQ


individuals. A statistical analysis of seventy-three studies on religion and mental health of LGBQ individuals found LGBQ individuals had better mental health when they were religious, though this positive effect disappeared (became statistically nonsignificant) in studies that recruited their participants from locations catering to LGBQ individuals, such as gay bars or clubs.  

**Suicide and Latter-day Saints**

A few studies have examined the relationship between being a Latter-day Saint and risk of suicide. Two studies of male suicide rates found the suicide rate for active Latter-day Saints lower than for less-active and non-Latter-day Saints. These studies found no difference in suicide rates between less-active Latter-day Saints and non-Latter-day Saints. Yet these studies were unable to explain why differences may exist between Latter-day Saints and those of other religions, with Hilton and coauthors suggesting it may be partially due to lower usage of drugs and alcohol among Latter-day Saints (substance use has been associated with greater suicidality). More recently, researchers from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) analyzed 2015 SHARP data (over 27,000 Utah youth) and found Latter-day Saints were significantly lower in suicidal thoughts and attempts than those of other religions.

Still, one unanswered question is how sexual orientation may play into the overall suicidality of Latter-day Saints. Despite Utah being average for its region, some have suggested the high suicide rates in Utah are due to LGBQ Latter-day Saints feeling they do not belong within the Church of Jesus Christ, which teaches against same-sex sexual

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relations.\textsuperscript{33} Through the latter part of the 1900s, statements by Church leaders on homosexuality focused primarily on the sinful nature of same-sex sexual relations and on the need for repentance by those engaging in such acts. While these teachings remain, Church leaders have also increasingly emphasized the importance of helping LGBQ individuals know they belong and have a place in the Church. The Church's website on same-sex attraction leads with the words: “Kindness, Inclusion, and Respect for All of God’s Children” (https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/topics/gay?lang=eng).

Some research on mental health and sexual orientation has been done with Latter-day Saints. Lefevor and colleagues compared current and former LGBQ Latter-day Saints, finding those who were highly religious and those who were not religious had the best mental health, with those in the middle having the lowest mental health.\textsuperscript{34} Another study found LGBQ individuals who were former Latter-day Saints to have better mental health compared to those who were current Latter-day Saints.\textsuperscript{35} Conversely, Cranney found LGB Latter-day Saints had better mental health than LGB individuals who were not Latter-day Saints,\textsuperscript{36} and another study found the more religious LGBQ Latter-day Saints were, the better their mental health, including lower suicidality.\textsuperscript{37} With only two studies on the suicide rates of Latter-day Saints compared to other religions and the conflicting research findings regarding LBGQ Latter-day Saints and suicidality, much more work is needed to better understand what factors relate to suicidality for Latter-day Saints and whether these may account for higher rates of suicide in Utah.

\textsuperscript{33} Prince, \textit{Gay Rights and the Mormon Church}, ch. 29.
\textsuperscript{36} Stephen Cranney, “The LGB Mormon Paradox: Mental, Physical, and Self-Rated Health among Mormon and Non-Mormon LGB Individuals in the Utah Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System,” \textit{Journal of Homosexuality} 64, no. 6 (2017): 731–44, https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2016.1236570. In this study, those who were questioning were not included.
Current Study

In this study, we sought to determine whether, in Utah, rates of Latter-day Saints’ suicidal thoughts and attempts were significantly different from those individuals from other religions or no religion. Although previous research has examined this question, this prior research was only with males, and the data used is now more than twenty-five years old, well before the historic rates of suicide we see today. Further, this prior research was unable to answer questions of why suicide rates may differ for Latter-day Saints. We hypothesized Latter-day Saints in Utah may have lower rates of suicide than those of other faiths and no faith (as previously found), and we examined possible explanations for this. Specifically, we examined whether family connections, alcohol and drug use, and social connections may explain differences between Latter-day Saints and those of other religions.

Regarding family connections, although an emphasis on family is prominent in many religions, the Church of Jesus Christ has a unique belief that marriage and parent-child connections are salvific, creating an emphasis on these relationships. Some research has found strong belief in the importance of family relationships was related to Latter-day Saint families engaging in a variety of family-based religious rituals and practices, which have been found related to family wellbeing. Further, divorce rates have been found lower for Latter-day Saints than those of other religions. We therefore hypothesized that the lower rates of suicidality for Latter-day

43. Parental divorce is also related to suicidality. For examples, see Bin Yang and George A. Clum, “Effects of Early Negative Life Experiences on Cognitive Functioning and Risk for Suicide: A Review,” Clinical Psychology Review 16, no. 3 (1996): 177–95, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-7358(96)00004-9; Evelyn L. Lehrer and Carmel U.
Saints would be partially explained by family connections, including less family conflict and more stable family structures.

Latter-day Saints may also be lower in suicidality given the Church of Jesus Christ’s strong discouragement of illegal drugs and alcohol. Several studies have found substance abuse a risk factor for suicide. Unsurprisingly, Latter-day Saints are less likely to use drugs or alcohol than the national average and also less likely than most other religious denominations. We therefore hypothesized that the lower rates of suicidality for Latter-day Saints would be partially explained by less drug use by youth and within their families. Conceptually, family drug use may also fit somewhat under “family connection,” given that it would likely impair family connections. However, family drug use likely has independent effects above family connections (possible involvement with the legal system, family income, increased abuse, and so forth) that are not well captured by “family connection.” Ultimately, family drug use was left in the “drug use” category, though its independent effects can be seen in the table of results. Finally, because Latter-day Saints in Utah are part of the majority religion, they may be more connected with their community. They may feel safer in school and experience less bullying for their religion. It may be that the above arguments about lower suicidality and depression do not hold for LGBQ Latter-day Saints. We therefore


examined whether findings hold the same for heterosexual and nonheterosexual youth. It may also be that given the Church of Jesus Christ’s nonsupport of same-sex sexual relations, fewer LGBQ Latter-day Saints are “out” and thus may be less likely to be bullied for their sexual orientation. We therefore hypothesized that the lower rates of suicidality of Latter-day Saints would be partially explained by feelings of community connection including feeling safe at school, not being bullied for their religion, and not being bullied for their sexual orientation.

We examined the above while statistically controlling for parent education, race, gender, and grade. Further, including a variable of being bullied for sexual orientation partially controlled for whether the sexual orientation of an adolescent is known to others. This is important given that Latter-day Saint youth may be less likely to disclose being nonheterosexual. In addition to suicidality, we also examined depression. In the data used here, questions about suicidality are simply two “yes/no” questions, with youth indicating whether they had seriously considered suicide or had attempted suicide in the last year. Although these kinds of “yes/no” items are frequently used in research, the recent recommendation is to add other, better-measured indicators of mental health to see if results are consistent.47

Methods

Sample. Data come from the 2019 Utah Prevention Needs Assessment survey that is conducted as part of the Student Health and Risk Prevention (SHARP) statewide survey administered by the Utah Department of Human Services.48 There were 86,346 participants in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12. The survey was anonymous. The survey assesses adolescent substance use, antisocial behavior, and risk and protective factors. Using weights, the survey yields results that are representative of all Utah youth in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12 (the sample is representative of 201,394). Analyses stratified by school districts provide more accurate estimates. The sample was 51.1% female, 48.5% male, with 0.4% choosing another gender category. Regarding race, 73.4% were white, 17.3% were


Hispanic, and 9.3% were other. The sample was 51.7% Latter-day Saint, 8.3% Catholic, 1.1% Protestant, 0.2% Jewish, 4.6% of another religion, and 20.5% with no religious preference. Regarding sexual orientation, 64.9% were heterosexual, 3.7% bisexual, 1.0% gay or lesbian, and 3.2% not sure. Another 27.2% did not respond to the question (data were missing). We were interested in this large group of individuals who did not report their sexual orientation. We thought it possible that these individuals might be LGBQ youth who were unwilling to disclose their sexuality, even on an anonymous survey. We therefore conducted the same analyses with this group as with the heterosexual and LGBQ groups to see whether they were more like the heterosexual or nonheterosexual youth.

**Measures.** The appendix contains full details of the SHARP questions used in this study, including reliabilities where applicable. The following question was used to determine whether the youth had recently seriously considered suicide: *During the past 12 months, did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide? (no = 0, yes = 1)*; and 16.3 percent indicated they had seriously considered suicide. The youth were also asked if they had attempted suicide in the last twelve months (*no = 0, yes = 1*), with 6.7 percent indicating at least one suicide attempt in the last twelve months. To measure youth depression, four standard depression questions were combined (see appendix for details).

Regarding religion, youth were asked: *If you have a religious preference, choose one with which you identify the most,* with responses being: Catholic, Protestant (such as Baptist, Presbyterian, or Lutheran), Jewish, another religion, LDS (Mormon), and no religious preference. Given the low proportion of Jewish, these were combined with “another religion.” Just over 14 percent of youth were missing data on their religion. Rather than ignore these individuals, they were simply coded as a separate group (“missing”) to examine whether this group was different from the others.

One measure of youth family connections was whether they lived with both their mother and father (coded as a 1) or in some other arrangement (coded as a 0). Although various possibilities regarding family structure could have been used, it was expected that those living with both their father and mother would have had, on average (though certainly not in every situation), a more stable household. Three questions were used to create a measure of family conflict (for example, People in my family often insult or yell at each other). These items were combined to create a measure indicating the amount of conflict in the family. Regarding drug use, youth were asked: *Has anyone in your family ever had severe alcohol or drug problems? (0 = no, 1 = yes).* They were
also asked if they had ever used alcohol, tobacco, or any drug (including prescription medications without a prescription). Overall, 24 percent had used one of these (0 = had not used any drug, 1 = had used a drug). Three questions were used to measure community connection: whether the youth felt safe at school, whether they had been bullied for their sexual orientation (0 = not bullied for sexual orientation, 1 = bullied for sexual orientation; 2.4 percent answered yes), and whether they had been bullied for their religion (0 = not bullied for religion, 1 = bullied for religion; 4.5 percent answered yes).

Analyses controlled for parent education, race, gender, and youth grade level in school. Since our primary interest was understanding the relationship between religion, suicidality, and depression, controlling for these variables makes sure that whatever differences we find are not actually the result of these control variables. We also controlled for reported honesty on the survey. At the end of the survey, youth were asked how honest they were in filling out the survey (from 1 = I was very honest to 5 = I was not honest at all). It is almost guaranteed that in every study, some participants are less than honest in some responses. This survey provides some indications of that. Although the question does not capture all levels of honesty, it does capture some, and that can be statistically accounted for. By adding this question to our statistical models, we can partially control for youth who may have intentionally misreported.

Analysis Plan. To test the relationship between religion, sexual orientation, and suicidality or depression, five regression models were conducted. These models build on each other. In the first model, suicidality or depression was predicted by religious affiliation. The second model added the control variables. The third model introduced family connection variables, and the fourth model added substance-use variables. The fifth model added community connection variables. Differences between Latter-day Saints and other religions and those of no religion could be examined at each step. If variables were added and any statistically significant differences between Latter-day Saints and those of other religions became nonsignificant, those variables were said to “explain” why Latter-day Saints and other religions may differ. These five statistical models were conducted for the sample as a whole and then were conducted again while breaking out youth by their sexual orientation. To break out analyses by sexual orientation, an interaction term was specified between religion and sexual orientation. Thus, all five models were estimated for heterosexuals, LGBQ individuals, and those missing sexual orientation data. Below we refer to differences across “religious
groups,” which also includes those who were not religiously affiliated (referred to as “nones”) and those who did not answer the religion question. Those who selected the option other when they reported their religion are designated “Other” religion.

**Results**

The appendix contains full details of results, with the main results summarized here.

Examining the simple correlations (see table 1), we see that Latter-day Saints were more likely to report being heterosexual. Being a Latter-day Saint was also positively related to protective factors (two-parent home, feeling safe at school) and negatively related to risk factors (suicidality, depression, family conflict, family and youth drug use, and being bullied for religion or sexual orientation). Those who identified as LGBQ were lower on protective factors and higher on risk factors. Table 2 contains proportions and means. Those missing sexual orientation data were more similar to those who identified as heterosexual in their suicidality and depression than those who identified as LGBQ. It is worth noting that those missing sexual orientation data were most likely to be in the sixth grade (mean = 6.11), whereas heterosexuals and LGBQ individuals were, on average, almost four grades older (means of 9.95 and 9.74, respectively). It may be that sixth graders had difficulty answering the sexual orientation question.49

Descriptively, we were interested in how rates of Utah youth suicidality in the SHARP data compared with national estimates. To do this, we used the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) conducted by the CDC. In order to get an appropriate comparison with CDC numbers, for this comparison only, we limited the SHARP survey to only high school seniors and examined those who were LGB (not those questioning). The YRBS does not collect data on religious affiliation, though here we compare CDC national rates to religion-specific rates in Utah. In the SHARP survey, high school senior rates of seriously considering suicide were: Latter-day Saint: 47%; Catholic: 32%; Protestant: 48%; “Other”: 53%; None: 50%. The national CDC rate for this group was 52%. For suicide attempts, rates were as follows: Latter-day Saint: 9%; Catholic: 23%; Protestant: 32%; “Other”: 23%; None: 17%. The national CDC rate for this group was 20%. Thus, CDC national rates of suicidal thoughts and

49. Anecdotally, the first author spoke with a sixth grader who took the survey, and the student was unsure what was being asked by the sexual orientation question and left it blank.
### Table 1. Correlations (n = 86,346)

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<td>2. Other Religion</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. No Religion</td>
<td>-.53</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Heterosexual</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. LGBQ</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-.36</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Suicide Ideation</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Suicide Attempt</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Depression</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Two-parent Home</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.11</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Family Drug Use</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Youth Drug Use</td>
<td>-.33</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.29</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Feel Safe at School</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.28</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>-.38</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.25</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.21</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Bullied for Religion</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.06</td>
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<td>.04</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Bullied for Sexual Orient.</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.18</td>
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<td>-.06</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>.11</td>
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*Note:* All correlations are significant at p < .001.
Table 2. Descriptives by Sexual Orientation, Weighted Proportions/Means and Standard Errors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Heterosexual (n = 51,189)</th>
<th>LGBQ (n = 7,205)</th>
<th>Missing (n = 28,132)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religion</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latter-day Saint</td>
<td>56.0%(.003)^L^M</td>
<td>26.7%(.007)^HM</td>
<td>48.7%(.004)^HL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>8.8%(.002)^L^M</td>
<td>7.6%(.004)^H</td>
<td>7.3%(.002)^H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>1.3%(.001)^M</td>
<td>1.1%(.002)^M</td>
<td>.7%(.001)^HL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4.5%(.001)^L^M</td>
<td>7.6%(.004)^H</td>
<td>5.0%(.002)^H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>19.0%(.002)^L^M</td>
<td>44.7%(.001)^HM</td>
<td>17.0%(.003)^HL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>10.5%(.002)^L^M</td>
<td>12.2%(.005)^HM</td>
<td>21.2%(.003)^HL</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mental Health</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide Ideation</td>
<td>15.6%(.002)^L^M</td>
<td>40.8%(.008)^HM</td>
<td>11.5%(.003)^HL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide Attempt</td>
<td>6.0%(.002)^L</td>
<td>19.1%(.008)^HM</td>
<td>6.6%(.003)^L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>1.86(.005)^L^M</td>
<td>2.50(.015)^HM</td>
<td>1.73(.006)^HL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>49.8%(.003)^L</td>
<td>63.7%(.008)^HM</td>
<td>50.5%(.004)^L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50.2%(.004)^L</td>
<td>31.8%(.008)^HM</td>
<td>49.5%(.004)^L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>.01%(.000)^LM</td>
<td>4.6%(.002)^HM</td>
<td>.02%(.000)^HL</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Family Connections</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Live with mother and father</td>
<td>76.9%(.003)^L^M</td>
<td>64.3%(.008)^HM</td>
<td>78.2%(.003)^HL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Conflict</td>
<td>2.00(.004)^L^M</td>
<td>2.30(.013)^HM</td>
<td>1.88(.005)^HL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drugs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family drug problems</td>
<td>32.8%(.003)^L^M</td>
<td>49.0%(.008)^HM</td>
<td>22.4%(.003)^HL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth drug use</td>
<td>26.4%(.003)^L^M</td>
<td>44.4%(.008)^HM</td>
<td>11.6%(.002)^HL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Connections</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Safe at School</td>
<td>3.27(.005)^L^M</td>
<td>2.97(.015)^HM</td>
<td>3.47(.006)^HL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied for Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>.80%(.001)^L^M</td>
<td>19.3%(.007)^HM</td>
<td>1.9%(.001)^HL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied for Religion</td>
<td>4.8%(.001)^M</td>
<td>5.0%(.003)^M</td>
<td>3.3%(.001)^HL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>77.1%(.003)^L^M</td>
<td>72.8%(.008)^H</td>
<td>72.7%(.003)^H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>9.95(.010)^L^M</td>
<td>9.74(.028)^HM</td>
<td>6.11(.006)^HL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Education</td>
<td>4.58(.007)^L^M</td>
<td>4.35(.022)^HM</td>
<td>4.55(.010)^HL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>1.16(.003)^L^M</td>
<td>1.19(.008)^HM</td>
<td>1.13(.003)^HL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H = Significantly different from Heterosexual by at least p < .05  
L = Significantly different from LGBQ by at least p < .05  
M = Significantly different from missing by at least p < .05
attempts were comparable to our sample, with Latter-day Saints being lower than national rates in thoughts and attempts.

In the results below, we will refer to one religion being “significantly” higher or lower than another religion. In the language of statistics, when something is “significantly” higher or lower, this indicates statistical significance. That is, the differences are unlikely to be due to chance. Although the absolute differences may be small, those differences may still be statistically significantly higher or lower. Absolute differences have been provided for the reader to determine the level of difference. However, we also note several instances where, although the differences may be statistically significant, the degree to which they are different is small. Thus, below, when we indicate something is “significantly” higher or lower, this simply refers to statistical significance and not absolute level of difference.

Results for the Full Sample

Figures 1 and 2 graphically represent results of model 1 (religion only) and model 5 (religion/controls/Family/Substance Use/Community Connection) for analyses with the full sample. Tables 3 and 4 in the appendix contain full model parameters and comparison statistics for these models. Further, more detailed graphs of the results can be found in the appendix.

Model 1: Religion. In our most basic models, religion was specified as the only predictor of suicidality and depression. In these model, rates of suicide ideation (that is, thoughts of ending one’s life) across religion are as follows: Latter-day Saint: 13%; Catholic: 15%; Protestant: 16%; “Other”: 19%; None: 22%. For suicide attempts, rates were as follows: Latter-day Saint: 4%; Catholic: 10%; Protestant: 9%; “Other”: 13%; None: 11%. Those of all other religions (including nones—which means no specific religious affiliation) were significantly higher in considering suicide, attempting suicide, and depression than Latter-day Saints. For considering suicide, compared to Latter-day Saints, these differences ranged from 4% (those missing religion data) to 14% (nones) higher. For suicide attempts, compared to Latter-day Saints, differences ranged from 5% (Protestants) to 9% (“Other”) higher. For depression, differences ranged from 0.15 (missing religion data) to 0.43 (nones) higher.

Model 2: Religion + Controls. When we added controls (parent education, race, gender, youth grade level in school, and reported honesty) to model 1, Latter-day Saints remained significantly lower than all other religious groups in suicidality and depression. The one exception was that for
Figure 1. Full Sample Suicidality, Comparison of Latter-day Saints and Other Groups

Figure 1a. Model 1: Religion Only

Figure 1b. Model 5: Religion + Controls + Family Connection + Drug Use + Community Connection

Note: * denotes significantly different from Latter-day Saints.
Figure 2. Full Sample Depression, Comparison of Latter-day Saints and Other Groups

Figure 2a. Model 1: Religion Only

Figure 2b. Model 5: Religion + Controls + Family Connection + Drug Use + Community Connection

Note: * denotes significantly different from Latter-day Saints.
seriously considering suicide, Latter-day Saints were no longer significantly lower than Protestants, they were statistically equal. Statistically equal means that though there may be slight differences between denominations, they are too small to conclude that they are not simply due to chance.

**Model 3: Religion + Controls + Family Connection.** When we added family connection, Catholics became statistically equal to Latter-day Saints with Protestants continuing to be statistically equal. Further, Latter-day Saints and Protestants also became statistically equal in both suicide attempts and depression.

**Model 4: Religion + Controls + Family Connection + Drug Use.** When we added drug use, Latter-day Saints were statistically equal to all other religions except they remained lower than those of no religion. When we added drug use, Catholics also became statistically equal to Latter-day Saints in both suicide attempts and depression.

**Model 5: Religion + Controls + Family Connection + Drug Use + Community Connections.** With the final addition of community connections, the only change was that those of all other religions became statistically equal to Latter-day Saints.

**Results by Sexual Orientation:**

**LGBQ Individuals**

Figures 3 and 4 graphically represent the results of model 1 and model 5 for analyses with the LGBQ individuals. Tables 5–8 in the appendix contain full model parameters and comparison statistics for LGBQ models as well as models for heterosexuals and those missing data on sexual orientation.

**Model 1: Religion Predicting Suicidality and Depression.** For LGBQ individuals, when religion was the only predictor, Latter-day Saints were significantly lower in suicide ideation and attempts than those of “Other” religions and those of no religion. Latter-day Saints were also significantly lower in suicide attempts than Catholics. For depression, Latter-day Saints were significantly lower than all other religions. For LGBQ individuals in this first model, rates of ideation were as follows: Latter-day Saint: 28%; Catholic: 37%; Protestant: 46%; “Other”: 50%; None: 49%. Rates of attempts for LGBQ individuals were as follows: Latter-day Saint: 10%; Catholic: 26%; Protestant: 25%; “Other”: 30%; None: 23%.

**Model 2: Religion + Controls.** Only one difference between model 1 and model 2 was found: when we added controls, Latter-day Saint and Catholic LGBQ individuals became statistically equal in their depression.
Figure 3. LGBQ Suicidality, Comparison of Latter-day Saints and Other Groups

Figure 3a. Model 1: Religion Only

![Bar chart showing Considered Suicide and Attempted Suicide for Latter-day Saints, Catholic, Protestant, Other, and None. Asterisks denote significant difference between Latter-day Saints and other groups.]

Figure 3b. Model 5: Religion + Controls + Family Connection + Drug Use + Community Connection

![Bar chart showing Seriously Considered Suicide and Attempted Suicide for Latter-day Saints, Catholic, Protestant, Other, and None. Asterisks denote significant difference between Latter-day Saints and other groups.]

Note: * denotes significantly different from Latter-day Saints.
Figure 4. LGBQ Depression, Comparison of Latter-day Saints and Other Groups

Figure 4a. Model 1: Religion Only

![Bar chart](chart1.png)

Figure 4b. Model 5: Religion + Controls + Family Connection + Drug Use + Community Connection

![Bar chart](chart2.png)

Note: * denotes significantly different from Latter-day Saints.
Model 3: Religion + Controls + Family Connection. In terms of significant differences between LGBQ Latter-day Saints and those of “Other” religions and no religions, there were no changes when we added family connections to the model.

Model 4: Religion + Controls + Family Connection + Drug Use. When we added drug use, all significant differences between Latter-day Saints LGBQ individuals and those of other religious groups became nonsignificant except that Latter-day Saints remained lower in suicide attempts and depression than those of no religion.

Model 5: Religion + Controls + Family Connection + Drug Use + Community Connections. With the final addition of community connections, the only change was that Latter-day Saint LGBQ individuals and LGBQ noneS became equal in suicide attempts. Latter-day Saints remained lower in depression than noneS, which was the only group significantly different from Latter-day Saints in model 5.

Results by Sexual Orientation: Heterosexual Individuals

Figures 5 and 6 graphically represent the results of model 1 and model 5 for analyses of heterosexual individuals.

Model 1: Religion Predicting Suicidality and Depression. For heterosexuals, when religion was the only predictor, Latter-day Saints were significantly lower in suicide ideation (thoughts about suicide) and attempts than those of “Other” religions and those of no religion. Latter-day Saints were also significantly lower in suicide attempts than Catholics and Protestants. For depression, heterosexual Latter-day Saints were significantly lower than all other religions and those of no religion. In model 1, percentages of ideation across religion are as follows: Latter-day Saint: 13%; Catholic: 15%; Protestant: 16%; “Other”: 19%; None: 22%. Rates of attempts for heterosexuals were as follows: Latter-day Saint: 4%; Catholic: 8%; Protestant: 8%; “Other”: 10%; None: 9%.

Model 2: Religion + Controls. When controls were added, Latter-day Saint heterosexuals were no longer significantly lower than Catholic heterosexuals in suicide attempts and depression. They were also no longer significantly lower than Protestant heterosexuals in suicide attempts.

Model 3: Religion + Controls + Family Connection. When we added family connections, Latter-day Saint heterosexuals were no longer lower than heterosexuals from “Other” religions on seriously considering suicide or depression.
Figure 5. Heterosexual Suicidality, Comparison of Latter-day Saints and Other Groups

Figure 5a. Model 1: Religion Only

![Figure 5a](image)

Figure 5b. Model 5: Religion + Controls + Family Connection + Drug Use + Community Connection

![Figure 5b](image)

**Note:** * denotes significantly different from Latter-day Saints.
Figure 6. Heterosexual Depression, Comparison of Latter-day Saints and Other Groups

Figure 6a. Model 1: Religion Only

Figure 6b. Model 5: Religion + Controls + Family Connection + Drug Use + Community Connection

Note: * denotes significantly different from Latter-day Saints.
Predictors of Utah Youth Suicidality

Model 4: Religion + Controls + Family Connection + Drug Use. When we added drug use as a control, significant differences between heterosexual Latter-day Saints and heterosexual “nones” in considering suicide became nonsignificant. For suicide attempts, all significant differences between Latter-day Saint heterosexuals and those of other religious groups also became nonsignificant. However, when we added drug use, Latter-day Saints became significantly higher in considering suicide than Catholics and significantly higher in depression than Catholics and Protestants.

Model 5: Religion + Controls + Family Connection + Drug Use + Community Connections. Adding community connections did not change the significance level of differences between Latter-day Saints and other religious groups.

Results by Sexual Orientation:
Individuals Missing Sexual Orientation Data

Given they are not the focus of this paper, we briefly review results for those who did not supply sexual orientation data, though full results are available in the appendix. For those missing sexual orientation data, there were no significant differences between Latter-day Saints and Protestants on considering suicide and attempting suicide. All other comparisons of suicidality and depression were significant with Latter-day Saints being significantly lower than all other religious groups and those of no religion. These significant differences remained through model 5, except Protestants became statistically equal with Latter-day Saints when we added controls. In the end, those missing data on sexual orientation were highly similar to heterosexuals and often significantly different from LGBQ individuals.

Other Important Predictors of Suicidality and Depression

Table 8 in the appendix contains the complete results for the final models. These models include all the variables, and we can here examine which variables matter most in predicting suicidality and depression. Compared to females, males were significantly lower in suicidality and depression. Being older (a higher grade level in school) was associated with fewer recent suicide attempts but greater depression. All family, drug, and community connections variables significantly predicted suicidality and depression in the expected direction. Of the family connection variables, family conflict was the strongest predictor of suicide,
leading to a nearly doubling of ideation, and a 170 percent increase in attempts along with being related to greater depression. Of the drug use variables, youth drug use was the strongest predictor, more than doubling the likelihood of ideation and attempt and related to higher depression. While not explaining differences between Latter-day Saints and others, community connections were highly related to suicidality. For example, being bullied for sexual orientation more than doubled the likelihood of ideation and attempt and was related to higher depression.

**Latter-day Saint Disaffiliation and Suicidality**

Study results suggest that LGBQ Latter-day Saints are not at higher suicidality risk than LGBQ youth of other religions or those with no religious affiliation, and in fact were significantly lower in suicidality than several of these other groups. Initial difference tests (model 1) suggest Latter-day Saints are, on average, lower in suicidality than most other religious groups. However, one may conjecture the reason LGBQ Latter-day Saints are lower is because those at high levels of suicidality (possibly due to difficulties within the Church) have disaffiliated with the Church. Thus, it may be Latter-day Saints are lower in suicidality because a disproportionate percentage of high suicidality LGBQ individuals no longer identify as Latter-day Saint. Unfortunately, SHARP data do not contain information about disaffiliation. However, it is possible to use other data on LGBQ youth disaffiliation from the Church of Jesus Christ to estimate the degree to which disaffiliation may play into results. Such analyses were conducted and are contained within the appendix. Results suggest it is very unlikely the reason those of no religion are higher than Latter-day Saints in suicidality is because of disaffiliated Latter-day Saints (the likelihood is lower than 2 percent).

**Discussion**

This study examined differences in suicidality and depression across religion and sexual orientation in a representative sample of Utah youth in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12. For the entire sample, before taking any other factors into account, Latter-day Saints were lower in their suicidality and/or depression than those of any other religious group or those of no religion. This is in line with previous research on Latter-day Saints and suicide in Utah,\(^50\) and with

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\(^{50}\) Fellingham and others, “Statistics on Suicide and LDS Church Involvement in Males Age 15–34”; Hilton, Fellingham, and Lyon, “Suicide Rates and Religious Commitment in Young Adult Males in Utah.”
other analyses of the same data.\textsuperscript{51} Going beyond this previous work, analyses here were able to explain these differences. Indeed, based on the data available in the SHARP survey, the majority of differences were explained by family connections and drug use.

This same pattern held for LGBQ individuals. LGBQ Latter-day Saints were lower in their suicidality and/or depression than LGBQ individuals of any other religion or no religion. Again, the majority of these differences became statistically nonsignificant when taking into account controls, family connections, and substance use.

Thus, results suggest that, on average, Latter-day Saints (whether LGBQ or not) are lower in suicidality and depression because they have (again, on average) stronger family connections and less drug use. This suggests that independent of religious background, a youth with a strong family background and low levels of substance use will have lower suicidality and depression. Hilton and his coauthors (2002) posited drug use as a possible reason for their findings of lower suicidality of Latter-day Saints. It also appears that strong family connections are central to a lower risk of suicide.

However, an additional nuance emerged in analyses with heterosexuals. Although initially Latter-day Saints were lower in suicidality and depression, after controlling for drug use, Catholics were lower in considering suicide than Latter-day Saints, and Protestants and Catholics were lower than Latter-day Saints in depression. In other words, although Latter-day Saints initially appeared to have lower levels of considering suicide, once other factors were taken into account, the relationship reversed. It appears there may be some additional protective factors for Catholics and Protestants (or some additional risk factors for Latter-day Saint heterosexuals) not accounted for in these models.

Still, it is important to recognize that when significant differences were found in our final models (whether Latter-day Saints were higher or lower) those differences were small and may not represent a practical difference. For suicidality, significant differences were no more than 2 to 3 percent. In contrast, differences in the initial models were much higher. For instance, for the combined sample (not breaking it out by sexual orientation), individuals of no religion were 14 percent higher in

\begin{footnotesize}\textsuperscript{51} James S. McGraw and others, “Family, Faith, and Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors (STBs) among LGBTQ Youth in Utah,” \textit{Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity}, advance online publication, October 7, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000517; Fellingham and others, “Statistics on Suicide and LDS Church Involvement in Males Age 15–34,” 179; Hilton, Fellingham, and Lyon, “Suicide Rates and Religious Commitment in Young Adult Males in Utah.”\end{footnotesize}
seriously considering suicide than Latter-day Saints. Although the difference remained statistically significant in the final model, the difference decreased to 2 percent.

It is important to note that the full nuance of religion’s influence (Latter-day Saint or other) is not captured here. Although we can see denomination, family, and substance use matter, the SHARP data do not provide sufficient detail about religiosity to examine how beliefs or religious practices may matter. It is likely that specific religious beliefs and practices influence family connections and drug use. Knowing precisely which beliefs and practices were most influential to family connections and drug use would provide additional information about how religion affects suicidality and depression. For example, the lower substance use by Latter-day Saints likely has an underlying religious mechanism not captured here. It may be that the Church of Jesus Christ’s unique emphasis on drugs and alcohol (the prohibition or control of these substances is included in their scripture and as part of one’s worthiness before God) provides a greater than normal incentive to avoid substance use. That is, substance use avoidance may take on higher, sacred meanings, providing additional motivation to avoid these substances. This study does not capture such influences of religious belief. It should also be noted that religion may impact the youth in ways not captured here. Indeed, suicidality and depression, although important, are not the “whole picture” of a youth.

It is interesting that for those missing data on sexual orientation, differences between Latter-day Saints and those of other religions and no religion persisted (though substantially reduced) through each of the models. Again, this group missing sexual orientation data is, on average, much younger than those who are not missing sexual orientation data. At this younger age, they may be less likely to use drugs or alcohol, and therefore this may be less likely to explain differences. Reasons why younger Latter-day Saints were lower in suicidality and depression are not fully captured here, suggesting future research should examine these younger youth for possible reasons why Latter-day Saints may be lower.

Little evidence was found that community connections explained the difference between Latter-day Saints and those of other religions or no religion. In two instances, community connection explained away a significant difference between Latter-day Saints and another religious group. The first was for depression, where a significant difference between Latter-day Saints and nones became nonsignificant. The second instance was for LGBQ Latter-day Saints and LGBQ nones, where
adding community connection dropped the difference between these two groups from 3 to 2 percent and became nonsignificant. In the end, when we added community connections, there were only a few instances where significant differences between Latter-day Saints and other religious groups became nonsignificant. Further, absolute differences changed little when we included community connections variables. After we included the family connections and drug use, nearly all the differences between Latter-day Saints and other groups were accounted for.

This does not, however, mean community connections are not related to suicidality and depression. It simply means they do not explain much of the difference between Latter-day Saints and other groups. It may also be that community connections have an effect on suicidality and depression through family conflict and drug use or abuse. That is, less community connection may create strain on the family and individual, leading to more family conflict. For instance, feeling safe at school is moderately correlated with family conflict (r = −0.25) and youth drug use (r = −0.21). However, longitudinal mediation models are needed to examine the indirect effect of community connections on suicide.

Indeed, community connections appear to have a major influence on suicidality and depression (see table 8 in the appendix). Those bullied for their sexual orientation were at more than double the risk for considering and attempting suicide and significantly higher in depression. Feeling safe at school also reduced ideation and attempts by 35 to 40 percent. Given this finding, providing training for community gatekeepers is a valuable area of intervention. Community “gate-keepers” are those who have face-to-face contact with large numbers of community members as part of their usual routine, such as school officials and other community officials. These individuals can be offered training designed to enable members of the community to inquire about suicide among youth (and others) who may be at risk. Such training is more effectively offered in settings where youth study, live, and play and should also include individuals who surround youth in these social contexts. Such training can not only identify youth at risk but can also help strengthen connections and convey caring—especially among youth who may be at risk.

of marginalization (for example, being bullied for sexual orientation or religion). Given the protective potential of religious communities, such gatekeeper training should be offered regularly in these contexts, particularly for youth who might be at risk of being estranged from their church or religious group. For youth identified as at risk of suicide, the use of crisis response plans (CRP)\(^{53}\) should be considered. A CRP is a personalized and highly specific plan written on a small card that addresses the following elements: warning signs of suicide, specific coping skills, helpful people to contact, specific reasons for living, and crisis resources (hotlines, emergency services). A CRP is intended to strengthen interpersonal connections, improve emotional regulation, and help the person-at-risk to avoid behaviors that may increase the risk of suicide, impulsivity, and disinhibition, including drug and alcohol use during a crisis. Our results also confirm what has been found in previous research: LGBQ individuals have far higher rates of suicidality and depression than heterosexuals. The suggestions for interventions here are particularly important for this higher-risk group.

Durkheim’s proposition that social connection is a facet of religion that reduces suicide\(^ {54}\) was suggested by results. However, within this study, it was social connections within the family that primarily explained differences in suicidality and depression across religion. Thus, religion may have its greatest influence on youth wellbeing through its effects on the adolescents’ family life.

**Limitations**

Several limitations of this study should be noted. First, the data used for this study do not account for those who deidentified with their religion. Analyses that examined the potential impact of disaffiliated Latter-day Saints on initial models should be noted for the various assumptions they make and should be interpreted cautiously and considered preliminary. Confirmatory analyses need to be conducted with a sample that contains information about religion, disaffiliation, sexual orientation, and suicidality. Further, we were unable to determine how religious


\(^{54}\) Rodney Stark, Daniel P. Doyle, and Jesse Lynn Rushing, “Beyond Durkheim: Religion and Suicide,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 22, no. 2 (June): 120–31, esp. 120.
youth were. It is likely the degree to which youth were religious would be a partial explanation of relationships examined here. Further, we do not have a measure of how “out” LGBQ youth were. It will be important for future research to determine the degree to which “outness” influences the suicidality of Latter-day Saint youth. Still, the partial control for outness (whether they had been bullied) explained few differences between Latter-day Saints and those of other religions.

The measures used to capture family and community connections are rather narrow. It will also be important to use more nuanced measures of family and community connections. Still, these measures explained most of the differences between religions and had strong main effects, which demonstrates their utility.

Conclusion

Although some have suggested otherwise, results here give support to research suggesting that, in Utah, being a Latter-day Saint is protective against depression and suicidality even for LGBQ individuals. This study also reveals that a major reason for that protection is that being a Latter-day Saint is associated with stronger family connections, less drug and alcohol use, and, to a lesser degree, more community connections in schools and with peers. Utah data match other state and national data suggesting significantly higher rates of suicide ideation and attempt among those youth who identify as LGBQ versus those who identify as heterosexual. We continue to see a need to learn more about the risk and protective factors for suicidal ideation and attempt for LGBQ individuals. Although we were not able to fully estimate the influence of disaffiliation, it should be noted that the majority of LGBQ individuals who currently identify as Latter-day Saints have not had suicidal thoughts or attempts in the recent past. Although the levels are still high compared to heterosexuals, the data indicate that most LGBQ Latter-day Saints are not having suicidal thoughts.

57. Cranney, “LGB Mormon Paradox.”
While community connections appear to explain little of the differences between Latter-day Saints and other religions, they have a strong main effect on suicidality and depression. The implications are rather clear: to address suicidality, engaging with families to reduce conflict and engaging with peers to reduce bullying are key strategies. Further, those youth engaged in substance use should have particular attention paid to them regarding suicidality because they are at substantially higher risk. A broad approach tackling family, drug, and community connections will be critical to reducing the suicidality in the suicide belt, a region of higher risk.

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Appendix

Measures

Descriptive statistics were calculated using the “svy” command in Stata with stratification and weights. Descriptives are representative of Utah youth in 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th grades. Items came from “The Communities That Care Youth Survey,” an instrument used nationwide by state and local governments to track the youth wellbeing.\(^{58}\)

Suicidality

Suicide consideration was measured with the item: *During the past 12 months, did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide?* with responses (no = 0, yes = 1) and 16.3 percent indicating they had seriously considered suicide. Suicide attempts were measured with the item: *During the past 12 months, how many times (if any) did you actually attempt suicide?* Given the highly skewed distribution, responses were coded 0 = no suicide attempts, 1 = one or more suicide attempts, with 6.7 percent indicating at least one suicide attempt in the last twelve months.

Depression

Depression was measured with four items on a four-point Likert-type scale: 1 = definitely no to 4 = definitely yes. Items were: *Sometimes, I think that life is not worth it*; *At times, I think I am no good at all*; *All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure*; and *In the past year, have you felt depressed or sad MOST days, even if you felt okay sometimes?* These measures come from the “Communities That Care Youth Survey” used to examine and assess a variety of adolescent problem behaviors.\(^{59}\) To reduce measurement error, a latent variable was created in Mplus\(^{60}\) and

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factor scores exported. Effects coding was used to preserve the scale.\textsuperscript{61} The appropriate measure of reliability for latent variables is maximal reliability (MR)\textsuperscript{62} and was good at 0.93.

**Religion**

Youth were asked: *If you have a religious preference, choose one which you identify the most,* with possible responses: Catholic, Protestant (such as Baptist, Presbyterians, or Lutherans), Jewish, Another religion, LDS (Mormon), and No religious preference. Given the low proportion of Jewish, these were combined with “Another religion” for analyses.

**Family Connections**

Youth were asked: *Think of where you live most of the time. Which of the following people live there with you?* Responses included: Mother, Father, Stepmother, Stepfather, Foster Parents(s), Grandparent(s), Aunt, Uncle, and other less common possibilities. Those who indicated they lived with both their mother and father were coded 1 (not including those living with a stepparent), while those who did not live with their mother and father were coded 0. Although a variety of possibilities regarding family structure could be indicated here, it is expected that those living with both their father and mother will have had, on average, a more stable household.

The following three statements were used to create a family conflict scale: *People in my family often insult or yell at each other; We argue about the same things in my family over and over; People in my family have serious arguments.*\textsuperscript{63} Responses were on a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = definitely no to 4 = definitely yes. A latent variable was created, which had good reliability (MR = .89), and the factor score was exported.


\textsuperscript{63} Statements drawn from Arthur and others, “Measuring Risk and Protective Factors.”
**Drug Use**

Youth were asked: *Has anyone in your family ever had severe alcohol or drug problems?* with a binary response 1 = yes (31.3%), 0 = no. They were also asked if they had ever used alcohol, tobacco, or any drug. We coded as 1 responses indicating they had used any of the following: marijuana (including synthetic marijuana such as herbal incense products), cigarettes, alcoholic drinks, LSD or other hallucinogens, cocaine, methamphetamines, heroin, or prescription stimulants, tranquilizers, products without a prescription. Participants were coded 0 if they had never used any of these. Overall, 24 percent had used one of these.

**Sexual Orientation**

Participants were asked: *Which of the following best describe you?* with responses: Heterosexual (straight), Bisexual, Gay or lesbian, Not sure. Given the substantial number of missing values (27.2%), it was determined to treat “missing” as a distinct category within the analyses. Although these values could have been imputed, we did not have high confidence in substantially identifying the mechanism of missingness. They are therefore treated as a unique category, and it was examined if this group followed patterns of heterosexuals or LGBQ individuals in relation to the outcomes.

**Community Connection**

Three variables measured community connections. The first is whether the youth feels safe at school. Youth were asked to rate the statement *I feel safe at my school* on a four-point response scale (1 = definitely no, 4 = definitely yes; mean[SE] = 3.31[.00]). Two items about bullying were also included: *If you have been bullied in the past 12 months, why do you think you were you bullied?* Two options were included: being bullied for sexual orientation (2.4%; 0 = not bullied for sexual orientation, 1 = bullied for sexual orientation) and religion (4.5%; 0 = not bullied for religion, 1 = bullied for religion).

**Controls**

Controls included gender (0 = female, 1 = male, 2 = other), which was treated as an unordered categorical variable; highest education of any adult living in the home (1 = completed grade school or less, 2 = some high school, 3 = completed high school, 4 = some college, 5 = completed college, 6 = graduate or professional school after college, with the mean[SE]
child's grade (1 = 6th, 2 = 8th, 3 = 10th, 4 = 12th, with the mean[SE] = 2.61[.01]); and race (1 = white [79.6%], 0 = other [20.4%]). A question on how honest the child was in completing the survey was also included (self-reported): How honest were you in filling out this survey? on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = I was very honest to 5 = I was not honest at all (mean[SE] = 1.13[.00]). This was reverse coded so higher values indicated greater honesty.

**Missing Data**

The most missing data was for parent education (16.0%) followed by honesty (14.9%), suicide attempts (11.1%), and seriously considered suicide (11.0%). All other variables were missing less than 10 percent. The Stata program ICE was used to create a multiply imputed dataset\(^{64}\) with 20 imputations. Given the amount of missing data, 20 imputation has excellent relative efficiency of between .99 and 1.00 (the highest is 1.00) and with no proportional increase in standard errors.\(^{65}\)

**Analysis Plan**

Stata was used to conduct all analyses. The Stata prefixes “mi estimate” and “svy”\(^{66}\) were used to perform logistic and OLS regressions with multiple imputation and accounting for the survey design (incorporating weights and stratification). Analyses generalize to all Utah youth in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12. To test hypotheses one through five, a series of five models were conducted for each outcome. Model 1 contained only the dependent variable and the religion variable, with Latter-day Saint as the base category. Model 2 added control variables, model 3 added family connections variables, model 4 added substance use variables, and model 5 added community connections variables. After each model, marginal proportions or means for each religion were estimated and compared. Bonferroni’s correction was used for the multiple comparisons. In a second set of models, we examined the research question of whether hypotheses hold for LGBQ individuals. The two unordered categorical variables of religion and sexual orientation were interacted together using Stata’s automated interaction specifications (i.e., religion##sexual_orientation). The same five models were analyzed

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66. StataCorp, *Multiple Imputation* (College Station, Tex.: Stata Press, 2017).
again, except that this set of regressions included the religion by sexual-orientation interaction.

Extended Results

Descriptives

Table 3 contains correlations. Given the sample size, all correlations were significant at $p < .001$. Being a Latter-day Saint was positively correlated to reporting “heterosexual” and was positively related to protective factors (two-parent home, feeling safe at school) and negatively related to risk factors (suicidality, depression, family conflict, family and youth drug use, and being bullied for religion or sexual orientation). Those who identified as LGBQ were lower on protective factors and higher on risk factors. Table 4 contains proportions and means. Regarding outcomes (suicidality and depression), those missing sexual orientation data were more similar to those who identified as heterosexual than who identified as LGBQ. Suicide consideration and attempt for those missing sexual orientation data was 11.4% and 6.6% respectively. For heterosexuals it was 15.7% and 6.0%, and for LGBQ individuals it was 40.8% and 19.1%. Depression for those missing sexual-orientation data (mean = 1.73) was also closer to heterosexuals (mean = 1.96) than for LGBQ individuals (mean = 2.50). It is also worth noting that those missing sexual orientation data had a mean school grade of 6.11, whereas heterosexuals and LGBQ individuals had mean grades of 9.95 and 9.74, more than three grades higher. It may be that sixth graders had difficulty answering the sexual orientation question. 67 Proportion and mean comparisons across sexual orientation were undertaken. Differences were significant in nearly every instance.

Religion Main Effects

When discussing differences, we refer to differences across “religious groups” which also includes those who were not religiously affiliated (referred to as “nones”). Those who selected the option other or Jewish when they reported their religion are designated “Other.”

Seriously Considered Suicide. Table 5 contains model-predicted percentages of those who seriously considered suicide and those who

67. Anecdotally, the first author spoke with a sixth grader who took the survey, and this student was unsure what was being asked by the sexual-orientation question and left it blank.
Table 3. Seriously Considered Suicide, Attempted Suicide, and Depression, Religion Main Effects Models (n = 86,346)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serious Considered Suicide</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uncond.</td>
<td>+Controls</td>
<td>+Family Connections</td>
<td>+Drugs</td>
<td>+Community Connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latter-day Saint</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>5%*</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>2%*</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>5%*</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>11%*</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>8%*</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>14%*</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>9%*</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4%*</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4%*</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Suicide Attempt            |         |         |         |         |         |
|                           | Uncond. | +Controls | +Family Connections | +Drugs | +Community Connections |
| Latter-day Saint          | 4%      | —       | 4%      | —       | 4%      |
| Catholic                   | 10%     | 6%*     | 7%      | 3%*     | 6%      |
| Protestant                 | 9%      | 5%*     | 8%      | 3%*     | 6%      |
| Other                      | 13%     | 9%*     | 10%     | 6%*     | 8%      |
| None                       | 11%     | 7%*     | 9%      | 5%*     | 7%      |
| Missing                    | 10%     | 6%*     | 8%      | 4%*     | 7%      |

| Depression                 |         |         |         |         |         |
|                           | Level   | diff. LDS | Level   | diff. LDS | Level   | diff. LDS | Level   | diff. LDS | Level   | diff. LDS |
| Latter-day Saint          | 1.72    | —       | 1.78    | —       | 1.81    | —       | 1.85    | —       | 1.85    | —       |
| Catholic                   | 2.01    | 0.28*   | 1.87    | 0.09*   | 1.89    | 0.08*   | 1.85    | 0.00    | 1.86    | 0.00    |
| Protestant                 | 1.93    | 0.21*   | 1.89    | 0.11*   | 1.85    | 0.04    | 1.81    | 0.03    | 1.80    | 0.05    |
| Other                      | 2.06    | 0.34*   | 1.98    | 0.20*   | 1.94    | 0.13*   | 1.90    | 0.05*   | 1.88    | 0.03    |
| None                       | 2.15    | 0.43*   | 2.07    | 0.29*   | 2.06    | 0.19*   | 1.96    | 0.11*   | 1.96    | 0.09*   |
| Missing                    | 1.87    | 0.15*   | 1.88    | 0.10*   | 1.87    | 0.06*   | 1.85    | 0.01    | 1.85    | 0.00    |

*Percentage different from Latter-day Saints within the model.

* p < .05. The following superscripts indicate a significant difference (p < .05) between one religion and another: C = Catholic, P = Protestant, O = Other, N = None, M = Missing religion data.
Table 4. Final Main Effects Models (Model 5)
Predicting Suicide Consideration, Suicide Attempt, and Depression (n = 86,346)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Suicide Consideration</th>
<th>Suicide Attempt</th>
<th>Depression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OR(SE)</td>
<td>OR(SE)</td>
<td>b(SE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religion (LDS Base)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>.89(.06)</td>
<td>1.23(.10)**</td>
<td>0.00(.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>.83(.10)</td>
<td>1.24(.19)</td>
<td>−0.05(.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.14(.08)</td>
<td>1.58(.14)***</td>
<td>0.03(.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>1.19(.05)***</td>
<td>1.35(.08)***</td>
<td>0.09(.01)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>.98(.05)</td>
<td>1.53(.18)***</td>
<td>−0.00(.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender (Girl Base)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>.71(.02)***</td>
<td>0.78(.04)***</td>
<td>−0.23(.01)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.10(.12)</td>
<td>1.03(.14)</td>
<td>0.01(.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual Orientation (Heterosexual Base)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBQ</td>
<td>1.98(.10)***</td>
<td>1.71(.12)***</td>
<td>0.27(.01)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1.00(.05)</td>
<td>1.03(.07)</td>
<td>0.06(.01)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Connections</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Parent Home</td>
<td>.85(.03)***</td>
<td>0.86(.04)**</td>
<td>−0.05(.01)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Conflict</td>
<td>1.99(.05)***</td>
<td>1.70(.05)***</td>
<td>0.42(.01)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drugs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Drug Problem</td>
<td>1.40(.05)***</td>
<td>1.37(.07)***</td>
<td>0.11(.01)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Drug Use</td>
<td>2.02(.08)***</td>
<td>2.21(.13)***</td>
<td>0.21(.01)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Connections</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe at School</td>
<td>.60(.01)***</td>
<td>.66(.02)***</td>
<td>−0.24(.01)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied for Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>2.40(.20)***</td>
<td>2.16(.23)***</td>
<td>0.28(.03)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied for Religion</td>
<td>1.64(.10)***</td>
<td>1.75(.18)***</td>
<td>0.21(.02)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1.05(.04)</td>
<td>0.76(.04)***</td>
<td>−0.09(.01)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>1.03(.02)</td>
<td>0.83(.03)***</td>
<td>0.03(.01)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Par. Education</td>
<td>1.02(.02)</td>
<td>0.97(.02)</td>
<td>−0.00(.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>.96(.03)</td>
<td>1.05(.06)</td>
<td>0.05(.01)***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001

Note: Parameters for consideration and attempt are odds-ratios meaning those ratios below 1.00 are indicative of a negative association.
Table 5. Percent Seriously Considered Suicide by Religion and Sexual Orientation (n = 86,346)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unconditional</td>
<td>+Controls</td>
<td>+Family Connections</td>
<td>+Drugs</td>
<td>+Community Connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Considered</td>
<td>% diff. LDS</td>
<td>% Considered</td>
<td>% diff. LDS</td>
<td>% Considered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latter-day Saint</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>6%*</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>5%*</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>9%*</td>
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“A” Percentage different from Latter-day Saints within the model.

*p < .05. The following superscripts indicate a significant difference (p < .05) between one religion and another: C = Catholic, P = Protestant, O = Other, N = None, M = Missing religion data.
attempted suicide across religion. It also contains model-predicted levels of depression across religion. In the unconditional model (religion only in the model), those of all other religions (including nones) had a significantly higher proportion of youth who had seriously considered suicide than Latter-day Saints, ranging from 4% higher (those missing religion data) to 14% higher (nones). When adding controls (model 2), Protestants were no longer significantly different than Latter-day Saints, and differences between Latter-day Saints and other religious groups decreased, ranging from 2% (Catholics) to 9% (nones) higher. When adding family-connections variables, neither Catholics nor Protestants were significantly different from Latter-day Saints, with differences reducing further, ranging from 1% (Protestants) to 6% (“Other” and nones) higher. When drug use was entered, no other group was significantly higher than Latter-day Saints except nones (2%), with Catholics and Protestants being lower (−1% and −2% respectively), though not significantly. Including community connections variables did not affect the significance level of any differences. In the final model, Catholics, Protestants and missing were also lower than nones, with Protestants also being lower than “Other” religions.

In the final model (see table 6), the only demographic significantly related to suicide consideration was gender (boys had lower suicide consideration than girls, OR(SE) = .71(0.02), p < .001). Those missing sexual orientation were no different than heterosexuals, though LGBQ individuals were significantly higher than heterosexuals (OR[SE] = 1.98[0.10], p < .001). All family, drug, and community connections variables significantly predicted consideration in the expected direction.

**Suicide Attempt.** In the unconditional model, all other groups were significantly higher than Latter-day Saints in suicide attempts, ranging from 5% (Protestants) to 9% (“Other”). When adding controls, all groups were still significantly higher, though differences were reduced, ranging from 3% (Catholics and Protestants) to 6% (“Other”). When adding family connections variables to the model, Protestants were no longer significantly different from Latter-day Saints, and significant differences between Latter-day Saints and others were reduced further, ranging from 2% (Catholics and Protestants) to 4% (“Other”). With the addition of drug use, neither Catholics nor Protestants were significantly different from Latter-day Saints, and other significant differences between Latter-day Saints and others were further reduced, ranging from 1% (Catholics, Protestants, and nones) to 3% (“Other”). The final model adding community connections was nearly identical to the previous model, though
Table 6. Percent Attempted Suicide by Religion and Sexual Orientation (n = 86,346)

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*Percentage different from Latter-day Saints within the model.
*p < .05. The following superscripts indicate a significant difference (p < .05) between one religion and another: C = Catholic, P = Protestant, O = Other, N = None, M = Missing religion data.
those missing religion data were no longer significantly different from Latter-day Saints, and the difference between “Others” and Latter-day Saints was reduced from 3% to 2%. In the final model, there were no other significant differences across any of the other groups. When we added community connections, a previously significant difference between Catholics and “Other” was no longer significant. In the final model (see table 6), a higher school grade and being male was negatively related to suicide attempts (OR[SE] = .78[.04], p < .001; OR[SE] = .83[.03], p < .001) while being LGBQ compared to heterosexual was positively related to suicide attempt (OR[SE] = 1.70[.12], p < .001). Being white was negatively associated with suicide attempt (OR[SE] = .76[.04], p < .001). Those missing sexual orientation data were not significantly different from heterosexuals. All family, drug, and community connections variables significantly predicted consideration in the expected direction.

**Depression.** In the unconditional model, all other groups were significantly higher than Latter-day Saints in depression with the difference ranging from .15 (missing) to .43 (nones). When adding controls, all groups were still significantly higher, though the differences was reduced, ranging from .09 (Catholics) to .30 (nones). When we added family connections variables, Protestants no longer significantly differed from Latter-day Saints, and differences between Latter-day Saints and other religious groups was reduced, ranging from .04 (Protestants) to .19 (nones). When we added drug use, all differences were further reduced ranging from −.03 (Protestants) to .11 (nones), with only “Other” and nones being significantly higher than Latter-day Saints. When we added community connections, the difference between Latter-day Saints and “Other” was no longer significant, though the difference between Latter-day Saints and nones remained. In the final model (see table 6), being male and being white were negatively related to depression (b[SE] = −.23[.01], p < .001; b[SE] = −.09[.01], p < .001, respectively), while school grade and being honest were positively associated with depression (b[SE] = .03[.01], p < .001; b[SE] = .05[.01], p < .001, respectively). Being LGBQ or missing sexual orientation data (compared to heterosexual) was positively related to suicide attempt (b[SE] = .27[.01], p < .001; b[SE] = .06[.01], p < .001, respectively). All family, drug, and community connections variables significantly predicted consideration in the expected direction.
Interaction between Religion and Sexual Orientation

Our research question was whether the findings above hold for LGBQ individuals. The 3×6 interaction (three sexual orientations by six denominations) produces numerous results. We therefore limit reporting results to similarities and differences from main-effects models, though full results are provided in tables 7 and 8. Further, it should be noted that the cell sizes of the 3×6 interaction vary substantially. The smallest cell size is 77 (Protestant LGBQ individuals), with all other cell sizes above 100 (most are about 1,000). This means for Protestant LGBQ individuals, the margin of error is greater, making it less likely to find significant differences. Small cell size may also accentuate differences, though results do not appear to suggest this.

Seriously Considered Suicide. For heterosexuals and LGBQ individuals (table 7; see also figure 7), the patterns exhibited in main-effects models generally held. However, after controlling for drug use, heterosexual Protestants were 3 percent lower than Latter-day Saint heterosexuals. In model 1 (only sexual orientation and religion), Latter-day Saint LGBQ individuals had lower suicide consideration than LGBQ “Other” and nones. In comparing Latter-day Saints to all other religious groups, there was no change in significant differences when we added community connections (compare models 4 and 5). However, when adding community connections for heterosexuals, the significant difference between Catholics and “Other” religions, and the significant difference between Catholics and missing, became nonsignificant. Further, a significant difference between Protestants and nones became nonsignificant when we controlled for community connections. When we added community connections, the difference between Catholics and nones also disappeared.

For those missing sexual orientation data, Catholics, “Other,” and nones were all significantly higher than Latter-day Saints in the final model, as they were in the previous model. Also, when we added community connections, a difference between Catholics and Protestants emerged, and a significant difference between Protestants and nones disappeared.

Suicide Attempt. In model 1 for LGBQ individuals (table 8; see also figure 8), Latter-day Saints were lower on suicide attempts than Catholics, “Other,” and nones. However, similar to main-effects models, there were no significant differences between heterosexuals and LGBQ individuals across religion groups in the final model. When we added community connections in model 5, a significant difference between LGBQ
Figure 7. Suicide Consideration by Religion and Sexual Orientation

Figure 7a. Model with only religion and sexual orientation (Model 1)

Figure 7b. Model with all variables included (Model 5)
Figure 8. Suicide Attempt by Religion and Sexual Orientation

Figure 8a. Model with only religion and sexual orientation (Model 1)

Figure 8b. Model with all variables included (Model 5)
nones and LGBQ Latter-day Saints became nonsignificant (dropping from a 3 percent difference to 2 percent), but no other changes in significance levels were observed when we added community connections. For those missing sexual orientation data, there was no change in significance when we added community connections. However, Latter-day Saints were significantly lower in suicide attempts than all other religions except Protestants.

**Depression.** In model 1 for heterosexuals (table 7; see also figure 9), Latter-day Saints were significantly lower in depression than other religious groups, except Protestants. In model 1 for LGBQ individuals, Latter-day Saints were lower in depression than all groups other than missing. For heterosexuals in the final model, Catholics and Protestants had significantly lower depression levels than Latter-day Saints. Nones had higher levels of depression than all other religious groups. When we added community connections, significant differences across the religious groups did not change, except a difference between “Other” and nons emerged.

For LGBQ individuals, in the final model, nons were significantly higher in depression than Latter-day Saints and those missing religion data. The only change in significance when adding community connections is that the significant difference between the nons and those missing religion data emerged. For those missing sexual orientation data, Latter-day Saints were significantly lower in depression than all religious groups except Protestants. There was no change in significance when we added community connections.

In the final models for suicide consideration, attempt, and depression (see table 8), males were at a higher risk than females. All family, drug, and community-connections variables significantly predicted consideration, attempt, and depression in the expected direction.

**Other Predictors of Suicide and Depression**

Table 8 contains the complete results for models including the interaction between sexual orientation and religion. Being male was related to significantly less suicidality and depression than being female, while school grade negatively predicted suicide attempt and positively predicted depression. All family, drug, and community-connections variables significantly predicted suicidality and depression in the expected direction. Of the family-connections variables, family conflict was the strongest predictor, with family conflict leading to a nearly doubling of consideration ($\text{OR}[SE] = 1.98[.05]$, $p < .001$) and a 170 percent increase
Figure 9. Depression by Religion and Sexual Orientation

Figure 9a. Model with only religion and sexual orientation (Model 1)

Figure 9b. Model with all variables included (Model 5)
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\textsuperscript{a}Mean difference from Latter-day Saints within the model.

*p < .05. The following superscripts indicate a significant difference (p < .05) between one religion and another: C = Catholic, P = Protestant, O = Other, N = None, M = Missing religion data.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8. Final Interaction Effects Models (n = 86,346)</th>
<th>Suicide Consideration</th>
<th>Suicide Attempt</th>
<th>Depression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OR(SE)</td>
<td>OR(SE)</td>
<td>b(SE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religion (LDS Base)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>0.74(0.06)**</td>
<td>0.98(0.10)</td>
<td>−0.06(0.02)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>0.78(0.10)</td>
<td>1.19(0.21)</td>
<td>−0.11(0.03)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.98(0.09)</td>
<td>1.32(0.16)*</td>
<td>−0.03(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>1.11(0.06)</td>
<td>1.20(0.09)*</td>
<td>0.05(0.01)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0.96(0.07)</td>
<td>1.52(0.21)**</td>
<td>−0.02(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual Orientation (Heterosexual Base)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBQ</td>
<td>2.00(0.16)**</td>
<td>1.67(0.17)***</td>
<td>0.22(0.02)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0.80(0.05)***</td>
<td>0.77(0.08)**</td>
<td>−0.00(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religion*Sexual Orientation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic*LGBQ</td>
<td>1.11(0.20)</td>
<td>1.66(0.36)*</td>
<td>0.08(0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic*Missing</td>
<td>2.27(0.27)***</td>
<td>1.89(0.28)***</td>
<td>0.23(0.03)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant*LGBQ</td>
<td>1.48(0.64)</td>
<td>1.39(0.59)</td>
<td>0.36(0.14)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant*Missing</td>
<td>0.90(0.30)</td>
<td>0.70(0.30)</td>
<td>0.18(0.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*LGBQ</td>
<td>1.11(0.20)</td>
<td>1.26(0.29)</td>
<td>0.03(0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*Missing</td>
<td>1.71(0.23)***</td>
<td>1.67(0.28)***</td>
<td>0.22(0.03)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None*LGBQ</td>
<td>1.04(0.12)</td>
<td>1.08(0.15)</td>
<td>0.11(0.03)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None*Missing</td>
<td>1.36(0.12)***</td>
<td>1.52(0.18)***</td>
<td>0.12(0.02)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing*LGBQ</td>
<td>0.76(0.13)</td>
<td>0.59(0.17)</td>
<td>−0.06(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing*Missing</td>
<td>1.26(0.13)*</td>
<td>1.30(0.22)</td>
<td>0.07(0.02)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender (Girl Base)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>0.71(0.02)***</td>
<td>0.78(0.04)***</td>
<td>−0.23(0.01)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.12(0.12)</td>
<td>1.06(0.14)</td>
<td>0.02(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Connections</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Two-Parent Home</td>
<td>0.85(0.03)***</td>
<td>0.85(0.04)***</td>
<td>−0.05(0.01)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Conflict</td>
<td>1.98(0.05)***</td>
<td>1.70(0.05)***</td>
<td>0.41(0.01)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drugs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Drug Problem</td>
<td>1.40(0.05)***</td>
<td>1.36(0.07)***</td>
<td>0.11(0.01)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Drug Use</td>
<td>2.05(0.08)***</td>
<td>2.24(0.13)***</td>
<td>0.22(0.01)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Connections</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe at School</td>
<td>0.60(0.01)***</td>
<td>0.65(0.02)***</td>
<td>−0.24(0.01)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied for Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>2.37(0.20)***</td>
<td>2.13(0.23)***</td>
<td>0.27(0.03)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied for Religion</td>
<td>1.62(0.10)***</td>
<td>1.74(0.17)***</td>
<td>0.21(0.02)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1.05(0.04)</td>
<td>0.76(0.04)***</td>
<td>−0.08(0.01)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>1.02(0.02)</td>
<td>0.82(0.03)***</td>
<td>0.03(0.01)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Education</td>
<td>1.02(0.02)</td>
<td>0.97(0.02)</td>
<td>−0.00(0.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>0.96(0.03)</td>
<td>1.05(0.06)</td>
<td>0.05(0.01)***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Note: Parameters for consideration and attempt are odds-ratios meaning those ratios below 1.00 are indicative of a negative association.
in attempts (OR[SE] = 1.70[.05], p < .001) along with being related to depression (b[SE]=.41[.01], p<.001). Of the drug use variables, youth drug use was the strongest predictor, more than doubling the likelihood of consideration (OR[SE] = 2.05[.08], p < .001) and attempt (OR[SE] = 2.24[.13], p < .001) and related to higher depression (b[SE] = .22[.01], p < .001). For community connections, being bullied for sexual orientation more than doubled the likelihood of consideration (OR[SE] = 2.37[.20], p < .001) and attempt (OR[SE] = 2.13[.23], p < .001) and was related to higher depression (b[SE] = .21[.02], p < .001), though family connections, drug, and community connections variables were important as well (see table 8).

Latter-day Saint Disaffiliation and Suicidality

Study results suggest that not only are LGBQ Latter-day Saints not at higher suicidality risk than LGBQ youth of other religions or those with no religious affiliation, but were significantly lower in suicidality than several of these other groups. The above results do not suggest that LGBQ Latter-day Saints are at higher risk for suicidality than any other religion. Initial difference tests (model 1) suggest Latter-day Saints as a whole are lower in suicidality than most other religious groups. A feature of the current study is the focus on those who currently either affiliate or do not affiliate with religion, focusing on the influence of affiliation. However, it is worthwhile to explore disaffiliation as part of the processes examined here. A question is what we might find if those who were ever affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (current and former members) were compared with those who were never affiliated with the Church. One may conjecture that current Latter-day Saints were lower in suicidality because a disproportionate percentage of high suicidality LGBQ individuals no longer identified as Latter-day Saint. Unfortunately, SHARP data do not contain information about disaffiliation. However, it is possible to use other data on LGBQ youth disaffiliation from the Church of Jesus Christ to estimate the degree to which disaffiliation may play into results.

The Family Foundation of Youth Development Project (Foundations) has data from Utah on youth sexual orientation and religion, including any prior religious affiliations (see https://foundations.byu.edu/). In Foundations data, 60.5% of LGBQ Utah teens who had no religion had, at some point in their lives, identified as Latter-day Saint. Of that 60.5%, 42.4% had seriously considered suicide and 11.5% had attempted suicide. It is worth noting that these rates are lower than CDC estimates for LGB
individuals nationwide. Although Foundations data also contains youth at younger grades, grade was negatively correlated with suicidality.

As supplementary analyses, in SHARP, 60.5% of LGBQ individuals of no religion were recoded as current Latter-day Saints (these recoded cases are referred to here as “estimated former Latter-day Saints”) with suicidality rates mirroring those in the Foundations data: 42.4% of them having seriously considered suicide and 11.5% of them having attempted suicide. In other words, in the SHARP data, those of no religion who mirror statistics of former LGBQ Latter-day Saints had their variable “religion” changed from “no religion” to “Latter-day Saint.” Thus, for these supplementary analyses, those coded as “LGBQ Latter-day Saint” included LGBQ individuals who indicated they were Latter-day Saint as well as LGBQ individuals who indicated they were not Latter-day Saint, but who mirror the suicidality characteristics of former LGBQ Latter-day Saints (that is, “estimated former Latter-day Saints”).

Model 1 analyses were then conducted comparing LGBQ Latter-day Saints (current and estimated former Latter-day Saints) with those of no religion. Results were substantively identical to results reported in table 5 and table 6, with LGBQ Latter-day Saints (current and estimated former combined) remaining significantly lower in suicide ideation and suicide attempts than LGBQ individuals of no religion.

To test the sensitivity of these analyses, several additional models were run. In these analyses, for estimated former LGBQ Latter-day Saints, the percentage of them who had considered or attempted suicide was gradually increased. For instance, in a subsequent model, instead of 42.4% having seriously considered suicide, 43.4% were specified as having seriously considered suicide. This percentage was gradually increased.

At 59.2% of estimated former LGBQ Latter-day Saints seriously considering suicide (17% higher than what was estimated in the Foundations data), LGBQ Latter-day Saints (current and estimated former Latter-day Saints combined) had higher levels of seriously considering suicide than LGBQ individuals of no religion. At 28.5% of estimated former LGBQ Latter-day Saints attempting suicide (also 17% higher than those of no religion) current and former LGBQ Latter-day Saints combined had higher levels of seriously considering suicide than LGBQ individuals of no religion.

The percentages 59.2% and 28.5% fall at the high end of the 95% confidence interval for considering and attempting suicide in the Foundations data. Given this 95% confidence interval in the Foundations data,
for initial models with no other predictors but religion, one can be 90% confident for considering suicide and 86% confident for suicide attempt that current and former LGBQ Latter-day Saints combined are equal to or lower in suicidality than LGBQ individuals of no religion who were never Latter-day Saints. Given these numbers, the likelihood is only 6.8% that the combined current and former LGBQ Latter-day Saints are higher in both considering suicide and suicide attempts than LGBQ individuals of no religion.

The question of whether to count those who are unaffiliated as affiliated is dependent on the research question. In this study, the focus was on those who currently identify with a particular religion or with no religion. This supplemental analysis provides some insight into a research question that needs future scholarly attention.
New Deacon

It is our son’s first trip down the chapel aisle
steering a silver tray of broken bread.
Repentant faces lift his way and smile:

our flock, dear villagers who raised this child
to bear their burdens, keep their spirits fed
beginning with this trip down the chapel aisle.

He follows solemnly the loping file
of taller boys, and his too-inclined head
makes us turn to each other, shrug, and smile.

This earnestness, and shoes that for a while
will still be much too big, seem to have led
to his hopefully only trip down the chapel aisle:

with scuff, then cry and clatter, clang and sprawl,
the ordinance’s dignity has fled.
Startled faces crane his way, then smile

at us. We nod. What better place to fall
than here, where all things rise? Hands rugburn-red,
he picks tray, bread, and self up from the aisle,
too sheepish and too shepherded not to smile.

—Kevin Klein

This poem received an honorable mention in the 2021 Clinton F. Larson Poetry Contest, sponsored by BYU Studies.
Prophets, Pagans, and Papyri
The Jews of Greco-Roman Egypt and the Transmission of the Book of Abraham

Stephen O. Smoot and Kerry Muhlestein

Egypt has a long history of exchange and contact with a variety of people. Ancient people of diverse ethnic backgrounds made their way into Egypt—whether as war captives, mercenaries, merchants, invading armies, members of diplomatic parties, refugees, or simple migrants—bringing with them their language and culture. One such group was the ancient Jews, whose enslavement at the hands of “a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph” (Ex. 1:8), and exodus under the prophetic leadership of Moses may be the best-remembered incident of a Hebrew presence in Egypt, but it was not the only one.

During the reign of the Ptolemaic (Greek) pharaohs (c. 300–30 BC) and well into Roman dominion (c. 30 BC–AD 350), there was an unmistakable Jewish presence throughout Egypt, evidence of which can be found in the surviving archaeological and historical record. These Egyptian Jews established communities in several locations and became a cultural force that, while perhaps not as influential on the Egyptian social landscape as the Greeks and Romans, was nevertheless substantial. Thanks to the “relatively abundant discursive evidence, the Judeans of Hellenistic Egypt” have been described as being “one of the best known of . . . the many minority immigrant populations long-settled in Egypt” by the time of the Greco-Roman Era.1 These Jews or Judean immigrants

brought their religious customs and texts with them into Egypt or, in some cases, composed new religious texts altogether and participated in the wider multicultural discourse of the time that shaped their ethnic (including religious) identity. “Egypt was a cosmopolitan country” during this period, after all, a period that was “an age of religious synthesis.”

The cultural setting of Greco-Roman Egypt may be interesting to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in its own right, but knowing more about it may help them better understand a possible transmission method for one of their scriptural texts. The Book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price purports to be “a translation of... the writings of Abraham, while he was in Egypt.” The story (and controversy) surrounding the Book of Abraham and the associated Egyptian papyri once owned by Joseph Smith is complex and multifaceted. Complications and questions abound regarding the historicity of the Book of Abraham, its relationship to the papyri owned by Joseph Smith, the way it was translated, and the Prophet’s interpretation of the three facsimiles that accompany the text. Given the gaps in the historical record (to say nothing of the diverse methodological assumptions that have undergirded different approaches to the text), this subject will give scholars plenty of fodder for continued academic investigation.

One question that remains open for examination is how a purported autobiography of the patriarch Abraham could have been transmitted from his time (most likely circa 2,000–1,800 BC) into the Ptolemaic period (when the Joseph Smith Papyri were created)—a journey of well

over a millennium and a half! How feasible or likely is it that a copy of Abraham's writings could have been recovered from a point in history so far removed from his own time? How was the text transmitted, and when? And by whom? And for what purpose(s)? And how likely is it that Abraham's writings would have been associated with a collection of funerary papyri seemingly unrelated to anything Jewish or biblical?

These are all valid and important questions that have been addressed in part before. To answer the question of how a putative copy of Abraham's writings could have been transmitted into Greco-Roman Egypt (and subsequently into the possession of Joseph Smith), this paper will first look at the evidence that demonstrates a Jewish presence in Greco-Roman Egypt. After reviewing this evidence, it will then explore questions related to the direction of cultural exchange between Egyptian and Jewish groups. Did Jewish migrants coming into Egypt absorb Egyptian culture more than they imported and disseminated their own culture and customs? Did the Egyptians ever borrow or adapt Jewish ideas and figures? Was there an even flow of cultural exchange in both directions? What kinds of exchange are detectable in the surviving evidence?

Finally, this paper will explore how all of this may shed light on a plausible way in which the Book of Abraham could have been transmitted down to the Hellenistic era.

In the spirit of candor, we acknowledge that this outline for a plausible transmission of the Book of Abraham rests on the assumption that Joseph Smith had in his possession a physical ancient copy of Abraham's writings. If one assumes that Joseph Smith translated the Book of Abraham in a way comparable to his translation of the parchment of John (D&C 7)—that is, as revealed text that did not exist among the Egyptian

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papyri he possessed or a physical copy of which he otherwise did not have tangible access to—then much of what is discussed in this paper will likely lose most of its significance. After all, some prefer to see the translation of the Book of Abraham as purely revelatory and disassociated from any actual papyri in Joseph Smith’s possession. This position is understandable, has some merit, and should be carefully considered. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints itself allows for just such a scenario in its Gospel Topics essay on this subject:

Joseph’s study of the papyri may have led to a revelation about key events and teachings in the life of Abraham, much as he had earlier received a revelation about the life of Moses while studying the Bible. This view assumes a broader definition of the words *translator* and *translation*. According to this view, Joseph’s translation was not a literal rendering of the papyri as a conventional translation would be. Rather, the physical artifacts provided an occasion for meditation, reflection, and revelation. They catalyzed a process whereby God gave to Joseph Smith a revelation about the life of Abraham, even if that revelation did not directly correlate to the characters on the papyri.

Additionally, there are those who have speculated that the Book of Abraham might be a pseudepigraphic text composed by a Jewish author during the Greco-Roman period. Much of what is laid out in this paper may be highly relevant to this line of thinking. But these additional issues are too broad to explore in this treatment. Suffice it to say for now that despite the important advances scholars have made in recent years,
no one single theory for the origin of the Book of Abraham can account for all of the evidence (a point that has also been stressed before).\textsuperscript{14}

We also wish to make clear what is and is not at stake with the argument we will make in this paper. The only thing at stake in this paper is our theory of a probable way a copy of Abraham’s record ended up in Ptolemaic Thebes. Further, we wish to emphasize that our putting forward this theory does not mean that we strongly favor the theory that the text of the Book of Abraham was on the papyrus over the theory that the papyri served as a catalyst to Joseph Smith’s reception of a revelation of an inspired scriptural text. We are merely exploring ways that the text of the Book of Abraham could have been transmitted if that text was actually on the papyrus Joseph Smith owned. As we acknowledge above, if faithful and sincere Latter-day Saints favor the “catalyst theory” for the origins of the Book of Abraham, they are free to reject our argument in this paper without in any way diminishing the text’s scriptural status. The inherent authenticity and inspiration of the Book of Abraham is not what is at stake in this paper. Latter-day Saints may of course accept both the text’s authenticity and inspiration without subscribing to our theory about its possible ancient transmission.

With that said, because the notion that the Book of Abraham was translated from papyri in Joseph Smith’s possession is a widely held theory, it is worth exploring how such a theoretical text could have ended up among the Joseph Smith Papyri. Therefore, for the purposes of this exploration, we shall proceed under the assumption that Joseph Smith possessed a copy of Abraham’s writings as we explore this noteworthy data.

**Prelude to the Ptolemies:**
**The Early Waves of Jewish Migration into Egypt**

Before discussing the evidence for the presence of Jews in Egypt during the time of the Joseph Smith Papyri (that is, the Ptolemaic Period), we provide a few words on the historical events leading up to this time in order to provide some context. The Hebrew Bible reports that from time to time, small parties of ancient Israelites—such as the future king of the northern Kingdom of Israel, Jeroboam—came to Egypt for refuge (1 Kgs. 11:40). Such isolated instances, however, cannot, on their own, account for a substantial Jewish presence in Egypt; nor do they seem to be the

most likely route of transmission for the Book of Abraham. The earliest sizeable Jewish migration into Egypt, probably one of soldiers and refugees, seems to have occurred as early as the seventh century BC, although we do not know much about their actual move to Egypt. Archaeological evidence from this time (in the form of wine decanters that were likely used in Sabbath rituals) suggests that these early migrants into the Nile delta retained a sense of Jewish religious identity and community.

The next large relocation of Jews into Egypt, which we can identify more precisely, was just after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, when Johanan, the son of Kareah, and the remaining captains of Judah's forces led many of the Jews who had survived Babylon's assault in a mass migration into Egypt (Jer. 43). “The Neo-Babylonian empire's conquests during the early sixth century BCE certainly encouraged emigration from the Kingdom of Judah.” This group included the prophet Jeremiah and his scribe, Baruch, along with earlier refugees or migrants, and it may have formed the seed-core of what would become a well-established colony of Jews.

While we do not have much more specific information about other waves of Jewish migration at the time of the Babylonian exile (circa 597–537 BC), it is clear that they took place and that there was continued resettling of Jews in Egypt. Shortly afterward, during the Persian Period (circa 550–330 BC), one settlement—a garrison of Jewish mercenaries—grew into a significant colony on the island of Elephantine in Upper Egypt. Significantly, this colony boasted a temple dedicated to Yaho (Yahweh), complete with its own priesthood, and was adjacent

to an Egyptian temple dedicated to the ram-headed deity Khnum.\textsuperscript{20} This Jewish temple was so important and occupied such a prominent place in the religious identity and practices of the Jewish inhabitants on the island that one scholar has gone so far as to call the Jews of Elephantine “a temple community.”\textsuperscript{21} Unfortunately, growing political and civil unrest would eventually lead to the temple’s destruction in 410 BC at the hands of Egyptian vandals.\textsuperscript{22}

The introduction of Jewish and Aramean foreigners into Egypt resulted, naturally, in a linguistic and cultural exchange that would continue well into the Ptolemaic Period (circa 300–30 BC).\textsuperscript{23} This included a
religious exchange that saw, for instance, the adoption of Egyptian burial liturgy and afterlife imagery in Aramaic funerary inscriptions (Aramaic being the language of postexilic Jews). Evidence for such includes several Egyptian sarcophagi recovered from Saqqara in Lower Egypt and Aswan in Upper Egypt (near Elephantine) and no less than five grave stelae written in Aramaic. This evidence “shows an adoption of Egyptian burial practices and religious beliefs” on the part of Aramaic-speaking persons who lived and died in Egypt. “Aramaic speakers participated in the Egyptian afterlife according to Egyptian practices, described in Egyptian terms. The material also shows a connection between the Aramaic-speaking communities at Elephantine and Saqqara.”

But Elephantine was not the only Jewish community in Persian Egypt. Fleeing violence or seeking economic and social stability, communities of Jews and other Semites (especially Arameans and Syrians) sprang up in multiple locations throughout Egypt. The Hebrew Bible, for instance, refers to “Judeans living in the land of Egypt, at Migdol, at Tahpanhes, at Memphis, and in the land of Pathros” during the time of the prophet Jeremiah (NRSV Jer. 44:1). When Alexander conquered the country in 332 BC, “a fresh wave of Jewish immigrants” into Egypt resulted. Surviving evidence confirms this portrait of a multiethnic Egypt during the Persian and early Ptolemaic periods. From it, we can clearly see that there was a significant Jewish population in Egypt from as early as the time of the Babylonian exile. These early migrations set the stage for the emergence of the Jewish community in Egypt during the Greco-Roman Period.

**Jewish Communities in Greco-Roman Egypt**

The ancient city of Alexandria claims the honor of being the best-documented location of a sizable Jewish community in Greco-Roman


Egypt. Abundant evidence has survived that attests to the presence of Alexandrian Jews well into the Roman period as well. The literature exploring the history and significance of the Jewish community at Alexandria is immense, well beyond the scope of this paper to address in full. Representative treatments can be found elsewhere.²⁹ What can be said here, in short, is that the Jews in Alexandria established a thriving community that included synagogues, homes, public buildings, and cemeteries.³⁰

Besides the erection of Jewish religious and civic structures, Alexandria also saw the proliferation of an influential Jewish intellectual movement perhaps best typified by the Hellenistic-Jewish writer Philo Judaeus (Philo of Alexandria). Writing in the early first century AD, Philo's voluminous works covered primarily theological and philosophical topics, including extensive commentaries on the Hebrew Bible.³¹ The Greek-speaking Alexandrian savant also touched on matters regarding the life and culture of his Jewish contemporaries and indeed significantly influenced the evolution of Hellenistic Jewish identity.³² Philo is significant for the understanding of first century A.D. Hellenistic


Judaism. He is the main surviving literary figure of the Hellenized Judaism of the Second Temple period of ancient Judaism.”

In the southeastern portion of the Nile Delta, the ancient city of Leontopolis (modern Tell el-Yahudiya) in the Heliopolitan Nome reportedly housed a Jewish colony complete with a temple modeled after the Jerusalem temple. From the Jewish historian Josephus, we learn that during the reign of Ptolemy VI Philometor in the second century BC, the Jewish priest Onias had replicated the Jerusalem temple at Leontopolis to serve the religious needs of his community. Onias’s letter purports that his sanctuary was refashioned out of the remains of a dilapidated Egyptian temple “after the pattern of that in Jerusalem.”

Although Josephus may have garbled (or embellished) some of the details, other evidence confirms the existence of Onias and his band of exiles, who had fled Egypt to escape the maneuverings of the Jerusalem priesthood. “Onias’ Temple was no run-of-the-mill backwater sanctuary solely catering to the religious needs of Onias’ community. On the contrary, at its pinnacle Onias’ Temple was a major religious and cultural center of Egyptian Judaism.” In addition to textual information about the temple, a significant Jewish presence in the area is attested by a large cemetery which contains a great number of names that are distinctly Jewish. “Already towards the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, archaeologists discovered a fairly large (Jewish) cemetery containing funerary epitaphs largely dating to the early Roman period. While one epitaph mentions the ‘Land of Onias,’ another attests to the presence of priests at the site.” Not unlike the earlier community at...
Elephantine, “the latter attestation implies that the local community [at Leontopolis] was centered on a temple.”

A group of Greek papyri from the Roman period attests to another Jewish community in the Egyptian city of Oxyrhynchus. Evidently these Jews were well organized politically and enjoyed official legal recognition by Roman authorities. Jews continued to live at Oxyrhynchus even after the city became dominated by Christians, although from the Christian period onward it becomes much more difficult to disentangle Jewish and Christian identities in the site’s surviving textual record.

Finally, there is evidence for a significant Jewish presence in the Fayum during the Greco-Roman period. The surviving corroboration for such is predominantly textual or inscriptive. “The nature of our evidence handicaps constructing an accurate picture of the Jewish presence in the Fayum. Lacking material culture in known archaeological remains that indicates Jewish individuals, and not having discovered a clearly Jewish cemetery, we are forced to rely on textual evidence which only incidentally bears on the subject.” The evidence from the Fayum includes a robust Jewish onomasticon, but epigraphic sources also attest to synagogues at Krokodilopolis and elsewhere. Moreover, a recently discovered but as of yet unpublished papyrus fragment from the Fayum dating to the third century BC affords new attestation to the heretofore unknown ethnic-legal designation “Judeo-Egyptian” (Ioudaioaigyptios). The important conclusion we can draw from this

42. Kasher, Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, 156–57.
47. Lincoln H. Blumell and Kerry Hull, “A Ptolemaic Petition of a ‘Judeo-Egyptian’ (Ioudaioaigyptios)?” (presented at the 2021 SBL/AAR annual conference in San Antonio, Texas). Our thanks to Blumell and Hull for alerting us to this new evidence, which is forthcoming in print.
evidence is that the Jewish population in Egypt grew dramatically during the Hellenistic and Roman eras. During the Ptolemaic period, there were indeed many large Jewish population centers throughout many parts of Egypt.

Onomastic Evidence for Jews in Greco-Roman Egypt

If we zoom in from a wider perspective on the major Jewish settlements in Greco-Roman Egypt to a specific look at some of the cultural artifacts that these communities left behind, we see how the members of these communities constituted a well-known and influential part of the ancient cultural landscape. Consider, for example, the identification of Jewish names in burial inscriptions, contracts, dedications, and letters, as well as textual sources in Aramaic, Greek, and Demotic Egyptian identifying Jews with specific ethnonyms. The onomastic evidence (or evidence that derives from names as attested in ancient written sources) for a widespread Jewish presence in Greco-Roman Egypt is compelling enough that one scholar concluded that during this time, “besides the Greeks, Jews were the most numerous group of foreigners living in Egypt.”

Besides Winnicki’s own illuminating study, two other works, by William Horbury and David Noy and by Silvie Honigman, have demonstrated this. Honigman says that “Jewish names are an important source of evidence about Jewish life in Graeco-Roman Egypt and elsewhere in the Jewish diaspora.” However, this evidence is not without its own limitations. For one thing, it is sometimes difficult to determine whether the bearer of a Jewish name, unless specified with an ethnonym, was in fact Jewish. Likewise, there are known Jews (identified as such in the textual sources) who bore Greek and even Egyptian names. The safest assumption in most cases is that a bearer of a Jewish name was in

48. Winnicki, Late Egypt and Her Neighbors, 181–82.
49. Winnicki, Late Egypt and Her Neighbors, 182.
50. Winnicki, Late Egypt and Her Neighbors, 180–259.
53. Moore, Jewish Ethnic Identity, 74.
fact Jewish, but this is sometimes difficult to be sure of.\footnote{The situation becomes especially troublesome when looking at Jewish names in sources from Christian Egypt, because Christians frequently adopted biblical or Hebrew names. See Blumell, \textit{Lettered Christians}, 27–88, 247–48. The problem of discerning Jewish identity in the broader ethnic landscape of the Hellenistic world has been explored in Shaye J. D. Cohen, “‘Those Who Say They Are Jews and Are Not’: How Do You Know a Jew in Antiquity When You See One?,” in \textit{Diasporas in Antiquity}, 1–46. Scholars have elucidated methodologies that helpfully address many of these concerns and bolster confidence in seeing Jewish names as coming from actual Jewish persons in most instances, as opposed to being adopted by non-Jews. See Honigman, “\textit{Abraham in Egypt},” 280–82; Gideon Bohak, “\textit{Good Jews, Bad Jews, and Non-Jews in Greek Papyri and Inscriptions},” \textit{Archiv für Papyrusforschung: Beiheft} 3 (1997): 105–12; Moore, \textit{Jewish Ethnic Identity}, 71–76.} Further, there were undoubtedly Jews that did not bear Jewish names, making it inevitable that our estimations of Jewish populations are underestimations.

From the Persian period into the Roman period, Jewish persons have been identified in ancient sources as residing at numerous locations. This has been done particularly, but not exclusively, using onomastic evidence. Such locations include the following:

- In Lower Egypt: Alexandria, Schedia, Xeneephyris, Nitriaei, Tanis, Pelusium, Athribis, Leontopolis, Demerdash, Berenike, and Memphis
- In the Fayum: Krokodilopolis, Syron Kome, Alexandrou Nesos, Samaria, Chanaanain, Trikomia, Tebtynis, Herakleopolis, and Tebetnoi
- In Middle–Upper Egypt: Oxyrhynchos, Hermopolis Magna, Thebes, Edfu, and Elephantine.\footnote{Winnicki, \textit{Late Egypt and Her Neighbors}, 240–49; Nathalie LaCoste, \textit{Waters of the Exodus: Jewish Experiences with Water in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt} (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 25–64.}

Of these, areas in Herakleopolis and Berenike (the Mediterranean Berenike, not to be confused with the Red Sea Berenike) were designated as Jewish \textit{politeuma}, indicating that they were known and officially recognized Jewish havens.\footnote{Sänger, “\textit{Jewish Military Colony in Leontopolis},” 182–84.} It is likely that other cities had similarly designated areas, but these are all we have extant textual evidence for.\footnote{For example, Sänger, “\textit{Jewish Military Colony in Leontopolis},” 189–94, argues that Leontopolis would have enjoyed this status as well.} Krokodilopolis had a large enough Jewish community to support two synagogues, one of which was built by a large group of Jews who moved there from Thebes sometime in the early Roman era. Such structures
also indicate a significant Jewish population in that city.\textsuperscript{58} This particular group seems to have migrated from Elephantine to Thebes by 300 BC and subsequently to Krokodilopolis by the end of the first century AD,\textsuperscript{59} making the zenith of Theban Jewry to be from about 200 BC to AD 50.

Further, at least twenty-five towns in Egypt hosted at least one synagogue.\textsuperscript{60} In short, Jewish names and political designations indicate that there were real concentrations of Jewish communities of varying density throughout the whole of Egypt. The onomastic evidence makes it clear that the Jewish community in Egypt was even more widespread and influential in the Ptolemaic period than we could tell by relying solely on other kinds of evidence. It is of particular interest to note that during the Ptolemaic period, there was a significant Jewish population in Thebes—Egypt's most religiously significant city and the place of the origin of the Joseph Smith Papyri.

**Literary Evidence for Jews in Greco-Roman Egypt**

Surviving evidence for Jewish literary works having been composed in, imported into, or otherwise disseminated throughout Egypt is especially noteworthy when discussing a possible route of transmission for the Book of Abraham. These works are primarily religious narratives or theological treatises. As discussed, Philo of Alexandria serves as the preeminent example. Philo, however, was not alone in producing Jewish literary works in Egypt. Although there remains some controversy surrounding its origins—including if it is a Jewish or Christian work—\textsuperscript{61} the story of Joseph and Asenath appears, according to the current consensus, to have been written by an anonymous Jewish author living in Egypt (likely in the Nile Delta region) sometime between the second century BC and the second century AD.\textsuperscript{62} This narrative, an expansion of the

\textsuperscript{58} Winnicki, *Late Egypt and Her Neighbors*, 243; also see Honigman, “Abraham in Egypt,” 290, 295; Kasher, *Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 158–60.


\textsuperscript{60} Muhlestein and Innes, “Synagogues and Cemeteries,” 55.


biblical account of Joseph of Egypt (Gen. 37–46), describes how Joseph’s espoused Egyptian wife Asenath turned from Egyptian idolatry and was converted to worshipping the true God through the miraculous ministration of an angel.

One scholar suggests that the text can trace its origins “to Onias’ arrival at Heliopolis, the construction of his temple there, and the various reactions to this move” and was written in response to both Jewish and Egyptian objections to the community’s existence. Whether or not this text was overtly used in proselyting activities, it would have served a role in enticing both longtime practitioners and recent converts to Judaism to the virtues of observing Jewish religious and ethical statutes. Piotrkowski has bolstered this argument with his own study, which suggests that not only Joseph and Asenath but several other Jewish works were composed by the Oniad community. “Scribal activity was part and parcel of Onias’ community too, as showcased by the works Joseph & Aseneth, the Third Book of the Sibylline Oracles, Pseudo-Hecataeus, 3 Maccabees, and probably other compositions as well. . . . It is likely that scribal activity was an integral part of Oniad Judaism, which gives furthermore testimony to the importance of the Oniad community and its temple as a cultural and religious center in the Egyptian Jewish Diaspora.”

Another important and popular Jewish work composed in Egypt in the first to second centuries AD is the Testament of Abraham. Written originally in Greek and widely copied and translated into Coptic, Arabic, Ethiopic, and later Slavonic and Romanian, the text narrates the near-death cosmic vision of the biblical patriarch that culminates with a judgment scene where the dead are tried by fire, records, and scales or balances. After Abraham sees God or a godlike personage on a blazing throne, the text describes the following:

Before him [the figure on the throne] stood a table like crystal, all of gold and byssus. On the table lay a book whose thickness was six cubits, while

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63. Bohak, Joseph and Aseneth, 90.
its breadth was ten cubits. On its right and on its left stood two angels holding papyrus and ink and pen. In front of the table sat a light-bearing angel, holding a balance in his hand. [On] (his) left there sat a fiery angel, altogether merciless and relentless, holding a trumpet in his hand, which contained within it an all-consuming fire (for) testing the sinners. And the wondrous man who sat on the throne was the one who judged and sentenced the souls. The two angels on the right and on the left recorded. The one on the right recorded righteous deeds, while the one on the left (recorded) sins. And the one who was in front of the table, who was holding the balance, weighed the souls. (Test. of Abr. 12:7–14)  

As we will discuss further below, this depiction of the judgement of the dead being conducted by weighing the souls in a pair of scales while an attending angel records the outcome on papyrus is viewed by many as clear evidence of Egyptian influence on the theology of the text.  

The most significant Jewish literary work produced in Ptolemaic Egypt would have to be the Septuagint—the monumentally important ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. It is well beyond the scope of this paper to delve into the history of the translation and transmission of the Septuagint. For that, the reader is directed elsewhere. Still, we will touch on a few points here for the sake of the discussion in the next section of this paper.

The Septuagint project was accomplished in or around Alexandria in the third to second centuries BC.\textsuperscript{71} The earliest account of the translation appears in the famous (and largely questionable) Letter of Aristeas.\textsuperscript{72} The letter purports to be the work of one Aristeas, a member of the court of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, writing to his brother Philocrates. In it, Aristeas describes how an entourage of seventy-two Jewish scholars (hence the name Septuagint, “seventy”) from Jerusalem was welcomed to Alexandria to accomplish the work of translation. The project took seventy-two days and when completed was enthusiastically received by Alexandrian Jews.\textsuperscript{73}

Modern scholarship has cast much doubt on the historical veracity of the claims made in the letter.\textsuperscript{74} What can be gleaned from the letter, however, is the general cultural or intellectual milieu that produced the Septuagint, and perhaps some faint memories of earlier events.\textsuperscript{75} There can indeed be little doubt that a Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures would have been necessary to accommodate the needs of Greek-speaking Jews in Egypt and elsewhere.

Jews throughout the Mediterranean region (Egypt, Syria-Palestine, Asia Minor, Greece, and the Italian Peninsula) during the Greco-Roman period utilized the Septuagint in literary and religious works, most notably in the writings that would eventually be canonized as the Christian New Testament. Jewish authors in the first century AD such as Philo, Josephus, and Saul of Tarsus (the Apostle Paul) all utilized the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew Bible in their own writings. Others, such as the Gentile-turned-Christian-turned-Jew Aquila of Sinope in the second century AD, later undertook new Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible that sought to improve the earlier translation accomplished in Egypt.\textsuperscript{76} Beyond the importance of the Septuagint for Greek-speaking Jews, the effort to render the Bible into Greek “had a considerable impact” on non-Jews, who now had “access to the sacred Hebrew texts. Alexandrian Judaism was clearly interested in spreading into ‘pagan’ milieu,”

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{71} Paget, “The Origins of the Septuagint,” 105–6.
\item \textsuperscript{73} Jobes and Silvia, \textit{Invitation to the Septuagint}, 33–34.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Wasserstein and Wasserstein, \textit{Legend of the Septuagint}, 19–26; Paget, “Origins of the Septuagint,” 106–11.
\item \textsuperscript{75} Paget, “Origins of the Septuagint,” 108.
\item \textsuperscript{76} Jobes and Silvia, \textit{Invitation to the Septuagint}, 39–40.
\end{itemize}
and the translation of the Septuagint paved the way for religious syncretism between Jews and non-Jews.\textsuperscript{77}

In summary, the important conclusions arrived at thus far in the paper are as follows:

1. A significant population of Jews was in Egypt as early as the Babylonian exile.
2. This population continued to thrive under the Ptolemies.
   a. It burgeoned especially in Alexandria.
   b. It also spread throughout the country with some specific areas of high concentration.
   c. One of these high concentration areas was Thebes.
3. There was healthy intellectual development and literary output among Jews in Egypt during the Greco-Roman period.

**Cultural Exchange between Jews and Egyptians during the Greco-Roman Period**

It should be clear from the above that Persian and Greco-Roman Egypt saw the establishment of several Jewish communities and the proliferation of many Jewish literary productions. At this point it becomes necessary to ask to what extent members of these communities interacted with their Greek and Egyptian neighbors. Were the Jews of Greco-Roman Egypt isolationists, piously secluding and shielding themselves from the influences of their “pagan” environment? Or did they actively participate in their newfound environment and exchange ideas, customs, and material culture with their non-Jewish contemporaries? Furthermore, to what extent did Egyptians reciprocate this exchange?

It is clear that at least some Jews occupied a social status that enabled, or even encouraged, cross-cultural interaction.\textsuperscript{78} They filled important political, civic, economic, police, and military positions.\textsuperscript{79} Many Jews


\textsuperscript{78} Some of these ideas have been discussed elsewhere by one of the authors. See Muhlestein, “Abraham, Isaac, and Osiris-Michael,” 246–58; Kerry Muhlestein, “The Religious and Cultural Background of Joseph Smith Papyrus I,” *Journal of Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22, no. 1 (2013): 20–33.

\textsuperscript{79} Muhlestein and Innes, “Synagogues and Cemeteries,” 56.
enjoyed the high social status of being a Hellene,\textsuperscript{80} or a Macedonian.\textsuperscript{81} A number of Jews became increasingly Egyptianized over time, indicating that they were interacting more and more with the larger Egyptian culture around them.\textsuperscript{82} Some even served in Greek temples,\textsuperscript{83} or in the royal administration.\textsuperscript{84} Some Jews remained somewhat separate culturally, while others fully participated in and often absorbed the surrounding culture.\textsuperscript{85} It is also clear that a number of influential rulers and employers developed a degree of familiarity with Jewish religion and customs.\textsuperscript{86}

Having established that intercultural influence was probable, this section will focus on just one aspect of ethnic interaction where the surviving evidence for exchange in both directions (Jewish to Egyptian, and Egyptian to Jewish) is rather clear: religious and mythological syncretism. In a word, there is discernable evidence in both Jewish and Egyptian religious works of this period for religious syncretism between Jews and Egyptians. As one might expect, there was little to stop the polytheistic Egyptians from freely adapting mythological elements from the religious system of incoming Jews. What is somewhat more surprising, however, is that many Egyptian and even Palestinian Jews evidently did not think it inappropriate to reappropriate Egyptian elements into their own religious worldview.

Before jumping into this evidence, a quick word on the nature of Greco-Roman Egyptian “magic” is necessary. This is because on the Egyptian side of things the evidence for syncretism mainly comes from so-called “magical” sources. As one scholar has explained, Egyptian magic during the Greco-Roman period (while certainly not wholly unique for its time or otherwise unprecedented) appears to have arisen

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Peder Borgen, \textit{Early Christianity and Hellenistic Judaism} (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 78.
\item Borgen, \textit{Early Christianity and Hellenistic Judaism}, 71–102.
\item For one example, see P. Gurob 22, 2/48–50, in J. Silbart Smyly, ed., \textit{Greek Papyri from Gurob} (Dublin: Hodges, Figgid, and Co., 1921), 38; Muhlestein and Innes, “Synagogues and Cemeteries,” 56.
\item See for example the funerary plaque of Ptolemy, son of Epikydes, the chief of police, in Horbury and Noy, \textit{Jewish Inscriptions}, 27, no. 27.
\item Muhlestein and Innes, “Synagogues and Cemeteries,” 57; Moore, \textit{Jewish Ethnic Identity}.
\item Muhlestein, “Abraham, Isaac, and Osiris-Michael,” 256–57; Kasher, \textit{Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt}, 60; Borgen, \textit{Early Christianity and Hellenistic Judaism}, 79.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
in part as a way to “contact and manipulate supernatural agents in daily life” to ensure fortuitous outcomes in life’s vicissitudes. Magical practices in Greco-Roman Egypt appear to have been a very popular enterprise, and “unlike temple rites” they “were not tied to a particular place, but could be executed wherever the need arose.”

Because of this, and thanks to the cross-cultural exchange that brought Egypt in contact with Greek, Jewish, and Near Eastern traditions, a variety of supernatural forces and agents could be invoked in healing and apotropaic spells, curses, love charms, divinatory practices, and horoscopes to interpret dreams, to acquire control of nature, or to manipulate the outcome of politics, litigation, athletic contests, and business transactions. Taken as a whole, the popular magical practices of Greco-Roman Egypt “present a fascinating mixture of old and new practices, of temple-based facilities and portable methods, of local and international trends.”

With this in mind, we proceed to look at the Egyptian evidence. The clearest example of Egyptians appropriating Jewish or biblical religious figures comes from the so-called Greek Magical Papyri (also known as the Theban Magical Library or the Anastasi Priestly Collection) from Greco-Roman Thebes. This corpus ranges in date from the second century BC to the fifth century AD, was composed by the Theban priesthood, and is “essentially religious in nature” in that it does not “represent anything out of the norm for Egyptian religion and religious practice.”

A look at the biblical figures invoked in this corpus of papyri is staggering. The nondivine names that are called upon in these spells include Abimelech, Abraham, Adam, Ammon, Aziel, Beruchiyahu, Darda, David, Gomorrah, Isaac, Israel, Jacob, Jeremiah, Jerusalem, Judah, Lot, Lot’s wife, Michael, Moses, Solomon, and, curiously, Osiris-Michael. The divine

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94. This last name is especially interesting as an example of exactly the kind of Egyptian-Jewish syncretism we wish to draw attention to in this paper. That a Jewish divine figure such as Michael was “invoked alongside [the Egyptian deity] Osiris” and perhaps even identified with the same in the “bilingual magical tradition” of Greco-Roman Egypt nicely punctuates our point about the significance this evidence might
names for Israel’s God are invoked as well, including Adonai, Adonai Sabaoth, Elohim, El, “God of the Hebrews,” and Yahweh with abbreviated forms. These biblical figures are utilized in ways that converge with known Egyptian magical practices. One spell calls upon Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to make the wearer of a ring famous, admired, and rich. Another—a love charm—invokes the name of Abraham in a list of magical words or names and promises to consign a female mummiform figure on a lion couch to the flames if she does not fall for the spell’s wielder. A Demotic spell for obtaining youth invokes Abraham, “the pupil of the sound eye,” in a long chain of magical words or agents meant to help in this regard. While scholars have debated how familiar the Egyptians using these spells were with the biblical material, it is clear that the Greek Magical Papyri (in addition to other Egyptian textual sources) provide evidence of “the Jewish contribution to the larger religious discourse in this period,” and that “Jewish divinity could be used in the broader Greco-Roman milieu in a variety of discourses, philosophical, religious and magical.”

But how might the Theban priesthood have gained a knowledge of these biblical figures? Honigman speculates that the dissemination of the influential Septuagint may have played a role in spreading knowledge of Jewish names and customs throughout Egypt. “After the Pentateuch was translated into Greek in Alexandria, apparently under Ptolemy II Philadelphus, it became an object of study for Jews, arguably not only in Alexandria but also in other Jewish settlements in Egypt,” Honigman

100. Smith, God in Translation, 282.
notes. Shortly thereafter, “various literary works soon popularized biblical stories: Ezechiel’s tragedies, and the novel Joseph and Aseneth, etc. These ‘adaptations’ of the Pentateuch to Hellenistic taste certainly played an important role in popularizing biblical characters, arguably perhaps playing an even greater role than the demanding study of the Septuagint.”

Given the evidence for a Jewish presence at Thebes beginning in the Persian period and into the Ptolemaic period, it is plausible that information about biblical or Jewish figures could have been transmitted by these colonists to the Theban priesthood, who then utilized said figures in innovative syncretic ways.

This brief summary should be enough to demonstrate syncretism among the ancient Egyptians during the Greco-Roman period. Now we will look briefly at a few examples of Jewish syncretism and utilization of Egyptian religious material. We begin with the Testament of Abraham, discussed above as having most likely been composed by a Jewish author living in Egypt in the first or second century AD. As mentioned, the judgment scene portrayed in the text almost certainly takes at least some of its inspiration from Egyptian religion, particularly the judgment scene from chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead. “The closest parallels to the post-mortem judgment as [the text] depicts it are in Egyptian sources,” notes Allison. “As one works through chaps. 12–13, again and again one comes back to Egyptian ideas and Egyptian texts.”

Ludlow draws our attention not only to the obvious parallels with the Book of the Dead but also to the Demotic tale of Setne Khamwas (discussed further below), which also contains a postmortem judgment scene that parallels the Testament of Abraham and other Jewish texts. Not only was the author of the Testament of Abraham “very familiar with Egyptian judgment scenes,” Ludlow concludes, “but [was] actually playing with them as he had with biblical figures to weave a memorable tale.” This suggests more than accidental or passing similarities between the two traditions and indicates that the Jewish author of the Testament of Abraham actively and unabashedly incorporated Egyptian mythological elements into his own work.

Further evidence of Jews utilizing Egyptian literary and mythological material can be seen in the appropriation of elements of the Demotic tale of Setne Khamwas. This story is divided into two main parts and revolves around the life of Setne Khamwas, a son of Ramesses II and high priest of Ptah at Memphis. The second part of the story, preserved on a Roman-period Demotic papyrus (Papyrus British Museum 604), includes an account of Setne’s travels to the underworld. While there, Setne, in the company of his son, witnesses the judgment of the dead, including the ironic outcome of a rich and honored man in mortality being tortured for his sins and a poor beggar in mortality being exalted by Osiris’ side for his good deeds.

Si-Osire walked out in front of him and said: “My father Setne, did you not see that rich man clothed in a garment of royal linen, standing near the spot where Osiris is? He is the poor man whom you saw being carried to Memphis with no one walking behind him and wrapped in a mat. They brought him to the netherworld. They weighed his misdeeds against the good deeds he had done on earth. They found his good deeds more numerous than his misdeeds in relation to his lifespan, which Thoth had assigned him in writing, and in relation to his luck on earth. It was ordered by Osiris to give the burial equipment of that rich man, whom you saw being carried out from Memphis with great honors, to this poor man, and to place him among the noble spirits, as a man of god who serves Sokar-Osiris and stands near the spot where Osiris is.

“That rich man whom you saw: they took him to the netherworld. They weighed his misdeeds against his good deeds. They found his misdeeds more numerous than the good deeds he had done on earth. It was ordered to imprison him in the netherworld. He is [the man whom you saw] with the pivot of the door of the netherworld fixed in his right eye, so that it opens and shuts on his eye, and his mouth is open in great lamentation.”


107. Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature, 140–41.
Since the pioneering work of Hugo Greßmann, several scholars have noted the striking parallels between this scene and Jesus’s parable of Lazarus and the rich man as recorded in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 16:19–31) and have argued for a Jewish borrowing and adaptation of the Egyptian material. Lichtheim introduces Setne Khamwas by commenting on the “genuinely Egyptian motifs” of the nobleman who is tortured in the netherworld while the poor man is deified in the afterlife. These motifs, she insists, “formed the basis for the parable of Jesus in Luke 16:19–31, and for the related Jewish legends, preserved in many variants in Talmudic and medieval Jewish sources.” Grobel has further explored the parallels between the two traditions. He notes how Lazarus being exalted in “the bosom of Abraham” in Luke’s retelling of the parable is very likely a Jewish refashioning of the imagery in Setne Khamwas of the poor beggar being found exalted by the throne of Osiris. “Abraham’ must be a Jewish substitute for the pagan god Osiris,” Grobel concludes. “He is the very seat of divine authority” in the parable, “for he was originally the lord of Amnte, Osiris.” Even the name Lazarus itself, Grobel posits, is the Greek (Lazaros) version of the Hebrew-Aramaic “God-helped-(him)” (ʾel-ʿazar), which “points back toward an Egyptian original with similar meaning: ‘Osiris-helps-him’, for instance.”

This is not, apparently, the only instance of the biblical figure Abraham being syncretized with Osiris in the Greco-Roman period. As explained by Gee, a funerary formula found on several mummy labels, grave stelae, funerary texts, and temple graffiti was syncretized with biblical figures in its later versions in Greek and Coptic. The short Demotic version of the formula reads, “May his soul live in the presence of Osiris-Sokar the great god, the lord of Abydos.” In its re-appropriated and reinterpreted Judeo-Christian rendering in Greek, however, the formula reads, “Rest his soul in the bosom of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob,” with an equivalent reading in Coptic. This would appear to strengthen the

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109. Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature, 126; see also Ritner, “Adventures of Setna and Si-Osire (Setna II),” 471.
111. Grobel, “... Whose Name Was Neves,” 380.
112. Grobel, “... Whose Name Was Neves,” 381.
contention that the popular Jewish parable enshrined in Luke’s gospel
drew inspiration from earlier Egyptian sources.

The Book of Abraham in Greco-Roman Egypt

From this we detect a clear trend—beginning in the Persian Period with
Aramaic funerary inscriptions and continuing on into the Greco-Roman
period with literary and religious syncretism—of cultural exchange and
innovation between Egyptians and Jews. Not only did Jews live and thrive
in Egypt during this time, but they actively participated in the broader
cultural discourse that included exchanging ideas about God, the after-
life, and related theological topics. It is this historical background that
may provide an illuminating context for the transmission of the Book of
Abraham and provide a plausible scenario for how and why an Egyptian
priest from Thebes may have obtained or created his own copy of Abra-
ham’s writings.114

To do this, we first need to review what we know about the ancient
owners of the papyri that eventually came into the possession of Joseph
Smith; specifically, the ancient owner of the text known as the Book of
Breathings. These papyri, conventionally labeled Joseph Smith Papyri
I+XI+X,115 constitute what the ancient Egyptians called the Document
of Breathing Made by Isis for Her Brother Osiris (commonly called the
Book of Breathings today).116 The copy of the Book of Breathings that
was acquired by Joseph Smith anciently belonged to a man named Hor
(or Horos in Greek) who was part of a priestly family from Ptolemaic
Thebes.117 We know quite a bit about Hor and his occupation as a priest,

114. This is, once again, assuming that an ancient copy was in fact transmitted down
to the Ptolemaic period.

115. Following the numbering for the papyri used in Jay M. Todd, “New Light on
Joseph Smith’s Egyptian Papyri: Additional Fragment Disclosed,” Improvement Era (Feb-
ruary 1968), 40–49.

116. François-René Herbin, Books of Breathing and Related Texts, vol. 4, Catalogue of
the Books of the Dead and Other Religious Texts in the British Museum (London: Brit-
is the meaning of št n snsn and proposes that the title of the text should be “Letters of
Fellowship” instead. This suggestion, however, has received pushback from Foy David
Scalf III, “Passports to Eternity: Formulaic Demotic Funerary Texts and the Final Phase
of Egyptian Funerary Literature in Roman Egypt” (PhD diss., University of Chicago,
2014), 19–27. See also the discussions in Marc Coenen, “Books of Breathings: More Than
a Terminological Question?,” Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica 26 (1995): 29–38; Nibley,
Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri, 95–130.

117. Gee, Introduction to the Book of Abraham, 59; compare Marc Coenen, “The Dat-
ing of the Papyri Joseph Smith I, X, and XI and Min Who Massacres His Enemies,” in
including his genealogy and the various roles he served as a member of the Theban priesthood.\footnote{118}{Coenen, “Horos, Prophet of Min”; Gee, “History of a Theban Priesthood”; Gee, \textit{Introduction to the Book of Abraham}, 57–72.} From his titles as preserved in the first column of text in P. Joseph Smith I,\footnote{119}{See image at “Fragment of Book of Breathing for Horos–A, between 238 and circa 153 BC,” Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/fragment-of-book-of-breathing-for-horos-a-between-238-and-circa-153-bc/1.} for example, we know he was both a “priest [or prophet] of Amon-Re, king of the gods,” as well as a “priest [or prophet] of Min, who massacres his enemies.”\footnote{120}{Rhodes, \textit{Hor Book of Breathings}, 21. The Egyptian term \textit{hm nṯr} means literally “god’s servant.” It is typically (though not always) translated as “priest” by Egyptologists today but is attested as being rendered \textit{prophētēs} (“prophet”) during the Greco-Roman Period. Both words capture an aspect of what it meant anciently to be a \textit{hm nṯr}, and so we have opted to follow the more common Egyptological nomenclature while also alerting our readers to this added nuance. See the discussion in John Gee, “Prophets, Initiation and the Egyptian Temple,” \textit{Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities} 31 (2004): 97–107; Gee, \textit{Introduction to the Book of Abraham}, 58; compare Coenen, “Horos, Prophet of Min.”} In both of these capacities Hor participated in execration rituals wherein he symbolically slaughtered the enemies of Egypt,\footnote{121}{John Gee, “Execration Rituals in Various Temples,” in \textit{8. Ägyptologische Tempeltagung: Interconnections between Temples}, ed. Monika Dolińska and Horst Beinlich (Wiesbaden, Ger.: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 67–80.} among other duties, and thus “had a professional interest” in what we might today call “human sacrifice” (or, more properly, ritual violence).\footnote{122}{John Gee, “Some Puzzles from the Joseph Smith Papyri,” \textit{FARMS Review} 20, no. 1 (2008): 128. Scholars today typically eschew the terminology “human sacrifice” both to avoid the pejorative connotations association with the phrase and to be more semantically precise. See the discussion in Kerry Muhlestein, \textit{Violence in the Service of Order: The Religious Framework for Sanctioned Killing in Ancient Egypt} (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2011), 5–8.} He was also a priest or prophet

of the deity “Khonsu, who is powerful in Thebes” (or Chespisichis in Greek). In this capacity Hor was “closely connected with the cult of Khonsu at Karnak” and attended to a god who was something of, among other things, a savior deity with miraculous powers of deliverance over evil and death.

To summarize, the Egyptian priest Hor lived in Thebes when there was a substantial Jewish population and an environment of transethnic cultural sharing. As a priest living in one of the major cult centers of ancient Egypt during the high point of Jewish presence and influence in Thebes, Hor would have enjoyed a cosmopolitan lifestyle and indeed “would have been highly educated, literate, and likely conversant in several languages; he also would have had access to the great libraries of the temples in Thebes.” The corpus of magical papyri from Thebes discussed above confirms that the city was a hotbed for religious syncretism and exchange during the Greco-Roman period, a point that is highly significant for our present theory about the transmission of the Book of Abraham. Hor was specifically interested in things having to do with ritual violence. He also served in functions that would have sparked an interest in creation, divine protection, and deliverance.

In short, Hor was in an occupation that may have made him interested in the very things the Book of Abraham speaks about and that may have put him in a position to encounter biblical and extrabiblical Jewish writings. What we know about Hor’s specific religious interests (the temple, ritual violence, and the veneration of a savior deity) indicates that a text like the Book of Abraham could very well have attracted his attention. With the evidence arrayed above for the presence of Jews throughout Egypt who were composing and transmitting their religious texts and traditions into the country and participating in

multiethnic exchange, we can posit a highly plausible route of transmission for a copy of the Book of Abraham into ancient Thebes that could have reached him. To be clear, this does not prove that Hor had a copy of the Book of Abraham in his possession. It does, however, reinforce the point that “if any ancient Egyptians were in a position to know about Abraham” or have access to a text like the Book of Abraham, “it was the Theban priests,” including Hor, the owner of P. Joseph Smith I+XI+X.\textsuperscript{127}

Conclusion

More could be said about many of the issues raised in this paper. For instance, it remains to be more fully explored how early Christianity’s first wave of converts (both Jewish and non-Jewish) from Egypt syncretized native Egyptian elements with their new faith of Christ.\textsuperscript{128} For now the following summary will suffice:

1. Archaeological and textual evidence conclusively demonstrates that ancient Jews migrated into Egypt beginning as early as the eighth century BC.

2. In addition to founding new communities complete with civic and religious structures (including temples), these Jews not only brought with them their religious texts (including the writings of the Hebrew Bible) but also composed and disseminated new literary works while residing in Egypt. While scholars continue to refine our understanding of the cultural identity of “diaspora” Jews during the Hellenistic Period, it is clear that Egyptian Jews contributed to their new home and culture.\textsuperscript{129} This evidence provides a plausible route of transmission for a copy of Abraham’s writings into Egypt.

3. Many Egyptianized or Hellenized Jews of the Greco-Roman period maintained their religious heritage and identity while also not

\textsuperscript{127} Gee, Introduction to the Book of Abraham, 61.


\textsuperscript{129} Joseph M. Modrzejewski, “How to Be a Jew in Hellenistic Egypt?,” in Diasporas in Antiquity, 65–92.
hesitating to freely syncretize Greek and Egyptian elements with their own religious traditions and texts. “For at least four centuries, from the beginning of the third century BCE to the beginning of the second century CE, the [Jewish] Diaspora in Egypt . . . succeeded in creating a new current within Judaism and in establishing a dialogue with ‘pagan’ culture.”

4. On the other side of the equation, the polytheistic Egyptians, for whom “the very concept of a false god was alien,” likewise imported Greek and Jewish religious elements into their own religious structures. They willingly incorporated Jewish religious figures including Moses and Abraham into their magical practices and participated in the broader cultural exchange that occurred at the time.

5. What we know about Hor, the ancient owner of P. Joseph Smith I+XI+X (the Book of Breathings), and his occupation as a priest at Thebes (a city that saw cross-cultural exchange during the Greco-Roman period) could very plausibly account for why he might have been interested in a copy of a text like the Book of Abraham.

6. The Book of Abraham itself would have been right at home in the literary and religious milieu of Greco-Roman Egypt. Its narrative about the near-sacrifice and deliverance of Abraham, its temple and priesthood themes, its grand cosmology and Creation narrative, and its depiction of Abraham as teaching astronomy to the Egyptians all find striking parallels in Hellenistic Jewish, pagan, and later Christian and Islamic works. The affinity with this

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130. Dunand and Zivie-Coche, Gods and Men in Egypt, 259.
extracanonical corpus provides a plausible ancient Sitz im Leben or social setting for the text in the time period of the creation of the Joseph Smith Papyri.\textsuperscript{133}

Taken together, the evidence above provides a plausible scenario for how a copy of a text “purporting to be the writings of Abraham, while he was in Egypt,”\textsuperscript{134} could have been transmitted into Greco-Roman Egypt by a group of Jewish émigrés and eventually coming into the possession of an Egyptian priest. Many more questions remain to be explored with the tools of critical scholarship when it comes to the origin and nature of the text. When it comes to explaining how an ancient copy of the Book of Abraham could have been transmitted into Egypt, we can, with a fair amount of confidence, position ourselves atop this evidence as a solid starting place to launch future investigations.

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\textsuperscript{134} “Book of Abraham,” Times and Seasons 3, no. 9 (March 1, 1842): 704.
Oracles of God
A New Digital Collection of Significant Prophetic Documents

Ryan S. Gardner

When President Russell M. Nelson read the “Restoration of the Fulness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ: A Bicentennial Proclamation” at the 190th annual general conference on April 5, 2020, several articles appeared explaining this newest proclamation in the context of its predecessors. These articles revealed that these historically and spiritually valuable documents were not readily accessible in a single digital repository.

A new online digital collection, entitled “Oracles of God,” has been created in the special collections at the David O. McKay Library at Brigham Young University–Idaho, making it possible for people to study some of the most significant documents from the First Presidency

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2. The collection can be found at https://archives.byui.edu/s/public/page/oracles-of-god.
and the Quorum of Twelve Apostles. The initial launch of this collection features twenty-four documents, including declarations, proclamations, statements, expositions, and epistles. Several criteria were used to determine which documents to include in this collection.

First, the document had to be noncanonical, meaning that it was not included in the standard works of the Church. Resources on the Church’s website or in the Gospel Library app already provide members of the Church with helpful background and commentary on these revelations.

Second, the document had to be disseminated by the First Presidency or the Quorum of Twelve Apostles (or both). Documents issued by the “unanimous voice” of these two quorums were given highest priority. Documents whose authorship could not be definitively ascertained were not considered.  

Third, the document had to be public-facing. Documents addressed to the entire Church membership or the world at large were given highest priority. In instances where a document was originally issued to a specific group of people for public use and later became used more broadly, it was considered.

Fourth, it had to be demonstrable that the document has had a significant impact on Church doctrine or practice. This was demonstrated either by how widely the document was distributed at the time of its original issuance or how often it has been reprinted over time, or both. Documents that were widely distributed when they were first issued and have been republished many times since were given highest priority. Other documents may have been included in this collection because they were distributed widely at the time, even though they may not have had a wide distribution since. In addition to merely being published widely, a document may also have been considered for inclusion because of the impact of the doctrines and principles it conveys.

3. For example, a series of articles in *The Evening and Morning Star* in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1833–34 have been deemed influential by many Church historians and scholars. But because the articles were issued by “the elders of the Church at Kirtland” and the editors at the Joseph Smith Papers Project determined they were written by “JS and other leaders in Kirtland,” this document was not included (see “Letter to the Church, circa February 1834,” Joseph Smith Papers, accessed August 6, 2021, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-the-church-circa-february-1834/2).

While these criteria were helpful in identifying key documents to include in the collection, considerations for what could realistically be prepared for the launch of the website also contributed to what constitutes the collection’s initial contents. The “Oracles of God” website does not contain all documents that meet or could be considered for inclusion based on these criteria. But it is a robust beginning.

The digital collection is organized into categories: declarations, proclamations, statements, expositions, and epistles. Each of the twenty-four documents has its own landing page within one of these groups. Underneath the title of the document is a headline image that links to a featured version of the document. The Introduction contains an image of the signatories of that document, as well as some helpful background information that gives some context for the document. The Commentary and Impact section provides brief introductions to additional resources to show how this document has been influential in the Church. Finally, the Extant Documents section provides links to as many electronic copies of the document as could be found in various venues, such as ChurchofJesusChrist.org or the Church History Library’s digital collection. Because this is intended to be an online resource, the vast majority of footnotes take readers to information that is electronically accessible to the public. The project is deeply indebted and grateful to all those who have provided these resources, which have enabled us to bring together such a tremendous amount of information that will enrich readers’ understanding of and appreciation for these prophetic documents.

In June 1829, nearly a year before the Church was organized, the Lord explained that the revelations given through his servants were “not of men nor of man, but of me. . . . For it is my voice which speaketh them unto you; for they are given by my Spirit unto you. . . . Wherefore, you can testify that you have heard my voice, and know my words” (D&C 18:34–36). Those who participated in the creation of this unique digital collection had this experience with these documents. It is hoped that all those who engage with the word of the Lord given through his servants in these documents will have the same experience and receive the spiritual stability promised by the Lord in 1841: “And if my people will hearken unto my voice, and unto the voice of my servants whom I have appointed to lead my people, behold, verily I say unto you, they shall not be moved out of their place” (D&C 124:45).

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The River Conception’s Mouth

Under her linea nigra the abdominals have parted, and the couple has finally neared the river’s estuary, a lowland of swirling impatience and rising pain.

Anxious to be done, to enter the full current and the pushing through, he realizes his wife is a center of commerce, has always been her own cottage industry, while he, roamer and solicitor, is simply a surplus warehouse. The notion mutes the world. Beside him, propped in her hospital bed, awaiting the next contraction, a labor force, an executive, a nearly complete economy watches over her manufacturing: a girl, another mortal consortium. He feels a swell press his conscience. Is he objectifying his wife? His daughter not even born? One day, he knows, he’ll reckon his guilt further, but here, in the mish-mash that he is, the man wants to tell you, daughter, how we entered the river’s mouth, your mother bearing down on the rudder against the sudden constantly choppy water as she also heaved the oars, while your father, mere passenger, newly conscious powerless consort, whooped, cheered. Doubled-up, a mechanical wail grinding from her throat, your mother crowned you with the jeweled halo of herself—a halo that tore so that your face, messy with vernix, could puncture the air.

—David Thacker

This poem won first place in the 2022 Clinton F. Larson Poetry Contest, sponsored by BYU Studies.
Because twenty-first-century public discourse in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints seems to feature the language of *covenant* more and more often, it may be helpful to step back and reexamine the scriptural and historical backgrounds for covenant theology and terminology. When the Restoration took shape in the first half of the nineteenth century, it was dependent primarily on the language of the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible and contemporary Protestant teachings for a context in which to interpret the language of Joseph Smith’s revelations and the Book of Mormon. After two centuries of modern linguistic and historical investigation, we now know that both the KJV and Protestant teachings were limited and even problematic as guides to the ancient cultures that produced the earliest scriptural references to biblical covenants that would have shaped the understandings of the first authors of the Book of Mormon.

Joseph Smith’s original translation of the Book of Mormon uses some form of the word *covenant* 153 times, and his revelations as collected in the Doctrine and Covenants include 94 instances. This compares with a meager 26 occurrences in the KJV New Testament. In contrast, the Hebrew Bible features 270 occurrences of *berit*, the Hebrew word usually translated as “covenant.”

Noah Webster’s 1828 dictionary of American usage leads off in its offering on *covenant* with the legal concept of “a mutual consent or agreement of two or more persons, to do or to forbear some act or thing; a *contract*; stipulation”¹—a definition once echoed by Joseph Smith

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himself. 2 Noah Webster's dictionary then goes on to distinguish three contemporary Protestant theological conceptions—the covenants of works, of redemption, and of grace—none of which show up in the phrasing of Joseph Smith's revelations or the Book of Mormon. In its opening pages, Book of Mormon prophecies warn its readers that the modern Gentiles would be hampered in their faith because of apostate Christian churches that “have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away” (1 Ne. 13:26, emphasis added). 3

In this paper I will briefly review the ups and downs in the career of the covenant concept in key Christian traditions before turning to a more in-depth review of theological and scholarly efforts to understand the Israelite concept of divine covenant before the Babylonian exile as it could have been understood and appreciated by Lehi and Nephi during their lives and education in ancient Jerusalem. Over the last two centuries, scholarly efforts in history, linguistics, theology, the Hebrew Bible, and even anthropology have contributed to a sometimes contentious but continually enlightening expansion of our understanding of the divine covenant in the religion and culture of ancient Israel. I will review these developments and point out their most promising contributions. In the end, I will explain why the 1998 approach of Bible scholar Frank Moore Cross seems to explicate the pre-exilic Israelite conception of covenant better than other alternatives by pointing to its origins in the kinship associations that provided moral and legal structure for the desert tribes of the ancient Near East (hereafter ANE). I will then test that conception against the teachings of the Nephite prophets and demonstrate the ways in which it can clarify and enrich those teachings for a modern reader.

The Evolution of Covenant Theology in the Christian Tradition

Students of the New Testament and the history of Christianity generally recognize that the concept of divine covenants seems to play a larger role in Christian thinking than the relatively limited appearances in the New

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2. “It requires two parties to make a covenant and those two parties must be agreed or no covenant can be made.” Joseph Smith, in Documents, Volume 2: July 1831–January 1833, ed. Matthew C. Godfrey and others, Joseph Smith Papers (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2013), 351.

3. In this paper, quotations from the Book of Mormon follow Royal Skousen, The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009). When italics are used in Book of Mormon quotations, they are added to draw the reader’s attention to key words in a quoted passage.
Testament would portend. The Greek word *diatheke* lies behind almost every occurrence of *covenant* in English translations of the New Testament. This reflects the pattern of the Septuagint, which provided New Testament writers with a Greek terminology for Old Testament concepts. The Hebrew term *berit* is usually translated as *covenant* in modern English editions and is translated as *diatheke* 270 times in the Septuagint. Scholarly agreement and confidence about the origins and meaning of the Greek term far exceed that of the Hebrew predecessor. That debate will be reviewed later.

**Covenant Language in the New Testament**

In his authoritative article on *diatheke* in the Greek Bible, Johannes Behm concluded that this Greek legal term meaning *testament* was infused with added religious meaning in its biblical usage, making *covenant* an ordinance or statute of God designed to implement his saving purposes for man. "Neither ‘covenant’ nor ‘testament’ reproduces the true religious sense of the religious term [*diatheke*] in the Greek Bible. [*Diatheke*] is from first to last the ‘disposition’ of God, the mighty declaration of the sovereign will of God in history, by which He orders the relation between Himself and men according to His own saving purpose, and which carries with it the authoritative divine ordering, the one order of things which is in accordance with it.”

Christian interpreters have often portrayed Jeremiah’s “new covenant” as something different than the recognized covenants of Abraham, Moses, and others in the Old Testament. When Jesus told his disciples, “This cup is the *new covenant* in my blood, which is poured out for you” (NIV, Luke 22:20, emphasis added), he reminds them of Jeremiah’s prophecy of a coming time when the Lord would “make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel,” saying “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people” (NIV, Jer. 31:31, 33, emphasis added).

Tiberius Rata argues persuasively that this is “not a brand new covenant, but it is in many respects the renewal of the old Mosaic covenant,” and that it “inherits the promises of the Abrahamic and the Davidic

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5. This statement in Luke 22:20 is the only place where the Greek New Testament uses *diatheke* as a translation for something Jesus probably said in Aramaic.
covenants. . . . [It] does not make null the other covenants, but it reaffirms them.” Because covenant is the Lord’s chosen means to relate himself to his people and because they have “failed to obey the first one,” a new one is needed. It is the same covenant in the sense that it comes again from the Lord because of his “love, grace, and mercy.” The difference is that this new covenant is not written on parchment or stone but on the hearts of his people through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In his analysis, Rata echoes Clement of Alexandria, who preached the harmony of the two testaments, referring to them as one “eternal covenant.”

Like Rata, Johannes Behm focused on the continuity of the new covenant with the old. The principal difference he finds between the two is “in the step from prophecy to fulfillment.” Even though the New Testament attributes only this one mention of διαθήκη to Jesus, Behm argues that it provides the connection and perspective that undergirds the various interpretations of the new covenant promoted by both Paul and the author of Hebrews, both of whom assigned “to the concept of the διαθήκη [diatheke] a central position in their theological understanding of history” because the covenant expressed “the mighty declaration of the sovereign will of God in history.”

From the time of Jesus, Christian converts were taught to engage this new covenant with the Lord through repentance and baptism. I have summarized this relatively new understanding among scholars in a previous essay.


8. Behm, “Greek Term διαθήκη,” 134. For the full development of his interpretations of covenant arguments in Paul’s letters, in Hebrews, and in the Gospels, see the entire dictionary article in pages 124–34. Of course, it should be remembered that Jesus would not likely have used the Greek term. There must necessarily remain some uncertainty about what he may actually have said on this topic.

Ben Witherington . . . follows Augustine and sees in baptism as understood in the New Testament church what is essentially a symbol, “a sign of a covenant,” or a pledge to live the Christian life, combined with an appeal to God to bless one to be able to keep that pledge.¹⁰ This conclusion, reached after his exhaustive review of previous scholarly literature on the topic, . . . echoes earlier conclusions reached by François Bovon that, for the earliest Christians, baptism was a sign of the covenant.¹¹ This understanding of baptism reaches back into the New Testament. Ferguson includes 1 Peter 3:20–21 in his survey of New Testament texts and explains why he interprets this difficult passage to say that “baptism is a pledge of loyalty to God; it proceeds from a motive of inner purity and is not an act of external cleansing.”¹² Ferguson relies on John H. Elliott’s recent translation: “Baptism now saves you too—not [as] a removal of filth from the body, but [as] a pledge to God of a sound mindfulness of God’s will.” (emphasis added)¹³

This single New Testament passage has been identified by one prominent commentator as “the nearest approach to a definition [of baptism] that the New Testament affords.”¹⁴ It would not be long before baptism and the other recognized rituals or ordinances of the Christian church would be relabeled as “sacraments,” and their basic connection to the covenant would be transformed.¹⁵

¹¹. François Bovon, “Baptism in the Ancient Church,” Sewanee Theological Review 42 (1999): 429–38, an English translation of his 1973 French original. This fits easily with a long line of pious Bible commentaries, for example, Joseph Benson, Commentary on the New Testament, 5 vols. (London: n.p., 1811–18), who understood John to be enjoining penitent persons to be baptized “as a testimony, on their part, of the sincerity of their repentance” or to be witnessing that they had received the forgiveness of sins, and so forth.
The Decline of Covenant in Early Christian Theology

In an earlier paper, I have documented the transformation that occurred in the second and third centuries AD, during which covenant-based rituals and ordinances became “sacraments.” The term sacramentum was most likely borrowed from the Roman army’s practice of extracting a loyalty oath from conscripts. Gary A. Heron says, “That the early Church recognized the covenantal context of the Lord’s Supper and regarded it as a sort of ‘pledge renewal’ or swearing ceremony instead of as a cultic sacrifice is supported by its designation of the Lord’s Supper as a sacramentum.”

While one can see a connection between covenants and such loyalty oaths, the doctrine of sacraments that grew up soon distanced itself from the requirement of a public commitment from the recipient of the sacrament. This allowed the development of practices such as the baptism of infants. The mature doctrine of sacraments proposed by Peter Lombard and embraced officially in the Council of Trent (1545–1563) finally eliminated any requirement of worthiness of the priest administering the sacrament or of faithfulness on the part of the recipient. Rather, the sacrament was understood to be a means by which God’s grace could flow through the priest administrator directly to the recipient without any requirement of covenantal engagement or compliance.

Modern scholars focused on biblical covenant ideas have noted the relative de-emphasis on covenant theology in both the New Testament and the early Christian movement. George Mendenhall pointed to possible political reasons: “The covenant for Judaism meant the Mosaic law, and for the Roman Empire a covenant meant an illegal secret society. This two-sided conflict made it nearly impossible for early Christianity to use the term meaningfully.” I’ve said elsewhere that “Christians

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18. For a detailed account and documentation of these developments, see Bryson L. Bachman and Noel B. Reynolds, “Traditional Christian Sacraments and Covenants,” in Prelude to the Restoration: From Apostasy to the Restored Church, The 33rd Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004), 24–39.
obviously had good reason to avoid association with either the Jews or with illegal secret societies. Emphasis on Christ’s gospel as a testament or as a unilateral gift was one manner in which Christians could distinguish themselves from law-bound Jews and avoid the appearance of a community based on clandestine pacts.\(^{20}\)

Daniel Elazar argued that the concept of covenant may have presented “practical and theological problems” in the early Christian era when the focus was on establishing orthodoxy and unity. According to Elazar, the church subsequently “de-emphasized covenant, especially after it believed that it had successfully superseded the Mosaic covenant and transferred the authority of the Davidic covenant to Jesus. After Augustine (354–430), the Church paid little attention to covenant and, even though the Eucharist remained central to the Christian liturgy, it ceased to be a truly common meal and its covenantal dimension was overshadowed by other features and meanings attributed to the Last Supper.”\(^{21}\)

Some elements of the Reformation did react against these developments, as Swiss theologians Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531) and Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575) attempted to resurrect a covenant theology for Christianity. While their efforts were not successful overall, they did produce a measurable increase in covenant discourse among Protestant theologians that continues to this day to express early divergences of approach: “When Luther called the sacrament a covenantal seal, he meant that baptism visibly ratified and guaranteed God’s promises, as a royal seal authenticated a government document on which it was inscribed. Only secondarily was baptism a pledge of obedience by men. For Zwingli, however, the sacrament was primarily ‘a covenant sign which indicates that all those who receive it are willing to amend their lives and to follow Christ.”\(^{22}\)

Heinrich Bullinger became the leading architect of the Protestant covenant theology emerging from the sixteenth century and was noted for his unique emphasis on the bilateral or mutual character of covenants. For him, “baptism is nothing other than an initial sign of the

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people of God, which binds us to Christ and to an irreproachable life. Secondly, its effect is to keep us for Christ in the covenant or in life pleasing to God.”

Like Clement of Alexandria, Bullinger sought to establish the harmony of the two testaments by developing a Christian theology of covenants that would match the more obvious covenantal approach of ancient Israelite religion. The Book of Mormon prophets also arose from an Old Testament background to which this paper now turns.

The Concept of Divine Covenant in the Hebrew Bible

Studies of covenant theology in Christian times have one significant advantage—we have direct access to the texts produced by participants in the development of those theologies. But the situation is very different for studies of the development of covenant theology in Old Testament times. Since the mid-nineteenth century, scholars have worked their way through a succession of theories and methodologies, several of which are still current. But we have no ancient writings dedicated openly to the exploration or defense of covenant theologies on which we can draw. Rather, scholars have the Hebrew Bible and other texts from the same historical period which include covenant references, but without explanations that would answer all our questions about ancient practices and beliefs.

A huge literature has grown up as scholars have attempted to understand ancient covenant concepts, to relate them to their historical and cultural times, and even to relate them to modern theological understandings. Fortunately, the last few decades have produced a number of excellent summaries and evaluations of this growing literature—which can facilitate the task of this paper. For the benefit of readers who may not be familiar with these scholarly debates, I will offer first a summary of the most important treatments of ancient covenant understandings, indicate their respective strengths and weaknesses, and then use the best of these to launch a parallel investigation of covenant concepts portrayed in the Book of Mormon.


Developments in Old Testament Studies of Covenant

Traditional Jewish and Christian approaches to interpreting the Old Testament, shaped by highly educated rabbis and pastors, were disrupted almost violently by Julius Wellhausen beginning in 1878 with the publication of his first German work, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*. Wellhausen's work has had enormous influence on the assumptions, methodology, and interpretations of generations of Old Testament scholars ever since. Of particular relevance to the present paper, he effectively established as basic premises for most subsequent efforts the ideas that the book of Deuteronomy—with the Mosaic covenant it presents—was written about 621 BC and that the Hebrew word for covenant (*berit*) has no older origins. The result of these claims was to portray the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and other covenants underlying Israelite religion as late inventions, fashioned to support changing theologies and ideological objectives. Further, the biblical texts were reanalyzed as amalgamations of multiple hypothesized earlier texts that often contributed competing versions of historical events and theologies. It is a testimony to the persuasiveness of his arguments and evidence that many of his key theses are still assumed in the work of a majority of Bible scholars today.

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25. A variety of English reprints are available. See, for example, Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2003).

26. Lothar Perlitt dramatically reinforced the view that biblical *berit* was a late invention of the Deuteronomists and went even further by restricting its meaning to the obligations Yahweh held toward Israel and the obligations the Israelites held toward their god in L. Perlitt, *Bundestheologie im Alten Testament* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969). A powerful summary and critique of Perlitt was provided in McCarthy's review essay: Dennis J. McCarthy, "*berit* in Old Testament History and Theology," *Biblica* 53 (1972): 110–21.

27. The claim that a handful of earlier mentions of *berit* in the writings of eighth-century prophets were added by later editors is challenged by scholars like Duane Andre Smith, who has pointed out how well-developed notions of covenant relating to adoption and marriage also occur in Hosea, but without mention of the word *berit*. See Duane Andre Smith, "Kinship and Covenant in Hosea 11:1–4," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 16, no. 1 (1994): 41–53.

But there has also been a significant series of efforts to counter that approach and its undermining of the history of covenant-based religion that the Bible we read today claims for itself. While there are a number of useful summaries of this scholarly controversy available, I will only mention a few highlights.\(^{29}\) The persistence of the etymological question about the original meanings of berit in the Hebrew Bible may be the best place to start.\(^{30}\)

**Etymological Studies**

Following Wellhausen, the covenant concept itself was already becoming controversial and was understood quite differently in the competing interpretive traditions. No small part of the difficulty stemmed from the fact that for a variety of reasons the Hebrew term berit, which is usually translated as covenant, firmly resisted the most competent efforts of linguists and biblical theologians to ascertain its original meaning in the 


\(^{30}\) An earlier systematic review of the most significant scholarly efforts to identify the meaning of berit can be found in Daniel C. Lane, “The Meaning and Use of berith in the Old Testament,” (PhD diss.: Indiana University, 1974).
times of Abraham and his successors. At the root of their difficulties was the etymological challenge. In spite of the best efforts of numerous able scholars to find the origins of the word in ancient Hebrew or other contemporary languages, none of the leading proposals were convincing to modern linguists. Oxford’s biblical semanticist, James Barr, provided a helpful critical review of the strongest proposals, in which he showed why none of them is plausible. He concluded that *berit* is an unusual word (it has no Hebrew synonyms and no plural forms) that has successfully resisted all the analytical strategies of modern linguistics and should be regarded as a Hebrew root from antiquity. It had no known historical derivation and “to the Hebrew speaker *berit* was a word fully opaque, a *brutum factum* of his language, a simply arbitrary sign.”

Kenneth Kitchen took up Barr’s challenge and within two years had published his findings of multiple early appearances of *berit* in relevant ANE contexts. In a later publication, Kitchen listed his three main discoveries: “West-Semitic *brt* occurring as a loanword in Egypt in the thirteenth/twelfth centuries BC, in Ugaritic in the thirteenth century BC, and in peripheral Akkadian (as a West-Semiticism) in Central Syria c. 1400 BC.” After documenting each of these, he concluded that

this group of first-hand data exhibits the robust and well-established use of *berit* in all spheres (religion/theology; social contexts; political realm) already, during the period c. 1400–1170 BC, the end-part of this period overlapping with the presence of Israel itself in Canaan from before 1207 BC onwards. This inescapable situation constitutes clear disproof that *berit* must wait until the eighth/seventh centuries BC to be used thus in West Semitic, Hebrew included. . . . Furthermore, the religious concept of covenant (linking man and deity) goes far back beyond

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31. For a convenient summary of these linguistic studies and the continuing uncertainty of their proposed solutions, see Davidson, “Covenant Ideology in Ancient Israel,” 324–25. Davidson’s paper provides a useful and evenhanded summary of the most significant approaches to biblical covenant that were proposed by scholars during the course of the twentieth century while identifying the strengths and weaknesses of each. The transliteration *berit* is based on the Hebrew original בְּרִית (covenant), which can also be transliterated as *bərit, b’rit, b’rith, bərith, or berith*.


even 1400 BC into the third millennium BC, being attested between king Uru’nimga (‘Urukagina’) of Lagash and his deity Ningirsu.\textsuperscript{36}

Kitchen’s earlier paper had also demonstrated the continuity between biblical Hebrew usage of related terms in the contemporary Levant. In West-Semitic, \textit{berit} ultimately meant “bond.” As in the Old Testament, words for bonds or oaths are regularly linked to verbs meaning to cut, enter, give, or establish a covenant or treaty and “are solidly attested for Phoenician, Aramaic, and Greek, besides Hebrew.”\textsuperscript{37}

\textbf{Covenants Are Not Contracts}

While some modern interpreters—including some LDS writers\textsuperscript{38}—have designated biblical covenants as contracts, that seems to be clearly inappropriate. “While a covenant certainly has an important legal aspect, the English term ‘contract’ conveys \textit{only} the legal aspect to the exclusion of its social, familial, liturgical, and other dimensions.”\textsuperscript{39} In his 1933 essay on \textit{hesed}, Lofthouse explained why that covenant relationship is so hard for moderns to grasp: “We live in a world of contract, and not (to use the convenient distinction made by Sir Henry Maine) of status. With us, 

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{36} Kitchen, “The Fall and Rise of Covenant,” 122–23.
  \item \textsuperscript{37} “Egypt, Ugarit, Qatna, and Covenant,” 461. While never formally published, Moshe Weinfeld’s centenary paper refuting Wellhausen’s claims that “the main legal sections of the Pentateuch . . . and . . . the Priestly Code are in fact a reflection of post exilic Judaism and must therefore be considered a turning away from the prophetic religion” is available in a forty-seven-page mimeographed form in some academic libraries as “Report No. 14/79: Getting at the Roots of Wellhausen’s Understanding of the Law of Israel on the 100th Anniversary of the Prolegomena,” distributed in 1979 by the Institute for Advanced Studies of the Hebrew University, Mount Scopus, Jerusalem, Israel. This quotation is from page 1. For a brief response to Weinfeld’s critique, see the review by E. W. Nicholson in \textit{The Journal of Theological Studies} 34, no. 2 (1983): 560–61. See Yehezkel Kaufmann’s seven-volume effort to restate what the scholarly world could say positively after forty years of effective critique of Wellhausen and his followers in the historical criticism movement in Yehezkel Kaufmann, \textit{The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile}, trans. Moshe Greenberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).
  \item \textsuperscript{39} Hahn, \textit{Kinship by Covenant}, 8.
\end{itemize}
the cash nexus is supreme. And we do not associate the cash nexus with any feelings which we could express by ‘leal love.’ But the Hebrews, like most of the ancients, lived in a world of covenant, not of contract. It is true that they had only one word, brith, for the two English expressions. But it is still truer that they did not understand the idea of contract at all.”

As Dennis J. McCarthy points out, “covenant is not a contract.” Rather, “it is a pledged, personal commitment.” Here, he retracted his previous use of the analogy between contract and covenant, even though he had previously cautioned, “The Sinai covenant . . . is an affair of ritual more than contract. . . . More than a matter of agreement it is a question of kinship. Israel is not so much the vassal of Yahwe, as the analogy with the treaties would have it, but His family. And so the laws are not the terms of a contract but the conditions covering continued union in the family.”

McCarthy cited Gene Tucker’s 1965 paper on covenant and contract verbal forms as the reason for his new conclusion that covenants were not contracts. In his comprehensive study of these two recurring forms in ancient Israelite and related texts, Tucker reached several important conclusions and insights:

The formal differences between covenants and contracts emphasize the difference in Sitz im Leben between the two. The contract is an economic, legal agreement, a witnessed transaction which would either be committed to writing or solemnized before the assembled court. Covenants, being sworn agreements, did not require the apparatus of the court for their solemnization. Covenant forms then support what would have been suspected from their contents: The covenants in the OT do not stem from the sphere of commercial life.

One may conclude then that the covenant between Yahweh and Israel, like the treaties and the other covenants between human partners, was formulated on the analogy of the oath form rather than on the analogy of economic agreements. The covenant, based on a mutual promises oath between Yahweh and Israel, is then the pledge of the parties to loyalty. This pledge at the heart of the ideal covenant is expressed by

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40. Leal means to be loyal or true.
Jeremiah. Yahweh says: “I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer. xxxi 33).45

Tucker’s position was strongly supported by an independent line of inquiry published in a series of articles by other authors that culminated in a 1973 book by Ernst Kutsch. In his richly documented review of Kutsch’s monograph, Moshe Weinfeld endorsed and reinforced Kutsch’s “demonstration that the proper meaning of berit is not agreement but obligation or pledge.”46 Weinfeld cites several equivalent idioms in related languages that “express the notion of bond by pledge or oath”47 and points out that Numbers 30 begins with a statement of the same principle. “When a man vows a vow to the Lord or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth” (RSV Num. 30:1–2).48 This understanding also fits perfectly with Weinfeld’s own previous discovery that biblical terms for covenant concentrate around two semantic fields, one of which is “oath and commitment.”49 But, as Weinfeld goes on to demonstrate in this same review, Kutsch’s commitments to Wellhausen’s late dating for Deuteronomy and berit “cannot be accepted.”50

Twentieth-Century Interpretations

Once scholars had adjusted to the shock of Wellhausen’s arguments for locating the authorship of Deuteronomy in the late seventh century BC, they turned increasingly to canonical approaches to interpreting the Old Testament—that is, to interpretations that take the final text as it is as a formulation of its final authors and editors, without invoking hypothesized prior source materials as a guide to interpretation. One consequence of this gradual development was that by the middle of the

twentieth century the biblical notion of covenant had taken center stage for many leading students of the Bible.

Following such scholars as Walther Eichrodt, many increasingly recognized God’s covenant with Abraham as the principal unifying thread for the entire Bible.\(^{51}\) Referring to the work of Eichrodt and others who followed, David Noel Freedman affirmed that “the covenant principle is intrinsic to the biblical material and . . . it defines the relationship of God to his people. Further, the term ‘covenant’ itself was consciously applied by the Israelites to their relationship with Yahweh, from the earliest times.”\(^{52}\) Many scholars were also turning to the covenant concept to explain the early unity of the tribes of Israel:

> It is inconceivable . . . that there could have been, at that time, any other basis of solidarity than a covenant relationship. If so, then it follows inevitably that the covenant relationship between Israel and Yahweh which is inseparable from the historical solidarity of the tribes, is not merely a stage in the history of religious concepts, but was an event which had a definite historical setting and the most surprising historical consequences. The difficulty in the past has been in arriving at any concept of a covenant which would bind together the tribes and also adequately form a foundation for the normative conception that in this event Yahweh became the God of Israel.\(^{53}\)

**Hittite Treaties and Biblical Covenants**

The 1931 publication of a large collection of ancient Hittite treaties that would have been contemporary with Moses sparked one of the biggest discussions of biblical covenant.\(^{54}\) George Mendenhall was one of the first to comment on the similarities between these ANE treaties and the covenant establishment and renewal rituals described in Deuteronomy and Joshua.\(^{55}\) As Mendenhall enthusiastically demonstrated, viewing the

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Deuteronomic texts as take-offs on a standard fourteenth-century ANE formula would refute Wellhausen’s claim of a seventh-century date for the content and language of Deuteronomy and its focus on covenant in Israelite religion.

An explosion of studies followed in the 1960s and 1970s as scholars explored previously unconsidered features of ANE texts and the Hebrew Bible, and these studies had enormous impact on the scholarly views regarding the authenticity, dating, and theology of the biblical text. With the continuing assistance of Gary Herion, Mendenhall summarized in his Anchor Bible Dictionary article much of what had been learned as well as the continuing issues. But the battles were far from over. Dennis McCarthy responded with a powerful critique of Mendenhall and his associates, and by 1986, Nicholson published what many thought was an effective defense of Wellhausen’s original conclusions.

Another important contribution to this debate had come from Moshe Weinfeld when he demonstrated that the biblical covenants at issue were of a different genre than the international treaties of the ancient Hittites and others:

While the “treaty” constitutes an obligation of the vassal to his master, the suzerain, the “grant” constitutes an obligation of the master to his servant. In the “grant,” the curse is directed toward the one who will violate the rights of the king’s vassal, while in the treaty the curse is directed toward the vassal who will violate the rights of his king. In other words,

49–76. This paper was made universally available as a pamphlet when the Presbyterian Board of Colportage of Western Pennsylvania re-published it the following year.


57. See Dennis J. McCarthy, Treaty and Covenant (1963 and 1978). McCarthy occupied a middle ground by denying that the covenants in Deuteronomy copied the form of Hittite treaties and arguing that in composing Deuteronomy, unnamed theologians in Israel borrowed some of the language of the ubiquitous treaties as they reflected creatively on an ancient covenant tradition that went back at least to earlier prophets and even to the monarchy. McCarthy provides a brief outline of his critique of Mendenhall on pages 4–6 of both editions, but the entire volumes should be read as an assemblage of the evidence assumed in the critique.

58. Nicholson, God and His People.
the “grant” serves mainly to protect the rights of the servant, while the
treaty comes to protect the rights of the master. What is more, while
the grant is a reward for loyalty and good deeds already performed, the
treaty is an inducement for future loyalty. The covenant with Abraham,
and so the covenant with David, indeed belong to the grant type and
not to the vassal type. Like the royal grants in the ancient Near East so
also the covenants with Abraham and David are gifts bestowed upon
individuals who excelled in loyally serving their masters. Abraham is
promised the land because he obeyed God and followed his mandate
(Gen. XXVI, 5; cf. XXII, 16, 18) and similarly David was given the grace
of dynasty because he served God with truth, righteousness and loyalty
(I Kings III, 6; cf. IX, 4, XI, 4, 6, XIV, 8, XV, 3). 59

At this point in the debate, it would seem that Kenneth Kitchen and his
coauteur, Paul Lawrence, may have had the last word once again. The pre-
liminary studies Kitchen had been citing for decades finally culminated
in 2012 in the exhaustive study of a comprehensive collection of ANE law
codes, treaties, and covenants. 60 In their detailed analysis of over eighty
ancient texts, they were able to demonstrate powerfully that the Old Test-
tament covenant texts fit much better with both the form and the con-
tent of ANE texts of the fourteenth to twelfth centuries BC than with the
later eighth- to seventh-century texts as had been claimed by Wellhausen,
Nicholson, and others.

**Covenants Establish and Manage Kinship Relationships**

The debate about the origins and dating of biblical covenant texts lasted
over a century and could resurface in the future as other scholars take
the time to digest and possibly challenge the findings of Kitchen and
Lawrence. In the meantime, the conversation seems to have moved on,
aided by a different set of historical and anthropological insights. In an
article by Harvard’s distinguished Semiticist, Frank Moore Cross drew
heavily on anthropological kinship studies to refocus the question on
what covenants would have meant to the ancient Hebrews and their con-
temporaries. Cross concluded that both the ANE treaty covenants and
the biblical language of covenant are derived from the moral structure
of the ancient desert tribes that were organized and managed as kinship
associations before the urban developments of formal law and contracts.

59. Moshe Weinfeld, “The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient
By adapting the prelegal kinship language of covenant, both the Hittite kings and the Hebrew tribes (and the Davidic monarch they would spawn) were able to connect to the ethos of their times while developing significant innovation in their sociopolitical and religious worlds.\textsuperscript{61}

Over the last few decades, a growing scholarly consensus has emerged as to which of the vast number of contributions to the study of biblical covenant have the most lasting value. Scott W. Hahn provides one of the most comprehensive and accessible overviews and will be relied upon in much of what is offered below.\textsuperscript{62} Like Hahn, I will take the definition of Old Testament covenant proposed by Gordon P. Hugenberger and the perspective of Frank Moore Cross as starting points.\textsuperscript{63}

**Kinship Associations and the Origins of the Biblical Covenant Concept**

The critical insight that distinguishes Cross’s and Hugenberger’s approaches from the bulk of twentieth-century studies that had concluded that the biblical idea of covenant was derived from ANE treaty formulae is that the widely studied occurrences of *covenant* in legal, ritual, and treaty contexts derive their meanings and validity in turn from an even earlier prelegal and familial context.\textsuperscript{64} The nonurban world of

\textsuperscript{61}. See Frank Moore Cross, “Kinship and Covenant in Ancient Israel,” a new study used to preface the collection of his earlier publications entitled *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 3–21.


\textsuperscript{64}. The wholesale identification of Israelite covenant making with the legalistic treaty covenants of the ANE seen as contracts was questioned early on by scholars like Dennis J.
the earliest Bible people was organized tribally. Social order within these groups was maintained by adherence to accepted norms of kinship association, as supplemented by necessary procedures or rituals (covenants) for incorporating outsiders into the group. In this prelegal world, covenant was the principal device used to manage the flow of non-kin into a tribal association and to bestow the rights and duties of kin on outsiders brought into the family through marriage, adoption, servitude, or alliance. As Paul Kalluveettil defined it, “A covenant implies an adoption into the household, an extension of kinship, the making of a brother.”

From his ground-breaking study of marriage in the Hebrew Bible, Hugenberger concluded that “the predominant sense of berit in biblical Hebrew is an elected, as opposed to natural relationship of obligation established under divine sanction.” By entering voluntarily into covenants, unrelated men and women could enjoy the same set of mutual rights and obligations they would have shared had they been born into the same family.

This point was expanded from the perspective of anthropological kinship studies four years later in the classic essay of Frank Moore McCarthy who could see echoes of Bedouin culture and the nomad life even in the biblical account of the Sinai covenant. He saw Sinai as “an authentic gesture of covenant making,” but “not in the character of the treaties. The ratification of alliance by rite rather than a contract based on an oath, and the gesture of superior to inferior rather than vice versa, these things are strangers to the treaty tradition.” See his Treaty and Covenant (1963), 162, compare pages 4–5. Even more to the point, following subsequent detailed studies of the ANE treaties, Hayim Tadmor has demonstrated that the Esarhaddon adê (oath) document, which scholars had assumed to be the treaty prototype for the covenant formulation in Deuteronomy, was most likely not available in Jerusalem in the relevant time frame. See his “Treaty and Oath in the Ancient Near East: A Historian’s Approach,” in Humanizing America’s Iconic Book: Society of Biblical Literature Addresses 1980, ed. Gene M. Tucker and Douglas A. Knight (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982), 151. Meredith G. Kline proposed somewhat different reasons for distinguishing covenant law from “mere legal codes” and contracts by emphasizing the element of personal consecration in covenants. See his “Law Covenant,” Westminster Theological Journal 27, no. 1 (November 1964): 19.


66. Hugenberger, Marriage as a Covenant, 171, emphasis added. Later studies independently take a similar position. For example, see Seock-Tae Sohn, “I Will Be Your God and You Will Be My People: The Origin and Background of the Covenant Formula,” in Ki Baruch Hu: Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Judaic Studies in Honor of Baruch A. Levine, ed. Robert Chazan, William W. Hallo, and Lawrence H. Schiffman (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 357: “I propose that the formula of marriage and adoption used both in ancient Israel and in Mesopotamia provides the origin and background of covenant formulas.”
Cross in which he traced this biblical covenanting practice to the family-based West Semitic tribal groups in the ANE: “The social organization of West Semitic tribal groups was grounded in kinship. Kinship relations defined the rights and obligations, the duties, status, and privileges of tribal members, and kinship terminology provided the only language for expressing legal, political, and religious institutions.”

Anthropologists have also paid close attention to what happens when local kinship systems of social organization overlap with larger cities and states that require law and courts to support and discipline the interactions of strangers. Kinship norms and expectations such as the hesed of the Israelites cannot be legally enforced or adjudicated by these overarching jurisdictions. In such situations, accommodations must be made for both systems to be able to do their jobs. Fortes illustrates this with a summary of Max Gluckman’s classic studies of Lozi judges, who applied kinship norms in local disputes but invoked the legal system of the kingdom for intervillage issues: “Lozi judges explicitly recognize the distinction between legal right enforceable by the courts, and moral right, the implementation of which is left to the pressure of public opinion, individual conscience, and social reciprocity. Lozi judges invoke these where a dispute is between persons in their capacity as kinsmen and affines. When they litigate as fellow villagers or citizens of the kingdom, . . . the legal sanctions of the politico-jural relations often clash with the ethic of generosity prescribed for the familial domain.”

**Hesed**

Like the monarchies and empires of the ANE, ancient Israel’s growth as a people created similar jurisdictional overlaps. As the league of tribes based on kinship became larger, urbanized, and more complex and evolved into monarchies, the Israelites continued to think and act in terms of hesed (covenant love, loyalty), the moral system of expectations derived from their traditional kinship associations and the only language they had available for dealing with the personal and local dimensions of their lives. Cross applied the anthropological findings regarding kinship associations to the ancient Hebrews and their distinctive moral system of hesed. But, he explains, as kinship structures began to break down and to be replaced with a different set of social and political institutions, “the extended
meaning of *hesed* became increasingly prominent. But its rootage in kinship obligations is primary. Strictly speaking, *hesed* is a kinship term.\(^{69}\)

In Old Testament usage, *hesed* could be used in secular contexts structured by relationships of kinship, servitude, friendship, or alliance. But the *hesed* created by the Abrahamic covenant included all the virtues that Yahweh promised to display to his people, the moral expectations of how he expected his people to conduct themselves toward him, and the complementary set of expectations that the covenant community and the Lord had of their mutual conduct toward and care for one another. The best studies of biblical *hesed* have concluded that the *hesed* of the Lord is always defined by the context of his covenant with his people. As Nelson Glueck concluded in his classic study on the topic, “God’s *hesed* can only be understood as Yahweh’s covenantal relationship toward his followers.”\(^{70}\)

This logic of “kinship by covenant” became a central component of the theology of ancient Israel and, as will be argued below, was adapted again by the Nephites to accommodate the revelation of Jesus Christ that they received in the visions of Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, and others. In its secular functions, covenant could be used to form voluntary associations between unrelated persons as evidenced most simply in marriage.

Hugenerberger has demonstrated convincingly that the Israelite concept of marriage was based on covenant with the inclusion of “divine sanction.” But kinship groups could also use covenant as a device to incorporate adopted children, servants, slaves, friends, and allies into the kinship group as equals with all the same rights and duties as the original family members. While role status might change across the normal course of a lifetime in the kinship association, the basic rights and duties of kinsmen persisted throughout their lives. This means that in a kinship association, everyone was either born into the covenant or had been adopted into the association by covenant. Because the covenant was a voluntary arrangement, people could also leave the kinship association by mutual agreement.

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Adoption as the Fundamental Metaphor

While the marriage metaphor is used occasionally to illuminate the covenant relationship between Israel and the Lord, it can only be pushed so far. But legal adoption provides a metaphor that always seems appropriate. Because there is no biological parental relationship between the Lord and his people, as predominates in kinship associations, all Israelites are bound to the Lord through the covenant by which they are adopted as children to a parent. Janet Melnyk has explored the law of adoption in ancient Mesopotamia and Mari and argues that the biblical covenant relationship between Yahweh and his people fits the ANE institution of adoption both in its general characteristics and in the details. Adoption has always depended on choices. Even children born to a concubine or a wife’s handmaiden were not considered to be adopted sons or daughters automatically, but only after explicit decisions to that effect had been made. Serious issues of inheritance and care responsibility would affect that decision.

The binding formula for adoption would usually be a statement consisting of “two parts: (1) the declaration of the new relationship between the adopted child and the adoptive parent, and (2) the description of the parties involved.” This declaration of a parental relationship “is the single thread on which a legal adoption process hangs.” As Nathan reported the Lord’s words to David: “I will be his father, and he will be my son.” Jeremiah applies the same concept to Israel as a whole: “I am Israel’s father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son” (Jer. 31:9). A more complete statement of the adoptive relationship is given in NIV Jeremiah 3:19: “How gladly would I treat you like my children and give you a pleasant land, the most beautiful inheritance of any nation. I thought you would call me ‘Father’ and not turn away from following me.”

As intimated in this passage, there are inherent stipulations in the adoptive relationship—“raising the child, providing an inheritance (usually land), and punishment for the rebellious child.” While Melnyk

goes on to illustrate examples of all these conditions in both the ANE and biblical texts, for some reason she does not pick up on the covenant connection for adoption that Hugenberger and Cross will identify and emphasize only a few years later. She does conclude helpfully that “by identifying Israel as God’s child, the biblical writers wrote Israel into a state of legitimacy, recognition, and inalienable inheritance.”

The Case of Ruth and Naomi

The voluntary nature of these covenants is illustrated at the beginning of the story of Naomi and her two widowed daughters-in-law. Ruth and Orpah had been connected by the covenant of marriage to Naomi and her Israelite husband and sons. But after all three men died, the material reasons for the covenantal union were permanently dissolved, and Naomi, having no resources or sons to offer either of the young widows, encouraged them, “Go back, each of you to her mother’s house.” Naomi recognized that the young women had each dealt properly with her according to the covenantal hessed entailed in their connection by marriage and prayed that the Lord would act out of his divine hessed to bless them in the next stage of their lives. Orpah accepted the advice of Naomi, but Ruth wanted to maintain the covenant relationship with both Naomi and Yahweh: “Your people is my people, and your god is my god. . . . So may the Lord do to me.”

The fact that both options facing the young widows—to leave or to reaffirm their covenant relationships at this critical juncture in their lives—were equally appropriate would seem to emphasize the voluntary nature of the covenant connection itself. As Nelson Glueck explains, “Ruth was by no means obliged to go with Naomi. She was as free as Naomi’s other daughter-in-law to return to her own people. Yet, in faithful love she followed her mother-in-law. In true religiosity she complied with Jewish custom. Ruth took it upon herself to practice hessed in order to fulfill the obligations of a Jewish widow.”

76. Robert L. Hubbard Jr. used the story in Ruth to demonstrate how the actions of God in the Hebrew Bible enable but do not determine the actions of humans in accomplishing his designs. See his “Theological Reflections on Naomi’s Shrewdness,” Tyndale Bulletin 40, no. 2 (1989): 292. On Hubbard’s reading, this story portrays faith as “the seizure of opportunities as God-given, the application of human ingenuity to reach divinely-honoured goals” (292).
78. Glueck, Hesed in the Bible, 41.
Not only does Ruth’s statement feature the three dimensions of Israel’s covenant relationship with Yahweh, but it also ends with the “solemn oath formulary”—“Thus may Yahweh do to me” (1:17), probably accompanied by a symbolic gesture—which would most easily be interpreted as a determined reaffirmation of her covenant connection to Israel or “the people of the Lord.” By her marriage, Ruth left her Moabite family and homeland and bound herself first in a covenant relationship not only to her Jewish husband but also to his family and a community—to Judah as a kinship association (tribe) and to Yahweh as Israel’s God—with all the rights and duties entailed in each of those three dimensions.

While many commentators have tended to read Ruth as a story of conversion or bond formation, others have invoked one or another understanding of Israelite covenant to illuminate this passage. Glueck uses Ruth 3:10 to show “that hesed is that mode of conduct which is in accordance with familial obligations.” Mark Smith has summarized these and has then used Ruth to defend his view that the story does not so much reflect the application of ANE notions of treaty and covenant to “the narrow compass of village life,” but rather suggests how these political and legal practices may be derived from the everyday realities of family life in the ANE. “It is not covenant that is the lofty concept brought down to routine village life in the book of Ruth . . ; instead, family relations are being expressed by Ruth, and it is the model of family extended across family lines that is being expressed in treaty and covenant language.”

The Divine Element in Kinship Associations

While the God of ancient Israel and his way of relating to his people was much different from those of the other desert tribes of the ANE, many of the patterns observable in Israelite religion can look like adaptations of

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79. See the detailed explanation in Edward F. Campbell Jr., Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary, The Anchor Bible Commentary, vol. 7 (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 74. See also Hugenberger, Marriage as a Covenant, 159–65, on the primarily covenantal implications of cleaving and leaving or forsaking.
80. “The normal form of marriage in the Ancient Near East was of the patriarchal type in which the woman left her own family to enter the house of her husband.” I. Mendelsohn, “The Family in the Ancient Near East,” Biblical Archaeologist 11, no. 2 (May 1948): 25.
81. Glueck, Hesed in the Bible, 40.
Covenant Language

those prevalent in other tribal societies. Cross explains how the tribal gods were integrated into the kinship world view:

In the religious sphere, the intimate relationship with the family god, the “God of the Fathers,” was expressed in the only language available to members of a tribal society. Their god was the Divine Kinsman. . . . The Divine Kinsman, it is assumed, fulfills the mutual obligations and receives the privileges of kinship. He leads in battle, redeems from slavery, loves his family, shares the land of his heritage (nahalāh), provides and protects. He blesses those who bless his kindred, curses those who curse his kindred (cf. Gen. 12:3). The family of the deity rallies to his call to holy war, “the wars of Yahweh,” keeps his cultus, obeys his patriarchal commands, maintains family loyalty (hesed), loves him with all their soul, calls on his name. 

Finally, Cross explains how the Israelite league of tribes becomes known as the people of the Lord (’am Yahweh), or, as Cross prefers to translate it, the kindred of Yahweh. Because the league was multifunctional, it could be referred to as a militia, a kinship organization, a religious organization, or “a kinship organization, a covenant of families and tribes organized by the creation or identification of a common ancestor and related by segmented genealogies. . . . The league in ideal form was conceived as twelve tribes, related at once by covenant and kinship.”

Because the organizing covenant was established with the clan patriarch Abraham, Yahweh is the Divine Kinsman and the “god of the father.” “Israel is the kindred of Yahweh; Yahweh is the God of Israel. This is an old formula. But this formula must be understood as legal language, the language of kinship-in-law, or in other words, the language of covenant.” Like the other confederations of tribes that flourished in southeastern Palestine and northern Arabia, the Israelites’ league was known by the name of its God. As explained below, this becomes an important consideration in the Book of Mormon requirement that the Lord’s covenant people take upon them his name.

85. The transliteration ’am Yahweh is based on the Hebrew original יְהוָ?ה עָ?ם (people of Yahweh, people of Jehovah, people of the Lord), which can also be transliterated as ’am Yahweh or ’am YHWH.
89. See the discussion in Jennifer Clark Lane, “The Lord Will Redeem His People: Adoptive Covenant and Redemption in the Old Testament and Book of Mormon,”
Taking the Name of God as a Covenant Act

In Numbers 6:27, we find the only comparable phrasing of the Hebrew Bible. The instructions for Aaron and his sons on how to bless the Israelites emphasize features of Yahweh’s hesed toward his people and include the requirement that his name be put on them:

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,
“Thus shall you bless the Israelites. Say to them:
May the Lord bless you and guard you.
May the Lord light up His face to you and grant grace to you;
May the Lord lift up His face to you and give you peace.”
And they shall set My name over the Israelites, and I Myself shall bless them”

This unique phrasing has been traditionally interpreted to imply that Israelites should wear amulets bearing the name of the Lord or even that the priest should literally write that name on their bodies. In other biblical contexts, the language of putting the name of the Lord somewhere means to locate his presence in that place—such as in the tabernacle or the future temple. Margaret Barker clarifies these two traditions in this way: “One strand of the Old Testament tradition shows that the Name had been used as a substitute for the presence of the Lord in the temple, but those who did not accept this new convention of the Deuteronomists kept to more ancient ways. For them the Name was simply one of the many ways of describing Yahweh.”

But here and in many other places, putting or taking the name of the Lord on a person or people obviously refers to the establishment of a covenant relationship between the Lord and his people.

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91. See the English abstract for Meir Bar-Ilan, “‘They Shall Put My Name upon the People of Israel’ (Num. 6:27),” Hebrew Union College Annual 60 (1989), 87–91.
93. Margaret Barker, The Great Angel: A Study of Israel’s Second God (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 208. Barker assembles extensive references in the ancient literature to demonstrate that the Name in the Jewish literature was Yahweh, which for the early Christians was Jesus. See 208–12.
The People of the Lord

The Nephite prophets obviously take the view that taking the name of the Lord upon oneself at the time of covenating with the Lord is a metaphor for an internal commitment—a self-chosen obligation—that is signaled externally through the ordinances of baptism in the first instance and of subsequent partaking of the bread and wine as ritual renewals of the same covenant. Nephi also clearly links a promise of the divine presence to those who “take upon [themselves] the name of Christ by baptism,” for unto them “will the Father give the Holy Ghost” (2 Ne. 31:12–13). This may suggest an alternative or additional interpretation for the blessing described in Numbers 6:27.

While there is no settled interpretation of the language of putting or taking the name of the Lord upon oneself among Bible scholars, Professor Cross does report that it was usual that the south-desert leagues he used as a model for Israelite kinship culture were “named after a deity.” Israel is referred to repeatedly as the people (‘am) of the Lord, which can signal either their genealogical connection to Abraham or their adoptive covenant relationship with Yahweh or both. “The Covenant people of the Lord will be one united people. That does not mean only biological descendants of Abraham are the ‘am.” He further identifies a few “sociomorphisms” in Israel’s religious language that arise from the ideology of kinship: “The God of Israel adopts Israel as a ‘son’ and is called ‘father,’ enters a marriage contract with Israel and is designated ‘husband,’ swears fealty oaths together with Israel and enters into covenant, assuming the mutual obligations of kinship.”

One of the more thorough studies of biblical thought on this paternal relationship of Yahweh to his people was done by New Testament scholar Brendan Byrne. “The description of Israel or Israelites as ‘sons (son) of God,’ together with the corresponding idea of God as ‘Father’ . . . never implies real paternity on God’s part. Rather, in a metaphorical way it expresses the intimate and unique relationship between Yahweh and Israel, founded upon the fact that he has chosen and created this people for himself.” Further, the specific application of this relationship

to David—“I will be his father, and he shall be my son”—“sets the filial relationship firmly within the framework of the covenantal theology that applies to the people as a whole.”

This terminology is quite natural for a kinship system that brings outsiders into the family artificially through covenants of marriage and adoption and links itself to its god as a father by a similar covenant. “When Israel was a child, I loved him and out of Egypt I called my son” (NIV Hosea 11:1). Cross notes similar language in Canaanite sources and cites other salient examples from the Old Testament, including Ezekiel 16:8, Malachi 2:14, and Hosea 2:4–25. His favorite example is the proclaimed divine sonship of King David in Psalms 89:29–30 and 132:1–12. Other passages mentioning sons of God or of gods in the Hebrew Bible or related noncanonical texts are usually interpreted to refer to angels or other vaguely divine beings and not to mortals in covenant relationship with Yahweh.

The Third Commandment Viewed from a Covenant Perspective

This usage also suggests a possible novel interpretation of the third commandment: “Thou shalt not take [lift up] the name of the Lord thy God in vain” (KJV Ex. 20:7). The Hebrew term translated here as “in vain” is the adverbial form of the noun shav which can have a variety of meanings that indicate deceitfulness or emptiness given in reward for trust.

Shepherd notes that the fifty-three occurrences of this word in the Old Testament draw on one or the other of its “two basic and interrelated senses, ineffectiveness and falseness, the latter probably being derived

from the idea that hopes and expectations prove false when placed in persons or things that are ineffective and therefore untrustworthy.”

Traditional Jewish and Christian interpretations of the third commandment have focused on misuse of the Lord’s name in magical exercises or in thoughtless or even formal situations of swearing. But interpreted in the context of the covenant culture of hesed that features trustworthiness as described above, the third commandment could also be understood as an injunction against failing to take seriously one’s covenant obligations to obey the Lord and display hesed in one’s conduct. Harman seems to endorse this insight when he translates shav’ as “hypocritically:”

Central to the thought of this commandment is the position of Israel in relation to God. Earlier in Egypt God had declared Israel to be his first-born son (Exod. 4:22f.) and had adopted Israel as his own people (Exod. 19:6). . . . Bearing the name or character of God was intrinsic to that role, and any false profession would mean a repudiation of the covenant relationship itself. The Third Commandment, with its associated curse, was to be the constant reminder to Israel of the need to fulfill her election and to demonstrate the character of God to a watching world.

Covenant Language and Concepts in the Book of Mormon

One must be impressed with the many decades of investigation that have enabled Bible scholars to bring our understanding of biblical covenant concepts to its present level. It is never easy to penetrate a foreign culture, and the Old Testament contains almost nothing reflective that would


103. These traditional interpretations were reviewed and summarized effectively in W. E. Staples, “The Third Commandment,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 58, no. 4 (December 1939): 326–27; and more recently in Allan M. Harman, “The Interpretation of the Third Commandment,” *Reformed Theological Review* 47, no. 1 (January–April 1988): 2. Staples and Harman recognized that the basic problem in translating and understanding the third commandment derives from the meaning of shav’ in this passage, recognizing that it has a wide range of meanings in its various occurrences, including “idol.” Staples proposed that Exodus 20:7 should be translated “Thou shalt not give the name of Yahweh (thy God) to an idol,” Staples, “The Third Commandment,” 329.

104. A different, but parallel interpretation is offered by Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan. See English abstract for Bar-Ilan, “They Shall Put My Name upon the People of Israel.”

explain itself to us on this topic. The Book of Mormon, on the other hand, is replete with sermons that spell out the concepts and expectations of the Nephite covenant culture.106 And the structure and language of those discussions make it easy to believe that they shared fully in the same covenant culture that Cross and others have now shown to be featured in the Old Testament.

Despite some rather obvious differences between Old Testament and Book of Mormon covenant discourse, there are multiple strains in the Nephite record that strongly suggest continuity and adaptation of the covenant language and concepts of ancient Israel.107 This essay will conclude with several examples of prominent features of Hebrew covenant culture that characterize the record written by the Nephite prophets. These examples will include (1) the integration of individualist and corporate understandings of salvation for God’s covenant people, (2) Nephite adaptation of the Abrahamic covenant to their own promised land tradition and to the revelation of Christ’s gospel to their first generation of prophets, (3) the apparent Nephite dependence on the same moral structure of a covenant society that is referred to as both divine and human hesed in the Bible, and (4) the kinship character of the covenant society that the Nephites promoted as they adapted the revelation of Christ and his gospel to their Abrahamic religion.


107. Kerry Muhlestein has helpfully demonstrated the similarity between the way in which the Abrahamic covenant was re instituted by Moses during the exodus and by Lehi and Nephi in their exodus from Jerusalem to a new promised land. See his “Prospering in the Land: A Comparison of Covenant Promises in Leviticus and First Nephi 2,” Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship 32 (2019): 87–296. In a second article, Muhlestein proposes that Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 present and reconfirm the basic terminology of the Abrahamic covenant that will guide LDS readers to recognize allusions to that covenant in Restoration scripture. While starting with this Old Testament terminology, my paper will show the evolution of that vocabulary as the gospel of Jesus Christ was revealed to the Nephites and as they interpreted it within their inherited covenantal framework, thus resolving much of the tension that theologians and scriptural scholars have detected between the two covenantal traditions. Compare Kerry Muhlestein, “Recognizing the Everlasting Covenant in the Scriptures,” Religious Educator 21, no. 2 (2020): 41–71.
Holistic versus Individualistic Interpretations of the Covenant

An obvious difference between Old Testament and Book of Mormon discourse arises from the radical individualism of the latter. The Nephite means of subscribing to the covenant through repentance and baptism, which includes taking the Lord’s name upon oneself, can only be understood as a sequence of actions in the life of each individual who becomes part of God’s people or church through covenant. On the other hand, most parallel references in the Old Testament refer holistically to the people of God, who have inherited the covenant from their fathers and who are blessed or cursed corporately.108 This same issue sometimes plays itself out under the question of what it means to be “chosen.” Truman Madsen has provided one important analysis of that question from the perspective of LDS scriptures and teachings.109

That holistic interpretation is certainly tempered to some extent by accounts of covenant renewal rituals in which all the people participated. And one passage in Isaiah 56 may betray a standard assumption that the Israelite covenant was understood to be an individual matter as well, just as Sabbath observance could be measured by the actions of individuals. Isaiah here quotes the Lord’s explicit listing of a variety of individual types who are very likely non-Israelite by birth as being joined to him by the covenant and their obedience to his commandments. “The son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the Lord,” the “eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant,” and “the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be his servants . . . and taketh hold of my covenant,” are all among those the Lord says he will “bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people” (KJV Isa. 56:1–7).

Historically, Jewish and Christian theologies that focused on corporatist blessings and punishments for the people of God tended to explain


these by reference to the Abrahamic covenant that promised blessings of land and posterity to Abraham’s seed. One forceful and continuing version of that debate in Christian circles derives from Luther’s theology of a predestinated elect that will receive salvation.\textsuperscript{110} LDS scholars have taken the theme up from the perspective of the Book of Mormon and have shown through independent analyses how the Nephite prophets interpreted the Abrahamic covenant as being fully compatible with the gospel of Jesus Christ, which focuses on the repentance and obedience of individuals. Heather Hardy demonstrates how Nephi’s presentation of the great vision given to Lehi and Nephi combines the long-term prophecies or salvation history of Israel, Lehi’s posterity, and the Gentiles; and the revelation of the gospel in that vision provides double, but fully compatible, perspectives on how God works with his people.\textsuperscript{111}

I have also argued that from Lehi to Moroni, the Nephite prophets and Jesus Christ use the gospel of Jesus Christ to show how individuals can become “the people of the Lord” and therefore recipients of the blessings promised to Abraham.\textsuperscript{112} At the judgment day, all people will be judged “according to their works” and not their genealogy. For as Nephi explains after reviewing the salvation history of Israel, “As many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord; and as many of the Jews as will not repent shall be cast off. For the Lord covenanteth with none save it be with them that repent and believe in his Son, which is the Holy One of Israel” (2 Ne. 30:2). Nephi clearly denies that anyone

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will be included among the Lord’s covenant people except they individually repent. And it will only be when those who belong to the house of Israel come to the knowledge of their promised blessings and choose to repent and follow Christ that they will receive the long-promised blessings listed in the Abrahamic covenant.

The Nephite Adaptation of the Abrahamic Covenant

The language of covenant is prominent in the teachings of the earliest Nephite prophets, in the teachings of Benjamin and Alma, in the teachings of Christ when he visits the Nephites, and in the closing words of Mormon and Moroni. The word *covenant* appears 103 times in the text in reference to the covenants between men and the Lord. But the concept appears even more frequently under other names (such as “promises of the Lord”) or even unnamed. In an attempt to sort these references into categories, I have interpreted 59 of these 103 references to refer to God’s covenant with Abraham, or as it may have been rearticulated with Jacob, Joseph, or even Moses. Three of these mentions refer to the special covenant God made with Lehi and Nephi for their people in this new promised land; 26 appearances of the word refer explicitly to the gospel covenant made through repentance and baptism by individual converts entering into Christ’s church; and another 15 are more general or inclusive—speaking of the covenants of the Lord with the children of men. But the implicit references to God’s covenants are far more numerous. For example, the covenant with Lehi and Nephi is so labeled only 3 times but is repeated or cited 80 times somewhere in the text—without the word *covenant* being used.113

In a previous essay I have identified and traced the development of three integrated streams of covenant discourse in the Book of Mormon which can be summarized as follows:

The Book of Mormon—from the writings of its first prophets to the very end—maintains three related but distinct streams of covenant discourse—each grounded in its own specific covenant. All three are embedded in prophecies that feature an if/then and if not/then structure. All three are intimately connected to the Book of Mormon itself and its long-term mission (as will be explained in detail below). Furthermore, all three are featured in the teachings of multiple Nephite prophets and in the teachings of Jesus Christ himself to the Nephites. The first of these streams of covenant discourse derives from the Lord's promise to Lehi and his successors that if they are obedient, the Lord will give them a chosen land of liberty in which they will prosper as a people. The second stream of covenant discourse features a version of the Abrahamic covenant, focused on Jacob's son Joseph as the ancestor of Lehi, that emphasizes (1) the promise to the house of Israel that it will ultimately be gathered in peace and righteousness to its promised homeland, and (2) the promise received originally by Abraham (which does not reappear much in the Bible) that all the kindreds of the earth would be blessed through his seed. The third stream of covenant discourse is grounded in the universal covenant the Father offers to all his children, regardless of Abrahamic descent, that if they accept his gospel and come unto him, they will receive eternal life.114

Biblical hesed in Nephite Covenant Culture

Glueck's 1927 dissertation and the waves of analysis it stimulated throughout the twentieth century revolutionized scholarly understanding of the relationship of Yahweh to his people and ideally of his people to each other under the Abrahamic covenant. Because of his goodness, the Lord had established his people by covenant with the assurance that because of his great power and his love toward them, he would protect and deliver them from all evils if they would remain faithful to him. The Hebrew term for this love and faithfulness was hesed, and as explained above, its complexity has led scholars to admit the impossibility of translating it accurately with a single English word. But the hesed that the Lord continually displays for his people and that he expects them to return both to him and to each other in their covenant association, distinguishes Israelite religion from all its ancient contemporaries.

Another insight Cross provides that corresponds closely to the Nephite understandings of these covenants with the Lord is that “there are no ‘unilateral’ covenants in a kinship-based society.” Rather, “kinship

obligations are necessarily mutual.” And this applies to the obligations between the Lord and his people as well. As discussed above, these obligations include the requirement that the Lord’s people obey his commandments and observe the same *hesed* that characterizes their god in their interactions with one another.

In a previous paper, I have described in detail the scholarly efforts to understand biblical *hesed* and have examined several examples in the Book of Mormon text that seem to describe and promote that same *hesed* among the Nephite believers. All the basic terminology that Bible translators have advanced as translations for *hesed* in various contexts shows up even more clearly in the Nephite text. From its opening sentence, the Book of Mormon identifies *the goodness of God* as the basic fact that has led him to provide a plan of salvation for his creation, a plan that includes the sacrifice of his own divine son as the means through which he can deliver all men and women who will accept the covenant path taught in his gospel from both death and hell, enabling them through faithful obedience to his commandments to become like him and to be prepared to enter into his presence and receive eternal life. While fully congruent with Old Testament *hesed*, the Book of Mormon characterizations are more explicit and developed than are the Old Testament mentions.

**Taking the Name of Christ in the Book of Mormon**

Just as the covenant Yahweh established with Abraham and his descendants made them kin by covenant, so also the Nephites who accepted the gospel covenant offered by Christ referred to themselves as “the people of the Lord.” From the time of his first vision, Nephi taught that all those who chose to make this covenant must “take upon [themselves] the name of Christ by baptism” (2 Ne. 31:13). The farewell sermon given by Benjamin at the center of the Nephite dispensation exemplifies

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117. In a separate paper, I have explored how the Nephites use *the goodness of God* to explain the origins of both the plan of salvation and the gospel of Jesus Christ in a way that both echoes and significantly expands on Old Testament usage. See Noel B. Reynolds, “The *Goodness of God* and His Children as a Fundamental Theological Concept in the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 46 (2021): 131–55.
118. This is echoed clearly in Mosiah 5:8, 25:23, Alma 34:38, and in the sacrament prayer recorded in Moroni 4:3.
the clear understanding of the Nephite prophets that the Christian’s
covenant with the Lord entailed taking upon oneself the name of Jesus
Christ: “I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ, all you
that have entered into the covenant with God that ye should be obedi-
ent unto the end of your lives” (Mosiah 5:8). Every person that will be
found finally at the right hand of Christ “shall know the name by which
he is called; for he shall be called by the name of Christ” (Mosiah 5:9).
Because the name could be blotted out only through transgression, Ben-
jamin urged his people to “remember to retain the name written always
in [their] hearts” that they might “hear and know the voice by which
[they] shall be called, and also the name by which he shall call [them]”
(Mosiah 5:11–12).

As Mormon abridged the Nephite records at the end of that dispen-
sation, he described how the people in Alma’s day who were “desirous
to take upon them the name of Christ” and to be baptized did “join the
churches of God,” and “were called the people of God” (Mosiah 25:23–24,
emphasis added).119 Jesus himself reminded the Nephites of the scrip-
ture that says “Ye must take upon you the name of Christ, which is my
name,” before summarizing his gospel when he promised them that
“whoso taketh upon him my name and endureth to the end, the same
shall be saved at the last day” (3 Ne. 27:6, emphasis added). Not only
did he require repentant individuals to take upon themselves his name,
but he went on to explain that these same people, when organized as
a church, should be called by his name (3 Ne. 27:7–9). Earlier, Captain
Moroni had rallied the besieged Nephites to a covenant that they would
not “forsake the Lord their God” or “be ashamed to take upon them
the name of Christ” (Alma 46:21, see also verse 18). And as Benjamin
warned his audience, “Whosoever shall not take upon them the name of
Christ must be called by some other name; therefore he findeth himself
on the left hand of God” (Mosiah 5:10).

The kinship-by-covenant established between the Lord and his
people is explicit in Nephite discourse. Benjamin provides the clearest
example in his sermon describing the covenant his people have made
to follow Jesus Christ when he tells them that by taking the name of
Christ upon themselves, they have become “the children of Christ, his
sons and his daughters” (Mosiah 5:7). Centuries later, Mormon assures
the few faithful Nephites that “are true followers of his Son Jesus Christ,”

119. Compare with Alma 34:38, where Amulek teaches the people to repent and “take
upon [them] the name of Christ.”
that the Father will fill them with “the pure love of Christ,” that they “may become the sons of God, that when he shall appear, [they] shall be like him” (Moro. 7:47–48). Here, the Old Testament concept that the covenant provides the mechanism by which the people of the Lord can imitate and become like him is stated clearly and explicitly in the Book of Mormon. R. W. L. Moberly stated it this way: “A fundamental principle of OT (indeed biblical) ethics is the imitation of God: as Yahweh, likewise Israel is to be. This is most famously expressed in Lev 19:2, ‘Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy’.”

Conclusions

In this essay, I have tried to provide a broad survey of the concept of covenant for Latter-day Saint students of the Bible and the Book of Mormon. I began with a sketch of the history of covenant theology in the Christian tradition showing how the early New Testament idea of a baptismal covenant was soon replaced by the Christian institution of sacraments. Although the covenant idea initially played little role in the historical developments of Christian theology, it did resurge in the Reformation, but without widespread theological impact.

In contrast, over the last century, the role of the covenant idea in the Hebrew Bible has occupied center stage for many scholars as competing schools of thought have risen and fallen. New stability has come to that discussion from the realizations (1) that the covenant texts in the Old Testament are genuinely ancient and (2) that the concept and language of covenant in the Bible tradition fits easily with the moral structure of the ancient desert tribes understood as kinship associations. While the Israelite adaptation of that covenant culture had its own distinctive features, especially in the characterization of its god Yahweh and his love for his people, it fit comfortably in that cultural context and persisted in the language and ideology of kinship-by-covenant long after Israel became a settled, urbanized monarchy.

Finally, in comparing that pre-exilic covenant culture of ancient Israel with the language and teachings of the Book of Mormon, it becomes evident that the Nephites were even more clear-mindedly committed to a world structured by their covenants with God. Not only were they continually mindful of their ancient covenant connection as descendants

of Joseph and Abraham, but they also had their own parallel covenant promises and promised land as given by the Lord to their ancestors Lehi and Nephi. Even more impressively, the Nephites accommodated their inherited covenant culture to the revelation of Jesus Christ and his gospel as given to their founding fathers. And in the process, they successfully propounded an even more powerful and explicitly developed version of biblical *hesed* and the covenant culture of Abrahamic religion.

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On the Necessity of Loss

Shamae Budd

The second night in the hospital after our son was born, I crept out of bed, hobbled a few feet across the linoleum, and curled up on the stiff pleather couch where Daniel was sleeping. Our son was in the NICU with a mild case of pneumonia, so it was just he and I in that little room. My body hurt. My heart, too. Daniel pulled me close on the little green hospital couch, and I wept. It felt like nothing would be good again—like we would never be the same.

Those early weeks after having a baby were like living in a fog. The outlines of everything blurred: day and night, self and other, waking and dreaming, happiness and sadness. I would wake in the night and fumble around in the dark, hallucinating that a pillow was my baby’s head (despite never having slept with him). I was everything at once. I was nothing, and I was also, somehow, a demi-god: giver and caretaker of life. I was anything but myself.

It was not until my son was two months old and I stepped into a Starbucks, finally alone, laptop bag slung over my left shoulder, that I felt momentarily crystalline again—my edges properly defined.

Maybe it was the crisp December air, or the flakes falling slowly—cleanly—through the black night onto the black asphalt. Maybe it was the slick feeling of a keyboard beneath my fingers when I sat down, the sharp click of each key. The letter “t,” the letter “k.” Whatever it was, I felt myself snap back into focus almost in the very moment that I returned to my craft—to words.
The feeling didn’t last. But that evening spent writing in a coffee shop two months into motherhood was a turning point. I began feeling like myself again, figuring out how to be both: a parent and a person.

I remember a conversation we had several months after our son was born. We were sitting on the patio beneath a zigzagging string of lights, two mugs of peppermint tea steaming on the table between us. It was still early springtime—the mosquitoes had not yet arrived in force, so we could sit there in the dusk without swatting, serene. The baby monitor was roaring dully in the background, and there was a book of essays open in my lap.

Daniel had a book in his lap, too, but he wasn’t really reading. At some point, he started talking. After a few long pauses and false starts, he expressed a feeling of deep loss—the sense that he didn’t know who he was anymore.

All the things that had once defined him, all his hobbies and passions, seemed to be impossible now that we had a child. We had not been rock climbing or cycling in over a year because of my pregnancy. Neither had we attempted camping or backpacking or hiking, which seemed imprudent with an infant in the winter. And his full-time job required very few of the problem-solving skills he had developed in school while studying to become an engineer. He was in despair. (More straightforwardly, he was experiencing postpartum depression—but neither of us could see it for what it was.)

I had begun feeling like myself again, despite the added complexities of parenthood, but he had not. He felt farther from joy than ever before.

Maybe I just need to accept it, he said. That my life is over now. That it will never be the same again.

I didn’t know how to help him, despite having so recently experienced similar feelings. I was by then mostly happy—I had enough time and energy to read and write, I was practicing yoga again, I could walk the dog in the afternoons, and I had a breathtakingly beautiful little son who smiled whenever I entered a room. I couldn’t understand why Daniel wasn’t happy, too. Why he was still living in that fog.

I tried offering solutions, which is not what he needed. Why don’t you go rock climbing without me? I asked. Why don’t you start running? You probably just need to get out of the house.

Before Quincy, Daniel had always been the one who wanted children, more than I did. Before Quincy, he could only see the glimmering
promise of what we might gain: the idyllic Saturday-morning pancake breakfasts and fishing trips and Christmas mornings with small, funny, tenderhearted people who orbited us with complete devotion, like little moons.

For me, the prospect of parenthood had always seemed to carry with it the promise of sweeping and inevitable loss. I knew my body would be changed, I knew our life together would become more exhausting and complicated and difficult, and I knew that my trajectory as a writer and an educator would stall—at least for a time. When I was being honest, I could see very few pros amid the cons.

When we decided—four years married, almost a year out of my master's degree—to try for a baby, I felt like Eve resolving to leave her Garden of Eden. I knew it was the right choice for us, for me; I also knew it would mean a huge amount of toil and sweat and tears. A harder existence.

From the beginning he was, in every sense, an equal partner. When my parents visited us in the hospital, even my father—who raised four kids as a full-time stay-at-home dad—was impressed by Daniel's attentiveness.

“He is so involved,” he said. “I was never so attentive with our newborns.”

In the NICU, where our son stayed for the first couple of days of his life, Daniel carefully checked his temperature, secured his sock monitor, and fed him milk through a little syringe. The nurses were impressed. “This dad's got it down!” they crooned.

After we returned home, we traded night shifts—I took the first half, and he took the second. He warmed up bottles and changed diapers in the dark, rocking a crying baby alone—sometimes for long stretches—while I slept with earplugs in another room. Even when he returned to work, we continued sharing nights. Often, he took more than his share of the caretaking load, especially when I was struggling.

I have never coped well with loss of sleep. (In fact, I have never coped well with loss of anything.) In the first couple weeks, Quincy cried a lot at night. He had “day/night confusion,” and he didn’t like to sleep in the bassinet. More than once, I woke Daniel early because I was frustrated and desperate, at my wit’s end because of a midnight blowout or a case of inexplicable crying. And Daniel—determined, affectionate—always stepped in to pick up my slack, even with a twelve-hour work shift looming.

Perhaps it is little surprise that in those first sleepless months after our son was born, our outlooks began to reverse. Perhaps it was because of his optimism that Daniel felt so blindsided, becoming discouraged by
the lack of sleep, the repetition of feeding and burping and changing and cleaning and waking and crying and waking and crying, the loss of our former life together.

I had been so focused on what would be lost that I failed to anticipate the joy, which is probably why it struck me so deeply. I was wholly enraptured by my new son, astonished by the gift of his velvety skin and milky breath, his small body curled against my own, his soft coos, and his sleeping smiles.

After the first couple of weeks, I began feeling pleasantly surprised by parenthood, but Daniel felt trapped, pummeled by it. What fascinates me now is how we were both right about what parenthood would entail—how we were each only seeing half of the bigger picture. There is plenty of magic in parenthood, but there is also plenty of loss.

As the months passed, I couldn’t understand his lingering sadness. Often, it made me angry. I wanted my old husband—the one who was endlessly good-humored and optimistic and patient and hardworking, not this man who sighed and sighed.

Of course, we had moments of connection—a laughing conversation in the shower when we officially dubbed that year “The Year of Regret.” A brief date night at a thrift store. I stood on the back of a shopping cart, and he pushed me through the aisles, cracking jokes. The fluorescent lights and endless racks of clothes we didn’t want to buy felt like heaven. It was like waking up and discovering the world was unchanged, after a bad dream.

But those moments of togetherness only seemed to amplify the pain of what we’d lost, especially for him.

When Quincy was three months old, Daniel said he didn’t want any more children—one was enough. And I felt enraged. I had built this incredible little body—a person, with his own voice and lungs that could breathe and gray-green eyes that could see, and perfectly miniature ears and fingers and toes. How could he say he didn’t want more, now that we had this one exquisite little child? Now that I knew I wanted more?

I didn’t understand until much later how alone he felt, especially in those first few months. I was in love with our son—in love with his soft, doughy throat and the dimples at his elbows. My love for him seemed to fill every tiny space inside my body, every cell. There was hardly room for anything (or anybody) else. Daniel began to feel irrelevant. And for
On the Necessity of Loss

all his fatherly efforts, he didn’t seem to be getting the long-anticipated emotional rewards. I held our son and felt totally, blissfully complete; he held our son and felt nothing.

Like holding a loaf of bread, he once said. Only it’s screaming.

He told me much later, after the fog had dissipated, about a night he spent alone in the kitchen. It was the farthest room from ours, on the opposite end of the house, where Quincy’s crying was less likely to bother me, asleep in the bedroom.

It was the middle of the night. Daniel was exhausted, and the baby was crying, but he had already been fed and changed and burped and rocked. There seemed to be no explanation for his earsplitting unhappiness. Daniel, wearing fat, noise-canceling headphones over earplugs, finally just sat down and gave up. He was flooded with anger and sadness and resentment and guilt; he cried like a baby, as the saying goes. He said it was strange, feeling his body convulse with so much emotion and hearing only silence. And in a cruel trick of irony, his convulsions are what finally soothed our baby to sleep in his lap.

I didn’t take care of Daniel as well as I could have. I know that now. I was so focused on myself and the baby, our health and wellbeing. I didn’t consider what Daniel might feel, what he might need, as a new father.

Sometimes, now, when I read about Adam and Eve—that brief, sketchy outline of a story—I wonder what’s missing. I imagine Adam, weeping in the wilderness.

I have spent my fair share of time feeling exhausted, harried, frustrated, bored, or lonely during the last two years of motherhood. I have grieved the loss of friendships that have dwindled as a result of competing nap times, and I have endlessly craved intellectual adult conversations, and I have missed writing for hours in the afternoon with bright, crisp light at my back that slowly stretches toward the mellow gold of evening, and I have felt strange in my own (once-familiar) body, and I have wanted desperately to sleep past seven on the weekend, and I have missed summertime backpacking trips in the Uintas and regular date nights, and I have swiped past my favorite music in order to play Blippi’s “Excavator Song” for the hundredth time on the way to the grocery store. I have grieved those losses—I have cried over many of them.

But I have gained so much in return. I have watched my son discover the world, watched him discover the falling yellow leaves of autumn
for the very first time. I have crouched beside him as he follows a black cricket through the grass. And I have heard his little voice in the darkness saying, “I just love you mommy, always always.”

I could not have had all those little glimmers of bliss, without the loss of my former, easier life. And there are so many people in the world who want what we have and cannot get it. I am lucky. I am blessed beyond measure.

Perhaps I finally understand something which seems obvious, but which I have never really been willing to embrace, until now: that loss is a necessary part of living. Something that makes our lives better—richer. That it is something we need to fully experience joy.

2 Nephi 2:22–23 says: “And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end. And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery.”

Looking back, I understand that parenthood (and life) is a rich and beautiful experience, precisely because it is full of loss. Grief and joy are two sides of the same coin, driven by the same principle that orchestrates the seasons: lose the warmth of summer, gain the color of autumn; lose the silent, chilly beauty of falling snow, gain the early morning birdsong of spring. You cannot have everything at once, but you can have everything in its season.

The gift of having something beautiful also means the grief of losing something beautiful—someday.

Since Daniel’s monthslong depression as a new dad, we have discovered that his experience is more common than either one of us would have guessed. I have friends whose husbands also suffered from postpartum depression, but it isn’t something I learn until after I mention Daniel’s experience. It’s not something many people talk about.

Maybe this is a symptom of lingering “mental health” taboos, but it seems like more than that—I was very aware that I was at risk for postpartum depression and anxiety. I had no idea my husband was also at risk of living in that debilitating fog. Perhaps we feel it’s shameful to respond with deep sadness when you aren’t the one birthing a baby and
undergoing wild hormonal swings. It’s something we don’t seem to want to acknowledge, maybe because men are supposed to be “strong.” But his strength—his persistence—was part of the problem. He wouldn’t quit. He wouldn’t take a break for himself because he was so focused on taking care of me.

Things are better, now, and they have been for a while. By the time Quincy turned one, Daniel had mostly returned to his usual self. But I still worry that he has not found himself completely—has not fully embraced this new version of joy. And I worry about how to take care of him—how to do better—if we choose to have another baby.

But we have gone camping a handful of times, both with and without our son. We have taken the dog backpacking in the Uintas, and we have taken turns carrying our boy in a pack on summer mountain trails. Last fall we strapped a baby carrier to the back of Daniel’s bike and felt the wind in our faces as we pedaled down the river trail through falling leaves.

That doesn’t mean we don’t miss the old joy. Not all the time, but sometimes. Sometimes, when we are alone, we will reminisce about how uncomplicated our lives together were, before. How beautiful and easy and happy and wrapped up in each other.

We have lost an incredible, beautiful thing, but we have also gained an incredible, beautiful thing. And maybe this is what we come here to learn: how to let go, again and again. How to lose things, so that we can gain something different. Maybe something better. Maybe we come here to embrace the necessity of loss—the way there will always be beautiful stuff out there to fill the gaps left behind by grief.

Quincy is two now, and sometimes—after he has brushed his teeth and put on his pajamas—we climb together into the “big bed,” all three of us, to snuggle and to talk. Quincy leans his head against Daniel’s, and asks a question:

“Daddy, you will tell me ’bout jellyfish?”

Daniel tells him everything he knows about jellyfish: they are sea creatures, they are translucent, their tentacles will sting you if you touch them, they are beautiful and strange. And when he has finished, Quincy scoots closer to me and repeats everything he can remember, his breath hot on my cheek:

“You know a jellyfish, mom? It is a creature. It lives in water, like sea turtles! It is bee-yooooo-double! But you no can touch it. It is ouch!”
As he talks, I feel Daniel’s hand on my leg—a little squeeze. I can feel how happy he is. I’m happy, too. I press my nose against Quincy’s blonde hair and inhale, knowing he will not be young forever. That someday he will be too old for this kind of cuddling—he will leave home, and live his own life, and maybe even have his own children, and I will grieve the passing of another season.

This personal essay by Shamae Budd received second place in the 2022 Richard H. Cracroft Personal Essay Contest, sponsored by BYU Studies.
This Holy Mess

Sharlee Mullins Glenn

When we go on road trips as a family, we often play what we call “Deep Questions.” One person asks a probing question, and then the rest of us have to answer (“What is the bravest thing you’ve ever done?” “If you could spend one hour with any historical figure, who would it be?” and so on). On one such occasion, someone asked: “What is your greatest fear?”

When it was my turn to answer, I responded (with what I thought was admirable honesty and vulnerability): “Messes.”

Everyone laughed. But I was absolutely serious.

I’ve always been terrified of messes. I seem to have been born with an extraordinary need for order in my life. Or it may be that the trauma and disruption of my early life led to this inordinate longing for things (both physical and emotional) to be tidy and predictable. I lost my father, my oldest brother, and my beloved grandmother all within a year’s time when I was five years old. When my grief-stricken, thrice-bereaved mother fainted at my brother’s funeral, I watched her fall and thought that she, too, had died. My whole world seemed to be careening out of control.

And so I became a neat freak. My few toys and other personal belongings were always carefully arranged according to size, color, and type—and heaven help the sibling who moved anything. For a time, I deluded myself with the hope that I could at least keep my own very small corner of the world in order. But you don’t have to live very long to learn that if anything at all can be said about life, it’s that it’s messy.
Which didn’t keep me from trying to hold back the relentless advance of entropy by sheer force of will—and a good vacuum cleaner. I cleaned, I dusted, I straightened. I made lists, I set goals, I filled planners. I lived by the mantra, “a place for everything, and everything in its place.”

And it worked pretty well for a while. Though there were inevitable bumps in the road and some unexpected twists, things went more or less according to plan through high school, college, a mission. Then I got married. The first thing that threw a wrench into my well-oiled machine of order and predictability was the fact that no matter how carefully we tracked my cycles and rhythms and morning temperature, no matter how faithfully we ate the right kinds of foods and took the right kinds of vitamins and prayed the right kind of prayers, we couldn’t get pregnant.

But then, finally, miraculously, joyfully, we did. And then we did again, and again, and again, and again. And I woke up one morning to the fact that I was a mother of five small children, none of whom seemed to care the slightest bit about my requirement for order.

Gradually, I’ve stopped fighting the disorder so much. I’ve learned to recognize its inevitability. On good days, I sometimes think I’ve even learned to find the beauty, or at least the value, in the messiness.

When our oldest daughter was twelve, the children’s choir she sang with was invited to participate in a music festival in Italy. I was able to go along as a chaperone, returning to the beloved land where I had served as a missionary many years before. After a Saturday evening concert in Florence, our group had to arise early the next morning to travel to Rome where we would be attending mass and then singing in St. Peter’s Basilica. Because of the early hour, a few people were late boarding the tour bus. Our Italian guide, Isabella, was becoming more and more frantic. “Hurry!” she called to the stragglers who were sleepily lugging their bags across the parking lot. “Andiamo! We can’t be late for the Holy Mess!”

We all (Isabella included) giggled at her earnest linguistic blunder, but I haven’t been able to stop thinking about it.

Many years later, I ran across this exact term—the one Isabella had formulated so innocently—in Ann Voskamp’s book The Broken Way. “All of us,” Voskamp writes, “get pushed from safe wombs out into this holy mess.”

Holy mess.

Is there any better description for this thing we call mortality? So much of life is at once holy and messy—birth, sex, creativity, cooking, relationships, parenting, forgiveness, death. In messiness, new life is conceived. In messiness, that new life enters the world. And in messiness (too often involving objectionable bodily fluids), that new life is cleaned, diapered, clothed, fed, burped, and cleaned again, in a seemingly endless cycle. In messiness, art is created, chaos is ordered (however fleetingly), patience is developed, and grace is extended.

Adam and Eve fell into messiness—a messiness involving weeds, labor, dirt, quarrelling children, sorrow, pain, and death. And it turns out that such messiness is a prerequisite for growth. Jesus Christ entered this world in messiness (into a stable filled with hay and dung), and, as our Savior and Redeemer, he willingly enters into our individual messes to be with us, to strengthen us, to help and uphold us. Christ, broken on the cross, understands our brokenness and sanctifies it. Even after his resurrection, Christ retained the scars in his hands, the wound in his side—visual reminders, of course, of his transcendent sacrifice, but also perhaps nostalgic mementos of his own mortal-ness and the holy messiness of it all.

A number of years ago, our stake planned a women’s conference around the theme “Becoming Women of Holiness.” In preparation for this conference, the stake Relief Society presidency asked us to seriously consider the injunction in Doctrine and Covenants 46:33 to “practice virtue and holiness before me continually.” They then invited us to join them in an experiment—to try for one entire week to be holy.

I was genuinely excited about this challenge. One of my favorite hymns has always been “More Holiness Give Me.” I think most of us yearn for this—to be better, to be holier, to be more like God. And I loved the wording of the scriptural admonition to “practice virtue and holiness.” Practice. I could do that. Isn’t that what mortality is all about—practicing? In his paradigm-shattering sermon “His Grace Is Sufficient,” Brad Wilcox asserts that “we are learning heaven. We are preparing for it. We are practicing for it.”

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2. See Isaiah 41:10.
Okay, I thought. *I can do this. I can practice holiness.*

The Hebrew word most often translated as “holiness” in the scriptures is qodesh, which means set-apartedness, separateness, sacredness. It makes sense, then, that it is easiest to feel holy and to act in holy ways when we are set apart from the world—on a mission, for example, or in the temple. The real trick is to feel and act holy while in the world. In really bad traffic, for example, or in Walmart on the last Saturday before Christmas.

And yet we *are* in the world. And it’s messy.

As I started my week of holiness practice, then, this question was wriggling about in the back of my mind: *Can one really be holy in a fallen world?* I woke up that first morning determined to try. My schedule was remarkably unencumbered that particular day—no meetings, no pressing deadlines, no looming demands. As I opened my eyes, I was filled with a deep sense of gratitude for life and for God’s grace. I rolled out of bed and onto my knees and said a focused, heartfelt prayer. I felt enveloped in peace. I greeted our children cheerfully as they stumbled, rumple-robed and sleepy-eyed, into the kitchen and made a nice hot breakfast for them (omelets, toast, and fresh juice rather than just cold cereal and milk). I hummed my favorite Primary songs as I packed five healthy, hearty lunches, writing little love notes to tuck inside each brown paper bag.

As I dropped the children off at their respective schools and then headed to the gym for my morning workout, the sun seemed brighter, the mountains more majestic, the whole world more beautiful than usual. I was really feeling holy! I arrived at the gym and briefly wondered, *Can holiness and sweat coexist?* It turns out that they can! As I tackled the elliptical machine and the weights, I felt happy, holy, and grateful. I was grateful for everything—air to breathe, water to drink, a body that, even after five babies, could still walk and bend and run and jump (well, sort of). I was grateful for the smiles of strangers, the big air fans hanging from the ceiling, hand sanitizer in nifty new dispensers.

I retained that feeling of holiness as I drove home (listening to the Tabernacle Choir) and prepared my morning bowl of oatmeal. I was grateful for stoves, for electricity, for pans, for running water, for oats and blueberries and bananas and cinnamon. I prayed over my steaming bowl and felt as though I was in the very presence of God. As I ate my breakfast, I opened my scriptures and feasted on the words of Isaiah. They were alive and vibrant, full of poetry and grace. “Fear not: for I have redeemed thee,” I read. “I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine” (Isa. 43:1).
Even doing laundry felt holy. I remembered an experience I’d had several years earlier when I was an overworked, overwhelmed, chronically under-rested young mother of five endlessly needy little ones. During this time, I read a book about Mother Teresa. She was my hero. I longed to be like her, doing genuine good in the world. I yearned to be that kind of a disciple. I firmly believe that the essence of the gospel is to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, and I felt guilty that I wasn’t able to devote more time to doing this. Then it hit me. Wasn’t that exactly what I was doing? Wasn’t I feeding the hungry and clothing the naked every single day in my own little family? This epiphany completely changed my mindset. The mundane, messy tasks of cooking, cleaning, mending, and otherwise caring for my family no longer felt meaningless. I was doing holy work.

I wish I could say I never once lost sight of this perspective in the ensuing years, but, alas, I sometimes did. But on this first day of my holiness practice, I remembered anew and eagerly jumped into the sacred work of sorting clothes, washing dishes, and chopping vegetables for the crockpot. The whole day slipped by in a happy haze of holiness.

Then the first child arrived home from school—tired, hungry, and uncharacteristically ornery. He intruded on my haven of holiness. He was sullen and sulky, which I could ignore, but then he got sassy and snappy, and I snapped back. And just like that, heaven collided with the dark and dreary world. Holiness evaporated, replaced by an oppressive cloud of contention. I felt sick with disappointment. How had I allowed this to happen? Why was I so weak, so easily beset by sin? I wanted the holiness back, the peace, the joy, the easy communion with the Spirit.

Then I looked at my boy (his unruly mop of hair and his too-big-for-his-body hands and his mad-sad eyes) standing there in all his glorious man-child holiness, and I felt my heart liquify. I hugged him and said I was sorry. Then he said he was sorry too, and voila! It was back. Just like that. That beautiful feeling of wholeness and holiness was back. Until the other hungry, school-weary kids swarmed through the door a few minutes later, that is...

I learned at least four important things from this experience: (1) holiness is slippery; (2) it’s much easier to act and feel holy when other people aren’t around to interfere; (3) holiness is more about gratitude and awareness and turning to the Savior than anything else; and (4) holiness may very well just be messiness sanctified by grace.

I also realized that, try as we might, we cannot make ourselves holy. As children of God who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ, we already are.
The trick is remembering that—about ourselves and about every other person on this planet. Messy and mortal though we are, we are all made holy through Christ, our Savior. As Moroni writes so movingly in the final chapter of the Book of Mormon, “Then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, . . . that ye become holy, without spot” (Moro. 10:33).

Life is untidy. It’s a fact. And we are too. We are complex beings, all of us: byzantine mixtures of good and bad, strength and weakness, the sublime and the ridiculous, the sacred and the profane. In short, we’re a mess. But we’re a beautiful mess—a mess that Jesus was willing to die for. Even as my own temperament continues to impel me to fight against chaos and to yearn for eventual, eternal order, I know I must persist in learning from the mess, surrendering to the mess, embracing the mess, being transformed by the mess. The holy, holy mess.

This personal essay by Sharlee Mullins Glenn received third place in the 2022 Richard H. Cracroft Personal Essay Contest, sponsored by BYU Studies.
Sally in Three Worlds: An Indian Captive in the House of Brigham Young, by Virginia Kerns (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2021)

In Sally in Three Worlds: An Indian Captive in the House of Brigham Young, Virginia Kerns relates the story of the settlement of Utah through the life of Sally, a Pahvant Ute woman who lived in Brigham Young’s household. On its surface, the book is a narrative of the life of one woman, but Kerns argues that “a single life can illuminate an entire cultural and social world, or reveal an unremarked but vital part of the human story” (1).

Kerns is a professor emerita of anthropology at the College of William and Mary in Virginia. She has written three books, including the award-winning Scenes from the High Desert: Julian Steward’s Life and Theory (Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2003). In Sally in Three Worlds, Kerns tackles the challenge of telling Sally’s story even though she left no records of her own. In addition, rather than relying on the accounts of the leaders of the Latter-day Saint settlers, Kerns instead focuses on the perspectives of natives, settler women, and strangers in the Salt Lake Valley. By examining the complex experiences of both natives and settler women, Kerns constructs an evidence-based narrative of Sally’s life both as a Pahvant Ute in a “civilized” community and as a woman in a male-dominated society.

Kerns introduces Sally’s story by setting up a wild-civilized dichotomy that Kerns uses as a lens through which to examine Sally’s experiences and the observations of the people around her. The book is divided into three parts that coincide with the “three worlds” Sally finds herself in throughout her life. The first part, “Mountains and Sky,” describes the first interactions between the native tribes and the settlers in the Salt Lake Valley. It also explores Sally’s introduction into a new community and lifestyle. Part two, “The Heart of Civilization,” presents details of Sally’s daily life while living with the other women in the Lion House and Beehive House. The final part, “Exiles,” examines Sally’s marriage and her “mission” to encourage other natives to adopt a civilized lifestyle. Kerns concludes by addressing several contradictory accounts that have misrepresented Sally’s actual experiences.

While addressing themes such as violence and the environment, Kerns presents a sensitive narrative in a way that is both informative and impactful. Anyone with an interest in the settlement of Utah and the experiences of a variety of individuals will find new insights in Sally’s story and appreciate Kerns’s efforts to rediscover someone who has been overlooked for so long.

—Julia Harrison

A New Witness to the World, by Robert A. Rees (Salt Lake City: By Common Consent Press, 2020)

This book provides a series of essays that analyze and contextualize the text of the Book of Mormon while providing Professor Rees’s faithful perspective on the text. Though each essay stands on its own as a separate work, the later essays, handling the context of Joseph Smith’s work as a nineteenth-century American writer, do reference and build off one another. These later essays handle the backgrounds and processes of various American writers contemporary to Joseph Smith, providing an effective survey of the literary milieu into which the Book of Mormon first entered; the earlier essays are more focused on the text of the Book of Mormon itself, looking...
at how it handles the stories of its individual figures, from Nephi to Ammon to those Nephites and Lamanites who lived for two hundred years in peace. Deeply present in every essay is Rees’s own testimony of the Book of Mormon and its importance in a faithful life.

This text is both devotional and academic and will be valuable to those seeking to gain a deeper understanding of the Book of Mormon through study and also through faith. It is written for faithful members of the Church, both those engaged in scholarly study of the Book of Mormon and those seeking to increase their faith. Ultimately, Rees concludes that “the primary message of the Book of Mormon from beginning to end is love” (229), and his own witness throughout this book reinforces that assertion.

Robert A. Rees is currently Visiting Professor of Religion at Graduate Theological Union in Berkley as well as Director of Mormon Studies and has formerly taught at the University of Wisconsin, UCLA, UC Santa Cruz, UC Berkley, and Vytautas Magnus University in Lithuania. He has published extensively about the Book of Mormon, both studies and poetry, including Proving Contraries: Essays in Honor of Eugene England (2005); The Reader’s Book of Mormon (2008); Why I Stay: The Challenges of Discipleship for Contemporary Mormons (vol. 1, 2011; vol. 2, 2021); and Waiting for Morning (2017).

—Lane Welch
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