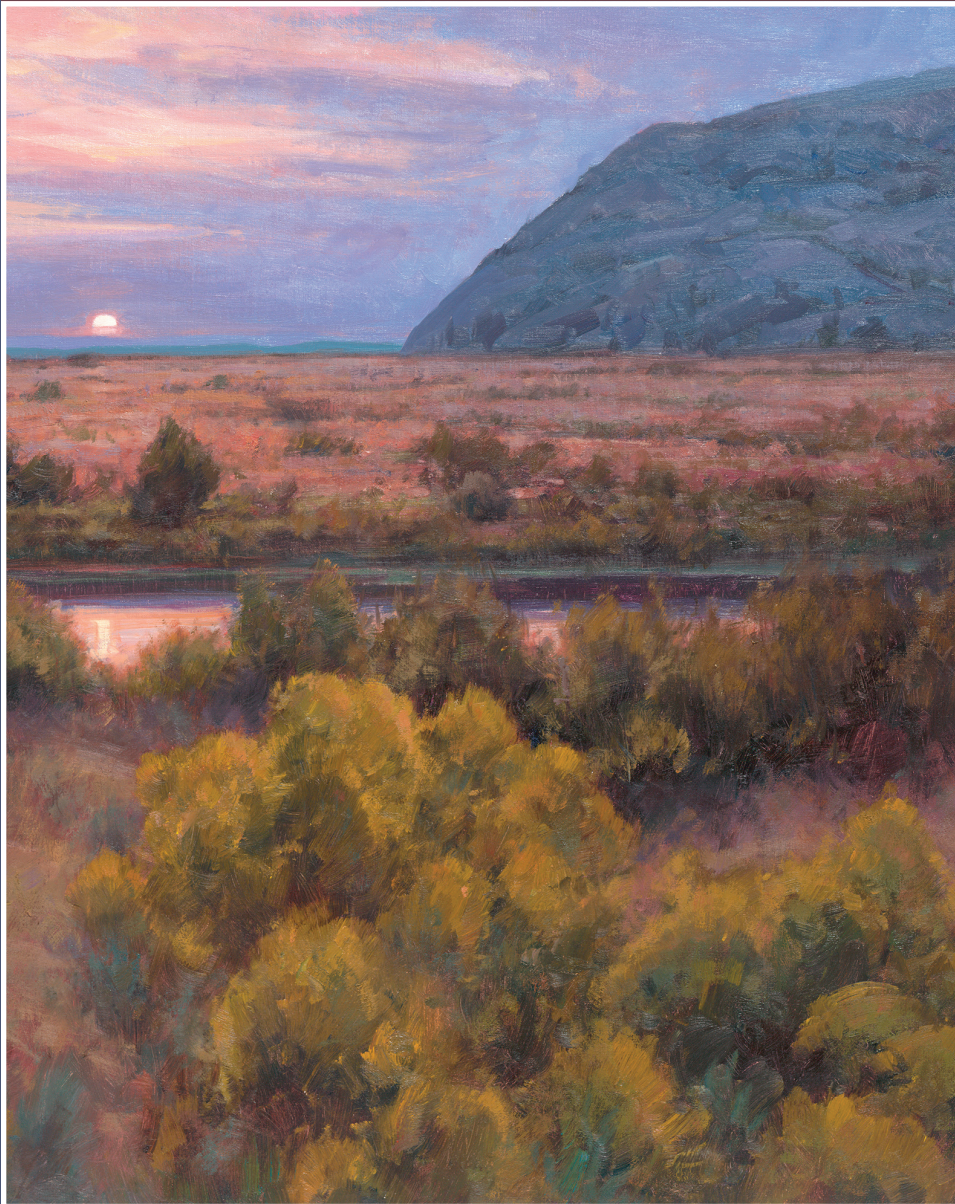


# BYU STUDIES

Scholarship informed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ



Volume 62 · Number 2 · 2023

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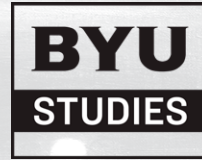
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**Scholarship Informed by  
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First Presidency, ca. 1974. Courtesy Church History Library.

# A Prophet's Journey

## The Journals of Spencer W. Kimball

*Jeffery L. Anderson and Brandon J. Metcalf*

**T**he Church History Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints recently released the journals of President Spencer W. Kimball online. President Kimball is well known for his advocacy of keeping personal journals and histories. He passionately preached about their worth and importance. “We renew our appeal for the keeping of individual histories and accounts of sacred experiences in our lives—answered prayers, inspiration from the Lord, administrations in our behalf, a record of the special times and events of our lives,” he taught. “Stories of inspiration from our own lives . . . are powerful teaching tools. I promise you that if you will keep your journals and records they will indeed be a source of great inspiration to you, each other, your children, your grandchildren, and others throughout the generations.”<sup>1</sup>

Throughout his life, President Kimball practiced what he preached. His journals rank among the very best kept by Church leaders and compare in importance to the Wilford Woodruff journals. The Woodruff journals stand as an essential source for nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint history, just as the Kimball journals do for the twentieth century. Both journal collections compare not only in chronological length but also in detail, insight, and ability to capture the personalities of their authors.

After his death, President Kimball's extensive journals remained in the custody of his family until they were donated to the Church in December 2008 by Edward L. Kimball, a son of Spencer and Camilla

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1. Spencer W. Kimball, “Therefore I Was Taught,” *Ensign* 12, no. 1 (January 1982): 4.



Spencer W. Kimball playing piano surrounded by grandchildren, 1951. Courtesy Church History Library.

Kimball. The journals fill twenty archival boxes (10.5 linear feet). The volumes were digitized in 2013. In 2023 they were prepared for access in the Church History Catalog. This is the first time the journals have been publicly available.

Spencer W. Kimball was born on March 28, 1895, in Salt Lake City, Utah, and spent his youth in Thatcher, Arizona. As a young man, he was called to serve a mission to Germany, but the outbreak of the First World War resulted in a reassignment to the Central States Mission. Though he dabbled with journal writing in his youth, he began a daily journal during his missionary service. After his mission, he returned to Arizona and married Camilla Eyring on November 16, 1917. Spencer ran a real estate and insurance business and served as president of the Mt. Graham Stake. The Kimballs lived in Safford, Arizona, until 1943, when Spencer was called to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, after which they moved to Salt Lake City, Utah. On December 30, 1973, he was ordained as the twelfth president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. His twelve-year presidency was marked by rapid growth in membership, an increase in the number of temples from fifteen to thirty-six, the restructuring of the Seventy, new editions of the scriptures, and the



revelation extending priesthood ordination to all worthy male members and temple blessings to all worthy members of the Church. President Kimball died in Salt Lake City on November 5, 1985.

The earliest journals in the collection are composed in the traditional sense with daily entries, but after his call as an Apostle, Elder Kimball expanded the scope of his journal by inserting what might be considered scrapbook elements. He supplemented his daily entries with additional contextual material, including newspaper clippings, letters, photographs, maps, and travel documents accumulated while on Church assignments and other activities. By volume, this supporting documentation is extensive and at times complicates the navigation of chronological journal entries.

Most entries were typewritten, but occasionally some appear in long-hand, possibly when Kimball did not have access to a typewriter. Red-pencil underlining, marginalia, and handwritten annotations made by Kimball appear throughout, suggesting that he reviewed and referenced his journals regularly.

The journals were the primary source for the two seminal works on the life of Kimball—a biography cowritten by his son, Edward L. Kimball, and grandson, Andrew E. Kimball Jr., and a later book by Edward focused on his father's presidency years.<sup>2</sup> Edward Kimball's heavy use of the journals is evident from occasional notations in his hand and some obvious rearrangement that presumably occurred over the course of his research. Edward's handwriting is smaller than President Kimball's, and some of his additions appear in the form of a typescript using a more contemporary printer. For instance, personal journal entries for the later years of President Kimball's life are not extant, but Edward inserted typed notes he had taken from an office journal kept by staff covering the years 1978 to 1981.

Preparing a journal like this for public release is complicated due to its recency and because President Kimball was involved in many confidential matters, including disciplinary councils, restoration of blessings, and private meetings with individuals. Furthermore, he included material (such as newspaper article clippings) that remains under copyright.

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2. Edward L. Kimball and Andrew E. Kimball Jr., *Spencer W. Kimball: Twelfth President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1977); Edward L. Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride: The Presidency of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005).

As the archives of a religious institution, the Church History Library collects and preserves records that document the Church and its members. Archival and manuscript collections are treated differently from other types of records in the way that they are housed, described, and accessed due to factors such as physical condition, scope and complexity, donor-imposed restrictions, or content. Before they were released, the Kimball journals were carefully reviewed according to the Church History Department's access policy. Excerpts containing sacred, private, or confidential information were identified, and the corresponding digitized images were redacted.<sup>3</sup>

In the case of the Kimball journals, privacy does not refer to President Kimball's privacy but rather to details about individuals whom he counseled or interviewed in private settings. A concerted effort was made with the cooperation of the Kimball family to minimize redaction throughout the journals and where possible only redact the names of individuals. In addition to privacy concerns, entries with content related to sacred temple rites and ceremonies were redacted. Moreover, beyond private priest-penitent communications, there are categories of information classified as confidential that were redacted. For example, some of the journals include details about disciplinary action and meeting minutes of the presiding quorums never intended for public consumption.<sup>4</sup>

## Call to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

The Kimball journals capture details of typical day-to-day happenings and family life as well as major life-changing events like his 1943 call to the Apostleship. Several entries colorfully recount his reaction to a conversation with President J. Reuben Clark, first counselor in the First Presidency, informing him of the call to the Twelve by telephone. By this time, President Heber J. Grant's poor health required many of his previous responsibilities to be handled by his counselors:

As I opened the front door of my home—coming to luncheon Eddie was saying “No—he isn't here—Oh yes here he comes now—”

I took the phone and my heart beat like a diesel as I heard the operator saying[.] “Mr. Kimball, Salt Lake City is calling—Just a minute please[.]”

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3. Less than one percent of the journal was redacted.

4. The Church History Department's current access policy is available at <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/content/library/access?lang=eng>. See also Keith A. Erekson, “A New Era of Research Access in the Church History Library,” *Journal of Mormon History* 46, no. 4 (October 2020): 117–29.

The voice came[,] “Spencer, this is Brother [J. Reuben] Clark. Do you have a chair?”

“Yes—Brother Clark.”

“The Brethren have selected you as one to fill the vacancies in the quorum.”

“O! Brother Clark!” as I sat upon the floor and gasped[,] “Not me surely.” As I hesitated to catch my breath[,] he said[,] “Are you there?”

“Yes,” I said. “I’m trying to catch my breath but you have me all of a sweat[.]”

“Well, it is pretty warm here in Salt Lake too,” He laughed [and] said[.] (But I was sitting in the direct blast of a new cooler[.] )

“That means that I must leave here and move up to Salt Lake?” I asked[.]

“Yes[,] ultimately.”

“But, Brother Clark, I am so small and weak and unworthy of such a great honor—Surely there must be some mistake[,]” I countered.

“Well, so far as we know[,]” he answered[,] “You are one of the finest young men in the church[.]”

“Could I have a little time to catch my breath and collect my thots [sic]?”<sup>5</sup>

He described his immediate reactions as family members became aware of the news:

Camilla, Andrew and Eddie heard my end of the conversation and were definitely wondering. I told them and charged them not to mention it to any one till I returned from Salt Lake[,] still thinking it a mistake or a dream.

I went about my work the balance of the day in a daze—I showed houses “for sale” but I spoke only words, empty ones for my mind was so completely occupied[.]

By 5.P.M. I realized I was of no value to my work. I lay down in the back room a few minutes then went home— I hadn’t been able to get my customary siesta at noon because of my shock— I tried again now— The pent-up tears of many dry years came forth as I realized how small and weak I was in proportion to the bigness and strength needed in such a work[.]

Camilla ran her fingers thru my hair as I went thru a sustained convulsion ending in a release of tears, the first flood since the night more

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5. Spencer W. Kimball, Journals, 1905–1981, July 14, 1943, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. This entry is dated July 14, 1943, but he is writing about events that occurred on July 8.

than 5 years ago when Brother [Melvin J.] Ballard notified me I was to be Stake President.<sup>6</sup>

Elder Kimball was sustained as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles at the October 1943 general conference along with Ezra Taft Benson. He handwrote the emotions felt that day:

Went to the offices of the Church early for my first meeting with all the Quorum of the twelve. Pictures were taken for the papers. The family came down—Camilla and I and the Bensons<sup>7</sup> had dinner at Hotel Utah and the women had their pictures taken—At 2 P.M. the first session of the Conference began. I had been in my locked room for a final prayer before this great experience. Bro Benson and I sat on the first row in the audience.

(Preston and Harold Mitchell<sup>8</sup> sat with us) Immediately after the opening exercises, the General Authorities were sustained and with the Twelve Apostles were the names 11-Spencer W Kimball, 12-Ezra T Benson. How weak I felt! How humble I was! How grateful I was when Pres McKay said the voting was unanimous. I seemed to be swimming in a daze. It seemed so unreal and impossible that I—just poor weak Spencer Kimball—could be being sustained as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ and tears welled in my eyes again as I heard myself sustained as an Apostle a prophet Seer, and Revelator to the Church.

We were called to the stand and took our places with the Twelve Apostles. I was next to Bro Lee who squeezed my arm in welcome. Thousands of eyes were upon us appraising weighing honoring us. What a sublime moment to feel that here were the great leaders of the Church upholding accepting and sustaining us – thousands of them representing the entire Church.

Mingled feelings of joy ecstasy – fear – humility.

After some other talks I was called on for my maiden talk—How I reached the pulpit I hardly know. What a moment. A sea of upturned wondering expectant faces met my first gaze. I began: My beloved Brethren etc. see the talk in the scrap book—<sup>9</sup>

I must have taken about 15 minutes—I lost track of time as I poured out my appreciation and gratitude and bore testimony—As I took my

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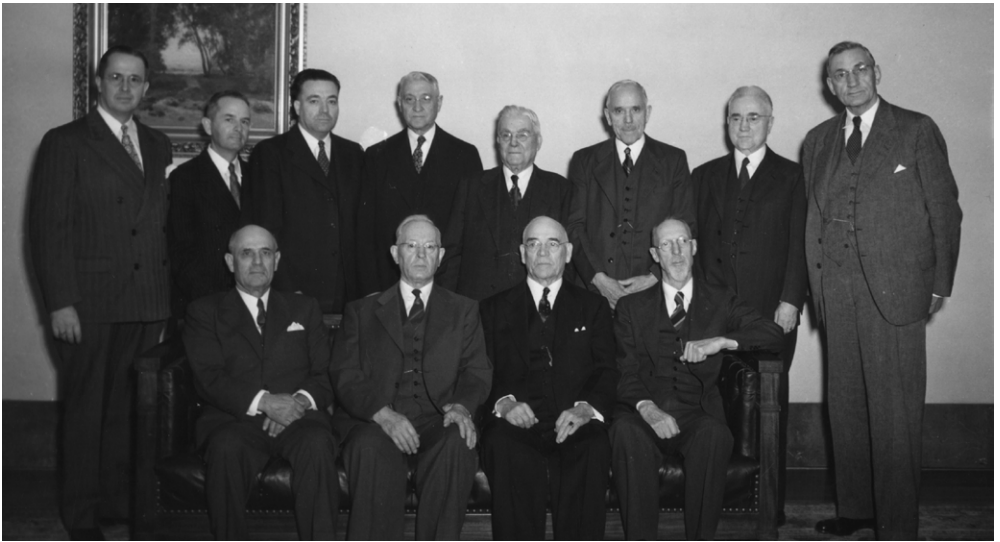
6. Kimball, Journals, July 14, 1943 (concerning events of July 8).

7. Ezra Taft Benson and Flora Smith Amussen were married on September 10, 1926.

8. Preston Woolley Parkinson (1903–2002) was Kimball's first cousin. Joseph Harold Mitchell (1895–1990) served as first counselor to Kimball in the Mt. Graham Stake presidency and had succeeded Kimball as stake president on September 12, 1943.

9. See Spencer W. Kimball, in *One Hundred Fourteenth Semi-annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1943), 15–19.





Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, 1943. Bottom row (*left to right*): Stephen L Richards, Joseph Fielding Smith, George F. Richards, George Albert Smith. Top row (*left to right*): Ezra Taft Benson, Spencer W. Kimball, Harold B. Lee, Albert E. Bowen, Charles A. Callis, Joseph F. Merrill, John A. Widtsoe, Richard R. Lyman. Courtesy Church History Library.



Elders Spencer W. Kimball and Ezra Taft Benson at the April 1972 general conference. Courtesy Church History Library.

seat I felt I had failed and continued to tell myself that I had failed as Bro Benson gave his simple sweet spirited testimony. The balance of the meeting was a blur except I remember now Bp [Marvin O.] Ashton and others paid tribute to the two new Authorities and their humble testimonies.<sup>10</sup>

## Swiss Temple Dedication

In the late summer of 1955, Elder Kimball filled an assignment to tour the European missions that concluded in Zollikofen, Switzerland, with the dedication of the Swiss Temple. For years, the Church had encouraged its members to remain in their homelands and build up stakes of Zion. But the distance required to travel to a temple prevented some European Saints from attending and prompted others to emigrate to the United States for easier access. The Swiss Temple was one of three temples built in the 1950s that were smaller than previous temples. They were the first to introduce a film presentation of the endowment ceremony.<sup>11</sup>

The film made the endowment ceremony available in multiple languages spoken by Latter-day Saints across the European continent, and dedicatory sessions were conducted in numerous languages. Elder Kimball noted attending many sessions where he did not speak the language.

Elder Kimball also described the first time that temple ordinances were administered in the Swiss Temple. Many at the dedication had waited decades to receive their ordinances and anxiously remained near the temple for the opportunity. To accommodate the large numbers, the temple stayed open for long hours. Elder Kimball felt compelled to meet as many people as possible, which left him physically exhausted. “I shook hands with most of the hundreds of the people and missionaries from the two missions. . . . I was exhausted tonight I slept poorly. . . . It has been a long hard but delightful tour almost night and day but I am tired. My nerves are getting ~~taught~~ taut.”<sup>12</sup>

A few days later, he added, “I have shaken hands with nearly every member and missionary except I missed many the first day. I was glad

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10. Kimball, Journals, October 1, 1943.

11. See *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, vol. 3, *Boldly, Nobly, and Independently, 1893–1955* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2022), 590–96. The Swiss (1955), New Zealand (1958), and London (1958) temples were all similar architecturally and in size. The Los Angeles Temple (1956) was the anomaly among 1950s temples and was much larger in scale.

12. Kimball, Journals, September 12, 1955.



Bern Switzerland Temple dedication, September 1955. Individuals pictured on the front row beginning eighth from left: Alice T. Evans, Richard L. Evans, Henry D. Moyle, Camilla E. Kimball, Spencer W. Kimball, David O. McKay, and Emma R. McKay. Seated second from right on the front row is Gordon B. Hinckley. Courtesy Church History Library.

to see the Saints from the various countries. Many remembered me and seemed pleased to see me.”<sup>13</sup>

Despite his fatigue, Elder Kimball continued putting in long days even after the dedication. After assisting at the temple into the early morning hours, Elder Kimball headed to his hotel in nearby Bern. His journal illustrates his resourcefulness at a time with limited modes of communication: “I left about 3:45 a.m. for Berne. It was very dark and still. At the station no train would run till 6 a.m.. I could not get an answer on the phone to call a taxi so I hitchhiked and a good Zollikofen farmer picked me up and gave me a ride to Berne in his market truck.”<sup>14</sup>

## Health Challenges

The journals reveal Elder Kimball’s health struggles throughout the years as well as the full range of emotions such challenges produced, from joy

13. Kimball, Journals, September 14, 1955.

14. Kimball, Journals, September 17, 1955.

and triumph to sorrow and frustration. In 1957, Elder Kimball began to experience some throat discomfort, and his doctors referred him to a specialist in New York. Travel and the painful biopsy of his throat precluded any daily journal entries. He retrospectively summarized the experience with heavy underlining and handwritten notes labeled “Surgery” and “Operation”:

It is dark and gloomy outside, drizzling rain and the sun has not been out today. I wish I were as sure that my own sun would come up as I am of the solar one. From where I sit this moment, life looks drab and empty and drizzly. . . .

We were ushered into the waiting room and not long afterward were sent in to Dr. Hayes Martin. He barely spoke to us, was cold and calculating. He looked at my throat [a] few times and attended another patient while Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ and Dr. Taylor looked me over. When he came again to glance down my h throat again he dictated to a stenographer a few lines, indicated they would perform the biopsy the next day and left unceremoniously.<sup>15</sup>

After another instance of similar treatment, he wrote, “I felt like I was just one of a herd of cattle being inspected before the kill.” Recounting the events of March 5, he wrote, “This was a sad day. I entered the hospital with a voice and came out the next day without one.”<sup>16</sup> Recovery was unpleasant:

Here was a lost day I had asked the woman Doctor, anaesthetist the night before, when she came to see me, how long I would be Unconscious and she replied, “just enough” I assumed that this meant that I would return to consciouness immediately after the operation was over as I did in Salt Lake in 1950 in a similar situation.<sup>17</sup> But it was about 16 hours I lay in unconsciousness. What I said or did during that time, I have no way of knowing but the first thing I knew a nurse was turning me on one side, I suppose to change [the] sheets. I did not seem to realize what she wanted or what she was doing and she spoke very crossly to me several times. I finally got half way up on my knees and said “don’t be so cross.” Then she railed upon me. I said “I don’t know just what you want” and she kept muttering and scolding me for what seemed a long time.<sup>18</sup>

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15. Kimball, *Journals*, March 8, 1957. Names in the journals are sometimes left blank, and Elder Kimball likely intended to add the name later.

16. Kimball, *Journals*, March 5, 1957. This entry was written out of sequence below a March 8 entry.

17. In 1950, Kimball had a spot removed from his throat, which was identified as noncancerous. See Kimball, *Journals*, March 8–13, 1950.

18. Kimball, *Journals*, March 7, 1957.



His greatest fear was that a total loss of his voice would make his service as an Apostle impossible. He reflected, "I have not feared to die so far as I can analyze it, but to face years of living without usefulness is frightening. After these years of extensive activity to think of being shelved for inability to serve is terrifying."<sup>19</sup>

To quicken his recovery, doctors instructed him not to speak. "I went to Priesthood Meeting with Andrew and was duly acknowledged but could not say a word. It was most difficult to sit in the class and say nothing. In Sunday School I was again acknowledged but could say nothing. Things were said in the class which I felt needed refutation but I was powerless."<sup>20</sup>

Results of the biopsy were inconclusive, but by July Elder Kimball's throat had not healed, and he was advised to return to the specialist in New York for further testing. This time, doctors found a cancerous growth, and within hours they removed one of his vocal cords and part of another. The Kimballs remained in New York for several weeks before returning to Salt Lake City in early September. Elder Kimball slowly regained the ability to speak and was able to deliver his first sermon since the surgery on December 8 at a quarterly stake conference in Arizona.<sup>21</sup> Yet his throat problems persisted, requiring additional biopsies and eventually radiation treatments in late 1971 to remove a cancerous tumor.<sup>22</sup> His new voice was later described as "a quiet, persuasive, mellow voice, an acquired voice, an appealing voice," one that was "loved by the Latter-day Saints."<sup>23</sup>

## Ministering to the One

Despite his health challenges, Elder Kimball repeatedly reached out to people from all walks of life. Another experience portrayed in the journal demonstrates his compassion toward individuals amid the demands of a hectic schedule.

In June 1957, Elder Kimball agreed to meet a man in his office at 2:30 p.m., but the man never arrived. Elder Kimball went looking for him and found him in a downtown Salt Lake City hotel. He described the man as

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19. Kimball, Journals, March 8, 1957. This is an entry on the page following the earlier March 8 entry.

20. Kimball, Journals, March 10, 1957.

21. Spencer W. Kimball to Camilla Kimball, December 8, 1957, Safford, Arizona, in Kimball, Journals.

22. Kimball, Journals, October 13, 1971; November 9, 1971; December 31, 1971.

23. Boyd K. Packer, "President Spencer W. Kimball: No Ordinary Man," *Ensign* 4, no. 3 (March 1974), 4.

unsteady on his feet, with ruffled hair and a red face. “He embraced me and wept and pointed to the dresser covered with empty and partly filled bottles of 7Up and a half empty bottle of liquor. He was ashamed. He babbled on as a drunk would: how glad he was to see me, how he appreciated my coming; that I was the first one who showed that much interest in him.”

Elder Kimball immersed the man in a bathtub full of cold water and gave him some tomato juice. The man’s wife had wired some money, and Elder Kimball escorted him to Western Union to retrieve it. “I am sure many people who knew me were surprised at my company. The W.U. girls were asked by him if they were Mormons and he told them proudly who I was in loud drunken terms and language. The girls were as embarrassed as I.” The pair then made their way to the downtown Alcoholics Anonymous group, and Elder Kimball arranged for him to stay there. “While I did this he was tell[ing] the men in the room that I was his friend and I was an Apostle of the Mormon Church etc.” After returning to the hotel to check out, the man disappeared. “I went along 2nd South and stepped in every pool hall, café, and tavern down the line and couldn’t find him.” Needing to catch a train to Los Angeles, Elder Kimball abandoned the search. At the time, he was suffering from a severe case of sciatica, and “every step was torture.” Walking around town looking for the man made the pain nearly unbearable.

Back in Salt Lake City several days later, a concerned Elder Kimball sought out the man and found him “bright and cheery and clean and look[ing] like a new man.” This story of charity and ministering to the one is just one of many preserved in the journals.<sup>24</sup>



Spencer W. Kimball on trip to Argentina, 1964. Courtesy Church History Library.

24. Kimball, Journals, June 8, 11, 1957.

## Mentoring a Future Prophet

The journals document interactions and relationships with family, General Authorities, and others. This includes his friendship with his doctor and future Church President Russell M. Nelson. Their first substantial contact occurred when Elder Kimball was assigned to reorganize the Bonneville Stake presidency in December 1964. He noted in his journal that he called “Russell Marion Nelson, a doctor who is an eminent heart specialist,” as the new president.<sup>25</sup> Throughout his six and a half years as stake president, President Nelson counseled with and was mentored by Elder Kimball regarding serious problems in the stake.<sup>26</sup> But it was President Kimball’s health issues that solidified their close bond.

While attending an area conference in Manchester, England, in August 1971, President Kimball told Dr. Nelson of some heart pains. A few weeks later, Nelson was at Church headquarters for a meeting in his role as newly called Superintendent of the Sunday School organization.<sup>27</sup> President Kimball stopped him in the hall and invited him to his office so they could discuss his health. Tests were ordered that soon revealed serious problems that required surgery. In March 1972, the Kimballs, Dr. Nelson, and Dr. Ernest L. Wilkinson<sup>28</sup> met with Presidents Harold B. Lee and N. Eldon Tanner to discuss the extreme risks of the surgery. With the encouragement of President Lee, it was decided to proceed, and Dr. Nelson performed open heart surgery on President Kimball on April 12, 1972.<sup>29</sup>

In subsequent years, Dr. Nelson performed an emergency appendectomy on Camilla Kimball and several more medical procedures on President Kimball. He regularly checked on the Kimballs, provided medical advice, ministered to individuals at the request of President Kimball, and traveled with the Kimballs to the South Pacific for area conferences, simultaneously filling the roles of Sunday School General President and personal

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25. Kimball, Journals, December 6, 1964.

26. Russell M. Nelson, *From Heart to Heart: An Autobiography* (Salt Lake City: Quality Press, 1979), 161–62.

27. Russell M. Nelson served as Superintendent and President of the General Sunday School from June 1971 to October 1979. A year after he was called, the title was changed from superintendent to president on June 25, 1972. See “Title Change is Announced, YMMIA Counselors Named,” *Church News*, published by *Deseret News*, July 1, 1972, 3.

28. Dr. Ernest Ludlow Wilkinson (1924–1992) was a cardiologist and the son of former BYU President Ernest Leroy Wilkinson (1899–1978).

29. Spencer J. Condie, *Russell M. Nelson: Father, Surgeon, Apostle* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 153–55; Kimball, Journals, September 15, 1971; March 13, 1972; April 12–15, 1972.

physician. At the time of Kimball's call as Church President in 1973, Nelson offered support by way of a visit and handwritten letter, causing Kimball to refer to him as "a real friend."<sup>30</sup> The letter touched President Kimball, and he transcribed it into his entry for the day:

The circumstances which have brought you to this sacred responsibility are many. Best known to me are those associated with the preservation of your life. You will recall it was President Lee who lent encouragement and support for you to proceed with the operation on your heart, even though you knew the risks were exceedingly great. . . .

Your surgeon wants you to know that your body is strong; your heart is better than it has been for years, and that by all of our finite ability to predict, you may consider this new assignment without undue anxiety about your health.

Now, may I presume to add a word of caution (as you did when setting me apart as Stake President in 1964) not to tax your capacity with excessive demands. Just as any delicate instrument can be misused, so the fine equipment you bring to this office can be overloaded. You must delegate and entrust to your beloved and capable associates everything that need not be done by you. Accurate medication, periodic checkups, proper rest and pacing will contribute as much to your total productivity as will your work.

Finally, I want you to know what a privilege it is to be your servant, for I know you have been sent, prepared, spared, and blessed by the Lord to lead His Church, with the special power that is uniquely yours.

I love and sustain you, always!

Devotedly,  
Russell M. Nelson<sup>31</sup>



Spencer W. Kimball recuperating from heart surgery, 1972. Courtesy Church History Library.

30. Kimball, *Journals*, December 26, 1973; Russell M. Nelson to Spencer W. Kimball, December 30, 1973, in Kimball, *Journals*.

31. Kimball, *Journals*, December 26, 1973. Nelson's letter was dated December 30, but the transcript appears in the December 26 entry. The original letter was also retained in the journal.



In the late 1970s, President Kimball counseled Nelson to write an autobiography for family members. President Kimball agreed to write the foreword with the understanding that Nelson would compose the first draft for Kimball to review and revise. *From Heart to Heart: An Autobiography* was privately published in 1979 and included two chapters on his experiences with President Kimball.<sup>32</sup> In 1984, amid health limitations, President Kimball approved the call of Russell M. Nelson to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles nearly twenty years after calling him as stake president. Their twenty years of close association illustrate how one prophet prepared and tutored a future one.<sup>33</sup>

## 1978 Revelation on Priesthood

Among the most significant events of President Kimball's presidency was the June 1978 revelation extending the priesthood to all worthy male members of the Church. Unfortunately, by 1977, President Kimball had stopped keeping a journal, though his personal secretary, D. Arthur Haycock, kept an office journal until 1981. In the 1980s, President Kimball's son Edward was permitted to take notes from the office journal covering the years 1977 to 1981. Edward's typescript of his notes was added to his father's personal journal at some point prior to its donation to the Church History Department in December 2008. The typescript included Edward's commentary, sometimes denoted with square brackets. Thus the 1977 to 1981 journal entries are Edward's notes of Haycock's office journal rather than President Kimball's personal writings.

Edward's notes on these office journal entries do not contain President Kimball's personal thoughts on the revelation, nor do they include details of President Kimball's persistent spiritual work in seeking the will of the Lord in the months preceding the revelation. His notes for June 9, 1978, are a verbatim copy of the office journal rather than the usually abbreviated summary.<sup>34</sup>

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32. Russell M. Nelson, *From Heart to Heart: An Autobiography* (Salt Lake City: Quality Press, 1979); personal communication from President Russell M. Nelson, February 18, 2023; Sarah Jane Weaver, "How the Unique Relationship between 2 Prophets Blesses the Church," *Church News*, February 26, 2023, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://www.thechurchnews.com/living-faith/2023/2/26/23609442/sarah-jane-weaver-unique-relationship-between-two-prophets-nelson-kimball-blesses-church>.

33. Russell M. Nelson became the seventeenth President of the Church on January 14, 2018.

34. For details regarding events leading up to the revelation, see Edward L. Kimball, "Spencer W. Kimball and the Revelation on Priesthood," *BYU Studies* 47, no. 2 (2008): 4–78.

6/9 “This morning at seven o’clock by prior arrangement met in the upper room of the Salt Lake Temple with all of the General Authorities to consider with them the matter of giving the Priesthood to all worthy male members of the Church: (See copy of letter.)<sup>35</sup>

“Immediately following the release of this announcement the telephones started to ring and rang continuously the balance of the afternoon. People, members and nonmembers, called from around the world to learn if what they had heard on the radio and TV was true.

“The First Presidency met with the Presiding Bishopric at 10:15 a.m. which was much later than usual due to our meeting in the Temple.

“At 11:00 a.m. the First Presidency met with a Mr. Ron Smith of Newsmaking International.

“This afternoon at 2:30, President David P. Gardner of the University of Utah brought Dr. Franklin, a black man, in to meet me and came into my office for a short visit.

“Had appointments with several of the General Authorities this afternoon on matters they needed to discuss with me. Also my counselors and I met with the Missionary Committee and then later with Brother Heber G. Wolsey and Wendell J. Ashton.

“It was a very busy day today and did not get away from the office until six o’clock tonight.”<sup>36</sup>

Two days later, another entry provides some insight into the revelation’s impact:

6/11 to Honolulu; conf. with Kauai Hawaii Stake.

“On the 11th of June we took plane to San Francisco and Hawaii. . . . One good brother approached with two sons about eleven and twelve and a little later his wife, a colored black lady, a member of the Church, but they had heard of the change of policy of the Church toward the black people and she was weeping copiously. She indicated that the day before when they had heard the news that the black people would now be given the privilege of the gospel, she had wept all day long, so grateful was she. This is true of many people, both white and black, who have indicated that they wept all day when they had heard the enlightening news.”<sup>37</sup>

About nine months after the revelation was announced, President Kimball reflected on the experience at a devotional for young adults:

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35. First Presidency circular to all General and Local Priesthood Officers, June 8, 1978; “Every Faithful, Worthy Man in the Church May Now Receive the Priesthood,” *Ensign* 8, no. 7 (July 1978): 75; “Revelation Extends Blessings of Gospel,” *Church News*, June 17, 1978, 3.

36. Kimball, *Journals*, June 9, 1978.

37. Kimball, *Journals*, June 11, 1978.

“We had the glorious experience of having the Lord indicate clearly that the time had come when all worthy men and women everywhere can be fellowheirs and partakers of the full blessings of the gospel. I want you to know, as a special witness of the Savior, how close I have felt to him and to our Heavenly Father as I have made numerous visits to the upper rooms in the temple, going on some days several times by myself. The Lord made it very clear to me what was to be done.”<sup>38</sup>

## Legacy of the Kimball Journals

The Kimball journals are among the richest resources for Latter-day Saint history in the twentieth century. They provide readers with a window into Spencer Kimball's individual growth, showing his frustrations, struggles, extreme trials, compassion, and drive. Above all, they show his deep and abiding faith in the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

President Kimball's lifelong commitment to keeping a journal reflects his numerous teachings on the subject. “Your own private journal should record the way you face up to challenges that beset you,” he taught. “Do not suppose life changes so much that your experiences will not be interesting to your posterity. Experiences of work, relations with people, and an awareness of the rightness and wrongness of actions will always be relevant.”<sup>39</sup> His journals embody the candid and honest type of personal histories he felt were important. Beyond their historical value, the Kimball journals serve as a model and motivation for our own record-keeping efforts.

The journals are now available on the Church History catalog at <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/record/4c1c1ed1-f19b-45fc-b835-626343188f24/o?view=browse&lang=eng>.

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38. Spencer W. Kimball, “The Savior: The Center of Our Lives,” *New Era* 10, no. 3 (April 1980): 3.

39. Spencer W. Kimball, “The Angels May Quote from It,” *New Era* 5, no. 10 (October 1975): 4–5.

# Weaving

Morning enters and splits the Hogan  
and she wakes from dreams of mountains,  
hungry for offerings tall for maize  
her eyes hold visions until she sees  
patterns her mother taught her

She fills her loom with dream colors  
bloom of yarrow  
desert sand  
sky before snow  
eyes of her lover  
She sings as she weaves  
a rhythm smooth as bone  
shuttles  
over and under  
over and under

The moon opens and closes his eye twice  
now her blanket holds figures  
of corn pollen boy and growth spirit girl  
dancing jagged  
like spires and peaks  
broken layers in the mesa  
lines that channel her cheeks.

Again, she sings as she watches her grandson  
his pickup its bald tires weaving  
another stripe of color on the horizon  
and sends a blessing  
that he will find her blanket a good home  
that it will bring money enough  
to keep those she loves through winter  
as they sleep full and deep  
in the belly of her Hogan

—Christine Bird

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This poem won first place in the 2023 BYU Studies  
poetry contest.

# A Close Look at Scriptural Teachings Regarding Jesus Feeling Our Pains as Part of His Atonement

Scott C. Woodward

Scriptural teachings regarding the Atonement of Jesus Christ represent the most important and cherished doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Elder Richard G. Scott emphasized its importance, stating, “The atonement of Jesus Christ is the single most significant event that ever has or ever will occur.”<sup>1</sup> Elder Neal A. Maxwell called it “the central act in all of human history” and “the hinge on which all else that finally matters turned.”<sup>2</sup> And Elder Bruce R. McConkie declared it to be “the center and core and heart of revealed religion.”<sup>3</sup>

The majority of what we learn and teach in the Church about Christ’s Atonement is solidly grounded in scripture. For example, dozens of scriptural passages attest that Jesus suffered for our sins, died on our behalf, and was resurrected in order to redeem us from the powers of death, hell, and the devil (see, for example, 1 Cor. 15:3; Heb. 2:14–15; 2 Ne. 2:6–9; 9:5–9, 19; Mosiah 15:7–9; 16:4–15; Alma 33:22; 42:12–24; Hel. 14:15–18; 3 Ne. 9:21–22; 11:11; and D&C 18:11–12). Yet not everything we understand and teach in the Church about Jesus’s Atonement is so scripturally clear. The purpose of this paper is to examine one such scripturally ambiguous example, what I will term the “empathetic” aspect of the Atonement,

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1. Richard G. Scott, “Finding Forgiveness,” *Ensign* 25, no. 5 (May 1995): 75.

2. Neal A. Maxwell, “Willing to Submit,” *Ensign* 15, no. 5 (May 1985): 70.

3. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 81.

by which I mean the idea that Jesus's empathy<sup>4</sup> toward humanity was gained by way of personally experiencing our pains and sicknesses during his atoning sacrifice.

It is strikingly clear, scripturally speaking, that Jesus Christ does understand each of us intimately and can compassionately empathize with and comfort anyone who is going through anything at any time (see Heb. 2:16–18; 4:14–16; Alma 7:11–13; and D&C 62:1). He has consistently demonstrated his ability to do so throughout scripture, including as the premortal Jehovah (see, for example, Mosiah 24:13–14; Alma 31:31–38; 58:10–12; D&C 107:55), the mortal Jesus (see, for example, Matt. 9:20–22; Mark 1:40–42), and the postmortal Christ (see, for example, 3 Ne. 17:5–9; D&C 62:1; 121:7–11). What is unclear, however, is whether Jesus's sufferings in Gethsemane and on Calvary constitute *the source* of Jesus's empathy toward mankind. Was his atoning sacrifice *the way* Christ came to truly understand us?

This question has grown out of the fact that in the last few decades it has become increasingly common in the Church to read or hear something to the effect that during his Atonement in Gethsemane and on the cross at Calvary, in addition to suffering for our sins, Jesus somehow personally experienced or took upon himself every individual human anguish, sickness, sadness, suffering, and infirmity so that he can perfectly empathize with and succor us as we experience the same in our lives. Such teachings situate the source of Jesus's empathy squarely within the context of his atoning sacrifice. But is this scripturally accurate?

This question may not at first seem consequential. After all, one might ask, isn't the important thing the fact that Jesus *does* understand us? Does understanding *how* he gained his empathy toward us have any bearing whatsoever on our faith? These are fair questions. While it is certainly true that the *how* of Jesus's empathy should not influence our confidence in his ability to offer us help and strength as we may need it, it is also true that if this empathetic Atonement idea is mistaken, then believing it to be correct may adversely impact our understanding of Christ's Atonement and consequently our efforts to exercise faith in him. It might be somewhat analogous to President Russell M. Nelson's caution to Latter-day Saints about using shortcut phrases to refer to Jesus's Atonement—such as “the enabling power of the Atonement,”

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4. “Empathy” as used throughout this paper is defined as the ability to understand and appreciate the feelings and experiences of another (see Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. “pain, *n.1*,” <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/61284>).



or “applying the Atonement,” or “being strengthened by the Atonement.” Such expressions, he warned, “present a real risk of misdirecting faith by treating the *event* as if it had living existence . . . independent of . . . Jesus Christ.”<sup>5</sup> In a related way, this empathetic Atonement teaching, if mistaken, may obscure and detract from the doctrine of Jesus’s Atonement and unintentionally misdirect our efforts to exercise faith in him and what he has accomplished on our behalf. Seen in light of these implications, the question seems consequential indeed.

One Latter-day Saint author, Chieko N. Okazaki, who favored this empathetic Atonement idea, took it to its furthest conclusions, writing that “Jesus experienced the totality of mortal existence in Gethsemane,” meaning that “he experienced everything—absolutely everything” there. He therefore “knows what it felt like when your mother died of cancer—how it was for your mother, how it still is for you. He knows what it felt like to lose the student body election. . . . He experienced the slave ship sailing from Ghana toward Virginia. He experienced the gas chambers at Dachau. He experienced Napalm in Vietnam. He knows about drug addiction and alcoholism.” This logic also includes women’s issues. “There is nothing you have experienced *as a woman*,” Okazaki wrote, “that he does not also know and recognize. . . . He understands about pregnancy and giving birth. . . . He knows about PMS and cramps and menopause. He understands about rape and infertility and abortion.”<sup>6</sup>

Conversely, Latter-day Saint author and scholar Robert L. Millet has questioned the validity of viewing Jesus’s Atonement as the source of his empathy. “Did Jesus really suffer delivery pains in Gethsemane?” he asks. “Did he suffer an ACL tear? Did he receive a rejection letter from Stanford? Or, rather, is it the case that his perfect empathy comes out of his perfect love?”<sup>7</sup> Millet cautioned, “If the Atonement of Jesus Christ is so broad, so expansive that it covers most everything . . . then it will gradually lose its meaning and full impact in our lives.”<sup>8</sup>

Whether true or false, the presence of this empathetic Atonement teaching in the Church has significant consequences on our Atonement theology. If it is true, it represents a profound expansion of our

5. Russell M. Nelson, “Drawing the Power of Jesus Christ into Our Lives,” *Ensign* 47, no. 5 (May 2017): 40, emphasis original.

6. Chieko N. Okazaki, *Lighten Up* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 174–75, emphasis original.

7. As quoted in Anthony Sweat, *Christ in Every Hour* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2016), 81.

8. Robert L. Millet, *The Atoning One* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2018), 158.

previous understanding of Christ's Atonement, which should be celebrated and proclaimed. If it is true, our Atonement theology is being imbued with an intensity of intimacy and connectedness between Christ and mankind beyond anything previously understood. If, on the other hand, Christ did not personally experience the totality of mankind's personal suffering during his Atonement, if he did not actually feel our specific non-sin-related afflictions either in Gethsemane or at Calvary (or both), then to teach that he did so obscures and detracts from the truth of what actually occurred. The risk is diverting Church members' faith toward an aspect of Jesus's Atonement that isn't real.

Thus, the rising prevalence of this teaching in the Church raises the following important question, which this paper seeks to address:

Are there clear passages of scripture that substantiate the idea that (a) during his sufferings either in Gethsemane or at Calvary, Jesus personally experienced all human anguish and suffering unrelated to sin, which (b) constitutes the source of his deep empathy toward mankind?

The intention of specifically probing the scriptural basis of this empathetic Atonement concept is to probe its doctrinal reliability. In a General Authority training meeting, President Gordon B. Hinckley explained the primacy of canonized scripture in determining doctrine when he stated, "When all is said and done, the test of the doctrine lies in the standard works of the Church."<sup>9</sup> Our canonized scriptures, he declared in another training to Church leaders, "provide the standard by which all gospel doctrine is measured."<sup>10</sup> Elder D. Todd Christofferson affirmed that "the scriptures are the touchstone for measuring correctness and truth."<sup>11</sup>

General Authorities have consistently taught that even their words are to be measured against the standard works. We "are not bound to accept . . . as truth," President Harold B. Lee explained on this matter, anyone's teaching "that is not substantiated by the standard Church works"—meaning the scriptures—"regardless of his position in the Church."<sup>12</sup> The doctrinal teachings of General Authorities, Elder Joseph Fielding Smith confirmed, should be accepted as true "only in so far

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9. General Authority Training Meeting, October 1, 1996, cited in *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 574.

10. "Cornerstones of Responsibility," Regional Representatives' Seminar, April 5, 1991, 2.

11. D. Todd Christofferson, "The Blessing of Scripture," *Ensign* 40, no. 5 (May 2010): 34.

12. Harold B. Lee, *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 543–44.

as they accord with the revealed word in the standard works.”<sup>13</sup> Elder Bruce R. McConkie elaborated further on this point, saying that if and when there are doctrinal discrepancies between scripture and modern Apostles, “it is the scripture that prevails. This is one of the reasons we call our scriptures *The Standard Works*. They are,” he continues, “the standard of judgment and the measuring rod against which all doctrines and views are weighed, and it does not make one particle of difference whose views are involved. The scriptures always take precedence.”<sup>14</sup>

Such repeated teachings of Church leaders on the doctrinal primacy of scripture represent both a challenge and an invitation to all gospel students to confirm the validity of doctrinal concepts through sound scriptural substantiation. For the purposes of this paper, therefore, only canonized scripture will be considered in this doctrinal analysis without reference to teachings of General Authorities, some of whom, I acknowledge, have taught the empathetic Atonement idea. It should not be understood that this paper is intended to pit canonized scripture against the teachings of any General Authorities. Instead, the purpose of this paper is to focus keenly on a thorough exegetical examination of what the scriptures themselves say on this matter in order to carefully test, measure, and weigh the doctrinal reliability of this concept. This we will do below by carefully examining the scriptural passages most frequently invoked to support it.

## An Analysis of Scriptural Teachings

When the empathetic Atonement concept is taught, there are four scripture passages consistently invoked to support it. These passages are Alma 7:11–13, Matthew 8:17, Isaiah 53:4, and 2 Nephi 9:21. Each of these passages will be analyzed to assess whether they support the empathetic Atonement teaching or not. However, the conclusions drawn herein will, of course, only represent the best efforts of this author to deduce the intent of each passage by evaluating context, intertextual clues, and word meanings. It is hoped that these efforts will ultimately motivate further careful exegetical work by others on these and related passages.

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13. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation: Sermons and Writings of Joseph Fielding Smith*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956), 3:203–4.

14. “Finding Answers to Gospel Questions,” letter dated July 1, 1980, published in *Teaching Seminary: Preservice Readings*, Religion 370, 471, and 475 (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 44, emphasis original.

The order of analysis will track from Isaiah 53:4 to Matthew 8:17 to 2 Nephi 9:21 and conclude with Alma 7:11–13.

### Analysis of Isaiah 53:4

*“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.”*

Isaiah 53 is part of Isaiah’s writing known as the fourth servant song,<sup>15</sup> which begins in Isaiah 52:13 and concludes at the end of Isaiah 53. The suffering servant of Isaiah 53 is never identified by name but is interpreted by Abinadi, Alma, Matthew, Mark, John, Philip, Paul, and Jesus himself as referring to the mortal Christ (see Mosiah 14–15, Alma 7:11, Matt. 8:14–17, Mark 15:28, John 12:38, Acts 8:32–33, and Luke 22:37). Therefore, verse 3, which speaks of this servant as being “despised and rejected of men” and “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,” is typically interpreted as saying that Jesus, during his mortal life, would be socially despised and rejected and would experience sorrow and grief. Verse 4 then says he would somehow bear “our griefs” (the Hebrew here can also be translated as sicknesses or diseases) and carry “our sorrows” (the Hebrew can here also be translated as pains or afflictions).

What precisely Isaiah means by saying he would *bear* our griefs and *carry* our sorrows in verse 4 is not completely clear, and different scriptural authors interpret this phrase in divergent ways (we will consider two such divergent interpretations in Matthew and Alma below). The crucial point for our purposes here is to note that verse 4 is never interpreted within scripture as a reference to Jesus personally experiencing our individual griefs and sorrows as part of his Atonement. The interpretation of these phrases as indicating a cosmic transfer of the aggregate sicknesses and afflictions of mankind upon Jesus either in Gethsemane or at Calvary is scripturally nonexistent. As a case in point, the prophet Abinadi, who provides the most detailed explanation of Isaiah 53 in all of scripture, draws no connection between verse 4 and Jesus’s atoning

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15. Bible scholars have identified at least four servant songs in Isaiah (also known as servant poems or Songs of the Suffering Servant), which are (1) Isaiah 42:1–9, (2) Isaiah 49:1–7, (3) Isaiah 50:4–9, and (4) Isaiah 52:13–53:12. See, for instance, *The HarperCollins Study Bible, Revised Edition* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2006), 965; see also Terry B. Ball, “Isaiah’s ‘Other’ Servant Songs,” in *The Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament: The 38th Annual Brigham Young University Sidney B. Sperry Symposium* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2009), 207–18.

sacrifice. Rather, Abinadi links Isaiah's image of Jesus bearing "our griefs" and carrying "our sorrows" to episodes during his mortal life where he "suffereth temptation, and yieldeth not to the temptation, but suffereth himself to be mocked, and scourged, and cast out, and disowned by his people" (Mosiah 15:5). Thus, for modern readers to interpret this verse as stating that Jesus will personally experience the griefs and sorrows of countless billions of mortals either in Gethsemane or on Calvary (or both) is to read more into the text than any scripture writers have done. It seems more reasonable to conclude, as Abinadi suggests, that this verse is merely descriptive of various distressing and painful episodes Jesus would experience in his own life as he briefly shared the mortal condition with us.

### Analysis of Matthew 8:17

*"That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses."*

In Matthew 8, we read that while in Capernaum, a fishing town more than one hundred miles north of Jerusalem situated on the north-western shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus visited Peter's house and "saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them" (Matt. 8:14–15). Matthew records that later that same evening "many that were possessed with devils" were brought to Jesus, "and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick" (Matt. 8:16). After telling his readers this much, Matthew punctuates this episode by declaring, "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias [Isaiah] the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses" (Matt. 8:17).

Here then is Matthew's interpretation of Isaiah 53:4. It is textually clear that Matthew sees in Jesus's actions in Capernaum the fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4. To Matthew, taking "our infirmities" and bearing "our sicknesses" was precisely what Jesus was doing at Peter's home as he healed those who were sick or possessed with devils. Thus, Matthew's reading of Isaiah 53:4 is something close to saying that God's servant "took our infirmities away" and "bare our sicknesses from us."

From this analysis, it is not clear why Matthew 8:17 would be invoked to support the view that Christ experienced our individual infirmities and sicknesses as part of his Atonement. When viewed in context, Matthew is unmistakably interpreting Isaiah's words as applying to Jesus's

actions of curing a fever, casting out devils, and healing the sick in Capernaum—not to his atoning actions, which would occur much later in Gethsemane and Calvary.

### Analysis of 2 Nephi 9:21

*“And he cometh into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice; for behold, he suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam.”*

Situated within the prophet Jacob’s more lengthy work dealing with the fulfillment of God’s covenant promises to the House of Israel (2 Ne. 6–10) is Jacob’s masterful sermon on the Atonement of Jesus Christ (2 Ne. 9). It is within this sermon that we find another passage often invoked to support the empathetic view of the Atonement. The phrasing in 2 Nephi 9:21 that Jesus would suffer “the pains of all . . . men, women, and children” is used by some to confirm the idea that Jesus somehow personally felt our mortal sorrows and anguish during his Atonement. To analyze the meaning of this phrase, however, we need the context provided by the verse that follows (v. 22). The main thought in these two verses is emphasized here for clarity. “And he cometh into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice; for behold, *he suffereth the pains of all men*, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam. And *he suffereth this that the resurrection might pass upon all men*, that all might stand before him at the great and judgment day.”

Note that Jacob’s complete thought spread across these verses is that Jesus will come into the world to save all men by suffering the pains of all men *in order* to enable the resurrection of all the family of Adam. This direct connection between “pains” and “the resurrection” calls into question the justification for using this verse to support the idea that Christ experienced all the non-sin-related suffering of humanity in Gethsemane and Calvary. How, we might ask, would feeling our pains as part of his Atonement on the one hand make possible the universal resurrection of all mankind on the other? Jacob’s explanation that Jesus (a) experienced the pains of all mankind as part of his Atonement so that (b) he could resurrect all mankind, does not fit the general empathetic Atonement logic, which instead says that Jesus (a) personally experienced all of humanity’s sorrows as part of his Atonement so that (b) he could empathize with us and help us in our times of need. Indeed, Jacob is teaching something altogether different.



To understand Jacob's meaning we need to understand how he is using the word *pains* in verse 21, or—since we do not have Jacob's original word in his native language—we need to know what the various English meanings are of this word and which one best fits the resurrection context of verse 22. In Webster's 1828 Dictionary, one of the meanings of the word *pain* is "penalty; punishment suffered or denounced; suffering or evil inflicted as a punishment for a crime."<sup>16</sup> This idea of punishment fits the most archaic meaning of the word *pain*. In fact, the etymology of the English word comes from the Old French word *peine*, meaning "suffering, punishment, Hell's torments"; the Latin word *poena*, meaning "punishment" or "penalty"; and the ancient Greek word *poinë*, meaning "penalty."<sup>17</sup> As we will see, this original meaning of *pains* as "penalties" or "punishments" best makes sense of Jacob's teaching within the broader context of 2 Nephi 9. When this meaning is inserted back into the text it reads as follows: "And he cometh into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice; for behold, *he suffereth the [penalties/punishments] of all men*, yea, the [penalties/punishments] of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam. And *he suffereth [their penalties/punishments] that the resurrection might pass upon all men*, that all might stand before him at the great and judgment day" (2 Ne. 9:21–22; emphasis added).

This meaning directly matches the substance of Jacob's teachings earlier in this chapter. According to Jacob, the penalty or punishment due to mortals as a consequence of the Fall is that our physical bodies will die, rot, and crumble (see 2 Ne. 9:6–7)—what Jacob refers to as "temporal" death (2 Ne. 9:11)—and our spirits will become subject to the miserable captivity of the devil in a state of endless torment (see 2 Ne. 9:8–9, 19, 26; see also Lehi's similar teaching in 2 Ne. 2:27, 29)—what Jacob refers to as "spiritual death" (2 Ne. 9:12). Accordingly, Jesus thus experienced the punishments due to every man, woman, and child—the punishments of temporal and spiritual death—by offering his own life as atonement to answer for our sins. One of Jacob's core messages in this chapter is that by entering into death and satanic subjection (the universal punishments—that is, "pains"—of the Fall) and then breaking the bands of death through his resurrection, Jesus created "a way for our escape from

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16. Webster's 1828 Dictionary, s.v. "pain," <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/pain>.

17. Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v. "pain (n.)," accessed June 8, 2023, <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=pain>.

the grasp of this awful monster[,] . . . the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit” (2 Ne. 9:10).

When verses 21–22 are thus read in the broader context of Jacob’s teachings that immediately precede them in this chapter, his message becomes clearer: Jesus “suffereth the pains of all men [that is, their punishments of temporal and spiritual death] that the resurrection might pass upon all men, that all might stand before him at the great and judgment day” (2 Ne. 9:21–22). From this contextual analysis, we conclude that the prophet Jacob’s use of the word “pains” in 2 Nephi 9:21 is not a reference to Christ personally experiencing our physical and emotional discomforts to enable him to empathize with us but instead is a reference to Christ experiencing our collective punishments so as to enable us to overcome death and hell and to receive a proper judgment commensurate with our repentance.<sup>18</sup>

### Analysis of Alma 7:11

*“And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.”*

In a speech to the Nephite people in the land of Gideon, Alma says, “I trust that you do not worship idols, but that ye do worship the true and the living God, and that ye look forward for the remission of your sins, with an everlasting faith, which is to come” (Alma 7:6). Alma’s desire for his people was to look forward specifically to the remission of their sins, which was coming. “For behold,” Alma continues, “there be many things to come,” but “there is one thing which is of more importance than they all—for behold, the time is not far distant that the Redeemer liveth and cometh among his people” (Alma 7:7).

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18. In June 1829, Jesus confirmed the above interpretation of 2 Nephi 9:21–22 when he explained to Joseph Smith that his physical death was equivalent to the “pain of all men,” which was connected to his resurrection and the bringing of all men unto him. His exact words were “For, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; *wherefore he suffered the pain of all men*, that all men might repent and come unto him. And he hath risen again from the dead, that he might bring all men unto him, on conditions of repentance” (D&C 18:11–12; emphasis added). The Apostle Peter, on the day of Pentecost, likewise testified that the crucified Jesus had been “raised up, *having loosed the pains of death*: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it” (Acts 2:24; emphasis added). This is a third scriptural instance where “pains,” as used in relation to Jesus’s Atonement, is associated directly with death.

Alma then sketches a few key details about the mortal life of the Son of God, largely rehearsing to the people what had been taught by King Benjamin and Abinadi about the coming of Jesus Christ. “And behold,” Alma says, “he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God” (Alma 7:10; see also Mosiah 3:8).<sup>19</sup> Alma then explains that following Christ’s birth, “he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people” (Alma 7:11).

Verse 11 is sometimes cited as though Alma were introducing a new doctrine about how Jesus would personally experience all of our pains, afflictions, temptations, and sicknesses as part of his atoning sacrifice. Yet, when read in light of verse 10, instead of situating the events of this verse within the context of Jesus’s Atonement either in Gethsemane or on Calvary, Alma appears only to be rehearsing to the people what had been taught previously by Abinadi and King Benjamin about the coming of the Son of God into mortality and the challenges he would endure in his own mortal life prior to his Atonement. The chronological flow between verses 10 and 11 suggests that the phrase “he shall go forth suffering” is best understood as a reference to Jesus’s mortal life following his birth. That is, following his birth into mortality Jesus would “go forth,” or go throughout his own life, suffering every kind of pain, affliction, and temptation which mortals are prone to experience. An angel uses this same phrase when explaining to King Benjamin that “the Lord Omnipotent . . . shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay, and *shall go forth* amongst men, working mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases” (Mosiah 3:5; emphasis added). Abinadi uses it, too, when he asks, “Have [all the prophets] not said that God himself should come down among the children of men, and take upon him the form of man, and *go forth* in mighty power upon the face of the earth?” (Mosiah 13:34; emphasis added).<sup>20</sup> “Going forth” is thus consistently associated with Jesus’s mortal sojourn as God dwelling in the flesh.

19. Alma may also be drawing here from Nephi’s teachings in 1 Nephi 11:13–21.

20. In 1 Nephi 11:24, Nephi uses a similar phrase in reference to Jesus’s mortality, saying, “I beheld the Son of God *going forth* among the children of men” (emphasis added).

Alma concludes verse 11 by saying, “And this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people”—a reference to the words of Isaiah 53:4 that we have considered above. The Hebrew words translated as “griefs” and “sorrows” in our King James version of Isaiah 53:4 can likewise be translated as “pains” and “sicknesses” as rendered here in Alma 7:11.<sup>21</sup> While some may say that the phrase “take upon him” in this passage signifies a cosmic transfer of all the pains and sicknesses of mankind during Jesus’s Atonement, this interpretation is unsupported in the text. First, Alma makes no reference to the events of Jesus’s Atonement but instead implies by narrative continuity with verse 10 that he is describing the events of Jesus’s mortal life following his birth. Also, it is vital to notice that Alma 7:11 uses the phrase “of every kind” to describe the range of Jesus’s mortal sufferings: “And he shall go forth suffering pains and afflictions and temptations *of every kind*” (emphasis added). For Alma to say that Jesus will suffer “every kind” of pain, affliction, and temptation as part of his own mortal life is vastly different from saying that Jesus will suffer “the totality of mortal existence in Gethsemane.”<sup>22</sup> Such a reading could hardly be further from Alma’s intended meaning.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, equating Alma’s “every kind” (a categorical statement) with “absolutely everything”<sup>24</sup> (an all-inclusive statement), while also assuming an Atonement context here—which Alma is not suggesting—constitutes an unfortunate but common misreading of this text. Thus, only when (1) the meaning of Alma’s “every kind” and “take upon him” phrases are misconstrued and (2) the context these phrases are describing is misjudged to be an atoning context can Alma 7:11 be used to support the empathetic Atonement idea.

In sum, the context provided by verse 10 favors a reading of verse 11 that says only that after the Son of God takes upon him mortal flesh by being born of Mary, he will go forth taking upon himself the *kinds* of pains, afflictions, and temptations that his people take upon themselves

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21. In fact, according to Latter-day Saint scholar Thomas Wayment, Alma’s rendering of “pains” and “sicknesses” is an even closer translation of the original Hebrew text than is “griefs” and “sorrows” as rendered in the King James translation. See Thomas A. Wayment, “The Hebrew Text of Alma 7:11,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005): 98–103.

22. Okazaki, *Lighten Up*, 174.

23. By analogy, to say that an experienced doctor has treated every *kind* of sickness and disease isn’t suggestive that the doctor has treated *every* sickness and disease. The difference between “every” and “every *kind*” is staggering in terms of scope and magnitude. We would do well to read Alma’s phrase “of every kind” in a similar light.

24. Okazaki, *Lighten Up*, 174.

as they go throughout their own mortal experiences. Alma's point here seems to be that not only will God's Son come down *among* mortals, but he will actually *become* mortal, fully shouldering in his own life all the same kinds of day-to-day suffering and pain that the mortal condition entails upon the rest of us. This, Alma is saying, is how Isaiah's words will be fulfilled about the Messiah "taking upon him" the pains and sicknesses of his people.

### Analysis of Alma 7:12

*"And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities."*

Alma 7:12 may be the passage most frequently invoked to scripturally support the empathetic Atonement teaching and therefore deserves our most careful analysis. It is important to note that the content and sequencing of Alma's teachings in this verse bear a striking likeness to the teachings of Abinadi in Mosiah 15:7–9, indicating that Alma is likely recalling and drawing upon Abinadi's words on these points—a likelihood strengthened by the fact that Alma quotes from Abinadi's teachings in Mosiah 15 in his subsequent teachings about Christ.<sup>25</sup> Specifically, after detailing the ill-treatment Jesus would experience in his life, Abinadi explains that he would (1) "be led, crucified, and slain," after which he would (2) break "the bands of death," which would (3) give him "power to make intercession for the children of men—having ascended into heaven, having the bowels of mercy; being filled with compassion towards the children of men" (Mosiah 15:7–9). In like manner, in Alma 7:12, Alma follows Abinadi's same sequence as he explains that Jesus would (1) die, then (2) loose "the bands of death" (Abinadi's phrase), and finally (3) have his "bowels . . . filled with mercy" toward his people (a close paraphrasing of Abinadi's words), having personally come to "know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities" (an idea strongly akin

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25. Alma draws upon Abinadi's words in Mosiah 15 without attribution in at least two other instances. Compare, for example, Alma's words in Alma 40:16 with Abinadi's words in Mosiah 15:21 and Alma's words in Alma 42:11 with Abinadi's words in Mosiah 15:19. Such evidence illustrates that Alma drew insight from Abinadi's teachings on Christ in Mosiah 15 and had the propensity to quote from them without attribution in his own teachings.

to both the intercessory and compassionate aspects described by Abinadi). As we will see below, understanding Abinadi as Alma's primary source for the content and sequence of ideas in this verse is invaluable in interpreting his meaning.

It is significant that in both Abinadi's and Alma's teachings there is an indisputable increase in Jesus's empathy toward mankind following his mortal life. Both his "power to make intercession" and his knowledge of "how to succor his people" expand appreciably following his own mortal sojourn. And given the central question of this paper, it is important to ask whether this empathic expansion toward mankind was caused by the events of Jesus's atoning sacrifice, by his own personal experiences as a suffering mortal prior to his Atonement, or somehow both. What did Alma believe?

Some have interpreted the following statement of Alma's in verse 12 as a reference to Jesus's Atonement: "And he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities." But did Alma intend this idea to be understood within the context of Jesus's Atonement or the whole of his mortal life? Let's examine the evidence.

On the one hand, a case could be made for an Atonement context for this phrase based on the fact that it immediately follows Alma's statement about Jesus's death at the beginning of verse 12. Alma says that Jesus "will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people"—a clear reference to Christ's Atonement—and then immediately follows in the same sentence saying, "and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy." The immediacy in proximity of the second thought in this sentence to the first could imply that they are associated as part of the same atoning experience.

On the other hand, it is difficult to read Alma as suggesting either that Jesus "will take upon him their infirmities" *at* his death or that he would do so *after* his death. Alma's sequencing here, therefore, is quite peculiar. One wonders why he would speak of Jesus's death and resurrection first and then talk about him taking upon himself the infirmities of mortality. This does not follow a Gethsemane to Calvary progression as we might expect if Alma was intending to connect this idea within the context of Jesus's Atonement. What seems the most likely (and most simple) explanation for Alma's sequencing here is, as noted above, that he is merely following Abinadi's conceptual flow in Mosiah 15:7–9 of



(1) Jesus dying, then (2) breaking the bands of death, and then (3) being filled with mercy toward mankind. This likelihood is strengthened by the fact that Alma clearly draws on Abinadi's language about Christ from Mosiah 15 elsewhere in his teachings.<sup>26</sup> Thus Alma's flow of ideas here is best understood as mirroring Abinadi rather than as introducing a revolutionary new doctrine about the universal transfer of all human-kind's infirmities upon Jesus during the events of his atoning sacrifice.

Indeed, when verse 12 is read in the context of verses 10 and 11, Alma can be understood as saying essentially this: the Son of God would be born of a mortal woman named Mary (v. 10), which would enable him to personally experience mortal vicissitudes of every kind (v. 11), which would enable him (1) to take upon himself death so he can "loose the bands of death which bind his people" and (2) to personally experience in his own life the infirmities of the mortal condition so he can know how to succor his people in their infirmities. Alma is thus highlighting the absolutely essential condition that Jesus be incarnated to enable him both to redeem his people from death *and* to draw compassionate insights from his own difficult mortal experiences regarding how to mercifully succor mankind. When Alma's words are combined with Abinadi's testimony in Mosiah 15, we have twin prophetic witnesses underscoring the deep empathetic compassion Jesus would gain for mankind by way of his own mortal life brimming with temptation, trial, sickness, infirmity, and flagrant ill-treatment at the hands of his fellow mortals. According to this prophetic pair, by becoming one of us Jesus learned keenly and experientially about all the distressing facets of mortality and was thereby filled with both a compassionate mercy toward us and an acute insight as to how to help us as we struggle in our own infirmities.

This understanding of Christ's empathy growing out of his own mortal experiences is paralleled in the letter to the Hebrews. In Hebrews 2:16–18, we read, "For verily [Christ] took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham"—that is, he became mortal, rather than angelic, just like the rest of Abraham's seed. The epistle continues, "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted."

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26. See footnote 25.

Note here that Jesus took upon himself mortal flesh so that “in all things” he became like us. One crucial reason he did so was that he might mercifully act the part of the high priest and make reconciliation for our sins. Another reason was that by personally experiencing what it means to be tempted, “he is able to succour them that are tempted.”

Two chapters later, in Hebrews 4:14–16, the author of Hebrews returns to this theme, saying, “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

Because the Son of God was “in all points tempted like as we are,” he understands the “feeling of our infirmities.” We can therefore boldly approach him to “obtain mercy” and “help in time of need.” The parallels between Hebrews 2 and 4 and Alma 7 are quite striking. Indeed, these verses in Hebrews offer independent scriptural support for the interpretation of Alma 7:12 above in which Jesus’s empathy, compassion, and mercy toward mankind—and his ability to succor us—grow out of the temptations and infirmities he experienced in his own mortal life, rather than by somehow personally experiencing all of our specific pains, sicknesses, and infirmities during his Atonement.

### Analysis of Alma 7:13

*“Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance; and now behold, this is the testimony which is in me.”*

Alma’s brief testimony of the life of God’s Son is brought to a conclusion in verse 13. Recall that verse 12 concluded with the idea that Jesus would come to “know” how to succor us as a result of his personal experience with mortal infirmity. Alma’s next word “now” at the beginning of verse 13 signals that a clarification is likely about to occur. He explains that “the Spirit”—almost certainly a reference to the eternal spirit within Jesus<sup>27</sup>—“knoweth all things.” Why would Alma say this? What point

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27. See Jared T. Parker, “Abinadi on the Father and the Son: Interpretation and Application,” in *Living the Book of Mormon: Abiding by Its Precepts*, ed. Gaye Strathearn and Charles Swift (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2007), 136–50.

might he be attempting to clarify? The subtle issue at play here is that it likely sounded odd to Alma's audience that God's Son (also referred to by Abinadi as "God himself" in Mosiah 15:1) would *learn* something through his infirmities. After all, could a God—who knows all things—come to know *anything* as a mortal he did not already know beforehand, including how to succor us? Is it a contradiction to suggest that a being who already knows all things could come into the flesh and learn something?

In verse 13, Alma seems to be attempting to explain that these are somehow both true: the eternal spirit within Jesus knew all things before his mortal birth, and yet in mortality he also came to "know according to the flesh" how to succor us in our infirmities. Alma is content to leave it at that. Rather than attempting to unravel this epistemological Gordian knot for his listeners, he instead only underscores what he seems to feel is the most central aspect of Jesus's mortal mission: "Nevertheless," he says, "the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance" (Alma 7:13).

In other words, Alma seems to be saying that Jesus would come to earth not *primarily* to understand us better or even to learn how to succor us (because his premortal spirit already knew all things); rather, Jesus would become mortal primarily to "take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance." It seems, in other words, that Alma is carefully bracketing in verse 13 what he had just said at the end of verse 12. He appears to be saying something close to this: "Although Jesus *did* come to know how to succor us in mortality, that is not the *main* reason he came to earth (since, after all, his spirit already knew all things); rather, his presence was required here—in mortal form—in order to directly deal with sin and deliver us from the consequences of our transgressions."

## Summary of Scriptural Analysis

The guiding question for this paper has been, "Are there clear passages of scripture that substantiate the idea that (1) during his sufferings either in Gethsemane or at Calvary, Jesus personally experienced all human anguish and suffering unrelated to sin, which (2) constitutes the source of his deep empathy toward mankind?" The four most oft-quoted passages used to affirm this idea have been analyzed above, and from this analysis, we are led to conclude that, instead of substantiating the idea of an empathetic component to Jesus's Atonement, each of these verses, in

various ways, trend away from that conclusion. It seems that only when the following phrases (with added emphasis) are isolated from their contexts or are assumed to be occurring within the context of Jesus's atoning experience do they appear to support the empathetic Atonement idea:

"Surely he hath borne *our* griefs, and carried *our* sorrows" (Isa. 53:4).

"Himself took *our* infirmities, and bare *our* sicknesses" (Matt. 8:17).

"He suffereth *the pains of all men*, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam" (2 Ne. 9:21).

"He will *take upon him* the pains and the sicknesses of *his people*" (Alma 7:11).

"He will *take upon him their* infirmities . . . that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities" (Alma 7:12).

When these phrases are read carefully within their contexts, however, we find in each instance, with the exception of 2 Nephi 9:21, that they are not specifically situated within nor attempting to describe the atoning experience but are instead referencing Jesus's mortal life prior to his Atonement. Thus, perhaps the most scriptural and contextually supported statement about Jesus's empathy is simply this: *Jesus's compassionate empathy toward those who experience pains, temptations, sicknesses, and infirmities in mortality was enhanced by way of his own mortal experiences living in a fallen world.* The essence of this idea was summarized well by President John Taylor, who said, "It was absolutely necessary that he should . . . have a body like ours, and be made subject to all the weaknesses of the flesh, . . . [and] be tried like other men." Having thus experienced his own mortality, President Taylor continues, Jesus can "thereby comprehend the weakness and the true character of human nature, with all its faults and foibles," so that now, "when he sees you passing through these trials and afflictions, he knows how to feel towards you—how to sympathise with you."<sup>28</sup>

## Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has not been to definitively determine whether Jesus personally experienced the totality of humankind's suffering during his Atonement. Rather, its purpose has been to probe the degree of scriptural support for such a teaching in order to assess its doctrinal

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28. John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 7:198–99 (November 13, 1859).

reliability and therefore the degree of confidence we might place in it. And while this analysis has concluded that current scriptural support is lacking to substantiate this teaching, future canonized revelation may someday determine this point with finality.

In the meantime, can we maintain confidence that Jesus truly understands us? Can a compelling scriptural case be made for hope and peace in Christ today for one grappling with debilitating depression, chronic sickness, suffocating heartache, or crushing temptation, even if Jesus did not personally experience these as part of his Atonement? Emphatically, yes! The scriptural witness is clear: after condescending from a place of flawless premortal perfection to dwell within his own fallen and infirmity-ridden flesh, Jesus went forth suffering. His mortal sojourn, rife with “pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind” (Alma 7:11), not only made him “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3) but also filled his bowels “with compassion towards the children of men” (Mosiah 15:9) and helped him “know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:12). One of the core reasons he became “fully human in every way” was so “that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest” toward a struggling humanity (Heb. 2:17, NIV). And because he was “in all points tempted like as we are” (Heb. 4:15), he “knoweth the weakness of man and how to succor them who are tempted” (D&C 62:1; see also Heb. 2:18).

In the portrait of scripture, we see a deeply compassionate Christ who was fully capacitated through the crush and struggle of his own lived mortal experiences to comfort and strengthen us as we experience our own unique commixture of afflictions. Hence the encouraging and hope-filled invitation to all of us who suffer in our myriad ways to “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

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# Wild Fruit

*Victoria Webb Rutherford*

Most woody nursery plants can be grafted or budded, but both processes are labor intensive and require a great deal of skill. For these reasons [grafting and budding] can be expensive and come with no guarantee of success. The nurseryman must therefore see in them a marked advantage over more convenient propagation techniques to justify the time and cost.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike when my parents euphemistically said they purchased me on sale at Kmart, my husband and I actually did get our children from a McDonald's PlayPlace, where they showed distinctive signs of having been formed from McNugget-clay paste, salt, and ketchup. The older boy, a five-year-old dynamo, was high powered, fast talking, and quick, but he wasn't childlike. He was a T-Rex, or so he rasped over and over from his perch on the play structure before shaking the tenuous plastic or bounding on top of the tube slide and jolting the riders inside. Brother, an observant two-year-old, was almost imperceptible compared to the full-tilt T-Rex, a quality he took full advantage of when he slipped out of the restaurant under cover of Jurassic chaos. When someone finally noticed and brought him back, the little boy impishly smiled as if to say, "There's always next time," and with his proximity to the house-on-fire T-Rex, he knew it was true.

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1. Ted Bilderback, R. E. Bir, and T. G. Ranney, "Grafting and Budding Nursery Crop Plants," NC State Extension Publications, June 30, 2014, <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/grafting-and-budding-nursery-crop-plants>.



As we got to know these children better in the weeks and months that followed, the older boy revealed impressive skills in the art of fit throwing. I witnessed a memorable display in a Ross Dress for Less checkout line where he threw himself down spread-eagle and ominously yelled his demands. Everything, including property damage and bystander casualties, was on the table. Similarly unforgettable was an explosive fit over a piece of pumpkin pie where T-Rex cleverly lured my husband into the garage and locked him in; during the time it took my husband to escape, the entire pie went down.

Brother had a different set of skills, but they were no less terrifying. He had a charm that melted your heart, yet it was jarringly indiscriminate. In the park, he would approach strangers about money or candy with unbelievable success, or he would join other families' picnics, unbidden. He sweetly made us feel special just long enough to cozy up on our laps and eat our entire lunch before pivoting and focusing his charm on the next sap with a full plate of food.

These alien inhabitants from McDonald's PlayPlace never slept and were never still. They were beyond busy and had no sense of boundaries or civility. They pulled down the Christmas tree and threw crystal in anger, shattering the window. They were driven to move, break, touch, jump, slam, hit. There were no games or friends that couldn't be broken or manipulated. If an organized activity were over and another hadn't begun, the dervishes would again begin to whirl as if their lives depended on it. Had I not been under water myself, I might have considered why.

I vacillated between feeling a cavernous loss and a sleep-deprived rage: my husband and I had no prior fostering experience (to say nothing of general parenting), and the social worker had assured us that we could give her a call if this placement didn't feel like a fit; it was, after all, our very first placement. When we tried to follow up with her weeks later, we learned she was no longer with the agency, the children were from another state, and we had limited options aside from dumping them across state lines; even so, wild branches were overcoming the roots. I prayed to God over and over for deliverance. I pondered the clear message he had given me during our last IVF treatment: our embryos would not produce a full-term pregnancy, but we should not fret because something good was coming. This did not feel *good*. It felt like a lump of crazy-making coal.

After six months of classes, books, and parent-child interactive therapy, I asked my doctor to refer me to a counselor. My doctor wondered aloud if I might be better served by going back to my old lifestyle.

I wasn't exercising or sleeping well in this phase, and my health and work were suffering.

"People will take these children," she assured me. "You need to focus on yourself right now. There are people who will do this," she said.

"What people?" I asked.

"You know," she said, "the kind of people who do this."

The only person I knew who might do this was Jesus, but I didn't know where he was. I needed to figure out if my husband and I were people who *do this*, and right then I didn't know. To make matters worse, I had felt T-Rex and Brother digging into me, sucking hard for sustenance. They didn't want to need me, but I could feel them desperately hoping that I might be what I claimed to be: a safe, stable adult.

I remembered teaching T-Rex to pray during his first night in our home. As I knelt by his bed, I asked him if he had ever heard of Heavenly Father, or God. He said no in his husky voice, and it never occurred to me that this rasp was vocal damage due to years of screaming for basic needs. He listened when I explained who God was. "We can tell him anything," I taught. "He hears us and loves us, and he can help us with our problems."

Some weeks later, a student from the local university rang my doorbell. I visited with him for a short time on my doorstep while my kids ran amok inside. He told me about the Great Pacific garbage patch, a huge collection of floating small plastic particles in the middle of the Pacific Ocean caused by human pollution. He wanted me to attend a meeting to discuss ways to help clean up our planet.

"Don't you care about our world?" he asked. He wasn't being accusatory; he was simply passionate about his cause.

I paused for a few seconds, and then I briefly told him about the two boys I was fostering—two among hundreds of thousands who needed care—and it became evident that we were both trying to clean up enormous world messes against impossible odds. Still, my choice meant I couldn't attend his informational meeting (or hundreds of other worthy things) later that week. Even so, I was touched that he had tried.

As the months went by, we took the boys camping. My husband taught them how to fly fish, and T-Rex became a Cub Scout. He made a pinewood derby police car, and the motto "be prepared" suited him well. When other kids came prepared with a compass or a map, he came with hypervigilance, with a brain that not only saw potential danger but also incessantly scanned the world for every possible dangerous scenario that could ever be.

As required by our pack, I read aloud to T-Rex from the Cub Scout training manual on abuse, and it was at that moment when I first knew, in my bones, that this boy had not been created *ex nihilo* in McDonald's. When I read the definitions of neglect, emotional, sexual, and physical abuse, T-Rex's behavior bore witness that every cell in his body understood those words: he had been cut out of a blighted tree, and he knew the diseases well. Furthermore, even though his words could not adequately relay what he had been through, he wanted us to know his story. I became aware of a new language with an unfamiliar syntax and vocabulary, yet once I discerned the rhythm, I could never not hear it again. I still hear it, faintly or loudly, to this day in the grocery store, on the street, in my ward, and with strangers and people I have known for years. It whispers of traumatic, invasive events that forever alter the brain and psyche.

And it was in this language that I first heard T-Rex. Someone had tried to teach me this in the brief foster training we had done before the boys came to us, but prior to this moment it was meaningless, like trying to teach premortal spirits about binge watching Netflix or what Mentos taste like. Most languages have hundreds of symbols that connect with corresponding referents, but in the language of complex trauma, there is only one stunning referent for millions of symbols: "I have been hurt in such an extreme and devastating way that nothing short of the full expression of the Atonement of Christ can ever make it right."



I first saw a lemon tree growing grafted limes and oranges on a trip to Southern California when I was eleven, and all I could think about was how weird it was. I didn't find it fascinating or interesting, and I certainly couldn't understand why my dad's friend, the hobby horticulturist, was so taken with this Frankentree. It seemed unnatural and freakish. But then again, maybe I just didn't understand his reasons for wanting to try. Similarly, at eleven, I didn't understand the family in our ward who had adopted two children from Cambodia. It seemed very hard, harder than I thought it should be. But today I am deeply moved by grafted trees.

My husband and I took the boys on an interstate pilgrimage to Utah and picnicked at the Murray City Cemetery. In the last years of his life, my grandfather had tenderly, if a bit eccentrically, arranged to move the buried remains of several immediate relatives from other locations in the Salt Lake Valley to this central place. He wanted them all to be together. He

erected a great monument to them complete with genealogical lines and names carved in granite, including the name of my living mother.

“Look, that’s our family!” T-Rex said as he saw the connection. I nodded evasively. At that point my children and I lacked any official binding status, but I knew that my grandfather, who knew no strangers, would have been fine to squeeze my two boys into his already overcrowded plot. On that hallowed ground with those two tender scions, I perceived a surge of strength. I thought of my grandmother’s great-grandmother Nancy Cook, who became the fourth wife of William Vaughan Morris in 1862. I don’t have any idea what led her (or any young woman) to marry under those circumstances, and it seems a very hard life to choose, but something about it must have felt important to her, and because of that, for that moment, her unorthodox family tree buoyed me in mine.

Sometime after our Utah trip, a police detective came to visit my husband and me. He informed us that a biological relative with whom my boys had lived prior to our placement had recently been convicted of numerous counts of child abuse. This offender was now locked up and would be for decades. We told our oldest son this in hopes that it would help him feel safer. It didn’t. For years thereafter, he still asked us to check his closet or outside the window to verify that this abuser wasn’t lurking. At our therapist’s suggestion, we bought alarms and security equipment. We established a family safe word. We made safety plans galore with fire routes, earthquake drills, weighted blankets, and cozy corners. We sang lullabies and did guided meditations on feeling safe.

Ultimately, though, none of this would get to the heart of why my son didn’t feel safe. He didn’t feel safe because the world is mad. He had personally witnessed how disturbing it could be. There may be some places that feel safer, like hopefully our homes or the temple, but Eliza Snow’s secret something that whispered “you’re a stranger here” is correct. This place is no heaven. We have been sent to earth, in part, to notice the difference.

But, external dangers were only part of it:

“Mom, can I ever change my DNA?” T-Rex was getting older, and he had just finished a science class.

“Why would you want to change your DNA?” I knew why he was asking. He perceived rotten rootstock as part of his genetic code; he also felt simultaneously pulled and repelled by those natural roots. He had been forced to eat genuinely evil fruit, and it had become a part of him. In trying to make sense of his pain, he had hurt countless others in the name of self-preservation. “Kill or be killed,” his subconscious had told him.

“Do you think I’m a bad kid?”

“I don’t think there are any bad kids, only bad behaviors,” I said, giving my standard answer. It had taken several years of listening to T-Rex through the language of complex trauma, but I had heard enough to know him to be a sweet boy with a good heart; nevertheless, he was also tempted and haunted in atypical, devastating ways. These deviations promised—to his mind at least—strange relief from the constant abyss of shame and guilt that he carried for someone else’s sins. His ironic badge for passing through the hell of childhood abuse would be relentless and pervasive thoughts of worthlessness and discomfort. I had been impressed to see how very much like the Savior he and other victims of complex trauma would be required to be—despised, rejected, and innocently made to suffer anguish of body and mind because of others’ misdeeds.

I marveled at T-Rex’s faith. But even more, I marveled at his faith requirement. I had been born to loving parents who cherished me, so it was easy for me to reason that heavenly parents would too. T-Rex’s early experiences told him that he was unworthy of love. Thus, for him to see things “as they really are, and . . . really will be” (Jacob 4:13) would require not only faith that “God so loved the world” (John 3:16) in general terms, but T-Rex would need to develop faith that he was unconditionally cherished by God—an idea that ran counter to his experience and thought patterns; he would need to deliberately choose to believe in the face of what he perceived as preliminary evidence to the contrary. His approach to this challenge made me wonder if perhaps Heavenly Father, knowing of the extraordinary faith challenges that can accompany traumatic experiences, chose especially noble and great ones, like Abraham, to negotiate abusive families. It also made me wonder how many other languages were out there that I couldn’t yet hear.

Later that year our family traveled to the Salt Lake Temple to be sealed, and my husband and I weren’t above offering a chocolate incentive to help the boys behave during the ceremony. T-Rex was struggling. He had a fear that my husband and I would get to the altar and say, “No way, not this kid!” He also understandably felt conflicting loyalties regarding his birth family. Thinking of my grandfather’s monument, I told T-Rex that if his birth family would be willing to keep Heavenly Father’s laws, I would be happy to have them join our motley band; we also let him know that he could choose for himself up until the moment the sealer asked him whether or not he wanted to be sealed to us. This seemed to put his mind somewhat at ease, but it made it a bit of a nail-biter for the rest of us.

To add to this excitement, our sealer was discursive and had intermittent cognitive issues; our forward progress seemed uncertain. I was very aware of the boys' typically short attention spans, and after three repetitive loops in the sealer's story, my husband and I traded glances. Between this and not knowing T-Rex's *final answer*, we couldn't stop from smiling—laughing almost. It wasn't irreverent or anything; in fact, it was just the opposite. It felt providentially tailored to reflect our family: beautifully screwball—the sacred magnanimously gracing our best (often pathetic, mortal) efforts. And in the end, it was lovely.

Later, over chocolates, we talked about Jacob 5 and the allegory of the tame and wild olive trees. We focused on the good fruit that our boys, these wild branches, can bring into the world if they will lean into the strength of the tree. We also discussed that their fruit would not necessarily resemble mine or my husband's, but if they would do good in their own ways, it would please the Lord. As I opened my scriptures to further make my point, my eye caught a line that I wasn't expecting in verse 18. I had anticipated reading in that verse, "because of the much strength of the root thereof the wild branches have brought forth tame fruit." But instead, this zinger that followed hit me squarely between the eyes: "Now, if we had not grafted in these branches, the tree thereof would have perished."

It has now been nearly nine years since we first met our boys in the McDonald's PlayPlace, and last week our family spent the afternoon tubing and fishing to celebrate. It was a lovely late-summer afternoon, and my husband encouraged me to tube a stretch of whitewater that he knew would challenge me. When I got to the bottom after a thrilling, bumpy ride, I made an impulsive dismount, and in my haste, I found myself literally between a rock and a hard place; moving one way or the other threatened to send me swiftly down the river. I wasn't in mortal danger, but I was stuck. I signaled to my boys who had been fishing nearby with rods and nets in tow. When they heard my call, I watched my sons, full of concern and love for me, immediately abandon what they were doing and come to my aid. I smiled as the words "they straightway left their nets" flashed through my mind (Matt. 4:20). At that moment, it was hard to imagine sweeter fruit.

# The Place—or the Tribe—Called Nahom?

## NHM as Both a Tribal and Geographic Name in Modern and Ancient Yemen

Neal Rappleye

For decades, Latter-day Saint scholars have argued that “the place . . . called Nahom” in the Book of Mormon (1 Ne. 16:34) is the Nihm region<sup>1</sup> in Yemen, located northeast of Sana’a, west of Ma’rib, and south of the Wadi Jawf.<sup>2</sup> The location fits well both with the directions provided for getting to and from Nahom in the Book of Mormon (1 Ne. 16:13–14, 33; 17:1) and with inscriptions dated to Lehi’s time referring to a person called a *nhmyn*, translated as “Nihmite,” confirming that the name goes back to the right time period.<sup>3</sup> Publications by Princeton,

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1. Nihm is also variously spelled *Nahm*, *Naham*, *Nehhm*, *Nehem*, and so on.

2. The first person to propose this connection was Ross T. Christensen in his October 8, 1977, presentation at the twenty-sixth annual symposium of the Society for Early Historic Archaeology (SEHA) at BYU. See Ruth R. Christensen, “Twenty-Sixth Annual Symposium Held,” *Newsletter and Proceedings of the SEHA* 141 (December 1977): 9; Ross T. Christensen, “The Place Called Nahom,” *Ensign* 8, no. 8 (August 1978): 73. See also “Some Possible Identifications of Book of Mormon Sites,” *Newsletter and Proceedings of the SEHA* 149 (June 1982): 11.

3. For a summary of the Latter-day Saint literature about these inscriptions, see Warren P. Aston, “A History of NaHoM,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2012): 78–98. Key publications include S. Kent Brown, “‘The Place That Was Called Nahom’: New Light from Ancient Yemen,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 1 (1999): 66–68; Warren P. Aston, “Newly Found Altars from Nahom,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no. 2 (2001): 56–61, 71; “Book of Mormon Linked to Site in Yemen,” *Ensign* 31, no. 2 (February 2001): 79; S. Kent Brown, “New Light from Arabia on Lehi’s Trail,” in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002), 81–83; Stephen D. Ricks, “On Lehi’s Trail: Nahom, Ishmael’s Burial Place,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 20, no. 1 (2011): 66–68; Brant A.



Oxford, and Brill have talked about the connection,<sup>4</sup> with some hailing the inscriptions as “the first actual archaeological evidence for the historicity of the Book of Mormon.”<sup>5</sup>

In recent years, however, skeptics of the Book of Mormon’s historicity have raised objections to this connection.<sup>6</sup> One common argument insists that the South Arabian inscriptions referring to *nhmyn* are identifying members of a *tribe* and thus cannot be used as evidence for a *place* called Nahom. One writer, for instance, maintains that in the Book of Mormon, “Nahom is inaccurately portrayed as a place rather than a tribal people,” and claims that “within an ancient south Arabian context, it does not make sense to speak of Nihm as though it were a regular place name.”<sup>7</sup>

Nihm has been the name of both a tribe and an administrative district in the Sana’a governate since the formation of the Republic of Yemen in 1990 (see fig. 1),<sup>8</sup> but some believe “it is doubtful that this later use of tribal names to refer to geographical entities can be retrojected

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Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2015), 105–108; Warren P. Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia: The Old World Setting of the Book of Mormon* (Bloomington, Ind.: Xlibris, 2015), 79–85.

4. See John M. Lundquist, “Biblical Seafaring and the Book of Mormon,” in Raphael Patai, *The Children of Noah: Jewish Seafaring in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 173; Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 120–21, 147; Terryl L. Givens, *The Book of Mormon: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 117–18; John A. Tvedtnes, “Names of People: Book of Mormon,” in *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, 4 vols., ed. Geoffrey Khan (Boston: E. J. Brill, 2013), 2:787; Grant Hardy, “The Book of Mormon,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Mormonism*, ed. Terryl L. Givens and Philip L. Barlow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 143.

5. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 120.

6. For a response to previous criticisms, see Neal Rappleye and Stephen O. Smoot, “Book of Mormon Minimalists and the NHM Inscriptions: A Response to Dan Vogel,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 8 (2014): 157–85.

7. RT, “Nahom and Lehi’s Journey through Arabia: A Historical Perspective, Part 2,” Faith-Promoting Rumor (blog), October 6, 2015, accessed May 25, 2023, <https://faithpromotingrumor.com/2015/10/06/nahom-and-lehis-journey-through-arabia-a-historical-perspective-part-2/>.

8. Unfortunately, as part of Yemen’s ongoing civil war, the Nihm region has been ground zero for several conflicts within recent years. See “Nihm Offensive,” Wikipedia, accessed May 25, 2023, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nihm\\_Offensive](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nihm_Offensive). Although the last reported conflict involving the Nihm was in January 2020, as of this writing the larger conflict remains unresolved, so it is hard to say if there will be any long-term impacts on political and tribal boundaries.



FIGURE 1. The boundaries of the Nihm district, ca. 2015. Map data: Google, © 2021 Terrametrics.

onto much earlier periods.”<sup>9</sup> Such skepticism is based, at least in part, on the belief that “careful examination of South Arabian inscriptions indicates that the names of tribes were essentially social-political in orientation,” and therefore carried no geographic meaning.<sup>10</sup>

This paper aims to address this issue by (1) reviewing the historical use of the name *Nihm* for both a tribe and place, documented back to the early Islamic period; (2) examining the historical relationship between tribes and their territories in northern Yemen, going back to antiquity; (3) assessing the use of *nhmyn* in the ancient inscriptions, as interpreted by scholars of ancient South Arabia. As will be shown, the use of *Nihm* as a toponym (the name of a place or region) does indeed go back to significantly earlier times, and general use of tribal names as toponyms in Yemen goes back earlier still. This is a natural consequence of the strong connection between tribe and territory in northern Yemen that has existed since pre-Islamic times. When understood in this context, the inscriptions referring to *nhmyn* can reasonably be understood as evidence for both a tribe and place called NHM going back to the early first millennium BC.

## Nihm: A Tribe and a Place

The use of Nihm as a geographic name predates its relatively recent adoption as the name of an official administrative district in the northeast corner of the Sana’a governate (see fig. 1).<sup>11</sup> As Warren Aston notes, shortly before the Yemen Arab Republic and South Yemen united to become the Republic of

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9. RT, “Nahom and Lehi’s Journey through Arabia.”

10. RT, “Nahom and Lehi’s Journey through Arabia.” For a previous response to this argument, see Jeff Lindsay, “Nahom/NHM: Only a Tribe, Not a Place?,” *Arise from the Dust* (blog), August 5, 2022, accessed May 25, 2023, <https://www.arisefromthedust.com/nahom-nhm-only-a-tribe-not-a-place/>.

11. This is unsurprising, since many of the administrative districts in northern Yemen are named after established tribes whose names have long been associated with the regions they occupy. For several examples, see the discussion of various tribes in Marieke Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen: A History of the Houthi Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 24–34, many of which have an eponymous district whose borders are roughly equivalent to the tribal territory. In a few instances, however, Brandt notes cases where a tribe’s territory is more expansive than the administrative district by the same name (for example, the Rāziḥ tribal territory expands beyond the Rāziḥ district into the neighboring Shidā’ district, pp. 27–28). Compare Marieke Brandt, “The Concept of Tribe in the Anthropology of Yemen,” in *Tribes in Modern Yemen: An Anthology*, ed. Marieke Brandt (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2021), 12: “In the 20th century, these tribal territories became the basis of the administrative divisions of northern Yemen; the borders of most of today’s districts (sg. *mudiriyyah*) and





FIGURE 2. The Nihm tribal territory, ca. 1986. Map data: Google, © 2021 Terrametrics.

Yemen, “Nehem [was] a fairly large and somewhat loosely defined district.”<sup>12</sup> According to Hiroshi Matsumoto, at this time the Nihm was considered a *nāḥiyah*, “district,” a third-order administrative level in the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR). In the YAR’s administrative structure, “the *nāḥiyah* level correspond[ed] to the tribe.”<sup>13</sup> In 1986, Christian Robin reconstructed the boundaries of this “loosely defined district” or tribal territory, sketching out a five-thousand-square-kilometer region that differed in some ways from what later became the Nihm district as it is constituted in the Republic of Yemen (see fig. 2).<sup>14</sup>

Various sources that predate the establishment of the official Nihm administrative district make formal and informal reference to this region as *Nihm* (or one of its variant spellings). For example, in 1947, when Egyptian archaeologist Ahmed Fakhry traveled through what was then called the Kingdom of Yemen, he mentioned passing through “the land of the bedouins of Nahm” just south of the Wadi Jawf.<sup>15</sup> In 1936, British explorer Harry St. John Philby also visited the region and later spoke of a “tribal area . . . known as Bilad [Ar., *country, land*] Nahm.”<sup>16</sup> Nihm (or one of its variant spellings) is also plotted on several mid-twentieth-century maps predating the rise of the Republic of Yemen.<sup>17</sup>

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municipalities (sg. ‘*uzlah*) are congruent with the boundaries of the tribes and tribal sections that inhabit them.”

12. Warren P. Aston and Michaela J. Aston, “The Search for Nahom and the End of Lehi’s Trail in Southern Arabia,” FARMS Paper (1989), 6.

13. Matsumoto specifically notes that the Nihm *nāḥiyah* “consist[ed] of only one tribe” and “the territorial names of the regional division . . . [within the Nihm *nāḥiyah*] correspond to the names of tribal sections completely.” Hiroshi Matsumoto, “The History of ‘Uzlah and Mikhlāf in North Yemen,” *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 24 (1994): 176.

14. Christian Robin, “Nihm: Nubdha fī ‘l-jughrāfiyya al-ta’rikhiyya wafq<sup>an</sup> li-mu’ṭiyāt al-Hamdānī,” in *Al-Hamdani: A Great Yemeni Scholar, Studies on the Occasion of His Millennial Anniversary*, ed. Yusuf Mohammad Abdallah (Sana’a, Yemen: Sana’a University, 1986), 84–87, 98 (map).

15. Ahmed Fakhry, *An Archaeological Journey to Yemen (March–May 1947)*, 3 vols. (Cairo: Government Press, 1952), 1:13. This is while he is traveling in Wadi Hirran, south of the Jawf (*El Gōf*; see figure 1 on 1:3). See also 1:22, where he talks about Joseph Halévy’s travels in “the land of the tribe of Nihm.”

16. Harry St. John Philby, *Sheba’s Daughters: Being a Record of Travel in Southern Arabia* (London: Methuen and Co., 1939), 381. Later he refers to the region as “the country of the Nahm tribe” (398).

17. Warren P. Aston, “The Origins of the Nihm Tribe of Yemen: A Window into Arabia’s Past,” *Journal of Arabian Studies* 4, no. 1 (2014): 141, documents Nihm on official government maps from 1961, 1962, 1968, 1976, 1978, and 1985. Aston, *Lehi and Sariah*

Sources from before the twentieth century paint a similar picture to the present-day situation, using the name *Nihm* (or one of its variant spellings) as both a tribal and geographic name. For instance, Ḥayyim Ḥabshūsh, a Yemeni Jew who acted as a travel guide to Joseph Halévy when Halévy explored southern Arabia in 1869–1870, provides accounts of traveling through the “the land of Nihm” among “Nihmī tribesmen.”<sup>18</sup> A map based on his account shows the “Land of Nihm” roughly thirty miles northeast of Sana’a.<sup>19</sup> Halévy’s own account also refers to Nihm variously as “the inhabited country of Nehm” (*pays habité de Nehm*), “the canton of Nehm” (*canton de Nehm*), and “the territory of Nehm” (*territoire de Nehm*). Halévy also mentions the Nehm among the tribes of Bakil and includes *Nehm* on the map published with his report.<sup>20</sup>

Earlier still are the various maps from the mid-eighteenth to the early-nineteenth centuries plotting the Nihm region, usually spelled *Nehem* or *Nehhm*.<sup>21</sup> These maps generally do not provide precise borders, but they consistently show *Nehem* or *Nehhm* to the north or northeast of Sana’a, in the same general area as the Nihm region today. The use of the Nihm name on these maps is *prima facie* evidence of its use as a geographic name more than 250 years ago. Most of these maps are based either on Jean Baptiste D’Anville’s 1751 map of Asia (including Arabia) or on Carsten Niebuhr’s 1771 map of Yemen.<sup>22</sup>

Niebuhr was the only survivor of the first European expedition to southern Arabia, which lasted from 1761 to 1767, and thus his map of Yemen was based on the firsthand knowledge he gained of the land.<sup>23</sup>

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in *Arabia*, 75–76, supplements those references with additional maps from 1939, 1945, and 1974.

18. See Alan Verskin, trans., *A Vision of Yemen: The Travels of a European Orientalist and His Native Guide, a Translation of Ḥayyim Ḥabshush’s Travelogue* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2018), 87–88, 96–105, 114–121, 238 n. 39. In the Hebrew version of Ḥabshūsh’s account, “land of Nihm” appears as אֶרֶץ נִהַם (*eretz NHM*). See, for example, Ḥayyim Ḥabshūsh, *Ru’yal al-Yaman (Mas’ot Ḥabshūsh)*, ed. S. D. Goitein (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1983), 33.

19. See “Map of locations mentioned in Ḥayyim Ḥabshūsh’s *Vision of Yemen*,” in Verskin, *Vision of Yemen*, [xvii].

20. See *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie* 6, no. 6 (1873): 16, 36, 112–13 (map), 260–61, 270. Halévy’s map is conveniently reprinted in Verskin, *Vision of Yemen*, [xvi].

21. See Aston, “Origins of the Nihm Tribe,” 139–41; Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia*, 75. See also James Gee, “The Nahom Maps,” *Journal of Book of Mormon and Restoration Scripture* 17, no. 1 (2008): 40–57.

22. See Gee, “Nahom Maps,” 42.

23. See Thorkild Hansen, *Arabia Felix: The Danish Expedition of 1761–1767*, trans. James McFarlane and Kathleen McFarlane (New York: New York Review Books, 1964). For

He showed *Nehhm* to the north-northeast of Sana'a. Unlike most other mapmakers, Niebuhr provided an outline of *Nehhm's* borders, which encompassed approximately 2,394 square miles.<sup>24</sup> If this is accurate, it means that at that time the Nihm region was slightly larger than the present-day tribal territory as estimated by Robin.<sup>25</sup> In his writings, Niebuhr characterizes *Nehhm* as a "principality" or "small district" and listed it as one of the "independent states of Yemen."<sup>26</sup> He never uses the *Nehhm* name to refer to a tribe. Thus, the earliest references to Nihm from modern times frame it primarily as a geographic term rather than a tribal name.

D'Anville's map is the earliest known modern map of Arabia that includes *Nehem* as the name of a region nearly due north of Sana'a.<sup>27</sup> Since D'Anville already knew about Nihm and included it on his 1751 map *before* Niebuhr's expedition, he must have gleaned that information from an earlier source. The specific source has not presently been identified, but D'Anville is known to have drawn from Arab sources from the twelfth to seventeenth centuries. D'Anville's map thus hints that Nihm was known as a geographic region in sources much earlier than 1751.<sup>28</sup>

Warren Aston has identified references to the Nihm in Arabic sources from the seventh to thirteenth centuries.<sup>29</sup> Among these, Abu Muhammad al-Hasan al-Hamdānī (ca. AD 893–945) was the most prolific and detailed. Historians of Yemen have long drawn on Hamdānī's writings to reconstruct the tribal geography of early Islamic times and assess the continuity and stability of Yemen's tribal structure over the centuries.<sup>30</sup> Based on analysis of Hamdānī's writings, Christian Robin found that in the tenth century AD, the Nihm controlled both the core regions of their traditional tribal lands on the south side of the Wadi Jawf and territory

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Niebuhr's own account of his travels, see Carsten Niebuhr, *Travels through Arabia, and Other Countries in the East*, 2 vols., trans. Robert Heron (Edinburgh: R. Morrison and Son, 1792–99).

24. See Gee, "Nahom Maps," 42–43.

25. As mentioned above, Robin estimated that the Nihm tribal lands covered 5,000 square kilometers, which converts to about 1,931 square miles. Robin, "Nihm."

26. Niebuhr, *Travels through Arabia*, 2:37, 50.

27. See Gee, "Nahom Maps," 40–42.

28. See Aston, "Origins of the Nihm Tribe," 139.

29. See Aston, "Origins of the Nihm Tribe," 139; Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia*, 76–77.

30. See Paul Dresch, *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1989), 320–29; Robert Wilson, "Al-Hamdānī's Description of Ḥāshid and Bakīl," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 11 (1981): 95–104.





**FIGURE 3.** Nihm tribal territory, according to Hamdānī (tenth century AD). Map data: Google, © 2021 Terrametrics.

on the north side of the Wadi Jawf, from Jabal al-Lawd to the Khabb oasis (see fig. 3).<sup>31</sup> More to the point, the *Nihm* name is used as both a tribal name and a geographic term in Hamdānī's writings and is applied to both parts of the Nihm tribal territory.<sup>32</sup>

Hamdānī thus provides evidence that the use of *Nihm* as a geographic name for the same general geographic region (along with additional territory to the north) goes back more than a thousand years. Other early Islamic histories make only passing reference to the Nihm, but they indicate that the Nihm had been in this same territory for several centuries by Hamdānī's time. Hisham ibn al-Kalbī (ca. AD 737–819) and Abū 'Abdallah Muḥammad ibn Sa'd (ca. AD 784–845) reported that the Nihm were part of the delegation from Hamdan that converted to Islam and made a covenant with the prophet Muhammed around AD 630.<sup>33</sup> This is corroborated by a letter from Mohammed himself, addressed to the Hamdan tribes and mentioning the Nihm.<sup>34</sup> This places the Nihm in the region north of Sana'a going back to *before* the rise of Islam.<sup>35</sup>

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31. See Robin, "Nihm," 87–93, 97 (map). See also Christian Robin, "Le Pénétration des Arabes Nomades au Yémen," *Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 61, no. 1 (1991): 85. However, this may imply more movement/change of the tribal geography than really exists, since according to Serguei Frantsouzoff, the Nihm tribe was still divided into two factions as recently as the 1970s, one living in the present-day Nihm region and the other living in the Amir region to the northwest of the Wadi Jawf. Sergui Frantsouzoff, *Nihm*, 2 vols. (Paris: Diffusion De Boccard, 2016), 1:9. Nonetheless, the Nihm name is no longer topographically applied to the region north of the Jawf, and the Nihm do not *control* any territory to the north, even if pockets of the tribe remain there.

32. See David Heinrich Müller, ed., *Al-Hamdānī's Geographie der arabischen Halbinsel: Nach den Handschriften von Berlin, Constantinopel, London, Paris und Strassburg*, 2 vols. (Leiden, Neth.: E. J. Brill, 1884–1891), 1:49.9; 81.4, 8, 11; 83.8–9; 109.26; 110.2, 4; 126.10; 135.19, 22; 167.15, 19–20; 168.10, 11. See also D. M. Dunlop, "Sources of Gold and Silver in Islam According to al-Hamdānī (10th Century AD)," *Studia Islamica* 8 (1957): 41, 43.

33. See Werner Caskel, *Ġamharat an-nasab: das genealogische Werk des Hišām Ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī*, 2 vols. (Leiden, Neth.: E. J. Brill, 1966), 2:46–47; Jawad 'Ali, *Al-Mufasssal fi Ta'rikh al-'Arab qabla al-Islam*, 10 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm lil-Malayin, 1969–1973), 4:187; 7:414.

34. See Aston, "The Origins of the Nihm Tribe," 139. An Arabic transcription and partial English translation of the letter can be read in Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia*, 77.

35. On the borders of the Hamdan in early Islamic sources, see Christian Robin, *Les Hautes-terres du Nord-Yemen avant l'Islam, Part 1: Recherches sur la géographie tribale et religieuse de Ḥawlān Quḍā'a et du Pays de Hamdān* (Istanbul: Publications de l'Institut historique-archéologique néerlandais de Stamboul, 1982), 41; Christian Julien Robin, "Matériaux pour une prosopographie de l'Arabie antique: les noblesses sabéenne et ḥimyarite avant et après l'Islam," in *Les préludes de l'Islam: Ruptures et continuités dans les civilisations du Proche-Orient, de l'Afrique orientale, de l'Arabie et de l'Inde à la veille de l'Islam*, ed. Christian Julien Robin and Jeremie Schiettecatte (Paris: De Boccard, 2013),

In light of these facts, the use of the Nihm name as a toponym very likely predates its earliest attestation in Hamdānī. After all, the Nihm tribe was established in the same region for centuries before Hamdānī's time (and likely earlier still), and the use of tribal names as toponyms was already common practice at that point, as I will discuss next. As such, the origins of the Nihm as both a tribe and place are most likely to be found in the pre-Islamic period.

## Tribe and Territory in Northern Yemen

This tendency to use tribal names to refer to the lands the tribes occupy is a superficial manifestation of a more deeply rooted conceptual connection between tribes and territory in northern Yemen. According to social anthropologist Marieke Brandt, one of the basic characteristics of Yemeni tribes is that “they are usually associated with a territory, homeland, or tribal area.”<sup>36</sup> Dr. Barak A. Salmoni and his co-authors, all experts in Middle Eastern history and politics, likewise explain:

[One] characteristic relatively unique to Yemeni tribalism is the strong identification of tribe with place. Unlike tribes in parts of Africa or other areas in the Middle East, north Yemeni tribes do not have a tradition of transhumance [seasonal movement], nor is a Bedouin nomadism a social value in tribal collective memories. As sedentary agriculturalists, therefore, Yemeni *qaba'il* [tribes] exhibit a particularly strong attachment to and identification with “their” territories. . . . Place names and tribe names become nearly identical.<sup>37</sup>

Paul Dresch further elaborates on the relationship between tribe and territory, explaining, “The tribes themselves are territorial entities. Usually the territory of each is contiguous, each has known borders with its neighbors, and there are very few points within ‘the land of the tribes’ which do not belong clearly to one tribe or another.”<sup>38</sup> Dresch adds that “the tribes are taken to be geographically fixed, . . . while men and families [who are part of the tribe] need not be.” The tribes “are usually taken ‘always’ to have been where they now are.”<sup>39</sup> This association is so strong

268, map 4. Since the Nihm were already established in that region when the Hamdan confederation converted to Islam, their origins in the region must go back earlier still.

36. Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen*, 18.

37. Barak A. Salmoni, Bryce Loidolt, and Madeleine Wells, *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen: The Huthi Phenomenon* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2010), 47.

38. Dresch, *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*, 75.

39. Dresch, *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*, 77–78.

that “the honour of the tribe,” Dresch explains, “depends on maintaining the ‘inviolability’ of its territory.”<sup>40</sup> As such, defending the honor of the tribe and defending its territorial borders tend to be conceptually and linguistically conflated, “so that ‘defence of the borders’ (*zabn al-ḥudūd*) is an expression of care for the tribe’s good name.”<sup>41</sup>

Thus, in northern Yemen, tribes are not just people, but in a sense, they are also places, with definable borders that are part of the region’s geography. The tribe is *identified* with its homeland—the territory is the tribe, in a certain sense, just as much as the tribesmen are.<sup>42</sup> Thus, to violate that territory in any way is to dishonor and commit offence against the tribe. While the tribal system and ideology in Yemen have not been stagnant over the millennia, this is by no means a new or recent development within the tribal ideology in Yemen—it goes back well into antiquity.<sup>43</sup>

In the writings of Hamdānī and other medieval Islamic sources, tribal relationships are described in terms of lineage, a practice that seems to have begun in the late pre-Islamic period (ca. fifth century AD) and continues to this day. Each tribe is represented as being named after an eponymous ancestor, from whom the tribesmen descend, and tribes and subtribes are understood in a father-son relationship.<sup>44</sup> Thus the Nihm were taken to be descendants of an eponymous ancestor who was a descendant of Bakīl, the larger tribal confederation of which Nihm is a part.<sup>45</sup> Anthropologists

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40. Dresch, *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*, 78. Compare Salmoni and others, *Regime and Periphery*, 47, who quote a Yemeni proverb, ‘*izz al-qabili biladah*,’ meaning “the pride/prestige of a tribe is his land” (translation adapted from Salmoni and others).

41. Dresch, *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*, 80. Compare Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen*, 19: “The protected space on which tribal honour depends is often identified with physical space: that is, with territory.”

42. Najwa Adra, “*Qabyalah* or What Does it Mean to be Tribal in Yemen?,” in *Tribes in Modern Yemen*, 21–38, not only defines *qabilah* (the Yemeni term for tribe) as “indigenous territorial groups” (p. 22) but also as “a bounded territorial unit.”

43. See Brandt, “The Concept of Tribe,” 12 n. 8, wherein she notes, “In some cases, the continuity of tribal names and their related territories spans almost three millennia.” Significantly, she cites work on the history of Nihm in support of this claim.

44. For background on these genealogies, see Christian Julian Robin, “*Tribus et territoires d’Arabie, d’après les inscriptions antiques et les généalogies d’époque islamique*,” *Semítica et Classica* 13 (2020): 225–36.

45. See Aston, “Origins of the Nihm Tribe,” 136. The Nihm are still part of Bakīl today (see Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen*, 30; Dresch, *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*, 24, table 1.2; Salmoni and others, *Regime and Periphery*, 50, fig. 2.2; Robert D. Burrowes, *Historical Dictionary of Yemen*, 2nd ed. [Lanham, Md.: The Scarecrow Press, 2010], 6–7, 157–58).



and historians, however, recognize these tribal genealogies as fictitious constructs primarily meant to represent political and territorial relationships among the tribes.<sup>46</sup> As such, the genealogies shift and change as old tribal alliances deteriorate and new ones form. Furthermore, tribes can move up and down in the lineage as they rise or fall in power.<sup>47</sup> Underneath this superficial idiom of lineage, the organization of tribes in the Yemeni highlands was based primarily on territory,<sup>48</sup> with toponyms and ethnonyms (names of tribes and other ethnic groups) conflated together and both linked to eponymous ancestors.<sup>49</sup> As Brandt notes, “In many regions of Yemen territoriality remained a basic principle since large parts of Yemen’s tribal system . . . remained characterized by an apparent longevity of toponyms and territorial boundaries as opposed to the respective resident population.”<sup>50</sup>

The conceptualization of tribes in genealogical terms was an innovation of the early Islamic period, perhaps with its roots in the practices of Yemeni Jews in the late pre-Islamic period (ca. fifth century AD).<sup>51</sup> For centuries prior, in the pre-Islamic period, tribes were organized and conceptualized in terms of territory and geography. Brandt explains:

The society of the South Arabian kingdoms of the ESA [Early South Arabian] period differs in important respects from that of the tenth century. The evidence from the inscriptions of the pre-Islamic South Arabian

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46. Marieke Brandt, “Heroic History, Disruptive Genealogy: Al-Ḥasan al-Hamdānī and the Historical Formation of the Shākir Tribe (Wā’ilah and Dahm) in al-Jawf, Yemen,” *Medieval Worlds: Comparative and Interdisciplinary Studies* 3 (2016): 116–45; Robin, “Tribus et territoires,” 225–36.

47. Brandt, “Heroic History,” 118: “Studies on tribal genealogy show that descent lines are in most cases the results of manifold processes of tribal fusion and fission and sometimes even pure constructs. . . . Tribal structures and genealogies are seldom stable, but rather dynamic and deformable so that new political constellations, alliances and territorial changes can be facilitated by genealogical alignments. In many cases genealogy follows a politics of ‘must have been’ rather than biological facts.” Brandt adds that “descent and genealogy are . . . the vocabulary through which [political and territorial] relations [of the tribes and tribal segments] are expressed, regardless of, and often in contradiction to, known biological facts” (p. 136). Compare Adra, “*Qabyalah*,” 22: “Some tribal units self-define in genealogical terms but, as is the case elsewhere, genealogies are used flexibly and manipulated to justify new relationships or break off old ones.”

48. See Brandt, “Heroic History,” 137. Compare Adra, “*Qabyalah*,” 23: “Because of the widespread use of genealogical idioms, tribes are often described as kin groups. Yet in Yemen and elsewhere, most tribal units are territorial, with kinship terminology providing a metaphor to indicate closeness or distance.”

49. Robin, “Tribus et territoires,” 236.

50. Brandt, “Heroic History,” 137.

51. Robin, “Tribus et territoires,” 232, 235–36.

societies suggests that descent and lineage were of little importance to the bearers of the ESA cultures: its communities were first and foremost territorial units and farming populations in which long elaborate pedigrees were unknown.<sup>52</sup>

The basic social structure of ancient South Arabia was the *sha'ab* (*s<sup>2</sup>'b*), typically translated as “tribe” but also sometimes translated as “community.”<sup>53</sup> Throughout much of the pre-Islamic period, there was a complex, multitiered structure of tribes and subtribes (or tribal “fractions”), all referred to as *sha'ab* in Sabaic.<sup>54</sup> Specifically speaking of the tribal structure of the Yemeni highlands, Jean-Francois Breton explains:

Each tribe (*sha'ab*) took its name from the territory in which it was located; it belonged to a larger tribe (also called a *sha'ab*) which in turn belonged to a larger *sha'ab*. Thus, the most solid and durable level of the pyramid was that of the tribe, rather than the clan affiliation. . . . This form of tribal organization is very ancient and has been remarkably stable through the ages; indeed, some of the most ancient of these tribes, including the Bakil, the Hashid, and the Sinhân, still exist today.<sup>55</sup>

As alluded to here by Breton, the different tribal levels “were all defined by territorial associations rather than strictly through kinship.”<sup>56</sup>

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52. Brandt, “Heroic History,” 136.

53. See Alessandra Avanzini, *By Land and By Sea: A History of South Arabia before Islam Reaccounted from Inscriptions* (Rome: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2016), 57; Robin, “Tribus et territoires,” 206–7.

54. See Robin, *Les Hautes-terres du Nord-Yemen*, 71–72; Robin, “Tribus et territoires,” 217–18; Christian Robin, “Le problème de Hamdân: Des qayls aux trois tribus,” *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 8 (1978): 46–52; Andrey Korotayev, “Sabaean Cultural Area in the 1st–4th Centuries AD: Political Organization and Social Stratification of the *Sha'b* of the Third Order,” *Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici* 11 (1994): 129–34; Andrey Korotayev, *Ancient Yemen: Some General Trends of Evolution of the Sabaic Language and Sabaean Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press; Manchester: University of Manchester, 1995), 2–3.

55. Jean-François Breton, *Arabia Felix from the Time of the Queen of Sheba: Eighth Century BC to First Century AD*, trans. Albert LaFarge (Norte Dame, Ind.: University of Norte Dame, 1999), 96. In contrast to Breton’s view that the “tribe took its name from the territory,” Robin, *Les Hautes-terres du Nord-Yemen*, 27, reasons that regional names in the highlands, such as Arḥab, Nihm, Ḥaraz, or Ġahrân, were tribal names *first* and then by extension the names of the tribal territory. In any case, the firm connection between tribe and territory is indisputably evident.

56. Breton, *Arabia Felix*, 95–96. See also Robin, *Les Hautes-terres du Nord-Yemen*, 72–73; A. F. L. Beeston, “Kingship in Ancient South Arabia,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 15, no. 3 (1972): 258.

Indeed, the Sabaic term *sha'ab* refers specifically to a “tribal group organized on a political *and territorial* (not genealogical) basis.”<sup>57</sup>

According to Alessandra Avanzini, “the name of a tribe . . . was exclusively territorial and did not refer to a common ancestor.”<sup>58</sup> Avanzini further explains that in the highlands, using the tribal name in the onomastic formula (which was often done using the *nisba*-form) indicated that a “relationship with the tribal group *and its territory* is . . . a privileged identification element.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, tribal names in South Arabian inscriptions are not only sociopolitical but also geopolitical, establishing a connection to both the tribe *and* its territory.

Unsurprisingly, given this strong connection between tribes and territory, tribal names are often used as toponyms in ancient South Arabian inscriptions. “When naming regions and territories,” Christian Robin explains, “South Arabians normally refer to political-tribal organization, that is, kingdoms and tribal groups.”<sup>60</sup> Robert G. Hoyland likewise notes, “In the highlands of south Arabia, . . . to specify an area one would habitually refer to the territory of a tribal group.”<sup>61</sup> Often this is done by

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57. Joan Copeland Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic: Sabaean Dialect* (Cambridge: Harvard Semitic Studies, 1982), 520, emphasis added. Compare A. F. L. Beeston, M. A. Ghul, W. W. Müller, J. Ryckmans, *Sabaic Dictionary (English-French-Arabic)* (Sana'a: University of Sana'a, 1982), 130, “*sedentary* tribe, commune, group of village communities” (emphasis in original). This strong territorial association is the reason some prefer the translation of “community” or “commune” over “tribe” for this term. Robin, “Matériaux pour une prosopographie de l'Arabie antique,” 134. To this day, *sha'b*, defined as “people, tribe, nation,” is commonly used in Arabian toponymy. Nigel Groom, *A Dictionary of Arabic Topography and Placenames: A Transliterated Arabic-English Dictionary* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban; London: Longman, 1983), 264.

58. Avanzini, *By Land and By Sea*, 58. Compare Robin, “Tribus et territoires,” 218–19.

59. Avanzini, *By Land and By Sea*, 59, emphasis added. Alternatively, Robin, “Tribus et territoires,” 214–15, says that *nisba* forms only specified an individual's tribal affiliation and did not (or only rarely) link their identity to city or territory. However, since Robin agrees that tribes were territorially based, and also goes on to say (as quoted in the body of the text) that territories are primarily named after tribal groups, it seems he is splitting hairs here.

60. Robin, “Tribus et territoires,” 215, translation mine. The original French reads: “Pour nommer les régions et les territoires, les Sudarabiques se réfèrent normalement à l'organisation politico-tribale, c'est-à-dire aux royaumes et aux groupes tribaux.” Robin goes on to add, “Although geographical appellations are sometimes used to identify territories, they are much less frequent than references to political and tribal divisions” (“Si, pour identifier les territoires, les appellations géographiques sont parfois utilisées, elles sont beaucoup moins fréquentes que la référence aux divisions politiques et tribales,” translation mine).

61. Robert G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 116.



prefacing the tribal name with *ʿrd*, “land,” but this is not always the case. As Robin says, in order “to designate a territory,” inscriptions “usually use the names of the *šʿb* [*shaʿab*, ‘tribe’] preceded or not by the word *ʿrd* (‘land, country’).”<sup>62</sup> Numerous examples could be cited.<sup>63</sup> For instance, some inscriptions speak of “the land (*ʿrd*) of Ḥaḍramawt,”<sup>64</sup> but others simply use Ḥaḍramawt in a toponymic way without explicitly calling it a “land” (*ʿrd*).<sup>65</sup> Likewise, several inscriptions mention “the land (*ʿrd*) of Ḥimyar,”<sup>66</sup> while one inscription speaks of people being “on their guard in Ḥimyar” without referring to Ḥimyar specifically as a “land” (*ʿrd*).<sup>67</sup>

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62. See Robin, *Les Hautes-terres du Nord-Yemen*, 73: “pour designer un territoire, on se sert habituellement de noms de *šʿb* precedes ou non du mot *ʿrd* (‘terre, pays’),” translation mine. Compare Robin, “Tribus et territoires,” 215: “The most common expression is to say ‘the Land of’ (*ard*, *ʿrd*) followed by a kingdom or tribal group name, e.g. ‘the Land of Ḥimyar<sup>um</sup>’ or ‘the Land of Madhhiḡ<sup>um</sup>’” (“*La tournure la plus commune consiste à dire ‘le Pays de’ (ard, ʿrd) suivi par un nom de royaume ou de groupe tribal, par exemple ‘le Pays de Ḥimyar<sup>um</sup>’ ou ‘le Pays de Madhhiḡ<sup>um</sup>’*,” translation mine). It is hard to square all these statements from Robin with his claim that tribal names “are not toponyms” and “in general, there is no confusion. The inscriptions distinguish always between Ḥimyar [a south Arabian tribe] and ‘the Land of Ḥimyar’” (personal communication to RT, July 27, 2015, quoted in RT, “Nahom and Lehi’s Journey through Arabia”). Robin actually makes a very similar statement in Robin, “Tribus et territoires,” 214: “In the mountains of Yemen, the categories ‘social groups’ and ‘toponyms’ are always distinguished” (“*Dans la montagne du Yémen, les catégories ‘groupes sociaux’ et ‘toponymes’ sont toujours distinguées*,” translation mine). It seems to me, in context, that Robin is perhaps meaning to say that tribes do not generally derive their names from toponyms or geographical terms (compare n. 55 herein), *not* that tribal names were not used as toponyms. There are scholars who appear to differ with Robin on this point (see nn. 55, 59, 88 herein), and Robin himself notes that this actually varies by region (pp. 214–15). In any case, in light of these additional statements from Robin (not to mention other scholars cited here), and even the epigraphic evidence discussed in this paper, it seems misguided to use this statement from Robin to claim that “it does not make sense to speak of Nihm as though it were a regular place name.” RT, “Nahom and Lehi’s Journey through Arabia.”

63. See Robin, *Les Hautes-terres du Nord-Yemen*, 73; Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, 116, for examples beyond those given here.

64. For “the land of Ḥaḍramawt” (*ʿrd* ḤḌRMWT), see epigraphs CIAS 39.11/o 3 n° 4, Ir 13, MB 2002 I-28, and B-L Nashq, *Corpus of South Arabian Inscriptions* (hereafter CSAI), accessed May 31, 2023, <http://dasi.cnr.it/index.php?id=26&prjId=1&corId=o&coid=o&navId=o>.

65. See, for example, “he came back towards THMT and Ḥa[ḍramawt]” in CIH 597, and “[to]wns and fortresses of Ḥaḍramaw[t]” in CIH 948, CSAI.

66. For “the land of Ḥimyar” (*ʿrd* ḤMYRM), see Antonini 1998, BR-M Bayḥān 4, CIAS 39.11/o 1 n° 1, CIAS 39.11/o 2 n° 3, CIH 155, CIH 343, CIH 350, CIH 621, Ja 576+577, Ja 578, Ja 579, Ja 580, Ja 586, Ja 740, CIAS 39.11/o 3 n° 5, Gr 185, Ir 9, MAFRAY-al-Miʿsāl 5, Ry 548, YM 18307, CSAI. See also the example of “the land of the Ḥabashites” (*ʿrd* ḤBS<sup>2</sup>T) in CIH 621, CSAI.

67. See RES 2687, CSAI.

Other tribal names are referred to as a “territory” (*bḏʿ*), such as “the territory (*bḏʿ*) of Maʿīn.”<sup>68</sup> Yet, once again, Maʿīn is also used in toponymic ways without being explicitly designated a “territory” (*bḏʿ*). For example, one inscription talks about traveling “on the route between Maʿīn and Rgmtm.”<sup>69</sup> Another talks about using “the road of Maʿīn” as a geographical boundary,<sup>70</sup> and two others speak of “the boundary (*s<sup>3</sup>nn*) of Maʿīn.”<sup>71</sup>

Tribal names are also used in toponymic ways while also being explicitly identified as a “tribe” (*shaʿab*). Thus one inscription speaks of “the borders (*ʿwṭn*) of the tribe (*s<sup>2</sup>ʿbn*) of Ḥashīd” and continues to use similar phrases, such as “the borders (*ʿwṭn*) of the Ḥashīd” and “in the west (*mʿrb*) of Ḥashīd,” without ever explicitly calling Ḥashīd a “land” (*ʿrd*) or a “territory” (*bḏʿ*).<sup>72</sup> While several more examples could be cited, these are sufficient to illustrate that tribal names are regularly used as toponyms in the ancient South Arabian inscriptions, sometimes explicitly (prefaced with *ʿrd* or *bḏʿ*) and other times implicitly.

Thus, as various sources make clear, using tribal names as toponyms is a practice that goes back to pre-Islamic antiquity. In the case of the *Nihm* name specifically, its toponymic use can be documented back to the early Islamic period, and given the strong link between tribal names and territory in ancient South Arabia, it very likely goes back earlier still. In fact, scholars commenting on inscriptions referring to *nhmyn*, which is the *nisba* form of the NHM name,<sup>73</sup> have interpreted it as referring to both a *tribe* and a *region*.

68. Maʿīn 1, Maʿīn 87, Maʿīn 88, YM 26106, CSAI.

69. M 247, CSAI. See also Rémy Audouin, Jean-François Breton, and Christian Robin, “Towns and Temples: The Emergence of South Arabian Civilization,” in *Yemen: 3000 Years of Art and Civilization in Arabia Felix*, ed. Werner Daum (Innsbruck: Pinguin-Verlag; Frankfurt: Umschau-Verlag, 1987), 63; Lindsay, “Nahom/NHM: Only a Tribe, Not a Place?”

70. Haram 2, CSAI.

71. Gr 326 and M 248, CSAI.

72. Ir 12, CSAI. A different inscription (Gl 1362) does use the expression “the land of Ḥashīd” (*ʿrd ḤS<sup>2</sup>DM*).

73. The *-y* is the *nisba* ending, while the terminal *-n* is the definite article. In the ancient South Arabian inscriptions, the *nisba* is most commonly used to express tribal affiliation (see Robin, “Tribus et territoires,” 214–15), but on occasion it was also used to indicate that a person is from a specific city or region (Avanzini, *By Land and By Sea*, 59, cites the example of *ns<sup>2</sup>qyn*, which is the *nisba* of Nashq, the name of a city). It functions similarly to the English gentile *-ite* suffix, and thus *nisba* forms are often translated using *-ite* (for example, *Nihmite*). On the *nisba* form, see Leonid E. Kogan and Andrey V. Korotayev, “Sayhadic (Epigraphic South Arabian),” in *The Semitic Languages*,

## Nhmyn in Ancient South Arabian Inscriptions

There are several ancient South Arabian inscriptions that refer to *nhmyn* and other forms of the NHM name (see fig. 4), not all of which have received significant attention from Latter-day Saints.<sup>74</sup> A funerary inscription from the third century AD refers to the “Image of Muthawibum the Nihmite.”<sup>75</sup> A list of clans and tribes found among a collection of administrative texts from Nashān, dated to between the first and third centuries AD, includes the Nihmite tribe (*nhmyn*).<sup>76</sup> There are two relevant inscriptions found near the ancient city of Širwāh: the first, generally dated to the early first millennium BC, refers to two pairs of “Nihmites” (*nhmynhn*);<sup>77</sup> the other identifies a man named ‘Azizum as both a “Nihmite” (*nhmyn*) and a “Mayda‘ite” (*myd‘yn*).<sup>78</sup> Finally, there

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ed. Robert Hetzron (New York: Routledge, 1997), 227–28, 230; Norbert Nebes and Peter Stein, “Ancient South Arabian,” in *The Ancient Languages of Syria-Palestine and Arabia*, ed. Roger D. Woodard (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 151; Peter Stein, “Ancient South Arabian,” in *The Semitic Languages: An International Handbook*, ed. Stefan Weninger (Göttingen, Ger.: de Gruyter Mouton, 2011), 1050–51.

74. See Neal Rappleye, “Ishmael and Nahom in Ancient Inscriptions,” presentation given at the 2022 FAIR Conference, August 3, 2022. Prior to my presentation at the FAIR Conference, only brief mention of any inscriptions beyond the three altars of Bi‘athtar (see n. 79 herein) had been made by Warren Aston and myself in a previous publication (cited in n. 80 herein). See Aston, “History of NaHoM,” 90–93; Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia*, 78–79.

75. CIH 969, CSAI, name transliterations mine. See also CIH 969 (Bombay 40), in Mayer Lambert, “Les Inscriptions Yéménites du Musée de Bombay,” *Revue d’Assyriologie et d’archéologie orientale* 20 (1923): 80–81; Alessandra Lombardi, “Le stele sudarabiche denominate ŠWR: monumenti votivi o funerari?,” *Egitto e Vicino Oriente* 37 (2014): 171. For the dating, see K. A. Kitchen, *Documentation for Ancient Arabia*, 2 vols. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1994–2000), 2:164.

76. YM 11748, CSAI. See also Jacques Ryckmans, Walter W. Müller, and Yusuf M. Abdallah, *Textes du Yémen antique inscrits sur bois* (Leuven, Belg.: Institut Orientaliste, Université Catholique de Louvain, 1994), 46–50, pl. 3A–B. See pages 12–13 for the dating of the collection.

77. RES 5095 (Ry 347), CSAI. See also al-‘Azm 1 (Ry 347) and facsimile, in Gonzague Ryckmans, “Inscriptions sud-arabes: Septième série,” *Le musée: revue d’études orientales* 55 (1942): 125–27; Fakhry, *An Archaeological Journey to Yemen (March–May 1947)*, 1:53, no. 42; 55, fig. 21; Albert Jamme, “Un désastre nabatéen devant Nagran,” *Cahiers de Byrsa* 6 (1956): 166; Albert Jamme, *Miscellanées d’ancien arabe IX* (Washington, DC: self-pub., 1979), 87. The *-nhn* ending of *nhmynhn* makes it the plural or dual form of *nhmyn*. See Kogan and Korotayev, “Sayhadic (Epigraphic South Arabian),” 228; Nebes and Stein, “Ancient South Arabian,” 152; Stein, “Ancient South Arabian,” 1051.

78. Gl 1637, CSAI. See also J. M. Solá Solé, “Inscriben von ed-Duraib, el-Asāhil und einigen anderen Fundorten,” in Maria Höfner and J. M. Solá Solé, *Inscriben aus dem Gebiet zwischen Mārib und dem Ġōf* (Vienna: Der Österreichischen Akademie der



FIGURE 4. Timeline of select references to the NHM name in South Arabia.

are the three altars well-known to Latter-day Saint scholars that refer to “Bi’athtar son of Sawdum, lineage of Naw’um, the Nihmite (*nhmyn*),” found in the foundation of temple 3 at the Bar’ān temple site near Ma’rib and dated to around the seventh century BC.<sup>79</sup>

In addition, four inscriptions, all dated to the seventh century BC, refer to persons identified as the “chief” or “tribal leader” (*kbr*) of the

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Wissenschaften, 1961), 40. For the dating, see Kitchen, *Documentation for Ancient Arabia*, 2:208. Some have interpreted *nhmyn* in this instance as “stonemason.” See GL1637, Glaser Collection, accessed June 6, 2023, <http://glaser.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/gl/rec/110003337>. The CSAI Database considers both translations a viable possibility. Typically, in a compound *nisba* (as found in this inscription with *nhmyn myd’yn*), both are considered references to the individual’s tribal affiliations, with one possibly being the subtribe of the other. Also, this inscription’s location near Širwāh makes it a likely reference to the Nihm since (1) Širwāh is in the Ḥawlān region, which borders the Nihm (see Hermann von Wissmann, *Zur Geschichte und Landeskunde von Alt-Südarabien* [Wien: Böhlau, 1964]), (2) another inscription from Širwāh refers to Nihmites (see RES 5095 [Ry 347], CSAI), and (3) evidence suggests that Širwāh controlled at least part of the Nihm in the early first millennium BC (see Frantsouzoff, *Nihm*, 1:22, 66, 76–77), thus making it likely that Nihmites would be subservient to the Širwāh tribe and make votive offerings at their temple.

79. See Christian Robin and Burkhard Vogt, eds., *Yémen: au pays de la reine de Saba* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997), 144; Wilfried Seipel, ed., *Jemen: Kunst und Archäologie im Land der Königin von Saba* (Wien: Kunsthistorisches Museum, 1998), 325; Alessandro de Maigret, ed., *Yemen: Nel paese della Regina di Saba* (Rome: Palazzo Respoli Fondazione Memmo, 2000), 344–45; John Simpson, ed., *Queen of Sheba: Treasures from Ancient Yemen* (London: The British Museum, 2002), 166–67; Kitchen, *Documentation for Ancient Arabia*, 2:18; Norbert Nebes, “Zur Chronologie der Inschriften aus dem Bar’ān Temple,” *Archäologische Berichte aus dem Yemen* 10 (2005): 115, 119. On the Bar’ān archaeological site, see Burkhard Vogt, Werner Herberg, and Nicole Röring, “Arsh Bilqīs”: *The Temple of Almaqah of Bar’ān in Marib* (Sana’a: Deutsche Archäologische Institut, 2000); Burkhard Vogt, “Les temples de Ma’rib: Bar’ān (aujourd’hui ‘Arsh Bilqīs), temple d’Almaqah,” in Robin and Vogt, *Yémen*, 140–41; Burkhard Vogt, “Der Almaqah-Tempel von Bar’ān (‘Arsh Bilqīs),” in Seipel, *Jemen*, 219–22; Jochen Görsdorf and Burkhardt Vogt, “Radiocarbon Datings from the Almaqah Temple of Bar’ān, Ma’rib, Republic of Yemen: Approximately 800 CAL BC to 600 CAL AD,” *Radiocarbon* 43, no. 3 (2001): 1363–69. Initial reports dated temple 3 and Bi’athtar’s inscriptions to the sixth to seventh centuries BC (see Robin and Vogt, *Yémen*, 144; Seipel, *Jemen*, 325; Maigret, *Yemen*, 344–45; Simpson, *Queen of Sheba*, 166–67; Kitchen, *Documentation for Ancient Arabia*, 2:18), but temple 3 and Bi’athtar’s inscription were later redated to a slightly earlier period, around the seventh to eighth centuries BC (see Nebes, “Zur Chronologie der Inschriften aus dem Bar’ān Temple,” 115, 119; and Vogt, Herberg, and Röring, “Arsh Bilqīs”). In either case, I believe the ruler named Yada’il mentioned in the inscription is most likely Yada’il Dhariḥ, son of Sumhu’ali, who conducted several temple-building projects in the early to mid-seventh century BC, and thus I consider the seventh century BC the most likely dating of the text. On Yada’il Dhariḥ, son of Sumhu’ali, see William D. Glanzman, “An Examination of the Building Campaign of Yada’il Dhariḥ bin Sumhu’alay, *mukarrib* of Saba’, in Light of Recent Archaeology,” *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 33 (2003): 183–98; Avanzini, *By Land and By Sea*, 114.

*nhmt* or *nhmtn*, which are potentially references to Nihm.<sup>80</sup> A pre-Islamic graffiti text from north of Najran near Himā may also refer to “Madid, son of Sa‘dum, the Nihmite (*nhmyn*).”<sup>81</sup>

Some scholars have interpreted these references as identifying members of the NHM tribe. Joseph M. Solá Solé, for instance, considered *nhmyn* an attestation of the “well-known tribal name NHM.”<sup>82</sup> Jacques Ryckmans likewise interpreted the *nhmyn* of the various inscriptions as references to the Nihm tribe south of the Wadi Jawf.<sup>83</sup> Norbert Nebes considered *nhmyn* as referring to the Nihm tribe but indicated that the tribe was “undoubtedly north of the Jawf,” a location that would partially overlap with the

80. See *kbr nhmt* in CIH 673, and *kbr nhmtn* in Haram 16, Haram 17, Haram 19, CSAI. For the dating of these inscriptions, see Kitchen, *Documentation for Ancient Arabia*, 2:120 (the Haram texts), 139 (CIH 673). For the Haram texts, see also Christian Robin, *Inabba', Haram, Al-Kāfir, Kamna et al-Harāshif*, 2 vols. (Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 1992), 1:85–89. On interpreting these as references to Nihm, see Neal Rappleye, “An Ishmael Buried near Nahom,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 48 (2022): 36, 44 nn. 21–23. The *-t(n)* ending in these texts may indicate that this is the collective form of the NHM name. Compare A. F. L. Beeston, “Habashat and Aḥābīsh,” *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 17 (1986): 5–9, who argues that *hbs²t* and *hbs²tn* are collective forms of the HBS² name (Ḥabash). Hence, the expression *mlk hbs²tn* is translated “Habashite king” (CIH 308, CSAI). The expression *kbr nhmt* or *kbr nhmtn* is a similar construct of high-ranking leader (*kbr*) + tribal/group name (*nhmt*, *nhmtn*), and I would propose it should similarly be translated as “chief of the Nihmites.”

81. See Ph. 160 n. 20 (JML-F-74), in Albert van den Branden, *Les Textes Thamoudéens de Philby*, 2 vols. (Louvain: Institut Orientaliste et Publications Universitaires, 1956), 1:52. Christian Julien Robin and others, *A Stopover in the Steppe: The Rock Carvings of 'Ān Jamal near Himā (Region of Najrān, Saudi Arabia)* (Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 2022), 266, translate *nhmyn* as “stonecutter” here but acknowledge that Nihmite is also a possible translation (p. 451). Since the *nisba* form is completely unknown in the local (Himaitic) inscriptions from this region (per Robin and Gorea), the use of *nhmyn* indicates that this individual was most likely a caravaneer/traveler from South Arabia. See Christian Julien Robin and Maria Gorea, “L'alphabet de Himā (Arabie Séoudite),” in *Alphabets, Texts and Artifacts in the Ancient Near East: Studies Presented to Benjamin Sass*, ed. Israel Finkelstein, Christian Robin, and Thomas Römer (Paris: Van Dieren Éditeur, 2016), 310–75. Van den Branden (pp. 23–24) argued that these texts should be dated to between the late second and late third centuries AD, but others had dated them to much later, around the fifth to sixth centuries AD. Robin and Gorea (pp. 330–35) indicate that Himaitic texts are currently undatable, hence I have simply used the vague designation of “pre-Islamic” to define the date of this inscription. See also Mounir Arbach and others, “Results of Four Seasons of Survey in the Province of Najran (Saudi Arabia): 2007–2010,” in *South Arabia and Its Neighbours: Phenomena of Intercultural Contacts*, ed. Iris Gerlach (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2015), 37–39.

82. Solá Solé, “Inscriben von ed-Duraib, el-Asāhil und einigen anderen Fundorten,” 40: “bekannten Stammesnamen nhm,” translation mine.

83. See Ryckmans and others, *Textes du Yémen*, 47.

Nihm territory documented in Hamdānī's writings (see fig. 3) but differs somewhat from its present-day location *south* of the Jawf.<sup>84</sup>

Others have specifically interpreted these references as identifying people from the NHM region. Mounir Arbach, for example, identified *nhmyn* as an ethnic name, which he defined as "those [names] designating the inhabitants of a territory or a country."<sup>85</sup> Based on this definition, *nhmyn* would, of course, refer specifically to an inhabitant of the NHM territory or country. Likewise, Burkhard Vogt, followed by others, defined *nhmyn* as someone who "comes from the Nihm region, west of Mārib,"<sup>86</sup> thus identifying it as the present-day Nihm region.

Finally, consistent with the close connection between tribe and territory discussed above, some have interpreted these references as indicating *both* a tribe and a region. Hermann von Wissmann, one of the early pioneers of the pre-Islamic tribal geography of Yemen, used references to *nhmyn* and *nhmt* as evidence for both a tribe and a land or region of NHM, which he believed was in the same general areas as the Nihm of Hamdānī's time (see fig. 3).<sup>87</sup> More recently, Peter Stein considered *nhmyn* an attestation of the tribal name NHM but classified tribal names under the rubric of "toponyms." He thus included NHM—identified as present-day Nihm—on a map showing

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84. Norbert Nebes, commentary on "Les autels du temple Bar'ān à Ma'rib," in Robin and Vogt, *Yemen*, 144. I explore the potential implications that relocating (or extending) Nihm to the north of Jawf has on equating it with Nahom in Neal Rappleye, "The Nahom Convergence Reexamined: The Eastward Trail, Burial of the Dead, and the Ancient Borders of Nihm," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* (forthcoming).

85. Mounir Arbach, *Les noms propres du Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum, pars IV: Inscriptiones Himyariticas et sabaes continens* (Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 2002), 15. Arbach is defining his category III names as "Names of Tribes and Ethnic Groups" ("*Noms de tribus et groupes ethniques*," translation mine). He includes two types of names in this category: (1) "names which are preceded by the term *s<sup>2</sup>'b*, which signifies 'tribe,'" and (2) "those designating the inhabitants of a territory or a country" ("*les noms qui sont précédés par le terme s<sup>2</sup>'b, qui signifie 'tribu', ceux désignant les habitants d'un territoire ou d'un pays*," translation mine). Since *nhmyn* is not preceded by *s<sup>2</sup>'b*, its inclusion in this category as an *ethnique* name (see p. 295) rather than a tribal name logically means it is the *second* of the two types—a name "designating the inhabitants of a territory or a country."

86. Burkhard Vogt, commentary on catalog no. 240, in Seipel, *Jemen*, 325: "*dem Gebiet Nihm, westlich von Ma'rib*," English translation in Simpson, *Queen of Sheba*, 166. Compare Maigret, *Yemen*, 345: "*della zona di Nihm a [ov]est di Marib*," translation mine.

87. See von Wissmann, *Zur Geschichte und Landeskunde von Alt-Südarabien*, 96–97, 294–95 (map), 307–8. More recently, Jan Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity: Their History from the Assyrians to the Umayyads* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 564, followed von Wissmann in presenting both a northern and southern Nihm in pre-Islamic times.



an “overview of places . . . as well as other identifiable toponyms, which are mentioned in the well-known minuscule inscriptions.”<sup>88</sup> Thus Stein essentially treated *nhmyn* as evidence of both a tribe and a region.

Given this range of interpretation among scholars of ancient South Arabia, it is unnecessarily reductive when talking about the Book of Mormon to insist that *nhmyn* can only be considered evidence for a *tribe* and therefore does not support the Book of Mormon’s reference to a *place* called Nahom (NHM).

## Conclusion

As is clear from the above evidence, the name *Nihm* (and its variant spellings) has deep roots far into the past as both a tribal name and a toponym and is part of a long-standing, ancient tradition in Yemen, where tribes have been strongly linked to their territories for millennia. The use of *Nihm* as a place name, specifically, is documented back more than a thousand years into the early Islamic period and is very likely older still. This situates the origins of *Nihm* as a geographic name back into the pre-Islamic era, when several inscriptions referring to *nhmyn* indicate there was a tribal entity—and by extension, likely a region—known by the NHM name.

Among the ancient South Arabian inscriptions, tribal names are regularly used as toponyms, sometimes by specifically being called the “land” (*ʿrd*) or “territory” (*bqʿ*) of the tribe. On other occasions, the tribe’s name could simply be used in toponymic ways without any geographic qualifiers. Furthermore, tribal names in the South Arabian inscriptions are understood to link a person to both a tribe *and* its territory. Looking specifically at occurrences of *nhmyn* in several ancient South Arabian inscriptions, scholars have interpreted these references as indicating affiliation with both the tribe *and* region of Nihm.

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88. Peter Stein, *Die altsüdarabischen Minuskelschriften auf Holzstäbchen aus der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek in München*, 2 vols. (Tübingen, Ger.: Ernst Wasmuth Verlag, 2010), 1:22: “Eine Übersicht der genannten Orte sowie weiterer identifizierbarer Toponyme, welche in den bekannten Minuskelschriften,” 22 n. 43, 23 fig. 1, translation courtesy of Stephen O. Smoot. On the map, NHM is in the category of “other place, tribal, or regional names mentioned in the minuscule inscriptions” (“*anderer in den Minuskelschriften erwähnter Orts-, Stammes- oder Landschaftsname*,” translation courtesy of Stephen O. Smoot). Stein indexes the names of tribes (*stamm*) and nisba (*nisba*) as toponyms (*toponyme*), illustrating more broadly that tribal names are, in fact, treated as toponyms by some scholars of ancient South Arabian studies, contrary to the assertion of Robin that tribal names “are not toponyms” (personal communication to RT, July 27, 2015, quoted in RT, “Nahom and Lehi’s Journey through Arabia”).

In biblical studies, scholars have debated over the meaning of the name “Israel” in the Merneptah stela (ca. 1209 BC). The Egyptian text “uses the determinative (semantic indicator) for an ethnic group, and not for a geographic region or city.”<sup>89</sup> Yet some have debated whether the name *Israel* “referred originally to a geographical region and was subsequently appropriated by or applied to the mixed population of the central hill country.”<sup>90</sup> While the reference to Israel is indeed to a people and not a geographic name, some scholars have pointed out that given the fact that the names of regions and the tribes that occupy them are typically one and the same, the whole debate seems to be unnecessarily splitting hairs. As J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hays put it, “We should probably not make too much either of the determinative that identifies Israel as a foreign people rather than a foreign land. As is the case with the name ‘Moab,’ which also makes its first appearance in Egyptian texts about this time, ‘Israel’ may have referred loosely to both a subregion of Palestine and the people who lived there.”<sup>91</sup>

In light of the evidence presented here, I suggest we likewise “should probably not make too much” of whether the *nhmyn* of ancient South Arabian texts refers to members of a tribe or to the inhabitants of a specific region. There is far more ambiguity in this case (in comparison with *Israel* in the Merneptah stela), and when considered in the context of the conceptual relationship between tribe and place, it hardly seems worth trying to split hairs over which interpretation is preferable. Given the proper understanding of tribes and their territory in ancient Yemen, there is little difficulty in linking a tribe in ancient inscriptions with what is called a “place” in the Book of Mormon.

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89. James K. Hoffmeier, “The (Israel) Stela of Merneptah,” in *The Context of Scripture*, 3 vols., ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger Jr. (Boston: Brill, 2003), 2:41.

90. James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 27, summarizing the argument of Göstra Ahlström. See also pages 28–30.

91. J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 42.

# Embracing Our Highest Worship

## Some Thoughts on Our Approach to the Temple

*Tyler Johnson*

I understate the matter when I say the temple strikes different Church members differently. I have friends who entered the temple for the first time many years ago and felt immediately at home. Indeed, they resonate with President Henry B. Eyring, who once said, “The first time I walked just a few feet into the temple I had the feeling that I had been here before. In an instant, the thought came to me that what I recognized was a sense of peace beyond anything I had felt before in this life, but that I seemed to recognize, and almost remember.”<sup>1</sup> Some friends find in the temple an inexhaustible fount of allegorical, scriptural, and symbolic allusions. Some members—steeped in the history of the modern Church or of early Christianity—find the temple endlessly fascinating, resonating with Church scholar Hugh Nibley, who devoted a great deal of his life and work to illuminating connections between the temple and the ancient world.<sup>2</sup> Still others love the temple because they do their duty in all things and understand the temple to be one such responsibility. Others find in the temple a haven from worldly concerns, going there to find peace, solace, and revelation. And, of course, any

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1. Henry B. Eyring, *Special Witnesses of Christ*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed April 19, 2023, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/video/special-witnesses-of-christ/2019-07-0030-henry-b-eyring-1080p>. See also “Special Witnesses of Christ,” *Ensign* 31, no. 4 (April 2001): 11.

2. For example, see Hugh W. Nibley, “The Early Christian Prayer Circle,” *BYU Studies* 19, no. 1 (1978): 41–78; and Hugh W. Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond This Ignorant Present*, ed. Don E. Norton, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley 12 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1992).

individual member may belong to one or all of these groups or may move between them throughout life.

Others, however, find that the temple puzzles, frustrates, challenges, or even alienates them. I have friends who have been to the temple many, many times and yet feel spiritually disconnected there. Many of these friends dutifully attend—sometimes even frequently—but find themselves wishing the temple connected with them more viscerally or that they at least felt more generally comfortable there. Other friends—especially some women I know—wish the temple felt more welcoming. Some find the temple anachronistic or at least distant, others sense it to be forbidding, and still others find it confusing and downright uncomfortable.

My purpose in this essay is to show that our *approach* to the temple matters. Writing about the temple is a fraught exercise because we promise not to discuss some details of our temple worship. Nonetheless, as Elder David A. Bednar clarified in his April 2019 general conference talk, “Many Church members are unsure about what appropriately can and cannot be said regarding the temple experience outside of the temple.” He then quoted President Ezra Taft Benson, who taught that because of our unsureness (about which elements of temple worship are sacred), “we are sometimes reluctant to say anything about the temple. . . . As a consequence, many do not develop a real desire to go to the temple, or when they go there, they do so without much background to prepare them for the obligations and covenants they enter into.” Still, Elder Bednar reminded us that while we should keep sacred the specific temple symbols we have covenanted not to discuss, nonetheless “we may discuss the basic purposes of and the doctrine and principles associated with temple ordinances and covenants.”<sup>3</sup> This essay aims squarely to do that.

I will not elucidate the history of temple ordinances or the specific meaning of particular symbols—there are others better qualified for those tasks. Rather, I intend to share some perspectives that have helped me as I think about temple worship and hope this approach will be helpful for others. I hope, in particular, that this essay might prove meaningful for Church members who are preparing to enter the temple for the first time. Preparation for a person’s initial temple experience matters deeply, and I hope that this paper will help open a member’s view to how temple worship fits into the rest of our theology and lived religious experience.

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3. David A. Bednar, “Prepared to Obtain Every Needful Thing,” *Ensign* 49, no. 5 (May 2019): 103.

## Section 1: On Preparing for Liturgical Worship

To begin with I'll offer this observation: after a lifetime of worship in a meetinghouse of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, showing up at the temple and expecting more of the same is not likely to prove very effective. What we do in the temple differs dramatically from what we experience each Sunday at church, and the ways we approach temple worship affect how much we are able to learn there. By analogy, if in college I show up to a geology class expecting a lecture with a Power-Point and get instead a field trip into the mountains to collect rock specimens, I am likely to leave frustrated (and perhaps with a lot of blisters). This does not indicate that such a field trip is not valuable as a teaching method but rather that my lack of preparation did not equip me to learn effectively from what I experienced. Before we consider any particular temple theme, then, we may find use in considering how we think about temple learning. I have found a few observations to help me in this regard. None of these is meant as "the right way" but rather is intended to broaden the frame of reference we use to approach this form of worship.

The first is to note that the medium is not the message.

In many ways, going to the temple is like reading the Bible on an ancient scroll. In a church that distinguishes itself by employing lay clergy, meeting in generally plain buildings, and using prayers and speeches that are unscripted and never uniform or standardized (with ordinance prayers being the exception), the formality and elegance of the temple can be quite different from our usual experience. What's more, the temple further distinguishes itself because in it we are asked to symbolically place ourselves amid the retelling of certain scriptural stories. Even though the stories can largely be found verbatim in the Bible and the Pearl of Great Price, the method of their presentation in the temple differs dramatically from our weekly church experience.

What I mean to observe here is simply that many Church members who pass through the temple for the first time can become so distracted by the unusual and, especially for lifelong members, unexpected aspects of the *presentation* of the temple ceremony that they may fail to recognize that the very large majority of what the temple teaches concords comfortably with the gospel truths we teach in our chapels every week. At its heart, the temple endowment invites us to become like Jesus and promises that doing so will prepare us to return to God's presence. To facilitate this being reborn in Christ, the temple invites us to covenant to sacrifice, to obey the law of chastity, and to consecrate our gifts to

build God's kingdom.<sup>4</sup> It is important to recognize the centrality of these promises to temple worship; these promises square with what a typical Latter-day Saint youth learns growing up in the Church. A recognition that the medium is not the message can lend the temple's lessons a more familiar ring.

That said, even as we recognize that the medium is not the message, we can nonetheless remain open thereafter to the lessons that come to us *from the medium*. That is, just because the temple's pedagogy differs from what we are accustomed to does not mean it is less meaningful; indeed, the participatory and vicarious nature of much of what we do in the temple is pregnant with spiritual symbolism.

Beyond this, however, many of the temple's distinctive elements deepen our temple experience. In a world forever abuzz and always noisily on the move, the temple asks us to still ourselves and to dwell for a time within the quiet corridors of our minds. There, the hubbub of life outside dims, and we are asked to wait where the only sounds are muted organ music, the nearly imperceptible padding of feet, and the occasional whispered conversation. Indeed, can you think of another place in modern life where groups routinely organize and voluntarily surrender their mobile devices? There may be a few—Buddhist meditation sessions, for example—but such other examples (and they are, in my experience, extremely rare)—are the exceptions that prove the rule; the whole point, as in the temple, is to provide an escape from a world that is “too much with us” (in a way more pervasive than Wordsworth ever could have imagined).<sup>5</sup> Indeed, multiple modern writers have chronicled the profound, often troubling, and not yet fully understood ways technology is warping our brains.<sup>6</sup> In this context, the stillness of

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4. For a list and discussion of the covenants made in the temple endowment, see The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 27.2, August 2022, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/general-handbook/27-temple-ordinances-for-the-living>. Several General Authorities have also listed the covenants entered into in the endowment ceremony in various publications. See Bednar, “Prepared to Obtain Every Needful Thing,” 103; Ezra Taft Benson, *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 121; and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Preparing to Enter the Holy Temple* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2002).

5. William Wordsworth, “The World Is Too Much with Us,” Poetry Foundation, accessed April 19, 2023, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45564/the-world-is-too-much-with-us>.

6. Among these are Nicholas Carr and Sherry Turkle. Carr is a former *New York Times* reporter who wrote a frightful chronicle of the ways the internet warps our ability

the temple offers a welcome respite. The temple invites us to be wholly, uninterrupted, and deeply present—that presence is a prerequisite for meaningful religious experience.

Along these same lines, the temple both arrests our senses and matters so much in part because it is heavily liturgical.<sup>7</sup> As Latter-day Saints, we are accustomed to a weekly worship experience that largely changes based on the time of year, the needs of the congregation, and the personalities and spiritual insights of the participants. Anyone who has grown up a member of the Church understands this intuitively—we adjust our expectations for a meeting depending on who is speaking. We understand that some orators will address us more eloquently than others, and, while we may never have articulated this, we are accustomed to Christmas-focused sermons at Christmastime, Easter-centered services in the spring, and perhaps even a paean to the pioneer spirit in July. Furthermore, with rare exceptions, our services distinguish themselves by their very accessibility. Rarely if ever would a believer walk into one of our meetings and be unable to access the meaning of what was going on. This is not to say that there are not deeper layers of symbolism to what happens in our meetings (in the case of the sacrament, especially, this is particularly evident), but so long as a visitor can understand the admittedly sometimes opaque vernacular (“ward,” “stake,” “D&C,” and the like), the words and scenes unfolding in the meeting are so compelling in part because they are so intuitive.

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to think. He argues that while members of previous generations venerated the ability to mentally “scuba dive” (that is, to dive deep and ponder long on a single subject), the internet is changing not just what but how we think by making most of us incapable of such scuba diving. Instead, he says, we are able only to water ski. By the same token, Dr. Turkle has extensively documented the ways in which the internet is changing how we feel and how we relate to those around us. She has written a series of books demonstrating that today’s youth largely don’t *want* life’s messy emotions and complicated situations and are thus often retreating behind the safety of a screen to shield themselves from difficult interpersonal emotions. In so doing, however, they have, as a generation, experienced an unparalleled, precipitous, and immensely concerning slide in their ability to feel empathy. All of this is not to suggest we should return to the 1980s, before the internet was available widely, but simply to acknowledge that its effects are not purely positive. Carr, in particular, argues that our brains are wired to savor rest, to seek quiet times, to need gaps between streams of input. While he does not, of course, mention Latter-day Saint temples, I would argue they fit squarely into the space he argues is increasingly important. See Tyler Johnson, “Reclaiming Reality: Doctoring and Discipleship in a Hyperconnected Age,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2018): 7–38.

7. Liturgy is “a rite [ordinance] or body of rites prescribed for public worship.” Dictionary, Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. “liturgy,” accessed April 19, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/liturgy>.



The temple stubbornly refuses to conform to this set of expectations. Where we are accustomed to accessibility, the temple furnishes us with sermons spoken almost entirely in a rarefied, symbolic, and almost mystical tongue. Where we weekly nestle comfortably into a world of seasonal sermons and rotating hymns, the temple remains constant time after time and year after year (we will address the occasional changes to temple liturgy below). Where our chapels offer their teachings freely, the temple guards its truths more closely; when worshipping in the temple, genuine and sustained effort is often required to access the meaning behind the layers of symbols.

When we enter the temple, we must radically revise our expectations for worship. We must prepare ourselves to be challenged. We must acknowledge that the meaning of what we experience will not necessarily flow easily into our hearts the first, second, or even tenth time. We must know that liturgical worship matters just as much, even though it differs significantly from our usual weekly worship. The temple will demand that we return to it, again and again, throughout our lives, prepared to accept rays of truth as they come. Over time, we can learn that sometimes the process of revelation may be as slow as a tree that grows imperceptibly.

In the temple, we relearn to speak our worshipful language; we soften and humble ourselves to prepare for the reality and truth that will seep into us over years. We must not imagine we will leave after our first trip understanding in any large part the meaning of the ritual. The meaning of the temple awaits our seeking, but that quest may take many years; indeed, we will likely never exhaustively plumb its depths. This stubborn insistence on learning “line by line” over a lifetime will increasingly seem countercultural in the era of fast food, Google, two-day Amazon delivery, and ChatGPT. But this steady unfolding does not make what we learn less true or less important—indeed, this gradual distillation reminds us that many of life’s most important truths can be learned in only this way.

We can further enhance our temple experience by considering what we might call a “meta-approach,” that is, by asking not just, *What do we make of the temple?* but also, *How do we think about the temple?* In this endeavor, we can learn much from our approach to great art. A number of years ago, my wife and I visited Italy as a celebration to mark the end of my medical training. Among the many artistic marvels we saw, Michelangelo’s *David* stands out as the grandest. Its size, understandably, struck us first—his head towers seventeen feet off the ground. As a doctor, however, the detail that most impacted me was the bafflingly lifelike way in which the artist depicted a vein snaking its way down the upper surface of *David*’s hand

(see fig. 1). This vein spoke to me because I have punctured similar veins to draw my patients' blood. I know that veins are spongy, wormlike things that often slink away just when you think the needle is inside. What struck me, though, is that it seemed I could have taken a needle and punctured David's vein—even though it's sculpted from marble.

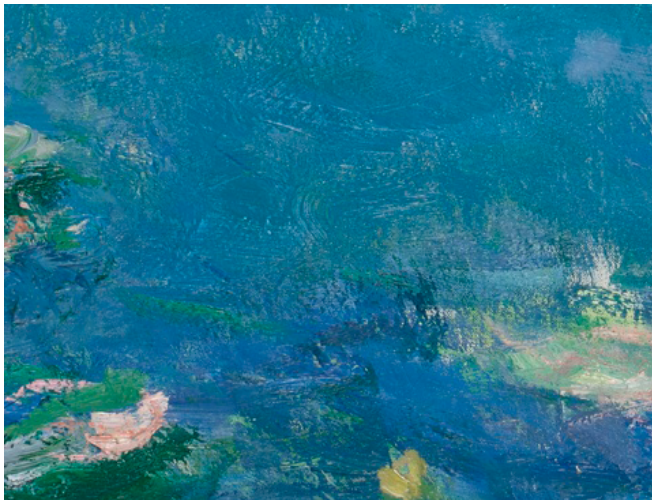
The hyperrealistic illusion is remarkable.

Even if Michelangelo's hyper-realism strikes us with immediate meaning, however, I've also realized over time that such realism is not the only moving form of art. Some art that does *not* directly depict the details of objective reality can move us equally, even if more obliquely. Over the years, for example, I have encountered examples of Monet's *Water Lilies* in several museums. These paintings affect me deeply—they convey the translucence of murky water, the undulating reflection of sunlight on a rippling pond, and the ephemeral beauty of flowers. Yet Monet's artistic toolkit could not be more different from Michelangelo's. Whereas closer inspection of David's sculpture brought an immediate "wow," similar inspection of a Monet painting leaves me puzzled because any square inch of his painting, taken in isolation, holds little meaning or beauty. His impressionism impresses only when absorbed as it was meant to be—as an entire work and without trying to match every brushstroke to an objective concrete detail (see fig. 2).<sup>8</sup> Importantly, this is not to say that Monet's paintings do not convey truth, but only that they convey truth in a different way.



FIGURE 1. *David's right hand*. Photo by Rabe!, shadows lightened, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Florenz\\_-\\_David\\_von\\_Michelangelo\\_03\\_-\\_Hand.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Florenz_-_David_von_Michelangelo_03_-_Hand.JPG), CC BYU-SA 4.0 license.

8. There are doubtless books written on Monet's technique, and I have no doubt many of them contain detailed explanations of why his work impresses on microscopic examination; I write as one who loves art but who has absolutely no understanding of the underpinnings of painting.



**FIGURE 2.**  
Detail from  
one of Monet's  
*Water Lilies*,  
1906. The Art  
Institute of  
Chicago. CC0  
license; public  
domain.

I have found that a parallel holds true in the temple. When I first began attending the temple, I was obsessed with “figuring it out” and “getting it right.” Because some details of the ceremony are available only there, I would at times wait an entire session to hear a phrase or clause, trying to discern what it meant. This would sometimes enlighten me but would just as often leave me frustrated or confused. I wanted the temple to be like *David*. My approach widened, however, one day when I was talking to a friend who had joined the Church just a year before. Preparing for his mission, he had gone through the temple. When I asked him what he thought, a look of serenity overtook his face and he said that it had been “beautiful” because he “just let it all wash over [him].”

Surprised that I had never thought of approaching the temple this way, I experimented on my next visit and tried approaching the temple in the way he had suggested, and, just as my friend had experienced, the beauty of the temple spilled over me in a new way. I have some difficulty articulating exactly what my experience looked like. The best I can do is to say that for many years previous to this experience, I had approached the temple largely as one might approach a lecture in preparation for an important exam—I went with specific questions and in search of a set of answers. It was as if I intuited—though I never thought of it this way *per se*—that the answers themselves were what would matter.

After talking with my friend, however, instead of approaching the temple only as a lecture, I learned also to approach it as a sunset. When I sit on a mountainside and watch the sun disappear beyond the horizon, I am not obsessed with answering questions or collecting facts. I am not future-oriented but am, instead, present. What I understand of the temple

now that I didn't before is that while there are times I go to the temple for answers—either concerning my problems or concerning theology—there are other times I go only to be there and to let the beauty of the moment fill my soul.

Appreciating the temple from a new vantage point opened up to me truths that had previously been hidden. The point is not so much the details of my then-new approach but, rather, the fact that multiple approaches each convey a different facet of truth, like turning a diamond to let the light play differently off each of its facets. If temple worship begins to lose its meaning, it may be worth considering whether a different approach will illuminate a new facet of truth.

## **Section 2: Revelation and Rhetoric— Language's Limits and the Temple's Meaning**

In this second section, I want to approach an issue that matters profoundly as we approach temple worship. Experience tells me that one of the aspects of temple worship that matters the most is the way we think about words and their relationship to divine truth.

As I alluded to at the beginning of this essay, there are some for whom the temple seems not merely distant but downright foreign. I recognize this and do not approach this topic lightly. Whatever else the temple is, it is serious. The language we use there and, particularly, the promises we make are not to be ignored or skated over. Because the temple does not simply invite us to explore or to think but to solemnly covenant, whatever issues a person might have with what they do in the temple are not just theoretical. The covenantal nature of the temple impresses the temple's teachings on us emphatically, leaving little room for personal discretion. I understand well why some faithful, earnest Church members may struggle with certain core aspects of temple worship and wonder how they can continue to attend.

I remember, for example, a woman who spoke in our stake conference in 2013 about her ten-year quest to reconcile the impulses of her heart with those of her mind. In particular, she struggled with aspects of the temple experience that treated men and women differently; she could not understand how to square these aspects with her testimony of the perfect love of heavenly parents who equally embraced every man, woman, and child. Part of the point of her talk was that the answers to her longing questions did not come quickly or easily. Beyond that, however, I sensed an equally important, if perhaps less obvious and intuitive, truth—and that is where I would like to turn our attention now.

While that sister considered the details of the answers she received too sacred to share, her story reminds me that one of the most important epistemological keys to understanding the temple is better appreciating the relationship between truth and our understanding of it, as well as the relationship between truth and the words we use to convey it. Her talk brings to my mind the great gospel principle that some of the most beautiful, nourishing eternal truths can be found at the heart of paradoxes—and one of these paradoxes lies at the center of our temple worship: If temple ordinances are of eternal importance, how can they ever change? Because we do not talk about the details of the temple ceremony outside the temple, and because we generally do not discuss the particulars of the temple ceremony’s evolution in print or in our meetings, some members may be unfamiliar with the idea that the temple ceremony has undergone significant changes over the decades, but this is a truth prophets have repeatedly taught. For example, in 2019 the First Presidency made the following statement: “Whenever the Lord has had a people on the earth who will obey His word, they have been commanded to build temples. Scriptures document patterns of temple worship [beginning in ancient times]. . . . Over . . . many centuries, details associated with temple work have been adjusted periodically, including language, methods of construction, communication, and record-keeping. Prophets have taught that there will be no end to such adjustments as directed by the Lord to His servants.”<sup>9</sup>

President Nelson later expanded on this theme at length in general conference in 2021 when he taught, “Current adjustments in temple procedures, and others that will follow, are continuing evidence that the Lord is actively directing His Church. He is providing opportunities for each of us to bolster our spiritual foundations more effectively by centering our lives on Him and on the ordinances and covenants of His temple. When you bring your temple recommend, a contrite heart, and a seeking mind to the Lord’s house of learning, *He* will teach you.”<sup>10</sup>

These statements would seem initially to stand in contrast to the way many members have traditionally conceptualized temple worship. For example, President Brigham Young is often quoted, “Your *endowment* is, to receive all those ordinances in the House of the Lord, which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, to enable you to walk back

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9. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “First Presidency Releases Statement on Temples,” Church News, January 2, 2019, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/first-presidency-releases-statement-on-temples>.

10. Russell M. Nelson, “The Temple and Your Spiritual Foundation,” *Liahona* 45, no. 11 (November 2021): 95, emphasis original.

to the presence of the Father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels, being enabled to give them the key words, the signs and tokens, pertaining to the Holy Priesthood, and gain your eternal exaltation in spite of earth and hell.”<sup>11</sup>

Nothing in President Young’s statement weighs in against the possibility of the temple ceremony changing, per se, but his emphasis is on the ordinances having eternal significance, and it seems at least mildly surprising in that context to hear President Nelson emphasize repeatedly that there will be “no end” to the “adjustments” that will come to the temple ceremony. Still, this juxtaposition—of eternal truths next to endless adjustments—can actually bring us to a vital and central insight regarding the way we understand the nature of truth.

Imagine for a moment an enormous white granite wall that is covered with sacred text. Let’s further imagine that this text is not just sacred but contains the actual information—the key—needed to get into heaven. That is, if you know every word written on the wall, you will understand the entirety of truth and gain access to the highest and holiest heavenly realms. In this analogy, what matters is knowing all the words. Essentially, the point of coming to understand what is written on the wall is not the piecing together of some larger, coherent story but, instead, simply uncovering and learning all the words themselves. The rub in our analogy, however, is that the wall is almost entirely covered by an opaque curtain. Within this analogy, revelation is, quite literally, the sequential unveiling of parts of the wall. For those of us who believe in restored Christianity, we accept that certain sections of the wall were uncovered by the Bible. Joseph Smith, because of his visions and the scriptures he translated and otherwise revealed, ripped further sections of curtain off the wall. As we seek personal inspiration, we uncover further corners that heretofore have remained obscure. Thus, today the wall still towers over us, with large sections of writing still obscured from us by the cloth that has not yet been ripped away, but with other sections revealing themselves to us readily (after all, we believe God will “yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” [A of F 1:9]).

There is merit to this analogy, and I believe this is how many of us intuitively picture our relationship with ultimate truth, but the analogy strikes me as at least incomplete and perhaps even spiritually dangerous, for reasons I will articulate momentarily. The analogy’s virtue is that it reminds us of the importance of words in learning divine truth. The Book

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11. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 2:31 (April 6, 1853), emphasis original.



of Mormon, as one example, repeatedly talks about “the power of the word” (2 Ne. 1:26; 4 Ne. 1:30; see also 1 Ne. 15:24 and Alma 31:5), and our religion’s focus on both written and oral scripture (such as when someone speaks under the influence of the Spirit, as described in D&C 68:4) illustrates the great emphasis we place on understanding truth through words.

Nonetheless, for all its merits, the danger with this analogy is its suggestion that each morsel of truth is self-contained and that it bears no necessary relationship with any other. In other words, according to this understanding, if each word I uncover on the granite wall is only going to be checked against its correlate—and nothing else—on Judgment Day, then all that matters is understanding each piece of the gospel separately. Taken to an extreme, this approach can suggest that gospel truth is very nearly like a cosmic spelling test where, so long as we can correctly spell each of the divine words, we will be admitted to heaven as we might to some enormously selective divine college. Not only that, but in its extreme form this approach can lead us to worship *words* instead of God—as if our understanding of *descriptions* of God mattered more than God *himself*. This approach atomizes truth into millions of disconnected fragments and privileges what we know over who we are and what we do. Coming to understand truth, after all, matters chiefly as it catalyzes Christian conversion and allows us to become new creatures in Christ.

Truth is not a million fragments; it is one great whole.

Thus, I believe a more complete analogy for how we come to understand truth is suggested by a favorite children’s book: *You Are Special*.<sup>12</sup> In it, a carpenter creates a class of little wooden people—the Wemmicks. These little people are variably kind and cruel to each other, but most of them define themselves by how other wooden people treat them. One beleaguered little wooden man—Punchinello—meets a mysterious Wemmick woman who blithely ignores the comments of her contemporaries. When Punchinello—who is the recipient of many slights from other Wemmicks and who feels those slights acutely—asks this woman how she manages it, she replies she no longer cares what other wooden people think because she has gone to see Eli, the Carpenter. She tells Punchinello a bit about Eli but soon says that if he wishes to really understand, he can only do so by coming to know Eli himself. The book ends at the conclusion of Punchinello’s first visit to Eli—teasing that Punchinello has only the faintest glimmer of understanding of who *Punchinello* is, who *Eli* is, and what they really have to do with each other but offering the implicit promise that a deeper understanding is yet to come.

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12. Max Lucado, *You Are Special* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1997).



Analogies abound in this story, but a couple matter particularly for our purposes here. The first is that if the operative question in the story is, “What is it like to know Eli?” the truth that is the answer to that query cannot be meaningfully understood as millions of fragments. Eli is an emotional, visceral, palpable, loving being—not a collection of words. This gets to the second important analogy: each important thing to be understood about Eli can only be understood in the context of all the other things that need to be understood about Eli. The little wooden woman could have told Punchinello how tall Eli was or what his voice sounded like or how things were arranged in his shop. This may have been interesting, and it may have even been factually correct, but it would not have been true or at least would not have been transformative truth.

The key theme here is as Joseph taught: “It is the first principle of the Gospel, to know for a certainty the character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another.”<sup>13</sup> None of these truths or any of their constituent parts can be understood in isolation—they must be considered as pieces of the great whole. The temple aims to teach us these very things, but we would do well to remember the lessons Punchinello and Eli teach us as we try to learn.

This also leads us to remember another key principle for understanding truth, including in the temple: language is a necessary but meager and ultimately insufficient vehicle for doing the very thing it purports to do: communicate truth. Words can persuade and even move us, but they nonetheless remain mere symbols. I can write you a letter and tell you what it is like to be in Yosemite Valley when the sun sets on a newly laid blanket of snow, but reading what I write will not be the same as having been there. This is not only because of the manifest inadequacy of my writing but because of words’ qualitative insufficiency. All of this is why Joseph Smith referred, in a letter to W. W. Phelps, to the “crooked broken scattered and imperfect language” and specifically prayed that God would hasten the time when he would be delivered “from the little narrow prison almost as it were total [*sic*] darkness of paper pen and ink.”<sup>14</sup>

What does all this teach us about learning in the gospel, in life, and in the temple?

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13. “History, 1838–1856, Volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844],” 1970, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed March 3, 2023, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/342>.

14. Joseph Smith to William W. Phelps, November 27, 1832, in Matthew C. Godfrey and others, eds., *Documents, Volume 2: July 1831–January 1833*, Joseph Smith Papers (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2013), 320.

Everything.

When the temple—or any other fountain of holy water, for that matter—confronts us with a seemingly dissonant teaching—a phrase, a chapter, a discourse, whatever—that does not concord with the remainder of our holistic understanding of truth, we would do well to take that teaching into our hearts, consider it carefully, and wait.

That waiting can clarify, enlighten, and instruct.

One effect of that waiting may be that our wisdom will grow and we will understand in a way previously hidden to us that the teaching agrees with what we know of the gospel but that the agreement between our understanding and this apparently new, or seemingly contradictory, principle requires a new paradigm, a broader reference frame, or a key connecting insight we lacked before but now have. Alternatively, we may learn that what we thought we understood about what we learned in the temple (or anywhere else) is not actually what the temple teaches or, rather, cannot be understood as we first supposed. As another option, a second principle, sometimes learned many years down the road, may shed key light on the first principle in a way that unlocks to our view the beauty of that first truth. And, in other instances, that piece of holy writ (whether in the temple or anywhere else) that seems out of joint with the rest of what we know will eventually fade into the background precisely because the very words themselves are changed. There have been, after all, many changes to the temple ceremony itself over its lifetime. It has evolved from a personal ceremony led by the Prophet Joseph himself, and lasting “through the day,”<sup>15</sup> to a ceremony that was shortened but always performed with live actors, to one that is largely recorded and projected on a screen.

These types of changes may at first unsettle us—if the temple reflects holy and unchanging truth, then why or how should it ever change?

But it is here again that the competing conceptions of language and its relationship to truth become so important. Above, I outline two analogies for the way we learn truth—that it is like uncovering words on a wall and that it is like coming to know a carpenter. These analogies both matter but differ in this key way: in the first analogy, the words themselves *are the truth*. In this understanding, well might we be confused and devastated if we were to find that tomorrow a large portion of the

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15. Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, and Richard Lloyd Anderson, eds., *Journals, Volume 2: December 1841–April 1843*, Joseph Smith Papers (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2011), 53–54.

text had been erased and replaced. In the second conception, however, the words are not the truth; they are merely one way to try to *express* the truth. Furthermore, we must readily acknowledge that the words themselves are not just quantitatively but also qualitatively inadequate. Even our greatest poets, when trying to communicate what Ralph Waldo Emerson (who was one of them) called “that divine idea,” fall short. Indeed, of that truth, Emerson said, “We but half express ourselves, and are ashamed of that divine idea which each of us represents.”<sup>16</sup>

This second understanding matters so much because it frees us from a slavish devotion to the words themselves. Please don’t misunderstand; this is not to suggest that the words don’t matter. Nothing about this understanding questions that. Imperfect words remain the major mode for communicating ideas between persons and across time. Still, a richer understanding of truth equips us with the tools—and humility—necessary to approach all of our divine texts with a spirit of charity and forgiveness that appropriately considers the mortality of the human vehicles of all divine revelation. As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland taught, “When you see imperfection, remember that the limitation is *not* in the divinity of the work. As one gifted writer has suggested, when the infinite fulness is poured forth, it is not the oil’s fault if there is some loss because finite vessels can’t quite contain it all.”<sup>17</sup>

It is in this light that we not only understand but can wholeheartedly resonate with the protestations of multiple Book of Mormon prophets—as well as Joseph Smith—that they are not adequate vessels for the truth they were tasked with revealing. Indeed, the Prophet Joseph is quoted as saying, “It was an awful responsibility to write in the name of the Lord.”<sup>18</sup> We often make the mistake of thinking of the Book of Mormon as if it were etched into those plates by God’s own divine finger, with no human intermediary. But such is insistently not the case. The truth contained therein was carried first in the hearts of the prophets who wrote the book. They then set to the work of recording the truth as best they knew how.

Moroni provides the perfect example. As he is wrapping up his herculean task of completing what would become the Book of Mormon, he worries he is not up to the task of communicating what he has been

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16. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” Emerson Central, accessed April 19, 2023, <https://emersoncentral.com/ebook/Self-Reliance.pdf>.

17. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Lord, I Believe,” *Ensign* 43, no. 5 (May 2013): 94, emphasis original.

18. “History, 1838–1856, Volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834],” 162, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed February 17, 2023, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/168>.

commanded to convey. His plea is plaintive; he leaves his fears naked on the page: “And I said unto him: Lord, the Gentiles will mock at these things, because of our weakness in writing; for Lord thou hast made us mighty in word by faith, but thou hast not made us mighty in writing; for thou hast made all this people that they could speak much, because of the Holy Ghost which thou hast given them” (Ether 12:23).

Nephi, who is one of the Book of Mormon’s other main authors, may initially come off as more confident in his writing ability, but ultimately he reveals himself to harbor just the same set of fears: “And if they [the things I have written] are not the words of Christ, judge ye—for Christ will show unto you, with power and great glory, that they are his words, at the last day; and you and I shall stand face to face before his bar; and ye shall know that I have been commanded of him to write these things, *notwithstanding my weakness*” (2 Ne. 33:11, emphasis added).

However we wish to understand Nephi’s anxiety—whether it is about his writing abilities, the adequacy of ancient words for modern readers, or whether he, too, is fretting about the qualitative inadequacy of language—it is clear he fears that those who receive his words will do so dismissively. I believe his initial and apparently more strident challenge—*judge ye!*—rings with a hint of self-doubt, as if he includes himself among the audience he wishes to convince.

Taken together, these observations suggest an expansive conceptualization of truth that cannot be contained entirely by any set of symbols or any finite text. Thus, it is not surprising that the temple ceremony has changed in the nearly two centuries since its latter-day inception. Likewise, when we encounter sections of our temple worship that seem not to fit with our understanding, we would do best to be patient until we receive more light and knowledge. We can accept that the temple ceremony itself will continue to be adjusted to better reflect the divine ideas it seeks to mirror—just as the First Presidency said it would in their 2019 statement.<sup>19</sup>

In the day when we come to understand all truth, perhaps it will be contained within the words of some as-yet-unknown divine tongue that outpaces even the glories of Shakespearean English, or perhaps it will simply be too beautiful for words. Regardless, it stands to reason that its full beauty will far transcend any current attempt to understand—let alone articulate—it.

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19. Church of Jesus Christ, “First Presidency Releases Statement on Temples.”

Thus, those who wrestle, even mightily, to understand one or another aspect of temple truth may find the understanding they seek in any of many ways, but most of those will not be easy or fast. Some will need meekness to allow themselves to change or to better understand, and some may require the patience necessary to await the continued refinement of the ceremony itself to better reflect divine reality.

Whatever the case, understanding temple truth merits patiently working things through.

### **Section 3: What the Temple Means to Me**

Still, all of the foregoing gets us only so far.

Reorienting our approach to the temple can open our hearts and minds to receive truth there. And a more holistic conception of revealed truth—and of revelation itself—allows us wider latitude to learn what the temple can teach us. But all of this still leaves the central question: *What do we go there to learn?*

This is not my question to answer in any final sense. I'm just one guy and have no place declaring doctrine. Still, the temple takes on meaning precisely as we interact with it. It is in that interpersonal interaction that temple ordinances transform from words to life-changing lessons and promises. I'd like to share with you a few of the lessons the temple has most meaningfully taught me.

First, the prominence of the Fall narrative strikes me as initially counterintuitive but ultimately deeply meaningful. After all, a visitor to our weekly worship services or to seminary and institute classes would be forgiven for concluding that we don't much focus on the Fall. Apart from scattered references in manuals and some general conference talks, this is simply not a subject on which we lavish much time. When, for example, was the last time you heard the subject as the theme of a sacrament meeting talk?

Yet in the temple, the Fall takes center stage.

Why is this?

To answer the question, we first must recognize that in few aspects does our theology differ more insistently and markedly than in our belief regarding what happened in the Garden of Eden and why. The Catholic catechism offers a representative example of just how far we depart from the traditional understanding. As it is for most Christians, for Catholic believers the Fall represents the nadir of sin, arrogance, pride, and

selfishness.<sup>20</sup> This conception of God's plan places Adam and Eve in a paradisiacal garden they were never meant to leave. Had they obeyed God's command to not eat the fruit, they would have stayed in Eden forever, and they and all their offspring would have been in a state of never-ending bliss.

In this representation, Eve is depicted as naïve, evil, or both—and all women are often painted with that same brush. Furthermore, in this narrative, Satan triumphs (if briefly) by pulling one over on Adam and Eve. Finally, the outcome represents tragedy on a cosmic scale. In effect, God must respond by setting in motion Christ's sacrifice to bridge the gap opened by Eve's arrogance.

But for Latter-day Saints, almost none of this is true. We believe, instead, that God offered to Adam and Eve competing options and allowed them to choose between them: either they could remain in the flat and empty—though still paradisiacal—Eden, or they could venture into the lone and dreary world. Doing so would bring death and sin into the world, but together with death and sin would come the entire gamut of human experience and the ability to genuinely appreciate meaningful opposite pairs (joy and sorrow, darkness and light, pain and comfort). All of this, taken together, would allow Adam, Eve, and all their posterity to learn genuine joy and love—and the effects of the Fall would be redeemed through the perfect love and eventual infinite sacrifice of the Savior Jesus Christ.

Seen in this light, Eve's choice to eat the fruit becomes heroic, even stunning: this was the height of courage and sacrifice. As President James E. Faust once taught, "We all owe a great debt of gratitude to Eve."<sup>21</sup> Likewise, the Atonement is no longer an after-the-fact remedy to an unforeseen problem but, instead, the culminating step in a preordained plan meant to allow God's children to become like him.

The importance of this story cannot be overstated. Its inclusion in the temple is not meant simply to set the record straight on a few historical, scriptural, or theological details. Instead, the prominence of the Eden narrative suggests it matters deeply. Let's consider why.

First, Eve's wisdom and bravery remind us that we are *meant to experience sorrow, suffering, and loss*. These are not merely the painful

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20. See, for example, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1.2.1.1.1.7.3.398, accessed April 28, 2023, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_\\_\\_P1C.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P1C.HTM).

21. James E. Faust, "What It Means to Be a Daughter of God," *Ensign* 29, no. 11 (November 1999): 101.

byproducts of a plan gone wrong; they are part of the warp and woof of the universe, forces woven into the fabric of everything—experiencing them matters. If we let them, these experiences can educate us and even transform us. Our belief that eternal law necessitated the choice made in Eden suggests that our becoming like our heavenly parents requires suffering. And anyone who has lived very long and suffered very much knows why: if borne meekly, suffering softens us and excavates in our hearts room to love—an excavation that is sometimes exquisitely painful but that can be accomplished in no other way.

Similarly, the Eden narrative suggests an even more comprehensive truth regarding where we should look in life to find meaning. Both the setup and the resolution of the Eden narrative remind us that the universe rests on the back of a seemingly insoluble paradox. After all, God gave two commandments—to not eat the fruit and to multiply and replenish the earth—but we know from 2 Nephi 2 that those commandments could not both be kept simultaneously (see verses 22–25). Eve and Adam had to break one to keep the other. They were forced to choose between competing goods. Eve’s brave choice to embrace the prospect of having children required them to leave the comfort of Eden—paradise could not be kept if they meant to fully embrace joy.

In this light, one of my most powerful temple experiences came many years ago when one day I found that the entire ceremony seemed to fall away from around me—except Eve. During that session, and for no obvious external reason, I found myself transfixed by her dilemma and captivated by the motivations behind her choice—wondering what might have been going through her heart and mind *before* Satan came tempting her to eat the fruit. The image that came to me was of her having decided to eat the fruit long before Lucifer approached her and for reasons he would never comprehend. I came out of the session that day filled with gratitude and an overwhelming sense that the choice she made that day rested on transcendent eternal truth. Sitting in my car after I left the temple, I wrote,

Since long before he came to her, she’d pondered on the tree;  
 She sensed some truth lay deep beneath his wheedling, devilish plea.  
 The choices pulled like gravities, her soul that way and this:  
 Her Father’s voice and close embrace she knew she soon would miss.  
 But in a moment to her heart came truth as clear as day—  
 If she would know her God in full, this was the only way.  
 She strained her faith to see beyond, to glimpse that farther shore—  
 Her better angels beckoned her: come see, come feel, know more.



So, resolute, she set her jaw, resigned now to this plight.  
 And with a bite she plunged us into darkness, fear, and night.  
 She knew the path she'd chosen would be laced with grief and thorns—  
 That from her womb a tearful race of sinners would be born—  
 But sensed then, too, that joy in full awaited all her kin  
 If through this way of suffering they all would enter in.

The temple invites us to fix our gaze on the moment Eve chose an exodus from comfort and requires us to ask what we can learn by studying and then following her example.

In a sense, then, the temple provides one of our theology's most powerful examples of a woman leading out in bravery and determination to follow the Savior. On one level, Eve's bravest choice is simply to leave the garden and embrace the way of suffering she seems to have known would follow. But her choice does not end there, because beyond the decision to leave the garden, the world into which she invites Adam will come to be defined by a covenant path that is meant to transform both of them, together, into the beings God would have them become.

One consistent emphasis of President Nelson during his prophetic ministry has been to call members to more assiduously walk "the covenant path," which culminates in making temple covenants.<sup>22</sup> I fear, however, that we often understand this invitation in a way that greatly impoverishes the meaning of a covenantal life. My experience suggests that many of us act as if the importance of the ordinances of salvation—with their associated covenants—is simply to have received the ordinances themselves, as if they are items to be ticked off a heavenly checklist.

But we have been warned very specifically that this is not the case. In 2000, Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught in general conference,

From such teachings we conclude that the Final Judgment is not just an evaluation of a sum total of good and evil acts—what we have done. It is an acknowledgement of the final effect of our acts and thoughts—what we have become. It is not enough for anyone just to go through the motions. The commandments, ordinances, and covenants of the gospel *are not a list of deposits required to be made in some heavenly account.* The gospel of Jesus Christ is a plan that shows us how to become what our Heavenly Father desires us to become.<sup>23</sup>

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22. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "New First Presidency Speaks to Members Worldwide," Church News, January 16, 2018, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/new-first-presidency-speaks-to-members-worldwide>.

23. Dallin H. Oaks, "The Challenge to Become," *Ensign* 30, no. 11 (November 2000): 32, emphasis added.

Thus, when we enter the temple, one of the primary questions we should be asking is this: What kind of person is the temple inviting me to become? The answer to this question comes as we review the five primary covenants we are asked to make as part of the endowment. Because the endowment presents the arc of Adam and Eve's journey away from God's presence and then back into his embrace, the endowment suggests that the covenants they—and, thus, we—make after we have entered the lone and dreary world are key components of the process that then fits us to come back into God's presence. That is, these covenants help us to become the kind of people God wants us to become.

The meaning of the covenants could fill entire volumes, but for the purposes of this paper, let us consider the first four briefly and then the fifth covenant at a bit more length. We first covenant to live the law of obedience—briefly, we promise to do our (always imperfect) best to keep God's commandments. Second, we covenant to live the law of sacrifice—briefly, we accept that living of a life of discipleship may at times require giving up even things that are deeply meaningful to us. Third, we consent to strive to live the law of the gospel, which Church leaders have defined as “the higher law that [Jesus] taught while he was on the earth”<sup>24</sup>—and which we find in distilled form in passages in the Sermon on the Mount. Fourth, we promise to be chaste, meaning we save the sexual part of ourselves to be shared only with our husband or wife.<sup>25</sup>

And that brings us to the final covenant: to keep the law of consecration.

The original latter-day context for the covenant of consecration comes in Doctrine and Covenants 42. Here the Lord gives early Saints “the law,” which was to be a set of precepts meant to govern their temporal affairs in Zion. While this arrangement was never implemented as intended for very long, it was meant to have worked as follows: If I wished to join the Church, I would legally deed all my property to the Church. Then, penniless, I would have determined a reasonable “stewardship” with the bishop, and he would have made me “steward” over that portion of money, property, and goods in kind. From that point forward, I would be a steward—not owner—of those resources and would thus be accountable for how I used them to bless my family and the world.

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24. Church of Jesus Christ, *General Handbook*, 27.2.

25. Listed in detail in “About the Temple Endowment,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed April 19, 2023, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/temples/what-is-temple-endowment>.

As I have grown older, I have come to appreciate more and more the importance of this covenant. In the first place, living the law of consecration invites us to shift the defining paradigm of our lives from *ownership* to *stewardship*. For me, this has become definitional. I still struggle to get this right, but it redefines the way I view everything I have. In a world of *ownership*, I am called to acquire, acquire, acquire—my definition of self largely varies proportionally with the size of my own personal circle of stuff. In the late stages of this worldview, I would become entitled, bitter, and selfish.

But in a world of *stewardship*, I become awed at the blessings heaven has showered on me, anxious to use them to bless and to build. Because I do not “own” anything, I have no more claim on my time, money, and resources than anyone else, and I am constantly worried about whether I am doing enough to get rid of my abundance to lift the poor and help the needy. For those of us who live in the most temporally prosperous era in world history, this recognition—that all that we have does not actually belong to us, but is given as a stewardship—becomes weighty and consuming: Can I ever possibly do enough to adequately discharge the stewardship that has been granted me? This is not to suggest we literally sell all we have and spend our lives in sackcloth and ashes, but instead it becomes an insistent, even incessant, reminder that even if I wear out the rest of my life in service and doing good, I will still fall far short of my full potential.

Paradoxically, though, even as my attempts to use my stewardship to bless the world grow, I find my gratitude growing commensurately. Freed from the incessant nagging of acquisitiveness, I can instead find beauty in sunrises, bird songs, smiles, hugs, and beautiful music. My abundance grows even as I try to give it away.

But the temple is not merely inviting us to a life of asceticism—we are called to consecrate ourselves to build the Church and to build Zion. I would like to think about each of these in turn.

I think we often misunderstand what it might mean to build “the Church,” because we often narrow inappropriately what is meant by “the Church.” It is true, of course, that in one sense “the Church” is a theoretical thing defined by a certain ecclesiology, history, and authority. But this theoretical church model doesn’t really need our building. Instead, when I covenant to consecrate to “build the Church,” I am effectively covenanting to build the people I see around me on Sunday.

These people—in all their imperfection—are, in one sense, “the Church.” So, those of us who have been to the temple covenant to consecrate all we have and are to build those who worship with us. And what

a beautiful promise this is. After all, while not everyone lives in a nuclear family, everyone can belong to a branch or ward. And in these congregations, we come together to celebrate successes and to mourn losses, to live and to love, to welcome babies and to bid farewell to those who die. We cheer each other in winning and hold each other while we cry. Wards can become, in Elder Gerrit W. Gong's words, havens of "covenant belonging."<sup>26</sup>

In a nation and world that is too often falling apart, wards (or branches) provide safe spaces where people of all ethnicities, economic strata, political persuasions, skin colors, and educational backgrounds come together and weave a community. We can teach one another and care for one another as we pass through the hard things in life. And for many of us, the ward will provide such an endless fount of opportunities that it could be all we will ever need.

And that brings us, finally, to the last covenantal call—to build Zion. Zion can be defined in many ways, but President Russell M. Nelson's prophetic plea for disciples of Jesus Christ to be peacemakers is both urgent and essential. The call to build Zion is, quite simply, our divine mandate to be among those "who spend their lives building up others," as President Nelson put it. "You have your agency to choose contention or reconciliation," he said, "I urge you to *choose* to be a peacemaker, now and always."<sup>27</sup> The establishment of Zion depends on it. The Lord prophesied in 1831 that peacemakers would find refuge in Zion, "and there shall be gathered unto it out of every nation under heaven; and [Zion] shall be the only people that shall not be at war one with another" (D&C 45:69). We build Zion when we heed President Nelson's urgent call to act: "*Now* is the time to lay aside bitterness. *Now* is the time to cease insisting that it is your way or no way. *Now* is the time to stop doing things that make others walk on eggshells for fear of upsetting you. *Now* is the time to bury your weapons of war."<sup>28</sup>

Thus, keeping the covenant to consecrate all that we have and are to making peace and building Zion does not need to involve grand acts that will leave an obvious imprint on any noticeable stage. Rather, the majority of what most of us will do in heeding this call—and keeping our promise—will come in the form of daily acts that play out quietly and mostly unnoticed across the world. These are the stars who, by their collective light, make luminous an otherwise inky sky. These are what

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26. Gerrit W. Gong, "Covenant Belonging," *Ensign* 49, no. 11 (November 2019): 80–83.

27. Russell M. Nelson, "Peacemakers Needed," *Liahona* 47, no. 5 (May 2023): 101, 100, emphasis original.

28. Nelson, "Peacemakers Needed," 101, emphasis original.

together make the leaven in the loaf or the salt of the earth. These are the myriad ways most of us will make the world a better place—the ways we will hasten the coming of Zion.

When you speak well of a colleague at work—you are building Zion. When you work to fight against “abuse or prejudice [against anyone] because of race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, culture, or *any other* identifier”—you are building Zion.<sup>29</sup> When you put out into the world edifying art or music—you are building Zion. When you provide professional counseling to a teen in trouble—you are building Zion. When you teach French in a troubled high school; when you do research that advances medical cures; when you offer a friend a kind word or a needed smile; if you win an election and go on to bring better resources to the poor—you are building Zion. If you go on to be a CEO, or a nanny, or a board chair, or a PTA president, or a tech leader, or civil rights lawyer, or a woman bringing soup to the homeless, or a doctor bringing care to the dying, or an elder helping your neighbor to move, or whatever good and luminous thing you may one day become—so long as you are leveraging your many gifts, your stewardship, to build and better the children of our heavenly parents—then you are building Zion. In considering all the foregoing, I think of my temple garment. I wear the garment for many reasons, but chief among them is this: as the clothing closest to my skin that virtually never leaves my side, the temple garment reminds me that my covenant to consecrate is total and ever-binding. Whether my service is to my family, my ward, or the wider world, I am to wear out my life in serving, building, and blessing—in making my family, my ward, and the world better.

As an oncologist, I have accompanied many patients as they neared death. I have watched the last breath of air leave the lungs, and I have felt a person’s skin turn cold. Having been there with these patients I’ve grown to love, I will tell you this: When I am called to die, whether that is next year or some sixty years down the road, I will not care how much money I made. Nor will it much matter where I went to school or how high I rose on the corporate (or medical) ladder. But what will bring me the greatest joy will be the loved ones who surround my bed as I breathe my last and—if I’m allowed to look down and see—those who come to mourn at my funeral. Too late, too many of us learn the lesson of Marley’s Ghost from *A Christmas Carol*. When Scrooge tries to

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29. Russell M. Nelson, “Morehouse College Peace Prize Award Acceptance Message,” April 13, 2023, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/morehouse-college-peace-prize-award-acceptance-message>, emphasis original.

console him by assuring him he was “a good man of business,” the ghost cries, “‘Business!’ . . . wringing its hands again. ‘Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence were, all, my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!’”<sup>30</sup>

These thoughts of life and death strike me as apropos as we consider the temple because, at the end of the day, the temple is inviting us to consider from the present moment the entire arc of a mortal life. Eve and Adam become our guide in the temple in bravely following Jesus Christ in a life of committed Christian discipleship. This involves, in the first place, finding the bravery to leave the comfortable confines of Eden for the travails of a world suffused in suffering. But the journey does not end there. No, the temple beckons us, by dint of covenants building on covenants, to commit ourselves to *becoming* the kind of people God needs us to be. We Church members constitute only the tiniest fraction of humans on earth—a sliver of a sliver of a sliver. If we are to play a part in being the salt, the light, or the leaven, it will only be by virtue of becoming women and men who follow Adam and Eve’s example in obeying God’s commands to love him and to love our neighbor, sacrificing our own good to lift those around us, living the Savior’s higher law, committing ourselves to lives of chastity, and consecrating all we have and are to building the Church and making the world a better place. By doing our imperfect best to live these covenants, we can eventually be transformed through the grace of Jesus Christ into the type of people who can do God’s work in the world. And thus the end of the eternal arc of all humans, as instigated by Eve and Adam when they blazed a trail out of the garden, will be to arrive back in God’s presence, only, as T. S. Eliot said, “We shall not cease from exploration / and the end of our exploring / will be to arrive where we started / and know the place for the first time.”<sup>31</sup>

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Tyler Johnson is a clinical assistant professor in medicine and oncology at Stanford University Medical School. He has also worked with the young adults in the Church in that area for many years. Dr. Johnson dedicates this article to the members of the Stanford 1st Ward, who have, through their love and sacrifice, blessed him and his family for many years. The thoughts reflected here were largely developed during time teaching and serving the members of that ward.

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30. Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, ebook (Project Gutenberg, 2006), 28, <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/19337/pg19337-images.html>.

31. T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*, Columbia University, accessed April 19, 2023, <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/history/winter/w3206/edit/tseliotlittlegidding.html>.



# To Make the Attempt

*I retired to the woods to make the attempt.*

—Joseph Smith

Fall, not spring.  
Idaho, not New York.  
Dusk, not dawn.  
Still, a prayer.

Yes, a fourteen-year-old child—a girl.  
But a potato field, not a grove.  
Shady shelter? No. Exposure.  
Father did not appear.

Her knees were cold in the soil.  
There were no angels or fire,  
except for the flame horizon  
and a burning heart.

Thick darkness gathers around her.  
The feeling fades.  
The last pillars of light slide  
behind the mountains.

The girl (her name is Faith)  
can barely see the handlebars  
that she clasps with cold fingers  
to ride the rocky tractor path  
headed for home.

—Isaac James Richards

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This poem won second place in the 2023 BYU  
Studies poetry contest.

# A Register Analysis of Public Prayers

Lindsey Newton and Brett Hashimoto

## Introduction

Prayer, as defined by scholars Corwin and Brown, is “a form of ritual language . . . [that] affords humans the possibility to communicate with non-human others.”<sup>1</sup> As a linguistic register (that is, a variety of language defined by an area of use, such as academic research articles, text messages, sermons, or blog posts), it denotes communication with an unseen being, primarily in a religious context. However, “despite the importance of religion and ritual in anthropology, prayer, a key component of religious practices and institutions, has received very little empirical attention.”<sup>2</sup> This is partially because the complexity of religion as a sociological concept makes it particularly difficult to study in an empirical context, even when it is broken down into individual acts and practices, such as prayer. Across cultures and religions, prayers appear in a wide variety of forms, each with a different intention and often with a different expected audience and response.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it is impossible to establish universal generalizations about prayer, though key conclusions can be drawn from investigating specific contexts.

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1. Anna I. Corwin and Taylor W. Brown, “Emotion in the Language of Prayer,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Emotion*, ed. Sonya Pritzker, Janina Fenigsen, and James Wilce (London: Routledge, 2019), 325–43.

2. Patricia Baquedano-López, “Prayer,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 9, no. 1–2 (1999): 197, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jlin.1999.9.1-2.197>.

3. Tania ap Siôn, “Implicit Religion and Ordinary Prayer,” *Implicit Religion* 13, no. 3 (December 19, 2010): 275–94, <https://doi.org/10.1558/imre.v13i3.275>.

Several researchers have examined Christian prayers from a linguistic perspective, including ap Siôn,<sup>4</sup> Szuchewycz,<sup>5</sup> and Shoaps;<sup>6</sup> these researchers each studied prayers in a different religious group and setting, and they all provide valuable insight into the attitudes and intentions of prayer-givers within their specific religious group of interest. However, to date, we know of no published studies about prayer language in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints despite the existing findings that members of the Church have unique language patterns.<sup>7</sup> By conducting a linguistic analysis of the prayers of Church members, similar answers about prayer-givers and their relationship with the divine may be gleaned.

In the Church, prayer-givers face a unique dilemma of formality. On one hand, prayers are offered to a being who is considered a powerful deity worthy of respect.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, Latter-day Saints also view God as their loving Father, which suggests a more familial, intimate, and personal relationship. This seeming contradiction is even more pronounced in prayers offered in sessions of general conference, where speakers are people of authority presenting to millions of strangers, which suggests formality, but the strangers are also referred to as “brothers and sisters,” which suggests a desire for closeness. Thus, analysis of general conference prayers may provide opportunities for research into how members view their relationship with God, their spirituality, and the concept of religion.

One way to study large quantities of language data, like the hundreds of recorded general conference talks, is to use the methods of corpus linguistics.<sup>9</sup> This subfield of linguistics leverages computers to automatically analyze large databases of language. A corpus (plural *corpora*) is a large sample of instances of language use (that is, texts) designed to represent a variety of language, such as a dialect (for example, British

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4. Ap Siôn, “Implicit Religion and Ordinary Prayer.”

5. Bohdan Szuchewycz, “Evidentiality in Ritual Discourse: The Social Construction of Religious Meaning,” *Language in Society* 23, no. 3 (1994): 389–410.

6. Robin A. Shoaps, “‘Pray Earnestly’: The Textual Construction of Personal Involvement in Pentecostal Prayer and Song,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 12, no. 1 (2002): 34–71.

7. Wendy Baker-Smemoe and David Bowie, “Linguistic Behavior and Religious Activity,” *Language and Communication* 42 (2015): 116–24, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2014.12.004>.

8. “God the Father,” Topics and Questions, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed April 19, 2022, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/eng/manual/gospel-topics/god-the-father>.

9. Michael Stubbs and Dorothea Halbe, “Corpus Linguistics: Overview,” in *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*, ed. Carol A. Chapelle (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal0033>.

English), genre (for example, romantic fiction), or register (for example, prayer). The methods used in corpus linguistics are inherently quantitative, as they deal with frequencies of occurrence of linguistic phenomena and statistical patterns of those occurrences. However, because corpus analysis relies on full textual data, one can also return to the prose to qualitatively interpret the results. Thus, corpus studies allow for traditionally qualitative questions to be answered quantitatively or with mixed methods. As a powerful analytical approach, corpus linguistics is flexible in its applications, ranging in fields from legal discourse<sup>10</sup> to medicine<sup>11</sup> to call centers<sup>12</sup> to forensics.<sup>13</sup>

One common type of corpus analysis is keyness analysis. Keyness analyses use statistical tests to determine which words occur with unusual frequency in a target corpus as compared to a reference corpus.<sup>14</sup> This is to say that they reveal the specific words that differentiate two corpora, thus allowing researchers to pinpoint key differences between the two registers or genres represented in the corpora. As such, a keyness analysis is a highly effective method for identifying keywords and features of specific registers, like prayers. Another analysis is n-gram analysis. This analysis uses frequently recurring strings of words (that is, n-grams) in a corpus to uncover formulaic phraseologies that act together as chunks or units.

As Bowie and Baker-Smemoe<sup>15</sup> identified, religious groups and subgroups have their own religiolects, or religious linguistic patterns, and the ability to fluently utilize features of a religiolect is an integral part of developing a sense of belonging. Since prayer is a regular and public linguistic act performed in front of the in-group, knowing and being able to implement keywords and patterns as well as the phraseology of

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10. Stanisław Goźdz-Roszkowski, "Corpus Linguistics in Legal Discourse," *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* 34, no. 5 (2021): 1515–40, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11196-021-09860-8>.

11. Shelley Staples, *The Discourse of Nurse-Patient Interactions: Contrasting the Communicative Styles of U.S. and International Nurses* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2015), <https://benjamins.com/catalog/scl.72>.

12. Eric Frigal, *The Language of Outsourced Call Centers: A Corpus-Based Study of Cross-Cultural Interaction* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2009), <https://benjamins.com/catalog/scl.34>.

13. Jack Grieve and others, "Attributing the Bixby Letter Using N-Gram Tracing," *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* 34, no. 3 (September 2019): 493–512, <https://doi.org/10.1093/llc/fqy042>.

14. Costas Gabrielatos, "Keyness Analysis: Nature, Metrics and Techniques," in *Corpus Approaches to Discourse: A Critical Review*, ed. Charlotte Taylor and Anna Marchi (Oxford: Routledge, 2018), 225–58, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/227092349.pdf>.

15. Baker-Smemoe and Bowie, "Linguistic Behavior and Religious Activity," 116–24.

prayers would allow children, English learners, and new Church members to more quickly develop that same sense of belonging.

### The Present Study

The goal of this study was to identify the defining aspects of Latter-day Saint prayers in general conferences in the hopes of (1) investigating the relationship between Church members and the divine in a public context and (2) uncovering patterns of language that could begin to assist in developing resources for new members and second-language English speakers to promote feelings of linguistic belonging.

### Methods

The methods for this study were a situational analysis and a linguistic analysis, which together form a register analysis. The situational analysis<sup>16</sup> was conducted to justify the use of the data for this study. However, because the results of the situational analysis lay beyond the main focus of this study, the methods and results for the situational analysis can be found in the supplementary materials to this article. Suffice it to state that the results of the situational analysis justify the data used in this study. The linguistic analysis consisted of a keyness analysis, which identified words distinctive to public prayers, and an n-gram analysis, which identified the most common phraseology in prayers. The keywords derived from the keyness analysis were interpreted using a thematic analysis, which is detailed in appendix B. Additional details about the methods can be found in the supplementary materials.

### The Data

The primary source of data for this study consists of transcriptions of the prayers given at general conferences from 2010 to 2019. These were extracted from the Church's official YouTube channel, which contains the complete prayers.<sup>17</sup> The resulting English Orisons by Saints Corpus (that is, ENOS Corpus) consists of 209 prayers with 36,345 words.<sup>18</sup>

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16. Douglas Biber and Susan Conrad, "Describing the Situational Characteristics of Registers and Genres," in *Register, Genre, and Style* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 31–49, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511814358>.

17. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "General Conference" (YouTube channel), accessed April 12, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/@churchofjesuschristgeneralconf>.

18. Contact the authors to request (noncommercial) access to the ENOS Corpus.

# Linguistic Analysis

A keyness analysis involves using statistical tests<sup>19</sup> to derive words that make a specific type of language use distinct from other language use. The resulting keywords were divided into categories using a thematic analysis (details in appendix B and supplementary materials). Lastly, an n-gram analysis was conducted to find patterns in the language of prayers on their own. N-grams are frequently reoccurring phrases or sequences of words. Additional details about this analysis can be found in the supplemental materials.

# Results and Discussion

## Keyness Results

The keyness analysis resulted in a total of seventy keywords that occurred a total of 19,630 times. These keywords made up over half of the total words in the ENOS corpus, signifying that most words were frequently repeated. The keywords were divided into eight categories (see table 1), which are explained in their own sections below.

**Table 1.**  
**Overall Results of Register Analysis**

Functional Category	Keywords in Category	Occurrences in ENOS Corpus
Requesting	10	1464
Thanking	5	787
Requesting/thanking	11	1876
Term of reference	17	2785
Leave taking	5	1444
Personal pronominals	6	5052
Reference to current time/place	13	2062
Clausal elaboration	6	4160
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>19630</b>

19. Log-Likelihood was used as the keyness statistic with an alpha level of  $p < 0.05$  (with a Bonferroni correction). Keyness is a statistical (log-likelihood) measure for how “key” or specific to the target corpus a word is. It compares the actual frequency to the expected frequency to accept or reject the null hypothesis that a given word’s frequency is a result of random chance to find words. To further reduce noise in the results, words that occurred less than fifty times or had a keyness statistic of less than twenty were also removed.



**Requests.** This category is characterized by words used to accomplish requests in prayers. One of the primary acts performed in Church prayers is that of requesting. Results for this category are shown in table 2. Requests are frequently made by using declarative forms that include “ask” and “pray” and imperative forms that include “please,” as emphasized in the following examples.

“We *ask*<sup>20</sup> a special blessing to be with those speaking to us.”

“*Please bless* all of us, Father, that we will follow the prophets.”

Because deference is important, requests are often made by using modals (“wilt,” “may,” “might”) and the requests are made “humbly.” Specifically, prayers often request “help” or for God to “bless” us (or leave a blessing “upon” us).

**Table 2.**  
**Requesting**  
**Keywords**

pray	<i>humbly</i>
bless	<i>may</i>
ask	<i>please</i>
wilt	<i>upon</i>
might	<i>help</i>

In the field of sociolinguistics, commands and direct requests are called “negatively impolite” because they leave the addressee without an easy “out.” In other words, if the addressee cannot or does not wish to fulfill a request, it is more difficult to refuse when the request was made in a negatively impolite way. Counterintuitively, many of the phrases used in prayers to ask for blessings, such as “we pray that” and “we ask that,” fit the definition of being negatively impolite due to their directness. It is interesting that the prayer-givers appear to use elements of impoliteness with a being whom they perceive to be omnipotent. These same prayer-givers tend to refer to the addressee as “Heavenly Father,” though, and less politeness is generally required with family members like fathers in the modern American culture, which is the context of the prayers in question. Other keywords, such as “humbly” and “please,” also soften the impoliteness and demonstrate more respect for the addressee. Similarly, broader structural elements of prayers, such as giving thanks before beginning a request and asking for things that God already desires (as in “bless us to serve with joy and gratitude”), could serve to reduce the impoliteness. This combination of traditionally impolite and polite language suggests that speakers talk to God with the assumption that their relationship is both hierarchal and familial.

**Thanking.** This category is characterized by words used to accomplish giving thanks in prayers (see table 3). Thanking in prayers is accomplished both by direct means using declaratives (for example, “we thank thee for . . .” or “we express our gratitude for . . .”) as well

20. In each example, keywords from the category of interest are marked in italics. All examples are taken directly from the ENOS corpus.

as by stating the prayer giver's feelings (for example, "we are thankful/grateful for . . ."). This is a very narrow set of means by which thanks are accomplished. In other circumstances, thanks in English are most frequently accomplished by the formulaic expression "thank you/thanks for . . .,"<sup>21</sup> which we did not observe at all in this corpus. Instead, "we" is always overtly expressed and "thee" is substituted for "you." We will return to the use of pronominals in discussing the "personal pronominals" category.

**Requesting and Thanking.** There were also a number of words used for both requesting and thanking (see table 4).

The word "for" was particularly interesting. It appeared in the majority of cases for both requesting and thanking as in the following examples:

"We are grateful *for* a living prophet."

"Finally, we pray *for* a blessing upon the widows."

The rest of the words in this category were things that were requested and thanked for. Consider the following two examples where "messages" are part of what is being asked and what gratitude is given for:

"and pray that their *messages* will be received."

"We're grateful for their *messages* and for the Spirit."

Note how a pattern within prayers is to request something and then to thank God that it has been received. This is a very common pattern that arose in the data for many types of things that were both requested and for which gratitude was given—things in both this and the "term of reference" category (for example, "love," "blessings," "gospel," "Monson," and "Son").

**Term of Reference.** Words in this category are words used to refer to personages. In prayers, holy figures (members of the Godhead and leaders of the Church) are frequently referenced. These are all frequently the object of requests and thanks but are used in other ways as well. Note that many of the words in this category that are not nouns are words that are used in combination with nouns to form terms of reference for holy figures (for example, "Beloved Son," "holy prophets," and "living Christ"). This variation in the terms of reference for Deity signifies the complex nature of those personages as well as the

**Table 3.**  
**Thanking**  
**Keywords**

grateful	gratitude
thank	express
thankful	

**Table 4.**  
**Requesting**  
**and Thanking**  
**Keywords**

for	blessings
hearts	blessing
messages	hear
love	gospel

21. Stephanie W. Cheng, "A Corpus-Based Approach to the Study of Speech Act of Thanking," *Concentric: Studies in Linguistics* 36, no. 2 (July 2010): 257–74.

**Table 5.**  
**Term of Reference**  
**Keywords**

Father	Christ
Son	Thomas
beloved	Spirit
dear	Heavenly
Jesus	living
Monson	apostles
heaven	President
prophet	holy
prophets	

complex relationship that prayer-givers have with them. For instance, when looking at terms of reference for God, we observed instances of “Heavenly Father,” “Father in Heaven,” “God,” “God, the Father,” and “Lord,” with “dear” appearing in front of many of them. For Jesus Christ, there were even more highly frequent variants. Note that in the case of references to God the Father, the variants are used in the greeting part of prayers (as in “dear Father in Heaven”) and in leave taking (as in “in the name of *thy* Son, Jesus Christ, amen”).

Thomas S. Monson, the prophet of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, led the Church for most of the 2010 to 2019 period. Prayer-givers often asked for blessings to be bestowed specifically upon the President of the Church, which is why “Thomas” and “Monson” are also keywords.

**Table 6.**  
**Leave-Taking**  
**Keywords**

amen	say
name	in
things	

**Leave Taking.** This category is characterized by the method used by prayer-givers for ending a prayer. In linguistic terms, the act of ending an interaction is known as leave taking.<sup>22</sup> Virtually all prayers were ended using almost the same wording “in the name of (Thy Son,) (even) Jesus Christ, amen,” where parenthesized segments are optional. Variants of this ending might include “our Savior” or “our Redeemer.”

**Personal Pronominals.** This category is characterized by words that stand in place of terms for people. The six words that form this category are all first- or second-person: the three first-person pronominals being “we,” “our,” and “us,” and the three second-person pronominals being “thee,” “thy,” and “thou.” It is interesting to note that the possessive forms “ours” and “thine” are missing, as are all of the forms of the second-person pronominals more common in contemporary English (“you,” “your,” and “yours”). It is also interesting to note that in Early Modern English, “thou” and its corresponding forms were considered more familiar and, therefore, less formal than “you” and its corresponding forms.<sup>23</sup> The singular second-person pronouns could be used in prayers for a sign of closeness. However, if they are perceived as more formal in contemporary language,

22. Miriam A. Locher and Sage L. Graham, eds., introduction to *Interpersonal Pragmatics* (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2010), 3, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110214338.o.i>.  
23. Charles Barber, Joan C. Beal, and Philip A. Shaw, *The English Language: A Historical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 196–97, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511817601>.

their use in prayers could indicate a show of respect. Prayer-givers could also be using these pronouns simply because it is traditional or stylistic.

The high rate of use of first- and second-person pronouns suggests that one of the purposes of prayers is to establish a connection between the speaker and the addressee, or, in other words, the prayer-giver and God. This is especially evident in sequences of words like “we thank *thee* for” ( $n = 114$ ) and “we ask *thee* for” ( $n = 59$ ).

**Reference to Current Time or Place.** Words in this category refer to times and places, especially deictically, meaning in relation to the time and place where the words were spoken (see table 8). Demonstratives (“this,” “these,” and “those”) were frequently used to refer to the current time and place as in “this session” ( $n = 54$ ), “these latter days” ( $n = 13$ ), and “those who will speak” ( $n = 11$ ). Other words in this category refer directly to the current setting: “session,” “general conference,” “today,” “here,” and so forth. Additional words in this category are words that reference the people not physically but virtually in attendance “throughout” the “world.” “Have” is also included in this category because it is most used as a present-perfect construction, which grammatically relates the past events, which have persisted up to the current time (as in the following example), to the immediate context:

“we are grateful for the messages that we *have* just heard.”

**Clausal Elaboration.** Perhaps the least transparent category, the clausal elaboration category, consists of keywords that have been shown to be features of clausal elaboration<sup>24</sup> (see table 9). These types of features have been tied to the situational parameter of real-time language use.<sup>25</sup> Because Latter-day Saint public prayers are not scripted beforehand, prayer-givers are usually required to come up with the ideas and how to word them in the moment. This is a cognitively challenging endeavor, especially when one is speaking in front of a large audience, increasing affect, and thereby decreasing cognition. For these reasons,

**Table 7.**  
**Pronominal**  
**Keywords**

thy	our
we	thou
thee	us

**Table 8.**  
**Reference to Current**  
**Time/Place Keywords**

this	world
session	these
conference	today
throughout	earth
general	day
here	have
those	

24. Douglas Biber, Bethany Gray, and Kornwipa Poonpon, “Should We Use Characteristics of Conversation to Measure Grammatical Complexity in L2 Writing Development?” *TESOL Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (2011): 18–19, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41307614>.

25. Douglas Biber, *Variation across Speech and Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511621024>.

**Table 9.**  
**Clausal Elaboration**  
**Keywords**

that	are
re*	be
and	who

\*As in *they're* or *you're*.

relating ideas usually happens with clausal elaboration features. Consider the following example, “We *are* grateful, Father, for the witness of the Holy Ghost *that* enlightens our minds *and* quickens our understandings, *that* we might comprehend *that* which we have been taught, *that* as we listen *and* act, *that* we might draw closer to Thee, *that* we may become more like Thy Son.”

Note in this example that each keyword relates the following idea to the previous one overtly and using many words. By spreading information out over many words, it allows the brain additional time to think of what to say next. From this example, consider the fact that “that which we have been taught” essentially means the same as a single word, “teachings,” but rather than using the one-word option, the prayer giver has opted to use many words instead. This pattern was observed repeatedly in virtually all prayers observed in the corpus. All words in this list function similarly, allowing the speaker to space out ideas over more words and time. This indicates that prayer-giving in public is a difficult task with which new members or language learners might struggle.

N-Grams

The most frequent n-grams are displayed in table 10.

Of the 134 unique words that made up the forty resulting n-grams, 117 were keywords (87.31 percent). Every n-gram except for one, “of the twelve,” contained at least one keyword, and thirty-eight of them contained at least two keywords, indicating that n-grams are comprised mostly of keywords and that prayers are highly linguistically formulaic

**Table 10. Frequencies of Most Common N-Grams**

Jesus Christ amen	we thank thee for	Thomas S Monson
the name of	in the name of Jesus Christ	Father in heaven we
we are grateful	Father in heaven	we are so
in the name of	in the name of Jesus Christ	that we have
of Jesus Christ	amen	thee for the
we thank thee	Son Jesus Christ	President Thomas S
name of Jesus Christ	of thy son	Monson
name of Jesus Christ amen	we pray for	we are grateful for the
we are grateful for	that we may	we thank thee for the
thank thee for	that we might	we ask thee
we pray that	thy Son Jesus Christ	and we pray
grateful for the	in heaven we	are so grateful
in the name of Jesus	Heavenly Father we	

in nature. Based on table 10, the n-grams all occur in a wide range of prayers, suggesting that Church prayers in general conference are made up of many n-grams that are in turn made up of many keywords, further indicating that public prayers are cognitively demanding tasks because, instead of creating new ways of saying something, prayer-givers appear to rely on fixed phrases, which they have likely memorized as chunks. In fact, an entire prayer can be conducted almost entirely of n-grams and keywords, as seen in appendix A. Thus, learning the keywords from this study and how they are used could be the basis for constructing prayers for those unfamiliar with this particular register in Latter-day Saint English. This is further supported by the fact that, of the 36,345 words in the ENOS Corpus, 19,816 (54.52 percent) are keywords.

## Conclusion

The original goal of this study was to find insights into language, situations, and functions of prayers offered in general conferences by leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints through analyzing specific keywords. The keywords revealed that prayers are more relationally based and functionally driven, in that they use pronominals and specific speech acts such as requesting and thanking. This suggests that prayers are meant to strengthen the connection between self and God. We also found that prayers in general conference were affected by the context and also appeared to be cognitively demanding.

Using the words and n-grams from our analysis, one could easily create pedagogical materials or add to existing materials for new members or language learners who would like to learn the conventional language of prayers in a public church setting. The Church is constantly growing and increasing in its global presence. Therefore, there will be a continuing need for resources to help members across the world to become acculturated to the common practices of the Church and gain a sense of belonging through learning the typical customs, traditions, and language elements. In the future, this same analysis could be used to help develop and improve English learning materials about prayer, such as those found in guides for missionaries or Primary teachers. Furthermore, this type of analysis could be applied in other registers within the Church to produce word and phrase lists for other purposes as well.

The n-gram analysis also shows that prayers are highly formulaic in nature. Prayers are largely, perhaps mostly, made up of sequences of preset n-grams that are pieced together into larger pieces. Further



research is required to determine whether this is because prayer-givers rely on oral tradition, because formulas are easier to produce spontaneously, because specific constructions are seen as more respectful or formal, or because of some other reason. Further research could also investigate broader structural patterns and elements of prayers.

Similarly, more research needs to be done on prayers in other settings. As discussed, general conferences are a unique environment, even within the context of the Church. While this study is very representative of that setting during a specific time frame, it does not represent other prayers, such as family, congregational, or individual prayers. Any one of these, or all of these, could have vastly different structures.

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## Appendix A:

### Constructed Prayer from N-Grams

The following text passage is an example of a realistic prayer that is almost entirely composed of the most common n-grams in the ENOS corpus. Words in parentheses are not keywords. The ENOS corpus contains only the texts of prayers offered from 2010 to 2019. Thomas S. Monson was the Church President for the majority of this time period, hence his first and last name occurred as keywords in the corpus and are included in the example prayer below.

“Our dear Heavenly Father, we are grateful (to)\* be here (and) throughout (the) world for this session (of) general conference. We thank thee for our beloved prophet, President Thomas (S.) Monson. We humbly ask thee that thou wilt bless us (with) thy Holy Spirit this day. We love thee, and we say these things in (the) name (of) Jesus Christ, amen.”

## Appendix B:

### Braun and Clarke's Phases of a Thematic Analysis

- Phase 1: familiarize with data—this was done through the process of creating the corpus.
- Phase 2: generate initial codes—these were generated via the keyword analysis.
- Phase 3: search for themes—this phase was performed by organizing and reorganizing codes into theme-piles until all of the codes were sorted (see Braun and Clark's method<sup>26</sup>).
- Phase 4: review themes—once a set of candidate themes was created, a dual-criteria for judging categories was used to determine the cohesiveness, meaningfulness, and distinctness of themes by checking each code in each theme for internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity.<sup>27</sup> This involved two steps: (1) reviewing at the level of the coded data extracts and (2) reviewing each theme in relation to the dataset separately, to ensure relevance of each theme, and together, so that they reflect the dataset as a whole (see Braun and Clark<sup>28</sup>).
- Phase 5: define and name themes—based on the codes that made up the theme, short descriptions of themes were created, and the themes were labeled according to those descriptions.
- Phase 6: produce the report—the report is included in the results section.

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26. Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101, <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>.

27. Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, 2nd ed. (Newbury Park, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 1990).

28. Braun and Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," 91–92.

# Appendix C: Full List of Keywords

Category	Keyword	Keyness	Frequency
<i>Requests</i>	pray	1203.7	369
	bless	629.6	201
	ask	325.8	142
	wilt	257.1	56
	might	213.6	125
	humbly	207.4	59
	may	172.3	228
	please	138	77
	upon	51	105
	help	26.3	102
<i>Thanking</i>	grateful	1682.1	392
	thank	662.7	169
	thankful	323.8	66
	gratitude	235.9	91
	express	215.2	69
<i>Requesting and Thanking</i>	for	1192.6	1128
	hearts	215.7	134
	messages	196.2	67
	love	138.5	229
	blessings	99.6	99
	blessing	83.6	68
	hear	78.3	57
	gospel	23.7	94

Category	Keyword	Keyness	Frequency
<i>Term of Reference</i>	Father	748.1	502
	Son	490.4	253
	beloved	246.3	112
	dear	228.1	108
	Jesus	211	329
	Monson	203.4	104
	heaven	194.1	124
	prophet	162.6	138
	prophets	154	87
	Christ	162.5	336
	Thomas	152.8	76
	Spirit	108.1	147
	Heavenly	102.4	131
	living	51.5	66
	apostles	53.8	58
	President	36.9	123
	holy	20.8	91
<i>Leave Taking</i>	amen	520.4	207
	name	317	225
	things	32.8	102
	say	25	50
	in	22.9	860
<i>Personal Pronominals</i>	thy	3335.5	726
	we	3165.7	2287
	thee	2337	506
	our	504.5	875
	thou	355.1	157
	us	275.2	501

Category	Keyword	Keyness	Frequency
<i>Reference to Current Time/ Place</i>	this	447.2	569
	session	411.6	101
	conference	397.9	159
	throughout	145.3	69
	general	104.2	83
	here	88.6	67
	those	82.2	182
	world	62.7	135
	these	52.7	130
	today	52.5	69
	earth	23.4	54
	day	21.5	113
	have	56.3	331
<i>Clausal Elaboration</i>	that	257	981
	re	557.8	122
	and	205.3	1921
	are	142.5	456
	be	122.8	462
	who	25.4	218



## What If I'd Not Been Raised to Know You?

I think I would have noticed. You call to me in pluckings  
of strings in the dark, in salty seaweed and woodsmoke  
and crickets and even the traffic. I would hear, I think.  
I'd find you in my own breath, in the 3 a.m. street-  
light on my pillow, the tug of a baby latched on my breast.  
I'd feel you in the heartswell of a choir of others who seek you,  
the skinny young Orthodox Jew I saw davening  
in his car in the parking lot, the old man bowing over soup  
at the diner. The teenage church boys pant as they shovel  
the holy snow from the driveways of the widows on my street  
making the din of Zion, the same song sung in AA meetings  
or at Stonehenge, and I am not tone deaf. I would turn  
my head. I would have scented you on the wind.

—Darlene Young

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This poem was a finalist in the 2023 BYU Studies poetry contest.

# “Show Them unto No Man”

## Part 2. The Book of Moses and the Early Jewish Christian Esoteric Tradition

*Barry R. Bickmore*

There can be no question but that the Restoration was in many ways strange for its time and place, and this can make life difficult for anyone attempting to track the history of Latter-day Saint religious beliefs. Its very strangeness makes it difficult for historians who do not believe Joseph Smith’s teachings were divinely inspired to pinpoint plausible, mundane sources of inspiration.

To make matters worse, Smith clearly practiced esotericism—the method of publicly proclaiming some teachings while reserving others for believers, or even a subset of believers. In the previous essay in this series,<sup>1</sup> I noted that together the Book of Mormon and book of Moses represent an incredibly rare phenomenon—an exoteric (publicly taught) and esoteric (hidden) pair of religious documents, dictated near contemporaneously by the same person. On the one hand, the Book of Mormon claims to contain “a lesser part” of the Christian message, which the intended audience “should have first, to try their faith,” after which they might be given “the greater things” (3 Ne. 26:8–11). On the other hand, the book of Moses (written only a few months later) includes two admonitions for Joseph Smith not to show it to anyone but believers until instructed otherwise (Moses 1:42; 4:32). In other words, the documents explicitly claim that important information was being left out of the Book of Mormon, to be disclosed later in subsequent revelations, such as

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1. Barry R. Bickmore, “Show Them unto No Man”: Part 1. Esoteric Teachings and the Problem of Early Latter-day Saint Doctrinal History,” *BYU Studies* 62, no. 1 (2023): 29–60.

the book of Moses. Therefore, if Joseph Smith actually was operating as both works explicitly claim, one would expect to find clearer expositions of his early theology in Moses.

And yet I showed that some historians who study early Latter-day Saint doctrinal history often ignore this exoteric-esoteric relationship and consequently make poorly supported interpretations of Book of Mormon passages to depict a series of seismic shifts in belief. For instance, they interpret Book of Mormon theology as a strange sort of modalism (that is, the idea that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are a single person who appears in three guises, rather than the standard Trinitarian formula of three distinct persons in a single divine being), which directly contradicts Moses 4:2–4 (a three-way conversation between the Father, the Son, and Satan, the latter two of which are depicted as subordinate to the Father) and cannot even withstand the totality of evidence from the Book of Mormon itself.<sup>2</sup> They also reject the idea that Book of Mormon teachings are compatible with the doctrine presented in the book of Moses of the premortal existence of the human soul (Moses 3:5; 5:24; 6:51), even though Ether 3:15 asserts that “all men were created in the beginning.” It seems clear that Joseph Smith was *successfully* employing esotericism while he went about his attempt to restore primitive Christianity, as evidenced by the fact that competent historians have so often demonstrably misread the Book of Mormon in ways that would have been impossible if they had prioritized its esoteric counterpart (the book of Moses).

I went on to argue that Joseph Smith appears, from the beginning, to have had in mind a theological framework in which the gap between God, angels, and humans was considerably narrower than commonly depicted in traditional Christian theology. What is more, I demonstrated that every essential point of this framework—an anthropomorphic God, the premortal existence of human souls, the fundamental similarity of God’s spiritual essence to that of angels and human souls, the oneness of the Son and Spirit with the Father as a oneness of will rather than being, the subordination in rank and glory of the Son and Spirit to the Father, creation from preexisting material rather than absolute nothingness, and the ultimate deification of humans—is found in a very narrow set of sources that scholars attribute to the most primitive

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2. See Ari D. Bruening and David L. Paulsen, “The Development of the Mormon Understanding of God: Early Mormon Modalism and Other Myths,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1989–2011 13, no. 2 (2001): 109–69.

early Christian sects, collectively known as early Jewish Christianity. Once again, given that Joseph Smith claimed his mission was mainly to restore primitive Christianity and that he demonstrably did gradually roll out a theological framework that would have been at home within early Jewish Christianity, it seems clear that Smith's esotericism was rooted in legitimate insights he had somehow gained into Christian origins.

Where did he get those insights? Smith's environment was awash with Christian primitivists attempting to return to the original, pristine religion,<sup>3</sup> and Charles Harrell has collected evidence that here and there a few people on the fringes of contemporary Christianity expressed beliefs similar to those of the early Jewish Christians just mentioned.<sup>4</sup> The idea that Joseph Smith, on the American frontier, could have plucked these ideas from the sea of contemporary thought to construct a theological framework that would have been at home among the most primitive of early Christian sects seems incredible, however.

Whether the inspiration for Smith's theology was divine or mundane, in this contribution I argue that Joseph Smith's body of esoteric teachings simply *could not* have been constructed piecemeal from the sorts of sources Harrell proposes. Instead, he must have somehow gained relatively direct access to the early Jewish Christian esoteric tradition. *We can be relatively certain of this because the book of Moses is composed in the form of a typical early Jewish and Jewish Christian esoteric text called an "ascent apocalypse."*<sup>5</sup> I will argue that the evidence for this is so compelling that the focus of historians working on early LDS doctrinal history should shift more fully to whether and how Smith could have gotten his hands on early Jewish Christian esoteric traditions.

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3. See Richard T. Hughes, ed., *The American Quest for the Primitive Church* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

4. Charles R. Harrell, "This is My Doctrine": *The Development of Mormon Doctrine* (Sandy, Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 133, 137, 206, 231–33.

5. I am hardly the first to point out parallels between the book of Moses and ancient apocalyptic literature. For example, see Hugh Nibley, *Enoch the Prophet*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1986); Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, *In God's Image and Likeness: Ancient and Modern Perspectives on the Book of Moses* (Salt Lake City: Eborn Publishing, 2010); Andrew C. Skinner, "Joseph Smith Vindicated Again: Enoch, Moses 7:48, and Apocryphal Sources," in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith: Essays in Honor of Truman G. Madsen*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002), 373–80.

## Early Christian Esotericism, the Ascent Apocalypses, and Moses

Esotericism was initiated within Christianity by Jesus,<sup>6</sup> who enjoined his disciples to secrecy regarding his identity as the Messiah (Mark 8:30; 9:9), predictions of his impending death (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:32–34), predictions about the coming end of the world (Mark 13), and other specific items of instruction. He taught in parables, not so that common people would understand his full meaning, but so that the unprepared would *misunderstand*. “Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand” (Matt. 13:13). Even his disciples were not given the full truth while Jesus lived. “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now” (John 16:12). Perhaps some of this additional information was given when the resurrected Jesus appeared to his disciples over a period of forty days “and [spoke] of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:1–3). And yet none of the New Testament writers tell us what was said during that time, perhaps because the Apostles still did not publicly share all the information they had. “I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able” (1 Cor. 3:2; compare 1 Cor. 2:6–7; 4:1).

During the next few centuries, Christians often claimed there was a body of esoteric traditions passed down orally from the Apostles and that the Gnostics (Christian splinter groups claiming esoteric knowledge passed down from the Apostles) had corrupted the true “*gnosis*” (that is, hidden knowledge).<sup>7</sup> The major themes of the oral tradition can be reconstructed from a few comments made by second-century Christian writers. Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 110 CE), as he was being escorted by soldiers to be martyred in Rome, wrote to the Roman Christians that he knew about “heavenly things,” such as the ranking of heavenly powers, but he would not write about them for fear of causing them “injury.”

I am able to write to you of heavenly things, but I fear lest I should do you an injury. Know me from myself. For I am cautious lest ye should not be able to receive [such knowledge], and should be perplexed. For even I, not because I am in bonds, and am able to know heavenly things, and the places of angels, and the stations of the powers that are seen and

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6. Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 125–32.

7. For several examples, see Guy G. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 2nd ed. (Leiden, Neth.: Brill, 2005), 27–62.

that are not seen, am on this account a disciple; for I am far short of the perfection which is worthy of God.<sup>8</sup>

Clement of Alexandria wrote in the late second century that the true *gnosis* involves the "science of nature," including the Creation and the-ology (the study of the nature of God). "The science of nature, then, or rather observation, as contained in the gnostic tradition according to the rule of the truth, depends on the discussion concerning cosmogony, ascending thence to the department of theology. Whence, then, we shall begin our account of what is handed down, with the creation as related by the prophets."<sup>9</sup>

Jean Daniélou notes that these themes were drawn from "a specifically Jewish conception" of *gnosis* as presented in apocalyptic writings from that period. Jewish Christianity inherited the same complex of ideas and characterized the *gnosis* as "the knowledge of eschatological secrets, with an especial emphasis . . . on the exegesis of Cosmic mysteries in the opening of *Genesis*; but it is also more than this, it is the knowledge of the fulfillment of these eschatological events in Christ."<sup>10</sup> Their theology was to be understood in terms of history, "but not simply that small section of history constituted by the recorded affairs of nations, and acted out within the horizons of terrestrial sea and land. Its concern is with cosmic history, from the Beginning of things to the End of time, and from the great abyss, through Sheol, earth, firmament, planets, stars to the last infinite Heaven of God. The axis pinning together this immeasurable sphere of things and events is the Incarnation."<sup>11</sup>

These themes are most evident in the "ascent apocalypses"—Jewish and Jewish Christian works thought to have been written between 300 BCE and 200 CE that describe the ascent to heaven of a protagonist, usually a biblical hero such as Adam, Enoch, or Moses. They include *1 Enoch*, *2 Enoch*, the *Testament of Levi*, the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, the *Ascension of Isaiah*, and *3 Baruch*. Some were Jewish in origin, others Christian, while still others might have been originally

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8. Ignatius, *Romans* 9, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, 10 vols. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 1:104, brackets in original.

9. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 4:1, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 2:409.

10. Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, trans. and ed. John A. Baker (London: Darton, Longman and Todd; Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1964), 365–66.

11. Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, 405.

Jewish compositions later edited by Christians. According to Martha Himmelfarb, “there is some debate about which are which.”<sup>12</sup>

In her monograph on the ascent apocalypses, Himmelfarb identifies several critical elements that define the genre. In the following subsections, I will discuss how the book of Moses contains all these elements discussed by Himmelfarb except a few that Joseph Smith introduced to his followers shortly after he dictated the book of Moses.

## The Sacred Mountain

The book of Moses is an expansion of the first several chapters of Genesis, recast as a vision given to Moses “at a time when Moses was caught up into an exceedingly high mountain, . . . the name of which shall not be known among the children of men” (Moses 1:1, 42). Moses also witnessed a vision of Enoch, who “beheld the heavens open” as he stood atop “the mount Simeon” (Moses 7:2–3). The visions in the ancient ascent apocalypses often involved mountains; for example, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* has God instructing Abraham to perform sacrifices “in the place I will show you—on a high mountain.” There God promised Abraham he would “set out for you the secrets of the ages, and tell you hidden things.”<sup>13</sup> In *1 Enoch*, the archangel Michael showed Enoch a mountain where God will make his throne in the eschaton. “This high mountain which you saw . . . is the throne where the Holy and Great One, the Lord of Glory, the Eternal King, will sit when he comes down to visit the earth for good.”<sup>14</sup> God told Baruch the scribe in *2 Baruch* to go to the top of a mountain to receive a vision of the heavens and the entire earth before his assumption into heaven.<sup>15</sup> Himmelfarb links such passages to the ancient Jewish understanding that “the earthly temple was . . . modeled on the god’s house in heaven or on a sacred mountain,” which appears to be linked to the earlier “imagery associated with the mountain of the gods in Ugaritic literature.”<sup>16</sup>

It is interesting to note that the *Book of Jubilees* (a Jewish retelling of Genesis from the same period as the ascent apocalypses) also depicts

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12. Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), vii, 3.

13. *Apocalypse of Abraham* 9:6–9, in *The Apocryphal Old Testament*, ed. H. F. D. Sparks (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 375.

14. *1 Enoch* 25:3, in Sparks, *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 214.

15. *2 Baruch* 76, in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, ed. R. H. Charles, vol. 2, *Pseudepigrapha* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 519.

16. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 11.



Moses's information about the Creation and what followed as being received in a vision on a mountain (Sinai). "And do you write down everything I tell you on this mountain, the first things and the last things that shall come to pass in all the divisions of the days, in the law and in the testimony, and in the weeks of the jubilees till eternity, till I descend and dwell with them through all eternity."<sup>17</sup>

## Transfiguration and Theophany

The ascent apocalypses assert that to survive both the journey through the heavens and the sight of God, the visionary must himself be transformed into a heavenly being.<sup>18</sup> As Isaiah traveled upward through the seven heavens in the *Ascension of Isaiah*, for instance, he noticed that "my face was becoming brighter and brighter as I went up from heaven to heaven."<sup>19</sup> In the fifth heaven, an angel explained to him that after he died, he would be given "the garment. . . . And then will you become equal to the angels of the seventh heaven."<sup>20</sup> After Isaiah was initially denied entrance to the seventh heaven, Jesus intervened to allow him in. Isaiah's angelic guide explained, "No man who is to return into a body of that world has ever come up here and seen what you see, what you have seen, and what you will see."<sup>21</sup> In the seventh heaven, Isaiah saw "all the righteous from the time of Adam. . . . [And they were] stripped of the garments of the flesh; and I saw them in their garments of the world above, and they were like angels, standing there in great glory."<sup>22</sup> Isaiah also reported, "And the eyes of my spirit were open, and I saw the Great Glory; but I could not then look upon him, . . . nor could any of the angels I had seen worshipping my Lord. Yet I saw the righteous gazing intently upon the Glory." The same phenomena occur in the Enoch literature; for example, in *1 Enoch*, Enoch saw God, whose "raiment was brighter than the sun. . . . And no angel could enter, and . . . no creature of flesh could look."<sup>23</sup> Later, Enoch saw all the spirits standing before God and praising him, whereupon Enoch was transformed. "And my face was changed; for I could no longer behold."<sup>24</sup>

17. *Jubilees* 1:26, in Sparks, *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 13.

18. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 29–46.

19. *Ascension of Isaiah* 7:25, in Sparks, *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 799.

20. *Ascension of Isaiah* 8:14–15, in Sparks, *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 801.

21. *Ascension of Isaiah* 8:11, in Sparks, *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 801.

22. *Ascension of Isaiah* 9:1–18, in Sparks, *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 802–4.

23. *1 Enoch* 14:20–21, in Sparks, *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 202.

24. *1 Enoch* 39:14, in Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, 2:211.

Enoch was told how the risen faithful will be given “a garment of life from the Lord of Spirits; and your garments will not wear out, and your glory will not fail before the Lord of Spirits.”<sup>25</sup> Likewise, when Enoch was brought to the seventh heaven in *2 Enoch*, Michael was instructed to “take Enoch and take off his earthly garments, and anoint him with good oil, and clothe him in glorious garments. . . . And I looked at myself, and I was like one of the glorious ones, and there was no apparent difference.”<sup>26</sup> In *3 Enoch*, he was clothed in a robe and crown and then described how the transformation felt. “At once my flesh turned to flame, my sinews to blazing fire, my bones to juniper coals, my eyelashes to lightning flashes.”<sup>27</sup> Peter, in the early Jewish Christian *Clementine Homilies*, explained why such a transformation must occur. “For I maintain that the eyes of mortals cannot see the incorporeal form of the Father or Son, because it is illumined by exceeding great light. . . . For he who sees God cannot live. For the excess of light dissolves the flesh of him who sees; unless by the secret power of God the flesh be changed into the nature of light, so that it can see light.”<sup>28</sup>

The book of Moses provides a similar explanation. Moses “saw God face to face, and he talked with him, and the glory of God was upon Moses; therefore Moses could endure his presence” (Moses 1:2). God explained, “Wherefore, no man can behold all my works, except he behold all my glory; and no man can behold all my glory, and afterwards remain in the flesh on the earth” (Moses 1:5). “But now mine own eyes have beheld God; but not my natural, but my spiritual eyes, for my natural eyes could not have beheld; for I should have withered and died in his presence; but his glory was upon me; and I beheld his face, for I was transfigured before him” (Moses 1:11). Moses also records Enoch saying something similar about his vision, “I beheld the heavens open, and I was clothed upon with glory; And I saw the Lord; and he stood before my face, and he talked with me, even as a man talketh one with another, face to face” (Moses 7:3–4).

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25. 1 *Enoch* 62:16, in Sparks, *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 245.

26. 2 *Enoch* 9:17–19, in Sparks, *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 337–38.

27. 3 *Enoch* 15:1, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 267.

28. *Clementine Homilies* 17:16, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 8:322–23.

## The Secrets of Creation

Himmelfarb writes, "Prominent among the secrets revealed to the visionaries of the apocalypses, often after they have taken their place among the angels, are accounts of creation and the phenomena of the created world."<sup>29</sup> Moses for the most part reproduces the Genesis account of creation, but resolves apparent differences in the accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 by positing a spiritual creation (including human souls), followed by the physical creation. "For I, the Lord God, created all things, of which I have spoken, spiritually, before they were naturally upon the face of the earth" (Moses 3:5). Moses was also given a vision of the entire earth and all its inhabitants.

Moses cast his eyes and beheld the earth, yea, even all of it; and there was not a particle of it which he did not behold, discerning it by the Spirit of God. And he beheld also the inhabitants thereof, and there was not a soul which he beheld not; and he discerned them by the Spirit of God; and their numbers were great, even numberless as the sand upon the sea shore. And he beheld many lands; and each land was called earth, and there were inhabitants on the face thereof. (Moses 1:27–29)

The account in *2 Enoch* also posits first a spiritual, then a physical creation. God explained, "Enoch, beloved, all thou seest, all things that are standing finished I tell to thee even before the very beginning, all that I created from non-being, and visible things from invisible."<sup>30</sup> That is, "before the very beginning," God had already created everything in an "invisible" (spiritual) state, and then the "visible" (physical) was brought from out of the "invisible." God "commanded . . . that visible things should come down from invisible," so he called forth a great spiritual being named Adoil, who "had a belly of great light. And [God] said to him: 'Become undone, Adoil, and let the visible come out of thee.'"<sup>31</sup> As I mentioned above, the spiritual creation in *2 Enoch* included human souls, for "all souls are prepared to eternity, before the formation of the world,"<sup>32</sup> so that God "created man from invisible and from visible nature," with Adam's "invisible nature" specifically identified as "a second angel, honourable, great and glorious."<sup>33</sup> Likewise the *Apocalypse of*

29. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 4.

30. *2 Enoch* 24:2, in Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, 2:444.

31. *2 Enoch* 25:1–2, in Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, 2:445.

32. *2 Enoch* 23:5, in Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, 2:444.

33. *2 Enoch* 30:10–12, in Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, 2:449.

*Abraham* depicts God telling the patriarch that “all the things and all the people you have seen stood before me before they were created.”<sup>34</sup>

### **The Obedience of Nature and the Disobedience of Humans**

One purpose for the visions of the Creation and natural phenomena in the ascent apocalypses, according to Himmelfarb, was to contrast the obedience the natural world shows to God with the disobedience of humans. “In 1 Enoch 1–5, Enoch appeals to the regularity of the luminaries in heaven and to the seasonal changes of the waters, trees, and heat on earth as examples of faithfulness to God in contrast to human unfaithfulness.” She goes on, “This theme, which is taken up in several later apocalypses, implies a certain degree of personification of natural phenomena, a development with little precedent in biblical tradition.”<sup>35</sup> For instance, another passage in 1 *Enoch* describes the personified sun and moon. “One stands opposite the other before the Lord of Spirits, and they give thanks, and sing praises, and do not rest, because their thanksgiving is rest for them.”<sup>36</sup> Similarly, the book of Moses describes part of Enoch’s vision in which the personified earth mourned the wickedness of men. “And it came to pass that Enoch looked upon the earth; and he heard a voice from the bowels thereof, saying: Wo, wo is me, the mother of men; I am pained, I am weary, because of the wickedness of my children. When shall I rest, and be cleansed from the filthiness which is gone forth out of me? When will my Creator sanctify me, that I may rest, and righteousness for a season abide upon my face?” (Moses 7:48).

Moses includes another episode in which rain is equated with God’s tears, shed for the wickedness of the world. “And it came to pass that the God of heaven looked upon the residue of the people, and he wept; and Enoch bore record of it, saying: How is it that the heavens weep, and shed forth their tears as the rain upon the mountains?” (Moses 7:28). Compare that with Enoch’s wish in 1 *Enoch* that he could weep for the world through the clouds. “Would that my eyes were a cloud of water that I might weep over you and pour out my tears like a cloud of water, so that I might have rest from the sorrow of my heart! Who permitted you to practise hatred and wickedness?”<sup>37</sup>

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34. *Apocalypse of Abraham* 22:3, in Sparks, *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 384.

35. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 77.

36. 1 *Enoch* 41:7, in Sparks, *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 225.

37. 1 *Enoch* 95:1–2, in Sparks, *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 297.

## The Origin of Evil

Another purpose of these alternative Creation accounts was to explain "the cause of evil in the world" in a way "quite different from the dominant biblical understanding expressed in the story of Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden," because Adam and Eve were often depicted in a more favorable light in the ascent apocalypses.<sup>38</sup> In the Enoch literature, the very brief and enigmatic account in Genesis 6:1–4 about the "sons of God" taking wives from the "daughters of men" and a mention of the presence of "giants in the earth in those days" is expanded into a detailed story of how the Watchers (a group of angels) married humans and produced giant offspring. In *1 Enoch*, the Watchers swore a terrible oath to follow through with this plan. "And they all answered him and said, Let us all swear an oath, and bind one another with curses not to alter this plan, but to carry out this plan effectively."<sup>39</sup> Their giant offspring then began to wreak havoc on the earth, and both Azazel (Satan) and the Watchers "taught all iniquity on the earth and revealed the eternal secrets which were made in heaven."<sup>40</sup> The *Apocalypse of Abraham* repeats the charge that Satan "betrayed the heavenly secrets."<sup>41</sup> Enoch was sent to preach against the Watchers, and the Flood was sent to cleanse the earth of the giants and the evils the Watchers introduced. This shift of blame for evil in the world was consistent with the early Jewish Christian belief, taught in the *Clementine Homilies*, that Adam "was ignorant of nothing,"<sup>42</sup> "neither was Adam a transgressor."<sup>43</sup> Likewise, *2 Baruch* denies that Adam passed the guilt for his actions on to his descendants. "For though Adam first sinned and brought untimely death upon all, yet of those who were born from him each one of them has prepared for his own soul torment to come, and again each one of them has chosen for himself glories to come. . . . Adam is therefore not the cause, save only of his own soul, but each of us has been the Adam of his own soul."<sup>44</sup>

The book of Moses also expresses a more favorable view of the Fall and explicitly denies the propagation of Adam and Eve's guilt.

38. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 4–5.

39. *1 Enoch* 6:4, in Sparks, *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 188.

40. *1 Enoch* 9:6, in Sparks, *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 193.

41. *Apocalypse of Abraham* 14:5 n.1, in Sparks, *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 379.

42. *Clementine Homilies* 3:18, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 8:241.

43. *Clementine Homilies* 2:52, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 8:238.

44. *2 Baruch* 54:15, 19, in Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, 2:511–12.

Adam blessed God and was filled, and began to prophesy concerning all the families of the earth, saying: Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God. And Eve, his wife, heard all these things and was glad, saying: Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient. (Moses 5:10–11)

Hence came the saying abroad among the people, that the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt, wherein the sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children, for they are whole from the foundation of the world. And the Lord spake unto Adam, saying: Inasmuch as thy children are conceived in sin, even so when they begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts, and they taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good. And it is given unto them to know good from evil; wherefore they are agents unto themselves, and I have given unto you another law and commandment. (Moses 6:54–56)

In the book of Moses, the introduction of evil into the world is attributed to Satan, who formed a secret society involving Cain and some of his descendants, who swore terrible oaths to one another and to Satan, who in return taught “this great secret,” how to “murder and get gain” (Moses 5:31). “Swear unto me by thy throat, and if thou tell it thou shalt die; and swear thy brethren by their heads, and by the living God, that they tell it not” (Moses 5:29). Those who revealed the secrets of the society to outsiders were killed (Moses 5:49–50). “And thus the works of darkness began to prevail among all the sons of men” (Moses 5:55). The “sons of God” in the story were Noah’s sons, whose daughters married “the sons of men”—that is, the wicked (Moses 8:13–15). When Noah preached against the wicked men, they responded with a counterclaim that “we are the sons of God” (Moses 8:20–21).

While the explanation in Moses of the identity of the “sons of god” in Genesis 6:1–4 is more consistent with later Jewish interpretation of the passage than with the story of the Watchers,<sup>45</sup> it should be noted that Moses’s expansion promotes the same theme (an alternate explanation for the origin of evil) and includes some very similar details (the oath pact and a fallen angel teaching secrets to mankind). Furthermore, it should be remembered that in Joseph Smith’s view, the “sons of god” actually were angels descended from heaven (D&C 129:1–3), since angels are simply the spirits of men.

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45. Jaap Doedens, *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4: Analysis and History of Exegesis* (Leiden, Neth.: Brill, 2019).

## The Sweep of History

The ascent apocalypses were not just concerned with the beginning of history, however. Each visionary was given a bird's-eye view of the entire sweep of cosmic history: the preexistent realities before the physical creation, the Creation, primeval history, the messianic advent, the Judgment, and the renewal of the world at the end of time. *1 Enoch* 83–90 contains a series of Enoch's "dream visions," which present a history of the world from Adam to the Maccabean period, followed by the Final Judgment and the Resurrection. *1 Enoch* 37–71 also discusses a messianic figure called "the Son of Man" (compare Daniel 7:13–14) at length. In *2 Enoch*, Enoch says, "You see how I wrote all works of every man before his creation, all that is done amongst all men for all time."<sup>46</sup> In *3 Enoch*, Metatron shows Rabbi Ishmael "the curtain of the Omnipresent One, . . . on which are printed all the generations of the world and all their deeds, whether done or to be done, till the last generation."<sup>47</sup> The *Ascension of Isaiah* describes a similar scene. "[An angel] showed me a book and opened it, and the book had writing in it. . . . The deeds of the sons of Israel were written in it, and also the deeds of others whom you do {not} know. . . . And I said, There is indeed nothing that happens in this world that is hidden in the seventh heaven."<sup>48</sup> Abraham's vision in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* (chs. 20–31) included the Creation and various scenes from history through the triumph of a messianic figure, the Final Judgment, and the restoration of the temple.<sup>49</sup>

Likewise, Moses reports that the Lord told Enoch, "Look, and I will show unto thee the world for the space of many generations" (Moses 7:4). In another vision, "the Lord showed unto Enoch all the inhabitants of the earth; and he beheld, and lo, Zion, in process of time, was taken up into heaven" (Moses 7:21). "And the Lord showed Enoch all things, even unto the end of the world; and he saw the day of the righteous, the hour of their redemption, and received a fulness of joy" (Moses 7:67).

## The Cosmic Journey

In addition to the similarities just discussed, it is just as enlightening to note the themes Himmelfarb identifies in the ascent apocalypses that are *not* clearly reproduced in the book of Moses. In particular, Moses

46. *2 Enoch* 53:2, in Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, 2:462.

47. *3 Enoch* 45:1, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:296.

48. *Ascension of Isaiah* 9:21–23, in Sparks, *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 804, brackets in original.

49. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 65–66.



neglects to discuss the details of the cosmic journey through the heavens—that is, the number and inhabitants of the heavens, the ascent as human deification, and the ascent as priestly investiture for service in the heavenly temple. Joseph Smith eventually included all of these elements in his later teachings, especially in the Latter-day Saint temple rites, which became the primary vehicle by which esotericism has persisted in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

In most of the ascent apocalypses, the hero was transformed into an angel as he ascended through multiple heavens—usually seven or ten, although Daniélou considers these systems to have been expansions of the original three heavens (compare 2 Cor. 12:2).<sup>50</sup> Various classes of beings inhabited the heavens—sometimes even including fallen angels and the spirits of the dead. However, at least in the highest levels, “the depiction of the transformation of the visionary in the apocalypses depends on an understanding of heaven as a temple with angels as heavenly priests.”<sup>51</sup> Therefore, as the hero ascended and essentially became one of the angels, he had to be anointed and clothed in priestly garments. However, “it is striking that in 2 Enoch, as in the Testament of Levi and Aramaic Levi, anointing precedes dressing in priestly garments, in opposition to the instructions for the consecration of Aaron as high priest in Exodus 29.”<sup>52</sup> The final result of the ascent and transformation is a kind of deification. Himmelfarb writes that in the ascent apocalypses, “human beings, whether all the righteous or a single inspiring example, have the potential to become like the angels, or even greater than the angels.”<sup>53</sup> For example, “in the Ascension of Isaiah the ability to endure the vision of God, to look upon his glory without blinking, demonstrates the superiority of the righteous dead to the angels.”<sup>54</sup>

The book of Moses mentions the existence of multiple “heavens” but does not explain what was meant by it. “And as one earth shall pass away, and the heavens thereof even so shall another come” (Moses 1:38). In 1832, however, Joseph Smith and Sydney Rigdon recorded a vision in which they were shown the three heavens (D&C 76). They described inhabitants of the highest kingdom as “priests and kings, who have received of his fulness, and of his glory; and are priests of the Most High, after the order of Melchizedek, which was after the order of Enoch, which was

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50. Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, 15.

51. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 4.

52. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 40.

53. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 71.

54. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 91.

after the order of the Only Begotten Son. Wherefore, as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of God" (D&C 76:56–58).

One of Smith's later visions (D&C 131) went on to explain that the highest of the three heavens itself has three divisions. Before his death, Smith instituted temple rites that incorporate washing, anointing, and clothing in a garment;<sup>55</sup> instruction regarding the Creation and history of the world based largely on the account in the book of Moses;<sup>56</sup> making covenants with God; instruction regarding the "step-by-step ascent into the eternal presence" through the heavens; and a "symbolic entrance into the celestial world and the presence of God."<sup>57</sup>

Similarly, while the book of Moses does not directly discuss human deification, it does include a passage where Enoch says to the Son of Man, "Thou hast made me, and given unto me a right to thy throne, and not of myself, but through thine own grace" (Moses 7:59). A statement like this would have constituted quite a striking reference to deification in the Jewish and early Christian milieu of the ascent apocalypses,<sup>58</sup> even if it would not likely have been understood this way in Joseph Smith's environment.

## Implications

Joseph Smith's first esoteric document, the book of Moses, was written in exactly the style of an ascent apocalypse, missing (or merely hinting at) only a few themes that he later explicitly introduced and incorporated (along with much of the material from the book of Moses) into the esoteric temple rites. This fact strongly supports the conclusion that Smith was employing esotericism throughout his prophetic career, which is undeniably inconvenient for historians attempting to reconstruct a timeline of development for early Latter-day Saint doctrine.

55. Boyd K. Packer, *The Holy Temple* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 154–55.

56. James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord: A Study of Holy Sanctuaries Ancient and Modern* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1962), 99–100.

57. Allen Claire Rozsa, "Temple Ordinances," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 4:1444; Todd Compton, "Symbolism," in Ludlow, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 3:1430.

58. For instance, 3 *Enoch* (a fifth- or sixth-century Jewish ascent apocalypse) has the exalted Enoch being given the divine name (YHWH) and a throne in the highest heaven. When a visitor mistakenly thought the throne meant Enoch was another power in heaven equivalent to God, Enoch was given sixty fiery lashes and made to stand up from his throne. 3 *Enoch* 10:3; 16, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:264, 268. In contrast, John saw Jesus sitting on God's throne (Rev. 7:17) and promised Christians they would be given the divine name (Rev. 3:12) and sit with Jesus on God's throne (Rev. 3:21).

The fact that the sort of apocalyptic documents discussed here were among the typical literary vehicles for early Jewish and Jewish Christian esoteric traditions poses no less of a challenge for historians trying to reconstruct the sources of Joseph Smith's esoteric doctrines. If he constructed his body of esoteric teachings piecemeal from various Christian nonconformists, as Charles Harrell proposes, or from a hodgepodge of folk-magical, Masonic, and Kabbalistic texts, as D. Michael Quinn argues,<sup>59</sup> it seems very unlikely that Smith could have plucked from such a sea of distractions a significant number of elements attested in early Jewish Christian writings that he could fashion into a coherent theology *and could then present in a standard format of early Jewish Christian esoteric literature*. He must somehow have had relatively direct access to the early Jewish Christian esoteric tradition.

Of the ascent apocalypses, only *1 Enoch* and the *Ascension of Isaiah* were available in English translation by 1830.<sup>60</sup> D. Michael Quinn and Salvatore Cirillo argue that Smith clearly did have access at least to *1 Enoch*,<sup>61</sup> but their arguments have significant flaws. For instance, the rest of the ancient Enoch literature (for example, *2 Enoch*, *3 Enoch*, and the *Book of Giants*), which was either undiscovered or not translated into English in Joseph Smith's lifetime, contains more striking and less diluted parallels with the book of Moses.<sup>62</sup> And in any case, *1 Enoch* and the *Ascension of Isaiah* could not have given Smith a complete picture of the essential elements of the ascent apocalypse genre and are missing

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59. D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998). For the Masonic parallels, see also Cheryl L. Bruno, "Congruence and Concatenation in Jewish Mystical Literature, American Freemasonry, and Mormon Enoch Writings," *Journal of Religion and Society* 16 (2014): 1–19, [https://www.academia.edu/8368033/Congruence\\_and\\_Concatenation\\_in\\_Jewish\\_Mystical\\_Literature\\_American\\_Freemasonry\\_and\\_Mormon\\_Enoch\\_Writings](https://www.academia.edu/8368033/Congruence_and_Concatenation_in_Jewish_Mystical_Literature_American_Freemasonry_and_Mormon_Enoch_Writings).

60. Richard Laurence published English translations of the *Ascension of Isaiah* and *1 Enoch* in 1819 and 1821 respectively. See <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=loc.ark:/13960/t64470b25&view=1up&seq=7> and <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.31175001827503&view=1up&seq=7>. Compare Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 191.

61. Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 191–92; Salvatore Cirillo, "Joseph Smith, Mormonism, and Enochic Tradition" (master's thesis, Durham University, 2010), <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/236/>.

62. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and Ryan Dahle, "Could Joseph Smith Have Drawn on Ancient Manuscripts When He Translated the Story of Enoch? Recent Updates on a Persistent Question," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 33 (2019): 305–74.

important elements of Smith's theology (for example, the premortal existence of souls) present in some other ascent apocalypses.

Given these facts, I believe the historian's task of tracking possible sources of Joseph Smith's ideas just became both easier and more difficult. It is easier because, whatever folk-magical, hermetic, Masonic, or Kabbalistic texts Joseph Smith may have encountered, he still must have had relatively direct access to early Judeo-Christian esoteric traditions to discern which aspects of those traditions had roots in the primitive Christianity he was explicitly attempting to restore. Therefore, the most important possible sources to locate must be the sort that would have given Smith insight into *that*. It is more difficult because that sort of source was in woefully short supply in Smith's lifetime.

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# The Baptismal Chair

*Ellis William LeRoy Jr.*

**I**t was a cool cloudy day when I arrived at his home some years past. His hospice nurse was attempting to console his family. He was nearing the end of his life. He was frail and partially conscious but knew we were there. He had always been a stoic man and had worked until disability forced him to retire. He had been confined to a wheelchair for several years. There were no complaints that day, and he was comfortable. He had no desires other than to be with his wife, who had preceded him in death. Now he lay in his bed on oxygen and at peace with the world. He had been a patient of mine almost as long as I had been a physician.

When I first met him, he was a large man, muscular, dynamic in character, with a loud, booming voice. During his visits to the office, he would tell me stories of his work, philosophize, and laugh. He always dominated the conversation. He was suffering from joint pain, and his fingers had begun to develop some joint enlargement. Lab tests and x-rays were done, revealing rheumatoid arthritis. Our visits to the office went on that way every few months for many years. New treatments were added as they became available. Still, the disease progressed.

When you are chronically ill, time is a slow taskmaster. Additional health burdens came as he aged, including emphysema, diabetes, and urinary incontinence. He worked as long as he could. The arthritis became so severe he could hardly walk, then later not at all. A wheelchair was required, then oxygen, and then a urinary catheter. For a while, he made his appointments at my office with the help of family members. This was becoming arduous and stressful for everyone involved. It wore everyone out. I told him I would start making visits to him at home. They

were called “house calls” then. Doctors don’t make them much anymore, but for me, that was one of the pearls of medicine. People’s homes and families told me much about them. Almost all of my work was as an internist and a critical care physician. Out of necessity, house calls came after work on my way home or sometimes on my afternoons off on Fridays. Home health was not in existence when I first started medicine. He started it as soon as he qualified, and it had become a real blessing. His nurses and aids helped bathe him, change his catheter, clean the home, and manage his diabetes. One nurse would always rearrange her schedule to be there during my home visit. I appreciated that so much because the visits were usually after their normal hours. We would review his blood glucose tests, adjust insulin doses and comfort meds, and evaluate other problems that may have come up. A family member was always present (usually his wife). His illness was wearing heavily on her. Then one day, quite unexpectedly, his wife died.

Her death seemed to change his personality. He was not as loud and boisterous and was more graciously thankful for all his care. With the help of his good family and hospice care, he was able to stay at home. At the end of our visits, he would thank me. I would thank him for the privilege of seeing him in his home and thank his family for being there. His nurses’ special efforts to care for him were extraordinary.

This big man had never joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, although he had grown up in my hometown, a predominantly Latter-day Saint community. His wife would express her desire for him to become a member. His children were all raised by their mother to be active in the Church. He would tell me that he had grown up never being interested in religion and hadn’t seen too much need for it.

In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, it is necessary to be baptized (beginning at age eight for children) to become a member. Converts older than eight can be baptized at any age. Adults can later receive additional ordinances in one of the sacred temples, including being sealed to one’s spouse and children for eternity. This was what his wife had longed for all her life.

When she died suddenly, he was heartbroken. She had been his companion and taken care of him for so long. He was supposed to go first. Now, other family members moved in to provide the care that he badly needed.

On one of my subsequent home visits, he blurted out an unexpected question: “Do you think I could survive being baptized?” I was startled, to say the least. It took me a minute to collect my thoughts. It

was totally unexpected. I had never seen a person in his condition baptized by immersion as is the requirement in the Church. He was completely immobile and on high levels of oxygen. The thought came to me of the crippled man in the New Testament whose bed was lifted onto the roof of a home where Jesus taught and then down through the ceiling of the house so that he could meet the Savior and be healed. Then I asked, "Is that what you want?" He replied, "Well, that is what my wife always wanted. I should have done it while she was alive, but I was afraid. I put it off too long. I really do want to be with her." I replied, "I know that is what she wanted, but is that what you want?" He answered, "Yes!" I thought to myself, "Who am I to question the sincerity of a man who has the extraordinary faith to be baptized knowing that it could be his last act on earth?" I could only answer, "If you really want to do it, we will find a way."

His family contacted the missionaries, who came to his home and taught him the gospel lessons and asked him to make commitments to keep God's commandments. The Book of Mormon was a challenge for him, but he began to read it. In the meantime, his home nurses and I were planning how to provide a safety net for his baptism so that he would not aspirate, drown, or have a cardiac arrest while under water. He was a big man and totally dependent on others. I thought briefly of a diver's outfit, but I doubted that would fly with Church authorities. Besides, they didn't come in white. Then his sons came up with a brilliant idea—a specially made baptismal chair. This would replace his wheelchair and facilitate the baptismal process. Approval was given by his bishop. His sons went to work to build the chair. The stairway into the font was measured to be sure the chair would fit. The finished chair had two handles on the back and handles on the legs and sides and was large enough for him to sit comfortably. Safety belts were made to keep him from floating up when he and the chair were immersed. We didn't want him to have to do it twice.

The missionary lessons were completed and the commitments accepted. A baptismal date was set. His interviews took place. He was ready. We had an ambulance parked outside the meetinghouse just in case. The baptismal font was filled with warm water. A congregation of family, ward members, friends, and home-health personnel convened. The meeting started with a hymn, a prayer, and a brief talk about baptism. Antibiotics were given to him before the baptism in case he aspirated. His catheter was removed, and long oxygen tubing was attached to a portable tank providing his six liters a minute of continuous oxygen.



His nurse was at the side of the font as three of his sons, dressed in white, carried him in his chair down four steps into the font, holding him suspended in the living water. One of his sons stood beside him and raised his hand to the square and repeated the words of the baptismal ordinance. The oxygen was removed and the tubing handed to his nurse. His nose was clamped, and he held his breath. He was immersed. Everyone there held their breath with him. The font overflowed a little as up he came, dripping wet with a smile. The oxygen was quickly replaced, and he was carried up the font stairs in the baptismal chair. Warm towels were given, and his family helped him dress. He was then confirmed a member of the Church and given the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands. There were no problems. The ambulance was not needed. His faith and that of those around him had prevailed. We had witnessed a miracle.

The bishop met with him often after his baptism—also doing house calls. The Aaronic Priesthood young men came on Sundays and administered the sacrament to him. Lessons were received on temple preparation, tithing, and the Word of Wisdom. Despite his failing health, he was as happy as any person I have ever met. His bishop had told him that he would have to wait the customary year to go to the temple. He hoped he could last that long. Six months went by. He was declining. Nine months, ten months, eleven months.

One of the things his wife wanted was for him to join The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The other was to be sealed to him forever in eternity. That required him to go to the temple and receive a special endowment in which he made covenants to be faithful in all things; only then he could be sealed to his wife.

One Sunday his bishop was seated on the stand in the ward sacrament meeting when he felt an urgent need to visit him. The bishop whispered in his counselor's ear that he needed to leave the meeting. He got up and went straight to this new member's home. He told him that the wait to be ordained an elder and qualify to go to the temple was nearing the year mark since his baptism, but that a month still remained. He was going to request an exception from the stake president, as he felt inspired to expedite the process. Within a week all the requirements had been met, including a house call by his stake president to sign the final recommend and confer upon him the Melchizedek Priesthood.

Plans were made and a date set for the endowment covenants and sealing in the Provo Temple as soon as possible. I arranged for the day off so that I could go, but at the last minute, the date was changed to

accommodate a family member's travel. I was on call that day and could not attend, but his home nurse accompanied him and his family. I spoke with a member of the temple presidency who lived near me about his needs. A special endowment session was held for him and his family, after which he was sealed to his children and deceased wife for time and all eternity. His daughter stood as proxy for her mother. His home nurse was with him. I am sure that angels were in attendance that day, especially his wife.

His bishop's promptings were justified. I visited him at his home just one or two more times. He died just a few weeks later. In Matthew 10:1–16, Jesus tells us the parable of the workers in the vineyard, in which the first laborers were paid a full day's wages, and those that came in the mid-day were given the same wage. Those who came in the eleventh hour were paid the same as those who worked the full day. I have thought about that a lot. I love that about the Savior.

My friends' wage will be the same. I miss this couple greatly. I love them both.

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This essay by Ellis William LeRoy Jr. was a finalist in the 2023 BYU Studies personal essay contest.

# “The Gospel of Intelligence and Culture”

## Literature and Literary Instruction in the Twentieth-Century MIA Curriculum

*Michael Austin and Rachel Meibos Helps*

*If the learned will only listen to the learned, God will send them learned men, to meet them on their own ground, and show them that “Mormonism,” the Gospel of Christ, is not only the Gospel of truth, but the Gospel of intelligence and culture.* —Orson F. Whitney, “Home Literature”

In his journal for April 29, 1888, Bishop Orson F. Whitney recorded a curious meeting that he had with an Apostle. “Had a long conversation in the morning with Apostle Moses Thatcher,” wrote Whitney. “He gave me a blessing and set me apart to deliver a lecture on Sunday, June 3rd next, at the Mutual Improvement Conference in the Tabernacle. My subject is Home Literature. I consented to deliver it, though very busy and overworked, at the request of the Authorities.”<sup>1</sup> This remarkable assignment—he was called and set apart to give a speech in the way men at the time were called and set apart to go on missions—was the genesis of Whitney’s “Home Literature” address.<sup>2</sup> “We will yet have Miltons and

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1. Orson F. Whitney, Diary, 1888 January 1–1889 March 3, April 29, 1888, COLL MSS 188, box 1, folder 9, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.

2. Orson F. Whitney, “Home Literature,” *Contributor* 9, no. 8 (June 1888): 300. On the significance of this address for the development of Mormon literature, see Eugene England, “Mormon Literature: Progress and Prospects,” in *Mormon Americana: A Guide to Sources and Collections in the United States*, ed. David J. Whittaker (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1995), 455–505; see also Richard L. Cracroft, “Nephi, Seer of Modern Times: The Home Literature Novels of Nephi Anderson,” *BYU Studies* 25, no. 2 (Spring 1985): 3–16; Michael Austin, “The Brief History and Perpetually Exciting Future of Mormon Literary Studies,” *Mormon Studies Review* 2, no. 1 (2015): 49–74.

Shakespeares of our own,” he prophesied in that speech, which gave its name to the new literary movement that flourished among the Latter-day Saints between 1880 and 1910. Whitney’s “Home Literature” speech has since become a rallying cry for generations of Latter-day Saints convinced that their religious tradition contains the raw materials they might forge in the smithies of their souls to achieve literary greatness.

Whitney’s address, however, was only peripherally about producing distinctive Latter-day Saint literature. The primary aim of the talk was not to convince some young Latter-day Saints to write literature; it was to convince all young Latter-day Saints to read literature so they would be able to speak on equal footing with the learned people of the world. Whitney began his speech by pointing to the Church’s biggest public-relations problem of the time, which was that most people in the world saw them as “enemies of education, despisers of learning, haters of books and schools, and of everything, in fact, that is pure, ennobling and refined.”<sup>3</sup> He did not overstate the case. In 1887, the Edmunds-Tucker Act disincorporated the Church and escalated the imprisonment of its leaders, filling the newspapers and the dime-novel press with lurid tales of barbarism. Only six months before Whitney spoke, Arthur Conan Doyle introduced the world to Sherlock Holmes in *A Study in Scarlet*, in which England’s first consulting detective traces a bizarre series of London murders back to the wilds of polygamous Utah. Whitney saw his faith as a comprehensive religion embracing everything beautiful and true, and he lamented the profound unfairness of the world’s perception of his faith. “A greater mistake was never made, a crueller wrong was never committed, a more heinous moral crime was never perpetrated than when the ‘Mormon’ people . . . were thus made odious in the eyes of mankind,” he thundered. “To rob such a people of their good name,” he continued, “is indeed a crime, not only against the immediate victims of the slander, but a crime against God and humanity.”<sup>4</sup>

Whitney insisted that the best response to this affront was to demonstrate to the world that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had a vibrant intellectual culture. He began his speech by quoting Doctrine and Covenants 88:118, “Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith,” which became the centering refrain of his remarks. He repeated it five times during the address, each time with increasing urgency.

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3. Whitney, “Home Literature,” 297.

4. Whitney, “Home Literature,” 297.

Literature means learning, and it is from the "best books" we are told to seek it. This does not merely mean the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the book of Doctrine and Covenants, Church works and religious writings—though these indeed are "the best books," and will ever be included in and lie at the very basis of our literature. But it also means history, poetry, philosophy, art and science, languages, government—all truth in fact, wherever found, either local or general, and relating to times past, present, or to come.<sup>5</sup>

Whitney believed that a thriving literary culture was essential to the missionary effort because the best way to convince educated and cultured people of the gospel's value was to speak to them in educated and cultured ways. "If the learned will only listen to the learned, God will send them learned men, to meet them on their own ground, and show them that 'Mormonism,' the Gospel of Christ, is not only the Gospel of truth, but the Gospel of intelligence and culture."<sup>6</sup>

The fact that Whitney gave this address on a direct assignment from an Apostle and member of the YMMIA superintendency suggests that the Church leadership—after decades of warning members against imaginative literature, especially fiction—was warming to the idea of making literary study a formal part of the MIA experience.<sup>7</sup> Whitney articulated two mutually inclusive reasons to do so. First, the missionary effort and the long-term social and economic health of the Latter-day Saints in Utah required that members of the Church be accepted as part of the civilized world—people who read the same books and knew the same things as other civilized people. Even more important for Whitney was the fact that he saw the Latter-day Saint gospel as an expansive theology that encompassed all good things in the world—including its great art and literature, which he believed to have been inspired by God through a process different in degree, but not in kind, from the revelations received by Joseph Smith.

Whitney's speech was published in the June 1888 issue of the *Contributor*, which, at the time, billed itself as representing "the Young Men's and Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Associations of the Latter-day Saints."<sup>8</sup> The same issue of the *Contributor* that published "Home

5. Whitney, "Home Literature," 299.

6. Whitney, "Home Literature," 299.

7. See Richard Cracroft, "'Cows to Milk instead of Novels to Read': Brigham Young, Novel Reading, and Kingdom Building," *BYU Studies* 40, no. 2 (April 2001): 102–31; see also Bruce W. Jorgensen, "Heritage of Hostility: The Mormon Attack on Fiction in the 19th Century," *Wasatch Review International* 4 (1996): 75–94.

8. *Contributor* 9, no. 8 (June 1888): front cover.

Literature” also published a proposal by Junius F. Wells, the editor of the *Contributor* and original president of the YMMIA Central Committee, to address the need for an understanding of the world’s literature that Whitney identified in his speech.<sup>9</sup> In an editorial entitled “A Course in Reading,” Wells argued that, to encourage its members to become good readers, the Church needed to solve the problem of filtration. Young people, he believed, lacked the knowledge to sift through the mass of printed pages available to them—much of which consisted of inexpensive, highly sensational dime novels that parents and Church leaders abhorred. “We go into the libraries, or into the bookstores, and gaze upon the shelves of books,” he wrote, “and we are bewildered to know which of these we should select, for our information, for our culture, and the development of our faculties. We are as likely as not to make a choice that is bad.”<sup>10</sup>

Wells suggested using the *Contributor* to encourage reading good literature by carefully curating books and making them part of the mutual improvement activities. At the time, he proposed that the *Contributor* would select five books each year in five different categories—including imaginative literature—as textbooks for the MIAs.<sup>11</sup> He convinced the Church to support the initiative financially by purchasing the books and making them available by mail order. Despite this support, however, the reading course didn’t catch on. In December 1890, a letter under the signatures of Wilford Woodruff, Joseph F. Smith, and Moses Thatcher—the general superintendency of the YMMIA—began, “Dear Brethren—we have on hand over one thousand sets of the M.I.A. First Year’s Course of Reading, and desire your co-operation in placing them, as soon as

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9. Brigham Young called Junius F. Wells, the son of his second counselor, Daniel H. Wells, to create and preside over the Young Men’s Mutual Improvement Association in 1875. He served in this capacity until 1880, when John Taylor reorganized the presidency with members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles as its presidency. Wilford Woodruff then became the YMMIA president, and Wells remained on the board as the editor and publisher of the *Contributor* until 1892, when he sold the journal to the Cannon family publishing company.

10. Junius F. Wells, “A Course in Reading,” *Contributor* 9, no. 8 (June 1888): 309.

11. Wells, “Course in Reading,” 311. The books for the first year were the following: B. H. Roberts, *The First Principles of the Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Contributor Company, 1888) (Doctrine); James E. Talmage, *The First Book of Nature* (Salt Lake City: Contributor Company, 1888) (Science); Charles Dickens, *A Child’s History of England* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1853) (History); Washington Irvine, *Readings from Washington Irvine* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1887) (General Literature); and George Q. Cannon, *The Life of Nephi, Son of Lehi* (Salt Lake City: Contributor Company, 1888) (Home Literature).

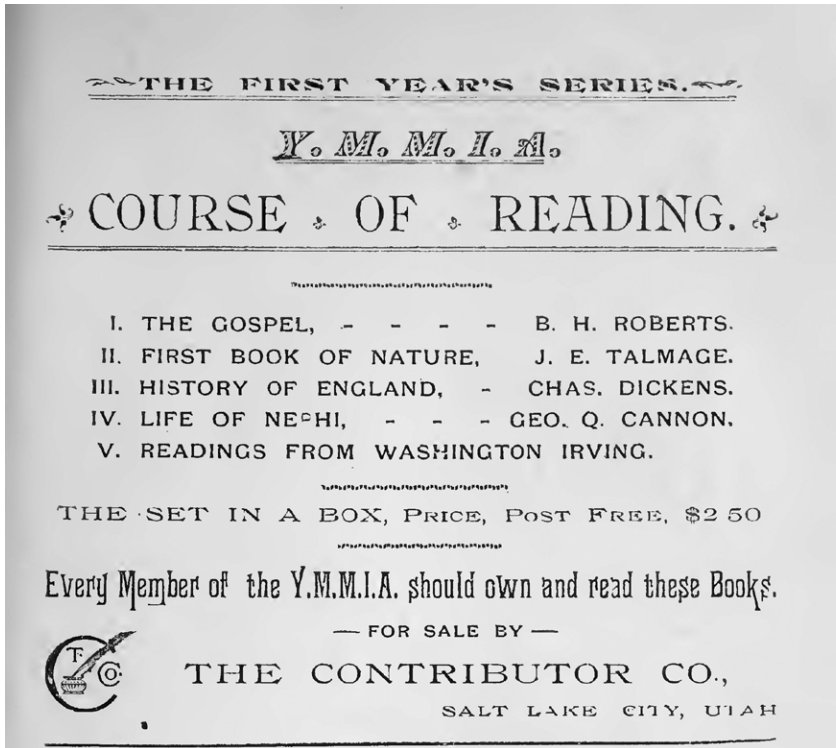


FIGURE 1. *Contributor* 12, no. 3 (January 1891): inside back cover. Archive.org.

possible, in the hands of the members of our Associations, with necessary instructions as to their proper use.”<sup>12</sup> The *Contributor* said very little about the course of reading in 1891, but the January issue carried a half-page ad selling the five books as a boxed set for \$2.50 (with free shipping) (fig. 1).<sup>13</sup>

Neither Junius F. Wells nor the *Contributor* had the institutional heft necessary to enact this curricular vision. The YMMIA Central Committee that Wells led had been replaced by a General Authority–led superintendency with Elder Wilford Woodruff as the president. As a privately owned periodical, the *Contributor* could not create curricula

12. *Contributor* 12, no. 2 (December 1890): 79. The first edition of the YMMIA manual in 1891 listed ten monthly readings from Irving’s reader and, for advanced students, a one-page outline of an American literature course consisting of seven monthly lessons. See *Latter-day Saints’ Young Men’s Mutual Improvement Associations, Manual, Part One* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1891), 88–90.

13. *Contributor* 12, no. 3 (January 1891): 129.



or set institutional priorities. In 1888, none of the Church's auxiliaries had a standardized curriculum or an official periodical—two things that would have helped the proposal to succeed. Each local organization controlled its own curricular and activity schedules. Soon after Wells made this proposal, however, the structures of the MIAs began to change. In 1889, the YLMIA board launched the *Young Woman's Journal* as an official periodical, edited by Susa Young Gates, and the *Contributor* focused entirely on the YMMIA until 1896, when it folded and was replaced by the *Improvement Era*—the official publication of the YMMIA general board. The YMMIA published its first lesson manual in 1891,<sup>14</sup> and the YLMIA published its first lesson outlines, the *Guides*, in 1893 and 1896.

As the nineteenth century ended, both of the Mutual Improvement Associations had the platforms and the curricular structures necessary to convert their institutional values into formal lesson plans. And both organizations counted reading and literature among their most important institutional values.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the generation of Latter-day Saints that came into leadership positions during the 1890s had been born in Utah during a time of relative stability and sent east to study at elite American universities.<sup>16</sup> They returned to Utah with advanced degrees and an expansive understanding of their religion as a vessel capable of containing everything in the world that was beautiful and true—and this included poetry, drama, and fiction, which played important roles in the intellectual formation of this generation of Saints. As a result, the opening decades of the twentieth century produced an unprecedented outpouring of literary instruction and reading encouragement from the youth auxiliaries of the Church.

## Libraries and Literary Lessons

In 1875, Brigham Young called Junius F. Wells into his office and instructed him to organize the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association (YMMIA). Two years later, Eliza R. Snow directed that the Young

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14. *Young Men's Mutual Improvement Associations, Manual*.

15. In 1891, the YMMIA published its first official handbook, which listed theology, history, science, and literature as the four basic studies at the center of the young men's organization. *Young Men's Mutual Improvement Associations, Manual*, 3. That same year, the YLMIA began collecting statistics from all of its members that included the number of pages read in "Church works" (including scriptures) as well as other works—namely, "literature, histories, [and] biographies." Lillie Freeze, "Home Reading," *Young Woman's Journal* 3, no. 2 (November 1891): 89.

16. See Thomas W. Simpson, *American Universities and the Birth of Modern Mormonism, 1867–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 28–53.

Ladies Retrenchment Association—which had been established in 1869 among Brigham Young's daughters and then established in most wards and stakes—be renamed the Young Ladies' National Mutual Improvement Association, which was eventually shortened to the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association (YLMIA).<sup>17</sup> Both organizations had roots in the mutual improvement society movement that had flourished in both the United States and Great Britain for much of the nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> Most mutual improvement associations and societies focused on book reading, literacy, and oratory, and most of them offered their members access to proprietary libraries and reading rooms.<sup>19</sup> Plans for libraries were part of the YMMIA from the start. When Brigham Young called Junius F. Wells to create a mutual improvement society for the young men, one of the first positions they discussed was a general librarian. When Wells asked about this, Young responded, "Yes and a librarian, when you are ready for it. That will be right, to collect good books and encourage reading them."<sup>20</sup>

By 1881, the Mutual Improvement Associations operated in twenty stakes and had eighty-one libraries with a total of 3,084 books.<sup>21</sup> Wells frequently toured the stakes to advocate for libraries in rural areas. After a visit to the Tooele stake in 1887, for example, Wells reported that the members agreed to contribute their sheep to create "a perpetual source of income for library and reading room purposes." The idea was so profound, he thought, that "in a few years we may expect that in all towns where sheep raisers are plentiful, there will be found thriving libraries and reading rooms, deriving support from this investment." And he concluded his report with the strong statement that "the Associations should endeavor to hammer in the idea that their library is to be the library of the town."<sup>22</sup> The local YLMIA's also maintained their own

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17. The organization's name was changed once again in 1924 to the Young Woman's Mutual Improvement Association. For a history of name changes, see Marba C. Josephson, *History of the YWMA* (Salt Lake City: Young Women's Mutual Improvement Association, 1955), 3–4.

18. Mary Kelly, *Learning to Stand and Speak* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 117; Elizabeth McHenry, "'Dreaded Eloquence': The Origins and Rise of African American Literary Societies and Libraries," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 6, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 32–56.

19. Kelly, *Learning to Stand*, 143; see also McHenry, "'Dreaded Eloquence,'" 32–56.

20. Wells related his meeting with Brigham Young to establish the YMMIA in his "Historical Sketch of the Y.M.M.I.A.: First Period," *Improvement Era* 28, no. 8 (June 1925): 714–16.

21. Junius F. Wells, "Historical Sketch of the Y.M.M.I.A. First Period, Part III," *Improvement Era* 28, no. 11 (September 1925): 1074.

22. Junius F. Wells, "Association Intelligence," *Contributor* 5, no. 8 (March 1887): 200.

libraries between 1890 and 1909. In 1890, the general board reported 3,141 books in the ward and stake libraries.<sup>23</sup> By 1895, the general board reported 5,970 books in the ward and stake libraries. The board reported 15,422 books in their libraries in 1905 and 24,621 in 1909.<sup>24</sup>

Two important differences between the library systems lay in the kinds of materials they contained and the processes they had for acquiring books. The YMMIA libraries did not have specific guidelines on what to include, though they were instructed in a communication from the Quorum of the Twelve that “all books used in libraries, for the use of the Association, [are] to be inspected and approved by the General Superintendent and his Council, and all works containing skeptical, immoral or improper doctrines or principles, [are] to be excluded therefrom.”<sup>25</sup> The Young Ladies’ organization took a much more active approach to curating library content. The 1896 edition of the YLMIA’s *Guide* instructed wards and stakes to make it a priority to “secure the Church works, then the text and reference books recommended in the *Guide*.”<sup>26</sup> The *Guide* lists 92 recommendations in five categories: theological (11), history and travel (25), fiction (40), poetry and essay (14), and household and psychology (2). Novels, poems, and literary essays accounted for 54 of the 92, about 60 percent of the recommendations. Practically, though, the percentage was greater, since some of the recommendations included all of the works of a single author, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Washington Irving, and Sir Walter Scott—three authors who together produced more than a hundred volumes of prose.

In 1898, the YLMIA proposed to expand its library program by adding a network of traveling libraries in which each stake would maintain a separate book collection apart from their stationary libraries and would ship those books to each unit in the stake for a specific period of time. This was a local response to a national movement to create traveling libraries in resource-starved rural areas.<sup>27</sup> YLMIA general board

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23. *Young Woman’s Journal* 1, no. 8 (May 1890): 270.

24. For a contemporary discussion of the YLMIA traveling library, see Susa Young Gates, *History of the Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Association of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints: From November 1869 to June 1910* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1911), 163.

25. *Contributor* 1, no. 8 (May 1880): 191.

26. *Guide to the Second Year’s Course of Study in the Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Association* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon & Sons, 1896), 11.

27. For a discussion of the traveling library movement at the turn of the century by one of its major figures, see Melvil Dewey, *Traveling Libraries: Field and Future of Traveling Libraries* (New York: New York State University, 1901). For a discussion of traveling

member and future president Ruth May Fox (fig. 2) proposed that the association establish traveling libraries to supplement ward libraries with secular classics and imaginative works by Latter-day Saint authors.<sup>28</sup> The YLMIA board approved Fox's proposal in December 1898 and spent much of the next year preparing to launch the program.<sup>29</sup> The board directed each stake YLMIA to appoint a library committee of at least three people to select books, raise funds to purchase them, and coordinate the sharing of books among the individual wards.<sup>30</sup> The *Young Woman's Journal* itself would vet books and publish occasional lists of approved or recommended materials. The first list included seven novels by Louisa May Alcott, Charles Dickens's *A Child's History of England*, Lew Wallace's *Ben Hur*, poetry collections from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Alfred Lord Tennyson, three collections of lectures by John Ruskin, and two recently published novels by Latter-day Saint authors: Ben E. Rich's *Mr. Durant of Salt Lake City* and Nephi Anderson's *Added Upon*.<sup>31</sup>



FIGURE 2. Ruth May Fox (1953–1958), the designer of the traveling library program and the third General President of the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association. Courtesy Church History Library.

libraries in Utah, including the YLMIA project, see Linda Thatcher, "The Traveling Library in Utah," *Utah Libraries* (June 1987): 4, 6–7.

28. For a contemporary discussion of the YLMIA traveling library, see Susa Young Gates, *History of the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association*, 249–51; for a retrospective analysis, see Josephson, *History of the YWMIA*, 217–26. Josephson includes an appendix with many of the early works approved for the library.

29. YLMIA Minutes, vol. 2, 1891–98, December 12, 1898, 208, Church History Library, History Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City; Gates, *History of the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association*, 250.

30. "The Traveling Library," *Young Woman's Journal* 11, no. 1 (January 1900): 36.

31. "Traveling Library," 37.

Every issue of the *Young Woman's Journal* from March through December 1900 added more approved titles to the traveling library list. At one point, the members of the board reconsidered a previous action to reject two novels—Ella Wheeler Wilcox's *Maurine* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*—and both books were placed on the approved list.<sup>32</sup> In July 1901, the *Young Woman's Journal* published a revised list of 181 works in six categories: Church Works (19), Home Authors (19), Works of Moralists (46), History (13), Poets and Poems (24), Fiction (60). Together, the categories of home literature, fiction, and poetry accounted for nearly 60 percent of the approved books, including books by Louisa May Alcott, Charles Dickens, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Sir Walter Scott, Edward Bellamy, Oliver Goldsmith, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, and Edgar Allen Poe.<sup>33</sup> But Utah's library resources increased dramatically in the early twentieth century, as Utah communities embraced Andrew Carnegie's library grant program and built twenty-three new libraries between 1901 and 1919.<sup>34</sup> In 1913, the YLMIA board told stake leaders "that the traveling library should be abolished whenever, in the judgment of the stake officers, it had outlived its usefulness."<sup>35</sup> At that time, the traveling libraries had a combined total of 3,959 books.<sup>36</sup>

One of the primary functions of the MIA's libraries was to support the literary portion of their curricula. Both the men's and the women's organizations included imaginative literature in their early manuals, and this emphasis was especially prominent in the YLMIA, whose leadership saw imaginative writing as an area in which young women could develop their talents and even achieve renown. In 1899, the YLMIA leadership commissioned Alice Louise Reynolds (fig. 3) to write a ten-part series of articles on "Great Women in History" for the *Young Woman's Journal*. Reynolds studied English literature at the University of Michigan and became Brigham Young University's first woman professor in 1894. She began the series with the bold statement that a women's intellectual

32. YLMIA Minutes, vol. 5, 1902–5, July 6, 1904, 313–14.

33. *Young Woman's Journal* 12, no. 7 (July 1901): 334–36.

34. See Susan H. Swetnam, "Small Mormon Towns: Carnegie Libraries to Protect Youth," in *Books, Bluster, and Bounty: Local Politics and Carnegie Library Building Grants in the Intermountain West, 1890–1920* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2012), 88–111. See also Max J. Evans, "A History of the Public Library Movement in Utah" (master's thesis, Utah State University, 1971), 71–104.

35. Josephson, *History of the YWMIA*, 223.

36. "Y. L. M. I. A. Annual Report, 1911," *Young Woman's Journal* 23, no. 10 (October 1912): 590.

renaissance had arrived and that women in the twentieth century would be able to pursue knowledge and creative expression alongside men:

Relegated to the past, are those superstitions and ideals which led a woman to believe it a crime well nigh impeaching her womanhood to analyze and seek to gain an intelligent appreciation of God's creations.

Woman has knocked at the door of intellectual life, and her magnanimous and gracious partner, man, has opened it unto her. Invention has freed her hands, and the humanitarian instinct of all classes has made for her an abiding place. It is the story of this intellectual renaissance that I am about to relate.<sup>37</sup>



FIGURE 3. Alice Louise Reynolds (1873–1938), founder of the Brigham Young University literature department, April 1930. Ernest DeAlton Partridge and Nell Clark Partridge family papers, MSS 4153, box 18, folder 8, Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

While Reynolds's series is not limited to literary accomplishments, women writers dominate the lessons. Six of the lessons highlight individual writers: two feature George Eliot, while Harriet Beecher Stowe, Louisa May Alcott, and Elizabeth Barret Browning are each featured in one lesson. Only two women who were not writers—Joan of Arc and Queen Elizabeth I—are featured as part of the series.<sup>38</sup> Reynolds's

37. Alice Louise Reynolds, "Woman's Intellectual Renaissance," *Young Woman's Journal* 10, no. 1 (January 1899): 6.

38. Alice Louise Reynolds, "Great Women in History," *Young Woman's Journal* 10, nos. 1–10, including "Woman's Intellectual Renaissance," *Young Woman's Journal* 10, no. 1 (January 1899): 5–8; "Woman in Eighteenth-Century Literature," *Young Woman's Journal* 10, no. 2 (February 1899): 70–72; "George Eliot's Religious Life," *Young Woman's Journal* 10, no. 3 (March 1899): 108–11; "George Eliot," *Young Woman's Journal* 10, no. 4 (April 1899): 157–60; "Woman as a Sovereign," *Young Woman's Journal* 10, no. 5 (May 1899): 224–36; "Joan of Arc," *Young Woman's Journal* 10, no. 6 (June 1899): 255–58; "Harriet Beecher Stowe," *Young Woman's Journal* 10, no. 7 (July 1899): 310–20; "Louisa M. Alcott," *Young Woman's Journal* 10, no. 8 (August 1899): 368–71; "Elizabeth Barret Browning," *Young Woman's Journal* 10, no. 9 (September 1899): 408–13; "Wherein We May Be Great," *Young Woman's Journal* 10, no. 10 (October 1899): 475–77.



emphasis on women whose accomplishments came through the written word framed literature as an especially important pursuit for Latter-day Saint women. This set the stage for the YLMIA literature lessons, which, from 1900 through 1914, constituted the most ambitious attempt thus far of any auxiliary organization in the Church to incorporate formal literary instruction into their curriculum.<sup>39</sup>

In 1900, the YLMIA launched the literary lessons with an eight-part course on the poetry of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, including three lessons on Longfellow's life and overall work and specific lessons on five individual poems.<sup>40</sup> The next literary lessons came in September 1903, when the *Young Woman's Journal* launched one of the most ambitious lesson sequences that any Church auxiliary has ever attempted. They sought to tell the history of world literature from the beginning of recorded history until the end of the sixteenth century in twelve lessons, a series titled "A Day in the Library." The sequence began with "The First Hour: Literature before Christ"—a six-page literary history that covered Moses; Gilgamesh; the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*; the Hindu Vedas; the poems of Hesiod, Sappho, and Pindar; the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides; and the writings of Cato, Cicero, Virgil, and Horace.<sup>41</sup>

These lessons were dense, and the subject matter was difficult. By October 1903, the *Young Woman's Journal* had already received

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39. In 1914, the Relief Society launched an equally ambitious literature curriculum in the *Relief Society Magazine*, which was also edited by Susa Young Gates. This curriculum lasted from 1914 until 1970. See Michael Austin and Rachel Meibos Helps, "Great Books and True Religion: The Relief Society Literature Curriculum, 1914–1970," *Journal of Mormon History* (forthcoming).

40. The first two sequences of monthly lessons for the YLMIA were published in a stand-alone pamphlet series called the *Guide*. Each edition of the *Guide* devoted twelve lessons to each of its topic areas. The first edition, *Guide to the First Year's Course of Study in the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon and Sons, 1893), had three topics (theology, Church history, and human physiology and hygiene) and 36 lessons. The second edition, *Guide to the Second Year's Course of Study in the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association*, had four topics (the New Testament, history of Utah, home management, and physical exercise) and 48 lessons. See also Gates, *History of the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association*, 181–83. From 1900 on, the lessons were printed in a section of the *Young Woman's Journal* labeled either "Guide Work" or "Guide Section." The Longfellow lessons were published in the *Young Woman's Journal* 11, nos. 1–8 (January–August 1900): 43–46, 96, 141–44, 190–92, 238–40, 286–88, 334–36, 381–83.

41. "A Day in the Library. The First Hour: Literature before Christ," *Young Woman's Journal* 14, no. 9 (September 1903): 427–32.



complaints about the difficulty of the lessons and responded with a strongly worded editorial about the importance of literature and beauty:

There are certain things about books that almost everybody in the world knows. Now while we, as a people, have many admirable qualities, our course of reading is decidedly limited. . . . If God had not intended us to read the great things of poetry and prose, He would not have inspired them. Anything that gives you a larger thought, a beautiful emotion, or a wholesome laugh, is in keeping with the mind of Deity. Our Lord is not a narrow Being who holds us down to the chapter and verse of square-cut doctrine. If He had been He never would have created such a lovely world. The fields would have brought forth only wheat and potatoes. There would have been no violets or primroses; the lucerne would have borne no purple flower, only a leaden sheath to hold the useful seeds.<sup>42</sup>

The twelfth "Day in the Library" lesson was published in the August 1904 issue of the *Young Woman's Journal*. This lesson introduced the writers and major works of the sixteenth century, including Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, More's *Utopia*, Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*, and Spenser's *Faerie Queen*; the last of these became the first lesson in the four-year lesson sequence that followed.<sup>43</sup> From September 1904 through March 1908, the YLMIA literary curriculum offered a four-year survey of major British and American (and some European) writers that began with Spenser's *Faerie Queen* (1590) and ended with the poetry of James Russell Lowell, who died in 1891. The chart below shows all of the lessons that were part of this four-year sequence.<sup>44</sup>

42. *Young Woman's Journal* 14, no. 10 (October 1903): 467.

43. "A Day in the Library. Twelfth Hour: Sixteenth Century," *Young Woman's Journal* 15, no. 8 (August 1904): 379–84.

44. 1904–5: "Faerie Queen," *Young Woman's Journal* 15, no. 9 (September 1904): 429–32; "Cervantes and Bacon," *Young Woman's Journal* 15, no. 10 (October 1904): 475–80; "Shakespeare," *Young Woman's Journal* 15, no. 11 (November 1904): 523–28; "Milton and *Paradise Lost*," *Young Woman's Journal* 15, no. 12 (December 1904): 579–83; "Dryden, Bunyan, Walton, Locke, and Newton," *Young Woman's Journal* 16, no. 1 (January 1905): 60–65; "The French Dramatists," *Young Woman's Journal* 16, no. 2 (February 1905): 106–12; "Addison, Pope, and Swift," *Young Woman's Journal* 16, no. 3 (March 1905): 156–60; "Defoe, Richardson and Fielding. The Novel," *Young Woman's Journal* 16, no. 4 (April 1905): 276–78. 1905–6: "Goethe," *Young Woman's Journal* 16, no. 9 (September 1905): 440–45; "Goethe (Continued)," *Young Woman's Journal* 16, no. 10 (October 1905): 493–96; "Robert Burns," *Young Woman's Journal* 16, no. 11 (November 1905): 541–44; "Wordsworth," *Young Woman's Journal* 16, no. 12 (December 1905): 597–600; "Walter Scott," *Young Woman's Journal* 17, no. 1 (January 1906): 44–48; "Lord Byron," *Young Woman's Journal* 17, no. 2 (February 1906): 92–96; "Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats," *Young Woman's Journal*

**Literary Studies Second Year (1904–5)**

*Faerie Queen*  
 Cervantes and Bacon  
 Shakespeare  
 Milton and *Paradise Lost*  
 Dryden, Bunyan, Walton, Locke, and  
 Newton  
 The French Dramatists  
 Addison, Pope, and Swift  
 Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding. The  
 Novel.

**Literary Studies Fourth Year (1906–7)**

Goldsmith  
 The Essayists—Lamb and DeQuincy  
 Charles Dickens  
 William Makepeace Thackeray  
 George Eliot  
 Alfred Tennyson  
 Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert  
 Browning  
 John Ruskin

**Literary Studies Third Year (1905–6)**

Goethe  
 Goethe (Continued)  
 Robert Burns  
 Wordsworth  
 Walter Scott  
 Lord Byron  
 Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats  
 Thomas Carlyle

**Literary Studies Fifth Year (1907–8)**

Washington Irving  
 William Cullen Bryant  
 Nathaniel Hawthorne  
 Ralph Waldo Emerson (Seniors) / Louisa  
 May Alcott (Juniors)  
 John Greenleaf Whittier  
 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow  
 Oliver Wendell Holmes  
 James Russell Lowell

In 1908, the board announced a shift in the focus of the literary lessons, from the sweeping studies of broad literary movements to the deep exploration of individual texts.<sup>45</sup> Subsequent lessons were work-based instead of author- or period-based and included Washington Irving's *Tales of the Alhambra*, George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, Emerson's "Friendship,"

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17, no. 3 (March 1906): 141–44; "Thomas Carlyle," *Young Woman's Journal* 17, no. 4 (April 1906): 189–92. 1906–7: "Goldsmith," *Young Woman's Journal* 17, no. 9 (September 1906): 428–32; "The Essayists—Lamb and DeQuincy," *Young Woman's Journal* 17, no. 10 (October 1906): 476–80; "Charles Dickens," *Young Woman's Journal* 17, no. 11 (November 1906): 523–28; "William Makepeace Thackeray," *Young Woman's Journal* 17, no. 12 (December 1906): 581–84; "George Eliot," *Young Woman's Journal* 18, no. 1 (January 1907): 45–48; "Alfred Tennyson," *Young Woman's Journal* 18, no. 2 (February 1907): 93–96; "Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning," *Young Woman's Journal* 18, no. 3 (March 1907): 139–45; "John Ruskin," *Young Woman's Journal* 18, no. 4 (April 1907): 189–92. 1907–8: "Washington Irving," *Young Woman's Journal* 18, no. 8 (August 1907): 380–84; "William Cullen Bryant," *Young Woman's Journal* 18, no. 9 (September 1907): 427–32; "Nathaniel Hawthorne," *Young Woman's Journal* 18, no. 10 (October 1907): 476–80; "Ralph Waldo Emerson; Louisa May Alcott," *Young Woman's Journal* 18, no. 11 (November 1907): 520–28; "John Greenleaf Whittier," *Young Woman's Journal* 18, no. 12 (December 1907): 581–84; "Henry Wadsworth Longfellow," *Young Woman's Journal* 19, no. 1 (January 1908): 44–48; "Oliver Wendell Holmes," *Young Woman's Journal* 19, no. 2 (February 1908): 90–96; "James Russell Lowell," *Young Woman's Journal* 19, no. 3 (March 1908): 139–44.

45. *Young Woman's Journal* 19, no. 7 (July 1908): 333–35.

and Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*.<sup>46</sup> In the 1910–11 year, the YLMIA reduced the number of formal literary lessons and adopted a suggested home reading list,<sup>47</sup> similar to the YMMIA's reading course, which we discuss below. While literary lessons appeared sporadically through 1917, most of the association's literary endeavors focused on selecting books for the annual reading course.<sup>48</sup>

## The Reading Courses (1906–15)

The minutes of the June 1906 MIA conference detailed some of the serious concerns that Church leaders had about the young men, including "the prevalence of the tobacco and liquor habit," "card-playing, loafing, and intellectual laziness," and a need to encourage "systematic and beneficial reading."<sup>49</sup> To address these problems, the YMMIA board decided to resurrect Junius F. Well's annual reading course. Joshua H. Paul, the former president of LDS University in Salt Lake City, offered a resolution at the conference "that a committee of twelve be appointed by the General Board to name books, preferably novels and dramas, suitable for supplementary reading, one book to be named each month for the senior, and one for the junior grade."<sup>50</sup> The motion passed, and the first selections came out just a few months later, though the ambitious notion of two books a month was replaced by just a few books each year, beginning with three books for 1906–7.<sup>51</sup>

The October 1906 issue of the *Improvement Era* announced a supplementary reading course for all young men enrolled in the MIA program.

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46. "The Alhambra—Irrving," *Young Woman's Journal* 19, no. 7 (July 1908): 335–36; "Adam Bede—George Eliot," *Young Woman's Journal* 19, no. 9 (September 1908): 547–48; "Friendship—Emerson," *Young Woman's Journal* 20, no. 1 (January 1909): 54–56; "Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities*," *Young Woman's Journal* 20, no. 2 (February 1909): 102–4.

47. *Young Woman's Journal* 21, no. 6 (June 1910): 341; *Young Woman's Journal* 22, no. 7 (July 1911): 395.

48. The two last lessons in the *Young Woman's Journal* formally labeled "Literary Lessons" occur in January and February 1917 (vol. 28, nos. 1, 2). These lessons are "Lyrics by Shelley" (53–54) and "Lyrics of Wordsworth" (108–9). Other articles on literary topics appear in later issues, including a lesson sequence on the literature of the Bible that began later in 1917.

49. "Our Work: Eleventh Annual M. I. A. Conference," *Improvement Era* 9, no. 10 (August 1906): 822–23.

50. "Our Work: Eleventh Annual M. I. A. Conference," 822.

51. The reading course followed the schedule of each volume of the *Improvement Era*, which began each year with no. 1 in November and ended the following year with no. 12 in October.

In announcing the reading course, Professor Bryant S. Hinckley said that it would serve three objectives: “First, to develop a taste for the beautiful in literature; secondly, to cultivate the habit of reading good books; and, lastly, to impart valuable information.”<sup>52</sup> All three of the first year’s selections were novels. Two of them were made available to Latter-day Saints at the Deseret News Book Store in Salt Lake City as well as other bookstores: *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856), Dinah Craik’s novel about an orphan who becomes wealthy through hard work and unshakable integrity; and *True to His Home* (1897), Hezekiah Butterworth’s historical novel about Benjamin Franklin as a young boy. The third book, Samuel Johnson’s classic Oriental fable, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia* (1759), was serialized in twelve parts throughout volume 10 of the *Improvement Era*, ensuring that it would be in the homes of every Latter-day Saint family who subscribed to the magazine.<sup>53</sup>

The choice of *Rasselas* as the common reading suggests that concerns beyond tobacco, alcohol, and intellectual laziness motivated leaders to create the reading course. Though only a minor classic, *Rasselas* is a major attempt to balance intellectual curiosity with spiritual contentment. Its title character, an Abyssinian prince whose name puns with “restless,” lives his early life in a region called Happy Valley, where children of the king live until they are called upon to take the throne. In Happy Valley, Rasselas has the best of everything: food, entertainment, companionship, and education. But he is forbidden to leave unless and until he becomes the king. When he reaches his twenty-sixth year, Rasselas becomes restless and convinces one of his tutors, his sister, and her maid to accompany him on a tour of the world. They take enough wealth with them to meet any contingency and escape to see what lies beyond Happy Valley. Most of the action in the tale consists of Rasselas and his companions finding people who seem happy and fulfilled and coming to realize that they are not happy at all and that the things that seem to fulfill them are really the causes of their unhappiness. At the end of the book, having seen everything the world has to offer, they return to their home, content that there is nothing better in the world to be had.

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52. “Our Work,” *Improvement Era* 9, no. 12 (October 1906), 984.

53. *Improvement Era* 10, no. 1 (November 1906): 16–24; no. 2 (December 1906): 89–99; no. 3 (January 1907): 199–207; no. 4 (February 1907): 274–84; no. 5 (March 1907): 372–78; no. 6 (April 1907): 463–68; no. 7 (May 1907): 518–25; no. 8 (June 1907): 586–94; no. 9 (July 1907): 664–72; no. 10 (August 1907): 790–98; no. 11 (September 1907): 868–77; no. 12 (October 1907): 950–56.

It does not take advanced interpretation skills to see that the first part of *Rasselas* mirrored the experiences of many bright, high-achieving young Latter-day Saints who lived in the Mountain West—a nurturing but highly restrictive home environment. The Church needed doctors, attorneys, scientists, engineers, architects, musicians, artists, industrialists, and educators in order to progress as an institution and build a modern society. In *American Universities and the Birth of Modern Mormonism*, Thomas Simpson traces the Latter-day Saint migration from Utah to prestigious American universities from 1867, when Brigham Young first authorized selected followers to leave Utah to study surgery, through 1940, when “hundreds of Mormons had left Utah and Idaho to study ‘abroad’ in the elite universities of the United States.”<sup>54</sup> The Church needed its youth to leave their homes and pursue education in prestigious secular schools. But they also needed them to return, like *Rasselas*, to Happy Valley.

A year before announcing the reading course, the *Improvement Era* published “The Mormon Boy at College” by Osborne Widtsoe, who attended Harvard University (like his more famous brother John) and received an MA in English literature. Widtsoe spoke openly about the temptations that Latter-day Saint students faced at places like Harvard—not just from a social culture built around alcohol and tobacco, which was indeed a problem, but also from an academic culture built on skepticism and doubt. None of this need be fatal to a boy’s testimony, Widtsoe insisted, because the gospel is capable of encountering all worthwhile ideas, and all forms of truth, and incorporating them into itself. “The temptations are, after all, only those that exist at home,” he concludes. “The boy’s best preparation can be given him while he is at home—that is, thorough instruction in the principles of the gospel; and the development of honest, manly strength to resist temptation. If our boys were thus prepared, we should not be humiliated by having to confess that they lose their faith when they are educated.”<sup>55</sup>

By 1906, much of the Church’s curriculum was in the hands of people like Alice Louise Reynolds and the Widtsoe brothers—men and women who had attended prestigious American colleges and who genuinely believed that Latter-day Saint beliefs and secular education were (or could be made to be) fully compatible.<sup>56</sup> These assumptions

54. Simpson, *American Universities and the Birth of Modern Mormonism*, 11–12.

55. Osborne Widtsoe, “The Mormon Boy at College,” *Improvement Era* 9, no. 1 (November 1905): 15–19.

56. The minutes from the 1906 MIA conference identify John A. Widtsoe, who studied at Harvard and the University of Göttingen, as the author of the next year’s official

**Be  
Readers**

Get an Ambition  
Do Something  
**BOOKS**

Suggested by General  
Board Y.M.M.I.A.  
to be read this  
season

For Young Men under  
18 years of Age

Tom Browns School Days \$ .25  
Wild Animals I Have Known 2.00

For Older Readers

The Secret of Achievement 1.50  
Great Truths . . . . .25  
Silas Marner . . . . .35  
The Strength of Being Clean  
(Out of Print.)

Send direct to ERA Office for  
these books. Money must accom-  
pany order.

IMPROVEMENT ERA,  
Salt Lake City, Utah.

FIGURE 4. *Improvement Era* 10, no. 11  
(September 1907): inside back cover.  
Archive.org.

were embedded in the early iterations of the annual reading course, which included classic novels like George Eliot's *Silas Marner* and Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*. They also included biographies of Hernando Cortez and Abraham Lincoln, contemporary bestsellers like Winston Churchill's *The Crisis*,<sup>57</sup> and several books about science and nature. These books were even permitted to contradict Church orthodoxy in nontrivial ways. *Our Inland Sea*, Albert Lambourne's classic memoir of his year spent homesteading on Gunnison Island in the Great Salt Lake, offered an unapologetically Darwinian view of nature. It was chosen for the reading course in 1909,<sup>58</sup> which began in November—the same month that the *Improvement Era* published the First Presidency's message "The Origin of Man," which sharply criticized evolutionary science and challenged many of the same assumptions that Lambourne made in *Our Inland Sea*.<sup>59</sup>

manual "on Modern Revelation, with special reference to the study of the Doctrine and Covenants." "Our Work: Eleventh Annual M. I. A. Conference," 822. The designer of the

1906–7 reading course, Joshua Paul, held MA and PhD degrees from Illinois Wesleyan University.

57. *The Crisis* was a bestselling 1901 novel by American writer Winston Churchill (1871–1947), who should not be confused with the British politician and prime minister Winston Churchill (1874–1965), who was also a writer.

58. To see books listed as suggested reading 1906–45, see the appendix.

59. *Improvement Era* 13, no. 1 (November 1909), 75–81. For the Darwinian assumptions in *Our Inland Sea* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1909), see pages 101, 123, 125–26, 134, 136–37, 155, 159–60.



The reading-course model had much to offer over other forms of literary instruction. It encouraged not only book reading but also book owning, which gave the youth a permanent stake in their own education. It was also a flexible program. Local ward and stake MIAs could use reading course books in regular lessons or as the basis for out-of-class assignments and reports. Or they could use them as requirements for various achievement awards that each association sponsored. In 1910, the YLMIA switched from teaching regular literary lessons to a "Suggestive Home Reading" course of nine books, from which each young woman was instructed to choose three to read during the year. This list included three weighty works of prose fiction—*The Fair God* by Lew Wallace, *Ivanhoe* by Sir Walter Scott, and *The Crisis* by Winston Churchill—along with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, and, for home literature, Susa Young Gates's *John Stevens' Courtship*.<sup>60</sup> The *Young Woman's Journal* also published articles about selecting and enjoying good literature—most notably the ten-part series of essays titled "Reading and the Larger Life" by John Henry Evans.<sup>61</sup> Even though the board curated the list carefully, they did receive occasional complaints. The 1914 YLMIA minutes address a letter from a gentleman in Wyoming "censuring the Reading Course committee for approving Winston Churchill's book entitled *The Crisis*." The board stood by their decision, though, and "the Secretary was instructed to answer and tell him there were no objections made by our committee, and his criticism might be made on the Bible."<sup>62</sup>

The two associations published separate reading lists from 1910–11 through 1914–15. The two lists differed significantly in their preferences for fiction, drama, and poetry. During this time, the YLMIA selected


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60. *Young Woman's Journal* 21, no. 6 (June 1910): 341.

61. John Henry Evans, "Reading and the Larger Life," *Young Woman's Journal* 22, nos. 2–7, 9–12, including "The Meaning of a Book," *Young Woman's Journal* 22, no. 2 (February 1911): 80–83; "Two Reasons for Reading," *Young Woman's Journal* 22, no. 3 (March 1911): 133–35; "Making a Life While Making a Living," *Young Woman's Journal* 22, no. 4 (April 1911): 202–5; "Is It Profitable to Read Novels?," *Young Woman's Journal* 22, no. 5 (May 1911): 236–39; "Good Novels and Bad," *Young Woman's Journal* 22, no. 6 (June 1911): 302–6; "How to Read Novels," *Young Woman's Journal* 22, no. 7 (July 1911): 361–64; "The Pleasure of Poetry," *Young Woman's Journal* 22, no. 9 (September 1911): 492–96; "On the Reading of History," *Young Woman's Journal* 22, no. 10 (October 1911): 553–57; "The Newspaper and the Magazine," *Young Woman's Journal* 22, no. 11 (November 1911): 624–27; "Reading and Study in the Home," *Young Woman's Journal* 22, no. 12 (December 1911): 697–702.

62. YLMIA Minutes, vol. 8, 1914–17, March 26, 1914, 16.





**There are a lot of things a Young Man ought to know**

THE BEST WAY TO LEARN IS TO STUDY GOOD BOOKS.

YOUR READING COURSE CONTAINS SOME INTERESTING READING.

"THE FAIR GOD," by Lew Wallace. A tale of the conquest of Mexico. Net, 50c. By mail, 60c.

"THEIR YESTERDAYS," by Harold Bell Wright. Net, 50c. By mail, 60c.

"THE YOUNG FARMER," by George B. Hill. A splendid story of a boy who takes his uncle's rundown farm and achieves success. Net, \$1. By mail, \$1.10.

"THE STORY OF CHESTER LAWRENCE," by Nephi Anderson. Being the complete account of one who played an important part in "Piney Ridge Cottage." Postpaid, 75c.

"THE STORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF MORMONISM," by Dr. James E. Talmage. Cloth, postpaid, 50c.

"FROM CATTLE RANCH TO COLLEGE," Doubleday. Net, 50c. By mail, 60c.

THIS COMPLETE SET will cost you \$3.80, postpaid. All worth while books.

**ON SALE AT THE**

**Deseret Sunday School Union Book Store**

44 EAST SOUTH TEMPLE      SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

WE ARE SOLE AGENTS FOR THE SCHAUB INDIVIDUAL SACRAMENT SETS

FIGURE 5. *Improvement Era* 18, no. 1 (November 1914): 95. Archive.org.

49 books, of which 37 (75 percent) were fiction, drama, or poetry—including works that were considered classics, such as Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* and Leo Tolstoy's "Where Love Is, There God Is Also." In the same period, the YMMIA selected 40 books, of which 15 (37 percent) were fiction and none were drama or poetry. The Young Men's readings were often practical and oriented toward agricultural careers, such as John A. Widtsoe's *Dry-Farming: A System of Agriculture for Countries under a Low Rainfall* and Colvin Bowfield's *Making the Farm Pay*. Both lists included generous helpings of Home Literature during this time. The YMMIA list included Alfred Lambourne's *The Pioneer Trail* and Nephi Anderson's *Story of Chester Lawrence*. The YLMIA list included Anderson's *Piney Ridge Cottage* and Ben E. Rich's *Mr. Durant of Salt Lake City*. Both lists included Lambourne's *Metta: A Sierra Love Tale* and Elizabeth Cannon's collection of Book of Mormon-themed stories, *The Cities of the Sun*.

Though the YMMIA and the YLMIA took different paths, they both arrived at the same place. By 1915, both auxiliaries sponsored a flexible

reading program based on curation and filtration—the same ideas that Junius F. Wells had proposed more than twenty-five years earlier. The separate lists and reading courses worked well with the distinct values and goals of the two Mutual Improvement Associations. The duplication, however, created several problems that consolidation could solve. Two book lists doubled the number of books that the Church offices had to order and publicize, and this led to more logistical issues that required cancellations and last-minute substitutions. More importantly, the total number of titles listed each year—as many as twenty-three books in 1913–14—strained the resources of families with members in both associations.<sup>63</sup> In 1915, the YLMIA board authorized the Guide Committee to “approach the Y. M. M. I. A. on the advisability of planning the literary work jointly.”<sup>64</sup> That August, the associations held a joint MIA conference and announced that the two reading courses would be combined into a single annual list for all members of the Mutual Improvement Associations.

## The Joint Reading Course

From the earliest days of mutual improvement, YLMIA leadership’s desire for autonomy conflicted with the powerful urge for correlation and coordination among the Church’s senior leadership. In the early 1900s, the YLMIA presidency rejected several requests from the Young Men to combine their ward and stake libraries.<sup>65</sup> Church officials tried at least twice to combine the *Young Woman’s Journal* and the *Improvement Era* into one magazine. The first attempt came in 1902, when a committee of the YMMLA general board submitted a proposal to Joseph F.

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63. See Marba Josephson, *History of the YWMIA*, 224.

64. YLMIA Minutes, vol. 8, 1914–17, January 13, 1915, 114–15.

65. The minutes of the Young Women’s general board reflect an extended conversation on the topic of combining libraries. **June 10, 1900:** “Pres. Taylor announced that a communication had been received from the General Board of the Y.M.M.I.A. asking that a resolution be passed instructing the uniting of all Ward libraries of Y.M. and Y.L.M.I.A.” The board determined that “the matter required further consideration.” Young Women General Board Minutes, 1899–1901, 118, Church History Library. **January 21, 1901:** “Sister Fox reminded the Board of the request of the young men to unite our Libraries with theirs. President Taylor instructed the members to come prepared to discuss the question at the next meeting” (183). **February 4, 1901:** “The question of uniting the Y.L. and Y.M. libraries was brought up and Sister Gates moved that all ward and Stake libraries be kept separate and distinct. Seconded by M.A. Freeze” (185–86). **March 4, 1901:** “The question had been put directly ‘Shall we united [*sic*] the Libraries?’ The sense of the General Board of the Y.L.M.I.A. was reported to be that it would not be beneficial to do so” (192).

Smith to combine the two periodicals.<sup>66</sup> The second came in 1907, when a committee led by future Apostle James E. Talmage submitted a series of resolutions to the First Presidency that included the recommendation that the *Improvement Era*, the *Young Woman's Journal*, and the *Juvenile Instructor* be combined into a single magazine.<sup>67</sup> A note in a 1907 issue of the *Young Woman's Journal* hints at the reasons that the young women consistently rebuffed these efforts at consolidation: "In some cases it has been reported to us that the young men of certain wards have a good library in their associations, and that they will lend the books occasionally to the young ladies. This is very kind on the part of the young men, and is fully appreciated by the young ladies, but we do not want to depend on the charity of any one for our reading matter, but would rather have our own books and be able to pass them around as needed."<sup>68</sup>

By 1915, however, consolidation had become inevitable. The first Church Correlation Committee, led by Elder David O. McKay and including representatives from all of the auxiliaries, was constituted in 1913 with a specific charge to prevent "unnecessary and undesirable duplication of work in the various auxiliary organizations."<sup>69</sup>

From 1915 through 1935, the Mutual Improvement Associations offered a single annual reading course for all members. During this time, 141 books were selected, of which 62, or about 44 percent, were drawn from literary genres. Significantly, none of the literature selections during this time came from the pool of canonical classics represented on earlier lists (Charles Dickens, Leo Tolstoy, Elizabeth Barret Browning, Samuel Johnson, Sir Walter Scott, George Eliot, and so forth). Most were contemporary fiction or classic young adult novels such as *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott, with occasional Home Literature selections, including Nephi Anderson's novel *A Daughter of the North*; Orson F. Whitney's long poem *Love and the Light, an Idyll of the Westland*; and Alfred Osmond's long pioneer poem, *Exiles*.

After eliminating the gender distinctions in the lists, both boards had to address the more vexing problem of age distinctions. Though the MIAs used "Young Men's" and "Young Ladies'" in their titles, they

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66. YMMIA General Board Minutes, 1902, 104, quoted in Leon M. Strong, "A History of the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association, 1875-1938" (master's thesis, BYU, 1939), 179, Church History Catalogue (M257.49 S923h).

67. YLMIA Minutes, vol. 6, 1906-09, August 15, 1907, 141.

68. "Officer's Notes," *Young Woman's Journal* 18, no. 9 (September 1907): 414.

69. Correlation Committee Minutes, 1913-20, 3, CR 398 1, Church History Library.

were open to, and regularly attended by, Latter-day Saints from age fourteen and above. Before the turn of the century, most local associations did not even segment members into graded age groups—everyone from fourteen to fifty or older was part of the same group, making it extremely difficult to select appropriate reading materials. By September of 1903, however, all units had created the gradations, with fourteen- to seventeen-year-olds normally in the junior class and anybody eighteen or older in the senior class.<sup>70</sup> MIA programming—including the reading course—often appealed more to the older students than to the youth to the extent that, in a 1920 YMMIA general board meeting, General Superintendent Anthony W. Ivins “called attention to the fact that MIA meetings consisted of the older people and that something should be done to hold the young people if the MIA organization was to fulfill its purpose.”<sup>71</sup>

The nature of the books began to change soon after the associations merged their reading courses. The 1915–16 course divided readings into junior and senior categories. Subsequent lists were not segmented and catered more intentionally to younger readers. Classic literature disappeared from the list after 1917–18, when John Greenleaf Whittier’s poem, “Snow-Bound: A Winter Idyl,” became the last canonical classic to appear on it. The purpose of the course shifted subtly but decisively away from introducing the youth to recognized classics and toward stamping an MIA imprimatur on recently published, age-appropriate books for youth and young adults.

During the time covered by the joint reading course, the MIAs were undergoing significant structural changes, which we can see in the ways that they formatted the book lists. Between 1919 and 1935, the Senior and Junior courses were further subdivided into Scouts/Beehive Girls (12–13), Explorers/Junior Girls (14–17), M Men/Gleaners (18–21), and Advanced Seniors (22–35),<sup>72</sup> and the Young Ladies Mutual Improvement Association formally changed its name to the Young Women’s

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70. “Our Work: Annual M.I.A. Conventions Report,” *Improvement Era* 6, no. 11 (September 1903): 866.

71. YMMIA General Board Minutes, February 11, 1920, quoted in Scott Kenney, *The Mutual Improvement Associations: A Preliminary History 1900–1950* (Salt Lake City: Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1976), 21.

72. See Strong, “History of the Young Men’s Mutual Improvement Association,” 110–16; Josephson, *History of the YWMIA*, 231–32. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, class names and age ranges were in constant flux, which can also be seen in the reading course.

Mutual Improvement Association.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, the *Improvement Era* subsumed the *Young Woman's Journal* in 1929 and became “a magazine for every member of the family.”<sup>74</sup> Beginning with the 1930–31 year, the reading course reflected both the Church-wide orientation of the *Era* and the graded nature of the MIAs, with selections for Executives (the bishopric and all auxiliary presidents), Adults (married adults not in the Executive Department), and all of the various age divisions of the MIAs. Each of these groups constituted a distinct department in the *Improvement Era*, and each department generally chose one book each year. The books were announced at the joint MIA summer conference each year and advertised heavily in the *Improvement Era* and in local newspapers.

On April 23, 1935, a combined meeting of the MIA general boards was held to consider a series of recommendations that had been created by a joint executive committee charged with simplifying the MIA programs. Recommendation #7 suggested “that the regular reading course be discontinued and in lieu thereof, each department stimulate reading through our publications, giving lists of good books.” The recommendation was approved.<sup>75</sup> From this point on, the reading course was formally discontinued, and book recommendations continued only as “suggested reading.” As it turned out, however, there was not much functional difference between “home reading” and “suggested reading,” and the reading course carried on much as it had before. Each department of the MIA continued to discuss potential readings in their meetings. They announced the coming year’s readings at the joint summer conference, and they advertised the readings regularly in the *Improvement Era*. In 1944–45, MIA handbooks still listed reading course books as requirements for achievement awards and directed instructors to make them part of the courses and activities.<sup>76</sup>

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73. See Josephson, *History of the YWMLA*, 4.

74. The *Improvement Era* first used the tagline “A Magazine for Every Member of the Family” in an advertisement in the July 1933 issue (36, no. 9; inside front cover). It appeared on the masthead from November 1933 until December 1943.

75. YLMIA Minutes, vol. 13, 1934–37, April 23, 1935, 156.

76. *Handbook for the Bee Keepers of the Y.W.M.I.A.* (Salt Lake City: General Board of the Young Woman's Mutual Improvement Association, 1944), 41, 83, 91, 149; *Handbook for the Bee Hive Girls of the Y.W.M.I.A.* (Salt Lake City: General Board of the Young Woman's Mutual Improvement Association, 1950), 34, 40.

The MIA recommendation list became a significant factor in book sales by the late 1930s. From 1935–36 through 1944–45, about a quarter of the books were published either by Deseret News Press or by Latter-day Saints seeking a national audience for their books, and inclusion on the reading list could boost sales considerably. After John A. Widtsoe took over as the editor of the *Era* in 1935, he began to receive requests from authors who wanted their books considered for the reading list. "I thought it not unlikely that my book on Masonry would be placed on the reading course of the Mutual," wrote one author in 1937, before adding that he had a new book coming out and that "this new one would not be out of place on the reading course for next year. If I were sure that it would be given that honor I would be glad to follow your suggestion and add a few chapters of the material you suggest."<sup>77</sup> Another sent a leaflet about a book under consideration in 1938 and wrote, "If you have a chance to speak a good word, . . . I would appreciate your doing it."<sup>78</sup> After corresponding with Widtsoe for more than a year, California-based writer Paul D. Bailey did manage to secure a place on the reading list for his novel *For This My Glory*, a historical novel that Bailey pitched as a friendly alternative to Vardis Fisher's bestselling *Children of God*. The novel was published by a small Los Angeles textbook company and sold an astonishing 28,000 copies, clearly demonstrating the marketing power of the MIA's list of suggested readings.<sup>79</sup>

In the 1940s, the literary programs of the MIA faced increased scrutiny from the correlation efforts inaugurated by J. Reuben Clark's 1940 "Memorandum of Suggestions."<sup>80</sup> Faced with the Church's mounting debts and increasing building costs, Clark sought to refocus the organization's efforts on the essential work of growing testimonies and teaching correct behavior. To that end, the First Presidency directed the auxiliaries to "consolidate, cooperate, eliminate, simplify, and adjust their

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77. E. Cecil McGavin to John A. Widtsoe, August 19, 1937, John A. Widtsoe papers, CR 712/2, box 44, folder 7, Church History Library.

78. Weston N. Nordgren to John A. Widtsoe, May 13, 1938, John A. Widtsoe papers, CR 712/2, box 46, folder 19.

79. See Michael Austin and Ardis E. Parshall, "The Novelist and the Apostle: Paul Bailey, John A. Widtsoe, and the Quest for Faithful Fiction in the 1940s," *Journal of Mormon History* 42, no. 3 (July 2016): 183–210.

80. The "Memorandum of Suggestions" is reproduced in full in Antone Kimball Romney, *History of the Correlation of LDS Church Auxiliaries, 1961*, 80–94, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/dadfb6f6-5dfc-47ce-a629-8a87593fe4be/o/o?lang=eng>, accessed December 27, 2022.

work.”<sup>81</sup> Clark specifically directed the MIAs to stop providing activities for members over twenty-five years old and to avoid trying to “occupy the proper field of the public school system.”<sup>82</sup> He also cautioned “the Mutuals” against trying to entertain the youth. “Work, not amusement, is the norm of men and women,” Clark wrote. “While ‘all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,’ so ‘all play and no work usually makes Jack a vicious boy.’ The constant multiplication of amusements should not continue. The world is more than a fun-house.”<sup>83</sup> In 1944, Clark notified auxiliaries that they would have to submit any materials for course use to the newly constituted Publications Committee. For the MIAs, this meant that a Church committee would have to approve every book that they recommended through the reading course.<sup>84</sup>

In response to the changing role of elective reading in the Church, the Joint Executive Committee of the MIA proposed a new model for the reading course in 1945. All departments would use the same scriptural text as their reading course book for the year, and a “Book of the Month” section would be added to the *Era* to recommend more contemporary books to those interested in further reading.<sup>85</sup> The Church’s leadership concluded that monthly book recommendations would not be feasible, since each book “would have to be read by the Church Publications Committee before it could be used,” and the program itself “might jeopardize the ‘Book Rack’ section of the *Improvement Era*,” which regularly published capsule reviews of both LDS and non-LDS books every month.<sup>86</sup> So the reading course became an annual common book of scripture. For the next three years, the texts were the New Testament (1945–46), 3 Nephi (1946–47), and excerpts from the Doctrine and Covenants (1947–48).<sup>87</sup> Some version of the single-book scriptural text

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81. Romney, *History of the Correlation*, 82.

82. Romney, *History of the Correlation*, 86.

83. Romney, *History of the Correlation*, 86.

84. A letter from the First Presidency outlining the role of the Publications Committee is reproduced in Relief Society General Board Minutes, vol. 25, September 13, 1944, 74–77, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/5a2a61d7-c703-4a02-ac84-8596fe31c64a/o/78?lang=eng>, accessed December 27, 2022.

85. YWMIA Minutes, vol. 15, 1942–45, January 3, 1945, 244.

86. Joint Meeting of the MIA General Boards, YWMIA Minutes, vol. 15, 1942–45, February 7, 1945, 260.

87. **1945–46:** Minutes of Joint Meeting of the MIA General Boards, YWMIA Minutes, vol. 15, 1942–45, January 3, 1945, 244; see also Minutes of Joint Meeting of the MIA General Boards, YWMIA Minutes, vol. 15, 1942–45, February 7, 1945, 260. **1946–47:**



reading course persisted, though irregularly and with several interruptions, through 1963.

Scattered among the official, highly concentrated one-book lists issued during the final decades of the reading course were frequent unofficial reading lists that appeared in the *Era* only in ads from the Deseret Book Store. In most years from 1948 through 1962, the Church-owned bookstore published at least one full-page advertisement for a "suggested reading course" that, while not formally endorsed by the Mutual Improvement Associations, did imply some continuity with the earlier program. The first such advertisement in 1948–49 lists eighteen books, separated into the various Mutual age groups.<sup>88</sup> The final such ad in 1961, while acknowledging that the "reading course book for the entire mutual [is] the Book of Abraham from the Pearl of Great Price," nonetheless listed forty-seven other "Suggested Books"—including W. Cleon Skousen's *The Naked Communist*, Virginia Sorensen's *Plain Girl*, and Thor Heyerdahl's *Kon Tiki*—for study by the Mutual Improvement Association.<sup>89</sup> In 1964, the *Improvement Era* announced that the reading list for that year would be the *Improvement Era*, which repeated in 1966–67 and 1967–68—the last year that the *Era* announced a reading course before itself being dissolved in the universal solvent of priesthood correlation in 1970.<sup>90</sup>

## Conclusion

It would be difficult to overstate how much The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints changed during the remarkable sixty-two-year lifespan of the reading course. When it began in 1906, the Church's membership was concentrated in the United States and the Intermountain West. Utah was a new state with few public schools and even fewer

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"New Tools for M.I.A.," *Improvement Era* 49, no. 8 (August 1946): 520. **1947–48:** Minutes of the Joint MIA General Boards, YWMIA Minutes, vol. 16, 1946–52, March 5, 1947, 93.

88. *Improvement Era* 51, no. 8 (August 1948): 486.

89. *Improvement Era* 64, no. 6 (June 1961): 363.

90. *Improvement Era* 67, no. 8 (August 1964): 674; 69, no. 9 (September 1966): 808; 70, no. 2 (February 1967): 63. In 1971, the *Improvement Era* was discontinued and replaced by two periodicals: the *Ensign* for adults and the *New Era* for youth. These changes were part of a larger effort to centralize the Church's auxiliary organizations and bring more coordination to their activities. For a description of this process, see the entry on "Correlation" on the Church History Topics page: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/correlation?lang=eng>, accessed December 27, 2022.

libraries, and the Church was the only institution in the region with the resources necessary to educate the population. The Mutual Improvement Associations were vehicles for creating libraries, designing curricula, and curating reading materials for young people who would otherwise have little access to education. As the Church grew, the goals of the reading course changed. By 1920, the book assignments focused less on introducing people to the classics and more on recommending popular books that supported (or, at least, did not contradict) Latter-day Saint doctrines and values. And in the 1940s, as correlation began to squeeze out auxiliary curricula with no overt connection to doctrinal principles, the reading course changed again to become a method for encouraging close reading and sustained engagement with one scriptural text every year.

But some portion of the original vision of the reading course persisted to the end. In 1888, Orson F. Whitney and Junius F. Wells perceived that the Latter-day Saint pioneers had created both a religion and a culture. And they understood that, while that culture would always be influenced and shaped by the American and global cultures of which it was a part, it could also shape and influence those cultures with its own values and distinctive features. In 1898, Joseph F. Smith called for Latter-day Saints to do just that. “It is quite time that we cease to play second fiddle in all literary matters,” he told a congregation in the Salt Lake 17th Ward. “Cease patronizing so largely the publications of the East, no matter how good they may be; we want to turn the tables and send out to them our thoughts. I would like to see the world patronize us; we ought to have something with which to educate them instead of their educating us.”<sup>91</sup> As Whitney clearly understood, Latter-day Saints had to be in the world before they could derive any value from not being of it.

All of the initiatives we have discussed here—the libraries, the literary lessons, and the different iterations of the reading course—were designed to help create a unique Latter-day Saint literary culture capable of fitting into American and world cultures but also of enlarging them. The women and men who implemented these initiatives had such a comprehensive view of their religion that they could not help but see the canons of world literature as a logical part of their own scriptural inheritance. The core assumptions that move through all these programs for

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91. Joseph F. Smith, “Remarks of President Joseph F. Smith,” *Young Woman’s Journal* 9, no. 2 (February 1898): 85.

literary instruction come from the theological heart of the Latter-day Saint religion as it was understood by people like Orson F. Whitney, Susa Young Gates, John A. Widtsoe, and Ruth May Fox. The religion they loved taught them that reading is important, that inspiration is universal, that writing is a form of prophecy, and that mutual improvement is part of God's plan. And they believed with all their hearts that all human beings have a spiritual obligation to seek out the best books and use them as entry points to the mind of God.

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## Appendix:

### The YMMIA Reading Course, 1906–45

\*Books of fiction, drama, poetry, or other literary genres.

#### 1906–7<sup>92</sup>

\**Rasselas*, Samuel Johnson (reprinted in *Improvement Era*)

\**John Halifax, Gentleman*, Dinah Maria Mulock Craik

\**True to His Home*, Hezekiah Butterworth

#### 1907–8

##### Juniors (under 18)

\**Tom Brown's School Days*, Thomas Hughes

*Wild Animals I Have Known*, Ernest Thompson Seton

##### Seniors (18 and older)

*The Secret of Achievement*, Orison Swett Marden

*Great Truths*, William George Jordan

\**Silas Marner*, George Eliot

*The Strength of Being Clean*, David Starr Jordan

#### 1908–9

##### Juniors

\**Last of the Mohicans*, James Fenimore Cooper

*Makers of History—Hernando Cortez*, John S. C. Abbot

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92. All YMMIA reading list citations come from the *Improvement Era* unless otherwise noted. **1906–7**: 9, no. 12 (October 1906): 984; **1907–8**: 10, no. 9 (July 1907): 762; **1908–9**: 11, no. 11 (September 1908): 896; **1909–10**: 12, no. 9 (July 1909): 752; **1910–11**: 13, no. 9 (July 1910): 859; **1911–12**: 14, no. 10 (August 1911): 945; **1912–13**: 15, no. 9 (July 1912): 858–59; **1913–14**: 16, no. 11 (September 1913): 1164; **1914–15**: 17, no. 11 (September 1914): 1086–87; **1915–16**: 18, no. 10 (August 1915): 891; **1916–17**: 19, no. 9 (July 1916): 852; **1917–18**: 20, no. 9 (July 1917): 838; **1918–19**: 21, no. 9 (July 1918): 814; **1919–20**: 22, no. 9 (July 1919): 839; **1920–21**: 23, no. 11 (September 1920): 1005; **1921–22**: 24, no. 9 (July 1921): 855; **1922–23**: 25, no. 9 (July 1922): 850; **1923–24**: 26, no. 9 (July 1923): 851; **1924–25**: 27, no. 9 (July 1924): 877–78; **1925–26**: 28, no. 8 (June 1925): 794; **1926–27**: 29, no. 9 (July 1926): inside front cover; **1927–28**: 30, no. 9 (July 1927): 835; **1928–29**: 31, no. 9 (July 1928): inside back cover; **1929–30**: 32, no. 9 (July 1929): inside back cover; **1930–31**: 33, no. 9 (July 1930): 643; **1931–32**: 34, no. 9 (July 1931): 554; **1932–33**: 35, no. 12 (October 1932): 759; **1933–34**: 36, no. 9 (July 1933): 573; **1934–35**: 37, no. 9 (September 1934): inside front cover; **1935–36**: 38, no. 8 (August 1935): 510; **1936–37**: 39, no. 9 (September 1936): 561; **1937–38**: 40, no. 6 (June 1937): 388; **1938–39**: 41, no. 6 (June 1938): 357; **1939–40**: 42, no. 6 (June 1939): 369; **1940–41**: 43, no. 6 (June 1940): 375; **1941–42**: 44, no. 6 (June 1941): 351; **1942–43**: 45, no. 9 (September 1942): 571; **1943–44**: 46, no. 9 (September 1943): 540; **1944–1945**: 47, no. 6 (June 1944): 400; **1945–46**: Joint MIA Board Meeting, YWMIA Minutes, vol. 15, 1942–45, February 7, 1945, 260.

## Seniors

\**A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens

\**Hypatia*, Charles Kingsley

## 1909–10

### Juniors

*Abraham Lincoln: The Man of the People*, Norman Hapgood

\**John Stevens' Courtship*, Susa Young Gates

\**The Castle Builder*, Nephi Anderson

### Seniors

*Ancient America*, John D. Baldwin

*Courage*, Charles Wagner

\**The Crisis*, Winston Churchill

*Our Inland Sea*, Alfred Lambourne

## The YMMIA Reading Course

### 1910–11

#### Junior

*Timothy Titcomb's Letters to Young  
People, Single and Married*, J. G.  
Holland

\**The Widow O'Callaghan's Boys*,  
Gulielma Zollinger

\**The Bishop's Shadow*, I. T. Thurston

#### Senior

\**Lorna Doone*, R. D. Blackmore  
*American Citizenship*, David Josiah  
Brewster

*The Adventures of Captain Bonneville*,  
Washington Irving

"Friendship," "Prudence," and "Hero-  
ism," Ralph Waldo Emerson

## The YLMIA Reading Course

### 1910–11<sup>93</sup>

*The Life of Heber C. Kimball*, Orson F.  
Whitney

*The Autobiography of Parley Parker  
Pratt*, Parley P. Pratt

\**The Fair God*, Lew Wallace

\**Ivanhoe*, Sir Walter Scott

\**The Crisis*, Winston Churchill

\**John Stevens' Courtship*, Susa Young  
Gates

*Character*, Samuel Smiles

\**The Indifference of Juliet*, Grace S.  
Richmond

\**Aurora Leigh*, Elizabeth Barrett  
Browning

\**Hamlet*, William Shakespeare

93. Citations for the YLMIA reading course 1910–16 come from the *Young Woman's Journal*. **1910–11**: 21, no. 6 (June 1910): 341; **1911–12**: 22, no. 7 (July 1911): 395–96; **1912–13**: 23, no. 7 (July 1912): 402; **1913–14**: 24, no. 6 (June 1913): 382; **1914–15**: 25, no. 7 (July 1914): 448; **1915–16**: 26, no. 7 (July 1915): 451.

## 1911-12

### Juniors

*Good Hunting*, Theodore Roosevelt

\**The Young Forester*, Zane Gray

*Boy Wanted*, Nixon Waterman

*Alfred the Great*, Jacob Abbott

### Seniors

*The Young Man and the World*,

Albert J. Beveridge

*Dry-Farming: A System of Agriculture  
for Countries under a Low Rainfall*,

John A. Widtsoe

\**The Cities of the Sun*, Elizabeth R.  
Cannon

\**John Marvel, Assistant*, Thomas Nel-  
son Page

### Joint Reference

*Book of Good Manners*, Florence  
Kingsland

*A Comprehensive History of The  
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day  
Saints: Century I* (6 vols), B. H.  
Roberts

## 1912-13

\**The Winning of Barbara Worth*, Har-  
old Bell Wright

*Mexican Trails*, Stanton Davis  
Kirkham

*Where Half the World Is Waking Up*,  
Clarence Hamilton Poe

\**Piney Ridge Cottage*, Nephi Anderson  
*The Pathbreakers from River to Ocean*,  
Grace Raymond Hebard

\**Metta: A Sierra Love Tale*, Alfred  
Lambourne

## 1911-12

\**The Opened Shutters*, Clara Louise  
Burnham

\**The Land of the Blue Flower*, Francis  
Hodgson Burnett

\**The Calling of Dan Matthews*, Harold  
Bell Wright

\*"Where Love Is, There God Is Also,"  
Leo Tolstoy

\**Freckles*, Gene Stratton-Porter

\**Happy Island: A New "Uncle William"*  
*Story*, Jennette Lee

\**Anne of Green Gables*, L. M.  
Montgomery

\**Keeping Up with Lizzie*, Irving  
Bacheller

\**The Cities of the Sun*, Elizabeth R.  
Cannon

## 1912-13

*Y.L.M.I.A. History*, Susa Young Gates

\**Mother*, Kathleen Norris

*The Story of My Life*, Helen Keller

\**Hamlet*, William Shakespeare

\**Bleak House*, Charles Dickens

\**Queed*, Henry Sydnor Harrison

\**Piney Ridge Cottage*, Nephi Anderson

\**Mary Cary: "Frequently Martha,"*  
Kate Langley Boshier

\**Metta: A Sierra Love Tale*, Alfred  
Lambourne

\**The Secret Garden*, Francis Hodgson  
Burnett

## 1913-14

### Juniors

*The Courage of the Commonplace,*

Mary R. S. Andrews

*Stories of Inventors,* Russell

Doubleday

*Heroes of Everyday Life,* Fanny E. Coe

*The Pioneer Trail,* Alfred Lambourne

\**The Southerner: A Romance of the*

*Real Lincoln,* Thomas Dixon

### Seniors

*The Reign of the Anti-Christ or the*

Great "Falling Away," Janne Matt-  
son Sjö Dahl

*The House of the Lord,* James E.

Talmage

*The American Government,* Freder-

ick J. Haskin

\**Corporal Cameron,* Ralph Connor

*Joseph and the Land of Egypt,* A. H.

Sayce

*Making the Farm Pay,* Colvin Cullen

Bowsfield

## 1914-15

### Juniors

\**Story of Chester Lawrence,* Nephi

Anderson

\**The Young Farmer,* George B. Hill

*Cattle-Ranch to College,* Russell

Doubleday

### Seniors

*Their Yesterdays,* Harold Bell Wright

*The Story and Philosophy of "Mor-*  
*monism,"* James E. Talmage

\**The Fair God,* Lew Wallace

## 1913-14

*Their Yesterdays,* Harold Bell Wright

\**The Marshall,* Mary R. S. Andrews

\**The Lady of the Decoration,* Frances  
Little

\**The Lady and Sada San,* Frances  
Little

\**The Harvester,* Gene Stratton-Porter

\**Christmas,* Zona Gale

\**Mother Carey's Chickens,* K. D.  
Wiggins

\**The New Chronicles of Rebecca,* K. D.  
Wiggins

\**The Sad Shepherd,* Henry Van Dyke

\**Daddy-Long-Legs,* Jean Webster

\**The Ruling Passion,* Henry Van Dyke  
*Helps for Ambitious Girls,* William  
Drysedale

## 1914-15

### Juniors

\**Peg O' My Heart,* J. H. Manners

*The Haunters of the Silences,*  
Charles D. Roberts

### Seniors

\**The Fear of Living,* Henry Bordeaux

\**The Glory of the Conquered,* Susan  
Glaspell

### All

*The Business of Being a Woman,* Ida  
Tarbell

*Optimism,* Helen Keller

*The Holy Land,* Lydia D. Adler

\**Mr. Durant of Salt Lake City,* Ben E.  
Rich



## Combined YMMIA/YLMIA Reading Course<sup>94</sup>

### 1915–16

#### Juniors

- \**Little Sir Galahad*, Phoebe Gray
- \**The Twenty-fourth of June*, Grace Richmond
- \**The Lance of Kanana*, Henry W. French (Scouts)  
(Nature book to be selected later.)

#### Seniors

- Joseph Smith, the Prophet-Teacher*, B. H. Roberts
- A Study of Greatness in Men*, J. N. Larned
- A Play-House*, Alfred Lambourne
- \**A Daughter of the North*, Nephi Anderson

#### Additional Books

- \**The Cities of the Sun*, Elizabeth R. Cannon
- \**Peter*, Francis Hopkinson Smith
- \**The Rosary*, Florence L. Barclay
- \**Mother Carey's Chickens*, Kate Douglas Wiggin
- The Problems of Boyhood*, Franklin W. Johnson (recommended for teachers in the YMMIA)

### 1916–17

#### The New Testament

- \**Tales from Shakespeare*, Charles Lamb and Mary Lamb  
*Hamlet*; *Midsummer Night's Dream*; *Henry VIII*; *King Lear*; *Romeo and Juliet*,  
William Shakespeare
- \**Little Women*, Louisa May Alcott
- How We Got Our Bible*, J. Paterson Smyth
- Sandy's Pal*, Gardner Hunting
- Wild Animals at Home*, Ernest Thompson Seton

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94. In 1915, the men's and women's reading lists were combined. The identical list was published in the August 1915 issues of the *Improvement Era* and the *Young Woman's Journal*. Subsequent reading lists were labeled "MIA Reading Course" and announced in both the *Improvement Era* and the *Young Woman's Journal* until 1927, after which the list was published in the *Improvement Era*. The lists of suggested reading material printed in the *Young Woman's Journal* from 1915 to 1927 can be found in the following places: **1915–16**: 26, no. 8 (August 1915): 519; **1916–17**: 27, no. 7 (July 1916): 439; **1917–18**: 28, no. 7 (July 1917): 402; **1918–19**: 29, no. 7 (July 1918): 419; **1919–20**: 30, no. 8 (August 1919): 454; **1920–21**: 31, no. 8 (August 1920): 478; **1921–22**: 32, no. 8 (August 1921): 495; **1922–23**: 33, no. 8 (August 1922): 464; **1923–24**: 34, no. 8 (August 1923): 455; **1924–25**: 35, no. 7 (July 1924): 381; **1925–26**: 36, no. 7 (July 1925): 439; **1926–27**: 37, no. 8 (August 1926): 528; **1927–28**: 38, no. 8 (August 1927): 528.

Jacob Hamblin, James A. Little

\**Wild Roses: A Tale of the Rockies*, Howard R. Driggs

\**Under the Country Sky*, Grace S. Richmond

*Speeches of the Flying Squadron*, eds. J. Frank Hanley, Oliver Wayne Stewart

## 1917–18

The New Testament

*Coniston*, Winston Churchill

\**Laddie*, Gene Stratton-Porter

\**The Three Things*, Mary R. S. Andrews

*Men Who Made Good*, John T. Faris

*Thomas Alva Edison*, Francis Rolt-Wheeler

*Florence Nightingale*, Laura Elizabeth Richards

\*"Snow-Bound: A Winter Idyl," John Greenleaf Whittier

*How to Get Ahead*, Albert W. Atwood

## 1918–19

*A Voice of Warning*, Parley P. Pratt

\**Kings in Exile*, Charles G. D. Roberts

\**Uncle Sam's Boy at War*, O. P. Austin

\**The Major*, Ralph Connor

*Abraham Lincoln*, Wilbur F. Gordy

*Heroines of Service*, Mary R. Parkman

\**Love and the Light: An Idyl of the Westland*, Orson F. Whitney

*The Man of Tomorrow*, Claude Richards

The book of Job from the Bible

## 1919–20

### (Repeated from 1918–19)

*A Voice of Warning*, Parley P. Pratt

\**Kings in Exile*, Charles G. D. Roberts

*Uncle Sam's Boy at War*, O. P. Austin

*Abraham Lincoln*, Wilbur F. Gordy

*Heroines of Service*, Mary R. Parkman

\**Love and the Light: An Idyl of the Westland*, Orson F. Whitney

*The Man of Tomorrow*, Claude Richards

The book of Job from the Bible

### (New for 1919–20)

*Tobacco and Human Efficiency*, Frederick J. Pack

*Leaves from My Journal*, Wilford Woodruff

\**The Light in the Clearing*, Irving Bacheller

## 1920–21

*Adventures in Contentment*, David Grayson

*Heroes of To-Day*, Mary R. Parkman

\**High Benton*, William Heyliger

\**Isabel Carlton's Year*, Margaret E. Ashmun

*Prophecies of Joseph Smith and Their Fulfillment*, Nephi L. Morris

## 1921–22

*The Restoration of the Gospel*, Osborne J. P. Widtsoe

*The Mormon Settlement in Arizona* (published by the State of Arizona)

\**A Man for the Ages*, Irving Bacheller

\**Fireside Stories for Girls in Their Teens*, Margaret W. Eggleston

*Trails to Woods and Waters*, Clarence Hawkins

*The Strength of Being Clean*, David Starr Jordan

*The Promised Land*, Mary Antin

## 1922–23

*The Vitality of Mormonism*, James E. Talmage

\**If Winter Comes*, Arthur S. M. Hutchinson

*Fundamentals of Prosperity*, Roger Ward Babson

\**Feet of the Furtive*, Charles G. D. Roberts

*The Strength of Being Clean*, David Starr Jordan

## 1923–24

3 Nephi from the Book of Mormon

*Companionable Books*, Henry Van Dyke

\**Ox-Team Days on the Oregon Trail*, Howard R. Driggs and Ezra Meeker

\**Including Mother*, Margaret Ashmun

\**The Dim Lantern*, Temple Bailey

## 1924–25

Book of Mosiah from the Book of Mormon

*The Founding of Utah*, Levi Edgar Young

\**Benefits Forgot*, Honoré Willsie

\**The Dear Pretender*, Alice Ross Colver

## 1925–26

*The Romantic Rise of a Great American*, Russell H. Conwell

\**Forty-Minute Plays from Shakespeare*, Fred G. Barker

\**Mother Mason*, Bess Streeter Aldrich

*Life of Christ*, Giovanni Papini  
The Gospel of Saint Matthew from the Bible

## 1926–27

The Book of Mormon  
*Prophecies of Joseph Smith and Their Fulfillment*, Nephi L. Morris  
\**Hugh Wynne, Free Quaker*, S. Weir Mitchell  
*Wild Life on the Rockies*, Enos A. Mills

## 1927–28<sup>95</sup>

The Book of Mormon  
*Saturday Night Thoughts*, Orson F. Whitney  
\**The Exiles*, Alfred Osmond (poetry of the Mormon pioneers)  
\*“The Mansion,” Henry Van Dyke  
*Two Years before the Mast*, Richard Henry Dana Jr.  
\**The Peace of the Solomon Valley*, Margaret Hill McCarter  
\**A Certain Rich Man*, William Allen White  
\**The Beauty of the Purple*, William Stearns Davis  
\**Marching On*, James Boyd  
\**The Ten Dreams of Zach Peters*, Hermann Hagedorn  
\**The Trail of the Sandhill Stag*, Ernest Thompson Seton  
*In the Temple of the Great Outdoors*, Theodore E. Curtis  
*The City of the Sacred Well*, T. A. Willard  
*George Washington*, Woodrow Wilson

## 1928–29

The Pearl of Great Price  
*From Immigrant to Inventor*, Michael Pupin  
*What Ails Our Youth?*, George A. Coe  
\**Round the Corner in Gay Street*, Grace S. Richmond  
\**So Big*, Edna Ferber  
\**Smoky the Cowhorse*, Will James

## 1929–30

Doctrine and Covenants  
*Karl G. Maeser: A Biography by His Son*, Reinhard Maeser

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95. From 1928 on, the reading list appears less frequently in the text of the *Improvement Era* or in reports of the MIA summer conference and more frequently in Deseret Book Company advertisements that accompany the text.

*The Book Nobody Knows*, Bruce B. Barton

\**A Lantern in Her Hand*, Bess Streeter Aldrich

\**The Southerner: A Romance of the Real Lincoln*, Thomas Dixon

*Three Points of Honor*, Russell Gordon Carter

\**The Dove in the Eagle's Nest*, Charlotte M. Yonge

\**The Drama* (magazine subscription)

### 1930–31<sup>96</sup>

*The Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet*, George Q. Cannon (Executives)

*Grandmother Brown's Hundred Years*, Harriet Connor Brown (Adults)

\**The Light in the Clearing*, Irving Bacheller (M Men)

\**Bambi, a Life in the Woods*, Felix Salten (Gleaners)

*Schumann-Heink: The Last of the Titans*, Mary Lawton (Junior Girls)

\**Mother Carey's Chickens*, Kate Douglas Wiggin (Bee-Hives)

*On the Bottom: The Raising of the U.S. Navy Submarine S-51*, Edward Ellsberg  
(Vanguard)

\**Chad of Knob Hill*, Howard Roger Garis (Scouts)

### 1931–32

*The Life Story of Brigham Young*, Susa Young Gates and Leah D. Widtsoe  
(Executives)

*People and Music*, T. C. McGehee (Music Directors)

*Medical Aspects of the Latter-day Saint Word of Wisdom*, L. Weston Oaks  
(Adults)

\**With Malice toward None*, Honoré Willson Morrow (M Men)

\**Singing in the Rain*, Anne Shannon Monroe (Gleaners)

*Larry: Thoughts of Youth*, Larry Foster (Vanguards/Junior Girls)

*Modern Pioneers*, Joseph G. Cohen and Will Scarlet (Scouts)

### 1932–33

*In Search of Truth*, John A. Widtsoe

*Through Memory's Halls*, Orson F. Whitney

*Twenty-one*, Erdman Harris

\**A White Bird Flying*, Bess Streeter Aldrich

*American*, Frank B. Linderman

*Boy Heroes of Today*, Dan Beard

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96. In the 1930–31 list, as with most subsequent lists, each book corresponds to one category within the MIA, given in parentheses.

## 1933–34

*Joseph Smith: An American Prophet*, John Henry Evans

*Life Begins at Forty*, Walter B. Pitkin

*John Jacob Astor: Landlord of New York*, Arthur D. Howden Smith

\**Two Little Savages*, Ernest Thompson Seton

\**As the Earth Turns*, Gladys Hasty Carroll

*Hidden Heroes of the Rockies*, Isaac K. Russell and Howard R. Driggs

## 1934–35

*Strategy in Handling People*, Ewing T. Webb and John B. Morgan (Executives)

*A Guide to Civilized Loafing*, H. A. Overstreet (Adults)

*Life of J. Golden Kimball*, Claude Richards (Seniors)

*William Clayton's Journal*, William Clayton (M Men)

*The Book Nobody Knows*, Bruce B. Barton (Vanguards)

\**Smoky, the Cowhorse*, Will James (Scouts)

The New Testament (Gleaners)

\**The Southerner: A Romance of the Real Lincoln*, Thomas Dixon (Gleaners)

*Heroines of Service*, Mary R. Parkman (Gleaners)

## Lists of Suggested Readings (noncurricular)

### 1935–36

*Brigham Young: The Man of the Hour*, Leah D. Widtsoe (Adults)

"The Community High Road to Better Things," Joseph Geddes (Seniors)

*The Leadership of Joseph Smith*, John Henry Evans (M Men/Gleaners)

*Happy Landings, Youth!*, Marba C. Josephson (Junior Girls)

### 1936–37

The New Testament (Executives)

*Wake Up and Live!*, Dorothea Brande (Adults)

*Making the Most of Your Life*, John J. B. Morgan and Ewing T. Webb (Seniors)

*North to the Orient*, Anne Morrow Lindbergh (M Men/Gleaners)

\**Heart of a Rose*, Mabel A. McKee (Explorers)

*Larry: Thoughts of Youth*, Larry Foster (Juniors)

*Voice of the Intangible*, Albert R. Lyman (Scouts)

### 1937–38

*The Return to Religion*, Henry C. Link (Adults/Seniors)

*Step a Little Higher*, John Henry Evans (Seniors/M Men/Gleaners)

*How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Dale Carnegie (M Men)

*Living through Biography: Real Persons*, Edwin Diller Starbuck (Explorers)

*North to the Orient*, Anne Morrow Lindbergh (Juniors)

\**Cowboy Hugh*, Walter H. Nichols (Scouts)

### 1938–39

*The Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Joseph Fielding Smith (Executives)

*Madame Curie*, Eve Curie (Adults)

*Utah Sings*, Harrison R. Merrill and Elsie T. Brandley (Seniors)

*Pasteur*, Francis E. Benz (M Men/Gleaners)

*The Magnificent Obsession*, Lloyd Douglas (M Men/Gleaners)

*Characters and Messages of the Book of Mormon*, John Henry Evans (Explorers)

*Madame Curie: A Biography*, Eve Curie (Juniors)

\**The Lance of Kanana*, Harry W. French (Scouts)

\**Little Soldier of the Plains*, Marian McDonough (Bee-Hive Girls)

### 1939–40

*A Voice from the Dust*, Genet Bingham Dee (Executive)

*The Rediscovery of Man*, Henry C. Link (Adults)

*Alone: The Classic Polar Adventure*, Richard E. Byrd (Gleaners/M Men)

*Antarctic Icebreakers*, Lorene K. Fox (Explorers)

\**Queer Person*, Ralph Hubbard (Scouts)

\**Three Sisters*, Cornelia Spencer (Juniors)

\**Caddie Woodlawn*, Carol Ryrice Brink (Bee-Hives Girls)

*Good Manners*, Beth Bailey McLean (Bee-Hive Girls)

### 1940–41

*Unto the Hills*, Richard L. Evans (Executives/Special Interest Groups)

*One Who Was Valiant*, Clarissa Young Spenser and Mabel Harmer (Special Interest Groups)

*The Four Gospels and Acts from the Bible* (M Men/Gleaners)

*Selected Book of Mormon stories* (Explorers)

*Hello Life!*, Elsie Talmage Brandley (Juniors)

*Monarch, the Big Bear of Tallac*, Ernest Thompson Seton (Scouts)

\**The Singing Tree*, Kate Seredy (Bee-Hives)

### 1941–42

*Abraham Lincoln, Man of God*, John Wesley Hill (Executives)

*Healthful Living*, Harold S. Diehl (Special Interest)

\**For This My Glory*, Paul Bailey (Special Interest)

*Cumrah's "Gold Bible,"* E. Cecil McGavin (Special Interest)

*Brigham Young, the Colonizer*, Milton R. Hunter (Special Interest)

*The Improvement Era* (M Men/Gleaners)

*The Latter-day Prophet*, George Q. Cannon (Explorers)



- \**This Is Freedom*, Rhoda Nelson (Juniors)
- Pioneer Stories*, Preston Nibley (Scouts/Bee Keepers)
- \**Blue Willow*, Doris Gates (Bee Hive Builders)
- \**All the Days Were Antonia's*, Gretchen McKown and Florence Stebbins Gleeson (Bee Hive Gatherers)
- \**The Yearling*, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings (Bee Hive Guardians)

#### 1942-43

- In the Gospel Net*, John A. Widtsoe (Executives)
- Gospel Standards*, Heber J. Grant (Special Interest)
- I Dare You!*, William H. Danforth (M Men/Gleaners)
- Missionary Experiences*, Preston Nibley (M Men)
- Elizabeth, England's Modern Queen*, Cornelia Spencer (Gleaners)
- Maud*, Isabella Maud Rittenhouse, ed. Richard Lee Strout (Junior Girls)
- Lincoln*, Lucy Foster Madison (Scouts)
- Clara Barton*, Mildred Mastin Pace (Bee-Hive Girls)

#### 1943-44

- Daniel Hammer Wells and the Events of His Time*, Bryant S. Hinckley (Executives)
- The American Canon*, Daniel L. Marsh (Special Interest Groups)
- Syrian Yankee*, Salom Rizk (M Men/Gleaners)
- Living through Biography: The High Trail*, Edward Diller Starbuck (Explorers)
- Mama's Bank Account*, Kathryn Forbes (Juniors)
- \**This Is Freedom*, Rhoda Nelson (Scouts)
- \**Little Women*, Louisa May Alcott (Bee-Hive Girls)
- Invincible Louisa*, Cornelia Meigs (Bee-Hive Teachers)

#### 1944-45

- The Gospel Kingdom*, John Taylor (Executives)
- The Church in War and Peace*, Stephen L Richards (Special Interest)
- \**The Robe*, Lloyd C. Douglas (M Men/Gleaners)
- I Wanted to See*, Borghild Dahl (Juniors)
- \**Faith-Promoting Stories*, Preston Nibley (Senior Scouts)
- \**Traveler's Candle*, Florence M. Updegraff (Bee Hive)
- \**Canyon of Whispers*, L. A. Wadsworth (Scout)

*Vengeance Is Mine:  
The Mountain Meadows Massacre and Its Aftermath*  
By Richard E. Turley Jr. and Barbara Jones Brown

New York City: Oxford University Press, 2023

*Reviewed by Kent P. Jackson*

September 11, 1857.

Thirteen years earlier, the Prophet Joseph Smith was murdered while in state custody. The Latter-day Saints had been driven from their homes in Missouri and Illinois, with no protection from those states or from the United States. The U.S. Army was on its way to the Utah Territory to put down a rebellion that didn't exist, and Utahns thought they might be driven from their homes once again. Because of the anticipated military invasion, leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had recently told settlers in Utah not to sell food, including grain, to non-Latter-day Saint emigrant companies passing through.

Those circumstances provided the backdrop for what became known as the Mountain Meadows Massacre. They are not an excuse for it—there is none—but they were realities in the world of Latter-day Saint settlers in the Utah Territory in the summer and fall of 1857. The events unfolded like this:

- A wagon train of about 130 emigrants from Arkansas arrived at Cedar City in southern Utah on its way to California.
- Men from the wagon train came into the town and tried to buy grain and other supplies to continue their journey.
- Latter-day Saint townspeople refused to sell to them.
- As a result, the travelers insulted the settlers and made idle threats against them.
- The wagon train moved on.
- The Cedar City residents felt they were disrespected by the actions and words of the travelers, so they decided to take revenge on them by means of a murderous attack on the wagon train.

- Not wanting to be implicated in what they planned, the settlers hired local Native Americans, Paiutes, to do the attacking and killing.
- The attack took place but didn't go off as planned, though several of the emigrants were killed.
- Surviving emigrants became aware that there were also whites among their attackers.

At that point, the men of the Cedar City area felt that they had a serious problem. If the train moved on and the emigrants arrived in California, the news would eventually get out that white residents of the territory—Latter-day Saints—had been involved in the attack on the emigrant party. That certainly would bring unwanted repercussions on the territory and on the Church.

Settlers, including officers of the territorial militia, deliberated over the course of a few days about what to do. Their decision? Send the militia to slaughter everyone in the traveling company except those who were so young that they wouldn't be able to tell anyone what happened.

So that is what they did.

*Vengeance Is Mine: The Mountain Meadows Massacre and Its Aftermath* is the long-awaited sequel to the 2008 *Massacre at Mountain Meadows: An American Tragedy* by Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley Jr., and Glen M. Leonard. The new volume is authored by Turley and Barbara Jones Brown, who served as content editor for the first book. Basically, *Massacre* tells the story of the crime, and *Vengeance* tells the story of its aftermath. Yet as the authors point out in *Vengeance's* preface, the details of the crime are retold sufficiently in the new volume that one need not read the first book before the second (xvi). Indeed, the crime is retold very well in *Vengeance*, and repeatedly, as it is narrated in the voices of those who experienced it or heard about it from the perpetrators.

Working for a combined total of forty years researching the massacre, the authors and their predecessors on the first volume have found, and made use of, sources never before available to historians. Thus, through these books, we now have a greater understanding of the events than was ever possible before.

In addition to the quality of its exhaustive research, *Vengeance Is Mine* is also a superb work of narrative history writing. It is divided into forty-seven short chapters, each with a chronological and geographical focus. Those chapters take the reader rapidly through time from one episode to

the next to the story's conclusion. The book is not a whodunnit because we already know, or we learn very soon, who did it. But the tension that the authors create is nonetheless persistent. We want to know, Who is going to get caught? Who is going to come forward and tell the truth? Who is going to blame whom? Who is going to be held accountable? How many unforced errors can the politicians, judges, and prosecutors make? Are any of the perpetrators going to try to implicate Brigham Young? And is anyone going to be punished in the end?

The book eventually answers all those questions. It also puts to rest, or hopefully will put to rest, three persisting narratives about the massacre: the narrative that it was the Paiutes who devised and carried out the massacre, a lie that the perpetrators told from the beginning and that was passed on for generations; the narrative that the traveling emigrants somehow deserved what they got, a lie that many Latter-day Saints have believed to the present time; and the narrative that Brigham Young and other Church leaders in Salt Lake City ordered the massacre, a lie told by anti-Mormons from the beginning and still believed by many now.

In addition to the answers revealed in *Vengeance Is Mine*, the book exposes questions that need to be considered but likely can never be answered. The Mountain Meadows Massacre is America's most heinous example of what we now call "road rage." Travelers engage in "trash talk," so one of the parties decides to chase down the other and commit murder. We see this kind of behavior among narcissists on our highways and among rival urban gangs, but what could convince otherwise ordinary frontier farmers and shopkeepers to think that verbal insults justify murder? Or how can a rational person understand the twisted math that executing over a hundred people could possibly conceal the killing of a handful? And what about future consequences? How could they imagine that no one involved would ever talk?

The Mountain Meadows story is an example of the hypocrisy of group-identity thinking and the ease with which people can vilify whole populations. Non-Latter-day Saints were "gentiles," not to be trusted and somehow probably complicit in the murder of Joseph Smith and in other atrocities. Mormons, in turn, were "murderers, fanatics, and whores" (236). "We will sweep them from the face of the earth" (56). U.S. Army Col. James H. Carleton, outraged over what the Mormons had done at Mountain Meadows, soon led his soldiers to slaughter Paiutes and hundreds of Navajo in Arizona and New Mexico (235). Col. Patrick Connor, commander of American forces in Utah, hated the Mormons and became one of the founders of an anti-Mormon political party in Salt

Lake. When he massacred hundreds of Shoshone across the border in Idaho, the army promoted him to brigadier general, and that slaughter was celebrated for years on its anniversary (236–37). When we so thoroughly dehumanize others—whether Latter-day Saints, dissenters from the Church, emigrants from Arkansas, Native Americans, or anyone else—we allow ourselves to act without conscience, and horrible things can happen.

Some of the leaders of the southern Utah militia clearly thought that their murderous plot was morally justified to protect the Saints. Others, who had nothing to do with the planning, arrived at the scene, some from other settlements, only in time to take part in the killing. In all, there were fifty to sixty participants. The planners, high officers in the militia, were also leaders in the Church. They told the militia members that the plan was the right thing to do, so they followed their orders. They were, after all, militia members acting under military orders in a militia operation. When I joined the U.S. Army in 1970, the specter of the Mỹ Lai massacre of 1968 in Vietnam was hanging over everything the army did. So I was trained emphatically that I was not to obey “illegal orders.” The farmers and shopkeepers of Cedar City, Washington, Santa Clara, and Parowan had no such training, and they believed what they were told. Nor would they have had any idea what an “illegal order” was.

For the most part, Turley and Brown ignore those participants in the massacre, largely because they had no role in its inception, went back to their homes, and played no further public part in the story. They were not pursued by lawmen and remained mostly under the radar, leaving few hints and fewer written testimonials of their involvement. Yet I could not help but think about those men through the pages of the book—what their lives were like after September 11, 1857. In time they undoubtedly concluded that what went on at Mountain Meadows was horribly wrong and that their own involvement—killing innocent people mostly by shooting them through their heads at close range—was something they would have to live with through the rest of their lives. They must have lived with the terror of their actions largely in silence and in secret, for few of them were willing to let others know that they were involved (see 385, 390–91).

Turley and Brown do a masterful job dealing with the very long effort to bring the guilty to justice. Only nine men were indicted for the crime, but they included the planners and leaders. The vast distances between Utah settlements and the many potential hiding places in the West were among the reasons why prosecutors and their agents had so little success

apprehending the perpetrators. But infighting among federal officials, poor decision making on the part of prosecutors and judges, and the political machinations of anti-Mormons in Utah contributed. As did the Civil War, which began three and a half years after the massacre took place. In the end, only one man, John D. Lee, was tried, convicted, and executed, but that was twenty years after his crime. The authors tell us why it turned out that way. Most of the other indicted men lived out their lives, often in hiding for years, often in despair and sometimes in misery. As Brigham Young stated regarding the massacre's instigators, if God's judgment doesn't catch up with them in this life, it will in the next (249). And as American soldiers wrote on a cross atop the monument they erected over the victims' bones, "Vengeance is mine: I will repay saith the Lord" (196, 240).

Turley and Brown dedicated the book to Juanita Brooks, a descendant of a massacre participant, who published *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* in 1950. Brooks grew up in a time and place that had long sought to put the events of 1857 in the past. People there wanted it to go away, a sentiment that continued among many Latter-day Saints well into the twenty-first century. *Vengeance Is Mine*, following on the heels of the 2008 *Massacre at Mountain Meadows*, further opens the horrible event to public view, enabling our generation to know the truth about the crime and to learn from it.

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*Documents, 1 January–15 May 1844*  
Vol. 14 of the Documents series of the Joseph Smith Papers  
Edited by Alex D. Smith, Adam H. Petty,  
Jessica M. Nelson, and Spencer W. McBride  
Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2023

*Reviewed by Richard E. Bennett*

HAVING grown up on a diet of Joseph Fielding Smith's *Essentials in Church History*, B. H. Roberts's *Comprehensive History of the Church*, and the six-volume *History of the Church*, which for me and so many others was once the gold standard for the study of Church history, I am convinced that the Joseph Smith Papers are a shaft of incredible new light, a welcomed revelation of sorts, a coming-out party to document Joseph Smith's life and ministry.

Superbly well-edited by a dedicated team of scholars, archivists, and editors employed by the Church History Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Papers strive to meet the highest national standards of documentary editing. They consist of two volumes of Histories (1832–47), three volumes of Smith's Journals from 1832 to 1844, seven volumes of his Revelations and Translations, and a single volume of the Administrative Records and Minutes of the Council of Fifty. The fifteen-volume Documents series, however, is the "core" of both the print and digital editions, presenting, with some exceptions, all of Joseph Smith's papers from July 1828 until his death in June 1844. Additional volumes of Smith's voluminous legal and financial transactions in digital format are forthcoming.

Edited by Alex D. Smith, Adam H. Petty, Jessica M. Nelson, and Spencer W. McBride, *Documents, Volume 14* is the penultimate offering in the fifteen-volume series of documents that Joseph Smith generated as prophet, president, and trustee of the Church; mayor and chief justice of Nauvoo, Illinois; lieutenant general of the Nauvoo Legion; and candidate for the presidency of the United States. This volume covers the tumultuous four-and-a-half-month period from January 1 to May 15, 1844, which ended just weeks before Smith's assassination and was a most challenging time for Smith and the ever-growing number of



Latter-day Saints in and around Nauvoo as discord and division erupted among themselves and mounting tensions developed between them and surrounding communities. These themes of growth and rising tension permeate the documents featured in this volume.

The contributions of the Joseph Smith Papers project are many, but I begin with their pedigree, or provenance. In so many ways, the Papers are a stunning archival achievement. Every document bears a “Source Note” explaining in detail its size, physical state, distinguishing properties, and current location, followed by a statement of provenance, or origin. Taken as a whole, the Papers are the latest and by far most definitive effort yet made to amalgamate into one archival register or calendar all of Joseph Smith’s extant material. They hearken back to some of Smith’s most trusted clerks and scribes, including Willard Richards, church historian from 1842 to 1854; Thomas Bullock, clerk from 1845 to 1865; William Clayton, scribe from 1842 to 1844; and other early recorders and transcriptionists. Andrew Jenson, who began working in the Church Historian’s Office in 1891 and who served as assistant Church historian from 1897 to 1941, spearheaded the production of an “inventory” of Joseph Smith’s documents circa 1904 and carefully documented continuous acquisitions in the years following.

As time passed, however, many more documents were found within the department itself, squirreled away in various lost files or basement corners, hidden in other collections, or accessioned in new acquisitions. Consequently, in 1973, the department published a much-enlarged inventory, or more precisely an archival register, entitled “The Joseph Smith Collection at the Church Historical Department.” Meanwhile, so many more source materials continued to surface that almost a decade later the Department felt compelled to produce an addendum entitled “Joseph Smith (Supplement), 1833–1844,” at which time it closed the collection to further acquisitions, confident, perhaps, that few, if any, more papers would come to light.

Such would not be the case. By 1974, Brigham Young University’s Special Collections of the Harold B. Lee Library had acquired the papers of Bishop Newel K. Whitney’s impressive private collection, which alone contains twenty-one original manuscripts of Joseph Smith’s revelations and a vast array of financial records.

The rise of the so-called “New Mormon History” movement was also a catalyst for new acquisitions. The appointment of Professor Leonard J. Arrington as Church historian in 1972 ushered in a new era of openness and discovery, the so-called “Camelot” years (albeit with some stunning

reversals along the way), when, like a breath of fresh air, the gates were opened, and new works and interpretations of Latter-day Saint history began to flourish as never before. Over time this contributed to the First Presidency's decisions to transfer from its secluded vaults to the Church Historical Department such remarkable collections as the William E. McLellin Journals and later, in 2010, the Council of Fifty Minutes, which contain many of Joseph Smith's documents essential to the integrity of the Papers project.

Other key individuals also played a part. Without the intrepid efforts of longtime Church archivist Dean Jessee, there quite simply would never have been the Joseph Smith Papers. Jessee's unflagging efforts at locating, identifying, arranging, verifying, classifying, and even publishing documents of the first Latter-day Saint Prophet were indispensable precursors to the current Papers project. Indeed, they almost should be named after him.<sup>1</sup>

To these points of provenance must be added another: the "age of Aquarius" in which the internet refuses to let sleeping dogs lie. Members and non-members alike crave transparency, ambiguities in our history notwithstanding, and balk at arcane barriers to discovery. Recent Church Historians and Assistant Church Historians—in particular Marlin K. Jensen, Steven E. Snow, LeGrand Curtis, Richard Turley Jr., and Kyle S. McKay—have played an integral role in acquiring new documents, improving access, encouraging research, and transforming a once-perceived fortress into a welcome center, while preserving the integrity of the Church History Department and its inspired mission.

A second contribution of the Papers is the impressive research that has gone into its production. While the Papers do not pretend to be a biography, the fact is no future biography of Joseph Smith, his family members, or closest associates—even his enemies—can ever be written without utilizing this treasure trove of material. Consonant with the lofty editorial standards of the multi-volume George Washington and James Madison Papers projects, *Documents, Volume 14* features a very helpful historical introduction, an essay on editorial methodology, a historical review of the period in question, the aforementioned source notes for each document, and the careful transcription of each document arranged chronologically. There are likewise an astonishing

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1. See Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989, 1992).

2,394 footnotes, all of which testify to the meticulous research and study that went into this work of almost 700 pages.

The final 197 pages consist of excellent reference material, including notes on multiple-entry documents, especially Smith's discourses; a chronology of important events; a thirteen-page geographical directory; a three-page essay on sources; a forty-two-page biographical directory of the 134 most prominent persons mentioned in the text; a thirty-six-page works-cited bibliography; nine pages showing corresponding sections of the Doctrine and Covenants; and, last but not least, a forty-page index.

The editors of *Documents, Volume 14* have gone to considerable lengths to include almost every currently known document of Smith's life in this time period. They consist of ninety-nine documents, the majority of which are letters, and of these, forty-five are incoming and seventeen outgoing. They include letters from Parley Pratt, Reuben Hedlock, John E. Page, and many others and cover a wide range of topics. There are also thirteen discourses, with multiple versions of the same; some scattered legal documents such as deeds; memorials and minutes of meetings; and an April 25 revelation. As might be expected, the great majority of them are located in the Church Historical Department in Salt Lake City, while six are housed in the Newel K. Whitney Collection at Brigham Young University. Others are located at the National Archives and Records Services in Washington, D.C.; the University of Chicago Library; Yale University's Beinecke Library; and the Hancock County, Illinois, Historical Society. At least two are copies of originals still held in private hands. Twelve documents are to be found only in published format in three newspapers: the *Nauvoo Times and Seasons*, the *Nauvoo Neighbor*, and Thomas Sharp's *Warsaw Signal*. The editors have also left us with the promise that future accessions will be digitized and made available on the Joseph Smith Papers website.

A fine example of the inclusivity of research in this volume is to compare it with its companion volume, *Administrative Records: Council of Fifty, Minutes, March 1844–January 1846* (2016). Not only does *Documents, Volume 14* highlight and explain more fully Joseph Smith's revelation of April 25, 1844, but it also prints in their entirety Orson Hyde's two letters to Smith and the Council of Fifty, dated April 26 and 30, 1844, respectively (413–32), both of which are missing from the *Council of Fifty* volume. The same holds true with Almon W. Babbitt's May 5, 1844, letter. Anyone studying the Council of Fifty will therefore have to research both volumes.

A third winning feature of *Documents, Volume 14* is its efforts at authentication, especially in its presentation of so many of Joseph Smith's greatest Nauvoo discourses. In a careful effort to ensure accuracy, eschew forgeries, and to authenticate what he actually said, every known account made by his scribes and others who heard him speak and who recorded his messages is reproduced with exactness. Nowhere is this quality of comparison more manifest than in the several separate accounts of Smith's famous King Follett address, which he delivered outdoors near the yet-uncompleted Nauvoo Temple during a session of the general conference of the Church on April 7, 1844. In what I believe to be the crown jewel and price of admission of the entire fifteen-volume Document series, the editors provide us with all seven currently known accounts, forty pages of text, and 138 footnotes of explanatory material. Smith's sermonizing on the nature of God, the premortal council of the Gods, the pathways and patterns of divinity, the creation (or more precisely the "organization" of the earth), man and woman's eternality as uncreated intelligences, the state of children in the resurrection, and many more topics on that spring day is captured with the utmost care and precision. The result is that the Joseph Smith Papers, and this volume in particular, may be trusted and relied upon as the authoritative rendition of Joseph Smith's Nauvoo sermonizing.

All of which points to yet another major contribution of this volume: new insights and understandings. I can only wish this volume had been available before I published my most recent work, *Temples Rising: A Heritage of Sacrifice* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2019), in which I argued that Joseph Smith taught the necessity not only of baptism for the dead but also of other saving ordinances, specifically endowments for the dead. My argument was based more on implication rather than specific statement, but *Documents, Volume 14* clarifies the point: "It is not only necessary that you should be baptised for your dead, but you will have to go thro' *all the ordinances* for them, same as you have to save yourself."<sup>2</sup> And again: "Then you must not only be baptized for them but thoy [they] must receive the Holy Ghost by Proxy and be sealed by it unto the day of their redemption *as all the other ordinances by proxy*."<sup>3</sup>

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2. "Discourse, 12 May 1844, as Reported by Thomas Bullock," in *Documents, Volume 14, 1 January–15 May 1844*, ed. Alex D. Smith and others, Joseph Smith Papers (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2023), 483, emphasis added.

3. "Discourse, 12 May 1844, as Reported by Samuel W. Richards," in Smith, in *Documents, Volume 14*, 486, emphasis added.

Even after a lifetime of studying the life of Joseph Smith, after studying all the thirteen discourses in this volume, I am struck by how much he had to say so earnestly and insightfully about the resurrection, Christ's redemption of the dead, and the all-compelling need for proxy saving temple ordinances. "We have the greatest hope," he concluded in his King Follett address, "in relation to our dead of any people on earth."<sup>4</sup> And "the greatest responsibility that God has laid upon us [is] to seek after our dead."<sup>5</sup> I am confident that many others will likewise discover in these Papers new insights and a deeper appreciation for the teachings of Joseph Smith than ever before.

This amalgamation and sequential ordering of so many different documents dealing with diverse topics and personalities provide us with yet another critical benefit: perspective. Considering all the many complicated business and political dealings in which he was involved, it is a wonder that Joseph Smith had the time or energy to expand upon so many defining tenets of his theology. One day there is a summons, another day charges against one or another, then letter after letter, interspersed on occasion, like a welcomed respite, with one of his defining discourses. One senses more clearly than ever before the pulse of everyday living, the pressure of mounting Nauvoo tensions, and the crowded busyness of it all.

A final and enduring legacy of the Joseph Smith Papers is that of being a springboard to future exploration and research. *Documents, Volume 14* in particular whets the appetite for more careful research into such topics as Smith's scribes and clerks, who carried so much of the load while acting in his behalf; Apostle John E. Page's intellectual defense of the Latter-day Saint message; evolving emigration patterns from Great Britain to Nauvoo in 1844; the restless state of Kirtland, Ohio, in 1844; the origins and development of Lyman Wight's Texas colony; the rise of the Council of Fifty and Smith's pivotal role within it; and intriguingly, Joseph Smith's reliance almost solely on the Bible for his sermons and discourses and surprising avoidance of Book of Mormon theology. These are but a few topics that bear much more study.

These many contributions notwithstanding, this work has its share of shortcomings. It is not what is found *in* it but what is omitted *from* it that I find disturbing. For example, I am haunted by the fact that Joseph Smith's brother, Hyrum Smith, is a total nonpresence. His papers are

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4. "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by Wilford Woodruff," in Smith, in *Documents, Volume 14*, 340.

5. "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by Thomas Bullock," in Smith, in *Documents, Volume 14*, 323.

entirely omitted. As Assistant President of the Church and Presiding Patriarch, Hyrum often acted as President of the Church in his brother's absence. Yet Hyrum is strangely silent, as if the editors entertained the forlorn hope that someone, someday, will fill in the cracks and publish his papers to the same rigorous editorial standards as found here.

Nor are there any papers or letters of Emma Smith, the “elect lady” (D&C 25:3) and Joseph Smith's first and leading wife. While granted the Papers are of Joseph and not Emma, one has to wonder to what extent she wrote on behalf of her husband and the Smith family. As with Hyrum, she and her writings are worth at least an essay of explanation and consideration. This is especially the case since Emma was at the center of so much of the growing turmoil, questioning, and distrust that came to permeate these closing months of her husband's life.

Of no less concern is distinguishing the Prophet from the scribe, the mind of the President from the views of his clerks. At least seven of the longest, most historically significant letters and editorials of Smith in the first half of 1844 were written by William W. Phelps, dominating sixty-five pages of text. Joseph's other clerks—William Clayton, Thomas Bullock, and Willard Richards—also wrote many pages of what is presented as Smith's own writings.

In the case of Phelps in particular, although ghost writing is a perfectly acceptable form of expression, especially for exceptionally busy leaders, one must ask: When was Phelps speaking for himself and when as Joseph? In Smith's letter to John C. Calhoun (17–26), *General Smith's Views of the Powers and Policy of the Government of the United States* (135–57), and his letter dated April 15, 1844, to Congressman Francis P. Blair (378–86), the editors admit that the probable writer is Phelps; however, “the extent of his role is unknown” (380). It is this unknown quality of origination, inspiration, and composition that demands an essay of explanation, a study of the voice, style, insight, and understanding of each of the principal scribes and clerks of Joseph Smith and to what extent they represented their prophet leader.

Further to omissions, why are so many studies of leading scholars not included? Although the editors explain that only works of “sound scholarship” and those that “distill several primary sources” that give “useful general context” are cited in explanatory footnotes (xxxvi), missing are such classics as P. A. M. Taylor's *Expectations Westward*; Donna (and Marvin) Hill's *Joseph Smith, the First Mormon*; Bruce Van Orden's 2018 *We'll Sing and We'll Shout: The Life and Times of W. W. Phelps*; and most disturbingly, Glen Leonard's *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, a People of Promise*. Though cited in the index, this remarkable work of Nauvoo

is barely referenced. I also seriously question why so few documents housed in the archives of the Community of Christ are included in this volume.

I conclude with my final and most weighty criticism: I have previously lamented the failure of the Joseph Smith Papers project to address fully Joseph Smith's initiation and secret practice of plural marriage, the gathering storm that undergirds this wrenching period of his life. I do so here again. Not that the topic is omitted. It is unavoidable when such letters and published accusations as those from Francis M. Higbee on January 10 (47–51) and Orasmus F. Bostwick's notice of April 9 (360–63) accusing Smith of polygamy are faithfully included. To the credit of the editors, they make clear the point that Joseph Smith was secretly practicing plural marriage well before 1842, that he had outlined the doctrine of plural marriage in a revelation that was recorded in 1843 (D&C 132) but given years earlier, and that Hyrum Smith eventually accepted the practice of plural marriage in May 1843, marrying two plural wives in August of that year.

What is conspicuously absent, however, is any comprehensive description, explanation, or listing of Joseph Smith's many plural wives or a full and decent explanation of the secrecy enjoined involving the practice, the proverbial elephant in the room. There are scattered references and admissions, yes, as shown above, but no careful analysis. The motto seems to be "Mention when necessary, but avoid elaboration."

To illustrate, pages 32–44 contain two letters from David S. Hollister and Dan Jones, both dated January 8, 1844, concerning the Church's ownership of the steamboat *Maid of Iowa*, its troubling financial condition, operations, and whereabouts. It is a very complete study with no fewer than thirteen pages and sixty-five helpful footnotes detailing every aspect of the history, economics, seasonal operations—even nomenclature—of steamboat travel on the Mississippi and of the management, legalities, financial setbacks, and controversies pertaining to this vessel in particular. One could ask for nothing more, please.

In contrast, the matter of Joseph Smith's guardianship of Maria and Sarah Lawrence, who were eventually secretly sealed to him in 1843 at the ages of 19 and 17, respectively, receives comparatively scant attention (112–14). According to Todd Compton's pathbreaking study, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*, the Lawrence family was converted near Toronto, Canada, in August 1837 and moved to Nauvoo sometime in 1840 or 1841. The father, Edward, died in 1840 and the mother, Margaret, remarried Josiah Butterfield, a widower and former high councilor in Kirtland. For reasons yet unclear, Joseph became guardian of the two young women, which, along with ownership of



the Lawrence estate, became a bitter point of contention between the two men. Furthermore, William Law, also from Canada and who knew the family well and who became Joseph's second counselor (1841–44), became alienated from the Prophet in large measure because of polygamy and "chose the marriage of Smith and Maria Lawrence as a test case with which to prosecute Smith for adultery."<sup>6</sup>

It was this controversy with Bostwick that led William W. Phelps to publish an article entitled "Voice of Innocence" in the *Nauvoo Neighbor* on March 20, 1844, which denounced those charging Smith with immoral conduct. Written in Joseph Smith's office and most likely at Smith's request, one wonders why it is not included along with all of Phelps's other writings described above? This highly charged affair led directly to Joseph Smith's open repudiation of a practice he was secretly conducting, damaged his credibility, led to an open rupture between him and William Law and others, and contributed to his eventual assassination. I suggest that this would have been the ideal time for the editors to stop all engines and fully address the issue openly and candidly. Instead, we have only two pages and a few scattered footnotes.<sup>7</sup>

To conclude, the Joseph Smith Papers are not perfect or fully complete. There are troubling omissions and oversights, some of the most glaring of which I have mentioned. Nevertheless, the Papers, and more particularly *Documents, Volume 14*, are remarkable, an enduring legacy for a whole bundle of reasons—provenance, research, authentication, new insights, perspective, and pointer to future study. Everyone who has ever been involved since the beginning with finding, preserving, describing, editing, and now publishing them deserves mountains of praise and only mild measures of criticism.

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Richard E. Bennett received his PhD in American intellectual history at Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan. Recently retired, he served as associate dean of Religious Education and chair of the department of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University. He has published several books and over seventy articles in Church History. He and his wife, Patricia, recently served as mission president/directors of the Mormon Trail Center in Omaha, Nebraska.

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6. Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 476.

7. "Voice of Innocence" was published in the *Nauvoo Neighbor* on March 20, 1844, and has been faithfully reproduced in *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society: Key Documents in Latter-day Saint Women's History*, ed. Jill Mulvay Derr and others (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2016), 151–56.

Let's Talk About series, 9 vols. to date (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2021–)

A couple of years ago, Deseret Book began publishing the Let's Talk About series, books designed to help readers learn about interesting—and potentially difficult—topics. The books are relatively short, ranging from 130 to 168 pages. Each book measures  $4\frac{1}{4} \times 7$  inches, making them the perfect size to fit into a pocket or purse. The tone of each book is conversational and engaging. The authors are as varied as the subjects, recognized authorities in their respective fields and believing Latter-day Saints. The series began in 2021, and nine volumes have been published as of summer 2023.

*Let's Talk about Polygamy*, by Brittany Chapman Nash (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2021)

Brittany Chapman Nash provides a thought-provoking exploration of the controversial practice of polygamy. A specialist in Latter-day Saint women's history, Nash explores the historical, cultural, and social aspects of polygamy, shedding light on its complexities and implications. Through historical narratives and thoughtful analysis, she offers a nuanced understanding of polygamy's impact on individuals, families, and communities—in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. With care and empathy, this book encourages open dialogue and critical thinking, addressing the historical and doctrinal dimensions while examining the lived experiences of those involved in polygamous relationships.

*Let's Talk about Religion and Mental Health*, by Daniel K. Judd (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2021)

Daniel K. Judd dives into the intricate relationship between religious

beliefs and mental well-being. An expert in the field, Judd explores how religious practices and beliefs can impact one's mental health. Drawing upon extensive research and personal experiences, he presents a balanced perspective, emphasizing the potential benefits of religious involvement while also acknowledging the complexities and potential challenges. This insightful work offers a compassionate and informative discussion that encourages open dialogue and understanding regarding religion and mental health.

*Let's Talk about the Book of Abraham*, by Kerry Muhlestein (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2022)

Kerry Muhlestein packs a comprehensive examination of the Book of Abraham into this relatively small volume. A renowned Egyptologist and scholar, Muhlestein guides the reader through the historical, textual, and archaeological evidence surrounding this sacred scripture. With detailed research and analysis, he explores various perspectives surrounding the origins, translation, and doctrines of the Book of Abraham. Muhlestein's work fosters a nuanced understanding of this important Restoration text, inviting readers to engage in thoughtful discussion and critical thinking about its authenticity and significance.

*Let's Talk about Faith and Intellect*, by Terryl L. Givens (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2022)

Widely recognized scholar Terryl L. Givens examines the tensions and harmonies that arise when reason and belief converge. Drawing from a wide range of philosophical, theological, and literary sources, he navigates complex topics such as the nature of God, the role of doubt, and the quest for spiritual truth. Through insight and prose, Givens

invites readers to embrace the richness and complexity of faith while engaging critically with the world of ideas. This book offers a compelling and enlightening dialogue between faith and intellect, encouraging readers to seek a deeper understanding of both within the context of the faith of Church members.

*Let's Talk about the Law of Consecration*, by Steven C. Harper (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2023)

Steven C. Harper provides an exploration of the principle of consecration in Church history and what it means today. A respected historian, Harper explores the historical origins, development, and application of this principle in the Church. He examines the complexities and challenges of living a consecrated life as well as its implications for individual and communal well-being. He also dispels some of the myths and misunderstandings associated with this foundational doctrine and practice. This thought-provoking book invites readers to reflect on the timeless principles of sacrifice, stewardship, and selflessness inherent in the law of consecration.

*Let's Talk about Temples and Ritual*, by Jennifer C. Lane (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2023)

In this exploration of the significance and meaning of temples and their rituals in the Restoration, respected scholar of religious studies Jennifer C. Lane peels back the layers of the historical, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of Latter-day Saint temple worship. Drawing upon diverse sources, she uncovers the rich symbolism and transformative power embedded within the temple experience. With clarity and depth, Lane invites readers to engage in understanding the purpose and impact of these sacred spaces and practices,

offering a fresh perspective on the role of temples in the covenant path.

*Let's Talk about Race and Priesthood*, by W. Paul Reeve, foreword by Darius A. Gray (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2023)

W. Paul Reeve writes a compelling and enlightening account of the historical relationship between race and priesthood authority in the Church, from Joseph Smith to the present day. An acclaimed historian, Reeve delves into the complex and often controversial history of racial exclusion (and inclusion) in the context of priesthood authority. Drawing on extensive research and archival materials—some in print for the first time—he examines the social, political, cultural, and doctrinal factors that have shaped Latter-day Saint understanding on this complicated topic. With sensitivity and scholarship, Reeve invites readers to reflect on the racial dynamics of the past and present, fostering a deeper understanding of race and religious identity for the future. The book is at once challenging and faith-enhancing. Well-known Latter-day Saint Darius Gray provides a tender and frank foreword.

*Let's Talk about the Translation of the Book of Mormon*, by Gerrit J. Dirkmaat and Michael Hubbard MacKay (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2023)

Coauthors and Book of Mormon scholars Gerrit J. Dirkmaat and Michael Hubbard MacKay provide a comprehensive exploration of the translation of the Book of Mormon. They examine the various methods employed by the Prophet Joseph Smith, explore the primary documents surrounding the translation, and answer many commonly asked questions. This enlightening book offers readers a deeper understanding of the translation process, shedding

light on the divine and miraculous origin of the Book of Mormon.

*Let's Talk about Science and Religion*, by Jamie L. Jensen and Seth M. Bybee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2023)

Jamie L. Jensen and Seth M. Bybee have written a captivating exploration of the dynamic relationship between science and religion. These two esteemed scholars in the field of biology investigate the complexities and intricacies that arise when these two realms

interact. Through analysis and thought-provoking examples, they bridge the gap between science and religion, offering a nuanced perspective that encourages conversation and understanding. With a focus on fostering mutual respect, intellectual curiosity, and faithfulness to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, this book invites readers to navigate the fascinating terrain where scientific inquiry and religious belief meet.

—Matthew B. Christensen

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*Looking West* (2014)

Bryan Mark Taylor

oil on canvas, 50" x 40"

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