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Higher Criticism and the Book of Mormon

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Abstract: The tenets of Higher Criticism certainly create some challenges for the Book of Mormon. However, rather than being simply dismissed or ig-nored, these issues should receive careful consideration. The following chapter provides a basic introduction to the Book of Mormon in light of the insights scholars have gained into the Pentateuch through Historical Criticism. Even though Historical Criticism (and by extension, Higher/Source Criticism) presents some difficulties for the Book of Mormon's claims, a careful reading of the text and a consideration of the work as revelatory literature can resolve some of these issues.

Chapter Nine

Higher Criticism and the Book of Mormon

Introduction

The Book of Mormon stands out as Joseph Smith's greatest scriptural achievement. In the March 26, 1830, edition of the *Wayne Sentinel*, a small printing company located in Palmyra, New York published the title page of the Book of Mormon, announcing: "The above work, containing about 600 pages, large Deuodecimo, is now for sale, wholesale and retail, at the Palmyra Bookstore, by E. B. Grandin."[1] Instantly, Joseph Smith, the uneducated farm boy from upstate New York, had become one of the most famous Americans in the nineteenth century.

Although the Book of Mormon is an independent historical record of an indigenous people from ancient America, its story begins in the city of Jerusalem shortly before the Babylonian captivity in 586 BC. It recounts how this small group journeyed through the ancient Near East to a land called Bountiful where they constructed a vessel that allowed passage to the New World. The Book of Mormon itself cites various passages from the Hebrew Bible and even gives emphasis to a collection of books written by the Prophet Moses. Thus, like the books of Moses and Abraham, the Book of Mormon may also be approached utilizing the insights scholars have gained through Historical Criticism.[2]

The Book of Mormon itself invites readers to ponder carefully over the truthfulness of its claims. As discussed in the prologue of this volume, Elder B. H. Roberts recognized this fact, writing:

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1. As cited in Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 110.

2. The chapter focuses on the issues raised thus far concerning the authorship of the Pentateuch. The topic of Deutero-Isaiah (another important observation made through Higher Criticism) will be considered in the subsequent volume.

> The Book of Mormon of necessity must submit to every test, to literary criticism, as well as to every other class of criticism; for our age is above all things critical, and especially critical of sacred literature, and we may not hope that the Book of Mormon will escape closest scrutiny; neither, indeed, is it desirable that it should escape. It is given to the world as a revelation from God. It is a volume of American scripture. Men have a right to test it by the keenest criticism, and to pass severest judgment upon it, and we who accept it as a revelation from God have every reason to believe that it will endure every test; and the more thoroughly it is investigated, the greater shall be its ultimate triumph. Here it is in the world; let the world make the most of it, or the least of it. It is and will remain true. But it will not do for those who believe it to suppose that they can dismiss objections to this American volume of scripture by the assumption of a lofty air of superiority, and a declaration as to what is enough for us or anybody else to know. The Book of Mormon is presented to the world for its acceptance; and the Latter-day Saints are anxious that their fellow men should believe it. If objections are made to it, to the manner of its translation, with the rest, these objections should be patiently investigated, and the most reasonable explanations possible, given.[3]

The tenets of Higher Criticism certainly create some challenges for the Book of Mormon. However, rather than being simply dismissed or ignored, these issues should receive careful consideration. The following chapter provides a basic introduction to the Book of Mormon in light of the insights scholars have gained into the Pentateuch through Historical Criticism. Even though Historical Criticism (and by extension, Higher/Source Criticism) presents some difficulties for the Book of Mormon's claims, a careful reading of the text and a consideration of the work as revelatory literature can resolve some of these issues.

Book of Mormon Versus Biblical Narrators

From the beginning, Joseph Smith and his associates insisted that rather than a mere revelatory text, the Book of Mormon was a translation of an ancient record written in a reformed Egyptian script.[4] It was history that conveyed a deep spiritual message, presented primarily through the

3. B. H. Roberts, "The Translation of the Book of Mormon," 435–36.

4. The term "reformed" seems to simply serve as an adjective meaning "altered." "Both hieratic and demotic [Egyptian scripts] were in use in Lehi's time and can properly be termed 'reformed Egyptian.'" John A. Tvedtnes and Stephen D. Ricks, "Jewish and Other Semitic Texts Written in Egyptian Characters," 158.

voices of three ancient narrators, Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni.[5] As one of those narrators states in the book's Title Page, the Book of Mormon has two primary objectives: to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord has done for their fathers through covenant, and to convince both Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ.[6] Thus, more than just being an ancient historical record, this volume of scripture's spiritual purpose ought to take precedent over any other approach to the text.

The Book of Mormon is comparable to the Bible in that it presents itself as a scribal compilation of a historical narrative and is a literary example of ethnogenesis, meaning the formation or emergence of an ethnic group put to narrative. However, instead of omniscient, anonymous narrators who tell the story of the rise and fall of *Israel*, named Book of Mormon narrators document the rise and fall of the *Nephite* nation. It follows the basic pattern of the Documentary Hypothesis with an editor or redactor taking various records (some of which cover the exact same time period and events, albeit from a different perspective) and organizing these sources into a single literary work.

Despite its biblical-like feel and the book's claims for an original Near Eastern connection, the fact that identifiable narrators serve as primary characters in the account makes the Book of Mormon different than the Hebrew Bible. For instance, the Book of Mormon's opening lines emphasize Nephi as an author through a common Judean scribal technique that appears in the Hebrew Bible—the growing phrase:[7] "I make a record; I make a record *which I know is true*; I make a record *with my own hand*; and I make a record *according to my knowledge*." Through this technique, readers of the Book of Mormon immediately begin the record learning that Nephi's record is true, that the text's first primary character himself made the account, and that it imparts his own authorial knowledge.

To illustrate the difference, we can also compare the Book of Chronicles, which is a scribal compilation of various sources brought together to tell the history of the House of Israel. Unlike the Book of Mormon, Chronicles follows the same pattern witnessed in the Documentary Hypothesis. It is a record written by an anonymous author (or perhaps even authors in the

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5. See the summary provided by Grant Hardy in *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide*, 10.

6. For a consideration on one of the ways in which the Book of Mormon articulates this dual theme of Christ and covenants, see David E. Bokovoy, "On Christ and Covenants: An LDS Reading of Isaiah's Prophetic Call," 29–49.

7. On the "growing phrase" as scribal technique, see J. Magonet, *Form and Meaning: Studies in Literary Techniques in the Book of Jonah*, 31–33.

plural). Yet like the Book of Mormon, Chronicles places considerable emphasis upon its merit as a historical record. Though anonymous, the author emphasizes that his history is a "work of scholarship" through constant references to his sources.[8] He claims to draw his information from "the book [*seper*] of the Kings of Israel" (1 Chr. 9:10); "The Words of Samuel" (29:29); "the Words of Nathan" (12:15); "the Words of Jehu" (2 Chr. 20:34); "The Prophecy of Isaiah" (32:32); "the Lamentations" (35:25); as well as other titles. "To a large extent," writes Karel van der Toorn, "these references are 'mere show' of wide learning; both by the actual mode of production and by self-conscious parading of scholarship, Chronicles is evidently a product from the scribal workshop."[9] Many scholars believe that these sources serve as a type of false footnoting system designed to provide Chronicles with a real historical feel. And yet, even this biblical book, which shares the Book of Mormon's emphasis on historicity, follows the general Near Eastern and specifically biblical trend of anonymous narrators.

Simply put, we do not have any type of record from the world of the Bible comparable to the Book of Mormon in which named narrators present their *true* history as a type of autobiographical narrative. Even the sections from the Hebrew Bible that feature stories of the prophets in the books named after these figures are not comparable. For example, commenting upon the autobiographical features in the Book of Jeremiah (a Judean prophetic contemporary of Nephi), van der Toorn explains:

> [Jeremiah] is a scribal composition as opposed to a prophetic memoir; those parts of the book that present themselves as a genuine autobiographical document by Jeremiah, namely the so-called Confessions, are in fact the works of scribes. . . . If indeed authentically autobiographical, [the Confessions of Jeremiah] are truly unique. There is nothing like them in the ancient Near East. No one kept this kind of personal diary. . . . The ancient Near East has no documented parallel to a private record of inner struggle with one's destiny.[10]

This observation is certainly not enough to sustain an argument against the Book of Mormon's claims for ancient authenticity, but it is an important distinction. The Book of Mormon presents itself in a manner that reflects the way scholars believe the Pentateuch came together in terms of

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8. Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, 117.

9. Ibid.

10. van der Toorn, 189. The Confessions of Jeremiah appear in 1:4–19, 6:8–11, 6:27–30, 9:1–6, 11:18–12:6, 15:10–21, 17:14–18, 18:18–23, 20:7–18. It is worth noting that Lehi was a contemporary of Jeremiah. Thus the personal accounts by Nephi are scripturally connected to his father's contemporary.

edited documentary sources, but it does so through the voice of narrators that serve as primary characters in the account.

Book of Mormon Narrators as Genuine Authors

When read critically, the characters in the Book of Mormon have a feel of genuineness. There is an intrinsic logic to their accounts. This point can be illustrated by a careful reading of the Book of Mormon's opening verses. For example, as author, Nephi begins his record by stating that he had been born of "goodly parents." He then immediately shifts to a focus on his father Lehi, as if Lehi is the sole parent to whom Nephi refers: I was born of goodly parents (in the plural), "therefore I was taught somewhat in the learning of my father" (1 Ne. 1:1). This patriarchal focus is certainly paralleled by general Near Eastern conventions. Moreover, it conveys one of the central themes in Nephi's writings: Nephi is the political and religious heir to Lehi's prophetic teachings.

As a witness of the character's authenticity, Nephi's love and respect for his Mother as teacher comes through almost unexpectedly in the narrative. We see this, for example, when comparing Nephi's response to a difficult challenge with that of his mother, Sariah. Toward the beginning of his record, Nephi draws a parallel for his readers between speaking with the Lord and speaking with his father in a tent (1 Ne. 3:1). Lehi is the Lord's representative, his mouthpiece for the family. Thus, when Lehi asks Nephi to return to Jerusalem and obtain "the record of the Jews" and a genealogy of their family, Nephi records a heroic response:

> I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them. (1 Ne. 3:7)

From a literary perspective, Nephi's declaration "I will *go*," serves as a sign of his complete fidelity to the specific command of his Father: "the Lord hath commanded me that thou and thy brothers should *go*. . . . Therefore *go*, my son. . . . And I Nephi said,'I will *go*'" (3:4, 6–7). However, this heroic testimony that pays homage to Nephi's "goodly parents" directly parallels the words spoken by Nephi's mother when her sons successfully return from the venture:

> Now *I know* of a surety that *the Lord hath commanded* my husband to flee into the wilderness; yea, and I also know of a surety that the Lord hath protected my sons, and delivered them out of the hands of Laban, and given

> them power whereby *they could accomplish the thing which the Lord hath commanded them*. (1 Ne. 5:8)

Almost unwittingly, therefore, Nephi reveals that his heroic qualities are not simply a result of having been born of goodly parents that taught him his father's language. Nephi's qualities of faith were learned from his mother's language as well.

Continuing this theme of authenticity, in the text's initial verse, Nephi repeats the expression "my days" a total of three times. Though redundant and unnecessary from a contemporary western literary perspective, this type of repetition served an essential purpose in ancient texts.[11] As narrator, Nephi tells his readers that his days were filled with "many afflictions"; his days were filled with the Lord's "favor"; and that he will make "a record" of his days (1 Ne. 1:1). Therefore, readers will experience an account which shows that afflictions and favor work together as a blessing in the lives of the faithful. To quote Nephi, his record will show readers "that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance" (v. 20).

The second verse in Nephi's account begins with the archaic English term "yea," a word that "enforces the sense of something preceding" as in "not only so, but more."[12] From a literary perspective, this conveys an *a fortiori* argument, meaning "an argument from a yet stronger reason" (biblical scholars James Kugel and Robert Alter have argued that the same type of conceptual rhetoric appears in biblical parallelism).[13] Thus, this verse gives emphasis to the idea that the author's record in the language of his father and teacher is a spiritual account designed to present the theological message that afflictions can be a blessing to those who experience God's tender mercies. In so doing, the text can be shown to feature a subtle yet consistent literary message.

It is interesting that in verses 2 and 3, Nephi expresses an immediate need to explain his ability to produce a record. As we have discussed throughout this study, prior to the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, Israelite and Judean societies placed greater emphasis on orality than tex-

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11. On repetition as literary device, see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 111–42.

12. Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language.*

13. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 3–26; James Kugel, *The Ideal of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998).

tuality.[14] Literacy in the ancient world was always restricted to a small segment of the social elite.[15] Thus, Nephi's explanation that he had been taught "the language" of his father, and that he had an ability to "make a record," provides an appropriate historical introduction to his work. Nephi possessed a very unusual skill. As author, Nephi received a scribal education and had an ability to produce a record in the language of his father. While it is difficult to know precisely what Nephi intended by the statement that his record reflects a combination of Jewish learning and Egyptian language, the declaration seems primarily to serve as an aside to Nephi's education. His greater focus is spiritual; his is a *true* record and a continuation of Lehi's teachings.

The expression "my father" in 1 Nephi 1:2 is given repeated emphasis throughout Nephi's introduction. It appears ten times in 1 Nephi 1. Significantly, Lehi's name occurs three times in the initial chapter, but it never appears without the additional descriptive, "my father." The mere fact that Nephi repeats the phrase with so much frequency shows that Lehi looms as a pivotal figure in Nephi's thoughts. Moreover, this repeated reference may carry a dual meaning: (1) in ancient Israel, the term "my father" was used as an honorific title for a leading prophetic figure (see, for example, 2 Kings 2:12);[16] and (2) in both ancient and modern Hebrew, when combined with the first-person common singular pronominal suffix ("my"), the noun "father" functions as a term of endearment equivalent to "poppa" or "daddy" in English.[17] Thus, through repetition, Nephi's emphasis conveys his love for Lehi and a deep respect for the figure to whom Nephi's people will look toward as a pivotal patriarchal figure.

This brief analysis of the opening authorial lines in the Book of Mormon illustrates that despite the fact that named authorial narrators is a technique foreign to biblical patterns, the accounts attributed to these characters in the Book of Mormon carry a strong sense of authenticity. One further illustration of this idea should suffice. Reading carefully the

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14. William M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book*, 81–82.

15. Though Mesopotamians were the first people to develop a writing system, it is estimated that less than five percent of the populations were actually literate. The number in Egypt was slightly higher at about seven percent. Even ancient Greece had only about a ten percent literacy rate; see van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, 10.

16. See, James G. Williams, "The Prophetic Father: A Brief Explanation of the Term Sons of the Prophets," 345.

17. Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary*, 105.

words of the Book of Mormon's named authors reveals that these narrators often had a difficult time closing their accounts.[18] Granted, such an effect could be attributed to a highly sophisticated author, however, it could also be argued that if Joseph Smith were the true and only author behind the text, moving onto a new authorial voice would have been an easier task.

This point can be illustrated by considering the conclusion to the account attributed to the book's second author and brother of Nephi, Jacob. As author, Jacob reveals his intent to conclude his contribution to the Book of Mormon in Jacob 6. Creating a clear sense of closure, he writes:

> O then, my beloved brethren, repent ye, and enter in at the strait gate and continue in the way which is narrow, until ye shall obtain eternal life. O be wise; what can I say more? Finally, I bid you farewell, until I shall meet you before the pleasing bar of God, which bar striketh the wicked with awful dread and fear. Amen. (vv. 11–13)

With these words, the Book of Mormon's second named authorial voice shows that he personally believes that his record is over. Then, following these verses, which include an official farewell to his readers, Jacob adds one final story to his account. When approached synchronically, the text reads as if this authentic narrator finished his record and then years later had an experience that for some reason he felt needed to be added.

After his initial conclusion, Jacob presents a story of an encounter that he had at the end of his life with Sherem, a man described as an "anti-Christ" who preaches to Jacob's people that there is no Messiah figure.[19] Jacob depicts Sherem as the epitome of pride. He was "learned," writes Jacob, and "he had a perfect knowledge of the language of the people; wherefore, he could use much flattery, and much power of speech" (Jacob 7:4). Jacob then illustrates this assessment by presenting Sherem's words in a speech that clearly carries a sense of intellectual and religious arrogance:

> Brother Jacob, I have sought much opportunity that I might speak unto you; for I have heard and also know that thou goest about much, preaching that which ye call the gospel, or the doctrine of Christ. And ye have led away much of this people that they pervert the right way of God, and keep not the law of Moses which is the right way; and convert the law of Moses into the worship of a being which ye say shall come many hundred years hence.

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18. This point appears well articulated by Grant Hardy in *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 217–67.

19. For an analysis of this exchange in terms of ancient legal constructs, see John W. Welch, "The Case of Sherem," 107–38.

> And now behold, I, Sherem, declare unto you that this is blasphemy; for no man knoweth of such things; for he cannot tell of things to come. (vv. 6–7)

Sherem's words are dripping with sarcasm. The question that critical readers of the text must ask, however, is why Jacob, the narrator of his own book, felt prompted to add this account to a record that he had already completed.

The answer to this question is derived by paying close attention to Sherem's pride and his specific message. Sherem accused Jacob of having "converted the law of Moses" into a false religious system that worshiped a Christ or Messiah figure. In so doing, Sherem inadvertently personifies the two primary themes Jacob focuses on as an authorial figure in the Book of Mormon.

In his writings, Jacob explores two basic themes, the sinfulness of pride and the connection between the Law of Moses and Christ. Jacob's concern with pride appears at the beginning of his narrative in a sermon delivered to his people at the temple. Jacob records his words of warning in this way:

> Ye are lifted up in the *pride* of your hearts. . . . [L]et not this *pride* of your hearts destroy your souls. . . . And now, my brethren, I have spoken unto you concerning *pride*; and those of you which have afflicted your neighbor, and persecuted him because ye were *proud* in your hearts. . . . I make an end of speaking unto you concerning this *pride*. (Jacob 2:13–22)

Thus, in Jacob's foundational literary sermon, "pride" functions as a biblical-like *leitwort* or theme word.[20] Its repetition illustrates one of Jacob's primary concerns as religious author.

This emphasis on pride is matched by Jacob's focus on the connections he sees between the Law of Moses and the Messiah. Concerning this theme, Jacob writes that Israelite patriarchs "believed in Christ and worshiped the Father in his name." He then adds:

> and also we worship the Father in his name. And for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him; and for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness, even as it was accounted unto Abraham in the wilderness to be obedient unto the commands of God in offering up his son Isaac, which is a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son. (Jacob 4:5)

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20. For an introduction to this important literary technique, see Martin Buber, "Leitwort Style in Pentateuch Narrative," 114–28. As literary scholar Robert Alter notes in his analysis of the convention, "This kind of word-motif, as a good commentators have recognized, is one of the most common features of the narrative art of the Bible," Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 92.

Thus, two of Jacob's primary themes include the wickedness of pride and the role of the Law of Moses as a system that points souls to the coming Messiah.

The account of Sherem is depicted as a personal, albeit dramatic encounter Jacob experienced after he initially concluded his authorial contribution to the Book of Mormon. As author, Jacob had finished his record, bid his readers farewell, and even written the line, "O be wise; what can I say more?" (Jacob 6:12). Why did he feel inspired, therefore, to pick up his record and recount one last story that happened several years later?

Jacob's encounter with Sherem personified the very concerns Jacob focused on earlier in his narrative. Jacob *feels* like a real character; a real *author*. Granted, such a technique could be produced by a highly sophisticated writer such as Joseph Smith, but again, reading the text carefully gives the impression that Book of Mormon narrators were real people who could be touched by an experience to the point that it unexpectedly shaped the course of their narrative. Book of Mormon authors are therefore nothing like anonymous biblical narrators. But as characters, they certainly come across as genuine people.

The Book of Mormon and the Brass Plates

In terms of the insights scholars have obtained through Higher Criticism, the most significant challenge the Book of Mormon faces is not that it is a work produced by named autobiographical authors. The greatest challenge the Book of Mormon faces is its reference to scriptural records that most critical scholars believe were produced after the Nephite exodus.

According to the Book of Mormon, these records were recorded on "brass plates" (1 Ne. 3:3) and written in the "language of the Egyptians" (Mosiah 1:4). Thus, it is specifically Higher Criticism and the analysis of biblical sources that presents the most difficult test for the Book of Mormon's historical claims. 1 Nephi 5 provides a glimpse of the contents of the "biblical" material Lehi and his family had access to through these records. The account states that once Lehi obtained the plates, he "did search them from the beginning" (v. 11). This phrase seems to function as a type of wordplay on the opening line of the Pentateuch, "in *the beginning* God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). It suggests that Lehi began his study of this material with the Priestly account of creation. However, Nephi's description of the record continues suggesting that in addition to an account of "the beginning," his father had access through the Brass Plates to much more material:

> And he beheld that they did contain the five books of Moses, which gave an account of the creation of the world, and also of Adam and Eve, who were our first parents; And also a record of the Jews from the beginning, even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah; And also the prophecies of the holy prophets, from the beginning, even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah; and also many prophecies which have been spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah. And it came to pass that my father, Lehi, also found upon the plates of brass a genealogy of his fathers; wherefore he knew that he was a descendant of Joseph; yea, even that Joseph who was the son of Jacob, who was sold into Egypt, and who was preserved by the hand of the Lord, that he might preserve his father, Jacob, and all his household from perishing with famine. And they were also led out of captivity and out of the land of Egypt, by that same God who had preserved them. And thus my father, Lehi, did discover the genealogy of his fathers. (1 Ne. 5:11–16)

As we have learned through this study, most scholars who adhere to the views of Higher Criticism do not imagine that the Pentateuchal sources were compiled together and attributed to Moses as author until the Persian era.[21]

Moreover, given our current understanding of the development of the Hebrew Bible, it is difficult to imagine that the Pentateuch could have been combined in a single volume of plates with the historical books recounting Israelite history and the writings of the prophets. This view reflects the contemporary understanding of the Christian Old Testament that begins with the Pentateuch, followed by the history of Israel (Joshua–Chronicles), and then the prophets (Isaiah–Malachi). Significantly, this is not even the sequence that the current Hebrew Bible used in Judaism follows. Instead, as a collection, the modern Hebrew Bible begins with the Torah, then the prophetic material, and the final section is the Writings.[22] Although the current Christian structure for the collection serves to emphasize the

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21. See Chapter 4 for dating of documentary sources.

22. As Marc Brettler points out, "The 'Hebrew Bible' and the 'Old Testament' differ in more than name only. They comprise different numbers of books, which they place in a different order. (The ordering matters because it alters the context in which we understand the text; a book's meaning can shift depending upon which books we read before and after it.) More significantly, the term 'Hebrew Bible' suggests a corpus that is self-standing, whereas the 'Old Testament' does not. The meaning of many passages in the 'Old Testament' changes when one views them as part of a larger whole that includes the New Testament." Marc Zvi Brettler, *How to Read the Bible*, 9.

fact that the prophetic material points toward the New Testament (since these books immediately precede the Gospels in the Bible), the structure that the description of the Brass Plates seems to apply to the collection is an original Jewish construct. But even this construct did not develop for several centuries after Lehi's exodus from Jerusalem.

Still, there is no hint in the Book of Mormon's references to the Brass Plates that these records were a "book" in the modern sense.[23] The first reference to these texts appears in Lehi's description: "For behold, Laban hath the record of the Jews and also a genealogy of my forefathers, and they are engraven upon plates of brass" (1 Ne. 3:3). Although subsequent verses in the Book of Mormon will use the expression "*the* plates of brass," this initial reference to these texts simply refers to material as documents that appear on "plates of brass" without the definite article. The word "the" seems to imply a collection, whereas "plates of brass" need not convey that nuance.[24]

Though the construct of the Brass Plates in 1 Nephi 5 seems to reflect the later Christian understanding of the Old Testament rather than individual documentary sources, a careful reading of Nephi's description of the Brass Plates does not suggest that all of this material existed in a single "book." In fact, the text seems to indicate that the books of Moses were a separate collection from "the record of the Jews from the beginning, even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah" (v. 12). This suggests, perhaps, two separate collections,

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23. However, the Book of Mormon does show signs of conceptualizing the Bible as a "book." Note, for instance, 1 Nephi 13:23: "And he said: Behold it proceedeth out of the mouth of a Jew. And I, Nephi, beheld it; and he said unto me: The book that thou beholdest is a record of the Jews, which contains the covenants of the Lord, which he hath made unto the house of Israel; and it also containeth many of the prophecies of the holy prophets; and it is a record like unto the engravings which are upon the plates of brass, save there are not so many; nevertheless, they contain the covenants of the Lord, which he hath made unto the house of Israel; wherefore, they are of great worth unto the Gentiles."

24. Even the subsequent expression "the plates of brass" might conceptually employ the definite article with the adjective "brass" to refer to groups of brass plates—as in phrases such as "the rich," "the poor," and "the young," which are all examples of English expressions that use the definite article as a designation of groups of people.

the Pentateuch and what biblical scholars refer to as the Deuteronomistic History (Joshua–Kings).[25]

The Old Testament contains three main sources that recount the tale of Israel's past. These compilations consist of what scholars refer to as the Tetrateuch (Genesis–Numbers), the Deuteronomistic History (Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings), and the Chronicles complex (1–2 Chronicles and Ezra–Nehemiah).[26] The Deuteronomistic History tells a version of Israel's story beginning at the plains of Moab that eventually concludes much like the Book of Mormon with the destruction and scattering of the covenant people. As a collection, this was a major literary work, much larger than anything else known to have existed in the ancient Near East.

Presently, most scholars believe that there existed both a pre-exilic and later post-exilic version of the Deuteronomistic History. Therefore, the idea that Lehi could have access to such a work is not a difficult challenge. The concept of five Mosaic books, however, is clearly anachronistic. Moreover, it is extremely difficult to imagine that these books could have existed as an Egyptian translation. There's no historical evidence that Judean scribes translated what would become biblical texts into a foreign language until the second century BC; and when they did, it was the Greek Septuagint.[27]

Thus far, the most helpful proposal concerning this material by an LDS scholar is John Welch's suggestion that perhaps the Brass Plates might have been produced for King Josiah himself, after the discovery of Deuteronomy.[28] Although the Book of Mormon refers to a collection of sources as the five Books of Moses, this claim does not directly challenge the validity of the Documentary Hypothesis. It simply suggests that if taken literally, five books attributed to Moses would have existed prior

25. The Deuteronomistic History will be addressed in greater detail in the subsequent study, *Authoring the Old Testament: The Prophets*.

26. See Martin Noth, "The Deuteronomistic History," 13. Steven L. McKenzie, "The Deuteronomistic History," 2:160.

27. Tvedtnes and Ricks have pointed to the *Papyrus Amherst 63* as a "Bible passage, in its Aramaic translation, written in late Egyptian characters;" see Tvedtnes and Ricks, "Jewish and Other Semitic Texts." However, this document from the second century BC cannot claim to be a translation of Psalm 20. Though related, it has too many differences, including references to multiple non-Israelite deities other than Yahweh (i.e., the focus of the biblical Psalm). See the analysis provided by K.A.D. Smelik, "The Origin of Psalm 20," 75–81.

28. John W. Welch, "Authorship of the Book of Isaiah," 430–32.

to the Babylonian exile.[29] These need not have been identical, however, to the present form of the Pentateuch put together after the exilic period (i.e., the form that appears in contemporary Bible's today).

Unfortunately, most students of the Book of Mormon have ignored its relationship to the claims of Higher Criticism. There have been, however, exceptions to this trend. The first LDS scholar to seriously engage the Documentary Hypothesis and the Book of Mormon was anthropologist John L. Sorenson. In 1977, Sorenson wrote an article suggesting that the Brass Plates may have been the original source for the Elohist tradition. Sorenson theorized that the Book of Mormon (particularly in its first portion), could be interpreted as a "manifestation" of the Elohist scribal school.[30] Since the E source reflects a pro-Northern perspective, Sorenson's theory would work well with the fact Lehi is identified as a member of the Northern tribe of Manasseh and that the only major Book of Mormon figure and line of ancestry from a southern tribe is the Zarahemla/Mulek connection. When the two distinct groups encounter each other, the smaller Lehite clan became the dominant political force (there is simply no return to a Davidic king and an acceptance of J's pro-Judean perspective despite Zarahemla's claim to being a direct descendant of David).

Additionally, Sorenson identified what he believed were examples of the Book of Mormon relying upon the E narrative rather than J. He referred to such issues as the fact that the Book of Mormon seems to ignore the Davidic covenant emphasized in J, and instead focuses its attention upon the Abrahamic covenant to the patriarchs. Like the Book of Mormon, E refers to Jacob by his proper name; whereas in J, Jacob

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29. In the original Book of Mormon manuscript, 1 Nephi 5:11 refers to the "five books of Moses." It is possible, however, as Kevin Barney has suggested that "five" is simply a translational gloss by Joseph Smith produced in the course of the original translation; see Kevin L. Barney, "Reflections on the Documentary Hypothesis," 57–99. In 1 Nephi 19:23 there exists a different reading in the printer's manuscript than later editions. There the text refers not to "books of Moses" in the plural, but rather "book of Moses" in the singular. The original manuscript, however, reads "books" in the plural. Oliver Cowdery appears to have simply miscopied the term into the printer's manuscript, the result being that "book" in the singular appeared in the1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. This was later changed, however, back to "books" in the subsequent 1837 edition. Thus, Skousen's *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* reads "books" in the plural. For his analysis, see Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part One: 1 Nephi 1-2 Nephi 10*, 421–22.

30. John L. Sorenson, "The Brass Plates and Biblical Scholarship," 36.

typically appears referred to as "Israel." Sorenson also noted that the inhabitants of Jerusalem are "branded as evil in the strongest terms," a reflection of a pro-Northern bias like the one reflected throughout the Elohist source. The Book of Mormon also follows the pattern in E by placing special emphasis upon Joseph being sold into Egypt and saving the entire House of Israel.

In addition to Sorenson's observations, additional points could be used to support a connection between the Book of Mormon and E. For example, Nephi depicts the account of Moses striking the rock and providing water for the children of Israel as a positive event that occurred "according to the power of God" (1 Ne. 17:29). The Old Testament presents two different versions of this story regarding Moses answering the needs of the thirsty Israelites in the wilderness. The first one appears in Exodus 17:1–7. According to the account, after the Israelites had crossed the sea, but before they arrived at God's mountain, the people complained to Moses that they had nothing to drink. In response, Moses struck a rock that produced water, and the location of the miracle was named Massah and Meribah. Later, after the Israelites left the mountain and once again journeyed in the wilderness, the people complained to Moses that they had nothing to drink. He responded by striking a rock to provide them with water (Num. 20:2–13). And once again, the place was named "the waters of Meribah."

Critical scholars attribute the first version of the story to E and the second to P. E's version of the story presents Moses striking the rock at Massah and Meribah as an obedient response to God's instruction (Ex. 17:5–7). This reflects E's thematic tendency to depict Moses as a prophet and in a very positive light. In contrast, P's version is quite critical of Moses. In P, God rebukes Moses for the act of striking the rock, stating "because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them" (Num. 20:12). Thus one version of the story (P) views Moses' act of providing water at Meribah as a negative event, and the other (E) interprets it as a positive miracle. Taking Sorenson's argument seriously, readers could assume that Nephi's positive interpretation of the story of Moses striking a rock and providing the thirsting Israelites with water derives from his familiarity with E.

At first, these arguments seem quite compelling. Nephi may have received his scribal training by members of the Elohist school. Whether right or wrong, Sorenson certainly deserves credit for attempting to recon-

cile the Book of Mormon with the Documentary Hypothesis. Ultimately, however, the notion that the Book of Mormon relies upon E instead of the other documentary sources is not a compelling proposal. Again, according to Nephi's depiction of the Brass Plates, they contained "the five books of Moses, which gave an account of the creation of the world, and also of Adam and Eve, who were our first parents" (1 Ne. 5:11). Thus, the Nephites had access to the J source, and it appears cited throughout the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon refers to the Cain and Abel story, which is unique to J (Hel. 6:27, Ether 8:15), and it also uses the name "Sinai" rather than "Horeb" for the mountain of God (Mosiah 12:33; 13:5; only J and P use "Sinai"; E and D use "Horeb"). Additionally, an Elohist source from the North would certainly not describe itself as "a record of the Jews," which is the term used for the scriptural material on the Brass Plates (1 Ne. 5:12). E was a northern source, at least initially connected with Israelite rather than Judean scribes.

In fact, a careful reading of the Book of Mormon clearly shows a literary reliance upon not just J, but also P and D. To provide one illustration of this fact, King Benjamin's sermon encouraging his people to serve God includes a statement featuring literary allusions to both P and J's creation narratives: "If ye should serve him who has created you from the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live, . . . ye would be unprofitable servants" (Mosiah 2:21). References to the verb "created" and the prepositional phrase "from the beginning" seem to reflect the opening verse of P's creation account: "In the beginning, God created heaven and earth" (Gen. 1:1). Allusion to "day to day" in this context reminds readers of the "day to day" creative acts in P's narrative. However, an allusion to "lending breath" and man *serving* God specifically reflects J's creation story in which Yahweh breathed into man's nostrils "the breath of life" (Gen. 2:7), and man was created to "serve" Yahweh by "dressing" and "keeping" the garden (Gen. 2:15). The statement, therefore, shows a reliance upon these distinct documentary sources to the point that it treats both narratives as a single account. Ultimately, whatever Nephi's relationship might have been to the Elohist scribal school, the Book of Mormon shows an awareness of all four documentary sources. This material, according to the Book of Mormon's claims, was accessible as the "five books of Moses" on the Brass Plates.

This brief summary of the relationship between the Book of Mormon and the Documentary Hypothesis is not meant to be exhaustive. Much more can and should be done in terms of analyzing the book's use of Pentateuchal

sources to the point that it treats various documentary sources as a single account. Such a study, however, would extend beyond the scope of the present focus, which is designed as a basic introduction to Historical Criticism and the Pentateuch. It seems appropriate at this point to simply quote from LDS scholar Kevin Barney's important study on this topic: "In the case of the Book of Mormon I see no necessary conflict between that book's essential historicity and the Documentary Hypothesis; the dating of the sources raises a potential conflict, if one accepts a late date."[31] Barney is correct. It really is the dating of the Pentateuchal sources that presents the only major challenge for the Book of Mormon's claims for ancient authenticity, not the hypothesis itself. The Documentary Hypothesis actually parallels the way the Book of Mormon presents its own literary development.

Historical Criticism: Questions And Answers

Although some Latter-day Saints might feel concerned by the process of applying Higher Criticism to the Book of Mormon, some of the critical perspectives scholars hold can be comfortably reconciled with the text. This fact was illustrated in the first chapter of the present study, which compared the Documentary Hypothesis to the way the Book of Mormon presents itself as a redacted religious work. To choose another illustration, even though the Book of Mormon's views on the Devil or Satan seem historically anachronistic from the perspective of Historical Criticism, a careful reading shows that they reflect critical paradigms.

Throughout the Book of Mormon, Satan appears as a character who personifies evil, a fallen angel who "leads away" human hearts "to do all manner of iniquity" (3 Ne. 6:16). This notion is central to traditional Jewish and Christian beliefs. However, the Devil, as such, does not appear in the Old Testament. Historically, the idea of a devil or Satan began to emerge in Judaism during the Hellenistic period (323 to 30 BC). Critical scholars maintain that Judaism eventually adopted the idea as a result of Persian influence.[32] Thus, one of the earliest historical references connecting the snake in Eden with Satan is the apocryphal book the Wisdom of Solomon, ca. 200 BC.[33]

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31. Barney, "Reflections on the Documentary Hypothesis," 73.

32. John J. Collins, "Cosmology: Time and History," 62.

33. For an analysis of later Jewish and Christian interpretations of the snake in contrast to the original idea a mere clever animal, see James Kugel, *The Bible as it Was,* 72–75.

In the King James Bible, the term "Satan" only appears in 1 Chronicles 21:1, Job 1:6–9, 12; 2:1–4, 6–7; Psalm 109:6, and Zechariah 3:1–2 (the term "devil" in the singular never occurs). However, the word *satan* in Hebrew means simply "the accuser" or the "adversary."[34] Texts such as Job 1, which refer to "satan" indicate that this figure is one of the divine beings in Yahweh's court. The fact that he is referred to with the definite article "the" (*ha-* in Hebrew) means that the text does not refer to a proper noun "Satan," the later Devil of Judean-Christian thought, but rather *the* "adversary" who represents the side of justice. The adversary or "opponent" opposing Yahweh's desire to bless Job on the grounds that his righteousness may simply reflect the fact that Job had never experienced anything difficult in his life. The divine being in this story does not personify evil. He is one of the "sons of God" or divine council deities who in this story personifies justice. Even the snake or serpent in J's creation story is never depicted as a devil figure. He is simply a literal serpent who talks with the woman in Eden.

This historical approach to the concept of Satan as an evolutionary theological development in Judaism raises the question of whether the Book of Mormon's references to the Devil should be seen as anachronistic. A careful reading of the Book of Mormon, however, shows that in this instance, the Book of Mormon seems to reflect the way biblical scholars who read the Hebrew Bible critically understand this issue.

One of the key texts for understanding the Book of Mormon's view of Satan is 2 Nephi 2:17. This passage derives from Lehi's final sermons to his sons. The text reads:

> And I, Lehi, according to the things which I have read, must needs suppose that an angel of God, according to that which is written, had fallen from heaven; wherefore, he became a devil, having sought that which was evil before God.

According to this passage, it was through the things he had read that Lehi learned about a fallen angel of God who became a devil. The notion of a Satan figure was something that Lehi was not taught before leaving Jerusalem around 600 BC. Moreover, the text even goes so far as to suggest that it was a doctrine that Lehi "supposed" to be true, a term that in Joseph Smith's day meant:

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34. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2:1317. See also see Welch, "The Case of Sherem," 107–38.

> To lay down or state as a position or fact that may exist or be true, though not known or believed to be true or to exist; or to imagine or admit to exist, for the sake of argument or illustration.[35]

This passage, then, presents Lehi proposing his own interpretation that was otherwise not known or believed to be true.

Reading through the Old Testament texts cited by Lehi and Nephi shows which sources Lehi most likely used to put together his supposition concerning Satan. His same sermon indicates that one of the texts Lehi used to create his understanding of Satan was J's Garden of Eden account. Lehi refers to this fallen angel as

> that old serpent, who is the devil, who is the father of all lies, wherefore he said: Partake of the forbidden fruit, and ye shall not die, but ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil. (2 Ne. 2:18)

However, given the fact that J's myth simply presents a serpent similar to the view of the serpent in the Epic of Gilgamesh (i.e., as a literal snake), it would take more for Lehi to come to this interpretation. He would need to have a text that described a fallen angel. Such a view appears in Isaiah 14. This biblical passage is a lament, mocking the death of an Assyrian king from the time of Isaiah. Many scholars assume that the fallen figure in this text is Sargon II who was killed in battle in 705 BC. The text reads:

> How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms. (vv. 12–16)

Even though this text refers directly to an Assyrian monarch who tried to make himself a divine being like the most High God, the taunt is based upon an ancient Canaanite motif of a literal divinity who tried to ascend to the throne of El, the highest god in the divine assembly.[36] Moreover, despite the lack of an explicit Satan figure, Israelite traditions concerning a divine being falling from heaven appear in a variety of biblical texts, including Psalms 82; Genesis 6:1–4; Ezekiel 28; Isaiah 14:12, 24:21; and

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35. Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language.*

36. Michael S. Heiser, "The Mythological Provenance of Isa. XIV 12-15: A Reconsideration of the Ugaritic Material," 354–69.

Zechariah 3:1–2.[37] It is significant, however, that Lehi's son Nephi cites the Isaiah 14 taunt in 2 Nephi 24. Lehi's statement that he gained a "supposition" concerning a fallen angel from the things he had read suggests that Lehi put texts such as Genesis 2–3 and Isaiah 14 together in a way to understand the theological notion of Satan before it later developed in Jewish history.

Historical Criticism presents some challenges to the Book of Mormon's claims for ancient authenticity. However, oftentimes these issues can be resolved through a careful, critical reading of the text. This is certainly true, for example, with the Book of Mormon's anachronistic understanding of Satan as a fallen angel who opposes God's work. However, one of the challenges Higher Criticism raises that cannot be resolved through a careful reading of the text is actually its greatest religious strength.

Related to the issue of the Book of Mormon's historically anachronistic view of Satan is the text's understanding of Jesus as the Christ. In terms of its theology, the Book of Mormon possesses what scholars would refer to as an advanced or "high" Christology.[38] Book of Mormon prophets had an awareness of not only Jesus' name, but that he was God's divine son. We see this view, for example, in Book of Mormon texts such as Mosiah 15, which presents a prophet by the name of Abinadi teaching:

> God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people. And because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son—The Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and Son. (vv. 1–3)

Book of Mormon prophets show a familiarity with Jesus' mission as a Messiah who will come to earth to suffer and die. Critical scholars believe, however, that this understanding of Christ did not develop amongst Jesus' followers until after his death.

LDS scholar Robert Millet points to this dissonance when he writes: "the Old Testament prophecies of Christ are often veiled, [whereas] the prophets of the plates of brass [i.e., Israelite prophets cited in the Book of Mormon but not in the Bible] are bold in testifying of the coming of Jesus Christ and are specific as to his ministry."[39] Thus, from an historical-

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37. Sang Youl Cho, *Lesser Deities in the Ugaritic Texts and the Hebrew Bible*, 125.

38. For an introduction to the distinctions historians makes in terms of "Christology," high and low, see Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 177.

39. Robert Millet, "The Plates of Brass: A Witness of Christ," *Ensign* Jan. (1988).

critical perspective, the Book of Mormon's greatest religious message (i.e., that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the human race) is also a sign of its modern influences.

However, given the book's extraordinary origins, the Book of Mormon's high Christology need not indicate that the book lacks an authentic ancient core. This point was acknowledged by non-LDS scholar James Charlesworth, a scholar famous for his work with second-temple Jewish sources. Regarding this issue, Charlesworth observed:

> Mormons acknowledge that the Book of Mormon could have been edited and expanded on at least two occasions that postdate the life of Jesus of Nazareth. It is claimed that the prophet Mormon abridged some parts of the Book of Mormon in the fourth century A.D. And likewise it is evident that Joseph Smith in the nineteenth century had the opportunity to redact the traditions that he claimed to have received.[40]

Charlesworth recognized that by its own claims, the Book of Mormon comes to us as a heavily redacted document. Historical anachronisms, therefore, such as the text's advanced Christology, must be interpreted in accordance with the book's intrinsic claim to be an ancient document produced as modern revelation.

The Book of Mormon as Modern Expansion

Even though the Book of Mormon presents itself as a historical narrative, it is without question a revelatory document. And like all revelation, the Book of Mormon comes to us through a human filter. It would seem impossible, therefore, for such a work not to carry the imprint of Joseph Smith. As "translated" material, the Book of Mormon was not produced in the way contemporary linguists analyze a document and then render it into another language.[41] The Prophet did not know any ancient languages at the time he dictated the text. He was a seer, and the work was revelatory. Joseph did not seem to have directly used the plates while producing his translation.[42] Instead, he would look into a seerstone while the plates lay

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40. James Charlesworth, "Messianism in the Pseudigrapha and the Book of Mormon," 125.

41. For the translation process see Tim Rathbone and John W. Welch, "Book of Mormon Translation by Joseph Smith," 210–13.

42. The Church's official website recently posted the following statement concerning the translation of the Book of Mormon:

hidden upon the table and typically dictate approximately eighteen words of text at a time.[43]

Thus, for those who accept the Book of Mormon's claims, one of the ways believers make sense of the presence of historical anachronisms in the text is through the theory of modern expansion through the imprint of Joseph Smith.[44] Blake Ostler explains this approach:

> The presence of translator anachronisms or expansions in the book show that Joseph imposed an interpretation on the text which was foreign to the ancient text, but not an interpretation alien to his revelatory experiences which produced the book. In other words, he did not perceive the ancient text and then consciously interpret it as he pleased; rather, the text is the revelation he experienced within his own conceptual paradigms.[45]

This approach, which suggests that the Book of Mormon we possess is the revelation Joseph Smith experienced through his own intellectual framework, allows believers in the book's ancient authenticity to explain such issues as references to Moses' five books, as well as citations of biblical passages that would have been unavailable to Lehi and his family.

In his analysis of the Book of Mormon, Terryl Givens refers to this method of interpreting the text as "one of the most appealing products

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> Joseph Smith and his scribes wrote of two instruments used in translating the Book of Mormon. . . . One instrument, called in the Book of Mormon the "interpreters," is better known to Latter-day Saints today as the "Urim and Thummim." . . . The other instrument, which Joseph Smith discovered in the ground years before he retrieved the gold plates, was a small oval stone, or "seer stone." As a young man during the 1820s, Joseph Smith, like others in his day, used a seer stone to look for lost objects and buried treasure. As Joseph grew to understand his prophetic calling, he learned that he could use this stone for the higher purpose of translating scripture. Apparently for convenience, Joseph often translated with the single seer stone rather than the two stones bound together to form the interpreters.

There is no historical evidence that Joseph used any other device other than the seerstone after the loss of 116 pages of the original manuscript. See "Book of Mormon Translation," available at http://www.lds.org/topics/book-of-mormon-translation?lang=eng.

43. Also, see the commentary on translation at the beginning of Chapter 8.

44. In terms of translation theory, the most helpful analysis thus far is Brant A. Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011).

45. Blake T. Ostler, "The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source," 111–12.

of the new détente in the Book of Mormon wars."[46] Givens goes on to note that historian Richard Bushman has observed that this interpretation is now "attracting more and more fairly faithful church members."[47] Yet despite his own apparent acceptance of the model, Givens is quick to note that the concept of modern expansion does not solve all of the challenges the Book of Mormon faces in terms of its claims for ancient authenticity. As Givens observes, the problem with this approach to the Book of Mormon is that many of the book's historical anachronisms appear "synthesized seamlessly" into the book as a whole. As an illustration, Givens writes that "it is hard to see the pervasive Christology in the narrative as mere insertions into a preexistent account."[48] This same observation is true for the Book of Mormon's use of Old Testament texts, particularly sections of Isaiah that critical scholars believe were written long after Lehi and his family left Jerusalem.[49]

Still, those who accept the Book of Mormon as an English translation of ancient scripture must allow for historical anachronisms as part of the revelatory process. Even Brigham Young was open to the idea that external forces influenced the present form in which the Book of Mormon appears. On this subject, Brigham Young taught: "I will even venture to say that if the Book of Mormon were now to be rewritten, in many instances it would materially differ from the present translation."[50] Taking this idea even further, LDS scholar Mark Thomas suggests that "the Book of Mormon uses the Bible as proof text, as a springboard to new revelation and creativity."[51] From this perspective, Joseph was doing the very thing that the ancient authors of the Hebrew Bible did by taking a previous source and making it relevant for a contemporary audience. Nephi, Mormon, Moroni, and Joseph Smith were all continuing the tradition of using archaic sources to create new scripture.

However ancient in its core, the Book of Mormon is not a traditional translation. It is a revelatory document designed to bring its readers closer to divinity. Ultimately, therefore, the Book of Mormon's ability to fulfill

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46. Terryl Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion*, 173.

47. Ibid., 173–74.

48. Ibid., 173.

49. See the forthcoming analysis in *Authoring the Old Testament: The Prophets*.

50. Brigham Young, July 13, 1862, *Journal of Discourses*, 9:311.

51. Mark Thomas, *Digging in Cumorah*, 17.

this objective is independent from how much or how little of the work can truly be considered ancient.

Conclusion

At a Church conference in 1831, the Prophet's brother Hyrum invited Joseph to explain how the Book of Mormon came forth. Joseph Smith responded that "it was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon; and . . . it was not expedient for him to relate these things."[52] Given the revelatory nature of the text and Joseph's evolving views regarding divinity, it seems likely that this statement was not a mere attempt to keep hidden the details concerning translation. Joseph himself most likely did not understand the exact manner by which he translated the Book of Mormon.

As understood in the Book of Mormon itself, translation is the gift of seeing hidden things and making them known to the world. The Book of Mormon is a spiritual text with a historical claim. Its historicity must be assessed critically in light of the way scholars have come to understand the authorship of the Bible. Though some of the conclusions scholars reach through Higher Criticism certainly create some challenges for the Book of Mormon's ancient claims, Latter-day Saint students should not be afraid to give these matters careful consideration. Often times issues such as the book's use of Satan and its reliance upon named authors are resolved through a close, critical reading of the text. Other matters, however, including the text's references to the "five books of Moses" and its advanced Christology prove more difficult to reconcile with the notion that the Book of Mormon is simply a literal translation of an ancient source. However, as with all scripture, the Book of Mormon's spiritual validity is a matter that transcends questions of historicity.

52. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:220.