



BOOK OF MORMON CENTRAL
<http://bookofmormoncentral.com/>



Religious Studies Center
<https://rsc.byu.edu/>

Two Shots in the Dark

Author(s): Hugh W. Nibley

Source: *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*

Editor(s): Noel B. Reynolds

Published: 1982

Page(s): 103-141



The Religious Studies Center is collaborating with Book of Mormon Central to preserve and extend access to scholarly research on the Book of Mormon. Items are archived by the permission of the Religious Studies Center.

<https://rsc.byu.edu/>

Two Shots in the Dark

Hugh W. Nibley, linguist, classicist, and historian, is Professor of History and Religion at Brigham Young University, where until recently he was Director of the Institute of Ancient Studies. Adept in some fourteen languages, he graduated from UCLA with highest honors, received his Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley, and has done specialized language study at Berkeley and Chicago. He is a prolific writer, having published hundreds of articles and books both on secular topics and on pioneering historical, linguistic, and cultural studies of the Book of Mormon and Mormonism. In "Two Shots in the Dark," Nibley examines two passages in the Book of Mormon—the account of Lehi's exodus from Jerusalem and the account of Christ's ministry in the Americas—in light of recent scholarship. He rigorously compares the Lachish letters, discovered in 1935, with Lehi's story, and finds truly astonishing parallels in form, style, subject matter, and even mention of specific names and

events. He also compares early Christian writings called "Forty-Day Literature" to 3 Nephi in the Book of Mormon, and again finds striking parallels and similarities. The article suggests that either Joseph Smith was "extravagantly lucky" or the Book of Mormon is indeed a translation of an ancient document that is historically, linguistically, culturally, and factually accurate.

**i. DARK DAYS IN JERUSALEM:
THE LACHISH LETTERS AND THE
BOOK OF MORMON (1 NEPHI)**

The Lachish Letters are the best evidence so far discovered for the authenticity of Bible history. "In these letters," wrote Harry Torczyner, whose edition and commentary remain the standard work on the subject, "we have the most valuable discovery yet made in the biblical archaeology of Palestine and the most intimate corroboration of the Bible to this day."¹ They are also the star witness for the correctness of the Book of Mormon, the opening scenes of which take place in exactly the same setting and time as the Letters. Both records paint pictures which are far removed from those supplied in any other known sources, and yet the two pictures are as alike as postcards of the Eiffel Tower.

The first contribution of the Lachish Letters to ancient studies was the revelation that such documents existed. Until their discovery in 1935, it was thought that the Hebrew alphabet of that time (shortly after 600 B.C.) was used only for the writing of inscriptions; indeed, all known inscriptions of comparable antiquity to the Letters are so scarce and scanty that it has been impossible even to put together a complete exemplar of the Hebrew alphabet from their contents. But with the finding of the Lachish Letters, it suddenly became clear that "the ancient Jews could write quickly and boldly, in an artistic flowing hand" (T. 15). The same arresting discovery was repeated at Qumran, where again the revelation of writing in common use

among the Jews of another Jerusalem six hundred years later came as a distinct surprise. While the Lachish Letters were written on potsherds, the scrolls were kept in the pots, both practices reminding us that since prehistoric times symbolic marks on pottery had been used to convey messages.

Potsherds, however, do not lend themselves to convenient filing, and the contents of important Lachish Letters were duly abridged for transfer to the official archives (T. 80) in the form of *delathoth*, as would appear from Letter 4 in which the writer reports that he is writing *'al ha-DLT*. What is a *delet*? Torczyner is puzzled that such a word should be used to indicate "a sheet or page of papyrus," since the word originally meant "door-board, then board in general," being applied according to the dictionary to a "board, plaque, plate, or tablet."*

Torczyner finds the root meaning of the Accadic word *edeln*, from *wdl, ydl*, "to lock or shut," the collective noun indicating things locked, hinged, or joined together—a reminder that the very ancient codex form of the book was joined pages of wood, ivory, or metal. The scanty evidence, confined to the time of Jeremiah, is enough to justify speculation of the possibility of the *delathoth* being such "plates" or metal tablets as turn up in the Book of Mormon story.

More specific resemblances in the records are evident, beginning with the same obsessive concern with writing and recording and the same association with the name of Jeremiah. Nephi informs us that Jeremiah's words had been put into writing from time to time (rather than appearing as a single completed book), and that the process was still going on at the time his family left Jerusalem (1 Nephi 5:13). From the Lachish Letters we learn that Jeremiah himself made use of other writings circulating at that time, including the Lachish Letters

* The one passage in the Old Testament that would justify calling a *deleth* a roll of papyrus is Jer. 36:23: "when Jehudi had read three or four leaves (*delathoth* = pagellas) he cut it with a knife and cast it into the fire, until all the roll (*megillah, volumen*) was consumed with fire." Papyrus tears easily, yet instead of ripping the roll to shreds in his wrath, the king had to go after it with a knife—surely it was solider than paper.

themselves, which may be "some of the actual documents" upon which the prophet based his account of his fellow prophet Uriah—Jeremiah 38:4, in fact, is a direct quotation from Letter 6 (T.18). (Jeremiah could hardly have visited the enemy stronghold of Lachish to consult the original potsherd text.)

Nephi's father, Lehi, kept a written account of things as they happened, including even his dreams and visions (1:16), which things Nephi faithfully transfers to his record, but only after he has abridged them and added his own account. This process of transmitting, abridging, compiling, and commenting as we find it at Lachish goes on throughout the Book of Mormon. Preservation on *delathoth* was no invention of Lehi's, since the story begins with the fetching of records written on bronze plates from the archives of Laban, the military governor of Jerusalem. Is metal plates carrying *delathoth* too far? The Copper Scroll of the Dead Sea Scrolls assures us that it is not. That scroll was made of separate plates riveted together, admittedly an unusual and inconvenient arrangement but nonetheless one necessary to insure the survival of particularly precious records. Joseph Smith's insistence on books made of metal plates was a favorite target of his detractors, metal plates were strange enough to seem ludicrous, and impractical enough to cause difficulties. This was *not* the normal way of writing; John Allegro comments that "the scribe [of the Copper Scroll], not without reason, appears to have tired toward the end, and the last lines of writing are badly formed and rather small. One can almost hear his sigh of relief as he punched out the last two words in the middle of the final line."² Compare this with the sighs of Nephi's younger brother:

. . . and I cannot write but a little of my words, because of the difficulty of engraving our words upon plates . . . But whatsoever things we write upon anything save it be upon plates must perish and vanish away; but we can write a few words upon plates. . . and we labor diligently to engraven these words upon plates, hoping that our beloved brethren and our children will receive them." (Jacob 4:1-3)

Equally significant for the Book of Mormon study is Torczyner's emphasis on the *Egyptian* manner of keeping records in the days of Zedekiah. The Lachish Letters were written on potsherds, he notes, only because of a severe shortage of papyrus, the normal writing material. With the use of Egyptian paper went the Egyptian scribal practices in general: "The new writing material first appears under Tiglath Pileser III," that is, its general use throughout the Near East begins a century before Lehi's day, "and thereafter [writes A. T. Olmstead] every expedition has its two scribes, the chief with stylus and tablet, his assistant with papyrus roll or parchment and Egyptian pen."³ More than sixty years before Lehi left Jerusalem the kings of Assyria were also pharaohs of Egypt, their Egyptian scribes glorifying them in Egyptian records. At the same time the Assyrian court "found it necessary to possess an Aramaic scribe" as well, to record in that language.⁴ Thus the idea of Lehi's bilingual record keeping, which caused considerable trouble to the recorders, is not entirely out of place. The reason given for it is economy of space. In Lehi's day a new type of Egyptian writing, demotic, was coming to its own, as much quicker and briefer than hieratic as hieratic was than hieroglyphic. This is perhaps what Lehi would have used. Only a thousand years later do we learn of "characters which are *called among us* the reformed Egyptian," something not recognizable to any Egyptologist today, altered beyond recognition even as "Hebrew hath been altered by us also" (Mormon 9:32-33, italics added). It should be noted however, that the only known example of supposed Nephite writing, the so-called Anthon Transcript, is compared by specialists with *Meroitic* writing—another type of "reformed Egyptian" developed at the same time as the Nephite script by people also fleeing from destroyers of Jerusalem, who in a short time transformed demotic or hieratic into their own new and mysterious writing.

The dates *post and ante quem* of the Lachish Letters are neatly bracketed by two layers of ashes representing two destructions of the city, one in 597 and the other in 588 B.C. between which they were found. Letter 4 "can date only a few

weeks before the fall of Lachish," while others "possibly cover a period of a few years" (T.18). There is definitely a conflict in the record as to who was the king at the time. The scribe of Jeremiah 27:1-3 says that Zedekiah was not yet king, but scholars now insist that he was wrong and that Zedekiah was ruling earlier than the Masoretic text says he was, so 1 Nephi 1:4 may not be an anachronism. While Lehi's story begins in the *first* year of Zedekiah "the background of our ostraca," according to Torczyner, "actually happened in the *last* year of the reign of Zedekiah" (T. 69). After his vision in the desert Lehi spent some time at Jerusalem entering into the activity of the other prophets and getting himself into the same trouble: "In that same year there came many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed" (1:4). This was the very message ("not good!") that "caused the hands to sink even the hands of (those in) the city and the country," according to the Lachish Letters (6:6-7).

The *proper names* in the Lachish Letters and the Book of Mormon belong to *one* particular period in Jewish history—the same period. Seven of the nine proper names in Letter 1 end in -yahu, which later became -iah, and during the Babylonian period lost the "h" entirely. In all the letters there are no Baal names and no El names—the lack of which was once thought to be a serious defect in the Book of Mormon. Torczyner finds "the spelling of the names compounded with -iah" to be most important. The -yahu ending is *also* found as -yah about a century later among the Jews in Elephantine, who were "perhaps the descendants of those Jews who, after the fall of the Judaeian kingdom, went down to Egypt, taking with them the prophet Jeremiah" (T. 27). Here we have another control over the Lehi story. The discovery of the Elephantine documents in 1925 showed that colonies of Jews actually did flee into the desert in the manner of Lehi, during his lifetime, and for the same reasons; arriving in their new home far up the Nile, they proceeded to build a replica of Solomon's Temple, exactly as Lehi did upon landing in the New World. Both of these oddities, especially the latter, were once considered damning refutations of the Book of Mormon. The -yahu ending of personal names,

abounds at Elephantine, but in a more abbreviated form (-iah) than at Lachish (-yahu) a hundred years earlier. The same variety of endings is found in the Book of Mormon, e.g., the Lachish name *Mattanyahu* appears at Elephantine as *Mtn*, and in the Book of Mormon both as Mathonihah and Mathoni. The Book of Mormon has both long and short forms in the names Amalickiah, Amaleki and Amlici, cf. Elephantine MLKih (T. 24). The Assyrian inscriptions show that the final "l" was dropped in the Hebrew spelling after Lehi left, when the Jews "lost their pronunciation of the consonant "l" under the influence of the Babylonian language" (T. 25). Of the two names in Letter 1 *not* ending in -yahu, the one, Tb-Shlm (which Torczyner renders Tobshillem), suggests Book of Mormon Shilom and Shelem, while the other Hgb (T. Hagab), resembles Book of Mormon Hagoth.

More significant are the indications that the -yahu names are "certainly a token of a changed inner Judaeon relationship of Yhwh." "This practice," Torczyner suggests, "is in some way *parallel* to . . . the first reformation by *Moses*"; what we have in the predominance of -yahu names reflects "the act of general reformation inaugurated by King Josiah (Yoshiyahu) [the father of Zedekiah]" (2 Kings 22 and 23) (T. 29). Another interesting coincidence: A Book of Mormon king 450 years after Lehi undertook a general reformation of the national constitution and revival of the religious life of the people. He and his brothers had been rigorously trained by their father, King Benjamin, "in all the language of his fathers, that thereby they might become men of understanding," familiar with the writings of the ancient prophets and also "concerning the records which were engraven on the plates of brass," without which records, he tells them, "even our fathers would have dwindled in unbelief." "And now, my sons, I would that ye should remember to search them diligently, that ye may profit thereby . . ." etc. (Mosiah 1:2, 3, 5, 7). Fittingly, this king named his eldest son, the great reforming king, Mosiah, suggesting both the early reform of Moses and its later imitation by Josiah. This would be altogether too much of a coincidence were it not that the Book of Mosiah supplies the information that fully accounts for the

resemblances when it explains just how Nephite names and customs were preserved intact in the transplanting of cultures from the Old World to the New. Lehi's ties to the Yahvist tradition are reflected in the only female name given in his history, that of his wife, *Sariah*; such feminine names turn up at Elephantine—*Mibtahyah*, though in female names the *yahu* element usually comes first (T. 27-28).

The action of the Lachish Letters centers around the activities of the prophets in the land, who are causing grave concern to the government. The Book of Mormon opens on a similar note: "and in that same year there came many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed" (1:4). The identity of all but two of these prophets has now been lost, but it is clear from both the Lachish Letters and the Book of Mormon that there were more of them. "It must certainly be admitted," writes Torczyner, "that there was more than one prophet at this time" (T. 65). The central figure is of course Jeremiah, but it is only by chance that we even know about him, for he is not mentioned in the book of Kings—it is the prophetess Huldah, "an otherwise quite unknown figure," whom Josiah consults (T. 70). Jeremiah in turn mentions the prophet Uriah "in only a few passages." and his name turns up nowhere else, though Uriah's "religious influence must have been of great extent and long standing!" (T. 70). Uriah "prophesied against this city and against this land according to all the words of Jeremiah" (Jeremiah 26:20). The words of such prophets were dangerously undermining morale both of the military and the people. Lachish Letter 6:5-6: "Behold the words of the . . . are not good, (liable) to weaken the hands . . . the hands of the country and the city" (T. 64). This passage is cited intact by Jeremiah 38:4.

As the Book of Mormon opens, we see Lehi as one of those citizens distressed and discouraged by the preaching of the "many prophets." "As he went forth," apparently on a business journey, for he was a rich merchant, he "prayed unto the Lord, yea, even with all his heart, in behalf of his people" (1 Nephi 1:5). In reply to his prayer he received a vision which sent him out to join the prophets: "my father . . . went forth among the

people, and began to prophesy and to declare unto them . . .” (1:18). He indeed was teaching “in the spirit of Jeremiah,” for Nephi explicitly links him to the prophet’s vicissitudes: “. . . for behold, they have rejected the prophets, and Jeremiah have they cast into prison. And they have sought to take away the life of my father, insomuch that they have driven *him* out of the land” (7:14, italics added). Torczyner suggests that Uriah “may have *hidden in the hills* of Western Judah . . . for a long time” (T. 70), and we find Lehi doing the same thing. Indeed, as Torczyner points out, what we are dealing with here is a type of thing, Uriah’s story being told only “as a *parallel* to Jeremiah’s not less dangerous position. . . .” (T. 69). To their number we may add Lehi, whose story has every mark of authenticity.

As the Book of Mormon leads us into a world of Rekhabites and sectaries of the desert, so the Lachish Letters give us “for the first time . . . authentic and intimate contemporary reports from Jews, faithfully following their God, about their inner political and religious struggles. . . .” (T. 18). Torczyner sees in the -yahu names a sure indication of “a loyal reformist faction which included even the highest military officers—.” Ya’ush and his men are the prophet’s followers (T. 66) even though they are necessarily the king’s defenders. We see Uriah hiding out in the wilderness “where he had friends and followers, for a long time” (T. 70). The Dead Sea Scrolls have put flesh on these sectarian bones, showing how from the earliest times communities of the faithful would withdraw from Jerusalem to bide their time in the wilderness. Lehi’s activities were not confined to the city, he was in the desert when he received the manifestation that sent him hurrying back to his house in Jerusalem, from which later he “went forth among the people” as a prophet (1:18). Badly received, he was warned in a dream that his life was in danger (2:1) and ordered to go into the wilderness and leave all his worldly things behind (2:2). It was the idea behind the Rekhabites (Jeremiah 35) and the people of Qumran: Nephi, inviting a new recruit to come and “have place with us,” points out to him that only so could he “be a free man like unto us,” and that to “go down into the wilderness” was the only way to “be diligent in keeping the commandments of the Lord”

(4:33-34; 1QS 1). This is the firm conviction of the sectaries of the desert, later expressed in the writings of St. Anthony. So Zoram duly takes an oath and joins the pious company (4:35).

One important aspect of Lehi's account has surfaced very recently in the light of what Klaus Koch calls the rediscovery of *Apocalyptic*. It seems that almost every ancient patriarch, prophet, and apostle is credited with having left behind a "Testament" or "Apocalypse" bearing his name. A key figure is Jeremiah, whose two assistants, Ezra and Baruch, are responsible for two of the six basic Jewish Apocalypses. Some of these stories are very old, and a consistent pattern emerges from the telling of them, widely scattered though they are in space and time. Briefly summed up, the general plot is this: A righteous man, sorely distressed by the depravity of the world or of Israel, prays fervidly for light and knowledge, and in due time receives a divine manifestation, when a heavenly messenger comes to teach him and takes him on a celestial journey, climaxing in a theophany, after which he returns to earth and reports his experience to family and friends; often this is just before he dies, bestowing a patriarchal blessing—his testament—upon his sons. Often also he goes forth to preach to the people, who reject his message with scorn, whereupon he departs into the wilderness with his faithful followers to establish a more righteous if tentative order of things in the desert, a sort of "church of anticipation." All of which things Lehi also does in due and proper order; the first part of Nephi's writing, he says, is but an abridgment of his father's record, which may properly be called the Testament or Apocalypse of Lehi. It also relates to the Lachish Letters, for Jeremiah was the champion of the Rekhabites (Jeremiah 35) and his assistants (cf. 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch) both headed such communities of refugees. Lehi is definitely doing the accepted thing for men of God in his time.

That the Rekhabite ideal of the desert sectaries was in full flower in Lehi's day, as many other sources now indicate, is clear from the accusation that Nephi's elder brothers brought against him, that he was planning to set up such a society with himself as "our ruler and our teacher . . .," leading them by his false claims of prophetic inspiration to believe "that the Lord

has talked with him . . . thinking, perhaps, that he may lead us away into some strange wilderness [some unoccupied tract]; and after he has led us away, he has thought to make himself a king and a ruler over us. . . ." Plainly they know about that sort of thing (16:37-38). When, after eight years of wandering, the party was commanded to build a ship and sail on the waters, they were all at their wit's end, because they had never dreamed of such a thing as a promised land beyond the sea; theirs was strictly the tradition of the desert sectaries, "a lonesome and a solemn people," as Nephi's younger brother put it.

Against the larger background of national calamity, which is never lost from view, both the Lachish Letters and the Lehi story are concerned with relatively narrow circles of friends and relations.* Clandestine flights from the city in both stories involve friends and families; Nephi and his brethren go back to town to persuade Ishmael and his family to join them in flight (7:2-5). But soon the group begins to split up as Laman, Lemuel, and the two daughters of Ishmael whom they later married, as well as two of Ishmael's sons, vote to return to Jerusalem (7:6, 7). They find the whole idea of giving up their opulent life-style and renouncing their fashionable friends quite unacceptable:

Behold, these many years we have suffered in the wilderness, which time we might have enjoyed our possessions and . . . been happy. And we know that the people . . . of Jerusalem were a righteous people; for they kept the statutes and judgments of the Lord . . . they are a righteous people; and our father hath judged them. . . . (17:21-22).

They are especially disgruntled at having to defer to a quality in their father for which the Lachish Letters have a particular

* Torczyner, p. 18, "The Lachish Letters are the first personal documents found, reflecting the mind, the struggles, sorrows and feelings of ancient Judah in the last days of the kingdom, within the typical form of ancient letter writing. . . . here for the first time we have authentic and intimate contemporary reports from Jews, faithfully following their God, about their inner political and religious struggles, as told in the book of Jeremiah." The Lehi history, as we showed in the book *Lehi in the Desert*, is nothing if not intimate.

expression characterizing the man of prophetic calling as *ha-piqqeah*, which Torczyner finds to mean "the open-eyed" or *visionary* man, (T. 53) "the seer," "the man whose eyes God had opened to see," (T. 65) i.e., to see things that other people do not see. So in the Book of Mormon the brothers use it in a critical sense against their father, arguing that he is being unrealistic and impractical:

. . . they did murmur in many things against their father, because he was a *visionary* man, and had led them out of the land of Jerusalem, to leave the land of their inheritance, and their gold, and their silver, and their precious things, to perish in the wilderness. And this they said he had done because of the *foolish imaginations of his heart*. (2:11, italics added)

They make fun of their father for being *piqqeah*, a "visionary man." Torczyner explains the word by referring to the instance in 2 Kings 6:17, where Elisha asks the Lord to open the eyes of his servant so he could see realities, horses and chariots, which otherwise only Elisha could see. In the same way the uncooperative brothers of Nephi hiding out with him in a cave in the Judean wilderness had their eyes opened so they could see "an angel of the Lord" while he was reprimanding them (3:29; 7:10).

When feelings run high the Lachish Letters resort to an unpleasant expression which Torczyner notes because of its peculiarity: "another interesting phrase may be 'to curse the seed of somebody,' used apparently in the form *ya-or zera ha-melek*, 'he curses (the) seed to the King,' (V, 10) reminding us of . . . the Arabic curse: 'May Allah destroy thy house.'" (T. 17). The exact Lachish practice however is not found in the Bible, but the closest thing to it is found in Alma 3:9: "And it came to pass that whosoever did mingle his seed with that of the Lamanites did bring the same curse upon his seed."

If the Lachish Letters reflect "the mind, the struggles, sorrows and feelings of ancient Judah in the last days of the kingdom" (T. 18), so to an even greater extent does the book of Nephi, where families split along political lines in a tragic conflict of loyalties. And if the situation of Uriah *parallels* that of

Jeremiah, as Torczyner points out, even more closely does it parallel that of Lehi when we learn from the Letters of "a warning from the prophet to one of his friends [Slm], who is apparently in the same danger as he himself [cf. Ishmael]. It is, therefore, a prophet fleeing from his home and his friends, a prophet wanted by the military authorities" (T. 64).

The leading character of the Letters is a high military officer Hosh'a'yahu at Qiryat-Ye'arim, suspected by one party, as reported to his superior Ya'ush, of treachery to the king in aiding the prophet, and by the other of betraying the prophet by revealing the contents of his warning letter to the king: this letter revealed to the king that the prophet was fleeing to Egypt. Likewise his superior officer Ya'ush, who has been ordered to investigate him, "appears to be on the best of terms with the king. But still both men respect the prophet and believe in him, in spite of the king's attitude to him, and their hearts ache that they should be responsible for his destruction" (T. 113). The same tragic confusion as in the Lehi story. This is borne out in the relationship of the actors to the Egyptians in both dramas. Though Lehi supports the anti-Egyptian party, his sons have Egyptian names and Egyptian educations and they keep their records after the Egyptian manner. Moreover, the party flees toward Egyptian territory. The same anomaly confronts us in the Lachish Letters, which tell of a certain general sent down to Egypt to fetch a prophet back to Jerusalem for execution (T. 63). But why on earth, asks Torczyner, would the good man flee to Egypt, of all places, when his crime was supporting Jeremiah in calling "for peace with *Babylonia*?" Our informant finds "this astonishing fact," that he fled towards Egypt instead of *Babylonia*, quite inexplicable (T. 67).

As the main actors in the Lachish drama are high military officers, so also in the Book of Mormon the key figure in the Jerusalem episode is another high military officer. This was Laban, whose official position resembles that of Ya'ush in Lachish very closely. "Thus Ya'ush must be the military governor of Lachish . . . this greatest fortress of Judah . . ." (T. 87); along with that ". . . 'lord Ya'ush' may have been Governor of the City, whose *archives* would probably have been housed in

the region of the palace-fort or keep, or perhaps he was only the senior military officer" (T. 12). All of which applies with equal force to Laban, the military governor of Jerusalem, "a mighty man" who "can command fifty," in his garrison (1 Nephi 3:31) and "his tens of thousands" in the field (4:1). Among the non-biblical names in the Book of Mormon which excited amusement and derision among its critics, we remember one *Josh*, identified in Reynold's Concordance as "a Nephite general, who commanded a corps of ten thousand men" at Cumorah—an interesting comment on the conservatism of Nephite tradition (Mormon 6:14). Where is the king in all this? In both stories he appears as a rather shadowy character in the background. As for Ya'ush, "the king appeals to him in everything concerning this part of the country" (118), that is, the whole western part of the kingdom (87)—he left things pretty much up to his general, as according to the Book of Mormon he also did in Jerusalem. Laban was of noble descent, of the same ancestry as Lehi himself and of a more direct line to the patriarch Joseph. For the genealogy was kept in his family (5:16) and the archives were housed at his official residence as the archives of Lachish "would probably be housed" at the headquarters and residence of Ya'ush. When Lehi's sons went to get the letters from Laban, they talked with him intimately as he sat in his house, and proposed buying the plates. He refused to give up the brass plates and so they decided to bribe him with what was left of their own family treasures. They knew their man, but not quite well enough, for he kept the treasure but chased them out of the house and sent his servants after them to get rid of them (3:24-25). The young men escaped and hid out in a cave, but the cat was out of the bag—Lehi's flight was now known to Laban as Uriah's was to Ya'ush, and Laban's troops would soon be on the trail of the refugees as Ya'ush's were already in pursuit of Uriah. Lehi was spared, however, because Laban never got into action on the case. That very night Nephi found him dead drunk in a street near his house and dispatched him with his own sword (4:5-18). Going toward the house, he met Laban's servant and got the keys to the treasury and archives from him by a ruse. In the dark the man thought that Nephi was Laban,

for he was expecting his boss to be returning very late (and drunk) from an emergency council of "the elders of the Jews . . . Laban had been *out by night* among them" (4:22, emphasis added). There is a world of inference in this—secret emergency sessions, tension, danger, and intrigue—as there is in Lachish Letter XVIII, which must be forwarded from Ya'ush to the king through the village of Qiryat Ye'arim *by night* (T. 183). Lehi's boys took Laban's servant along with them "that the Jews might not know concerning our flight . . . lest they should pursue us and destroy us" (4:36). Even so we see in the Lachish Letters "a prophet fleeing from his home and friends, a prophet wanted by the military authorities" (T. 64). Zoram was carried along by force but was persuaded that it was in his own interest to join a pious escape-group in the desert, and he duly exchanged oaths with his captors, his conscience not overly bothered by the change of sides; displaying the same hesitant and divided loyalties as everyone else in the Book of Mormon and the Lachish Letters. The military correspondence of the Lachish Letters with its grim suspicions of disloyalty and double-dealing, fervid denials, charges, investigations, and reports, reminds one of the much later Bar Kochba letters (discovered in 1966) which in turn present truly astonishing parallels to some of the military correspondence in the Book of Mormon.*

One peculiar situation in the Lachish Letters casts a good deal of light on an equally peculiar and highly significant episode in the Book of Mormon. Hosha'yahu protests to his boss in Lachish, "and the letter (which) Nedabyahu, the NKD of the King, had brought, has the slave sent to my Lord" (p. 64 n. 1). The title NKD suggests that "the prophet's warning letter . . . could have been sent while the prophet was still near his hometown, through a little boy, most suited as an unsuspected messenger," in view of the fact that little boys performed such offices in the time of David (2 Samuel 15:36; 17:17-21), and that "such small boys are used also today in Palestine, often for quite responsible missions . . ." (68). What suggests the idea to Torczyner is the mention of "Nedabyahu, the NKD of the

* Discussed by Hugh Nibley in *BYU Studies* 14 (Autumn 1973), pp. 120-24.

King," as the one who delivered a letter from the prophet to SHLM warning him of the danger he was in (LL III, 19-21). The word NKD suggests first of all grandson. There is a Nedabiah, grandson of King Jehoiakim, in 1 Chronicles 3:18, and Torczyner finds it "possible and even probable" that he is the very one named here. What, the king's own grandson bearing letters for his opponent the prophet? The exact meaning of NKD is "unfortunately . . . not definitely established" so that the king referred to may be "either Jehoiakim . . . or less likely, Jeconiah, . . . or Zedekiah. . . ." (T. 61). It is not a direct line of descent, Jeconiah being not the father but the nephew of Zedekiah; but since most scholars maintain, along with LXX, that NKD simply means offspring or descendant, "it would be quite possible . . . to call somebody the 'grandson' [NKD] of his grandfather's brother" i.e. in this case of Zedekiah. ". . . the Hebrew *nekedh* may certainly have been used at least for *grandnephew* as well as for grandson" (T. 61). This Nedabiah, whose title "may equally well mean the grandson of Jehoiakim as the grandnephew of Zedekiah," was quite young; "one would prefer the age of 10-13 to that of 5 years" (T. 69), carrying dangerous letters between the towns and camps for the prophet's people. Since he was running errands for the opposition party, the boy was, of course, away from home most of the time; and since he was specifically carrying letters of warning telling people to decamp and save their lives, he could surely count on escaping with them. When news reached them that the royal family was wiped out, only one course of action was open to the child (as survivor) and his friends. Where would they go? Torczyner suggests "*the date of 590-588,*" for this episode, i.e. the year 589, just eleven years after 600 B.C. According to the Book of Mormon, eleven years after Lehi left Jerusalem, i.e., 589, a company escaped from the land of Jerusalem bearing with them the youngest son of Zedekiah, the only member of the family not put to death when Jerusalem was taken. From the descendants of these people, arrived in the New World, the Nephites learned that Jerusalem actually did fall as prophesied: ". . . will you dispute that Jerusalem was destroyed? Will ye say

that the sons of Zedekiah were not slain, all except it were *Mulek*? Yea, and do ye not behold that the *seed* of Zedekiah are with us, and *they* were driven out of the land of Jerusalem?" (Helaman 8:21, italics added). By an interesting coincidence, the LXX translates the word NKD by which Nedabياهو is designated in Hebrew simply as "seed" (T. 61), as apparently does the Book of Mormon—"the seed of Zedekiah." The land north where they settled in the New World "was called Mulek, which was after the son of Zedekiah; for the Lord did bring Mulek into the land north. . . ." (Helaman 6:10). Nowhere are we told that Mulek was the leader of the company, and indeed at his age that would be unthinkable—his father Zedekiah was only about thirty-one when he was taken prisoner and blinded. But as the sole survivor of the royal family and heir presumptive to the throne, he was certainly the most important person in the company, a source of legitimate pride to the group. The name tells everything—"Mulek" is not found anywhere in the Bible, but any student of Semitic languages will instantly recognize it as the best-known form of diminutive or caritative, a term of affection and endearment meaning "little king." What could they call the uncrowned child, last of his line, but their little king? And what could they call themselves but Mulekiyah or Mulekites?

And so the coincidences go on accumulating. It is time to turn to the computer, as we do today whenever questions and problems arise. What are the chances of the many parallels between the Lachish Letters and the opening chapter of the Book of Mormon being the product of mere coincidence?

1. First consider the fact that only one piece of evidence could possibly bring us into the Lehi picture, and that one piece of evidence happens to be the *only* first-hand writing surviving from the entire scope of Old Testament history. Lehi's story covers less than ten years in the thousand-year history of the Book of Mormon, and the Lachish Letters cover the same tiny band of a vast spectrum—and they both happen to be the *same* years!

2. Not only in time but in place do they fit neatly into the

same narrow slot; and the people with which they deal also belong to the same classes of society and are confronted by the same peculiar problems.

3. With the Book of Mormon account being as detailed and specific as it is, it is quite a piece of luck that there is nothing in the Lachish Letters that in any way contradicts its story—that in itself should be given serious consideration. Is it just luck?

4. Both documents account for their existence by indicating specifically the techniques and usages of writing and recording in their day, telling of the same means of transmitting, editing and storing records.

5. The proximity of Egypt and its influence on writing has a paramount place in both stories.

6. Both stories confront us with dynastic confusion during a transition of kingship.

7. Both abound in proper names in which the yahu ending is prominent in a number of forms.

8. In both, the religious significance of those names gives indication of a pious reformist movement among the people.

9. The peculiar name of Jaush = Josh, since it is not found in the Bible, is remarkable as the name borne by a high-ranking field officer in both the Lachish Letters and the Book of Mormon.

10. In both reports, prophets of gloom operating in and around Jerusalem are sought by the government as criminals for spreading defeatism.

11. The Rekhabite background is strongly suggested in both accounts, with inspired leaders and their followers fleeing to the hills and the caves.

12. Political partisanship and international connections cause division, recriminations, and heartbreak in the best of families.

13. The conflicting ideologies—practical vs. religious, materialist vs. spiritual—emerge in two views of the religious leader or prophet as a *piqqeah*, “a visionary man” a term either of praise or of contempt—an impractical dreamer.

14. For some unexplained reason, the anti-king parties both flee not towards Babylon but towards Egypt, “the broken reed.”

15. The offices and doings of Laban and Jaush present a complex parallel, indicative of a special military type and calling not found in the Bible.

16. Almost casual references to certain doings by night create the same atmosphere of tension and danger in both stories.

17. Little Nedabyahu fits almost too well into the slot occupied by the Book of Mormon Mulek, "the Little King" who never came to rule but escaped with a party of refugees to the New World.

18. The whole business of keeping, transmitting, and storing records follows the same procedures in both books.

Other parallels may be added to taste, but this should be enough to show that Joseph Smith was either extravagantly lucky in the opening episodes of his Book of Mormon—that should be demonstrated by computer—or else he had help from someone who knew a great deal.

ii. CHRIST AMONG THE RUINS

The great boldness and originality of writings attributed to Joseph Smith are displayed in their full scope and splendor in the account, contained in what is called Third Nephi in the Book of Mormon, of how the Lord Jesus Christ after his resurrection visited some of his "other sheep" in the New World and set up his church among them. It would be hard to imagine a project more dangerous to life and limb or perilous to the soul than that of authoring, and recommending to the Christian world as holy scripture, writings purporting to contain an accurate account of the deeds of the Lord among men after his resurrection, including lengthy transcripts of the very words he spoke. Nothing short of absolute integrity could stand up to the consequences of such daring in nineteenth-century America. We know exactly how his neighbors reacted to the claims of Joseph Smith, and it was not (as it has become customary to insist) with the complacent or sympathetic tolerance of backwoods "Yorkers," to whom such things were supposedly every-

day experience: nothing could equal the indignation and rage excited among them by the name and message of Joseph Smith.

And yet the particular part of the Book of Mormon to which we refer, the post-resurrectional mission of Christ in the New World, has not been singled out for condemnation; it has in fact met with surprisingly little criticism. Why is that? Experience has shown, for one thing, that the tone and content of this particular history are so elevated and profoundly sincere as to silence and abash the would-be critic. When the austere Dean of the Harvard Divinity School can take Third Nephi seriously as a religious outpouring, who can laugh at it?⁵ More to the point, the story of Christ's ministry among men during the forty days following his return from the tomb is one to which the churchmen have always given a wide berth, frankly disapproving of the crass literalism of Luke's almost clinical accounts. What can one say about events for which, as one scholar puts it, "no metaphysical or psychological explanation can be given?" What controls does one have for testing matters that lie totally beyond our experience?

Of recent years the discovery and rediscovery of a wealth of very early Christian writings suggests at least one type of control over the illusive history of the forty days. For with surprising frequency the oldest of these texts purport to contain "The Secret Teachings of Our Lord to His Disciples" after his return from the dead, or titles to that effect. Since this is the theme of the history in Third Nephi, ordinary curiosity prompts us to ask how that document compares with the ancient ones in form and content. That question in turn waits on the prior necessity of comparing the older writings with each other to see whether, taken all together, they tell anything like a consistent story. When this writer brought a number of the "Forty-Day" texts together some years ago (the amount of available material has grown considerably since then) it became at once apparent that they do have certain themes and episodes in common.⁶ At that time nothing could have been farther from this person's mind than the Book of Mormon, and yet if we set those findings over against the long account of Nephi, the latter takes its place in the bona fide apocalyptic library so easily and naturally that

with the title removed, any scholar would be hard put to it to detect its irregular origin. That is only our opinion, but fortunately copies of the Book of Mormon are not hard to come by in our society, and the reader is free to control the whole thing for himself. Permit me to run down the list of common features in the forty-day writings in the order in which we presented them in the article referred to.

First, we noted that the large literature of the Forty-Day Mission of the Lord was early lost from sight by the Christian world because it was never very popular, and that for a number of reasons. In almost all the accounts, for example, the Apostles, who are about to go forth on their missions and establish the Church throughout the world, anxiously ask the Lord what the *future* of that church is to be, and are given a surprisingly pessimistic answer: the Church will fall prey to the machinations of evil and *after two generations* will pass away. "The Apostles protest, as we do today: Is this a time for speaking of death and disaster? Can all that has transpired be but for the salvation of a few and the condemnation of many? But Jesus remains unyielding: that is not for us to decide or to question."* A strangely negative message for the Church, understandably unacceptable to the conventional Christianity of later times. One would hardly expect such a thing in the Book of Mormon, but there it is, the same paradox: the glad message of the resurrection and the glorious unifying of the Saints is saddened, dampened by the forthright declaration that the Church is only to survive for a limited time. To speak of the world in negative terms is permissible—but the Church?

3 Nephi 27:30. And now, behold, my joy is great, even unto fulness, because of you, and also this *generation* . . . for none of them are lost.

31. Behold, I would that ye should understand; for I mean them who are now alive of this *generation*. . . .

32. But behold, it sorroweth me because of the fourth generation [in the Old World it was the *second* generation] from this *generation*, for they are led away

* H. N. in *Vigiliae Christianae*, 20 (1966), pp. 6-7.

captive by him even as was the son of perdition; for they will sell me for silver and for gold. . . . And in that day will I visit them, even in turning their works upon their own heads (*italics added; cf. 17:14; Chs. 21-23*).

On both hemispheres the people of the Church were only too willing to forget such disturbing prophecies and insist that God would never desert his church.

The loss of the "Forty-Day Literature" was clearly hastened by the secrecy with which the various writings were guarded. The usual title or instruction to the texts specifies that "these are the secret teachings" of the risen Lord, and as such they were treasured and guarded by the communities possessing them. This *secrecy* made possible all sorts of sectarian misrepresentations, forgeries, and *Gnostic aberrations*, which flourished throughout the Christian world of the second century and served to bring the final discredit and oblivion on the writings and the sects that exploited them. The apocryphal literature contains no better explanation of the original observance of secrecy than the book of Third Nephi itself:

26:6. And now there cannot be written in this book even a hundredth part of the things which Jesus did truly teach unto the people;

10. And if . . . they will not *believe* these things, then shall the greater things be *withheld* from them, unto their condemnation.

11. Behold, I was about to write them, all which were engraven upon the plates of Nephi, but the Lord *forbade* it, saying: I will try the faith of my people.

27:23. Write the things which ye have seen and heard, save it be those which are *forbidden*.

Besides things which *should* not be recorded were those which by their nature could not be:

17:17. And no tongue *can* speak, neither *can* there be written by any man . . . so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard Jesus speak . . .

29:32. And tongue *cannot* speak the words which he prayed, neither *can* be written by man the words he prayed.

34. . . . so great and marvelous were the words which he prayed that they *cannot* be written, neither *can* they be uttered by man.

Peculiar to the "Forty-Day Literature" is the emphasis on *certain teachings* neglected or vigorously opposed by the intellectual churchmen of later Christianity. Whether or not one chooses to accept them as authentic, it is their presence in the preachings of the risen Lord in Third Nephi which interests us here. One aspect of his activity which does not receive particular attention in Luke's accounts is the worldwide circulation of the Savior among his servants in the apocalyptic versions. Luke has the Lord come and go with great freedom and frequency among his people in Judaea, but in the "Forty-Day Literature" he appears to them in all parts of the world. So also in the Book of Mormon:

3 Nephi 16:1. . . . I have other sheep which are not of this land, neither of the land of Jerusalem, neither in any parts of that land round about whither I have been to minister.

2. . . . they . . . have not as yet heard my voice.

3. But . . . I shall go unto them, and . . . they shall hear my voice, and shall be numbered among my sheep (cf. 15:14-24; 17:4; 27:2ff.).

In the early Christian texts, the teaching of the risen Lord is *prophetic and apocalyptic*, reviewing the history of God's dealing with men on earth from the beginning and carrying it down to its glorious culmination at the Parousia; the story is usually presented in a series of "*dispensations*," alternating periods of light and darkness through which the world and the saints must pass. The Third Nephi version faithfully follows the pattern in a long exposition which goes back to the beginning of the law, its presence among peoples scattered in divers places, not in just one place (ch. 15); its future among them and its spread throughout the world among the Gentiles (ch. 16), with the vicissitudes through which both Israel and the Gentiles must pass (*ibid.*). Chapter 20 carries the coming history of Israel and especially of the Nephites themselves right through to the end, including the climactic events of our own day, as chapter 21 sets

forth God's dealings to come with the people on this hemisphere until the establishing of the New Jerusalem.

The most natural questions to ask anyone returning to earth after being away would be, Where did you go and what did you see? These questions, put by the disciples in the Old World accounts, lead to discussions of the *Descensus and the Kerygma*, i.e., the Savior's descent to the prison-house to preach to those spirits who were disobedient in the days of Noah (1 Peter 3:19-20). This theme became the subject of the "Harrowing of Hell" drama of the Gospel of Nicodemus and the medieval mystery plays. Does the Book of Mormon version have anything about that? Yes, and the Descensus and the Kerygma described there are uniquely glorious. Let us recall that the Descensus closely parallels the earthly mission of John the Baptist "to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" (Luke 1:79). In the Book of Mormon, the hosts that sit in darkness are the Nephites themselves, exhausted and in utter despair and desolation after three days of destruction followed by *total darkness*, and awful *lamentations* followed by even more awful silence. The Lord, three days after his crucifixion, leaves the spirits in prison and *now* descends to *them* as a figure of light "descending out of heaven . . . clothed in a white robe" exactly as he does to the spirits in hell in the Old World writings; announcing to them "I am the *light* and the *life* of the world" (11:11) who has come directly from the agony of the "bitter cup" to bring light and deliverance to them. And they accepted him as such as "the whole multitude fell to the earth" (11:12); then he identified himself to them and announced his mission, and "they did cry out with one accord, saying: Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God! And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him" (11:16-17). For they knew that he had come to lead them out of their prison. The first thing he did was to address them as disobedient spirits (11:32), "And this is my doctrine . . . that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to *repent* and believe in me"—we are all *disobedient spirits* in prison! The next thing was to insist that they all be *baptized*—exactly as in the "Descensus" accounts; he must give the "Seal" of baptism to all

to whom he preaches in the underworld before they can follow him out of darkness up into his kingdom. Jesus puts it to them as an act of deliverance. Then the Lord says a striking thing to the Nephites (11:39-40). "Verily, verily . . . this is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the *gates of hell* shall not prevail against them. And whoso shall declare more or less than this . . . the *gates of hell* stand open to receive such when the floods come and the winds beat upon them." He has come to deliver them from the *Gates of Hell* that hold them in bondage; this is the "smashing of the Gates theme," the "Harrowing of Hell" motif all the way through. As he is about to leave there is a great sorrowing among them as if they were being left behind in darkness. This vividly recalls like situations in the royal Parousias of Egyptian rulers, a concept going back at least as far as the text of the Am Duat.

To show his people that he is really a resurrected being and not a spirit, both in the New Testament account and in the apocryphal version, Jesus calls for food—real food—and insists that they share it with him in a sacred meal. The meal usually follows the baptism, putting its seal upon the initiation and the union of those who follow the Lord. In Third Nephi the sacral meal with the risen Lord, repeated more than once, is an event of transcendent importance, to which we shall refer below.

Most scholars and theologians have seen the purpose of the Forty Days to be the laying of a firm foundation for the sending out of the disciples into all the world to lay a foundation for the Church. At the time of the Crucifixion they were utterly demoralized and scattered, in no condition to go forth as powerful ambassadors of the Lord into all the world. The Forty-Day teaching has the object of *preparing them for their missions*. This is exactly the case in the Book of Mormon. After the founding of the Church among the people come two chapters (27-28) dealing exclusively with the preparation of the chosen disciples for their special missions into the world, upon which after his departure they immediately set forth.

As might be expected, the appearances of the Lord to the astonished multitude, as well as his departures from them, are events of *celestial splendor*, nowhere more movingly described

than in chapter 11 of Third Nephi. The utter glory of his presence among the people or with the disciples is a constant theme in both the Book of Mormon and the other sources. And yet it is combined with a feeling of the closest and most loving *intimacy*, especially moving in the Book of Mormon accounts of his dealings with the children.

The comings and goings of God himself, moving between heaven and earth, must needs be surrounded by an aura of mystery and excitement. Can such things really be? Luke in his meticulous, almost clinically exact and factual reports, wants us to know once and for all that they really *can* be. The wonder of it, something akin to the excitement of Christmas, quickens the reader's pulse, but how could we describe the state of mind of those who actually experienced it? The apocryphal writings go all out to make us feel with them, but it is Third Nephi who really catches the spirit:

. . . when Jesus had ascended into heaven, the multitude did disperse, and every man did take his wife and his children and did return to his own home.

And it was noised abroad among the people immediately, before it was yet dark, that the multitude had seen Jesus . . . and that he would also show himself on the morrow unto the multitude.

Yea, and even all the night it was noised abroad concerning Jesus; and insomuch did they send forth unto the people that . . . an exceedingly great number, did labor exceedingly all that night, that they might be on the morrow in the place where Jesus should show himself unto the multitude (19:1-3).

Nothing could convey the atmosphere of the electrifying "Forty-Day" message better than that.

But now it is time to turn to a particular text. When E. Revillout announced the discovery of a Coptic manuscript of the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles in 1904, he declared it to be the text which Origen and Jerome "considered . . . to be perhaps earlier than Saint Luke and referred to by him in his prologue," a work esteemed by the Church Fathers as of "capital importance," uniquely free of any hint of heresy, carrying the tradition of Christ's visits to the earth beyond the scope

of Luke—even to an event fifteen years later.⁷ German scholarship promptly and routinely minimized the claims of Revillout, and went too far in the process. If the fragments of the Coptic Gospel of the Twelve Apostles do not necessarily occur in the order in which Revillout arranged them (the order which we will follow), subsequent discoveries make it clear that they really are connected parts of a single—and typical—Forty-Day manuscript, and that they belong to the earliest stratum of early Christian writing. Revillout's arrangement does not follow quite the same order as Third Nephi, either, but a comparison of the two may be instructive.

The Lord's condescension: He came and ate with them:

Ev.XII; Aps. Frg. 2 PO 2:132

. . . friends: Have you ever seen, Brethren, such a loving lord, promising his apostles his own kingdom? where they would eat and drink with him upon a heavenly table even as he had eaten with them on earth at an earthly table.

Thereby he put them in mind of the heavenly table, considering the things of this world (kosmos) as nothing.

3 Nephi 10:18. And it came to pass that in the ending of the thirty and fourth year, behold, I will show unto you that the people of Nephi who were spared, and also those who had been called Lamanites who had been spared, did have great *favours* shown unto them, and great *blessings* poured out upon their heads, inasmuch that soon after the ascension of Christ into heaven he did truly manifest himself unto them—

19. Showing his body unto them, and ministering unto them; and an account of his ministry shall be given hereafter.

3 Nephi 26:13. Therefore, I would that ye should behold that the Lord truly did teach the people, for the space of three days; and after that he did show himself unto them *oft, and did break bread oft, and bless it, and give it unto them.*

To make them one with him and with each other:

If you really want to know, listen and I will tell you. Did not God

3 Nephi 19:23. . . that they may believe in me, that I may be in

feel an equal love for all his Apostles? Listen to John the Evangelist, testifying how the Christ used to plead with (*sops*) his Father on their behalf, even that "they become One *even as we are one*."

Do you want to know the truth about that? It is that he chose the Twelve. . . .

"Listen to John the Evangelist testifying."

[On this matter he refers them back to the testimony of John.]

The Loaves and Fishes:

. . . upon them, saying, I feel concerned (pity) for this multitude; for behold they have been with me for *three days*, and (now) they have nothing to eat. I don't want to let them leave here hungry, lest they faint by the wayside.

Andrew said to him, My Lord, where will we find bread in this wilderness? . . .

Jesus said to Thomas: Go to a certain (*pei*) man who has with him five loaves of barley bread and two fishes, and bring them to me here.

Andrew said to him, Lord, how far would five loaves go with such a huge crowd?

Jesus saith to him: Bring them to me and there will be enough.

them as thou, Father, art in me, that we may be one.

29. Father, I pray . . . for those whom thou hast given me out of the world . . . that they may be purified in me, that I may be in them as thou, Father, art in me, that we may be *one*, that I may be glorified *in them*.

3 Nephi 28:6. (In another matter also he refers the disciples back to John): ". . . I know your thoughts, and ye have desired the thing which John, my beloved . . . desired of me."

3 Nephi 17:6. And he said unto them: Behold, my bowels are filled with *compassion* towards you.

3 Nephi 8:23. ". . . for the space of *three days*" preceding all had been deprived. The place was now desolate.

3 Nephi 20:6. Now, there had been no bread, neither wine, brought by the disciples, neither by the multitude;

[While they go for the food Jesus talks with a little child.]

And so they went [for the food]. A small child was brought to Jesus and straightway he began to worship him.

The small child said to Jesus, Lord I have suffered much because of these [i.e., at the hands of people. The puzzled scribe connects this with the loaves: the child must have suffered because of *them*, as if the child had been sent to fetch them], Jesus saith to the child, Give me the five loaves which have been entrusted to you.

Thou has not saved (rescued) this multitude in time of need, but it is the *toikonomia* (arrangement, ordinance, divine intent) that (they) behold a marvelous thing, the *remembrance* of which shall never pass away, nor the food with which they are filled.

Note here the *strange precocity* of the child and the sacramental (memorial) nature of the meal.

3 Nephi 18:2. And while they were gone for bread and wine, he commanded the multitude that they should sit themselves down upon the earth.

3 Nephi 17:11. And it came to pass that he commanded that their little children should be brought.

3 Nephi 17:12. So they brought their little children and set them down upon the ground round about him, and Jesus stood in the midst; and the multitude gave way till they had all been brought unto him.

3 Nephi 26:14. And it came to pass that he did teach and minister unto the children of the multitude of whom hath been spoken, and he did loose their tongues, and they did *speak unto their fathers great and marvelous things*, even greater than he had revealed unto the people; and he loosed their tongues that they could utter.

3 Nephi 18:5. And when the multitude had eaten and were filled, he said unto the disciples . . .

7. . . . this shall ye do in *remembrance* of my body, which I have shown unto you . . . that ye do always *remember* me. And if ye do always *remember* me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you.

11. And this shall ye always do to those who repent and are baptized in my name; and ye shall do it in *remembrance* of my blood,

which I have shed for you, that ye may witness unto the Father that ye do always *remember* me. And if ye do always *remember* me ye shall have my spirit to be with you.

The Sacrament administered:

And Jesus (1) took the loaves

3 Nephi 18:3. And when the disciples had come with bread and wine, he (1) took of the bread

and (2) blessed them (gave thanks over them)

and (2) brake

and (3) divided them

and (3) blessed it;

and (4) gave them to the Apostles

and (4) he gave unto the disciples and commanded that they should eat.

(5) *that they might bear them to the multitude.*

4. And when they had eaten and were filled, he commanded that (5) they should give unto the multitude.

The Sacrament withheld:

For Judas (had been) the last to partake of the loaves (refers back to the Last Supper, to illustrate a principle).

3 Nephi 18:28. And now behold, this is the commandment which I give unto you, that ye shall *not* suffer any one knowingly to partake of my flesh and blood *unworthily*, when ye shall minister it;

Andrew said to Jesus, O Master (sah), Judas did not receive a *kleronomia* (of) loaves . . . to bear to the multitude . . . (such as . . . we were to give to them. . .

29. For whoso eateth and drinketh my flesh and blood *unworthily* eateth and drinketh *damnation* to his soul; therefore if ye know that a man is *unworthy* to eat and drink of my flesh and blood ye shall forbid him.

. . . That is because he to whom I did *not* give a share of the loaves from my hands was *not worthy* of a part (share) of my flesh.

Neither did he care to share with the poor, but thought only of the glosogomon (finance)

The Sacramental Prayer:

It is a mystery of my Father . . . which con(cerns) . . . the partaking (dividing) of my flesh.

And forthwith he blessed them, saying, O my *Father*, root (source) of all good, *I ask thee to bless these five barley loaves that all these* (multitude) may be filled, that thy son may be glorified in thee; and that those whom thou hast drawn to thee out of the world might *hearken to* (after, obey) *him*.

And straightway his word came to pass in exousia (authority, as requested). His blessing fell upon (shope) on the bread in the apostles' hands.

And all the people ate and were filled. They *gave praise* to God.

Jesus prays three times:

You have seen, O my beloved ones, what love Jesus had toward his Apostles, insomuch that he kept (hid) nothing from them of any of the things touching upon his godhead (relationship to God).

The actual words of the prayer (Moroni 4:1-2) are given by Moroni, 4:3:

O God, the Eternal *Father*, we ask *thee* in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to *bless* and sanctify *this bread* to the souls of *all those* who partake of it; that they may eat in *remembrance* of the body of thy Son and . . . always remember him, and *keep his commandments* which he hath given them, that they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen.

Moroni 5:2. . . . wine . . . that they do always *remember* him, that they may have his *Spirit* to be with them. Amen.

3 Nephi 20:9. Now, when the multitude had all eaten and drunk, behold, they were filled with the Spirit; and they did cry out with one voice, and gave *glory* to Jesus, whom they both saw and heard.

3 Nephi 28:13. And behold, the heavens were opened, and they were caught up into heaven, and saw and heard unspeakable things.

14. And it was forbidden them that they should utter; neither was it given unto them power that they could utter the things which they saw. . . .

(1) the first time while blessing the five loaves of barley-bread.

(1) 3 Nephi 19:19. And it came to pass that Jesus departed out of the midst of them, and went a little way off from them and bowed himself to the earth, and he said:

20. Father I thank thee that thou hast given the Holy Ghost unto these whom I have chosen . . . out of the world.

24. . . . When Jesus had thus prayed . . . he came unto his disciples, and . . . 25 . . . blessed them as they did pray unto him . . . and behold they were as white as the countenance and also the garments of Jesus.

(2) The second time in his giving thanks to his Father. [Without quoting.]

(2) 3 Nephi 19:28. Father, I thank thee that thou hast purified those whom I have chosen . . . and also for them who shall believe on their words. . . .

29. Father, I pray not for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me out of the world. . . .

30. And [Jesus] . . . came again unto his disciples . . . and behold they were white, even as Jesus.

(3) The third time in giving thanks for the seven loaves. [The prayer is not quoted.]

(3) 3 Nephi 19:31. And . . . he went again a little way off and prayed unto the Father.

32. And tongue cannot speak . . . *neither can be written* by man the words which he prayed.

33. And the multitude did hear and do bear record; and their hearts were open and they did understand in their hearts the words which he prayed.

The Lord invites the disciples to ask for higher things:

Have you seen (considered) O my beloved ones, the love of Jesus towards his Apostles? Insomuch

3 Nephi 27:2. And Jesus again showed himself unto them, for they were praying unto the Father

that he did not conceal anything from them, even all the things concerning his godhead:

in his name; and Jesus came and stood in the midst of them, and said unto them: What will ye that I shall give unto you?

They are abashed and have to be encouraged:

Jesus saith to Thomas: Thomas my friend, you and your brethren are free to ask me whatsoever you please and I will keep nothing back from you. Insomuch that you may see, and feel (palpitate) and be convinced in your heart. If you want to see those in their tombs revived, you do well to ask for a sign of the Resurrection. For it was I myself who said to you, "I am the Resurrection and the life." And also "If the ear of wheat does not die, there will be no yield (karpos). And if you yourselves do not see with your eyes (1 John 1:1), your heart will not be confirmed in this. . . .

Thomas wept and said to Jesus: Thou hast taken all this trouble to come to the tomb *because of my incredulity*. Let thy will be done and this tomb receive me until the day of the Resurrection.

Jesus said: *Thomas, be not afflicted*; that which I do you know not . . . I told you to move the stone so that a witness of the Resurrection might appear in the tomb of death. . . .

You likewise, if you do not see with your eyes will not be strengthened in your hearts.

Have I not told you: More blessed are ye who have not seen and have

3 Nephi 28:1. And it came to pass when Jesus had said these words, he spake unto his disciples, one by one, saying unto them: What is it that ye desire of me, after that I am gone to the Father?

6. And he said unto them: Behold, I know your thoughts, and ye have desired the thing which *John*, my beloved, who was with me in my ministry, before that I was lifted up by the Jews, desired of me.

3. And he said unto them: Blessed are ye because ye desired this thing of me; therefore, after that ye are seventy and two years old ye shall come unto me in my kingdom; and with me ye shall find rest.

4. . . . he turned himself unto the three, and said unto them: What will ye that I should do unto you, when I am gone unto the Father?

5. And *they sorrowed in their hearts, for they durst not speak* unto him the thing which they desired.

6. And he said unto them: Behold, *I know* your thoughts, and ye have desired the thing which *John* . . . desired of me.

3 Nephi 19:35. And it came to pass that when Jesus had made an end of praying he came again to the disciples, and said unto them: So great faith have I never seen *among all the Jews*; wherefore I

believed than *ye who have seen* and not believed.

Ye had seen how many wonders and miracles I did in the presence of *the Jews*, and they *believed not* on me.

could not show unto them so great miracles, because of their unbelief.

36. Verily I say unto you, there are *none of them* that have seen so *great things as ye have seen*; neither have they heard so great things as ye have heard.

The disciples are understandably embarrassed at having to ask questions which argue a lack of faith in the very presence of the Resurrection. Here was the living Jesus before them, risen from the dead; and yet he knows that they are still unsettled in their minds. For how could they be guaranteed their own resurrection? After all, Jesus was a special case, the Son of God; but the men, women, and children he raised from the dead all had to die again. What about this? Are there levels and degrees of immortality? Is there a transition zone between the living and the dead? On these questions both of our sources at this point launch into earnest discussions. For the type of the human who is dead but not dead, raised from the dead but still not resurrected, the Gospel of the XII Apostles gives us Lazarus, while the Book of Mormon discusses the same matters as represented by the strange case of the Three Nephites.

Thomas said to Jesus: My Lord, behold thou has granted us every favor in thy goodness. *There is just one thing* which we would like you to bestow on us. We want to see, O Lord, those people who were dead and buried, whom you revived (raised up), as a sign of thy *resurrection* which is to take place for us.

We know, Lord, that thou didst raise up the son of the widow of Nain. But we are thinking of *another kind* of miracle, for you met with that multitude going along the road. What we want to see is the bones that have fallen apart in the tombs and are able to

join together so that they can speak on the spot. . . .

Didymus boldly (took heart) said to him: My Lord, how shall we go to him since the Jews are seeking to stone thee?

He said this because he was worried by the things which Jesus had said about Lazarus and did not want to go.

Didyme (Thomas), come with me, let us go to Bethany, so that *I can show you the TYPE of the Resurrection* at the Last Day in the grave, that your heart may be strengthened that I am the Resurrection and the Life.

Come with me O Didymus, and I will show you the bones that have come apart in the tomb uniting themselves together again . . . I will show the body hollow putrefied eye-sockets . . . devoid . . . the tongue of Lazarus, rotted away, which *will speak again* with thee . . .

see that which the worm have eaten coming forth at my voice when I call. . . .

Thou seekest a sign of the Resurrection, Thomas, come and I will show it to you at the tomb of Lazarus.

You have asked about the stretched out hands; come and I will show you the hands of Lazarus wrapped in their bandages, tight in their shroud, which will be raised up as they come out of the tomb.

3 Nephi 28:7. Therefore, more blessed are ye, for ye shall never taste of death. . . .

8. Ye shall never endure the pains of death; but . . . ye shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye from mortality to immortality; and then shall ye be blessed in the kingdom of my Father.

3 Nephi 28:13. . . . and they [all the disciples] were caught up into heaven. . . .

15. And whether they were in the body or out of the body, they could not tell; for it did seem unto them *like a transfiguration* . . . changed from this body of flesh into an immortal state. . . .

17. . . . now, whether they were mortal or immortal, from the day of their transfiguration, I know not. . . .

37. . . . there must needs be a change wrought upon their bodies . . .

38. Now this change was not equal to that which shall take place at the last day; but there was a change wrought upon them. . . .

Didymus my friend, come with me to the tomb of Lazarus, for *my mouth desires what thou hast thought*. . . .

Jesus said to him: Didymus, *he who walks in the LIGHT trembleth not* (or, is not offended) Jesus said this to Thomas to console him when he saw that he was afflicted because of the death of Lazarus. . . .

And these are the things which Jesus said to his Apostles.

Jesus cried out, saying: *My Father, My Father, root of all goodness, I pray unto thee, for the moment has come to give glory to thy Son, that all may know that it is Thou who hast sent me for this. Glory unto thee unto the eternity of the eternities. Amen.*

3 Nephi 28:6. . . . *I know your thoughts* 3. . . . Blessed are ye because ye desired this thing of me. . . .

3 Nephi 18:16. And as I have prayed among you even so shall ye pray in my church, among my people who do repent and are baptized in my name. Behold *I am the light; I have set an example for you.*

3 Nephi 19:29. *Father, I pray . . . for those whom thou hast given me . . . that I may be in them as thou, Father, art in me, that we may be one, that I may be glorified in them.*

No passage of scripture has puzzled theologians more since the days of the primitive Church than 1 Peter 3:18f, 4:6, the brief notice of the Descent of Christ to preach to the dead, "regarded by some," as MacCulloch observes, "as wholly enigmatic" because "the plain meaning of the passages conflicted with the interpreters' views of the nature of life beyond the grave."⁸ Descent to *what?* was the question. Not to the Underworld, certainly, was St. Augustine's conclusion—too primitive and naive for words.⁹ To what, then? There are three missions of Christ, three descents in the Gospels: 1) As a mortal condescending to mortals, 2) as a spirit, ministering to spirits in their deep prison, 3) as a glorified resurrected being who frequently descends during the forty days to minister to certain mortals who share in his glory in special manifestations, as described in the Gospel of the XII Apostles and 3 Nephi. Since the second mission is rejected by the Doctors of the Church, in the allegorizing spirit of the times they had no trouble in making the Petrine passage refer to the first: The Lord descended to

those in this life only who sat in the dark prison of ignorance, who were disobedient *like* those of Noah's day, etc. Thus they confine the Petrine doctrine to the Lord's mortal mission, as does the modern Catholic explanation, that "the effect of Christ's preaching extended to the lost [in Limbo, not in Hell], without His having actually descended to them. . . ." ¹⁰

But that third mission was hard to shake. "Whether the Petrine passages referred to the Descent or not, the doctrine itself, wherever derived, soon became a most vital one in early Christian thought."¹¹ And the farther back we go in the record the more conspicuous it becomes. The famous Harrowing of Hell mystery play is only its final expression, taken from the earlier Gospel of Nicodemus and other still earlier sources well attested at least in the second century.¹² Indeed, MacCulloch suggests that "Jewish belief in the possibility of good news being announced to the dead," goes clear back to the ancient prophets, including Isaiah (51:1; 52:7; 49:9).¹³

In this third realm we run into a strangely ambiguous state of things, confronted by an impressive cast of characters who have died, are raised from the dead as an earnest of the Resurrection, and then have to die again! There was the host of those risen from the dead in Galilee; the pair Leucius and Karinus who went to Jerusalem to deposit their written affidavits to the Resurrection and then returned to their tombs;¹⁴ or the two in Arimaetha who, "having given up their writings . . . were transfigured, exceeding white, and were no more seen." On the way to enlist the testimonies of Karinus and Leucius, Nicodemus, Joseph and three rabbis "meet twelve thousand who have risen."¹⁵ All of these were raised from the dead only to return to the grave.

Since none of these risen ones are mentioned in the scriptures, however, the test case would have to be Lazarus, who appears at all three levels in the Gospels. We find *a* Lazarus speaking from "Abraham's bosom" on high to one in the depths of hell—communicating between the worlds (Luke 16:20-25). On earth we find a very human Lazarus, the friend of Jesus, who goes the way of mortality only to be recalled from the tomb (John 11:1-43). He is the obvious candidate to witness

what went on in both worlds; the perfect living example of those ambivalent beings who in their persons prove the Resurrection and yet are still subject to death, like the three Nephites and the host of witnesses mentioned above. Lazarus's experience is put to good use in the early Christian dramatizations. In the dialogue between Death and Hades that is the opening scene of the Harrowing of Hell, Hades is distressed at the prospect of one who has but recently snatched Lazarus from his power ". . . have mercy on me," cries Hades, "do not bring Him here, for he is great!"¹⁶ Lazarus is the test case, the proof of the reality of the whole thing. As such he appears frequently in the accounts of the Kerygma.¹⁷

Viewing the three types of descent, we must admit that one is not more miraculous than the other; actually, Christ's visits during the Forty-Day Mission are no more incredible than the other two, and all are attested by an interesting interweaving of documents which deserve much closer study in which the Book of Mormon scores many points.

In early Christian ordinances ties are clearly established between the three levels. Thus, the designation of baptism as *photismos* or "light-bringing" was by the early Saints "sometimes symbolized as an actual light, the result of Christ's presence, shining in the gloom of hades," which is mentioned as early as the Odes of Solomon. Does that mean baptism was connected with the Lord's visits to the world below as well as to the world above? MacCulloch thinks so, for the preaching must be followed by baptism: "All this is in keeping with the custom of vicarious baptism . . ." (1 Corinthians 15:29).¹⁸ So the overpoweringly dramatic appearance of the Lord to the Nephites sitting in darkness, identifying himself to them as "the Light and the Life," has its counterpart in the world below. Baptism was an initiation into the Church, and an important part of the Lord's Descent to the Underworld is the way in which he galvanizes the spirits there (*excitavit et erexit*), and organizes them, as they form up in special marshaling areas¹⁹ or form into a procession behind Adam and the Patriarchs, the grand parade that is the climax and conclusion of the Harrowing of Hell.²⁰ In a word, the Lord organizes the Church, as he does in the Book of

Mormon, of those who are about to be saved and led out of darkness.

NOTES

1. Torczyner, Harry, *Lachish I (Tell ed Duweir): The Lachish Letters* (Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 18.
2. Allegro, John M., *The Treasure of the Copper Scroll* (New York: Doubleday, 1960), p. 27.
3. Olmstead, A. T., *History of Assyria* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 583.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 581-82.
5. See Krister Stendahl, "The Sermon on the Mount and Third Nephi," Truman G. Madsen, ed., *Reflections on Mormonism* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1978), pp. 139-54.
6. See Nibley, H., "Evangelium quadraginta dierum," *Vigiliae Christianae* 20 (1966), pp. 1-24.
7. Revillout, E., *Les Apocryphes Coptes. Première Partie, Les Évangiles des douze Apotres et de Saint Barthélemy* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1904), in *Patrologia Orientalis*, Tome II, Fascicule 2, 1907.
8. J. A. MacCulloch, *The Harrowing of Hell* (Edinburgh: T. Clark, 1930), p. 30.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 50f.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-56, discusses six different interpretations.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
12. In such early Christian classics as Ignatius, Clement, the Odes of Solomon, etc. *Ibid.*, p. 241, the Shepherd of Hermas, and the Epistle of the Apostles, all very early, p. 246.
13. MacCulloch, *The Harrowing of Hell*, p. 252.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 158ff.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 158f, 170f.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 163f.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 177, cf. 290, 333.
18. *Ibid.*, ch. XV, pp. 240-52; quote is from p. 248.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 260 ff. ch. XV.
20. The most available text of the Harrowing of Hell is in the popular reprint volume entitled *The Lost Books of the Bible and the Forgotten Books of Eden* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1926).