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## Nephite Observance of the Performances and Ordinances of God: Pre-Exilic Israelite Religious Patterns in the Book of Mormon

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Comments  
of Sullivan  
Sunday B-

**NEPHITE OBSERVANCE  
OF THE PERFORMANCES  
AND ORDINANCES OF GOD:  
PRE-EXILIC ISRAELITE  
RELIGIOUS PATTERNS  
IN THE BOOK OF MORMON**

**Gordon C. Thomasson  
Vestal, New York  
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**Dedicated,**

**to Hugh Winder Nibley,  
who became to me  
a teacher and a friend,**

**נִסַּח לְךָ רֵעַ וְקֹנֵה לְךָ חֵבֵר**<sup>?</sup>

**showing me,**

**by his study and with his faith,  
the meaning of consecration.\***

**and to the proposition**

**that it should be made known**

**“Unto the remnant of the House of Israel**

**what great things the Lord**

**hath done for their fathers;**

**and that they may know**

**the covenants of the Lord,**

**that they are not cast off forever”**

**and**

**“As touching the election [of Israel],**

**they are beloved for the fathers' sakes.**

**For the gifts and calling of God**

**are without repentance.”**

\* My indebtedness to Hugh Nibley, reflected here and in this essay's originally intended title “Expanding Approaches to the Book of Mormon”, as in many other areas, should be obvious. The quotation is from Rabbi Joshua ben Perachiah: “Secure a teacher for yourself, and acquire a companion for yourself [with whom to study].” Hugh has been these things to many of us, and I am grateful, and dedicate this study to him. It was originally written to be included in a *Festschrift* for Hugh, but for reasons beyond my control was not included in that collection. I present it now, standing alone, because I believe it is still my best tribute to him, notwithstanding its flaws.

**NEPHITE OBSERVANCE OF THE PERFORMANCES  
AND ORDINANCES OF GOD:  
PRE-EXILIC ISRAELITE RELIGIOUS PATTERNS  
IN THE BOOK OF MORMON <sup>1</sup>**

Gordon C. Thomasson <sup>2</sup>

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*And, inasmuch as it shall be expedient,  
ye must keep the performances and ordinances of God,  
until the law shall be fulfilled which was given unto Moses.  
II Nephi 25:30*

**ABSTRACT**

This is a report on the discovery of major pre-exilic Israelite feasts, festivals, holy days, and related religious practices within the Book of Mormon, their implications for study of the text, insights into the continuity of religious practices from pre-exilic to modern times, and the potential contribution of the Book of Mormon to the study of pre-exilic Israelite religion.

**METHODOLOGY & ASSUMPTIONS**

As is the case with any subject, systematic study of the Book of Mormon is a cumulative process. No discovery, however new or revolutionary in appearance, is made in a vacuum. All insights and inventions of any value, despite the conceits of patent, copyright, and

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<sup>1</sup> Grateful acknowledgements are due to the Gospel Doctrine class of what was then (in 1985) the Lakeview IV Ward in Provo, Utah, who so enthusiastically met their responsibilities as students, through prayerful personal reading and study, as to spur on and make possible many of these discoveries. Also, I am indebted to F.A.R.M.S. for help in organizing the August 14, 1985 F.A.R.M.S. seminar on festivals in the Book of Mormon, and to the seminar participants and later contributors, including, among others, David E. Boruchowitz, Richard Erickson, Jerome Horowitz, John L. Sorenson, John W. Welch, Steven Wood, and Benjamin Urrutia. Robert F. Smith's many contributions along these and other lines at all stages in this research, linked as it was to his work on the Book of Mormon critical text project, have been too numerous to adequately acknowledge. Special thanks are also owed to Elder Neal A. Maxwell for his encouragement and support, and to my family, who have sacrificed more than anyone else to make this research possible.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon C. Thomasson is an applied anthropologist, historian, and student of religions. His area studies background includes Latin America, Southeast Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. He has worked in rural development and refugee resettlement in the Third World, and has taught at a number of colleges and universities. Currently he is on the World History faculty of the Social Science Department of Broome Community College in Binghamton, New York. He was the founder and, from 1986-1988, director of the American Academy of Religion's Consultation on the Study of the Latter-day Saints Religious Traditions. He, his wife Elizabeth, and their four sons currently reside in Vestal, New York.

now the even more pretentious "intellectual property" laws, are built on the shoulders of others. "Ownership" and profit from such clearly social products should never, therefore, be monopolized completely by one person, let alone his or her heirs. It is enough to take credit for the mistakes we make individually, and repent. As I have detailed elsewhere, study of the Hebrew nature of the Book of Mormon has its roots in the first generation of L.D.S. church history.<sup>3</sup> Later generations also each have made their contributions.<sup>4</sup> Notably, since the 1930s, Sidney Sperry and his students' study of the Hebraic nature of the Book of Mormon's translation-English greatly enlarged our horizons. More directly, with Hugh Nibley's recognition of "Old World Ritual in the Nephite World" as published in *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (1957:256-270; 1964:243-256; 1988b:295-310), a new frontier was opened. Following Hugh Nibley's pioneering, John A. Tvedtnes' study of "The Nephite Feast of Tabernacles" (1978:145-177), further enlarged our perspective.

By 1984 the stage was set for the discovery of a multitude of texts referring or alluding to the major pre-exilic Israelite feasts, festivals, holy days, and related religious practices within the Book of Mormon. These discoveries initially accumulated without a recognition of their implications, through the spring and early summer of 1984. It was not mid-1984 that I first noted clear, although heretofore unrecognized implicit references to the celebration of Passover in Alma 36-42, that go far beyond the already recognized explicit use of the typology of the Exodus in the Book of Mormon (Tate, 1978:245-262). The significance of these discoveries then became obvious: that the ancient Israelite lunisolar calendar with its ritual cycles (of weeks, lunar months, harvests, one, seven, and fifty years, etc.) underlie or serve as the foundation of the Book of Mormon narrative.<sup>5</sup> Up until now these have gone unrecognized, mainly due to the intellectual mind set or bias which students, for generations, have brought to their study of the text, conditioning their own expectations and even those of persons raised or trained in Judaism.<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup> See especially parts II. "An analysis of *Book of Mormon* apologetics, 1830-1839," and III. "An analysis of *Book of Mormon* apologetics, 1840-1851," of my forthcoming Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (hereafter abbreviated as F.A.R.M.S.) Preliminary Report "Three Easy Pieces Preliminary to a Critical Analytic History of Book of Mormon Apologetics" (Thomasson, 1970a), which includes materials developed while doing graduate work under Hugh W. Nibley and Richard L. Anderson in 1966-1968.

<sup>4</sup> See the F.A.R.M.S. bibliography on the Book of Mormon (Welch, *et al.*, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> The same could be said for much of the gospel narrative in the New Testament, as Raymond E. Brown showed with regard to the Gospel of John (1980:201-204).

<sup>6</sup> The biases to which scholars and casual readers alike have succumbed cover a wide range. Minor problems are to be found, such as the non-scriptural headnotes to most chapters, which editors after Joseph Smith have inserted (for example, the textually unjustified and probably anachronistic allusions to Nephite "coins" [1920 edition] and "coinage" [1981 edition] rather than, if anything, to "weights and measures" preceding Alma 11). But there have also been massive and theologically unjustified hermeneutical assumptions (e.g., that anything remotely resembling "Judaism" would not be found in the Book of Mormon since Lehi would have left behind all such supposedly "apostate" practices "in the old country" or when he "got off the boat."). This latter prejudice, absorbed unconsciously from and reflecting a general current of Christian anti-Semitism in American culture, has conditioned most people's approach to the Book of Mormon, in spite of consistent affirmations of the "Law of Moses" by the pre-Christian New World Israelite communities that are found within the text (cf. I Nephi 4:16; II Nephi 5:10; 25:24;

discussion which follows reports assumptions underlying this study, some of the discoveries which have been made, and their implications.

### Methodological Caveats

Secular scholarship, for some two centuries, has consistently operated on a number of usually unquestioned assumptions, including, among others:

- 1) that religious histories reflect consistent evolutionary patterns,
- 2a) that prophecy based upon inspiration or revelation is impossible,
- 2b) consequently, any passage which appears to anticipate an historical event must necessarily be a later interpolation into a text, and
- 3) that the "supernatural" is an unnecessary category.

Any pretense of "objectivity" is thoroughly falsified by the adoption of such unprovable assumptions, of course, as is also the case with their opposites. As is now widely understood, a scholar may claim to have adopted one set or another based on letting the "facts speak for themselves," but by the time "facts" have been teased enough to talk to anyone, they are already thoroughly molded by the puppeteer's--or scholar's--hand (see the debate in Novick, 1988).

Anthropologically, it is self-deception to pretend that the implications of most if not all biases deriving from a secular worldview are any less pervasive and invisible to the scholars who share them than are those of the supposedly most "primitive" and isolated tribe.

The question of evolutionary and anti-prophetic/"supernatural" bias is especially relevant here since it often translates, in the academy, into an assumption that what we today know as Judaism is a post-Babylonian development. From an evolutionary framework, it is assumed that pre-exilic Judaism cannot be like what existed later, and so the biblical text is often scissored to fit a pattern.<sup>7</sup> I am operating with objectively no less justifiable assumptions:

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Alma 30:3, etc. See also my unpublished manuscript "Judaism: A New (?) New Testament Hermeneutic," 1985). And we should not shrink from calling the early Nephite community Christian. From the standpoint of what constitutes a "good" translation of meaning into English--to say nothing of a true prophet being able to reveal to a people the Lord's name before His earthly ministry--it is not at all anachronistic for the Book of Mormon, whether as edited by Mormon or as translated by Joseph Smith, to represent messianic communities as knowing a translation equivalent of the name of Jesus Christ that we give the Messiah in English, or to their being essentially "Christian," at the same time that they remained observant of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants.

<sup>7</sup> Geo Widengren questioned the assumption that patterns in the admittedly late *Test. Levi* were so late as to be irrelevant to what came before.

Actually it is *so* late that these mythological ideas cannot have come from Babylonian religion which had by now lost all expansive force. But these notions cannot revive out of themselves, they must come from somewhere ... In Israelite-Jewish religion there must have existed many ideas and

1) that among other possibilities, continuity, even over millennia, and/or "social oscillation"<sup>8</sup> are just as potentially viable as is a unilineal evolution, especially in the realm of public religious rituals which are virtually psychological "community property,"<sup>9</sup>

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ceremonies scarcely hinted at in the O.T., and they must have been living enough to force their way into the literature of Hellenistic times. (1950:9, note 1)

It is important to note here that in contrast to Widengren, a discouraging trend is becoming more commonplace in attacks on LDS scriptures. Some non-LDS and estranged Mormons have adopted, from previous generations of biblical scholars, evolutionary perspectives on the "development" of biblical religion in Israel. The evolutionary hypothesis as framed assumes that the various types of Judaism known at around the time of Christ (including early Hebrew Christianity itself), differed substantially from pre-exilic forms of worship and belief. Specifically, some have argued that concepts and names such as Messiah, Christ, Satan, life after death, and resurrection only were borrowed or developed due to cultural contact and transfer during the Babylonian captivity. This argument is sustainable only from silence. That is to say, texts generally acknowledged to be pre-exilic lack such vocabulary--but note that any exceptions are simply re-defined as "obviously" later interpolations, a standard gambit of procrustean scholarship. So an actual or artificial absence of evidence is taken as proof. With this foundation, the presence of such terms in the books of Moses/Enoch, Abraham, and throughout the Book of Mormon are taken as "proof" that these texts were written in the modern era, rather than from the time of the patriarchs down to the Lehite colony's separation from Judah before the exile, or in the Americas before 400 C.E. Since the Book of Mormon peoples had no contact with the supposedly more sophisticated Babylonians, the presence of such concepts is held to be anachronistic. The essentially anti-Semitic roots of such arguments are often ignored. The Goodspeed school was so rabid on the religious originality of Israel that they held the Jews of Christ's time to be completely illiterate. Only the massive weight of the Dead Sea scrolls finally put their myth of the illiterate Jews to rest. (Matthew Black's magisterial *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospel and Acts* [1967], in which he accounted for the supposed syntactical and other idiosyncracies of New Testament Greek simply by translating the texts word by word into first century Aramaic, showing that Aramaic originals preceded the Greek text, had a major role in crushing their opposition.) But the myth of the Jews as intellectually inferior, spiritually deprived and dependent on others for theological ideas still persists. Anti-, quasi-, and ex-LDS authors also consistently fail to point out an alternative hypothesis that many know in fact exists: this is simply that apostasies occurring before 600 B.C.E. could have involved the loss of these and other vital but socially fragile teachings of the Gospel (hence the necessity of restorations at the beginning of dispensations). This hypothesis, while also based on silence in certain texts, does not require radical scissors and pasting of "exceptions" and has both theoretical grounding and explanation as well as textual precedents within the Book of Mormon, as well as a modern day comparison to be found in the catastrophic revisionism of RLDS theology since the majority of its bureaucracy were educated in Protestant Seminaries on the GI Bill after World War II. The fact that Pharisees and Sadducees could argue over as fundamental a teaching as the resurrection is also suggestive of the problem. This hypothesis can account for the absence of concepts in biblical texts and their appearance in Latter-Day scriptures with at least as much logical justification as the pro-Babylonian/anti-Semitic position can command.

<sup>8</sup> "Social oscillation" is Sir Edmund Leach's term, coined to describe repeated changes back and forth between essentially totalitarian and democratic poles on a political spectrum within Burmese hill tribes. His findings (reported in Leach, 1967), pulled the cozy "evolutionary rug" out from under British social anthropological theory, and provide an interesting perspective on cycles of apostasy and repentance in the Book of Mormon.

<sup>9</sup> As I have elsewhere written concerning the origins of myth in ritual,

When an *apostasy* occurs the first thing that is lost is the *priesthood* or authority to act and speak for God. The ability to communicate with and for God is seen as vital to maintaining the sanctity of the public teachings. The outward and physical rituals, on the other hand, are in effect "community property" and facts of common experience which are more resistant to change. The community "knows" that [and how] the rituals are to be performed, just as their ancestors had done, and the myths evolve as a rationale for the

2a) that historical sources are as much or **more** entitled to a presumption of "innocence" or accuracy than is any theory developed after the fact which qualifies or contradicts the text, and

2b) consequently, that the burden of proof rests on those who assert the need to do violence to the text which is and will almost certainly always be our largest and primary source for Israelite history--the Bible--in order to make it (the "facts") fit the procrustean bed of a particular theory or hypothetical model, developed millennia later, all the while claiming to be letting the text "speak for itself," and

3) that the mantic, prophetic and "supernatural" are legitimate potential categories of explanation.

I accept as more probably true the proposition that most, if not all Israelite biblical religion and ritual pre-dates the exile, rather than being an after-the-fact interpolation by "deuteronomists" or whomever.<sup>10</sup> I am also convinced that sufficient evidence already exists to substantiate the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, to justify its use as a source for the study of pre-exilic biblical religion, rather than using the Bible to "prove" the Book of Mormon. I could even argue that the Book of Mormon has moved beyond the need for apologists, to the point where it can be used, albeit with caution, as some of the richest, oldest, and most comprehensive documentary evidence available for the study of pre-exilic biblical religion, second only to the Bible itself.

Significant points of Israelite history remain unsolved at this point that are especially relevant to the Book of Mormon. These include, among others,

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[persisting] rituals. (Thomasson, 1970:3)

<sup>10</sup> I take this position without denying the potential validity of a JEDP-type hypothesis for explaining certain aspects of the canonical text. For one possible model which fits this case see John L. Sorenson's "The 'Brass Plates' and Biblical Scholarship" (1977:31-39). This in no way precludes the option that an editorial melding of sources could have occurred under "supernatural"/prophetic direction before, as easily as after the fact. This could make possible a deutero- and trito-Isaiah without compromising the "authenticity" of scripture (Nibley, 1967:138ff.; 1988c:121ff. Compare also the abridger's preface in II Maccabees 2:19-32; see especially Welch, ed., 1992:269-271). The recent discovery, in Jerusalem, of pre-exilic silver scroll/amulets bearing the quintessentially priestly (that is, part of the supposedly post-exilic "P" text) liturgical blessing (Numbers 6:24-26, compare Leviticus 9:22-24), does not rule out a "P" redaction so much as it would necessitate it being a pre-exilic event. It is ironic that some L.D.S. scholars have taken positions regarding biblical criticism totally oblivious to the ancient internal textual/editorial history of the Book of Mormon. In contrast, see my discussion of some thirty types of texts and textual traditions cited internally in the Book of Mormon which feed into the Book of Mosiah (Thomasson, 1983, note 2), and S. Kent Brown's "Lehi's Personal Record: Quest for a Missing Source" (1984a:19-42). Moreover, the 19th and 20th century editorial histories of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price provide precedents and test cases for the vast majority of hypotheses produced by biblical criticism, which in the latter-day cases certainly do not endanger the inspired or revealed integrity of scripture. See, in this regard, the *Book of Mormon Critical Text: A Tool for Scholarly Reference*, 2nd edition (F.A.R.M.S., 1986-87), from which I cite Book of Mormon texts unless otherwise noted.



- 1) ambiguity as to when the biblical "New Year" was situated/celebrated. In the Old World, a reference to the New Year might involve the relatively more "political" calendrical New Year on 1 *Tishrei* (linked with divine kingship, as in the Book of Mosiah, and counted as the seventh month in Exodus)<sup>11</sup> or the more "religious" New Year on 15 *Nisan* at a particular point in history (Exodus 12:1-2, which links with the exodus from Egypt and freedom from slavery--see especially the F.A.R.M.S. UPDATE, "New Year's Celebrations," 1985a; Welch, ed., 1992:209-211).<sup>12</sup> This is compounded by
- 2) the independently shifting locations of the New Year in Israelite (luni-solar) and Mayan (360-day Long Count) calendars,
- 3) the very close correlation between the dates of the Lehite exodus from Jerusalem and Christ's birth within the Nephite text and Old World chronology that obtain using the Mayan Long Count,<sup>13</sup>
- 4) the shifts that radical differences in climate, cropping patterns and growing seasons impose on agriculturally-linked festivals (and other culture patterns, including warfare--cf. II Samuel 11:1, 1 *Nisan* or the Vernal Equinox, I Chronicles 20:1) as one moves from the dry Mediterranean climate of Israel to the hot, rainy tropics,<sup>14</sup>
- 5) the apparent blurring of distinctions between the major festivals that are thematically and structurally connected with the Exodus from Egypt (Tabernacles, Passover, and [its arguable extension] Pentecost),<sup>15</sup> in the Old World at certain points in history,

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<sup>11</sup> To what degree the link of 1 *Tishrei* and the creation was recognized in antiquity is debated.

Ancient Jews, particularly prior to the Babylonian diaspora (6th cent. B.C.E.), were hardly aware of the significance of the first of Tishri. ... The sacrificial rite of the holiday was confined to the Temple, and most people did not witness it. ... It is most unlikely, however, that in ancient times this ritual was observed *outside Jerusalem*. (Bloch, 14-15, *italics added*.)

<sup>12</sup> There is a close ritual symmetry shared between the two, Fall and Spring New Years and the two Mosaic commandments to observe the Sabbath. The one pair celebrates the world's creation, and the other Israel's new beginning in freedom from Egypt (and for Christians the crucifixion/atonement and liberation from sin). The parallel is explicit in the rationalization or reasoning behind the celebration of the Sabbath, which on the one hand recalls the world's creation (Exodus 20:8-11, especially verse 11), and on the other Israel's redemption and liberation from slavery in Egypt (Deut. 5:12-15, in particular verse 15).

<sup>13</sup> The correlation was first noted by John L. Sorenson, in his "Observations on Nephite Chronology" (1970). See also Robert F. Smith's discussion of the "Book of Mormon Event Structure: The Ancient Near East" (1985:2).

<sup>14</sup> See especially the discussion of the linkage of royal progresses within systems of divine kingship to, for example, the monsoon cycle in Southeast Asia in my "Togetherness is Sharing an Umbrella: Divine Kingship, The Gnosis, and Religious Syncretism" (Thomasson, 1978a:86ff; 1990:538ff).

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Abraham P. Bloch's discussion of "Shavuot: An Appendage of Passover" (1978: chapter 9).

6) the oscillation in emphasis or predominance that occurs within a ritual complex such as the New Year-Divine Kingship-Feast of Tabernacles and Rosh Hashana to Yom Kippur "days of awe," all of which were probably combined into one effectively continuous major annual event (Bright, 1981:171), with Tabernacles until this day still being called "The Festival," where the shifting emphasis would depend primarily, so it would appear, more on "political" considerations such as whether the people are governed by a prophet and elders, judges, or a king at that moment in their history than by any single religious principle,<sup>16</sup>

7) unauthorized human intervention, as in I Kings 12:32-33, and

8) simple human clerical error, as reflected in III Nephi 1:5, 8:2-3, 5.

Lastly, it must be acknowledged that references to Israelite religious practices in the Book of Mormon are of a more or less implicit nature.<sup>17</sup> The majority of the authors and editors of the text seem to have been relatively ethnocentric, as all humans are prone to be, in that they took for granted that later readers would "naturally" understand much of the writers' cultures without explanation. They do not seem to imagine that subsequent generations would live in such a different cultural world that they would not recognize the often subtle though (to them) unmistakable allusions they make to various practices without explicitly naming them.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, unless an evolutionary historical position is dogmatically assumed, minimal familiarity with modern Judaism, let alone Israelite biblical religion, will make visible and

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<sup>16</sup> On some aspects of the writers' orientation in the Book of Mormon see John L. Sorenson's, "The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Codex" (1976).

<sup>17</sup> For comparison, consider that the Hebrew verb *muwl* that is translated with the word "circumcision" only occurs thirty-two times in the Hebrew scriptures, half of which are in Genesis. Of the remainder, all are found within the Books of Moses except eight in chapter 5 of Joshua, where preparations are made to enter the promised land, twice in the Psalms where the word is rendered "cut" and context does not suggest the rite, and two figurative allusions to the practice in Jeremiah. So after Joshua 5:8, not one specific reference is found in the records of pre-Christian Israel to the ritual practice that is at the foundation of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 17:9-14). This center of Israelite religion is taken for granted by subsequent prophets and compilers of the Hebrew scriptures. While the ritual continues without its performance being mentioned, other words are used, generally in a figurative way, to suggest the concept of being "uncircumcised." This is usually as a criticism of peoples' unrighteousness. Outside the Books of Moses and Joshua 5, this concept, which does presuppose the ritual and covenant, is mentioned in English twenty-nine times, but sixteen of these are in the Book of Ezekiel, and ten occur in Ezekiel 32:19-32. So if a researcher could only rely on texts after Joshua 5, there would be no way of knowing that circumcision was central to Israel's existence as a covenant people.

<sup>18</sup> By taking their culture for granted, Book of Mormon writers left later generations of readers in essentially the same position as generations of New Testament students who are relatively ignorant of Jewish law (though the latter was at least in part a result of an anti-Semitic bias held by early Gentile Christians controlling the New Testament texts. Thomasson, 1985).

meaningful references and allusions to ancient practices in the text that are highly suggestive if not indisputable.<sup>19</sup>

### "The ordinances of God, according to the law of Moses"

Nephi, within a brilliant discussion of the necessity of cultural understanding in relation to the interpretation of the scriptures, informs us that he intentionally did not teach his people the "doings," "manner," "works" and "things of the Jews" (II Nephi 25:2, 6). This and subsequent chapters are revealing, in part because of the distinction Nephi draws between Israelite religion, which is to be observed, and apostate practices common in Judah prior to and at the time of Lehi's departure from Jerusalem.<sup>20</sup> Observance of the former is crucial in his teachings. The unrighteousness of some does not preclude others keeping

the performances and ordinances of God, until the law shall be fulfilled which was given unto Moses. (II Nephi 25:30; see also Mosi. 13:30; Alma 25:15, 30:23, 31:10; IV Ne 1:12; and compare D&C 138:54.)<sup>21</sup>

Nephi and his prophetic successors are concerned with obedience to the weightier matters of the Law, not apart from but in the context of the calendrically based sacred observances and ritual practices of Mosaic religion. The patriarchal laws and covenants, ranging from the Abrahamic covenant of circumcision (which seems to persist up until 400 C.E., depending on how Moroni 8:8 is read. Thomasson, 1992:283.), and the conditional-upon-righteousness "covenant of the [promised] land," to laws of the clean and unclean including dietary laws, etc. (Thomasson, 1994b:21-24), were established or reaffirmed by Moses. Later prophets make explicit their concern to not just keep the commandments of the Lord, but to observe

the *ordinances* of God, according to the law of Moses; for they were taught to keep the law of Moses until it should be fulfilled.<sup>22</sup> (Alma 30:3, *italics* added.)<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> If the Book of Mormon were a forgery, it would, here as elsewhere, be an incredible masterpiece. The forger quite unsubtly creates apparent marks of authenticity, making sure no one misses them. Passages would thus be quite explicit, noting, for example, that a Passover was being celebrated, or whatever. Instead the Book of Mormon understates to the point that the Israelite rituals so far discovered and now clear to many Jews, non-Mormons, and Mormons alike, remained effectively invisible, with the exception of Mosiah 1-6, for 154 years.

<sup>20</sup> I find it amazing, for example, that discussions of Hosea 1:2 ff., usually ignore the role of hierodules in Canaanite religion and their influence on Israel generally, and in particular the means employed by the Canaanite Tamar to insure Judah's otherwise reluctant compliance with the law of Levirate marriage (Genesis 38).

<sup>21</sup> Consider here also the discussion of legal terminology in "Statutes, Judgements, Ordinances, and Commandments" as well as "outward performances" (Welch, ed., 1992:62-65.).

<sup>22</sup> It should be noted, here, that "fulfilled" does not necessarily read to mean "be done away with" but rather "to be added to" or "be made complete", as in Matt. 5:17; (πληρωσας). In Matt. 5:17-48, the Lord in each case takes an existing law and gives it the broadest possible or fullest interpretation. In each "Ye have heard ... But I say unto you" not a single commandment of the Law is abolished. In each case where "fulfill" occurs in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible (Gen. 7:67; Matt. 3:43 "fulfill all righteousness"--imagine interpreting this verse to

Instead of rejecting the Law of Moses, there **should** be found a concern within the Nephite community to purify the ordinances, removing layers of pagan accretions from the observances and restoring their true nature. If this is the case, then the major, scripturally mandated and authentic oral law-based pre-exilic Israelite patterns of worship, including rites<sup>24</sup> of the home, synagogue, sanctuary, and temple, as well as pre-exilic feasts, festivals, and Holy Days should have been practiced by the Book of Mormon peoples. At the same time, we should not necessarily expect to find every one mentioned in the Book of Mormon any more than all are in the Bible, nor expect these to be identical in every particular with what we find in other Old World sources.<sup>25</sup> There would be both continuities and divergences, not just in terms of deletions, but also in adaptations based upon these peoples' own collective history as a covenant and a diaspora people, as well as changes reflecting differences between physical environments (when firstfruits **could** be harvested, etc.). I would suggest that this is in fact the case, and it is time that we seriously begin discussion of ritual/religious life among the peoples of the Book of Mormon.<sup>26</sup>

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mean "do away with"; Luke 16:20; Rev. 17:17), the context involves making something complete. In Moroni 7:31 it is the "covenants of the Father" that are fulfilled. "Abolishing" simply cannot be read into these texts logically.

<sup>23</sup> This view is reflected in more than thirty passages throughout Book of Mormon history. In fact, I would propose that this is in fact a testable hypothesis: If the position in Alma 30:3 is correct, then evidence should be found in the text of the Book of Mormon that tends to confirm this claim that the commandments and ordinances are observed by the righteous. This article precisely is about presenting evidence to that effect. (Compare also I Chron. 22:12-13.)

<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that a typically common misspelling in published editions of the Book of Mormon is the substitution of "rights" for the word "rites," thus giving a false political connotation to a religious statement (cf. Alma 43:45, 47, where both the parallel verses read "rites" in the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon and the printer's manuscript). Alma 44:5 preserves "rites" as it should be, whereas Alma 51:6 follows the printer's manuscript in reading "rights," while the original manuscript employs the word "rites" and makes much more sense in context (cf. III Nephi 2:12, which was likewise very probably "rites" in the original manuscript--in accordance with a scribal correction in the printer's manuscript). In a number of other verses where "rights" is found today, the context could as easily imply rites. These and other sources for the Book of Mormon text will hereafter be referred to as [O] (original manuscript), [P] (printer's manuscript), [P<sup>c</sup>] (corrected printer's manuscript), and 1830 (1830 edition of the Book of Mormon). The above cited and subsequent Book of Mormon references have been checked and where necessary are qualified, using these symbols, based on the *Book of Mormon Critical Text* (F.A.R.M.S., 1986-1987), which normally follows [O], [P] and 1830 whenever possible.

<sup>25</sup> While every effort has been made to discover post-exilic patterns (e.g., *Purim*, *Chanukkah*), these, the celebrations that anyone encountering Judaism in 19th century America would have been likely to notice, have not been found in the Book of Mormon.

<sup>26</sup> The Book of Mormon's authors and editors would have taken for granted the many religious practices we are here concerned with, and would hardly have thought to mention them explicitly for the benefit of later Gentile readers. Moreover, our own lack of familiarity (to say nothing of a lack of expectation or "looking for" certain data) with Israelite religion would also blind us to what for them would have been very obvious allusions and references. Several rabbis, having examined this data, were surprised that Mormons did not recognize what was to them the "obvious." Their only question was where Joseph Smith obtained such materials.

Nephi, beside instructing his people to observe the performances and ordinances of the Law of Moses, encourages them to preface or consecrate those actions through prayers. In language that is essentially foreign to contemporary 19th century Christian traditions but still resonates directly and deeply with countless Jewish practices, the Nephites are instructed

But behold, I say unto you that ye must pray always, and not faint; that ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul. (II Nephi 32:9)<sup>27</sup>

In that Spirit I hope to proceed in the pages that follow, presenting examples of the generally indirect and typological allusions to Israelite and Mosaic religious feasts, festivals, and Holy Days that are to be found in the Book of Mormon, in the order they occur through the year as reckoned beginning with celebration of the creation.<sup>28</sup>

### FEASTS AND FESTIVALS IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

The eternal *pattern* of Israelite history and worship is reflected in sacred cycles enumerated when

1 ... the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,  
2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, Concerning the feasts of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts.

...  
44 Moses declared unto the children of Israel the feasts of the LORD" (Leviticus 23; compare Deuteronomy 16:1-17; Numbers 28-29).

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<sup>27</sup> Summarizing insights David Boruchowitz has noted, examples of such prayers are obvious in Judaism today. A perfect example is the prayer that women recite to consecrate one's performances in the observance of a festival when lighting the candles:

"Blessed art Thou ... who has sanctified us with Thy commandments and commanded us concerning the lighting of the lights for \_\_\_\_\_."

This same *berakhah* pattern is used whenever performing any *mitzvah* (good deed, righteous act). It is followed up to the phrase "commanded us," after which the appropriate expression is inserted. The *Kiddush* (meaning sanctification), which follows the lighting of the candles, is far more than a blessing on wine. That part, said whenever wine is consumed, is just the beginning. It has special inserts for the festivals. *Kiddush* itself is only said on special occasions, the most common being *Shabbat*, and then on all the holy days. No pious act is performed without some blessing, but the Sabbath and festivals observances are especially consecrated.

After lighting the candles and the *Kiddush* one says the *Shehecheyanu* (see summary of Boruchowitz's study of this prayer as it appears in Mosiah 2, below) that gives thanks, among other things, for one's life being preserved to reach the moment of observing the festival. In the *Amidah* there are also special passages for each festival. The concept in II Nephi 32:9 is fundamental to the practice of Judaism. (Communication with the author, 4 November 1996.)

<sup>28</sup> There are a number of introductions to the feasts, festivals and Holy Days (see, for example, Bloch, 1978; de Vaux, 1965:484-517; and for a comparative view, de Moor, 1972).

*including  
lighting and  
prayer*

The symbology of these observances overlaps or is shared in a complementary way. Each is not a wholly exclusive set of concepts, but part of a cohesive whole which reinforces the others.<sup>29</sup> These include jubilee and sabbatic years (Lev. 25), and individual lunisolar years punctuated by the major feasts, solar cycles (equinoxes and solstices), and rhythms of the agricultural year:

- 1) The Feast of Trumpets or New Moon (Lev. 23:23-25), the first or New Year's day in the civil calendar, celebrating the day of creation, known as *Rosh Hashana*.
- 2) The Feast of the Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur* (Lev. 23:26-32).

And the three Mosaic pilgrimage festivals that recapitulate and renew for each generation the Passover-Exodus-Sinai-Wandering covenant experience of Israel. Attendance at these was required of observant Jewish males.

- 3) The Feast of Tabernacles, Booths, or Ingathering (Lev. 23:33-43; Deut. 16:13-15), that symbolizes Israel's wanderings in the wilderness.
- 4) Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:4-8; Deut. 16:1-7; Exo. 12), recalling Israel's liberation from slavery.

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<sup>29</sup> An unjustified posture of disdain towards the Law as delivered through Moses has blinded Christian exegetes toward one of the more obviously misunderstood texts at the foundation of historically anti-semitic Christian discourse. At the time when Pilate offers to release Jesus, he makes a comment that has perplexed generations.

38 Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all.

39 But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews?

40 Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber. (John 18:38-40; cf. Mt. 27:16-26; Mk 15:7-15; Lk. 23:14)

Commentators have tried to find a precedent for this custom everywhere except in the religion of Israel itself (for a summary and overview of the discussions see Chavel, 1941; Maccoby, 1969; and especially Merritt, 1985). It is variously suggested that, despite the clear concern for equity in their laws, the Jews had somehow developed this custom themselves, or that the Jews had adopted a pagan custom which resulted in the freeing of Barabbas, and so on. Despite all of the mutually deconstructing hypotheses that have been offered, one obvious possibility has been systematically overlooked. Just as there is an isomorphic parallel between the scapebird imagery of Leviticus 14:4-7 and the Day of Atonement "scapegoat" ritual in Leviticus 16:5-26, the release of Barabbas is a structural equivalent to both on a literary level.

While the crucifixion takes place at Passover, *Yom Kippur*--the Day of Atonement--should have been a crucial dimension of Christians' analysis of the narrative. But it has been ignored. A few points of reference are helpful. First, robbery, unlike theft or burglary, was a violent and a capital crime. Moreover, a robber, if freed, would necessarily have had to flee the city even after being released since any of his victims' surviving relatives might kill him in retaliation. Thus, being freed from Roman judgement would be a mixed blessing unless the criminal subsequently fled from Jerusalem. Just as the goat bearing the sins of the community is exiled to the wilderness, Barabbas would have to depart. At the same time, while the goat bearing the sins of the community (Lev. 16:21-22) goes free, Jesus is depicted in terms identical to those of the innocent goat (Lev. 16:9ff.), whose blood is essential to the act of atonement itself. Whatever the source or motive of the evangelists, the symbolic parallel is obvious. There was no more appropriate genre in which to portray what the writers of the text understood to be the redemption of Israel than through a combination of the imagery of Passover and the Day of Atonement.

5) The Feast of Pentecost (Lev. 23:15-21; Deut. 16:9-12), also known as the Feast of Weeks, Day of Firstfruits, and Feast of Harvests, commemorating the giving of the Law.

The years in turn are divided into months with their new and full moons punctuated by weeks that are also separated by sacred Sabbaths (Lev. 23:3), and "days" that begin at night (for there was "In the beginning ... darkness." Genesis 1:1-2), with each set apart and sanctified at regularly set intervals by prayer. These many sacred events simultaneously point the believer's mind back through time to archetypal occurrences such as the creation of the world and subsequent major moments of history (such as liberation from the slave pits in Egypt, the Exodus, receiving the Covenant and Law, etc.), and foreshadowings in types and images that look through future events to the Day of Judgement. These remembrances and observances, integral parts of the essentially sacral worldview of the devout, are not comparable to effectively secular "holidays" that are at most just recognitions of days that occur only once (for example, the 200th anniversary of the signing of the American Declaration of Independence). The Mosaic calendar reflects an experience of a sacred universe and a sacred time in which past, present and future events (many being prophetically anticipated), are to be regularly and perpetually<sup>30</sup> celebrated in ways that are more holy to participants than they are simply ritual and symbolic.

### **The New Year-Linked Complex of Festivals:**

The more frequently recognized New Year in modern Judaism at least implicitly links a series of events. These include:

- 1a) a religious observance of the New Year (*Rosh Hashana*, dated from the New Moon, and essentially an anniversary of the world's creation), which begins
- 1b) the complex of the High Holy Days or ten "days of awe" (1-10 *Tishrei*),
- 1c) and concludes with *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement.
- 2) the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkoth*, the feast of booths that commemorates Israel's forty years of travels in the wilderness--beginning on the Full Moon, from 15-20 *Tishrei*),
- 3) *Simhat Torah* (23 *Tishrei*) which celebrates the culmination and re-beginning of the annual liturgical reading of the Torah,
- 4) and the beginning of the religio-political (divine kingship/coronation) year rites.

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<sup>30</sup> "[I]t shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings." (Lev. 23:14, compare verses 21, 31, 41).

All of these are more or less linked into a complex of new year celebrations. They also correlated with harvest-linked celebrations in ancient Israel, and the Autumnal Equinox.<sup>31</sup> While a given text at a specific moment in history may emphasize one element of the complex, almost eclipsing other dimensions, this may well correlate with both the type of government in power (kings will tend to emphasize the coronation, prophets and judges the Day of Atonement, etc.), and the text we are reading at the moment (Chronicles contrasted with Samuel, for instance; or, perhaps, the Large Plates of Nephi compared to the Small Plates). The Book of Mormon reflects elements of these various dimensions during its various historical periods (the patriarchal: Lehi; kings: Nephi to Mosiah; and judges: Alma, etc.), as does the Bible.<sup>32</sup>

### Rosh Hashana—Yom Kippur: The Ten Days of Awe

The most pacific and sacred dimension of the New Year festival complex is the period of "ten days of awe" and penitence, that extend from *Rosh Hashana* or New Year's day through *Yom Kippur*, the "Day of Atonement" (1-10 *Tishrei*). The ten days of awe are typical of the entire calendar in reflecting an archetypal participation in sacred history. On *Rosh Hashana* the creation of the world, when time began, is remembered at the same time that the new year's beginning (a re-creation), is celebrated. By the time the High Holy Days are ended with the Day of Atonement, believers are looking forward to the end of time and the Day of Judgement.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The astronomically exact hour and day of each solar equinox and solstice oscillates around the arbitrarily placed and more or less averaged-dates of 21 December, March, June and September. While the modern world dismisses the non-astronomical portents associated with such once auspicious days, their archetypal significance or potential symbolic meaning is easily evoked, as much in early Christianity and ancient Judaism as in the history of Mormonism.

... [O]ne must come to grips finally with a Joseph Smith who is born at the **Winter** Solstice, dies shortly after the **Summer** Solstice, probably has his First Vision near the **Vernal** Equinox, and, after returning for four successive years to the same location on the same date, removes a sword, breastplate, seer-crystal spectacles and golden plates from a stone box in the hill early Saturday, September 22, 1827, at the New Moon (first crescent) and **Autumnal** Equinox. (Smith, 1987:29-30.)

... The precise Autumnal Equinox in 1827 came at 3:07 pm on 23 September ... and [; none] of the 4 previous Autumnal Equinoxes [only that on 22 September 1824] fell [as] precisely at [true (astronomical)] New Moon. (*ibid.*: 30, note 89, corrections and additions in [square brackets] supplied verbally by Robert F. Smith.)

Indeed, detailed examination of the facts shows that Joseph Smith Jr was born in a Jewish Sabbatical Year, came close to death and received his archetypal scar and limp at the next Sabbatical, had his First Vision in another such Sabbatical Year, and his annual, equinoctial return to that particular hill "convenient to the village of Manchester" culminated on Saturday, September 22, 1827, by coinciding with the close of yet another Sabbatical Year on 1 **Tishri** of the floating Jewish calendar. (*ibid.*: 31-32.)

<sup>32</sup> De Moor gives a good picture of changes occurring through time in the biblical record (1972:4-29).

<sup>33</sup> While the Temple survived, until 70 C.E., these events were actualized in the divine service--one of the three pillars upon which the world is sustained (*Pirke Aboth* 1:2). Subsequently, the same principles are to be kept in the hearts of worshippers who attempt to live the law.



In the initial methodological discussion, it was noted, factors ranging from a lack of familiarity with the religion of Israel to editorial and typographic conventions can blind us to important details in the text. Typical in this regard is a description of the transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth year of the judges among the Nephites.<sup>34</sup> In this case, the "obvious" has been missed because, among other things, we tend to visually "read" extra-textual chapter breaks, headings, and editorial insertions as interrupting the continuity (or being intended to signal the discontinuity), of both history and narrative, often not connecting the content of the last verse of a chapter with the first verse in the next. When chapter divisions and headings (including, as in this case, those found in the original manuscript) are removed, on the other hand, the obscure becomes obvious. Note how the New Year ritual elements, *italicized*, stand out below when compared with normally printed editions, and obviously reflect both a ritual and a literary transition from the 18th to the 19th year.

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<sup>34</sup> First noted by Benjamin Urrutia.

ALMA 44:23-45:2 [1981 L.D.S. edition]

23 And the armies of the Nephites, or of Moroni, returned and came to their houses and their lands.

24 And thus ended the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi. And thus ended the record of Alma, which was written upon the plates of Nephi.

ch45-62 [header] The account of the people of Nephi, and their wars and dissensions, in the days of Helaman, according to the record of Helaman, which he kept in his days. Comprising chapters 45 to 62 inclusive.

ch45 [header] Helaman believes the words of Alma--Alma prophesies the destruction of the Nephites--He blesses and curses the land--Alma is taken up by the Spirit, even as Moses--Dissension grows in the Church.

1 Behold, now it came to pass that the people of Nephi were exceedingly rejoiced, because the Lord had again delivered them out of the hands of their enemies; therefore they gave thanks unto the Lord their God; yea, and they did fast much and pray much, and they did worship God with exceedingly great joy.

2 And it came to pass in the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi ...

\* Critical Text readings [O], [P], excedingly; 1830 exceedingly.

\*\* Critical Text readings: [O], [P], exceding; 1830, exceeding.

Alma 44:23-45:2, read as an uninterrupted text, reveals that in rejoicing for deliverance from their enemies, fasting, prayer, and worship, these Nephites participated in a very predictable pattern of transition from the end of one year into the next, well known in Judaism down to the present day.

During the Nephite reign of judges we find other instances of what appear to be the High Holy Days and other ancient practices being alluded to in the text and almost certainly

ALMA 44:23-45:2 [uninterrupted text]

23 And the armies of the Nephites, or of Moroni, returned and came to their houses and their lands.

24 And thus *ended the eighteenth year* of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi. And thus ended the record of Alma, which was wrote upon the plates of Nephi

...  
1 Behold, now it came to pass that the people of Nephi were exceedingly\* *rejoiced*, because the Lord had again *delivered* them out of the hands of their enemies; therefore they gave *thanks* unto their God; yea, and they did *fast* much and *pray* much, and they did *worship* God with exceding\*\* *great joy*.

2 And it came to pass in *the nineteenth year* of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi ... (**bold** and *italics* added for emphasis)

being observed. Beginning in Alma 28, for example, we see that the Amalekite-inspired Lamanites' war against the Nephite armies ended with widespread death and destruction.

And now, surely this was a sorrowful day; yea, a time of solemnity, and a time of much fasting and prayer. And thus *ended*<sup>35</sup> the fifteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi ... and the fifteenth year of the reign of the judges *is ended* (Alma 28:6-7,9, *italics* added for emphasis).

After this explicit end of the fifteenth year, and I feel it can justifiably be assumed from the way the text reads that warfare did not continue up to the very last day of that year, we find that a curious combination of statements occurs.

But it came to pass that *after* they had buried their dead, *and also after the days of fasting, and mourning, and prayer*, (and it was *in the sixteenth year of the reign of the judges* over the people of Nephi) there began to be continual peace throughout all the land. Yea, and the people did observe to keep the commandments of the Lord; and *they were strict in observing the ordinances of God, according to the law of Moses*; for they were taught to keep the law of Moses until it should be fulfilled. And *thus* the people did have no disturbance *in all the sixteenth year* of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi (Alma 30:2-4, **bold** and *italics* added for emphasis).<sup>36</sup>

Since the war was over, the phrase "buried their dead" normally would include a process of mourning. In the one description of funerary ritual in the Book of Mormon that gives timing (Helaman 9:10), in typical Semitic style the deceased is buried within 24 hours; and cases where immediate burial is impossible, as in some wars when the dead are too numerous, they are thrown into a river to avoid polluting the land (for example Alma 44:21-22). From this I would argue that we are justified in putting emphasis on the phrase "*and also after*" as setting off a reference to the period of 1-10 *Tishrei* (the High Holy days that are aptly summarized in the phrase "*the days of fasting, and mourning, and prayer*"). Without explicitly naming them, this

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<sup>35</sup> "Ended" is used here, as in the *Book of Mormon Critical Text*, in preference to "endeth," both because the latter is an archaizing of the text that occurred contrary to readings in [O], [P], and 1830, and because "ended" in verse 6 better matches verse 9.

<sup>36</sup> At the F.A.R.M.S. 1984 Festivals Seminar, John W. Welch quickly recognized that continual peace throughout all the land (adding sixteen years of the reign of the judges together with thirty three years of the reign of Mosiah II), signals that this is a type of royal jubilee year, falling 50 years after Benjamin and the priests had worked to establish peace in the land (Words of Mormon 17-18) and 49 years after Benjamin's feast and coronation of Mosiah II, which ends with Mosiah II commanding the people to go and plow their fields (Mosiah 6:7. This would be a *non sequitur* among agricultural peoples, unless it follows a Jubilee year when agriculture is prohibited). Mosiah II himself begins the royal ritual first plowing known around the world. Moreover, Helaman 6:14 indicates that the sixty-fifth year of the Judges was also a year of peace, continuing the Israelite Jubilee pattern. As Benjamin Urrutia suggests, this is a "Good question to pursue. Did Nephites and Lamanites respect the Jubilee year truce? Most of the time? Some of the time?" If they did, it suggests that both groups were still using or remembering essentially the same ritual calendar system, many centuries into their history.

is still an effective reference to the *Rosh Hashana* to *Yom Kippur* "Days of Awe," and the text uses it directly ("*and it was in*") to introduce the sixteenth year, which, as noted was a Jubilee year. From this dating, we can see that in the context of the historical prose narrative sections that precede (chapter 28) and follow (chapter 30) it, Alma's "Thanksgiving Hymn" (Alma 29) is a most appropriate and perhaps even predictable liturgical creation for celebrating the High Holy Days after so bloody a war.

Finally, "Day of Atonement" types and images are notable in I Nephi 2-4, and help to clarify ritual and typological aspects of the text.<sup>37</sup> Highlighting some obvious themes, we see Nephi's task is to **redeem** the plates (I Nephi 3:22-24) in order to **observe the law** (I Nephi 3:20, 5:11, etc.). There is a **rebuke for sins** and a **beating** (I Nephi 3:29, albeit a literal rather than a symbolic one). Laban, and Nephi and his brothers as a group are like **scapegoats**<sup>38</sup> **that are chosen by lot** (Lev. 16:8, I Nephi 3:11), one to be **sent away from the camp of Israel** to

<sup>37</sup> Contrast the Anchor Bible translation of the Hebrew text of Genesis 49:22-24 with the traditional reading:

*Meaning of the Hebrew text*

**Anchor Bible**

Joseph is a wild colt,  
 A wild colt by a spring,  
 Wild asses on a hillside.  
 Archers in their hostility  
 Harried and attacked him.  
 Yet each one's bow stayed rigid ...  
 (Speiser, 1980:363, 367-368, note 22)

**King James Translation**

Joseph is a fruitful bough,  
 even a fruitful bough by a well;  
 whose branches run over the wall.  
 The archers have sorely grieved him  
 and shot at *him*, and hated him:  
 But his bow abode in strength ...  
 (*italics added*)

While extra-textual interpretations of the *Book of Mormon* have employed the "fruitful bough ... whose branches run over the wall" as a foretelling of Lehi's peoples coming to the Americas, the possibly related internal references to Lehi's family as a "branch" seem to be related more to the allegory of the olive given by the prophet Zenos (Jacob 5), than to a KJT reading of Genesis. For example, "they shall become a righteous branch unto the house of Israel" (II Nephi 9:53), and that "I might raise up unto me a righteous branch from the fruit of the loins of Joseph" (Jacob 2:25). See also Speiser's discussion of bows that fail (1980:367-368, note 24), and W.F. Albright and George E. Mendenhall's, "The Creation of the Composite Bow in Canaanite Mythology" (Albright and Mendenhall, 1942:227-229), in relation to I Nephi 16:18. It should be noted that linkage of Lehi with both the jawbone of an ass (Judges 15:17) and Joseph's blessing is both complicated and enhanced by Speiser's reading in combination with ancient "Day of Atonement" imagery (Lev. 16:5-28; cf. Hanfmann, 1985:421-426, and figs. 1-4).

<sup>38</sup> It should be noted that conventional interpretations of the cleansing of the ten lepers (Luke 17:12-19) ignore the fact that a Samaritan was neither bound nor eligible to have a Levite perform the prescribed (and ritually isomorphic) "scapebird" ritual for cleansed lepers (Luke 17:14; cf. Leviticus 14:4-7). Consider also the "scapebird" rituals that seem to have been a non-Levitical part of familial observance of *Yom Kippur* (Gaster, 1978:134). Consider again the "scapegoat" imagery associated with the Day of Atonement, Lev. 16:8). Another aspect of sins being cast away comes with the preservation, in

Traditional Judaism ... the custom of purifying oneself for the New Year, by throwing into a body of water crumbs that are fancied laden with one's transgressions. (Gordon, 1965:13-14)

Cyrus Gordon sees this as reflecting a ritual mentioned in Micah 7:18-20, in which God will cast sins, not sinners, into the depths of the sea (*ibid.*, but, contrast Exodus 15:5; Jeremiah 51:63-64; Matthew 18:6; Revelations 18:21; cf. Ecclesiastes 11:1, II Nephi 10:20).

Azazel, never to return, and **the other to be killed**.<sup>39</sup> Lehi and his family must leave Jerusalem (I Nephi 2:1-2), and later his sons are pursued **into the wilderness** (over/beyond the [city] wall) by Laban's servants (I Nephi 3:27, Leviticus 16:10). And then Laban seems to fall into the place of the **goat** (ram or sheep) **which is sacrificed**:

It is better than one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief. (I Nephi 4:12-13, cf. John 11:50; Leviticus 16:15).<sup>40</sup>

## Tabernacles and Divine Kingship

The Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkoth*, 15-20 *Tishrei*, cf. Lev. 23:33-36)<sup>41</sup> is the first of the three major feasts (the other two being Passover, and Pentecost), which all Israel was commanded to observe, commemorating events associated with the Exodus. It is also known as the Feast of Booths, reflecting Israel's wanderings in the wilderness, dwelling in tents or other temporary shelters (hence tabernacles). The most well-known occurrence of ritual in the Book of Mormon is the *Sukkoth* or Feast of the Tabernacles in Mosiah 1-6.<sup>42</sup> This particular event is linked very directly with the year-rite and regency of the two most notable kings in the Book of

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<sup>39</sup> There is a reversal or substitution of roles here, resembling both the killing of the king's substitute in divine kingship rituals, and the legal fate of a false accuser (Laban falsely accused Laman and his brothers of being robbers—a capital crime—and sent his servants to perform a summary execution, but, as in the Song of Susanna, the tables are turned), when Laban dies instead of the brothers he tried to have killed. Consider also the text's paralleling of Laban and the Pharaoh who attempted to block the Exodus. But more to the point, Laban dies with his throat cut like the ram providentially caught in the thicket [Genesis 22:13] instead of Isaac (Nephi and his brothers). Compare the ritual slaying of the already defeated Goliath (I Samuel 17:51-54), thus redeeming Israel from an insult to their God and the threat of **enslavement** to the Philistines (also a type of Exodus and Passover):

If I [Goliath] prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us. (I Samuel 17:9)  
Day of Atonement typology is also reflected in the sending of Joseph into Egypt and the killing of a kid to bloody his gown.

<sup>40</sup> Does Nephi's **negative confession**: "Never at any time have I shed the blood of man" (I Nephi 4:10), also fit the *Yom Kippur* pattern? The *Book of Mormon Critical Text* here compares Acts 10:14, 9-18; where the phrase "I have never" is repeated three times in response to a command from heaven, with I Nephi 4:10-18 (I:20, note 169). Also, in I Nephi 3:7-4:37, is the concern for the **fulfillment of vows** a reflection of a pattern of which the prayer *Kol Nidre* is a part? For example,

As the Lord liveth, and as we live, we will not go down unto our father in the wilderness until we have accomplished the thing which the lord hath commanded us. (I Nephi 3:15)

In another example, David Clark Goble posted to SAMU-L (Studies in Antiquities and Mormonism [Uncontentious]), a multi-part discussion of II Nephi 6-10 and whether Jacob was speaking on a Day of Atonement or if his rhetoric was built around the types and images associated with the day. I look forward to his further explorations and publication on that topic, because the material he circulated was sufficient to support a *prima facie* case (Goble, 1994).

<sup>41</sup> See Raymond E. Brown's discussion of Tabernacles in the Gospel of John (1980:306, note 2; 307ff; 326-327).

<sup>42</sup> Tabernacles would seem to be one the festivals to be observed in the last days. See Zechariah 14:16, 18-19. Compare also Malachi 3:3; III Nephi 24:3; *Doctrine and Covenants* 13; 124:39; 128:24.

Mormon, Benjamin and Mosiah II, and has been widely but not exhaustively discussed (Nibley, 1957, 1964, 1988b; Thomasson, 1982; Tvedtnes, 1978; Welch, 1985).<sup>43</sup>

It is not commonly recognized among non-Jews that some of the political rituals of divine kingship practiced in ancient Israel persist in the modern day. For example, the *Haqhel* or Sabbatic Year assembly at the New Year, prescribed in Deuteronomy 31:9-13, is still observed in the modern state of Israel, albeit not without some controversy.

9 And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and unto all the elders of Israel.

10 And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles,

11 When all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing.

12 Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law:

13 And that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it.

Many of the orthodox today oppose the idea of a non-orthodox Jew performing this function, and protested, for example, that Israel's President Chaim Herzog could not be considered either a "political *Melech*" or a "Torah *Melech*" by Halachic definition (Schwartz, 1987:8B, 24). The effective "invisibility" of such practices in the Christian world reflects our distance from and ignorance of ancient Israelite and modern Jewish religion generally.

Several examples of divine kingship ritual patterns have been found among the records dealing with the Lamanites, indicating that their culture and that of the Nephites might be noted as much by the similarities in calendar and ritual as by their differences that developed. In Alma 20, after the conversion of Lamoni, Ammon and this vassal king, son of the overlord or "king over all the land" (v. 8), are proceeding to Middoni to attempt to free Ammon's brethren. Lamoni's father, a "king of [Lamanite] kings" is, judging from the text, in a belligerent mood. His first words are the key:

Why did ye not come to the feast on *that great day* when I made a feast unto my sons,<sup>44</sup> and unto my people? (Alma 20:9 **bold** and *italics* added for emphasis)

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<sup>43</sup> Stephen Ricks and John W. Welch are currently editing a collection of essays that provide a more detailed study of Mosiah 1-6.

<sup>44</sup> At least one of Lamoni's father's other sons, he who became the "Anti-Nephi-Lehi" and replaced his father after he abdicated his crown was almost certainly also already a vassal king like Lamoni himself. "Anti-Nephi-Lehi" is a very appropriate inherited title or throne name for a Lamanite king.

For a vassal king not to attend the great feast at the year-rite, or to give one himself was treason.<sup>45</sup>

There is little reason to question that the **great day** referred to in Alma 20:9 was the annual feast and coronation, or to doubt that Lamoni's father had mounted a punitive expedition to suppress the rebellion which King Lamoni's non-attendance normally would have signified. His anger at Ammon probably reflects his suspicion that Ammon had incited Lamoni to revolt, following a common pattern among Nephite dissenters in Lamanite history. In deed, Lamoni's father takes Ammon to be Lamoni's champion, and after being vanquished offers him (or does he ritually offers through him to Lamoni?) half the kingdom. After his life is spared he in fact makes Lamoni his equal rather than his vassal, ceding to him "his kingdom from this time and forever; and I will govern him no more" (Alma 20:26).

Two other reflections of the Divine Kingship/Year-Rite pattern have also been discovered reflecting both Nephite and Lamanite understanding of these practices. John Sorenson and I both independently noted that Teancum's killing of Amalickiah (Alma 51:34-37--52:1-2) almost certainly caused panic among the Lamanites because it (was timed/planned to?) so perfectly fit into the rituals of divine kingship with the dying and resurrection of the king taking place on the evening and morning of the New Year. In this case, however, Teancum's javelin prevents Amalickiah rising, and throws panic into the Lamanite forces. This appears to be a set-piece of psychological warfare, like pulling tent pegs during a Bedouin night-time raid on the enemy's camp, and it worked as planned. Add to this the non-Freudian, though otherwise "Oedipal" accession of Amalickiah to the Lamanite throne (killing the king and marrying the queen), and the archetypal nature of this text becomes overwhelming.

Teancum's second foray, when he kills Ammoron but is himself killed, is not just a failed act of macho bravado. It too is timed, occurring on the day before the end of the thirty-first year of the reign of the judges (Alma 62:36-39; compare also the war reported at the end of the 15th year of the Judges in Alma 28). From the former two instances we seem to see an ideology of kingship reflected as it was understood among the Nephites and Lamanites. All three also seem to suggest the emergence of what may be a New World seasonal pattern in the times when kings go forth to battle (II Samuel 11:1, I Chronicles 20:1). Such a pattern is predictable, both due to climate facilitating or rendering nearly impossible the movement of men and matériel during the dry and rainy seasons respectively, and the characteristic reticence of agricultural peoples to fight during the times of peak labor demand that extend from when land clearing and sowing begin until the harvests are in. The season of traditional warfare in all but equatorial regions is usually after the harvests are in upon which the troops can forage, and before the

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<sup>45</sup> When Adonijah, one of David's sons, takes it upon himself to host such a feast everyone understands that it is more than a dinner. He, Nathan, Bathsheba and David all recognized it as an attempt to claim and usurp Solomon's place as David's heir (I Kings 1:1-30). David knows the "game," however, and "pre-empt" Adonijah by having Solomon make a peaceful/royal entry into Jerusalem upon the king's mule (a horse was reserved for conquest), having him receive the prophet's anointing and receiving the acclamation of the populace, which puts Adonijah in his place and quells the revolt (I Kings 1:33-53, cf. Matthew 21:7-11, for Jesus' Triumphal Entry as King).

coming of the next rainy season.<sup>46</sup> Also, we may begin to suspect that in a book as heavily condensed and carefully edited as the Book of Mormon purports to be and demonstrably is, no date in the text is without some significance, whether or not it is immediately apparent to us.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> A confirmatory exception to the apparent pattern of post-harvest/New Year seasonality of warfare in the Book of Mormon is found in the successful Nephite resistance led by Lachoneus and Gidgiddoni to Giddianhi (III Nephi 2-4). By gathering together the population and subsisting on stored food (III Nephi 3:13, 22), the people deprive the Gadiantons of hosts (themselves) that the robber-army, following world historian William H. McNeill's model, wanted to macro-parasitize (1976). The passive resistant act of not growing food where it can be appropriated or commandeered progressively weakens the Gadianton force. Also, the apparent fact of previous Nephite success in the necessary requirements of sedentary agriculture and animal husbandry (clearing lands, especially forests for fields; probably extensive hunting during the first phases of settlement and land-clearing, especially before a first harvest; intensive and extensive grazing; etc.), predictably changed the ecosystem they had been inhabiting. Thus, "there were no wild beasts nor game in those lands which had been deserted by the Nephites" (III Nephi 4:2). This creates a crisis for the Gadianton leaders, since "there was no way they could subsist save it were to plunder, rob, and murder" (III Nephi 4:5). Furthermore, the strategic situation is such that they cannot disperse "upon the face of the land insomuch that they could raise grain" without falling victim to Nephite patrols (III Nephi 4:6. That the Gadiantons might have considered planting crops as a possibility could suggest that we are dealing here with a time period at or before the onset of the vernal equinox and the rainy season around April, rather than in September-October). As a result, Giddianhi is forced to stage a desperate and disastrously unsuccessful attack in the sixth month of the nineteenth year (III Nephi 4:5-7). Thus, meteorological elements may well have worked against a Gadianton military success, as much as the "starve them out" strategy itself. Just as "General Winter and General Mud" have successfully defended Russia against land-invasions, climatic variations in the wrong season in the hot, humid tropics would provide a substantial obstacle.

It should also be noted that the attack begins on a "great and terrible" day (III Nephi 4:7, 11). Taking into account the already mentioned confusion or paralleling of "first" months or possible dual new years, it should be considered whether this ritualistic phrase could also refer to Passover, rather than just to Tabernacles. The Gadianton attackers—who are in large part former Nephites and are quite familiar with their technology including Moroni's military innovations (they are, after all, wearing headplates and armor)—are nevertheless described in a terrifyingly curious way. Their wearing of lamb-skin girdles does not effectively recall Masonic imagery because this dress is noted to combined specifically with the robbers having dyed themselves in blood. This is also not just the psywar imagery of German Death's Head battalion uniforms. In combination, the psychological impact of these symbols seems to be a rather predictable "magical" distortion of Exodus passover symbolism (sacrifice, blood on the lintels, etc. Ex 12:3-7 ff.). This follows along the lines of supposedly bullet-proof ghost-dance shirts and similar phenomena well-known around the world in the history of religions. It is worth considering whether, as described in the text, the nearly suicidal attack in part can be explained not just by the shortage of food and the immanent specter of starvation, but by the robbers having been convinced that thus clothed, the angel of death would pass them by. In any case, the parallel with passover imagery and symbols is striking.

<sup>47</sup> Another example of the close editing of the Book of Mormon is found in what, at first glance, appears to be an almost pointless digression from the narrative in Alma 11. The discussion of the sophisticated system of Nephite weights and measures seems almost irrelevant to the text, until the metonymic relationships of the units *ezrom* (Alma 11:6) and the largest unit of measure, the *antion* (Alma 11:19) are linked to the character/nature/behavior of *Zeezrom* (Alma 11: 22), the chief ruler *Antionah* (Alma 12:20), and the city characterized by pride in its "big money" status, *Antionum* (Alma 31:3). (In this regard see Thomasson, 1994b:15-16.)



## Passover

The Feast of the Passover (*Pesach*, 15-21 *Nisan*, cf. Exodus 12; 23:15; Lev. 23:5-8),<sup>48</sup> is the second of the major annual festivals based upon the Exodus. It commemorates Israel's liberation from slavery in Egypt and also serves as a type of New Year, with history beginning anew from their release. The modern *Seder* ritual symbolically epitomizes everything from the bitterness of slavery to the joy of freedom, the need to make bread without waiting for it to rise, and the passing over of the children of Israel by the Angel of Death. One symbol of the Passover, where the blood of the sacrificed lamb on the lintels and doorposts preserved the lives of the firstborn of Israel, reflects back to the ram's sacrifice which preserved Abraham and Sarah's firstborn son, Isaac, and forward to the Messiah (in anticipation of whom the Passover Seder ends). The unleavened bread and dietary restrictions (Thomasson, 1994b:21-24) associated with Passover evoke the experience of the refugee in flight. And the sheaf offering on the second day of the celebration begins the count of fifty days to the celebration of Pentecost.

The text of Alma 36-42 represents one of the more dramatic uses of such Feast images and types in the Book of Mormon. While it is not our purpose in this essay, Alma 36 could be analyzed very systematically in terms of its style, especially as an intricate and elegant example of chiasmus (Welch, 1981:206-207). For the purpose of this essay it is worthwhile to ask the question of **why** so much poetic effort would be expended in a written record: is it possibly because the text had a liturgical purpose? In fact, after examining two of the more complex chiasms in the Book of Mormon, Benjamin's discourse in Mosiah 2-4,<sup>49</sup> and Alma 36,

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<sup>48</sup> See Raymond E. Brown on the linkage of Passover with springtime and its role in the Gospel of John (1980:240, 245).

<sup>49</sup> In this regard, a study of Mosiah 2, by David E. Boruchowitz, "Who Has Kept Us and Preserved Us ...: on the Structure of Mosiah 2:20" (1984), follows up and develops his very important discovery that Benjamin's discourse, besides being cast in a poetic/liturgical style, is a Midrash on a specific text, namely, the *Shehecheyanu* prayer, that translates:

*Interesting interpretation of a  
handwritten*  
Shehecheyanu  
Praised [or Blessed] art Thou,  
Lord our God, King of the universe,  
who has kept us [alive],  
and hast preserved us,  
and enabled us to reach this season.

Mosiah 2:20

... If you should render all the thanks  
and praise ... to that God  
who hath created you  
and hath kept and preserved you  
and hath caused that you should rejoice

"Season" here refers to a feast, as when the day of Pentecost is referred to as the "season of the giving of our Torah." Anciently this prayer was to be offered on the first night of every festival, such as *Sukkoth*. Given the consensus that Mosiah 1-5 involves a celebration of Tabernacles, Benjamin's audience would almost certainly not only have been intimately familiar with this prayer, but would have said it, perhaps only minutes before this part of the king's address. More recently, David Boruchowitz was also party to the recognition of fragments of another ancient prayer, preserved as one of the Hallel or Grace after meals in the Passover *Haggadah*, that also appears to be reflected in this same discourse by Benjamin.

I would suggest that their "literary" form results precisely from these being carefully composed as liturgical texts for use on a specific occasion. To begin to see this in Alma 36-42 one should preface its reading with a question:

**Father, why is this night different from other nights?**<sup>50</sup>

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*Hallel*

Were our mouths as full of song  
as the sea,  
and our tongues as full of jubilation  
as its multitude of waves,  
and our lips as full of praise  
as the breadth of the heavens,  
and our eyes as brilliant as the sun  
and the moon,  
and our hands as outspread in prayer  
as the eagles of the sky  
and our feet as swift as the deer--  
we still could not sufficiently  
thank you, Hashem  
our God and God of our fathers,  
and bless your name,  
for even one of the thousands  
upon thousands  
and myriads of myriads of favors,  
miracles and wonders,  
which You have performed  
for our fathers and for us.  
(Scherman, 1981:73)

Mosiah 2:20-21

If you should render all the thanks and  
praise  
/which your whole souls hath power  
to possess ...  
if ye should serve Him  
who hath created you from the beginning  
and art preserving you from day to day  
by lending you breath  
that you may live and move ...  
if ye should serve him with all your  
whole soul  
and yet ye would be unprofitable  
servants.

Discovery of parallels to the texts of these Hebrew prayers in the Book of Mosiah is a major step forward in our understanding of the pervasiveness of Israelite religious practices in the Book of Mormon.

<sup>50</sup> It was precisely hearing this question asked, while struggling against a stupor of thought that prevented my making any sense out of a reading of Alma 36, that jelled an accumulation of semi-insights into other texts and began my conscious examination of Israelite religion in the Book of Mormon.

Other scriptures with a broader implicit Passover text matrix and Jewish cultural framework have been found. Jesus's twelfth year visit to the temple at Passover reveals him as a firstborn son with the doctors, both hearing them, and *asking them questions*. And all that heard him were *astonished at his understanding and answers*. (Luke 2:46-47, *italics added*.)

What questions might a boy be expected to ask at such a time? And what answers might he provide. Passover ritual provides both a context and an answer.

Is there also significance in the "record of John" [the Baptist], where representatives of the [leaders of the Sanhedrin (?)] Jews first ask him four questions: 1) "Who art thou" (John 1:19), 2) "Art thou Elias [Elijah]?" (v. 21), 3) "Art thou that prophet?" (v. 21), and 4) "Who art thou? ... What sayest thou of thyself?" (v. 22). John is then asked to elaborate on the Law: "Why baptizest thou then ...?" (v.25).

I cite the traditional first question asked by a child to begin a Passover *seder* because Alma 36-42 is either structured upon and/or in fact is occurring during a Passover service.<sup>51</sup> The questions asked by a child are a very good place to begin, since the normal Passover service contains answers a father may give to different kinds of sons, according to the way the particular son asks the question.<sup>52</sup> To the wise son a father must "expound the laws of the Passover" (Ben Shahn, 1965:20).<sup>53</sup> Alma's son Helaman, to whom the religious "birthright" (as it were) is ultimately conveyed, is given a very complex lesson in Alma 36, which is a narrative paralleling of Israel's liberation from slavery and Alma's being freed from the slavery of sin. This is followed in chapter 37 by an exposition of the law. On the other hand, a father should reply to the offensive comments of a "wicked son" in such a way as to "set his [son's] teeth too on edge" (*ibid.*, 20). Alma's sermon to his son Corianton in chapters 39-42 certainly fills this requirement. I am suggesting, in other words, that Alma's statements to at least two of his three sons fall within the expected pattern of Passover ritual.<sup>54</sup> This parallel tends to justify our relating the text structurally to an actual Passover observance or exposition. But beyond this correlation there is a high degree of resemblance of the content of the text to the ritual itself, keeping in mind that it is an attested ancient practice to modify or personalize and internalize the communal celebration of the covenant of Israel with God, paralleling the history of Israel with one's own life. In Gamaliel's words on the observance of Passover, for example, we read that:

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<sup>51</sup> Compare here the discussion of the Passover *Haggadah* as the underlying structure of the Gospel of Mark and early Jewish (pre-Hellenistic) Christian worship, based upon an analysis of, among other things, the nature of the four kinds of questions asked in Mark 11:27-12:34 (Daube, 1959:174-187; cf. Mann, 1986:77ff.). Witness that Passover was not "done away" with and will yet be celebrated is found in Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25; and Luke 22:18.

<sup>52</sup> Concerning the questions asked, see David Daube "Four Types of Questions" (1951:45-48, cf. 1959; see also Bloch, 1981:152-166; and the F.A.R.M.S. UPDATE "The Sons of the Passover," 1984a; Welch, ed., 1992:196-198). The Sadducees' question in Mark 12:23 was, in part like Corianton's concern, involving the resurrection and marriage. The former, however, was also an attempt to elicit a commentary on the sixth through the ninth chapters of the Book of Tobit, which, considering that five copies of this book were found at Qumran, almost certainly was taken as part of the canon by all parties concerned (Thomasson, 1984).

<sup>53</sup> Compare the text of any current *Haggadah* for Passover.

<sup>54</sup> Shiblon does not precisely fit the pattern of a son who is too young to ask the required questions, nor is he a simple minded son. He is an adult and a successful missionary. Nevertheless, Alma's comments to him structurally fit a pattern. For a "simple son," or one so young as to "not know how to ask," the *seder* specifies other answers (*ibid.*, 29). For the former there should be a "concise reply couched in elementary terms" (*ibid.*, 26). Shiblon receives just the first half of the chiasm that is contained in Alma 36, without elaborations, which turns the recursive poem into a linear prose narrative (Alma 38). In the latter case--really a variation of the previous one--the father must tell the child. Medieval manuscripts pictured this as a ritual opening of the mouth for the child (*ibid.*, 26; cf. Urrutia, 1982:222-223).

It is noteworthy that, as Richard Erickson has pointed out, that Lehi, in blessing his sons, divides them into three groups: righteous sons (Sam and Nephi, II Nephi 4:11), wicked sons (Laman and Lemuel, II Nephi 4:1-9), and young sons born in the wilderness and too young, perhaps, to fully comprehend (Jacob and Joseph, II Nephi 2-3). Was this a Passover occasion as well, or is its clear isomorphism with Passover liturgy coincidental?

In every generation each man must regard himself as though he himself came out of Egypt, for it is written "You shall tell your son on that day 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt'(Exodus 13:8)." Mishnah *Pesahim* 10:5.<sup>55</sup>

As George Tate has noted, the typology of the Exodus pattern is found throughout the Book of Mormon (1978:245-262; consider also Hawkins and Thomasson, 1984). Passover types and images persist in the early Christian community as well.<sup>56</sup> The Passover *seder* is a

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<sup>55</sup> It is not an uncommon ritual pattern that each participant or officiant should think of him- or herself as if actually being the person whose actions are ritually re-created, portrayed, or enacted before an altar. Compare the way in which Peter parallels his deliverance at Passover from bondage with the Exodus in Acts 12 (especially Exodus 12:11 and Acts 12:8;

I have discovered that a dramatic Christian textual example of the same kind of personalizing of Passover liturgy suggested by Rabban Gamaliel is found in chapter 12 of Acts. Acts 12:3 tells us Peter is imprisoned by Herod during the "days of unleavened bread," with the intention that after what the KJV incorrectly renders as "Easter" (12:4, where the Greek reads  $\pi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\chi\alpha$  which of course translates "Passover"), Peter would be brought to judgement and executed. Comparing the commandments given for observance of the Passover in Egypt with the instructions from the angel appearing to Peter we read, for example:

And thus shall ye eat it;  
*with your loins girded,*  
*your shoes on your feet,*  
and your staff in your hand,  
and ye shall eat it in haste:  
*it is the LORD'S Passover.*

(Exodus 12:11, *italics* in original, *italics* added.)

*Gird thyself,*  
*and bind on thy sandals...*  
Cast thy garment about thee,  
and follow me  
(Acts 12:8, *italics* added.)

That this resemblance is not coincidental is obvious by the remainder of the narrative in Acts. In freeing Peter the angel *goes before* Peter (is the angel's light, v. 7, like a pillar of fire?), gates opening of their own accord, *delivering Peter from bondage* (vs. 9-10), past four quaternions of soldiers (v. 4).

As it is Passover, the disciples are meeting together in prayer (v. 12), when Peter arrives and declares "to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison" (v. 17). The earliest Christian church had no better model with which to articulate and explain Peter's release than by describing it in terms of Israel being freed from bondage from Egypt. This is more than typological resemblance. Apart from timing, Peter's personal salvation experience here simply fits Passover. Another complex of symbols or genre is not as efficient and evocative for a community of Jewish Christians who still keep the Law. There is no better way to tell the story. [Also note that the narrative of Peter's release ends with Herod attempting to have himself recognized as the divine king, giving the appropriate oration, receiving the prescribed *acclamatio*, and being smitten by an angel with, as it were, the plagues of Egypt for his presumption (Acts 12:21-23; Josephus, *Antiquities*, XIX, 8:2--see note in Loeb Classics translation. Consider also Thomasson, 1985).]

<sup>56</sup> Just as David Daube pointed out with regard to Mark 11:27-12:34 (1959), the Jewish liturgy constantly influenced the "telling" of the Christian story. The symbology of the early Church was a "Jewish" symbology. Thus, even Paul describes the Christ as "our Passover" and speaks of how the household of faith must purge out the leaven, employing an aspect of Passover ritual as a metaphor that was only meaningful to Jewish Christians who knew perfectly well what it was to "kosher" a house for Passover (I Cor. 5:7). And whatever its authorship, the Epistle to the Hebrews consists, in the main, of paired comparisons between Noahide, Abrahamic and Mosaic ritual and Law on the one hand and Christian practice on the other, and the literary purpose of these parallels (and they are *not* antithetical) is to show that there is *continuity* between the two, *not* a radical departure. And so it is with countless other Christian texts. Steven Wood's study of Jewish ritual and the cultural bases of Christian texts, which includes

ritual reenactment and celebration of those historical events as recorded in the scriptures. Alma 36 is a balanced chiasm. It begins and ends with a recitation of the basic events of the Exodus and the commandments associated with them. In so doing it is bringing to mind these crucial events just as they were to be recalled by Israel through all generations.<sup>57</sup> The chiasm (**boldface**) and Passover themes (*italicized*) that begin and end Alma 36 appear below.

1) My *son*, give ear to my **words**, for I swear unto you, that inasmuch as ye shall keep the *commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land*.

2) I would that *ye should do as I have done, in remembering the captivity of our fathers; for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them* except it was the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and he surely did deliver them in their afflictions.

30) But behold, my *son*, this is not all; for ye had ought to know as I do know, that inasmuch as ye shall keep the *commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land*; and ye ought to know also, that inasmuch as ye will not keep the commandments of God ye shall be cut off from his presence. Now this is according to his **word**.

29) Yea, and he hath also brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem; and he hath also, by his everlasting power, *delivered them out of bondage and captivity*, from time to time even down to the present day, and *I have always retained in remembrance their captivity; yea, and ye also had ought to retain in remembrance, as I have done, their captivity*.

The crux or pivot of the chiasm in Alma 36 is in verses 17-18. Quite appropriately for this messianic Israelite/Nephite (and Qumran-like) community, this is the Messiah, known in translation as Jesus Christ, who is clearly alluded to since He is the lamb slain before the foundation of the world, of whom the sacrificial Passover lamb is a type and an image.

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his discovery of traditional Passover ritual aspects of the "cleansing of the Temple" (Matthew 21), totally revises gentile Christian readings. His recognition of Judas' role as the "wicked son" within the Passover liturgy of the celebration of the Last Supper (Matthew 26), is one of many Passover implications of which are consistently ignored by Christians.

<sup>57</sup>

Consider the text:

And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD *throughout* your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance *for ever* ... And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons *for ever*. And it shall come to pass, *when ye be come to the land* which the LORD will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service. (Exodus 12:14, 24-25, *italics added*)

Many other details of Passover imagery and structure are found in Alma 36, whether as allusions or by explicit mention. An angel calls Alma to leave his former way of life/slavery to sin (v. 8-9), and threatens destruction if he does not (remembering that Alma is his father's firstborn, this parallels the death of the Egyptian firstborn). The three days and nights of torment Alma experienced (v. 10), is a double-allusion harking back to the plague of darkness in Egypt (Exodus 10:21-23), and looking forward to the darkness in the Nephite lands during the time Christ spent in the tomb. The pillar of fire which guided Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 14:24) is pointed to by citing Lehi's vision (v.22, quoting I Nephi 1:8) which, for those familiar with it, would also recall that patriarch's vision of a pillar of fire (I Nephi 1:6). Also the command to remember (pass on) these things from generation to generation (v.29) is recalled. On every Sabbath night, and especially on Passover, it is appropriate for a father to bless his children, and Alma's comments to his sons can be seen in this regard. There is much more that a detailed study of rabbinic literature (for example the tractate *Mo`ed*) and an historical study of the *Haggadah* could reveal, as, for example, Alma's helping Corianton see that his "mind is worried" (40:1; cf. 42:29) with the wrong questions, the answers to which "mattereth not." (v.5). A characteristic of the wicked son is asking the **wrong** questions.

Another apparent Passover allusion has been noted in Alma 8-10. At first glance, Amulek's mention of the "fourth day of this seventh month" (counting from *Tishrei* this could be *Nisan*) in Alma 10:6 is not an obvious reference to anything. Once put in context, however, its seeming lack of significance becomes problematic. Amulek is here ritually serving as a witness in a prophetic indictment/judgement against the city of Ammonihah, seconding Alma's testimony ("in the mouths of two or three witnesses ..."). Compare first their statements (important details are **boldfaced** and the main parallels are *italicized*, those readings followed with a superscripted != and a number are from the *Book of Mormon Critical Text*, as explained below):

AMULEK--Alma 10:

6 ... even until the **fourth day of this seventh month**, which is in the tenth year of the reign of our<sup>1=1</sup> judges.

7 As I was a<sup>1=2</sup> **journeying to see a very near kindred**, behold an *angel of the Lord appeared unto me* and said: Amulek,

return to **thine own house**, for thou shalt **feed a prophet of the Lord**; yea, a *holy man*, which<sup>1=3</sup> art<sup>1=4</sup> a *chosen man of God*; for he hath<sup>1=5</sup> **fasted many days** because of the sins of this people, and he is an *hungered*,

and thou shalt<sup>1=6</sup> *receive him into thy house and feed him*, and *he shall bless thee* and thy house; and the **blessing of the Lord shall rest upon thee and thy house**.

ALMA--Alma 8:

16 And behold, I [*an angel*] am sent to command thee that thou return to the city of Ammonihah, and preach again unto the people of the city; yea preach unto them. Yea, say unto them, **except they repent the Lord God will destroy them**.

17 For behold, they do study at this time that they may destroy the **liberty** of thy people ...

19 And [it came to pass that]<sup>1=7</sup> as he entered the city *he was an hungered*, and he saith<sup>1=8</sup> to a man: **Will ye give to an humble servant of God something to eat?**

20 And the man saith<sup>1=9</sup> unto him: I am a Nephite, and I know that thou art a *holy prophet of God*, for thou art the man which<sup>1=10</sup> an *angel saith*<sup>1=11</sup> *in a vision*: Thou shalt receive. Therefore, go with me *into my house*, and I will *impart unto thee of my food*; and I know that thou wilt<sup>1=12</sup> be a *blessing unto me* and my house ...

26 And now, Amulek, because *thou hast fed me and took*<sup>1=13</sup> *me in*, **thou art blessed**; for I was an *hungered*, for I had fasted many days.

27 And [it came to pass that]<sup>1=14</sup> **Alma tarried many days with Amulek before he began to preach** unto the people.\*

\* Variant readings: <sup>1=1, 2, 7, 12, 13, 14</sup> are found in [P] and [1830]; <sup>1=3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11</sup> are from the *Book of Mormon Critical Text*; <sup>1=6</sup> "shall" is in [P] and 1830; "shalt" is in [P<sup>c</sup>].

Examining the two narratives together, we find it is crucial to the story that Amulek (a Nephite) was travelling to visit a near kinsman (who better to spend the Passover with?), when the angel appears to him and commands him to return to his own home and make a place at his table for a prophet who has been fasting. If he does this, he and his family will be blessed. Alma comes into his home and they are indeed blessed. Note what is essential, however: Amulek, in

describing the events says, "on the fourth day of *this* seventh month," (10:6) on the occasion of their preaching, while we are told "Alma tarried many days with Amulek before he began to preach unto the people" (8:27). Restating the obvious, early in the seventh month Amulek is commanded to set a place for a fasting prophet. The prophet comes and tarries many days, then (remembering that however long he tarries it is still "this" the seventh month, when they go out to preach to the people of Ammonihah), the message they carry is that if the people of Ammonihah do not repent, the destroying Angel will not pass them by. In this context, the plate Amulek sets serves as one more symbolic token of the judgement of condemnation that the people of Ammonihah will have visited upon them, Egypt and Sodom-like, by the Lamanites.<sup>58</sup>

Finally, the "Christian" Passovers in III Nephi demand special attention. The first, well known occurrence is in III Nephi 8, where Christ's death is witnessed throughout the land. What has been missed, however, is that popular non-scriptural media including paintings, pageants and dramatized cassette tape depictions of the Lord appearing to the survivors who are still crawling out of the ruins have biased our understanding of the text here in a crucial way. Christ actually appears to the Nephites a **year after** (!) the events described in III Nephi 8. And understanding the pervasiveness of Israelite ritual among the Nephites makes this point obvious and intelligible.

And it came to pass that in the *ending* of the thirty and fourth year, behold, I will shew unto you that the people of Nephi which were spared, and also they which had been called Lamanites, which had been spared, did have *great favours*<sup>59</sup> shewn unto them, and *great blessings* poured out upon their heads, insomuch that *soon*<sup>60</sup> after the ascension of

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<sup>58</sup> Anciently it is the plate that in their turns Abraham and Lot set for the angels whom Sodom rejected; in post-exilic times it is the plate Jews set for *Elijah* and the poor; and among Christians it is the meal that should be shared with a "poor wayfaring man of grief," "for inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me."

<sup>59</sup> [P] favours.

<sup>60</sup> "Soon" is a crucial word here, of course. Reading it in twentieth century English as meaning something akin to "immediately" gives us the impression that these events happened "back to back" or at most after Christ's "forty days" ministry. Consulting Noah Webster's *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828), which gives us our best access to what English words meant to Joseph Smith and his contemporaries at the time when the Book of Mormon was being translated, we find:

SOON, *adv.* [Sax. *sona*; Goth. *suns*] In a short time; shortly after any time specified or supposed; as *soon*, after sunrise; *soon* after dinner; I shall *soon* return; we shall *soon* have clear weather.

The usage of *soon* to refer to an event occurring "shortly after any time specified or supposed," where the time specified may be quite long is exemplified in many scriptural passages, as below.

... the day *soon* cometh that all the proud and they who do wickedly shall be as stubble; and the day cometh that they must be burned. For the time *soon* cometh that the fullness of the wrath of God shall be poured out upon all the children of men; for He will not suffer that the wicked destroy the righteous. (III Nephi 22:15-16, **bold** added for emphasis.)

*Soon*, in this example, refers to an event that may be ±2600 years in the future of the time the prophecy is uttered.

*Supper, from the dictionary, follows*



Christ into heaven<sup>61</sup> he did truly manifest himself unto them--Shewing his body unto them, and ministering unto them; and an account of his ministry shall be given hereafter ... And now it came to pass that there were a *great multitude* gathered together, of the people of Nephi, *round about the temple* which was in the land Bountiful ... (III Nephi 10:18-19; 11:1, **bold** and *italics* added for emphasis).

Again, the setting here is very similar to that of Mosiah 1-6, with the people gathered around the temple. The occasion would seem to be the typical *Sukkoth* rituals for beginning the thirty-fifth year of the new Nephite calendar that began with Christ's birth. By the Old World calendar Christ was crucified at Passover (14 *Nisan*), which fell on the fourth day of the first month of the thirty-fourth year of the Nephite calendar (III Nephi, 8:2,5). But whatever the date in relation to previous calendars, in the coming of Christ to the Nephites we see a fusion of all the major festivals in the person of Christ, of whom all the symbols of the many feasts, festivals and Holy Days, the divine king, the new year's creation rituals, the sacrificial lamb, etc., are only types and images.<sup>62</sup>

### Pentecost

Even in the Hebrew scriptures, references to the Israelite Pentecost, feast of Weeks or Firstfruits (*Shavuot*, 6-7 *Sivan*, cf. Exodus 23:16; Lev. 23:15-21) are elusive. This is partly because, as noted (Bloch, 1978:179-189), it is conceptually an extension of Passover and shares the general exodus theme of the other two major festivals. But Pentecost also has an agricultural theme and an historical association with the giving of the Law at Sinai.<sup>63</sup> This is in contrast to

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<sup>61</sup> Again, the question here is which ascension? The one of which he spoke of in the garden to Mary (John 20:17), or at the end of his forty day ministry (Acts 1:3, 9-11). How long is soon after either ascension?

<sup>62</sup> Although almost a full year has passed, the Lehite survivors still gather to the temple to celebrate the Nephite New Year. It is celebrated based upon the calendar reform at the time of the Lord's birth, but their Passover now dates from Christ's death according to the Old World calendar. Applying Professor John L. Sorenson's insights regarding the Mayan Long Count, the two festivals would now be in conjunction (with the 360 day year there would be 178.5 days of "slippage" in a seasonally-based Passover festival during the 34 lunisolar years of Christ's life [5.25 days slippage per year x 34 years of Christ's life = 178.5 days]).

Jerome Horowitz has independently noted and quite convincingly argued that Christ came to the Nephites a year after his death, in accord with the traditional ritual calendar. He makes a very good case for the events of III Nephi 11ff. dating a year after the Lord's death. Among other points, he states,

In III Nephi 23:9-13 Christ criticized Nephi for not having recorded the fact that many of the saints were resurrected following his resurrection. The context indicates that the time that occurred and should have been recorded was in the past. It seems incongruous to conclude that Nephi was criticized for having failed to record in the past what had just happened. III Nephi 23:12 says that Nephi "remembered" that it had not been written. Use of the word remembered seems to imply bringing back to mind something that happened at an earlier time. A likely explanation is that for a time following the resurrection Nephi was so busy helping with the consequences of the cataclysmic events just ended including [first] burying great numbers of dead [caring for the injured and then rebuilding?] he did not make the record at the time and then when the hectic activity was over he forgot to make it. (Horowitz, 1984; cf. Brown, 1984b.)

<sup>63</sup> Whether or not one agrees with the assumption of the relative antiquity of Israel's agricultural festivals compared to the celebrations of the Exodus with which they are linked, doubtless

the more obviously "Christian" Pentecosts (Acts 2; III Nephi 19, 26:13-15, 16). Upon analysis of the ancient festival's apparently most crucial details, however, one definite and several plausible allusions to Pentecost were found in the Book of Mormon. Remembering that the historical (Sinaitic) festival elements involved Moses being encircled by fire and smoke on the mountain, conversing with God and bringing down the tablets of the Law, after which he shone to such a degree that the people had him veil his face (Exodus 35:29ff.), there are several possibilities.

One Pentecost type/event is quite clear in the Book of Mormon. While the text is not explicit as to the calendar day when the prophet Abinadi came to preach to the court of King Noah, it is very specific as to how he, in our vernacular, "laid down the law." Abinadi comes to the court of King Noah with a prophetic warning of impending destruction because the rulers have set their hearts upon the "golden calves" of riches and whoredoms and tax the people heavily to do so (Mosiah 12:29-32; 11:6). If we only look superficially this is like many others such warnings, but in detail it is a type of the Sinaitic Pentecost. Two years after his first appearance Abinadi returns to preach to the people. He is arrested and taken to the court. After preaching against Noah and his retinue the first time, Abinadi is explicitly referred to as being transfigured (cf. Matthew 17:1-2) so that people feared to approach or touch him,

And his face shone with exceeding luster, even as Moses' did while in the mount of Sinai, while speaking with the Lord. (Mosiah 13:5)

His message is a careful recitation of the Decalogue to the assembly (Mosiah 12:33-36; 13:11-24),<sup>64</sup> and he tells them that if they had taught the people these laws and kept them he would not have been sent by the Lord to prophesy against them (Mosiah 13: 25-26).<sup>65</sup> It is worthy of note that Noah incarcerates Abinadi rather than executing him immediately, and that the trial is in fact resumed after three days (Mosiah 17:6). If the events of Mosiah 12:9-17:5 occurred **during** a festival such as Pentecost, the trial would have been illegal, to say nothing of the execution, which would have been doubly prohibited because of laws against executions and the kindling of fires on sabbaths and Holy Days. By resuming the trial after the festival it would have a

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in the process which connected originally agricultural feasts to events in Israel's history, the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) was identified with the celebration of Moses' receiving the Law on Mount Sinai. We are not certain how old this identification is. (Brown, 1980:206, n. 1)

In the liturgy it is known as the "season of the giving of our Torah."

<sup>64</sup> Is it possible that this case of Abinadi's reading of the Law was based on part of the regular observance of Pentecost as a celebration of God's giving the Law to Israel, where it would be read to the assembly, as argued in Moshe Weinfeld's "The Decalogue: Its Uniqueness and Place in Israel's Traditions" (1990).

<sup>65</sup> See the F.A.R.M.S. UPDATE "Abinadi and Pentecost" (1985c; Welch, ed., 1992:135-138).

semblance of legality.<sup>66</sup> And if Abinadi had gained any supporters they would probably have gone home soon after the festival ended.<sup>67</sup>

A second case is thematically similar. It involves Nephi's being commanded to go up the mountain (I Nephi 17:7), having a vision (vs. 8-10), and finally confronting his brothers in such a way that they "durst not lay their hands upon me nor touch me with their fingers" (v. 52, 48-55).

A case where structural elements do not exactly fit chronology is found at the Feast of Tabernacles where King Benjamin reiterates the text of his previously revealed "Apocalypse of Benjamin," that has certain pentecostal aspects (Mosiah 3:2-27), which he interweaves with his Midrash on the *Shehecheyanu* prayer to create his New Year sermon. The people's response, while ritualistic, also has certain pentecostal features (Mosiah 4:3ff.).

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<sup>66</sup> On legal aspects of the trial see John W. Welch, "Judicial Process in the Trial of Abinadi" (1983). Contrast the attempted execution of Nephi and Lehi as recorded in Helaman 5:21-22, in which there is an apparent delay of the execution until Pentecost, but no trial of any sort is mentioned. See also discussion of the Helaman text in relation to Pentecost, below.

<sup>67</sup> A text that is structurally similar to Pentecost, and fits reasonably with a Passover date for Lehi's flight from Jerusalem, relates to the sons' return for the Brass Plates (though the reception of the plates in the camp more closely parallels *Simhat Torah*). The occasion is Nephi's intimate conversation with the Spirit which constrained him to kill Laban, thus obtaining the plates and bringing them back to the Lehite camp (I Nephi 4). If this seems strained, it should be recalled that the very imagery which Nephi uses is that of being "strong like unto Moses" (v. 2) and comparing Laban to the Egyptians. Related to the idea that "it is better that one man should perish" (v. 14) there is the fact that human death and/or sacrifice seems to have been an early and recurring part of Pentecost, as well as being an implicit dimension of Passover. In fact, at the first Pentecost, Hur, thought to have been groomed as a successor to Moses (Exodus 17:12, 24:14), is supposed to have been

[M]urdered by the people for courageously opposing their demand to make the golden calf. (See the article "Hur," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 8:1113; cf. Exodus Rabba 48:3, Sanhedrin 7a)

Moreover, the sons of Levi killed about three thousand men (Hur's wife Miriam was a Levite. Was this in retaliation?) after Moses came down from the mountain (Exodus 32:26-28). Linking human sacrifice with at least a corrupted observance of Pentecost is not an unprecedented idea.

Another likely candidate for a type of Pentecost has been pointed out by Benjamin Urrutia in Helaman 5. The young Nephi and Lehi were taken prisoner by Nephite dissenters and Lamanites. Rather than being killed outright they are held in prison "many days" after which their captors:

[G]o into the prison to take them that they might slay them (Helaman 5:22).

The two missionaries could easily have been slain at the time of their capture. Instead they are held for a specific occasion. Before they can be killed, however, Lehi and Nephi are "encircled about *as if by fire*" (Helaman 5:23; cf. Acts 2:3). A heavenly message calling their captors to repent follows (see especially Helaman 5:30; cf. Acts 2:2). Then the Lamanites ask "What shall we do?" (Helaman 5:40; cf. Acts 2:37--is this formulaic?), and receive the reply to repent and have faith in Christ (Helaman. 5:41; cf. Acts 2:38). If this occurred on a ritual occasion such as Pentecost the effect on the Lamanites would have been all the more impressive (cf. the narrative of Elijah in I Kings 19:11-12). This incident, at least, bears further study. It is not impossible that other pentecostal type events will yet be discovered in the Book of Mormon.

## OTHER RITUAL PRACTICES

Like the feasts and festivals, circumcision is taken for granted by Book of Mormon writers through 95% of Lehite history (597 B.C.E. to ca 350 C.E.), in much the same way that it goes virtually unmentioned but implicitly assumed through almost all of the Hebrew scriptures. It is only mentioned explicitly when its practice is abandoned (Moroni 8:5-8),<sup>68</sup> and by implication in passages such as II Nephi 8:24 (cf. III Nephi 20:36 in Christian times), which presuppose the practice for all Israelites including the Lehite peoples.

Briefly, other Book of Mormon ritual practices that are mentioned and could be profitably compared with Israelite biblical and Talmudic sources include prayers of many types (as in II Nephi 32:9), non-Levitical thank-offerings upon altars (I Nephi 2:7), and sacrifice and burnt-offerings that may or may not have been Levitical in nature (I Nephi 5:9).<sup>69</sup> Reading the scriptures seems to have been a ritual practice. Various liturgical texts seem to have been employed, and numerous Hebrew Psalms are cited, as well as new ones such as the Psalm of Nephi (II Nephi 4:16-35), and the Thanksgiving Hymns of Ammon (Alma 26:11-37), and Alma (Alma 29:1-17).

Marriage rituals seem to be taken for granted in the Book of Mormon (I Nephi 7), but Hugh Nibley and Sidney Sperry's suggestions that kinship patterns that establish "preferred marriage partners" are also relevant (compare Abraham's concern that his descendants marry the appropriate cousins).<sup>70</sup> Polygyny is practiced by various peoples (Jacob 2, Mosiah 11:14, and Alma 10:11).

Divination for various purposes (including "place divination" Alma 16:5) took several forms, including using the *Urim and Thummim* and the *Liahona* (I Nephi 16:10, Mosiah 8:13). The function of the *Liahona* and other items in coronation ritual also should be considered (Thomasson, 1993). Prophecy seems to have had a role in ritual and worship services, as a didactic mechanism. Pre-Christian baptism is mentioned (I Nephi 10:9, Mosiah 18:13 [in fact, here, re-baptism]).

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<sup>68</sup> This text links the ritual significantly with baptism, as pointed out by Max H. Russell. It is worth wondering if Mormon 1:2, where Mormon

being about ten years of age ... began to be learned somewhat after the manner of learning of my people. may refer to the preparation necessary to become *bar Mitzvah*.

<sup>69</sup> Was Zoram a Levite who had resided in the Northern Kingdom and had been attached in a priestly capacity to Lehi's clan or Laban's family in particular? If so this would account for Levitical ritual among the Nephites prior to their joining with the Mulekite refugees, who very possibly would have had both Levitical and Aaronic functionaries as part of the retinue. If Zoram had a priestly function would this account for his seeming link to the brass plates? Also, are the descendants of Mulek the original "kingmen," raising their hereditary claims against those of the Nephites? Is there any connection between Zoram and Zoramite ritual (the Rameumptom, etc.)? Even today, those men of priestly descent (*Kohanim*) are first among equals in the Jewish synagogue.

<sup>70</sup> Did their speculations serve as the foundation upon which Mark Hoffmann drew to create part of the text of his forged letter from Lucy Mack Smith to her sister, which he dated January 23, 1829? Was this letter itself simply more groundwork for Hoffmann's planned forgery of the 116 missing pages of Book of Mormon manuscript?

There are specific mourning and funerary practices (I Nephi 16:34-35), as well as ceremonial executions (Mosiah 19:20, 24; III Nephi 4:28-33).<sup>71</sup> "Patriarchal" blessings are frequently given (II Nephi 4). Bearing witness or testifying is also a specific practice, (I Nephi 22:31) as is the taking/making of oaths and covenants (I Nephi 4:32, Alma 24:15-19, Alma 37:27). There is public covenanting (Mosiah 6:1) associated with some of the large festivals.<sup>72</sup>

Temple worship of a Levitical nature seems to have been common throughout the Nephite lands from the building of the first Nephite temple (II Nephi 5:16). Temple worship of a non-Levitical nature, perhaps paralleling what the Coptic Gospel of Philip describes as a temple with a Holy of Holies and a "Bridal Chamber" (see Thomasson, 1970b), involving the Melchizedek priesthood covenant also is present (Alma 9-14).

Writings in Apocalypse style also have a liturgical function (see the Apocalypse of Benjamin, Mosiah 3:2ff.), and some midrash also seem to be created for liturgy and/or sermonizing (see the Isaiah Midrash by Nephi in II Nephi 25:1, 7ff.; and the already noted *Shehecheyanu* Midrash in Mosiah 2:20ff.). Ritual self-abasement is practiced as a sign of repentance (Mosiah 11:25), and there also is a ritual which signifies status differentiation that diffused from the Nephites to the Lamanites who elaborated upon it (Alma 47:22-23). Harvest (and equinoctial ?) festivals may have been common (Mosiah 20:1-2).<sup>73</sup>

Religious conversions and attending rituals (name changes and *rites de passage*, etc.) are common throughout the text. Priests were ordained (Mosiah 25:19), excommunication was practiced (Mosiah 26:36), and at certain times warfare seems to have been ritualized. Hugh Nibley also noted what seems to be a pattern of syncretistic encroachment of some already established native American religion upon the Mosaic order practiced by the Nephites, one of several probable references to non-Book of Mormon peoples in the Nephite records.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> See, for example, the November 1984 F.A.R.M.S. UPDATE on "The Execution of Zemnaridah" (1984b; Welch, ed., 1992:250-252), which compares Maimonides' discussion of the law as it relates to this text.

<sup>72</sup> There is also a very specific type of covenant administered by Moroni (Alma 46:21) which appears to be derived from the Book of Jacob (or Joseph) on the Brass Plates (Alma 46:24-25, a text which, as Dr. Nibley has noted, has echoes in the works of the Moslem scholar Tha'Labi) and known to, among others, Abinadi (Mosiah 12:3).

<sup>73</sup> There may be precedent for both summer (early harvest) and fall festivals that involved youth in the fields. Jacob Neusner points out that before the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., the Day of Atonement was a time of great celebration.

After the sin-offering was completed [on the Day of Atonement] in the Temple, people felt themselves free of sin and guilt. It was a time of tremendous spiritual exultation and excitement. Then young people--we are told--would go out and dance in the fields. (Neusner, 1975:6)

With regard to the summer festival see the F.A.R.M.S. UPDATE "Dancing Maidens and the Fifteenth of Av" (1985b; Welch, ed., 1992:139-141).

<sup>74</sup> Memo of 5/9/84. Copy in possession of the author.

## RITUAL PLACES

Besides the temples, sanctuaries (following the pattern of Northern Kingdom or Lehite worship?—perhaps involving “high places”) and synagogues apparently were common (Alma 16:13; 23:2. Does the fact that these were “built after the manner of the Jews” reflect the Kingdom of Judah and Mulekite practices, or is this simply the best choice in translation vocabulary? [Consider here Welch, ed., 1992:193-195.]). Alma teaches and baptizes refugees from Noah’s kingdom in the forests and the “Waters of Mormon” (Mosiah 18:5-8). Ammon teaches the Amalekites in their synagogues and the Lamanites in their “assembly[s]” (Alma 21:16).<sup>75</sup> The Zoramites gathered together once a week in a synagogue to pray (Alma 31:12), whereas Alma questions the supposition that one must either be in a synagogue to worship or only do so once a week (Alma 32:10-11). In his Midrash on Zenos’ teaching (Alma 33:3-11), Amulek seems to reflect the more common Israelite practice of praying three times daily (Alma 34:21). Lehi’s naming the valley and river after his sons also may have had a ritual component (I Nephi 2:7-10).

## CONCLUSIONS

In 1957 Hugh Nibley pointed out Ariadne’s clue—an approach to the Book of Mormon—for all to follow. Today we find that it is not a mere single red thread which runs through the tapestry of Nephite history. In Joseph Smith’s translation of the Book of Mormon,

*every English thread is ouercast with a thick woollen woofe of strange wordes* [1627].  
 (Little, 1955:2246, *italics added*).

Strange words that reveal strange things strangely told, and not just to the philologist. Ancient Israelite religious ritual cycles in the Book of Mormon, unlike the occasional historical “facts” so commonly embroidered upon the fabric of after-the-fact pseudepigrapha, are the very warp threads that run almost invisibly and inseparably throughout the entire 1,000 years of Nephite history.<sup>76</sup> Except for an increasing public awareness of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, most

<sup>75</sup> Consider the relationships of:

Synagogue,	“assembly”		<i>Assembly</i>
	Amalekites		Lamanites
Heb.	<i>‘eda</i>		<i>qahal</i>

*Book of Mormon Critical Text* (I:22, note 190 [I Nephi 4:26]; I:257, note 1043 [II Nephi 26:26]; II:657, note 190 [Alma 21:16]).

<sup>76</sup> Even cursory study of ancient Israel’s festivals makes it obvious that celebration of the yearly cycle was inextricably linked with and had its primary locus in the temple. Elaboration of the point is beyond the scope of this study, but it is essential to note that along with the festivals, reflections, types and shadows of Israelite temple rituals are found throughout the *Book of Mormon* text. But these are only visible to persons within the culture of the text’s origin, or to those who are sufficiently versed in it—knowing what the first Nephi describes as the “performances and ordinances of God ... given unto Moses” (II Nephi 25:30)—to recognize subtle or even unconscious allusions. This is compounded by the fact that, unlike the festivals, these references are to an esoteric tradition. Nevertheless, certain passages are transparent once recognized (cf. Alma 9-14; see Thomasson, 1973, especially note 12; 1988; and Welch, 1975, 1979).

readers' vision of the book's internal cohesiveness and structural integrity has heretofore almost been obscured by the weft of day-by-day events it reports. And it is these latter which, due to the common denominators of human life in every age and the perennial concerns of any religious community, often have led to the unjustified, cavalier dismissal of the Book of Mormon as a 19th century document, and also have resulted in the book's devout students and most vicious critics alike completely missing its overall patterns.

Since Hugh Nibley began publishing on the Book of Mormon,<sup>77</sup> there has been no real justification for simple-minded "environmental" explanations that ignore the wealth of detail he has single-handedly documented. Today, with a calendar of Nephite sacred time emerging into view, I would argue that few since the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. and the interruption of its divine service, probably even the most conservative East European *shtetl* or urban Hasidic community of Joseph Smith's day, let alone in upstate New York, has anyone had the ancient sacred cycles so thoroughly integrated into their life that they could write such a narrative so un-self-consciously. Here, as in some other crucial dimensions, the ancient and Israelite character of the book cannot be ignored. It has long been past the time for mere apologetics. We must pay attention to what the Book of Mormon can teach us, even about the religion of pre-exilic Israel.

Ancient Israelite religion is the common substratum and the basic contextualizing feature of the Book of Mormon narrative. Whereas the previously recognized Feast of Tabernacles (Mosiah 1-6) appeared to be the major exception to what critics of the Book of Mormon argued was only an otherwise supposedly de-ritualized American Protestant worship pattern that was an artifact of Joseph Smith's New England background, religious narrative in the text have been shown to be permeated with and in fact grounded in a usually implicit though highly sophisticated seasonal ritual calendar based on careful observance of the "ordinances of God, according to the law of Moses." Nevertheless, the Book of Mormon's treatment of ancient Israelite religious practices is so sophisticated and subtle that no less eminent and careful a social historian than Richard L. Bushman could conclude in his excellent study *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, that

Book of Mormon peoples abided by the Mosaic law until the coming of Christ, but Mormon buried the fact as if it were of little importance. Nephite prophets taught Christ and the resurrection. Sacrifices, feasts, temple worship, all the material evidence in *View of the Hebrews* received scant attention amidst the outpouring of sermons on salvation through Christ. After the appearance of the Savior the Mosaic law was abandoned altogether and presumably sifted out of Nephite culture. (1984:136)

This widespread perspective needs to be re-evaluated.

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<sup>77</sup> In 1948, with his article "The Book of Mormon as a Mirror of the East" in the old *Improvement Era*. From this evolved magazine serials and then the book *Lehi in the Desert & The World of the Jaredites* (1952; 1988a), and another magazine serial: "There Were Jaredites" that was re-published with the former book (1988a). Consider also a number of separate articles later collected together (Nibley, 1989).

*A relative of Joseph?*

By comparison to the Book of Mormon, Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* (1825),<sup>78</sup> is just that. A distant sketch of Hebrew religious life that is self-conscious and overdrawn, the obvious work of an outsider. The Book of Mormon reflects an intimate and integrated holistic Israelite religion as it can only be depicted by someone native to a society where the ritual year is the ground of experience within which all events occur, and everyone in the society takes for granted.<sup>79</sup> In contrast, secular societies' "holidays" punctuate history which otherwise, in an apt summation of the modern mind, is "just one damn thing after another." Just as the major feasts, festivals and holy days were the public/exoteric foundation of life, the temples of antiquity were the esoteric superstructure, to be referred to, as in the Book of Mormon, through subtle and reverent, although clear and precise "between-the-lines" allusion, as in Alma 9-14. Understanding Israelite religion in the Book of Mormon is more of an anthropological than an historical problem, and it is no surprise that the book's students and critics alike have missed it. Whatever their attitudes toward religion in general, with very few exceptions, all have shared a cultural background or worldview that is at root Christian, and was at least negatively biased toward Judaism and the religion of ancient Israel by the doctrine of supersession and, in most cases, the anti-semitism of Marcion and those who followed his lead. Finally, like the Jerusalem church of the first century, Book of Mormon peoples did not abandon those aspects of pre-Sinai Abrahamic and Mosaic religion that they had been commanded to observe through all their generations. Like the early Jewish Old World Christians, they instead infused new meanings into the timeless observances, whether or not we recognize or understand their doing so.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> It is important to consider the notoriety of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon following the publication of Alexander Campbell's critique in his *Millennial Harbinger*, February 7, 1831, reprinted and circulated widely as *Delusions: An Analysis of the Book of Mormon; with an Examination of its Internal and External Evidences, and a Refutation of Its Pretences to Divine Authority*, (1832). If Ethan Smith or any of his contemporary clergy who were closest to him and familiar with his work had suspected the slightest relationship of *View of the Hebrews* to the Book of Mormon they would have not hesitated in denouncing it. An evidence of Ethan Smith's status and visibility is to be found in his *Key to the Revelation [of John] in Thirty-Six Lectures, Taking the Whole Book in Course* (1833), that notes his authorship of the *View* on the title page, which is followed by three pages of recommendations of Ethan Smith's works by some 23 leading Protestant clergy in the United States, beginning with Professor Ralph Emerson of the Andover Theological Seminary.

<sup>79</sup> The first Nephi's discourse on a culturally-based hermeneutic or process of textual interpretation (II Nephi 25:1-6, discussed above), which I have employed in this paper, was still, even when published in 1830, far in advance of its time.

<sup>80</sup> The earliest Christian Church, consisting virtually in entirety of Jewish converts, was informed by an understanding that they were to remember all the festivals mandated in the law.

And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD *throughout* your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance *for ever*. ... And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons *for ever*. And it shall come to pass, *when ye be come to the land* which the LORD will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service. (Exodus 12:14, 24-25, *italics added*.)

It is in this context that we must understand Paul's concern, even after it had been decided *not* "to put a yoke upon the neck" of the gentiles (Acts 15:10), that he personally "*must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem*" (Acts 18:21, *italics added*. Cf. I Cor. 16:8), and that he "*hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost*" (Acts 20:16, *italics added*). And this was not the later developed Catholic



Jan Shipps, in her study, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (1985, see especially the preface and chapters I-III), goes farther than any non-Mormon scholar previously has attempted to go in understanding an outward and rather superficial isomorphic relationship of Mormonism to Judaism, or more accurately, to the ancient Hebraic religious experience up through the first century of Jewish Christianity. Professor Shipps acknowledges that a supernatural explanation is at least a plausible alternative for understanding Mormonism though she does not accept it.<sup>81</sup> Her effectively Harnackian perspective on the Hellenization of Christianity (Harnack, 1957; Thomasson, 1978b:236-258), as extensive as it is, barely scratches the surface and fails to uncover the actual "Jewish" (more comprehensively, ancient Israelite) roots of modern Mormonism. For while she correctly recognizes that the essence of the 19th century Mormon experience was belief in the Book of Mormon, she did not have available to her the evidence of how thoroughly "Jewish" a book it actually is. And her essentially secular phenomenological analysis ultimately undermines itself, because unlike the collective social phenomena she so convincingly analyzes, the Book of Mormon itself cannot be accounted for as a mere social phenomenon or artifact of 19th century history, and yet, as she also acknowledges, it was at the core of 19th century Mormon life.

Besides further study to discover the full extent of ancient Israelite patterns in the Book of Mormon, interpretation of the text must now be infused with a more complete grasp of the nature and value of heretofore neglected Abrahamic- and Mosaic-covenant based religious practices, liturgy and symbolism. The common Anglo-European Christian prejudice that "Judaism" is an apostate religion that can contribute little to our understanding must be reassessed as well. An intellectual anti-Semitism does not have any more place in our study of the scriptures than it does in our day-to-day social life.

We must also recognize that, rather than strife between Nephites and Lamanites occurring because they were so different, these were two very similar cultures--sharing a calendar system and many though not all religious concepts. When a radical deviation occurs, as in the case of the Zoramite Rameumptom cult in the city of Antionum (Alma 31:13-14, 21), it left the Nephite prophets nonplussed. Slight deviations they knew how to deal with, but huge qualitative differences were not what characterized the tensions among Lehite peoples generally.

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Pentecost, but the Jewish feast of *Shavuot*.

<sup>81</sup> To quote Professor Shipps precisely,  
But if the process [of restoration movements] is natural enough to be studied, it is nevertheless so very complex--aye, even mysterious--that unless its beginnings are examined within a clear theoretical framework, it can appear to be completely supernatural and thus amenable only to observation, not to analysis. (1985:69)

One can develop such a "clear theoretical framework" as a defense against the "supernatural" only with the data available at a given moment in history. But time has a habit of revealing more data, such as this study reports, for example, and the ongoing research of Robert F. Smith epitomizes, which tend to complicate the data beyond the capacity of any time-bound theory. It must not be forgotten, after all, that theories (the word shares a common root with theater), can only be "lies". They are social fictions of a polite and often well-intentioned nature, but oversimplifications of that infinite data set which is reality nonetheless, that humans in general and social scientists in particular employ precisely because it is impossible for finite beings to apprehend/comprehend all of reality.

*This Pentecost, Mormonism is a restoration within Judaism, not a new religion.*

Also, with the discovery of specific major Israelite feasts, festivals and Holy Days in the text, we are moving towards a point of establishing **absolute** dates for Book of Mormon chronology. When the archeological profession gets to the point that even a tenth as much research has been done in Mesoamerica as has been done on ancient Near Eastern biblical sites (and that point is far into the future), we well may see the potential open up for direct correlation of Book of Mormon events and places with Mesoamerican records, inscriptions, or city foundation texts. John Sorenson's pioneering geography (1985), suggests where we may need to look.<sup>82</sup>

For the non-L.D.S. reader, this manuscript is especially challenging. But it is here appropriate to recall Jacob Neusner's words, concerning the profession of Religious Studies.

... among our colleagues are some who do not really like religion in its living forms, but find terribly interesting religion in its dead ones. That is why an old Christian text, one from the first century for example, is deemed a worthy subject of scholarship. But a fresh, Christian expression (I think in this connection of the Book of Mormon) is *available principally for ridicule*, but never for study. Religious experience in the third century is fascinating. Religious experience in the twentieth century is frightening or absurd. (Neusner, 1977:118, *italics added*.)

The question here, of course, is whether, in fact, the Book of Mormon is nothing more than a "fresh, Christian expression." I am confident it bears consideration as something more than that.

Finally, the Book of Mormon stands out as an essential aid to our study and understanding of pre-exilic Israelite religion, for which there is a paucity of textual evidence apart from the Bible itself. The two books, joined together in one hand, are an ever more eloquent witness of the faith in the Messiah and devotion of God's chosen people in past dispensations to all who live today.

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<sup>82</sup> And in spite of tremendous technical problems in recovering the remains of anything organic or metallic from the highly acid, bacterially active soils of the hot rainy tropics, where almost nothing lasts long enough to be mineralized (an incredible handicap which the layman ignores, especially in comparison to the almost perfect cold storage of the Arctic or the near ideal artifact dehydrating preservation that takes place in the hot sands of much of the ancient Near East), we have every likelihood of success.

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