



Type: Book Chapter

Thematic Literary Forms

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2E. Thematic Literary Forms

In the Book of Mormon, the multiple parallelistic line forms and Hebrew-like word forms become a part of larger thematic literary forms. In his 1947 *Our Book of Mormon*, Sidney B. Sperry would introduce the Book of Mormon reader to these multiple thematic literary forms. These forms would be addressed individually in various articles and books in the decades that followed. Indeed, the pertinent chapters from Sperry's 1947 book would also be reprinted in 1995 (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 4/1). In 1997 Richard Dilworth Rust would bring forth his book: *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon*. In 2004, James T. Duke (*The Literary Masterpiece Called the Book of Mormon*) would also review these thematic literary forms. Among the thematic forms that were addressed are the following:

- (1) Historical Narrative
- (2) Genealogies
- (3) Prophetic Dialogue
- (4) Poetic language (memorable phrases)
- (5) Epistles (formal directed messages)
- (6) Scriptural Commentary & Sermons
- (7) Prayers
- (8) Sacred songs (Psalms)
- (9) Reasoning
- (10) Typology
- (11) The Law

1. **Historical Narrative:** According to the Title Page, the historical narrative in the Book Mormon is structured around covenant themes and Christ, with parallels to sacred history. But how does one go about analyzing this narrative? Can we correlate the narrative with covenant themes? Can we see Christ woven into the narrative? Can we correlate the narrative with "real" history and geography? And finally, does the narrative withstand modern-day literary scrutiny in the general manner of presentation? In other words, are the writings of First Nephi not only put together with high literary standards, but more importantly, are they true? From reading a vast number of volumes and articles that have been published over literally centuries, I would have to answer: "Much more than you would ever suspect!" The narrative testifies of itself in an astoundingly complex manner.

Perhaps the most detailed literary analysis of the Book of Mormon, at least by modern-day academia perspectives regarding general literature, has been authored by Grant Hardy (*Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide*, Oxford University Press, 2010.) His 273 pages of analysis and over 52 pages of notes amounts to what I consider a "must-read" for anyone interested in literary narrative analysis.

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In saying this, I acknowledge that I don't have the space here to adequately review his findings, other than to say that he has written to reach that middle-ground between believer and non-believer. What I can say is that in my "Sources" section of this Introduction, I have tried to list a vast amount of excellent material on the literary aspects of the Book of Mormon that, to my knowledge, have come forth, especially in the last few decades.

Grant Hardy has acknowledged that the effort to understand the Book of Mormon is continuous. He writes:

There is much more to discover in terms of narrative techniques, connections between various people and events, thematic development, and the specific language employed by different speakers. . . . Understanding the book on its own terms, recognizing its structure and form, and identifying the means by which it conveys its message are the first steps to any further inquiries, whether they be historical, literary, or religious. (p. 268-269)

To be precise, Grant Hardy was only attempting to put forward a literary narrative analysis of the Book of Mormon without attempting to address the idea of whether it was fact or fiction.

Another outstanding scholarly historical narrative analysis of the Book of Mormon has been made by Terry L. Givens (*By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion*, Oxford University Press, 2002), but from a different and more general perspective. In his "Editor's Note" he writes:

My focus in any case has not been on whether the Book of Mormon or the account of it given by Joseph Smith is true. Rather, I have tried to examine why the Book of Mormon has been taken seriously—for very different reasons—by generations of devoted believers and confirmed skeptics . . . as the resources of archaeology, literary analysis, evangelical polemics, and varieties of textual and cultural studies are increasingly brought to bear on this historically contentious and influential document . . .

In trying to understand the "real" history and culture of the Book of Mormon, hundreds of books and articles have been published. I have listed (and recorded the comments of) many of these works in my writings posted on my cultural and geographical commentary website (alancminer.com or search "Step-by-Step through the Book of Mormon"). However, for Volume 1 (1 Nephi), perhaps a "must-read" in this "historical and cultural" category is authored by George Potter and Richard Wellington (*Lehi in the Wilderness*, Cedar Fort, 2003).

In their book they claim "81 new, documented evidences that the Book of Mormon is a true history." These evidences concern Nephi's account in First Nephi of their travels through Arabia from Jerusalem to Bountiful, situated on the shores of the Indian Ocean, where Nephi acquired the materials and skills to build an ocean-going ship, and the knowledge to navigate that "one-of-a-kind" ship from the Old World across thousands of miles of sea under many threatening conditions to the New World.

Some of the 81 evidences they document in detail are as follows (see *Lehi in the Wilderness*, p. 174-177):

CLAIM

- 1 There was a logical route to flee from Jerusalem that could be described as traveling in “the wilderness” (1 Ne. 2:2, 4) . . .
- 3 There are two sets of “borders”—one “near” and one “nearer” the Red Sea (1 Ne. 2:5) . . .
- 7 The Valley of Lemuel is in the mountains “nearer” the shore (1 Ne. 2:5-8) . . .
- 11 The valley is a three-day journey into the wilderness (1 Ne. 2:6).
- 12 The valley contains a river of running water (1 Ne. 2:6).
- 13 The river flows “continually” (1 Ne. 2:9) . . .
- 17 The river empties into the “fountain” of the Red Sea (1 Ne. 2:8-9) or the Gulf of Aqaba . . .
- 23 There exists a place named Shazer (1 Ne. 16:13-14) . . .
- 36 The “most fertile” areas are along a trail that runs south-southeast from Shazer . . .
- 44 Bow-wood grows in Arabia (1 Ne. 16:30) . . .
- 47 There exists in southern Arabia the place-name Nahom (1 Ne. 16:34) . . .
- 51 There is a trail that runs nearly eastward from Nahom (1 Ne. 17:1) . . .
- 55 The eastward trail from Nahom leads from the hinterland to the ocean of “many waters” (1 Ne. 17:6).
- 56 The eastward trail from Nahom leads to a land that can be called Bountiful for its abundant and wide variety of fruits (1 Ne. 17:5; 18:6) . . .
- 63 Near the place Bountiful it is possible to build a ship (1 Ne. 17:2) . . .
- 71 The honey in the land Bountiful is from wild bees . . . (1 Ne. 17:5) . . .
- 75 Bountiful had flint, for Nephi made a fire using stones (1 Ne. 17:11) . . .
- 79 Bountiful was a place where Nephi could learn seamanship (1 Ne. 18).
- 80 Bountiful had a harbor that provided protection from cross winds and high seas of the ocean.
- 81 The weather pattern of prevailing winds, a storm blowing in the opposite direction, Doldrums, and then the return of the original prevailing winds can be found at sea near Bountiful (1 Ne. 18:13-21).

George Potter and Richard Wellington write (p. 171):

In concluding our six-year study, we are convinced that Arabia and its history holds straight-forward and compelling evidence that Joseph Smith could not have authored the Book of Mormon. Rather the prophet had to have been amongst the greatest, if not the greatest, translator of ancient script who has ever lived. So perfect is the work that every First Nephi place-name in Arabia can now be readily identified with a potential site that fits with complete harmony the Book of Mormon narrative. . . . Yet in 1830, each of these nine remote desert places, *The Borders*, *River of Laman*, *Valley of Lemuel*, *Shazer*, *the Most Fertile Parts*, *the More Fertile Parts*, *Nahom*, *Land Bountiful* and *Place Bountiful* (where the ship was built), would have been known only to the Arabs living in the immediate vicinity of each of these places. We had to travel in the desert back roads of Arabia for nearly six years to find these places. How could Joseph Smith have known about them in upstate New York in 1830?

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As for the covenant themes conveyed in the Book of Mormon, and more especially First Nephi, some “must-reads” are the writings of Steven L. Olsen (see my “Sources” section). Steven and I have been corresponding on this theme from shortly after I was first introduced to it by Raymond Treat (Ray and Mary Lee Treat, “Survey of the Covenants and Principles of the Book of Mormon,” *Zarahemla Research Foundation*, 1991). From the last chapter of a lengthy 1994 unpublished manuscript titled, “Covenants in the Book of Mormon,” Steven Olsen writes the following (p. 245-254) (Used by permission of the author):

This study has demonstrated how most if not all of the contents and structure of the Book of Mormon text can be explained in terms of a system of covenants, whose central symbols are the promised land, the chosen people, and Christ’s gospel. (p. 245) . . .

Chapters four through six illustrate the extent to which historical, geographical, ecclesiastical, doctrinal, social, military, biographical, and other details of the abridgments of Mormon and Moroni can be explained in terms of these covenants. (p. 246) . . .

As I proceeded with this study, I was frankly surprised to discover how thoroughly Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni used repetition to drive home their central messages in a variety of powerful and unmistakable ways. It is not accidental, therefore, that the four most frequently used nouns in the Book of Mormon are land(s), people(s), God, and Lord. Each appears in the text well over one thousand times—respectively 1444, 1774, 1681, and 1578 times, not including their various synonyms. (p. 247) . . .

From this perspective, the central, unifying message of the Book of Mormon seems to be that salvation is available to all who will make and keep the divine covenants of establishing Zion (Promised land), gathering Israel (Chosen people), and building up Christ’s church (Christ’s gospel). (p. 247) . . .

In short, the covenants of the promised land, the chosen people, and Christ’s gospel receive systematic and complementary treatment throughout the Book of Mormon along a series of significant dimensions, at once temporal and eternal, material and spiritual. The extent to which and the complexity with which they are developed systematically within the text strongly suggests that the contents and organization of the text are neither accidental nor incidental. (p. 250) . . .

What is surprising is not that the authors of the Book of Mormon were conscious of the book’s spiritual purpose and capable of achieving it through their literary skills, but rather that this intent, clearly stated and faithfully fulfilled, should have remained hidden from systematic analysis for so long. (p. 254)

In the years since 1994, Steven Olsen has continued his study of the covenant-related structure of the Book of Mormon, and refined the ideas and concepts of these early writings to produce multiple published articles. (again, see the “Sources” section of this Introduction)

As for my efforts in the matter of covenant themes, the reader will notice that most all of my headings in my 9-volume text of the Book of Mormon are covenant-oriented.

2. **Genealogies:** Genealogies establish legitimacy. While the most prominent genealogy in the Book of Mormon is found in the book of Ether (Ether 1:6-32), in the preface to 1 Nephi we find the following:

An **account** of _____ **Lehi**
and [of] his wife _____ **Sariah**
and [of] his four _____ **sons**
 being called
 beginning at the eldest **Laman**
 [and] **Lemuel**
 [and] **Sam**
and **Nephi**

Nephi also notes in 1 Nephi 5:14 that:

he was a descendant **of Joseph**;
yea even that **Joseph** who was _____ the **son of Jacob**;
 who was sold **into** _____ **Egypt**
and who was **preserved by** the **hand of the Lord**

3. **Prophetic Dialogue:** There are passages in the Book of Mormon that appear to quote dialogue between individuals, usually associated with a prophet.

Examples:

1 Nephi 3:2-7: Lehi instructs Nephi concerning the plates.

1 Nephi 4:10-13: Nephi struggles with the Spirit.

1 Nephi 4:22-27: Nephi speaks with Zoram.

1 Nephi 5:2-6: Lehi answers the complaints of his wife Sariah.

1 Nephi chapters 11→14: Nephi is instructed by the Spirit of the Lord

1 Nephi 15:6→16:5: Nephi talks to his brethren about their disputations.

1 Nephi 17:7-10: Nephi converses with the Lord.

1 Nephi 17:17-52: Nephi converses with Laman and Lemuel about the ship.

4. **Poetic language (memorable phrases):** While there is continued debate on what constitutes “poetry,” or the length of that “poetry,” there are some memorable poetic phrases that exemplify principle and imagery. James T. Duke (*The Literary Masterpiece Called the Book of Mormon*, 2004, p. 192-204) lists the following memorable phrases:

Examples (Principle):

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

1 Nephi 4:13: It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief.

1 Nephi 7:12: The Lord is able to do all things according to his will, for the children of men, if it so be that they exercise faith in him.

1 Nephi 10:19: He that diligently seeketh shall find.

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- 1 Nephi 15:34: The kingdom of God is not filthy, and there cannot any unclean thing enter into the kingdom of God.
- 1 Nephi 16:2: The guilty taketh the truth to be hard, for it cutteth them to the very center.
- 1 Nephi 17:35: The Lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favored of God.
- 1 Nephi 19:7: For the things which some men esteem to be of great worth, both to the body and soul, others set at naught and trample under their feet.
- 1 Nephi 20:22: There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked.
- 1 Nephi 22:17: Wherefore, the righteous need not fear; for thus saith the prophet, they shall be saved, even if it so be as by fire.
- 1 Nephi 22:19: For the time surely must come that all they who fight against Zion shall be cut off.
- 1 Nephi 22:31: Wherefore, if ye shall be obedient to the commandments, and endure to the end, ye shall be saved at the last day.

Examples: (imagery): 1 Nephi 16:24: The energy of my soul.

1 Nephi 9:28: They fell away into forbidden paths and were lost.

1 Nephi 9:33: They did point the finger of scorn at me.

1 Nephi 9:37: He did exhort them with all the feeling of a tender parent.

1 Nephi 10:19: The course of the Lord is one eternal round.

1 Nephi 17:20: foolish imaginations of his heart.

1 Nephi 17:41: fiery flying serpents

1 Nephi 17:45: still small voice

1 Nephi 22:6: lifted up his hand upon the Gentiles and set them up for a standard.

5. **Epistles (formal directed messages):** The Book of Mormon contains the contents of a number of formal letters or epistles. These epistles can be classified by their setting (i.e., “pastoral,” “prophetic,” “war,” etc.)

Examples: There are no examples in 1 Nephi. However, the Title Page can be classified as an “epistle” to the future readers of the Book of Mormon. It contains the prophetic warning:
“And now, if there are faults they are the mistake of men; wherefore, condemn not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment-seat of Christ.”

Sometimes, despite not being in the form of a formal epistle, prophets are inspired to direct comments to a particular group as if they were present.

Examples: 1 Nephi 19:24: Hear ye the words of the prophet, ye who are a remnant of the house of Israel.
1 Nephi 21:1: Listen, O isles, unto me.

- 6. **Scriptural Commentary and Sermons:** A prophet who is writing or giving a sermon explains covenant aspects or doctrinal ideas by using and interpreting scripture.

Examples: 1 Nephi 10→15: If Lehi’s vision (1 Ne. chapter 8) can be considered “scripture,” then Nephi’s vision and commentary (1 Ne. chapters 10→15) applies here.
 1 Nephi 22: Nephi discusses and explains the writings of Isaiah contained in the previous chapters (1 Ne. 20-21).

- 7. **Prayers:** Although short prayers can be classified as word forms, extended prayers can be classified as thematic literary forms. Some of the more prominent prayers in the Book of Mormon are:

The apostate prayer of the Zoramites (Alma 31:15-18).
 The Lord’s Prayer (3 Ne. 13:9-13).
 Jesus’s prayers to the Father (3 Ne. 19:20-23).
 The brother of Jared’s prayers concerning their journey (Ether 2:18-29; 3:2-5).
 The sacramental prayers (Moroni 4, 5).

There are multiple references to prayer in 1 Nephi.

See: 1 Nephi 1:5-6; 2:16
 1 Nephi 7:17
 1 Nephi 7:21
 1 Nephi 8:8-9
 1 Nephi 18:3, 19, 21

However, the only prayer that is quoted is found in 1 Nephi 7:17:

17 **But it came to pass**
that I [Nephi] **prayed** unto **the Lord**
saying
 O **Lord**, according to my **faith** which is in **me / ^Thee**
 [O **Lord**] wilt **Thou deliver** me from _____ the **hands**
 of **my brethren**
yea [O **Lord**] even **give me strength**
that I [Nephi] may burst these _____ **bands**
 [of **my brethren**]
 with which **[bands]**
 I [Nephi] _____ am **bound**

- 8. **Sacred songs (Psalms):** A Psalm is a passage of scripture that contains expressions that could be recited, much like the lyrics of a song. Perhaps the most famous, and most lengthy is the “Psalm of Nephi (2 Nephi 4:16-35). Another example is “The Song of the Vineyard” from Isaiah that is quoted by Nephi (2 Ne. 15:1-7). Other possible songs are found in Alma 26:8, 16, and 2 Nephi 9.

Examples: None in 1 Nephi that I am aware of at present

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- 9. **Reasoning:** These are usually associated with a series of “wherefore” beginnings, a series of “if/then” statements, or a series of hypothetical questions followed by a “thus we see” or a “therefore” initiated statement.

Example: 1 Nephi 4:32→ 4:34

32 And it came to pass

that I [Nephi] spake with_ him [the servant]
 that if_ he [the servant] would hearken unto my words

[then] as [he]the Lord liveth
 and as I [Nephi] live

even so that if_ he [the servant] would hearken unto our words
 [then] we would spare his life [a covenant oath]

33 And I [Nephi] spake unto him [the servant]
 even with an [covenant] oath

that he [the servant] need not fear
 that he [the servant] should be a free man
 like unto us

if_ he [the servant] would go
 down [O/ ^conjecture]
 in / ^into the wilderness
 with us

34 And I [Nephi] also spake unto him [the servant]
 saying

Surely the Lord hath commanded us to do this thing
 and Shall we NOT be diligent in keeping the commandments of the Lord ?

Therefore

if_ thou [the servant] wilt go
 down into the wilderness
 to my father
 [then] thou [the servant] shalt have place with us [duality]

Other Examples:

- 1 Nephi 7:8→7:15
- 1 Nephi 15:32→15:36
- 1 Nephi → 1 Nephi 16:1 → 16:28 →17:3: And thus we see . . . And thus we see
- 1 Nephi 17:49→17:51

10. **Typology:** “Typology . . . is the assumption that there is some meaning and point to history, and that sooner or later some event or events will occur which will indicate what that meaning or point is.” “All intensified language sooner or later turns metaphorical,” thus “literature is not only the obvious but the inescapable guide to higher journeys of consciousness.” (Northrup Frye, *Words with Power: Being a Second Study of the Bible and Literature*, 1990, p 28, 80)

The following series of lengthy quotes come from Richard Dilworth Rust in his book, *Feasting on the Word*, and are being used here with his permission. I would recommend the book to every reader. He writes:

Erich Auerbach in his *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1953: 73-74) sees a conception of history such as this as being structured vertically rather than horizontally. Two events are horizontal to each other if they are linked by time or causality. A vertical connection, however, “can be established only if both occurrences are vertically linked to divine Providence.” God alone “is able to devise such a plan of history and supply the key to its understanding.” . . . With typology, “the here and now is no longer a mere link in an earthly chain of events, it is simultaneously something which has always been, and which will be fulfilled in the future; and strictly, in the eyes of God it is something eternal.

Essentially every event or person in the Book of Mormon may well remind us of another event or person; the book is like a beautifully composed symphony with repeated themes and motifs. . . . Most significantly, all God-given events or God-directed persons in the Book of Mormon are reminders of Jesus Christ or his gospel.

In both the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon, Joseph is a notable type of Christ. (Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, p. 202-205). Like Joseph, Nephi is [also] a suffering servant, is resisted by older brothers who do not want him to be a ruler over them, is bound and threatened with death, fulfills his father’s mission, and helps preserve the lives of those who earlier tried to take his life.

Desiring to “be strong like unto Moses” (1 Nephi 4:2), Nephi several times likens his situation to [that of] Moses . . . and like Moses he (and Lehi) guides his people towards the promised land.

Richard Rust cites George Tate, who makes the following parallels:

<u>Exodus</u>	<u>1 Nephi</u>
Flee bondage into wilderness	flee Jerusalem into wilderness (Nephi refers to Israel’s exodus (1 Ne. 4:2; 17:26)
Guidance: light/cloud	Lehi sees pillar of fire on rock, (1 Ne. 1:6); Lord as light (1 Ne. 17:13) Liahona (1 Ne. 16:10); Nephi refers to Exodus light (1 Ne. 17:30)
Water	They cross ocean (Nephi refers to Red Sea – 17:26)
Enemies destroyed	Jerusalem destroyed. Nephi refers to destruction of Egyptian host (1 Ne. 17:27)
Manna	Food miraculously provided (1 Ne. 16:23, 31); Nephi refers to manna (1 Ne. 17:28)
Water from rock	Nephi refers to water from rock (1 Ne. 17:29)
Mountain / law	Nephi is instructed on a mountain (1 Ne. 16:30; 17:7; 18:3)
Text (ark)	Plates of Laban, Nephi’s plates (Nephi refers to the Pentateuch and Isaiah-5:11)

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Tabernacle	Nephi builds a ship according to the Lord's instruction (1 Ne. 17:8; 18:2)
Order / governance	Nephi sees in vision the 12 apostles (1 Ne. 12:9)
Brazen serpent	Nephi refers to the brazen serpent (1 Ne. 25:20) & Prophecies healing (1 Ne. 26:9)
Promised land	Nephi is led to a promised land (1 Ne. 5:5) Nephi refers to crossing Jordan (1 Ne. 17:32)

Yet Tate doesn't stop here, he continues the parallels through other places and characters in the Book of Mormon, not just with Moses, but also with Christ. Rust concludes: "The Book of Mormon is itself the word of God, meant to be feasted on . . . through its literary elements that engage the senses, Jesus bids his disciples to 'come unto me, that ye might feel and see' (3 Nephi 18:25)."

In 1999, John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch would cite even more correspondences:

<u>1 Nephi</u>	<u>Exodus</u>	<u>Motifs Common to both Accounts</u>
1:6	3:2	fire present at calling of Lehi and Moses
1:6; 16:16	13:21	Lord's guidance
1:20	1:11-16	oppressive conditions
2:2	3:7-18	Lord's command to depart
2:6-7	3:18; 15:22; 20:25	sacrifice to the Lord after three days' journey
2:11-12; 5:2; 16:20	15:24; 16:2-3	murmuring against the Lord
2:15; 3:9; 10:16	18:7; 33:8	dwelling in tents
2:20	3:17	promise of a new land of inheritance
4:12	17:8-13	victory over enemies
7:6-7	14:12	rebellious desire to return
9:1-4	17:14	a record of the journey
11:1—14:27	19:19—31:18	instruction from God on a high mountain
15:6—16:5	19:3-25	prophet who teaches with divine instruction
16:10	7:98-21; 8:16; 14:16	miraculous objects (Liahona, rod)
16:34	Joshua 24:32	a burial
17:3-5	16:11-18	Lord's provision of ready-to-eat food
17:4	16:35; Deut. 8:2	prolonged wandering in the wilderness
17:6	16:3; 17:1	afflictions in the wilderness
17:26; 18:8-23	14:21-22,29; 15:19	crossing a sea
17:52	34:30	a transfiguration
17:55	14:31; 20:12	acknowledgment of the Lord's power
18:7	18:3-4	two sons born in the wilderness
18:8	14:21	Lord's providential wind
18:9	32:18-19	wicked revelry
18:20	32:10	death warnings from the Lord
18:23-25	Joshua 11:23	inheritance of a promised land
19:11	20:18	thunderings and lightnings at God's presence

(Sources: George Tate, "The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," *Literature of Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experience*, 1981, p. 245-262; S. Kent Brown, "Nephi and the Exodus," *Ensign*, April 1987, p. 64-65; Terrence L. Szink, "Nephi and the Exodus," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 1991, p. 38-51; S. Kent Brown, "The Exodus: Seeing It as a Test, a Testimony, and a Type," *Ensign*, Feb. 1990, p. 54-57; S. Kent Brown, "The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30/3 (1990): 111-126; Richard Dilworth Rust, *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon*, 1997, p. 196, 200-201, 206-207, 245; Mark J. Johnson, "The Exodus of Lehi Revisited," in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, 1999, p. 54-58; John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon*, 1999, chart 94.)

11. The Law

Note* This literary theme was not discussed by either Sidney Sperry or James Duke. While the study of the Law in the scriptures is ancient, the association of legal issues in the scriptures with literary criticism is relatively modern. In view of the legal studies that have been made in the last number of decades with the text of the Book of Mormon, I have chosen to add “The Law” to my list of literary forms.

Perhaps the foremost LDS scholar with respect to legal issues and the Book of Mormon is John W. Welch. In the Foreword to his book, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (2008: xi-xxv), he gives a detailed chronological review of the progression he has made in his understanding, in his education, and in his writings on this theme. I would refer all readers to that Foreword and that book for a much greater perspective of this literary theme.

In that Foreword John Welch writes:

The legal cases reported in the Book of Mormon, as in the Bible, are not just about crime and punishment in a secular sense. To the men and women who experienced those legal confrontations, those cases are all about the ultimate definitions of righteousness and wickedness, the open differentiation of truth from falsity, and the firm recognition of righteous authority as opposed to unjust imposition. Reading the scriptures in light of ancient laws, principles, practicalities, purposes, and sympathies enriches appreciation for issues and contexts out of which many of the plain messages of the prophetic Book of Mormon arose. [xii]

In regard to 1 Nephi (Volume 1), there is the legal matter of the slaying of Laban (see 1 Nephi 4). John Welch writes:

The Spirit told Nephi that the Lord had delivered Laban into Nephi’s hands and that it was better for Laban to die than for an entire nation to perish because of unbelief (see 1 Nephi 4:11-13). Though this case is extremely rare, ancient Israelite laws authorized the slaying of a particular man at least two other times: the beheading of the rebel Sheba (2 Samuel 20 – abt. 100 B.C.) and the execution of King Jehoiakim (see 2 Kings 24 – abt. 598 B.C.). Five conditions were present in each of these instances (the conditions in 1 Nephi 4 being noted in parenthesis):

- (1) The recognized leader of Israel pronounced judgment upon – (Jehovah)
- (2) a specifically named person— (Laban)
- (3) who was guilty of some form of rebellion or disobedience— (disobedience)
- (4) that would result in the destruction of at least part of Israel— (nation will perish)
- (5) unless the innocent people turned the traitor over for execution. (Nephi)

(Sources: John W. Welch and Heidi Harkness Parker, “Better That One Man Perish,” FARMS Update, *Insights* (June 1998): 2. John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon*. Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999, chart 115.)

Near the end of his book (*The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*), John Welch provides a lengthy 34-page Bibliography of related non-LDS and LDS sources. The following is my attempt to provide a chronological list of those LDS-related written works: (Those pertaining to Volume 1 are in red)

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- 1957 Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1957. Republished in 1988, p. 95-131.
- 1980-2002 Papers written for Law 607 (“Ancient Legal Systems and the Scriptures”), taught by Professor John W. Welch, J. Reuben Clark Law School, BYU. (See John W. Welch, “Bibliography of Hebrew Law in the Book of Mormon,” *Studia Antiqua: The Journal of the Student Society for Ancient Studies* (BYU (Summer 2003): 181-186.
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