Type: Book Chapter

# Is the Book of Mormon True?: Notes on the Debate

# IS THE BOOK OF MORMON TRUE?
## NOTES ON THE DEBATE

*Daniel C. Peterson*

Since its publication in 1830, the Book of Mormon has been an object of intense controversy and has been subjected to virtually unparalleled critical attacks. Indeed, the opposition began even before the book came from the press. Thus, perhaps the greatest secular argument for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon is the sheer fact that millions of people around the world, including a considerable number of highly educated and well-informed people, continue to find the Book of Mormon believable 165 years after its appearance. A simple yarn spun by an uneducated frontier con artist should have—would have!—collapsed years ago. How many books published in 1830 continue to be read today?

Nevertheless, it is useful from time to time to examine the details of the arguments, pro and con, about the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Within the limited space

*Daniel C. Peterson is associate professor of Asian and Near Eastern languages at Brigham Young University.*

afforded by this article, we shall do just that with a representative sample of the criticisms.

## Textual Changes

Critics of the Book of Mormon, particularly those of the conservative Protestant variety, like to point to thousands of changes made in the text of the Book of Mormon since its first printing, changes the critics allege have been kept secret by the leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.[1]

### Have Changes Been Hidden?

There seems, however, to be no evidence whatever that the Church is suppressing early texts of the Book of Mormon or trying to cover up the changes that have in fact been made in it; indeed, there is a great deal of evidence to the contrary. Consider the following: (1) Wilford Woods's reprint of the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon has been widely available for many years and is frequently sold in Latter-day Saint bookstores. (2) Between 1984 and 1987, the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) produced and published a critical edition of the Book of Mormon that attempted to list all of the textual variants. (3) In 1980 Deseret Book, the Church's publishing house, produced and marketed a reprint of the 1830 edition to commemorate the sesquicentennial of Mormonism. (4) Professor George Horton of Brigham Young University published a 1983 article on the subject in the Church's official magazine.[2] (5) Professor Royal Skousen of Brigham Young University has been working for several years to prepare a definitive critical edition of the Book of Mormon, complete with a textual apparatus listing all variant readings. He has had the full co-

operation of the Church leadership in his efforts and intends a major volume on the textual history of the Book of Mormon to accompany the actual critical edition when it is published. (6) In conjunction with his work, Dr. Skousen has taught several classes on Book of Mormon textual criticism at Brigham Young University. (7) Dr. Skousen's work has hardly been kept a secret, but has been reported widely in various publications.[3]

### Are the Changes Important?

Furthermore, when one examines the changes exhibited by critics of the Book of Mormon—and presumably they choose the very "best" out of the alleged several thousand when they are trying to establish their case—it is difficult not to be disappointed by the trivial character of virtually all of the examples. For instance, Ed Decker offers up Mosiah 27:29 as an illustration: In current English versions of the Book of Mormon, that verse reads: "My soul was racked with eternal torment," whereas the 1830 edition has "wrecked" for "racked." And, Decker reveals, whereas today the English version of Alma 13:20 reads: "Behold, the scriptures are before you; if ye will wrest them it shall be to your own destruction," the 1830 printing has "arrest" instead of "wrest." But these are simply obvious cases of the scribe having misheard a spoken word, and therefore mistakenly writing a word that had a similar sound. It is the very thing that a tired scribe would tend to do, and, as such, it tends to verify the traditional account of Joseph's having dictated the Book of Mormon to a scribe.

Decker and others seem, at first glance, to have a more substantial case when they cite the few textual changes in the Book of Mormon that appear to have theological import. Thus, for instance, where in the 1830 edition Jesus Christ is

identified as "the Eternal Father" at 1 Nephi 11:21 and 13:40, the modern English printing of those two verses calls him "*the Son of* the Eternal Father" (emphasis mine). Likewise, 1 Nephi 11:32 calls him "the Everlasting God" in 1830 but "*the Son of* the Everlasting God" in current editions, while 1 Nephi 11:18 termed Mary "the mother of God" before it was altered to read "the mother of *the Son of* God" in more recent printings. But are these changes really doctrinally significant? Latter-day Saints believe that Jesus Christ is God, and in fact, they affirm that he was the Jehovah of the Old Testament. And they assert that, in very real and important ways, Christ is and will be the Father of those who accept his atoning sacrifice.[4] Viewed in this light, the 1830 renderings of the verses just mentioned were not at all incorrect, although subsequent modifications (made by the very prophet through whom the Book of Mormon was revealed in the first place) do obviously clarify the passages and make them more precise.

## Do the Changes Actually Point to the Book's Authenticity?

Decker also notes Alma 46:19, which, in modern English editions of the Book of Mormon, says that Moroni "went forth among the people, waving the *rent part* of his garment in the air, that all might see the writing which he had written upon the *rent part*" (emphasis mine). Quite correctly, Decker observes that the 1830 printing of this verse had Moroni "waving the *rent* of his garment in the air," and speaks of writing "upon the *rent*" (emphasis mine). This, of course, is bad English. "It is impossible," declares Decker, "to write on a 'rent,' since a rent is an absence of cloth. It is also hard to wave a 'rent' in the air."[5] Decker is evidently unaware that the verse as rendered in the 1830 edition rep-

resents perfectly acceptable Hebrew usage—which, since the Book of Mormon claims to have been written originally by ancient Hebrews, is very interesting indeed. "Thus, the 'error' [Decker sees] as evidence of fraud [is] really a Hebraism that [is] evidence for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon."[6]

## Implausibilities and Anachronisms

Critics of the Book of Mormon have traditionally sought elements in the text that would prove it to be a product of the nineteenth century. They have hoped, for example, to find *anachronisms*, items wrongly inserted into a purportedly ancient story by an ignorant or careless modern author.[7] They have looked for implausible stories that would indicate that the Book of Mormon cannot really be reporting eyewitness accounts of real events.

### A Man Named Alma?

The presence of the name *Alma* in the Book of Mormon, attached to an important prophet and his equally important son, has occasioned considerable merriment among certain critics of the book. *Alma*, they gleefully point out, is a *woman's* name and is not of Hebrew but of *Latin* origin.[8] Many people are likely to be familiar with it in the phrase *alma mater*, which means something like "foster mother" or "bounteous mother" and refers to a benevolent or protective institution (most often, nowadays, a college or university). However, during the archaeological season of 1960–61, while he was excavating in the Judean caves on the western shore of the Dead Sea near En-Gedi, the eminent Israeli scholar Yigael Yadin found an interesting document from the early second century A.D. that not only destroys the

objection of the critics, but furnishes striking support for the Book of Mormon. During the second Jewish revolt against Rome, the leader of that revolt, Shimeon Bar-Kokhba (or Bar-Kosiba), had nationalized some of the real estate around the northwestern shores of the Dead Sea. Professor Yadin discovered a land deed bearing the names of four people who had leased nationalized property under Bar-Kokhba and wanted to set down with more precision the perimeters of each of their holdings. One of those four was "Alma, son of Yehudah."[9] What this find means is that, although Joseph Smith, if he had known the word *Alma* at all, would have known it as a Latinate woman's name, recently unearthed evidence that he could never have encountered demonstrates *Alma* to be an authentically ancient Semitic masculine personal name, just as the Book of Mormon presents it.[10]

### Was There (Chuckle) *French* on the Plates?

Another popular claim among critics of the Book of Mormon has alleged that the occurrence of the word *adieu* at Jacob 7:27 is anachronistic, that it does not belong in the period where Joseph Smith seems to place it. French didn't exist in the sixth century B.C., they point out. So why does French show up in the Book of Mormon?[11] But, of course, what this argument fails to notice is that the Book of Mormon, as we have it today, purports to be a translation. Therefore, it stands to reason that the language into which the Book of Mormon has been rendered is not that from which, according to its own claims, it was translated. The language of the Book of Mormon is, necessarily, the language of its translator, Joseph Smith. There is nothing mysterious about this. The presence of *adieu* in the modern English Book of

Mormon no more implies the existence of French on the plates than the occurrence of the words *in the beginning* indicates the existence of English in the original Hebrew text of Genesis 1. And it is doubtful, by the way, that the extremely unsophisticated Joseph Smith of 1829–30 was even aware that *adieu* was French. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word had been a common one in English since at least 1374. It is included in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Oxford American Dictionary*, as well as, most importantly, in Noah Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language*. It was simply a word that Joseph knew; he could just as easily and justifiably have used *ciao, auf Wiedersehen,* or *sayonara* if those words had formed part of the functioning vocabulary he shared with his audience.

## The Beheading of Shiz

Another apparent blunder in the Book of Mormon appears at Ether 15:29–32. At the end of the bloody and violent last Jaredite battle, the exhausted Coriantumr, propping himself up with his own sword and gathering his last bit of strength, "smote off the head of Shiz," his archrival, who had fallen unconscious beside him from loss of blood. Fatally wounded, Shiz then "raised [himself] up on his hands and fell; and after that he had struggled for breath, he died." Recent critics have found this too laughable for words, much less for analysis. It is, they say, an "absurdity," "impossible."[12] But Dr. M. Gary Hadfield, M.D., professor of pathology (neuro-pathology) at the Medical College of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University, concludes otherwise, contending, on the basis of precedents in the medical literature, that the story of the last moments of Shiz is, in fact, entirely believable.[13]

## Archaeology and History

Critics frequently charge that there is no archaeological evidence for the Book of Mormon. Many critics point to a supposed contrast between the Book of Mormon and the Bible, claiming that, while the former has been devastated by archaeological research, the latter has been vindicated or even proven by recent scholarly work.[14] Such assertions are typically made in virtual or entire ignorance of recent work on the archaeology and geography of the Book of Mormon. Yet the seminal studies done by John L. Sorenson and others have established a highly plausible ancient American setting for the Book of Mormon,[15] and the research of Warren and Michaela Aston appears to have identified believable Lehite locations on the Arabian peninsula.[16] Furthermore, conservative Protestant critics of the Book of Mormon have invariably tended both to exaggerate its archaeological weakness and to overstate, often grossly, the extent to which archaeological research supports the biblical narrative.[17]

## Warfare

Military history is one area where recent research has clearly tended to support the Book of Mormon. Yet this was not always the case. For many years, scholars argued that, essentially, no warfare existed in Mesoamerica, that no fortifications and certainly no armor existed as described in the Book of Mormon. The Maya, announces one Book of Mormon critic, "were on the whole a peaceful people. Their ceremonial centres had no fortifications, and were for the most part located in places incapable of defense."[18] Accordingly, he says, the Book of Mormon simply does not fit ancient America. But this rosy picture of an idyllic ancient Mesoamerica can no longer be seriously maintained. Still, some critics seem unaware of the overwhelming evidence

now available for "the state of war that existed constantly among many Maya cities. The modern myth that the Maya were a peace-loving, gentle people who only tended their milpas and followed the stars has fallen with a thunderous crash."[19] As the Yale Mayanist Michael D. Coe puts it, "The Maya were obsessed with war. The Annals of the Cakchiquels and the Popol Vuh speak of little but intertribal conflict among the highlanders, while the sixteen states of Yucatán were constantly battling with each other over boundaries and lineage honour. To this sanguinary record we must add the testimony of the Classic monuments and their inscriptions."[20] Linda Schele and Mary Ellen Miller's important book *The Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art* shows beyond dispute that the Maya must be ranked among the most bloodthirsty people in world history.[21]

**Plants and Animals**

The Book of Mormon has likewise been criticized on the grounds that its portrayal of the flora and fauna, the plants and animals, of the New World is inaccurate.[22] As one vocal critic exclaims, *"barley never grew in the New World* before the white man brought it here!"[23] (The existence of pre-Columbian American barley, incidentally, was revealed by archaeologists in 1983.)[24] Another, in a memorable formulation, points to the Book of Mormon's "botanically unverifiable animals."[25] However, such critics appear to have been left behind by current research, as surveyed, for instance, in John L. Sorenson's work on animals and the Book of Mormon.[26] Professor Sorenson demonstrates that naming conventions for animals and plants are far more varied from culture to culture—and are far more complex—than Book of Mormon skeptics assume, and that simplistic readings of the Nephite record are, thus, deeply misleading. He even

shows that the horse and the elephant may well have survived into historic times in the Americas, contrary to common opinion. Though questions and problems remain, as they do in connection with every subject in antiquity, believers in the Book of Mormon have solid reasons for regarding the book as biologically reasonable.[27]

## Metals

Similarly, critics of the Book of Mormon have alleged that the metals it mentions have not been found in Mesoamerica, and presumably did not exist there in pre-Columbian times.[28] But their criticisms typically manifest an oversimple reading of both the Book of Mormon and ancient America, as well as a too-simple ("common sense") way of looking at the anthropology and onomasticon of historical metallurgy.[29] Fortunately, the important studies of John L. Sorenson have again greatly deepened our understanding of the issues, demonstrating in the process that there is plenty of room in Mesoamerica for the claims of the Book of Mormon. Metal use among pre-Columbian Americans appears to be much earlier than conventional wisdom has believed.[30] What is more, the "golden plates" from which Joseph Smith declared he had translated the Book of Mormon can be persuasively argued to represent an authentically ancient American alloy known as tumbaga.[31]

## Reformed Egyptian

Many skeptics have declared that, contrary to the claims of the Book of Mormon, there is no such language as "reformed Egyptian." And besides, some add, real Jews wouldn't have used it anyway, since Jews believe Hebrew to be a sacred language, and ancient Jews held Egyptian,

the language of their hereditary enemies, to be evil and corrupt.[32] The last contention, however, is not true. Not only were ancient Jews capable of using other languages and scripts to write their scriptures, but there is clear evidence that they did precisely that. Specifically, we now know of ancient instances of the writing of Old Testament scriptural passages in Egyptian.[33] Furthermore, there is no reason to expect that anything called "reformed Egyptian" would necessarily show up anywhere else, nor that the name "reformed Egyptian" would be familiar to secular scholars, for the Book of Mormon clearly states that "reformed Egyptian" was the Nephites' own term for a complex of script and language that, at least at the end of nearly a millennium of independent linguistic evolution, was unique to them:

> And now, behold, we have written this record according to our knowledge, in the characters which *are called among us the reformed Egyptian, being handed down and altered by us, according to our manner of speech.*
>
> And if our plates had been sufficiently large we should have written in Hebrew; *but the Hebrew hath been altered by us also*; and if we could have written in Hebrew, behold, ye would have had no imperfection in our record.
>
> But the Lord knoweth the things which we have written, and also that *none other people knoweth our language*; and because that none other people knoweth our language, therefore he hath prepared means for the interpretation thereof. (Mormon 9:32–34; emphasis mine)

The Book of Mormon never claims that "reformed Egyptian" existed in Egypt; on the contrary, it expressly says "reformed Egyptian" did not exist in Egypt. Therefore, testimony from Egyptologists (or, more frequently, from Egyptological amateurs) about the absence of "reformed Egyptian" from the Nile Valley or the failure of the precise phrase "reformed Egyptian" to show up in their grammar

books is fundamentally irrelevant. Besides, "reformed Egyptian" is not necessarily the proper name of a specific language. Languages and scripts are constantly evolving, constantly being modified or "reformed," as anybody who has ever sat down to read the great Old English poem *Beowulf* or the English poems of Chaucer in the original can surely attest. "Reformed Egyptian" describes, simply, a linguistic system that had changed in an idiosyncratic direction over a thousand years of isolation.

### Nephite Money

On a more tangible topic, many critics of the Book of Mormon have decided that the book describes "a complex system of coinage"[34] among the Nephites, and these critics have derided it because no such coins have been found by archaeologists. It is quite true that there is no evidence whatsoever for the existence of Book of Mormon coins—not even in the Book of Mormon itself. The text of the Book of Mormon never mentions the word *coin*, nor any variant of it. The reference to "Nephite coinage" in the chapter heading to Alma 11 is not part of the original text and is almost certainly mistaken. (It represents the same unexamined modern assumption—that *money* equals coins or currency or both—that misleads the critics.) Alma 11 probably refers to standardized weights of metal—a historical step toward coinage, but not yet the real thing.[35] So Latter-day Saint scholars would be as surprised as anybody if we were someday to find a cache of "Book of Mormon coins."

But the instance of "coinage" brings up a very important point. Time after time, critics of the Book of Mormon have punished the Book of Mormon on the basis of straw men of their own invention. They have imposed upon it claims it does not itself make and have then professed to

have disproved it because it fails to deliver things it never pretended to deliver. However, it is not only critics of the Book of Mormon who have frequently misread the Nephite record; believers too have often carelessly construed its statements on geography and other issues, thereby setting themselves up for attacks from anti-Mormons. We must be perpetually vigilant against entrapping ourselves within pseudoproblems of our own devising.

## The Temple of Nephi

Another issue of history and archaeology appears to further illustrate this point. Nephi's construction of a temple, recorded in 2 Nephi 5, has drawn a great deal of attention from critics of the Book of Mormon. Nephi states:

> And I, Nephi, did build a temple; and I did construct it after the manner of the temple of Solomon save it were not built of so many precious things; for they were not to be found upon the land, wherefore, it could not be built like unto Solomon's temple. But the manner of the construction was like unto the temple of Solomon; and the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine. (2 Nephi 5:16)

But how, the skeptics demand, could a small family of refugees possibly build such a structure when Solomon's own temple required years of construction and the efforts of many thousands of workers?[36]

Seeming problems in the Book of Mormon often dissolve when we attempt to find out what the text actually says, which is not always what we initially imagine it to say. What does it mean to be built "after the manner of the temple of Solomon"? I submit that it means to be patterned after, to have the same general layout as Solomon's temple, without necessarily being on the same scale. And since we know that smaller temples did in fact exist in ancient Israel, there seems

no real reason to assume, without evidence, that one could not have existed among the Nephites. "Biblical evidence," notes the Israeli archaeologist Avraham Negev, "points to the existence of numerous other cult places all over Palestine, in addition to the main Temple of Jerusalem, and such shrines have now been found at Arad and Lachish, both of a very similar plan."[37] Indeed, says Negev, "No actual remains of the First Temple [Solomon's] have come to light, and it is therefore only by the study of the Bible Scriptures and by comparison with other contemporary temples that we can reconstruct the plan."[38] Negev tells of one such temple, built "after the manner of the temple of Solomon," as follows: "The most remarkable discovery at Arad is the temple which occupied the north-western corner of the citadel. . . . Its orientation, general plan and contents, especially the tabernacle, are *similar to the Temple of Solomon.* . . . Flanking the entrance to the *hekal* were two stone slabs, probably bases of pillars, similar to the pillars of Jachin and Boaz in the temple at Jerusalem (1 Kings 7:21; 2 Chronicles 4:17)."[39] Yet the Arad temple was only a fraction of the size of Solomon's temple. Significantly, it survived, in use, until approximately the time of Lehi.

### Jerusalem or Bethlehem?

One attack on the Book of Mormon has actually, to my personal knowledge, made its way onto bumper stickers in California, which must surely be a measure of something. Alma 7:10 predicts that the Savior "shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers." Yet the Bible unmistakably informs us that Jesus was born in the small town of Bethlehem, close to but quite distinct from the much larger city of Jerusalem. This, say many critics, is a major historical error.[40]

I confess I have never seen the point of their argument. To suggest that Joseph Smith knew the precise location of Jesus' baptism by John ("in Bethabara, beyond Jordan" [1 Nephi 10:9]) but hadn't a clue about the famous town of Christ's birth is so improbable as to be ludicrous. Do the skeptics seriously mean to suggest that the Book of Mormon's Bible-drenched author (or authors) missed one of the most obvious facts about the most popular story in the Bible—something known to every child and Christmas caroler?[41] Do they intend to say that a clever fraud who could write a book displaying so wide an array of subtly authentic Near Eastern and biblical cultural and literary traits as the Book of Mormon does was nonetheless so stupid as to claim, before a Bible-reading public, that Jesus was born in the city of Jerusalem? As one anti-Mormon author has pointed out, "Every schoolboy and schoolgirl knows Christ was born in Bethlehem."[42] Exactly! It is virtually certain, therefore, that Alma 7:10 was foreign to Joseph Smith's preconceptions. "The land of Jerusalem" is not the sort of thing the Prophet would likely have invented, precisely for the same reason it bothers uninformed critics of the Book of Mormon.

Why did Alma not give a more precise location for the birth of Jesus? Perhaps because he was talking to people five centuries and many thousands of miles removed from any direct knowledge of the geography of Judea. A prophetic reference to a small, unfamiliar village near Jerusalem would, therefore, likely have been meaningless to Alma's audience. Jerusalem, by contrast, was well-known and frequently mentioned. Furthermore, from across the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean, the five-mile distance between Jerusalem and Bethlehem would hardly have seemed significant to a Nephite.

Much more importantly, though, the Book of Mormon's prophecy that Christ would be born "at Jerusalem which is

the land of our fathers" accords remarkably well with what we now know to have been ancient usage.[43] Far from casting doubt upon the authenticity of the book, the statement in Alma 7:10 represents a striking bull's-eye—and a bull's-eye, it must be remembered, on a target at which Joseph Smith surely did not even know he was aiming.

In order to understand this, we need to grasp clearly what the passage says. No Latter-day Saint has ever, to my knowledge, claimed or believed because of Alma 7:10 that Jesus was born in the city of Jerusalem and not in Bethlehem. And this is right, for Alma 7:10 does not even *mention* the "city" of Jerusalem. It refers, rather, to a "land" of Jerusalem, and in this it is consistent both internally and with ancient Near Eastern usage. "City and state often have the same name in the Ancient Orient, although distinct entities."[44] Likewise— and exactly as one would expect from a text that claims an ancient Near Eastern cultural background—the Book of Mormon routinely refers to "lands" that both surround and bear the names of their chief cities.

Strikingly, Bethlehem itself seems to have been regarded anciently as lying within Jerusalem's "land," just as the Book of Mormon describes it. The so-called Amarna letters, which date to approximately 1400 B.C., allude to "a town of the land of Jerusalem, Bit-Lahmi by name," which the illustrious American archaeologist W. F. Albright regarded as "an almost certain reference to the town of Bethlehem."[45]

And, at the beginning of Book of Mormon history in 597 B.C., Jerusalem could indeed be considered nothing more than a city-state. The former kingdom of Judah had been completely conquered by the Babylonians on 16 March 597, after which Zedekiah (Mattaniah) had been placed on the Jewish throne as a Babylonian puppet. Thus, the "first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah" (1 Ne. 1:4), when the story of Lehi opens, was precisely the year of the collapse of

the kingdom of Judah and of its reduction to a vassal city-state under Babylonian domination. Although technically still called the "kingdom of Judah," the area of Zedekiah's rule had in fact been limited to the region directly surrounding Jerusalem, which could accurately be called the "land of Jerusalem." As John Bright describes it, "Certain of [Judah's] chief cities, such as Lachish and Debir, had been taken by storm and severely damaged. Her territory was probably restricted by the removal of the Negeb from her control, her economy crippled and her population drastically reduced."[46]

This is the political situation with which Nephi was familiar when he left Jerusalem. Judah had been reduced from a kingdom controlling all of Israel and much of Syria in the days of Solomon to a much more humble status under Babylonian hegemony. Thus, the very recently published Dead Sea Scrolls document called *Pseudo-Jeremiah (4Q385),* which purports to come from the exact time of Nephi, can quite accurately say that the Jews whom Lehi and his family left behind were "taken captive from the land of Jerusalem."[47] In Nephi's personal experience—and therefore, in subsequent Nephite tradition—Judah was not an independent kingdom, but a tributary city-state, tenuously ruling only the "land of Jerusalem."

The prophecy of Alma 7:10 thus fits into antiquity very well. As two prominent scholars of the Dead Sea Scrolls observe of the reference in the *Pseudo-Jeremiah* fragment to "the land of Jerusalem," it "greatly enhances the sense of historicity of the whole, since Judah or 'Yehud' [the name of the area on coins from the Persian period] by this time consisted of little more than Jerusalem and its immediate environs."[48] Isn't it, therefore, reasonable to say that the similar reference in Alma 7:10 "enhances the sense of historicity" of the Book of Mormon? Far from being a serious liability, Alma's prophetic comment about the birth of the Messiah is

plausible evidence that the Book of Mormon is exactly what it claims to be.

## No Mormon Doctrine

One currently popular anti-Mormon line of attack points out that the Book of Mormon fails to teach a number of distinctively Latter-day Saint doctrines, even though the Doctrine and Covenants declares it to contain the "fulness" of the gospel (D&C 20:9; 27:5; 42:12; 135:3; compare 18:4). This is supposed to show that Mormonism cannot be true if the Book of Mormon is true, and that the Book of Mormon must be false if Mormonism is true. Of course, it is one thing to demonstrate that a given principle is not taught in a particular passage or book, and it is quite another to show that that principle has been directly contradicted. But it is entirely true that no explicit discussion exists in the Book of Mormon of the plurality of gods, eternal progression, celestial marriage, baptism for the dead, the corporeality of God, the denial of *ex nihilo* creation, and three degrees of glory.[49]

What, then, do we mean to say when we speak of the Book of Mormon as containing "the fulness of the gospel"? When the Doctrine and Covenants describes the Book of Mormon as containing the "fulness" of the gospel, does it mean the Book of Mormon contains the "totality" of Mormon doctrine?[50] Does it intend the "totality" of doctrinal propositions, ritual observances, administrative practices and patterns, and cultural distinctives that make up Mormonism?[51] First of all, we need not admit that no allusion to such doctrines exists at all. Thus, for instance, the command to "be perfect" (an essential component of the principle of eternal progression) occurs not only in Matthew 5:48 but in 3 Nephi 12:48, and it can certainly be argued that 3 Nephi 28:10 contains a subtle but unmistakable allusion to a doc-

trine of human deification. And, just a few verses later, at 3 Nephi 28:13–16, we find what might well be an analogy to Latter-day Saint temple ritual, which takes the form of an ascension rite and which likewise involves the communication of matters that are not to be publicly taught or discussed.

More importantly, Noel B. Reynolds has shown in several carefully reasoned articles that the word *gospel*, as the term is used in the Book of Mormon, refers to the means by which a person comes unto Christ and is saved. In its most basic sense, the word does not refer to all of the ordinances and all of the specific doctrines held by the Latter-day Saints, but represents a six-point formula including repentance, baptism, the Holy Ghost, faith, endurance to the end, and eternal life. These teachings are clearly—one might well say "fully"—set out in the Book of Mormon.[52] Furthermore, there is no need for these doctrines to be explicitly discussed in the Book of Mormon, for the Nephite record itself repeatedly teaches that after the believer has come to Christ and received the Holy Ghost, important further revelations will follow.[53] The Book of Mormon consistently points beyond itself to things that were not "lawful" for its authors to write or to utter, thus teaching us that there are other doctrines not contained within its pages but implicitly embraced within a life lived according to the gospel.[54]

## Joseph Smith as the Supposed Author

From the start, critics have denounced Joseph Smith's claims as those of a conscious and deliberate fraud. They have disagreed, however, about whether he wrote the Book of Mormon himself or simply stole it from someone else. In regard to this question, it is important to note that Emma Smith, who knew her husband as well as anybody on earth could have known him, insisted to the end of her life that

the writing of the Book of Mormon was utterly beyond his
unaided capacities.

> I wrote for Joseph Smith during the work of transla-
> tion. . . . The larger part of this labor was done [in] my
> presence and where I could see and know what was be-
> ing done. . . . During no part of it did Joseph Smith have
> any mss. [manuscripts] or book of any kind from which
> to read or dictate except the metalic [*sic*] plates which I
> knew he had.
>
> Joseph Smith could neither write nor dictate a coher-
> ent and well-worded letter, let alone dictate a book like
> the Book of Mormon. . . . [F]or one so ignorant and un-
> learned as he was, it was simply impossible.[55]

## Rival Candidates: Solomon Spaulding and Ethan Smith

At first, critics were nonetheless inclined to see Joseph
Smith as sole author. But when that became obviously im-
plausible, they found themselves obliged to hypothesize one
or more co-conspirators. A bad novel by an Episcopalian
minister named Solomon Spaulding, for instance, has long
been held by many opponents of the Church to have served
as a principal source for Joseph Smith's Book of Mormon.
Even the actual rediscovery of Spaulding's *Manuscript Found*
in 1884 and the obvious fact that it bears little, if any, resem-
blance to the Book of Mormon have failed to prevent new
generations of anti-Mormons from resurrecting the theory.[56]
Nevertheless, as Dr. Lester E. Bush Jr. illustrated in detail in
an important 1977 article, though the Spaulding yarn has
been "disinterred," it very desperately needs "reburial."[57]
Some critics, perhaps jumping from an obviously sinking
ship, have alleged that Joseph plagiarized from Ethan Smith's
*View of the Hebrews*,[58] but John W. Welch has supplied nearly
a hundred significant disagreements—he calls them

"unparallels"—between the Book of Mormon and Ethan Smith's work, in comparison to which the relatively few and profoundly superficial similarities adduced by critics are entirely unconvincing.[59]

### The Gadianton Robbers

One assumption favored by many skeptics who want to place the writing of the Book of Mormon in the Jacksonian United States is that the book's notorious Gadianton robbers are really only thinly disguised early nineteenth-century Masons.[60] Recent research, however, indicates that this long-cherished notion has little or no basis in fact.[61] Moreover, the account of the Gadianton robbers given in the Book of Mormon turns out to be a highly realistic story of what sounds very much like a genuine series of military events, narrated in a style quite foreign to the uniform-and-parade patriotism favored by Joseph Smith and other Jacksonian Americans, some of whom had served in the Revolutionary War.[62]

### Joseph Smith: A Highly Unlikely Candidate

As I write, though, the pendulum among skeptics seems to be swinging back to the notion—rejected by those who knew him best—that Joseph Smith composed the book on his own. Yet I would contend that the publication over the past several years of Joseph Smith's authenticated personal writings—writings mostly not designed for printing, and hence, unlikely to be part of a public pose—reveals an honest, humble, and sincere man who simply cannot have been the conscious fraud depicted in conventional anti-Mormon writing.[63] Similarly, newly gathered evidence about Joseph Smith and his family has effectively demolished the early

anti-Mormon affidavits that the Prophet's enemies have treasured for more than a century and a half as evidence that he was a dishonest schemer.[64] And recent statistical studies of Book of Mormon prose seem to offer striking scientific evidence that Joseph Smith could not have been the book's author.[65]

## The Witnesses

In any case, advocates of Joseph Smith's authorship of the Book of Mormon have been no more successful than other critics in dealing with the eleven witnesses to the plates. Some have alleged, without real proof, that certain of the witnesses eventually denied their testimonies[66] or that they admitted they thought they had seen "only" a vision, nothing real.[67] Many skeptics, perhaps realizing that such arguments were going nowhere, have also attempted to dismiss the witnesses as unreliable men of bad character.[68] Unfortunately for such attempts, though, they run head-on into an impressive body of recent scholarship that strongly supports the consistency and dependability of the witnesses' testimonies.[69] As Professor Richard Lloyd Anderson noted in 1981:

> The first anti-Mormon book was written in 1834 . . . and set the precedent . . . devoting most space to show them to be either superstitious or dishonest. This became a formula: ignore the testimony and attack the witness. . . . That method is sure to caricature its victims: lead off with the worst names anyone ever called them, take all charges as presented without investigating, solidify mistakes as lifelong characteristics, and ignore all positive accomplishments or favorable judgments on their lives. Such bad methods will inevitably produce bad men on paper. The only problem with this treatment is that it cheats the consumer—it appears to investigate personality without really doing so.[70]

Those, therefore, who wish to dismiss the Book of Mormon as merely a piece of nineteenth-century frontier fiction must explain where the gold plates came from, or how Joseph Smith managed to make eleven serious, honest, sane men (and a number of others not listed among the formal witnesses) think they had seen them if they did not really exist. No serious try has been made at this. Almost without exception, critics have dealt with the witnesses by simply ignoring them.

Nonetheless, Fawn Brodie can speak glibly of Joseph Smith's "marvelously fecund imagination," his "extraordinary capacity for fantasy," which "spilled over like a spring freshet" in the production of the Book of Mormon.[71] One recent book has received a great deal of acclaim for contending that Joseph Smith's Book of Mormon merely reflects his supposedly hermetic and occult background.[72] But such judgments have come largely from scholars who know little of Mormonism, let alone of the ancient milieu from which the Book of Mormon claims to derive, and the revisionist accounts seem to rest upon little or no evidence.[73] And it all seems rather irrelevant anyway, since, as Hugh Nibley has observed, "There is no point at all to the question: Who wrote the Book of Mormon? It would have been quite as impossible for the most learned man alive in 1830 to have written the book as it was for Joseph Smith."[74]

## A Side Issue

A popular argument against the Book of Mormon in some circles rests upon the claim that B. H. Roberts, a long-time General Authority of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and one of its premier writers and intellectuals, lost his own faith in the book during the last years of his life.[75] Exactly how this would constitute evidence

against the Book of Mormon, even if the sad tale were true, is not entirely clear. Surely there have been cases of lost religious faith throughout the whole history of Christianity and beyond. But unquestionably, the claim has a certain shock value when used against faithful Latter-day Saints. Fortunately, the evidence strongly indicates that Elder Roberts retained his faith in the Book of Mormon and the restored gospel until his death.[76] In fact, the long-delayed recent publication of B. H. Roberts's last work, the one he considered his masterpiece, should settle this question permanently. In it, Elder Roberts consistently refers to the Book of Mormon as a historically authentic account of ancient peoples.[77]

## Temporary Conclusion

Some critics of the Book of Mormon, demonstrably unaware of (or at least unwilling to acknowledge) competent Latter-day Saint scholarship, actually seem to believe that such scholarship does not exist. Therefore, they say Mormons are obliged to take refuge from objective fact—which is invariably hostile to them—in subjective testimony, or feelings.[78] "The 'Anti-Mormon' label releases Mormons from feeling obligated to respond to the challenges of such literature on the basis that it is persecution."[79]

I hope the examples I have sketched here have shown such a portrait to be misleading. I do not, however, mean to suggest by this brief and necessarily cursory survey that no problems remain unsolved for Book of Mormon researchers.

Probably no significant book—certainly no ancient one, emphatically including the Bible—poses no difficulties to those who study it carefully. Quite as one would expect, therefore, interesting questions continue to arise in connection with the Book of Mormon. But they are not paralyzing questions. Were the Book of Mormon merely what its critics

have claimed it to be over the years (i.e., a simple excrescence of shallow fraud), it would not, today, continue to draw respectful attention and even veneration from those who study it most intensely. And as their studies grow ever deeper and more sophisticated, many continue to be astonished by both the richness and the toughness of the Book of Mormon. These studies reinforce their spiritual conviction that the Book of Mormon is what it claims to be: a testimony to the divinely appointed mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith and, more significant still, another witness to the deity of Jesus Christ, the atoning Savior of the world.

## For Further Reading:

Those wishing to look in greater detail at the state of the arguments about the Book of Mormon will find good starting points in John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, eds., *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), and John W. Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992). The *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, which commenced publication in 1992, features original articles on the subject. The *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* began in 1989 (its name was changed to the *FARMS Review of Books* in 1996) and evaluates all books published in the field, both pro and con (including several of the anti-Mormon books cited here). Both periodicals are available from the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), as well as in many LDS bookstores.

## Notes

1. The examples below are taken from Ed Decker, *Decker's Complete Handbook on Mormonism* (Eugene, Oreg.: Harvest House, 1995), 109–14. Compare John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism* (Eugene, Oreg.:

Harvest House, 1992), 277, 292, 295, 305–11; Peter Bartley, *Mormonism: The Prophet, the Book and the Cult* (Dublin, Ireland: Veritas, 1989), 62–4; Mark J. Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1993), 212; John R. Farkas and David A. Reed, *Mormonism: Changes, Contradictions, and Errors* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1995), 119–29; Floyd C. McElveen, *The Mormon Illusion* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1985), 43–8; Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 128–33; James R. White, *Letters to a Mormon Elder* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1993), 149–53.

2. George Horton, "Understanding Textual Changes in the Book of Mormon," *Ensign* (December 1983): 24–8.

3. Royal Skousen, "Piecing Together the Original Manuscript," *BYU Today* 46/3 (May 1992): 18–24; Royal Skousen, "Towards a Critical Edition of the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30/1 (Winter 1990): 41–69; Royal Skousen, "Critical Methodology and the Text of the Book of Mormon," review of *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations of Critical Methodology,* ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 121–44; and Royal Skousen, *The Critical Text of the Book of Mormon,* 60 min., 1995, FARMS, video and audiotape (transcript available).

4. See, for instance, "The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition by the First Presidency and the Twelve" (June 1916), conveniently available in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* 4:1670–7.

5. Decker, *Decker's Complete Handbook on Mormonism,* 112–3.

6. John A. Tvedtnes, "The Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon,* ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 78. The same is also true in Arabic, a language closely related to Hebrew. See, for instance, Michael A. Sells, trans., *Desert Tracings: Six Classic Arabian Odes by 'Alqama, Shánfara, Labíd, 'Antara, Al-A'sha, and Dhu al-Rúmma* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 5, with some related examples from ancient Arabian poetry on pp. 11, 15, 31–5, 37–9, 45, 47, 50, 68, 75–6.

7. A famous example of literary anachronism can be found in William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* 2.1.192–3, where, although

clocks were unknown in ancient Rome, a clock strikes three. The Bible itself is not free of items that certain scholars have branded anachronistic. Some, for instance, have argued that the domestication of camels in the ancient Near East occurred relatively late, and consequently, that the passages in the patriarchal narratives of the Bible that mention them prominently (e.g., Genesis 12:16; 24:10; 30:43; 31:17; 32:15) are simply the mistaken retrojections of later authors. See J. A. Thompson, "Camel," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible,* ed. G. A. Buttrick, et al. (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1962–76), 1:491; Richard W. Bulliet, *The Camel and the Wheel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 35–6.

8. From the Latin adjective *almus/-a/-um* ("nourishing," "kind," "bountiful"), where *alma* is the feminine form.

9. Yigael Yadin, *Bar-Kokhba* (New York: Random House, 1971), 176.

10. I might incidentally mention that at least one Oklahoma-based set of anti-Mormons knows this, because I personally sent the evidence to them. Nonetheless, and despite their written promise that they would correct their inaccurate statements on the matter, they have continued to ridicule the name *Alma* in the Book of Mormon.

11. See, for example, Ankerberg and Weldon, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism,* 322; White, *Letters to a Mormon Elder,* 145; Decker, *Decker's Complete Handbook on Mormonism,* 113.

12. Farkas and Reed, *Mormonism: Changes, Contradictions, and Errors,* 152; compare Decker, *Decker's Complete Handbook on Mormonism,* 114; Latayne Colvett Scott, *The Mormon Mirage* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1980), 90.

13. M. Gary Hadfield, "Neuropathology and the Scriptures," *BYU Studies* 33/2 (1993): 313–28. The results of Dr. Hadfield's study were summarized, with some additional points supplied by John W. Welch, in "The 'Decapitation' of Shiz," *Insights* (November 1994): 2.

14. Ankerberg and Weldon, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism,* 275, 282–90, 295; Bartley, *Mormonism: The Prophet,*

the Book, the Cult, 33–55; Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, 213; McElveen, *The Mormon Illusion*, 61–3, 66; Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, *Archaeology and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm Co., 1969), reprinted with second appendix in 1972; Tanner and Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism*, 133–41, 145–6; Kurt Van Gorden, *Mormonism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1995), 9 n. 9; Scott, *The Mormon Mirage*, 77–85; Wesley P. Walters, "The Book of Mormon Today" (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Gospel Truths Ministries, 1992); White, *Letters to a Mormon Elder*, 134–40. Compare Edward H. Ashment, "Historiography of the Canon," in *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History*, ed. George D. Smith (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 284.

15. John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985); John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992). Compare David A. Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah: New Evidences for the Book of Mormon from Ancient Mexico* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon, 1981). John Clark, "A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies," review of F. Richard Hauck, *Deciphering the Geography of the Book of Mormon*, in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1 (1989): 20–70, corroborates Sorenson's important claim that the Book of Mormon contains an involved and internally consistent implicit geography.

16. Warren P. Aston and Michaela Knoth Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi: New Evidence for Lehi's Journey across Arabia to Bountiful* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994). The Astons have extended and corrected the valuable earlier work of Lynn M. Hilton and Hope Hilton, *In Search of Lehi's Trail* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976).

17. This has been pointed out in a fine article by William J. Hamblin, "Basic Methodological Problems with the Anti-Mormon Approach to the Geography and Archaeology of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/1 (1993): 161–97. See also William J. Hamblin, review of Tanner and Tanner, *Archaeology and the Book of Mormon*, in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 5 (1993): 250–72.

18. Bartley, *Mormonism: The Prophet, the Book, the Cult*, 53. Com-

pare Scott, *The Mormon Mirage*, 83–4.

19. Linda Schele and Mary Ellen Miller, "The Blood of Kings: A New Interpretation of Maya Art," *Archaeology* 39 (May/June 1986): 61.

20. Michael D. Coe, *The Maya*, 3rd ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 148. The Maya should not be simplistically identified with Book of Mormon peoples. Still, in this context, one can hardly fail to recall the somber words of Moroni, recorded at Mormon 8:2, 8, or the depressing prophecy of 1 Nephi 12:20–21.

21. Fort Worth: Kimbell Art Museum, 1986.

22. McElveen, *The Mormon Illusion*, 63; Scott, *The Mormon Mirage*, 81–2; Walters, "The Book of Mormon Today."

23. Scott, *The Mormon Mirage*, 82 (italics in the original); cf. 84; also White, *Letters to a Mormon Elder*, 139.

24. See the discussion, with references, by John L. Sorenson and Robert F. Smith, "Barley in Ancient America," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 130–2.

25. Ashment, "Historiography of the Canon," 284.

26. John L. Sorenson, "Animals in the Book of Mormon: An Annotated Bibliography" (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992). See also Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting*, 288–99.

27. See the discussion, with references, by John L. Sorenson and Robert F. Smith, "Barley in Ancient America," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 130–2.

28. Scott, *The Mormon Mirage*, 83.

29. See Michio Kaku, *Hyperspace: A Scientific Odyssey through Parallel Universes, Time Warps, and the Tenth Dimension* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994), vii: "Scientific revolutions, almost by definition, defy common sense. If all our common-sense notions about the universe were correct, then science would have solved the secrets of the universe thousands of years ago. The purpose of science is to peel back the layer of the appearance of objects to reveal their underlying nature. In fact, if appearance and essence were the same thing, there would be no need for science."

30. John L. Sorenson, "Metals and Metallurgy relating to the Book of Mormon Text" (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992). See also Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting*, 278–88.

31. See "The 'Golden' Plates," in Welch, *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 275–7.

32. Ankerberg and Weldon, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism*, 294–5; Scott, *The Mormon Mirage*, 63–4; Tanner and Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism*, 141–5; Van Gorden, *Mormonism*, 8 n. 7.

33. For a good, brief summary of the evidence, with references, see William J. Hamblin, "Reformed Egyptian" (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1995).

34. White, *Letters to a Mormon Elder*, 139. Compare Ankerberg and Weldon, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism*, 285–6; Farkas and Reed, *Mormonism: Changes, Contradictions, and Errors*, 155; Scott, *The Mormon Mirage*, 81–2; Tanner and Tanner, *Archaeology and the Book of Mormon*, 11–2, 91; Van Gorden, *Mormonism*, 9 n. 9.

35. See Hugh Nibley's discussion in *The Prophetic Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989), 245–6, in an article entitled "Howlers in the Book of Mormon" reprinted from the *Millennial Star* 125 (February 1963): 28–34; also Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting*, 232–3, and Hamblin, review of Tanner and Tanner, *Archaeology and the Book of Mormon*, 259.

36. For examples of this kind of attack, see Ankerberg and Weldon, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism*, 322, and Scott, *The Mormon Mirage*, 83.

37. Avraham Negev, ed., *Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1972), 311. See also Amihay Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 492–502. Negev says that Solomon's temple followed a general "Canaanite plan," common to both Hebrew and pagan shrines of the Bronze Age.

38. Negev, *Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land*, 312. In correspondence, one critic of the Book of Mormon demanded to know why, if Nephites really once existed, we have not found any

ruins of Nephi's temple. I would suggest that it is for the same reason that we have found "no actual remains" of Solomon's temple.

39. Ibid., 28 (emphasis added).

40. Ankerberg and Weldon, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism*, 353, 364; Weldon Langfield, *The Truth about Mormonism: A Former Adherent Analyzes the LDS Faith* (Bakersfield, Calif.: Weldon Langfield Publications, 1991), 53; Scott, *The Mormon Mirage*, 86; Van Gorden, *Mormonism*, 25 n. 52.

41. See Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1990), for a recent assault on the Book of Mormon, the argument of which rests heavily upon the debatable assumption that Joseph Smith knew the Bible extremely well and in extraordinary detail. It is absolutely impossible to reconcile such alleged mastery of biblical detail with the "dumb mistake" that the Prophet is supposed to have committed with respect to Christ's birthplace. Critics of the Book of Mormon really cannot have it both ways.

42. Langfield, *The Truth about Mormonism*, 53.

43. For a much more detailed examination of this issue, see Daniel C. Peterson, Matthew Roper, and William J. Hamblin, "On Alma 7:10 and the Birthplace of Jesus Christ" (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1995). Earlier Latter-day Saint treatments of this issue include B. H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God*, Part 3 (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909), 481–2; Sidney B. Sperry, *Answers to Book of Mormon Questions* [formerly *Problems of the Book of Mormon*] (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1967), 131–6, 207–8; D. Kelly Ogden, "Why Does the Book of Mormon Say That Jesus Would Be Born at Jerusalem?" I Have a Question, *Ensign* (August 1984): 51–2; Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 6–7; Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 100–2; Welch, *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 170–2.

44. Kenneth Anderson Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (London: Tyndale Press, 1966), 68 n. 43.

45. See James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East* (Princeton:

Princeton University Press, 1958), 1:274; also Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, eds., *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1977), map 39. For the dating of the Amarna Letters, see Walter Harrelson, "Shechem in Extra-Biblical References," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 20 (1957): 4, 6–7. Hugh Nibley drew our attention to the letters years ago. See Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 100–2. Nibley's references are to the Amarna letters, tablets 287:25 = "the land of the city of Jerusalem (*[a-]mur mat u-ru-sa-lim an-n[i-]ta*)"; 46, 61, 63 = "lands [*matat*] of Jerusalem"; 290:15–6, discusses "a city of the land of Jerusalem, whose name is *bit-ninib*." Samuel A. B. Mercer, *The Tell el-Amarna Tablets* (Toronto, Canada: Macmillan, 1939), 722 n. L16, speculated that it might be possible to read this as "Bethlehem." Transliteration and translation can be found on 710–1, 722 of Mercer's book. The preferred translation is now William L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

46. Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 328.

47. The Hebrew text and English translation are conveniently available in Robert H. Eisenman and Michael Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered* (Rockport, Mass.: Element, 1992), 57–8.

48. Eisenman and Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered*, 57.

49. See, for example, Ankerberg and Weldon, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism*, 292–4; Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, 96, 212, 243–4; Scott, *The Mormon Mirage*, 91; Walters, "The Book of Mormon Today."

50. This is the claim made, and the word used, by Ankerberg and Weldon, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism*, 294.

51. It is interesting to note that Webster's 1828 dictionary offers as its second meaning for *fullness*: "the state of abounding or being in great plenty; abundance." Only afterwards, as the third meaning, does it speak of "completeness; the state of a thing in which nothing is wanted; perfection."

52. See Noel B. Reynolds, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets," *BYU Studies* 31/3 (Summer 1991): 31–

50; Noel B. Reynolds, "Gospel of Jesus Christ," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* 2:556–60; Noel B. Reynolds, "How to 'Come unto Christ,'" *Ensign* (September 1992): 7–13; Noel B. Reynolds, "The Gospel As Taught by the Nephites" (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1994).

53. See 2 Nephi 28:26–30; Alma 12:9–11; 3 Nephi 26:9–10; Mormon 8:12; Ether 4:4–10, 13.

54. See 2 Nephi 27:7–11, 21; 3 Nephi 26:11, 16, 18; 27:23; 28:13–14; Ether 13:13.

55. Milton V. Backman Jr., *Eyewitness Accounts of the Restoration* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1983; republished in 1986 by Deseret Book), 126–7. Original quotation from Emma Smith's testimony as reported by Joseph Smith III to James T. Cobb, 14 February 1879, Letterbook 2:85–8, RLDS Archives, and in *Saints' Herald* 26 (1 October 1879): 289–90. See also Joseph Smith III, "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Advocate* 2 (October 1879): 52.

56. See, for example, Wayne L. Cowdrey, Howard A. Davis, and Donald R. Scales, *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?* (Santa Ana, Calif.: Vision House, 1977); Vernal Holley, *Book of Mormon Authorship: A Closer Look* (Ogden, Utah: Zenos Publications, 1983); Charles A. Crane and Steven A. Crane, *Ashamed of Joseph: Mormon Foundations Crumble* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1993), 121–6.

57. Lester E. Bush Jr., "The Spalding Theory Then and Now," *Dialogue* 10/4 (1977): 40–69. Compare Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*, 2nd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 68, 143, 442–56. Brodie was no friend of Joseph Smith or of Mormonism, but she could see that the Spalding theory was dead. See also *Manuscript Found: The Complete Original "Spalding Manuscript" by Solomon Spalding*, ed. Kent P. Jackson (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1996).

58. Ankerberg and Weldon, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism*, 279–80, 301–2; Bartley, *Mormonism: The Prophet, the Book, the Cult*, 28–9; Crane and Crane, *Ashamed of Joseph*, 123–5; Tanner and Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism*, 126–8; Walters, "The Book of Mormon Today."

59. John W. Welch, "An Unparallel" (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1985); see also Spencer J. Palmer and William L. Knecht, "View of

the Hebrews: Substitute for Inspiration?" *BYU Studies* 5 (1964): 105–13 and *View of the Hebrews: 1825 2nd Edition Complete Text by Ethan Smith*, ed. Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1996).

60. See, for example, Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 63–6; John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 168–71, 174–7, 226, 230, 233; Decker, *Decker's Complete Handbook on Mormonism*, 210–1, 280; Robert N. Hullinger, *Mormon Answer to Skepticism: Why Joseph Smith Wrote the Book of Mormon* (St. Louis, Mo.: Clayton, 1980), 100–19, republished as *Joseph Smith's Response to Skepticism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 99–120; David Persuitte, *Joseph Smith and the Origins of the Book of Mormon* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1985), 173–80; Scott, *The Mormon Mirage*, 75; Dan Vogel, "Mormonism's 'Anti-Masonick Bible,' " *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 9 (1989): 17–30.

61. Daniel C. Peterson, "Notes on 'Gadianton Masonry,' " in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 174–224.

62. Daniel C. Peterson, "The Gadianton Robbers As Guerrilla Warriors," in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, 146–73.

63. See, for instance, Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984); Scott H. Faulring, ed., *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989); Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989).

64. Donald L. Enders, "The Joseph Smith, Sr., Family: Farmers of the Genesee," in *Joseph Smith: The Prophet, the Man*, ed. Susan Easton Black and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1993), 213–25. See my summary "Can the 1834 Affidavits Attacking the Smith Family Be Trusted?" *Insights* (September 1993): 2.

65. For a clear and accessible account of recent statistical research, see John L. Hilton, "On Verifying Wordprint Studies: Book

of Mormon Authorship," *BYU Studies* 30/3 (1990): 89–108, re-printed in this volume.

66. Ankerberg and Weldon, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism*, 297–8; Tanner and Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism*, 94; Van Gorden, *Mormonism*, 9 n. 12.

67. Ankerberg and Weldon, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism*, 296–8; Crane and Crane, *Ashamed of Joseph*, 211–2; McElveen, *The Mormon Illusion*, 48; Tanner and Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism*, 107–10; Van Gorden, *Mormonism*, 9 n. 12. Dan Vogel, "Book of Mormon Witnesses and the Nature of Religious Testimony," unpublished paper presented in Salt Lake City at the Sunstone Symposium (August 1995).

68. Ankerberg and Weldon, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism*, 297–9; Crane and Crane, *Ashamed of Joseph*, 211–2; Decker, *Decker's Complete Handbook on Mormonism*, 400–4; McElveen, *The Mormon Illusion*, 48–9; Tanner and Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism*, 94–107; Van Gorden, *Mormonism*, 10 n. 13.

69. See especially Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981); Milton V. Backman Jr., *Eyewitness Accounts of the Restoration* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1983), republished in 1986 by Deseret Book; and Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1991); see also Eldin Ricks, *The Case of the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Olympus, 1961); and Rhett Stephens James, *The Man Who Knew: The Early Years* (Cache Valley, Utah: Martin Harris Pageant Committee, 1983), dealing with Martin Harris. Fascinating collateral materials are supplied by Susan Easton Black, ed., *Stories from the Early Saints Converted by the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992).

70. Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 166. For recent responses to specific criticisms of the Witnesses, see Matthew Roper's review of Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?* in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 170–6; Matthew Roper, "Comments on the Book of Mor-

mon Witnesses: A Response to Jerald and Sandra Tanner," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/2 (1993): 164–93; William J. Hamblin, "An Apologist for the Critics: Brent Lee Metcalfe's Assumptions and Methodologies," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 506–20.

71. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), 44, 27.

72. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire*; cf. D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987).

73. See the reviews of Brooke's book by William J. Hamblin, Daniel C. Peterson, and George L. Mitton and by Davis Bitton in *BYU Studies* 34/4 (1994–95): 167–81; 182–92; also William J. Hamblin, Daniel C. Peterson, and George L. Mitton, "Mormon in the Fiery Furnace or, Loftes Tryk Goes to Cambridge," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/2 (1994): 3–58.

74. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 123.

75. Ankerberg and Weldon, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism*, 280, 301–3; Farkas and Reed, *Mormonism: Changes, Contradictions, and Errors*, 222; Joel B. Groat, "B. H. Roberts' Doubts," *Heart and Mind: The Newsletter of Gospel Truths Ministries* (January–March 1995): 5–6; James R. Spencer, "The Disappointment of B. H. Roberts: Five Questions That Forced a Mormon General Authority to Abandon the Book of Mormon" (Boise, Idaho: Through the Maze, 1991); Tanner and Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism*, 126–8; Walters, "The Book of Mormon Today"; White, *Letters to a Mormon Elder*, 140–2.

76. For some Latter-day Saint writing on B. H. Roberts and the Book of Mormon, see the anonymously edited collection *A Sure Foundation: Answers to Difficult Gospel Questions* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 60–74; Truman G. Madsen, "B. H. Roberts and the Book of Mormon," in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1982), 7–31, republished in 1996 by FARMS; Truman G. Madsen, ed., "B. H. Roberts: His Final Decade: Statements About the Book of Mormon (1924–

1933)" (Provo, Utah: FARMS, n. d.); Truman G. Madsen and John W. Welch, "Did B. H. Roberts Lose Faith in the Book of Mormon?" (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1985); John W. Welch, "Finding Answers to B. H. Roberts's Questions and 'An Unparallel' " (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1985).

77. B. H. Roberts, *The Truth, the Way, the Life: An Elementary Treatise on Theology,* ed. John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Studies, 1994).

78. Ankerberg and Weldon, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism,* 273–4; 299–300. Bill McKeever and Eric Johnson, *Questions to Ask Your Mormon Friend* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House, 1994), 65–70; Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons,* 116–20, 211–2; and White, *Letters to a Mormon Elder,* 131–4, attack the idea of praying about the Book of Mormon. Compare 2 Nephi 32:8.

79. Van Gorden, *Mormonism,* 80.