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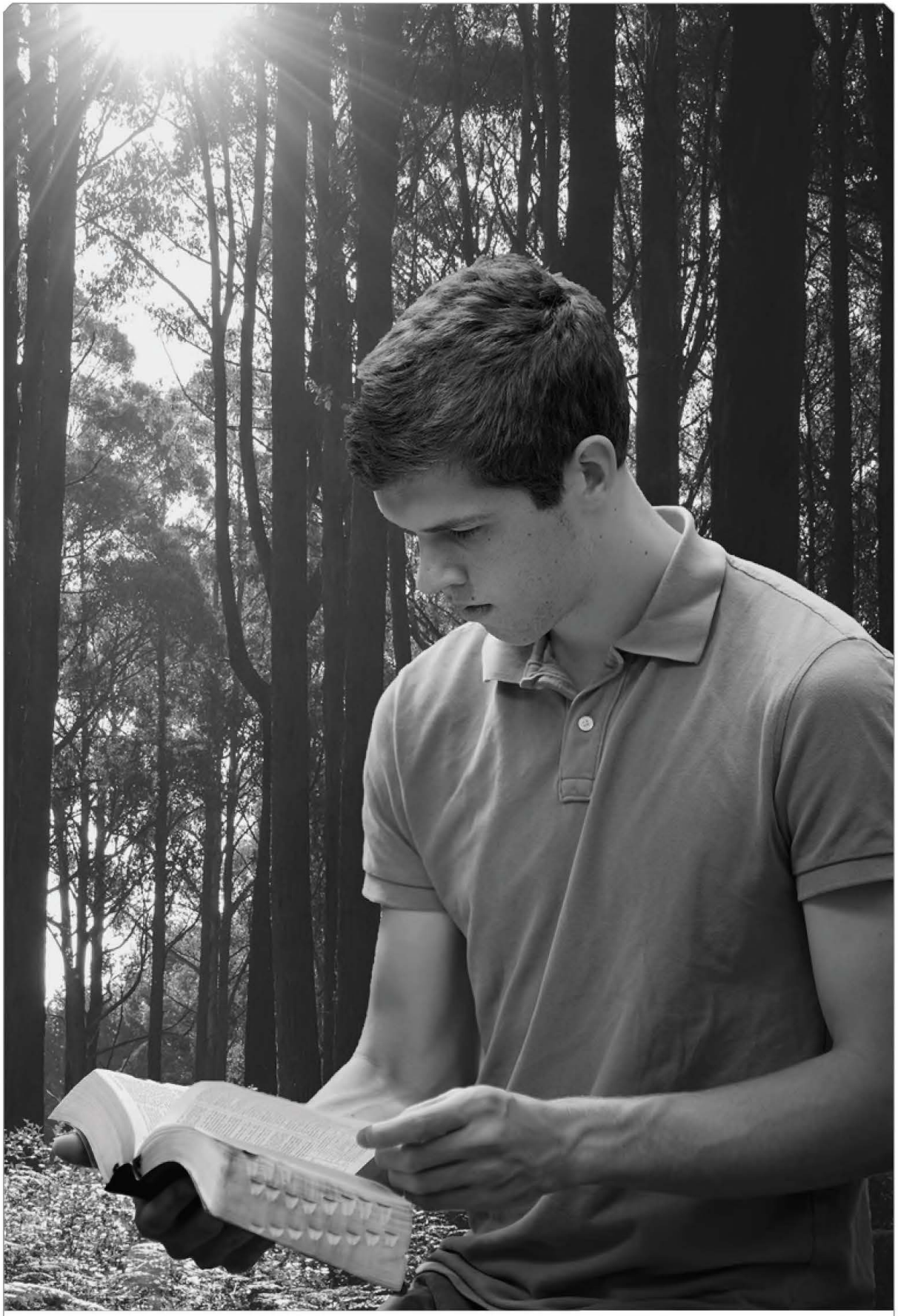

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The Bible and the Book of Mormon must be read in a manner that allows the spirit of prophecy and revelation to enlighten our minds.

"The Intent for Which It Was Given": How the Book of Mormon Teaches the Value of Scripture and Revelation

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The book of Jarom is a short chapter, consisting of only fifteen verses, that nonetheless manages to summarize the affairs of the Nephites over an approximately forty-year period. In the midst of his outline of the current Nephite status quo, Jarom makes mention of the religious climate of the time: "Wherefore, the prophets, and the priests, and the teachers, did labor diligently, exhorting with all long-suffering the people to diligence; teaching the law of Moses, and the intent for which it was given; persuading them to look forward unto the Messiah, and believe in him to come as though he already was. And after this manner did they teach them" (Jarom 1:11).

This statement informs readers of two important notions: First, the Nephites are being taught the *written* word in the form of the law of Moses, presumably from a text such as the brass plates or from Nephi's own record. Second, they are interpreting the law in such a way that it has led them to believe in the Messiah "as though he already was." This is a remarkable statement and raises the question of *how* Nephite society had reached this theological awareness about the relationship between the law and the Messiah. Based upon Nephi's record, it seems likely that this hermeneutical

realization is the result of a Nephite revelatory tradition that uses the visionary experiences of Lehi, Nephi, and Jacob as an interpretive lens. Thus, what Jarom presents readers with is a religious society that is reading the written word, the scriptures, through the lens of revelation. Crucially, the Nephites understand the law, and they possess the means to correctly interpret it. This synthesis of the written[1] word and the revelatory[2] word exposes a tension that runs through the Book of Mormon. From its opening pages, the Book of Mormon presents two sides of Nephite religion. First, there are those Nephites who, like Jarom relays, possess both a knowledge of the written word and an awareness of a Nephite revelatory culture. Followers of this position realize that the ability to interpret God's word requires more than intellect; it requires a heart open to divine inspiration and a belief that God will respond to those who faithfully call upon his name. Second, there are those Nephites who either are unaware of or unbelieving in this revelatory culture and instead maintain that they possess the ability to interpret the written word through their own intellect and reason, subscribing to a Nephite "common sense."[3] Again and again, the Book of Mormon will highlight this tension, praising the former and warning against the latter. The purpose of this article is to examine this conflict between the "written" and the "revelatory" in the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon implicitly argues for a religious culture constructed after the manner of Jarom's, one where both the written word and the revealed interpretation are joined in unison. In order to explore this claim, this article will first examine examples from the narrative of the Book of Mormon where the tension between the "written" and the "revelatory" are brought to the foreground. The article will then explore the implications of this claim on Nephi's assertion that "plain and precious things" have been lost from the Bible.[4]

Nephi and Lehi, Laman and Lemuel

In the first chapter of the Book of Mormon, readers are introduced almost immediately to Lehi, whose prophetic calling is demonstrated through two visionary experiences. The first, and shorter experience, finds Lehi encountering a pillar of fire upon a rock, images that may have linked the new exodus of Lehi and his family with that of Moses and the children of Israel. After a brief respite, Lehi was "carried away in a vision" where he "saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God" (1 Nephi 1:8).[5]

By the end of the vision, Lehi has joined the angels "in the praising of his God" (1 Nephi 1:15). While this visionary experience may lack some of the detail and scope of later Book of Mormon visions, it nonetheless alerts the reader that God interacts with his righteous servants in a specific fashion, namely by pulling back the veil and revealing to them knowledge directly from a divine source. Notably, in the midst of this revelatory experience, Lehi was also presented with a book, and a man "bade him that he should read" (1 Nephi 1:11). It is after reading the book that Lehi joins the concourses of angels, and it is the information he gleaned from the book that "manifested plainly the coming of a Messiah" (1 Nephi 1:19) that Lehi proclaims to those in Jerusalem. Crucially, the catalyst for this visionary experience was Lehi's decision to pray "unto the Lord, yea, even with all his heart" (1 Nephi 1:5).[6] Lehi reached out to the Lord, and the Lord responded.

Lehi's revelatory encounters in 1 Nephi 8 and his subsequent prophecies in 1 Nephi 10 provide a further catalyst for Nephi to experience his own grand apocalyptic vision in 1 Nephi 11–14.[7] Nephi tells his readers that he believed "that the Lord was able to make them known unto me" (1 Nephi 11:1). After Nephi spent time "pondering in mine heart" (1 Nephi 11:1), he finds himself taken to a high mountain by the "Spirit of the Lord" (1 Nephi 11:1). At this point, Nephi is asked a series of questions: What do you want? Do you believe your father? Do you understand the condescension of God? As Nephi answers each question, more of the vision is revealed. Nephi's breakthrough comes when he is shown a tree "like unto the tree which my father had seen" (1 Nephi 11:8). Following the appearance of the tree, the angel asks Nephi again, "What desirest thou?" (1 Nephi 11:10). At this point, Nephi is at a crossroads. He could simply say, "Well, I've seen what my father saw, and that's good enough," but he appears to sense that what he is *seeing* is not the full picture, that sometimes a tree isn't simply a tree. So he responds to the Spirit of the Lord that his desire is "to know the interpretation thereof." At this point the setting and scope of the vision shift. An angel replaces the Spirit of the Lord, and the setting has changed to the Holy Land, where Nephi learns about the Savior's ministry, sees his people scattered by the Lamanites, witnesses the Protestant occupation of America, beholds the rise of the great and abominable church, and views the gathering of Israel through the spread of the Bible and the Book of Mormon.

On the other side stand the much-maligned Laman and Lemuel. Too often, they are dismissed as unbelievers or nonreligious, but this assumption

may be overly simplistic. Despite Nephi's characterizations, Laman and Lemuel seem to believe they have a more accurate view of proper religious observation than their younger brother. This "proper" religious practice can be seen in two interactions between Laman and Nephi.[8] First, when Nephi's vision concludes and he returns to camp, he finds Laman and Lemuel discussing Lehi's teachings regarding the branches of the olive tree. When Nephi asks if they have "inquired of the Lord" (1 Nephi 15:8), they respond, "We have not; for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us" (1 Nephi 15:9). Laman and Lemuel possess a belief in God; what they appear to lack is a belief that God continues to speak. The difference between Nephi and his older brother is not that of simply believer and nonbeliever but of a believer and a nonbeliever *in God's willingness to communicate.* As Grant Hardy notes, "Whatever else they may have been, Laman and Lemuel appear to have been orthodox, observant Jews. Nephi—who has a vested interest in revealing their moral shortcomings—never accuses them of idolatry, false swearing, Sabbath breaking, drunkenness, adultery, or ritual uncleanness."[9] The tension between Nephi and his brothers must come from an alternate source of conflict.

Later, when Nephi receives instructions to build a ship, Laman and Lemuel express a strong disbelief. Their contention is that Nephi claims that he was "instructed of the Lord" (1 Nephi 17:18), and they disparagingly compare Nephi to Lehi as someone "led away by the foolish imaginations of his heart" (1 Nephi 17:20). Instead, they put forward their own concept of righteousness: "We know that the people who were in the land of Jerusalem were a righteous people; for they kept the statutes and judgments of the Lord, and all his commandments, according to the law of Moses; wherefore, we know that they are a righteous people" (1 Nephi 17:22).[10] Laman and Lemuel demonstrate a belief in God and in the law of Moses—for them, this is righteousness, and they are hesitant to move beyond *sola scriptura*. Nephi appears to realize this, and he appeals to Laman and Lemuel through the biblical stories of Moses and the wickedness of the children of Israel. Significantly, Nephi's point is that the children of Israel have rejected God's prophet and in the process rejected God (1 Nephi 17:42). Nephi and Lehi, and the revelatory culture they are engaged in, stand far outside Laman and Lemuel's conception of how righteous individuals behave.

Jacob and Sherem

This tension finds a second expression in the encounter between Jacob and Sherem. Jacob informs his readers that he "had faith in Christ who should come" (Jacob 7:3) and that he had experienced "many revelations" as well as the ministering of angels (Jacob 7:5). It is presumably the expression of this revealed understanding of the Messiah that leads Sherem to seek out an audience with Jacob: "Brother Jacob, I have sought much opportunity that I might speak unto you; for I have heard and also know that thou goest about much, preaching that which ye call the gospel, or the doctrine of Christ" (Jacob 7:6). Sherem accuses Jacob of "blasphemy" for what he perceives as Jacob's disregard or even perversion of the law of Moses: "And ye have led away much of this people that they pervert the right way of God, and keep not the law of Moses which is the right way; and convert the law of Moses into the worship of a being which ye say shall come many hundred years hence" (Jacob 7:7).[11] The two begin a debate over the reality of the future Messiah. Jacob argues that it is impossible to read the scriptures and disbelieve in a Messiah, while Sherem argues that while he does accept the scriptures, nevertheless "there is no Christ, neither has been, nor ever will be" (Jacob 7:9). At this point, Jacob makes a critical move. While both accept scripture, they disagree on the interpretation.[12] This stalemate causes Jacob to move directly into the area of their disagreement, namely the actuality of revelation. Jacob tells Sherem that his knowledge of the Holy Ghost comes not from the scriptures alone, for "it also has been made manifest unto me by the power of the Holy Ghost" (Jacob 7:12). Sherem, whose religious expectation seemingly does not extend beyond the pages of the scriptures, remarks, "Show me a sign by this power of the Holy Ghost, in the which ye know so much" (Jacob 7:13). The result of Sherem's taunt is that "the power of the Lord came upon him, insomuch that he fell to the earth" (Jacob 7:15). Significantly, when Sherem asks for the people to gather together and listen to his final words, he offers his witness of the facets of Jacob's own self-described revelatory experience of how he "confessed the Christ, and the power of the Holy Ghost, and the ministering of angels" (Jacob 7:17).

Abinadi and the Priest of King Noah

The debate between Abinadi and the priests of Noah provides the setting for another debate over Nephite revelatory culture. Abinadi is introduced as a prophet, one who stresses that both his calling and message have been

received directly from God: "And thus saith the Lord, and thus hath he commanded me" (Mosiah 11:25) or "And the Lord said unto me: Stretch forth thy hand and prophesy" (Mosiah 12:2). Unsurprisingly, King Noah and his priests respond with skepticism, asking, "Who is Abinadi, that I and my people should be judged of him, or who is the Lord, that shall bring upon my people such great affliction?" (Mosiah 11:27). While the priests of Noah may reject Abinadi and his prophetic role, they appear to be well-versed in scripture. They defend themselves against the harsh words of Abinadi by declaring, "Behold, we are strong, we shall not come into bondage, or be taken captive by our enemies; yea, and thou hast prospered in the land, and thou shalt also prosper" (Mosiah 12:15). Their logic, that their success and prosperity equates with righteousness, suggests an awareness of the Deuteronomic axiom that God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked, an idea that the Book of Mormon repeatedly emphasizes through the Lehite covenant (2 Nephi 2:20; cf. Deuteronomy 11:13–21 and 28:1–14).[13] The priests appear to be using their prosperity and success as signs that they have been righteous, and thus Abinadi's words can only serve to "stir up my people to anger one with another" (Mosiah 11:28).

Two debates over scripture illustrate the tension between the written and the revelatory in Abinadi's encounter with the priests: First, the priests pose a challenge to Abinadi: "What meaneth the words which are written, and which have been taught by our fathers, saying:" (Mosiah 12:20). At this point, they quote Isaiah 52:7–10. Perhaps the priests expect Abinadi to find condemnation in the statement "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings; that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good" (Mosiah 12:21; cf. Isa. 52:7). After all, Abinadi has brought neither "good tidings" nor "peace," and therefore, they believe his message can't be from God. Or perhaps they've applied Isaiah's words to themselves and expect Abinadi to follow suit and thereby concede. Has God not "comforted his people" in giving them riches and success? Was his arm not "made bare" in their defeat of the Lamanites? Either course ends with Abinadi looking foolish. While Abinadi does eventually offer his interpretation of Isaiah 52:7–10, he first responds to their query by chastising them: "Are you priests, and pretend to teach this people, and to understand the spirit of prophesying, and yet desire to know of me what these things mean?" (Mosiah 12:25). The priests of Noah lack "the spirit of prophesying," and without that key lens through which to interpret Isaiah, they have "perverted the ways of the Lord"

(Mosiah 12:26). It is one thing to read the words on the page and analyze them with your mind, but, as Abinadi reminds them, "Ye have not applied your hearts to understanding." Without both mind and heart, written and revelatory, the priests of Noah "have not been wise" (Mosiah 12:27).

Second, when Abinadi asks, "What teach ye this people?" the priests respond, "We teach the law of Moses" (Mosiah 12:27–28). When Abinadi questions them as to whether "salvation come by the law of Moses," the priests state that "salvation did come by the law of Moses" (Mosiah 12:31–32). Their answers lead Abinadi to deliver a lengthy discourse on the law of Moses, after which he remarks that "there was a law given them, yea, a law of performances and ordinances, a law which they were to observe strictly from day to day, to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him" (Mosiah 13:30). However, the law was also intended to point the Israelites toward the coming Messiah, who would provide them with salvation—"all these things were types of things to come" (Mosiah 13:31). There is a written element to the law of Moses, namely the "performances and ordinances," but these can only truly be understood with the spirit of prophecy and revelation as "types of things to come." The written law, stripped of its revelatory lens, is insufficient and inadequate. As if to emphasize that Abinadi speaks as a prophet, that he possesses a present knowledge of future events, Mormon (or Alma) later inserts the seemingly parenthetical expression that Abinadi, when he speaks of Christ, is "speaking of things to come as though they had already come" (Mosiah 16:6). The priests of Noah have the scriptures, and they've been taught by their fathers. What they lacked, however, was what Abinadi possessed—namely, the revelatory lens through which the law of Moses and the words of Isaiah can be correctly interpreted with an eye toward future events.

Ammon and King Lamoni

The story of Ammon's mission to the Lamanites is one of the most well-known stories in the Book of Mormon. Ammon, one of the sons of King Mosiah II, renounces the kingship his father offers him and instead desires to go on a mission to the Lamanites. Ammon travels to the land of Ishmael and gains the favor of King Lamoni, who offers Ammon his daughter as a wife. Ammon refuses and asks only that he be a servant to King Lamoni, which the king grants him by putting Ammon in charge of watching over his flocks. When a group of Lamanites arrives at the Waters of Sebus to scatter King Lamoni's

flock, Ammon protects the animals by cutting off the arms of the attackers. Stunned, King Lamoni's servants relay to him what Ammon has done, and King Lamoni comes to believe that Ammon may not be what he appears but may actually be "that Great Spirit" (Alma 18:18). Ammon takes advantage of King Lamoni's curiosity and begins a discussion with King Lamoni that will end with the king, his wife, and many of his people converted to the message of Jesus Christ.

The conversion experience of King Lamoni warrants a closer look on two fronts. First, Ammon leads the king step by step, point by point, toward an understanding of the reality of God and God's plan. Ammon teaches King Lamoni that the earth was created by God (Alma 18:36), that humanity was created in the image of God (18:34), and that humanity fell through the transgression of Adam and Eve (18:36). Ammon also informs the king of Lehi's exodus and the rebellions of Laman and Lemuel (18:37–38). Most importantly, Ammon "expounded unto them the plan of redemption, which was prepared from the foundation of the world; and he also made known unto them concerning the coming of Christ, and all the works of the Lord did he make known unto them" (18:39). Essentially, what Ammon presents King Lamoni with is a recapitulation of the written word, "and [he] rehearsed and laid before him the records and the holy scriptures of the people, which had been spoken by the prophets, even down to the time that their father, Lehi, left Jerusalem" (18:36).

But Ammon's instructions represent only a part of King Lamoni's experience, which leads to the second point: two revelatory experiences complement the "written" lesson Ammon teaches King Lamoni, who faints "as if he were dead" following his conversation with Ammon (18:42). For two days and two nights King Lamoni's family and servants grieve over him, fearing that his experience with Ammon has left him dead. But King Lamoni awakes and proclaims to his wife, "For as sure as thou livest, behold, I have seen my Redeemer; and he shall come forth, and be born of a woman, and he shall redeem all mankind who believe on his name" (19:13). King Lamoni and his wife then fall to the earth, "being overpowered by the Spirit" (19:13).

At this point, a second visionary experience comes into play through Abish, a servant of the queen who had been converted "on account of a remarkable vision of her father" (19:16). It is Abish whose vision has prepared her for this moment, and it is Abish who protects the lives of Ammon, King Lamoni, and the queen by gathering the multitude together and, in one of the

truly transcendent moments of the Book of Mormon narrative, a Lamanite servant takes the Lamanite queen by the hand and causes her to arise. In the story of the conversion of King Lamoni, we see the written word and the revealed word working together in a powerful manner. Ammon's relaying of the scriptural record to King Lamoni allows for his mind and heart to be opened, an experience that is then deepened through his vision of the Savior. Notably, King Lamoni's revelatory experience is then expanded to include his people, as following King Lamoni's declaration to his people of his conversion, many of them believe and even claim "that they had seen angels and conversed with them" (19:34) while the Lord proceeded "to pour out his Spirit upon them" (19:36).

Alma and Corianton

Alma 39–42 presents readers with a lengthy doctrinal discourse by Alma the Younger to his son Corianton. While it is difficult to fully grasp what issues Corianton was struggling with or what led to his brief period of apostasy,[14] Alma responds to his son's questions and doubt through a theological elaboration of the future, working through the Resurrection, the spirit world, and the relationship between justice and mercy. Perhaps this elaboration was Alma's response to the Zoramite doctrines of election and a disembodied deity, or perhaps the Nehorite concept of universal salvation for both righteous and wicked was responsible for Corianton's confusion. Alma gives only two explicit references to the group who may have been influencing Corianton. The first comes in Alma 40:15: "Now, there are *some that have understood* that this state of happiness and this state of misery of the soul, before the resurrection, was a first resurrection" (emphasis added). The second comes a few verses later, in Alma 41:1: "And now, my son, I have somewhat to say concerning the restoration of which has been spoken; for behold, *some have wrested the scriptures*, and have gone far astray because of this thing" (emphasis added). The second verse may help us understand the first. It appears likely that Corianton has been swept up in a debate regarding the true nature of resurrection and the fate of those who die. According to Alma, the scriptures (likely meaning the brass plates, or perhaps even the record of Abinadi's discourse) have been perverted or distorted in order to support the position contrary to Alma's. Alma's declaration in Alma 40:15, "Yea, I admit it may be termed a resurrection, the raising of the spirit or the soul," appears almost a concession to this other group, as if he can see why they might be advocating

the position that they are, even if Alma personally believes it to be a faulty interpretation.

Alma's response is to settle these questions not through a sole reliance upon scripture but through an engagement with the divine. He first tells Corianton that he is about to "unfold unto [Corianton] a mystery," meaning doctrines or ideas that "no one knoweth . . . save God himself" (Alma 40:3). In order to learn these "mysteries" for himself, Alma states, "I have inquired diligently of God that I might know" (Alma 40:3). Alma then proceeds to lay out for Corianton a very detailed look at the state of souls after they die, information that was "made known unto me by an angel" (Alma 40:11). Brant Gardner has suggested that Alma's experience was not simply listening to the words of an angel but rather that "he apparently had a vision that gave him pure understanding."[15] The idea of Alma having a visionary experience similar to that of Joseph F. Smith (D&C 138) finds support in Alma's attempts to elaborate on particular eschatological elements, all of which relate to the timing of the Resurrection. On three occasions he simply admits that "I do not say," almost as if he has yet to fully process or comprehend what he has seen. In a similar fashion, Paul recounts his own visionary experience as one where he was overwhelmed to the point that he was unsure whether or not he was even still in his body: "Whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth" (2 Corinthians 12:2–3). What Alma's discussion with and correction of Corianton highlights is the effect that the distortion of scripture can have on those who don't have the proper lens through which to interpret. For Corianton, the result of this misinterpretation was to abandon his ministry. It took his father's willingness to seek an understanding of the mysteries, as well as the subsequent angelic experience to provide him with the proper understanding of scripture he thought he had found elsewhere.

Nephi$_2$

The tension between the written word of scripture and the revealed word of God appears again with Nephi$_2$, the son of Helaman, and his encounter with the Nephites. Mormon introduces Nephi as one who "did preach the *word* of God unto them, and did *prophesy* many things unto them" (Helaman 7:2; emphasis added). Perhaps as a way of drawing the attention of the people to his message, Nephi pronounces a heartfelt lament from a tower located in his garden. His words attract the attention of both the people and those of the band of Gadianton. Some believe in Nephi, declaring him a "prophet,"

(Helaman 8:9), but others resist. Nephi then adds as witnesses of his own prophecies the words of earlier Israelite figures who predicted the coming of the Messiah, such as Moses (Helaman 8:13), Abraham (Helaman 8:16), Zenos (Helaman 8:19), Zenock, Ezias, Isaiah, and Jeremiah (Helaman 8:20). By linking his own modern prophecies with a biblical prophet accepted by the Nephites, such as Moses, Nephi challenges his opponents to reject his prophetic message at the risk of rejecting the written words of Moses and other important Israelite figures.

At this point, Nephi offers two signs as evidence of his prophetic calling. First, he tells his audience, "Behold it is now even at your doors; yea, go ye in unto the judgment-seat, and search; and behold, your judge is murdered, and he lieth in his blood; and he hath been murdered by his brother, who seeketh to sit in the judgment-seat" (Helaman 8:27). Unfortunately, the five men sent to verify Nephi's prophecy are themselves charged with the murder of the chief judge, although they are later released. Not surprisingly, the judges doubt Nephi's prophecy and believe that the only way he could know about the murder was if he himself were part of it. So Nephi offers a second sign: they will find blood on the cloak of Seantum, the brother of the chief judge (Helaman 9:26–35). As with the first sign, the second sign also proves to be true. Yet the reaction of the people to Nephi is mixed. Some believe and say that Nephi is a prophet; others say that only "a god" could know what Nephi knows (Helaman 9:40–41). Mormon's summary of the end result of this entire episode is a poignant one: "And it came to pass that there arose a division among the people, insomuch that they divided hither and thither and went their ways, leaving Nephi alone, as he was standing in the midst of them (Helaman 10:1). After all Nephi has revealed to them, the people, in the end, desert Nephi and leave him standing by himself. Significantly, this desertion of Nephi does not seem to be the result of a lack of belief in God. The people have access in some form to the teachings contained in the scriptures and are familiar with the stories of Moses and Abraham. They attribute the fallen state of the five sent to check on the chief judge to "God," who "has smitten them that they could not flee from us" (Helaman 9:8), and they even confuse Nephi with "a god." Rather, the misunderstanding seems to be over the nature of revelation and prophecy. Signs are largely intended to complement belief, not to create it.[16] Had the people been interpreting their texts with the proper lens, they would have recognized in Nephi one like Moses, who was authorized by God. Yet they didn't, because they hadn't.

Between the time of Nephi and the coming of Jesus, Mormon leaves some hints as to how the written word and the revealed word are being used. In Helaman 11, Mormon informs readers that "much strife" had arisen due to "a few contentions concerning the points of doctrine which had been laid down by the prophets" (Helaman 11:22–23). Again, disputes have arisen regarding what has been *written* in the scriptures—the people are unable to understand the written words through their own abilities. However, the problems are solved through the intercession of Nephi and Lehi and others "who knew concerning the true points of doctrine, *having many revelations* daily" (Helaman 11:23; emphasis added). This combination of using the revealed word to understand the written word led to "an end to their strife in that same year" (Helaman 11:23). Something similar appears to occur in 3 Nephi 1. Following the sign of Jesus's birth, Mormon tells us that a few "began to preach, endeavoring to prove by the scriptures that it was no more expedient to observe the law of Moses" (3 Nephi 1:24). However, these men become "convinced of the error which they were in, for it was made known unto them that the law was not yet fulfilled" (3 Nephi 1:25). The origin of the "word" by which they were informed is not stated by Mormon, but the description of the word as something that "came unto them" (3 Nephi 1:25) suggests either that the men received some sort of revelation or that those who were prophets relayed the true meaning of the scripture to them.

The Savior's Appearance

The appearance of Jesus to the Nephites provides another chance to explore the tension between the written word and the revealed word. Jesus Christ, of course, stands as the central figure in the text, and the Book of Mormon has been gradually unveiling him over the course of the narrative. Notably, the way Mormon unfolds the narrative of Jesus's actual post-Resurrection appearance continues to develop Jesus as a revealed figure. Following the massive destruction, a voice is heard "among all the inhabitants of the earth, upon all the face of this land" (3 Nephi 9:1). Later on, those at the temple in Bountiful again here a voice, this one "as if it came out of heaven" (3 Nephi 11:3); at which point they witness "a Man descending out of heaven" (3 Nephi 11:8). The unveiling of Jesus begins with the opening of heavens and the revelation of a divine message or messenger, and it continues as Jesus appears at the temple and links the Nephites with the Father through prayer, mediating heaven and earth.

Once he arrives, Jesus shows a careful attention to written texts. He reveals to his audience a sermon that closely mirrors the Sermon on the Mount as it is recorded in Matthew 5–7 (cf. 3 Nephi 12–14). He quotes lengthy sections of scripture from Isaiah, Micah, and Malachi. He instructs the Nephites to include the prophecies of Samuel (3 Nephi 23:13). However, Jesus is not simply providing his audience with portions of the Hebrew Bible that are unfamiliar to them, he is reorienting the Nephites toward *how* they should be reading the scriptures. He commands them to "search these things diligently; for great are the words of Isaiah" (3 Nephi 23:1). The chapters from the Hebrew Bible that Jesus quotes, Isaiah 54 and Malachi 3–4, are chapters that have serious covenantal implications, a key issue for a Nephite audience struggling with understanding their role in the broader spectrum of the Abrahamic covenant. In Jesus's discourse, one in which he "expounded all the scriptures in one" (3 Nephi 23:14), the written word joins with the revealed word to provide the Nephites with a hermeneutic lens through which they can more clearly gain this understanding. God's plan continues to move forward: Israel will ultimately be redeemed, and the covenant promises will be fulfilled.

Back to Nephi

Let us return to the experience of Nephi. Toward the end of his grand, apocalyptic vision, Nephi witnesses the rise of the "great and abominable church" (1 Nephi 13:26). This church is responsible for taking away "many plain and precious things" from the "book of the Lamb of God," presumably the Bible (1 Nephi 13:29 and 38). As Latter-day Saints, we often seem to interpret the removal of "plain and precious" truths as an action whereby scribes or wicked leaders have physically removed from biblical texts sacred teachings or perhaps even entire records, rendering the Bible as some sort of second-rate, corrupted text. However, Nephi suggests this interpretation may not be correct. In 1 Nephi 14, Nephi sees a man "dressed in a white robe" who is the one charged with writing the remainder of Nephi's vision, and it seems pretty certain that the figure is John the Revelator, with the book of Revelation corresponding to the "remainder of these things" (1 Nephi 14:19; 21). Nephi is then told something quite remarkable: "Wherefore, the things which he shall write are just and true; and behold they are written in the book which thou beheld proceeding out of the mouth of the Jew; and at the time they proceeded out of the mouth of the Jew, or, at the time the book proceeded out

of the mouth of the Jew, the things which were written were *plain* and pure, and *most precious* and easy to the understanding of all men" (1 Nephi 14:23; emphasis added).

Apparently, according to the angel, the book of Revelation in its earliest form was "plain and pure, and most precious and easy to the understanding" (1 Nephi 14:23). However, as we saw, the "great and abominable church" took away the plain and precious truths. There are at least two possible ways of understanding this passage:

1. The text of the book of Revelation has been significantly altered in a physical sense and therefore reads notably different now than it did when John wrote it down.
2. The removal of plain and precious truths needs to be understood differently.

As to the first point, the earliest lengthy and extant manuscripts of the book of Revelation are P^{47} (9:10–17:2) and א (all) with the former dating to the third century AD and the latter to the fourth.[17] Additionally, "perhaps more than any other NT book, the Apocalypse enjoyed wide distribution and early recognition."[18] Second-century Christian writers such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus seem to have accepted it as inspired, with the latter quoting extensively from it.[19] It is probable that "by the close of the second century the Apocalypse had circulated throughout the empire and was widely accepted both as Scripture and as the product of the apostle John."[20] An extraction of plain and precious truths would have had to have happened quite quickly if one assumes a date of about AD 60 for the book of Revelation, or extremely quickly if one assumes a later date of AD 90.[21] It is therefore hard to believe that the text of Revelation has been significantly tampered with.

So what about point number two? If we assume that the text of the book of Revelation reads in much the same way now (with, of course, a few variants) as it did when John composed it, we are left with the challenge of finding a different interpretation for the removal of plain and precious things. Most readers of the book of Revelation today would laugh at the idea that the book is "plain" or "easy to the understanding of all men," but that does appear to be what Nephi is telling us (1 Nephi 14:23). The logical conclusion, then, is that the book of Revelation is no longer plain, precious, or easy to understand because we as readers have lost the lens through which to interpret the text. Without the spirit of prophecy, we lose the ability to interpret certain types of texts, such as the prophecies of Isaiah or, in this case, the book of

Revelation, which, without the proper tools, become "sealed" books. Perhaps because Christianity appropriated what they wanted from Judaism and jettisoned the rest, the tools required to understand a Jewish apocalyptic text were jettisoned as well. Understood in this way, the actions of the great and abominable church were to sever Christianity from Judaism and set it adrift, in the process depriving it of the lenses needed to interpret much of its own scripture, leaving only the written word devoid of revealed truths.

The assertion of the Book of Mormon to its readers, then, is not that texts such as the Bible are deformed or deserving of a "second-class" status, but that texts such as the Bible (and the Book of Mormon) must be read in a manner that allows the spirit of prophecy and revelation to enlighten our minds. None of us can read a "sealed book" (Joseph Smith—History 1:65). The words may be visible on the page, but the meaning behind the words will remain hidden unless we actively seek additional, spiritual assistance. Jacob taught, "But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God" (2 Nephi 9:29).[22] Readers of the Book of Mormon must resist the impulse to believe, as Laman and others did, that God expects us to rely upon our own reason and intellect when it comes to interpreting scripture. It is fitting that the Book of Mormon ends with Moroni's plea to both *read* the book and *pray* about its veracity (Moroni 10:3–4). With the promise that God will "manifest the truth of it [the Book of Mormon] to you, by the power of the Holy Ghost," and that "by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things," Moroni assures readers that the hermeneutic keys needed to interpret the text are available to all those willing to seek them (Moroni 10:4–5). RE

Notes

1. By "written," I refer to actual written texts such as the brass plates. I do not mean to suggest that every Nephite has access to a written text, only that the words of the written texts are available and were perhaps passed on to the general Nephite population through oral tradition.

2. By "revealed," I refer to instances where intercession from heaven is present in the text, such as revelations, visions, inspired dreams, prophecies, manifestations of angels, or the workings of the Holy Spirit, as well as the use of such experiences as a mode of interpretation.

3. In his study of the Book of Mormon, Brant A. Gardner argues that Nephite religion was greatly affected by Josiah's moves during the Deuteronomic reforms. Following Margaret Barker, Gardner views the Book of Mormon's depiction of theological concepts such as messianism and atonement as a remnant of pre-reform Judah, and the exclusion of such ideas as the result of post-reform Judah. It is very possible that Gardner is right, perhaps by his reasoning, that the "revelatory" in the Book of Mormon would be a sign of pre-reform Judah,

and the emphasis upon the written removed from the revealed would be a sign of post-reform Judah. However, this article will focus strictly on how the Book of Mormon handles the concepts of *written* and *revealed* without speculating about historical sources outside the text itself. See Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols (Draper, UT: Greg Kofford Press, 2007–10), 1:31–41. For more of Barker's interpretation of Josiah's reforms, see *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), and "What Did King Josiah Reform?" in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 522–42. For Barker's thoughts on Joseph Smith, see "Joseph Smith and Preexilic Israelite Religion," in *The Worlds of Joseph Smith: A Bicentennial Conference at the Library of Congress*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2006), 69–82. Welch's comment on Barker is also useful: "Although it is difficult to know exactly how the book of Deuteronomy was being interpreted and employed by various religious and political factions in Lehi's Jerusalem, Barker's work shows, at a minimum, that Lehi's and Nephi's teachings would have given rise to lively legal issues and religious controversies in the days of Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, and Sherem." John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2008), 110.

4. See 1 Nephi 13:40.

5. For more on Lehi's visionary experience, see Blake T. Ostler, "The Throne-Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi: A Form-Critical Analysis," *BYU Studies* 26, no. 4 (Fall 1986): 67–95.

6. There appears to be a fair amount of irony in this first chapter of the Book of Mormon, notably when the reader reaches the final chapter of the Book of Mormon: Moroni 10. Here, Moroni exhorts his readers to "deny not the gifts of God" (Moroni 10:8), and in this catalogue of spiritual gifts Moroni mentions "the beholding of angels" (Moroni 10:14) as well as speaking in "divers kinds of tongues" (Moroni 10:16). Upon a second reading of 1 Nephi 1, readers see in Lehi's experiences the actualization of Moroni's exhortation as they encounter Lehi beholding the angels, and indeed joining them in song and praise with, one can assume, the "tongue of angels" (cf. 2 Nephi 32:2). Like James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, it is not until one reaches the end of the book that one gets the information necessary to comprehend the beginning. Readers must fully understand what has been *written* in order to understand what is being *revealed*.

7. For analysis of 1 Nephi 11–14 as apocalyptic, see Jared M. Halverson, "Lehi's Dream and Nephi's Vision as Apocalyptic Literature," in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi's Dream and Nephi's Vision* (2011 Sperry Symposium), ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 53–69. For an analysis of 1 Nephi 11–14 in general, see Andrew C. Skinner, "The Foundational Doctrines of 1 Nephi 11–14," *Religious Educator* 2, no. 2 (2001): 139–55.

8. A third possibility is Lehi's construction of an altar outside of Jerusalem. After Lehi builds the altar, Laman and Lemuel begin to murmur, due to Lehi being "a visionary man" (1 Nephi 2:11). Nephi relates that their frustrations stemmed from Lehi leading "them out of the land of Jerusalem, to leave the land of their inheritance, and their gold, and their silver, and their precious things, to perish in the wilderness" (1 Nephi 2:11). But the mentioning of the murmuring right after the construction of the altar hints at a possible connection. One of the results of the recent Deuteronomic reforms was a centralization of sacrifice, wherein offerings were restricted to Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 12:11; cf. 2 Kings 23:7–9). Laman and

Lemuel may have been frustrated that their father had stepped outside what they perceived as the bounds of the law of Moses and had instead acted upon information given him in visions.

9. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 38–39.

10. For more on Laman's assertion about the preservation of Jerusalem, see David Rolph Seely and Fred E. Woods, "How Could Jerusalem, 'That Great City,' Be Destroyed?," in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, 595–610.

11. For the implications of Sherem's charges against Jacob, see Welch, *The Legal Cases of the Book of Mormon*, 117–20.

12. John W. Welch writes, "If we take Sherem's arguments at face value, he essentially resisted the messianic clarifications introduced by the revelations of Lehi and Nephi. He preferred a system of legal rules based on the law of Moses, especially as enforced by certain provisions in the book of Deuteronomy, without any foreshadowing in light of messianic expectation." See Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, 110.

13. Noah's priests likely possessed much more of a religious awareness than they are given credit for. Joseph M. Spencer writes, "Though it is perhaps common to see the priests as crafty but simply wrong—as if they had no theological leg to stand on, no actual scriptural or even logical defense for their ideology—it may prove important to see them as having believed they had a watertight case that would settle the whole Abinadi affair to everyone's—perhaps even Abinadi's—satisfaction. The priest's 'astonishment' may well have been more of a question of their being completely unprepared for the radically 'unorthodox' position Abinadi would take than of their being unprepared to defend their own position in generally convincing terms." Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology* (Salem, OR: Salt Press, 2012), 135.

14. For the viewpoint that Corianton's struggles went beyond sexual sin, as is commonly held, see Michael R. Ash, "The Sin Next To Murder: An Alternative Interpretation," *Sunstone*, November 2006, 34–43; B. W. Jorgensen, "Scriptural Chastity Lessons: Joseph and Potiphar's Wife; Corianton and the Harlot Isabel," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 32, no. 1 (1999): 7–34, and Gardner, *Second Witness*, 4:526–34.

15. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 4:541.

16. D&C 63:9 states, "But, behold, faith cometh not by signs, but signs follow those that believe." See also Mormon 9:24.

17. See G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 70.

18. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 21. It should be noted Mounce's observation is based largely upon patristic awareness of the book of Revelation.

19. Just. *Dial.* 81.4; Iren. *Adv. Haer.* IV. 18.6; 20.11. IV. 21.3.

20. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 23.

21. These are the two dates given most often by scholars. For a full discussion, see Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 4–27.

22. Cf. "I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart" (D&C 8:2).