



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



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

---

## A Different Way of Seeing the Hand of the Lord

Author(s): John Gee

Source: *Religious Educator*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2015), pp. 113–127

Published by: BYU Religious Studies Center

---



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

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

# *A Different Way of Seeing the Hand of the Lord*

JOHN GEE

John Gee (john\_gee@byu.edu) is the senior research fellow and the William Gay Research Professor at the Neal A. Maxwell Institute.

---

Synonyms can be tricky things. Synonyms, of course, are words that mean more or less the same thing. The “more or less,” however, can sometimes make all the difference. Such is the case with a pair of idioms in the Book of Mormon; two English synonyms are used where the idioms, in fact, end up being almost antonyms—that is, they mean almost the opposite. These two idioms, to *stretch out the hand* and to *extend the arm*, describe two gestures in the Book of Mormon that, because *stretch out* and *extend* are synonyms in English, are easily confused.

## **Stretching Out the Hand**

The idiom to *stretch out the hand* occurs seven times in the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 1 5:25; 19:12, 17, 21; 20:4; 24:26–27), all of them in quotations of Isaiah (Isaiah 5:25; 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4; 14:26–27). Five of these occurrences are in Isaiah’s refrain: “For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still” (Isaiah 5:25; 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4). The refrain occurs in Isaiah after passages wherein Isaiah discusses the various punishments that

will befall the wicked. This includes having their carcasses strew the streets (2 Nephi 15:25; Isaiah 5:25), the Syrians and the Philistines devouring Israel (2 Nephi 19:12; Isaiah 9:12), having no mercy on the fatherless and widows (2 Nephi 19:12; Isaiah 9:17), burning up the people and subjecting them to cannibalism (2 Nephi 19:18–21; Isaiah 9:18–21), and subjecting the people to captivity, slavery, and death (2 Nephi 20:4; Isaiah 10:4). So, whatever “stretching out the hand” is, it occurs in the context of punishing the wicked.

The English sentence is constructed to say that in spite of the punishments afflicted (“for all this”), the punishments do not satisfy the Lord’s anger (“his anger is not turned away”). In other words, to the contrary (“but”), the hand of the Lord is still “stretched out.” So a stretched forth hand, by any careful reading of the English translation, is a hand administering punishment.

The Hebrew is also clear on the subject. The idiom is *yadô neṭūyâ*, which means that the hand is hanging over, threatening, or bent.<sup>1</sup> It is thus a threatening gesture.

The cultural context reveals even more about this idiom. Canaanite deities are often depicted as having arms that are bent, hanging over, threatening, or stretched out. There is a good example in a stele from Ugarit, now in the Louvre (Louvre AO 15775). This stele shows the god holding a weapon over his head, ready to strike. His hand and upraised arm are *neṭūyâ*—stretched out, bent, hanging over, and threatening. The same pose is known from statues from the same area (BM 134627, BM 25096).

This “punishing” imagery is in the language that Isaiah is using in the Bible (and that Nephi is quoting in the Book of Mormon), and would have been familiar to his audience, because there are many other examples of this sort of iconography in statues and steles of gods from Canaan. The iconographic motif comes from Egypt, where it seems to mean the same thing and is connected with the expression *pr* ‘, meaning *to lift up the hand*.<sup>2</sup> The Egyptian expression and accompanying iconographic motif spread throughout the ancient Near East where it was translated into Akkadian as *tarāṣu qāti*, “to stretch forth the hand (against),”<sup>3</sup> and from there was translated into Sumerian as *á-nir-da*, “arm of murder,” or *á-šer7-da*, “the arm of punishment” (both literally “the stretched forth arm”).<sup>4</sup>

Egyptian usage is also well documented. The earliest Egyptian use of the phrase is the famous boat-fight scene from the tomb of Ti, where an Egyptian is told: “Lift up your hand against him, my lad.”<sup>5</sup> Egyptian generals also

describe themselves as “lifting up the hand as his lord wishes.”<sup>6</sup> One Egyptian peasant complains to an official: “Behold, you are mighty and powerful; your arms uplifted; your heart rapacious; mercy has passed you by.”<sup>7</sup> The Middle Kingdom pharaoh, Sesostris I, was hailed as “also a victor, who acts with his mighty arm, with uplifted hand, who has no peer.”<sup>8</sup> The New Kingdom pharaoh Thutmose III borrowed these same lines to describe himself,<sup>9</sup> as did King Tutankhamun.<sup>10</sup> Thutmose III also said of himself that he was “a warrior of uplifted hand on the battlefield—no one can stand in his presence.”<sup>11</sup> Several of the pharaohs, such as Seti I and Ramses III, depicted themselves as having an uplifted hand, and therefore as being in the image or stead of a deity.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the epithet of “outstretched arm” is frequently applied to Egyptian deities.<sup>13</sup>

This Egyptian background comes to permeate the ancient Near East and is documented for ancient Israel. This is the background of God as a punishing warrior that Isaiah utilizes in his prophecies, which are then quoted in the Book of Mormon.

### **Excursus: Why Does God Stretch out His Hand?**

What causes God to stretch out his hand against people? Isaiah enumerates the individuals whom God deems worthy of punishment in his discussion:

1. those who “call evil good, and good evil, that put darkness for light, and light for darkness, that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter” (2 Nephi 15:20; Isaiah 5:20),
2. those who are “wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight” (2 Nephi 15:21; Isaiah 5:21),
3. those “who justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him,” the “righteousness” here being a vindicating verdict given in a law court (2 Nephi 15:23; Isaiah 5:23),
4. those who “have cast away the law of the Lord of Hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel” (2 Nephi 15:24; Isaiah 5:24),
5. those who speak “in the pride and stoutness of heart: The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones; the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars,” in other words meaning those that boast that they (not the Lord) will make things better, even though things are in shambles (2 Nephi 19:9; Isaiah 9:9),

6. those who fail to “seek the Lord of Hosts” (2 Nephi 19:13; Isaiah 9:13),
7. those “that teacheth lies,” in other words, “the leaders of this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed” (2 Nephi 19:15–16; Isaiah 9:15–16),
8. those who “decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed; to turn away the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless” (2 Nephi 20:1–2; Isaiah 10:1–2).

Those guilty of such things should expect the wrath of the Lord to descend upon them. Even after terrible punishments have come upon them, “his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still” (Isaiah 5:25; 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4).

An example of how these punishments played out is the history of the people of Zeniff, Zeniff’s son, Noah, and his cronies that he appointed as priests. Note how Noah and his priests fit the same set of circumstances that Isaiah outlined would cause the hand of the Lord to be stretched out against people (Mosiah 11:5):

They called evil good and good evil (“O king, what great evil hast thou done, or what great sins have thy people committed, that we should be condemned of God or judged of this man? And now, O king, behold, we are guiltless, and thou, O king, hast not sinned; therefore, this man has lied concerning you,” Mosiah 12:13–14).

They were wise in their own eyes (“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).

They justified Noah while sentencing Abinadi to death (“we are guiltless, and thou, O king, hast not sinned,” Mosiah 12:14; “Abinadi, we have found an accusation against thee, and thou art worthy of death,” Mosiah 17:7).

They cast away the law of God (“king Noah hardened his heart against the word of the Lord, and he did not repent of his evil doings,” Mosiah 11:29; “if ye understand these things ye have not taught them; therefore, ye have perverted the ways of the Lord,” Mosiah 12:26).

They spoke in pride (“they were lifted up in the pride of their hearts; they did boast in their own strength,” Mosiah 11:19) and built costly buildings

(“king Noah built many elegant and spacious buildings; and he ornamented them with fine work of wood, and of all manner of precious things, of gold, and of silver, and of iron, and of brass, and of ziff, and of copper,” Mosiah 11:8).

They failed to seek the Lord (“If ye teach the law of Moses why do ye not keep it?” Mosiah 12:29).

They taught lies (“they were deceived by the vain and flattering words of the king and priests; for they did speak flattering things unto them,” Mosiah 11:7; the priests “should speak lying and vain words to his people,” Mosiah 11:11).

They decreed unrighteous decrees to take away from the poor (“And he laid a tax of one fifth part of all they possessed. . . . And all this did he take to support himself, and his wives and his concubines; and also his priests, and their wives and their concubines; thus he had changed the affairs of the kingdom,” Mosiah 11:3–4).

As a result of this, after Abinadi’s death and the departure of Alma and his people, there were a series of divine punishments. First, civility broke down: “There began to be a division among the remainder of the people. . . . And there began to be a great contention among them” (Mosiah 19:2–3). This ended in an attempt on the king’s life by his own people (Mosiah 19:4–6), but King Noah was spared because at that moment “the army of the Lamanites were within the borders of the land” (Mosiah 19:6). Though the people fled, “the Lamanites did pursue them, and did overtake them, and began to slay them” (Mosiah 19:10). Though Noah escaped (Mosiah 19:11–12), only to be tortured and burned alive by his own army (Mosiah 19:20), the people pled for mercy, and “the Lamanites did spare their lives, and took them captives and carried them back to the land of Nephi, and granted unto them that they might possess the land, under the conditions that they would deliver up king Noah into the hands of the Lamanites, and deliver up their property, even one half of all they possessed” (Mosiah 19:15).

During all these terrible chastisements, the Lord’s anger was not turned away, but his hand was stretched out still. And the punishments did not stop there. The people of Limhi, Noah’s son appointed in his stead (Mosiah 19:26), were attacked in punishment for a crime they did not commit (Mosiah 20:1–8). Then, because the Lamanite king would not allow Limhi’s people to be killed, the Lamanites “would smite them on their cheeks, and exercise authority over them; and began to put heavy burdens upon their backs, and drive them as they would a dumb ass” (Mosiah 21:3). Again, these are just more



examples of the Lord's hand being stretched out still. "Yea, all this was done that the word of the Lord might be fulfilled" (Mosiah 21:4).

Then, when they could bear it no longer, "they gathered themselves together again, and put on their armor, and went forth against the Lamanites to drive them out of their land. And it came to pass that the Lamanites did beat them, and drove them back, and slew many of them. And now there was a great mourning and lamentation among the people of Limhi, the widow mourning for her husband, the son and the daughter mourning for their father, and the brothers for their brethren. Now there were a great many widows in the land, and they did cry mightily from day to day" (Mosiah 21:7-10). So "they went again to battle, but they were driven back again, suffering much loss. Yea, they went again even the third time, and suffered in the like manner" (Mosiah 21:11-12). Still, the Lord's anger was not turned away, and his hand continued to be stretched out.

Only when "they did humble themselves even to the dust" did the Lord hear their cries. They "subject[ed] themselves to the yoke of bondage, submit[ed] themselves to be smitten, and to be driven to and fro, and burdened, according to the desires of their enemies. And they did humble themselves even in the depths of humility; and they did cry mightily to God; yea, even all the day long did they cry unto their God that he would deliver them out of their afflictions. And now the Lord was slow to hear their cry because of their iniquities; nevertheless the Lord did hear their cries" (Mosiah 21:13-15). Thus, extraordinary sin requires extraordinary repentance. Now in the depths of humility, "they themselves had entered into a covenant with God to serve him and keep his commandments" (Mosiah 21:31).

Yet, even so "the Lord did not see fit to deliver them out of bondage" (Mosiah 21:15). It would be some time yet and after some vain attempts (Mosiah 21:25-26) before messengers would arrive from outside (Mosiah 21:23) and Limhi's people would be delivered from their bondage by escaping to Zarahemla (Mosiah 22:11-13).

If the punishment seems out of proportion considering that Noah and his wicked priests disappeared from the people early in the stage of the punishments, recall that Mosiah admonished his people to "remember king Noah, his wickedness and his abominations, *and also the wickedness and abominations of his people*. Behold what great destruction did come upon them; and also *because of their iniquities* they were brought into bondage. And were it not for the interposition of their all-wise Creator, and this because of their sincere

repentance, they must unavoidably remain in bondage until now” (Mosiah 29:18–19; emphasis added). Mosiah also reminded the people how fortunate Noah’s people had been to get rid of Noah since “ye cannot dethrone an iniquitous king save it be through much contention, and the shedding of much blood. For behold, he has his friends in iniquity, and he keepeth his guards about him; and he teareth up the laws of those who have reigned in righteousness before him; and he trampleth under his feet the commandments of God; and he enacteth laws, and sendeth them forth among his people, yea, laws after the manner of his own wickedness; and whosoever doth not obey his laws he causeth to be destroyed; and whosoever doth rebel against him he will send his armies against them to war, and if he can he will destroy them; and thus an unrighteous king doth pervert the ways of all righteousness” (Mosiah 29:21–23).

The Book of Mormon thus provides an illustration of exactly what Isaiah’s prophecy referred to: the kind of unrighteousness that would cause the Lord’s hand to be stretched out against a people.

### Stretching Forth the Hand

Another Book of Mormon idiom is easily confused with the idiom of *stretching out the hand*; it is the idiom of *stretching forth the hand*. These two expressions might seem to be synonyms, and at least some of the time, they are—but *stretching forth the hand* seems to cover at least five different meanings. Previous discussion of the latter idiom has focused on the meaning of prophesying,<sup>14</sup> but it is clear that *stretching forth the hand* is not always connected with speaking or prophesying in the Book of Mormon.

The two idioms are used as synonyms in one of the Isaiah quotes: “Therefore, is the anger of the Lord kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth [*wayyēt*] his hand against them, and hath smitten them; and the hills did tremble, and their carcasses were torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out [*netūyá*] still” (2 Nephi 15:25; Isaiah 5:25). In this verse the same (irregular) verb is translated as both *stretched forth* and *stretched out*, indicating that the two translations might be equivalent. This passage indicates that they can be different translations of the exact same idiom.<sup>15</sup>

When Nephi is working with his brothers building a ship, the idea of prophesying does not communicate the passage’s meaning as well as the idea of smiting:



And it came to pass that the Lord said unto me: *Stretch forth thine hand* again unto thy brethren, and they shall not wither before thee, but I will shock them, saith the Lord, and this will I do, that they may know that I am the Lord their God. And it came to pass that I *stretched forth my hand* unto my brethren, and they did not wither before me; but the Lord did shake them, even according to the word which he had spoken. (1 Nephi 17:53–54, emphasis added)

In this case Nephi stretches forth his hand and the Lord smites Nephi's brethren; the gesture is not accompanied by any verb of speaking, much less one of prophesying. From this example, we learn that stretching forth one's hand is closer to the idea of smiting.

Later in the Book of Mormon, the idea of smiting is still present. King Lamoni's father, himself a king, "stretched forth his hand to slay Ammon" (Alma 20:20). This shows that the smiting gesture is still being used as such well into Nephite history.

In a few cases, the idea behind *stretching forth the hand* seems to indicate not smiting so much as exertion. For example, in the parable of the olive tree, the idiom may also take on this idea. The Lord says, "I have stretched forth mine hand almost all the day long, and the end draweth nigh. And it grieveth me that I should hew down all the trees of my vineyard, and cast them into the fire that they should be burned" (Jacob 5:47). Once again, the expression is not accompanied by a verb of speaking, and thus is not a mention of prophesying. Rather, here the idiom might be taken as meaning "to exert oneself." But while there is some evidence that it meant that at one time in Egypt, the last known usage dates at least a millennium before Lehi's day.<sup>16</sup> Instead the expression is invoked just before suggesting hewing down the trees of the vineyard—another example of the idiom being used in the context of smiting. Jacob also quotes this phrase in his explication of the parable (Jacob 6:4).

The use of the expression in the book of Ether seems to match the usage in the parable of the olive tree, but may simply be a Jaredite, rather than a Nephite, idiom. In Ether, "the Lord stretched forth his hand and touched the stones one by one with his finger" (Ether 3:6). In Israelite usage, a stretched out hand is made into a fist, which is the wrong hand position to touch something with a finger. Thus, the Lord's stretching forth of his hand here could be another example of the idiom being used in exertion.

A few passages in the Book of Mormon indicate that the English idiom may not always (indeed, probably does not always) indicate smiting or exertion. Sometimes, the idiom seems to convey the idea of blessing or healing. This can be seen when Alma and Amulek find Zeezrom "upon his bed, sick,

being very low with a burning fever; and his mind also was exceedingly sore because of his iniquities; and when he saw them he stretched forth his hand, and besought them that they would heal him” (Alma 15:5). It does not seem that Zeezrom would make a smiting gesture while asking a favor. Nor does it seem to be the case when Lamoni “arose, . . . stretched forth his hand unto the woman [his wife], and said: Blessed be the name of God, and blessed art thou” (Alma 19:12). A gesture of blessing seems expected here. One is also expected when Alma “stretched forth his hand, and cried unto those whom he beheld, who were truly penitent, and said unto them: I behold that ye are lowly in heart; and if so, blessed are ye” (Alma 32:7–8).

As mentioned previously, in the past, the idiom of *stretching forth the hand* has been connected with prophesying and the Book of Mormon provides some clear instances of that usage. For example, Abinadi uses this imagery when prophesying of doom: “And the Lord said unto me: *Stretch forth thy hand* and prophesy, saying: Thus saith the Lord, it shall come to pass that this generation, because of their iniquities, shall be brought into bondage, and shall be smitten on the cheek; yea, and shall be driven by men, and shall be slain; and the vultures of the air, and the dogs, yea, and the wild beasts, shall devour their flesh” (Mosiah 12:2). The same thing happens later in Abinadi’s story: “[After] Abinadi had spoken these words *he stretched forth his hands*<sup>17</sup> and said: The time shall come when all shall see the salvation of the Lord; when every nation, kindred, tongue, and people shall see eye to eye and shall confess before God that his judgments are just. And then shall the wicked be cast out, and they shall have cause to howl, and weep, and wail, and gnash their teeth; and this because they would not hearken unto the voice of the Lord; therefore the Lord redeemeth them not” (Mosiah 16:1–2). While it is possible that the use of the plural (*hands* as opposed to *hand*) might change the meaning of the idiom—as we will mention later, *to stretch forth the hands* is an idiom for prayer<sup>18</sup>—this passage seems like an example of the idiom being used to describe prophesying.

Jesus also seems not to have used the smiting gesture, neither when he “stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people, saying: Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world” (3 Nephi 11:9–10), nor when “he stretched forth his hand unto the multitude, and cried unto them, saying: Blessed are ye if ye shall give heed unto the words of these twelve whom I have chosen from among you to minister unto you”

(3 Nephi 12:1). Both of these instances could certainly be an example of the idiom, once again, being used as prophesying.

In many cases the usage is simply ambiguous and because of the context either smiting or prophesying might be understood. These are mostly passages dealing with prophecies of punishment. For example, Abinadi uses this imagery when prophesying of doom: “And the Lord said unto me: *Stretch forth thy hand* and prophesy, saying: Thus saith the Lord, it shall come to pass that this generation, because of their iniquities, shall be brought into bondage, and shall be smitten on the cheek; yea, and shall be driven by men, and shall be slain; and the vultures of the air, and the dogs, yea, and the wild beasts, shall devour their flesh” (Mosiah 12:2). The same thing happens later in Abinadi's story: “Abinadi had spoken these words *he stretched forth his hands* and said: The time shall come when all shall see the salvation of the Lord; when every nation, kindred, tongue, and people shall see eye to eye and shall confess before God that his judgments are just. And then shall the wicked be cast out, and they shall have cause to howl, and weep, and wail, and gnash their teeth; and this because they would not hearken unto the voice of the Lord; therefore the Lord redeemeth them not” (Mosiah 16:1–2). While the use of the plural might change the meaning of the idiom (as we will see later in the Book of Mormon, *to stretch forth the hands* is an idiom for prayer), it is clear that this example could be either one of smiting or one of prophesying.

Amulek also uses the gesture as one of condemnation: “Amulek *stretched forth his hand*, and cried the mightier unto them, saying: O ye wicked and perverse generation, why hath Satan got such great hold upon your hearts? Why will ye yield yourselves unto him that he may have power over you, to blind your eyes, that ye will not understand the words which are spoken, according to their truth? For behold, have I testified against your law? Ye do not understand; ye say that I have spoken against your law; but I have not, but I have spoken in favor of your law, to your condemnation” (Alma 10:25–26). Here the gesture could yet again either refer to smiting or prophesying.

Alma also uses this gesture in condemnation: “Behold, the scriptures are before you; if ye will wrest them it shall be to your own destruction. And now it came to pass that when Alma had said these words unto them, he *stretched forth his hand* unto them and cried with a mighty voice, saying: Now is the time to repent, for the day of salvation draweth nigh” (Alma 13:20–21). This passage could also refer to either smiting or prophesying.

Alma and Amulek even have a discussion of the appropriateness of using this particular gesture: “And when Amulek saw the pains of the women and children who were consuming in the fire, he also was pained; and he said unto Alma: How can we witness this awful scene? Therefore let us *stretch forth our hands*, and exercise the power of God which is in us, and save them from the flames. But Alma said unto him: The Spirit constraineth me that I must not *stretch forth mine hand*; for behold the Lord receiveth them up unto himself, in glory; and he doth suffer that they may do this thing, or that the people may do this thing unto them, according to the hardness of their hearts, that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just; and the blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them, yea, and cry mightily against them at the last day” (Alma 14:10–11).

Samuel the Lamanite may have also used the condemning gesture when he “went and got upon the wall thereof, and *stretched forth his hand* and cried with a loud voice, and prophesied unto the people whatsoever things the Lord put into his heart. And he said unto them: Behold, I, Samuel, a Lamanite, do speak the words of the Lord which he doth put into my heart; and behold he hath put it into my heart to say unto this people that the sword of justice hangeth over this people; and four hundred years pass not away save the sword of justice falleth upon this people. Yea, heavy destruction awaiteth this people, and it surely cometh unto this people” (Helaman 13:4–6). Both the smiting and the prophesying gestures are appropriate here.

Finally, *stretching forth the hands* (in the plural) is used for prayer. When a Zoramite desired to pray, he would “stretch forth his hands towards heaven” (Alma 31:14) in a gesture of prayer. In this case the plural use of *hands* indicates a different gesture.

So, to sum up the discussion so far, *to stretch out the hand* is to lift it up to smite, *to stretch forth the hand* may or may not refer to the same thing. *To stretch forth the hand* is more likely to indicate smiting in earlier passages in the Book of Mormon and less likely to indicate it in later passages. *To stretch forth the hand* probably covers a number of different gestures that can indicate smiting, but also might indicate exertion, prophesying, or praying (and probably does indicate praying when the plural, *hands*, is used). The English translation possibly covers a number of different idioms expressed on the plates.

## Extending the Arm

The idiom to *extend the arm*, even though it uses synonyms for *stretch out the hand*, is a much different idiom and has a very different meaning.

For instance, Jacob begs his people to repent “while his [God’s] arm of mercy is extended towards you in the light of the day, harden not your hearts” (Jacob 6:5). This idiom does not come from the Hebrew Bible. The passage in Jacob 6:5–6 quotes language from Psalm 95:7–8, but the arm of mercy is not mentioned in that Psalm. Though the Hebrew Bible talks about “extending mercy” mainly in texts written after the exile and thus many years after Lehi (Ezra 7:28; 9:9; Psalms 109:12), it does not talk about extending arms in mercy or arms of mercy, or any sort of arms at all. The idiom may instead be our first demonstrable example of something that can only be an Egyptianism and not a Hebraism, although a gesture originating in a New World culture cannot be completely ruled out.

The ancient Egyptians had an expression *zwi* ‘, “to extend the arm” or “extend the hand,” which meant “to make long . . . the arm’ ‘to offer;” and was “used in parallel with other verbs of offering” (the noun form was *zwt-*’).<sup>19</sup> There was also a gesture associated with this expression. It is usually depicted with the hands out, palms facing up. It is extremely common in all kinds of temple scenes. A funny thing, however, has happened in modern depictions of this gesture. In Egyptian scenes, the hand or hands are holding the offering. Modern artists, depicting the human figures the way the Egyptians portrayed humans, would leave out the offering. The resultant human figure would end up with the hand looking completely contrived, contorted, and empty. This has produced the habit of caricaturing the Egyptians as walking around with contorted hand positions with nothing in their hands, and has produced the expression *to walk like an Egyptian*. Ironically, no ancient Egyptians are actually depicted according to the caricature that modern people have of them. That is merely the modern mocking of the sacred experience of Egyptian offerings.

Therefore, in Egyptian, *to extend the arm* is usually something that humans do when making offerings to various deities. But the Egyptians also used the expression to express deities offering blessings to humans.<sup>20</sup> In the Book of Mormon, too, it is God who is offering mercy to humans. Although Book of Mormon authors speak of using Egyptian (1 Nephi 1:2; Mosiah 1:4; Mormon 9:32), it is not clear if it was their primary language or how fluent even people like Lehi and Nephi were in Egyptian.



Courtesy of John Gee.



The Egyptian king (Thutmose III) extending his arm in offering to the god.

In the Book of Mormon, extending the arm is something that the Lord does. The Lord is the one who “extended his arm in the preservation of our fathers” (Mosiah 1:14), and he is the one “extending the arm of mercy towards them that put their trust in him” (Mosiah 29:20; similarly Alma 5:33; 19:36; 29:10; 3 Nephi 9:14) So people need to call upon the Lord “while the arms of mercy were extended towards them” (Mosiah 16:12).

So if extending the arm is an idiom to show God offering blessings to humans, under what conditions does God extend his arm? Jacob notes that God extends his arms of mercy to those who “harden not your hearts” (Jacob 6:5) but instead “repent, and come with full purpose of heart, and cleave unto God as he cleaveth unto you” (Jacob 6:5). Alma concurs that repentance and coming to Christ are the keys to receiving the arms of mercy: “repent, repent, for the Lord God hath spoken it! Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith: Repent, and I will receive you” (Alma 5:32–33). Alma assures his readers that “[the Lord’s] arm is extended to all people who will repent and believe on his name” (Alma 19:36). Alma recalls his own experience: “When I see many of



my brethren truly penitent, and coming to the Lord their God, then is my soul filled with joy; then do I remember what the Lord has done for me, yea, even that he hath heard my prayer; yea, then do I remember his merciful arm which he extended towards me” (Alma 29:10).

Jesus himself confirmed the process of extending his arm when he spoke to the Nephites after his death:

O all ye that are spared because ye were more righteous than they, will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you? Yea, verily I say unto you, if ye will come unto me ye shall have eternal life. Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive; and blessed are those who come unto me. (3 Nephi 9:13–14)

Finally, King Benjamin notes that those to whom the Lord extended his arm to preserve (Mosiah 1:14) would lose that protection if they “should fall into transgression, and become a wicked and an adulterous people” (Mosiah 1:13).

## Conclusions

The Book of Mormon uses three phrases composed of synonyms in completely different ways. *To stretch out the hand* and *to stretch forth the hand* both exemplify God’s justice; *to extend the arm* exemplifies God’s mercy. The Book of Mormon also warns us: “Do ye suppose that mercy can rob justice? I say unto you, Nay; not one whit” (Alma 42:25). The bridge between the two ends of the spectrum is repentance; “There is a law given, and a punishment affixed, and a repentance granted; which repentance, mercy claimeth; otherwise, justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment” (Alma 42:22).

Both justice and mercy are typical of God, and the Book of Mormon seems to use the stretched out hand more than the extended arm. This is interesting, because Latter-day Saints often talk about seeing the hand of the Lord in their lives, but generally only discuss or emphasize the positive aspects. The Book of Mormon has its emphasis in a different place. We may not acknowledge the hand or arm of the Lord in our lives, but one day the arm of the Lord will be revealed (Mosiah 14:1; Isaiah 53:1) or made bare (1 Nephi 22:11; Mosiah 12:24; 15:31; 3 Nephi 16:20). Which arm of the Lord is revealed to us depends entirely on what we choose to do here and now. **RE**

## Notes

1. Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Putnam, 1903), 2:898. Compare Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001), 1:692–93.
2. John Gee, *The Requirements of Ritual Purity* (PhD diss., Yale University, 1998), 263–74.
3. Wolfram von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1981), 2:1326; for a different view, see *CAD* T 211, s.v. *tarāšu* 3.c.2'a<sup>1</sup>–c<sup>1</sup>.
4. Åke W. Sjöberg, *The Sumerian Dictionary of the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: The Babylonian Section of the University Museum, 1994), 1.2:90, 101–2. All references listed come from Izi Ugarit 65–66, in Miguel Civil, *Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon XIII* (Rome: Pontificum Institutum Biblicum, 1971), 129. It is probably significant that the only Sumerian use of this phrase is a lexical list from an area under Egyptian influence.
5. Georg Steindorff, *Das Grab des Ti* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1913), Tafel 110; Henri Wild, *Le Tombeau de Ti*, MMIFAO 65 (Caire: IFAO, 1953), 2:pl. CXI; Adolf Erman, *Reden, Rufe, und Lieder auf Gräberbildern des Alten Reiches* (Berlin: Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1919), 58.
6. BM EA 1177 line 6, in *Hieroglyphic Texts from Egyptian Stelae, &c., in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1913), 4:pls. 2–3.
7. Eloquent Peasant B1 147–48 (formerly 116–17), in R. B. Parkinson, *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1991), 24.
8. Sinuhe B 52/R 76–77, in Aylward M. Blackman, *Middle Egyptian Stories* (Bruxelles: FERE, 1972), 19.
9. *Urk.* IV 809.1–2.
10. *Urk.* IV 2035.19.
11. Gebel Barkal stele of Thutmosis III line 5, in G. A. Reisner and M. B. Reisner, “Inscribed Monuments from Gebel Barkal: Part 2. The Granite Stela of Thutmosis III,” *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 69 (1933): 27.
12. *KRI* 1:12/1; 5:573.
13. *LGG* 3:55–56.
14. David Calabro, “‘Stretch Forth Thy Hand and Prophecy’: Hand Gestures in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 21, no.1 (2012): 46–59.
15. For a slightly different analysis, see Calabro, “Hand Gestures in the Book of Mormon,” 51–52.
16. CT 502, in Adriaan de Buck, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935–1963), 6:86–87.
17. Following the reading of the Printer’s manuscript.
18. So also Calabro, “Hand Gestures in the Book of Mormon,” 50.
19. Penelope Wilson, *A Ptolemaic Lexikon* (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 2–3; R. O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1962), 1–2; Rainer Hannig, *Ägyptisches Wörterbuch I: Altes Reich und Erste Zwischenzeit* (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 2003), 4. The expression is not included in the Berlin *Wörterbuch*.
20. *LGG* 1:3–4; Wilson, *Ptolemaic Lexikon*, 2; Hannig, *Ägyptisches Wörterbuch I*, 4.