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Alan Goff

Abstract: Ancient texts are too often approached using modern assumptions. Among those assumptions obstructing an understanding of ancient texts is the modern emphasis on originality and on writing as intellectual property. Ancient writers relished repetition—stories that were repeated in succeeding generations—over originality. The Bible is full of repeated or allusive stories, and the Book of Mormon often reinscribes this biblical emphasis on repetition. One such biblical reverberation in the Book of Mormon is Nephi's ocean voyage, which evokes biblical stories of origination: creation, deluge, and exodus. These three stories of beginnings are carefully alluded to in Nephi's own foundational story, exactly as we would expect an ancient Hebraic text to do.

The dialectic of repetition is easy, for that which is repeated has been—otherwise it could not be repeated—but the very fact that it has been makes the repetition into something new.

Søren Kierkegaard

Few texts are misused more often than the biblical text is. The Bible has been extended in a number of ways in a number of traditions: Judaism has its Written Torah (the Bible) and its Oral Torah (the Talmud and midrashic commentary), the Koran is largely a reaction to the Bible, for Latter-day Saints the Book of Mormon is clearly an extension of the biblical text into the promised land of the Nephites and Lamanites. A peculiarly modern extension of the biblical text occurs in the Enlightenment project known as higher criticism of the Bible. If the Bible can be and often is misused, then one would expect that its

extensions would be also. Since I do not believe the Bible is in conflict with the Book of Mormon, I frequently find a consonance between biblical criticism and my readings of the Book of Mormon. I often also find that particular uses of biblical criticism in the attempt to drive a wedge between the Bible and the Book of Mormon dramatically distort not only that criticism, but also the Book of Mormon and the biblical text as well. This essay is an attempt to demonstrate one way biblical criticism can help us understand the Book of Mormon. My belief is that the new approaches to biblical criticism (based on literary rather than historical analysis) provide opportunities for us to understand both the Bible and the Book of Mormon. Literary approaches to the Bible tend toward holism in the biblical text, both within individual books and in the work as a whole. Older historical approaches¹ tend to fragment the text: looking for the *Sitz im Leben* for even individual verses and sections of verses. Historical approaches frequently attempt to find hypothetical *ur*-texts out of which the present text evolved, a project that many biblical critics are beginning to see as futile. While I prefer literary approaches, historical approaches are in many ways fundamental. My analysis attempts to lay the foundations for a reading of the Book of Mormon similar to some I read in biblical criticism. At times, my own reading may more resemble the historical approaches than the literary approaches.

Biblical Criticism and Boats

Eliade gives us good reason to believe that archaic people saw the unfolding of history differently than do modern people. Archaic people looked to events from the past to guide the interpretation of contemporary events. Not only did past events serve as interpretive guides, but the people conceived themselves as reliving those events—I call this *repetition*, using Kierkegaard's term intentionally for all the reasons he outlines (in particular because Kierkegaard distinguishes between a Christian and Greek attitude toward the past—the Greek attitude is wistful and he calls it “recollection,” as opposed to the biblical notion of “repetition” which looks forward).² In particular, archaic people

¹ Such approaches by a linguistic oddity are still referred to as literary analysis by historical critics—I don't use the term in this way.

² Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and Repetition*, vol. 6 in *Kierkegaard's Writings*, ed. and trans. by Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

looked back to foundational events or creation events in a way that transformed the present and the future as they came into contact with that past; these events served as the beginning of time for their people. Referring to archaic man, Eliade says:

What he does has been done before. His life is the ceaseless repetition of gestures initiated by others. This conscious repetition of given paradigmatic gestures reveals an original ontology. The crude products of nature, the object fashioned by the industry of man, acquire their reality, their identity, only to the extent of their participation in a transcendent reality. The gesture acquires meaning, reality, solely to the extent to which it repeats a primordial act.³

A primordial act is one effecting change by occurring at the creation of the world or the creation of a people, such as the founding of the children of Israel through a series of patriarchs or an escape from captivity during the Exodus. During times of repetition the participants are lifted out of profane time and are transported through sacred time: "there is an implicit abolition of profane time, of duration, of 'history'; and he who reproduces the exemplary gesture thus finds himself transported into the mythical epoch in which its revelation took place."⁴

Eliade points specifically to ancient Greece, Iran, India, and Judea as the locus of the idea of eternal return: these are cycles of Golden Ages followed by ages of degeneration and regeneration.⁵ Anderson, citing Eliade, makes a distinction between Israel and other archaic people: Israel maintained a distinction between the sacred and profane but historicized it.

In Israel's faith the realm of the sacred was located in the midst of history, not in some mythical twilight zone, for Israel experienced the reality of God in "concrete events and interpersonal relations." Instead of cultically imitating actions of the gods in "the olden days" beyond historical recall, Israel

³ Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard K. Trask (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 5.

⁴ Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 35.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 121.

remembered the celebrated events that happened in a definite place and time.⁶

Eliade points out that this notion of history is different from a modern view of history. Moderns tend to think that events happen once and are finished and that is the meaning of them, "but exemplar history [is that] which can be repeated (regularly or otherwise), and whose meaning and value lie in that very repetition."⁷

This need to prove the truth of myth also helps us to grasp what history and "historical evidence" mean to the primitive mind. It shows what an importance primitive man attaches to things that have *really happened*, to the events which actually took place in his surroundings; it shows how his mind hungers for what is "real," for what *is* in the fullest sense. But, at the same time, the archetypal function given to these events of *illud tempus* give us a glimpse of the interest primitive people take in realities that are significant, creative, paradigmatic.⁸

These repetitions of the cosmogony are particularly important at times of new beginnings: Eliade points specifically to times when man "creates something (his 'own world'—the inhabited territory—or a city, a house, etc.)," but also when a new king is being consecrated, when the crops are imperiled, in times of war, or during "a sea voyage."⁹

Given the notion that repetitions are meaningful specifically because they are repetitions, revisionist readers of the Book of Mormon need to reconsider their conclusion that because the Book of Mormon contains some repetitions from the Bible, Joseph Smith merely plagiarized the book. Revisionist readers take a superficial approach to the Book of Mormon,

⁶ Bernhard W. Anderson, *Creation versus Chaos: The Reinterpretation of Mythical Symbolism in the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 31.

⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: New American Library, 1958), 430.

⁸ Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 431.

⁹ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1957), 81–82.

claiming that Joseph Smith merely absorbed his antebellum American cultural environment and put it down on paper as the Book of Mormon; part of this strategy is to claim that Joseph Smith merely borrowed parts of the King James Version of the Bible. Revisionist readings require that the repetitions from the Bible found in the Book of Mormon be extremely shallow copies. But the ideological position which claims that repetitions are plagiarisms partakes of a modern prejudice against repetition (preferring a post-Romantic originality to an ancient predilection in favor of recurrence) and needs to be argued rather than merely taken for granted. The claim that repetitions in the Book of Mormon are plagiarisms from the Bible must specifically ignore a genuinely biblical hermeneutic. I want to actually read the stories and find a deeper form of the story and show the sophisticated nature of the narrative.

Nephi says he is going to build a ship. This event qualifies in a number of ways as Eliade's time of primordial creation. The group is about to embark on a sea voyage; the ideological battle over who will be the ruler has been taking place and will continue; the group sees itself as independent of the Jews at Jerusalem (a new people) and will soon take the eponymous names of Nephites, Lamanites, and others; the group has undergone a typological exodus through the wilderness. This is a time of creation that relives the creation of the world, just as the building of Noah's ark and the Tabernacle in the wilderness relived the cosmogony.

When Nephi is at Bountiful he hears the Lord's voice telling him to do as Moses did and go to the mountain: "Arise, and get thee into the mountain. And it came to pass that I arose and went up into the mountain, and cried unto the Lord" (1 Nephi 17:7). I will arrange the passage in its rhetorical pattern so the command/execution formula is explicit and the synthetic parallelism is evident (synthetic parallelism occurs in biblical literature when the rhetorical statement is repeated but with an additional element raising the statement to a higher level):

- a. Arise,
- b. And get thee into the mountain.
And it came to pass that I
- a'. Arose
- b'. And went up into the mountain,
- c. And cried unto the Lord.

This pattern of biblical repetition is what Alter calls hidden repetition: A word “in the first verset, usually a verb, governs the parallel clause in the second verset as well.”¹⁰ Notice the matching action in the verbs of command and fulfillment, with the synthetic action caused by the addition of another verb: Nephi arises, goes up, and cries unto the Lord. The journey to the mountain is too common a motif in biblical literature to require additional comment. Moses does receive a similar command to “come up to me into the mount,” where Moses stays for forty days and nights and receives the tablets of the law and a divine pattern for the Tabernacle (Exodus 24:12). The text is clear that the pattern for the earthly dwelling of the Lord is not of earthly origin: “According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it” (Exodus 25:9).

Notice also that once Nephi has climbed the mountain he is commanded: “Thou shalt construct a ship, after the manner which I shall show thee, that I may carry thy people across these waters” (1 Nephi 17:8). The same “thou shalt” command is given to Moses regarding each item in the tabernacle (Exodus 25:10–27:9 and more). In the middle of all the commands is the order once again for Moses to “look that thou make them after the pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount” (Exodus 25:40). The heavenly pattern is essential:

It is clear that the tent that Moses had built is a copy of the heavenly tent in accordance with the ancient religious principle, “like is like.” The similarity in form between the earthly dwelling of the god and its heavenly prototype brings about the presence of the deity. In Israel, of course, the presence of Yahweh was subject to a number of conditions, yet the principle of “like is like” seems imperative here, too.¹¹

Nephi is clear throughout his narrative that the pattern for the ship is divine: he worked the timbers not “after the manner which was learned by men, neither did I build the ship after the manner of men; but I did build it after the manner which the

¹⁰ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 23–24.

¹¹ Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 123–24.

Lord had shown unto me; wherefore, it was not after the manner of men" (1 Nephi 18:2).

The mountain is the place where the holy man communes with God; for Nephi "did go into the mount oft, and I did pray oft unto the Lord" (1 Nephi 18:3). The "like is like" principle does not apply only to temples: a heavenly pattern is needed for any cosmogony. I have mentioned the Tabernacle;¹² Noah built his ark after the pattern the Lord gave him (Genesis 6:14–16) in a specific re-creation of the earth. Holloway compares Noah's ark with Utnapishtim's ark in the Gilgamesh epic. Each is specifically a re-creation of the world. "I would argue that the flood stories in *Atrahasis* and Gilgamesh re-enact creation in the same manner as the Genesis account, and that the seven-day span of the deluge or the period prior to the opening of the ark in the Mesopotamian stories is a reverse analog to the seven days of creation in Genesis chapters 1–2."¹³ David delivers to Solomon the divine pattern for the temple for him to execute (1 Chronicles 28:11–12),¹⁴ and the "seven days and seven days" of the Feast of Tabernacles dedicating the temple is a reenactment of the seven days of creation (1 Kings 8:65) as is the seven-year time period required to build the temple (1 Kings 6:38), which Blenkinsopp suggests connects it with the creation narrative.¹⁵ Nephi explicitly appropriates this divine pattern in building his temple in the promised land (2 Nephi 5:16). Holloway includes the ark in this category because the ark has the same dimensions as and in many ways is portrayed in the

¹² Kearney provides an extended comparison of the P material in Exodus 25–40, comparing the building of the tabernacle to the creation narrative in Genesis. Peter J. Kearney, "Creation and Liturgy: The P Redaction of Ex 25–40," *Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 89/2 (1977): 375–87.

¹³ Steven W. Holloway, "What Ship Goes There: The Flood Narratives in the Gilgamesh Epic and Genesis Considered in Light of Ancient Near Eastern Temple Ideology," paper presented at the Institute for the Advanced Study of Religion, Divinity School of the University of Chicago, 9 November 1988, 7.

¹⁴ Holloway advances the claim that in ancient Near Eastern cultures, any time God "commands a human being to construct a building, that building is a temple." Holloway, "What Ship Goes There," 9. He includes the ark in this category because the ark has the same dimensions and is portrayed in the Bible as a ziggurat, or temple.

¹⁵ Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Structure of P," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 38/3 (July 1976): 283.

Bible as a ziggurat, or temple; the ark and the temple of Solomon share the three-level design common to Near Eastern cosmogonies that the portable sanctuary could never reproduce.¹⁶ After listing all the occurrences of the execution and completion formulas in what scholars call the “P” segment of the Pentateuch, Blenkinsopp points to the two “physical constructs”—Noah’s ark and the Tabernacle. He claims that because these two are especially important manifestations of the completion formula because they are physical creations that “are built according to divine specifications, there is a certain correspondence between the spatial and temporal axes of the work. Thus, the whole of reality, in its spatial and temporal aspects, is shown to rest on the word first spoken at the creation.”¹⁷ It does seem rather odd for me to compare the divine pattern in tabernacle and temple to this ship. But the comparison is not mine:

Shortly after the episode of the Tower there is another episode which has a bearing on our theme. The building of the Ark by Noah provides us with what is perhaps the closest parallel to the later making of the elaborate tent. The initial command comes from God: “Make thee an ark” (Gen. 6:14). There follow precise instructions about the size and shape of the boat, and these Noah takes care to execute to the letter. When it is finally done we are told: “Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he (6:22).”¹⁸

The divine pattern is essential to the building of both boats. Josipovici continues to compare the tower of Babel incident with the golden calf incident. In both cases the wicked take it upon themselves to construct an object of worship after a human pattern. In both the flood and the tabernacle narratives, the people glorify God by following his pattern. Nephi is also insistent that we understand that he is following the divine pattern, not constructing a work according to human folly:

¹⁶ Ibid., 286.

¹⁷ Ibid., 277.

¹⁸ Gabriel Josipovici, *The Book of God: A Response to the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 98.

And the Lord did show me from time to time after what manner I should work the timbers of the ship. Now I, Nephi, did not work the timbers after the manner which was learned by men, neither did I build the ship after the manner of men; but *I did build it after the manner which the Lord had shown unto me*; wherefore, it was not after the manner of men. (1 Nephi 18:1–2)

Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. *And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of . . .* (Genesis 6:14–15)

The voice of the Lord came unto me, saying: *Arise, and get thee into the mountain*. And it came to pass that I arose and went up into the mountain, and cried unto the Lord. And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto me, saying: *Thou shalt construct a ship, after the manner which I shall show thee*, that I may carry thy people across these waters. (1 Nephi 17:7–8)

“And the Lord said unto Moses, *Come up to me into the mount*, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone and a law . . .” (Exodus 24:12). [The narrative continues with Moses staying on the mount for forty days and receiving the pattern for the tabernacle.] “And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. *According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle*, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.” (Exodus 25:8–9)

Josipovici continues by commenting that medieval artists knew what they were doing when they associated Noah’s ark with the Christian church sailing on the stormy waters of earth. “They read better than later scholars, who have been so busy matching instructions to archaeological evidence that they have failed to understand the larger function of these buildings within the unfolding narrative.”¹⁹

Moses executes the divine pattern, and then he looks on the work of the tabernacle and pronounces it good (Exodus 39:42–43):

The linguistic parallels too between God looking at what he had done and Moses looking at the completed Tabernacle are striking: “And God saw every thing that he made, and, behold, it was very

¹⁹ Ibid.

good (Gen. 1:31)”; “And Moses did look upon all the work, and behold, they had done it as the Lord had commanded, even so had they done it” (Exod. 39:43). “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished” (Gen. 2:1); “Thus was all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation finished” (Exod. 39:32). “God ended his work which he had made” (Gen. 2:2)”; “So Moses finished the work” (Exod. 40:33); and “God blessed the seventh day” (Gen. 2:3); “And Moses blessed them” (Exod. 39:43).

Of course none of this escaped the ancient commentators. Already in antiquity, as my earlier quotation from Josephus demonstrated, the Tabernacle was seen as a model of the cosmos or the heavens. And there are many examples from the ancient Near East of the temple of the god facing his heavenly dwelling and mirroring it.²⁰

Nephi also seems to be aware of the cosmological connections between his ship and other earthly copies of the divine pattern. Nephi explains that he has executed the pattern as he has been commanded, just as Noah and Moses did:

And it came to pass that after *I had finished* the ship, *according to the word of the Lord . . .* (1 Nephi 18:4)

Thus did Noah; *according to all that God commanded him*, so did he. (Genesis 6:22)

Thus was all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation *finished*: And the children of Israel did *according to all that the Lord commanded Moses*, so did they. (Exodus 39:32)

And he reared up the court round about the tabernacle and the altar, and set up the hanging of the court gate. So *Moses finished the work*. (Exodus 40:33)

Thus were the heavens and the earth *finished*. (Genesis 2:1)

This “execution formula” (“the Lord’s servant did according to what the Lord had commanded him to do”) appears time and again in three general locations in the Hebrew Bible, especially

²⁰ Ibid., 102.

as a conclusion formula: (1) the creation, (2) the building of the tabernacle, and (3) the division of the land among the tribes of Israel.²¹ But Blenkinsopp also notes that the formula appears “regularly throughout the history” ranging from the building of Noah’s ark to the allotment of residences for the Levites. The completion formula we have here in Nephi’s record (the “finishing of the work”) is more specific than the execution formula. The completion formula marks a new stage in history: for the Israelites the finished creation marks the beginning of time; the tabernacle marks the culmination of the Abrahamic covenant; and the apportioning of the land to the tribes and to the Levites marks the completion of the conquest.²² In Nephi’s story the completion formula marks the new beginning of the people as they set out irrevocably toward the promised land. A noteworthy feature of Nephi’s creation repetition is that the Spirit of God presides over it as it did over the previous creation narratives; “the divine spirit is mentioned only three times in P, all crucial points in the historical narrative: the creation of the world (Gen 1:2), the construction of the sanctuary (Ex 31:3; 35:31), and the commissioning of Joshua as successor to Moses (Num 27:18; Dt 34:9).”²³ The Spirit of God is also present at Nephi’s creation narrative so powerfully that his brothers dare not rebel against him further (1 Nephi 17:52–55).

Just as God beheld his work and pronounced it good at the end of his creation, Moses, Noah, and Nephi also pronounce their work good. Except in Nephi’s case, ironically, Nephi’s rebellious brothers, who believed he could not build a ship, look on the work and pronounce it good:

My brethren beheld that it was good, and that the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine (1 Nephi 18:4)

According to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so the children of Israel made all the work. And *Moses did look upon all the work*, and, behold, they had done it as the Lord had commanded, even so had they done it: and Moses blessed them. (Exodus 39:42–43)

²¹ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Prophecy and Canon: A Contribution to the Study of Jewish Origins* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 60.

²² *Ibid.*, 61.

²³ Blenkinsopp, “The Structure of P,” 282.

And God saw every thing that he had
made, and, behold, it was very good.
(Genesis 1:31)

All of the work of building a ship or tabernacle follows the same cycle: the Lord gives the pattern and the command, the order is executed exactly, the finished result is viewed and pronounced good. Brisman suggests that the formula "as the Lord directed Moses" (Exodus 40:16–33) and the formula "Moses finished the work" suggests the creation story when God also finished his work. The Priestly writer re-creates the creation narrative in the dull business of recording the construction of the sanctuary, infusing the idea "that the 'work' of the tabernacle is an image of the 'work' of Creation. Both nature and worship are given mythological origins, representations of when they first occurred."²⁴ This analysis depends on the notion of eternal return and of repetition. The Book of Mormon narrative fits the pattern as well as the narratives from the Bible do.

The final note about the creation reenactment from 1 Nephi requires explanation. Nephi later relates the pronouncement that the workmanship is "good" and "exceedingly fine" (1 Nephi 18:4). But it is not just that the workmanship is good, it is also unusual:

We did work timber of *curious workmanship*. And the Lord did show me from time to time after what manner I should work the timbers of the ship. Now I, Nephi, did not work the timbers after the manner which was learned by men, neither did I build the ship after the manner of men. (1 Nephi 18:1–2)

See, I have called by name Bezaleel. . . . And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge and in all manner of workmanship, to *devise cunning works*, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in *all manner of workmanship*. (Exodus 31:2–5)

In this microcosm of the cosmos and the creation, the workmanship of the hands of the creator must be varied—for God glories in dappled things. Josipovici says that the translation "to devise cunning works" could alternatively be translated "to make makings," "to encunning cunningness" when it refers to crafts-

²⁴ Leslie Brisman, "On the Divine Presence in Exodus," in Harold Bloom, ed., *Exodus* (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), 106.

manship. He equates it with the Homeric translation “dappled,” “cunningly wrought,” and the Latin “artificial,” “adorned,” “variegated.”²⁵ Just as the creation requires a variety of animals and that variety is repeated in the deluge—in the parade of animals entering and exiting the ark—the construction of the tabernacle possesses a rich variety of material and workmanship. Nephi’s creation also has its own curious workmanship.

Just as the spirit of God moves about the waters of creation, it also moves through the workman Bezaleel: “the human artist is a craftsman who is filled with the ‘spirit of God’ (Exod. 35:31), the same *rûah ʿĕlōhîm* mentioned in Gen. 1:2 as moving over the waters of the primordial world of creation.”²⁶ Note that the spirit of God is also present at Nephi’s construction of his work of curious workmanship (1 Nephi 17:52).

But the ship as a cosmogonic work is not the only bit of curious workmanship in the Book of Mormon. During the sea voyage Nephi resorts to using the compass to still the waters of chaos. Nephi followed no human pattern in building his ship—consequently, the ship is a work of curious workmanship because it is built after a divine pattern. Likewise, also, when Lehi walks out of his tent as the group is about to begin their exodus through the wilderness, he finds “a round ball of curious workmanship” (1 Nephi 16:10). In later generations, the Nephites explicitly connect the curious workmanship with the divinity of the pattern: Alma speaks to his son Helaman saying, “concerning the thing which our fathers call a ball, or director—or our fathers called it Liahona, which is, being interpreted, a compass; and the Lord prepared it. And behold, there cannot any man work after the manner of so curious a workmanship. And behold, it was prepared to show unto our fathers the course which they should travel in the wilderness” (Alma 37:38–39). The ball, circle, or compass is a symbol of the cosmogony. At the beginning of Lehiite history, when the group has severed all relations with the Jews at Jerusalem, when God creates this new people by leading them on an exodus through the wilderness, God gives them this circle/compass. When Nephi is endangered by the chaotic forces of the sea, he takes out his compass and prays to the creator. Small wonder the Liahona is one of the

²⁵ Josipovici, *The Book of God*, 105.

²⁶ Harold Fisch, *Poetry with Purpose: Biblical Poetics and Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 24.

symbols of kingship prized by later generations of Nephites:²⁷ the plates of brass, the sword of Laban, and the "ball or director, which led our fathers through the wilderness, which was prepared by the hand of the Lord" (Mosiah 1:16).²⁸ Thomasson's analysis of the ball imagery points to it as a symbol of the earth, the globe. The bit of curious workmanship parallels the one fashioned after a divine pattern by Nephi.

So the exodus (specifically the tabernacle construction) is connected to the deluge and both are connected to the creation. Nephi's construction of the ship is connected to all three of the biblical archetypes of new creations, as shown in table 1 (see pp. 82–83).

The cosmogonic imagery in this narrative is not only essential at the creation of the new people, but it is also closely connected to the exodus just preceding it. Anderson locates the main "fulcrum of Israel's faith" in the exodus rather than the creation. He suggests that the first creation is the exodus, and that we should then read backward to the creation: "The creation accounts at the beginning of the Bible are written from the standpoint of the meaning disclosed in the event of the Exodus. The history that is now recorded forwards must be read backwards, so to speak, through the faith of the believing community."²⁹ The purpose of biblical creation is the later creation of the children of Israel: "From the Exodus, Israel looked back to the creation, confessing that the God who was active at the beginning of her history was likewise active at the beginning of the world's history."³⁰ We should not be surprised to see the exodus and creation symbols linked in the Book of Mormon just as they are linked in the tabernacle narrative.

Among the cosmic connotations of the many waters and the sea voyage, Nephi is also telling us something about the journey to the promised land. "Settlement in a new, unknown, uncultivated country is equivalent to an act of Creation."³¹ Eliade cites the Scandinavian settlers of Iceland as an example. "Their enterprise was for them only the repetition of a primordial

²⁷ Gordon C. Thomasson, "Mosiah: The Complex Symbolism and the Symbolic Complex of Kingship in the Book of Mormon," F.A.R.M.S. preliminary report, 1982.

²⁸ Ibid., 4.

²⁹ Anderson, *Creation versus Chaos*, 35.

³⁰ Ibid., 38.

³¹ Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 10.

act: the transformation of chaos into cosmos by the divine act of Creation.”³² To settle in a new land is to repeat the cosmogony.³³ This act of creating is exactly what the Lehi colony does. We should not be surprised then when the settlers finish their sea voyage and begin fulfilling the creation injunction to subdue the earth: “And it came to pass that we did begin to till the earth, and we began to plant seeds; yea, we did put all our seeds into the earth, which we had brought from the land of Jerusalem. And it came to pass that they did grow exceedingly; wherefore, we were blessed in abundance” (1 Nephi 18:24). The creation of the earth ends with the command that man go forth on the earth, multiply and be fruitful (Genesis 1:28); Blenkinsopp’s parallel incident of the conquering of the promised land and the subsequent partitioning of it also ends with the same subduing (Joshua 18:1, 19:51).³⁴ Noah and his group are commanded likewise to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 8:17). “The image of the ‘seed of all living’ issuing from the bowels of the arks is the primary expression of abundance and prosperity in the Deluge stories. A minor concretion of the same ideology in Gilgamesh is probably reflected in the cargo and skills of the individuals admitted into the ark.”³⁵ Nephi’s cosmogony ends with the going forth on the land, planting the seeds (they had carried with them from Jerusalem) in the earth as God did, and exercising dominion.

Seeds of Faith, Seeds of Scholarship

The narrative that tells us about Nephi’s building his ship is much more sophisticated and deserves far more analysis than I have given it here. My point is that if revisionists can be selective about those assumptions and evidence from biblical criticism that serve their ideological purposes, then those of us who believe in the Book of Mormon can also—everyone who takes up the text does that: explores it partially and with particular interests. Rather, we ought at least to point out the conflicting views within biblical scholarship. Biblical scholarship is not inimical to belief in the Bible or the Book of Mormon.

³² Ibid.

³³ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 65.

³⁴ Blenkinsopp, *Prophecy and Canon*, 68.

³⁵ Holloway, “What Ship Goes There,” 18.

	Work De- clared Good	Completion Formula	Blessing Pronounced
Creation	Gen. 1:31 “And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good”	Gen. 2:1 “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them”	Gen. 2:3 “And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it”
Deluge	Gen. 9:11–17 God establishes a covenant	Gen. 6:22; 7:5 “Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he”	Gen. 9:1 “And God blessed Noah and his sons”
Taber- nacle	Ex. 39:43; cf. 39:43 “And Moses did look upon all the work, and, behold, they had done it as the Lord had commanded, even so had they done it”	Ex. 39:32; cf. 39:43; 40:33 “And the children of Israel did according to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so did they”	Ex. 39:43 “And Moses blessed them”
Nephi’s Ship	1 Ne. 18:4 “And it came to pass that after I had finished the ship, according to the word of the Lord, my brethren beheld that it was good”	1 Ne. 18:4 “And it came to pass that after I had finished the ship, according to the word of the Lord”	1 Ne. 18:24 “Wherefore, we were blessed in abundance”

Table 1. Biblical archetypes of creation compared to Nephi’s construction of the ship.

**Multiply and
Fill the Earth**

Gen. 1:28
“And God said unto
them, Be fruitful, and
multiply, and replenish
the earth”

Gen. 8:17; 9:1
“Bring forth with thee
every living thing . . .
that they may breed
abundantly in the earth,
and be fruitful, and
multiply upon the
earth”

Josh. 18:1
“And the whole
congregation of Israel
assembled together at
Shiloh, and set up the
tabernacle of the
congregation there.
And the land was
subdued before them”

1 Ne. 18:24
“And it came to pass
that we did begin to till
the earth, and we began
to plant seeds”

**Curious
Workmanship**

Gen. 1:11–12, 20–22,
24–25
The variety of species
is emphasized.

Gen. 6:14–16
Divine pattern for
building the ark
specified

Ex. 31:3–4
“I have filled [Bezaleel]
with the spirit of God,
in wisdom, and in
understanding, and in
knowledge, and in all
manner of
workmanship. To
devise cunning works
in gold, and in silver,
and in brass”

1 Ne. 18:1; cf. 18:2
“We did work the
timbers of curious
workmanship. And the
Lord did show me from
time to time after what
manner I should work
the timbers of the
ship”

**Mountain
Theophany**

Ex. 24:12
“And the Lord said
unto Moses, Come up
to me into the mount”

1 Ne. 17:7; cf. 17:8
“The voice of the Lord
came unto me, saying:
Arise, and get thee into
the mountain. And it
came to pass that I
arose and went up into
the mountain, and cried
unto the Lord”

During our journey through the wilderness and across the sea with the Book of Mormon, we have carried with us many seeds. Those seeds produce fruit after their own kind; implicit in the idea of creation is the notion that the variety of the harvest is good in itself. We ought to rejoice that we can find a species of biblical criticism that opens the Book of Mormon text up in ways we never before imagined. We should plant the implicit seeds of faith that have been our cargo all these years.