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AN UNFORTUNATE APPROACH TO JOSEPH SMITH'S TRANSLATION OF ANCIENT SCRIPTURE

Spencer Kraus

Review of Jonathan Neville, *A Man That Can Translate: Joseph Smith and the Nephite Interpreters*. Salt Lake City: Digital Legends Press, 2020. 385 pages. \$22.99 (paperback).

Abstract: *This is the first of two papers that explore Jonathan Neville's two latest books regarding the translation of the Book of Mormon. Neville has long argued that Joseph Smith did not use a seer stone during the translation of the Book of Mormon, and he has more recently expanded his historical revisionism to dismiss the multitude of historical sources that include the use of a seer stone. Neville's "Demonstration Hypothesis" is explored in A Man That Can Translate, arguing that Joseph recited a memorized text from Isaiah rather than translate Isaiah from the Book of Mormon record. This hypothesis, meant to redefine how Joseph Smith used a seer stone during the translation of the Book of Mormon, however, fails to deal with the historical record seriously or faithfully. Neville, in a purported effort to save Joseph Smith's character, ironically describes Joseph as a liar, reinvigorating old anti-Latter-day Saint claims that Joseph simply recited a memorized text, even to the point that Neville defends hostile sources while targeting Church-published histories and publications. He further attacks the witnesses of the translation in an effort to discredit their testimonies regarding the seer stone, and repeatedly misrepresents these sources. Coming from a Latter-day Saint, such claims are troubling and demand a response.*

Despite historical documentation to the contrary, Jonathan Neville has long maintained that Joseph Smith did not use a seer stone during the translation of the Book of Mormon. While belief in or rejection of the seer stone in the historical record will not affect one's

standing within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Neville has recently published two books relating to the translation of the Book of Mormon that explore his two latest theories regarding the translation and Joseph Smith's use of a seer stone. This is the first of two papers that will explore the claims that Neville makes in these two books and offers a thorough response to his unorthodox and unjustified claims.

The first of the two books, *A Man That Can Translate*, deals in detail with the question of Joseph Smith's use of a seer stone, presenting his "Demonstration Hypothesis" as what he believes is a faithful and superior alternative to the historical analysis offered by faithful Latter-day Saint scholars. However, Neville fails to deliver any argument that can be described as an accurate or rigorous analysis of the historical record, or even the Church itself. Neville relies heavily on misrepresenting his sources and making claims from silence, and enough factual discrepancies and contradictions are found within his book that any serious reader will quickly recognize its lack of serious scholarship or peer review. Neville states that as we are all "pursuing truth together," he is open to hearing from anyone who finds anything that he missed or overlooked.¹ I hope his openness to hearing from those who disagree with him is as sincere as he claims, especially as the evidence is weighted against his unorthodox theories.

Neville's approach deals heavily with the definition of the Urim and Thummim and how he believes Joseph Smith understood the word "translation." Neville inserts his misunderstandings into the historical record, producing an analysis that is designed to lead the reader to his conclusions, while discrediting other sources that disagree. Because these two topics are so fundamental to his arguments and his new hypothesis regarding the translation of the Book of Mormon, I will first discuss what Neville says regarding the use of a seer stone by Joseph Smith and what Joseph Smith meant by the term "translate." I will then move into a discussion of Neville's Demonstration Hypothesis, his acceptance of sources critical of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and his targeting of sources produced by the Church. I will also discuss his treatment of the witnesses to the translation and how he attempts to discredit each of their various statements and testimonies regarding the divine translation of the Book of Mormon.

Seer Stone or Urim and Thummim?

A crucial point of contention for Neville comes from the seer stone in the historical record. Much of his work in this book attempts to argue

that no such seer stone was used in the translation of the Book of Mormon because, “the nature of the translation implicates theological and historical issues related to the historicity and divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon itself” — that is, Neville believes that should a seer stone have been used, the “narrative of the ancient creation and preservation of the plates” would be rendered “pointless.”² Neville goes further to state that use of the seer stone even “contradicts the scriptural narrative,” thus questioning whether or not the Urim and Thummim or plates were ever needed and, by implication, whether or not the Book of Mormon could be regarded as historical.³

Neville repeats his position multiple times by claiming that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery only ever described translation via the Urim and Thummim — as such, Joseph and Oliver must have used the term Urim and Thummim exactly as Neville proposes, limiting its use strictly to the Nephite interpreters. Neville claims that “Joseph and Oliver responded promptly to *Mormonism Unveiled* by emphasizing that Joseph used *the* Urim and Thummim that *came with* the plates to *translate* the plates. They consistently claimed this throughout the rest of their lives.... In connection with the translation of the Book of Mormon, they never referred to *a* Urim and Thummim as a generic term. Neither of them claimed that Joseph read words that appeared on a seer/peep stone, that he didn't actually translate the plates, or that he had power to translate the plates with anything other than *the* Urim and Thummim.”⁴ This proposal has several problems.

Early Saints and the Term “Urim and Thummim”

Central to all of Neville's claims is this question — what did early Saints understand by the term “Urim and Thummim” and could they have had a more expansive view of the term than Neville here presents?

According to Neville, there “is no indication or implication that Joseph, Oliver, or anyone else referred to the ‘seer stone’ or ‘peep stone’ as *a* Urim and Thummim or vice versa. All contemporary accounts referred to the objects Moroni put in the stone box as *the* Urim and Thummim, the spectacles, or the Nephite interpreters.”⁵ Neville also repeatedly paints the use of a seer stone in the translation as a recent development in Church history in an attempt to separate the idea from Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery.⁶ Not only is this a false claim, but Neville's use of the sources is troubling for his hypothesis, since he goes on to cite contemporary sources calling the seer stone a Urim and Thummim.

Neville quotes from the final testimony of Benjamin Winchester, a disgruntled former member of the First Quorum of the Seventy and mission leader. Winchester was excommunicated in 1844, and after a brief time with Sidney Rigdon's church appears to have become opposed to the restoration as a whole. Winchester remarks that Joseph "carried what he called a 'Peep stone' through which he claimed to see hidden treasure & etc. This is what he afterwards called his 'Urim and Thummim.'" ⁷ While Winchester was hardly a friendly source, he was a contemporary of Joseph Smith who saw little problem in calling the seer stone the Urim and Thummim.

One might claim that Benjamin Winchester was simply parroting a hostile source such as *Mormonism Unveiled*, but such a theory does not withstand critical analysis, since he was not the only one to refer to it in these terms. David Whitmer, who would not have any motivation to cite from sources critical to the Book of Mormon, once told a reporter that "[Joseph] Smith was given by the angel, a Urim and Thummim of another pattern, it being shaped in oval or kidney form. This seer's stone he was instructed to place in the hat."⁸ David Whitmer later wrote that Joseph was given power to translate "by means of a stone" before referring his readers to multiple scriptures from the Bible referencing the Urim and Thummim, "being the same means and one by which the Ancients received the word of the Lord."⁹ While Neville had claimed almost one hundred pages earlier that *no* contemporary of Joseph Smith described the seer stone by the biblical term Urim and Thummim, Neville now admits that David's use of the term Urim and Thummim "[implied] the term described the stone Joseph used."¹⁰

Neville later tries to dismiss a journal entry by Wilford Woodruff stating that "I had the privilege of seeing for the first time in my day the URIM & THUMMIM."¹¹ He tries to explain this via a quote from Brigham Young describing the same event, who recorded that Joseph "explained to us [the apostles] the Urim and Thummim which he found with the plates" and then after discussing seer stones, Joseph "showed us his seer stone."¹² Based on Brigham Young's statement mentioning both the Nephite interpreters and Joseph's seer stone, Neville claims that "[Woodruff's] statement can be interpreted several ways, including the possibility that he didn't care much about the seer stone but was impressed because Joseph still had the actual Urim and Thummim."¹³

However, such a reading cannot reasonably nor responsibly be taken from Brigham Young's journal. He makes no mention of Joseph *showing* the apostles the Nephite interpreters — Joseph just explained

what they were before moving on to discuss seer stones. According to Brigham Young in that same journal entry, Joseph “said every man on earth was entitled to a seer stone, and should have one, but they are kept from them in consequence of their wickedness.” This may be an expansion of Joseph’s teachings recorded in D&C 130:10–11, stating that “the white stone mentioned in Revelation 2:17, will become a Urim and Thummim to each individual who receives one” which would be given to the righteous saints “who come into the celestial kingdom.” Then, after the discussion of the Urim and Thummim and seer stones, Joseph showed the apostles one of his own seer stones.¹⁴ Here again we have a further statement by Joseph Smith linking seer stones to the Urim and Thummim, showing that the title did not just belong to the Nephite interpreters that he found with the plates. When we consider all the historical evidence, then, Wilford Woodruff’s journal is best read as a description of Joseph showing the same item to the apostles in Nauvoo.

Heber C. Kimball was another contemporary of Joseph cited by Neville who appears to have used the title Urim and Thummim to refer to a seer stone. Kimball told the Saints in 1853 that Brigham Young had “everything that is necessary for him to receive the will and mind of God to this people,” including the Urim and Thummim.¹⁵ Neville says that it is “congruent with Woodruff’s journal entry to infer that what Woodruff saw and what Brigham Young possessed was the Urim and Thummim that Joseph obtained with the plates.”¹⁶ As we have already seen, it would assuredly *not* be congruent with Wilford Woodruff’s journal entry to believe that the item in question was the Interpreters obtained with the plates. While we might debate what Heber C. Kimball meant in his declaration, either the brown seer stone or the white seer stone (or perhaps even both) seem to be the most likely referent.

Joseph’s white seer stone appears to have been passed down to the apostles after his martyrdom, eventually being placed on the altar of the Manti temple during its dedication by Wilford Woodruff.¹⁷ There is little reason to doubt that Brigham Young, as the President of the Church, would have had it at the time Heber C. Kimball spoke. Furthermore, the brown seer stone that was given to Oliver Cowdery passed to Brigham Young after Cowdery gave it to Brigham’s brother Phineas. The brown stone has remained in the Church’s possession since.¹⁸ Conversely, while multiple accounts detail the return of the Nephite interpreters to Moroni, there is not a single record that corroborates the idea that Joseph eventually received those interpreters again, not even to show the apostles (none of whom ever claimed to see the Nephite interpreters).¹⁹

Orson Pratt likewise taught that the Urim and Thummim were not in the possession of the Church while in Utah (contrary to Neville’s claim that Brigham Young possessed them), describing the future coming forth and translation of “other records translated by the Urim and Thummim, that same instrument that Joseph Smith used in the translation of the ‘Book of Mormon,’ *which will again come forth and be revealed to the seer and revelator that God will raise up by which these ancient records will be brought to light.*”²⁰

It is evident that Joseph and his contemporaries (who were prominent Church leaders and apostles, including two future Church presidents²¹) used the term Urim and Thummim much more broadly than Neville admits. He goes to great lengths to redefine history according to his own conception.²²

This poor historiography can even be seen in Neville’s repeated claims that Joseph and Oliver “never said anything about [translating with] *a* Urim and Thummim, let alone a seer stone found in a well.”²³ This is a red herring — the use or disuse of the definite article does not imply what Neville thinks it means. This is especially evident when one considers that the Urim and Thummim is a *plural* term that apparently could be used to describe a single stone (as in D&C 130) or multiple stones, as can be seen in the case of the Levitical high priest’s Urim and Thummim (see Exodus 28:30) and the Nephite interpreters. A similar phrase in English might be “I saw the sheep” — in this instance, the word *sheep* can be understood as referring to either a single animal or a whole flock of animals (or any number in between). So how many sheep were seen, and how many instruments were used in the translation of the Book of Mormon? Even if each individual sheep is not described in detail in every retelling of a child’s trip to a farm, one cannot simply declare that only a single sheep was seen. Likewise, one cannot claim that multiple instruments of translation were not used by the Prophet Joseph Smith just because he (purposefully) did not go into detail regarding the means of translation.²⁴

Seer Stones and “[Contradicting] the Scriptural Narrative”

Another of Neville’s key efforts to dismiss the seer stone’s role in the translation of the Book of Mormon comes from an apparent trump card for Latter-day Saints. By claiming that the use of a seer stone “contradicts the scriptural record,”²⁵ he makes agreeing with him the price of maintaining a belief in the scriptures themselves. If you believe the

scriptures, the subtext goes, then you must agree with Jonathan Neville's interpretation of them; if you do not, you are a part of the problem.

However, Neville provides no substantial evidence that the use of a seer stone contradicts the scriptural record. As we will now see, through a selected handful of scriptures he reaches his conclusion through unfounded presuppositions and misreadings of the text. This would be more convincing if he did not portray them as agreeing with him even when he seems to deliberately avoid responding to arguments counter to his position.

Neville first states that "Moroni explained that the record could be read *only* with the interpreters." For this argument, Neville draws upon Ether 3:22–24, which records the words of the Lord to the brother of Jared that "*these stones shall magnify to the eyes of men these things which ye shall write.*" Neville then states "Whether a stone found in a well could serve the same purpose as 'these stones' that the Lord gave the brother of Jared is a question we can each answer for ourselves."²⁶ This is a rather coy bit of rhetoric — he won't *say* that the Lord could not mean this, but leave us to draw the conclusion on our own — but it is not an argument.

It is hard to escape the impression that this rhetorical sleight of hand attempts to paper over the fact that nowhere in this scripture does the Lord limit the translation to *just* the stones mentioned in Ether 3. A key insight into what made those stones so special is actually even raised by Neville, albeit inadvertently — these were stones that the Lord had prepared and placed in the prophet's possession to enable future revelations and even translations. According to Wilford Woodruff, Joseph Smith had similarly found at least one of his seer stones "by revelation some 30 feet under the earth."²⁷ Under such circumstances, it is just as reasonable to claim that Joseph Smith's seer stone could serve translation purposes, because the Lord had placed it there knowing in advance that Joseph Smith would one day find the stone and that he would be able to use it in his prophetic mission.

Another instance comes from Alma 37. Citing the 1830 edition and the Original Manuscript, Neville rightly claims that Alma 37:21 originally used the term *directors* instead of the modern reading of *interpreters*. Neville then states that this change in the 1920 edition reflected "a new interpretation of what the verse 'should' have read" and that the original term *directors* "suggests a meaning different from the 'interpreters' mentioned [elsewhere in the Book of Mormon.]"²⁸ Neville goes on to declare (based on D&C 17:1 where "marvelous directors"

are given to Lehi) that the term *directors* only refers to the Liahona and perhaps a seer stone given to Lehi that is otherwise unmentioned in the scriptural record.²⁹

However, Neville again offers a weak argument with contradictory evidence when he claims that the 1920 change reflected a “new interpretation” of the text. He is well aware of sources — since he quotes them elsewhere — from William McLellin and Elizabeth Ann Whitmer Cowdery describing the translation instruments as *directors*, demonstrating that this was *not* a new interpretation of the text pushed into the Book of Mormon by certain Church members, but reflects an understanding of the text that is faithful to its original message. As early as 1847, McLellin described the translation of the Book of Mormon as having been done “by the ‘inspiration of the Almighty,’ by the use of the means that the Lord had caused to be provided, viz. Interpreters, *Directors*, or more anciently called Urim and Thummim.”³⁰ Later, Oliver Cowdery’s wife, who was an eyewitness of the translation, would say that Joseph “would place the *director* in his hat” and then dictate the translation to his scribe.³¹ While Neville claims that Oliver Cowdery made a distinction between the interpreters and the directors, his own wife was a contemporary witness that Oliver and the others likely made no such distinction.³² Neville may disagree, but any counter argument he may provide must address these issues when citing the evidence, not ignore them.

As a final note in this debate, Neville mentions an article written by Stan Spencer that argues that the term *directors* could be an authentic translation of the term *Urim* based off of the Greek Septuagint. Regarding the use of the term *directors* in Alma 37, Spencer notes:

Alma uses *director(s)* to refer to both the interpreters and the brass ball in Alma 37 and seems to be aware of that fact. He calls the interpreters “these directors” and the brass ball “this director” (not “*the* director”), suggesting that he considers directors to be a class of instruments of which the interpreters and the brass ball are two examples.³³

Spencer then discusses the term *Urim* in light of its Greek translation, pointing out that “in the books of Moses, [*Urim*] was translated by forms of *deloi*, likely signifying “manifestations,” and by *delosis*, signifying “manifestation” or “revelation,” or perhaps “direction” or “instruction.”³⁴ Using this interpretation, should Joseph Smith have translated the term *Urim* instead of the common transliteration that we find in English bibles, “it could have been translated with both a plural and a singular

meaning — as *directors* (for the interpreters) and as *director* (for the brass ball) — just as *elohim* is translated as both *gods* and *God* in the Bible.”³⁵

Neville claims that Spencer’s article “doesn’t mention that, in today’s editions of the scriptures, the only reference to *directors* is in D&C 17:1.” However, had Neville read even the first paragraph of the article, he would realize that Spencer had indeed noted that the change in 1920 made sense because “Alma is speaking of the two sacred stones used to interpret ancient writings, and everywhere else in the Book of Mormon those stones are fittingly called *interpreters*. Also, *director* (i.e., in the singular) in the Book of Mormon and *directors* in the Doctrine and Covenants always refer to the brass ball that guided the Nephites to their promised land, not to the two interpreter stones.”³⁶

Neville goes to greater lengths to dismiss Spencer’s scholarship by avoiding any engagement with the latter’s arguments. Rather, he refers his readers to comments on the article that “raise interesting points,” though none are cited.³⁷ Looking at the few comments left on the online version of this paper, one also must wonder what comment he could possibly be referring to — none of the comments at the time of this writing challenges Spencer’s claim that *directors* is a fitting translation for *Urim* based on their specific uses.³⁸ And Neville has the responsibility — if he wishes to engage in history instead of special-pleading — to deal with contrary evidence himself, and not rely on blog comments to do the work for him. Given that Neville is likely unable to provide any response to a matter about which he has no training, his avoidance is understandable, though not excusable.

Further evidence that seer stones support, rather than contradict, the scriptural narrative lies in the fact that multiple Church leaders — from the 1800s to the present — have openly taught and supported the historical data showing that Joseph Smith used a seer stone to translate the Book of Mormon. President Russell M. Nelson described Joseph’s use of a seer stone positively in 1992,³⁹ and has most recently reaffirmed that fact in a video produced by the Church at the John Whitmer household, stating “We know they had the golden plates, covered usually, and Joseph used these — the Urim and Thummim, seer stones — in the hat, and it was easier for him to see the light [from the stones] when he’d take that position.”⁴⁰

President Nelson is not the only living apostle who has taught that Joseph Smith used a seer stone to translate the Book of Mormon. In a post to social media dated 21 June 2016, Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf stated, “People have asked me, ‘Do you really believe that Joseph Smith

translated with seer stones? How would something like this be possible? And I answer, ‘Yes! That is exactly what I believe.’ This was done as Joseph said: by the gift and power of God.⁴¹ Elder D. Todd Christofferson has similarly taught that Joseph Smith used a seer stone in the translation of the Book of Mormon in a North America Northeast Member Devotional on 20 October 2019,⁴² and Elder Quentin L. Cook discussed both the Urim and Thummim and seer stones in his April 2017 General Conference address.⁴³

Even as early as 1888, President George Q. Cannon wrote one of the earliest (and still useful) biographies of the Prophet Joseph Smith, wherein he states:

One of Joseph’s aids in searching out the truths of the record [the Book of Mormon] was a peculiar pebble or rock which he called also a seer stone, and which was sometimes used by him in lieu of the Urim and Thummim. This stone had been discovered to himself and his brother Hyrum at the bottom of a well; and under divine guidance they had brought it forth for use in the work of translation.⁴⁴

While I would like to believe that no Latter-day Saint would claim that these living prophets and apostles are “contradicting the scriptural narrative,” Neville has previously stated that Elder Gong’s general conference address had fallen victim to “scholars providing bad information to Church leaders.”⁴⁵ There is thus no small irony in Neville implying that to believe in seer stones means disagreeing with scripture, while not addressing the fact that his disbelief in seers stones means disagreeing with the modern apostles and current president of the Church — and, not incidentally, implicitly charging those same leaders with disregarding scripture too.

Other Poor Arguments Against the Seer Stone

Jonathan Neville has made other weak arguments to dismiss the seer stone from Church history that are worth brief mention. Neville repeatedly conflates the seer stone with Royal Skousen’s Early Modern English hypothesis, which states that some Early Modern English may be evident in the finished translation of the Book of Mormon (which, Skousen argues, would be inconsistent with a 19th-Century composition).⁴⁶ Neville has long been a critic of Skousen’s hypothesis,⁴⁷ and so he attempts to wed it exclusively to the seer stone.⁴⁸ However, he fails to note that should Skousen be correct, the same traces of Early Modern English could come

from Joseph's use of the Nephite interpreters just as much as it could come from the seer stone in a hat, or any other divine instrument or process. Conflating two entirely separate ideas makes for an excellent strawman, leaving unwary readers none the wiser.

Another strange attack on the seer stone comes from Neville's book *Infinite Goodness: Joseph Smith, Jonathan Edwards, and the Book of Mormon*. The odd remark does not belong in the overarching discussion of Joseph Smith's 1832 History. One single-sentenced paragraph reads "No one proposes the 1832 History came from a stone in a hat."⁴⁹ Of course, Neville is correct — nobody in their right mind would claim that Joseph Smith would need a seer stone to record his own life experiences. What Neville does, however, is introduce yet another red herring. Neville uses this undisputed and trivial "fact" as supposed proof against the use of the seer stone in general, but this claim ultimately proves and provides nothing of substance to the matter there discussed (with which seer stones had absolutely nothing to do) or the discussion on the use of Joseph Smith's seer stone in general.

Joseph Smith and the "Translation" of Ancient Records

A key aspect of the interpretation of any historical record is offering a correct understanding of words as historical figures used them. In Neville's work, however, this key aspect appears to be ignored, with modern definitions of words used, offering a form of presentism that is destructive to historical arguments. Because of this lapse, Neville errs repeatedly because he does not understand Joseph Smith's use of the word "translate."

According to Jonathan Neville, when Joseph Smith said that he translated ancient records, it means he translated ancient records much like we would expect a Hebrew scholar to translate the Old Testament:

Joseph translated the engravings on the plates in the ordinary sense of the word The translation was inspired both because of the aid of the interpreters and because, although Joseph had to study it out in his mind (D&C 9:8), the Spirit confirmed the translation he came up with as he dictated it to his scribe. Viewed in this way, the idea that Joseph actually translated the Nephite records into English seems obvious.⁵⁰

Neville also states that the "acceptance of [Joseph's use of a seer stone] means Joseph could not have translated in the ordinary sense of using his best judgement to restate something" from the language used by the

ancient Nephites and the English spoken in Joseph Smith's day.⁵¹ Because of this supposed scholarly translation process, Neville proposes that as Joseph had to "study it out in his mind," the translation process "could have taken two hours per page"⁵² but would later "proceed relatively quickly once Joseph understood the Nephite characters and learned how to use the Spirit to guide his word choice and placement."⁵³ Because Neville's proposed two hours per page would be a slow pace relative to the rapid pace described by witnesses, Neville sees it as evidence against Joseph "reading already translated words" off a stone in a hat (again conflating some of Skousen's proposed theories with the seer stone).⁵⁴ Because Neville believes that this was a scholarly translation effort, he argues further that Joseph Smith could pick up where he left off because he would (of necessity) have "ended previous [translating] sessions at the bottom of a particular plate" (an argument made completely from silence).⁵⁵

These claims, however, show circular reasoning on Neville's part that weaken his argument. Neville uses his own presuppositions about how long the translation took in order to provide evidence that Joseph did not use his seer stone. This illogical tactic further illustrates the weakness of his argument. Neville also uses presentism when determining what Joseph Smith meant when he described translating ancient records, using *his* interpretation of the word rather than Joseph Smith's. To make sense of the historical problems that such a reading of Joseph's use of the word *translate* would involve, Neville again misrepresents sources that he cites and ignores Joseph's other translation projects that might challenge his view.

For example, Neville claims that phrases such as "in other words" or "or rather" are best understood *not* as Mormon's rethinking of a phrase or fixing an error that may have crept in as he engraved on metal plates, but "it seem[s] more likely" that it was Joseph who felt that his word choice "did not capture the meaning he wanted to convey."⁵⁶ Neville believes that "the existence of [these phrases in the translated Book of Mormon] would be another reason to reject [the seer stone's use] as implausible" because there would be little reason for a divine translation to require a reworking of words or phrases.⁵⁷ (He does not explain why, if Joseph was unhappy with his first translation's phrasing, he could not simply say, "Strike that, instead write....")

This is a problem that simply does not exist. He himself notes that Paul used the phrase "or rather" in his epistles, and even Jonathan Edwards used the phrase when not translating any ancient

text, but Neville appears to be unwilling to offer that same liberty to the Nephite authors.⁵⁸ Neville likewise fails to consider that should those phrases be authentic to Mormon's writings, it would not discredit the seer stone *or* the Nephite interpreters, because Joseph Smith could as easily have translated these phrases into English from the original text, just as they were translated from the original text in Paul's epistles (who assuredly did *not* write in English).

However, because Neville is intent on dismissing the seer stone as a revelatory instrument used in the translation of the Book of Mormon, this logical analysis escapes his due consideration. He instead moves on to misrepresenting sources that state that Joseph would read words as they appeared on the seer stone. Neville claims that such a possibility "contradicts Joseph's direct claim that he translated the engravings on the plates" (using, of course, Neville's definition of translation),⁵⁹ the "witness statements [describing Joseph reading words off of a stone in a hat] reflect inference, assumption, and conjecture." These statements, therefore, should be treated lightly.⁶⁰ He likewise claims that "neither [Joseph nor Oliver] claimed that Joseph merely read words that appeared on a seer/peep stone."⁶¹

Neville, however, quotes a source from Oliver Cowdery explaining the translation in that precise manner. In a newspaper from 1831, Oliver Cowdery is reported to have said that "by looking through [the Urim and Thummim, Joseph] was able to read in English, the Reformed Egyptian characters."⁶² While not necessarily describing a stone in a hat, Oliver explained that Joseph merely had to look into his translation instrument to be able to read the characters in English. No mention of any scholarly, two-hour-long effort was ever given by Oliver Cowdery in order to finish a page, despite Neville's "inference, assumption, and conjecture" to the contrary.

It is also incorrect (if not dishonest) to state that all of the witnesses to the translation who testified that Joseph was able to read words off of a stone in a hat were simply basing their claims off of inference, assumptions, or hearsay.⁶³ David Whitmer testified that it was Joseph Smith who told him that "the original character appeared upon parchment and under it the translation in English,"⁶⁴ and on another occasion he stated that Joseph told him and others that the "letters appeared on [the Urim and Thummim] in light and would not go off until they were written correctly by Oliver."⁶⁵ Neville cites both of these interviews, but ignores the implications when the data does not match his thesis.

How, then, should we understand Joseph Smith's use of "translate" in light of his prophetic calling? If we accept the presuppositions of Neville, then what can we make of Joseph Smith's other translation projects? Are we to expect that he held in his hands an ancient papyrus written in *koine* Greek by the apostle John and was able to translate Doctrine and Covenants 7 through his (nonexistent) knowledge of the Greek language? Did Joseph Smith have in his possession some ancient Hebrew, Greek, or Coptic manuscripts from which he was able to provide his "New Translation" of the Bible, and if so, what happened to those manuscripts? Did Joseph also learn how to read and translate Egyptian hieroglyphics to provide a scholarly translation of the Book of Abraham?⁶⁶ Using Neville's proposed model, none of these translations would be possible. However, when "translate" is understood in the more inclusive sense used by Joseph, it does not require scholarly work to be part of the translation process at all. (None of this is a novel idea; Latter-day Saint scholars have written reams about Joseph's conception of *translation*.⁶⁷ Neville neither acknowledges nor engages this work.)

Returning also to Neville's concern that the seer stone invalidates the existence of the plates, while such a concern is valid, it need not be troubling when all things are duly considered. While Joseph did initially use the plates and the Urim and Thummim in the conventional method that Neville accepts, as he spiritually matured and learned how he might receive revelation he apparently was able to receive the words without having to open the plates at any given time. He similarly felt at a later point that he no longer needed to rely on the seer stone for revelation, giving it to Oliver Cowdery. Elder Quentin L. Cook similarly discussed the seer stone and Urim and Thummim in terms of "training wheels on a bicycle" used until Joseph Smith could exercise the faith to receive revelations without relying on these instruments, showing a level of spiritual progression for the young prophet.⁶⁸ This is attested by Orson Pratt, who saw Joseph working on the New Translation of the New Testament and wondered why Joseph did not use an instrument like the Urim and Thummim as he did when translating the Book of Mormon: "Joseph, as if he read his thoughts, looked up and explained that the Lord gave him the Urim and Thummim when he was inexperienced in the Spirit of inspiration. But now he had advanced so far that he understood the operations of that Spirit, and did not need the assistance of that instrument."⁶⁹

Joseph's lack of strength following the First Vision (see Joseph Smith — History 1:20) is similarly contrasted with his reaction following the reception of "The Vision" now recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 76,

where he joked upon viewing Sidney's composure (recorded as being "limp and pale, apparently as limber as a rag") that "Sidney is not used to it as I am."⁷⁰ Even when Joseph was not looking at the characters engraved on the plates as he translated, the translation still took place in close vicinity to the plates, perhaps showing his reliance on their existence,⁷¹ and they would have served as an actual, physical witness to both prophet and scribe that the translation being performed was of divine origin.⁷² The existence of the plates still remained crucial to the Restoration, even when a seer stone was placed inside a hat.

However, it is also important to note that even disregarding the Book of Mormon, Joseph could provide (and indeed has provided) translations and restorations of ancient texts *even when he did not have them in his possession*. Examples include Doctrine and Covenants 7 or the visions of Enoch and Moses in the New Translation of the Bible, and these were even translated without a working knowledge in Hebrew, Greek, or Egyptian. Such a translation feat — these were, after all, ancient texts not originally written in English, so "translation" still applies to them — are greater evidence of Joseph Smith's prophetic calling, and could help contextualize how Joseph Smith could provide a translation of the Book of Mormon while using a seer stone in a hat.

Demonstrations and Lies of Translation

Because Neville does not accept all the historical documents, the most untenable of his theories lies at the heart of this book. By redefining how early Saints saw the Urim and Thummim and Joseph Smith's translation projects, Neville attempts to produce a harmonization between his heterodox beliefs and the historical records that he has so far tried to discredit.⁷³ Ironically, despite Neville's claim to purportedly defend Joseph Smith's character and honesty, his Demonstration Hypothesis is rooted in the presupposition that Joseph Smith was an apparent liar who would take advantage of his friends's trust in him throughout their lives.⁷⁴

The Demonstration Hypothesis claims that Joseph Smith, being unable to show the Nephite interpreters to anyone, assuaged his friends's curiosity by reciting Isaiah from memory with his seer stone in a hat:

Joseph conducted demonstrations to satisfy curiosity and explain the gift and power of God. He used a stone in a hat, a process with which his contemporaries were familiar, as

a proxy to demonstrate how he could translate the engravings on the plates by means of the [Urim and Thummim] and then dictate the English words to a scribe.... Joseph simply dictated — from memory — some of the chapters from Isaiah that are found in 2 Nephi today. (I think he recognized Nephi was quoting from Isaiah and he saw this as an opportunity to conduct a demonstration.) ...Because Joseph dictated these passages from memory, he did not *translate* them. This made it possible for Joseph and Oliver to truthfully say that Joseph translated the plates with the [Urim and Thummim] even though others observed him dictating Isaiah with [his seer stone].⁷⁵

The sources that Neville uses to support such an audacious claim, however, are lacking and his hypothesis requires a great deal of special-pleading and blatant misrepresentation. Furthermore, as will be demonstrated with the passages of Isaiah that Neville cites, the proposal that Joseph dictated Isaiah from memory is not consistent with textual evidence in the Book of Mormon and early manuscripts of Isaiah. Neville's proposal is effectively an ill-advised resuscitation of early (and still unfortunately common) anti-Latter-day Saint arguments that have little merit.

Misusing and Misrepresenting Historical Sources

There are three main sources that Neville uses to support his initial claims to a demonstration of the translation.⁷⁶ One of the first sources Neville mentions is unintentionally ironic: William McLellin in 1880 recounted fifty-five reasons to explain why he no longer sustained any branch of the Restoration. Neville only quotes two: "I do not believe Joseph translated the book of Mormon. He only read the translation as it appeared before him. The Lord translated it for him, so says the book [drawing on 2 Nephi 27:20 for support]" and McLellin did not "believe in pretending to translate with Urim and Thummim when only a small Stone was used."⁷⁷ Neville believes that should make everyone reconsider the narrative: "These reasons McLellin listed for not being a [Latter-day Saint] are being taught to new members and the youth of the Church today. That should give everyone pause."

Neville then suggests that it is more "productive (and historically accurate) to articulate a reconciliation of the historical sources" which he will attempt through his Demonstration Hypothesis.⁷⁸ Neville apparently sees no problem, however, with "pretending to translate"

while Joseph really just recited Isaiah from memory, nor does he give the same weight to other statements from McLellin, betraying a double standard. Had Neville been consistent, he would have to claim that it should give us pause that the Church still teaches that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God to youth and recent converts, since McLellin became disillusioned with Joseph and criticized him throughout his life.⁷⁹

Another source used by Neville to reinforce his already weak Demonstration Hypothesis comes from an interview of David Whitmer by Zenos Gurley in 1885. Gurley recorded that Whitmer reported “that Joseph had another stone called seers’ stone, and ‘peep stone,’ is quite certain. This stone was frequently exhibited to different ones and helped to assuage their curiosity; but the Urim and Thummim, never, unless possibly to Oliver Cowdery.”⁸⁰ Neville then concludes from this quotation that Joseph felt he must *demonstrate the translation* with his seer stone, something that Whitmer never claims.⁸¹

Instead, David Whitmer merely related how Joseph was commanded not to show the Nephite interpreters to other individuals, but Joseph was under no such obligation in regard to his seer stone. Hence, without mentioning the translation method, David described how Joseph could show one translation instrument and not the other. It is disingenuous to misrepresent this interview to force it into Neville’s hypothesis.

However, Neville misrepresents another source even further — to the point that he offers direct contradictions to what the source says and what he thinks it should say. Neville cites an interview of David Whitmer published in the *Millennial Star* (and elsewhere in the *Chicago Tribune*) that reads as follows:

In order to give privacy to the proceeding, a blanket, which served as a portiere, was stretched across the family living room to shelter the translators and the plates from the eyes of any who might call at the house while the work was in progress.... In fact, Smith was at no time hidden from his collaborators, and the translation was performed in the presence of not only the persons mentioned [Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer], but of the entire Whitmer household and several of Smith’s relatives besides. The work of translating the tablets consumed about eight months, Smith acting as the seer, and Oliver Cowdery, Smith’s wife, and Christian Whitmer, brother of David, performing the duties of [scribe], in whose handwriting the original manuscript now is. Each time before resuming the work, each present

would kneel in prayer and invoke the Divine blessing on the proceeding. After prayer, Smith would sit on one side of the table, and the [scribes], in turn, as they became tired, on the other. Those present and not actively engaged in the work, seated themselves around the room, and then the work began. After affixing the magical spectacles to his eyes, Smith would take the plates and translate the characters one at a time.⁸²

Neville claims this source must demonstrate how Joseph “dictated in front of a group without consulting the Urim and Thummim or the plates,”⁸³ yet Whitmer says precisely the opposite. There is no mention of the seer stone being placed in a hat, nor are the plates described as being out of the picture. Rather, Whitmer is recorded as saying that both the plates and the Nephite interpreters were used. We might argue that this is a conflation of what the reporter had been told, but Neville’s own account of this source does not hold up. If he cannot fairly tell us what the account baldly states, why ought we to trust his interpretations of other sources?

Neville also draws attention to the blanket that “was stretched across the family living room to shelter the translators and the plates from the eyes of any who might call at the house while the work was in progress” and states that had the plates been covered, “a blanket would not be needed to shield them” from other people’s view.⁸⁴ This is another quick argument that Neville makes without seeming to think through what the source was saying or the historical context behind it. Had Joseph and his scribes ever translated a portion of the Book of Mormon downstairs (an atypical event in the Whitmer home, but still possible on occasion nonetheless), the blanket was expressly used to shield the process from the view of anyone who might visit the Whitmers at that time.⁸⁵

A third issue Neville takes with this source deals closely with his belief that Joseph Smith translated the plates at a slow and scholarly pace of two hours per page.⁸⁶ “Joseph dictated fast enough that his scribes tired and traded off,”⁸⁷ says Neville, claiming that this “also indicates it was a demonstration.”⁸⁸ However, one would be hard-pressed to find support for this claim from the source Neville uses — while the scribes did trade off as they became tired, nothing is said regarding the atypical speed that Joseph Smith displayed when he (as Neville has it) speedily recited Isaiah from memory.

The scribes switching places could be indicative of any number of reasons, most likely sitting and writing for long periods of time. By contrast, under Neville’s two-hours-a-page model, it seems to be less

likely that the scribes could grow tired of writing and would demand a much faster pace in order to translate the rest of the Book of Mormon in time.⁸⁹ This source thus “solves” the problem that Neville has invented (however, it would get tiring and test the patience of the scribes, one would imagine, if they had to wait two hours while Joseph worked out a scholarly translation). Neville has “solved” a problem that he invented through his return to an old argument from critics of the Church — he claims that Joseph didn’t really translate the plates (or, in this case, a portion of them), but only feigned to do so (which is ironic, given the title of his book).

Isaiah, Nephi, and the Masoretic text

As a final note on the Demonstration Hypothesis, it is worth examining the claim that Joseph Smith merely recited portions of Isaiah from memory. Neville begins his discussion on the matter by stating that there are “inexplicable anomalies” between the King James Version (KJV) of Isaiah and 2 Nephi 13–21 that “are typical of memorization errors.”⁹⁰ Neville argues from silence that because there is not a quote of Joseph “*saying* it was a translation,” we are unable to claim whether it is or not.⁹¹ Neville offers no reason to suggest that Joseph ever claimed any part of the Book of Mormon came about by means *other* than a translation, as no source could ever support such a claim, and so he can only hope that a claim made from silence can stand in for the evidence he needs. That is poor historiography. (Joseph likewise never said that the third word of the Book of Mormon was a translation, so it probably wasn’t — we can see how absurd this quickly becomes.)

After briefly discussing some Isaiah variants that differ widely from the KJV and, Neville recognizes, are perhaps produced by a retranslation, he claims that these variants “make more sense as errors in reciting memorized material.”⁹² Unfortunately, Neville appears entirely unwilling to view minor differences in the Isaiah portions of the text as retractions as well, since many of the variants do not dramatically alter the meaning or clarify the text. This is an unfair assumption of what the translation *must* be, and it is important to note how even the most minor of changes could still reflect a retranslation of an ancient Isaiah text. (It would in fact be suspicious if a retranslation matched word-for-word, especially words of little consequence.)

For evidence that Joseph Smith was able to recite Isaiah, Neville errs by twisting more sources to fit his narrative. For example, Neville claims that based on Joseph Smith’s 1838 history and his encounter with the angel

Moroni, “Joseph recognized the scriptures Moroni quoted by chapter and verse — well enough to recognize the changes.” Neville also uses Joseph’s multiple sermons quoting extensively from the Bible to suggest that Joseph Smith could have memorized and recited Isaiah during the translation of the Book of Mormon.⁹³ What Neville fails to consider, however, is how each of these instances were recorded at a much later date — between hearing Moroni in 1824 and writing about it in 1838, Joseph had ample time to discover the references for the scriptures that were repeated to him multiple times by the angel (or, perhaps, Moroni could have told him the specific chapters and verses that he was quoting for Joseph to refer to the next day — a possibility that Neville fails to consider). Similarly, most of Joseph’s recorded sermons date from well into his prophetic career. They were preceded by a long apprenticeship during which he had received multiple revelations, translated an entire book of scripture, and after he had begun retranslating the Bible. These later sermons, then, cannot be used as evidence of Joseph Smith’s familiarity with the Bible years earlier in his life.

Neville similarly uses an anecdotal fallacy by comparing his own memory and experiences to that of Joseph Smith: “I once memorized Ether 12, which has more words than Isaiah 18–19 combined. It’s not that difficult.”⁹⁴ Obviously, citing Neville’s own ability to memorize scripture says *nothing* about history itself, and is a poor argument. It is also a relatively poor analogy, since the Isaiah passages are much longer than Ether 12, contain language that is more complex and opaque, and Neville has much more education and literacy than Joseph in 1829.

Neville even endorses sources written with the intent of destroying the Prophet’s character and the nature of his work. He cites an 1831 article published by a critic of the Church who accused Joseph Smith of reciting the New Testament to an unsuspecting Martin Harris. Neville states that this is another evidence of another “demonstration” (i.e., feigned translation) given to Martin Harris: “[I]f Martin wanted to know how the translation worked ... such a demonstration would be an effective solution — just as it was for the observers in Fayette.”⁹⁵ Elsewhere (and in a connected vein), Neville suggests that Joseph “drew on his mental language bank to render [the Sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi] the way he had memorized [the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew].”⁹⁶

In response to claims that Joseph Smith recited from the Bible by memory (and especially Isaiah), both Royal Skousen and Brant Gardner have pointed out that such a reading of the text is not supported by the manuscript evidence,⁹⁷ which groups Isaiah into larger thematic groups

rather than the somewhat awkward KJV chapter divisions (which were imposed upon the published Book of Mormon almost forty years after Joseph Smith was killed in Carthage). There are enough variants in the text that likewise align with ancient manuscripts that makes coincidence an unlikely explanation for how Joseph Smith's poor memory (considering how Neville believes these variants are memorization errors on Joseph's part) could align so well with ancient sources.⁹⁸

While Neville claims that all of 2 Nephi 13–21 was recited from memory,⁹⁹ he includes three tables in his book that describe various textual variants only in 2 Nephi 17, 19, and 20. Though these tables are flawed (even introducing many variants through his own error that are not attested in any Book of Mormon), he presents them as evidence that 2 Nephi is best understood as containing recitation errors.¹⁰⁰ It is worth considering these variants to see that they more plausibly arose and are best understood *not* from Joseph's faulty memory, but rather as a translation of an ancient text.¹⁰¹

2 Nephi 13:1 Compared with Isaiah 3:1

Regarding the variant in this verse, John Tvedtnes wrote:

The problem found in this verse is known to biblical scholars, who generally consider the text to be corrupt (the New English Bible deletes the problematic passage). [The] KJV speaks of “the stay and the staff” but then goes on to mention the “stay of bread” and the “stay of water.” The word translated “stay” from [the Masoretic Text] is *ms'n*, while its feminine counterpart, *ms'nh*, is translated “staff.” The occurrence of the latter but once in [the Masoretic Text]/KJV destroys a parallel (probably caused by dropping the feminine singular suffix) which is corrected in [the Book of Mormon].¹⁰²

Thus, the verse as presented in the Book of Mormon likely reflects an ancient reading that Joseph would have been unaware of had he simply recited his KJV from memory.

2 Nephi 13:10 Compared with Isaiah 3:10

The only variants in this verse are the preposition with identical meanings: *to* in the KJV and *unto* in the Book of Mormon. John Tvedtnes wrote concerning this variant:

While there is no difference in meaning here, [the Book of Mormon] nevertheless seems to be stressing the preposition. Curiously, there is no preposition at this point in [the Masoretic Text], though one would expect it. It is there,

however, in IQIsa (as a superscript) and the Peshitta (which also has the plural, thus confirming [the Book of Mormon]’s “them” vs. [the] KJV’s “him” which follows). The parallel word, “wicked,” in the same verse, does have the preposition in [the Masoretic Text], and we should expect it to be here also. We thus have evidence of the antiquity of the text from which [the Book of Mormon] came, as compared with [the Masoretic Text].¹⁰³

2 Nephi 13:26 Compared with Isaiah 3:26

John Tvedtnes notes how the Masoretic Text contains a finite verb that is not captured in the KJV, but is reflected in the Book of Mormon, making the Book of Mormon a more literal and a superior translation than the KJV in this instance.¹⁰⁴

2 Nephi 15:30 Compared with Isaiah 5:30

The Book of Mormon reads, “if *they* look,” compared to the KJV “if *one* look.” As Tvedtnes notes, while the Masoretic text contains a singular verb, it can be understood in the collective (i.e. plural) sense. Furthermore, the Septuagint contains a plural verb, matching the Book of Mormon.¹⁰⁵ The Book of Mormon thus reflects a genuine ancient reading.

2 Nephi 16:12 Compared with Isaiah 6:12

John Tvedtnes again notes how the Masoretic Text contains a finite verb that is not captured in the KJV, similar to Isaiah 3:26. This is reflected in the Book of Mormon, making the Book of Mormon a more literal translation than the KJV in this instance.¹⁰⁶

2 Nephi 17:1 Compared with Isaiah 7:1

The 1830 Edition of the Book of Mormon originally reads “Rezin king of Syria,” compared to the KJV’s “Rezin *the* king of Syria.” The Masoretic Text does not include the *heh* prefix before the word “king,” so the Book of Mormon provides a more literal translation of this verse.

Neville mistakenly identifies a second variant that does not exist: he claims the Book of Mormon reads that the kings “went up *towards* Jerusalem,” but that reading is not attested. The Book of Mormon matches the KJV.

2 Nephi 17:11 Compared with Isaiah 7:11

Neville erroneously transcribes the Book of Mormon as “ask either in the depths,” rather than “ask *it*” as it matches the KJV. The Book of Mormon also makes *depths* and *heights* plural, as other translations of the Bible have rendered it to be more readable in English.¹⁰⁷

2 Nephi 17:14 Compared with Isaiah 7:14

The Book of Mormon reads, “*shall* bear a son,” making the verb explicitly in the future tense. This matches the Masoretic Text, from which the KJV was derived. The KJV translators, however, elected not to include the second *shall*.¹⁰⁸

2 Nephi 17:15 Compared with Isaiah 7:15

The Book of Mormon reads, “that he may know to refuse the evil and to choose the good.” This is a perfectly acceptable translation of the verb into English from Hebrew and reflects translator preference.¹⁰⁹

2 Nephi 17:17 Compared with Isaiah 7:17

Neville fails to note the removal of the italicized *even* near the end of the verse. Like other italicized words, it is not original to the Hebrew and a perfectly acceptable translation could not include the word, such as in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

2 Nephi 19:3 Compared with Isaiah 9:3

While the KJV reads “*not* increased the joy,” the Book of Mormon removes the negation. Regarding this difference, Tvedtnes notes:

Jewish scholars of the [Masoretic Text] sometimes realized that a mistake was present in the biblical text. But since it was forbidden to alter the sacred scriptures, they left the error as a *Ketib* (“that which is written”), while adding a footnoted *Qere* (“that which is read”) to be vocalized in reading the text. In this passage, the *Ketib* of [Masoretic Text] has the negative particle, while the *Qere* deletes it.¹¹⁰

Expanding on Tvedtnes’s findings, I would also add that the word that does appear in the Masoretic Text (אָלָיו) is pronounced the same as אֵלָיו, meaning “to him.” This word need not always be translated expressly when context is clear, and it is the sort of error one could reasonably expect a scribe to make when taking oral dictation. Joseph Smith would have been unaware of this fact, and yet he provided a translation more befitting the original reading.

2 Nephi 19:7 Compared with Isaiah 9:7

The Book of Mormon differs from the KJV by its noticeable removal of the possessive pronoun *his*, among other minor changes. However, the Book of Mormon actually provides a more accurate translation of the Masoretic Hebrew (which lacks the prenominal suffix) than the KJV, and such a reading is also supported by other modern translations of the Bible such as the Jewish Publication Society *Tanakh*.

2 Nephi 19:9 Compared with Isaiah 9:9

The Hebrew word for inhabitant can often have a collective meaning. While the KJV and the Book of Mormon differ in whether it is translated as a singular or plural noun, each are acceptable translations, and in the context of this verse, the Book of Mormon provides a better translation.¹¹¹ The Book of Mormon reading is also reflected in the Dead Sea Scrolls.¹¹²

2 Nephi 19:14 Compared with Isaiah 9:14

The Book of Mormon reads, “Therefore *will the Lord* cut off from Israel” whereas the KJV reads “Therefore *the Lord will* cut off from Israel.” These two readings are virtually identical and each are acceptable translations of the Hebrew.

2 Nephi 20:6 Compared with Isaiah 10:6

The Book of Mormon reads, “I will send him against *a* hypocritical nation compared to the KJV’s “*an* hypocritical nation.” These are once again identical phrases, with only a modernized spelling offered by Joseph Smith, typical of a translator for his time.

2 Nephi 20:29 Compared with Isaiah 10:29

The Book of Mormon translates the name “Ramah” instead to *Ramath*. As Tvedtnes notes regarding the changed ending of the name:

[Ramath] would be the more ancient form of the name, with the old feminine *-ath* suffix which, in later (usually even biblical) Hebrew disappeared in the pausal form of the noun. Compare verse 28, where both [the] KJV and [the Book of Mormon] have the name “Aiath,” with the same feminine ending. This is particularly interesting, since it is ‘yt in [the Masoretic Text], but was written as ‘yh’ in IQIsa, with the *-t* suffix apparently added as an afterthought (it is in superscription), following a writing which shows later pronunciation. That is, IQIsa originally wrote it as “Aiah” — as [the Masoretic Text] wrote “Ramah” — and later added a superscript letter to show the older form “Aiath,” possibly copying an older manuscript. This provides evidence that the brass plates are from an older source than [the Masoretic Text].¹¹³

In short, even Neville’s abbreviated tables contain numerous errors. Many could have been avoided had he sufficient competence in Hebrew, or was conversant with the Latter-day Saint literature on these matters, or even copied the text from the Book of Mormon accurately. He is no more accurate when citing scripture than he is other historical documents.

Choosing Sources Unwisely Regarding Joseph's Seer Stone

As already shown, Neville's arguments repeatedly misrepresent his sources. Two especial areas are worth mentioning in detail: Eber D. Howe's 1834 *Mormonism Unveiled* and various publications made by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Mormonism Unveiled

Mormonism Unveiled serves as both a tool to promote Neville's Demonstration Hypothesis and as a weapon against any who claim that Joseph Smith used a seer stone to translate the Book of Mormon. This inconsistent privileging of the first "anti-Mormon" book is especially ironic considering the amount of vitriol that Neville has previously leveled against organizations friendly to the Church's claims, such as Book of Mormon Central, FAIR, the Interpreter Foundation, and even Church publications such as the *Ensign*, stating that they repeat the arguments presented in *Mormonism Unveiled* positively.¹¹⁴

For example, throughout his book Neville tries to portray the seer stone narrative as something concocted by Howe as a baseless attack against Joseph Smith and the Church. In fact, sources relating the use of a seer stone predate Howe's work. Despite his hostility to a key aspect of Howe's screed, Neville sees in *Mormonism Unveiled* the perfect tool to tie his "history" together. He repeatedly claims that Howe set the seer stone and the Nephite interpreters as "explicitly alternative explanations."¹¹⁵ Neville also claims that Howe made a distinction between the "spectacles" or "Urim and Thummim" with Joseph's seer stone (derisively called by critics of the Church, including Howe, a "peep stone").¹¹⁶ By creating two alternative methods of translation, Neville claims that Howe made a straw-man argument that would be easier to dismantle: "[Howe] ridiculed the idea of a 'translation' by means of a seer stone in a hat, whether the instrument was a 'peep stone' or the [Urim and Thummim]."¹¹⁷ Of course, although Neville believes Howe "conflated" the two translation methods, he is unwilling to believe that Joseph's faithful contemporaries could do the same.

Neville, however, is unfair in his use of sources, even to the point of clearly contradicting himself on the same page. Immediately after claiming that Joseph and his contemporaries understood Howe as presenting "two alternative, competing explanations of the translation of the Book of Mormon," he immediately quotes from *Mormonism Unveiled* to show that Howe *didn't* set up the Nephite interpreters and the seer stone as mutually exclusive: "Now, whether the two methods for

translating, one by a pair of stone spectacles ‘set in the rims of a bow,’ and the other by one stone, were provided against accident, we cannot determine — *perhaps they were limited in their appropriate uses* — at all events the plan meets our approbation.”¹¹⁸ While Howe ridiculed both the Nephite interpreters and the seer stone, he was not just mutually exclusive to whether or not Joseph placed either instrument in a hat¹¹⁹ — Howe ridiculed all forms of modern prophetic revelation.¹²⁰ He further confuses the Urim and Thummim/Nephite interpreters with the biblical Urim and Thummim used by the Israelite High Priest, which is a claim that the Book of Mormon never makes, nor do scholars associate the Israelite Urim and Thummim with anything that could appear to a modern viewer to be spectacles.¹²¹

To judge whether or not Neville reads Howe correctly, consider how Joseph and Oliver responded to it. Howe made every effort to claim that the Book of Mormon was flawed, fictitious, and incompatible with the revelations recorded in the Bible.¹²² He further made every effort to ridicule the translation of the Book of Mormon through *any* prophetic means. Joseph Smith and other early saints responded to Howe not by refuting the seer stone translation as Neville claims,¹²³ but they instead linked *all* tools of translation to the Urim and Thummim — sacred tools mentioned in the Bible — to underscore the divinity of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s calling and revelations. As further evidence of their perspective, we recall that Oliver’s letters, which provide a brief history of the Church, are further worded such that it cannot be ascertained exactly whether or not the phrase “Urim and Thummim” originated with Moroni or another individual in our dispensation. This issue was apparently not important enough for him to make this distinction — his priority was defending the gospel.

Howe’s work is so seriously flawed and disparaging of the Church and its founding events that it is astonishing that any Latter-day Saint could claim to support his book today. However, Neville surprisingly supports many claims in *Mormonism Unveiled* that are meant to degrade the character of the Prophet Joseph Smith and cast doubts on the restoration of the gospel.

Neville quotes an affidavit included in *Mormonism Unveiled* meant to deride Joseph’s honesty. In Peter Ingersoll’s affidavit, he claims that Joseph Smith did not correct a toll collector when he paid him the correct price but got half of his money back in the end. When questioned about the money, Ingersoll claims that Joseph told him he handed the collector the correct amount, so he fulfilled his end of the deal. Neville

claims that Ingersoll's statement should be taken to be accurate and is demonstrative of "Joseph's willingness to let others make inferences without correcting them."¹²⁴ However, should such a story be true, it would make Joseph Smith a liar (a passive one at best and a deliberate one at worst), as Ingersoll intended to paint him. Not only was Ingersoll's Joseph dishonest in his payment and knew it to be so, but he also then actively withheld the truth for his own personal gain. Neville, like Ingersoll's Joseph, likewise needs to hide the truth for his own gain in order for the Demonstration Hypothesis to hold water. So, he endorses Ingersoll's slander and uses it as evidence.

Ingersoll continues his affidavit and claims that Joseph confided in him that he had a bag full of sand and tricked his foolish family into thinking that he had found a sacred book. According to Ingersoll, Joseph didn't believe such a book even existed, but he would have his fun with the fools and see what he could profit from it.¹²⁵ Neville claims that this affidavit reflects something that Joseph Smith *actually* said in order to prevent others from trying to steal the plates: "It seems plausible that Joseph would seek to deter [future theft] attempts *by spreading the word that he didn't really have the plates*. A confidante such as Ingersoll would be an effective method to spread such a rumor."¹²⁶ Neville further claims that Joseph lied and had others lie for him to "deflect attention" from the plates.¹²⁷ Whereas Neville first painted Joseph Smith as a sly trickster who withheld the truth, he now paints the prophet as a liar whose shady tactics would inevitably prevent many from ever accepting the Book of Mormon. If Joseph Smith had lied to his contemporaries, such as Ingersoll, why would they ever have any desire to read a book that he knew the "translator" himself had lied about? Why would he or his close friends ever desire to join the Church, having been told by Joseph himself that it was based on a lie? If Neville is correct, then Joseph Smith, even after having been called to restore the Lord's Church, would seemingly be prohibiting others from coming to Christ in a monumental way. I do not believe that any Latter-day Saint in good faith can make such a claim, and following Neville's hypothesis presented here to its logical end offers a disturbing characterization of Joseph Smith.

Honoring and Promoting Mormonism Research Ministry

Another example that shows Neville's willingness to use sources directly opposed to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints if it serves his revisionist account, is his repeated citations to Mormonism Research Ministry's (MRM) online edition of the *Journal of Discourses*. MRM is

a conservative evangelical anti-Latter-day Saint ministry that has long been opposed to the Church and has sought to attack it through a variety of tactics. It is thus troubling to see Neville refers his readers to them at all. However, this problem is compounded by his defense of the website in one of his citations: “[This is] an easy-to-use website that some *perceive* as ‘anti-Mormon’ but is merely offering a resource.”¹²⁸

There is no question whatsoever that MRM is an “anti-Mormon” ministry in intent and content. (MRM doesn’t like being called *anti-Mormon* because they feel it means they’re against Mormons. They do say, however, “we may plead guilty to being against Mormonism, we are not at all against Mormons”¹²⁹ It is clear, however, that their opposition is to the Saints’s faith — which concerns me, but apparently does not concern or persuade Neville.)

It is astonishing that Neville claims in one breath that organizations such as Book of Mormon Central or FAIR (and even a Church magazine) are promoting sources meant to destroy faith when he himself does so openly and brazenly by a group that will tout their own “anti-Mormonism” — until one realizes that the “faith” that Neville seeks to protect is faith in his own “history.” In that case, MRM is welcome, but the *Ensign* might not be, as we will now see.

Targeting Publications of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

While Neville uses *Mormonism Unveiled* with a lack of introspection and lauds Mormonism Research Ministry, he also treats Church publications with an increased amount of vitriol for their mention of the seer stone. Specifically, Neville misrepresents and attacks the *Ensign*, the Church’s official history *Saints*, Church manuals, and even general conference addresses.

Neville disparages two issues of the *Ensign*, and in both cases he attacks an article written by a general authority Seventy. The first is Elder LeGrand R. Curtis, Jr.’s article regarding the translation of the Book of Mormon, published in the January 2020 *Ensign*. Neville has previously eviscerated this piece on one of his many blogs and compared it to *Mormonism Unveiled*, accusing it of publishing “revisionist history.”¹³⁰ (Given that Neville uses *Mormonism Unveiled* when it serves his purposes, how is it consistent for Neville’s readers to regard a comparison to *Mormonism Unveiled* as a fault in this instance, but not his own reliance on Howe’s work?)

In his article, Elder Curtis discusses how Joseph Smith used the Nephite interpreters and his own personal seer stone to translate the Book of Mormon. Neville, however, attempts to misrepresent Curtis's remarks as agreeing with Neville's own Demonstration Hypothesis. Noting Elder Curtis's statement that Joseph Smith used at least one other seer stone, Neville remarks: "The paragraph does not specifically state that Joseph used the 'other seer stone' *for translation*. The vague wording accommodates the idea that Joseph used the 'other seer stone' for other purposes."¹³¹ But, if this article is so accommodating to Neville's views, why the complaints about revisionist history and comparisons to anti-Latter-day Saint literature? He protests too much.

Neville's reading is in clear contradiction to what the article actually states. Elder Curtis is connecting the seer stone to translation through not only the context of the article, but through his footnotes as well — a footnote that refers to a previous article in the *Ensign* that Neville previously discussed in the blog post cited above and heavily criticizes in the next chapter in his book. Based on Neville's previous discussion of this article on his blog and his use of the article's sources, it would appear that Neville is aware that his statement is an unfeasible reading of Elder Curtis's words (that's why they must be criticized and attacked), yet he attempts to justify his Demonstration Hypothesis by twisting this article's words to fit his needs. This is a dishonest use of sources in every regard.

The article that Elder Curtis cites and Neville discusses at length, "Joseph the Seer,"¹³² goes to great lengths to discuss Joseph Smith's use of a seer stone in the translation of the Book of Mormon. Neville states that this article is wrong to state that evidence "shows" Joseph Smith's use of a seer stone because "the 'translation' element was an inference by the witnesses."¹³³ As we saw above, it reflects Neville's own worldview, *not* the historical record — but it again puts the lie to Neville's claim that Curtis's article can really be harmonized with the Demonstration Hypothesis after all.

Neville also attacks *Saints*, the new documentary history of the Church, which he has also done many times on his blog.¹³⁴ I could say much more, but it suffices to note that Neville insinuates that the Church historians who wrote *Saints* plagiarized from David Whitmer's *An Address to All Believers in Christ* because both discuss Joseph's seer stone using similar words.¹³⁵ In reality, both Whitmer and *Saints* share a common source: The Book of Mormon. Neville makes much of *Saints* describing the seer stone "[shining] in the darkness," and Whitmer

says that “in the darkness the spiritual light would shine,” yet Neville fails to recognize that *Saints* is making a clear connection to the Book of Mormon which describes in many instances about stones shining in darkness.¹³⁶ (Neville could benefit from *Saints*’s example — it is not a fault for histories to reflect the concepts found in the sources. The use of a single descriptive word from multiple sources does not constitute “plagiarism.” It is simply good historiography.)

Neville also attacks the Gospel Topics essay discussing the translation of the Book of Mormon as well as the 2020 *Come, Follow Me* manual prepared by the Church for individual and family study of the Book of Mormon. Neville states that because the manual uses both the terms *Urim and Thummim* and *seer stone*, then it contradicts either itself or Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery — a false dichotomy of his own invention.¹³⁷ He also attacks the seer stone’s use in the manual by raising straw men such as, “In what way did God prepare the seer stone” compared to the Nephite interpreters?¹³⁸

Neville’s treatment of the Gospel Topics essay is just as disingenuous, claiming that the essay does not teach what Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery taught.¹³⁹ (Neville even includes two lengthy appendices on this essay attempting to fix its supposed “errors.”)¹⁴⁰ In one of these, Neville states that “there are no historical records” that justify attributing the idea of Joseph using a seer stone to translate originated with Joseph Smith, which as we have seen at length is false. Ironically, Neville also states that this is “pure speculation passed off as fact,” and yet Neville himself will offer pure speculation regarding Oliver Cowdery that he explicitly states as a fact elsewhere in his book, as we will soon see.¹⁴¹ Neville also attempts to weaken the validity of the essay through “guilt by association” because Dan Vogel, a vocal critic of Joseph Smith and the Church, also believes Joseph used his seer stone (although Vogel rejects the idea of a divine translation).¹⁴²

Finally, Neville states that no General Conference address since 2007 has taught that Joseph Smith used the Urim and Thummim to translate the Book of Mormon. Up until then, Neville believes, all leaders of the Church were uncompromising in their rejection of the seer stone, which is demonstrably untrue.¹⁴³ Neville seems to link this date to an interview about the translation with Richard Lyman Bushman that discusses the seer stone, but Neville fails to note that Church leaders have discussed the Urim and Thummim by name since 2007. As recently as 2017, Elder Quentin L. Cook discussed both the Urim and Thummim and the seer stones being used to translate the Book of Mormon.¹⁴⁴ The Urim and

Thummim was also mentioned by name by Elder Lynn G. Robbins of the Seventy in 2016, making Neville's analysis all the weaker.¹⁴⁵

Attacking the Witnesses

In a lengthy portion of his book, Neville seeks to reinterpret the testimonies of various witnesses to the translation to destroy confidence in their testimonies. If he can do this, it is easier to reject the historical records that contradict his Demonstration Hypothesis. Part of this effort uses citations from psychologists regarding the inherent malleability and subjectivity of memory, leading him to claim that it is “natural for people to think their memories are accurate, but it's also unrealistic, except when there are specific details that make a particular memory memorable.”¹⁴⁶ Aside from the tautology of saying something is memorable only if it is memorable, we are apparently to accept that serving as a witness to the translation of new scripture does not count as “memorable.”

Interestingly, in a table that Neville includes to rate the importance and credibility of the witnesses to the translation, Neville ranks Lucy Mack Smith *above* the first-hand witness of the scribe Martin Harris, and further places *Mormonism Unveiled* above Elizabeth Ann Whitmer Cowdery, an eye-witness to the translation.¹⁴⁷ This is evident of another way that Neville attempts to discredit the witnesses — all sources dating after 1870 “appear to have been influenced by William E. McLellin,” according to Neville, but we will see that his reasoning is faulty.¹⁴⁸

Neville claims that the witnesses to the translation were affected by the need to respond to the Solomon Spaulding theory and shaped their testimonies in response. He also discusses at great length the Three Witnesses and Emma Smith's testimonies, attempting to discredit them through a variety of means.¹⁴⁹ Each of Neville's claims will be analyzed against the historical record.

The Witnesses and *Manuscript Found*

Central to Neville's rejection of various statements from the historical record is the infamous *Manuscript Found* by Solomon Spaulding. Long claimed to be a source for the Book of Mormon until *Manuscript Found* was actually found, it is clear from the historical record that Joseph Smith and his contemporaries did see a need to respond to this claim and defend the truth of the translation of the Book of Mormon. However, Neville draws certain conclusions that are not supported by the historical record in this regard.

According to Neville, “The honorable end [of refuting the Spaulding theory] justified the means of altering their testimonies.”¹⁵⁰ Because of this, the witnesses to the Book of Mormon were technically lying and bearing false witness, but they were doing so with a good intention after recognizing that “truth is not always an effective defense.”¹⁵¹ (If Neville endorses this strategy, it makes it all the harder to credit his revisionism, since he too could then justify lying to defend his history’s truth. If this were the case, it could explain much of the egregious misrepresentation that we have seen so far.)

Because of the Solomon Spaulding theory, Neville argues that the seer stone took the center stage in the eastern United States where Harris and Elizabeth Cowdery remained. Furthermore, Neville conflates responding to the Spaulding theory with testifying of the translation with a seer stone. Neville believes that Oliver Cowdery and other leaders of the Church were able to respond to the Spaulding theory “without resorting to [the seer stone].”¹⁵² However, while Oliver Cowdery does explicitly call out the Spaulding theory in his 1846 testimony when seeking readmission to the Church, it does not mean that he does not believe the seer stone was used in the translation, as Neville claims.¹⁵³ It is important to note that nowhere in Oliver’s writings or any leader of the Church’s writings that anyone denounced the seer stone being used as an instrument of translation — indeed, as discussed above, they saw it as a Urim and Thummim and had no issue calling it by that name. They did, however, explicitly reject the Spaulding theory, it being antithetical to the Restoration.

Neville plays fast and loose with his sources to make it appear as though the seer stone is inseparable from the Spaulding theory, ignoring earlier sources discussing a seer stone that predate the conception of the Spaulding theory, thus permitting him to paint the historical record and testimonies of the witnesses as lies told honorably. This is of course not a new approach — his Demonstration Hypothesis already charges Joseph Smith with this claim (whether he intended it or not).

Misrepresenting Oliver Cowdery’s History

The one witness to the translation that Neville actually paints in a positive light (despite his misrepresentation of him) is Oliver Cowdery. Unfortunately, Neville’s treatment of Oliver’s history is flawed and filled with Neville’s unjustifiable assumptions and speculation mislabeled as facts.

Neville elevates Oliver Cowdery's eight letters to near-canonical status throughout his book, based on his belief that Joseph Smith had these letters republished in all but one Church periodical throughout his life.¹⁵⁴ While Neville claims that Joseph Smith expressly had the letters republished, he never cites a source supporting this — because no such source exists. As Stephen Smoot previously pointed out, these letters were never republished under Joseph Smith's direction or given special treatment by the prophet in any way — the letters, in fact, contain factual errors that make it hard to believe Joseph had as large a role in their composition as Neville would apparently like his readers to believe.¹⁵⁵

Neville also asserts without evidence that Oliver Cowdery saw the golden plates in Harmony, Pennsylvania, when Oliver attempted to translate the Book of Mormon, because the translation model that Neville proposes requires that to be the case.¹⁵⁶ However, the historical record stands in stark silence and even opposition to this theory. Oliver testified that an angel had shown him the plates when he became one of the Three Witnesses; nowhere did he ever say that he saw the plates before this time. Furthermore, Joseph Smith himself was relieved when Oliver, David, and Martin had seen the plates. According to Lucy Mack Smith, Joseph exclaimed to her:

[Y]ou do not know how happy I am The Lord has caused the plates to be shown to 3 more besides me who have also seen an angel and will have to testify to the thuth [truth] of what I have said for they know for themselves that I do not go about to deceive the people and I do feel as though I was relieved of a dreadful burden which was almost too much for me to endure, but they will now have to bear a part and it does rejoice my soul that I am not any longer to be entirely alone in the world.¹⁵⁷

This is not someone who had previously shown the plates to Oliver Cowdery. Up until this time, Joseph described himself as “entirely alone” and being weighed down by a “dreadful burden.” Had Oliver seen the plates sooner, these comments regarding the plates would make little sense. It appears evident that Oliver's participation in the translation was different than what Neville proposes.

Another claim that Neville makes is the most ironic. Despite his insistence that Joseph's use of the seer stone is based solely on inappropriate speculation passed off as fact, Neville himself offers this very approach in his own work. Neville claims that when Oliver Cowdery sought readmission to the Church, “Oliver still had in his possession

the brown seer stone Joseph had given him.... The stone was probably in his pocket.”¹⁵⁸ Neville later states in his book that “Oliver possessed Joseph’s brown seer stone.... *It was in his pocket* as he stood and spoke [at Council Bluffs].”¹⁵⁹ This speculation is based on *no* historical evidence whatsoever other than a well-known fact that Oliver was given the seer stone. Neville raises the issue that Oliver didn’t hold up the seer stone to show the congregated Saints, and yet he cannot even verify Oliver then had the stone in his pocket to begin with. In short, Neville presents his speculation and passes it off as fact, only to build a fragile interpretive structure thereon — the same error for which he reproaches faithful historians.

David and Elizabeth Ann Whitmer

The rest of the witnesses fare worse. Their history is not just misrepresented, but treated with vitriol so that their testimonies might be less credible regarding seer stones. David Whitmer, the longest living of the Three Witnesses, never rejoined the Church after his excommunication in 1838, and Neville uses that fact to his advantage in an apparent attempt to dismiss his testimonies regarding the translation of the Book of Mormon.

Neville, for instance, uses David Whitmer’s *An Address to All Believers in Christ* dishonestly, not distinguishing between something that David was testifying about and those about which he allowed his own personal feelings to reflect. In fact, Neville even claims that Whitmer believed that the Latter-day Saints in Utah “were ‘in error’ about various doctrines and practices” immediately after Neville — *not* Whitmer — discussed the Urim and Thummim, and that “denying that Joseph used the [Urim and Thummim] fit his [Whitmer’s] objectives.”¹⁶⁰ Neville also claims that after David was excommunicated, “David turned against Joseph and this may have affected his memory ... David sought to persuade people not to follow the [Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints], but he also wanted people to accept the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon.”¹⁶¹

Neville here — whether intentionally or not — paints the seer stone narrative as a matter of faith for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a whole. If you believe what Joseph taught, you *have* to reject the seer stone; if you believe Joseph could have used a seer stone (like David Whitmer) you are in error. And, because Whitmer believed some other (completely unrelated) doctrines taught by the Church were incorrect, to accept his first-person account of the translation is to

necessarily accept his views about everything else. This is a straw man focused on his readers's emotions — while Neville, ironically, disregards Church teachings on Joseph Smith's translation of the Book of Mormon in order for him to fit the evidence into a contrived box of "truth" to which only he has the key. (This argument reflects Neville's naïve "all or nothing" approach as well.)

Neville further quotes Whitmer extensively regarding what he witnessed during the translation of the Book of Mormon, and then immediately tries to say that because Whitmer didn't say the word "witness," he wasn't actually a witness.¹⁶² This is an argument easily dismissed — the words "I witness" do not automatically make a witness credible, nor does its absence weaken a witness's testimony of any event. This is grasping at straws.

Neville also attacks Elizabeth Ann Whitmer Cowdery — David's sister and Oliver's wife. In addition to claiming that *Mormonism Unveiled* was a more reliable source than Elizabeth's testimony,¹⁶³ he paints her and David's testimonies as influenced by William E. McLellin.¹⁶⁴ Because Elizabeth's affidavit and most of David's testimonies postdate 1870, Neville believes that this discloses a collaboration by all the witnesses to tell the same message, perhaps in league with William E. McLellin. This, however, ignores how the seer stone was discussed and well-known long before 1870, and there is little evidence to suggest that McLellin had any effect on David Whitmer's retellings of his experiences. There is also no evidence that Elizabeth's affidavit was altered with ill intent or shaped to be other than what she claimed it was — an eyewitness, day after day, of Joseph Smith translating the Book of Mormon with his face in his hat with his seer stone.

Assassinating Martin Harris's Character

Neville's treatment of Martin Harris is unfortunately worse than his treatment of any other witness discussed so far. Neville effectively offers a lengthy character assassination of Martin Harris, detailing his time spent apart from the Church, in an effort to undermine his authority as an eyewitness as a scribe to the Book of Mormon.¹⁶⁵ (Just as he endorses *Mormonism Unveiled's* assault on Joseph Smith, Neville simply returns to another well-worn anti-Latter-day Saint attack originally designed to undermine the Book of Mormon. Consistent with his methods, he does *not* use the same argument against his more preferred witness, Oliver Cowdery, who likewise spent time out of the Church.)

Neville's treatment of Martin is similar to his treatment of David — he weaponizes their time outside of the Church to dismiss them wholly, regardless of the fact that they remained true to the Book of Mormon and their witness of it the entire time. In fact, in Neville's table of various accounts of the translation, Martin Harris — a scribe to the Book of Mormon — is awarded a place as a second-hand account of events, a contradiction with the definition of "scribe to the Book of Mormon" which readers are sure to easily notice.¹⁶⁶

In his discussion of Martin's infamous meeting with Charles Anthon, Neville also portrays Martin as unreliable. Martin is made over into an over-enthused man who may have misunderstood Anthon, yet no discussion is given of how Anthon changed his story throughout the years in clearly contradictory terms.¹⁶⁷ Anthon, not Martin, proved to be the inconsistent witness to the event. Martin was also willing to put his money where his mouth was, and undertake significant financial and personal risk to publish the Book of Mormon. Neville's efforts to belittle him and his first-person testimony should discomfort any Latter-day Saint.

Neville changes his story regarding Martin multiple times throughout the chapter dedicated to him. First, Neville attempts to paint Martin's discussion of the seer stone as the effect of a frenzied mind and an after-effect of a weak spell that Neville insinuates Martin never fully recovered from, despite the source saying that Martin remained in excellent health after the incident: "This 'singular event' [when Martin grew weak] suggests a possibly serious health problem. Could it have affected Martin's memory? We'll never know, but it was after this that he claimed Joseph used a seer stone to translate the Book of Mormon."¹⁶⁸

Unfortunately for Neville, such a diagnosis of Martin's health is entirely unfounded and unsupported through the historical evidence. Given that none of his contemporaries thought there was anything wrong with Martin Harris's memory (even into old age), and given how cogent and convincing they found him, it appears evident that this event did *not* affect Martin's memory or mental capacity in any way. Neville saying "we'll never know" whether it did or not is also incorrect — people in the 1800s knew what confusion or dementia looked like, and so the historical record would be almost certain to tell us if there were any clear signs of a mental problem. Such a diagnosis of a long-dead historical figure is complicated further because the patient in question is, in fact, dead — as Ronald Walker stated, "It is difficult enough to pronounce a diagnosis with a patient emitting a stream of consciousness

on the couch without being a biographer separated from a subject by time and distance.”¹⁶⁹ Neville also makes this diagnosis entirely without *any* medical training or background, which underlines his inability to offer any serious argument to Martin’s mental capacities. (This recalls how Neville’s inability in Hebrew compromised his criticisms of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon.)

The intent of this untenable claim becomes clear when Neville retells one of Martin’s interviews where he *doesn’t* mention the seer stone *immediately following this false diagnosis*; he mentions the Urim and Thummim: “By means of Urim and Thummim ‘a pair of large spectacles’ as Mr. Harris termed them, was the translation made.”¹⁷⁰ If Martin was mentally incapacitated long after the weak spell, then why ought we to trust his account given just after it? As always, Neville’s interpretive method shifts with whatever will serve his one-track historical goals.

Neville’s argument is further weakened by earlier accounts — before the purported head injury — of Martin Harris talking about both the seer stone and placing divine instruments in a hat for the translation, which would include the seer stones from the Nephite interpreters themselves: “Joseph had a stone which was dug from the well of Mason Chase.... In this stone he could do so many things, to my knowledge.... The stones [now discussing the stones from the Nephite interpreters] were white, like polished marble, with a few grey streaks. I never dared to look into them by placing them in the hat.”¹⁷¹ Neville conveniently ignores what Martin said *prior* to the “singular event,” because if he were to deal honestly with his sources, he could not here pass Martin off as a man of an addled mind. But Neville must find reason to believe that Martin’s testimonies involving a seer stone are not to be trusted, and so only sources he can use to promote his agenda are used.

Another equally untenable claim that Neville makes is the suggestion that Martin, like David, Elizabeth, and even Emma Smith, was aware of each other’s testimonies and sought to shape his own to align with theirs. Neville even makes mention of William E. McLellin again during this brief discussion, apparently alleging — still without evidence — that McLellin had a greater part to play in shaping how the witnesses testified of the Book of Mormon’s translation.¹⁷²

Even after Martin has been made into a victim of a frenzied mind or conspiracy to shape the narrative in the east, Neville uses a statement that fits his ends uncritically: “Martin’s final statement about the translation [before his death] said nothing about a seer stone.”¹⁷³ If Martin was such a compromised witness, why should this statement give his readers any

sense of hope or solace? Neville continuously tries to make Martin's testimonies at odds with each other based on the terminology that Neville is imposing upon the historical materials, ignoring the fact (as evident in this case especially) that Martin discussed *both* instruments of translation. Unless one has an "all or nothing" view of evidence, just because he doesn't mention both instruments in every testimony does *not* make one account more or less valid than the other — unless you have a historical model that must be proven, come what may.

Neville also mistakenly insinuates that at the same time Martin was speaking about the seer stone, Church leaders such as Orson Pratt responded to this claim not only by *not* mentioning Martin's accounts, but also by not even mentioning the seer stone, using instead only the term "Urim and Thummim."¹⁷⁴ If, however, it was something that they felt they needed to respond to, there is no indication in the historical record that they ever saw accounts of Joseph using a seer stone to translate as troublesome. If they were troubled by it, one would expect a direct denunciation, not the universal silence that bodes poorly for Neville's claims.

One final abuse of Martin's testimonies and Joseph's character is evident in Neville's continued rejection of all accounts relating to a seer stone. As Martin told Edward Stevenson:

Martin Harris related an incident that occurred during the time that he wrote that portion of the translation of the Book of Mormon which he was favored to write direct from the mouth of the Prophet Joseph Smith. He said that the Prophet possessed a seer stone, by which he was enabled to translate as well as from the Urim and Thummim, and for convenience he then used the seer stone.... Martin found a stone very much resembling the one used for translation, and on resuming their labor of translation, Martin put in place the stone that he had found. He said that the Prophet remained silent, unusually and intently gazing in darkness, no traces of the usual sentences appearing. Much surprised, Joseph exclaimed, "Martin! What is the matter? All is as dark as Egypt!" Martin's countenance betrayed him, and the Prophet asked Martin why he had done so. Martin said, to stop the mouths of fools, who had told him that the Prophet had learned those sentences and was merely repeating them, etc.¹⁷⁵

Rather than view this interview in light of the other historical records that affirm that Joseph indeed used both instruments in the

translation of the Book of Mormon, Neville attempts to describe this as another “demonstration” performed by a cunning Joseph to dupe an unsuspecting and overzealous Martin:

If Joseph was using a seer stone he'd had for years, a stone he stared inches away from his nose inside a hat at many times, it is unimaginable that Martin could find a random stone identical enough that Joseph couldn't tell the difference. One wonders also why, if the seer stone was so valuable, Joseph would have left it out in such a manner that Martin could swap it without Joseph knowing.

The way Martin tells the story comes across as Joseph playing along with Martin's test. He sits, silently (as Martin infers he is unable to read anything on the stone). Then he looks up and asks Martin what the problem was.

Why would Joseph ask Martin what the problem was unless he knew what Martin had done?

Joseph surely was aware of Martin's need for reassurance. Under a strict command not to show the plates or interpreters, conducting a demonstration with the seer stone would be a logical solution that, hopefully, would satisfy Martin. The stone swap was a fitting conclusion to the matter.¹⁷⁶

Neville then says that the whole incident may not have even happened: Martin either exaggerated, misremembered, or was confused because of the fall that Neville believes addled his mind, except when he agrees with Neville and the fall's effects are conveniently absent. Or, Neville also proposes, Martin “realized Joseph was merely playing along with him” later in his life.¹⁷⁷ Neville dismissively labels this story a “fun anecdote” and evidence that “Joseph played along with it” to validate Martin's faith — as if faith based on a lie could ever be as strong as faith based on divine truth.¹⁷⁸

There are multiple issues with Neville's analysis. Neville wrongly believes that Joseph should be able to tell one dark-colored stone from another when it is in a hat held up to block all light from entering the hat — this is a faulty assumption, out of place in reality or history. There is no way to describe how similar the other stone could be to Joseph's seer stone, and it is unrealistic to expect Joseph to be able to tell it apart from his own seer stone when there is no light. It is also unrealistic to expect that Joseph wouldn't feel like he could trust the stone in Martin's

presence for a few minutes should he have to leave the room — they were close friends, and Martin had proven himself a priceless friend and support for the work earlier in their friendship. Neville also ignores the verisimilitude of the account — Martin and Joseph were down by the river casting stones. Martin just happened, it seems, to find a stone that looked enough like Joseph’s. It may even have been that which gave him the idea of a test. It’s the sort of detail that rings true.

Neville also mistakes Joseph’s confusion for a sly deception, knowing full well what Martin had done. This is to push his Demonstration Hypothesis yet again. Neville also seeks to make Martin an untrustworthy source by either making him an overzealous exaggerator for attention, a man afflicted with a confused mind, or someone who knew it was a hoax but still told it as if it were true anyway. In the final scenario, Neville paints both Joseph and Martin to be liars, and in all scenarios, Joseph is a liar and Martin is an untrustworthy witness for anything useful. But this conclusion is more congenial to him than the chance that his history might be wrong.

Rejecting Emma Smith’s Testimonies

The final witness that Neville dismisses is Emma Smith. Although she never came to Utah, she never abandoned her faith in her husband’s prophetic calling, nor the Book of Mormon.¹⁷⁹ But because she never came to Utah, Neville plays many of his same tricks he used on David and Martin to reject her witness entirely.

Emma had a rocky relationship with Brigham Young after Joseph was murdered in Carthage, which only adds fuel to Neville’s fire. Emma would deny that Joseph ever taught or practiced polygamy, which led to more division between her and the Saints in Utah. Neville uses some of Brigham Young’s more heated statements regarding Emma uncritically in hopes that her testimonies of the translation can be rejected entirely, failing to relate the context behind those statements. He also does not tell us that no Latter-day Saints ever challenged or disputed her testimony of the translation.¹⁸⁰

Saints in Utah did, however, challenge Emma’s testimonies regarding the practice of plural marriage by Joseph Smith. When Joseph Smith III published “The Last Testimony of Sister Emma”¹⁸¹ shortly after her death, Joseph F. Smith responded to her testimony, suggesting that he did not necessarily believe it reflected honestly the answers she had given regarding plural marriage,¹⁸² which Neville cites to make his case: “Although he focuses on the polygamy question, [Joseph F. Smith]’s

observations about the credibility of the ‘Last Testimony’ and unavailability for questioning [due to her death] apply to the entire document.”¹⁸³ Neville also adds that there “is just no way to tell if the Last Testimony is authentic.”¹⁸⁴

However, his use of Joseph F. Smith in this instance is disingenuous and dishonest. Neville attempts to paint Joseph F. Smith as questioning the entire document — in reality, he specifically cites the questions that he has issue with and that he finds dubious. Joseph F. Smith did not call into question all aspects of the testimony, but it fits Neville’s approach to reject anything that he does not find convenient for his theory, and so he rationalizes his rejection of Emma Smith by portraying Church leaders inaccurately.

Had any Church leader — any at all — seen the seer stone as a challenge to the prophetic calling of Joseph Smith and the doctrine and practices of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we should expect to find at least a single source Neville can cite. However, in the cases he has presented thus far, we are met with silence in the historical record, because Church leaders simply did not find Emma or Martin’s testimonies regarding the seer stone problematic.

Neville, however, has a simplistic method when using historical sources — either all or none. This is evident especially when he complains that “Those [Latter-day Saint] historians who *accept* Emma’s ‘Last Testimony’ to support [the seer stone method of translation] also *reject* her testimony denying polygamy.”¹⁸⁵ This method of historiography is exceptionally poor, although unsurprising given his use of sources throughout his book. Acceptance of one fact does not mean that you must accept the entire work. By Neville’s own logic, because *Mormonism Unveiled* talks about the Nephite interpreters or “spectacles,” does that mean that Neville accepts the entire book as authoritative? Unfortunately, this is a poor example — Neville has, after all, already shown that he accepts affidavits in *Mormonism Unveiled* regarding Joseph’s dishonest character.¹⁸⁶ The point, however, stands — a witness may be convincing and accurate on one point, and unconvincing and mistaken on another. The job of the historian is to weigh all the evidence, and make these judgments. The key, however, is that the same standard and approach should be used with all the evidence — and it is on that issue that Neville recurrently fails so spectacularly.

In another strange turn, Neville describes how Emma is quoted as follows:

[O]ne time while he was translating he stopped suddenly, pale as a sheet, and said, “Emma, did Jerusalem have walls around it?” When I answered “Yes,” he replied “Oh! I was afraid I had been deceived.” He had such limited knowledge of history at that time that he did not even know that Jerusalem was surrounded by walls.¹⁸⁷

This presents a detail that Neville has to redispense of given his arguments regarding Joseph Smith’s literacy and knowledge with the Bible he presents in *Infinite Goodness*.¹⁸⁸ So, Neville instead rejects this source altogether, unable or unwilling to change his theories when presented with historical facts.

Neville’s response to this claim, however, reflects his tendency to cherry-pick scriptures to make his point:

Does the Bible say there were walls around Jerusalem when Lehi left Jerusalem? No. The Book of Mormon refers to “the first year of the reign of Zedekiah.” This is in 2 Kings 24. There’s nothing in the Bible about walls around Jerusalem in that year. Asking about walls around Jerusalem when Lehi left seems like a reasonable question to me.... I think it’s a stretch to say Joseph didn’t know the Bible because he didn’t know if there were walls around Jerusalem when Lehi left the city.¹⁸⁹

Neville cites two scriptures that postdate Lehi’s departure as well to show that Joseph may have simply thought that the walls were built after Lehi and his family departed. Unfortunately, while Neville claims that the Bible does not mention walls around Jerusalem circa 600 BC, the Bible makes it clear that Jerusalem had walls much earlier than Zedekiah’s reign. Jerusalem was ruled by the Jebusites, who managed to hold Jerusalem centuries after Joshua’s conquest and into David’s reign — a feat nothing short of miraculous had the city *not* been a walled or otherwise inaccessible area. The city is also called a “fort” and a “castle” (see 2 Samuel 5:9, 1 Chronicles 11:5) because of its defensive nature at the time of David’s conquest. During Solomon’s reign, Solomon is *expressly* said to have built (or expanded) “the wall of Jerusalem” at the same time as he was building the temple (1 Kings 3:1, cf. 1 Kings 9:15).

References to Jerusalem’s walls continue throughout the narrative of the Old Testament preceding the fall of the city to Babylon. Hezekiah defends against the Assyrian army by rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem and building additional walls for defense, as recorded in 2 Chronicles 32:5. In 2 Chronicles 33:14, Manasseh is said to have “built

a wall without the city of David ... and raised it up a very great height,” expanding upon the work of his father. Second Chronicles 36:19 also describes the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem and the destruction of its walls *in the same chapter* as Zedekiah becoming king, implying that those walls were still maintained during the beginning of Zedekiah’s reign. This is further evident when one reads the Book of Jeremiah, who was a contemporary of Lehi according to the Book of Mormon (see 1 Nephi 7:14).¹⁹⁰ Jeremiah explicitly mentions the “walls ... round about” Jerusalem in Jeremiah 1:15 and again refers to them in Jeremiah 5:10, as well as describing the impending conquest where Jerusalem would be besieged “without the walls” (Jeremiah 21:4). Anyone with a knowledge of the Old Testament to the level that Neville claims Joseph must have had would be familiar with the walls surrounding Jerusalem. Joseph Smith, according to Lucy Mack Smith, had never read through the Bible in full,¹⁹¹ and there is little reason to believe that both Lucy and Emma would lie on this matter. Emma’s anecdote further strengthens the divine translation of the Book of Mormon, but it weakens Neville’s theory, and so it must go.

Another interesting jab at Emma Smith comes in Neville’s analysis of Joseph and Emma’s writings. He claims that “Emma’s own literacy was not exemplary, based on her 1839 two-page letter that is mostly one long continuous sentence.”¹⁹² Neville raises this point in an attempt to challenge her claim that Joseph Smith was relatively unlearned at the time he translated the Book of Mormon.¹⁹³ However, Neville uncritically cites Joseph Smith’s 1832 history in full in an attempt to show how Jonathan Edwards influenced Joseph Smith, and Joseph’s 1832 history is “mostly one long continuous sentence.” If Neville will level that complaint against Emma’s literacy, it must stand against Joseph’s as well, but consistent principles of interpretation and historiography only apply when he needs them to.

Other Testators Misrepresented

A final area worth mentioning derives from Neville’s misrepresentation of other sources. Lucy Mack Smith, who was a second-hand witness to the translation, is listed by Neville as a first-hand witness.¹⁹⁴ Neville also fails to take into account Lucy’s late retellings of certain events, treating them as though her retelling was contemporaneous.¹⁹⁵

Neville also cites various sections of the Doctrine and Covenants as evidence for his case. He especially makes use of the section headings that refer to the Urim and Thummim, attributing them to Joseph Smith’s

authorship.¹⁹⁶ However, these sections are modern study aids that were not written by Joseph Smith, and so it is a misuse of his sources to state that they were. If he knows this, it represents dishonesty. If he does not, it speaks to his lack of competence in even basic historical matters.

Conclusion

The ideas presented in this book are troubling. Neville's Demonstration Hypothesis makes Joseph Smith a liar. He systematically tries to dismiss all sources and witnesses to the translation of the Book of Mormon that do not support his thesis, and Neville accepts and even defends the use of sources that stand in opposition to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Neville's claim that Joseph Smith recited Isaiah from memory is unsustainable in light of the Hebrew text and other manuscripts that have been transmitted to us today. Sources regarding Joseph Smith's seer stone are treated dishonestly, and Neville misrepresents the Church and its leaders's position regarding the translation of the Book of Mormon.

This book is not a book to turn to if you need answers to questions or want to study the history of the Church in greater detail. Neville's work is something that comes almost entirely out of his own imagination, punctuated by a few brief but fleeting contacts with actual evidence. More often than not, that evidence is deformed in the collision, only to have the story veer off into fantasy again.

History, on the other hand, is written through the careful analysis of documents in their context and against a wide array of evidence. Neville has not done his due diligence, and his theses reflect either a poor understanding and treatment of history or a ruthless willingness to distort the facts. This book, in short, should not be found in any serious Latter-day Saint's library, save as a cautionary tale.

[Author's Note: I would like to thank Mike Parker and Gregory L. Smith for reviewing an earlier draft of this review and offering helpful suggestions, as well as my other family and friends (especially my father) who helped edit and offer clarifying remarks. I would also like to thank the pseudonymous "Peter Pan" who offered encouragement as I wrote this review.]

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Endnotes

- 1 Jonathan Neville, *A Man That Can Translate: Joseph Smith and the Nephite Interpreters* (Salt Lake City: Digital Legends Press, 2020), 21.
- 2 Ibid., vii–viii.
- 3 Ibid., 22.
- 4 Ibid., 22, cf. *ibid.*, 17, emphasis in original. Throughout Neville's two books, he constantly refers to Joseph's seer stone as a "peep stone," a derogatory term used primarily by critics of the Church.
- 5 Ibid., 56, cf. *ibid.*, 345, emphasis in original.
- 6 E.g. *ibid.*, vii.
- 7 Benjamin Winchester, "Testimony of Benjamin Winchester," interview by W. L. Crowe, November 27, 1900, quoted in Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 87. Spelling in context.
- 8 David Whitmer, quoted in "The Book of Mormon," *Chicago Daily Tribune* XLV (December 17, 1885), 3, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Chicago_Daily_Tribune,_December_17,_1885. Though the detail of the seer stone being given by the angel is certainly a mistake on the reporter's part, this interview is evidence that the term *Urim and Thummim* had a more widespread use than Neville accepts.
- 9 Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, MO: published by the author, 1887), 6, <https://archive.org/details/addresstoallbeli00whit/page/n9/mode/2up>.
- 10 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 130.
- 11 Wilford Woodruff, "Journal (January 1, 1841 – December 31, 1842)," 122, <https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/documents/a9d1a2cb-18fe-445d-a5e4-350caaf63442/page/18514a77-9924-4236-8538-7c348353ff09>. Spelling in context.

- 12 Brigham Young, “History of Brigham Young,” *Millennial Star* 26 (20 February 1864): 118–19, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id/27235>.
- 13 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 336.
- 14 This was probably the white seer stone that Joseph had found near Lake Erie, as Oliver Cowdery was then in possession of the brown seer stone that he had found digging a well for Willard Chase. For a discussion on the white seer stone in light of these events, see Michael Hubbard MacKay and Nicholas J. Frederick, *Joseph Smith’s Seer Stones* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2016), 77–84.
- 15 Heber C. Kimball, *Journal of Discourses* (13 August 1853), 2:111. Paraphrased in Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 336.
- 16 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 336–37.
- 17 In a journal entry dated 18 May 1888, Wilford Woodruff wrote, “Before leaving [Manti] I consecrated upon the altar [of the temple] the seer stone that Joseph Smith found by revelation some 30 feet under the earth [and] carried by him throughout life.” Wilford Woodruff, *Journal*, 18 May 1888, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/8eee1db1-409c-43b2-ac32-1d344bc519c7/0/157>. Incidentally, Joseph Fielding Smith once wrote about this event in terms of the Urim and Thummim: “The statement has been made that the Urim and Thummim was on the altar in the Manti Temple when the building was dedicated. *The Urim and Thummim so spoken of, however, was the seer stone which was in the possession of the Prophet Joseph Smith in early days.*” Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1956), 2:225, emphasis added. Although Joseph Fielding Smith did not believe Joseph Smith used a seer stone to translate the Book of Mormon and would erroneously describe eyewitness statements as “hearsay,” this instance may show that he did view the white seer stone as a type of Urim and Thummim, albeit an inferior one. Heartlanders have often quoted Joseph Fielding Smith uncritically for stating his opinion that Joseph did not use a seer stone, using an appeal to authority, while (as will be shown) rejecting the teachings of modern apostles regarding the seer stone. See, for instance, Rian Nelson, “Nephite Interpreters,” *Book of Mormon Evidence* (blog), 30 December 2020, <https://bookofmormonevidence.org/the-truth-about-seer->

stones/. A quick search of Neville's many blogs shows that he similarly quotes Joseph Fielding Smith uncritically regarding the location of Cumorah, falling into many of the same logical traps described above. Joseph Fielding Smith was extremely faithful to the gospel and a wonderful apostle, but using his (or any other Church leader's) opinions uncritically is dangerous.

- 18 For a brief account of the brown seer stone from Joseph Smith's life and onward, see MacKay and Frederick, *Joseph Smith's Seer Stones*, 66–77.
- 19 Michael Hubbard Mackay and Nicholas J. Frederick have included an in-depth appendix in their book *Joseph Smith's Seer Stones* that is an appendix of references to the Urim and Thummim or Joseph Smith's other seer stones. David Whitmer includes many statements referring to the Urim and Thummim being taken from Joseph alone. See MacKay and Frederick, *Joseph Smith's Seer Stones*, 181–232.
- 20 Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses* (9 December 1887), 19:216, emphasis added.
- 21 Of the three Church leaders mentioned, Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball were the only two of the original apostles who never rebelled against the Prophet Joseph Smith, underscoring their devotion to the gospel. Wilford Woodruff was later called to be an apostle but likewise never rebelled against the Prophet and remained true to the restored gospel throughout his life.
- 22 Another example of Neville attempting to force his definition upon leaders of the Church can be seen in Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 87–88, where Neville attempts to paint Wilford Woodruff and Franklin D. Richards's use of the term Urim and Thummim as part of a “long history of Church leaders defending and reiterating what Joseph and Oliver claimed” but this observation forces his definition onto virtually every leader of the Church who has ever discussed the Urim and Thummim. This is bad practice and poor historiography on Neville's part, as I have demonstrated in the preceding paragraphs.
- 23 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 108.
- 24 See “Minutes, 25–26 October 1831,” p. 10, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-25-26-october-1831/2>.

- 25 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 22.
- 26 Ibid., 27–28, emphasis added. When Neville quotes from Ether 3:24, the entire quoted portion is in bold.
- 27 Wilford Woodruff, “Wilford Woodruff Journals, 1833–1898,” 158, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/8eee1db1-409c-43b2-ac32-1d344bc519c7/0/157>.
- 28 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 49, 342.
- 29 Ibid., 49–50, 366. Ironically, Neville is apparently willing to allow the term “director” to apply to a seer stone that we know nothing about but is unwilling to allow the term to apply to a seer stone that was verifiably in possession of and used by the Prophet Joseph Smith.
- 30 William W. McLellin, *The Ensign of Liberty of the Church of Christ* 1 (March 1847): 2, quoted in Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 137, emphasis added
- 31 Elizabeth Ann Whitmer Cowdery, quoted in William W. McLellin, “My Dear Friends,” manuscript, February 1870, Community of Christ Library and Archives, quoted in Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 294. Although this affidavit was given to William McLellin, who at that time had become antagonistic to the restored gospel, there is little reason to doubt that it is fraudulent in any way. More on Neville’s treatment of Elizabeth Cowdery’s testimony will be discussed below.
- 32 See Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 342, 365–66.
- 33 Stan Spencer, “Reflections of *Urim*: Hebrew Poetry Sheds Light on the Directors-Interpreters Mystery,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 14 (2015): 188.
- 34 Ibid., 194.
- 35 Ibid., 195.
- 36 Ibid., 187–88.
- 37 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 365.
- 38 Comments on Spencer, “Reflections of *Urim*,” <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/comments-page/?id=6774>.

- 39 Elder Russell M. Nelson, “A Treasured Testament,” *Ensign* 23, no. 7 (July 1993), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1993/07/a-treasured-testament>.
- 40 President Russell M. Nelson, “The Book of Mormon Is Tangible Evidence of the Restoration,” video, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 3:30, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/media/video/2020-05-0290-the-book-of-mormon-is-tangible-evidence-of-the-restoration>. As President Nelson said these words, he demonstrated the position that Joseph would take by placing his own face in the hat. Neville has previously tried to claim that this video is evidence of President Nelson demonstrating the translation akin to Neville’s Demonstration Hypothesis, but such an interpretation is a dishonest gloss on President Nelson’s words. I have previously responded to this claim in Spencer Kraus, “A Response to Strange Theories Regarding the Translation of the Book of Mormon,” *Latter-day Light and Truth* (blog), 15 May 2021, <https://latterdaylightandtruth.blogspot.com/2021/05/a-response-to-strange-theories.html>.
- 41 Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf, 2016, “*Not long ago, the Church published photos and background information on seer stones.*” Facebook, 21 June 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/dieterf.uchtdorf/photo/s/a.120510344786318/400421293461887/>.
- 42 Elder D. Todd Christofferson, “*Small and Simple Means,*” *North America Northeast Member Devotional* (Worcester, MA), 20 October 2019, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/multimedia/file/Elder-D.-Todd-Christofferson---“Small-and-Simple-Means”-Transcript.pdf>.
- 43 Elder Quentin L. Cook, “Foundations of Faith,” *Ensign* 47, no. 5 (May 2017), 129, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2017/05/sunday-afternoon-session/foundations-of-faith>.
- 44 George Q. Cannon, *The Life of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1888), 56–57, <https://archive.org/details/lifeofjosephsmit01cann/mode/2up>.
- 45 See Jonathan Neville, “More on the fake Moroni/Mary Whitmer Story,” *Saints Review* (blog), 12 October 2020, <http://saintsreview.blogspot.com/2020/10/more-on-fake-moronimary-whitmer-story.html>. This claim originated because Elder Gong referred to Mary Whitmer being shown the gold plates by the angel Moroni,

who Neville has long claimed should be understood as Nephi, one of the Three Nephites (although his claim that Nephi was one of the Three Nephites is nowhere backed up in the Book of Mormon, which instead keeps their names a sacred secret). I have responded to Neville's claim previously in Spencer Kraus, "Another Response to Jonathan Neville, Critic of the Church," *Latter-day Light and Truth* (blog), 9 December 2020, <https://latterdaylightandtruth.blogspot.com/2020/12/another-response-to-jonathan-neville.html>.

- 46 I recognize that I am not qualified to get involved in the discussion of the purported use of Early Modern English, and instead refer the reader to Skousen's own work on the matter. A brief introduction to some of Skousen's findings can be found here: Royal Skousen, "The Language of the Original Text of the Book of Mormon," *Brigham Young University Studies* 57, no. 3 (2018).
- 47 See, for instance, Jonathan Neville, "Skousen/Carmack and Early Modern English Translation (EMET)," *Moroni's America* (blog), 29 May 2020, <http://www.moronisamerica.com/skousen-carmack-and-early-modern-english-theory-emet/>.
- 48 See Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 22–23, 190–91.
- 49 Jonathan Neville, *Infinite Goodness: Joseph Smith, Jonathan Edwards, and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Digital Legends Press, 2021), 80. I will treat this book in more detail in a forthcoming review.
- 50 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 189–90. Although Neville claims that the use of the Urim and Thummim made the translation inspired, Neville fails to fully explain what its role was in the translation of the Book of Mormon should Joseph have translated the record in a scholarly manner.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 29. Throughout Neville's book, he uses the acronyms "U&T" for "Urim and Thummim" and "SITH" for "stone-in-the-hat." I have respectfully expanded these acronyms throughout this review to faithfully describe the translation methods in a more complete context.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 107.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 237.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 10.

- 55 Ibid., 237.
- 56 Ibid., 118. One verse that highlights the issues of writing on plates is Alma 24:19, with Mormon apparently correcting himself after saying that the Anti-Nephi-Lehies “buried their weapons of peace” to instead read “or they buried their weapons of war, for peace.” While it is entirely possible that the error was introduced as Joseph translated the plates, Daniel H. Ludlow recognizes that this verse may reflect the challenges Mormon faced as he wrote on metal plates and would be unable to correct what he had previously written. See Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 210.
- 57 Ibid., 200.
- 58 Ibid., 200.
- 59 Ibid., 195.
- 60 Ibid., 331.
- 61 Ibid., 355.
- 62 Oliver Cowdery, quoted in Abram W. Benton, “Mormonites,” *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate* 2 (9 April 1831): 120, quoted in Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 263–64.
- 63 In Neville’s repeated insistence that “translating characters isn’t merely reading words off a stone in a hat,” Neville finds himself in a position not too dissimilar from critics of the Church who, like Sterling McMurrin, are so entrenched in their own presuppositions that they adamantly declare, “You don’t get books from angels and translate them by miracles; it’s just that simple.” Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 153 and Blake Ostler, “An Interview with Sterling McMurrin,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17, no.1 (1984): 25. The primary difference is, of course, that Neville still believes the Book of Mormon to be ancient scripture, but the a priori argument presented by both McMurrin and Neville is grounded in similar logic — because they reject at least one method of translation, they of necessity must reject all of the evidence to the contrary of their belief, no matter how great the evidence might be.
- 64 David Whitmer, in “Questions asked of David Whitmer,” 1885, Zenos Gurley Collection, Church History Library, quoted in Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 269.

- 65 David Whitmer, quoted in E. C. Briggs, “Letter to the Editor,” *Saints’ Herald* 31 (21 June 1884): 396–97, quoted in Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 297.
- 66 While some have speculated that Joseph Smith may have used scholarly means to attempt a translation of the Book of Abraham by using the Kirtland Egyptian Papers, Kerry Muhlestein has convincingly argued that such scholarly efforts were not connected to the revealed translation of the Book of Abraham by comparing the hieroglyphics that are found in the *Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language* to those found on the manuscripts to the Book of Abraham. See Kerry Muhlestein, “Egyptian Papers and the Translation of the Book of Abraham: What Careful Applications of the Evidence Can and Cannot Tell Us” (presentation, FAIR Conference, August 2020), <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/conference/2020-fairmormon-conference>. He presents a similar argument in Kerry Muhlestein, *Let’s Talk About the Book of Abraham* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2022), 52–66. Jeff Lindsay has also provided an excellent response in regards to Joseph Smith’s translation of the Book of Abraham to some who have made this claim (i.e. that Joseph offered a scholarly translation of the Egyptian hieroglyphics), pointing out that Joseph Smith is remembered as having immediately begun the work of translation by John Riggs, who stated that “the morning following” Joseph Smith’s meeting with Michael Chandler, “Joseph came with the leaves he had translated.” See Jeff Lindsay, “Book of Abraham Polemics: Dan Vogel’s Broad Critique of the Defense of the Book of Abraham,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 47 (2021): 107–50, with the Riggs quote from *Tullidge’s Quarterly Magazine* 3, no. 3 (July 1984): 283, as cited by Terryl Givens and Brian Hauglid, *The Pearl of Greatest Price: Mormonism’s Most Controversial Scripture* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2019), 120.
- 67 See, for instance Brant Gardner, *Translating the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011); Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith’s Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015); Matthew B. Brown, *Plates of Gold: The Book of Mormon Comes Forth* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2003); and MacKay and Frederick, *Joseph Smith’s Seer Stones*, 45–64.

- 68 Cook, "Foundations of Faith." Although presented as a question, footnote 5 of his talk makes it clear that he believes that this is the case, citing Orson Pratt's observations of the translation of the New Testament that I cite below.
- 69 "Two Days' Meeting at Brigham City, June 27 and 28, 1874," *Millennial Star*, 11 August 1874, 498–99, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id/13925>.
- 70 Philo Dibble, "Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith," *Juvenile Instructor* 27, no. 10 (May 15, 1892): 304, <https://archive.org/details/juvenileinstruct2710geor/page/304/mode/2up>.
- 71 Similar arguments have been made regarding the Joseph Smith papyri serving as a catalyst for revelation. It is possible that the constant presence of the plates served as a catalyst for the translation to occur during the instances when Joseph Smith used the seer stone in the hat. See Muhlestein, *Let's Talk About the Book of Abraham*, 52–66.
- 72 For a further discussion on the plates' presence during the translation of the Book of Mormon, see Book of Mormon Central, "Why Were the Plates Present During the Translation of the Book of Mormon? (Mosiah 1:6)," *KnowWhy* 366 (September 21, 2017), <https://knowwhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowwhy/why-were-the-plates-present-during-the-translation-of-the-book-of-mormon>.
- 73 More will be discussed below on Neville's attempts to discredit the Book of Mormon witnesses and others who were familiar with the translation process below.
- 74 More on this will likewise be said in the discussion of Neville's treatment of the witnesses and *Mormonism Unveiled*.
- 75 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 45, 79–80.
- 76 Neville will further argue that other sources relating to the seer stone from the witnesses to the translation reflect a demonstration on various occasions, but those will be discussed below in his treatment of the witnesses to the translation, and his reading of a demonstration into those texts is largely dependent on how he reads the sources mentioned here.
- 77 William E. McLellin, "Some of the Reasons Why I Am Not a Mormon," in *The William E. McLellin Papers, 1854–1880*, ed. Stan

Larson and Samuel J. Passey (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2007), 380. Spelling in context.

- 78 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, viii. Throughout Neville's book, published after President Nelson requested we reemphasize the name of the Church, he uses the terms "Mormon" or "LDS" to refer to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Neville mentions that these terms are "currently disfavored" by the Church but common in historical documents, but still uses them himself. *Ibid.*, x. Because President Nelson has requested that we use the full name of the Church and no longer call ourselves by these titles, I have replaced Neville's use of them with the corresponding accurate titles in my citations, but have left historical documents unaltered.
- 79 An example of McLellin's opinions regarding Joseph Smith and the Church can be found here: Larry C. Porter, "William E. McLellan's Testimony of the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (1970): 485–87.
- 80 David Whitmer, quoted in Zenos H. Gurley, "The Book of Mormon," *Autumn Leaves* 5 (1892), quoted in Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 24.
- 81 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 24.
- 82 Edward Stevenson, "The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon," *Millennial Star* 48 (12 July 1886): 436–38, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id/28246/rec/48>. While the translation at the Whitmers' farm did not take eight months, David appears to be recounting how long the translation took after Joseph received the plates from Moroni following the loss of the manuscript entrusted to Martin Harris.
- 83 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 108.
- 84 *Ibid.*, 94.
- 85 Given the strict command Joseph had received to keep the plates safe, it would be little wonder should he have requested that some sort of veil be hung as further protection of a sacred process of translation from those who might want to ridicule him. However, because other accounts suggest that no curtain was used and the plates were out of sight, the atypical nature of this event should be read in light of other sources that refer to a more common and typical day of translation.

- 86 See above for my response to this claim.
- 87 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 108.
- 88 Ibid., 94.
- 89 See *ibid.*, 50.
- 90 Ibid., 89.
- 91 Ibid., 94–95, emphasis in original.
- 92 Ibid., 109–11.
- 93 Ibid., 113.
- 94 Ibid.
- 95 Ibid., 114.
- 96 Ibid., 219.
- 97 See Royal Skousen, “Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations in the Book of Mormon,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1998), 378–79 and Gardner, *Translating the Book of Mormon*, 303–307.
- 98 Several scholars have pointed out how the Book of Mormon’s use of Isaiah is best understood as a translation of an ancient text, with many features that cannot be easily described as memorization errors. See, in addition to my discussion below on some of Neville’s selected verses, Paul Y. Hoskisson, “Was Joseph Smith Smarter Than the Average Fourth Year Hebrew Student? Finding a Restoration-Significant Hebraism in Book of Mormon Isaiah,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 17 (2016): 151–58. Jeff Lindsay also offers excellent insights regarding other selections of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon, particularly Isaiah 49:13 (1 Nephi 21:13), offering evidence that the inclusion of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon is fitting for a divine translation. See Jeff Lindsay, “‘Arise from the Dust’: Insights from Dust-Related Themes in the Book of Mormon (Part 2: Enthronement, Resurrection, and Other Ancient Motifs from the ‘Voice from the Dust’),” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 22 (2016): 255–64.
- 99 In contrast to Neville’s views regarding Nephi’s use of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon, see David Rolph Seely, “Nephi’s Use of Isaiah 2–14 in 2 Nephi 12–30,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, 151–70

for a discussion on how Nephi purposefully used and adapted the themes of Isaiah for his own people, thus arguing for their inclusion on the plates.

- 100 It appears that Neville also ignores previous variants of Isaiah as printed in earlier editions of the Book of Mormon and is entirely reliant on the 2013 edition published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He also failed to note several variants in the Isaiah text or created his own variants through bad typography and review of his work. I have included in my list some of Neville’s mistakes, but have found his tables of Isaiah variants to be unreliable and the product of bad compiling and bad editing. Neville’s tables are found in Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 112–13, 306–308, although a much more rigorous and useful guide to Isaiah variants can be found in Ann N. Madsen and Shon D. Hopkin, *Opening Isaiah: A Harmony* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2018).
- 101 I plan on addressing all of the Isaiah quotations in a similar manner in a future paper. In order to allow this paper to focus more on Neville’s hypotheses, I will limit my discussion to a handful of verses while demonstrating how his unfamiliarity with Hebrew has led him to unfounded claims in order to defend his idiosyncratic theories. For these comparisons, I am comparing the English translations of Isaiah with the Masoretic text (or referring to previous findings). While we cannot know what the brass plates of Isaiah looked like, the Masoretic text can provide a good starting point in determining the merits of the Isaiah translation found in 2 Nephi and the rest of the Book of Mormon.
- 102 John A. Tvedtnes, “Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon,” in *Isaiah and the Prophets: Inspired Voices from the Old Testament*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1984), 170, <https://rsc.byu.edu/isaiah-prophets/isaiah-variants-book-mormon>. For clarity, in further citations to this book, I have expanded his abbreviations for items such as the Masoretic Text and Book of Mormon.
- 103 Ibid., 171.
- 104 Ibid.
- 105 Ibid.

106 Ibid.

107 See, for instance, the New International Version (NIV): “Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.”

108 Other modern translations, such as the NRSV and New English Translation (NET), include a variation of the phrase “shall bear a son” as found in the Book of Mormon.

109 This reading is reflected in modern English translations as well, such as the Lexham English Bible (LEB).

110 Tvedtnes, “Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon,” 171–72.

111 See *ibid.*, 172.

112 IQIsa^a, cited in Madsen and Hopkin, *Opening Isaiah*, 34.

113 Tvedtnes, “Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon,” 172.

114 In a 2 January 2020 blog post, Neville accused Elder LeGrand R. Curtis of publishing “revisionist Church history” and included a doctored photo with the title page to *Mormonism Unveiled* on the front of the Ensign. See Jonathan Neville, “January 2020 Ensign,” *Book of Mormon Central America* (blog), 2 January 2020. <http://www.bookofmormoncentralamerica.com/2020/01/january-2020-ensign.html>. Neville has also claimed that these organizations “create a revisionist history to support the E.D. Howe version of events [as told in *Mormonism Unveiled*].” Jonathan Neville, “Witnesses Movie Review,” *Moroni’s America* (blog), 25 June 2021, <http://www.moronisamerica.com/witnesses-movie-review/>.

115 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 47. Cf. *ibid.*, 23, 56; Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 314.

116 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 54–55.

117 Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 319.

118 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 56–57; Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville, OH: published by the author, 1834), 77, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Mormonism_Unveiled_Or_A_Faithful_Account/KXJNAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1, emphasis added.

119 Howe continues his assessment, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 77, by asking what use the plates or Nephite interpreters had if they were not used in the way he imagines they must be used

- throughout the entire translation, a perspective shared by Neville and perhaps the source of his antipathy toward the seer stone. For responses to these concerns, see Neal Rappleye, “‘Idle and Slothful Strange Stories’: Book of Mormon Origins and the Historical Record,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 20 (2016): 21–37, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/idle-and-slothful-strange-stories-book-of-mormon-origins-and-the-historical-record/>; MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 86–89; and Daniel C. Peterson, “Tangible Restoration: The Witnesses and What They Experienced,” (presentation, 2006 FairMormon Conference, Sandy, UT), 31–33, <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/2006-Daniel-Peterson.pdf>.
- 120 In Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 128, Howe ridicules both the seer stone and “silver spectacles” as revelatory devices with no mention of Joseph placing either in a hat. Earlier in *ibid.*, 30, Howe says (in regard to the Book of Mormon), “We consider, and believe, the prophecies and doctrines of the Bible of divine origin, and any thing which contravenes its precepts, or its revelations, will be regarded by us as false.” Spelling in context. Clearly, Howe did not just ridicule a translation method including a seer stone; he ridiculed the entire Restoration, seer stone notwithstanding.
- 121 Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 18.
- 122 See *ibid.*, 30.
- 123 See Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 57–58.
- 124 *Ibid.*, 82; Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 233–37.
- 125 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 83; Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 235–36.
- 126 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 83, emphasis added.
- 127 *Ibid.*, 85.
- 128 *Ibid.*, 373n393, emphasis added.
- 129 Eric Johnson, “Is Mormonism Research Ministry ‘Anti-Mormon?’” Mormonism Research Ministry (website), <https://www.mrm.org/is-mrm-anti-mormon>.
- 130 For the article in question, see Elder LeGrand R. Curtis, Jr., “The Translation of the Book of Mormon: A Marvel and a Wonder,” *Ensign* 50, no. 1 (January 2020), 38–41, <https://www>.

churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2020/01/the-translation-of-the-book-of-mormon-a-marvel-and-a-wonder. For Neville's previous treatment of this article, see Neville, "January 2020 Ensign." It is worth noting that Elder Curtis is currently serving as the Assistant Church Historian.

- 131 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 38–39.
- 132 See Richard E. Turley Jr., Robin S. Jensen, Mark Ashurst-McGee, "Joseph the Seer," *Ensign* 45, no. 10 (October 2015), 49–55, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2015/10/joseph-the-seer>. It is worth noting that at the time this article was written, Richard E. Turley was the Assistant Church Historian and Robin S. Jensen and Mark Ashurst-McGee were Church historians as well.
- 133 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 50n61.
- 134 See, for instance, Jonathan Neville, "Hoffman, Church history, Saints, and President Oaks" *Moroni's America* (blog), 5 March 2021, <http://www.moronisamerica.com/hoffman-church-history-saints-and-president-oaks/>.
- 135 *Ibid.*, 42–43.
- 136 See Alma 37:21 and Ether 3:4, each discussing special stones prepared by the Lord that would shine by his power. Other instances of "darkness unto light" are explicitly connected to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon within the text itself.
- 137 See Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 41–42.
- 138 See *ibid.*, 42.
- 139 See *ibid.*, 43–44.
- 140 See Appendices 3 and 4 in *ibid.*, 321–62.
- 141 *Ibid.*, 334.
- 142 See *ibid.*, 339–40.
- 143 I have discussed how Russell M. Nelson, George Q. Cannon, Dieter F. Uchtdorf, and D. Todd Christofferson have referred to the seer stone above and will revisit the topic below in Neville's treatment of the witnesses.
- 144 See Cook, "Foundations of Faith."

- 145 See Lynn G. Robbins, “The Righteous Judge,” *Ensign* 46, no. 11 (November 2016), 97, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2016/11/sunday-morning-session/the-righteous-judge>.
- 146 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 48–49.
- 147 *Ibid.*, 239.
- 148 *Ibid.*, 264.
- 149 Oliver Cowdery is the one exception, but Neville seriously misrepresents Oliver’s history to force his own worldview and ideas onto Oliver.
- 150 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 61.
- 151 *Ibid.*, 65.
- 152 *Ibid.*, 63.
- 153 See *ibid.*, 52. Neville claims that because Oliver used the term Urim and Thummim, he was expressly refuting the seer stone in the hat — and yet despite Oliver’s willingness to call out problems when he saw them by name, such as the Spaulding theory, Oliver never once said “Joseph did not use his seer stone.”
- 154 See *ibid.*, 53–54; cf. *ibid.*, 86.
- 155 See Stephen O. Smoot, “Seven Reasons Why Letter VII Is Not a Heartlander Silver Bullet,” *Ploni Almoni: A Latter-day Saint Blog* (blog), 26 July 2018, <https://www.plonialmonimormon.com/2018/07/seven-reasons-why-letter-vii-is-not-a-heartlander-silver-bullet.html>.
- 156 See Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 24–26, 92.
- 157 “Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, Page [1], bk. 9,” p. [11], bk. 8, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1844-1845/103>. Spelling in context.
- 158 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 26. Cf. Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 318.
- 159 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 363, emphasis added.
- 160 *Ibid.*, 43.
- 161 *Ibid.*, 122.
- 162 See *ibid.*, 128.

- 163 See *ibid.*, 239, as discussed above.
- 164 See *ibid.*, 243.
- 165 In *ibid.*, 163–67, Neville effectively offers a brief expose regarding Martin Harris, quoting multiple Saints in England. At the time Martin was on a mission affiliated with James Strang
- 166 See *ibid.*, 266–73.
- 167 See *ibid.*, 167–68.
- 168 *Ibid.*, 174. This “singular event” is told in Edward Stevenson, “One of the Three Witnesses,” *Millennial Star* 44 (30 Jan 1882):79, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id/5774>.
- 169 Ronald W. Walker, “The Challenge and Craft of Mormon Biography,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 22, no.2 (Spring 1982): 189.
- 170 Martin Harris, quoted in “A Witness to the Book of Mormon,” *Des Moines Iowa State Register*, 28 August 1870, spelling in context.
- 171 See Martin Harris, quoted in “Mormonism — No. II,” *Tiffany's Monthly* (June 1859): 163–70, quoted in MacKay and Frederick, *Joseph Smith's Seer Stones*, 193.
- 172 See Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 174–75.
- 173 *Ibid.*, 181.
- 174 See *ibid.*, 179–80.
- 175 Edward Stevenson, “One of the Three Witnesses,” *Millennial Star* 44 (6 February 1882):86–87, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id/5774>.
- 176 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 178.
- 177 *Ibid.*, 179.
- 178 *Ibid.*, 180–81.
- 179 Emma Smith would bear testimony to her son, Joseph III, shortly before her death regarding both Joseph's prophetic calling and the Book of Mormon's translation. I will discuss below how Neville dismisses Emma's testimony on superficial grounds.
- 180 See *ibid.*, 152–53.
- 181 See “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saint's Herald* 26 (1 October 1879).

- 182 See Joseph F. Smith, "Joseph the Seer's Plural Marriages," *Deseret News* 38 (22 October 1879):12, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2663429>.
- 183 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 147–48; cf. 162, 372.
- 184 *Ibid.*, 161.
- 185 *Ibid.*, 146.
- 186 See my discussion above relating to Neville's use of sources hostile to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
- 187 Edmund C. Briggs, "A Visit to Nauvoo in 1856," *Journal of History* 9 (October 1916): 454.
- 188 I respond to these claims in the second part of my review, forthcoming.
- 189 Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 151.
- 190 While this scripture is found in the small plates' record and would have been translated at the end of Joseph Smith's translating efforts, it is likely that Jeremiah was mentioned in the lost manuscript as well because of his prominence in Jerusalem at the time. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that Joseph Smith had likely learned early on that Lehi was a contemporary with Jeremiah. Had Joseph been intimately familiar with Jeremiah's writings he would have recognized that there was a wall surrounding Jerusalem before reading about it in the Book of Mormon translation.
- 191 See "Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, Page [1], bk. 4," p. [1], bk. 4, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1844-1845/43>.
- 192 Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 175.
- 193 More on Joseph's literary abilities will be explored in the second part of my review.
- 194 See Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 245.
- 195 See *ibid.*, 245–50.
- 196 *Ibid.*, 249–50.