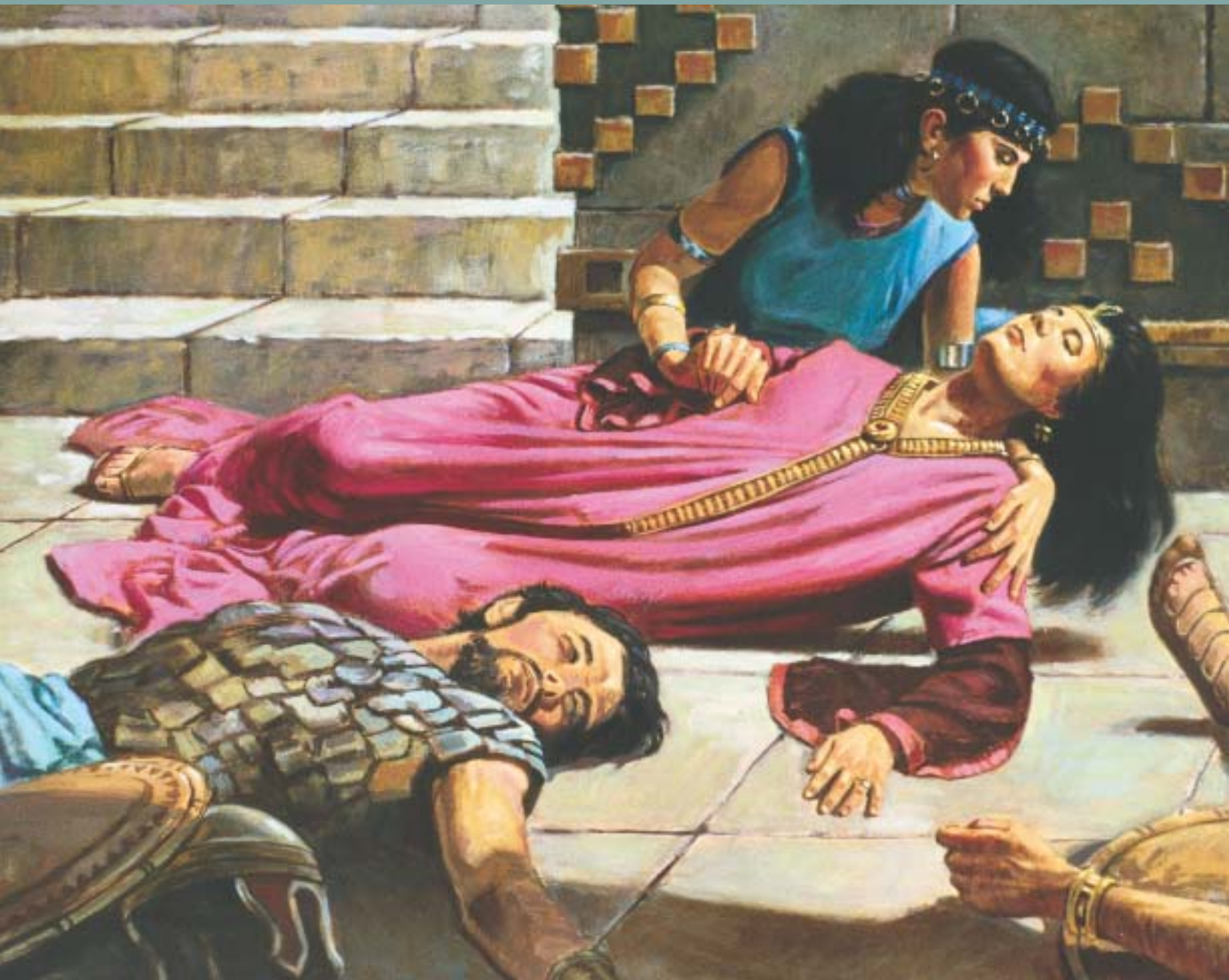
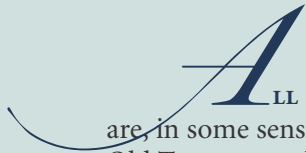


Women IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

INCLUSION, EXCLUSION, & INTERPRETATION

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ALL INTERPRETATIONS OF SCRIPTURE are, in some sense, a dialogue with the text, or, as Old Testament scholar Phyllis Bird notes, “an exercise in cross-cultural understanding.” This exercise may be aided by knowing the writers’ and compilers’ world-views and by avoiding interpretations that “distort the ancient writer’s understanding or intention, whether to a ‘negative’ or ‘positive’ effect.”¹ Our understanding of scriptural texts, as with other “dialogues,” is affected by our expectations, experiences, and purposes for reading those texts.

In reference to the Bible, Sharon Ringe cautions:

Although the careful reader attempts to distinguish between the voice of the ancient author and his or her own concerns as a modern interpreter, this distinction is never absolute. The place in history, culture, and society occupied by the reader inevitably influences what she or he can perceive in any text and what questions seem important to ask about the text and its context.²

During the past 30 years, the most important questions for some readers have been what Katharine Bartlett calls “the woman question,” actually a set of questions about the status and treatment of women in law and in cultural practices.³ As a result of interdisciplinary interest in women’s issues, the amount of research about women in biblical times and texts has grown exponentially. During this same period of time, the amount of published research on the text and cultures of the Book of Mormon has increased significantly, although few feminist explorations of Latter-day Saint texts have been published.

A common assumption among some contemporary readers is that most women’s stories have been excluded from scripture, that women have been “silenced” by male scribes, editors, and commentators.⁴ So far as we know, virtually all of the texts we have “about the lives of women in the ancient world . . . have been written by men.”⁵ Ruth and Esther are the only book-length narratives in the Bible focusing on females. “No other female characters in the Hebrew canon dominate the narrative scene for more than one chapter, not even the extraordinary character of Deborah.”⁶ The stories that have been included are frequently interpreted “as a primary source and legitimator of patriarchal religion.” Feminist biblical scholars have extended this view to every branch of their theology but consider it to have “particular bearing on the question of biblical authority,” or the truth of

the scriptural testimony concerning the nature of humanity and the nature of God.⁷

“Modern feminist critique of the Bible as male-centered and male-dominated has elicited widely differing historiographical and hermeneutical responses, ranging from denial of the fact or intent of female subordination to rejection of the authority of the Scriptures as fundamentally and irredeemably sexist.”⁸ The relative absence of women and women’s voices in scriptural texts, including the Book of Mormon, has raised questions for some LDS readers about issues of equality and the meaning and authority that these texts can or should have for us today.

Questions about women’s status in scripture are not trivial and cannot be answered by recommending that we focus instead on the “big questions,” such as the nature of God, the problem of evil, or the meaning of life.⁹ For a significant number of readers, questions about the treatment of women anciently and currently *are* the “big questions.”¹⁰ The answers or lack thereof will be predictive of the value some readers place on the scripture text and, to some extent, on the religious institutions that consider those texts canonical. Because these questions matter to so many, we ought to seriously consider them. That is the purpose of this paper. Asking questions about women’s roles, ancient and modern, as we read the scriptures can bring new insights, even when the texts are incomplete and women’s stories abbreviated. In addition, an examination of the Book of Mormon in light of its stated purpose and provenance suggests that the presence or absence of women in the text is not determinative of its authority as a witness of Jesus Christ nor, therefore, of its relevance to women as well as to men.

The Context of the Contemporary “Woman Question”

While significant interest in women’s issues now permeates our society as a whole, spanning the political and social spectrum, it is an overtly feminist¹¹ approach to the Bible that has had perhaps the most impact in the academy and in publishing about women in scripture.¹² Women have not always been “self-conscious about reading [the Bible] *as* women,” but many now consider it important to do so.¹³

Some scholars have argued that the Bible “might be patriarchal and androcentric without necessarily being misogynistic.”¹⁴ But for religiously committed feminists, there is a persistent tension between their

belief that the Bible is the word of God, and therefore must support the equality of male and female, and their view that the Bible is a primary source and sanction of women's oppression and cannot, therefore, be divine revelation—or worse, that it reveals a God unworthy of reverence.¹⁵ Some women have jettisoned much of the religious traditions in which they were reared and are seeking religious forms they feel honor women and the experiences of women.¹⁶

Latter-day Saint feminist commentaries are, by comparison, few and generally less caustic.¹⁷ LDS doctrines and the statements of prophets affirming the worth of women as individuals and in their various roles in the family, church, and community have also consistently stressed the value of women¹⁸ and have turned aside some harsh interpretations of women in scripture, most notably that of Eve and the treatment of Lot's daughters.¹⁹

However, LDS women have challenges that some of their sisters of other faiths do not have. In addition to the problems presented by biblical texts, latter-day scripture contains far fewer stories of individual women than those in either the Old or the New Testament. Carol Lynn Pearson argues that the dearth of women mentioned in the Book of Mormon is a “strong anti-female statement made by Nephite society,” in whose record we see a few “spiritually dependent [women]” and a plethora of faceless, nameless women listed as part of their husband's possessions.²⁰ Francine Bennion has attributed to Nephite culture what might be seen as a fairly common set of assumed characteristics about ancient societies:

The power of men over women in Book of Mormon societies produced abuses, as does any hierarchy not based on virtue alone. Even when good men did not abuse their power but protected women and were tender with them, men did have the power. Men made the decisions. Men did the ruling, the judging, and the prophesying. Men did the preaching, and addressed it to “my brethren.” Men defined the history and recorded it.

Women were primarily accessories to men, dependent upon them not only for survival but also for identity, which is presented as a matter of relationship to a man, usefulness to a man, or use by men.²¹

When the harshest of LDS commentaries criticize the Book of Mormon's treatment of women,

they do so from a perspective that might be called the “hermeneutic of suspicion,”²² wherein there is an adversarial or distrustful approach to a text coupled with an examination less of the text's content per se than of the author's presumed self-interest.²³ A few writers are engaged in reconstructing LDS theology in ways they believe are more amenable to feminist principles of equality.²⁴ Most of current Book of Mormon commentary targeting an LDS audience reflects what might be called the hermeneutic of charity or consent,²⁵ in which Book of Mormon stories, for the most part, are universalized to include females in one way or another²⁶ in an interpretation intended to conform to church teachings.²⁷ Unfortunately, this truce may not last. Marie Cornwall has predicted that “the next generation of [LDS] readers will find the scriptures' lack of attention to women, particularly in the Book of Mormon, to be disquieting.”²⁸

Of course, Book of Mormon scholarship has challenges that differ from those in biblical studies: we have a relatively short history of research on the Book of Mormon, there are few scholars focused on Book of Mormon research, no ancient texts of the Book of Mormon are available to us for textual criticism,²⁹ and the Book of Mormon text abridges the spiritual histories of peoples across a span of more than a thousand years, with the linguistic, sociological, and archaeological evidence of those peoples considered sparse at best.³⁰ Further, those with a particular interest in the history of women appear to have even less to work with, given the small number of individual women named in the Book of Mormon.

Probing the Portrayal of Women in the Book of Mormon

A consideration of the portrayal of women in the Book of Mormon text would likely include these questions: Why are there so few women in the Book of Mormon? How many women should we expect to find in an ancient text, and what should we expect them to be doing? Why are there so few individual women named in the text? Why aren't women more prominent in the Book of Mormon narratives? Why didn't God command the prophets to include more women in the record? Why were specific stories included in the Book of Mormon and others apparently excluded? Is a writer advancing his own self-interest by excluding stories about women?

Obviously that list is not exhaustive, and neither are the proposed answers that follow. But asking such questions invites discussion that may help us better understand the text as well as ourselves.

Why are there so few women in the Book of Mormon?

The short answer is we don't know. This question may reflect a reader's honest concern, or it may be a polite way of asserting that women do not have enough power, visibility, or prestige in the church today—an issue unlikely to be resolved by examining ancient cultures and their texts. The question may also reflect concern for children: can our youth, most of whom are aware of disparities between the sexes, find Christ in the Book of Mormon if they cannot find women there? Obviously, it is not counting the number of women, nor assessing their prominence in the text that is our real task; rather, we must decide how we are to *interpret* the apparent absence of women in the Book of Mormon. For some readers, merely stating that there are few women in the Book of Mormon is a way of concluding that women were unimportant to the writers of the book or even that women are unimportant in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints today.

But are such questions that are ultimately grounded in the feminism of our own day truly legitimate when voiced as though their assumptions and unchallenged presuppositions were a valid basis for a substantive criticism of the text? “If [the woman questions] are not the agenda of the authors or even of their principal audiences, should—or even *can*—they be pursued?”³¹ asks Sharon Ringe in reference to biblical texts. As with many ideological³² approaches, Pearson's feminist approach is predictive of her conclusion: “The valuable things I have gleaned from the Book of Mormon have been bought at the expense of putting my femaleness aside and ignoring what is said of it. And while I am more than my femaleness, my femaleness is a profound and highly valued part of me, and to have to put it away when I pick up the book violates my spirit.”³³

To experience scripture as demeaning to women is an unhappy outcome, to say the least. If we are as skillful at questioning ourselves as we think we are at questioning a text, or at least as able to recognize our own biases as we are able to recognize the potential biases of the authors, our

reading of ancient scripture will be less distorted than it might otherwise be. In other words, if we are to engage in a dialogue with the text, “reader bias” must be examined as closely as is “writer bias.” Kevin and Shauna Christensen argue that paying attention to narrator perspective and cultural context, and incorporating recent research about text and context, allows a more satisfactory reading than Pearson's, for it reveals “that women play a broader role in the Book of Mormon narratives than appears to the casual reader.”³⁴ With these considerations and caveats in mind, we may proceed to question the text, and to question ourselves as we read the Book of Mormon.

Reader Expectations and Observations

What do we expect to find?

We likely have at least two sets of expectations. One set is related to the structure or genre(s) of the text: we don't look for poetry in a phone book, nor do we expect that spiritual insights will readily flow from census records. The standard works include the following genres: historical accounts, genealogies, dialogue, narratives or stories (about individuals, tribes, and nations), sermons and expositions of doctrine, letters, accounts of visions, poetry, parables, proverbs, prayers, and songs.³⁵ These types of texts may conform to certain literary or other conventions, some of which may initially be unfamiliar to us.³⁶ In addition, the Old Testament, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants contain sections outlining religious practices and ordinances or describing the organization and administration of the church.

Coupled with our expectations about the form of the text, we have expectations about content. The title page of the Book of Mormon leads us to anticipate an abridged record about a remnant of the house of Israel and an abridged record from the people of Ether. The abridgments were written to a specific audience of Lamanites, Jews, and Gentiles for purposes specific to each subset of readers: to show the remnant what God did for their fathers and to disclose the covenants that prevent them from being cast off forever, and to convince both Jews and Gentiles that Jesus is the Christ of all nations. The nature of the book's stated audience and purpose suggests that what is included was chosen to meet those criteria, rather than to give, for example, a detailed account of the history, economy, or

family life of those ancient inhabitants, as interesting as those topics might be.

In addition to expectations about the form and content of a text, our culture has expectations about gender relations. Equal treatment for women is a contemporary cultural value,³⁷ and we are suspicious of arrangements that smack of a “separate but equal” justification. Equality is usually measured not only in terms of educational and economic opportunities but also in terms of participation, representation, power, and prestige. The asymmetrical relations in the family and in society that we see in so many scripture texts looks not only foreign but frequently offensive to our contemporary taste.

We should acknowledge at the outset that every age has its issues, concerns, and fads that may be brought to the scripture texts as the expectations of successive generations. Paula Fredriksen argues that when we read accounts of Christ’s life, for example, though we tend to invoke the historical Jesus, we too often see a “(thinly disguised) version of ourselves. . . . The Jesus of the 1960s was a freedom fighter. And the most recent Jesus of the modern academy battles not ancient demons [such as devils who possess people], but our own [demons]—sexism, nationalism, social hierarchy.”³⁸ Such an approach may be a way of likening the scriptures to ourselves, a recycling of old issues renamed in current jargon, or a reflection of changing social values.

While contemporary social issues are significant, we must not assume that we are the generation to finally get everything right. We must consider the possibilities that some of our cherished values (e.g., individual autonomy) may have their downside and that earlier values or practices (e.g., arranged marriages) may not have been wholly invidious. It may be that reading the Book of Mormon is less like reading the editorial page of the Sunday paper than it is like the experience of temple ordinances: an invitation to separate ourselves from the world and join with others in a common purpose before the Lord. Suspending our enculturated expectations may allow us to read the Book of Mormon not so much in terms of our self-defined, biologically defined, or culturally defined *differences* of sex, race, or class, but rather in terms of our commonality as offspring of deity, as sinners in need of the Savior.

How many women should we expect to find in an ancient text, and what should we expect them to be doing?

There are, of course, ancient texts with fairly extensive stories about individual females, particularly female deities. Women also appear in ancient legal codes, contracts, and other legal documents. Extant ancient texts contain examples of females whose social status varies widely: goddess, queen, princess, high priestess, daughter, wife, mother, sister, aunt, grandmother, merchant, hierdoule,³⁹ prostitute, and slave. While most women were likely occupied much of the time by responsibilities within the family and household, they likely also had additional opportunities or responsibilities according to marital and social status (e.g., according to whether they lived in a rural or urban area, and whether they lived within a tribal system or under a centralized monarchy).⁴⁰ Bird’s caution about women in the Bible seems applicable to women in the Book of Mormon:

A common status or lifestyle cannot be assumed for the woman of an Early Iron Age pioneer settlement, the wife of a wealthy merchant or large landowner in Samaria or Jerusalem, the daughter of an indebted eighth-century peasant, the foreign wife of a returned exile, a priest’s daughter, queen mother, palace servant, childless widow, or prostitute. Nor can one expect a common portrait from narrative compositions, proverbial sentences, prophetic oracles, and legal stipulations.⁴¹

In the Book of Mormon we do see women occupying a wide range of social roles and performing a variety of activities.⁴² In addition to their family roles as daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers, apparently some of them made yarns, textiles, and clothing (see Mosiah 10:5; Helaman 6:13). Some armed themselves for battle (see Alma 54:12; 55:17; Ether 15:15); some rebelled, murmured (see 1 Nephi 7:6; 16:35),⁴³ complained, mourned, received comfort, testified, rejoiced, and gave thanks (see 1 Nephi 5:1–9); some pleaded for Nephi’s life (see 1 Nephi 7:19); and some danced or sang (see 1 Nephi 18:9; Mosiah 20:1, 2, 5; Ether 8:10–11). Some were conspirators in murder and overthrowing a kingdom (see Ether 8); some were martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ (see Alma 14:8–12); some were deceived by an anti-Christ (see Alma 30:18); some were polygamous wives or



In this panel of the Dura-Europos synagogue (third century A.D.), Abraham, Isaac on the altar, and Sarah in her tent turn to the accepting hand of God. Dura-Europos Collection, Yale University Art Gallery.

concubines (see Mosiah 11; Ether 10:5); some were prisoners of war who were fed human flesh or were raped, tortured, and eaten by their captors (see Moroni 9:7–10); some were harlots (see Mosiah 12:29; Alma 39:3); some were queens (see Alma 19; 47:32); some were slaves or servants (see Alma 19:15–16; 50:30);⁴⁴ some were witches (see 3 Nephi 21:16; Mormon 1:19; 2:10);⁴⁵ and some were “married” by capture and later pleaded for the lives of their husbands/captors (see Mosiah 20:1, 2, 5; 23:31–34).

Although we have no indication that women authored religious texts in Book of Mormon subcultures, it is apparent that women were converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ, participated in ordinances, bore testimony, and taught their children the gospel.⁴⁶ It appears that the transmission of the gospel was primarily by word of mouth and that the peoples of the Book of Mormon probably did not have access to vast quantities of texts in the way that we do. Writing and reading reformed Egyptian may have become a specialized task. But it appears that whether or not women could themselves read the sacred records, they knew the content, including knowledge of secret combinations.⁴⁷

There are no direct references to goddesses, although some of the peoples in the Book of Mormon at times were practicing idol worship, including human sacrifice (see Mormon 4:14). So it is possible, but not certain, that goddesses were represented or associated with some of the idols.⁴⁸ Nor do we find direct references to priestesses in the Book of

Mormon.⁴⁹ Just as the secular record is truncated or absent, the record of religious activities is also partial in the Book of Mormon, as it is in the Bible. Phyllis Bird argues that “where women appear at all in the standard [biblical texts], it is in incidental references, as exceptional figures, or in limited discussion of practices or customs relating especially to women. . . . But it can no longer be viewed as an adequate portrait of Israelite religion.”⁵⁰ Noting that the incomplete material gives a skewed view of women’s participation, Bird points out that women appeared to have a supporting role that did not require clergy status, such as spinning or weaving temple hangings, preparing meals or foods used in sacrificial ritual, and cleaning temple vessels, furniture, or quarters. She also suggests that women perhaps enjoyed more public roles as members of a royal or priestly household.⁵¹ It may be the case that women in Book of Mormon cultures served in similar ways. While we do not have that record, neither do we have the extensive outline of the Mosaic law of sacrifice or of ritual impurity found in the Bible, nor as much information about the religious practices of those who rejected the gospel.⁵²

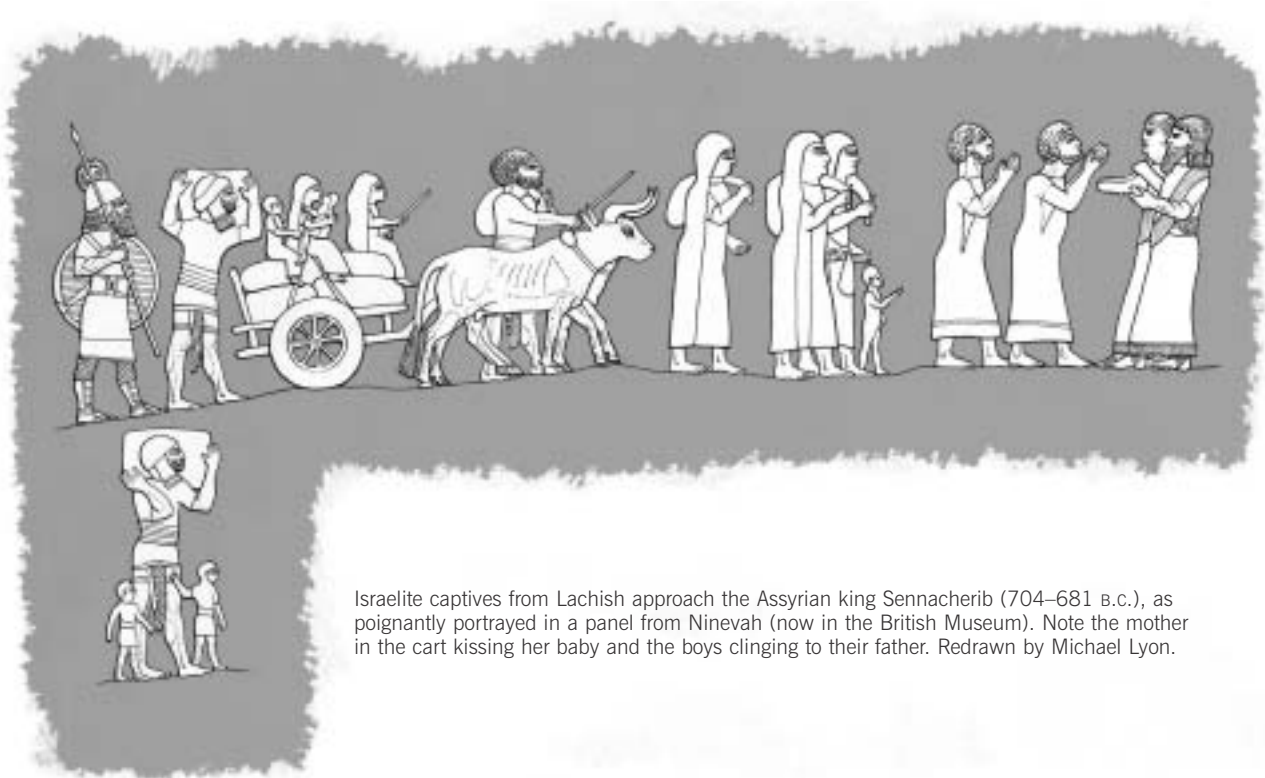
Ze’ev Falk contended that in order to understand the status of women in biblical law, one must see it as a reaction “against the worship of female goddesses and the role of women in fertility cults.”⁵³ It may be that the peoples of the Book of Mormon were also tempted to worship goddesses and engage in the practices of fertility cults, although it seems that the abridger and compiler included relatively little about competing religious practices.⁵⁴ If it was the case that women were fully engaged in the tasks of family and household, then it is not surprising that the record of Mormon contains relatively little about those roles, given its focus on the spiritual state of the people as a whole.

Why are there so few individual women named in the text?

It is fair to ask why certain things are included in a text and others may have been excluded from it.⁵⁵ For example, we may ask why a person in a narrative might be named or not named. In the Book of Mormon only six women are named (Sariah, Mary, Eve, Sarah, Abish, and Isabel), and three of those are from the Bible. The inclusion of a name may provide meaning if the name is descriptive or symbolic in some sense (e.g., Adam meaning “[hu]man”), or

simply may make it easier to refer to an individual (e.g., referring to Sariah by name avoids repeating a phrase such as “the mother of Nephi” or “the wife of Lehi”). Such constructions as those in the latter example seem awkward to us, but depending on how the character or glyph was written, and on the social or linguistic conventions of the culture, they actually may have been more natural to the writer or may have demonstrated respect for the individual woman or her family.⁵⁶ Certainly such constructions

linked to a family or a city was to have no identity, to be an outcast. Merely being named, however, gives relatively little information about the individual. Although there are two dozen genealogical lists in the Old Testament, two in the New Testament, and one each in Alma 10:2–3, Ether 1, and Moses 6, we know little or nothing about most of those named persons in most of those lists.⁵⁸ Because the Book of Mormon contains fewer genealogies than does the Bible, we need not conclude that familial



Israelite captives from Lachish approach the Assyrian king Sennacherib (704–681 b.c.), as poignantly portrayed in a panel from Ninevah (now in the British Museum). Note the mother in the cart kissing her baby and the boys clinging to their father. Redrawn by Michael Lyon.

are numerous and are not confined to references to women (e.g., brother of Jared, sons of Ishmael, priests of Noah). Given the difficulty of etching the plates, it is reasonable to suppose that this may have been the easiest or most efficient way of designating those individuals or groups.

While naming has had tremendous importance in most cultures, public knowledge of one’s name may not necessarily indicate the importance of the name or the named person. It was the custom anciently to identify people according to family—their primary source of sustenance and social identity for both males and females, although not all cultures use surnames, or family names.⁵⁷ In fact, not to be

identity was less important to Book of Mormon peoples than to those of the Old Testament. It seems that for the purposes of the abridgment, the full list was not necessary:⁵⁹

And now I, Nephi, do not give the genealogy of my fathers in this part of my record; neither at anytime shall I give it after upon these plates which I am writing; for it is given in the record which has been kept by my father; wherefore, I do not write it in this work. For it sufficeth me to say that we are descendants of Joseph. . . . I desire the room that I may write of the things of God. For the fullness of mine intent is that I may persuade men to come unto the God of

Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved. (1 Nephi 6:1–4)

Nephi subordinated the custom of giving a complete paternal lineage to his task of bearing testimony of Christ. He may have expected that other records would survive to more fully identify him and those who traveled from Jerusalem.

Further, it is unlikely that simply giving the names of Nephi's sisters or of Lamoni's queen would provide much insight regarding their lives and their respective testimonies. Their actions suggest more about their spiritual contributions to ecclesiastical history than about their individual identities. Nephi's sisters recognized the "warnings and the revelations of God" and chose to separate themselves from Laman and Lemuel, following Nephi's counsel (see 2 Nephi 5:6). It appears that Lamoni's queen used her own powers of observation ("as for myself, to me he doth not stink"), investigation ("The servants of my husband have made it known unto me that . . ."), and judgment to know that Lamoni was not dead before calling Ammon to confirm her evaluation (see Alma 19:4–5). By believing Ammon, a witness for the Lord's hand in the matter, she demonstrated a faith greater than any Ammon had witnessed among the Nephites (see Alma 19:10). She was quite obviously teachable and amenable to the Spirit, despite her elevated social status and Ammon's servant/alien status. While we do not have extended narratives of named women in the Book of Mormon, we do have interesting glimpses that point to ways in which women participated in family, religious, and social life.

Why aren't women more prominent in the Book of Mormon narratives?

Obviously, the mere presence of women in a text is not sufficient to make that text of interest and value to women.⁶⁰ Nor is it logical to suppose that merely because women do not appear in a specific text that the text was written by a misogynist.⁶¹ Biblical scholars look to comparable cultures as part of their task of interpreting women's lives in ancient Israel; we may also reasonably look to biblical and comparable cultures to better decipher why the role of women in the Book of Mormon may, upon first consideration, seem small.

A primary reason may be that the book focuses on the larger culture, rather than the family, and on

extraordinary events rather than daily occupations.⁶² This focus does not give attention to modesty or unheralded service, both of which are undervalued in our own culture and perhaps in most others. Bird also reminds us that "a woman's primary and essential role within the family, with its multiple demands of time and skill, . . . accounts for her highest personal and social reward—but also for her restriction in roles and activities outside the family and her hiddenness in documents from the public sphere."⁶³

Even when women are prominent in narratives, their stories might not be considered helpful to women or positive in general. According to Alice Bach, while a substantial number of feminist biblical studies during the past 20 years have examined ancient texts with the purpose of "recovering submerged female voices,"⁶⁴ the results have been mixed. A significant number of "subversive" readings affirm women's courage, strength, faith, ingenuity, talents, dignity, and worth. Some interpreters see women as sometimes challenging the patriarchal culture in which they lived.⁶⁵ But the "valorization" of mothers, Esther Fuchs argues, is also in support of patriarchy, making those women "enablers" in their own suppression and in the suppression of women generally.⁶⁶

Because our larger contemporary culture does not value mothering,⁶⁷ it is difficult for us to believe that any culture, ancient or modern, truly can.⁶⁸ Because modern society in general has been educated to regard population growth as negative, it is hard for some people living today to appreciate the social value of giving and sustaining life in a subsistence economy or a preindustrial society. Both in terms of religious belief and economic need, the birth and survival of children was a necessity,⁶⁹ and women were the workers who ensured the continuation of the family and the society through birthing, child-care, and management of the household.⁷⁰

It is also difficult for us, steeped as we are in power politics, to appreciate roles that appear to have little or no power in the polity. Yet the too-common view of ancient women as uniformly oppressed is being discarded in light of the "anthropological study of gender [which] reveals complex patterns of male-female relationships within patriarchal societies, involving distinctions of formal and informal power and recognition of spheres of influence and authority, which require qualification of many commonly held views of women's lives in ancient Israel"⁷¹ and elsewhere.

Clearly, women did not receive “equal treatment”—nor did anyone else, for that matter—in ancient societies. Martha Roth points out that “to assess the standing of a person before the law, to arrive at a systemic valuation of the individual, it is necessary to know much more than simply whether the person is female or male. A wide range of tangible and intangible factors, such as citizenship, wealth, age, family position, as well as gender, combine in often subtle and unexamined ways to produce an individual’s standing in the law as a ‘legal subject.’”⁷² Early legal codes, with their distinctions among citizen and noncitizen, male and female, husband and wife, parent and child, slave and freeborn, appear glaringly unjust to contemporary readers. Nevertheless, they set a predictable standard for conduct and outlined a person’s rights and duties,⁷³ although we have relatively little documentation of the application and enforcement of those laws.⁷⁴ No person in ancient societies was completely unfettered simply because he was male,⁷⁵ and even slaves had some minimal protections.⁷⁶

Men as well as women were constrained by family duties and customs. Lehi apparently arranged marriages for his *sons*, just as Ishmael apparently arranged marriages for his *daughters*. Predisposed as we are to prize individual autonomy above subordinating our desires to the good of family or group, practices such as arranged marriages seem obviously oppressive to us. But part of our repugnance may arise from our ignorance of the values or the safeguards that may be inherent in such practices,⁷⁷ or of the relative merits of the then-available alternatives.

Clearly, the Book of Mormon record is not the detailed history of any one individual or family; rather, it is a story of peoples and a witness of Christ. The emphasis on peoples and witnessing does to some degree keep the record focused on activities outside the household, women’s primary sphere of influence and action. About 50 percent of the Book of Mormon could be classified as historical narrative or historiography designed to inculcate moral values. In addition, significant portions of the book comprise doctrinal exposition (including what Sperry calls “prophetic discourse”), oratory such as King Benjamin’s address, and the words and actions of Christ (see 3 Nephi 11:8–28:13).⁷⁸ The condensed nature of the book may have also decreased the incidence of women’s stories or the number of stories about individuals in general.⁷⁹ Covering 1,000 years in 522 pages allows only an average of about one-half page per year,⁸⁰ scant space for

recording names or events, much less prophecies, revelations, and testimonies.

While the Book of Mormon’s witnessing of Christ is more pronounced than its narrative, some of the narratives of the Bible seem at times almost unrelated to the witness of Jesus Christ, the Father, or the Holy Ghost. Susan Niditch sees the tales of the women of Genesis as arising from traditional Hebrew literature. She argues that several of the women in Genesis are “portrayed as active tricksters who, like Eve, alter the rules, men’s rules.” This creates a tension between the wishes of the males (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and “the women’s wishes and God’s wishes,” which are aligned in these stories.⁸¹ This kind of tension between the sexes is a classic scenario in folklore. The books of Ruth and Esther are named after their protagonists but contain relatively little that is overtly about God. “Women in the biblical texts,” Bird states, “are presented through male eyes, for purposes determined by male authors. This does not mean that women are necessarily suppressed in the account or portrayed unsympathetically. It does mean, however, that women are not heard directly in the biblical text, in their own voices; the Old Testament gives no unmediated access to the lives and thought of Israelite women.”⁸² It might be safe to say we have no unmediated access to any ancient author or person, given our understanding of the means of transmission. We may feel we are closer to the ancients in the Book of Mormon because the individual writers identify themselves and frequently tell their own stories. In contrast to the overwhelming use of the third person in biblical narrative, the first person is used extensively in Book of Mormon narrative.⁸³

Why didn’t God command the prophets to include more women in the record?

Francine Bennion’s hypothetical critical reader asks: “Whatever the assumption of the people [of Nephi], couldn’t God tell the men to record women’s names and make opportunities equitable, even if the men didn’t know enough to ask about it?”⁸⁴ Bennion concludes that “God speaks to us according to our own language and understanding, which at the same time both aids and limits us.” Of course, such commandments for inclusion might have had results that would now dismay us: had the text included as many named women as men, or many women functioning equally in the public sphere, it is likely that today’s

critics would view such an “ancient” society as anachronistic and see the inclusion as evidence that the Book of Mormon is not an authentic ancient text.

Perhaps reading scripture as a woman has its limitations and drawbacks. Sensitivity to individual and group differences can be positive, but once we begin to read scripture from an interest-group perspective, we may enter the clash of diversity politics so common in academe today. Such an approach can eventually lead to the view that a male Savior cannot understand the suffering of women or other marginalized groups, or it can turn Christ from a person to a symbol. This may encourage the view that what we seek is not a literal savior who atoned for our sins but principles for a “redemptive community” that “transforms people and social systems,”⁸⁵ the focus remaining on a social system rather than on a savior.

Some feminists both inside and outside the church argue that viewing God as literally male disadvantages women as individuals and as members of the church.⁸⁶ For example, drawing on the LDS standard works and principles of equality, Janice Allred sees the Holy Ghost as the immanent manifestation of God the Mother and argues that “we must also picture God as female and experience her as mother if women are to attain equality and if feminine attributes and roles are to be valued equally with masculine ones.”⁸⁷ Pearson contends that significant detrimental effects result from the absence of women in the Book of Mormon, coupled with the positive images of males and what she considers the negative images of females.⁸⁸

To those who never viewed the alleged negative female imagery as hurtful to women, the emphasis on re-imagining or reconstructing women in the Book of Mormon may seem at best unnecessary or speculative. For some readers, even if the Book of Mormon contained only the equivalent of the published proceedings of a contemporary general priesthood meeting in Moroni’s time, it might still be of interest and spiritual value to female readers. Asking the “woman question” is not tantamount to apostasy, and neither Ruether nor Allred nor Pearson would recommend that we simply reconstruct God or women in scripture according to our own tastes. Rather, it appears that asking the woman question can become, for some readers, an indictment of our collective religious history and the foundation for recommendations to change our practices today. Certainly that is not the trajectory of every ques-

tioner. However, we might ask ourselves: Am I concerned about the status of women in scripture, or am I more worried about my own status today? Am I reading into an ancient text my own self-concern? Clarifying our own concerns and motivations may change how we approach the text. At the least, we may be able to evaluate whether we are acting on what we find as evidence about women in the Book of Mormon or whether we are actually focused on women’s roles in our own time.

If scripture is simply narrative aimed at personal religious experience, then those questions are relatively unimportant. If, on the other hand, the Book of Mormon is an ancient record designed to give witness of factual events of eternal import, then a focus on myself and contemporary social or psychological concerns may distort the witness and obscure the saving message.⁸⁹ The Book of Mormon is about the saving mission of Christ, and in a very real sense the mission of Christ is about us—those he was sent to save. Examining how the record keepers in the Book of Mormon tried to communicate Christ’s message to us is an interesting venture, whether we ask the woman question or not.

Inclusion and Exclusion in the Book of Mormon Text

Why were specific stories included in the Book of Mormon and others apparently excluded?

How did the stories function as part of the cultural history?⁹⁰ Why so much about Nephi and the journey and relatively little about Jacob and the time and lives that passed away like a dream? (see Jacob 7:26). Why is the book of Omni so short and the book of Alma so long? Why is there so little about how those peaceable people lived for 200 years after Christ’s visit (23 verses) and so much about so many wars?⁹¹

Robert Alter proposes that “biblical narrative characteristically catches its protagonists only at the critical and revealing points in their lives.”⁹² The Book of Mormon narratives highlight important transitional events in the history of the gospel among the children of Lehi but do not provide much detail. Unlike biblical narrative, they contain considerable interspersed or embedded explanation to aid the reader’s interpretation.⁹³

The first part of the Book of Mormon lays the foundation for the Nephite-Lamanite schism that dominates the bulk of the record. Just as Genesis

presents the patriarchs, introduces the Abrahamic covenant, and sets the stage for the rivalry among brothers—all preparatory to understanding the Egyptian sojourn, the exodus, and the struggle to maintain Israelite allegiance to God—so 1 Nephi presents to us in rapid succession the exodus of the Book of Mormon patriarchs, a covenant specific to Lehi's family and the intersibling rivalry, and a prophecy of the coming of Christ while introducing the theme of preserving sacred records, which permeates the remainder of the text. Book of Mormon links to Old Testament narratives are numerous and richly allusive, although narrative in the Book of Mormon is subordinated to the interpretive or didactic treatment of the events and helps fill in the gap in religious history between the Old and the New Testaments. In the Bible, each writer/ compiler gives relatively few interpretive comments and virtually no information about the preparation of the text itself or the purpose of the book. In contrast, the editing,⁹⁴ abridging,⁹⁵ and custody of the Book of Mormon text are matters repeatedly brought to the fore.

Concerning the Book of Mormon, some have concluded that the male record keepers overlooked women or did not understand what it feels like to be a woman and so did not include female role models in their records. But if we say, in effect, to Mormon, "What do you know about being a woman?" couldn't he fairly reply, "What do you know about being a prophet?"

The Record Keeper's Self-Interest and Burden

If we take the words of the record keepers at face value,⁹⁶ the provenance of the Book of Mormon is a model of simplicity and clarity in comparison to that of the Bible. Even if we grant that the biblical books were written by those traditionally considered the authors or by their scribes, we do not know who had custody of the texts for significant periods of time.⁹⁷ In contrast, the chain of custody⁹⁸ for the Book of Mormon record is unbroken⁹⁹ (which explains the inclusion of the otherwise puzzling book of Omni). That these record keepers took their charge seriously, and testified that they had custody of the record, even when they gave little other information about themselves, their families (except as it was relevant to the task of record keeping), or their times may be an indication of the authenticity of the record.

Feminist studies commonly conclude that women and women's stories "have been (and continue to be)

erased from the historical record"¹⁰⁰ because men fear them or do not value them. We cannot conclude that those topics the Book of Mormon authors did not or could not write about were excluded because they were feared or not valued. Nor can we conclude that those topics were all too sacred to be recorded. Rather, in the Book of Mormon, we see a range of topics excluded, from the very sacred words of Christ (and those blessed by him) in 3 Nephi to the names of the three Nephites who remained upon the earth and the prohibition on including in the record information about secret combinations (see Alma 37:29; Ether 8:20), as well as much of the historical information regardless of its moral content.

We know that Mormon and the other record keepers faced a number of constraints that limited the length of their records. One was spatial—the surface area of the available plates was relatively small. For example, Jarom explains his brevity by twice noting that "these plates are small" (Jarom 1:2, 14). Amaleki notes that "these plates [the small plates of Nephi] are full," adding, "And I make an end of my speaking" (Omni 1:30). Moroni, finishing his father's record, states, "I would write it"¹⁰¹ also if I had room upon the plates, but I have not; and ore I have none [to make additional plates], for I am alone [with neither family nor friends who could obtain plates]" (Mormon 8:5). Moroni apparently left room for an abridgment of the Jaredite record (the book of Ether), then was surprised to find that there was still some space on the plates and that he was still alive to write something (see Moroni 1:1, 4). There were also orthographic or linguistic challenges outlined by Moroni, who referred to "our weakness in writing," for "we could write but little, because of the awkwardness of our hands," and "when we write we behold our weakness, and stumble because of the placing of our words" (Ether 12:23–25).¹⁰²

The more important constraint, however, was deciding which "hundredth part"¹⁰³ of the record of the peoples should be included. Some things were included because the Lord directed or commanded that they be included.¹⁰⁴ Since at least two kinds of records were kept—one historical, the other religious¹⁰⁵—and we have an abridgment of the religious record alone, we can reasonably assume that there may be more about women in the historical record or in the complete religious record, neither of which we can access at this time. Even in the religious record, some things were excluded by way of commandment, forbidden to be written.¹⁰⁶ At other times



Heroes: Taught by Their Mothers, by Liz Lemon Swindle

Taught by their mothers, Helaman's stripling warriors exuded confidence in God's power to deliver them from their enemies (see Alma 56:47–48).

there is a record of an event, but the time was not right to have the record come forth.¹⁰⁷

Mormon and Moroni have given us a remarkably cohesive abridgment of the records of at least 18 men who were given custody of the record and the assignment to write the things of God. We possess few details about the manner of transferring the record, the usual age (if there was one) when the recorder was given the plates, or how the decision was made about when to transfer the plates to another person. These decisions appear to have been at the discretion of the record keepers. It is possible, too, that the length of the various books is directly related to the importance Mormon placed on each book rather than to the length of the unabridged records alone. Occasionally a particular writer's comment is preserved in Mormon's abridgment and may echo to a certain extent the principles and exigencies guiding Mormon's handling of the record. For example, Amaleki gives two reasons for ending

his record: "I am about to lie down in my grave; and these plates are full. And [so] I make an end of my speaking" (Omni 1:30). Jarom notes that the plates are small, so he needs to write but little, then states tellingly: "I shall not write the things of my prophesying, nor of my revelations. For what could I write more than my fathers have written? For have not they revealed the plan of salvation? I say unto you, Yea; and this sufficeth me" (Jarom 1:2).

Is a writer advancing his own self-interest by excluding stories about women?

While it may be possible to apply the hermeneutic of suspicion to the Book of Mormon¹⁰⁸ and assume that the stories were included in order to advance male interests, or the interests of specific males, the text may not support such a conclusion.

If Mormon wanted to consolidate patriarchal or male power, it was a mistake for him to have included Jacob 2, which better than any other scriptural

discourse advances the interests of women and children and clearly condemns their exploitation by men. Jacob's words are remarkably like President Hinckley's at the priesthood session of the April 2002 general conference,¹⁰⁹ except that Jacob castigated the men in the presence of their wives and children (see v. 7), indicating that the meeting was not segregated by age or gender. Mormon should also have edited out Jacob 3:7, 10 and other empathic references. Had the record keepers sought to portray males well, it would have been wiser, perhaps, for the writers and editors not to have used women as an index of the health of the Book of Mormon societies.¹¹⁰ Even Laman and Lemuel describe their wives' travails in the wilderness as the sufferings of persons, distinguishable from damage to or loss of their possessions (see 1 Nephi 17:1, 20–21). In the Book of Mormon, war is justified only as a defensive action to protect religion, freedom, and family (see Alma 48:14; also Alma 24:5; 35:14; 43:23, 26, 30; 3 Nephi 3:22). War to avenge supposed wrongs was not justified (see Mormon 3:15–16). In the Book of Mormon there are no triumphal hero celebration scenes akin to the praise received by Saul or David (see 1 Samuel 18:7; 2 Samuel 6:15–16). In fact, war is seen as the destructive force that it is, leading not only to death by violent means but also to famine (see Alma 62:35, 39), either because armies ravage the crops or because farmers must leave their fields to fight and have no time to plant.

Rather than describing the depth of Nephite and Lamanite depravity in terms of the suffering of women (as in Moroni 9:8–10, 16, 18–20; Mormon 4:15, 21), Mormon could have focused more on male suffering. Mormon's descriptions of final battles include women and children (see Mormon 6:7) but give little detail about the glory of war or the gore involved in the killing of around 220,000 warriors. Even his lament is inclusive, addressed to fair sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, rather than to his soldiers (see Mormon 6:16–20). More detail about the male martyrs cast out and stoned in Alma 14:7–8, rather than on the suffering of their wives and children in verses 8–9, would have created more admiration for the men and would have avoided expressions of concern for the women and children. The tone of the above passages, coupled with the overt denunciation of wrongs against women and children, suggests that Nephi, Jacob, Mormon, Alma, and Moroni felt the same empathy that contemporary

readers feel for those women and children. In fact, Mormon's syntax breaks down as he describes atrocities against women and children (see Moroni 9:11–15), in the way that a man's voice catches when he is near weeping. It is difficult to see how those passages advance either the self-interest of males generally or of the writers and editors specifically.

It is possible that the Book of Mormon writers and editors were fairly uninterested in advancing themselves at the expense of their task and the text. Perhaps they were kept on task and in the right frame of mind in part by the admonishment of the Lord (as in Ether 12:35) and by the ability they were given at various times to "see" those for whom they made the record (e.g., Mormon 8:35). Some readers of the Book of Mormon focus on the woman questions; some readers from other faiths seek answers to the "fundamental questions of mankind"¹¹¹ or to "the great question": Is there really a redeeming Christ?¹¹² The Book of Mormon prophets may not answer the questions we have about women today, but they do advance considerably the knowledge we have of Christ, which advances the self-interest of every reader, whether male or female. The Book of Mormon does not deal with every contemporary concern; that was clearly not its mission or purpose. Certainly the testimonies of the prophets are expansive in comparison to the amount of history, sociology, geography, demographics, or law contained in their accounts.

The record keepers and the abridgers were united in their desire to present the testimony of Christ and the plan of salvation.¹¹³ In fact, if they showed a "self-interest," it was the interest they had in ridding their garments of the blood of those to whom they were called to preach. After outlining the calling Nephi gave to him and Joseph, Jacob states:

And we did magnify our office unto the Lord, taking upon us the responsibility, answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence; wherefore, by laboring with our might their blood might not come upon our garments; otherwise their blood would come upon our garments, and we would not be found spotless at the last day. (Jacob 1:19)

Being found spotless seems to have particular relevance for those called as special witnesses of Christ.¹¹⁴

Jacob's concern is repeated by the Three Witnesses in their testimony of the Book of Mormon

and is echoed in the warning of the title page: “condemn not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment-seat of Christ.” Moroni is even more direct, promising that “the time speedily cometh that ye shall know that I lie not, for ye shall see me at the bar of God; and the Lord God will say unto you: Did I not declare my words unto you, which were written by this man, like as one crying from the dead, yea, even as one speaking out of the dust?” (Moroni 10:27).

The writers and abridgers were convinced of the purpose of their calling, even if they did not know the details.¹¹⁵ They were witnesses of Christ to their own people and to generations unborn, seen by some of them in vision (see Mormon 8:35). It may be churlish to condemn an aged prophet and his prophet son, hunted fugitives lugging 60-plus pounds of plates, for failing to include more of the female perspective. All things considered, they were remarkably faithful and successful in carrying out their charge.

Conclusion

The status of women anciently and currently is both interesting and important and is not unrelated to the mission of Christ, Savior of us all. The record of women in the Book of Mormon, like the record of virtually every other aspect of those people, is incomplete, fragmentary. Nevertheless, the Book of Mormon is a worthy witness of Christ and a resounding affirmation that “all are alike unto God,” for through its divinely inspired teachings Christ invites all of us—each of us—to come unto him (see 2 Nephi 26:33). And even if some female readers were to insist that they could access the Book of Mormon witness of Christ only through Book of Mormon women, the book makes that possible.


In the very heart of the abridgment, Alma 19, is the story of the queen and her servant Abish, a narrative that could serve as a pattern for our efforts to understand “the things of God.” These women are at opposite ends of the social scale: if anyone lived in luxury or had access to education, it was likely to be the king, the queen, and their children; we don’t know Abish’s marital status, but she was at least a working woman, if not a slave, and already converted to the Lord. Whatever else she didn’t have, we know she had the gospel of Jesus Christ, the one thing we all must possess.

We don’t know the queen’s name, but we know the name of the servant, a believer who was able to

understand “the power of God” (Alma 19:17). Abish naively assumed others would also understand merely by “beholding th[e] scene” of the court and Ammon, sunk to the earth, overcome by the power of God (see vv. 19:14, 17). The multitude that gathered faced a task of interpretation not unlike our own as readers of the Book of Mormon.

Some could not perceive the power of God because of the cultural tradition that viewed Nephites as enemies: a Nephite witness such as Ammon was unacceptable. For how could a Lamanite be touched by a witness so foreign and unaware of the unique Lamanite experience of perceived Nephite dominance and oppression? Some thought Ammon a “monster,” not a man. Some tried to slay Ammon where he lay. The actions of the faithful servant woman in gathering a crowd and taking the hand of the queen set in motion the successive testimonies of the queen and the king, resulting in the conversion of many hearers. By the end of the story there are an abundance of witnesses: many hearts are changed, many see angels, many are baptized, and the church is established among the Lamanites.

While it does not do to push the analogy too far, it might be said that some feminist critics may reject the Book of Mormon because it is the “witness of males” and therefore unavoidably sexist. Some may view the Book of Mormon as a “monster” created by Joseph Smith, an amalgam of biblical and other sources, some manifestation (even if unintended) of a male-dominated culture. Some may have supposed the Book of Mormon vulnerable, capable of being “slain” or rendered powerless by those aggrieved by it or its alleged “male perspective.” But, like Ammon, it has been and is preserved by God for his purposes. Whatever its perceived shortcomings, it possesses a spirit that no other book has. Readers have responded to that spirit and testimony as did those who heard the queen and King Lamoni: their hearts have been changed. That change of heart is a primary component of coming unto Christ. And like the queen and Abish, we each are dependent upon Jesus Christ for our salvation.

Will women today, trained to be suspicious of texts that appear male-dominated, be able to find themselves through reading and pondering the Book of Mormon?¹¹⁶ If we are first able to find Christ, who has promised that he will neither forsake nor forget us, we will surely find ourselves where we have always been: “graven . . . upon the palms of [his] hands” (1 Nephi 21:16). 

handed down from one generation to another? Why would the Lord allow a people to have two sets of interpreters? Where did Moroni leave Mosiah's other interpreters, if not with the gold plates (Joseph Smith found only one set)?

7. Hugh Nibley, in trying to solve the seeming anachronism, suggested that Benjamin in his last years had a share in the record keeping of the 24 plates with his son Mosiah. Besides the possibility that the sealed record and the 24 plates were separate records, this is rather unlikely since Benjamin was probably already dead or, if he still lived, in his very last months. Why would Moroni particularly refer to Benjamin's very short joint record keeping of the Jaredite plates if Mosiah had already been given custody of all the records and sacred artifacts three years earlier? See Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 7.

Into the Desert: An Arab View of the Book of Mormon
Ehab Abuunwara

1. See Louis Midgley, "A Maori View of the Book of Mormon," *JBMS* 8/1 (1999): 4–11.
2. I make a distinction between *Arab and Middle Eastern* to acknowledge the non-Arab ethnic groups that exist in the Middle East and that have been or are exposed to missionary work, including Iranians and Armenians.

Women in the Book of Mormon: Inclusion, Exclusion, and Interpretation
Camille S. Williams

1. Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 6–7. While Professor Bird's comments are limited to the Hebrew Bible, I believe her notion of dialogue with the text can be expanded to include the ways we approach the scriptures of the restored church. Using the tools of modern biblical scholarship, Sidney B. Sperry, Hugh W. Nibley, and the scholars at FARMS have contributed immensely to our attempts to find reasonably undistorted reconstructions of the Book of Mormon writers' and compilers' worldviews.
2. Sharon H. Ringe, "When Women Interpret the Bible," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (London: SPCK, 1992), 1–2.
3. See Katharine Bartlett, "Feminist Legal Methods," reprinted, with deletions of text and notes, from *Harvard Law Review* 829 (1990) in *Feminist Legal Theory: Readings in Law and Gender*, ed. Katharine Bartlett and Rosanne Kennedy (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1991), 371.
4. See John L. Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs: Women of the Old Testament among Biblical Commentators from Philo through the Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3, 222–35.
5. Alice Bach, ed., *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999), xiii.
6. Esther Fuchs, "Status and Role of Female Heroines in the Biblical Narrative," in *Women in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Bach, 77.
7. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities*, 9.
8. *Ibid.*, 82–83.
9. See, for example, Robert C. Solomon,

The Big Questions: A Short Introduction to Philosophy, 3rd ed. (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990).

10. While published discussion of women in the Book of Mormon has focused on the small number of named women, and their mostly unknown roles in the narratives of these peoples, interpreters interested in women in the Book of Mormon may also ask, for example: Is there a woman or woman's point of view in this text? (The places where women do not appear in the text can be as significant as the places where they do appear.) How are women portrayed in this text? How is power distributed? How is power distributed? How have women's lives and voices been suppressed by this text? What hidden gender assumptions lie behind this text (for example, women lead men astray or women cannot be trusted)? Whose interests are being served by the text? These questions (slightly modified and with considerable text deleted) are taken from J. Cheryl Exum, "Feminist Criticism: Whose Interests Are Being Served?" in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 69.
11. There are many "feminisms." Perhaps the most widespread is what is sometimes called "equality feminism," such as that defined by B. Kent Harrison and Mary Stovall Richards as affirming "the equal worth of all people, the equal right to and capacity for spirituality, and the evils of abuse" ("Feminism in the Light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ," *BYU Studies* 36/2 [1996–97]: 181). Feminism concerns itself with the status of women in all areas of life, including theology and church practices, and is pervasive, even in its more radical forms, in university settings. However, feminist biblical scholar Esther Fuchs lists the lack of independent journals and independent scholarly associations or presses as a hindrance to feminist publishing on biblical texts (*Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman* [Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 2000], 18).
12. Phyllis Trible's book *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), treating the stories of Hagar, Tamar, an unnamed concubine, and Jephthah's daughter, has become a "description for many other narratives where the God of the Bible seems not only to allow cruelty against women but even to abet it with a silence that looks all too much like complicity" (quoted in Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs*, 3).
13. *Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Newsom and Ringe, xiii. Alice Bach raises questions like these: How does the text reflect and support the patriarchal structure of Western society? Can I as a reader stand outside this structure and cast off the underpinnings of misogyny? What images of female goodness does this text present? Do the good woman and her sister, the serpentine siren, have stories of their own? Can you uproot her story from inside his story? What does the text say or fail to say about the reader's own set of issues? Bach then advises readers not to allow the text to set the agenda, but to learn to read all over again by analyzing who speaks, who sees, and who acts and by analyzing whose story is told more fully, whose agenda is fulfilled, which characters are approved of or disapproved of by the narrator, and whose

agenda supports the social order. She also points out that those who focus on the presence or absence of women in the text make the reading a gendered one, not the eyes or mindset of those who read the text. For fuller discussion, see Alice Bach, "Man's World, Women's Place: Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible," in *Women in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Bach, xxiv–xxv.

14. Carol Smith, "Delilah: A Suitable Case for (Feminist) Treatment?" in *Judges: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, 2nd series, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 1999), 106. See her discussion of feminist biblical criticism in general on pp. 93–108, as well as her discussion of Delilah and feminist criticism on pp. 108–16.
15. See Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities*, 249.
16. For a brief outline of this movement, as represented particularly in the work of Rosemary Radford Ruether, see Camille S. Williams, "Redeeming Feminism: A Feminist Testament," *The World and I* 14/6 (1999): 297–317. See also Frances Devlin-Glass and Lyn McCredden, "Inside and Outside the Traditions: The Changing Shapes of Feminist Spiritualities," in *Feminist Poetics of the Sacred: Creative Suspicions*, ed. Frances Devlin-Glass and Lyn McCredden, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3–20.
17. There may be a dearth of publishers willing to publish LDS feminist writings. LDS publishers may be uncomfortable with the term *feminism* itself, which is widely associated with support for abortion and gay/lesbian rights; and non-LDS publishers may consider the audience interested in LDS feminism too small to justify publication or may consider Mormons too cultlike to interest readers from other religious traditions.
18. See, for example, Gordon B. Hinckley, "Women of the Church," *Ensign*, November 1996, 67–70; Spencer W. Kimball, "The Blessings and Responsibilities of Womanhood," *Ensign*, March 1976, 70–73 (address given to the last Relief Society General Conference, 1–2 October 1975); Bruce R. McConkie, "Our Sisters from the Beginning," *Ensign*, January 1979, 61–63; and Richard G. Scott, "The Joy of Living the Great Plan of Happiness," *Ensign*, November 1996, 73–75. Note also references to our Mother in Heaven in the hymn "O, My Father," "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," and M. Russell Ballard, "Here Am I, Send Me," devotional address given 13 March 2001 at Brigham Young University. See also Camille S. Williams, "The Father, the Family, and Feminism," in *Launching Conversations between Latter-day Saints and Nonrestoration Christians*, ed. David L. Paulsen and Donald W. Musser (SUNY Press and BYU Press, forthcoming).
19. See Doctrine and Covenants 138:38–39 and Genesis 19:11–15 in *The Bible Corrected by Joseph Smith*, 2nd ed., ed. Kenneth and Lyndell Lutes (Midway, Utah: Lutes International, 1998), 58.
20. Carol Lynn Pearson, "Could Feminism Have Saved the Nephites?" *Sunstone* 19/1 (1996): 35–36.
21. Francine R. Bennon, "Women and the Book of Mormon: Tradition and Revelation," in *Women of Wisdom and Knowledge: Talks Selected from the BYU Women's Conferences*, ed. Marie Cornwall and Susan Howe (Salt Lake City: Deseret

Book, 1990), 171.

22. Thompson attributes the coining of this term to Paul Ricoeur, who also envisioned a hermeneutic of faith as part of a dialectic leading to reflection (see Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs*, 5, 15). See Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 32–36, as cited in Thompson.
23. See Pearson, "Could Feminism Have Saved the Nephites?" 32–40.
24. For example, Maxine Hanks sees a need for what she calls "Mormon feminist theology," in which "the female or feminine needs to fully emerge in Mormon theology and doctrine" (Maxine Hanks, ed., *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism* [Salt Lake City: Signature, 1992], xxv–xxvii). Janice Allred deals with the same issue in her book *God the Mother and Other Theological Essays* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1997), noting, however, that she does not attempt in her "constructive theology" to make official pronouncements about LDS theology. Related treatments include Melodie Moench Charles, "Scriptural Precedents for Priesthood," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 18/3 (1985): 15–20; Melodie Moench Charles, "The Need for a New Mormon Heaven," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 21/3 (1988): 73–87; and Margaret M. Toscano, "The Missing Rib: The Forgotten Place of Queens and Priestesses in the Establishment of Zion," *Sunstone* 10/7 (1985): 17–22. Maureen Ursebach Beecher predicts a grassroots movement in which "increasing charismatic experience and greater openness" of mothers participating in blessing babies at home prior to the public blessing and pronouncing blessings on women and children will eventually be accepted by the institutional church, which she says has responded to feminist challenges in ways that seem "to muddy the waters of doctrinal consistency" but at the same time show sympathy for women's individual circumstances ("Forum: Female Experience in American Religion," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 5/1 [1995]: 15–16).
25. See the discussion of the hermeneutic of charity in Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs*, 5–15, especially notes 7 and 23.
26. See the broad range of evidence from the text in Kevin and Shauna Christensen, "Nephite Feminism Revisited: Thoughts on Carol Lynn Pearson's View of Women in the Book of Mormon," *FARMS Review of Books* 10/2 (1998), 9–61. Of uneven quality and containing much *ad hominem* is Rush Utah's *Could Feminism Have Destroyed the Nephites? A Rebuttal to Carol Lynn Pearson's Article "Could Feminism Have Saved the Nephites?"* (Albuquerque: Gallstone, 1996).
27. See, for example, Jerrie W. Hurd, *Our Sisters in the Latter-day Scriptures* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987); and Camille Fronk, "Desert Epiphany: Sarah and the Women in 1 Nephi," *JBMS* 9/2 (2000): 5–15.
28. Marie Cornwall, "Women: Changing Ideas and New Directions," *Sunstone* 14/3 (1990): 54. See Jerrie Hurd, *Leaven: 150 Women in Scripture Whose Lives Lift Ours* (Murray, Utah: Aspen, 1995), 66. Hurd notes that in her teaching "sooner or later the inevitable question would arise: Where are the young women in scripture?" She contends that young women today

- want “the assurance that the efforts and faithfulness of young women were noticed [in ancient times]. And mattered—then as well as now. Without role models, without stories, that’s a hard point to get across.” Christie B. Gardner, in her review of *Heroes from the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), makes the same point: “I think of the many lovely and faithful young women who also have need of feminine heroes. The only element I might suggest for consideration in creating such a book as *Heroes from the Book of Mormon* is to include some women for us to emulate” (FARMS Review of Books 9/1 [1997], 10).
29. But see M. Gerald Bradford and Alison V. P. Coultts, eds., *Uncovering the Original Text of the Book of Mormon: History and Findings of the Critical Text Project* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2002); Royal Skousen, ed., *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2001); Royal Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2001); and FARMS, *Book of Mormon Critical Text: A Tool for Scholarly Reference* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1987). These texts of the Book of Mormon are much less complex than those faced by textual editors of the Bible. For an illustration of Old Testament complexity, see Emmanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).
 30. These potential difficulties have led some observers to conclude that a dialogue with the Book of Mormon is not without the effort or, alternatively, that the book should be approached as something other than an ancient text. For a critique of this position, see John W. Welch, “Approaching New Approaches,” *FARMS Review of Books* 6/1 (1994), 145–18, a review of Brent Lee Metcalfe, ed., *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1993).
 31. Ringe, “When Women Interpret the Bible,” 2. I am extending Ringe’s analysis of interpretation to the Book of Mormon, though she was referring to the Bible only.
 32. Some theorists argue that there are no nonideological approaches, merely alternative ideologies that may be judged according to standards of reasonableness, justice, or other virtues or qualities, including their social or political manifestations.
 33. Pearson, “Could Feminism Have Saved the Nephites?” 34.
 34. Kevin and Shauna Christensen, “Nephite Feminism Revisited,” 60.
 35. The published research is too extensive to list here. For a summary of the types of literature in the Book of Mormon, see Sidney B. Sperry, *Our Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1947, 1950), chaps. 7–12. Those chapters were reprinted in *JBMS* 4/1 (1995): 41–118. See also Stephen D. Ricks, “Book of Mormon Studies,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:208–9.
 36. See, for example, Donald W. Parry, *The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted according to Parallelistic Patterns* (Provo, Utah: FARMS), 1998; John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1982), 33–52; and Alan Goff, “Historical Narrative, Literary Narrative—Expelling Poetics from the Republic of History,” *JBMS* 5/1 (1996): 50–102.
 37. Some would judge this value more honored in the breach than in the observance.
 38. Paula Fredriksen, “Who Do You Say That I Am?: The Modern Quest for the Ancient Jesus,” *The World and I* 14/12 (1999): 296. See, for example, Pearson’s comparison of the Jesus of the New Testament with the Jesus of the Book of Mormon in “Could Feminism Have Saved the Nephites?” 36–38.
 39. Hierdoules were temple slaves serving a specific deity. Some such service involved sexual acts or ritual prostitution.
 40. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities*, 54. See, for example, Alexander Uchitel, “Women at Work: Pylos and Knossos, Lagash and Ur,” *Historia: Journal of Ancient History* 33/3 (1984): 257–82.
 41. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities*, 54–55.
 42. Kevin and Shauna Christensen present probably the most exhaustive list (“Nephite Feminism Revisited,” 59–60).
 43. Two of the daughters of Ishmael murdered, but Lehi did also in 1 Nephi 16:20, and two of the sons of Ishmael rebelled along with Laman and Lemuel (1 Nephi 7:6); so the inclusion of this detail does not weigh heavier against females than against males.
 44. As in the Bible, *servant* probably means “slave” in some contexts.
 45. Wizards are mentioned in 2 Nephi 18:19 (quoting Isaiah 8). Sorceries or sorcerers are mentioned in Alma 1:32; 3 Nephi 24:5; and Mormon 1:19.
 46. See 1 Nephi 5:8–9, where Sariah testifies and offers sacrifice and burnt offerings unto the Lord with Lehi, and Moroni 8:10: “this thing shall ye teach—repentance and baptism unto those who are accountable and capable of committing sin; yea, teach parents that they must repent and be baptized.” See also Alma 53:21 and 56:44–48, where mothers taught stripling warriors to keep commandments and trust in God.
 47. The daughter of King Jared refers to Jaredite records as containing secret plans to obtain kingdoms and great glory (see Ether 8:9). It could be argued either that the daughter of a king would be more likely to be literate than the average woman or that her knowledge came from what she had heard or been taught, not what she herself had read.
 48. See 2 Nephi 9:37; Enos 1:20; Mosiah 9:12; 11:6; 27:8; Alma 1:32; 7:6; 17:15; 31:1; 50:21; Helaman 6:31; 3 Nephi 30:2; Mormon 4:14, 21; Ether 7:25–26.
 49. It is possible that Isabel was a hierdoule, as suggested by Hugh W. Nibley (*The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989], 542). If this were the case with Isabel, then Corianton was probably guilty of not only sexual sin but also apostasy.
 50. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities*, 83.
 51. See *ibid.*, 93–99.
 52. John W. Welch has illustrated, however, that Book of Mormon legal and religious practices exhibit a significant number of similarities to those that appear in the Bible. Consult his “Ancient Near Eastern Law and the Book of Mormon” (FARMS, 1981).
 53. See Ze’ev W. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times*, 2nd ed. (Provo, Utah: BYU Press and Eisenbrauns, 2001), 189.
 54. See John L. Sorenson’s important study “Religious Groups and Movements among the Nephites, 200–1 B.C.,” in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000), 163–208.
 55. See Cheryl Brown, “I Speak Somewhat concerning That Which I Have Written,” in *The Book of Mormon: Jacob through Words of Mormon*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1990), 55–72.
 56. “Perhaps, as in some Semitic cultures today, the formal or more polite way of referring to a woman was not by her given name but by describing her position in the family, such as ‘the daughter of Jared’” (Donna Lee Bowen and Camille S. Williams, “Women in the Book of Mormon,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4:1579).
 57. Families still are a primary source of identity. See, for example, Patricia Smith, “Family Responsibility and the Nature of Obligation,” in *Kindred Matters: Rethinking the Philosophy of the Family*, ed. Diana Tietjens Meyers, Kenneth Kipnis, and Cornelius F. Murphy Jr. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 41–58. Many people today are quite pleased to find genealogical connections to a king, someone who came on the *Mayflower*, or someone who crossed the plains in 1847.
 58. There are also 11 men listed as the leaders of 10,000 fighting men, though little or nothing more is known about them, nor do we know even the names of the other 10 leaders of 10,000 each. It may be that the naming of the leaders and their 10,000 is part of a refrain or other rhetorical device. Rather than a victory song, as in 1 Samuel 18:7, “Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands,” here it is part of a song of defeat.
 59. There are many abbreviated genealogies: Mosiah 7:3, 13; 25:2, of Ammon; Mosiah 17:2, of Alma; Alma 17:21, of King Lamoni; Alma 54:23, of Ammoron; Helaman 1:15, of Coriantumr; 3 Nephi 5:20 and Mormon 1:5, 8:13, of Mormon; Ether 10:1, of Shez; Ether 11:11, of Ethem; Ether 11:17, of an unnamed brother of Jared. Being named in a text does indicate some level of respect from one’s descendants. It is believed that biblical genealogies probably vary in historicity and purpose, so a mere count of the number of men’s names compared to the number of women’s names in a text may not be of primary significance. For a cursory outline of the function of biblical lists, see Paul J. Achtemeier, ed., *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), s.v. “genealogy.”
 60. Even in Judges, where “there is an apparent centrality of women, . . . out of 19 female figures or collective figures, only four are named and the others are nameless. Such namelessness can be variously interpreted but, ultimately, hardly seems to indicate complementary centrality.” Those “woman stories . . . are, by and large, androcentric” (Brenner, ed., *Judges: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, 13).
 61. Esther Fuchs defines *misogyny* as a psychological phenomenon, the hatred and fear of women. She distinguishes that from *androcentrism*, which is the “epistemology of masculine normativity,” and from *patriarchalism*, which is “the politics of male domination and the ideological validation of androcentrism.” She concludes, “While the portrayal of women as ‘good’ or ‘positive’ in a particular narrative may perhaps indicate that this narrative is not misogynous, it does not necessarily mean that the narrative is not patriarchal” (*Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative*, 30).
 62. We don’t know, for example, how Lehi earned his living, though we know David was a shepherd. Nibley suggests that Lehi may have been a merchant, perhaps a caravaner (*Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites*, ed. John W. Welch, Darrell L. Matthews, and Stephen R. Callister [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988], 34–38).
 63. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities*, 55.
 64. Bach, ed., *Women in the Hebrew Bible*, xv.
 65. See Fuchs’s discussion of the work of Exum and others in *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narratives*, 46–47.
 66. See *ibid.*, 48–49, including the discussion of Exum’s earlier work; and J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 1993).
 67. See Ann Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood: Why the Most Important Job in the World Is Still the Least Valued* (New York: Holt, 2001).
 68. The traditional division of labor in the kingdom between motherhood and priesthood is derided as outmoded, if not reactionary. Obviously, the great plan of happiness requires that people be born and sufficiently nurtured so that they may participate in the ordinances of the gospel. Were women to refuse to bear and rear children, neither priesthood service nor saving ordinances could further the Father’s plan.
 69. Regard for high fertility may have been tempered at various times by other constraints. For a discussion of ways to approach Nephite demography, see James E. Smith, “Nephi’s Descendants? Historical Demography and the Book of Mormon,” *FARMS Review of Books* 6/1 (1994), 255–96.
 70. Men ensured survival of the culture by providing for the household and protecting it, figuratively if not literally.
 71. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities*, 54. For an expression of the “old view” of women in the Book of Mormon, see Bennion, “Women and the Book of Mormon,” in *Women of Wisdom and Knowledge*, ed. Cornwall and Howe, 171: “Whatever their strengths or virtues, women were subsidiary to men, shown making decisions only when their men were absent or helpless.”
 72. Martha T. Roth, “Gender and Law: A Case Study from Ancient Mesopotamia,” in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Victor H. Matthews, Bernard M. Levinson, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky (Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 1998), 173–74.
 73. See, for example, the Babylonian laws known as the Laws of Eshnunna (1900 B.C.) and the Code of Hammurabi (1792–1750 B.C.) and the laws contained in Exodus 20–23.
 74. See Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times*, 3–4.
 75. See Roth, “Gender and Law,” 173–84.
 76. See Carolyn Pressler, “Wives and Daughters, Bond and Free: Views of Women in the Slave Laws of Exodus 21.2–11,” in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and*

- the Ancient Near East*, ed. Matthews, Levinson, and Frymer-Kensky, 147–72, esp. 148–49; and in the same volume Raymond Westbrook, “The Female Slave,” 214–38. Our disdain for slavery might be tempered by remembering that the owner had the duty to provide for a slave, a duty that desperately poor parents could not fulfill. Even in our own day in Afghanistan, parents have sold children to richer families in hopes of preserving the lives of the children and perhaps their own lives.
77. An Indian woman explained to me her arranged marriage as something that both her parents and her husband’s parents had approached very carefully. She also said that the husband and wife learn to love each other after the marriage ceremony and that for a husband or wife to be unkind or abusive would be to dishonor the family of origin and to insult the spouse’s family. She observed that people in the United States spend a lot of time dating but that after they marry, they “complain, complain, complain.” Such complaints in her culture would be a sign of immaturity and an embarrassment to the family. Which cultural practice shall we say is inherently superior?
78. Warfare and defensive actions were undoubtedly disruptive to both agriculture and to home life and drew attention away from the ordinary activities of daily life. On historical narrative, consult Sperry, *Our Book of Mormon*, 113–24, reprinted in *JBMS* 4/1 (1995): 81–94. Historical narrative might be distinguished from personal narrative or biography by its emphasis on “the big picture,” as opposed to our contemporary fascination with the intimate details of individuals’ lives as evidenced by tell-all biographies or so-called reality television. The Book of Mormon writings might be classified as “exemplar historiography,” which illustrates what is desired to be inculcated in the reader or what the reader is to be warned against. Sperry cites 1 Nephi 22; 2 Nephi 1, 29, 32; Jacob 6; Mosiah 12:1–8; Alma 10:17–23; 32:8–43; 33:2–23; 34:2–41; and Helaman 7:13–29. See also David B. Honey, “The Secular as Sacred: The Historiography of the Title Page,” *JBMS* 3/1 (1994): 94–103.
79. Consider, for example, Mormon’s and Moroni’s decisions not to include in their respective abridgments portions of the five books of Moses and most of the Old Testament, which they supposed were had among the Jews (see the Book of Mormon title page; 1 Nephi 5:11–16; Ether 1:3–4).
80. This is, of course, a very crude estimate, given the differences in Nephite scribal technology and our own, and does not take into account the time span covered by the earlier record of Ether.
81. Susan Niditch, “Genesis,” in *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Newsom and Ringe, 16. Niditch asks further: “Would not women authors and audiences take special pleasure in Rebekah’s fooling her dotty old husband or in Rachel’s using men’s attitudes toward menstruation to deceive her father Laban, or in Tamar’s more directly and daringly using her sexuality to obtain sons through Judah? Like Adam, the men in many of the women’s stories of Genesis are bumbling, passive, and ineffectual.”
82. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities*, 53.
83. The first person is also used in the words of God given to Moses in Moses 1–4 and to Abraham in Abraham 1–3:23. That pattern of “I, [given name],” used so frequently in the Book of Mormon, is also used in Abraham’s account (see Abraham 1:1; 2:2; 3:1).
84. Bennion, “Women and the Book of Mormon,” in *Women of Wisdom and Knowledge*, ed. Cornwall and Howe, 175.
85. Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Can a Male Savior Save Women? Liberating Christology from Patriarchy,” to be published in *Launching Conversations between Latter-day Saints and Nonrestoration Christians*, ed. Paulsen and Musser, 207, 208.
86. Drawing on Hebrew tradition, Ruether contends that we must deliteralize the phrase *Son of God*, perhaps by using the term *Wisdom*, the original version of the Logos, which is the “presence of God as means of creation, revelation and redemption.” In this way, then, “Christ can take on the face of every person and group and their diverse liberation struggles. We must be able to encounter Christ as Black, Asian, Aboriginal, or as woman. This also means that the coming Christ, the uncompleted future of redemption, is not the historical Jesus returned, but rather the fullness of human diversity gathered in a redemptive community” (“Can a Male Savior Save Women?” in *Launching Conversations between Latter-day Saints and Nonrestoration Christians*, ed. Paulsen and Musser, 201–2, 207–8).
87. Allred, *God the Mother*, 29.
88. “The messages that go into our spirits and our psyches as we study this book and absorb the positive images of the male and the absent or negative images of the female affect our lives, our self-images, our images of the opposite sex, our relationships to God, and our relationships to one another.” Pearson also recommends that we teach the Book of Mormon in a broader context, explicitly stressing that the “message about women is not the message God wants us to have. And, in fact, that the Nephite view of women may have been one of the many things that led to their downfall.” She also recommends some change of pronouns or usage: “For example, ‘the great and abominable church, the mother of harlots, the whore of all the earth’: does this entity need to be female?” Her third recommendation is that “whatever we do about the past, making alterations or changing the context, . . . we [must] realize that the present is the point of greatest power; that now, *this moment*, we create new and powerful images of women and femaleness, that we create new volumes of history and indeed new scripture that will fill our minds and our hearts with positive female pictures, pictures of women serving as full and fully honored partners in our religious life” (Pearson, “Could Feminism Have Saved the Nephites?” 39–40).
89. Or it may address social situations in Book of Mormon times that parallel our own, such as the importance of not separating personal morality from the law, that is, privatizing religion (see Alma 30:7–11); the potentially oppressive nature of a religious state that allows no freedom of worship (for example, Alma 14:1–22, Alma and Amulek in the land of Ammonihah); or the end of cultures bent on revenge (see Ether; Mormon 5–8).
90. I am indebted to the late Arthur H. King for much of the approach I use in reading scripture.
91. Arguably, the stories of the conflicts among the Jaredites and between the Nephites and the Lamanites are perfect stories for our times because they illustrate how ethnic cleansing destroys whole societies. They also show us that only the gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to change the hearts of those bent on destroying a people; only the gospel of Jesus Christ can bring unity to societies marred by years or even centuries of ethnic or racial wars.
92. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981), 51. Alter notes that “the biblical type-scene occurs not in the rituals of daily existence but at the crucial junctures in the lives of the heroes, from conception and birth to betrothal to deathbed.” Alan Goff and Richard Rust have analyzed narratives in the Book of Mormon, demonstrating a remarkably rich literary bridge between the Bible and the Book of Mormon. See, for example, Alan Goff, *A Hermeneutic of Sacred Texts: Historicism, Revisionism, Positivism, and the Bible and Book of Mormon* (master’s thesis, BYU, 1989). See also Alan Goff, “Historical Narrative, Literary Narrative—Expelling Poetics from the Republic of History,” *JBMS* 5/1 (1996): 50–102; Richard Dilworth Rust, “Recurrence in Book of Mormon Narratives,” *JBMS* 3/1 (1994): 39–52; and Edgar C. Snow Jr., “Narrative Criticism and the Book of Mormon,” *JBMS* 4/2 (1995): 93–106. But see Exum’s discussion of type-scenes as reducing women to gynotypes in the service of patriarchy, in her *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives*.
93. For example, see the editorial comment in the story of Ammon at the Lamanite court: “Now we see that Ammon could not be slain for the Lord had said unto Mosiah, his father: I will spare him, and it shall be unto him according to thy faith—therefore, Mosiah trusted him unto the Lord” (Alma 19:23); the Words of Mormon; and Alma 19:36: “and we see that [the Lord’s] arm is extended to all people who will repent and believe on his name.” Susan Ward Easton [Black] has demonstrated the pervasive presence of Christ in the Book of Mormon in *The Book of Mormon: A Witness for Christ* (unpublished manuscript, 1977). We contrast those frequent references to Christ with the analogical approach that the Old Testament seems at times to necessitate, as illustrated by Andrew C. Skinner, “Finding Jesus Christ in the Old Testament,” *Ensign*, June 2002, 24–28.
94. See Thomas W. Mackay, “Mormon as Editor: A Study in Colophons, Headers, and Source Indicators,” *JBMS* 2/2 (1993): 90–109.
95. See 1 Nephi 10:15. Mormon also abridges his account because he is commanded to do so (see Mormon 5:8–9).
96. Alternative approaches would be to use the hermeneutic of suspicion, for example, to ask how foregrounding the tasks of editing, abridging, or having custody of the record serves the male prophets, record keepers, editors, and abridgers. Does it allow readers to excuse the relative absence of women too easily and elicit reader sympathy for the male record keepers? See “The Question of Excusing Men at Any Cost,” in Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs*, 233–35. Another approach would be to see the editorial comments as a literary device providing a frame within which the author can present a wide range of disparate material, using the editorial insertions as transitional material.
97. Custody of those records for most of their existence is mostly unknown. The study of the various texts of the books of the Bible and their transmission history from oral to written record forms a sub-specialty of biblical studies that cannot be adequately discussed here. Summaries of the current best hypotheses may be found in any reliable Bible dictionary under “Texts,” “Versions,” “Manuscripts,” or “Editions.”
98. Chain of custody is a legal term that refers to the weight (importance) of real (tangible, physical) evidence presented at trial. For example, chain of custody is proven if an officer can testify that she took physical control of the item of physical evidence (e.g., a knife), identified it, placed it in a locked or protected area, and then retrieved the item being offered on the day of trial. See *Black’s Law Dictionary*, 6th ed. (St. Paul, Minn.: West, 1990), s.v. “Chain of custody.”
99. It could be argued that the transfer of records from Chemish to Abinadom and from Abinadom to Amaleki must be inferred. But given the charge to hand them down from generation to generation and the familial relationships stated, the inferences are reasonable. Mormon is the general editor, abridger, of course, with Moroni taking those responsibilities after his father’s death. But other custodians include Nephi (1 Nephi 1:1); Jacob (Jacob 1:1–8); Enos (Jacob 7:27); Jarom (Jarom 1:1); Omni (Omni 1:1); Amaron (Omni 1:3); Chemish (Omni 1:8); Abinadom (Omni 1:10); Amaleki (Omni 1:12); King Benjamin (Omni 1:25); Mosiah (Mosiah 28:11); Alma the son of Alma (Mosiah 28:20); Helaman (Alma 37:1–5) and his sons (Helaman 16:25); Nephi the son of Nephi who was the son of Helaman (3 Nephi 1:2); Amos (4 Nephi 1:19); Amos the son of Amos (4 Nephi 1:21); Ammaron (4 Nephi 1:47), who hid the records as directed by the Holy Ghost so that they might not be destroyed; Mormon (Mormon 1:1–5, 17); and Moroni (Mormon 8:1–4), who hid them up in the earth. Some 1,400 years later, Moroni transferred the record from the hiding place in the earth to the next custodian, Joseph Smith, who translated the plates and returned them to Moroni in 1829 (see JS—H 1:59–60). We know that at least one potential record keeper, Nephiah, the second chief judge, “refused . . . to take possession of those records and those things which were esteemed by Alma and his fathers to be most sacred; therefore Alma had conferred them upon his son, Helaman” (Alma 50:38). Neither was Nephiah granted the office of high priest, which Alma retained after giving up the judgment seat (see Alma 4:16–18).
100. Darlene M. Juschka, “And Then There Were None . . . Writing Women Back into the Historical Record,” in *Feminism in the Study of Religion*, ed. Darlene M. Juschka (London: Continuum, 2001), 161.
101. The referent is unclear; perhaps the word *it* refers to Mormon’s *intent*, judging from the previous sentence.
102. See Brown, “I Speak Somewhat concerning That Which I Have Written.”
103. The term is probably a figure of speech rather than a factual measurement; both recorders and abridger(s) wrestled

- with the problem (see Jacob 3:13; Words of Mormon 1:5; Helaman 3:14; 3 Nephi 5:8; 26:6; Ether 15:33).
104. See 3 Nephi 23:6–13, where the Nephite record did not contain part of the prophecy of Samuel the Lamanite (now in Helaman 14:25) and Nephi was commanded to and did correct the record. Nephi and the other disciples were commanded to “write the words which the Father had given unto Malachi” (chaps. 3 and 4) in 3 Nephi 24–25. Mormon, having been forbidden to write all of Christ’s words to the Nephites, notes in 3 Nephi 26:12: “I, Mormon, do write the things which have been commanded me of the Lord. And now I, Mormon, make and end of my sayings, and proceed to write the things which have been commanded me.”
105. See, for example, 2 Nephi 4:14: “For I, Nephi, was constrained to speak unto [Laman and Lemuel], according to his [Lehi’s] word; for I had spoken many things unto them, and also my father, before his death; many of which sayings are written upon mine other plates; for a more history part are written upon mine other plates.” See also Jacob 1:2: “And he [Nephi] gave me, Jacob, a commandment that I should write upon these plates a few of the things which I considered to be most precious; that I should not touch, save it were lightly, concerning the history of this people which are called the people of Nephi.”
106. For example, Nephi is forbidden to write part of his vision in 1 Nephi 14 (see vv. 19–28) and is told that John, “the apostle of the Lamb of God[,] . . . should write them”; Nephi is “bidden” not to write things he viewed that were “too great for man” (2 Nephi 4:25); Mormon was forbidden from writing all of Christ’s teachings that were engraved on the plates of Nephi (see 3 Nephi 26:11); the day after Christ healed the multitude and ascended a second time into heaven, the words given to children and babes, heard by the multitude, “were forbidden that there should not any man write them. . . . And many of [the disciples] saw and heard unspeakable things, which are not lawful to be written” (3 Nephi 26:16, 18); Christ instructs the disciples to “write the things which ye have seen and heard, save it be those which are forbidden” (3 Nephi 27:23); Mormon was forbidden to record the names of the three Nephites who would remain upon the earth until Christ’s second coming (see 3 Nephi 28:25); and Moroni was forbidden to write more of the prophecies of Ether (see Ether 13:13).
107. See Ether 4:1, where the brother of Jared was commanded to write his vision of the Lord, but the record was not to come forth until after Christ’s crucifixion. Moroni testifies in Ether 5:1: “I, Moroni, have written the words which were commanded me, according to my memory; and I have told you the things which I have sealed up; therefore touch them not in order that ye may translate; for that thing is forbidden you, except by and by it shall be wisdom in God.”
108. See, for example, Eugene England’s Girardian reading of Nephi’s account of killing Laban (“A Second Witness for the Logos: The Book of Mormon and Contemporary Literary Criticism,” in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990], 2:91–125, esp. 101–23).
109. “Personal Worthiness to Exercise the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, May 2002, 52–59.
110. See Bowen and Williams, “Women in the Book of Mormon,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4:1577–80. Note also the imagery of the daughters of Zion in 2 Nephi 13:16, 18 (Isaiah 3:16, 18) and Zion as a woman in 3 Nephi 22:1 (Isaiah 54:1). See also Cynthia L. Hallen, “The Lord’s Covenant of Kindness: Isaiah 54 and 3 Nephi 22,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 313–49.
111. Richard Dilworth Rust, “Questions Answered: My Study and Teaching of American Literature and the Book of Mormon,” in *Expressions of Faith: Testimonies of Latter-day Saint Scholars*, ed. Susan Easton Black (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1996), 226.
112. Neal A. Maxwell, “The Book of Mormon: A Great Answer to ‘The Great Question,’” in *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, the Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988), 1–17.
113. See John W. Welch, in “Ten Testimonies of Jesus Christ from the Book of Mormon” (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1991). This paper delivered at the annual Sperry Symposium at BYU (26 October 1991) outlines the testimonies of at least 10 witnesses of Christ in the Book of Mormon. See also John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999), chart 42 (“Nephite Declaration of Faith”) and chart 43 (“Consistent Elements in Nephite Declarations of Faith”). See the plan of salvation as taught, for example, by Lehi (1 Nephi 10:2–11, 14–29; 2 Nephi 6:2–13) and Nephi (1 Nephi 19:8–24 through 1 Nephi 22).
114. The blood of the consecration ram on the priest’s garments, the blood of Christ’s atoning sacrifice, the blood of the unrepentant on Christ’s garments, and the effort of chosen witnesses to rid their garments of the blood (sins) of their hearers are linked. See Genesis 49:11; Isaiah 63:3; D&C 133:46–51 (of Christ); Exodus 29:21; Leviticus. 6:27; 8:30 (of priests and the sacrificial animal); 1 Nephi 12:10; 2 Nephi 9:44; Mosiah 2:28; Mormon 9:35; Ether 12:38; D&C 88:74–5, 85; 112:30–33 (of special witnesses); 1 Nephi 12:11; Alma 5:21, 22, 27; 13:11–12; 34:36; 3 Nephi 27:19; Ether 13:10 (of the repentant/the righteous/high priests). We note that Zeezrom cries of Alma and Amulek: “I am guilty, and these men are spotless before God” (Alma 14:7). No doubt the “blood of the innocent,” mentioned in Alma 14:11 and in numerous other places in the Book of Mormon is related to the day of judgment, and being cleansed by the blood of Christ is part of the imagery used for repentance. See, for example, Alma 12:14; 3 Nephi 27:19; and Mormon 9:6.
115. An alternative interpretation would be to see these affirmations of the writers/abridgers’ faith, knowledge, and purpose as appeals to authority, or ways of influencing how their writings are interpreted. The writers acknowledged their incomplete understanding of the purpose for keeping the record (see 1 Nephi 9:5; Words of Mormon 1:7; Alma 37:12).
116. We may reject any witness upon any ground that appeals to us, or on no ground whatsoever. It may be that the actions of those ordinary people who know the Book of Mormon is a true witness of Christ will prove to be like those of Abish. They give a copy of the Book of Mormon to a friend or a stranger, trusting that the spirit of God’s work will reach that person and that the successive witnesses in that book will bear testimony of Christ again and again to the reader. Many will believe those witnesses, though they have no other.

[With Real Intent]
Loving the Book of Mormon
James E. Faulconer

1. I have recounted my experience with this professor, Professor Steven L. Goldman (Mellon Distinguished Professor in Humanities, Lehigh University), in “Studying the Scriptures,” chapter 1 in my book *Scripture Study: Tools and Suggestions* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999), 1–7.
2. “I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1968], 194).
3. See Moroni 10:24, where Moroni specifically says that what follows is “unto all the ends of the earth.”

[What’s in a Name?]

Irreantum
Paul Y. Hoskisson, with Brian M. Hauglid and John Gee

1. The printer’s manuscript contains the spelling as we now have it in our 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon. The original manuscript of the Book of Mormon contains a partly readable spelling, *Irreantum*, where *-rre-* are only partially legible and the second *a* has been crossed out. See Royal Skousen’s critical texts, *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text and The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2001).
2. The complete list of six are *Irreantum*, “many waters” (1 Nephi 17:5); *Rabbanah*, “powerful or great king” (Alma 18:13); *Rameumptom*, “holy stand” (Alma 31:21); *Liahona*, “compass” (Alma 37:38); *deseret*, “honey bee” (Ether 2:3); and *Ripliancum*, “large, to exceed all” (Ether 15:8). In addition, several proper nouns are rendered into English without the transliteration of the ancient name, such as *Bountiful* and *Desolation*.
3. In addition to Hebrew and Egyptian, the following languages could provide help when looking for etymologies of Book of Mormon names, given here in the approximate descending order of importance: Northwest Semitic languages (of which

Hebrew is one), such as Ugaritic, Phoenician, and Aramaic; South Semitic, such as Arabic and Epigraphic South Arabian; Assyrian and Babylonian (both are East Semitic languages related to Hebrew, though more distantly than the Northwest and South Semitic languages); Hurrian (a people mentioned in Genesis but who are not related to any other known ethnic group); Hittite (Indo-Europeans who are mentioned in the Bible); and Sumerian (an altogether unrelated language from Mesopotamia that died out as a spoken language about 1,400 years before Lehi left Jerusalem but continued to be used as a classic language until after the time of Christ).

4. Despite popular assumptions, nowhere in the Book of Mormon—small plates or Mormon’s abridgment—does an author or redactor ever state what the language of either set of plates was. Nephi’s statement in 1 Nephi 1:2 is ambiguous because it does not discuss which script he wrote in, leaving open the possibility that “language” could refer to either the spoken language or to the script. Only a thousand years after Lehi is a script ever singled out, and that passage applies to Mormon’s abridgment of the large plates of Nephi only and not to the small plates of Nephi, with which we are dealing (see Mormon 9:32–34). Mosiah 1:4 speaks of the brass plates only, not of the large or the small plates.
5. For example, in 1 Nephi 16:34, the chapter previous to the one in which *Irreantum* appears, Nephi provided only the transliteration of the place-name *Nahom*. By contrast, in the very same verse in which *Irreantum* appears (1 Nephi 17:5), he provided only a translation for the place-name *Bountiful*. Why provide both transliteration and translation for *Irreantum* when that is not the normal practice in the Book of Mormon?
6. I use the name Canaanite for simplicity’s sake, knowing that there is still controversy over what that term denotes and connotes. I use it here simply to designate the people in the Late Bronze Age who wrote the letters sent from Palestine to Egypt.
7. For hints at what Nephi and subsequent writers could expect their readers to know, see 1 Nephi 1:2; Mosiah 1:4; and Mormon 9:32–34.
8. In inscriptions Qatabanian the root *rwy* means “irrigation system” (Stephen D. Ricks, *Lexicon of Inscriptional Qatabanian* [Roma: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico], 153). In Sabaic *yhrwy[n]* means to “provide with irrigation,” while *rwym* is a well or watering place (see Joan Copeland Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic: Sabean Dialect*, Harvard Semitic Studies 25 [Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982], 482). Finally, in modern Arabic the root *rwy* is associated with water for drinking and irrigation (see Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* [Beirut, Lebanon: Librairie du Liban, 1980], 3:1194–95).

This root, *rwy*, also appears in Hebrew and other Northwest Semitic languages. For example, Hebrew has רָוַי, which has the following meanings in its various verbal forms: *Qal*, “to drink one’s fill, to be refreshed”; *Piel*, “to give to drink abundantly, water thoroughly”; and *Hif’il*, “to water thoroughly” (see Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, CD-ROM version [Leiden: Brill],