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AMERICAN PROTO-ZIONISM AND THE “BOOK OF LEHI”:
RECONTEXTUALIZING THE RISE OF MORMONISM

by

Don Bradley

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

History

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2018

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ABSTRACT

American Proto-Zionism and the “Book of Lehi”:
Recontextualizing the Rise of Mormonism

by

Don Bradley, Master of Arts
Utah State University, 2018

Major Professor: Dr. Philip L. Barlow
Department: History

Mormonism is often understood in academia as primarily an expression of nineteenth-century Christian primitivism. In Jan Shipps’s comprehensive model of Mormon origins, Mormonism went through three developmental phases: an original, 1829-early 1830s Christian primitivist phase; a later-1830s Hebraic phase; and an 1840s esoteric phase.

This thesis will complicate and expand Shipps’s model, arguing that before its familiar early Christian primitivist phase Mormonism went through a still earlier *Judaic* phase. This early Mormon Judaic phase is contextualized by a contemporaneous phenomenon I am terming “American proto-Zionism” and was expressed in Mormonism’s contemporaneous scripture, the “Book of Lehi.”

“American proto-Zionism,” as conceptualized here, was an endeavor to make the New World a provisional Zion for Jewish colonization, preparatory to an ultimate return

to Palestine. American proto-Zionism manifested in competing Christian and Jewish forms, with Christian proto-Zionists aiming to convert Jews while Jewish proto-Zionists aimed to enhance the prosperity of and protect the religious practice of fellow Jews. American proto-Zionism was centered primarily in New York state and confined almost entirely to the 1820s—the precise time and place of Mormonism’s emergence.

The most ambitious American proto-Zionist project was that of Mordecai Noah, the United States’ first nationally prominent Jew, who endeavored to “gather” the world’s Jews to a “New Jerusalem” in western New York. Early (1827-28) reports about the Mormon movement describe it focusing, like Noah, on the gathering of the Jews and Native Americans to an American “New Jerusalem.”

The now-missing first portion of the Book of Mormon, the Book of Lehi, or “lost 116 pages,” is Mormonism’s earliest scripture. Using internal evidence from the extant Book of Mormon text and external sources it is possible to reconstruct contents from this lost Mormon scripture. Doing so reveals it to have focused on Judaic aims, such as Jewish gathering, and to have implicitly provided a model for ending the Diaspora.

Mormonism was shaped by its encounter, not only with biblical Judaism, but also by its encounter with living Judaism, in the form of Jewish American proto-Zionism, and by its brief encounter with its original scripture, the Book of Lehi.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

American Proto-Zionism and the “Book of Lehi”:

Recontextualizing the Rise of Mormonism

Don Bradley

Although historians generally view early Mormonism as a movement focused on restoring Christianity to its pristine New Testament state, in the Mormon movement’s first phase (1827-28) it was actually focused on restoring *Judaism* to its pristine “Old Testament” state and reconstituting the Jewish nation as it had existed before the Exile.

Mormonism’s first scripture, “the Book of Lehi” (the first part of the Book of Mormon), disappeared shortly after its manuscript was produced. But evidence about its contents shows it to have had restoring Judaism and the Jewish nation to their pre-Exilic condition to have been one of its major themes. And statements by early Mormons at the time the Book of Lehi manuscript was produced show they were focused on “confirming the Old Testament” and “gathering” the Jews to an American New Jerusalem.

This Judaic emphasis in earliest Mormonism appears to have been shaped by a set of movements in the same time and place (New York State in the 1820s) that I am calling “American proto-Zionism,” which aimed to colonize Jews in the United States. The early Mormon movement can be considered part of American proto-Zionism and was influenced by developments in early nineteenth century American Judaism.

DEDICATION

In giving the world this thesis on Mormonism's lost sacred text,

I dedicate it

to those I have lost,

my little brother

Charles David McNamara Bradley

and my parents

Edward Francis Bradley, Sr.

and

Patricia Mae Thornhill Bradley,

both of whom passed away while I was working on it;

and to those I have found,

my sons

Donnie

and

Nicholas,

whose very existence sustains me.

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Any work of scholarship emerges from a matrix of thousands of earlier works and countless personal relationships and interactions. The number and extent of my debts of gratitude can never be fully stated. But I will try to acknowledge a number of them here.

I wish to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Philip Barlow, for his generosity, perspective, and wisdom. Dr. Barlow has always made himself available and always given me more than the allotted time. And he has always believed in me.

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Thank you to my parents, Don Brown, Patricia Thornhill Bradley, and the late Ed Bradley. Because you made me who I am, everything I make is yours as well.

Thank you especially to my mother, Patricia Thornhill Bradley, for teaching me by her example the essential elements of being an historian—to be curious, to think deeply, to exercise empathy, and to always ask “why.”

Orceneth Fisher, of long ago, left a legacy that greatly enhances my life and that informs this work.

I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude for the support of Nathan and Molly Hadfield, Jerry Grover, Randy Paul, Dr. Stephen and Janae Thomas, Marcus and Annice North, Steven and Judith Peterson, and Earl and Corrine Wunderli. Thank you so much.

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Through much of the time I was writing this thesis I suffered from severe sleep apnea, which led to a deep and protracted depression. There are caring people who were so helpful in overcoming that. Thank you, Adrienne Shaver, Dr. Kirt Beus, and Dr. Dan Daley.

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Brian Hales has been an incomparable friend and supporter through this process, and so much else in my life. Thank you, Brian.

My two greatest intellectual interlocutors over the years, who are also two of my very best friends, have influenced everything I do. This is for you, Trevor Luke and

Maxine Hanks. I hope when you read this you see your fingerprints.

During my depression, I experienced a near-total loss of belief in myself. But there were friends who showed so strongly that they never stopped believing in me.

Thank you for that, Mark Thomas and Nathan Hadfield.

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Michaelann – the journey here has not been easy, and not what you thought you were signing up for. But we made it! Thank you for your patience and support through this journey, for your extra help in my final push at the end, and for growing with me.

Donnie and Nicholas, thank you for letting me talk with you about all this, for giving me useful input, for the inspiration you've given your dad, and, when I needed it, the will to live. Everything I do is partly for you. And this is no exception.

Don Bradley

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CHAPTER I:
RECONSTRUCTING A LOST TEXT
AND ITS LOST CONTEXT

Introduction

The Book of Lehi is the earliest Mormon scripture.¹ Given its position at the foundation of the Mormon faith and at the head of Mormon scripture, one might expect to find a substantial body of scholarship aimed at reconstructing its contents and significance. But such an expectation would be in vain. One hundred eighty-three years after the book's loss, the scholarly output on the subject consists principally of a single chapter.² For the academic community and the Latter Day Saint religious community alike, the "lost 116 pages" are not only still lost, they are effectively blank.

The absence of even a skeletal reconstruction of the Book of Lehi has impoverished the understanding of Mormon scripture and the scholarship on Mormon origins. A principal purpose of the present study is to remediate this lack by reconstructing significant elements of the Book of Lehi's content and context, and relating the one to the other. The reconstructed content from the Book of Lehi consists of

¹ In explaining the theft of the Book of Mormon's lengthy "forepart" in the preface to the book's first published edition (1830), Joseph Smith called that first section of the book "the Book of Lehi." It seems likely that this was not an internal title meant to refer to the entirety of the lost manuscript but, rather, a term Smith used for convenience and clarity in distinguishing the lost Book of Mormon text from the extant text. I will use the term for similar reasons here. As discussed later in this chapter, while the lost text was an early section or stage within the same work as the published Book of Mormon text, using a different name for it will help distinguish the two as we explore how the lost text differed from the extant text.

² John A. Tvedtnes, "Contents of the Lost 116 Pages and the Large Plates," in *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Salt Lake City: Cornerstone Publishing, 1999), 37–52.

teachings, themes, and narratives. This content will be placed in the cultural and circumstantial contexts that shaped the book's meaning for its audience.

The other principal purpose of this study is to use the Book of Lehi's discernible content and context to illuminate and clarify the origin and character of Mormonism.

The reconstruction of both the Book of Lehi text and its context to be carried out in this thesis promises three benefits to historians of Mormonism and scholars of religious studies. First, uncovering portions of the lost Book of Lehi provides context for interpreting Mormonism's extant scripture. The Book of Mormon text available to modern audiences is most meaningfully read against the backdrop of the Book of Lehi.

A second benefit of reconstructing contents of the Book of Lehi and its context is anthropological and cross-cultural. The work of reconstruction opens a window onto Smith's early prophetic activity and Mormonism's evolution in the period before its extant scripture. This will shed light on the rise of Mormonism, and the example of Mormonism's rise can, in turn, be used as data for modeling the origins of many older prophetic religions, whose beginnings are impossible to examine as closely.

Whereas the origins of most influential religious traditions lie in the remote past and must be viewed as if through a telescope, Mormonism's origin can be placed under a microscope. After observing patterns in the birth of prophetic religion in the Mormon microcosm of the 1820s we are better positioned to understand the myriad births and rebirths of prophetic religion in the more remote periods of human history. The present analysis may be profitably used in building models for processes such as how the prophet's response to crisis builds novelty and complexity in an emerging religion and

how an emerging syncretic religion is shaped by encounters with living bearers of the traditions it syncretizes.

A third contribution to scholarship promised by a partial reconstruction of the Book of Lehi's content and context is the illumination of Mormonism's character and place in American religion. Scholars taking up the perennially contested question of Mormonism's relationship to other strains of American religion have searched for the initial Mormon impulse—the faith's originary purpose and *raison d'être*. As Mormonism's embryonic scripture, the Book of Lehi is both the first known historical source for the faith and the primal expression of the Mormon cosmos. Because the Book of Lehi precedes the extant Book of Mormon, which scholars have taken as Mormonism's earliest manifestation, knowledge of this still earlier Mormon scripture has the potential to confirm—or upset—existing theories of Mormonism's origin, character, and relationship to other religious and cultural currents.

Our exploration of the Book of Lehi's content and context, and the relationship between these, will help demonstrate that Mormonism began as a very different kind of movement than scholars have heretofore believed. While scholars have overwhelmingly situated the early Mormon movement within the meta-narrative of the New Testament and the history and goals of American evangelical Christianity, earliest Mormonism is better situated in the meta-narrative of the “Old Testament,” the Hebrew Bible, and emerges from the history and goals of nineteenth century American Judaism as much as from nineteenth century American evangelicalism.

By way of preview, this thesis will consist of five chapters. The present chapter will lay out the problems to be solved. It will review the impact of the loss of the Book of

Lehi manuscript, the attention—or neglect—given to the subject by scholars, and the varied answers scholars have given to questions like, “What kind of movement was earliest Mormonism?” and, “From what strands of American culture did Mormonism emerge?” The chapter will also describe the theoretical framework within which the present thesis is carried out, overview the challenges of textual reconstruction, and introduce the methodology of reconstruction to be used herein.

Chapter II, “The Rise of American Proto-Zionism in 1820s New York,” will explore a heretofore-neglected context in which the Book of Lehi emerged—that of the rise and decline of the movement I am terming “American proto-Zionism” in New York State in the 1820s. American proto-Zionism was a fervent but short-lived flurry of efforts to colonize Jews in the United States as a temporary place of refuge, in preparation for their ultimate return to Jerusalem. It emerged in both Jewish and Christian forms and ultimately served as a precursor to the true Zionist movement that began emerging later in the century.

Chapter III, “The Proto-Zionist Character of the Earliest Mormon Movement,” will demonstrate that the adolescent Joseph Smith would have been aware of American proto-Zionism, particularly in the form of Mordecai Noah’s program to “gather” the world’s Jews to Smith’s environs in western New York. And it will show how Smith’s own incipient movement shared these aims and can be understood as both an extension of and response to this movement.

Chapter IV, “The Book of Lehi: A Primer in American Jewish Restoration,” will reassemble fragments of the Book of Lehi’s content, the puzzle pieces of its lost narrative. This narrative will prove thoroughly Judaic. The lost text, not surprisingly, fit

into its lost, or neglected, Jewish context. The book's early narratives report Lehi's exodus from Jerusalem and his son Nephi's establishment of a new Jewish commonwealth in their American "Promised Land." Some of its later narratives report the subsequent exodus of Mosiah₁ and his re-establishment of a Nephite commonwealth modeled on the original Davidic Israelite United Monarchy and later Southern Kingdom of Judah.³ After reconstructing these narratives the chapter will show how they dealt with the loss of the institutions of pre-Exilic Israel and their replacement with parallel institutions among the Nephites, providing a precedent—and even a script—for the "gathering," and political, and religious reestablishment of the Jews in the nineteenth-century United States.

The final chapter, Chapter V, "The Legacy of the Book of Lehi," will take up the questions of how Mormonism transformed from a proto-Zionist movement to a Christian primitivist movement, and of the lasting legacy of the Book of Lehi and Mormonism's American proto-Zionist passage. In conclusion it will articulate a revision of Jan Shipps's model of the origins of Mormon theology (discussed below), explore the implications of a Mormonism that began as a proto-Zionist movement responding to contemporaneous currents in both Christianity and Judaism, and propose how the development of Mormonism's Judaic-Christian syncretism may be relevant to understanding the origin of Islam and the evolution of other faiths in their early, prophetic phase.

The Problem

³ Two Book of Mormon kings are denominated "Mosiah." I distinguish the earlier Mosiah dynastic founder and father of King Benjamin, from the later Mosiah, terminal Nephite monarch and son of Benjamin, by referring to them respectively as Mosiah₁ and Mosiah₂.

The earliest historical sources for the rise of Mormonism are its seminal scriptural texts—the Book of Mormon and the associated revelations issued by the faith’s founder, Joseph Smith, Jr. These texts demonstrate the religious understandings held at Mormonism’s nascence by Smith and its other early disciples. But the very first of Joseph Smith’s revelatory texts, comprising the Book of Mormon’s opening centuries of narrative—known as “the Book of Lehi” or “the lost 116 pages”—is not extant, having been stolen before any additional Latter Day Saint scripture was produced. (The term “Latter-day Saint” refers to the largest religious body based on the Book of Mormon, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah. The term “Latter Day Saint,” using the spelling employed by the earliest of the “saints,” refers to all religious groups based on the Book of Mormon. I have chosen to employ the more inclusive form.)

Our understanding of the problem this loss posed for Smith, and the problem it poses for present-day scholars, will be enhanced by situating the Book of Lehi and its extant replacement in the nineteenth-century context in which they emerged.

Introducing the Book of Mormon and the Book of Lehi

Joseph Smith offered a supernatural account of the Book of Mormon’s origins. Smith related that an angel visited him on September 22, 1823 and directed him on how to find a record engraved on golden plates by the prophets of an ancient American-Israelite civilization, the Nephites. He reported translating the book by scrying. Early witnesses say that Smith translated much of the opening text of the Book of Mormon, the Book of Lehi, behind a veil while looking into the ancient “interpreters” (a scrying device

structured like spectacles), found with the Book of Mormon plates. And they say he translated the remainder while looking into his less elaborate “seer stone,” using his hat to occlude the stone from external light during the process.⁴ As Smith dictated, a scribe seated on the other side of the veil, or at a desk near Smith, recorded the words.

Smith and the early believers referred to this process as “translation,” but we will require neutral terminology. I will use the terms “dictation” and “transcription.” These terms bracket the question of the text’s ultimate origins, be they natural or supernatural, while accurately characterizing the interplay between Smith and his scribe in creating the Book of Mormon manuscript.⁵

Narrated in a style echoing that of the biblical books of Chronicles and Kings, the resulting work offers itself as the sacred history of three ancient groups who migrated from the Old World to the New: the Jaredites, the Lehites, and the Mulekites/Mulochites, or “people of Zarahemla.” The book focuses largely on the family of Lehi, a Jew who flees Jerusalem at the beginning of the Babylonian Exile and leads a colony to the Americas.⁶ After Lehi’s death, his family divides into several American Israelite tribes, which the extant text distills into two principal warring factions—the Lamanites (named

⁴ On Smith’s use of scrying instruments, see Mark R. Ashurst-McGee, “A Pathway to Prophethood: Joseph Smith Junior as Rodsman, Village Seer, and Judeo-Christian Prophet,” (Unpublished Master’s Thesis; Logan: Utah State University, 2000).

⁵ One of Smith’s revelations appears to equate his work of “translation” with the process of transcription, referring to the resulting manuscript text as, “the words which you have caused to be written, or which you have translated” (D&C 10:10).

⁶ For the description of Lehi and his family as “Jews,” see the extant Book of Mormon text (1 Nephi 1:2; 2 Nephi 30:4) and Joseph Smith’s first-person divine voice revelations (Doctrine and Covenants 19:27; 57:4). Except as otherwise noted, citations to the Book of Mormon are to the 1981 LDS edition: *The Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), and citations to the Doctrine and Covenants are similarly to the 1981 LDS edition: *The Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981).

for Lehi's rebellious eldest son Laman) and the Nephites (named for Lehi's pious younger son Nephi).

Smith delivered the book's opening narratives about Lehi's exodus from Jerusalem to the Americas shortly after beating his own hasty exodus from upstate New York to northern Pennsylvania, to escape enemies who coveted the golden plates. He dictated these early stories to his wife Emma Hale Smith, his brothers-in-law Reuben and Alva Hale, and his own brother Samuel H. Smith.⁷ He then narrated several more generations of the Book of Lehi's chronicle to the prosperous farmer Martin Harris, who was to finance the book's publication. Harris, however, insisted on taking the manuscript home to Palmyra, in upstate New York, to persuade his wife that the time and money he was putting into the book were well spent. While the manuscript was at the Harris home in summer 1828, it disappeared. Neither Harris nor Smith was able to recover it or learn its ultimate fate.

This loss of a large portion of the Book of Mormon—approximately the first 450 years of its 1000-year narrative—precipitated a crisis in Smith's prophetic career, and prompted a revelation instructing him not to retranslate the stolen portion. Skeptics of Smith's translation claims generally believe he crafted this instruction to dodge the impossible task of rewriting the lost text word for word. Smith's revelation offered its own rationale: the thieves had not only taken the manuscript but also tampered with it, such that even a word-for-word retranslation would appear to be mistaken (D&C 10:8-18). The revelation stated that rather than produce the same text over again, Smith was to

⁷ For documentation of the scribes who assisted Joseph Smith with the Book of Lehi, see Don Bradley, "Written by the Finger of God?" *Sunstone* 161 (Dec. 2010): 20–29.

translate from another ancient record—”the plates of Nephi”—which covered the same period (D&C 10:38-45).

In about March 1829, Joseph Smith and his scribes resumed the transcription of the Book of Mormon. But instead of immediately providing an account to substitute for the lost manuscript, Smith continued the narration from his earlier stopping point (the present Book of Mosiah, Chapter 1). Only after dictating from there to the book’s chronological conclusion did he then go “back” to provide another account of the Nephites’ first four and half centuries. This replacement text, referred to internally as “the plates of Nephi” and known to Latter Day Saints as “the small plates of Nephi” or just “the small plates,” is to a great extent comprised of prophecy and Christocentric doctrinal discourse, genres reportedly in short supply in the original Book of Lehi.⁸ But after narrating Lehi’s exodus to an American promised land, the new account only touches on some highlights of the Book of Lehi’s several succeeding centuries. Absent are the book’s original introduction; the narratives—and even identities—of the Nephite kings in the 350 years separating Nephi from Mosiah₁; any substantive description of Nephite temple worship; an account of the transfer of the “interpreters” from the Jaredites to the Nephites; accounts of the Nephites’ major destructive wars; the founding narrative of the

⁸ The term “small plates,” or “small plates of Nephi,” is generally used to refer to this text in Latter Day Saint discourse. Since the use of this term assumes the Latter Day Saint faith claim that Joseph Smith found ancient plates, Brent Metcalfe has proposed “replacement text” as a more neutral term. Since “small plates” is by far the most common term that has been used for this text in the existing literature, I will generally favor that term. But in order to bracket the faith claim that may be taken as implicit in the term I place the term in quotation marks. (See Brent Lee Metcalfe, “The Priority of Mosiah: A Prelude to Book of Mormon Exegesis,” in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 395–444.

Mulochite⁹ people; the details of King Mosiah₁'s exodus and reign; and no doubt a tremendous amount more. It is difficult even to know what more we are missing until we begin to reconstruct it.

It is necessary to say a further word here about the Book of Lehi's relationship to the Book of Mormon. The Book of Lehi is, properly, *part* of the Book of Mormon. According to Joseph Smith it shared the same narrator, Mormon, as the extant Book of Mormon text.¹⁰ It comprised the first four and half centuries of the Book of Mormon's narrative and was intended to be published as part of that book. With the introduction of a "small plates" text (narrated by Nephi, his brother Jacob, and Jacob's descendants) to replace the missing Book of Lehi, the structure of the book changed. There is every reason to believe that the outline of its early centuries of narrative remained the same, but the level of detail with which these centuries were narrated changed dramatically: the replacement-text version of those narratives is a fraction of the length of the Book of Lehi originals. There is evidence (discussed in Chapters III and IV) that some of the doctrinal emphases of the Book of Lehi and that of the extant text differed substantially.

The result of all this is that the Book of Lehi can be treated both as part of the Book of Mormon—an original piece that shares much of its narrative and many of its

⁹ This spelling of the name "Muloch" may be unfamiliar to readers of the Book of Mormon. The name has been misspelled "Mulek" in most or all printed editions of the Book of Mormon, but is spelled "Muloch" in the earliest Book of Mormon manuscript. It should also be noted that the term "Mulochite" (or "Mulekite") has been created by Book of Mormon scholars and does not appear in the text. In the Book of Mormon text, this group is called, instead, "the people of Zarahemla," the name of their final king. This denomination is odd, since the Book of Mormon usually calls a people after its principal founder, rather than after one of the figures from late in its history, and usually uses the convention of referring to a people as "X-ites." The term "Mulochite" is used here in parallel to the Book of Mormon terms Nephite, Lamanite, and Jaredite, and because it is less awkward than referring to the nation across its history as "the people of Zarahemla."

¹⁰ *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon, upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi* (Palmyra, NY: Joseph Smith Jr., 1830), iii-iv.

messages—and also as a distinct work. Where the Book of Lehi and the extant Book of Mormon text appear to coincide, I will often refer to them as a single work, “the Book of Lehi/Book of Mormon” or simply refer to the Book of Lehi as part of the larger Book of Mormon narrative. Where it is important to consider the Book of Lehi on its own terms, in contrast with the extant text, I will refer to it more specifically as “the Book of Lehi.”

Literature Review

The arguments and findings in this thesis can best be appreciated and assessed when read in light of the larger dialogue on Mormonism’s place in American religion and in the light of earlier discussion on the Book of Lehi. To position the present thesis relative to those bodies of scholarship, I will first overview the extensive literature on early Mormonism in American culture and then review the more preliminary work done thus far on the Book of Lehi.

Scholarship on Mormonism’s Place in American Religion

For over a century after its founding, scholars most often treated Mormonism as too facile and transparently spurious to merit substantive analysis.¹¹ Only since the Second World War have scholars made sustained efforts to account for the faith’s rise and situate it in the American religious landscape. These scholars have overwhelmingly taken one of two tacks. Historians have typically assessed possible sources for

¹¹ For discussion of early attempts to account for Mormonism, see David Brion Davis, “The New England Origins of Mormonism,” *New England Quarterly* 26 (June 1953): 147–68; and Klaus Hansen, “Mormon History and the Conundrum of Culture: America and Beyond,” in Newell G. Bringhurst and Lavina Fielding Anderson, eds., *Excavating Mormon Pasts: The New Historiography of the Last Half Century* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2004), 1–26.

Mormonism using both the criterion of theological similarity and that of propinquity, geographical and genealogical proximity. The sources they have identified are thus, not surprisingly, Protestant movements that resemble Mormonism and to which Joseph Smith had plausible access through his family and environs. These Protestant movements are Puritanism, Christian primitivism, and revivalism.¹² By contrast, scholars of other disciplines, such as literary criticism, have typically identified antecedents to Mormonism using almost exclusively the criterion of theological similarity, with little attempt to demonstrate Smith's access to these influences. They have accordingly located Mormonism's roots in esoteric movements that shared some of its more idiosyncratic beliefs but were not obviously near to Smith in time and space—such as the hermetic-alchemical tradition, Christian Gnosticism, and the mystical Jewish tradition of Kabbalah.¹³

The first serious scholarly effort to uncover Mormonism's cultural roots was made by Whitney R. Cross, whose 1950 work *The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850* established the precedent of using propinquity to literally “locate” Mormonism's roots.¹⁴ Mormonism, on Cross's analysis, grew from upstate New York's “Burned-over District,” the ground of which had been enriched by successive blazes of revivalism. For Cross,

¹² Proponents of each of these as sources of Mormonism will be discussed and cited below.

¹³ For a professional historian arguing for hermetic-alchemical influence on Mormonism, see John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

¹⁴ Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1950). See particularly pages 138–150.

Mormonism was rooted in the region's "heritage of moral intensity" and blossomed "in the heat of evangelistic fervor."¹⁵

Historians writing since Cross have similarly identified sources of Mormonism in religious traditions that parallel its theology and are linked to it by genealogy, proximity, and regional culture. Some of these historians working in the immediate wake of Cross's contributions promptly relocated Mormonism's origin to the theological and physical territory of the Smiths' ancestral home, New England. For these interpreters, as for Emerson, the angelic trumpet heralding the Mormon restoration sounded suspiciously like "an after-clap of Puritanism."¹⁶

Propinquity and theological parallel have also been employed by several scholars of the past half-century who argue that Smith founded Mormonism to fulfill the Christian primitivist quest to restore the New Testament church.¹⁷ The goal of purging Christian faith of post-New Testament accretions and corruptions was essential to, if not the very essence of, the Protestant Reformation. But heirs of the Reformation tradition have differed in how explicitly they have enshrined the model of the New Testament church and in how fundamentally they have been willing to break with tradition in order to return to this "primitive" Christianity. "Christian primitivists" can be described as participants in the Reformation tradition for whom the pursuit of this goal has been so

¹⁵ Ibid., 144.

¹⁶ Davis, "The New England Origins of Mormonism, 147–68. For Emerson on the Mormons, see James Bradley Thayer, *A Western Journey with Mr. Emerson* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1884), 39–40.

¹⁷ Mario S. De Pillis, "The Quest for Religious Authority and the Rise of Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 1 (Spring 1966): 68–88; Marvin S. Hill, "The Role of Christian Primitivism in the Origin and Development of the Mormon Kingdom, 1830–1844," (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1968); and Dan Vogel, *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988).

explicit, systematic, and radical that they have either defined their denominational identity on it or held aloof from any denomination because of it.

Such Christian primitivism was an important part of Joseph Smith's family religious background. His maternal uncle Jason Mack was a Christian primitivist. And his father, Joseph Smith, Sr., appears to have similarly been a kind of Christian primitivist "seeker" who refused to join any of the existing churches because he sought a return to the pristine church.¹⁸ It is thus not surprising that scholars would identify Mormonism as having originated as Smith's attempt to fulfill the Christian primitivist quest by restoring original Christianity.

The identification of early Mormonism as an expression of Christian primitivism suggests the faith began as a radical Protestant sect. Over time, scholars advocating a Christian primitivist explanation of Mormonism's origin have nuanced the explanation, acknowledging that Mormonism sometimes departs spectacularly from the familiar primitivist vision. Christian primitivism had as its explicit and defining feature the aim to restore the New Testament church. But Mormonism also restored "Old Testament" practices (most notoriously polygyny), and thereby transgressed the traditional boundary between the testaments.¹⁹ The maverick restorationist movement even dared add Masonic and folk supernaturalist ("magical") esoterica to its "restoration of all things."²⁰

¹⁸ Sources for the Christian primitivism of Jason Mack and Joseph Smith, Sr. are provided in the further discussion of Christian primitivism in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

¹⁹ Richard T. Hughes, "Two Restoration Traditions: Mormons and Churches of Christ in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Mormon History* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 34–51; and Jan Shipps, "The Reality of the Restoration and the Restoration Ideal in the Mormon Tradition," in Richard T. Hughes, ed., *The American Quest for the Primitive Church* (Urbana and Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1988) 181–95. Hughes discusses the differing meanings of "restoration" between Mormonism and the archetypal Christian primitivist denomination the Disciples of Christ. And Shipps helpfully identifies two restoration ideals growing out of the biblical tradition—the first Judaic, that of the restoration of Israel to its lands,

Departing from the historians' judgments, the eminent literary critic Harold Bloom argued in 1992 that Mormonism is *primarily* an esoteric restoration.²¹ Bloom identified its doctrines of deification and plurality of gods with the tenets of Gnosticism and the Kabbalah. Although Bloom remained *agnostic* on whether Smith was directly influenced by Gnostic and Kabbalistic tradition or “reinvented” these, subsequent proponents of Mormonism's esoteric origins have conjectured on how such underground traditions reached Smith.²²

With most scholars admitting some admixture of Hebraic content into Mormon restorationism and a few exploring possible esoteric roots of the faith, the academy increasingly understands Mormonism to join multiple streams of religious tradition. But despite the usefulness of pluralistic visions of Mormon origins in accounting for the variegated data, such pluralism runs the risk of collapsing into conceptual chaos, treating Mormonism as an unstructured hodgepodge of influences.

Preempting this disintegration, eminent scholar of religious studies Jan Shipps has synthesized its three “restorations” into a single model. For Shipps, Mormonism was formed by Joseph Smith's “sequential introduction” of three theological “strata” or

temple, and unified peoplehood, and the second Christian, that of the restoration of spiritual gifts and the primitive church. She argues that early Mormonism drew upon both.

²⁰ Hughes, “Two Restoration Traditions,” 45. For “magical” and Masonic esoterica in Mormonism, see D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (revised and enlarged edition; Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998); and Michael W. Homer, “‘Similarity of Priesthood in Masonry’: The Relationship between Freemasonry and Mormonism,” *Dialogue* 27, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 1–116. For a critical review of Quinn's work on the subject, see William J. Hamblin, “That Old Black Magic” (review of *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View, revised and enlarged edition*, by D. Michael Quinn), *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 12, no. 2 (2000): 225–394. One reason scholars appear to be unable to arrive at consensus on Joseph Smith's relationship to “magic” is that to modern ears the term is almost necessarily pejorative—hence my placement of the term in quotation marks.

²¹ Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992).

²² Lance S. Owens, “Joseph Smith and Kabbalah: The Occult Connection,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 117–194; Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire*.

“layers.”²³ The first stratum, Mormonism’s foundation, is Christian primitivism, as taught in the 1829 Book of Mormon. The second is the “Hebraicizing” of Mormonism in the 1830s by Smith’s post-Book of Mormon revelations in Kirtland, Ohio, and Missouri. Though Shipps acknowledges that some of the Hebraic elements of these revelations (such as temple, sacred city, and the gathering of Israel) are also integral to the Book of Mormon, she understands the later revelations to effect the faith’s “pivotal turn of the movement toward the Old Testament experience.” To this second stratum, Shipps’s Joseph Smith added a third and “final dogmatic overlay” when, primarily in the 1840s at Nauvoo, Illinois, he “appended a set of esoteric beliefs” to Mormon theology.²⁴

Shipps’s organizing schema provides the most systematic model of Mormon origins to date and demonstrates a maturation of thought on the subject. Yet it constitutes only a step toward the hoped for synthesis. The strata she discusses do not neatly line up in the order Christian, Hebraic, esoteric. Furthermore, although Shipps acknowledges that the Book of Mormon emphasizes Hebraic religious elements as well Christian primitivism, her *model* anticipates the appearance of such elements only later in Mormonism’s development. Thus, historical models of Mormon origins, even at their best, have yet to adequately describe Mormonism’s development or situate the Book of Mormon in its surrounding cultural landscape.

If the proposed models of Mormon origins deal inadequately with the extant Book of Mormon and the Mormonism it represents, they engage still less with Mormonism as

²³ Jan Shipps, “Joseph Smith and the Creation of LDS Theology,” in Shipps, *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years among the Mormons* (Urbana and Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 289–301.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 293–95.

reflected in the fragments of the earlier Book of Lehi. As an earlier textual layer “beneath” the extant Book of Mormon text, the knowable content of the Book of Lehi offers a glimpse of an earlier stage in the development of Mormonism, much as the reconstructed “Q” source behind the Gospels of Matthew and Luke offers a glimpse at an earlier (pre-Lucan, pre-Matthean) stage in the development of Christianity.²⁵

As expressed in that first LDS scripture, the primal, proto-Zionist Mormonism of 1827-28 was already both Hebraic—centralizing covenant, lineage, priesthood, and temple—and esoteric, narrating hierophanies that prefigured the 1840s Mormon temple ritual. Mormonism’s development across Joseph Smith’s post-Book of Mormon career is thus best modeled not as the layering of Hebraic and then esoteric elements over a Christian primitivist bedrock, but as the natural and sequential outworking of a Mormon logos that interwove the Christian primitivist, Hebraic, and esoteric.

In light of the Book of Lehi it can be seen that Mormonism’s Hebraicism and esotericism were not grafted onto the faith as it entered its Hebraic-dominant Ohio and esoteric-dominant Illinois periods. Rather, Mormonism’s developmental stages of the 1830s and 1840s—like the stages of flowering and fruit formation in plants—serially unfolded and actualized potentialities programmed into the Mormon genome in the 1820s. Scrutinizing the remains of the earliest Mormon scripture under our critical microscope, we will glimpse Mormonism’s DNA, its Hebraic and esoteric strands inexorably intertwined.

Rejecting the view that the earliest Mormon movement was an expression of Reformation faith, this thesis will use the discernible content of the Book of Lehi, the

²⁵ For more about “Q,” see the discussion of textual reconstruction below.

proto-Zionist context in which it emerged, and reports of how early believers characterized the book and the movement to craft a new model of Mormonism's emergence. At its genesis, during the emergence of this initial Mormon text in 1827 to mid-1828, the Mormon movement was not a Christian primitivist group attempting to restore the New Testament church, not a type of Protestantism, and not even a sect in its own right. Rather, the earliest Mormon movement, which promoted "the restoration of the Jews," emerged from the American proto-Zionist movement (the effort to build a provisional Jewish Zion in the United States) and from Joseph Smith's ideological "conversation" with contemporaneous Judaism. The earliest Mormons attempted to help Jews reach distinctively Jewish goals.

Scholarship on the Lost Book of Lehi

Like any new work of scholarship, the present thesis builds on earlier works. Among the previous works on which this volume relies heavily are compilations of sources for Mormonism's 1820s period (principally Dan Vogel's *Early Mormon Documents* series) and text-critical analyses illuminating the lost manuscript's relationship to its replacement (e.g., Royal Skousen's *Book of Mormon Critical Text* and Brent Metcalfe's "The Priority of Mosiah"). There are also a select few scholarly works that have directly inquired into the Book of Lehi's contents. These will be reviewed here and put to use in the body of the thesis.²⁶

²⁶ Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents*, 5 vols., (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996-2003). Royal Skousen, ed., *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts*, Part One (Provo, Utah: The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon

Histories of Mormonism usually mention the Book of Lehi's theft and replacement with the "small plates of Nephi." And several works have discussed this episode's implications for understanding the Book of Mormon as either an ancient or a nineteenth century document.²⁷ Some of these writings, though written amidst a swirl of religious and counter-religious polemics, adduce evidence that sheds light on the Book of Lehi's relationship to its replacement text.

The most significant scholarly works to discuss this relationship are Royal Skousen's *Book of Mormon Critical Text* and Brent Lee Metcalfe's "The Priority of Mosiah: A Prelude to Book of Mormon Exegesis."²⁸ Employing the methods of textual criticism, Skousen and Metcalfe each argue persuasively that after Joseph Smith "lost" the Book of Mormon's forepart, he resumed dictating from the point in the narrative at which he had left off, continuing from there to its end, and only then providing the "small plates of Nephi" text to replace the lost portion. For Metcalfe, who approaches the Book of Mormon as a nineteenth century work composed by Joseph Smith over the course of its dictation, establishing the Book of Mosiah's temporal priority is "a prelude to Book of Mormon exegesis": the unfolding of the Book of Mormon's contents can only be understood when the "small plates" replacement text is placed *last*.

Studies, Brigham Young University, 2001). Metcalfe, "The Priority of Mosiah," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, 395–444.

²⁷ See, for instance, Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1990); Matthew Roper, "Review of Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon by Jerald and Sandra Tanner," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3, no. 1 (1991): 170–187; and John A. Tvedtnes, "Review of Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon by Jerald and Sandra Tanner," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3, no. 1 (1991): 188–230.

²⁸ Metcalfe, "The Priority of Mosiah," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, 395–444.

Other papers relating to the Book of Lehi, written from the contrasting perspective that it is an ancient text, discuss its possible sources in antecedent records. David E. Sloan argues in “The Book of Lehi and the Plates of Lehi” that “the plates of Lehi,” from which Joseph Smith stated “The Book of Lehi” had come were a subsection of “the [large] plates of Nephi.”²⁹ In “Lehi’s Personal Record: Quest for a Missing Source,” BYU professor of ancient scripture S. Kent Brown has carefully culled from the extant Book of Mormon clues regarding what should have been in Lehi’s personal writings, from which the plates of Nephi account was reportedly drawn.³⁰ But although Brown comprehensively identifies those elements of the extant text that it traces back to Lehi’s personal record, he does not further attempt to identify which of these also appeared in the lost manuscript.

The earliest information to appear in print about the Book of Lehi’s contents was provided by Joseph Smith in a brief preface to the first (and only the first) edition of the Book of Mormon. In this preface to the 1830 printing, Smith felt the need to explain why the large opening portion of the writings of Mormon had been replaced with material from the record of Nephi. In making this explanation Smith described the lost manuscript as consisting of, “one hundred and sixteen pages, the which I took from the Book of Lehi, which was an account abridged from the plates of Lehi, by the hand of Mormon.”³¹ This minimal information about the lost text—a name, internal author, page count, and

²⁹ David E. Sloan, “The Book of Lehi and the. Plates of Lehi. *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2 (1997): 269–72.

³⁰ S. Kent Brown, “Lehi’s Personal Record: Quest for a Missing Source,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (Winter 1984): 19–42.

³¹ Book of Mormon (1830), iii-iv.

ascribed source—has thus always been available and has been noted in many scholarly publications on the Book of Mormon.

Prior to the 1990s, the only other source cited on the subject was a secondhand statement from Joseph Smith on the genealogy of the Book of Mormon patriarch Ishmael. Smith's statement was reported by Franklin D. Richards, a close associate of Smith and later a Mormon apostle. In the fall of 1843, about fifteen years after Joseph Smith dictated the Book of Lehi, Richards heard Smith say the Book of Lehi identified Ishmael as a descendant of the biblical tribe of Ephraim. Richards published this recollection several decades later.³² The same genealogical detail was reported in the 1880s by another Joseph Smith associate and LDS apostle, Erastus Snow.³³ Snow did not offer a source for his information, but given that Richards and Snow were both called to the Quorum of Twelve Apostles on February 12, 1849 and had long served together in this capacity by the time of Snow's statement, it seems likely that he derived his information from Richards.

The first, and until quite recently the only, scholarly piece largely devoted to identifying what was in the Book of Lehi is the 1999 essay, "Contents of the Lost 116 Pages and the Large Plates," by BYU professor of Ancient Scripture, John A. Tvedtnes.³⁴ In this sixteen-page essay, Tvedtnes highlights several events (e.g., the Nephites encamping at a hill north of the land of Shilom) and Nephite cultural practices (e.g., their

³² Franklin D. Richards, "Origin of American Aborigines," *The Contributor* 17, no. 7 (May 1896), 425–28.

³³ Erastus Snow, "God's Peculiar People Called a Kingdom of Priests," May 6, 1882, Logan, Utah Territory, in *Journal of Discourses* (26 vols.; Liverpool: F. D. and S. W. Richards, 1854–86), 23:184–85.

³⁴ John A. Tvedtnes, "Contents of the Lost 116 Pages and the Large Plates," in *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Salt Lake City: Cornerstone Publishing, 1999), 37–52.

rules of war) that are alluded to but never detailed in the extant Book of Mormon text.

These, he reasonably infers, were likely given fuller development in the Book of Lehi, or, if not in the Book of Lehi, then in the “large plates of Nephi,” a common source posited to stand behind both the lost Book of Mormon text and the extant text.

Tvedtnes’s gathering of and competent inference from the Book of Mormon evidence regarding the lost text was a substantial first step in reconstructing its contents. But Tvedtnes was pursuing a more modest purpose. Tvedtnes aimed to identify elements or topics that appeared *either* in the lost manuscript or the large “plates of Nephi,” as opposed to attempting the reconstruction of entire narratives that appeared specifically in the lost manuscript. For instance, Tvedtnes infers that the narrative flashback about the fleeing “children of Nephi” encamping at “the hill which was north of the land of Shilom” (Mosiah 11:13) was part of the lost story of King Mosiah₁, but he does not attempt to recover more of the story by connecting this detail with other narrative fragments and patterns in the extant Book of Mormon.

More specific narrative material probably contained in the Book of Lehi has been identified by Mark R. Ashurst-McGee in his 2000 Utah State University M.A. thesis, “A Pathway to Prophethood: Joseph Smith Junior as Rodsman, Village Seer, and Judeo-Christian Prophet.” The source for this narrative is an 1870 account by Palmyra, New York native Fayette Lapham of his 1830 interview with Joseph Smith, Sr., father of the Mormon prophet.³⁵ Ashurst-McGee brings considerable skepticism to bear on Lapham’s

³⁵ Fayette Lapham, “Interview with the Father of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet, Forty Years Ago. His Account of the Finding of the Sacred Plates,” *The Historical Magazine and Notes and Queries concerning the Antiquities, History, and Biography of America* [second series] 7 (May 1870): 305-09, in Dan

late account, critiquing it where it seems inconsistent with other data. But he nonetheless concludes that Lapham’s interview account is laden with genuine insider-knowledge and likely based on conversation notes Lapham made while or shortly after talking with Joseph Smith, Sr.³⁶ This interview account describes the circumstances surrounding the Book of Mormon’s emergence and summarizes its narrative—with a twist.

Ashurst-McGee hears the echoes of the lost Book of Lehi where Joseph Smith, Sr.’s narrative departs from that of the present Book of Mormon, describing the Nephites’ discovery of the scrying instrument “the interpreters”—an event implied but not detailed in the extant text. Because Lapham’s larger narration is clearly rooted in inside information (as he claimed) and answers a question posed, but not answered, by the extant Book of Mormon text, Ashurst-McGee appears to have identified in it a specific narrative from the lost Book of Lehi.

Taking a different approach, Jack M. Lyon and Kent R. Minson argue in their paper, “When Pages Collide: Dissecting the Words of Mormon,” that some of the text believed to have been lost—the end of the original Book of Mosiah, Chapter II—was

Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:462. *The Historical Magazine* was published by Henry B. Dawson in Morrisania, New York.

³⁶ Mark Ashurst-McGee’s conclusion that Lapham relied on contemporaneous notes was given in Mark Ashurst-McGee, letter to Don Bradley, “Lapham Notes,” September 26, 2017. For Ashurst-McGee’s suggestion that Lapham communicated narrative from the lost 116 pages/Book of Lehi see Ashurst-McGee, “A Pathway to Prophethood.” For his critical appraisal of Lapham’s account of the finding of the plates, see Mark Ashurst-McGee, “Moroni as Angel and as Treasure Guardian,” *Mormon Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2006): 34–100.

actually retained by Joseph Smith and placed within the extant Book of Mormon manuscript as the end of “The Words of Mormon.”³⁷

Despite these important forays by Tvedtnes, Ashurst-McGee, Lyon, and Minson, the puzzle of Mormonism’s lost primordial scripture has received far less attention than its significance merits and its resolution requires. Why scholars have given the Book of Lehi’s contents such infrequent attention is a puzzle in itself, but at least two plausible reasons can be identified. First, scholars may have imagined that the Book of Lehi merely duplicates the themes and narratives of the extant Book of Mormon text, and thus has little to add to the understanding of Mormon origins. Second, historians of Mormonism may have been pessimistic that adequate methods exist to reconstruct narratives from the Book of Lehi.

Whatever the reasons, to date no scholar has proposed methods for reconstructing specific Book of Lehi contents. And only one, John Tvedtnes, has attempted to gather the relevant sources. Given these voids in the existing scholarship, the present thesis must lay some of its own foundations, identifying the types of sources the problem requires and constructing effective methods to address it.

Sources and Methodology

As groundwork for this thesis, I will briefly overview the source materials that offer clues to the Book of Lehi’s contents. Given the availability of sources for a lost text’s content, how can a historian assay the value of the sources, draw out their

³⁷ Jack M. Lyon and Kent R. Minson, “When Pages Collide: Dissecting the Words of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2012): 120–36.

implications, and piece them together to integrate the evidentiary fragments into a larger portrait of the text's themes, concepts, and narratives? A glance at textual reconstruction projects in various fields of inquiry will highlight ways other scholars have engaged this problem and provide context for my own work of reconstructing content from the Book of Lehi.

As a scholar applying the methods of the academy to the foundational scriptures of a living religious tradition, it seems also fitting that I should preview for the reader how I intend to tack my course between Scylla and Charybdis. First, I will look at how the challenge of reconstructing lost texts has been taken up by scholars in various disciplines.

Scholarly Reconstruction of Lost Texts

One type of scholar who confronts related quandaries is the textual critic, who uses variants within a manuscript tradition to create genealogical stemmas for the manuscripts, seeks to identify the processes of textual mutation that produce these variants, and attempts to reconstruct the "common ancestor" or original behind them. Textual critics have carefully systematized their principles and methods into a near-science for tracing and assessing manuscript variations.³⁸

There are insuperable obstacles in seeking to reconstruct contents of the Book of Lehi through textual criticism. Textual critics generally possess *versions* of the text they study and attempt to determine which of these versions best represents the original,

³⁸ Erick Kelemen, *Textual Editing and Criticism: An Introduction* (New York: Norton, 2008).

ancestral text at various points. Our problem is not that we must decide which manuscript of the Book of Lehi to follow, but that there *is* no Book of Lehi manuscript.

A closer analogue to the challenge of reconstructing Book of Lehi contents may be found in attempts to map out missing portions of an ancient manuscript or extrapolate the overall plot of an ancient narrative from its surviving fragments or reflections in later texts. Such problems are confronted by scholars in a range of historical disciplines.

Classicists frequently work with fragmentary manuscripts that require a *restitutio textus*.³⁹ Scholars of Chinese history and literature have engaged similar puzzles since at least 1772, when work began on the reconstruction of the great Yongle Encyclopedia.⁴⁰ Arabists and Islamicists attempt to reconstruct early Muslim sources and lost portions of ancient medieval literary works, and have made forays into formally defining the methodology for such reconstruction.⁴¹ And biblical scholars seek to reconstruct the “J,” “E,” “P,” and “D” strands of tradition behind the Pentateuch and the “Q” document believed to be a common source for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.⁴²

³⁹ See, for example, the papers by Mark L. Damen discussed and cited below.

⁴⁰ For details on this Herculean task and the emperor who decreed it, see Mark C. Elliott, *Emperor Qianlong: Son of Heaven, Man of the World* (New York: Longman, 2009). Regarding similar efforts, in the nineteenth century and today to reconstruct historic Chinese texts, see Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Rewriting Early Chinese Texts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 195, 256; Robert F. Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth: A Translation and Study of Ge Hong's Traditions of Divine Transcendents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and T. H. Barrett, “On the Reconstruction of the *Shenxian zhuan*,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 66, no. 2 (2003): 229–35.

⁴¹ Lawrence I. Conrad, “Recovering Lost Texts: Some Methodological Issues,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113, no. 2 (Apr.-Jun. 1993): 258–63; and Ella Landau-Tasser, “On the Reconstruction of Lost Sources,” in *History and Historiography in Early Islamic Times: Studies and Perspectives*, ed. Lawrence I. Conrad (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁴² For a description and examples of work on the textual strands within the Pentateuch, see Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (San Francisco: Harper, 1987/1997) and Friedman, *The Hidden Book in the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper, 1999). For work on “Q,” see James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffmann, and John S. Kloppenborg, eds., *The Critical Edition of Q: Synopsis including the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Mark and Thomas with English, German, and French Translations of Q and Thomas* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2000).

As noted above, the parallel to “Q” may be particularly instructive. The reconstruction of “Q” has provided evidence for an earlier, less formalized and less Judaism-independent, stage of the Jesus movement than the stage of development reflected in the gospels. There are, of course, differences between the reconstruction of the Book of Lehi and the reconstruction of “Q.” One difference, favoring the reconstruction of “Q,” is that this reconstructive work aims to provide the source’s exact text, a text that is believed to be largely encoded in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. But another difference, favoring the reconstruction of the Book of Lehi, is that scholars working on “Q” reconstruct a *hypothetical* source, whereas the existence of the Book of Lehi is attested in a number of nineteenth-century sources. The inferred narrative of the Book of Lehi, while necessarily less detailed than the exact text pieced together for “Q,” is nonetheless more certain, since the existence of the source itself is more certain. Both texts, however, promise to reveal more about the origins of the religious traditions they undergird.

Despite the frequency with which the problem of missing texts occurs for investigators of the past, a methodology for addressing the problem has yet to be systematically delineated. As scholar of Chinese literature Robert Ford Campany has observed regarding attempts to “work out general principles of procedure” for textual reconstruction, these efforts have thus far achieved “only small results.”⁴³

Why has the methodology for reconstructing missing texts not been better defined? One reason is doubtless that the specific modes of analysis and types of argument employed in reconstructing texts vary widely, making it difficult to spell out

⁴³ Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 127n.29.

methodology very precisely. Another is that it is difficult to explain the methods used without *demonstrating* them in action. The methodology is most easily explained, not in the abstract, but in actual application.

There are, however, principles that will probably apply to most cases of textual reconstruction. Some of the methods used in this thesis, though developed independently by the author, bear considerable similarity to those used in the reconstruction of classical Greek and Roman plays. A key method in both is to identify narrative patterns or structures in other texts by the same author, or in works the author used as models, and then situate the surviving fragments at the appropriate places in the structure. Thus, for example, Utah State University historian of ancient theater Mark L. Damen extrapolates missing sequences of action from the lacunae of Menander's *Adelphoi* and *Dis Exapaton* from how the playwright structures such sequences in his extant works, and from the patterned ways in which Terence and Plautus appropriate Menander's models in their own works.⁴⁴

Sources for Reconstructing Book of Lehi Narrative

Several types of sources provide evidence for the Book of Lehi's contents. Foremost among these is the extant Book of Mormon text, which provides multiple lines of evidence for the missing material. A portion of the book—the “small plates of Nephi,” which fills the space left by the Book of Lehi—recapitulates in broad strokes the story of

⁴⁴ Mark L. Damen, “Translating Scenes: Plautus’ Adaptation of Menander’s *Dis Exapaton*,” *Phoenix* 46 (1992): 205–31; and “Reconstructing the Beginning of Menander’s *Adelphoi* (B),” *Illinois Classical Studies* 12 (1987): 67–84. Dr. Damen graciously corresponded with me about the methods he employs in his work. Letter to Don Bradley, January 3, 2012, in possession of the author. Another analogous problem would be reconstructing lost portions of the ancient Greek “epic cycle.”

the first four and a half centuries of Nephite narrative that had been given in detail in the Book of Lehi. This substitute “small plates” text is followed by a chronicle that picks up where the lost manuscript left off, a chronicle that identifies itself as an abridgment of Nephite history by the redactor Mormon. This record, the Book of Mormon proper, occasionally glances back to the “lost” narratives that preceded it, alluding, for instance, to the Nephite encampment at the hill north of Shilom (Mosiah 11:13), the preaching of King Mosiah¹ (Mosiah 2:31-32), and the interpretation by one Aminadi of writing by God’s finger on the wall of the Nephite temple (Alma 10:2).

A second category of relevant sources is comprised of revelations Joseph Smith dictated in the wake of the initial manuscript’s theft. Mormonism’s earliest historical source, a summer 1828 revelation now published as Section 3 of the LDS Doctrine and Covenants (D&C), responds directly to the theft, chastises Smith for allowing it, and hints at how and why the stolen manuscript’s replacement will differ from it. Another relevant revelation (now published as D&C Section 5) was dictated by Joseph Smith in March 1829. This revelation addressed Smith and Harris, the two people most intimately involved in producing the lost manuscript, and spoke at length about the work in which they were engaged. D&C Section 10, a revelation Smith may have partly understood by fall 1828 but issued in its detail in May 1829, instructs that the lost book not be retranslated and hints at its sources and doctrinal content.

Each of these revelations emerged in the wake of the Book of Lehi and was produced for an intimate audience familiar with that book’s contents. The religious understandings expressed and addressed by these revelations had in part been fashioned by the Book of Lehi. They almost certainly, and perhaps discernibly, reflect its influence.

A third category is comprised of sources describing Mormon beliefs during the September 1827 – June 1828 period in which it emerged. Joseph Smith and Martin Harris both made statements during this period that communicated their understanding of what the book was to achieve. These statements—which agree with one another but disagree with what scholars have assumed of Mormonism during this period—are almost certainly consistent with, and probably express, the Book of Lehi content then being dictated. The statements show that the early Mormon movement had a Judaic, proto-Zionist self-understanding, suggesting that the material the movement’s proponents were encountering in the Book of Lehi was consistent with that emphasis.

A fourth type of source on the Book of Lehi is reminiscent accounts of its contents from people who had privileged access to such information. Several such accounts are available, and some of these will be used in this thesis. Some have been previously published, and some have not. The thesis will assess the reliability and significance of the Fayette Lapham account identified by Mark Ashurst-McGee. It will also present a narrative from Martin Harris’s brother Emer Harris regarding Muloch, the founder of one of the Book of Mormon peoples, a source that will be used here for the first time.

Glimpses of Reconstructive Method

Fragments of Book of Lehi narrative from these various sources can be brought together to reconstruct or approximate the original narrative. The fragments can be assembled on the narrative “map” provided in the Book of Lehi’s “small plates” replacement. So, for instance, details from the extant text’s narrative “flashbacks,” such

as the Aminadi reference, and from external sources, like the Emer Harris report about Muloch, can be added at appropriate points in the summary repetition of the Book of Lehi narrative in the “small plates” text. Since the Muloch story is told when Mosiah₁ meets Muloch’s descendant Zarahemla, the added detail from Emer Harris’s account can be imported into the narrative of Mosiah₁ and Zarahemla. And a setting for the Aminadi story can be inferred from the number of generations given between Aminadi and his descendant Amulek and from the story’s content, all of which suggest that Aminadi’s interpretation of the writing on the wall of the temple occurred in the land of Nephi prior to the destruction of the original “temple of Nephi” (Alma 10:2-3).

Patterns evident in extant Book of Mormon narrative and in the way it appropriates biblical narrative provide templates for ordering the various narrative fragments into cohesive wholes. When a constellation of data points on the Book of Lehi’s content evokes a narrative structure familiar from Book of Mormon or biblical narrative, these fragments can be plugged into that structure and a coherent narrative inferred. So, for instance, the use of a Mosaic “Exodus pattern” in the extant narrative of Lehi’s journey (discussed in Chapter III) provides a plausible context for Joseph Smith, Sr.’s report of the building of a “tabernacle” in the wilderness early in lost narrative. And the extant text’s pattern of mentioning the land Shilom and its north-side hill in the context of journeys between the land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla suggests that the narrative flashback to a time when “the children of Nephi” stopped at the hill north of Shilom when they “fled out of the land” (Mosiah 11:13) refers to such a journey—likely to Mosiah₁’s exodus when he was warned to “flee out of the land” of Nephi and make his way to Zarahemla (Omni 1:12).

Discussing Matters of Faith

The final methodological and stylistic conundrum for this thesis is that of how to discuss matters of Latter Day Saint religious faith from an impartial academic perspective. The Book of Mormon emerged in one historical context, that of the late 1820s United States, but narrates events set in other contexts—the ancient Near Eastern world of the Bible and the pre-Columbian Americas. To write or argue in a way that selects one or the other of these settings is the only “right” one would thus be to pass judgment for or against one of Mormonism’s central faith claims.

Such dilemmas are, of course, not new in the academic study of religion, and resolutions have been proposed. Perhaps the most influential has been that of prominent sociologist of religion Peter Berger. Berger, himself a liberal Protestant, has argued that scholars should adopt a stance of “methodological atheism,” treating the supernatural phenomena posited by religions as if they either do not exist or are confined to a transcendental realm, and thus do not impinge on the world we can subject to scholarly analysis.⁴⁵ Berger formulated methodological atheism in order to preserve naturalism in the social scientific study of religion and because he feared academics imposing onto their work either religious belief or *philosophical* atheism. He wanted to avoid having scholars, while ostensibly acting *as* scholars, passing judgment on the existence of supernatural phenomena.

Berger’s methodological atheism has been critiqued by other sociologists of religion. Some, such as Ralph W. Hood, Jr. and Douglas V. Porpora, argue that

⁴⁵ Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967).

methodological atheism goes too far and that Berger's goal of separating the religious and secular domains is better served by methodological *agnosticism*.⁴⁶ Since religions overwhelmingly do not confine their claims to transcendental realms, methodological atheism's presumption that all earthly manifestations of religion are amenable to naturalistic explanation rejects many religious propositions at the outset. It constitutes scholarship done as if all religious claims about this world can simply be assumed false, making all scholarly discourse and thus all apparent scholarly "findings" on religion atheistic. Thus, from methodological atheism one may be able to proceed to the actual atheism (or at least the rejection of specific religions or religious tenets) that Berger sought to keep from becoming the "scientific" approach to religion. Hood and Porpora's methodological agnosticism, by contrast, brackets the causation of claimed supernatural phenomena, leaving them open to either naturalistic or transcendent explanations, thereby creating space for religious belief.

Other sociologists, such as Benton Johnson, similarly argue that religion makes testable claims about this world but criticize methodological atheism for shielding religious belief from disconfirmation by purporting that religion does not make such claims.⁴⁷ For Johnson, religion and social science have an imperfect truce at best, and religious beliefs are subject to empirical disconfirmation through academic inquiry.

⁴⁶ Ralph W. Hood, Jr., "The Empirical Study of Mysticism," in *The Psychology of Religion: Theoretical Approaches*, ed. Bernard Spilka and Daniel N. McIntosh (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 222–32; Douglas V. Porpora, "Methodological Atheism, Methodological Agnosticism, and Religious Experience," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 36, no. 1 (2006): 57–75.

⁴⁷ Benton Johnson, "Sociological Theory and Religious Truth," *Sociology of Religion* 38, no. 4 (1977): 368–88.

My own preference would be to preserve the spirit of Berger's proposal while embracing the insights of his critics. Berger seeks both to leave space for faith and to find a common ground for discourse between scholars of varied worldviews. Yet the common ground on which Berger proposes scholars of all belief perspectives meet is precisely what they do *not* hold in common: the reducibility of religion to natural causes.

An approach I find more appropriate to our pluralistic society is to allow and encourage a plurality of differing perspectives on religious claims while generally embracing a scholarly neutrality toward religious claims as the default posture (i.e., something like Porpora's methodological agnosticism). Some scholars might legitimately seek naturalistic causes for phenomena that religionists ascribe to supernatural agency. This approach could potentially enlarge the domain of theoretical explanation, or demonstrate the limits of such explanation. But it might also limit the authors' audience and interlocutors to those with the same metaphysical outlook. Other scholars might, also legitimately, frame their inquiry in terms of their religious precepts and experiences, though here, the authors may risk dropping out of wider academia and limiting their community of discourse only to those who share their faith. A methodological agnosticism that makes no claims to be *the* right way to practice scholarship allows for a plurality of approaches and creates a common ground on which scholars with differing ideological commitments can engage should they choose to do so.

For the present thesis, methodological agnosticism regarding Book of Mormon authorship seems most appropriate. I will not seek to adjudicate whether the author or authors of the Book of Lehi and extant Book of Mormon lived in the ancient world or in Joseph Smith's world. I will, however, *relate* the book to each of these worlds.

Regardless of when and by whom the Book of Mormon was written, it has at least these two relevant contexts: 1) the context in which its events are set—the context of the narrative; and 2) the context in which the manuscript itself emerged—the context of its transcription.

The Book of Mormon narrative is set in the world of the Bible, beginning in the prophet Jeremiah’s sixth century BCE Jerusalem and carrying the Israelite narrative to a second promised land across the ocean in the Americas. It intersects with the New Testament timeline and characters when a star appears to mark Christ’s birth in that promised land, when Christ’s crucifixion impacts their world, and when the resurrected Jesus visits that land. The Book of Mormon is not a complete scriptural mythos, a standalone sacred narrative. Positioned within the world of the Bible, the Book of Mormon narrative requires reading in that context.

The book also positions itself in the context of its emergence—early nineteenth century America—and demands to be related to *that* context. It speaks *of* this context and explicitly addresses itself *to* Joseph Smith and his cohorts (e.g., 2 Nephi 27:20-23; Ether 5:1-6) and to its readers: e.g., Mormon 8:35: “Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not... Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing.” It is thus not surprising that the small group of believers from upstate New York in the late 1820s located themselves and the issues of their day within the book.

In the body of the present work, I will relate elements of the Book of Lehi narrative to each of these contexts—its narrative context and its context of emergence—but not in ways that assume one context or the other is that narrative’s “true” context of origin. Rather, I will relate the Book of Mormon’s “lost” narrative to the context of

biblical Jerusalem at the opening of the sixth century BCE because that is the setting in which the narrative opens, and it cannot be adequately understood without that setting. I will also relate this narrative to the late 1820s setting in which it was dictated because that is the setting in which it was encountered by the earliest Mormons, and the setting in which it had its most immediate impact.

My arguments in the body of this work for how the lost text should be reconstructed do not assume either of these contexts of the narrative's origin. Occasionally, if the book's presumed context of origin becomes relevant to how the text should be reconstructed or understood, I will relate the book's narrative to one or the other of these contexts in the footnotes. While some types of scholarly inquiry may require judgments on matters of faith (e.g., using psychological theory to explain glossolalia), the methods and arguments employed in this thesis overwhelmingly do not.

An analogy from textual criticism will help frame my approach. The analyses performed by textual critics to establish an original text—say, for the Gospel of Matthew—do not require any assumptions or conclusions about the historicity of the events narrated there. The far horizon, the boundary limit, for textual criticism of the Gospel of Matthew is not knowledge of the life of Jesus, but accurate reconstruction of the earliest manuscript of Matthew. Scholars who will wage war over this gospel's historicity (e.g., a biblical inerrantist and a mythicist) could conceivably arrive at peaceable agreement about how to reconstruct its earliest text—without either yielding an inch on historicity. They can, for instance, arrive at the same reading of the earliest text of the Matthean Resurrection narrative without agreeing on the historicity of the Resurrection.

Though my work on the Book of Lehi is necessarily painted with a broader brush than that of the textual critic, who works from extant manuscripts, it shares the textual critic's goal of reconstructing contents of a lost text. The endpoint of my inquiry is what was in the Book of Lehi manuscript. The veil behind which Joseph Smith dictated that manuscript—and either translated or composed it—marks a boundary between methodologically agnostic academic history and ideological commitments on matters of faith. Beyond that hem, the present inquiry does not pass: it will not adjudicate matters of faith.

What this thesis's discussion of the Book of Lehi *will* do is reconstruct contents from the nearest Mormon equivalent to the Pentateuch's "P" source and the gospel's "Q"—the missing text behind the extant scripture. In so doing it promises to illuminate the meanings of Mormonism's sacred texts, the faith's origin and place in American religion, and the stages through which an emerging religion unfolds.

Chapter II:
THE RISE OF AMERICAN PROTO-ZIONISM
IN 1820s NEW YORK

Introduction

While the Book of Lehi was, as we will see in our next chapter, a very Hebraic story, the story of its emergence was a very American one. To discern the Book of Lehi's significance to the early believers at the time it emerged, and to facilitate our reconstruction of its narrative, we need to situate it in the context of its emergence geographically, temporally, and culturally. Accordingly, in this chapter we will set the "lost" text in its largely "lost," or forgotten, contexts.

The initial Book of Mormon manuscript, the Book of Lehi, was midwifed into being in the first half of 1828 by a small group of believers based out of western New York. Martin Harris, for instance, lived in the canal town of Palmyra, in Wayne County. And the Joseph, Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith family lived just over the town line in adjoining Manchester, Ontario County. While producing the Book of Lehi manuscript and part of the Book of Mormon manuscript Joseph, Jr. took a detour south of the state line, to his in-laws' at Harmony (now Great Bend), Susquehanna, Pennsylvania. But he and Emma returned to the Finger Lakes region in June 1829 to complete the Book of Mormon manuscript and arrange for its publication. The cultural setting of the upstate New York environs in the late-1820s shaped how these earliest believers understood the Book of Lehi manuscript's content, purposes, and theft.

The Cultural Setting in which American Proto-Zionism and the Book of Lehi Emerged

The Book of Lehi manuscript emerged amidst tremendous technological, social, religious, economic, and political transformations. In this work I primarily focus on a central thesis largely untouched in previous works: that earliest Mormonism, the Book of Lehi movement, is related to what I am calling “American proto-Zionism”—a collection of movements aimed at bringing the world’s Jews to places of refuge in the United States.⁴⁸

In the succeeding chapter I will argue that proponents of the Book of Lehi movement—i.e., the Mormon movement during its earliest phase (1827-28)—pursued an American proto-Zionist dream of “gathering the Jews” to a New Jerusalem in the United States and anticipated that the Book of Lehi would be the means for fulfilling that dream.

To see that we will need, in this chapter, to describe the rise of American proto-Zionism—a collection of movements aimed at bringing the world’s Jews to places of refuge in the United States. And we need to assess the respective aims of its Jewish and Christian proponents and its most prominent form(s), in which Joseph Smith would have been most likely to encounter it. Against the backdrop of contemporaneous developments in the larger American proto-Zionist endeavor, it can then be seen how the Book of Lehi offered a solution to proto-Zionism’s seemingly insurmountable problems.

⁴⁸ For notable exceptions, scholars who have observed a possible connection between early Mormonism and other efforts at Jewish gathering, see Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois, 1984), 138, and G. St. John Stott, “Amerindian Identity, the Book of Mormon, and the American Dream,” *Journal of American Studies of Turkey* 19 (2004): 21-33.

To set the stage for the story of American proto-Zionism I will first briefly describe a few cultural dynamics of the 1820s United States and upstate New York that will be relevant to understanding that movement, and also to understanding the Book of Lehi's emergence and early interpretation. To understand American proto-Zionism and the Book of Lehi movement we need to understand the primitivist impulse in the early U.S., the ever-expanding American frontier, and the Transportation Revolution of the early-to-mid nineteenth century.

Our discussion of American proto-Zionism will bring together these various cultural threads: American proto-Zionism was portended by the Jews' important place in the national, biblical myth, sparked by the possibilities of open space and easy transportation, and fueled by the fervor of the Second Great Awakening, millenarianism, and an American sense of mission.

We will see that American proto-Zionism emerged, in both Jewish and Christian forms, in the 1820s, and primarily in New York State. We will narrate the rise of Christian proto-Zionism in the U.S., under the influence of Joseph Frey, and the rise of Jewish proto-Zionism, led principally by Moses Levy and Mordecai Noah. And we will focus on one American proto-Zionist visionary in particular—Noah—who aimed to capitalize on the Erie Canal to create a Jewish New Jerusalem in western New York.

Lastly, by examining sources about Mormonism's earliest manifestation, the Book of Lehi movement, we will see that this movement resembled Noah's "Ararat" project and may have drawn much of its original self-understanding from that project.

Just Like Starting Over:

American Primitivism and the Sense of Divine Destiny

Euro-Americans of the early republic often had the sense that their new nation, in a “new” land, was free from the fetters of history. Their distance from the “Old” World and the pristine state of their land created what has been called “the illusion of innocence” and gave the sense that Americans could leap over millennia to return to ideal moments of antiquity.⁴⁹

Along with their “historylessness” and “illusion of innocence,” Americans tended to have a sense of divine election—of being called to perform a great role in a providential plan. Particularly formative in this sense of mission was the early colonists’ identification with biblical models. The New England Puritans, for instance, aspired to be a “city on a hill,” as Jesus enjoined in the Sermon on the Mount, a demonstration to the world what an ideal, godly commonwealth is like. And, building on the Apostle Paul’s framing of Christians as a new, allegorical Israel, the Puritans saw themselves as Israelites. While still expecting that God would gather the Jews and “lost tribes” to their literal, Judean homeland, the Puritans identified themselves as a new Israel and understood themselves to be making an “exodus” to a new promised Canaan. This idea was so vivid to the Mayflower colonists, who lived among Sephardic Jews in Holland before their journey across the Atlantic, that Governor William Bradford taught himself Hebrew and presided over a harvest festival recalling the biblical Sukkot, which inspired our later Thanksgiving traditions. These New World Israelites followed scriptural “Old

⁴⁹ Richard Hughes and Leonard Allen, *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism, 1630–1875* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

Testament” laws and abandoned the trappings of what they saw as apostate Christianity, such as Christmas.

Living in a new “Promised Land,” they also saw themselves as the builders of a figurative “New Jerusalem.” And a few in the Puritan tradition reified the allegory and anticipated that the prophesied New Jerusalem would be physically built on American soil, as did Society for the Propagation of the Gospel commissioner Samuel Sewall in his 1697 tract *The New Heaven as it Makes to Those who Stand upon the New Earth*.⁵⁰

But the Puritans were neither the only nor the earliest American colonists to identify with biblical models and begin laying the groundwork for Americans’ identity as a chosen nation.⁵¹ Indeed, the identification of English Christian settlers with the Israelites and America with the Promised Land was part of the ideology *behind* colonization. The most comprehensive treatise justifying English colonization, written in 1583 by Sir George Peckham, would-be colonizer of Catholics in New England, presented Christians as a new Chosen People divinely authorized to subdue America’s indigenous peoples, as the hosts of Israel had subdued the Canaanites.⁵² Similar views would be propounded by Virginia Anglicans and later by the New England Puritans.⁵³

⁵⁰ Samuel Sewall, *Phaenomena quaedam Apocalyptica ad Aspectum Novi Orbis configurata, or, some few Lines towards a description of the New Heaven As It makes to those who stand upon the New Earth* (Boston: Bartholomew Green and John Allen, 1697). For a discussion of Puritan identification with Israel that carefully distinguishes the literal from the metaphorical, see Reiner Smolinski, “‘Israel Redivivus’: The Eschatological Limits of Puritan Typology in New England,” *New England Quarterly* 63 (1990), 357–95.

⁵¹ For a discussion of the limits of Puritan influence in American religious history, see Charles L. Cohen, “The Post-Puritan Paradigm of Early American Religious History,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 54, no. 4 (October 1997), 695–722.

⁵² Peckham’s treatise *A True Reporte of the Late Discoveries and Possession, Taken in the Right of the Crowne of Englande, of the Newfound Landes* (London, 1583) is discussed in Alfred E. Cave, “Canaanites in a Promised Land: The American Indian and the Providential Theory of Empire,” *American Indian Quarterly* 12, No. 4 (Autumn 1988), 277-97.

⁵³ Cave, “Canaanites in a Promised Land,” 280-92.

The symbol of America as an allegorical Canaan, a new promised land, was a powerful and enduring one.⁵⁴

When an American sense of identity began to solidify, this Christian sense of divine election and mission was absorbed into the emerging national consciousness and became part of the national inheritance.⁵⁵ And it was part of the family inheritance passed down through Puritan stock to Joseph Smith, Jr., whose family on both sides had centuries-deep roots in New England.

A mission of restoration. The myth of national innocence and the sense of divine election and destiny fused in the American impulse toward primitivism. Primitivism was the aspiration to return to a primordial ideal, a pure original form, after a presumed period of apostasy, corruption, or decay. This aspiration to bypass the ages and recapture ancient ideals is evident in the Puritans' effort to reconstitute the biblical commonwealth of Israel and in the Founding Fathers' self-conscious attempt to recapture the glories of the

⁵⁴ Alfred E. Cave documents sixteenth and seventeenth century uses of the America-Canaan idea in "Canaanites in a Promised Land," 277–97. A prominent example of late eighteenth century identification of America with Canaan may be found in Book Ten of Timothy Dwight's *The Conquest of Canaan; a Poem, in Eleven Books* (Hartford: Elisha Babcock, 1785), 239-270, in Rick Grunder, *Mormon Parallels: A Bibliographic Source* (LaFayette, NY: Rick Grunder, 2014), (entry #126]). Dwight represents an angel bringing Joshua a vision of the future New World Canaan at the time of Joshua's own Conquest of the Old World Canaan.

An example of this idea during Joseph Smith's early life may be found in a children's history textbook published when he was thirteen. It presents North America as having been "reserved as the modern Canaan" and compares the division of post-Conquest Israel into tribal territories to the division of America into states. Frederick Butler, *A Catechetical Compend of General History, Sacred and Profane; From the Creation of the World, to the Year 1817, of the Christian Era, In Three Parts...*, Fourth Edition (Hartford: Cook and Hale), 1819), 22-23, 97-98; in Grunder, *Mormon Parallels* 341 (entry #80).

⁵⁵ Loren Baritz, ed., *City on a Hill: A History of Ideas and Myths in America* (New York: John Wiley, 1964); Ernest L. Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

Classical tradition.⁵⁶ As the inhabitants of a new Eden, Americans were tasked with redeeming humanity from its sundry “falls” by restoring the lapsed ancient ideals in their purity. They were to make the world anew.

During the Second Great Awakening, the American primitivist impulse most often manifested in religious form, particularly as Christian primitivism. Christian primitivism was, and is, the ideology and aspiration of restoring Christianity to the “primitive” purity and completeness of the original New Testament church, which is deemed to have been lost in a post-apostolic apostasy. While this impulse to return to the pristine faith preceded the Protestant Reformation, it was during the Second Great Awakening that Christian Primitivism emerged in the United States as an influential and enduring movement.

The primitivist impulse appeared widely in the religious denominations and movements of the Second Great Awakening. The most successful denominations of the period, the Baptists and the Methodists, attempted to recapture the simplicity and spiritual power of early Christianity. And a number of new groups like the Adventists also sought the return to a more powerful and biblically pure faith.

Christian primitivism is perhaps best epitomized by the Stone-Campbell movement, which survives today principally in the Churches of Christ and Disciples of Christ denominations. Working independently in the opening decades of the nineteenth century, Barton Stone and Thomas and Alexander Campbell arrived at very similar

⁵⁶ Theodore Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Mortimer N. S. Sellars, *American Republicanism: Roman Ideology in the United States Constitution* (New York: New York University Press, 1994).

Christian primitivist views. They recognized the consonance between them and thus joined their churches in common fellowship in 1832.

In good American and primitivist fashion, Stone and the Campbells elided seventeen centuries of post-apostolic Christian history in their attempt to re-create primitive Christianity, rejecting the authority of post-biblical Christian creeds and traditions. Stone and the Campbells narrowed the field of normative sources even beyond *sola scriptura*. Focusing solely on the New Testament, they rejected not only the authority of tradition but also the continuing authority of the Old Testament. The Campbells gave doctrinal arguments supporting this rejection of the Old Testament's relevance. But even without such rationales their rejection of the currency of the Old Testament flows naturally from their goal. To restore the New Testament church in its purest form they eliminated both what came after *and* what came before.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the Book of Mormon has itself been described as a Christian primitivist text, albeit without the New Testament-only focus of the Stone-Campbell movement.⁵⁷ In Jan Shipps's intriguing model, the Book of Mormon is emblematic of Mormonism's earliest developmental phase, in which it was primarily a Christian primitivist movement.⁵⁸ But the Christian primitivist model scholars have used to describe earliest Mormonism and its scripture will interest us below primarily because of its *limits*—the ways in which it does *not* adequately characterize the Book of Lehi.

What follows in the succeeding chapters of this thesis will implicitly critique this model by demonstrating its limits and showing how evidence for the Book of Lehi's

⁵⁷ De Pillis, "The Quest for Religious Authority and the Rise of Mormonism," 68–88; Hill, "The Role of Christian Primitivism in the Origin and Development of the Mormon Kingdom, 1830–1844."

⁵⁸ Shipps, "Joseph Smith and the Creation of LDS Theology," 289–301.

contents and early interpretation contrasts with the posited Christian primitivist focus.

The character of Mormon restorationism at the time the Book of Lehi emerged can perhaps be best seen against the foil of the Christian primitivist model.

The “Open” West and the Transportation Revolution

For Euro-Americans of the early republic opportunities for westward settlement were pragmatically limitless. Many took advantage of these opportunities and sought their fortunes away from the Atlantic seaboard. These included Joseph Smith’s family, who moved from Vermont to western New York in the wake of a disastrous agricultural year. And the prospect of “free” land drew many even further to the west, to the frontier.

But life away from the Atlantic seaboard had definite drawbacks. Travel between points not joined by navigable rivers or lakes was difficult. Most travel was by foot. Horses were expensive to purchase and maintain. And even those with horses or oxen faced the reality that roads were generally poor and unpaved, and during rain turned to rivers of mud. These conditions often made the overland shipment of goods painstakingly slow and prohibitively expensive. In 1818 the cost of moving freight from Albany, on the Hudson River, to Lake Erie was assessed at about \$100 a ton.⁵⁹

Open and even “free” land was of limited use if agricultural surpluses from times of abundance could only profitably be sold to one’s neighbors, who likely had surpluses of their own. And the problems were more acute during times of scarcity since it was difficult to import goods in a timely and affordable way from distant regions that were

⁵⁹ Peter L. Bernstein, *Wedding of the Waters: The Erie Canal and the Making of a Great Nation* (New York: Norton, 2005), 163.

experiencing a surplus. Consequently, farmers in the west often experienced much greater risk of loss than chance of gain. Theirs was more a dangerous game of subsistence than one of turning profits.

Deliverance from this state of affairs was wrought by a revolution in means of transportation and, particularly, in transportation infrastructure. This revolution had a tremendous impact on the United States—and particularly upstate New York—in the 1820s. It made possible the transition from subsistence agriculture to surplus-market agriculture. In this way, the Transportation Revolution would directly impact the transcription of the Book of Lehi and the publication of the Book of Mormon through its effect of making Martin Harris wealthy, and therefore able to subsidize the Book of Mormon's transcription and finance its publication. The revolution would also contribute to the proliferation of proto-Zionist colony schemes centered in western New York, which, in turn, would impact the meaning given to the Book of Lehi by its audience.

Transportation revolution in upstate New York: The Erie Canal. Major breakthroughs in transportation occurred shortly before and even during the Book of Lehi's transcription. The early decades of the century saw the building of numerous turnpikes, which allowed travellers to travel roads for a fee that were regularly cleared and well maintained. These roads facilitated the journeys Joseph Smith and Martin Harris made between western New York and northern Pennsylvania preparatory to and during the Book of Lehi's transcription. And the chartering and groundbreaking for the nation's first railway, the Baltimore and Ohio, occurred in 1827 and 1828, the respective years when Joseph Smith

reportedly acquired the golden plates and dictated the Book of Lehi. These developments made the west increasingly promising for settlement and commerce.

The transportation development that particularly impacted the emergence of the Book of Lehi and Book of Mormon was the construction of the Erie Canal. Begun in 1817 under New York governor DeWitt Clinton, the canal connected Lake Erie on New York's western border with the Hudson River in eastern New York. Before the canal Clinton's well-documented 1810 trip from Albany (where the canal would meet the river) to Buffalo took thirty-two days. After the canal's completion, traversing the same distance took less than five days.⁶⁰ Shipping costs from Albany to Lake Erie dropped from \$100 a ton to \$9 or \$10 a ton.

The change in speed and in freight cost transformed upstate New York's subsistence agriculture into surplus agriculture. Prior to the canal farmers along its future path lost more than 50% of their ultimate proceeds to freight costs by shipping their surplus just 130 miles. With the canal they did not reach this point of diminishing profitability until shipping over a distance of 2750 miles. DeWitt Clinton had predicted that when the canal was complete New York would become "the granary of the world." In line with Clinton's boast, farmers of upstate New York were soon feeding Europe.⁶¹

Predictably, population and commerce along the canal exploded.⁶² Among the sleepy upstate New York villages that the canal transformed to boomtowns was Palmyra. With the canal running through the city's center, Palmyra was now connected by a

⁶⁰ Bernstein, *Wedding of the Waters*, 327.

⁶¹ Bernstein, *Wedding of the Waters*, 26, 364-65.

⁶² Ronald E. Shaw, *Erie Water West: A History of the Erie Canal, 1792-1854* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 263-73.

navigable waterway on the west to western Pennsylvania, northern Ohio, southern Michigan, and southern Ontario and on the east, via the Hudson, to New York City and the Atlantic, and thereby to the entire eastern seaboard, Europe, the Middle East, and beyond. No longer an isolated backwater, Palmyra and the entire western New York corridor surrounding the canal joined the larger world.

The section of the canal running alongside Palmyra became operative in 1822. In 1823, Palmyra Township divided into Palmyra and Macedon. And between 1820 and 1830 the population within the old town boundaries grew by 50%, from 3724 to 5416.⁶³ In 1824 Horatio Gates Spafford identified Palmyra as “a place of very considerable business” and “increasing rapidly.” Spafford predicted that Palmyra’s growth would soon result in its further division and the formation of a new county.⁶⁴

Expanding population pressures led to the growing dispossession of Native Americans from their lands. Yet, crucial to our story of the Book of Lehi and Book of Mormon, this further opening of the west by improvements in transportation contributed to the sense that the United States might serve as a fitting home for the Jews.

Proto-Zionism: Colonizing Jews in America

Joseph Smith almost certainly never met any Jews in person in western New York. They were not there to meet.⁶⁵ But he regularly encountered them by proxy in his reading and was quite aware of the Jewish Diaspora. In place of attending church, his

⁶³ Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 46.

⁶⁴ Horatio Gates Spafford, *A Gazetteer of the State of New York* (Albany: B. D. Packard, 1824), 400-01.

⁶⁵ Recognizably “Jewish” names first appear in the federal census in the larger nearby city of Rochester in 1840.

mother reported, the teenaged Joseph spent hours in the woods reading his Bible.⁶⁶ In many of its pages the Diaspora is a painfully personal and present reality. And the Palmyra newspaper Smith read frequently published stories in which the Diaspora's difficult continuing realities were present: stories of Jewish persecution and of intense and growing concern amongst fellow New Yorkers for the welfare of the world's Jews.⁶⁷

While Native Americans were being uprooted from lands settled by Euro-American Christians, the fervent Biblicism inspired by the Second Great Awakening and the opportunity opened up by the Transportation Revolution combined to create a very different place in the early republic for Jews. These conditions helped give rise to American proto-Zionism, an effort by Christians and Jews in the U.S., and particularly in New York, to give Jews refuge from the perils of their global Diaspora in a provisional homeland. That provisional homeland was the United States, which would serve as a place of refuge and a way station in their ultimate exodus back to permanent homeland of Palestine/Judea. The world's Jews overwhelmingly did not gather to an American haven. But this American proto-Zionism ultimately helped give rise to the actual Zionist movement. And it shaped the earliest understandings of Mormonism, held by the earliest Mormons.

The Jewish Diaspora

The Jewish Diaspora was inaugurated by the Babylonian Exile, which began with the deportation of Jewish notables in 597 BCE and swelled to encompass the entire

⁶⁶ Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845, Joseph Smith Papers, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org>.

⁶⁷ See the discussion below of the Smiths as newspaper subscribers and readers. And see discussion in Chapter III regarding Jews in the Palmyra newspaper.

nation in 586. The invaders also destroyed the major legacies of David and Solomon: the sacral dynasty, and the First Temple. In 538 BCE, the exiles were allowed to return to their homeland under Cyrus the Great, but the Return was never as complete as the Exile. Although their very name identifies them with Judea, most Jews remained in Babylon, and many others lived in Egypt. The Diaspora would again be complete after the successive falls of Jerusalem to Roman military power in 70 CE, when Titus destroyed the Second Temple, and 135 CE, when Hadrian laid waste to Judea.

By Joseph Smith's time, the Diaspora had been a reality for nearly two and a half millennia. And it had been seventeen centuries since Jews controlled Judea or worshipped in a temple. Christians had often blamed the Jews themselves for these misfortunes, regarding them as cursed for the role attributed to them by the gospels in the Crucifixion of Jesus.

Yet American Jews, despite being religiously marginal and presumed "cursed" in the heavily Protestant early republic, held a place in American culture that was essentially opposite to that of Native Americans. While Native Americans were numerous and widespread, Jews in America were few and far between. And whereas Bible readers had to develop ingenious theories to fit Native Americans into the biblical narrative, the Bible was almost entirely by and about Jews. Jews, if marginal in Christian society, were yet central in Christian narrative. And if the Jews were "cursed" in some Christian traditions, the biblical literalism of most American Christians made them chosen nonetheless.

Given the Jews' central place in the Bible and the Bible's central place in American identity and sense of mission, it would not be difficult to find or make a place

for them in the national mythos. America's role vis-à-vis the Jews was first seen as evangelizing them and then, consequently, as providing them refuge.

The groundwork for this American mission of bringing the Jews to a refuge or provisional Zion was largely laid by two men: Mordecai Manuel Noah and Joseph Samuel Christian Frederick Frey, respectively the United States' first nationally prominent Jew and its first nationally prominent convert from Judaism to Christianity. The promotion of their respective programs for Jewish gathering was facilitated by the apocalyptic zeitgeist of the second half of the 1810s.

The Rise of American Organizations to Proselytize and Provide Refuge for Jews

Jonathan Sarna, who has written extensively about the experience of nineteenth-century American Jews, identifies 1816 as the year American Christians suddenly awoke to the idea of evangelizing Jews and organized societies for that purpose. Sarna identifies the background to these developments as "Post-Edwardsian theology, the Second Great Awakening, the growth of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, and the Peace of Ghent."⁶⁸ To these we might add the Indonesian eruption of Mount Tambora, which produced climatic signs of apocalypse in 1815-16 globally, and a consequent further upsurge in religious devotion.⁶⁹ Against that backdrop, in June 1816, three weeks after the founding of the American Bible Society, New England Episcopalian

⁶⁸ Jonathan D. Sarna, "The American Jewish Response to Nineteenth-Century Christian Missions," *The Journal of American History* 68, no. 1 (June 1981), 36.

⁶⁹ Sean Munger, "1816: 'The Mighty Operations of Nature': Societal Effects of the Year without a Summer," *Madison Historical Review* 10 (2013), available online at <http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/mhr/vol10/iss1/3/>.

women established the Female Society of Boston and the Vicinity for Promoting Christianity among the Jews.⁷⁰ By the year's end this was followed by the founding of the American Society for Evangelizing the Jews in New York City.

Sarna also identifies as a factor in the new American zeal for Jewish evangelism the 1816 arrival in New York City of Joseph Samuel Christian Frederick Frey. Frey (born Joseph Samuel Levy) was a Bavarian Jew who had converted to Christianity in early adulthood. He wrote prolifically in the cause of converting Jews, took the lead role in the 1809 founding of the London Society, and published, if with a measure of exaggeration, reports of his evangelical successes. Frey would become the century's most prominent advocate for the evangelism of his former co-religionists.

But despite his international reputation and the stir he caused on his arrival in New York, Frey failed to make many Jewish converts. In its first few years the American Society for Evangelizing the Jews, modeled on Frey's London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews, made only faltering steps. Frey would not then, or ever, approach the effect he hoped for in evangelizing Jews. "Frey's significance," George Berlin has written, "lies, rather, in the impact he made on *Christian America*."⁷¹

The Christian America to which Frey wrote held strong millennialist expectations, integrating these with its national sense of mission in the unfolding of God's worldwide plan. Frey reinforced this perception of America's role in the divine scheme, and helped shape that perception. His writings confirmed the popular biblical interpretation that the

⁷⁰ *Constitution of the Female Society of Boston and the Vicinity for Promoting Christianity among the Jews. Instituted June 5, 1816* (Boston: Lincoln and Edmands).

⁷¹ Berlin, George L. "Joseph S.C.F. Frey, the Jews, and Early Nineteenth Century Millenarianism," *Journal of the Early Republic* 1 (Spring 1981), 31. Emphasis added.

Jews would have to be restored to Palestine before Christ could come again. But Frey taught that the Jews would convert *as a people* only *after* that restoration.⁷² Frey's well-respected judgment as a converted Jew and prominent evangelist encouraged incipient Christian Zionist expectations. Frey also lent further credence to the theory of Elias Boudinot and others that the Indians were the lost ten tribes of Israel.⁷³ And Frey's work further renewed Protestant optimism for Jewish conversion. The result was that American Christians became more confident that they could help bring about the promised millennium by assisting with the restoration of the Jews. Frey and his co-workers planted seeds of the American Christian tradition of support for Zionism.

In that same fateful year that the former Joseph Samuel Levy had left London for the United States, an American Levy with greater pride in his name and a firmer attachment to the Judaism of his birth sailed from the Western Hemisphere to London. Under the apocalyptically dark skies over Joseph Frey's former mission field, Moses Elias Levy made a life-changing decision. Levy, a liberal Sephardic Jew who was born in Morocco but became a wealthy owner of plantations in Florida and Cuba, would build colonies in America where European Jews could take refuge.⁷⁴

Levy wasted no time in attempting to drum up support for the incipient plan, using his stay in Europe and his Masonic connections to promote it. What inspired this modern Moses with such urgency to lead his people to a makeshift promised land?

⁷² Kohn, S. Joshua, "Mordecai Manuel Noah's Ararat Project and the Missionaries," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, 55, no. 2 (December 1965), 162-98.

⁷³ Berlin, "Joseph S.C.F. Frey, the Jews," 41-43.

⁷⁴ Joseph Gary Adler, "Moses Elias Levy and Attempts to Colonize Florida," in Samuel Proctor and Louis Schmier, eds., *Jews of the South: Selected Essays from the Southern Jewish Historical Society* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), 17-29.

Levy's plan lacked mythic foundations like the later legend that Christopher Columbus was Jewish, which would locate precedent for European Jewish colonization of the New World in that land's very "discovery."⁷⁵ What Levy did have was a new sense of the immediate need experienced by many unfortunate fellow Jews—and a religious urgency. Levy shared the motivation that moved American Protestants to convert and colonize Jews: each believed they were living in the profane world's last days, and the time was short. Moses Levy, with many of his supporters and would-be colonists, were caught up in an international wave of Jewish messianic fervor. Levy stated his belief that the "purposes of revelation [would] soon be accomplished," a climax to history "which the world is fast approaching."⁷⁶ Levy biographer C. S. Monaco suggests that Levy, like his ally Rabbi Joseph Crooll, and many other European Jews of the time, understood a passage in the mystical text the Zohar to say the Messiah would come in 1840. And this was a messianic timetable made all the more plausible and desirable by the contemporaneous tumult of the natural and human worlds.

A prosperous plantation owner, Levy envisioned American Jewish immigrants following a path to success much like his own. His places of refuge were to be agricultural colonies in Florida. On a visit to the U.S. from Cuba in 1818, Levy also promoted plans for a Jewish boarding school in the Midwest and arranged the purchase of public lands for this purpose in Illinois.

⁷⁵ Simon Wiesenthal, *Sails of Hope: The Secret Mission of Christopher Columbus* (New York: Macmillan, 1973).

⁷⁶ C. S. Monaco, *Moses Levy of Florida: Jewish Utopian and Antebellum Reformer* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 129.

Joseph Adler has called Levy “the guiding force” behind the attempts by young American Jews to draw their European cousins to the U.S.⁷⁷ The most important of these young American Jews whom Levy influenced was Mordecai M. Noah. Noah was a native-born American hailing from South Carolina, and, like Levy, a liberal Sephardic Jew. After serving as a diplomat for the U.S. in the Middle East in the mid-1810s, Noah established himself as a politician and newspaper publisher in New York City. In these roles he swiftly rose in influence, rank, and fame to become America’s first nationally prominent Jew.⁷⁸

A passionate advocate for his people, in 1817 Noah wrote against Christian evangelism of Jews. And on July 4, the forty-first anniversary of American independence, Noah gave an address in which he presented a vision of the United States as a haven for the oppressed, including a temporary home for the Wandering Jew on the way to ultimate return to Palestine.⁷⁹

Noah soon drew fresh inspiration for his vision of the U.S. as a proto-Zion, and a sense of how this vision might be achieved, from Moses Levy. In February 1819, an emissary from Levy proselytized him to Levy’s cause and relayed to him the essentials of Levy’s plan for Jewish agricultural colonies in Florida. It was Noah who would carry Levy’s colony ideas to international prominence, or notoriety, and bring them to the

⁷⁷ Adler, *Moses Elias Levy*, 18.

⁷⁸ For biographical information on Noah, see Jonathan D., Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew: The Two Worlds of Mordecai Noah* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1981); Isaac Goldberg, *Major Noah: American-Jewish Pioneer* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1936); Simon Wolf, *Mordecai Manuel Noah: A Biographical Sketch* (Philadelphia: Levytype Company, 1897); and Abraham J. Karp, *Mordecai Manuel Noah: The First American Jew* (New York: Yeshiva University Museum, 1987).

⁷⁹ This characterization of Noah’s speech is offered by S. Joshua Kohn in “M. M. Noah’s Ararat Project and the Missionaries,” 189.

attention of the boy Joseph Smith. But it was Levy who pioneered the idea of American Jewish colonies.⁸⁰

As Moses Levy and Mordecai Noah nursed their vision for an American Jewish proto-Zion, Christians formed their own vision of the U.S. as a haven to a Jewish-*Christian* proto-Zion.

Soon after Joseph Frey's September 1816 arrival in the U.S. he received a letter from fellow Jewish convert John David Marc arguing the need for Jewish colonies in the United States. Jewish converts, according to Marc, required a settlement, a safe haven, and the U.S. was the ideal place for it. Marc sent several subsequent letters advocating a plan for an American settlement for converted Jews. The last of these letters, arriving in April 1819, finally prompted Frey to act.⁸¹

As Frey began promoting a settlement for converted Jews, others acted on a similar vision. In 1819 German nobleman Adelbert Count von der Recke-Volmerstein made the first practical move to establish a colony of converted Jews, purchasing a farm near Dusseldorf⁸² and opening it up as a settlement for converted Jews. This same year, a number of converted German Jews announced their desire to immigrate to the U.S. to form a settlement of converted Jews.⁸³ And in October Christian political agitator William Davis Robinson published a tract titled *Memoir addressed to persons of the Jewish Religion in Europe on the Subject of emigration in one of the most eligible parts*

⁸⁰ Adler, "Moses Elias Levy and Attempts to Colonize Florida." For a concise summary of several Jewish colonizing efforts before, during, and after Levy's, see Abraham D. Lavender and Clarence B. Steinberg, *Jewish Farmers of the Catskills: A Century of Survival* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995), 8-11.

⁸¹ Joseph Samuel C. F. Frey, *Narrative of the Rev. Joseph Samuel C. F. Frey*, 9th ed. (New York: n.p., 1832), 138-142.

⁸² Kohn, "Mordecai Manuel Noah's Ararat Project and the Missionaries," 174.

⁸³ Frey, *Narrative* (1834), 155.

of the *United States of North America* to promote the idea of Jewish colonization in the upper Mississippi and Missouri area.⁸⁴

Around this same time, Joseph Frey met with Elias Boudinot to press the need to establish a colony for converted Jews.⁸⁵ Boudinot was a onetime delegate to the Continental Congress, author of *A Star in the West* and other religious works, and founder of the American Bible Society. Writing to Frey afterward on November 26, 1819, Boudinot encouraged him to further the colonization plans under the auspices of a reorganized, repurposed “American Society.”⁸⁶ Frey immediately set to work on this project.

Frey’s gambit seems to have set off a kind of colonization arms race between Protestants and Jews. Frey’s next move would be to build a coalition supporting the evangelization and colonization of Jews and to petition the state legislature to charter a society dedicated to these ends. What Frey had almost certainly not foreseen was the American Jewish response.

No sooner had Frey set his plans in motion than Mordecai Noah tried to preempt them by rushing to the state legislature with a petition of his own. Noah envisioned a “city of refuge” for the world’s Jews. This anticipated city he first considered calling “New Jerusalem,” but, noting that his colony was not to replace Jerusalem but only to serve as a temporary haven, he ultimately named it “Ararat” after the mountain where the

⁸⁴ Helen Anne B. Rivlin, “American Jews and the State of Israel: A Bicentennial Perspective,” *Middle East Journal* 30, no. 3, Bicentennial Issue (Summer, 1976), 369-89.

⁸⁵ Frey, *Narrative* (1834), 155-56.

⁸⁶ Frey, *Narrative* (1834), 156.

biblical Noah's ark found rest.⁸⁷ On January 16, 1820 Noah petitioned the New York State Assembly to permit the sale of Grand Island to serve as the site for this city of refuge.⁸⁸ Located at the mouth of the Niagara River, by Lake Erie and near the canal's anticipated western terminus at Buffalo, Grand Island was strategically located for immigration and commerce.

Noah's petition was referred to committee on January 19. The committee, seeing merit in Noah's project, accepted it and accordingly on January 24 prepared a bill to authorize the survey and sale of the land.⁸⁹

Given that Noah was a supporter of Levy's Florida colonization plan, why did he choose to press a competing project? One answer, surely, is opportunity. In his contemporaneous 1820 "history" of the still-under-construction Erie Canal and its smaller New York predecessors, Elkanah Watson argued that a Jewish colony at the west end of the completed canal would have remarkable prospects for development into major metropolis. Given Jewish commercial acumen and the commercial boom to be set off by the canal, Watson envisioned such a settlement as both a New Jerusalem and a second New York City:

During the sitting of the present legislature Mordecai M. Noah, Esq. (of the Jewish religion...) petitioned that body on behalf of his persecuted brethren, the Jews in Europe, for a sale to him of Grand Island, as an asylum of rest, and there to erect a New Jerusalem.

⁸⁷ Michael Weingrad, "Messiah, American Style: Mordecai Manuel Noah and the American Refuge," *AJS Review* 31, no. 1 (2007), 77.

⁸⁸ Jonathan D. Sarna, "A German-Jewish Immigrant's Perception of America, 1853-54: Some Further Notes on Mordecai M. Noah, a Jewel Robbery, and Isaac M. Wise," *American Jewish History*, 68 (December 1978), 206-12.

⁸⁹ *Journal of the Assembly of the State of New-York: At Their Forty-third Session, Begun and held at the Capitol, in the city of Albany, the Fourth Day of January, 1820* (Albany, NY: J. Buel, 1820) 117, 197.

...One thing is certain;--they would have brought an immense wealth in their train; and I doubt not from that circumstance, and considering their spirit of enterprize [sic], had the sale been made to them, that a splendid city would soon have arisen overtopped with its gilded spires, in place of trees; and that in twenty or thirty years, the very effect of that capital and their habitual industry would have advanced the interior population one century in anticipation; and in one other sense, it would in some measure have transferred the city of New York to the borders of the lakes.⁹⁰

The opportunity afforded by the canal was not one to be passed up, but the immediate prompt for Noah to take action when he did was Frey's initiation of a Christian colonization plan. While Noah quite agreed with Frey that the United States was the most promising place for the world's Jews to find refuge from religious compulsion and persecution, Frey's program would grant asylum to Jews only on the condition that they abandon the religious identity for which they had borne their persecutions in the first place. To Jews *as Jews*, it offered no sanctuary. Noah could not countenance a plan that would, in effect, offer the needed safe haven as an incentive for Jews to abandon their Judaism.

Hence, as Elkanah Watson described, Noah sought, "on behalf of his persecuted brethren, the Jews in Europe," to purchase Grand Island, "as an asylum of rest, and there to erect a New Jerusalem."⁹¹

Report of Noah's petition to the legislature was published in his paper the *National Advocate* on January 24,⁹² and around this time in other New York City newspapers. The following day, January 25, a meeting of New York City clergy and

⁹⁰ Elkanah Watson, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing Condition of the Western Canals in the State of New York, from September 1788, to the Completion of the Middle Section of the Grand Canal in 1819* (Albany: D. Steele, 1820), 104.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² *National Advocate* (New York, NY), January 24, 1820, 2.

laymen resolved to form a society for colonizing and evangelizing Jews,⁹³ presumably with the intention of promoting a Christian alternative to Noah's plan. The group was officially founded as the American Society for Colonizing and Evangelizing the Jews on February 8.⁹⁴ Elias Boudinot supported the effort by serving as the society's founding president—and by appropriating in his will large tracts of land on which the proposed colony could be built.⁹⁵

Whereas in 1815 the fate of the Jews, spiritually and physically, had not been of sufficient concern for American Christians to organize on either front, five years later it was not a fringe concern but a mainstream cause. The society was thus able to attract eminent men to its ranks, including canny politicians like New York's own governor, DeWitt Clinton, and U.S. Secretary of State and soon-to-be-President John Quincy Adams.

On February 28, less than three weeks after the organization of the new Christian society, Mordecai Noah's promising Grand Island plan, which had sailed through committee, was rejected by the legislature.⁹⁶ Evidence that will have to be presented in detail beyond the bounds of the present thesis suggests that this rejection resulted from interference by Noah's Christian competitors. It will have to suffice here to note that on

⁹³ "The American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews, and its Organ, the Jewish Chronicle," *The Occident, and American Jewish Advocate: A Monthly Periodical Devoted to the Diffusion of Knowledge on Jewish Literature and Religion*, 1, no. 1 (April 1843) 44-45.

⁹⁴ Joseph Samuel C. F. Frey, *Narrative of the Rev. Joseph Samuel C. F. Frey* 9th ed. (New York: n.p., 1832), 143-144.

⁹⁵ *The Jewish Era: A Christian Quarterly in Behalf of Israel*, (January 1897): 18. *The First Report of the American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews, Presented May 9, 1823 with an Appendix* (New York: Gray and Bunce, 1823), 41.

⁹⁶ *Journal of the Assembly of the State of New-York: At Their Forty-third Session*, 557.

March 17, the assembly received from the state senate a bill the senate had passed to incorporate the American Society for Colonizing and Evangelizing the Jews.⁹⁷

On April 14, the assembly incorporated Frey's new society,⁹⁸ which had by now changed in name to the Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews, a name with which Frey himself was dissatisfied, since it blurred the society's purpose of converting Jews and forming a Jewish-Christian colony.

Over the next several years, Christian and Jewish proto-Zionists engaged in a subtle conflict of move and countermove. Due to space limitations most of this conflict will need to be elided as we move to the major proto-Zionist event that stood in the near background of Joseph Smith's work with the Book of Lehi: Mordecai Noah's 1825 dedication of Grand Island for the gathering of the Jews.

In 1825, Moses Levy's Florida project faltered while that of the Christian proto-Zionists appeared to vault forward as they established a colony at Harrison, Westchester County, New York.⁹⁹ Mordecai Noah suddenly returned to work on his Grand Island colony. Late in the spring, Noah made a trip to Grand Island, or at least its environs, so he could examine the area and provide a description of it in newspaper articles that would help boost his settlement plans. These he published under the title, "A Peep at the West."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Ibid., 726.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 1019-20; Frey, *Narrative* (1832), 144.

⁹⁹ Kohn, "Mordecai Manuel Noah's Ararat Project and the Missionaries," 179-81.

¹⁰⁰ *Ontario Repository* (Canandaigua, NY), June 15, 1825, 3; *Ontario Repository* (Canandaigua, NY), June 22, 1825, 2-3; *Ontario Repository* (Canandaigua, NY), July 20, 1825, 3.

A newspaper article in Canandaigua reported Noah purchasing a part of Grand Island in an auction of public lands at the state capital of Albany on June 3.¹⁰¹ Another report has Noah purchasing 2555 acres of Grand Island via his friend Samuel Leggett.¹⁰²

Noah's renewal of his Ararat plan in mid-1825 appears to react to the ASMCJ's establishment of a colony at Harrison, but his timing may also reflect the outworking of a larger strategy. Moses Levy's worthy plan had floundered in part because it simply had not drawn enough attention, and the ASMCJ's colony was heralded primarily in its *Israel's Advocate*—the society's own publication. A newspaperman, Noah knew that to draw the needed attention to his project he had to do something spectacular. While it might have seemed Noah had waited too long to act, putting him behind the ASMCJ, his public unveiling of the Ararat project demonstrated the impeccable timing of a true strategist and showman. To make the announcement of his project spectacular, he piggybacked it on what was then the greatest spectacle in the country, and one of the greatest in the world: the inauguration of the Erie Canal.

Billed then, and since, as one of the engineering marvels of the world, the canal was dedicated and began operation along its full length—"wedding the waters" of Lake Erie with those of the Hudson—in October 1825. Noah dedicated Grand Island for Jewish settlement in September 1825, just in advance of the dedication of the canal. The dedicatory services, held in Buffalo, were described at the time in an extra published by the *Buffalo Patriot*:

¹⁰¹ *Ontario Repository* (Canandaigua, NY), June 22, 1825, 2.

¹⁰² Kohn, "Mordecai Manuel Noah's Ararat Project and the Missionaries," 193; Severance, Frank H., ed., *The Book of the Museum*, (Buffalo, NY: Buffalo Historical Society, 1921), 120.

The celebration took place this day in this village, which was both interesting and impressive. At dawn of day, a salute was fired in front of the Court House, and from the terrace facing the Lake. At 10 o'clock, the masonic and military companies assembled in front of the Lodge, and at 11 the line of procession was formed [including]... military, citizens, civil officers, state officers, in uniform, U. S. officers, president and trustees of the corporation, tyler, stewards, entered apprentices, fellow crafts, master masons, senior and junior deacons, secretary and treasurer, senior and junior wardens, masters of lodges, past master, rev. clergy... all congregated around the Principal Architect ...with square, level and plumb,...Bible, square and compass born by a master mason, the judge of Israel [Noah] in black, wearing the judicial robes of crimson silk, trimmed with ermine and a richly embossed golden medal suspended from the neck; a master mason, royal arch mason, knight templars...¹⁰³

As part of the dedication Noah displayed a cornerstone identifying Grand Island as “ARARAT, a City of Refuge for the Jews, founded by Mordecai Manuel Noah, in the Month of Tizri, September 1825, and in the 50th year of American Independence.” The flamboyantly arrayed “Judge in Israel” also issued a dramatic, authoritative, and overreaching “proclamation” to the world’s Jews, instructing them to gather to the island, levying a tax to build up the new Jewish state, and issuing legislation, including a ban on polygamy. Noah proclaimed the gathering, not only of the Jews, but also of the lost Ten Tribes, in the form of the American Indians. And Noah appointed as his “counselors” some of the most authoritative of the world’s Jewish religious leaders, first among them, “the Grand Rabbi,” Abraham de Cologne.¹⁰⁴

To promote his venture, Noah contributed a barge he dubbed the “Noah’s Ark” to the celebration of the Erie Canal’s dedication a month after he dedicated Ararat. “Noah’s Ark” came complete with “a bear, two eagles, two fawns, with a variety of other animals and birds, together with several fish—not forgetting two Indian boys, in the dress of their

¹⁰³ *Geneva Gazette and General Advertiser* (Geneva, NY), September 28, 1825, 2.

¹⁰⁴ *Ontario Repository* (Canandaigua, NY), September 28, 1825, 2.

nation,” and was to travel the length of the canal and up the Hudson, from Buffalo to New York City.¹⁰⁵ But the “ark,” like the city of refuge it represented, would never reach its goal.¹⁰⁶

Noah’s brilliant use of the canal and its dedication in the marketing of his project not only amplified his project’s publicity, it also highlighted one of Ararat’s best features—that the project itself capitalized on the canal, making the anticipated colony easy to travel to and a potential hub of the coming commercial boom.

Noah’s “proclamation” to worldwide Jewry set off the media eruption he had envisioned. His judicial “proclamation” and Ararat dedication were published in newspapers around the country under the title “Revival of Jewish Government” and spread widely in Europe. Noah won over to his plan Erasmus Simon, a public dissenter from the AMSCJ’s colony.¹⁰⁷ But many more scoffed. In response to Christians who questioned his authority in the Jewish community Noah published in the October 15, 1825 *New York Religious Chronicle* a letter of January 1, 1822 from Berlin, making him a member of the *Verein fur Kultur and Wissenschaft der Juden* (Society for Jewish Culture and Science).¹⁰⁸ But the *Verein fur Kultur and Wissenschaft der Juden* was not a religious body; it was a scholarly one.

¹⁰⁵ “Celebration of the Completion of the Canal,” *Wayne Sentinel* (Palmyra, New York), November 8, 1825.

¹⁰⁶ Cadwallader D Colden, *Memoir Prepared at the Request of a Committee of the Common Council of the City of New York, and Presented to the Mayor of the City, at the Celebration of the Completion of the New York Canals* (New York: W.A. Davis, 1825), 313.

¹⁰⁷ Kohn, “Mordecai Manuel Noah’s Ararat Project and the Missionaries,” 182-83.

¹⁰⁸ Kohn, “Mordecai Manuel Noah’s Ararat Project and the Missionaries,” 192.

For all the Ararat gathering plan's virtues and Noah's marketing genius in promoting it, the plan had considerable religious weaknesses. In promoting the gathering of Jews to an American refuge, Noah simply lacked religious leverage.

The religious weaknesses in Noah's project were clearly exposed by the chief religious authority to whom Noah himself had appealed for support in his proclamation. Abraham de Cologna, the "Grand Rabbi" whom Noah had designated his "counselor" and right-hand man in the work of gathering and governing the Jewish people, responded to his "appointment" and to Noah's pretensions in a letter published in the newspapers:

... Mr. Noah ... dreams of a heavenly mission; he talks prophetically; he styles himself a judge over Israel; he gives orders to all the Israelites in the world.... The whole is excellent; but two trifles are wanting: 1st, the well authenticated proof of the mission and authority of Mr. Noah; 2dly, the prophetic text which points out a marsh in North America as the spot for re-assembling the scattered remains of Israel.¹⁰⁹

While acknowledging Noah's sincere desire to do good, the Grand Rabbi dismissed him as "a pseudo-restorer," declaring that the Israelites, "faithful to the principles of their belief" waited on God to bring about, "by signs entirely unequivocal," the "epoch of the Israelitish restoration."

When there was little positive Jewish response immediately after Mordecai Noah's "Proclamation," the "ark" of refuge Noah had offered the world's Jews had immediately shown signs of taking in water. But with the Grand Rabbi's devastating dismissal, published widely in the U.S. at the beginning of 1826, Noah's ark sank.

¹⁰⁹ *Ontario Repository* (Canandaigua, NY), March 8, 1826, 2.

With Ararat's failure, Mordecai Noah gave up on the idea of an American proto-Zion. He soon came to advocate, instead, Jewish gathering directly to the once-and-future Zion: Jerusalem.

The competing project by the American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews did not fare much better than Noah's. By the end of 1826, it too was showing signs of failure: Joseph Frey resigned from the society, and *Israel's Advocate* ceased to advocate, ending its run in print. And by 1827 the society's Harrison settlement had collapsed.¹¹⁰ The society would attempt another settlement, a farm at New Paltz, New York. However, by 1839 the farm at New Paltz had been sold, apparently because European Jews were beginning to want to skip the intermediate gathering to a *proto-Zion* and go straight to Jerusalem.¹¹¹

In the years just before Joseph Smith began the dictation of the Book of Lehi/Book of Mormon, New York State witnessed opposing movements intended either to uproot a people from the land or welcome it to the land. Native Americans, believed by many to be Israelites or Jews who had lost their identity, were the target of great efforts at conversion but were also pushed from their traditional, sacred lands. In this same time and place actual Jews were the target of conversion efforts. And as their alleged cousins were pushed out of the land, they were invited in with portions of New York being offered to them as a makeshift Zion. The Jews were being given a place in upstate New York; the Iroquois nations forced out their place.

¹¹⁰ Frey, *Narrative* (1834), 160; Kohn, "Mordecai Manuel Noah's Ararat Project and the Missionaries," 184.

¹¹¹ *The Western Peace-maker and Monthly Religious Journal, Volume 1* (Oxford: W. W. Bishop, 1839), 84.

Mordecai Noah's gathering program would have arrested this displacement, offering sanctuary to both Jews and Native Americans at a united New Jerusalem in western New York. The earliest Mormon movement, grounded in the Book of Lehi, would have done precisely the same.

CHAPTER III:
THE PROTO-ZIONIST CHARACTER OF
THE EARLY MORMON MOVEMENT

Introduction

An examination of statements by Joseph Smith, Jr. and Martin Harris during the period they were laboring on the transcription of the Book of Lehi shows that the earliest believers understood the book's purpose and Smith's divine calling in surprisingly Judaic and American proto-Zionist terms.

On the basis of these reports, the Book of Lehi and its associated movement may be understood as a solution to the problems of proto-Zionism—both the problems proto-Zionism was trying to *address* and the problems it *encountered*. Early proponents understood it as a means for fulfilling American proto-Zionism's aspirations. And it can particularly be understood as a solution to the concerns and problems of the *Jewish* brand of American proto-Zionism—especially Mordecai Noah's Ararat project, which it both duplicated and amended. Like Noah, the Book of Lehi movement sought to gather the Jews and the "Israelite" Indians to the refuge of a new Zion in the United States. Also like Noah, the Book of Lehi movement appears to have intended to gather the Jews *as* Jews, without the need for them to abandon their faith and convert to Christianity. The Book of Lehi also offered the movement a way of answering the types of religious criticisms leveled at Noah's plan.

Given the parallels of the Book of Lehi movement to Noah's project, this chapter will not only examine characterizations of the Book of Lehi and Book of Lehi movement, it will also examine what Joseph Smith would likely have known of Noah's project.

Our preliminary look in this chapter at the Book of Lehi's themes and purpose, as understood by believers before the manuscript was lost, will enable us to begin relating the Book of Lehi to the American proto-Zionist context we have sketched. Then the succeeding chapter of this study, devoted to reconstructing specific narrative elements that were in the Book of Lehi, will enable us to draw more intricate connections.

Judaic, Proto-Zionist Characterization of the Book of Lehi and its Early Movement

During the Book of Lehi period the movement's key proponents, Smith and Harris, understood the Book of Lehi not as a book to undergird a Christian primitivist sect and restore the New Testament Church, but as a book related in purpose to the "*Old Testament*," the Hebrew Bible, and which would solve proto-Zionism's problems and achieve its ends. Reports by Smith and Harris during their work with the Book of Lehi indicate this understanding of the emerging book.

The first of these reports, from one of the earliest affidavits on the rise of Mormonism, offers Smith's characterization of his prophetic mission during the Book of Lehi timeframe (1827-28). On this account, the focus of Smith's prophetic vocation at the time was not yet re-establishing primitive Christianity, as it would be by 1829-30, but gathering the Jews. Hezekiah McKune, who was first cousin by marriage to Smith's wife Emma Hale Smith and their neighbor

during the Book of Lehi's transcription, swore the affidavit on March 20, 1834, about six years after his conversation with Smith. It was published in the local newspaper, the *Susquehanna Register and Northern Pennsylvanian*, on May 1 of that year. Smith, McKune reported, had declared his divine mission in these terms: "he was a prophet sent by God to bring in the Jews." Smith would have made this declaration of his prophethood and mission to McKune sometime after Smith's arrival in Harmony in about December 1827 and before the McKunes and other local families began isolating Smith in mid-1828 because of his prophetic claims.¹¹² This places Smith's self-characterization as a prophet sent to gather the Jews either 1) within the December to February period during which Smith says he transcribed characters from the plates and made preliminary interpretations preparatory to his transcription of the Book of

¹¹² Hezekiah McKune, statement, March 20, 1834, in *Susquehanna Register and Northern Pennsylvanian* (Montrose, Pennsylvania), 1 May 1834. McKune was married to Elizabeth Lewis, daughter of Emma's maternal uncle Nathaniel Lewis. He was the son of Joseph McKune, Sr., whose property adjoined Joseph and Emma's.

McKune does not date his conversation with Smith, but several factors tend to place the conversation around early 1828, when Smith was dictating the Book of Lehi. On Smith's account he moved to Harmony in December of 1827. Several neighbors report hearing Smith's prophetic claims from him during the transcription of the Book of Lehi and before his wife gave birth to their stillborn child in June of 1828. Within months after his arrival, Smith appears to have become more socially isolated within the community. Smith's father-in-law Isaac Hale reportedly turned against his son-in-law (again) during this period. Smith's brother-in-law David Hale struck his name from his store ledger in May 1828 (soon after Martin Harris arrived to begin scribing for Smith), indicating that he no longer intended to trade with Smith. The Hale family did not turn against Joseph Smith permanently. In his 1838-39 history, Smith said that by May 1829, "my wife's father's family...had become very friendly to me." Smith omits any mention of renewed friendliness from his wife's *mother's* family, the Lewises—into which Hezekiah McKune had married.

Smith's attempt to affiliate with the Methodist probationary class in Harmony during July of 1828 had been rebuffed by Hezekiah McKune's brother Joshua McKune and brother-in-law Joseph Lewis, because of Smith's treasure digging claim to supernatural visions. The Lewises' hard feelings and rejection of Smith persisted through his stay in Harmony. According to Mark Lyman Staker, the Lewis family continued to be "very antagonistic" toward Joseph Smith. Smith's 1838 history describes his father's family protecting him from "mob" opposition in 1829. If the Hales were protectors from the "mob," the Lewises appear to have been part of it.

See Mark Staker, "The Prophet Joseph Smith and His Family in Harmony, Pennsylvania: New Light on the Hale Family and Early Church History in Pennsylvania" (lecture, LDS Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, October 17, 2008), lecture notes in author's possession; and Robin S. Jensen and Mark L. Staker, "David Hale's Store Ledger: New Details about Joseph and Emma Smith, the Hale Family, and the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (2014): 77-112.

Lehi, or 2) during the March to June period in which he worked directly on the Book of Lehi's transcription.

In line with this reported Judaic emphasis in Smith's prophetic consciousness during his labors with the Book of Lehi, Martin Harris at this same time characterized the book's purpose more in "Old Testament" terms than in "New Testament" terms. This is recounted by John H. Gilbert, an associate of Harris and Palmyra resident who would soon become the Book of Mormon's typesetter. Gilbert's memory has been tested by comparing his description of the Book of Mormon manuscripts, which he had not seen for a half century at the time of his testimony, with the manuscripts themselves, a test that confirms his memories in detail.¹¹³ Gilbert's testimony of what he was first told about the book thus merits serious consideration. Gilbert placed his conversation with Harris around late 1827-early 1828. It should thus reflect what Harris understood of the book's content during this period when Smith made his first forays into deciphering the plates and began dictating the Book of Lehi.¹¹⁴ Gilbert wrote: "Late in 1827 or early in '28, was the first I heard Harris speak of Jo [sic]'s finding the plates.... The plates...*as represented at the time*, purported to be a history of the lost tribes of Israel—and *not establishing*

¹¹³ Royal Skousen, "Worthy of Another Look: John Gilbert's 1892 Account of the 1830 Printing of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 21, no. 2 (2012), 58-72. See also Shirley R. Heater, "History of the Manuscripts of the Book of Mormon," available online at <http://www.restoredcovenant.org/Document.asp?CAT=Manuscripts+%26+Editions&DOC=History+of+the+Manuscripts+of+the+Book+of+Mormon> (Last accessed May 20, 2015).

¹¹⁴ The conversation between Harris and Gilbert would have occurred while Harris was in Palmyra. Harris journeyed from Palmyra to Harmony around February 1828 to pick up the character transcript from Smith, and then journeyed to cities eastward (particularly New York City) to show the transcript to "the learned." After returning home to Palmyra for an unspecified period, Harris journeyed to Harmony with his wife, returned to Palmyra again, and then journeyed to Harmony once more in mid-April to serve as Smith's scribe. A conversation with Gilbert could thus have occurred before Harris retrieved the character transcript, after his return from New York City with the transcript, or shortly before his mid-April trip to Harmony to serve as scribe.

a new religion, but confirming the Old Testament.”¹¹⁵

The broad strokes description of the Book of Mormon as a story of “lost tribes” of Israel was substantially correct, since the book speaks of members of two of the “Ten Lost Tribes,” Ephraim and Manasseh, and this was a common nineteenth-century characterization of the book’s contents. Far less familiar is Martin Harris’s early description of the book, not as the foundation for a new church or sect, but as a second witness to the Hebrew Bible or “Old Testament.” This contemporaneous description of the book’s earliest contents would be puzzling if applied to the extant text. While the extant text includes many “Old Testament” elements, such as the making of covenants, the exodus to a promised land, and the building of a temple, it foregrounds at least as much numerous “New Testament” elements including angelic annunciation of Christ’s future birth, the institution of baptism, the establishment of a church, Pauline-style missionary work, a new star given as a sign of Christ’s birth, post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, a redacted version of the Sermon the Mount, and quasi-Pauline epistles on baptism and on faith, hope, and charity. The completed book, as it would emerge from the 1829 transcription effort, identified its purpose as primarily that of bringing both “Jew and Gentile” to Jesus Christ and provided a model and detailed plans for a latter-day church built along

¹¹⁵ John H. Gilbert to James T. Cobb, at Salt Lake City, from Palmyra, New York, dated Feb 10, 1879, in Theodore Schroeder Papers, Manuscript Division, NYPL; microfilm copy in LDS Church History Library, emphasis added. James T. Cobb, a stepson of Brigham Young, evidently repeated Gilbert’s report in a letter of inquiry he wrote to Hiel Lewis (an 1828 Harmony resident and first cousin to Emma Smith). Seven months after Gilbert’s letter to Cobb, Lewis wrote a letter, apparently in response to Cobb, stating, “Your idea that the first start of the book was a money speculation, not a new church, is perfectly correct.” Lewis’s report is problematic insofar as it surmises that the Book of Lehi was a profit-making venture, since even if this were the case it is highly doubtful that Smith would have confided this in Lewis. But Lewis’s report coheres well with those from John H. Gilbert and Hezekiah McKune—Lewis’s brother-in-law—in suggesting that Smith did not view the Book of Lehi’s *raison d’être* as the establishment of a church. Hiel Lewis to [James T. Cobb?], 29 September 1879, Salt Lake City *Daily Tribune* 18 (17 October 1879): 2, in *Early Mormon Documents* 4:321.

“primitive” Christian lines.

Yet Harris’s seemingly anomalous description of the book, given during the preparation for or transcription of the Book of Lehi, dovetails with Joseph Smith’s self-characterization during this period as a prophet sent to gather the Jews. In this early phase, the men who together transcribed the Book of Lehi saw both the book’s mission and their mission in bringing it forth in profoundly *Judaic* terms. The book, as they knew it up to this point, was not so much about restoring the New Testament church as it was about confirming and fulfilling the prophecies of the “Old Testament,” the Hebrew Bible, and restoring Jewish nationhood.

This need not suggest that the book omitted a strong emphasis on the Messiah, which characterizes the extant text—and, indeed, if the extant narrative of Lehi is any indication, the coming of the Messiah was a central theme of the Book of Lehi from the start. More plausibly, then, Martin Harris’s description of the book as “confirming the Old Testament” should be taken to indicate that the coming Messiah was called just that, “the Messiah” (as he is in the earliest chapters of the extant text as well), rather than “Jesus Christ,” and that the book otherwise lacked New Testament language and theologizing.

Joseph Smith’s and Martin Harris’s statements implying that the Book of Lehi’s content was more Judaic, and less Christian-primitivist or New Testament-like, also suggest that their early understanding of the new scripture as an “Old Testament”-like tool for gathering the Jews may have been shaped by their 1820s New York milieu.

The Book of Lehi Movement Echoed “Ararat”

The Book of Lehi-period (1827-1829) Mormon movement was prefigured by Mordecai Noah’s “Ararat” program.¹¹⁶ The two projects shared several points of resemblance. Both, like American proto-Zionist projects in general, aimed at Jewish colonization of North America. However, several of the points of resemblance were distinctive on the American proto-Zionist landscape. Both Noah’s Ararat and the Book of Lehi movement, as seen contemporaneously by Joseph Smith and Martin Harris, aimed much higher than minor colonization. Each was to “gather” the world’s Jews to a single gathering place. Each sought to “gather” the American Indians, as putative Israelites, with the Jews. And each, as we will see more clearly as we continue our analysis of the Book of Lehi movement, sought to build what adherents regarded as a “New Jerusalem,” and sought a restoration not only of gathered “peoplehood” but also of Jewish *nationhood*. These distinctive points of resemblance point to a connection—a fact not lost on Smith and Noah’s contemporaries. One contemporary wrote in 1831 that the Mormons believed

that treasures of great amount were concealed near the surface of the earth, probably by the Indians, whom they were taught to consider the descendants of the ten lost Israelitish tribes, by the celebrated Jew who a few years since promised to gather Abraham’s sons on Grand Island, thus to be made a Paradise.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Richard Bushman noted the consonance between Mordecai Noah’s program of Jewish gathering and Joseph Smith’s later efforts at the gathering of Israel in his *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 138.

¹¹⁷ David S. Burnett, “Something New—’The Golden Bible,’” *Evangelical Inquirer* (Dayton, Ohio), 7 March 1831, 217-19, in *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:278-79. See James Gordon Bennett, “Mormon Religion—Clerical Ambition—Western New York—The Mormonites Gone to Ohio,” Part II, *Morning Courier and Enquirer*, 1 September 1831. Reprinted in *Christian Register* (Boston), 24 September 1831, in *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:289.

The connection between Noah's Ararat project and the Book of Lehi/Book of Mormon cannot be one of complete causation, since Smith's 1820 or 1821 calling theophany and 1823 angelophany and golden plates claims all antedated the full development of Noah's "Ararat" project by over two years. Nevertheless, resemblances could be taken to evidence any of the following: 1) that the Book of Lehi's message was influenced by Noah's movement, 2) that Noah's movement providentially anticipated the Mormon movement, or 3) that early Mormon interpretation of the book's meaning was influenced by Noah's movement.

Would Joseph Smith Have Known about Noah's Project?

The young Joseph Smith had a keen interest in the Bible, including biblical Israel, and had access to a good deal of information about Noah's Ararat project.

Smith came from a family whose worldview and even language were saturated with the Bible. His mother reports him having been a devout Bible reader, taking his Bible into the woods to read in solitude. As we have seen, on his own report the young Joseph Smith experienced an angelophany two years before the culmination of Noah's Ararat, suffused with biblical prophecy—and specifically biblical prophecy about the gathering and restoration of Israel. Against this backdrop, Noah's efforts to gather the Jews to the nineteen-year-old's geographical backyard on the banks of the Erie Canal just up the road from the Smith home should have been of exceptional interest to all residents of Palmyra-Manchester, and particularly the young Smith.

The budding prophet not only had considerable reason for *interest* in Jewish gathering, he also had access to considerable *information* on Noah's gathering project—via the local newspaper, information networks, and direct personal observation.

Smith's most basic avenue of exposure to information about Noah's project was the newspaper. Joseph's father, Joseph Smith, Sr., was a subscriber to the local Palmyra paper. Among Joseph, Sr.'s children it appears to have been Joseph, Jr. who took the greatest interest in the newspaper. Orsamus Turner, a Palmyran near in age to Joseph, Jr., recalled that it was he who came "once a week" to pick up the newspaper during Turner's five-year (1818-22) apprenticeship in the shop that printed it. That Joseph, Jr. not only picked up his father's newspaper but took an active interest in the current news is also further indicated by Turner, who recalled the adolescent Smith participating with Turner and other young men in a debate society that considered the issues of the day. The Smiths were still subscribers to the local newspaper in August 1826, when Joseph, Sr. appeared in a list of delinquent subscribers, nearly a year after Ararat's inauguration.¹¹⁸ So Joseph, Jr. would have had a chance to glean information from the newspaper through the period when Noah's project rose to and declined from prominence.

The newspaper in question was the *Palmyra Register* (1817-21) and its successive incarnations as the *Palmyra Western Farmer* (1821-22), the *Palmyra Herald, Canal Advertiser* (1822-23), and the *Wayne Sentinel* (1823-63). This Palmyra paper carried

¹¹⁸ *Wayne Sentinel*, August 11, 1826, 3.

information about Christian efforts to gather, assist, or convert Jews, about Noah, and about Noah's Ararat project.¹¹⁹

As a New York politician and the country's first nationally prominent Jew, Mordecai Noah made regular appearances in the Palmyra paper. And Noah's dealings and influence reached into the Palmyra region, as, for example, when he was reportedly working to start a newspaper in Canandaigua, the larger town fourteen miles south from the Smiths, and when he served as executor for a will in Sodus, some twenty-three miles north of the Smiths. The *Palmyra Register* published news of Noah's initial January 1820 petition to the state legislature, including the text of the bill drafted in response.¹²⁰ The *Register* printed this news without added comment, but the local attitude toward Noah's plan of gathering the Jews to western New York is expressed in the response of the *Ontario Repository*, in neighboring Canandaigua: "if the project of Mr. Noah, in locating some of their rich bankers in this quarter is feasible, it is hoped the State will encourage it by disposing of the Island for that purpose."¹²¹

Noah's 1825 activities in promoting Ararat were closely covered by the *Register's* successor the *Wayne Sentinel*. On September 27, the *Sentinel* published a detailed account of Noah's dedication of Ararat under the title "Revival of the Jewish Government" and printed Noah's "Proclamation to the Jews." The *Sentinel* then

¹¹⁹ A few examples of Jewish matters appearing in the Palmyra paper will be listed here. Elias Boudinot's will, including the provision granting land for an ASMCJ colony was printed in an untitled article in the *Palmyra Western Farmer*, December 19, 1821, 3. For other examples of coverage of Christian assistance to Jews, see *Palmyra Register*, October 4, 1820, 4 (re: an English Parliament bill to meliorate the condition of the Jews) and *Western Farmer*, August 1, 1821, 1 (re: an American Christian mission to Palestine). For Noah's appearance in the local news, see the text in the body of the chapter below.

¹²⁰ "Legislature of New York," *Palmyra Register*, February 9, 1820, 2. For a few other early mentions of Noah in the Palmyra newspaper, see *Palmyra Register*, December 20, 1820, 3; *Palmyra Herald*, November 21, 1821, 2; September 4, 1822, 2; and November 20, 1822, 2.

¹²¹ *Ontario Repository*, January 25, 1820, 3.

published Noah's lengthy dedicatory speech in the succeeding issues of October 4 and 11. The *Sentinel* continued its coverage in a November 15 follow-up story, reprinting a letter Noah had printed from an E. Gans. Gans wrote that "the *better part of the European Jews are looking with the eager countenance of hope to the United States,*" which Noah offered as evidence that there was "a general disposition of the European Jews to emigrate," to the U.S. for refuge, "until the period of the great restoration arrives."¹²²

In addition to being able to access information on Noah's proto-restoration via the local newspaper, the Smiths were well positioned geographically to receive information about Noah's project in two ways.

First, the Smiths lived at a crossroads. There were two major routes through western New York. The first was Buffalo-Erie Road (now Route 20), the main government road connecting the north side of the eastern seaboard with the western interior of the nation. The second was the vast Erie Canal, which began operations in the Smiths' area in 1822 and extended its reach to Lake Erie in 1825. On the canal, two or three miles north of the Smith property, stood Palmyra. On the Buffalo-Erie Road fourteen miles to the south of the Joseph Smith, Sr. property stood the larger city, county seat, and stagecoach hub Canandaigua.¹²³ And on a road connecting the two lived the Smiths. The Smith farm was located between the canal and the Buffalo-Erie Road, on Stafford Road, via which travelers could pass between Palmyra and Canandaigua. A mile

¹²² "The Jews," *Wayne Sentinel* (Palmyra, NY), November 15, 1825, 1. Emphasis in original.

¹²³ Richard Palmer, "Canandaigua – A Stagecoach Town," *Stagecoach Days* (blog), October 17, 2011, accessed May 11, 2017, <http://stagecoachdays.blogspot.com/2011/10/canandaigua-stagecoach-town.html>.

to the east of the Smith's was Canandaigua Road, the major artery connecting these destinations and their associated routes of travel.

The Smiths' nearness to the Erie Canal, to Canandaigua and the Buffalo-Erie Road, and their location between the two routes provided access to information about Noah and Ararat. The "information superhighway" of the day was comprised of the literal highways and waterways. By these ways traveled persons who carried not only goods but also a freight of information. Despite the Smiths' rural setting, New York's transportation revolution and their privileged position within its infrastructure placed them at an important nexus in the contemporaneous economy of information.

Second, the Smiths were along the path of relevant events. In preparation for his Ararat project, in spring 1825 "Major Noah" traveled to the region of Grand Island, passing through Canandaigua, just fourteen miles from the Smiths.¹²⁴ Noah presumably returned by the same route, passing through Canandaigua again. He would have traveled to and from the Ararat dedication in Buffalo either by the major road or by taking the nearly completed canal over almost the entire distance. He would thus have passed just above or just below Manchester each time.

The dedication ceremonies occurred at Buffalo, up the canal 100 miles to the west of Palmyra. Soon after these ceremonies Noah charted a course for his flamboyant "Noah's Ark" down the canal, and therefore right through Palmyra. It is uncertain whether the malfunctioning barge reached Palmyra, but the anticipation for it would have. In an age before mass media entertainments, the buzz about Noah's floating zoo

¹²⁴ Mordecai Noah, "A Peep at the West," reprinted in part in *Ontario Repository* (Canandaigua, NY), July 20, 1825.

would have preceded it down the canal and raised the excitement of locals, who would hope to catch a glimpse.

Joseph Smith lived at an information nexus where there was proximity to Noah's venture and much enthusiasm for it. The budding nineteen-year-old prophet, whose recent angelophany had prophesied the gathering and restoration of Israel, could not have been unaware of or uninterested in Mordecai Noah's program to bring the world's Jews through Palmyra by way of the Erie Canal and out to the western end of Smith's state.

Among other things, Joseph Smith was positioned to learn of the fate of Noah's project, including the Grand Rabbi's enumeration of the project's fatal flaws. This was published nearly as widely as Noah's proclamation, and while it did not appear in the *Wayne Sentinel*, it circulated in the area around Palmyra, such as in neighboring Canandaigua and nearby Rochester.¹²⁵ If information about why Noah's project failed did not naturally flow to Smith, a little curiosity on his part would have led him to the answer, as expressed by Noah's "counselor," the Grand Rabbi.

Meeting the Grand Rabbi's Objections: Resolving American Proto-Zionism's Authority Problem

The early Mormon New Jerusalem project is connected to Noah's Ararat project not only in how it resembles it, but also in how it differs from it. It duplicates the framework and goals of Noah's project but *differs from it in ways that correct the deficiencies in Noah's project identified by the Grand Rabbi.*

¹²⁵ "Re-assemblage of the Jews," *Ontario Repository* (Canandaigua, NY), January 25, 1826, 2; and "Re-assemblage of the Jews," *The Album* (Rochester, NY), January 24, 1826, 3; and "Re-assemblage of the Jews," *The Republican* (Batavia, NY), January 27, 1826, 2.

Noah's endeavor had faltered for want of adequate solutions to religious challenges, challenges of which the Grand Rabbi's letter was the most prominent and authoritative expression. Although Mordecai Noah's bold effort to gather Israel had lacked the necessary religious elements, Joseph Smith's effort could claim them. Smith's exceptional religious experiences equipped him to answer the Grand Rabbi's objections to Jewish gathering in North America in a way Noah could not.

Smith's program, at least as he understood it at the time, was like Noah's in purpose, but, unlike Noah's, could lay claim to *religious authority* via precedent, prophecy, and sign. This is not to say that Smith's claim to have found the golden plates was inspired by Noah's proclamation and the Grand Rabbi's response—it *could not* have been, since it preceded these developments by two years. Yet as Joseph Smith approached the task of presenting the world with the book that was to gather Israel to a New Jerusalem, these recent events provided a readily available lens that could focus and shape his understanding of both the text and the consequent gathering.

When the Grand Rabbi identified Noah's American proto-Zionist program as lacking in precisely what Joseph Smith's own nascent program of bringing forth the ancient American book of plates could provide, what else could the budding prophet perceive in this but providence? If his experiences of the divine provided what was needed to fulfill prophecy by gathering the world's Jews, how could he not use them to fill the need? If Smith was still seeking to understand what the newly revealed plates might accomplish, he needed to seek no further.

The Authority Problem

In the wake of several proto-Zionist schemes to colonize Jews in cities of refuge in western New York, the Book of Lehi had startling implications. Much as the “myth of a Jewish Columbus” validated Jewish settlement in the New World by giving Jews the earliest precedent in European settlement of the New World, the claim that ancient Diasporan Jews had taken refuge in the Americas—by divine direction—gave precedent for *modern* Diasporan Jews to then do the same. They thus had claim upon the land: it was a natural haven for them.

The value of precedent like this was recognized, at least implicitly, by various American proto-Zionists. This is evident from the fact that the people who were promoting Jewish colonization in America and the people who were promoting the idea that the American Indians were Jews were *the same people*. The overlap between the two groups is telling. American proto-Zionist leaders, Jewish and Christian, tended to also advocate the view that Native Americans were themselves “Jews,” “scattered” Israelites who had found a home in the New World. Those advocating this view included Elias Boudinot and Joseph Frey, the two most significant Christian proto-Zionist leaders, and Mordecai Noah. Significantly, Noah came to adopt this view during the years he worked toward an American Jewish gathering place.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ In an 1817 address, Noah referred to Native Americans as, “the savage of the wilderness, whose repast is blood, and whose mercy is death,” in Mordecai M. Noah, *Oration Delivered by Appointment Before Tammany Society of Columbian Order, Hibernian Provident Society, Columbian Society, Union Society of Shipwrights and Caulkers, Tailors’, House Carpenters’, and Masons’ Benevolent Societies United to Celebrate the 41st Anniversary of American Independence*. (New York: J. H. Sherman, 1817), 6.

Noah’s eventual acceptance of Indian-Israel ideas is demonstrated in his 1825 Ararat “Proclamation”: “The Indians of the American continent, in their admitted Asiatic origin, in the worship of one God, in their dialect and language, in their sacrifices, marriages, divorces, burials, fastings, purifications, punishments, cities of refuge, division of tribes, in their High Priest, and in their wars, and in their victories, being in all probability the descendants of the lost tribes of Israel, which were carried captive by the king of Assyria, measures will be adopted to make them sensible of their origin, to cultivate their minds, soften their condition, and finally to re-unite them with their brethren, the chosen people.”

Why did American proto-Zionist leaders also tend to advocate Israelite theories of Native American origins? Two rationales present themselves. First, for people who see the United States having a mission to help restore God's covenant people—as did many American proto-Zionists—a providential understanding made sense: God put the U.S. and its indigenous peoples together to help facilitate that mission. If God wanted America to help gather Israel, what better way to facilitate that than to put the lost tribes *in* America?

Second, the idea of gathering Jews to refuge in the New World and the idea that the Native Americans are *already* Jews living in the New World go together. If the Native Americans are Jews, then the United States as a refuge for Diasporan Jews is not a proposed future but an accomplished fact. The American Indians' presence established a precedent for the Jews to immigrate and made the U.S. a land where long-separated branches of the house of Israel could providentially reunite.

Like Noah's ideas, and Indian-Israel theories generally, the Book of Lehi presented precedent for Jewish gathering in the New World. Nevertheless, it bolstered and expanded that precedent, portraying ancient Jewish immigration to the Americas as a divinely guided exodus, offering itself as evidence of that ancient Jewish immigration, and, as we will see, providing precedent also for the building of an American Jewish temple to serve as a focal point of the gathering.

Mordecai Manuel Noah, "Proclamation to the Jews," *The Jewish Expositor and Friend of Israel; Containing Monthly Communications Respecting the Jews and the Proceedings of the London Society*, volume 10 (London: A. Macintosh, 1825), 453.

A second source of authority offered by the Book of Lehi/Book of Mormon was that of prophecy, of sacred text. The Grand Rabbi had faulted Noah's Ararat for lacking a "prophetic text" designating an American gathering place. The Book of Lehi/Book of Mormon *was* such a text, one that presented precedent for Jews gathering in the Americas and prophesied the New Jerusalem to which they were to gather (e.g., 3 Nephi 20:21-22, 21:22-24; Ether 13:2-6).

A third source of authority for an Israelite gathering plan provided by the Book of Lehi/Book of Mormon was the book's function as a *sign*. The Grand Rabbi had required, "well authenticated proof of the mission and authority" of the would-be gatherer and had looked for God to signal "by signs entirely unequivocal" that the "epoch of the Israelitish restoration" had arrived. The Book of Mormon describes itself as a sign that the time of restoration had indeed arrived: "I give unto you a sign, that ye may know the time when these things shall be about to take place—that I shall gather in, from their long dispersion, my people, O house of Israel, and shall establish them again among my Zion" (3 Nephi 21:1; see also verses 2-7). To accept the book was, of course, to accept the one who brought it forth. The book itself was the "proof of the mission and authority" of Joseph Smith, whom it identified as a true restorer, as opposed to the well-intentioned "pseudo-restorer" Noah.¹²⁷

The point is not, of course, that the Grand Rabbi would have accepted the Book of Lehi as a sign "entirely unequivocal" that the time of restoration had arrived, but, rather, that the Book of Lehi movement could lay claim to presenting the required sign. For

¹²⁷ The Grand Rabbi's letter was widely reprinted, including in Canandaigua, some fourteen miles from the Joseph Smith, Sr. homestead. *Ontario Repository* (Canandaigua, NY), March 8, 1826, 2.

anyone who accepted the book it would have met the requirement, something Noah had not even claimed to be able to do.

Addressing Practical Problems of Proto-Zionism

In addition to offering authority for an American proto-Zionist program, the Book of Lehi offered potential practical support. The Book of Lehi would establish its translator as a prophet on the order of Moses, or of Lehi and Nephi, the founding prophets of the Amer-Israelite nation who, respectively, directed the exodus to the New World and built a New World temple. This identification as a prophet not only legitimated Smith's authority as a gatherer and nation builder but gave him the right to issue divine commandments to direct the details of the gathering and nation-building processes.

Smith's reported finding of the Book of Mormon plates also, as we will see below, marked a holy site as a specific place for Jewish settlement, a location with similar advantages to Grand Island but with a sacred rationale that could quell any quibbling over the location—the sacred site where the plates had been deposited. This location would not be arbitrary, but necessary.

The Book of Lehi further provided a vehicle for spreading and promoting the cause. Christian proto-Zionists had used missionizing to bring Jews to the Americas with little success. Mordecai Noah both created and capitalized on media spectacle, timed to promote his "Proclamation," and thereby garnered wide publicity—but no immigrants. Joseph Smith had a "prophetic text"—not a single *passage*, as the Grand Rabbi had

required—but an entire *volume*. What Noah had lacked, Smith possessed in super-abundance.

At this early, pre-ecclesiastical point in his prophetic vocation, Smith may have hoped that advocates of Jewish colonization in the Americas, such as Noah, would spread the Book of Lehi in order to promote the cause. The idea suggests an intriguing, if conjectural, re-reading of one of the early events of Mormon history.

Early in 1828, as he began his work on the Book of Lehi, Joseph Smith sent Martin Harris to New York City with a transcript of characters representing those on the golden plates. After showing the characters to classicist Charles Anthon of Columbia College, who identified them as belonging to various ancient Old World alphabets, Harris requested of Anthon a certificate affirming the identity of these characters. Anthon initially complied, but, on learning of the angelic claims associated with the finding of the characters, tore up the certificate. Harris himself seems not to have needed the certificate in order to believe in the antiquity of the golden plates characters. He had believed before there was one. For whom, then, was the certificate?

A plausible purpose for Harris's trip to New York City to get the authenticity of the characters certified was to ultimately present the characters, the certificate, and the story of the newfound book of plates to one who had both the interest and the means to print and promote an American proto-Zionist book: Mordecai Noah. Noah would surely have been among the Jews that Joseph Smith hoped the Book of Lehi would persuade to the cause. He had proved a dedicated and capable promoter of the American proto-Zionist idea. And, as a newspaper publisher, he had a printing press.

Anthon in the end refused to give Harris a certificate, possibly preempting Harris's intentions of taking the character transcript to Noah. Or Harris may have attempted to approach the very busy publisher-politician and found him unavailable or aloof. Whatever Noah's hoped-for role, adherents to the emerging Book of Lehi appear to have first understood the book as a providential solution to problems of Jewish gathering, problems that would have been familiar to them from Mordecai Noah's ordeals with Ararat, including especially the problem of authority. The book offered a sacred rationale for the Jews to "gather" to an American New Jerusalem founded on the book itself.

The Jewishness of the Mormon Solution

While Frey theoretically opined that Jews needed to be gathered first and only later proselytized, his organization took exactly the opposite tack, opening its colonies only to Jews who had already converted to Christianity or who desired to be instructed in Christian beliefs. Unlike the other American proto-Zionist projects, the Mormon project would have been in some sense both Christian and Jewish—broadly Jewish in its aims, but initiated by Christians and drawing heavily on Christian support.

With the Christian primitivist emphasis the Mormon movement of this period is generally presumed to have had, we might expect the early Mormons to have not engaged proto-Zionism at all. If they did, we would most naturally expect them to do so similarly to their Christian co-religionists. However, the Mormons closely engaged and were part of the American proto-Zionist movement, and in engaging it they more closely resembled the Jewish than the Christian proto-Zionists. They prioritized the concerns of the Jewish

proto-Zionists—refuge for persecuted Jews and the restoration of Israel—rather than that of the Christian proto-Zionists: conversion to Christianity.

**From Noah’s Ark to Joseph’s Ark:
The Mormon Radicalization of American Proto-Zionism**

The earliest Mormon movement has been thought of as a manifestation of Christian primitivism, the effort to restore the pristine New Testament church. Despite this, as we have seen, the Book of Lehi movement’s adherents were not initially trying to restore Christianity to its golden age under Jesus and the Apostles. Rather, they were trying to restore Judaism to *its* golden age under David and Solomon.

In this, the Mormon project far exceeded even Noah’s ambitions. It aimed not only to “gather” the Jews and begin restoring their nationhood, but also to effect the restoration of a once-defining element of Jewish *religious* life: temple worship.

We have seen that an ancient Jewish exodus to the Americas, as described by the Book of Lehi, had implications for modern Jewish colonization of the Americas. Joseph Smith’s reported finding of the golden plates, in their protective stone container, in a hill in Manchester extended these implications. America, the Book of Lehi indicated, had served as a place of refuge for Diasporan Jews for millennia. And Smith’s reported discovery of relics in his hometown suggested that *New York* in particular had served as a place of refuge: the ancient American Jews had attested to this by leaving an ancient reliquary on the Manchester hilltop.

Over time Latter Day Saints have interpreted and reinterpreted the significance of this hill and its reliquary. In May 1829, near the end of his work with the Book of Mormon

text, Joseph Smith dictated the narrative of the Nephites' destruction at a hill located in the land "Desolation" and called "Cumorah." Early Mormons subsequently came to understand the Manchester hill *as* Cumorah. Many present-day interpreters of the Book of Mormon have abandoned this identification of the Manchester hill with Cumorah, concluding instead that Moroni, the last Nephite, transported the plates and other sacred relics from Nephite lands in Mesoamerica to upstate New York to enable Joseph Smith to later find them there.

Evidence suggests that prior to Smith's 1829 dictation of the Nephite destruction narrative, the early believers held yet another interpretation of the Manchester hill and its reliquary. To grasp the meaning the hilltop reliquary would have had for Smith and his contemporaries in 1827-28 we need to "read" the reliquary's meaning through the lens of events up to that point, rather than through the lens of later events. We have noted that Smith *subsequently*, in May 1829, dictated the narrative of the Nephites' destruction in "the land Desolation" at the hill "Cumorah." This narrative and these place names, when applied to the Manchester hill with the Amer-Israelite reliquary, give the place a very definite meaning: it is the final battleground and graveyard of a once great nation, a place of mourning.

However, in order to understand how believers viewed the hill in 1827-28, we need to bracket and temporarily set aside these narratives that they did not encounter until May 1829. When viewed through the lens of what Joseph Smith, Martin Harris, and their associates demonstrably knew during the early period, the hill takes on a very different signification from that of a mass grave. Among the data that crucially informed the early Latter Day Saints' understanding of the hilltop reliquary were the characteristics of its

sacred relics. This collection of relics did not evoke or associate the reliquary with wars of annihilation. Rather, the relics associated their reliquary with a temple.

Martin Harris and other early believers appear to have understood the hilltop reliquary as an American Israelite counterpart to the biblical Ark of the Covenant, which had held Moses' stone tablets and embodied the presence of God to the early Israelites. Two years after the Book of Mormon was published, the "Gentile" press suggestively reported that the book's adherents claimed to know where the Ark of the Covenant and its relics were hidden.¹²⁸ Further analysis of early Mormon perspectives suggests this was a misinterpretation of the actual claim—not that Joseph Smith had discovered the *biblical* ark, but that he had located a *new* "ark."

For instance, Palmyra minister John A. Clark, conveying the gold plates narrative as he had heard it from Martin Harris in 1828, reported that the plates were found in an "ark."¹²⁹ Other Latter-day Saints, among them John Taylor, would also perceive the parallel between the stone cache of Nephite relics and the Ark of the Covenant:

¹²⁸ Letter, Rev. B. Pixley, Independence, Jackson Co. Missouri, Oct. 12, 1832, to the editor of the *Christian Watchman*, *Christian Watchman* (Boston, MA) November 9, 1832. Transcription from <http://www.sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/ne/miscne01.htm> (Last accessed April 21, 2018). It may be worthy of note that early nineteenth century authors arguing that the American Indians were Jews adduced as evidence for this proposition the Indians' possession of an equivalent to the Ark of the Covenant. Ethan Smith argues that a traditional "medicine bag" was equivalent to the Ark of the Covenant and also quotes James Adair and Elias Boudinot arguing that a box of relics carried by certain tribes was a native Ark of the Covenant. Ethan Smith, *View of the Hebrews; or the Tribes of Israel in America* (Second edition; Poultney, Vermont: Smith and Shute, 1825), 94-95, 140-42.

¹²⁹ John A. Clark, reporting on detailed 1828-1829 narrations by Martin Harris, wrote of Joseph Smith's discovery of the plates, "This book, which was contained in a chest, *or ark*, and which consisted of metallic plates covered with characters embossed in gold, he must not presume to look into, under three years." Clark, Letter to "Dear Brethren," Fairfield, Pennsylvania, August 24, 1840, *The Episcopal Recorder* 18 (September 5, 1840): 94, in *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:264, italics added. The term "ark," as used here, was an accurate one. The primary definition given for "ark" in the 1828 Webster's dictionary was, "a small close vessel, chest or coffer, such as that which was the repository of the tables of the covenant among the Jews" and another definition was "a depository." The stone vessel in which the plates had been deposited fits both. Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols. (New Haven, CT, 1828).

As ancient Israel preserved in the Ark of the Covenant memorials of God's power, goodness and mercy, manifested during the exodus from Egypt, in the two tablets of stone and the pot of manna; and of the recognition of the Aaronic Priesthood in Aaron's rod that budded; and as the sword of Laban, the sacred plates already revealed, as well as numerous others yet to be made manifest, and a Urim and Thummim were preserved on this continent; so will there be an exhibition an evidence, a memorial . . . preserved and manifested in the dispensation that the Lord in His loving kindness has now inaugurated."¹³⁰

The reliquary's contents, moreover, fit with its characterization as an "ark." All the objects Joseph Smith reported finding in it parallel and evoke either the biblical Ark of the Covenant—the heart of the First Temple—or the vestments of the biblical high priest, who presided over sacrificial worship in the temple and had exclusive access to the ark, annually, on the Day of Atonement. These points deserve attention, highlighting parallels early believers were likely to recognize between the contents of the New York reliquary and the biblical Ark of the Covenant.

Among the relics Joseph Smith reported recovering from the Nephite "ark" were "the interpreters" and a breastplate. The interpreters were, like the biblical high priest's Urim and Thummim, two sacred stones used to divine God's will. Also like the Urim and Thummim, these accompanied the breastplate. The parallel between the interpreters and the Urim and Thummim is sufficiently obvious that believers, including Joseph Smith, began calling the interpreters "the Urim and Thummim" no later than 1832.¹³¹ A

¹³⁰ John Taylor, *The Mediation and Atonement of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1882), 122–23.

¹³¹ When Orson Hyde and Joseph Smith's brother Samuel Harrison Smith were questioned in 1832 about the translation of the Book of Mormon, they referred to the interpreters as "the Urim and Thummim." "Questions Proposed to the Mormonite Preachers and Their Answers Obtained Before the Whole Assembly at Julian Hall, Sunday Evening, August 5, 1832," *Boston Investigator* 2 (August 10, 1832). This usage was also adopted in Latter-day Saint publications, such as *The Evening and the Morning Star*, edited by W. W. Phelps, which equated the interpreters with the Urim and Thummim. "The Book of Mormon," *The Evening and the Morning Star* 1, no. 8 (January 1833), 2.

revelation shored up the connection, also referring to the interpreters as “the Urim and Thummim” (D&C 17:1).¹³²

The interpreters were not, of course, the sole contents Joseph Smith reported finding in the stone “ark.” Most prominent among the artifacts of the stone box were the golden plates. Interestingly, Joseph’s new “ark” bearing plates paralleled but inverted the pattern of the biblical ark: in place of stone tablets in a golden ark, the Nephite sacred cache consisted of golden tablets in a stone ark.¹³³

The Manchester “ark’s” connection to the biblical temple relics is made yet stronger by Joseph’s description of the golden plates as having been engraved with linguistic characters. The Hebrew Bible only once describes an engraved gold plate. This plate appears as part of the sacerdotal vestments that the high priest wore—along with the breastplate and Urim and Thummim—and was engraved with sacred words (Exodus 39:30; Leviticus 8:9).¹³⁴

¹³² This revelation is dated June 1829, but because the earliest known version of the revelation is that recorded in “Revelation Book 2” (pp. 119-20) around November 1834, it is unclear whether the original text contained the term “Urim and Thummim,” as opposed to the more standard 1829 term “interpreters.” In either case, Smith’s prophetic text, whether in 1829 or 1835, shows that the interpreters were identified strongly enough with the biblical Urim and Thummim that the term “Urim and Thummim” was thought appropriate to use for the interpreters themselves. The Joseph Smith Papers editors place the recording of this document in Revelation Book 2 “not before 25 Nov. 1834,” but also state that Revelation Book 2 was not used to copy revelations after November 1834, thus placing the copying of this revelation into the book in late November 1834. See Michael Hubbard MacKay, Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds., *Documents, Volume 1: July 1828–June 1831*. Vol. 1 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, Richard Lyman Bushman, and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2013), 82, 441.

¹³³ The biblical ark was plated with gold, befitting the ornate temple of Solomon in which it was housed. Nephi’s temple is described in the Book of Mormon as less ornate, decorated with fewer “precious things” (2 Nephi 5:16), making a stone ark appropriate to this temple.

¹³⁴ The words on the high priest’s gold plate were “HOLINESS TO THE LORD” (Exodus 39:30, emphasis in original). The only other biblical mention of gold plates in the King James Bible is also with reference to the high priest’s vestments, gold plates being included as part of the ephod, on which the Urim and Thummim were worn (Exodus 39:2-3).

Other relics reportedly transmitted with the interpreters and plates were found in the stone box—the Liahona and sword of Laban.¹³⁵ And even these, as will be discussed in the following chapter, evoke biblical relics said to have been stored in or with the Ark of the Covenant.

The high priestly relics and the Ark of the Covenant had been kept in the inner chambers of the First Temple, which stood in Jerusalem atop the “Temple Mount,” Mount Moriah. The burial atop a hill of the Nephite stone reliquary bearing the golden plates evoked this original, Jerusalem model. And the early believers’ identification of that reliquary as an “ark” indicates that they recognized the pattern.

If the reliquary atop the hill evoked the Ark of the Covenant for the earliest believers, the hill itself would have evoked the site of the First Temple—the Jerusalem Temple Mount. The believers would subsequently encounter the Cumorah narrative and then apply it to this hill, changing the hill, in its perceived significance, from a “Moriah” to a “Gomorrah,” a likely source for the name “Cumorah.”¹³⁶ It is the earlier meaning of the

¹³⁵ Descriptions of the contents of the stone box vary. The Nephite set of sacred treasures clearly consisted of the brass plates, various sets of golden plates, the sword of Laban, the Liahona, and, eventually, the interpreters and accompanying breastplate. No early historical sources of which I am aware place the brass plates or Nephi’s large plates in Cumorah’s stone box, but the remainder of the Nephite relics are reported to have been in the box. For a description of the Liahona and sword of Laban appearing in the box, see Fayette Lapham, “Interview with the Father of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet,” *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:462.

¹³⁶ I suspect “Gomorrah” as the source for “Cumorah” based on 1) both locations being places of the annihilation of the wicked, and 2) the similarity of the names. That Book of Mormon proper names are often based on the name’s meaning is argued in Gordon C. Thomasson, “What’s in a Name? Book of Mormon Language, Names, and [Metonymic] Naming,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no. 1 (1994), 1-27; available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol3/iss1/2>. (Note that the bracketed word “Metonymic” appears in this way in the article’s title.) The derivation of “Cumorah” from “Gomorrah” has also been argued for by Paul Hoskisson. Hoskisson’s arguments assume a Hebrew background to the Book of Mormon text, but the similarity of “Cumorah” to “Gomorrah” is close enough for the derivation to also make sense if English is assumed to be the text’s original language. Paul Y. Hoskisson, “What’s in a Name? The Name Cumorah,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 13/1–2 (2004): 158–60, 174–75, available at <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/jbms/13/1/S00017-50be6b87bfcee16Hoskisson.pdf>.

Manchester hill as an American temple mount that illuminates Smith and Harris's 1828 understanding of the Book of Lehi's purpose.

While Mordecai Noah and others had attempted to establish a "New Jerusalem" in western New York, their efforts could claim no precedent and draw no authority from the past. The sole biblical connection Mordecai Noah offered for his project—that it was "Ararat," or an "ark" of safety, like his canal boat—was not a sign of divine authority but a gimmick.

Smith's "ark" differed from Noah's, not only in being of the sacerdotal rather than the marine variety, but also in being putatively an ancient relic, not an *ad hoc* marketing contrivance. As a new "Ark of the Covenant" that preserved high priestly vestments and temple relics and rested on a high place, the Nephite "ark," as Smith described it, has the appearance of being the heart of a temple complex. For early believers this "ark" marked the site of an ancient temple built by Jews in exile, and thus of an ancient temple city—a new, American Jerusalem.

Just as the parallels of the interpreters to the Urim and Thummim and of the hilltop reliquary to the biblical Ark did not remain merely implicit, neither did the apparent parallel of the Palmyra-Manchester region surrounding the hill to Jerusalem. The earliest indication that the Mormons expected to build a temple calls the anticipated edifice "the temple of Nephi" and implies that it would be built in a New Jerusalem located at or near Palmyra.

*Building “the Temple of Nephi”
and a New Jerusalem at Palmyra-Manchester*

Like Mordecai Noah, the earliest Mormons seem to have anticipated establishing a New Jerusalem in western New York. However, unlike Noah, who proposed his new Zion on an island situated where the Niagara River emptied into Lake Erie, they apparently intended to build theirs around a temple they expected to erect on the golden plates hill, their American Mount Moriah.

Of course, this might surprise Latter Day Saints and students of Mormon history, who will recall that Joseph Smith’s revelations identified Independence, Missouri as the location for Zion, but this identification was not made until 1831 (see D&C 57:2–3). An earlier, September 1830 revelation implies that the location of the New Jerusalem had been a subject of disagreement and controversy among the Saints. When Book of Mormon witness Hiram Page wrote revelations on building the New Jerusalem, Joseph Smith’s September 1830 revelation countered, dismissing Page’s revelation as unauthorized and declaring that “it is not Revealed & no man knoweth where the City [Zion] shall be built But it shall be given hereafter.” Joseph Smith’s revelation excluded a Palmyra-Manchester location for the city by identifying the proper location as in the vicinity of Indian Territory—“on the borders of the Lamanites” (D&C 28: 9-11).¹³⁷ This countering of Page’s revelations with an Indian Territory site for the New Jerusalem suggests that Page’s revelations assumed a location closer to his upstate New York home.

¹³⁷ The word “Zion” was later added to this revelation for clarity. For the earliest extant version of this revelation, see “Revelation, September 1830–B,” 1830, Joseph Smith Papers, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org>.

The identification of the Manchester hill as Cumorah, and of Independence, Missouri as the New Jerusalem, occurred so early in the Mormon history that the earlier understandings of the hill as ancient temple site and of Palmyra-Manchester as the New Jerusalem were overshadowed and must now be inferred from early historical records. Nonetheless, they can be inferred from converging lines of evidence. John H. Gilbert recalled Martin Harris stating at the E. B. Grandin print shop in Palmyra that the New Jerusalem was to be built there.¹³⁸ This claim by Martin Harris, made during the negotiations for printing the Book of Mormon, was independently recalled by William Van Camp, editor of the *Lyon's Gazette*. Van Camp remembered Harris identifying Palmyra as the New Jerusalem in conjunction with a nearby hill, presumably the golden plates hill, at Grandin's shop while he (Van Camp) worked there as an apprentice.¹³⁹

Closer to the events, one of the earliest newspaper articles on Mormonism, published in August 1829, expressed the same understanding. A now lost piece published by Jonathan A. Hadley in his anti-Masonic newspaper the *Palmyra Freeman* appears to have described Mormon plans to build or rebuild "the Temple of Nephi." Abner Cole echoed Hadley's information about the Mormons building "the Temple of Nephi" in an article of his own, while facetiously referring to the *Palmyra Freeman* as "the *New Jerusalem Reflector*." Cole's equation of "Palmyra" with "New Jerusalem" treats these

¹³⁸ "Martin...said that Palmyra was to be the New Jerusalem..." John H. Gilbert, "Memorandum, Sept. 8th, 1892[,] Palmyra, N.Y.," Palmyra King's Daughters Free Library, Palmyra, New York, as cited in Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents* 2:547-48.

¹³⁹ "According to Harris' prophecy, a certain hill, about three fourths of a mile east of Palmyra, was or is, to open, out from which was to come an angel who would put one foot upon the sinful village and sink it. The site was subsequently to become the 'New Jerusalem,' into which the righteous (all the Mormons, of course) were to be gathered." William Van Camp as editor, *Lyons Gazette* (Lyons, New York), 9 August 1854.

designations as interchangeable and implies that the *Freeman* article had announced that the New Jerusalem “Temple of Nephi” it referenced would be built at Palmyra.¹⁴⁰

It should be asked from whom the *Freeman*’s editor acquired his information? Hadley’s source was likely the same as that of John H. Gilbert and William Van Camp: Martin Harris. In the summer of 1829 Harris visited various newspaper printers in the Palmyra area, including the Grandin shop where Gilbert and Van Camp worked, to persuade these establishments to print the Book of Mormon. Gilbert and Van Camp both heard Harris identify Palmyra as the site for the future New Jerusalem at E. B. Grandin’s print shop. However, Grandin was not the only printer Harris visited to negotiate the Book of Mormon’s printing. Harris, who was an anti-Mason and a subscriber to the *Palmyra Freeman*, may have preferred to have the book printed by Hadley, instead of by the pro-Masonic Grandin. Hadley refused. Harris had visited Hadley in an attempt to persuade him around the same time he first visited the Grandin shop—just two months before Hadley published his article identifying Palmyra as the site for the Mormons’ New Jerusalem.¹⁴¹ Harris thus appears to have told Hadley, in addition to Gilbert and Van Camp, that Palmyra, or Palmyra-Manchester, was to be the site of the New Jerusalem. This point he doubtless thought would help persuade them to publish the book, since having their city transformed into the biblical New Jerusalem would surely have been good for business.

¹⁴⁰ *The Reflector* (Palmyra, New York), 7 October 1829.

¹⁴¹ Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith’s Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 163-79.

Hadley was thus able to provide the earliest glimpse of Mormon intentions to build a New Jerusalem and a temple, information echoed by Cole. The information they passed on from Martin Harris discloses what believers in the Book of Mormon apparently initially expected about this temple and the New Jerusalem—that they would rebuild a temple that had first been built millennia earlier by Nephi atop the Manchester hill, and then build the New Jerusalem around it.

The probable earliest Mormon center of gathering was, like Noah's, advantageously located along the aquatic highway system comprised of the Great Lakes and Erie Canal. However, *unlike* Noah's gathering place, this site was selected with a spiritually compelling rationale: it held not only material benefits in the here and now but also significance in the sacred past.

Conclusion

As we have seen, in the earliest years of the Mormon movement, Joseph Smith, Martin Harris, and other adherents to the Book of Lehi were American proto-Zionists on the model Mordecai Noah, and thus, like him, were forerunners of modern Zionism.

The earliest Mormons probably understood the purposes of their movement to be in many ways the same as Noah's purposes—gathering the Jews and American Indians into a united New Jerusalem in western New York—with the distinction that they perceived their movement as having divine authorization to build the New Jerusalem and prophetic means for determining its appointed location. Although if this is true of the Mormon sense of mission in 1827-28, what happened? How did the earliest Latter-day Saints come to abandon their New York Zion in favor of one in Indian Territory, and to

shift from the work of “confirming the Old Testament” and gathering the Jews to that of restoring the New Testament church and focusing their gathering efforts on the Natives?

Chapter V of this work will attempt to answer these questions, explaining how the Mormon movement transformed from a proto-Zionist endeavor to a distinct religion in its own right. First we will explore more fully the Book of Lehi’s reconstructed contents, and how they fit the Mormon movement’s early proto-Zionist character and purpose.

CHAPTER IV:
THE BOOK OF LEHI:
A PRIMER IN AMERICAN JEWISH RESTORATION

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to reconstruct select narrative elements of the lost Book of Lehi, and to show how these lent themselves to an American proto-Zionist understanding of the book's message and purpose and even implicitly *modeled* a proto-Zionist program the early Mormons could undertake. The first part of the chapter will introduce the proto-Exilic setting in which the Book of Lehi opens and show how this setting ideally frames an American proto-Zionist message. The second part of the chapter will build on Chapter I in further describing the methodology of reconstruction. The third part, comprising the body of the chapter, will do the actual work of reconstruction and relate the results to the proto-Zionist interpretation of the book originally held by Joseph Smith and Martin Harris.

In our previous chapter we saw that early Mormons interpreted the purpose of their nascent movement and its founding scripture, the Book of Lehi, as that of gathering the Jews to a New Jerusalem in the United States. In the work of reconstructing elements of the Book of Lehi in this chapter I hope to illuminate a major reason *why* the early Mormons understood their movement as one that would gather the Jews to an American Zion—namely, the earliest Mormons interpreted their movement in such American proto-Zionist terms because the Book of Lehi's opening narratives epitomized the problem of exile, and typified an American proto-Zionist solution to that problem.

In recounting the story of how an ancient band of Jews found refuge from the travails of the Exile in an American promised land, the book implicitly modeled how “latter-day” Jews might do the same. The narrative of Lehi and Nephi given in the Book of Lehi/Book of Mormon *opens* at the beginning of the biblical Exile and deals extensively with the themes of exile, the loss of sacred land and institutions, and the restoration, recovery, or replacement of sacred land and institutions.¹⁴²

That the Lehi narrative, and thus the entire Book of Mormon narrative, opens with the inauguration of the Exile appears to have heretofore escaped scholarly notice, but it is evident in the extant text and is a key to reconstructing the Book of Lehi’s narratives and understanding why its adherents interpreted the book in proto-Zionist terms.

The narrative of the Book of Mormon’s initial, later “lost,” manuscript begins within that of the Hebrew Bible, recapitulating the saga of biblical Israel and extending it into the New World. Its foundational narratives of Lehi’s family fleeing Jerusalem and of Nephi establishing a kingdom and a new Jerusalem introduce the Hebraic themes of covenant, promised land, exile, and restoration that pervade both the book and the faith that emerged from it.¹⁴³ These accounts comprise the narrative bedrock of the Book of Mormon and a scriptural foundation for Mormonism.

However, important elements of those narratives are missing from the extant text,

¹⁴² The Book of Lehi narrative presumably began at the same point as the extant 1 Nephi narrative. The first portion of the Nephi narrative is represented as being, like the first part of the Book of Lehi itself, an abridgment of Lehi’s personal record (1 Nephi 1:17), so each is a telling of the same basic narrative. Nephi’s narrative begins with the problem and incident that most likely would have also framed the Lehi story in the Book of Lehi: the impending destruction of Jerusalem and Lehi’s calling as a prophet.

¹⁴³ For the particular centrality of covenant in Mormonism see Rex Eugene Cooper’s anthropological study *Promises Made to the Fathers: Mormon Covenant Organization* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1990).

leaving holes in contemporary understanding of the book and of the early Mormon ideal of restoration. This chapter will reconstruct missing narrative elements.

As we will see in reconstructing these missing pieces, the story of Lehi and his son Nephi, particularly as it was told in the first part of the Book of Lehi, was a story of Jewish exile and restoration—of exile from the biblical Promised Land and of restoration in a new, American promised land. Extant evidence indicates that the Book of Lehi's Nephite saga recapitulated major narratives of biblical Israel (e.g., the Exodus, the building of the Tabernacle, the Conquest, and the establishment of a divinely appointed dynasty) and described the systematic replacement of the biblical institutions of the commonwealth of Judah (e.g., sacred city, Tabernacle, Ark of the Covenant, temple, sacral dynasty) with the parallel institutions of a Nephite commonwealth of Joseph.

We will begin our work of reconstruction looking at the narrative of Lehi and Nephi. We will first reconstruct an element of the Lehi story from the Book of Lehi that is absent from but consistent with the extant text, echoes the story of biblical Israel, and establishes institutions parallel to those of the pre-Exilic commonwealth of Judah. In this narrative, part of Lehi's "Exodus," Lehi constructs a "tabernacle," parallel to the Tabernacle of the Exodus, to provisionally replace the Jerusalem temple he and his family had lost. We will reconstruct this information about Lehi's "tabernacle" using both Fayette Lapham's report of his 1830 interview with Joseph Smith's father, Joseph Smith, Sr. and internal evidence from the extant text. We will next review the brief extant narrative regarding Nephi's temple, reconstructing further details that help flesh out that narrative and show the extent to which "the temple of Nephi" was modeled on "the

temple of Solomon.”

After reconstructing “lost” details of the Book of Lehi’s opening narratives, we will turn our attention to some of the Book of Lehi’s closing narratives—those of King Mosiah₁. As discussed below, one of the narratives scholars have recognized as missing from the extant Book of Mormon text is the narrative of the Nephite recovery of the Jaredite “interpreters,” a counterpart instrument to the biblical high priest’s Urim and Thummim, described as having been “sealed up” with the “sealed” plates of “the brother of Jared” (Ether 4:5). Returning to the Fayette Lapham narrative, we will find just such a story provided there. We will assess that narrative using clues from the extant text. We will also review the story of Mosiah₁ joining his people with the people of Zarahemla and discuss how this story’s more complete “lost” version likely differed from the present text.

After exploring these stories from the lost manuscript, we will assess how they collectively evoked the idea of gathering Jews and Indians to an American New Jerusalem and provided a ready-made pattern for such a program of gathering.

Proto-Exilic Setting: Lehi’s Jerusalem and the Problem of Exile

It is understandable that the early Mormons would have thought their new sacred book would gather the Jews in from their long exile, because the book, in ways that have not been appreciated, is *about* exile and restoration. The problem of exile was particularly central, as I will argue below, in the detailed lost version of the narrative of Lehi and Nephi, but it is also prominent in the extant version. The Book of Mormon introduces the

problem of exile up front, in its replacement for the Book of Lehi, as a primary problem to be solved. Lehi's prophetic call and flight from Jerusalem are presented as near simultaneous with the Exile's first wave. The book thus uses the inaugural events of the Exile to frame the narrative of Lehi and Nephi.

Lehi's story begins in Jerusalem within the biblical narratives of both Jeremiah, who prophesied the exile of the Jews, and Zedekiah, the ill-fated—and terminal—monarch of David's dynasty. Lehi experiences a theophany and prophetic call in the first year of Zedekiah's reign. The new prophet promptly joins his jeremiads to those of Jeremiah, warning Jerusalem's citizens of their pending captivity and their city's destruction. Not surprisingly, borrowing another page from Jeremiah, he soon finds his message rejected and his life threatened. Yet it is not in the footsteps of “the Weeping Prophet” that Lehi will ultimately follow, but in those of the wilderness-wandering Moses. Being warned by God that Judea was soon to become a land of captivity, as Egypt had been for his forebears, Lehi and his family flee to the wilderness for freedom and safety.

Lehi's exile was appropriately timed. The familiar account of Lehi's initial calling and warning theophany, in the opening verses of the extant Book of Mormon text, places these events, “in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah” (1 Nephi 1:4). This phrase's familiarity to Book of Mormon readers obscures its significance. When was “the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah”? And how, exactly, was his reign commenced? In the biblical narratives, Zedekiah's reign begins during an invasion of Jerusalem by the forces of Babylonian emperor Nebuchadnezzar II.

Jerusalem reportedly fell to Babylon's siege in Adar, the twelfth month in the Jewish calendar. Jehoiachin was apparently dethroned and replaced by the Babylonians at the approximate end of the calendar year. The Chronicler states, "*when the year was expired*, king Nebuchadnezzar sent, and brought him [Jehoiachin] to Babylon, with the goodly vessels of the house of the LORD, and made Zedekiah his brother [sic] king over Judah and Jerusalem" (2 Chronicles 36:10).¹⁴⁴ (Biblical quotations herein are from the English version that was authoritative in Joseph Smith's time and is echoed in the language of Latter Day Saint scripture—the King James.) The inauguration of the first year of Zedekiah's reign was therefore timed to coincide with the ringing in of the new calendar year with the month of Nisan. At this time Nebuchadnezzar not only replaced Jehoiachin with Zedekiah, he also effected the first wave of the Babylonian Exile:

He carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths: none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land. And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, and the king's mother, and the king's wives, and his officers, and the mighty of the land, those carried he into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. And all the men of might, even seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths a thousand, all that were strong and apt for war, even them the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon (2 Kings 24:14-16).

Zedekiah's coronation was thus concurrent with the beginnings of the Exile.

How does the Book of Mormon position Lehi's warning and prophetic call relative to these events? The significance of the phrase "in the commencement of the [nth] year" in a Book of Mormon context can be gleaned from its use elsewhere in the book.

¹⁴⁴ In line with this, the Babylonian chronicles place the fall of the city just a few weeks before the installation of the new king. They state that the city fell on the second day of Adar, (corresponding to March 16, 597 BCE. Watson E. Mills, and Richard F. Wilson, eds. *Mercer Commentary on the Bible: History of Israel*. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 142. Note that while this passage refers to Zedekiah as Jehoiachin's "brother," other sources indicate that Zedekiah was his uncle, brother to his father Jehoiakim.

There is one instance, in Alma 56:1, where the phrase is used in conjunction with an exact calendar date, enabling us to discern how literally it is to be taken. When that passage narrows “the commencement of the...year” to a specific date, the date is “the second day in the first month”—i.e., the second day of the year. This is indeed “the commencement” of the year, suggesting that the phrase is meant to be taken quite literally. When the narrative places Lehi’s calling/warning vision “in the commencement of” Zedekiah’s first year of reign, this should be taken at face value, placing Lehi’s vision at or near the opening of the calendar year.

The primary purpose of this chronological indicator in the narrative of Lehi’s calling is to place that event relative to the *biblical* chronology. If Lehi’s calling narrative opens near the beginning of Zedekiah’s first regnal year, then the calling event is meant to be understood in a certain relationship to the biblical events we have been describing. Namely, it is meant to be understood as essentially simultaneous with—in the immediate wake of, or even during—the Babylonian invasion that “commenced” Zedekiah’s reign: the invasion that removed Jehoiachin, installed Zedekiah, and inaugurated the first wave of the Babylonian Exile.

The Book of Mormon chronology thus places Lehi’s vision concurrent with major events that fractured Jewish polity and religious practice. The invasion of Nebuchadnezzar II’s armies that had deposed Jehoiachin and installed Zedekiah also stripped the temple of its treasures, leaving worshippers without their literal touchstones with Deity—the divinely inscribed tablets of the Ark of the Covenant, and the Urim and

Thummim by which the high priest received revelation.¹⁴⁵ Nebuchadnezzar's armies carried Jehoiachin and many of Jerusalem's notables to Babylon with them in bondage, a small beginning to the vast Babylonian Exile.

Lehi and family abandon Jerusalem in anticipation of the Babylonian emperor's final invasion and the world-shattering changes it would bring for Jews and Judaism: the destruction of the First Temple, the abolition of the Davidic monarchy by the capture of Zedekiah and execution of his sons, and the exile of much of the population to Babylon. The generations of Jews after the Babylonian Captivity inherited the fractured world of the Diaspora, never restoring the pristine wholeness of living in a single body, ruled by the scion of the house of David, and worshipping in a temple that housed the Ark and its sacred memorials of the Exodus.

Lehi's band escapes this forced exile to Babylon only by undertaking *voluntary* exile in the wilderness. Other than the loss of liberty, Lehi's group endures the losses that characterized the Exile, with the additional loss of the biblical high priest and the entire Aaronite priestly class. The exiles in the Book of Lehi and "the small plates of Nephi" narrative, no less than those in the biblical narrative, are dispossessed of their inherited land, the temple, the divine presence embodied in their sacred relics and enshrined in the Ark of the Covenant, and the sacral rule provided by the Davidic dynasty. They become, in the words of Lehi and Sariah's wilderness-born son Jacob, "wanderers cast out from Jerusalem" (Jacob 7:26).

¹⁴⁵ The loss of the Urim and Thummim is indicated by Ezra 2:63 and Nehemiah 7:65. The Ark of the Covenant would have disappeared from the temple no later than Nebuchadnezzar's earlier capture of Jerusalem (ca. 597 BCE, when he installed Zedekiah), in which he reportedly stripped the temple of its major treasures, including all those made of gold (2 Kings 24:13). The Ark's fate is not definitively known.

Thus, although Lehi's prophetic career begins several years before Nebuchadnezzar II's destruction of Jerusalem and mass deportation of its peoples, the setting for his prophetic career is not pre-Exilic, but *proto-Exilic*. Lehi's calling occurs contemporaneous with the first wave of the Exile. The story of his prophetic career opens with exile, and much of its early action is motivated by the problem of exile—that of coping with the loss of the sacred places, institutions, and relics of the Jewish commonwealth.

Notably, in the Lehi story, the New World is the Jews' *original* place of refuge from the travails of the Exile: no sooner had the first wave of the Exile begun than Jews from Jerusalem set out for an American promised land. Yet despite the fact of their exile from the land of Abraham, the Book of Mormon's narrators almost never express a *sense* of exile, of being strangers in a strange land. Jacob stands alone among them in his longing for the Jerusalem he had never seen. This is perhaps because although the Book of Lehi/Book of Mormon peoples are represented as suffering the same loss of religious and political center as the biblical exiles to Babylon, their framing of the loss, and their response, differ dramatically. Rather than framing his journey as an exile from the Promised Land of his ancestors, Nephi frames it as an exodus to the new promised land provided for his descendants—and thus the birth of a new Jewish nation (e.g., 1 Nephi 2:20; 7:13; 10:13).

Nephi preserves his people's Israelite identity outside *Eretz* Israel by establishing religious and political institutions like those he knew in his youth in the pre-Exilic Israelite commonwealth. Despite that commonwealth's destruction and his people's exile,

they were not long bereft of sacred city, temple, relics embodying God's presence, instruments of revelation, and a divinely chosen king. Taking Lehi for their Moses, they had journeyed to a new promised land. There, under Nephi's reign, they built a new Jerusalem, and at its heart a sanctuary "like unto the temple of Solomon," in which they housed the memorials of their exodus and continued their sacrifices.

Many of the clues to the Book of Lehi's contents cluster around this central theme of founding a new nation of Israel and restoring what had been lost through exile. The Book of Lehi delineated even more clearly than the extant account how Lehi and Nephi echo the major figures and events of the founding of Israel. Among the elements of the Book of Lehi narrative that can be inferred from the extant Book of Mormon text and/or identified in nineteenth-century sources are Lehi's covenant with God for a "promised land," Lehi's deathbed blessings on his children dividing them (as Jacob divided his children) into discrete tribes, echoes of the Israelites' struggle with the Egyptians in the narrative of Lehi's exodus, an account of Lehi constructing a "tabernacle" modeled on Moses' Tabernacle, narratives of Nephite settlement of the new "promised land" modeled on the biblical "Conquest," Nephi's construction of a Solomonic temple, mentions of a Nephite equivalent to the biblical Ark of the Covenant, and echoes of the founding of David's dynasty in the founding of Nephi's dynasty. The unifying theme of these narratives is that of the establishment of a new Israelite nation modeled on the establishment of the biblical Israelite nation. To fully lay this out will require an entire book. In this chapter we will reconstruct just a couple of those elements of the Lehi and Nephi narrative—namely, Lehi's construction of a "Tabernacle" echoing that of Moses' and Nephi's construction of a temple modeled on that of Solomon.

We will also reconstruct a few elements of the narrative of the later King Mosiah₁, whose narrative again iterates the pattern of dispossession from one sacred land and exodus to another. The elements of the Book of Lehi narrative reconstructed in this chapter thus have an underlying theme: exile, followed by “restoration” in a new land. The Book of Lehi’s accounts of Lehi and Nephi portrayed them countering their loss of the Jewish commonwealth in the Old World by constructing a smaller but structurally parallel commonwealth in the New World. Lehi and Nephi *re-create in microcosm* the Israel they left behind. Similarly, Mosiah₁ counters the loss of Lehi and Nephi’s sacred land (the “land of Nephi,” or “land of Lehi-Nephi”) and its institutions by building parallel institutions in yet another sacred land, the “land of Zarahemla.” The stories of Lehi and Nephi and of Mosiah₁ thus recapitulate the biblical story of Israel’s founding as a people and a kingdom.

Working Assumptions and Methodology of Reconstruction

As noted in the introductory chapter, this thesis does not assume that the Book of Mormon is historical. It also does not assume that the Book of Mormon is ahistorical. Rather than using scholarship to adjudicate this Latter Day Saint faith claim, in this work I approach the Book of Mormon, including the Book of Lehi, on its own terms, as *a coherent narrative world*. As Wolfgang Iser, one of the founders of reader-response theory, argued, the process of reading or interpreting a text assumes that the text has a

fundamental coherence and seeks to find that coherence.¹⁴⁶

In the case of the Book of Mormon, the premise of a high degree of coherence seems warranted by its fruitfulness. Literary analyses of the Book of Mormon, including Grant Hardy's highly praised *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide*, published by Oxford University Press, and, more recently, John Christopher Thomas's *A Pentecostal Reads the Book of Mormon*, have profitably approached the Book of Mormon as a coherent narrative populated by self-consistent characters and narrated by personae who demonstrate distinctive motives and voices.¹⁴⁷ Building on the success of Hardy's methodology, I take the characters and narrators of the Book of Mormon to be self-consistent and comprehensible and, per Iser, seek the most coherent readings of the Book of Mormon narrative.

One reason this needs to be spelled out starkly is that readers unfamiliar with this methodology might confuse the assumption of coherence with the assumption of historicity. Here is the distinction: for my purposes here, it matters how the narratives in the Book of Mormon relate to one another, to their implicit backstories, and to the biblical narrative that serves as their backdrop. Having said that, for my present purposes it does not matter how Book of Mormon narrative relates to the "actual events" in sixth-century BCE Jerusalem, insofar as these may have differed from the account available in

¹⁴⁶ For Iser, "Consistency-building is the indispensable basis for all acts of comprehension." In Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 107-33 (quotation from page 125).

¹⁴⁷ Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); John Christopher Thomas, *A Pentecostal Reads The Book of Mormon: A Literary and Theological Introduction* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2016).

the Bible, nor to incidents of ancient Native American history recoverable by archaeologists.

What is assumed here is not the Book of Mormon's historicity, but its *narrativity*. My methodology of reconstruction assumes that the Book of Mormon narrative, like narratives generally, is largely coherent with itself, its implicit backstory, and with the prominent narratives it explicitly identifies as its backdrop (in this case, the biblical narrative). My methodology does not assume that the Book of Mormon is perfectly coherent with itself or this background, only that it is largely so. My methodology also does not assume the Book of Mormon is necessarily coherent with the world beyond its own narrative and that of the Bible, nor is such a larger coherence relevant to reconstructing the book's missing narrative.

Another point, raised in Chapter I but bearing reiteration and further elucidation here, is the relationship of "the Book of Lehi" to "the Book of Mormon." The Book of Lehi is properly the initial portion of the Book of Mormon. It shares the same narrator as the extant Book of Mormon text, Mormon,¹⁴⁸ and consisted of the first four and a half centuries of a narration that the extant text then takes over in the Book of Mosiah and carries through to the destruction of the Nephite nation. The term "Book of Mormon narrative" thus includes the Book of Lehi.

That said, in my text below I will often draw distinctions between the Book of Lehi and the extant Book of Mormon text. I do this because evidence such as I discussed in the

¹⁴⁸ *The Book of Mormon* (1830), iii-iv.

previous chapter suggests that the Book of Lehi had emphases distinct from those of the extant Book of Mormon text, such as its particular emphasis on Hebraic themes. While such themes run throughout the Book of Mormon, the statements of John H. Gilbert and Hezekiah McKune and further evidence to be presented below suggest that such themes were more pronounced in the Book of Lehi. While the Book of Lehi should not by any means be thought of as an autonomous work, independent of the Book of Mormon, it is fruitfully approached as *a thematically distinct subset* of this larger work.

Granting the premise of substantial internal coherence in the Book of Mormon's narrative world, which seems both necessary to analyzing its narratives and warranted by previous analyses, the extant Book of Mormon narrative provides clues by which we can infer elements of the non-extant narrative. Most straightforwardly, we can assume that structural elements of the narrative were substantially the same. So, for instance, given that the extant Book of Mormon narrative begins in Jerusalem and describes a group of Jews, we can safely assume that the lost Book of Mormon narrative also begins with Jerusalem Jews and not, say, Han Dynasty Chinese soldiers. More specifically (and less facetiously) we can safely assume that essential elements driving the plot of the extant Lehi and Nephi narratives—such as Lehi's calling vision and warning of Jerusalem's impending destruction, Lehi's exodus, Nephi's beheading of Laban to obtain the brass plates, and the rebellion and ultimate cursing of Nephi's brothers Laman and Lemuel, and the like—appeared in substantially similar form in the non-extant text. The extant narrative thus provides our first source of evidence for the content of the non-extant narrative. Essential plot incidents in the extant narrative would be found also in the Book of Lehi narrative. Even non-essential elements in the extant text can be assumed to be

consistent with the Book of Lehi, since the two exist in the same narrative world, enabling us to use the extant narrative to make inferences about the missing narrative.

Comparison of this method with Iser's reader-response theory is again illuminating. According to Iser, one of the more significant acts a reader does is make creative inference at "gaps" "or 'blanks'" in a text such that narrative coherence is created or restored.¹⁴⁹ The "gaps" and "blanks" of which Iser speaks are intentional compositional voids in the story, rather than places where text has been inadvertently lost.¹⁵⁰ Yet, the use of inference to create narrative coherence across gaps is a common feature shared by the general act of reading, as Iser describes it, and the method employed herein of reconstructing lost Book of Lehi narrative using the extant narrative. What I will be doing in my reconstructive inference is an extension of the strategies used in ordinary reading.

There are limits to our ability to infer Book of Lehi elements from the extant text. We encounter these limits in two ways. First, there will be many details of the Book of Lehi text that our data in the extant text is insufficient to infer. While we can infer some elements of the Book of Lehi narrative, it will not be possible to recover that narrative in most of its detail and (with occasional exceptions) with its exact wording. Second, the presumed *consistency* of the extant narrative with the missing narrative does not mean they incorporated all the same elements; and in some areas we have reason to believe that

¹⁴⁹ Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 167-69.

¹⁵⁰ Iser writes, "The Blanks of the literary text...necessitate a connecting equivalence which will enable the reader to discover what has been called the 'Archisem' which underlies the disconnected segments and, as soon as it has been 'found', links them up into a new unit of meaning. ... As the connectability of segments in this type of text is disturbed by blanks, this disturbance will come to fruition in the acts of consistency-building triggered in the reader's imagination." *Ibid.*, 185.

the Book of Lehi *differed* from the extant text, incorporating elements the extant text lacks, or omitting elements the extant text contains. We have evidence from John H. Gilbert and Hezekiah McKune, for instance, that the Book of Lehi was perceived by its earliest audience as an “Old Testament”-like project, rather than a New Testament-like project. On this basis we might question whether some of the more “New Testament” elements of the extant narrative—such as Nephi’s vision of the early Christian church in 1 Nephi 11-14—appeared in the Book of Lehi. And, fortunately, we are given further clues to the distinctions between the extant text and the missing text in the extant text itself. The “small plates of Nephi,” the portion of the extant text that fills the chronological void left by the Book of Lehi, carefully delimits the scope of its content, and contrasts its content with that of other records. Specifically, this replacement text distinguishes itself from what are supposed to be the sources behind the Book of Lehi—Lehi’s personal record and Nephi’s “large plates.” In drawing distinctions between itself and the narratives that went into the Book of Lehi, the “small plates” replacement text implicitly distinguishes the contents of the Book of Lehi from those of the extant narrative. The extant “small plates” text characterizes itself as much richer in prophecy and doctrinal discourse than Lehi’s record and Nephi’s “large plates,” but much poorer in historical (i.e. narrative) and genealogical detail ministry (1 Nephi 6:1-6; 19:3; 2 Nephi 4:14; 5:33; Jacob 1:1-4). This differentiation suggests a limitation on how the extant “small plates” narrative can be used to infer the contents of the Book of Lehi: prophecy and doctrinal discourse in the “small plates” text cannot be assumed to have appeared in the Book of Lehi.

Such differentiation serves a positive function as well as a negative function.

Knowing that we should expect the Book of Lehi to have given a richer genealogical and historical narration than the extant account means that narrative details absent from or merely implicit in the extant account cannot be assumed to have been absent from or merely implicit in the Book of Lehi. Many narrative details that manifest only as implicit backstory in the extant account would likely have appeared as explicit story in the Book of Lehi.

*The Nature and Challenge
of Reconstructive Work on the Book of Lehi Narrative*

The most difficult part of the work of reconstruction is the inference involved. This will also be the most difficult “sell” for the reader of the reconstruction. The ideal way to recover the lost stories of the Book of Lehi would be to find the lost manuscript! Another straightforward way to recover stories from the lost manuscript would be if someone had made and transcribed a detailed interview with Joseph Smith or Martin Harris and mined their memories for Book of Lehi content. After nearly 190 years, it seems unlikely that the missing manuscript will emerge. Over that time no records of detailed interviews about the lost pages have been recovered. (The closest thing to this is Fayette Lapham’s interview with Joseph Smith, Sr., detailed below.)

In the absence of the Book of Lehi manuscript or a detailed interview about its contents, some readers may be skeptical that we *can* meaningfully recover information about the narrative of the lost manuscript. The work of reconstructing a lost narrative is necessarily probabilistic and provisional. Each reconstruction of narrative elements from

the Book of Lehi herein is presented as *the best working model* for how the varied data fit into a cohesive narrative whole.

Nevertheless, though it would be wonderful to locate a detailed interview about the lost pages—or, heaven knows, the lost manuscript itself—this is not how our knowledge of the past usually advances. Rather, as philosopher of history Robin G. Collingwood laid out, “The enlargement of historical knowledge comes about mainly through finding how to use as evidence this or that kind of perceived fact which historians have hitherto thought useless to them.”¹⁵¹

And even if a source purporting to be the Book of Lehi manuscript or a transcription of an interview about it emerged, such a source would need to be tested to ensure that it was genuine. And, in addition to physical tests, *it would necessarily be tested using the very same data about the Book of Lehi’s contents that we are examining here*. Only a document consistent with the extant fragments of Book of Lehi narrative could be deemed authentic.

There is a great deal of extant data relevant to the content of the lost pages. The historian’s task on this subject is to use that data inferentially to craft better and better models and increasingly approximate the contents of the Book of Lehi. Once reconstructive models have been crafted and presented, these can be modified, replaced, or otherwise improved on, both by the present author and future scholars.

In that spirit, I offer the following work of reconstruction. With this and the above

¹⁵¹ Robin G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, rev. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946/1993), 247.

methodological considerations in mind, let us begin our work of modeling or reconstructing select narratives and narrative elements from the Book of Lehi.

Lehi's Tabernacle

As numerous scholars have noted, Lehi is a new Moses, and his exodus recapitulates *the* Exodus.¹⁵² Many of the Moses and Exodus echoes in the Lehi story are readily visible. For instance, long before Lehi encounters God in “a pillar of fire” (1 Nephi 1:6) Moses encounters God within flames at Sinai’s burning bush (Exodus 3:2-4) and experiences the divine presence as a “pillar of fire” during the wanderings of the Exodus (Exodus 13:21-22; 14:24; Numbers 14:14). So, dramatic as it was, Lehi’s fiery night vision of God and angels was not something entirely new but the reigniting of an ember from the saga of Moses (1 Nephi 1:8).¹⁵³

Lehi can frequently be seen in the Book of Mormon narrative to follow in the footsteps of Moses. And when he does not follow in Moses’ footsteps, he backtracks in them: Lehi understands his journey *away* from Moses’ Promised Land as an Exodus to a

¹⁵² George S. Tate, “The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon,” in *Literature of Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experiences*, ed. Neal E. Lambert (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1981), 245-62; Terrence L. Szink, “To a Land of Promise (1 Nephi 16-18),” in *Studies in Scripture: Volume Seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, edited by Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 60-72; S. Kent Brown “The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (Summer 1990): 112-26; Bruce J. Boehm “Wanderers in the Promised Land: A Study of the Exodus Motif in the Book of Mormon and Holy Bible,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no. 1 (1994): 187-203; Mark J. Johnson, “The Exodus of Lehi Revisited,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no. 2 (1994): 123-26; Noel B. Reynolds, “Lehi as Moses,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 2, (2000): 81-2; S. Kent Brown, “The Exodus,” *Ensign* 20 (February 1990): 54; Terrence L. Szink, “Nephi and the Exodus,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, edited by John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 38-51.

¹⁵³ Blake T. Ostler has explored the connection of Lehi’s experience with biblical “throne theophanies” in his, “The Throne-Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi: A Form-Critical Analysis,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (Fall 1986), 67-95.

new Promised Land.

One element of the biblical Exodus narrative reportedly recapitulated by Lehi is the building of the Tabernacle to worship Israel’s God in the wilderness. The narrative of Lehi’s tabernacle is not recounted in the extant Book of Mormon text. Rather, Lehi’s construction of a tabernacle is reported by Fayette Lapham, from his interview with Joseph Smith, Sr. This account narrates that after Nephi returned from obtaining Laban’s record:

The family then moved on, for several days, when they were directed to stop and get materials to make brass plates upon which to keep a record of their journey; also to erect a tabernacle, wherein they could go and inquire whenever they became bewildered or at a loss what to do. After all things were ready, they started on their journey, in earnest; a gold ball went before them, having two pointers, one pointing steadily the way they should go, the other the way to where they could get provisions and other necessities.¹⁵⁴

Some elements of this account are familiar from the extant Book of Mormon narrative; others are obvious garblings of what is in the extant narrative. Are there other elements that are neither familiar nor garbled, and that might convey narrative from the Book of Lehi? Before we assess the various details of this account, and what it might tell us about the lost narrative, let us assess the source from which it is taken.

*Fayette Lapham’s Interview with Joseph Smith, Sr.:
A Key Source of Lost Manuscript Content*

One of the few historical texts that has been suggested as a possible source of “lost

¹⁵⁴ Fayette Lapham, “Interview with the Father of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet,” *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:465. Lapham does not offer the names “Nephi” and “Laban” in his account, because he uses no names in the account at all, but the reference is clearly to these two figures. Fayette Lapham either did not recall names from the Book of Mormon or simply was not told them by Joseph Smith, Sr.

pages” content is Fayette Lapham’s account of an interview with Joseph Smith, Sr.¹⁵⁵

The interviewer, Palmyra businessman Fayette Lapham, along with his brother-in-law Jacob Ramsdell, visited the Smith household in neighboring Manchester shortly before the Book of Mormon came off the press, early in 1830.¹⁵⁶ Lapham published an extensive account of this interview, mostly narrating Joseph Smith, Jr.’s reported recovery and translation of the golden plates, in *The Historical Magazine* in 1870.¹⁵⁷ Despite the lapse of years and the account’s occasional evident garbling of fact, Lapham’s narration is filled with inside information that demonstrates his reliance on a source close to Joseph Smith, Jr. For example, Lapham’s account is the earlier of the only two historical sources to correctly identify the order in which Joseph Smith dictated the contents of the Book of Mormon.¹⁵⁸

After the theft of the initial Book of Mormon manuscript, Joseph Smith could have picked up his dictation at one of two points: 1) where he had left off in the narrative, in the Book of Mosiah; or, 2) at the beginning of the Book of Lehi’s replacement, in the First Book of Nephi. Until the late twentieth century, students of the Book of Mormon

¹⁵⁵ The suggestion was made by Mark Ashurst-McGee, also in an M.A. thesis at Utah State University. Mark Ashurst-McGee, “A Pathway to Prophethood,” 227-28.

¹⁵⁶ Lapham dates his interview with Joseph Smith, Sr. to 1830, but does not specify a month. However, his narrative enables us to place the interview more precisely. Lapham reports that his curiosity about the Book of Mormon was aroused by the hubbub surrounding its printing in Palmyra. That Lapham journeyed to neighboring Manchester in order to learn more about the book rather than examining one of the 5,000 printed copies of the book in Palmyra indicates that such copies were not yet available. Also telling is the fact that Lapham does not describe Joseph Smith, Sr. attempting to sell him one of the books, from which the family both felt duty-bound to spread and from the sale of which they would have profited, or displaying a copy to him. Lapham’s information about the book is all acquired through conversation, not through perusal of the books, which would have been available beginning in late March.

¹⁵⁷ Lapham, “Interview with the Father of Joseph Smith,” in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 1:456-66.

¹⁵⁸ The other source, an interview with Joseph Smith’s sister Katharine Smith Salisbury, is quoted and discussed below.

generally assumed Smith had picked up the dictation at its new chronological beginning in 1 Nephi, but in the 1990s textual critics found firm evidence that Smith had resumed the dictation where he had left off in the Book of Mosiah.¹⁵⁹ Joseph Smith's sister Katharine had reported as much in an unpublished 1893 interview.¹⁶⁰ However, Fayette Lapham had revealed the order of dictation twenty-three years earlier in his published interview with Joseph Smith, Sr.: the transcribers were "to begin where they left off."

A number of such corroborating details have led the most careful analyst of this document to date, Mark Ashurst-McGee, to conclude that Lapham wrote his interview account from notes recorded at the time of his interview with Smith, Sr.¹⁶¹ Whether Lapham's source was interview notes or an extraordinary memory, his accuracy on many obscure, but confirmable, information lends credence to additional, unique details he provides.

After relating Joseph Smith, Sr.'s report of the history of the Book of Mormon, Lapham also relates Smith, Sr.'s report of the history in the Book of Mormon—its

¹⁵⁹ Brent Lee Metcalfe, "The Priority of Mosiah," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, 395–444; and Royal Skousen's review of Metcalfe, "Critical Methodology and the Text of the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994):121-44. While Skousen is critical of Metcalfe's naturalistic assumptions in his review, he also presents evidence for Mosian priority.

¹⁶⁰ Kyle R. Walker, "Katharine Smith Salisbury's Recollections of Joseph's Meetings with Moroni," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (2002): 16.

¹⁶¹ Ashurst-McGee of the Joseph Smith Papers Project is the scholar who has given Lapham's interview account perhaps the finest level of analysis. Ashurst-McGee identifies some errors in Lapham's account but concludes from Lapham's accurate reporting of many other confidential details that he must have made use of contemporaneous interview notes. Mark Ashurst-McGee, letter to Don Bradley, "Lapham Notes," September 26, 2017. For Ashurst-McGee's critical evaluation of the Lapham interview, see his, "Moroni: Angel or Treasure Guardian?" *Mormon Historical Studies* 2, no. 2 (2001): 53, 57, 82, 83. For his positive use of the Lapham interview see, "A Pathway to Prophethood: Joseph Smith Junior as Rodsman, Village Seer, and Judeo-Christian Prophet" (master's thesis, Utah State University, 2000), 202-03, 228-29, 251.

narrative. And it is here that his account becomes relevant to the present inquiry. At the time of their interview, before the Book of Mormon was available in print, such direct communication with someone close to the Book of Mormon dictation process was the only way that outsiders could have learned the Nephite story. The prophet's father obligingly related to his visitors portions of this narrative.

In relating this history, the interview account largely retells familiar Book of Mormon stories. Yet at key points it also adds to the narrative covering the "lost pages period" elements not found in the extant Book of Mormon text. These additional pieces of Nephite narrative, though new, fit remarkably well into the familiar narrative, suggesting that they are not the confabulations of faulty memory but echoes of actual Book of Mormon narrative from the lost pages.

In the interview report, Joseph Smith, Sr. gives nearly five times as much space to the period of the narrative covered by the lost pages as it does to the slightly longer period that follows. It is as if Smith, realizing his hearers would not be able to read the fuller early Nephite narrative given in the Book of Lehi manuscript, attempted to provide more of that early narrative than the published book would provide. Indeed, I will argue that this is the most probable explanation for the additional Nephite narrative given in the Joseph Smith, Sr. interview. Over and over, Lapham's interview account provides narrative details for the lost pages period that are not found in our present text but that both cohere remarkably well with it and illuminate the extant narrative. For example, the interpreters are arguably the most significant sacred relics mentioned in the Book of Mormon aside from the golden plates themselves. But, as discussed in detail below, a few

scholars have noted that the extant Book of Mormon narrative offers no account of how the Nephites acquired this relic. Lapham's interview account, as we will see, offers just such an account, filling a gap in the extant narrative.

It is significant for assessing his account to know that Fayette Lapham was never a believer in Mormonism and appears never to have read the Book of Mormon. Lapham stated colorfully that he and his companion came away from his interview with Joseph Smith, Sr., “fully convinced that we had smelt a large mice”—that is, a rat. This conclusion that the Book of Mormon was a hoax obviated the need to read it. Had Lapham read even the book's first pages, he almost certainly would not have placed the story's opening at the time of the Exodus and he likely would have recalled the names of at least one character. Given this lack of familiarity with the published book, Lapham should not have been able to identify what was missing from its narrative and construct narratives that fill those gaps and fit the general pattern of Book of Mormon narrative. Rather, Lapham acquired those “new” pieces of the book's narrative the same way he acquired his inside information about the book's emergence—from one who knew details of the Book of Mormon's emergence and “lost” content.

Lapham's Tabernacle Narrative

Having glimpsed that Fayette Lapham's account of his Joseph Smith, Sr. interview has evident basis in fact, let us now closely examine what Lapham reports Smith, Sr. saying about Lehi's tabernacle, as quoted earlier:

The family then moved on, for several days, when they were directed to stop and

get materials to make brass plates upon which to keep a record of their journey; also to erect a tabernacle, wherein they could go and inquire whenever they became bewildered or at a loss what to do. After all things were ready, they started on their journey, in earnest; a gold ball went before them, having two pointers, one pointing steadily the way they should go, the other the way to where they could get provisions and other necessities.¹⁶²

Comparing this with the extant Lehi narrative, it appears that Lapham garbled some of what he heard. Yet even where Lapham may have misinterpreted, the narrative elements he gives are, with one exception—the construction of the tabernacle—known elements of the Lehi narrative. The brass plates are, of course, part of the narrative but were not an additional item Lehi needed after acquiring Laban’s record—they were Laban’s record. Lapham correctly describes the Liahona as a ball with two spindles that pointed the way for Lehi to travel in the wilderness, but he connects the brass of the ball with the gold of the plates Nephi makes and is confused about how the ball functioned. He envisions the Liahona guiding Lehi’s band by moving in front of them, as the biblical pillar of cloud had guided Moses’ people during the Exodus, rather than pointing the way they should travel.

Lapham’s narrative twist about the construction of, “a tabernacle, wherein they could go and inquire,” differs from these other variances from the known narrative. This new detail could not have resulted in any evident way from combining or misconstruing other known elements of that narrative. The “tabernacle” detail adds something not found in the extant Book of Mormon text.

Does the narrative presented in Lapham’s interview with Joseph Smith, Sr. of

¹⁶² Lapham, “Interview with the Father of Joseph Smith,” *Early Mormon Documents* 1:465.

Lehi's tabernacle thus offer otherwise "lost" details of Lehi's exodus? In this portion of the chapter I will identify evidence, mostly in the extant text, that supports Lehi having built a wilderness tabernacle.

Evidence for Lehi's Tabernacle

Any makeshift "tabernacle" Lehi's family could construct on their journey would have to be imagined as small and meager compared to the elaborate biblical Tabernacle. Yet the narrative of Lehi constructing a tabernacle would mirror Moses's construction of the Tabernacle in the biblical Exodus and so fit the larger pattern of Lehi's narrative, which recapitulates the Exodus. Given the patterning of Lehi's exodus on the biblical Exodus, his building of a tabernacle seems a natural development—a next step in the Exodus pattern.

A narrative of Lehi constructing a tabernacle would also continue another larger pattern, visible in the extant text, of Lehi and Nephi progressively replacing the Jerusalem temple. In the extant text, they first build an altar (1 Nephi 2:7) and later a temple explicitly patterned on the one in Jerusalem (2 Nephi 5:16). The building of a tabernacle fits that pattern and adds a transitional step between stand-alone altar and temple.

This progressive sequence is also consistent with the known narrative's characterizations of Lehi as a new Moses and of Nephi as a new David and Solomon.¹⁶³

¹⁶³ For Lehi as a Moses see, Reynolds, "Lehi as Moses," and the numerous other papers on the Exodus pattern in the Book of Mormon cited above. For Nephi as a Solomon and a David, see 2 Nephi

The extant narrative shows Nephi, as relic bearer and temple builder, stepping into the shoes of David, who brought the Tabernacle's sacred relics to the future temple city, and also into the shoes of Solomon, who constructed the temple. For Lehi, who is frequently framed as a new Moses elsewhere in the narrative, to have constructed a tabernacle would be for Lehi to act as Moses to Nephi's David and Solomon. It again fits a larger pattern.

Another reason the construction of a tabernacle fits into the Lehi narrative—and would be expected—is the text's insistence that the Lehites scrupulously observe the law of Moses, which required a sanctuary for the fulfillment of its ritual observances (e.g., Leviticus 16). During their exodus, Lehi and family could only meet this requirement by creating a portable temple like Moses' wilderness sanctuary, the Tabernacle.

Lastly, moving beyond inferential evidence, we have the narrative of Lehi's tabernacle from Fayette Lapham, who demonstrably conveys inside information and particularly details his narrative of the Book of Lehi time period. Given how well the narrative provided by Lapham fits the patterns of Book of Mormon narrative, despite Lapham's own apparent unfamiliarity with the book (demonstrated by his omission of names and conflation of narratives), Lapham's narrative that Lehi constructed a tabernacle probably perpetuates a detail conveyed to him by Joseph Smith, Sr. from the Book of Lehi.

5:16; and Benjamin McGuire, "Nephi and Goliath: A Case Study of Literary Allusion in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 18, no. 1 (2009): 16-31. Work in progress by Colby Townsend further supports Nephi as a Book of Mormon David by identifying where the language of Nephi's killing of Laban in 1 Nephi 4 echoes that of the biblical (King James Version) story of David's killing of Goliath.

Nephi's Temple and "Ark"

One way in which the Book of Lehi/Book of Mormon narrative both follows the pattern of biblical Israel and lays down a pattern for proto-Zionists is that Nephi builds a temple and gathers a set of temple relics. The construction of Nephi's temple occurs in a part of the "small plates" that severely compresses historical narrative. Given several things we know of the Book of Lehi—that it gave a more detailed narrative history, that it was more Hebraic, and that it spoke more about sacred space, ritual worship, and relics (e.g., the narrative of Lehi's tabernacle above and of Mosiah₁'s interpreters below), we should expect it to have substantially detailed more about Nephi's temple.

While there is not much we can definitely say was in the lost manuscript about Nephi's temple, there are things we can infer about the Nephite temple system using the extant text and some external evidence that the more detailed and Judaic Book of Lehi was *likely* to include. There is a fair amount we will be able to say below about the relics associated with Nephi's temple that was likely said explicitly in the Book of Lehi. And there is a little, albeit only a little, we can say that was probably in the Book of Lehi about the actual temple itself: 1) the Nephi narrative in the lost manuscript probably shows him using a tabernacle until his temple was complete; 2) his temple was modeled on the biblical First Temple, Solomon's temple, likely to the level of having a Holy of Holies and a repository/altar within that inner sanctum to take the place of the biblical Ark of the Covenant; and 3) this temple was likely referred to in the text as "the temple of Nephi."

That Nephi initially uses a tabernacle is likely from the precedent set by his father, as reported to Fayette Lapham by Joseph Smith, Sr., and from Nephi's emphasis, even in the not-so-Judaic extant text, on keeping the Mosaic Law, which would have required the use of a provisional sanctuary (a tabernacle) until the permanent sanctuary (the temple) was complete. Nephi's use of a tabernacle is made even more likely by a story about Mosiah₁'s tabernacle, reconstructed below, which gives us a Book of Lehi *pattern* in which a tabernacle is used while a permanent temple is unavailable.

The patterning of Nephi's temple on Solomon's temple is explicit in the Book of Lehi's extant "small plates" replacement:

And I, Nephi, did build a temple; and I did construct it after the manner of the temple of Solomon save it were not built of so many precious things; for they were not to be found upon the land, wherefore, it could not be built like unto Solomon's temple. But the manner of the construction was like unto the temple of Solomon; and the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine (2 Nephi 5:16).¹⁶⁴

This brief description offers no detail about the inner structure of Nephi's temple, in terms of the layout of sacred space. But both Nephi's emphasis on the temple being, within practical constraints, "after the manner" of Solomon's and his insistence in other passages that he and his people kept the Mosaic Law punctiliously (2 Nephi 5:10; 25:24) imply that his temple is to be understood as having the sacred spaces necessary to meet the Law's requirements. Most prominent among such spaces would be the Holy of Holies, which in Solomon's temple, imitated by Nephi, contained the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant there functioned firstly as a repository for relics believed to be imbued with God's presence—Moses' divinely touched stone tablets, the

¹⁶⁴ For nineteenth-century understandings of the First Temple, see Orceneth Fisher, *The Temple of Solomon, embracing the history of its location, building, use, and typical significations, as understood by Masons and Christians* (San Francisco: A. Roman and Co., 1864).

miraculous manna from heaven and blossoming rod of Aaron—and which served as memorials of God’s mercy to the Israelites on their Exodus. And it functioned secondly as an altar for the Day of Atonement, when the high priest would sprinkle sacrificial blood on it (Leviticus 16:14-15). A Nephite temple structure spelled out on the lines of Solomon’s temple, as described in the Hebrew Bible, would therefore include a Holy of Holies and an “Ark”-equivalent to serve as both divine reliquary and sacrificial altar.

The third insight we can draw about the first Nephite temple in the Book of Lehi is that it was likely denominated “the temple of Nephi.” Nephi calls the First Temple “the temple of Solomon.” This non-biblical term would establish a Book of Lehi/Book of Mormon precedent for naming temples after the king who had them built. And we find Martin Harris, who would have been exposed to the Book of Lehi’s own terminology for its first temple, telling others about “the temple of Nephi.”

Other evidence, which we will review next, suggests that the Nephite temple system, which was represented implicitly in the extant text and more likely explicitly in the lost text, included a substitute for the Ark of the Covenant and its associated relics.

A new “ark.” As argued above, given that the Book of Lehi is indicated to be more historically detailed and “Old Testament” in character than its extant replacement, it stands to reason that elements of the Nephite temple system and temple worship that may be absent from—or implicit in—the extant text would have been more explicitly detailed in the Book of Lehi. To read carefully and flesh out what is implicit about the Nephite temple system in the extant text is thus one way of identifying elements that were probably laid out more clearly in the lost text. Examining implicit clues in the extant text

about Nephite equivalents to the biblical relics of the Ark of the Covenant and the high priest provides a prime opportunity to identify elements of the Book of Lehi's temple narratives.

We have seen in our previous chapter that early Mormons identified the stone box from which Joseph Smith reported taking the golden plates as an "ark." The stone box as described would have also made a serviceable altar. The top stone that acted as the lid was reportedly, "thick and rounding in the middle on the upper side, and thinner towards the edges, so that [when it was buried] the middle part of it was visible above the ground, but the edge all around was covered with earth."¹⁶⁵

We have also seen that the Mormons' "ark" mirrored the pattern of the biblical ark and, as real mirrors do, reversed it. Instead of an ark of gold bearing tablets of stone, the Mormons' box was an ark of stone bearing tablets of gold. Yet, the golden plates are not the only Ark of the Covenant-associated relic in the Nephite narrative.

There are other relics that are gathered by the Nephites in the story of Lehi and Nephi (which was first told in the Book of Lehi). These also systematically parallel the memorials of the Exodus associated with the biblical Ark of the Covenant. The brass ball "compass," or Liahona, parallels the pot of manna and "Aaron's rod that budded," two relics from the Exodus narrative that the biblical Epistle to the Hebrews places *inside* the Ark (Hebrews 9:4; cf. Exodus 16:33; Numbers 17:10). The "sword of Laban" parallels

¹⁶⁵ "History, 1838–1856, Volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August]," Joseph Smith Papers, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org>.

the “sword of Goliath,” which becomes part of the paraphernalia associated with the biblical high priest (1 Samuel 21:9, discussed below).

The Liahona, found by Lehi, was a “compass” or divinatory pointing device that revealed the will of God (1 Nephi 16:10-33;18:12). The Liahona parallels the pot of manna and Aaron’s rod both in function and in how it enters the narrative. “Aaron’s rod that budded” was a staff used for divinatory purposes (Numbers 17:1-10). Manna, which the Israelites found in round clumps on the ground each morning, provided their sustenance during the Exodus to their Canaanite “Promised Land” (Exodus 16:14-21). Similarly, the Liahona pointed the way to food and Lehi’s New World “Promised Land” (1 Nephi 16:10, 23-32). And Lehi found this round “ball” on the ground in the morning, just as the Israelites did the manna (1 Nephi 16:10).

The sword of Goliath was used by the young David to behead its owner, Goliath. In a parallel story, Nephi beheads Laban with his own sword—and takes the sword (1 Nephi 4:6-21). Several scholars, including Noel Reynolds and Benjamin McGuire, have examined how the story of Nephi and Laban parallels that of David and Goliath. McGuire has found distinctive phrasing from the David and Goliath narrative in the Nephi and Laban narrative and found several thematic elements of the David and Goliath narrative that repeat—in the same order—in the narrative of Nephi and Laban.¹⁶⁶

The sword of Goliath is probably not familiar to many readers as a temple or tabernacle relic, but its preservation in the Tabernacle is attested in 1 Samuel’s narrative of David’s flight from Saul. When David enters the Tabernacle for asylum and asks the high priest Ahimelech for a sword to defend himself against Saul’s men, Ahimelech

¹⁶⁶ McGuire, “Nephi and Goliath,” 16-31.

answers: “The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom thou slewest in the valley of Elah, behold, it is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod,” the “ephod” being the vestment on which the high priest wore the breastplate within which the Urim and Thummim were placed (1 Samuel 21:9).

Later in the Nephite narrative even a parallel to the Urim and Thummim appears in the form of the interpreters, which also accompanied a breastplate (Joseph Smith—History 1:35), and which by virtue of having been touched by God (Ether 3:23; cf. Ether 3:4-6), also parallel the stones residing in the biblical Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:21; 31:18; Deuteronomy 9:10; 10:2, 5).

Thus, Nephi’s temple appears to have been understood by the earliest Mormons to have included a stone “ark” paralleling the biblical Ark of the Covenant. This “ark” was understood to bear sacred relics that we can systematically parallel with the sacred relics of the biblical high priest and Ark of the Covenant. The Nephite temple system, implicit in the extant narrative, and more likely to have been made explicit in the lost narrative, is modeled, down to the level of its “ark” and high priestly relics, on the system of the First Temple in Jerusalem.

It is Nephi who constructs the first Nephite temple and this system. By establishing himself as a New World successor to the temple builder Solomon, building a temple directly patterned on Solomon’s in a new Jerusalem, and compiling his own set of sacred relics and memorials parallel to those in the Ark of the Covenant, Nephi reestablishes Jewish temple worship after the fall of Solomon’s temple and sets a pattern that could be used by Mormon proto-Zionists eager to reestablish Jewish temple worship in their day.

The Narrative of Mosiah₁: The Finding of the Interpreters

Among the lost stories we can restore to Book of Mormon narrative is one that scholars have known was missing, but lack details of—how did the Nephites acquire the scrying tool called the “interpreters,” which had originally been in the possession of another Book of Mormon people, the Jaredites?

The interpreters originate in the extant story of the Jaredite co-founder known as “the brother of Jared” and are presumably passed down with his sealed plates to the last surviving Jaredite prophet, Ether. Centuries later they simply appear in the extant Nephite narrative without explanation of how they passed into Nephite hands (Mosiah 8:13-14).

In an essay titled “Unanswered Questions in the Book of Mormon,” John A. Tvedtnes classes this transfer of the interpreters among the questions the Book of Mormon raises but does not answer.¹⁶⁷ For similar reasons, the late Sidney B. Sperry labeled it one of the Book of Mormon’s “problems.” Wrote Sperry, “Now the interesting question arises, How and when did the Urim and Thummim [the interpreters] leave the hands of the Jaredite people and get into the hands of Nephite prophets?”¹⁶⁸ Tvedtnes and Sperry offer multiple hypothetical answers to this question, including in both cases the idea that the Nephites found or were led to the interpreters after the Jaredites lost or buried them.

More recently, Valentin Arts has engaged with this puzzle. Positing, the same as I will argue below, that Mosiah₁ was the first Nephite to acquire the interpreters, Arts wonders how he came to possess the interpreters and the brother of Jared’s plates with

¹⁶⁷ Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book*, 318-323.

¹⁶⁸ Sidney B. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 27.

which they were said to be “sealed up”: “How did the elder Mosiah obtain the sealed record and the interpreters?”¹⁶⁹

That the Book of Mormon would leave this question open is uncharacteristic. The book seems obsessed with explaining the provenance of various relics. Using the information given within the extant text it is possible to trace every link in the provenance of Nephi’s small plates *across an entire millennium* separating him from his distant descendant Moroni.¹⁷⁰ The extant text similarly tracks the transmissions of the large plates, other than omitting names for the individual kings who possessed the plates during the lost-manuscript period—omissions that were probably not made in the fuller text.

Given that the Book of Mormon is generally so careful in tracing the transmission of relics even from one *individual* to another, it is startling that it fails to trace the transmission of the interpreters from one *nation* to another. Where is the narrative describing how the interpreters got from the Jaredites to the Nephites? An answer is suggested by the timing of the interpreters’ first appearance among the Nephites. As further detailed below, the first indication that the Nephites had acquired the Jaredite interpreters appears in the extant condensed narrative of Mosiah₁, whose fuller story was contained in the lost manuscript (see Omni 1:20-22). If the interpreters first came into Nephite hands during the period covered in detail only in the lost manuscript, this

¹⁶⁹ Valentin Arts, “A Third Jaredite Record: The Sealed Portion of the Gold Plates,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 11, no. 1 (2002): 50-59, 110-111.

¹⁷⁰ For a discussion of the provenance of internal records within the Book of Mormon, see Anita Wells, “Bare Record: The Nephite Archivist, The Record of Records, and the Book of Mormon Provenance,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 24 (2017): 99-122.

accounts for the event's absence from the extant text: the missing story is in the missing manuscript.

As Valentin Arts wrote, “If such an important event...occurred, why was it not explicitly recorded in the Book of Mormon? To that question we do not have a definitive answer. Maybe there was information on this topic in the 116 pages that were lost by Martin Harris.”¹⁷¹

Fayette Lapham's Joseph Smith, Sr. Account of the Interpreters

Fortunately, survivals from the missing story appear in a familiar source: Fayette Lapham's interview with Joseph Smith, Sr. Lapham's interview report offers an account of the Nephite acquisition of the interpreters.

As mentioned in Chapter I, Mark Ashurst-McGee has raised the possibility that this narrative from Lapham originally appeared in the Book of Lehi. I will argue an extensive case for this hypothesis, and, going further, will attempt to “place” Lapham's narrative geographically, biographically, and chronologically within the world of the Book of Mormon, identifying where the interpreters were found, by whom, and at what point relative to the extant narrative. Lastly, I will build on this work of “placing” Lapham's narrative in its Book of Mormon contexts to further argue that Lapham's narrative of the interpreters fits into the larger Book of Mormon narrative about the interpreters and also coheres with—and illuminates—Joseph Smith's practices as a

¹⁷¹Arts posits that Mosiah₁ was led to or given the interpreters by Ether, the last prophet of the Jaredites, now an immortal being. Arts' full question is therefore, “If such an important event as an appearance of Ether to Mosiah the elder occurred, why was it not explicitly recorded in the Book of Mormon?” Valentin Arts, “A Third Jaredite Record,” 50-59, 110-11.

scriber. The upshot of all of this will be that Fayette Lapham's narrative of the interpreters fits the Book of Mormon too well to *not* be a narrative from the initial Book of Mormon manuscript, a "lost" Book of Lehi narrative.

In the arguments below, the skeptical reader may especially question how well the Lapham narrative can be "placed," perhaps particularly in geographical location within the Nephite world. The data provided by the extant Book of Mormon text is in some places quite thin, and the strength of the arguments I can make from that data are necessarily bounded by the limitations of the data itself.

In seeking to place Lapham's narrative in a Book of Mormon context I am looking for the best "fit" among the data—the working model in which the data connect most intricately and coherently and that best accounts for all the available data. The inferences from the data made below vary in certainty and strength. Some of the inferences made below are very strong on their own, and I will argue that the overall case authenticating Lapham's narrative is quite strong. Nonetheless, even where the data is thinnest, as it is for identifying the hill north of Shilom as the geographical setting of Lapham's interpreters narrative, I can offer an analysis of the available data and a coherent model to serve as a springboard for future scholarship on the subject.

*The Smith-Lapham Narrative
and the Book of Mormon's "Unanswered Questions"*

That Fayette Lapham, who likely never read the Book of Mormon, could offer answers to questions that arise only upon close reading of the text gives evidence that he did, as he claimed, have inside information about the Book of Mormon's contents from

Joseph Smith, Sr.—and that these contents were from the book’s lost manuscript.

That Joseph Smith, Sr. would have told Lapham a narrative of the acquisition of the interpreters from the lost manuscript is highly plausible. As noted earlier, the elder Smith’s recounting of Book of Mormon narrative to Lapham and Ramsdell was front-heavy, emphasizing the early, lost-manuscript period—presumably because this was precisely the part of the narrative Lapham and Ramsdell would not be able to read later in the published work. As a treasure digger, Joseph Smith, Sr. also had a special interest in scrying, and hence would have naturally homed in on narratives about a scrying instrument like the interpreters.¹⁷² Since Smith, Sr. had already related to Lapham the story of the role of the interpreters (or “spectacles”) in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, he would have had all the more reason to tell him the interpreters’ backstory from within the book’s actual narrative.¹⁷³

Lapham’s account of the Nephite acquisition of the interpreters is as follows.

Describing the travels of the American Israelites in their promised land, Lapham recounts:

They...found something of which they did not know the use, but when they went into the tabernacle, a voice said, “What have you got in your hand, there?” They replied that they did not know, but had come to inquire; when the voice said, “Put it on your face, and put your face in a skin, and you will see what it is.” They did so, and could see everything of the past, present, and future; and it was the same spectacles that Joseph found with the gold plates. The gold ball stopped here and ceased to direct them any further....¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² According to Vermont neighbors, Joseph Smith, Sr. sought a seer stone for his newborn son in 1805. Green Mountain Boys to Thomas Sharp, February 15, 1844, in *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:597. Smith, Sr.’s further interest in treasure digging and folk supernaturalism, including scrying, are documented throughout D. Michael Quinn’s *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*.

¹⁷³ Lapham, “Interview with the Father of Joseph Smith,” *Early Mormon Documents* 1:462, 464.

¹⁷⁴ Lapham, “Interview with the Father of Joseph Smith,” *Early Mormon Documents* 1:466.

Lapham's report thus offers an answer to a question about the interpreters raised by the extant Book of Mormon text but left unanswered by that text.

Notably, Lapham's very brief account also answers a second question raised but left unanswered by the extant Book of Mormon text, one about the "ball" or Liahona. Namely, why is the Liahona, which is used to guide travels during the lost-manuscript period, not used during later journeys and wars of the Nephites detailed in the extant text, even though it is handed down among the Nephites with the plates?¹⁷⁵

Despite Fayette Lapham's evident lack of familiarity with the Book of Mormon's details, in one brief narrative from Joseph Smith, Sr. he offers answers to both these questions: his narrative describes how the Nephites acquired the interpreters—they found them, having been led to them by the Liahona; and it offers a reason why the Liahona was not used in the extensive wars and journeys of the extant Book of Mormon, despite these relics being retained and handed down among the Nephite kings and high priests—having led the Nephites to the interpreters, which are presented as a superior instrument (Mosiah 8:13-16), the Liahona stopped working.

The ability of Lapham's narrative to provide plausible answers to these questions raised by but left unanswered in the extant Book of Mormon text is remarkable, and tends strongly to confirm the genuineness of his narrative as based on one originally found in the Book of Mormon.

¹⁷⁵ The Liahona is handed down from Benjamin to Mosiah₂ in Mosiah 1:16. Alma₂ discusses the Liahona's symbolic meanings in the context of delivering Nephite sacred relics to his son Helaman, immediately following this with the charge, "And now, my son, see that ye take care of these sacred things," suggesting that the Liahona was among the relics being delivered (Alma 37:1, 38-47).

Is There a Plausible Narrative Context for Lapham's Account of the Finding of the Interpreters?

Positing that the Joseph Smith, Sr.-Fayette Lapham account of the acquisition of the interpreters and the obsolescence of the Liahona was originally found in the Book of Lehi manuscript, can we plausibly place where in the lost narrative the event would have occurred? Indeed we can. The most likely candidate for the finder of the interpreters in the Smith-Lapham narrative is Mosiah₁, and the probable context for the finding is his exodus from the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla.

Though Lapham offers no names and refers to everyone in his account using the pronoun “they,” in this case, referring to a specific individual, one who could carry the interpreters in his hand into the presence of God, wear them, and use them. Two lines of evidence suggest that this individual was Mosiah₁.

First, the account offered by Lapham, which portrays a Moses-figure on an exodus in which a tabernacle was used, is distinctive, narrowing the possible narrative contexts to just two. One way the finder of the interpreters in Lapham's narrative echoes Moses is that he has a Sinai-like encounter with God. God's question of him—“What have you got in your hand there?”—evokes the one God asks Moses out of the burning bush on Mount Sinai regarding his rod: “What is that in thine hand?” (Exodus 4:2). In a second echo of the narratives of Moses and Sinai, the seer's covering of his face after an encounter with God is also part of the Exodus. When Moses comes down from Sinai after God touches the stones and writes the Ten Commandments on them with his finger, Moses' face shines—so he covers his face with a cloth (Exodus 34:29-35). Yet a third echo of the Exodus events at Mount Sinai, the seer has these experiences in a *tabernacle*

his people have erected in imitation of the biblical Tabernacle, which is represented as having first been erected at Mount Sinai (Exodus 33:7).¹⁷⁶

Not surprisingly, the finder of the interpreters in Lapham's narrative also echoes Moses in being on an exodus. Lapham reports that this man was traveling in the New World, led by the Liahona—like Lehi on his exodus—and that he used a tabernacle. Since a tabernacle, in this context, is a portable temple, the finder of the interpreters was evidently in transition between stationary temples. Only two such gaps between temples occur in the Book of Mormon narrative: the first when Lehi and Nephi have left the Jerusalem temple behind but Nephi has not yet built his temple in the land of Nephi, and the second when Mosiah₁ has left Nephi's temple behind but has not yet built his temple in the land of Zarahemla.

Although the events Lapham narrates could only occur in the Lehi/Nephi narrative or that of Mosiah₁, the extant text does not describe the finding of the interpreters in either of these narratives. While this omission may seem on the surface to leave entirely open the question of which of these individuals finds the interpreters, it actually weighs in favor of one alternative. The reason is that only one of these narratives is given in enough detail in the extant text that it would be unlikely to omit the story. The narrative of Lehi and Nephi is allotted some twenty-four chapters in the extant “small plates” account (1 Nephi 1-19; 2 Nephi 1-5). The narrative of Mosiah₁, by contrast, is

¹⁷⁶ It should be noted that some biblical scholars have questioned whether the tent erected at Sinai was in fact the sacerdotal Tabernacle. For example, William Propp notes that 1) it appears the Tabernacle has not yet been built; 2) the Tabernacle is to be in the center of the camp; and 3) the Tabernacle is to be inaccessible to non-priests like Joshua. William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19–40: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 2006), 599.

The Sinai tent is, in any case, a house for the Ark and a place for Moses to meet Yahweh and is presented in the text as “the Tabernacle of the congregation” (Exodus 33:7-11).

allotted eleven verses (Omni 1:12-22), and Mosiah₁'s exodus is given only two verses (Omni 1:12-13). The extant narrative of Lehi and Nephi has considerable space to devote to describing the creation, discovery, use, and preservation of relics—the sword of Laban, the brass plates, the Liahona, and Nephi's golden plates. It devotes some 126 verses to these topics (1 Nephi 3; 4; 5; 6; 16:10-30; 18:12; 19:1-6; 2 Nephi 5:12), several times over as much space as the extant text gives to Mosiah₁'s entire narrative. The Mosiah₁ narrative is given in the extant account in such spare detail as to make it quite believable that many of the significant events of Mosiah₁'s exodus are entirely elided in this account. Not so with the narrative of Lehi and Nephi.

Had the finding of the interpreters been part of the original Lehi and Nephi narrative, we would expect the extant “small plates” version of that narrative to devote a similar amount of space to the interpreters as it does to other relics. The interpreters are one of the most significant Book of Mormon relics. They are part of the story of the book's own emergence. They parallel Moses' stone tablets in having been touched by the hand of God. The story of their origin is given *in extenso* later in the Book of Mormon (Ether 3). And their possession and use is said to be the greatest gift a human being can have without possessing God's own power (Mosiah 8:13-16). At the very least, we would expect this crucial relic to garner a *mention*. Yet the Lehi and Nephi narrative is entirely silent on the interpreters. Indeed, no one is described in the extant “small plates” text as using the interpreters, or doing anything that would require their use, until the times of Mosiah₁, Benjamin, and Mosiah₂.

This leads us to a second line of evidence that demonstrates Lapham's narrative pertains to Mosiah₁. The extant text identifies Mosiah₁'s immediate successors to the

throne as possessors of the interpreters and further implies that he had them as well.

An argument for this has been well summarized by Valentin Arts in his work on the sealed plates and the associated interpreters.

Arts comments on Ether 4:1, in which the earliest text stated that “king Benjamin” had kept the sealed plates from his people, but which Joseph Smith changed in 1837 to say that “king Mosiah” had kept them back. (Note that “Mosiah” is the name of both Benjamin’s father and Benjamin’s son.)

If King Benjamin held the sealed record of the vision of the brother of Jared, he must also have possessed the interpreters. But how and when did the Nephites get possession of these Jaredite materials? The first direct reference to the interpreters comes from the days of the younger King Mosiah [Mosiah₂] (see Mosiah 8:13). The first direct reference to the sealed record among the Nephites is, as we have seen, in the days of King Benjamin (see Ether 4:1, 1830 edition). The first indirect reference to the interpreters among the Nephites is in Omni 1:20. We read that the elder Mosiah translated the engravings on a large stone “by the gift and power of God.” To understand this expression, we notice that the title page of the Book of Mormon reads, “To come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof . . . The interpretation thereof by the gift of God.” The phrase “by the gift and power of God” thus has reference to the interpreters and the gift of translation. From this we may conclude that Mosiah the elder [Mosiah₁] was already in possession of the interpreters that the Lord had entrusted to the brother of Jared and therefore also in possession of the sealed record. This explains why Joseph Smith changed the name Benjamin in Ether 4:1 to Mosiah. Apparently, not only did Mosiah the younger hold both the sealed record and the interpreters, but his grandfather did too. This would mean that the original reading of Ether 4:1 was absolutely correct, but that the emended reading is more accurate because Mosiah the elder’s possession of the sacred relics predated Benjamin’s possession of them.¹⁷⁷

Clarifying and expanding on Arts’ argument, we can trace the interpreters backward from Mosiah₂, who is explicitly said to possess them, demonstrating the probability that

¹⁷⁷ Arts, “A Third Jaredite Record,” 56. One caveat on the above is that the revised text of Ether 4:1 is ambiguous: it could refer to either Mosiah₁ or Mosiah₂. Arts interprets it as referring to Mosiah₁ and hinges part of his argument on this interpretation. The further argument I offer below does not hinge on this assumption but offers an independent case that Mosiah₁ possessed the interpreters.

Mosiah₂ acquired them from his father, Benjamin, and that Benjamin in turn acquired them from Mosiah₁.

Mosiah₂ uses the interpreters to translate the twenty-four Jaredite plates found by Limhi's people (Mosiah 28:10-20). Mosiah₂ appears to have obtained these interpreters from his father Benjamin. In the text, Mosiah₂ simply possesses the interpreters, without any narration of his finding them. Given the importance of the interpreters within the book as a whole and particularly within Mosiah₂'s own subsequent narrative, the omission of Mosiah₂'s discovery of the interpreters would be glaring. We are surely supposed to understand, instead, that Benjamin bequeathed the interpreters to Mosiah₂ as an unspecified part of the transfer of royal relics made when Mosiah₂ acceded to the throne (Mosiah 1:16).

That Benjamin would have given Mosiah₂ the interpreters also makes sense since, as Arts points out, two different passages of the Book of Mormon's earliest manuscripts identify Benjamin as having had the interpreters. The earliest versions of Ether 4:1 indicate that Benjamin possessed the sealed plates, with which the interpreters had been "sealed up," implying that Benjamin possessed the interpreters as well.¹⁷⁸ The earliest versions of Mosiah 21:28 explicitly identify Benjamin as the previously unnamed king said to have the interpreters (Mosiah 8:13).

In Ammon₁'s conversation with King Limhi in Mosiah 8:13, Ammon₁ identifies the interpreters as "a gift from God" by which the king in Zarahemla could translate: "I can assuredly tell thee, O king, of a man that can translate the records; for he has wherewith that he can look, and translate all records that are of ancient date; and it is a

¹⁷⁸ See Ether 4:1 in Skousen, ed., *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 918.

gift from God. And the things are called interpreters.” When this conversation is later referenced in the printer’s manuscript of Mosiah 21:28 (the earliest extant manuscript for this portion), this king is explicitly identified as Benjamin: “& now Limhi was again filled with joy on learning from the mouth of Ammon that king Benjamin had a gift from God, whereby he could interpret such engravings...”¹⁷⁹ While this identification has been questioned, because of other chronological indicators that appear to have Benjamin already deceased by the time of that conversation (Mosiah 6:4-7; 7:1-3), there is no question that the earliest manuscripts of Ether 4:1 and Mosiah 21:28 identify Benjamin as a possessor, respectively, of the sealed plates and of their accompanying interpreters. From the authorial perspective there does not appear to have been any doubt that Benjamin possessed both of these closely related relics.

We can thus trace Nephite possession of the interpreters to as far back as Mosiah₁’s son, Benjamin. Can we trace it back any further? Valentin Arts accurately notes that Omni 1:20 implies that Mosiah₁ used the interpreters to “interpret the engravings” of a Jaredite stone record “by the gift and power of God” (Omni 1:20). Nearly identical language is used to indicate that Mosiah₁’s successor(s) could translate or “interpret such engravings” by “the gift of God” or “a gift from God,” by use of “the interpreters” (Mosiah 8:11-14; 21:28). This gift of God, the wherewithal of the translation, *is* the interpreters: “he has wherewith that he can look, and translate all records that are of ancient date; and it is a gift from God. And the things are called interpreters” (Mosiah 8:13). Mosiah₁ is thus implicitly identified as having—and using—

¹⁷⁹ See Mosiah 21:28 in Skousen, ed., *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, Part Two, 353.

the interpreters. As Sidney B. Sperry concluded in his essay, “The Problem of the History, Transmission and Use of the Urim and Thummim,” “these sacred ‘interpreters’ were certainly in the possession of the Nephites as early as the days of the elder Mosiah, who must have used them in translating engravings on a large stone which had been brought to him.”¹⁸⁰

Mosiah₁ is as far back as we can trace the interpreters having been in the Nephites’ possession. The interpreters are not mentioned before Mosiah₁, and no one before him is said to “interpret engravings” or doing anything else that would *require* the use of the interpreters. Mosiah₁ is thus the earliest known Nephite possessor of the interpreters. Given 1) that Lapham’s story of the finding of the interpreters could only refer to either Lehi/Nephi or Mosiah₁, 2) that if Lehi or Nephi found the interpreters we should have that story in their extensive extant narrative, and 3) that Mosiah₁ is the earliest known Nephite possessor of the interpreters, it follows that Lapham’s account of the Nephite finding of the interpreters should be understood as narrating a story of Mosiah₁.

*The Finding of the Interpreters at or by the Nephite Sinai:
“The Hill North of the Land Shilom”*

The probable context for this story from the lost Book of Mormon manuscript can be fleshed out even further—not only can we place it in the larger narrative of Mosiah₁, and specifically in the story of his exodus, we can place the narrative geographically, in its most probable place setting within the Book of Mormon.

¹⁸⁰ Sidney B. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium*, 27.

“The hill north of the land Shilom” as a place on Mosiah’s exodus. Extant materials from the Mosiah₁ narrative indicate that when Mosiah₁ led his people, “the children of Nephi,” on their exodus from the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla, they encamped at “the hill north of the land of Shilom,” paralleling “the children of Israel’s” encampment at Mount Sinai during the biblical Exodus.

This element of the Mosiah₁ narrative can be found in the extant Book of Mormon text in a narrative “flashback” to the lost manuscript (Mosiah 11:13). The flashback appears in the Book of Mormon text not far from the point where Joseph Smith resumed the dictation after losing the initial manuscript. After the loss of the manuscript, Joseph Smith picked up the dictation at the present opening of the Book of Mosiah.¹⁸¹ Soon after resuming the dictation in the Book of Mosiah, Joseph Smith dictated the narrative of the wicked king Noah, and it is here that our flashback occurs. The narrative reports that Noah, “caused a great tower to be built on the hill north of the land Shilom, which had been a resort for the children of Nephi at the time they fled out of the land” (Mosiah 11:13). The story of “the children of Nephi” fleeing from their land to gather at their “resort,” or place of refuge and defense, at the hill north of the land Shilom is not familiar to readers of the Book of Mormon prior to this point. But it is apparently *supposed* to be.

¹⁸¹ Key evidence that Joseph Smith resumed the dictation at the present opening of the Book of Mosiah can be found in the earliest manuscript for this opening. The current opening chapter, now numbered “Chapter 1,” was first numbered “Chapter III,” suggesting that the original first two chapters of the Book of Mosiah are missing and were part of the initial, later lost, manuscript. Further confirming the original beginning of the Book of Mosiah is no longer extant, this manuscript (the printer’s manuscript) lacks either a title for the book or the introductory superscript that is otherwise characteristic of all the books in what is called “Mormon’s abridgment.” After copying this manuscript from the original, Oliver Cowdery added “The Book of Mosiah” interlinearly and renumbered Chapter III to Chapter I. Skousen, ed., *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, Part One, 284. For further evidence that the transcription resumed at the present beginning of the Book of Mosiah, see Metcalfe, “The Priority of Mosiah.”

When the hill north of Shilom is identified as the one the Nephites used as a “resort” when they “fled out of the land,” this appears to be intended to orient the reader by relating this hill back to a previously reported narrative. The attempted orientation fails because whatever narrative has been given about this event is not in the extant text. Nevertheless, the attempted reminder of the Shilom hill’s role in a previous narrative gives a peek at that otherwise-missing narrative: namely, at a time when “the children of Nephi . . . fled out of the land,” they used this hill as a “resort.”

What more can we say about this missing narrative? Fortunately, the extant text gives us enough information to identify the narrative context in which this non-extant narrative occurred. Asking a few questions of the evidence will help us situate the “fleeing out of the land” incident in the context of a larger narrative.

First, what is “the land” out of which “the children of Nephi” are fleeing? The land referenced is almost certainly the land of Nephi. The land of Nephi is the original Nephite homeland, where the main body of Nephites dwelt until Mosiah₁ led them on their exodus to the land of Zarahemla (2 Nephi 5:7-28; Mosiah 9:1, 10:13; Alma 22:28, 54:12-13; Omni 1:12-14). The land of Nephi is also close enough to the hill north of Shilom that this hill had a watchtower built on it for the protection of the land of Nephi—it was thus reasonable “fleeing” distance for a group seeking refuge (Mosiah 11:12-13).

Second, *when* did “the children of Nephi” flee out of the land? Identical language to this talk of “fleeing out of the land” is used in two “small plates” narratives that stand in for the Book of Lehi originals: the narrative of Lehi’s exodus from Jerusalem (1 Nephi

3:18; 2 Nephi 1:3) and the narrative of Mosiah₁'s exodus from the land of Nephi (Omni 1:12).

Lehi's exodus from Jerusalem cannot be the event referenced. Those who "flee" are described as "the children of Nephi," and when they flee they take refuge at the hill north of Shilom. At the time of Lehi's exodus, Nephi has no children, and the hill north of Shilom and the land of Nephi are on the other side of the ocean from Lehi's fleeing band.

Mosiah₁'s exodus, on the other hand, can be the event referenced. Mosiah₁, per the extant summary of his narrative, was "warned of the Lord that he should flee out of the land of Nephi, and as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord should also depart out of the land with him, into the wilderness" (Omni 1:12). Mosiah₁ led the Nephites, or "children of Nephi," on an exodus from the land of Nephi, and would have needed to lead them on only a three days' journey for them to arrive at their "resort" at the hill north of Shilom.

Third, why are those who flee referred to as "the children of Nephi"? Once we have observed how similar language about "fleeing out of the lands" is used in the extant Book of Mormon narrative of Mosiah₁ we find this "children of Nephi" phrasing readily explained as an allusion to Mosiah₁'s exodus. The phrase "children of Nephi" is patterned on the phrase "children of Israel," used of the Israelites hundreds of times in the Hebrew Bible. Yet despite the phrase's frequent use as a generic term for the Israelites in the Bible, it is mostly *not* used this way in the Book of Mormon. It is used, instead, in a very particular context.

The Book of Mormon uses the phrase “children of Israel” as a generic term for the Israelites twice, both times in the same passage (3 Nephi 29:1-2). The remaining six times the term is used in the Book of Mormon it refers specifically to the Israelites *at the time of the Exodus*. It is used to describe the Israelites at various stages of the Exodus: their captivity immediately preceding the Exodus (1 Nephi 17:25), the flight from Egypt (1 Nephi 17:23), the parting of the Red Sea (Mosiah 7:19), the smiting of the rock (1 Nephi 17:29), the “provocation” in the wilderness (Jacob 1:7), and the giving of the Law (Mosiah 13:29).

Given that the Book of Mormon uses the phrase “children of Israel” primarily to evoke the biblical Exodus, the parallel use, in Mosiah 11:13, of “the children of Nephi” fleeing out of the land is likely meant to evoke the exodus of Mosiah₁. Notably, the phrase “children of Nephi” is itself used elsewhere in the Book of Mormon four times. In two of these cases it serves as a generic reference to Nephites (Mosiah 10:17; 4 Nephi 1:39); in one it identifies non-Nephites as adopting a Nephite identity (Mosiah 25:12); and in the fourth it refers to Mosiah₁’s people at the end of their exodus (Mosiah 25:2). While the reference to “the children of Nephi” in Mosiah 11:13 could just be a rare generic reference to Nephites, the context of their “fleeing out of the land” suggests that here, as in Mosiah 25:2, Mosiah₁’s exodus is being evoked.

Fourth, what does the location of the hill used as the children of Nephi’s “resort” tell us about the event when they “fled out of the land”? One thing the extant narratives of the Book of Mormon tell us about “the land Shilom” and its northern hill is that they were on the route between the land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla—and this, again, points to the event in question being the exodus of Mosiah₁. Twice in the extant narrative

when a group is traveling between the land of Nephi and the land Zarahemla Shilom is mentioned, and in one of these instances its north-side hill is noted. First, the land Shilom and this hill are acknowledged as part of the journey of Ammon₁. Ammon₁ camps at this, “hill, which was north of the land Shilom,” as part of a journey from the land of Zarahemla back to the land of Nephi that retraces the exodus of Mosiah₁ in reverse (Mosiah 7:5, 7, 16). Ammon₁’s journey is a narrative inversion of that of Mosiah₁. In Mosiah₁’s journey a future king who is a descendant of Nephi leads an exodus from the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla. In Ammon₁’s journey, a descendant of the abdicated-king Zarahemla leads an expedition from the land of Zarahemla to the land of Nephi (Mosiah 7:1-3). In the second such journey where Shilom is mentioned, Ammon₁’s group and Limhi’s people flee from their Lamanite oppressors, this time traveling like Mosiah₁ from Nephi to Zarahemla: “they went round about the land of Shilom in the wilderness, and bent their course towards the land of Zarahemla” (Mosiah 22:8, 11). What these two journey narratives tell us is that the course between the lands of Nephi and Zarahemla winds around the edges of the land of Shilom, with the hill north of Shilom serving as a way station along the path. Given the positioning of the land Shilom and its north-side hill between the lands of Nephi and Zarahemla, we know of one Nephite journey narrated in the lost manuscript that that would have skirted the land of Shilom and passed by its north-side hill: the exodus of Mosiah₁.

Since Mosiah 11:13 refers to “the children of Nephi” “fleeing from the land” of Nephi and traveling by the hill north of Shilom, on the course between Nephi and Zarahemla, and we are supposed to already know this narrative from the lost manuscript, the parsimonious reading is that this text and Omni 1:12 refer to the same series of

events: a flight from the land of Nephi after which Mosiah₁ camped his people at the hill north of Shilom on their way to Zarahemla.

Sinai and Shiloh: The hill north of Shilom as the site of Mosiah₁'s tabernacle and dialogue with God about the interpreters. Granting that the hill north of the land Shilom served as a “resort” for the Nephites on their Mosian exodus, what more may be inferred about this hill? I hypothesize that it is here that Mosiah₁ erects his tabernacle and brings the interpreters into the presence of God, as described in Joseph Smith, Sr.'s narrative to Fayette Lapham.

The hill north of Shilom is connected with Lapham's tabernacle narrative via the hill's echoes of two biblical sacred high places: Sinai and Shiloh. The Shilom hill's name echo of the biblical Shiloh suggests a possible connection between that hill and Joseph Smith, Sr.'s narrative of the interpreters and the Nephite tabernacle. The echoes of the biblical Sinai in both the narrative of the Shilom hill and the Smith, Sr. tabernacle narrative also serve to further link this hill with his narrative.

The first intimation of the Shilom hill's possible connection with Joseph Smith, Sr.'s narrative of the interpreters and the Nephite tabernacle is the name “Shilom.” The biblical high place Shiloh served for three centuries as home to the Tabernacle, and hence also to the Ark, the high priest, and the high priestly relics like the Urim and Thummim (Joshua 18:1; 19:51; Judges 18:31; 1 Samuel 1:3f; 4:3; 14:3; Psalms 78:60; Jeremiah 7:12-14). The echo of the biblical Shiloh in the Book of Mormon toponym “Shilom” fits with the hill identified as adjoining Shilom being the place where Mosiah₁ found *his*

Urim and Thummim, the interpreters, and began using them at his tabernacle.¹⁸² The occurrence of that Mosiah₁ narrative at or by this location could thus explain why the name “Shilom” is assigned to the location.¹⁸³ If the echo of the biblical Shiloh in the name “Shilom” suggests the possibility that the Shilom hill was where Mosiah₁ brought the newly found interpreters into his tabernacle, connections of both locations to the biblical Sinai strengthen this possibility.

Recall that the story of the interpreters in Lapham’s Joseph Smith, Sr. interview not only echoes the Exodus in general but also repeatedly echoes specific Exodus events occurring *at Mount Sinai*. At the location where this seer, whom we have identified as the Moses-figure and Exodus leader Mosiah₁, brings the interpreters 1) he has erected a tabernacle in imitation of the biblical Tabernacle—which was first erected at Mount Sinai, 2) God asks him what is in his hand—as God asks Moses out of Sinai’s burning bush, and the 3) he covers his face after his encounter with God. In other words, Mosiah₁’s “Sinai” events, his equivalents to various Sinai incidents of Moses’ Exodus, occur at the place he pitches his tabernacle in the Lapham narrative. This is his Sinai.

And just what is the place that serves as Mosiah₁’s Sinai? The Shilom hill presents itself as an obvious candidate. This hill is the one landmark or place of

¹⁸² Also of potential relevance is the fact that Shiloh was a “Josephite” sacred place, situated in the land of Ephraim within the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The Nephites are identified in the Book of Mormon as of the tribe of Joseph’s other son, Manasseh. Joseph Smith reported that the Book of Lehi identified Nephi’s wife and sisters-in-law as members of the tribe of Ephraim, making the Book of Mormon peoples a blend of the two Josephite biblical tribes. See Franklin D. Richards, “Origin of American Aborigines,” 425–28.

¹⁸³ This explanation holds whether the name is thought to have been assigned by contemporaneous Nephites or by a much later literary author of the narrative. Note that if the hill north of Shilom was the setting for Mosiah₁ bringing the interpreters into the tabernacle, then this hill was also where the Nephite sacred reliquary or set of “ark” relics was completed. The other Nephite sacred relics that would reportedly later appear in Manchester’s stone “ark”—the Liahona, sword of Laban, and golden plates—had already been collected. The last to be added, and which completed the set, was the interpreters.

encampment between “the children of Nephi’s” exodus place of departure and their destination whose role in their exodus is significant enough to garner mention in the available text. As a known high place and “resort” on Mosiah₁’s exodus, the Shilom hill parallels the original Mount Sinai of Moses’ Exodus. This hill north of the land Shilom is our best candidate for Mosiah₁’s Sinai, where the events narrated by Joseph Smith, Sr. to Fayette Lapham were set.

*Lapham’s Nephite Interpreters Narrative
and the Jaredite Interpreters Narrative in the Book of Ether*

Another way the Fayette Lapham-Joseph Smith, Sr. interpreters narrative coheres with the Book of Mormon is how it fits into the larger Book of Mormon narrative about the interpreters. The first installment, by narrative chronology, in the Book of Mormon’s history of the interpreters is the story of the Jaredite acquisition of them by the brother of Jared. Lapham’s narrative describing the Nephite acquisition of the interpreters provides another installment in the same narrative. This narrative of Nephite acquisition of the interpreters parallels and provides a fitting and intertwining counterpart to the extant narrative of the Jaredite acquisition of the interpreters.

In the Jaredite story, the brother of Jared creates transparent “white” stones from molten rock and takes them to the top of Mount Shelem, where he presents them to God. God speaks to the brother of Jared from a cloud, through “the veil,” the metaphysical boundary between the physical and spiritual worlds. At the brother of Jared’s request, God reaches through “the veil” and touches the stones. As he does so, the brother of Jared sees God’s finger. God then asks him a series of questions, beginning with a question

about what he saw, to test the brother of Jared's faith and knowledge. Having passed the test, the brother of Jared then sees God and is admitted into the divine presence. As part of the interaction, God also gives the brother of Jared two stones—the interpreters (Ether 3:23).

This narrative shares several elements with Lapham's story of a Nephite acquiring the interpreters. Each is the story of a man's initiation as a seer in which the incipient seer approaches the divine presence "at the veil" in a holy place (whether the metaphysical veil on Mount Shelem or the veil of the Nephite "tabernacle" on the hill north of Shilom). In each case, the man brings stones to God and God makes inquiries, in one case about *his own* hand and in the other about what is in *the man's* hand.¹⁸⁴

Each story also evokes the biblical narratives of Moses on Mount Sinai. Lapham's Nephite interpreters narrative, we have seen, evokes three Sinai incidents: God's question to Moses out of the burning bush; Moses covering his face when coming down from speaking with God; and the building of the Tabernacle. The Book of Ether's Jaredite interpreters narrative evokes at least two Sinai incidents: God writing with his finger on two stones and giving them to Moses and, separately, Moses taking stones to God for him

¹⁸⁴ The brother of Jared next sees God, which was likely the next event for Mosiah₁. If Mosiah₁ dons an instrument designed to make normally invisible spiritual things visible while standing in the divine presence in the tabernacle and speaking with God, it seems that he would naturally see God. The idea of seeing God when looking into the interpreters was one held by Martin Harris, scribe to the original Mosiah₁ narrative, during his service as scribe. Harris stated of the interpreters and Joseph Smith's other seer stones, "I never dared to look into them by placing them in the hat, because Moses said that 'no man could see God and live,' and we could see anything we wished by looking into them; and I could not keep the desire to see God out of my mind. And beside, we had a command to let no man look into them, except by the command of God, lest he should 'look aught and perish.'" In his statement Harris paraphrases a Book of Mormon explanation regarding the interpreters: "the things are called interpreters, and no man can look in them except he be commanded, lest he should look for that he ought not and he should perish" (Mosiah 8:13). That Harris should so strongly associate looking through the interpreters with seeing God would make particularly good sense if Mosiah₁'s interpreters narrative culminated in seeing God. "Martin Harris, Joel Tiffany interview," *Tiffany's Monthly*, August 1859, 166, in *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:305.

to touch (Exodus 31:18; 34:1, 4; Deuteronomy 10:1-4). Also, assuming we have correctly identified the place where Mosiah₁ takes the interpreters into the tabernacle, each of these narratives echoes the Exodus Sinai narratives in occurring at a high place—on a hill or mountain.¹⁸⁵ The Ether and Lapham narratives relate parallel episodes in the history of the interpreters and the New World seers who have used them. They read as two installments in the same larger narrative.

Lapham's Interpreters Narrative and Joseph Smith's Scrying Practices

A final validating feature of Lapham's narrative of the Nephite acquisition of the interpreters is how it parallels Joseph Smith's practices as a scryer or seer. In Lapham's narrative the new seer who has found the interpreters is instructed to put the interpreters on his face, like spectacles, and then put his face in an animal skin. Such occlusion from ambient light during scrying episodes is well known as characteristic of Joseph Smith's practice as a scryer. Less well known, but also characteristic of Smith's scrying, is the use of an animal skin.

In reports of Smith using the interpreters he is described as sitting in a dark corner and hanging a blanket in front of him. In using his more mundane scrying instruments, his white and brown seer stones, he shielded his eyes from the light by putting his face in his hat. Smith's practice of burying his face in his hat while using his seer stone has

¹⁸⁵ Joseph Smith would later teach that when God's people are unable to build temples, God uses mountains in place of temples: "The keys are certain signs & words by which false spirits & personages may be detected from true.— which cannot be revealed to the Elders till the Temple is completed.— The rich can only get them in the Temple . The poor may get them on the Mountain top as did moses [sic]." Joseph Smith, "Discourse, 1 May 1842, as Reported by Willard Richards," Nauvoo, Illinois, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org>.

garnered much comment on the oddity of the practice, but the Lapham account of Nephite use of the interpreters parallels, and can shed light on, this unusual practice. The telling point of connection between the Nephite scrying practices in Lapham's narrative and Joseph Smith's known scrying practice is that *both involved putting one's face in an animal skin*. While Smith's putting his face in a *hat* is well known, little attention has been paid to the composition of Smith's hat. Remediating that and looking at a description of what the hat was made of we find it described as *a beaver-skin hat*.¹⁸⁶

This new datum suggests a new view of Smith's self-understanding as a scryer: Joseph Smith did not understand himself to be looking into a hat, *per se*, but rather to be looking into an animal skin. In this, Smith paralleled the new seer in Lapham's Book of Mormon narrative: each used his scrying instrument by putting his face in an animal skin. This parallel, with the use of an animal skin by the scryer in Lapham's narrative, suggests yet another revision to Smith's understanding of his scrying practices because this

¹⁸⁶ According to information gathered by local historian Charles W. Brown, of Manchester, New York, Joseph would use his seer stone by putting it "in a well worn and antiquated beaver," placing his face in the hat, and "peering intently" into the hat. "Beaver," according to the 1828 Webster's dictionary, could mean, "The fur of the *beaver* and a hat made of the fur." Similarly, in the late nineteenth century the word meant, "fur of the beaver," or, "a hat, made of this fur, or of silk." in *Webster's Academic Dictionary of the American Language*, s. v. "beaver" (New York: American Book Company, 1895). Brown's account is late. But it should be taken seriously because it is the only extant description of the material of Smith's hat, because Brown had a ready source for the information he reports, and because his report well matches the fashions of the day. While Charles W. Brown does not explicitly identify his source, he gives the description of Smith's hat and his use of it with the seer stone in a narrative about a treasure dig that Smith did on the property of William Stafford. Stafford was Brown's father-in-law. Beaver hats were popular until the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

It has previously been argued by Meg Stout that Smith's hat was a beaver-skin hat. In making her argument, Stout cites the Lapham account above from a presentation made by the present author and examines the fashions of the day. Her interpretation, though, was made independent of awareness of Brown's account, which makes the identification of Smith's hat as "a beaver" explicit. (Meg Stout, "The Beaver Skin Hat: How Joseph Interpreted the Plates," *Millennial Star* (blog), January 22, 2015, accessed October 9, 2017, <https://www.millennialstar.org/the-beaver-skin-hat-how-joseph-interpreted-the-plates/>.)

Of possible related interest, in making a case that the American Indians were Jews, Ethan Smith quoted John Dunn Hunter describing a contemporary Native American priest as wearing, "on his breast, suspended from his neck, a dressed beaver skin stretched on sticks, on which were painted various hieroglyphic figures, in different colours." Smith, *View of the Hebrews*, 2nd edition, 166.

element of the Lapham narrative is an echo, or set of echoes, of the biblical Exodus narrative.

In the Exodus narrative Moses *covers his face* after speaking with God on Sinai. Also in the Exodus narrative, animal skins are used as coverings in the narratives of the Tabernacle and the associated sacred relics. The Book of Exodus reports God commanding that the outer covering of the Tabernacle be made from badger skins, and commanding that when the Ark of the Covenant and the sacred vessels from the Tabernacle are transported they must be wrapped in badger skins as well (Exodus 26:14; Numbers 4:6-14).

Lapham's narrative of God speaking to a Moses-like seer in a tabernacle and commanding that he use the sacred interpreters by putting them on his face and putting his face in an animal skin thus profusely echoes the biblical Exodus narrative. This likewise suggests, first, that Lapham's narrative fits the pattern of authentic Book of Mormon narrative in the complex ways it evokes the biblical Exodus and suggests, second, that in Joseph Smith's scrying practice he had a biblical self-understanding. Smith understood himself to be following precedent for the covering of the face established by Moses and for the covering sacred relics with animal skins established by divine commandment to Moses.

The Authenticity of the Lapham Narrative

Given these various connections, if Fayette Lapham confabulated or manufactured his account of the Nephite acquisition of the interpreters, he managed to do so with preternatural acumen—answering questions that scholars have identified the

extant Book of Mormon text as raising but not answering, echoing the biblical Exodus in ways characteristic of extant Book of Mormon narrative, presenting a story that parallels and interacts with the narrative of the Jaredite acquisition of the interpreters in Ether 3, and also presenting narrative that parallels and illuminates Joseph Smith's scrying practice of burying his face in his hat. In other words, with virtual certainty Fayette Lapham did *not* make up this story. He got it, via Joseph Smith, Sr., from the Book of Mormon's lost pages.

The Mulochites

The extant "small plates of Nephi" narrative that replaces the lost Book of Lehi manuscript tells, in abbreviated form, the story of the Mulochites, or "people of Zarahemla" and how this group was "discovered" by and united with Mosiah₁'s people.

The extant version of this narrative, as given in the Book of Omni, is as follows:

Behold, I will speak unto you somewhat concerning Mosiah, who was made king over the land of Zarahemla; for behold, he being warned of the Lord that he should flee out of the land of Nephi, and as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord should also depart out of the land with him, into the wilderness.... And they discovered a people, who were called the people of Zarahemla. Now, there was great rejoicing among the people of Zarahemla; and also Zarahemla did rejoice exceedingly, because the Lord had sent the people of Mosiah with the plates of brass which contained the record of the Jews. Behold, it came to pass that Mosiah discovered that the people of Zarahemla came out from Jerusalem at the time that Zedekiah, king of Judah, was carried away captive into Babylon. And they journeyed in the wilderness, and were brought by the hand of the Lord across the great waters, into the land where Mosiah discovered them; and they had dwelt there from that time forth. And at the time that Mosiah discovered them, they had become exceedingly numerous. Nevertheless, they had had many wars and serious contentions, and had fallen by the sword from time to time; and their language had become corrupted; and they had brought no records with them; and they denied the being of their Creator; and Mosiah, nor the people of Mosiah, could understand them. But it came to pass that Mosiah caused that they should be taught in his language. And it came to pass that after they were taught in the

language of Mosiah, Zarahemla gave a genealogy of his fathers, according to his memory; and they are written, but not in these plates. And it came to pass that the people of Zarahemla, and of Mosiah, did unite together; and Mosiah was appointed to be their king (Omni 1:13-19).

Later in the extant Book of Mormon text Zarahemla is described as “a descendant of Mulek [sic],” who in turn is said to be the only of “the sons of Zedekiah” to have survived the second Babylonian invasion (Mosiah 25:2; Helaman 8:21).

The lost manuscript’s accounts of Muloch and his heir Zarahemla would have been more extensive than its history-poor replacement. Indeed, additional narrative details from that more extensive account, albeit only a handful, survive in the form of a report of the lost manuscript’s content from Emer Harris, brother to Martin Harris, principal scribe of the Book of Lehi, printed here for the first time.

Muloch’s Traveling Companions: The Emer Harris Account

Speaking at a Latter-day Saint stake conference in Provo on April 6, 1856, Emer Harris narrated the rise of the LDS church and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. After mentioning the loss of the book’s initial manuscript, Harris stated:

now I will tell you of the history of those that were lost when the King from jerrusalim [sic] had hid his Eyes put ~~house~~, out but his son Muleck with some others of the royal family hid themselves, and on coming out of their hiding place the found 4 females of the royal family who also had hid themselves from the wrath of the King, they were married together. ther being 4 males and 4 females—they were found in this County in the south part when they were found the had become a small tribe[.]¹⁸⁷

While Emer Harris’ account gives only a few details of the Muloch story from the lost manuscript, these are a few more details than we have available in the extant manuscript.

¹⁸⁷ General Minutes, April 6, 1856, Provo Utah Central Stake, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

These few lost manuscript details provided by Emer Harris do not greatly flesh out the Muloch narrative, but they do suggest that the Muloch narrative evoked the biblical narrative of Noah. In Genesis, Noah's Ark is said to have carried four males and four females, just like Muloch's ship (Genesis 8:15-18).

Among the more significant elements of the Mosiah₁ and Mulochite narratives presumably covered in the lost manuscript but omitted from the extant narrative is some explanation of how the Nephite and Mulochite peoples joined together and how Mosiah₁ became king over the combined Nephite-Mulochite nation. This question that the extant Book of Mormon text raises but fails to answer will become important in our discussion later, so we therefore will lay it out here.

Mosiah₁ and the Nephites come to the land of Zarahemla as refugees from the land of Nephi. When they arrive in the land, King Zarahemla is there as the established monarch over a settled people much more numerous than Mosiah₁'s group (Mosiah 25:2-3). Yet, when Mosiah's and Zarahemla's respective peoples unite, it is Mosiah₁, the leader of the refugees, not Zarahemla, the sitting king, who ends up as king over the combined nation. The selection of Mosiah₁ as king becomes only more puzzling when we consider that King Zarahemla is represented as having been the scion of the house of David, the Hebrew Bible's "everlasting" divinely ordained dynasty (2 Chronicles 13:5). Given *that* competition, how does Mosiah₁ emerge as king? As shown above, the extant narrative does not explain this, reporting only, "that the people of Zarahemla, and of Mosiah, did unite together; and Mosiah was appointed to be their king" (Omni 1:19).¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ The dominance of the incoming, literate monotheistic group suggests colonialism. However, the dominance of the *less powerful* group suggests a kind of reverse-colonialism.

Because this question will prove significant to our discussion below of the Book of Lehi narrative as the pattern for an American proto-Zionist program, it will be taken up further there.

The Book of Lehi as American Proto-Zionist Primer

The Book of Lehi narrative provided more than just a general precedent for Jewish gathering in the New World. It modeled a response to the problem of Diaspora. The book narrated the story of a group of Jews who fled to avoid the Babylonian Exile, the event that had inaugurated the Diaspora. Yet the Book of Lehi was not itself a narrative of Diaspora, but one of *counter*-Diaspora. Within this narrative's framework Lehi's wilderness journey out of Judea was not an Exile *from* the Promised Land but an Exodus *to* the Promised Land, the passage to a *new* promised land. The book's narrative recapitulated the establishment of the Israelite nation in Bible, including events of the Exodus (such as building a "tabernacle" and acquiring sacred relics that would be enshrined in the tabernacle), a new "Conquest" in which the chosen people "inherited" the new land as others were cleared out, the establishment of a sacral dynasty, and the construction of a Solomonic temple. Rather than pine for Jerusalem and its temple, divinely appointed dynasty, priesthood, and other sacred institutions, Lehi and his son Nephi replaced the lost institutions of the pre-Diaspora Judean commonwealth with parallel institutions of their own, American Jewish commonwealth. The text thus models a systematic program for Jewish restoration and renewal in which all the effects of the Diaspora, save one—the final need to physically return to Jerusalem—could be reversed in an American *New Jerusalem*. In the narrative of the Nephites and the Mulochites, as

we will see, the Book of Lehi even provided a model for how Jewish immigrants to the U.S. might restore their unity with their Indian “brethren.” The Book of Lehi thus provided a primer for how to restore holistic Jewish peoplehood, resume the practices of First Temple Judaism, unite the Jews and the “Amer-Israelite” Indians, and prepare for the final end to the Diaspora, the return to Palestine. We will flesh out below some details of how the Book of Lehi narrative provided such a counter-Diasporan, American proto-Zionist pattern.

“The Temple of Nephi”: A Once-and-Future Sanctuary

We have seen above that in the early part of the Nephite narrative, covered by the Book of Lehi and its extant replacement, Nephi built a temple on the model of the First Temple or “temple of Solomon.” We also saw in the previous chapter that Jonathan Hadley’s 1829 *Palmyra Freeman* article offered the earliest glimpse of Mormon intentions to build a temple, and that this anticipated temple was referred to, probably using Book of Lehi parlance, as “the temple of Nephi.”¹⁸⁹

Martin Harris’ use of the name “temple of Nephi” for the anticipated New Jerusalem temple has implications relevant to our current inquiry. It suggests that the believers expected not so much to build a temple as to *rebuild* one. A temple built up for the first time in the nineteenth century by Joseph Smith and believers in the book would hardly be *Nephi’s* temple. According to

¹⁸⁹ Hadley’s article almost certainly reflects Martin Harris’ own ideas and words. His report that the Mormons were going to build a temple seems too prescient to have been a misunderstanding or a guess. The Book of Mormon was not yet published, meaning that the public could not have known even that there was a Nephi in the book, much less that he had built a temple, unless they were so informed by an insider. Harris, it seems nearly certain, had been spreading the report that the book’s adherents would build a New Jerusalem and in it what he called “the temple of Nephi.”

the Book of Lehi/Book of Mormon, Nephi had built his temple some twenty-four centuries earlier. But where was that temple now? Since Nephi's temple, like Solomon's, no longer stood, it could only come into existence again by being *re*-built.

The narrative of Nephi building a temple like Solomon's shaped early Mormon expectations of a new, American temple—and also their expectations of a new, American “Jerusalem.” For believers, the narrative meant that there was an American temple site already authorized and consecrated by Israel's God—a site where an Israelite temple could therefore acceptably be built, or rebuilt. Having the narrative of Nephi's temple, and an apparent site for that temple, the early Mormons would thus have understood their anticipated building of a temple on that site as a *rebuilding* of Nephi's temple.

In that light, Joseph Smith's reported relic find on the Manchester hill took on greater significance. What Smith narrated having located on the hill was the resting place of an American “ark of the covenant.” As the original Ark of the Covenant had resided on the Jerusalem Temple Mount, in the Holy of Holies, so its New World counterpart would naturally be thought to mark the sanctified site of a *new* “holy of holies.” Joseph Smith's golden plates hill was thus, for early believers, an American “temple mount,” and the heart of a new “Jerusalem,” a perception that accounts for Martin Harris identifying the Palmyra region as the New Jerusalem and identifying the anticipated New Jerusalem temple as “the temple of Nephi.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ It is also significant that Smith's golden plates site was a “high place” since sacred locations in both the Bible and Book of Mormon often are elevated. Several mountains are given in the Bible as places sacred to the Hebrew God—including Sinai, Horeb, and Paran. Idol worship also frequently occurred at “high places.” And Book of Mormon sacred sites that were elevated include Mount Shelem, “the hill north of Shilom,” and the unnamed mountains on which Nephi has visions.

The Book of Lehi narratives of Nephi's temple and the sacred relics he gathered, coupled with the site at which Joseph Smith reported finding the Nephite stone "ark," gave early believers a precedent and a model for building an American Jewish temple and the site on which to build it.

Admittedly, the difficulties the early Mormons would have encountered in actually persuading Jews to worship at a temple outside of Jerusalem seem insuperable. Yet the idea of rebuilding a temple God had anciently sanctioned has a rationale that building a new temple, without ancient precedent, does not. It is, after all, on just such a basis—the precedent of a temple anciently accepted by God—that many Orthodox Jews, then and now, have anticipated a future temple on Jerusalem's Mount Moriah. To any who would embrace the Book of Lehi alongside the Hebrew Bible, its narrative offered similar precedent for Jewish temple worship, this time outside of Jerusalem, in the Americas. If, as reported by Hezekiah McKune, early Mormons anticipated that the Book of Lehi would "bring in the Jews" to their New Jerusalem gathering place, the Mormons could also anticipate that these same Jews would accept the place Joseph Smith found the new "ark" as the valid site for rebuilding "the temple of Nephi."

But what sort of temple worship did Joseph Smith anticipate these gathered Jews would carry out in the rebuilt American temple? And what does it reveal about his motivations? The temple worship Smith expected in the New Jerusalem temple was almost certainly not worship on a New Testament model, but on a Hebrew Bible model—and a Book of Lehi model. Nephi's temple is built on the model of the First Temple, to provide a house for the same kind of sacrificial worship that had been carried out in the First Temple. This is precisely what the Nephites are said to have done (cf. 2 Nephi

5:10). The model provided by the narrative for latter-day worship in the “rebuilt” temple of Nephi is thus one of animal sacrifice, as specified in the Mosaic Law.

Joseph Smith is known to have expected the restoration of animal sacrifice. Later in his prophetic career, ten years after organizing a church, Smith presented his interpretation of Malachi 3:3—”And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.” He indicated that it referred to modern “sons of Levi” literally reinstating animal sacrifice:

the offering of Sacrifice... shall be continued at the last time, for all the ordinances and duties that ever have been required by the priesthood under the direction and commandments of the Almighty ~~in the last dispensation at the end thereof~~ in any of the dispensations, shall all be had in the last dispensation at the end thereof. Therefore all things had under the Authority of the Priesthood at any former period shall be had again--bringing to pass the restoration spoken of by the mouth of all the Holy Prophet. ...then shall the sons of Levi offer an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord Se[e] Malichi 3 Chap. 3&4 And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of Silver; and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord

It will be necessary here to make a few observations on the doctrine, set forth in the above quotation [Malachi 3:3], As it is generally supposed that Sacrifice was entirely done away when the great sacrifice was offered up--and that there will be no necessity for the ordinance of Sacrifice in future, but those who assert this, are certainly not acquainted with the duties, privileges and authority of the priesthood. or with the prophets The offering of Sacrifice has ever been connected [with] and forms a part of the duties of the priesthood. It began with the priesthood and will be continued untill after the coming of Christ from generation to generation--

... These sacrifices as well as every ordinance belonging to the priesthood will when the temple of the Lord shall be built and the Sons [of] Levi be purified be fully restored and attended to then all their powers, ramifications ramifications and blessings....¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Joseph Smith, “Instruction on Priesthood,” discourse, Nauvoo, Illinois, October 5, 1840, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/>. A reminiscent account from Oliver B. Huntington also reports Smith teaching that animal sacrifice would be resumed: “I heard the Prophet reply to the question: ‘Will there

Several observations make it nearly certain that during the Mormon movement's Book of Lehi period Smith expected that in the American Jewish temple he would help to build, Jewish sacrificial practices from ancient times would be renewed: 1) the early Mormons' sense of mission of the Book of Lehi's purpose were Judaic and centered on gathering the Jews; 2) the early Mormons evidently expected to (re)build a Jewish temple; 3) their models for worship in this temple were the sacrificial worship in the biblical temple of Solomon and in the Book of Lehi's temple of Nephi; and 4) even a decade into his leadership of a Christian primitivist church Joseph Smith expected a restoration of Jewish sacrificial temple worship. If Smith anticipated a return of full Jewish temple worship some twelve years *after* the most Judaic phase of his prophetic career, he almost surely anticipated it *during* that phase while looking to rebuild a Jewish temple. Far from trying to make Jews more Christian, the early Joseph Smith appears to have expected the Book of Lehi to make them more fully Jewish, restoring elements of Judaism that had been lost with the Diaspora.

The Mormon movement expanded its scope beyond Mordecai Noah's vision, going in the direction of his ambitions but further. The new movement aimed to do even more than "gather" the Jews together again as a people and gain the toehold on renewed national life envisioned by Noah.

ever be any more offering of sheep and heifers and bullocks upon altars, as used to be required of Israel?' He said: 'Yes, there will; for there were never any rites, ordinances of laws in the priesthood of any gospel dispensation upon this earth but what will have to be finished and perfected in this last dispensation of time—the dispensation of all dispensations.'" Hyrum L. Andrus and Helen Mae Andrus, *They Knew the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1974), 62.

More than just a form of American proto-Zionism, the early Mormon program was primitivism—not Christian primitivism, but a *Judaic* primitivism. Christian primitivism harked back to Christianity’s glory days under the Apostles. The early Mormon movement harked back to Judaism’s and the Jewish nation’s glory days under Solomon. As Christian primitivists aimed to restore the Christian faith to its New Testament purity, the early Mormon program founded on the Book of Lehi aimed to restore the Jewish faith to its biblical purity, reconstitute the Jewish nation, and return it to its full capacity to perform Jewish ritual—in a temple like the Solomonic First Temple. The Mormons’ counter-Diasporan program aimed to reverse the religious, political, and geographical fragmentation of the Exile, restoring the nation to its pre-Exilic wholeness and preparing it for its return to Jerusalem.

The primary inspiration and tool for this restoration was to be the Book of Lehi, with its narrative that some of the first Diasporan Jews took refuge in the Americas and there rebuilt the institutions they had lost, and even, as we shall see, found wholeness in reunion with some of their old Jerusalem kin.

What Has Zarahemla to Do with Jerusalem? The Book of Lehi’s Model for the Unification of Jews and Native Americans

The Book of Lehi not only provided precedent and a model for the relocation of Diasporan Jews to the United States and the building of a new temple, it also modeled the uniting of Jewish immigrants with their Indian “brethren.” It provided an implicit roadmap to achieving this objective shared by Mormon proto-Zionists and some other proto-Zionists like Mordecai Noah.

In telling the story of two Israelite groups who united in the New World, the Book of Lehi modeled and provided terms for the integration of the two “Israelite” groups it would help to gather, the Indians and the Jews. As discussed above, the Book of Lehi narrative of Mosiah and Zarahemla, known to us in only its broad strokes, described the commingling of one Israelite group that was literate, spoke Hebrew, possessed scriptures, and worshipped Israel’s Creator God—the Nephite nation—with another that was illiterate, had forgotten Hebrew, possessed no scriptures, and had turned their worship from their Creator to his creations—the Mulochite nation. The story of the Nephite-Mulochite encounter was a familiar one: it was the story that American proto-Zionists like Mordecai Noah and the Mormons anticipated for the Jews and the Indians.

The Nephites evoked the Jews, and the Mulochites evoked the Indians. The Book of Mormon’s Nephites *are* “Jews” in self-identification: they call themselves Jews (2 Nephi 31:4; 33:8). They speak Hebrew (Mormon 9:33), use the Jewish scriptures, worship the Jewish God, and live the Jewish law. Similarly, as the Mulochites were Israelites who had lost their language and scripture and turned from the worship of their Creator, so, too, when viewed through the American proto-Zionist lens, were the Indians. The successful integration of these nations provided a model for the parallel integration of the Jews with the Indians.

The parallels between the Nephite-Mulochite merger and the anticipated merger of Jews and Native Americans are strong enough that it is difficult to imagine American proto-Zionists who were seeking Jewish-Native union not perceiving them. That the early Mormons, and other potential audiences of the Book of Lehi, would have seen in the Mulochite story a parallel and model for Jewish-Native American union is made still

likelier by the identification of the story's less advanced, religiously errant people with "Muloch."

Native Americans were widely perceived by Anglo-Americans of the early nineteenth-century as idolaters, as having abandoned the worship of their Creator in favor of worshipping elements of the creation. Some Native practices were even equated with the worship of Molech, more often called "Moloch," a blood-thirsty god of the Canaanites to whose worship the biblical Israelites are said to have been constantly tempted. Indeed, as shown below, Native American religiosity in general was often identified by European and Euro-American Christians with Moloch. So, for many Euro-Americans, both the people of Muloch's corrupted worship and the name "Muloch" would have evoked native religiosity. The connection, in the European mind, of native worship with the worship of Moloch can be seen in many sources surrounding the time of the Book of Lehi's 1828 transcription.

In an 1829 address that Thomas L. McKenney, then U.S. Superintendent of Indian Affairs, gave to "the Indian Board for the Emigration, Preservation, and Improvement of the Aborigines of America" in New York City, McKenney noted that because of stories of native violence, in the Euro-American mind, the Indian had "stood for the Moloch of our country."¹⁹²

Less metaphorically, some identified types of Indian worship, particularly in Mesoamerica, as resembling or actually *being* the worship of Moloch, who could only be

¹⁹² The Indian Board for the Emigration, Preservation, and Improvement of the Aborigines of America, *Documents and Proceedings Relating to the Formation and Progress of a Board in the City of New York, for the Emigration, Preservation, and Improvement of the Aborigines of America. July 22, 1829* (New York City: Vanderpool and Cole, 1829).

sated with human sacrifice. An 1825 review of a book on the religion of the Carthaginians described it as arguing that “a worship similar to that of *Moloch*, existed in America.”¹⁹³ An 1830 British article noted that in one theory of Native American origins the Indians actually *were* Moloch-worshipping Canaanites: “Others argue that, from the Mexicans sacrificing their children to Moloch, the natives must be descended from the Canaanites who fled from before Joshua.”¹⁹⁴

Of special relevance to the Book of Mormon, an 1827 account of missionary work among the Senecas and the Munsees published in New York described Indian lands as “the dominion of our modern Moloch,” and, as if in anticipation of the Book of Mormon and its engraved golden plates, argued that “hieroglyphical representations,” such as a certain copper plate made by a converted Jew were particularly powerful in converting the natives away from idolatry and to Christianity.¹⁹⁵

In the context of contemporaneous representations of Native American worship, the Book of Mormon’s identification of Zarahemla’s people as descendants of Muloch who had turned from the worship of their Creator would have evoked images of “idolatrous,” “Moloch”-worshipping Indians.

Oddly, while the encounter of Nephites and Mulochites clearly parallels the prospective encounter of Jews and “Lamanites” (Native Americans as conceived of in the Book of Mormon narrative), the Nephites are not always the parallel to the Jews, nor the

¹⁹³ “Review of Religion Der Karthager [Religion of the Carthaginians, Bishop Frid. Munter: Second Edition, Copenhagen, 1821],” *The Classical Journal* 31 (June 1825): 211–12.

¹⁹⁴ Edward Walsh, M.D., “Reminiscences and Anecdotes of the North American Indians, No. I,” *The British Magazine: A Monthly Journal of Literature, Science, and Art* 1 (January-June 1830): 38-43.

¹⁹⁵ Letter V, written by Timothy Alden about his missionary work among the Seneca, June 8, 1827, in Timothy Alden, *An Account of Sundry Missions Performed among the Senecas and Munsees; in a Series of Letters*, (New York: Printed by J. Seymour, 1827), 138-55. See especially 153-54.

Mulochites to the Indians. With respect to the *lineages* of the groups involved, the elements in parallel are transposed. In terms of lineage, the Mulochites parallel *the Jews*, and the Nephites parallel the “Lamanite” Indians. Both the Jews and the Mulochites are identified as of the tribe of Judah, the tribe with the traditional right of rule (Genesis 49:10), while the Nephites and Lamanites are identified as of the less prominent tribe of Manasseh, son of Joseph (Alma 10:3).

*How Does Mosiah₁ Unite the Nephites
and the Mulochites under His Rule?*

Returning to the question raised but left unanswered in the extant version of the Mosiah₁-Zarahemla story, how does the leader of a relatively small refugee group come to rule over the settled Mulochites, who had been ruled by David’s heir, and unite them with his people, the Nephites? It may be tempting, for many, to dismiss the question with the explanation that the narrative in question is fiction, but this response, if accurate, would nonetheless be inadequate. If the narrative is identified as fiction, this still fails to tell us *why* the author would have turned the narrative in this improbable direction rather than in the more obvious direction of having the Mulochites and Nephites unite under King Zarahemla.

Whether the narrative is regarded as fictional or historical, its surprising twist of having Mosiah₁ accede to kingship over a united Nephite-Mulochite nation calls for explanation. It seems likely that the detailed Book of Lehi chronicle of Mosiah₁’s accession would have given some indication of how this highly counter-intuitive outcome

came about, making the question part of the subject we have been exploring in this chapter—the content of the Book of Lehi.

The explanation for Mosiah₁'s dominance, and that of his people the Nephites, in this merger may also clarify what early Mormon proto-Zionists would have expected to happen in the merger of the Jews and the Indians. So it behooves us to try to address the problem in at least a preliminary way.

Why *does* Mosiah₁ come to rule over David's heir? Without more of the Mosiah₁ narrative, answers to this question will necessarily be partial and provisional, but even a partial and provisional answer to this question may offer insight. Two of the more likely factors in Mosiah₁'s preferential ascension to kingship over the united Nephite-Mulochite nation, factors which are not mutually exclusive of each other, are, first, Mosiah₁'s lineage and, second, Mosiah₁'s wisdom and supernatural power.

First, while Zarahemla is represented as a descendant of Judah through David, Mosiah₁ is represented as a descendant of Joseph through Nephi—and, in a Book of Mormon religious framework, this is a superior qualification for dominance in the new promised land. The Bible presents the tribe of Judah as the tribe from which the king would come (cf. Genesis 49:10) and presents David as the divinely appointed Judahite king over Israel's Promised Land (1 Samuel 16:1-13). The Book of Mormon, by contrast, presents the Americas as a promised land for the seed of Joseph, as Judea was for the seed of Judah (Jacob 2:25). Along these lines, the resurrected Jesus tells his twelve Nephite disciples that the Nephites are “a remnant of the house of Joseph” and “this is the land of *your* inheritance” (3 Nephi 15:12, emphasis added). The Book of Mormon represents this new promised land as having been given by divine covenant to Lehi and

Nephi (1 Nephi 2:20; 4:14; 5:5).¹⁹⁶ So, while Zarahemla has an obvious lineal claim to kingship in the old Promised Land, the Nephite religious framework, which they promulgate among the Mulochites, gives superior lineal claim to rule in the new promised land to Mosiah₁.

Another more obvious factor is that Mosiah₁ was a seer and possessed the interpreters. Mosiah₁'s possession of supernatural perception and of divine wisdom, with which the interpreters are elsewhere equated (Mosiah 8:19-20), made him a New World Solomon—the wisest man in the world—and an ideal ruler. Mosiah₁'s supernatural source of wisdom provides one clear reason for him to be appointed king in preference to Zarahemla.

With two advantages to Mosiah₁'s claim to kingship identified, let us turn to what the narrative of Nephite-Mulochite unification under Mosiah₁ would have modeled for the anticipated unification of Jews and Indians. Notably, the two leadership qualifications on which Mosiah₁ exceeded King Zarahemla were shared by Joseph Smith. Smith, like both the “Lamanite” Indians and Mosiah₁, is identified in the Book of Mormon as a descendant of the biblical Joseph (2 Nephi 3:6), and thus a fitting leader in Joseph's “promised land.” Smith, like Mosiah₁, was also a seer and reportedly in possession of the interpreters that had made Mosiah₁ divinely wise.

What early believers would thus have found modeled for “latter-day” Jews and Native Americans coming together in an American New Jerusalem is thus for the natives to receive religious tutelage from the incoming Jews, as the Mulochites had from the

¹⁹⁶ Mosiah₁ also possessed the sword that represented Nephi's status as a new David and his right to rule, the sword of Laban.

Nephites, and for the Jews and natives together to unite under the community headship of the Josephite seer Joseph Smith, as Nephite and Mulochite alike had under the rule of Mosiah₁. In this encounter Joseph Smith and the Jews, like Mosiah₁ and the Nephites, would bring a book to help their “lost” brothers reclaim their Israelite identity. The Jews would return to the natives their original language and religious worship, as the Nephites had done with the Mulochites, and together they would build a temple.

Conclusion

The narrative of the Book of Lehi was one of *restoration*. The city of Zarahemla, where the Nephites and Mulochites united to build their temple, would become not only a “New Jerusalem,” but also a new *Jerusalem*. As Jerusalem had had Solomon’s temple, their new American Jerusalem had both a new temple modeled on Solomon’s and a new Solomon to build it. As the Jerusalem Jews prior to the Exile had had the Urim and Thummim, the people of Mosiah₁’s nation had a new Urim and Thummim, the interpreters. And as the families of Zedekiah and Lehi had lived together in Jerusalem before the Exile, so now they lived together in their new Jerusalem. This was restoration.

So again, early Mormon proto-Zionists could anticipate that a temple like Solomon’s would rise in the New World, as they rebuilt Nephi’s temple. They would be led by a seer with the new Urim and Thummim, a divinely wise man, a new American Solomon. The Jews and the Lamanites, whose families had once lived side by side in the old Jerusalem would live side by side in their new Jerusalem. Like two sticks in the Almighty’s hand in the prophecy of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 37:16-19), Joseph and Judah would then be one.

CHAPTER V: THE LEGACY OF THE BOOK OF LEHI

Introduction

I have argued in this thesis that incipient Mormonism was an American proto-Zionist movement, aimed at “gathering the Jews” to an American New Jerusalem. In line with this, I have also argued that the Book of Lehi was Judaic and proto-Zionist in its emphasis and themes and that its narrative offered precedent and a pattern for building a Jewish commonwealth in the New World.

Yet, if this is so, what happened? How did an American proto-Zionist movement become a Christian primitivist movement—and a church? Given that the original emphasis on gathering the Jews to an American New Jerusalem disappeared, what, if anything, is the legacy of the Book of Lehi and the Judaic, proto-Zionist phase that accompanied its emergence? Lastly, what is the significance of these events for the study of religion more broadly? That is, what does close attention to the early transformations of Mormonism tell us or enable us to model about the early development of religious movements? In this final chapter we will take up these questions.

From the Temple of Nephi to the Church of Christ: Explaining the Transformation of the Early Mormon Movement

How did the early Mormon movement shift from a proto-Zionist, and *Judaic* primitivist, focus to a Christian primitivist focus? I posit that, first, a series of disastrous reversals for the movement, in the form both of personal events in the life of Joseph

Smith and social and even national events that impinged on the emerging movement, arose to cast doubt on the viability of the goals of “gathering” the Jews and “restoring” biblical Judaism. Second, the further unfolding of the Book of Mormon narrative across the course of its dictation pointed the movement to other goals, such as converting the Indians to Christianity and restoring the New Testament church. Interpreters may disagree over whether this was a cause or an effect of the movement’s new direction, but it surely partly caused or strongly reinforced that new direction, if not both.

The reversals experienced by the movement and its prophet in rapid succession in the summer of 1828 were as follows: the loss of the book that was to gather the Jews; the loss of Joseph Smith’s newborn son; Joseph Smith’s rejection by the Methodist church; and, prospectively, the looming election of Andrew Jackson as U.S. president.

Loss of the Book of Lehi Manuscript and Joseph Smith’s Son

According to Joseph Smith’s account, he and Martin Harris completed the transcription of the Book of Lehi manuscript on June 14, 1828. Smith’s firstborn son was born—and died—the following day. Within two or three weeks, the manuscript was gone as well.

Could Smith reproduce the precise text of the lost Book of Lehi? On a naturalistic explanation of the text’s origin, this would require flawless, computer-like memory. On a theistic explanation, it would require perfectly replicable revelatory processes, in which the text had been provided to Smith strictly by invariant supernatural agency, with no variable human input on his part. In either case, Smith’s ability to reproduce the exact same text would not be put to the test. Some ten months later Smith would dictate a

revelation declaring that God forbade him from reproducing the text in order to foil a plan to discredit the work (D&C 10).

An earlier revelation in the summer of 1828, within several weeks after the manuscript loss, indicates that at the time the manuscript was lost Smith also lost his prophetic gift (D&C 3:12-14). It is clear that for a time the project came to a halt, with Smith and his followers uncertain how—and even whether—he would be able to replace the manuscript that was supposed to effect the plan of gathering the Jews and Native Americans to the New Jerusalem.

The loss of Smith's son at this same time was both a personal tragedy and another blow to his anticipated Judaic primitivist program. Smith had expected his son to have a major role in the unfolding purposes of the Book of Lehi movement. In good “Old Testament” fashion he had expected divine promises to him to pass lineally to this firstborn son, and had predicted that his son would receive the plates and other relics after him and be able to open and read the plates' sealed portion.¹⁹⁷ The emotional shock and cognitive dissonance of losing both the Book of Lehi and the son he expected to help carry out the book's work must have been enormous.

Rejection of Joseph Smith—and His Book—by the Methodists

After losing his son and the manuscript in rapid succession, Smith, perhaps to placate his wife as well as to seek solace, began attending the Methodist church in

¹⁹⁷ Isaac Hale Statement, 1834, in Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:284–87; Sophia Lewis, Statement, 1834, in Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents* 4:298; Joshua McKune, Statement, 1834, in Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents* 4:325; and John A. Clark, *Gleanings by the Way* (Philadelphia, 1842), 226; available in Google Books, <https://books.google.com/books?id=Q-sQAAAAIAAJ> .

Harmony, Pennsylvania and joined as a “probationary” member. Within a matter of weeks the Methodists snubbed him. Church leaders branded as “necromancy” Smith’s report of conversing with the ancient custodian of the golden plates and told him that unless he recanted his claims he would have to give up his membership in the probationary class.¹⁹⁸ This rejection demonstrated what would become only clearer with time: Protestants would refuse a new sacred text regardless of its content or aims and would dismiss the prophet who presented it.

It is not entirely clear how Joseph Smith had initially expected the Book of Mormon to be spread and what role he thought the existing Christian churches might play in this. The task of spreading the book to Native Americans throughout the western hemisphere and to Jews throughout the *world* was absolutely daunting, to say the least. Joseph Smith almost certainly expected that there were would be other Christians like himself and his initial followers who would care enough for the welfare of the Jews and the Indians, and for the fulfillment of biblical prophecy, that they would help spread the message.¹⁹⁹ As noted above, it seems likely that he also expected some Jews like Mordecai Noah to see the book’s value to Jews and help disseminate it.

What he does *not* appear to have expected, early on, is that the book would have its own church to spread it. The idea of a church built on the book was absent from Martin Harris’s early representations about the book to John H. Gilbert. And if the book

¹⁹⁸ See “Joseph and Hiel Lewis Statements, 1879,” in *Early Mormon Documents* 4:299-316, and association discussion of documents by series editor Dan Vogel.

¹⁹⁹ Mark Thomas has posited that Joseph Smith originally anticipated disseminating the Book of Mormon through the existing Methodist ecclesiastical framework: “Apparently the Prophet originally intended to bring forth the Book of Mormon through the Methodist church (perhaps through the central Methodist Book Concern),” in Mark D. Thomas, “Revival Language in the Book of Mormon,” *Sunstone* 8, no. 39 (May-June 1983): 20.

did, in fact, focus on “confirming the Old Testament,” it would not have taken the kinds of positions on New Testament interpretation that divided Christianity into countless sects, and that would have been required to undergird a distinct sectarian identity.

Given the book’s initial, Judaic message, Smith and his associates may well have hoped that American Christians as a whole, who all had a united interest in the fulfillment of biblical prophecy regarding the Jews and in the “civilizing” of the Indians, would—regardless of sect—spread the work to these target audiences. But if, as portended by his rejection by the Methodists, the existing churches would not embrace the prophet or his book, how would it be spread? Without the pre-existing churches to spread it, the book might require a church of its own. This, incongruously, would mean that the Book of Mormon text as it had been emerging, heavily Hebraic as it was, was inadequate to the demands of propagating itself. But *that* Book of Mormon text had been *lost*—and in this, perhaps, could be seen serendipity—or providence. However, the early Mormon proto-Zionist program was about to be dealt a more fundamental blow than rejection by Protestant Christians, making the loss of that program’s foundational text even more serendipitous.

The Coming Presidency of Andrew Jackson—and Indian Removal

A national event that challenged the viability of early Mormonism’s proto-Zionist goals was Andrew Jackson’s looming ascension to the U.S. presidency. Channeling national outrage over John Quincy Adams’s 1824 acquisition of the presidency through an alleged “corrupt bargain” with Henry Clay, Jackson took such a high lead in popular

support over his opponent that he would go on to win with a popular vote margin of over 12%. By the time of the manuscript loss, four months before the election, a Jacksonian victory would have been increasingly in the cards.

The popular groundswell in favor of Jackson portended ill for the Mormons' New York New Jerusalem. While the relocation of Native Americans to west of the Mississippi was already federal policy under Adams, Adams attempted to effect this policy by negotiation and treaty. Jackson's reputation for the use of force against the Natives pointed to a different strategy. His intention of making forcible "Indian removal" was understood before his election.²⁰⁰ Forcible removal of the Natives would have preempted any effort to gather them to Palmyra, and was highly problematic for a proto-Zionist plan that aimed to gather Native Americas and Jews together to a New Jerusalem centered on a rebuilt ancient Jewish temple outside of what was to become Indian Territory.

A potential problem with any American proto-Zionist plan is that biblical Judaism is crucially centered on an established sacred *place*, and that place is not in the Americas but at Jerusalem. The Book of Lehi's narrative of God establishing *another* Jerusalem in the Americas, and Joseph Smith's identification of the center-place for that Jerusalem where he reportedly found the plates, suggested an American proto-Zionist solution to this problem by engaging the biblical emphasis on sacred place and providing the logic on which a new gathering place could be propounded. That logic was that the "New Jerusalem" was not new: God had authorized and sanctified it anciently, just as he had

²⁰⁰ Grant Foreman, *Indian Removal: The Emigration of the Five Civilized Tribes of Indians* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1932; 11th printing, 1989), 21.

the original Jerusalem. So, gathering to the “New Jerusalem” would not be an innovation, but a return to an ancient divine pattern.

An anticipated Mormon proto-Zionist program thus had a unique purchase on the authority of precedent and would need to rely heavily on that authority to justify the building of a Jewish temple. As argued above, Joseph Smith’s reported finding of a sacred cache, effectively a new “Ark of the Covenant,” at the Manchester hill sacralized that place and, in conjunction with the contents of the book, implicated it as the site of an ancient Jewish temple. It was this identification of the site that distinguished the expectation of “*re-building*” a Jewish temple there—building a temple with ancient, divine precedent—from the unprecedented and unauthorized construction of a *new* Jewish temple far from Jerusalem. The “rebuilding” of a Jewish temple at this site would make the place a new Jerusalem, a sacred center for reassembling the world’s scattered Jews. Such expectations hinged first on the premise that the Manchester hill’s stone-box location was an ancient temple site, and second on the premise that believers would be able to gather the Jews and their Native kin to a New Jerusalem centered there. Both these premises were to be overturned: the first by the Book of Mormon itself, the second by the unfolding of national events.

The trouble with Indian removal was that the authority of precedent that Smith’s reported find of sacred relics granted for a new Jewish temple was not portable. Identifying a site in upstate New York as that of an ancient Jewish temple would not support the building of a brand new Jewish temple west of the Mississippi any more than knowing the original temple site in Jerusalem had justified the building of a new Jewish temple in Babylon. The need to move the New Jerusalem westward, to where the

“removed” Native Americans would be able to gather to it, thus undermined the logic of Jewish gathering to that New Jerusalem.

The dilemma would be this. One of the following linchpins of an anticipated Mormon proto-Zionist program built on the Book of Lehi/Book of Mormon would have to be sacrificed:

1. The location of the New Jerusalem and its temple where Joseph Smith reportedly found the golden plates—a location on which the authority of precedent for “re”-building a Jewish temple depended; or,
2. The ability to gather the Native Americans to America’s New Jerusalem.

Given the Book of Mormon’s identity as writings of the Native American’s Israelite ancestors, to whose seed the land belonged by covenant, *to use the book to build an American New Jerusalem from which the Native Americans themselves would be excluded* would be unthinkable—contrary to the entire logic of the book. It is here that a cleavage with Judaism occurred.

Although biblical Judaism, on which the Book of Lehi movement built and which it tried to “restore,” was grounded in the authority of established sacred space, Christianity was portable. A Christian New Jerusalem could be built without the authority of ancient precedent. Such New Jerusalems were being built all the time, including Jemima Wilkinson’s “Jerusalem” thirty-five miles south of the Smith farm in Manchester.²⁰¹ Christianized Native Americans who had been dispossessed of their lands

²⁰¹ Alan Taylor, “The New Jerusalem of the Early American Frontier,” *Quaderno V* (1996): 117–26.

need not have any religious objection to gathering to such a New Jerusalem. With Indian removal on the horizon, the movement was fated for an eventual shift away from the impossible goals of establishing a Jewish temple and Jewish-Native New Jerusalem, and toward the still possible goals of establishing a Christian primitivist church and a Christian Native New Jerusalem.

The point is not to say that Joseph Smith and the other early Mormons were disingenuous in their Christian primitivism or adopted it only after the failure of their proto-Zionist project. To the contrary, the evidence is clear that Joseph Smith came from a Christian primitivist family and that his initial prophetic experience, his “First Vision,” was prompted by Christian primitivist concerns over the identity of Christ’s “true church.”²⁰² While Smith as an individual was always a Christian primitivist, his initial Book of Mormon-linked movement was not a Christian primitivist *movement*.²⁰³ However much he and others involved were Christian primitivists in their beliefs, the

²⁰² In various accounts Joseph Smith described one of his principal motives in the prayer that resulted in his “First Vision” as that of finding out which church was the true church of Christ. He reported that he was told that none of the existing churches were Christ’s church, but that the true church would be restored. Dan Vogel identifies both Smith’s father and mother as Christian primitivists in *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism*. Smith’s maternal uncle Jason Mack was a Christian primitivist preacher. According to Lucy Mack Smith, “Jason, my oldest brother was a studious and manly boy. Before he attained his sixteenth year he became what was then called a Seeker; and believing, that, by prayer and faith the gifts of the gospel might be attained which were enjoyed by the ancient disciples of Christ, he labored almost incessantly to convert others to the same faith. He was also of the opinion, that God would, at some subsequent period, manifest his power as he anciently had done— in signs and wonders.” Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845, Joseph Smith Papers, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org>.

²⁰³ Martin Harris was also a Christian primitivist before his connection with Mormon movement. He later recounted having been a Christian primitivist as early as 1818: “in the year 1818...I was Inspired of the Lord & Thought [sic] of the Spirit that I Should not Join Eny [sic] Church ... the Spirit told me to join None of the churches for none had Authority from the Lord for there Will not be A true church on the Earth untill [sic] the Words of Isa[ia]h shall be fulfilled ... So I Remained for there was No authority for the Spirit told me that I might Just as well plunge myself into the Water as to have Eny [sic] one of the Sects Baptise me[.]” Edward Stevenson, “Testimony of Martin Harris Written by my hand from the Mouth of Martin Harris,” dictated to Edward Stevenson 4 September 1870, Edward Stevenson Collection, Miscellaneous Papers, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah, in Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents* 2:332-33.

initial *purpose of their movement*, as they then perceived it, was not the restoration of the primitive Christian church but the “restoration of Israel.”

As the prospect of Indian removal grew the logic of Jewish gathering to an American New Jerusalem correspondingly diminished. Joseph Smith, as the movement’s prophetic leader, would have been tasked with reinterpreting the purpose of their movement and the book it was midwifing. If the book’s purpose was not, as it appeared and as the group had believed, to “confirm the Old Testament” and “bring in the Jews” from their long dispersion, what was it?

The Creation and Transformation of Judaic Primitivism

We can better apprehend the early Mormon movement’s shift from Judaic primitivism to Christian primitivism by considering both the limits of the change and how Joseph Smith had formulated the movement’s Judaic primitivism in the first place. While the change from gathering the Jews to a “rebuilt” Jewish temple to re-establishing the early Christian church was a major change in *focus* for the movement, it was not a change in *kind*. The movement remained a biblical primitivist movement: it had just shifted from one biblical primitivism to another. While the content of what was to be “restored” changed, the ideology of primitivism or restorationism remained unchanged.

Joseph Smith, Martin Harris, and presumably other early Mormons had initially seen their movement as one to restore primitive Judaism, rather than primitive Christianity, but from whence had they derived their fundamental ideology of primitivism? The most familiar, fully developed, and religiously relevant form of primitivism available to them was *Christian* primitivism. We have already seen that

Joseph Smith and his family were Christian primitivists from the outset. Joseph Smith extracted from the Christian primitivism he knew a generic primitivist ideology. It was on that conceptual scaffolding that he constructed Judaic primitivism. The early Mormon movement's primitivist vision of restoring "Old Testament" Judaism can be understood as a mutation on the familiar vision of restoring New Testament Christianity.

As posited here, Joseph Smith framed his expectations for what the Book of Lehi/Book of Mormon would achieve by borrowing an ideological framework from Christian primitivism, but swapping its New Testament Christian content out for "Old Testament" Judaic content. When the "Old Testament" vision failed, Smith re-centered his primitivist vision and swapped the New Testament vision back in. Christian primitivism had once been a model for the early Mormons' purpose. Now it *became* their purpose.

Providence and Prophetic Adaptation

The point, again, is not to view Smith as conniving to change his spiritual vision to whatever would work. Joseph Smith *has* been seen by some as behaving fraudulently; and, indeed, the hypothesis that Joseph Smith was a pious fraud is one of the more prominent explanations that has been offered for his prophetic career.²⁰⁴ My hypothesis is different: rather than acting opportunistically, Smith was acting providentially, so to speak. Given Joseph Smith's personal religious background, the theology expressed in

²⁰⁴ The pious-fraud theory of Joseph Smith's prophetic career has been most fully developed by Dan Vogel. Dan Vogel, "The Prophet Puzzle' Revisited," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 31 (Fall 1998): 125-40; Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004).

his religious texts, and the setbacks he experienced just prior to reassessing his prophetic direction, his changes in direction are best explained by his perceiving in the changes around him the hand of Providence, disclosing God's will through the unfolding of events.

Such a providential view of human events would have grown naturally from Smith's religious upbringing and was expressed in his scriptural texts. Joseph Smith's family had deep roots in New England Puritanism, which saw all events as shaped by and expressing the will of a sovereign God.²⁰⁵ The Book of Mormon itself takes what has been called a "providential view of history."²⁰⁶ Joseph Smith's early revelations assert that God's "wrath" is "kindled" against only two kinds of people—those who "obey not his commandments" and those who "confess not his hand in all things" (D&C 59:21).

Joseph Smith's expectations for the Book of Lehi had been upended, in rapid succession, by the loss of its manuscript, the death of his son, his rejection—and that of the book—by Protestants, and by the growing inevitability of Indian removal, which would destroy his American proto-Zionist vision. Given his Calvinist heritage and personal theology of divine sovereignty that put God's hand "in all things," why *not* perceive in the events that balked him at every turn the hand of Providence blocking the way, and the finger of God pointing him in a new direction?

If Smith "read" life through such a hermeneutic of divine providence, interpreting events as disclosing the divine will, then insuperable roadblocks to the Book of Mormon

²⁰⁵ Richard L. Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New England Heritage: Influences of Grandfathers Solomon Mack and Asael Smith* (Second edition; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book / Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2003).

²⁰⁶ Dan Vogel, "The Book of Mormon and the Providential View of History," unpublished manuscript, copy in author's possession.

creating a Jewish-Indian New Jerusalem in western New York could mean only one thing: God's will for the book was different than what he had supposed. On such a providentialist view, while it may have served divine purposes for God to temporarily allow Smith to believe that the Book of Mormon's primary purpose was to effect a kind of Jewish restoration at the New Jerusalem, God ultimately corrected this understanding and opened up a new vista by shaping events in a different direction. This should not be seen as crowding out the influence of Smith's religious experiences. His inner revelatory experiences and his reading of the signs of God's will in external events could readily work in tandem.

*The Unfolding Text of the Book of Mormon and
Mormonism's Christian Primitivist Transformation*

Whatever the source of the new direction, signposts toward that new direction appeared when Joseph Smith resumed dictating the Book of Mormon text. As Smith dictated beyond the Book of Lehi's lost pages, the Book of Mormon text's Christian primitivist character became clear, culminating in Jesus appearing to the Nephites and establishing a church among them. This was not only a book to "confirm the Old Testament" as Martin Harris had thought, but also one to provide the foundation for a new church on the New Testament model.

Such indications of the Book of Mormon's explicitly Christian purpose appeared immediately when Smith resumed dictating. The new dictation began with a sermon by King Benjamin explicitly announcing that "the Lord God Omnipotent" would soon incarnate as the Messiah. Benjamin testifies that he acquired this information the

previous night from “an angel from God” who announced that he came to bring “glad tidings of great joy,” echoing the angels of the Lucan Nativity story of Jesus (Mosiah 3:2-3; Luke 2:10). The angel announced to Benjamin of the coming divine Messiah:

The time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay... . . . And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary (Mosiah 3:4-8).

This angelic pronouncement to Benjamin evokes the biblical Annunciation to Mary, prior to the birth of Jesus, in Luke’s Gospel. Benjamin’s angel echoes “the angel Gabriel...sent from God” to Mary (Luke 1:26). At the Annunciation, Gabriel tells Mary, of her unborn child, that “he shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest” (Luke 1:32) and that he “shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Benjamin’s “angel from God” similarly tells him of the unborn Messiah, “he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God,” adding that “his mother shall be called Mary” (Mosiah 3:8). These declarations to Benjamin are made, and responded to, as if made here for the very first time. His people react with faith and rejoicing (Mosiah 4:1-3; 5:1-5).

If, as argued above, the Book of Lehi manuscript was not explicit in teaching Christian doctrine (e.g., giving the Messiah’s name as Jesus), then Benjamin’s report of an angelic declaration of the coming Christ would have been the first time explicit teaching of a *divine* Messiah or the name Jesus Christ occurred in the Book of Mormon’s dictation. The angelic declaration to King Benjamin would thus have appeared, in the context of the

narrative to this point, to be a first “Annunciation” to the Nephites of Jesus’ coming.²⁰⁷ After the very Judaic content of the initial Book of Mormon manuscript, the angel’s sudden “Annunciation” to Benjamin would have also been a dramatic revelation to early Mormons, delivering or reinforcing a new paradigm by clearly signaling that the book was not intended to gather Jews *qua* Jews, but to preach to all the Christian message.

Readers may differ on the direction of influence here, depending on their view of the Book of Mormon’s origins. Was the book’s unfolding of Christian primitivist content a contributing cause of Mormonism’s Christian primitivist transformation, or was it solely an effect of that transformation? In either case, a shift of focus within the Book of Mormon text accompanied a shift of vision within the Mormon movement and gave the new Christian primitivist vision canonical status.

The further unfolding of the Book of Mormon text across its transcription would bring with it additional shifts in perspective, as when the hill presumed to have been the ancient site of Nephi’s temple comes to be identified with a battlefield and genocidal mass grave, delegitimizing further speculation that it was the sanctified site for building a temple.

As proposed here, what shifted Joseph Smith and the other early Mormons from a Judaic primitivist focus to a Christian primitivist focus was initially a set of events that flouted Joseph Smith’s vision of events, balked the way forward, and portended the implausibility of using the Book of Mormon and its associated sacred site to gather the

²⁰⁷ The evocation of the biblical Annunciation in Benjamin’s sermon is strengthened by the fact that the phrasing—“shall be called the Son of God”—is rare in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon, being used only one place besides these, in another “Annunciation” event paralleling Benjamin’s, when Limhi’s people are first told of the coming Christ (Mosiah 15:2).

Jews to western New York. While this gathering plan had always been quixotic, that fact would have become progressively clearer to Smith and his associates as it became evident that national politics would preclude a Jewish-Indian New Jerusalem in western New York and that the existing Christian churches would not take up a new sacred text to carry to the descendants of Israel. Such indications that the book could not successfully gather the Jews were followed by the dictation of new Book of Mormon texts that taught explicit Christian doctrine, predicted and modeled the establishment of a Christian primitivist church, and called on Native Americans to gather to the New Jerusalem while holding out that the Jews scattered from the “old” Jerusalem would be gathered *back* to that Jerusalem (Ether 12:4-11). With these texts in place, the movement’s new direction was crystal clear.

The Legacy of the Book of Lehi and Mormonism’s Proto-Zionist Passage

The preceding evidence collectively suggests that early Mormonism—as understood by its adherents in 1827-28—was substantially more Judaic and proto-Zionist than historians have perceived. This early Mormon self-understanding can be accounted for in some measure by the wide publicity, just two years before Joseph Smith began the work of transcribing the Book of Mormon, of Mordecai Noah’s proto-Zionist project, a project that offered a Judaic lens through which Smith and associates might view that work. Joseph Smith may have been predisposed to adopt this lens by the apparent providence that his 1823 angelophany and reported finding of golden plates provided precisely what the Grand Rabbi had described Noah’s project as missing.

Having taken Ararat as a model, the original Mormons adopted their early self-identity, not from Christian primitivists, of whom they are usually seen as a subset, but from proto-Zionist *Jews*. More precisely, we might say the early Mormons formed their self-identity by incorporating the *goals* of proto-Zionist Jews into a restorationist *framework* adapted from Christian primitivism.

Steven Epperson noted in his 1992 *Mormons and Jews: Early Mormon Theologies of Israel* that Joseph Smith's theology was overwhelmingly philo-Semitic and philo-Judaic and allowed room for the continuing legitimacy of Jewish faith.²⁰⁸ The present study confirms Epperson's conclusion and suggests that the seeds of both Mormonism's own Judaic elements and its affirmation of Judaism were planted in its own early Judaic, proto-Zionist phase.

*Mormonism's Christian-Jewish Syncretism
as a Consequence of its Early Proto-Zionist Passage*

Though early Mormons soon came to understand their purposes as differing in crucial ways from Mordecai Noah's, Mormonism has continued to be distinctively Judaic among Christian denominations, marrying the Jewish language of temple, chosenness, and covenant with the traditional Christian language of faith, grace, and redemption. Mormonism is Christian primitivist in character, but syncretically so. Mormonism has apostles *and* high priests, builds churches *and* temples, and identifies its adherents as disciples *and* Israelites. Joseph Smith predicted the return of animal sacrifice and the Second Coming, aimed for the restoration of Israel and of primitive Christianity, and,

²⁰⁸ Steven Epperson, *Mormons and Jews: Early Mormon Theologies of Israel*, (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1992).

taking a Zionist turn alongside Mordecai Noah, sent an *apostle* to dedicate Jerusalem for the return of the Jews.²⁰⁹ In place of narrowly New Testament-focused primitivism, Joseph Smith would ultimately advocate a kind of whole-Bible primitivism, which he called “the restoration of all things” (cf. D&C 27:6; 86:10).

Modern Mormonism’s Christian-Jewish syncretism can be understood as a result of its Judaic, proto-Zionist passage. Even as they adopted a Christian primitivist mission for their movement, the early Mormons did not abandon a Judaic sense of identity and purpose. Even during the 1829-31 phase identified by Shipps as one in which it was Christian primitivism that dominated the theology laid down by Joseph Smith, the movement added “Old Testament” offices like that of priest, aimed to build a temple, and tried to “gather” native “Israelites.” The movement’s new Judaic or Hebraic phase identified by Shipps, beginning in 1831, is much more comprehensible against the backdrop of its first Judaic phase just a few years earlier. Judaic goals and self-identity, rather than disappearing from the Mormon movement, temporarily receded into the background.

This suggests a revision of Shipps’ hypothesis on the origins of Mormon theology. Rather than beginning as a movement that emphasized Christian primitivism before moving on to a Hebraic emphasis, Mormonism made an American proto-Zionist, Judaic primitivist passage, then moved on to Christian primitivism, and then *reprised* and more fully developed its brief original encounter with Judaic primitivism.

²⁰⁹ For a discussion of Orson Hyde’s mission to dedicate Jerusalem for the return of the Jews, see Epperson, *Mormons and Jews*, 139-71.

Shipps' model is therefore not so much mistaken as it is incomplete. Shipps' description of three periods of theological "layering," largely in the order Christian primitivist, Hebraic, and esoteric, is substantially correct. What precedes Shipps' Christian primitivist layer of Mormon theologizing is not so much an earlier layer of Judaic theologizing as it is a formative layer that planted the seeds that would flower in that later Hebraic theological layer.

We might analogize this relationship to the evolution and expression of genes explored in evolutionary developmental biology. Mormonism's formative encounter with a very Judaic sacred text, the Book of Lehi, along with its early adoption of a proto-Zionist self-identity, constituted the "mutation" that wove Judaic strands into the movement's ideological DNA or, less poetically, created Judaic genes in the Mormon genome. Although this DNA was not much expressed during the developmental phase in which the movement was formally founded as a Christian primitivist church, it expressed itself heavily in the next developmental phase, which would transform the Mormons from merely a *church* into a *people*. The successive "mutations" of Mormonism's ideological DNA, and the successive expression over distinct developmental phases of both its Christian primitivist "genes" and its Judaic primitivist "genes" made it a syncretic, and thus more complex, religious organism.

If, as posited above, Joseph Smith saw the Mormon movement's early period of proto-Zionist self-understanding as a passage providentially allowed by God, then through Smith's eyes, and other eyes of belief, the evolution we are describing here was *theistic* evolution—i.e., the twists and turns of Mormonism's early history would be seen

as designed to make it evolve into precisely the Christian-Judaic syncretic faith it became.

**Implications of the Mormon Experience:
“Prophetic Failure” as an Impetus toward Religious Syncretization**

As a relatively new religious tradition, Mormonism offers the opportunity to examine “up close” how religious traditions originate and develop. It may be possible to develop models using the wealth of data afforded by a young tradition like Mormonism that can then be applied to understanding the origins of older traditions about which there is less early data.

One implication that may be drawn from the early Mormon experience examined here relates to when and how religious traditions in their originary, prophetic phase syncretize with other extant traditions. Joseph Smith appears to initially begin shifting away from his Judaic primitivism and toward Christian primitivism, thereby ultimately syncretizing the two, because the expectations and vision he had for his Judaic primitivism were thwarted. Thus, we might infer, “prophetic failure,” or the thwarting of prophetic expectations and goals, can lead a prophet to change directions in a way that initiates or modulates syncretization with other religious communities or traditions.

For example, one way of modeling the Arab-Judaic syncretization of Islam is to look at it in terms of such “prophetic failure,” or thwarting of prophetic goals. Muhammad’s failure to convert or make allies of the Meccan establishment, and consequent flight to Medina, with its substantial Jewish population, appears to have produced a “Judaic” phase in early Islam, during which Muhammad focused his efforts at

conversion and alliance-building on Jews. Failure to convert or successfully ally with the Jewish population there in turn produced a pivot back to centralizing the Arab/Meccan experience.

In response to the first of these “prophetic failures” Muhammad initiates syncretization with Judaism. In response to the second he modulates this syncretization, changing both *how much* and *how* Islam is syncretized with Judaism. The peculiar Arab-Judaic syncretism of Islam may thus be modeled in terms of the successive thwarting of Muhammad’s prophetic objectives. The apparent consequences of “prophetic failure” in Mormonism and Islam suggest a possible pattern by which religions in their prophetic phase are often enriched and transformed by responding to failure with shifts in syncretization.

Conclusion

We have seen in this thesis that Mormonism has been crucially shaped by its American proto-Zionist passage. We have seen that Joseph Smith’s American proto-Zionist expectations, which left this lasting impression on the Mormon mind, did not result merely from reading scripture. Rather, these expectations were substantially shaped by *contemporaneous developments in American Judaism*, principally by an American Jewish attempt to establish an American proto-Zion. The formative Judaic shaping of Mormonism was therefore not effected only by an encounter with *scriptural* Judaism, but by an encounter with *living* Judaism.

Joseph Smith for a time adopted as his working model for the Mormon movement’s purpose American proto-Zionism in a very *Jewish* form—that of Mordecai

Noah's "Ararat," perhaps enhancing Noah's vision by taking into account the Grand Rabbi's critique. In Jewish history, American proto-Zionism is significant as a forerunner to actual Zionism. In Mormon history, it is significant as a source of Judaic ideas, objectives, and self-identity. Among surviving large-scale movements there are two that are the legatees of Jewish American proto-Zionism: Zionism and Mormonism.

Mormonism's encounters with American proto-Zionism and the Book of Lehi were fleeting. American proto-Zionism was a flash in the pan within American, and Jewish, history, fading during the second half of the 1820s and disappearing altogether in the 1830s. The Book of Lehi remained in the nascent Mormon movement's possession for less than four months before it was stolen, never to reappear. Yet its "Old Testament" framework and connected artifacts such as divine interpreters left both legacies and questions for the rest of the Book of Mormon text, transcription, and resulting readers and scholarship to consider. Mormonism's fleeting encounters with the Book of Lehi and with contemporaneous Judaism, whether by the accidents of history or the providences of the divine, left a lasting impress, shaping Mormonism's ideological DNA and producing a distinctively syncretic new religious tradition.

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