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Abstract Review of “A Further Inquiry into the Historicity of the Book of Mormon” (1982), by William D. Russell.

HINDSIGHT ON A BOOK OF MORMON HISTORICITY CRITIQUE

Kevin Christensen

Review of William D. Russell. "A Further Inquiry into the Historicity of the Book of Mormon." *Sunstone*, September–October 1982, 20–27.

Every problem that normal science sees as a puzzle can be seen, from another viewpoint, as a counterinstance and thus as a source of crisis.¹

Book of Mormon historicity remains a hot topic in Latter-day Saint circles, as it should, given the implications one way or the other. One useful way to gain perspective on the current state and ongoing stakes of the debate is to look back at earlier phases and results. Doing this provides an opportunity to reevaluate past arguments in light of subsequent developments and also to consider the effect that those arguments had on the communities and individuals involved.

In this light I will comment on William D. Russell's 1982 article, "A Further Inquiry into the Historicity of the Book of Mormon."² Russell begins by claiming that "historians of Mormonism have avoided considering in any depth the question of the historicity of the

1. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 79.

2. This paper was based on two earlier presentations, "Russell's 1977 Presidential Address to the John Whitmer Historical Association on preexilic Israel and the Book of Mormon and a paper on III Nephi and Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, which he read at the 1982 Mormon History Association meetings." Editor's note to Russell, "Historicity of the Book of Mormon," 26.

Book of Mormon” (p. 20). He observes that the topic is important and therefore deserves consideration. He then offers an entire paragraph on the importance of honesty, including the following:

The Book of Mormon is a fundamental part of our heritage, but we are content to slide over evidence that runs counter to the traditional generalizations that are repeated without question from generation to generation. We seem to shy away from honest research for fear that uncomfortable conclusions will result. I think it is time we subject the Book of Mormon to serious inquiry and revise our assertions about the book if our findings require it. (p. 20)

By explicitly associating honesty with a willingness to boldly state the bad news, he makes a willingness to bring bad news a measure of academic integrity. But there is a danger here that he does not address. In my own first contribution to Mormon letters, an essay in *Dialogue* in 1991, I called attention to a phenomenon that I called “spiritual masochism.”³ This happens when scholars become so fixed on demonstrating their ability to deliver bad news that they lose perspective. When facing problems publicly becomes desirable in itself, facing solutions to those problems is seen as counterproductive.

Russell insists that we should be “willing to revise our conclusions about the book if our findings require it” (p. 20). This is a logical extension of his discussion about the importance of honesty. I presume Russell would agree that honest scholars should welcome new information that might require revision of their own earlier findings, including those offered in his 1982 paper.

The tricky bit comes in deciding when, at any given moment in time, our findings require that we revise our conclusions, not just at the level of a specific detail or of a secondary assumption but of the paradigms that guide our overall approach and that define the communities in which we participate.⁴ Russell presents his assertions as though they

3. Kevin Christensen, “New Wine and New Bottles: Scriptural Scholarship as Sacrament,” *Dialogue* 24/3 (Fall 1991): 128–29.

4. I have been fascinated by just how this process works and have published several detailed essays on the topic, drawing heavily on Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific*

are unopposed by any other notions. He seems unaware that he might not correctly interpret what he has found. It is not just a matter of facing problems honestly—one must be mindful of the perspective used to decide whether to treat a problem as a potentially productive puzzle or as a decisive counterinstance. The way to compensate for our inevitable shortcomings at any given moment is to keep as broad a perspective as possible and to not let particular details or issues overshadow the big picture. And this is where Russell has trouble.

Establishing Perspective?

Russell begins by briefly reviewing some essays written by scholars of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (now Community of Christ) in the two previous decades. He cites a 1962 paper by James E. Lancaster on historical accounts of the Book of Mormon translation⁵ that can now be supplemented and corrected by more recent work, including Royal Skousen's ongoing study of the original and printer's manuscripts.⁶ Russell is much exercised by the "face in hat" reports of how the Book of Mormon was translated and makes much of the suggestion that the translation should be thought of as conceptual, leaving room for Joseph to express himself in the translation even if one assumes historicity. He then cites works by Leland Negaard and Wayne Ham,⁷ two RLDS scholars who raise the specter of the so-called Second Isaiah, typically dated to after Lehi's departure from Jerusalem. Ham's paper summarizes "problems in interpreting the Book of Mormon as history, such as: difficulties in identifying the

Revolutions. For example, Kevin Christensen, "Paradigms Crossed," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/2 (1995): 144–218.

5. Later published as James Lancaster, "The Translation of the Book of Mormon," in *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture*, ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 97–112.

6. See, for example, Royal Skousen, "Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 61–93.

7. Leland Negaard, "The Problem of Second Isaiah in the Book of Mormon" (B.D. thesis, Union Theological Seminary, 1961; Negaard, "Literary Issues and the Latter Day Saint," *University Bulletin* 18 (Spring 1966): 21–24; and Wayne Ham, "Problems in Interpreting the Book Of Mormon as History," *Courage* 1 (September 1970): 15–22.

book's narrative with a particular setting in time and space, its propensity for reflecting in detail the religious concerns of the American frontier, its anachronisms, and the use of biblical scriptures and ideas as sources, particularly the use of Second Isaiah" (p. 21). Russell also cites a 1977 paper by Susan Curtis Mernitz that sees the Book of Mormon as reflecting early nineteenth-century American thought, though she never addresses the question of whether ancient contexts might provide comparable or superior illumination.⁸ He mentions an unpublished student paper by Larry W. Conrad that observes that while "the Book of Mormon assumes the story of the Tower of Babel to be historical, biblical scholars hold it to be mythological." With this brief survey of scholarship⁹ sufficing as background, Russell launches into his own take on two additional issues: apparent disparity between certain ideas in 1 and 2 Nephi and the thought of preexilic Israel and, second, the supposed problematic inclusion of Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi.

Other Book of Mormon scholarship that Russell mentions in his essay includes Wesley P. Walters's 1981 master's thesis from Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, "The Use of the Old Testament in the Book of Mormon";¹⁰ Robert N. Hullinger's 1980 book, *Mormon Answer to Skepticism: Why Joseph Smith Wrote the Book of Mormon*;¹¹ and Thomas F. O'Dea's book, *The Mormons*, published by the University of Chicago in 1957. And that is it—the state of the art on Book of Mormon scholarship as of 1982, sufficient to guide individuals and faith communities through time and into eternity. Or is it?

8. See Louis Midgley, "More Revisionist Legerdemain and the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3 (1991): 268–71; and Garth Mangum, "The Economics of the Book of Mormon: Joseph Smith as Translator or Commentator," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/2 (Fall 1993): 78–89.

9. For more on Russell and his favored authorities, see Midgley, "More Revisionist Legerdemain," 261–71.

10. Jerald and Sandra Tanner reprinted this study in 1990. In the *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 220–50, both John Tvedtnes and Stephen D. Ricks offered reviews. Many of the issues they raised have received further attention elsewhere.

11. Reprinted, with some of the anti-Mormon rhetoric toned down, as Robert N. Hullinger, *Joseph Smith's Response to Skepticism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), and reviewed by Gary F. Novak in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 139–54.

The Neglected Voices of 1982

Before considering how Russell's arguments have fared in light of subsequent developments, we should ask if, even in 1982, Russell's survey of Book of Mormon scholarship addressing the question of historicity was adequate.

The most conspicuous absence is any mention of Hugh Nibley. In three volumes and several important essays, Nibley had discussed the Book of Mormon in its Old World context. In 1967 he directly addressed the Second Isaiah question in *Since Cumorah*, making a fresh argument that the Book of Mormon could be compatible with many findings proceeding from Isaiah scholarship.¹² Sidney B. Sperry had addressed the same question from another perspective as early as 1939.¹³ In 1974 *BYU Studies* published "A Computer Analysis of the Isaiah Authorship Problem."¹⁴ Avraham Gileadi in 1981 published his dissertation, "A Holistic Structure of the Book of Isaiah,"¹⁵ followed by his first book, *The Apocalyptic Book of Isaiah*, in 1982.¹⁶

Nibley's *The World of the Jaredites*, originally published in serialized form in the *Improvement Era* in 1951 and 1952, had directly addressed the question of the Tower of Babel:

Think back, my good man, to the first act of recorded history. What meets our gaze as the curtain rises? People everywhere building towers. And why are they building towers? To get to heaven. . . . That goes not only for Babylonia but also for the

12. Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah: The Book of Mormon in the Modern World* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967).

13. Sidney B. Sperry, "The 'Isaiah Problem' in the Book of Mormon," *Improvement Era*, September 1939, 524–25, 564–69, October 1939, 594, 634, 636–37.

14. L. La Mar Adams and Alvin C. Rencher, "A Computer Analysis of the Isaiah Authorship Problem," *BYU Studies* 15/1 (Autumn 1974): 95–102. See also L. La Mar Adams, "A Scientific Analysis of Isaiah Authorship," in *Isaiah and the Prophets: Inspired Voices from the Old Testament*, ed. Monte S. Nyman (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1984). 151–63.

15. Avraham Gileadi, "A Holistic Structure of the Book of Isaiah" (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1981).

16. Avraham Gileadi, *The Apocalyptic Book of Isaiah* (Provo, UT: Hebraeus Press, 1982).

whole ancient world. . . . The towers were artificial mountains, . . . and no temple-complex could be complete without one.¹⁷

Nibley had also dealt extensively with the question of the best method for testing historical documents.¹⁸ He explored charges that the Book of Mormon merely reflected Joseph Smith's environment and discussed in detail the inadequacies of such an approach as a valid test and sufficient explanation.

Most of the essays reprinted in Noel B. Reynolds's *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*¹⁹ in 1982 had already appeared in various Latter-day Saint journals. For example, John W. Welch published on chiasmus in the Book of Mormon in 1969 and 1970, and Richard L. Bushman published in 1976 "The Book of Mormon and the American Revolution," showing how the Book of Mormon failed to fit the nineteenth-century context.²⁰ Lynn and Hope Hilton published *In Search of Lehi's Trail* in 1976.²¹

Aside from Nibley's Old World approach, in 1975 John L. Sorenson began circulating the manuscript of what became *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, published in 1985.²² While Russell may not have been aware of that manuscript, Sorenson's essay "The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Codex" was available in 1976.²³ David A. Palmer's *In Search of Cumorah: New Evidence for the*

17. Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 164.

18. Hugh Nibley, "New Approaches to Book of Mormon Study," had appeared in the *Improvement Era* from November 1953 to July 1954 and was reprinted in volume 8 of the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 54–126.

19. Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Lights on Ancient Origins* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1982).

20. John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 10/1 (Autumn 1969): 69–84; Welch, "A Study Relating Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon to Chiasmus in the Old Testament, Ugaritic Epics, Homer, and Selected Greek and Latin Authors" (MA thesis, Brigham Young University, 1970); and Richard L. Bushman, "The Book of Mormon and the American Revolution," *BYU Studies* 17/1 (Autumn 1976): 3–20.

21. Lynn M. and Hope Hilton, *In Search of Lehi's Trail* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976).

22. John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985).

23. John L. Sorenson, *Newsletter and Proceedings of the S.E.H.A* (December 1976): 1–9.

Book of Mormon from Ancient Mexico appeared in 1981.²⁴ Publishing in 1982, Russell neglects all of these sources. He assumes that it is obvious that the Book of Mormon is not an authentic history. This conspicuous neglect of important, readily available material leads me to read his essay as an example of spiritual masochism. Russell congratulates himself for having the integrity to publicly deliver the bad news. His focus is completely negative, citing only those scholars and issues that he can use to support his case. He fails to mention, let alone address, the most important and most conspicuous work arguing in favor of historicity. He never spells out the implications of his own assumptions, nor does he specify his standards of judgment.

Climbing the Sermon on the Mount

It turns out that Russell is one-sided not only in his survey of Book of Mormon scholarship but also in his recourse to New Testament scholarship. In 1984 Latter-day Saint scholar A. Don Sorenson pointed out that Russell's critique of the Sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi assumes that a "fluid tradition" theory of the New Testament is valid and that Russell fails to mention the existence of a "controlled tradition" stream of scholarship that is more congenial to the 3 Nephi account. Sorenson reports that "the fact is that the fluid-tradition theory is not the well-established view that Russell wants his readers to think it is."²⁵ Sorenson also notes that "question-begging occurs inasmuch as the *conclusion* that Jesus did not deliver the sermon, on which Russell's challenge to the Book of Mormon depends, results from assuming a naturalism, assuming the fluid-tradition theory rather than some version of the controlled-tradition theory."²⁶

Subsequent to Sorenson's paper, John W. Welch produced *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount*. Where Russell asks, "Wouldn't Jesus have shaped his sermon to the

24. David A. Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah: New Evidence for the Book of Mormon from Ancient Mexico* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon, 1981).

25. A. Don Sorenson, "The Problem of the Sermon on the Mount and 3 Nephi," *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): 126. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Mormon History Association meeting in Provo, Utah, on 11 May 1984.

26. Sorenson, "Problem of the Sermon on the Mount and 3 Nephi," 137–38.

cultural setting of his hearers in the New World?” Welch discusses how “the change in setting from Palestine to Bountiful accounts for several differences between the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon at the Temple.”²⁷ Where Russell *asserts* almost no difference, Welch sees *telling* differences, devoting an entire chapter to the topic.²⁸ Where Russell sees clumsy, anachronistic borrowing by Joseph Smith, Welch argues that “the Sermon at the Temple enhances our understanding of the masterful Sermon on the Mount as much or more than any other source I know. The Sermon at the Temple does this primarily by disclosing the *context* in which Jesus spoke these words on that occasion.”²⁹ For example, Welch, drawing on the work of New Testament scholar Joachim Jeremias, notes that “five things are presupposed by the Sermon on the Mount: it assumes that its audience is already familiar with (1) the light of Christ, (2) the coming of the new age, (3) the expiration of the old law, (4) the unbounded goodness of God, and (5) the designation of the disciples as successors of the prophetic mission. These must be taken as givens for the Sermon on the Mount to make sense. Strikingly, these are among the main themes explicitly stated in 3 Nephi 9:19 and 11:3–12:2 as a prologue leading up to the Sermon in 3 Nephi 12–14.”³⁰ On these and many other points relevant to Russell’s claims, Welch’s book is an important contribution to Book of Mormon (and New Testament) scholarship, demonstrating how the temple context of the Sermon at the Temple “offers answers to questions about why the Sermon was given, what was being said, what kind of sermon it was, how all of its parts fit together, and what it all means.”³¹

27. John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 129. An earlier edition, *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount*, appeared in 1990.

28. John W. Welch, “The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount: The Differences,” in *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount*, 125–50.

29. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon*, 15.

30. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon*, 15–16.

31. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon*, 14–15.

The Book of Mormon Settings

Russell refers to Wayne Ham's short discussion of the difficulty of matching the Book of Mormon narrative with a particular real-world setting (p. 21). Yet today we can plausibly trace Lehi's travels from Jerusalem to a good candidate for the Valley of Lemuel, then south through various staging points to Nahom, and then east to impressive candidates for Nephi's Bountiful.³² But even before 1982, Nibley and, later, the Hiltons had already begun this process of exploring intriguing cultural and geographic settings in the Old World. Subsequent work has extended and refined their observations.

What about the New World? Russell offers nothing specific, but let's consider the most recent critique of Book of Mormon historicity by Mayanist Michael Coe. In the PBS series *The Mormons*, Coe first puts Joseph Smith in a category consistent with Russell's judgment: "I really think that Joseph Smith, like shamans everywhere, started out faking it. I have to believe this—that he didn't believe this at all, that he was out to impress, but he got caught up in the mythology that he created."³³

The point of placing Joseph Smith in a category is that it can provide predictions and explanations for his actions. Yet as Coe describes Joseph's accomplishment, his chosen category fails: "He made it up and dictated it nonstop. It's very long, the Book of Mormon. . . . I mean, if it's a work of fiction, nobody has ever done anything like this before. And I think it is fiction, but he really carried it through, and my respect for him is unbounded." If no one in or out of the "fraud" category has done anything like the Book of Mormon, what good is the category? It becomes a mere label that explains nothing. And we still have to correlate the content predicted by Coe's theory with Joseph Smith and the actual text.

Coe continues:

32. For a recent summary of this research, see the entire issue of *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15/2 (2006). Also, in general see John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely, eds., *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004).

33. "The Mormons. Interview: Michael Coe," accessed 20 October 2010, <http://www.pbs.org/mormons/interviews/coe.html>

In 1841—after the Book of Mormon, actually—there was a publication in New York and London of a wonderful two-volume work called *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* by John Lloyd Stephens, an American diplomat, and his artist-companion, the British topographical artist Frederick Catherwood, with wonderful illustrations by Catherwood of the Maya ruins. This was the beginning of Maya archaeology, . . . and we who worked with the Maya civilization consider Stephens and Catherwood the kind of patron saints of the whole thing.

Well, Joseph Smith read these two volumes, and he was flabbergasted, because what he had dictated about the ancient cities in his mind, these were the ancient cities that he was talking about. They weren't in South America, as he originally thought; they were in Central America and neighboring Mexico.

Notice that Coe has a consciously fraudulent Joseph Smith composing his text with a hemispheric setting in mind, and *not even imagining a limited setting* until the Nauvoo period, when he encounters the Stephens and Catherwood volume. Here we can test the claim. What New World physical setting does the Book of Mormon describe, if any?

Lawrence Poulsen recently examined all of the passages³⁴ in the Book of Mormon that describe the river Sidon, the axis for most of the action in the Book of Mormon, and extracted the salient characteristics of that river. He then performed a computer search of a 3-D satellite map of the entire Western Hemisphere to find candidates that matched the description. For a real-world river that begins in a narrow strip of wilderness that reaches from a sea west to a sea east, that begins flowing from east to west, then turns north, and then empties into an eastern sea, he found exactly one candidate. This turns out to be the Grijalva, which several Latter-day Saint models, including

34. "The river Sidon is mentioned 37 times in 28 different verses with accompanying directional and geographic information related to at least six different geographical locations." Lawrence Poulsen, "Lawrence Poulsen's Book of Mormon Geography," accessed 20 October 2010, <http://www.poulsenll.org/bom/index.html>.

John L. Sorenson's, put forward as a candidate for the Sidon. For those who mistrust computers, just look at the passages that Poulsen uses and the details the Sidon requires. The Grijalva is the only viable candidate that meets the demands of the text. Notice that Coe's model of Book of Mormon composition requires that this precise match happened in direct violation of the conscious conception of the author.

Think about how likely it is to spread such an accident across thirty-seven direct mentions distributed across twenty-eight verses of rapid dictation. And that amid all the complex story lines and discourses in the Book of Mormon. Then, along with that happy accident, consider the interlocking interrelations with the seven hundred other passages with geographic information on distances, coastlines, marches and tactics, the ups and downs, a massive volcanic event. Then add the numerous cultural details.³⁵ If accidentally getting just the river Sidon in Mesoamerica while imagining an undisclosed location in South America seems unreasonable, how about getting the rest of the text to fit around the Grijalva by accident as well? Coe's approach fails as soon as we look closely at the text, which suggests that, for all his expertise in things Mayan, he has not looked closely at our text.

Coe dismisses arguments by Sorenson, John E. Clark, and Brant A. Gardner regarding how the Mesoamerican setting supports the Book of Mormon account of the rise and fall of the two major civilizations.³⁶ Tellingly, Coe makes much of the disappointments of Thomas Ferguson relative to the Book of Mormon, but he does not seem to have grasped the implications of the very different approach taken by better trained, more disciplined Latter-day Saint archaeologists. Brant Gardner provides a particularly striking example of the difference that a change in perspective can bring to the questions one asks and the evidence, or lack thereof, that one finds:

The rather interesting discovery made just a few years back was that I, and many other Mesoamericanists, had simply made some incorrect assumptions about the [Book of Mormon]

35. See chapters 5–7 in John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Map* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000).

36. On this, see, for example, John E. Clark, "Archaeological Trends and Book of Mormon Origins," *BYU Studies* 44/4 (2005): 83–104.

text. The attempts of LDS archaeological apologetics [were] for years focused on finding the Christian or the Hebrew—or who knows what—in Mesoamerican archaeology.

The difference came when I started looking for Mesoamerica in the Book of Mormon instead of the Book of Mormon in Mesoamerica. Oddly enough, there is a huge difference, and the nature and the quality of the correlations [have] changed with that single shift in perspective.³⁷

When people ask for one thing that is the most important correlation, I have a hard time coming up with one, because it isn't a single thing. It is that the entire text of the Book of Mormon works better in a Mesoamerican context. Speeches suddenly have a context that makes them relevant instead of just preachy.³⁸ The pressures leading to wars are understandable. The wars themselves have an explanation for their peculiar features.³⁹ All of those things happen with a single interpretive framework that is in the right place at the right time. Even the demise of the Nephites happens at “the right time.”⁴⁰

Against Sorenson's correlations, Coe raises questions about horses, metal, scripts, and the disappointments of Thomas Ferguson. He claims that there is a stage but no actors for the Book of Mormon story. Yet that conclusion seems to be based on the same kind of as-

37. This statement is a slightly modified version of Brant Gardner's post on Zion's Lighthouse Message Board (ZLMB), <http://pub26.ezboard.com/bpacumenispages>. Quoted in Kevin Christensen, “Truth and Method: Reflections on Dan Vogel's Approach to the Book of Mormon,” *FARMS Review* 16/1 (2004): 309–10.

38. For example, Gardner's explanation of the reasons for Jacob's discourse in “A Social History of the Early Nephites,” accessed 13 November 2010, http://www.fairlds.org/FAIR_Conferences/2001_Social_History_of_the_Early_Nephites.html.

39. For example, John L. Sorenson, “The Seasonality of Warfare in the Book of Mormon,” in *Nephite Culture and Society: Selected Papers* (Salt Lake City: New Sage Books, 1997), 155–72.

40. Brant Gardner, post on ZLMB, <http://pub26.ezboard.com/bpacumenispages>. In an essay in *FARMS Review* 16/1, I quote Gardner on these specific correspondences at greater length. See also Gardner's six-volume *Second Witness: Analytical and Textual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007).

sumptions that led to Ferguson's disillusionment, and not on those held by Latter-day Saint archaeologists whose fieldwork Coe praises. While Latter-day Saint archaeologists produce archaeology that Coe respects, yet they see their findings in a different relation to the Book of Mormon text than Coe does—because they have different expectations of the text than he does.

Science historian and philosopher Thomas Kuhn observed that paradigm choice always involves deciding which problems are more significant to have solved.⁴¹ Suppose that in the ongoing Book of Mormon historicity debate we could swap currently plausible solutions for current problems. That is, suppose we had better evidence for metals and horses, a scrap of recognizably reformed Egyptian script, and even some profoundly unlikely DNA that somehow pointed directly to 600 BC Jerusalem. At the same time, suppose we did not have a unique fit for the river Sidon, nor an archaeologically suitable Cumorah, nor the rise and fall of major cultures at the right time (Olmec and Preclassic), nor a Zarahemla candidate that explained various circumstances in the text (physical, geographic, and linguistic), nor evidence of a major volcanic eruption at the right time, nor fortifications of the right kind, nor a candidate for the Waters of Mormon complete with a submerged city, nor a good candidate for the Gadianton movement, nor the other abundant cultural details that Sorenson, Gardner, Clark, and others have detailed. Suppose that Clark had demonstrated that the trend for Book of Mormon criticisms was moving consistently away from resolution of questions rather than toward it. And then for good measure, toss out all of the ancient Near Eastern correlations from Jerusalem through the Arabian desert to Nahom and Bountiful as well. Given that exchange of current solutions for current puzzles, would the present case for New World Book of Mormon historicity be stronger or weaker?

41. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 110.

Russell and the Thought of Preexilic Israel

After granting that a few themes in 1 and 2 Nephi fit with preexilic Israel, Russell itemizes ten major complaints on this theme. “The first is that the Book of Mormon anticipates the division of the chosen people into contending sects, much like modern Protestantism. It seems inconceivable that the Israelites would divide into warring sects” (p.22). Few scholars discover what they consider to be inconceivable. Consider the division of the northern kingdom from the southern and the creation of rival shrines in the north. Consider the rivalries between different priestly families in Israel and how their fortunes and influence depended on which group received royal endorsements.⁴² Look at the priestly opponents faced by prophets such as Jeremiah (Jeremiah 23:21–22) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 22:25–26). Look at the upheaval caused by the reforms of Josiah during Lehi’s time in Jerusalem (2 Kings 23:20). Look at the contradictory passages within the Bible itself on such topics as whether Moses saw God (Exodus 24:9–11 vs. Deuteronomy 4:12) and whether the sacred calendar includes the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29–30 vs. Deuteronomy 16, which mentions only Passover, Pentacost, and Tabernacles). Look at the sectarianism implied by the existence of the Samaritans and also at the differences between Dead Sea Scrolls Judaism and that which emerged from the Roman wars. I find the Book of Mormon description of the rise of contending sects in general to be quite characteristic of religious people in every age and time.

With regard to specific issues in context, I find that Sherem’s arguments against Jacob (Jacob 7) correspond neatly to the Deuteronomist arguments against the first temple. Jacob 4 exactly specifies first temple attitudes that the reformers targeted. Jacob 4:14 points directly at the Jerusalem reformers, whose explicit rejection of revelation explains the “blindness” that Jacob refers to and whose removal of the Day of Atonement from the sacred calendar shows that they were looking beyond the “mark” that both designated and named the anointed high

42. See, for example, Richard Elliot Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 47–48.

priests. The debates in Jacob, far from reflecting Joseph Smith's background, make good sense as emerging from the conflicts that raged in Lehi's Jerusalem.⁴³

Russell complains that Nephi refers to "the Jews" as though he is talking about a people other than his own (p. 22). Nibley had dealt with this question in his 1953 *Improvement Era* series, "New Approaches to Book of Mormon Study": "Throughout history, the determining factor of what makes one a Jew has always been some association with the geographical area of Judaea, and since 'Lehi. . . dwelt at Jerusalem in all his days' (1 Nephi 1:4), the best possible designation for him is *Jew*, regardless of his ancestry. . . . The Lachish letters distinguish between the Jews of the country and the Jews of the city, and this distinction is also found in Nephi's account."⁴⁴

Russell also complains that "in the Book of Mormon the 'Gentiles' become part of the House of Israel *by belief*. It wasn't until long after the Diaspora that the Jewish people began allowing the incorporation of persons not Jewish by birth into the Jewish community by proselyte baptism. The Book of Mormon notion of Gentiles becoming part of the House of Israel by belief seems to be a Pauline concept found in the New Testament" (p. 22). This argument overlooks this famous passage: "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16). Further, Brant Gardner recently observed that Jacob's discourse in 2 Nephi 6 and 10 deals with adoption into the covenant, based on Isaiah's prophecies on the topic.⁴⁵

The next element on Russell's list of issues is this: "The Messianic expectation in the Book of Mormon is another problem."

43. See my study "The Temple, the Monarchy, and Wisdom: Lehi's World and the Scholarship of Margaret Barker," in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, ed John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 449–522.

44. High Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 99–100.

45. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 2:131, 134–35.

. . . This notion of the Messiah as Saviour of the world is foreign to Israel. . . The Messiah would save Israel, restore the Davidic kingdom—not wash away the world’s sins. . . .

Christians have often read the Messianic expectation passages in the Old Testament as referring to the future career of Jesus. Yet the Old Testament passages in question, such as the Suffering Servant passages in the Second Isaiah, are quite vague and have to be interpreted with considerable imagination by Christians who would apply them to Jesus. (p. 22)

As a student of the scholarship of the eminent British Bible scholar Margaret Barker, I find in Russell’s complaints here more evidence of Joseph Smith’s inspiration. Barker herself is impressed with how the Book of Mormon matches the thought of preexilic Israel, particularly in its depiction of the Messiah as understood at the time of the first temple.⁴⁶ My essay “The Deuteronomist De-Christianizing of the Old Testament” shows how the Book of Mormon treatment of the Messiah fits with this more recent research.⁴⁷ Brant Gardner’s Book of Mormon commentary also observes how Barker’s model challenges Russell on this point.⁴⁸

Russell’s 1982 article makes much of the Isaiah problem while ignoring all thoughtful Latter-day Saint perspectives to that time. The Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University published *Isaiah and the Prophets* in 1984, a scholarly work that reprinted the statistical study of Isaiah authorship as well as John A. Tvedtnes’s illuminating essay on the Isaiah variations in the Book of Mormon. In 1998 FARMS produced the important volume *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*. The Isaiah question remains open, but Isaiah scholarship has not remained static.

Margaret Barker is an important authority on Isaiah who authored the Isaiah commentary in *Eerdman’s Commentary on the Bible*, which

46. Margaret Barker, “Joseph Smith and Preexilic Israelite Religion,” *BYU Studies* 44/4 (2005): 69–82.

47. Kevin Christensen, “The Deuteronomist De-Christianizing of the Old Testament,” *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): 59–90.

48. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 1:40 n. 26.

was published in 2003. She accepts the contemporary consensus that divides Isaiah into an original Isaiah writing at the times of Ahaz and Hezekiah, a second Isaiah writing during the Exile, and a third Isaiah writing during the period of the return. In “Paradigms Regained,” I wrote a summary of Latter-day Saint scholarship on Isaiah and the Book of Mormon up to 1999 and offered some suggestions for how open issues could be reconciled. I noted that the specific chapters in which the Second Isaiah re-interprets Israelite theology (40–47), fusing Yahweh and El Elyon, do not appear in the Book of Mormon. I also referred to John S. Thompson’s essay on Isaiah 50–51 in relation to the preexilic autumn festival, observing that in the Book of Mormon narrative those chapters appear to be quoted in the context of that festival.⁴⁹ While all issues could not be said to be resolved, I found the situation quite promising.

When I wrote “Paradigms Regained,” I had not read Barker’s essay on the original background of the Fourth Servant Song (Isaiah 53, which Abinadi quotes in Mosiah 14). Her abstract states the following:

Hezekiah had a potentially fatal boil which suggests that he had bubonic plague. This also destroyed the Assyrian army threatening Jerusalem. The king made a miraculous recovery. Isaiah first predicted that the king would die for his sin (of destroying the high places) but he then promised recovery. The prophet’s two explanations of the king’s suffering inspired the Fourth Servant Song, which depicted the suffering servant first as a sinner and then as the sin bearer. This is evidence for a sin-bearing priest-king, and for Isaiah’s hostility to the so-called ‘reforms’ of the cult. Evidence from Lachish and

49. Kevin Christensen, “Open Questions and Suggestions regarding Isaiah in the Book of Mormon,” in *Paradigms Regained: A Survey of Margaret Barker’s Research and Its Significance for Mormon Studies* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001), 77–81, referring to John S. Thompson, “Isaiah 50–51, the Israelite Autumn Festivals, and the Covenant Speech of Jacob in 2 Nephi 6–10,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 123–50.

ancient eclipses supports this reconstruction, and so calls into question the suggestion that it was a later fiction.⁵⁰

While not written with the Book of Mormon in mind, and not solving all questions about a Second Isaiah, Barker's case that Isaiah 53 was written about Hezekiah suggests that it was originally composed by Isaiah of Jerusalem. Serendipitously, this makes the text available to Abinadi via the brass plates and thus *improves* the case for the Book of Mormon. Furthermore, the same essay answers some of Russell's objections about Christian use of the Fourth Servant Song as a prophecy of Jesus. Barker shows the relationship between Hezekiah's illness and the role of the high priest on the Day of Atonement:

"How, then," she asks, "could Hezekiah's affliction, which had first been interpreted as punishment, be seen instead as a sign of salvation?" She cites the stories in Numbers 16:46 and Numbers 25:13, where in both cases "*atonement protected against the wrath of plague, and the ritual was performed by the high priest.*"

Hezekiah's illness and recovery, together with Isaiah's interpretations of the affliction, are recorded in the Fourth Servant Song. Hezekiah's illness did not give rise to the idea of a 'suffering servant', a sin bearer, a wrath interceptor like Aaron, but rather Isaiah's second interpretation of the king's illness was understood in the light of such a belief. In other words, the suffering figure, the wrath interceptor, was part of the ancient understanding of atonement and the role of the king. The Fourth Servant Song contains not only elements of the underlying ideology which enabled Isaiah to make the second interpretation of the king's illness but also elements which reflect the actual circumstances of Hezekiah's situation.

The clearest link between the Hezekiah incident and the Fourth Servant Song is the fact that Isaiah gave two interpre-

50. This abstract for Margaret Barker, "Hezekiah's Boil," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 95 (2001), is found at <http://jot.sagepub.com/content/26/1/31.abstract> (accessed 27 October 2010). Barker's paper is accessible under a different title, "The Original Setting of the Fourth Servant Song," at <http://www.margaretbarker.com/Papers/FourthServantSong.pdf> (accessed 27 October 2010).

tations of the suffering. At first he deemed the plague a punishment and then he saw it as the sign of salvation. In the Song the suffering figure is at first despised because he is deemed to be punished by God, ‘smitten by God and afflicted’, ‘a man of pain and sickness’ (Isa. 53.3–4). Then the poet realizes that the suffering figure is not being punished for his own sins, but for the sins of others ‘has borne our sicknesses and pains’. *The change in the Song is exactly the change in Isaiah’s interpretation of Hezekiah’s illness.*⁵¹

Is this reconstruction, seeing Hezekiah having the bubonic plague, historically plausible?

There is evidence outside the texts themselves to make what I propose a possibility. The strange story of the reversing shadow could be linked to a dateable eclipse of the sun, the mass burials at Lachish are most likely to have been plague victims, and the Lachish Letters just might have been written in this time of distress. Apart from this, there are enough details in the texts themselves which are inexplicable if Hezekiah did not have the bubonic plague. All the rest of what I propose could then follow.

On the other hand, if the story of the king’s sickness was a later addition to the story of the deliverance of Jerusalem, and that story in itself was a pious fiction, it was all very skillfully done, with plenty of false clues left in the text, and we need to find another explanation for the mass burials at Lachish.⁵²

The Fourth Servant Song, then, is tied to the role of the high priest on the Day of Atonement. Barker has elsewhere shown how Jesus came to see himself in that role. Regarding Christian use of Isaiah, Barker observes:

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus explained to the two disciples that it was necessary for the Anointed One to suffer and enter

51. Barker, “Hezekiah’s Boil,” 38, emphasis in the original.

52. Barker, “Hezekiah’s Boil,” 41–42.

his glory (Luke 24:26); this must refer to the Qumran version of the fourth Servant Song [Isaiah 53], *since there is no other passage in the Hebrew Scriptures which speaks of a suffering Anointed One.*⁵³

This is but one example of Barker's demonstration that the Hebrew scriptures that the Christians knew were different than the Masoretic Hebrew that we have now. Some of the vagueness that Russell sees in the Hebrew scripture appears to have been put there by Jewish editors in response to the rise of Christianity. The story that Barker tells about how the text and the context of Hebrew scriptures changed after the rise of Christianity, and at whose hands, is remarkably like the prophecy in 1 Nephi 13.⁵⁴ She observes that

the distribution of unreadable Hebrew texts is not random; they are texts which bear upon the Christian tradition. Add to these examples the variants in Isaiah about the Messiah, the variants in Deuteronomy 32 about the sons of God, and there is a case to answer. These are instances where traces remain. We can never know what has completely disappeared.⁵⁵

Barker shows how Jerome successfully pushed for the Christian adoption of this altered Hebrew canon. She also observes that "all the texts in the chosen canon would have had an original context, which presupposed a certain pattern of shared beliefs within which the text was set. The context was as much a part of the meaning as the words themselves. Set in a new context, the same text would soon acquire a new meaning."⁵⁶ The lost texts and lost context that Barker explores point to the world of the first temple, Lehi's world of 600 BC.

Russell's list of complaints continues:

53. Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 136, emphasis in the original.

54. Margaret Barker, "Text and Context," in *The Great High Priest* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 294–315.

55. Barker, "Text and Context," 309.

56. Barker, "Text and Context," 294.

One historical problem might be labeled “piety vs. the later apocalyptic world view. . . .” The eschewing of wealth in the Book of Mormon is more consistent with the apocalyptic world view that did not infiltrate Israel until after the Exile, rather than the earlier Deuteronomist view which regards riches as Yahweh’s blessing.

In response to Russell’s charges, *Sunstone* soon published a letter by Robert L. Charles, who noted, “Curiously, three of the Book of Mormon passages which are cited as exhibiting this anachronistic post-exilic apocalyptic view are passages from First Isaiah. (II Nephi 13:18–26; II Nephi 15:11; II Nephi 23:12). Therefore, the Old Testament is also inconsistent in its exhibiting post-exilic views in preexilic or exilic times.” Charles also observed that “the Book of Mormon speaks repeatedly of righteousness resulting in prosperity and the wealthy becoming corrupt. However, wealth itself is not condemned as evil.”⁵⁷ It’s the inequality and pride that cause the trouble in the Book of Mormon.

Here again, Margaret Barker’s work provides an alternative approach to the origins of apocalyptic. Her approach is based on writings that “would have been lost but for the accidents of archeological discovery.”⁵⁸ Her first book, *The Older Testament*, summarizes its case on the origins of apocalyptic this way:

The whole myth of the fallen angels which is already highly developed in the earliest pseudepigrapha and continues in the Christian literature is nowhere spelled out in the biblical writings. It was ancient. It was fundamental. But where did it originate? These strange elements of the non-canonical writings were indigenous to Israel, but we have failed to recognize them as such because a major channel of that tradition has been dammed and diverted, and because the non-canonical

57. Robert Charles, Readers’ Forum letter in *Sunstone*, January–March 1983, 2–3.

58. Margaret Barker, *The Older Testament: The Survival of Themes from the Ancient Royal Cult in Sectarian Judaism and Early Christianity* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005), 7.

writings have themselves picked up a quantity of débris along their way. It is not possible to follow them all to their source, but the similarities between the opacities of the Old Testament and the patterns of the non-canonical literature make a common origin likely. The apocalyptic elements of the Old Testament are not insertions, but fossils.⁵⁹

The Older Testament surveys key passages touching on these themes and reflects on the condition of many of those texts within the Hebrew Bible:

Texts dealing with the Holy Ones and the Holy One have significant elements in common: theophany, judgement, triumph for Yahweh, triumph for this anointed son, ascent to a throne in heaven, conflict with beasts and with angel princes caught up in the destinies of earthly kingdoms. Many of these texts are corrupted; much of their subject matter is that of the 'lost' tradition thought to underlie the apocalyptic texts. The textual corruption and the lost tradition are aspects of the same question.⁶⁰

In other words, the themes of key noncanonical texts and their corrupted state provide evidence that the content of the lost preexilic traditions correspond to what we call apocalyptic and evidence that this content was deliberately suppressed in the Hebrew canon.

Russell complains about the book of Revelation and the Book of Mormon:

The greatest apocalyptic document—the Book of Revelation—is exalted in the Book of Mormon. How Lehi's group knew of the book and its author seven centuries before it was written is a puzzle. Why they should revere a book which has baffled so many Christians with the benefit of historical hindsight is also bewildering. It is particularly problematic because the apocalyptic world view of the Book of Revelation and the Book

59. Barker, *Older Testament*, 281–82.

60. Barker, *Older Testament*, 119.

of Mormon is so contrary to the thought of preexilic Israel in several ways. For example, the Book of Revelation and the Book of Mormon believe in life after death. The Israelites before the Exile had no such concept. God rewards the righteous in this life. In preexilic Israelite thought there was also no cosmic struggle between good and bad gods—called God and Satan or the devil or whatever. Neither is there a hell for those who back the wrong god. There is no resurrection of the body in the Old Testament. Yet all of these elements of the apocalyptic Christian world view found in certain New Testament writings like the Book of Revelation are alleged to have been held by the original Nephites when they had just left an Israel which knew not such strange doctrines. (p. 23)

In the Book of Mormon, Nephi himself makes the connection to the future apocalyptic revelation of John explicit (1 Nephi 14:27). Barker, coming from the other direction, connects the book of Revelation back to a largely lost tradition that is well represented in the writings of Lehi's contemporary, Ezekiel:

The Book of Revelation has many similarities to the prophecies of Ezekiel, not because there was a conscious imitation of the earlier prophet, but because both books were the product of temple priests (Ezek. 1.3) and stood in the same tradition. There is the heavenly throne (4.1–8, cf. Ezek. 1.4–28 [cf. 1 Nephi 1:8; Jacob 4:14; Moroni 9:26]); the sealing of the faithful with the sign of the Lord (7.3, cf. Ezek. 9.4 [cf. Mosiah 5:15]); the enthroned Lamb as the Shepherd (7.17, cf. Ezek. 34.23–24 [cf. 1 Nephi 13:41; Alma 5]); the coals thrown onto the wicked city (8.5, cf. Ezek. 10.2 [cf. 1 Nephi 14:15, 17; 3 Nephi 8:8, 24; 9:3, 8, 9, 11]); eating the scroll (10.10, cf. Ezek. 3.1–3 [cf. 1 Nephi 1:11–12; 8:11–12]); measuring the temple (11.1 and 21.15, cf. Ezek. 40.3 [cf. 2 Nephi 5:16]); the seven angels of wrath (16.1–21, cf. Ezek. 9.1–11 [cf. 3 Nephi 9–10]); the harlot city (18.9, cf. Ezek. 26.17–18 [cf. 1 Nephi 14:17]); the riches of the wicked city (18.12–13, cf. Ezek. 27.1–36 [cf.

1 Nephi 13:5–8]); the fate of Gog (19.17–21 and 20.8, cf. Ezek. 39.1–20 [cf. 1 Nephi 11:34–36]); the vision of Jerusalem (21.9–27, cf. Ezek. 40.1–43.5 [cf. 1 Nephi 13:37; 3 Nephi 21:23]); the river flowing from the temple and the tree of life (22.1–2, cf. Ezek. 47.1–12 [cf. 1 Nephi 8; 11]).⁶¹

At every point at which Barker shows the relationship between Ezekiel and Revelation, I have noted a reference to the same themes in the Book of Mormon, mostly in 1 Nephi. The most conspicuous theme in Lehi’s vision in 1 Nephi 8—the tree of life—appears not as an isolated parallel but as one element amid a constellation of related themes. The same explanation for the relationship that Barker gives holds true—these writers all stand in the same temple tradition.

Notice Russell’s complaints about a belief in life after death in the Book of Mormon. In an essay published in 1992, I observed that the teachings of the afterlife in the Book of Mormon come through Alma and that Alma’s conversion comes from a near-death experience that matches modern accounts. I’m also skeptical of his claim that a belief in life after death was foreign to all of the ancient Israelites. The first Christian apologist, Justin Martyr, claimed that the Jews had removed a prophecy from Jeremiah that the Messiah would preach to the dead.⁶² This circumstance has several implications for Russell’s approach. Russell also ignores the implications of texts like 1 Enoch that did not become part of the Hebrew canon yet have deep roots in ancient Israel.

Back to Russell’s critique: “There is also a problem with what might be called ‘institutional anachronism.’ Specific problems lie in the references to ‘church’ and ‘synagogue’” (p. 23).

A church is simply an assembly of people, a “gathering.” A synagogue is simply a meeting place, whether a city gate or a building. Both words were part of Joseph Smith’s translation vocabulary. Both the social gatherings of like-thinking people and the physical structures serving their needs existed anciently. These are not serious problems.

61. Barker, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 67.

62. John A. Tvedtnes, “Jeremiah’s Prophecies of Jesus Christ,” in *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon, 2003), 99–101.

An essay by William Adams Jr. highlights recent research indicating that synagogues existed in Jerusalem before the exile.⁶³

But Russell continues: “On the other hand, the lack of awareness in the Book of Mormon of the priestly rituals of the Old Testament seems remarkable. There are references to ‘priests’ but we see no evidence that Nephite priests perform the Israelite priestly rituals such as the sacrifices” (p. 23). Contemporary Latter-day Saint scholars point to the imposing FARMS volume on King Benjamin’s discourse, particularly the essay by John W. Welch and Terrence L. Szink showing that the discourse combines the priestly rituals and sacrifices of the New Year, Day of Atonement, Sabbath, and Jubilee.⁶⁴ William J. Hamblin has also gathered evidence that Jacob’s discourse in 2 Nephi 9 occurs on the Day of Atonement. And John Welch and I have highlighted the priestly elements of 3 Nephi 8–28.⁶⁵ There is much more, leading me to conclude that Russell’s judgment regarding anachronistic terminology was premature.

“Another problem concerns the nature of scripture,” Russell asserts. “In the Book of Mormon there is much talk about plates and holy writings.” This is as it should be in an authentic text with roots in Jerusalem in 600 BC. Demonstrating that the Book of Mormon is quite at home in this regard are John Tvedtnes’s *The Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books* and William Hamblin’s “Sacred Writing on Metal Plates in the Ancient Mediterranean.”⁶⁶

Russell goes on with a revealing series of rhetorical questions: “And if the law is so important, why do we find almost nothing from the Pentateuch in the Book of Mormon? Where are all the dietary and ritual laws? Where is the mass of legislation on matters we would

63. William Adams Jr., “Synagogues in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/1 (2000): 5–13.

64. Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, “King Benjamin’s Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 147–223.

65. John W. Welch, “Seeing Third Nephi as the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 19/1 (2010): 36–55.

66. John A. Tvedtnes, *The Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books: “Out of Darkness unto Light”* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000); William J. Hamblin, “Sacred Writing on Metal Plates in the Ancient Mediterranean,” *FARMS Review* 19/1, (2007): 37–54.

consider trivial today?” (p. 23). John Welch has shown that many stories in the Book of Mormon demonstrate close attention to nuances of Hebrew legal practices.⁶⁷ I find the Book of Mormon’s implicit awareness of the law in a wide range of practical applications far more impressive than explicit block quoting of the law. Russell seems not to consider the stated purpose of the Book of Mormon. Why should an *abridgment* of the Nephite scriptural record designed to “convince Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ” contain ritual and dietary laws and masses of legislation that we would consider trivial today? Must the Book of Mormon be irrelevant and incomprehensible to seem authentic?

Russell continues his questioning: “And while Isaiah is quoted extensively in the Book of Mormon, why is there little or nothing from the other prophets who lived prior to 600 B.C. such as Amos, Hosea, Micah, Zephaniah, Habbakuk, and Jeremiah?” (p. 23). Isaiah is the single best source on the priesthood of the first temple. He is quoted by Nephi, who knew the first temple and who consecrated his younger brother Jacob as a temple priest. In 3 Nephi 23:2–3, the Lord endorses Isaiah and explains that “he spake as touching all things concerning my people. . . . And all things that he spake have been and shall be, even according to the words which he spake.” The Lord tells us to “search the prophets, for many there be that testify of these things” (v. 5). We note that the Book of Mormon quotes Zenock and Zenos, both northern kingdom priests. Rather than making arbitrary complaints about what we don’t have, it is more productive to explore what we do have in the Book of Mormon and to use that to outline as much as we can about the origin and content of the brass plates. John L. Sorenson has made the case that the brass plates reflect a northern

67. See, for instance, his paper “Theft and Robbery in the Book of Mormon and in Ancient Near Eastern Law” (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1985), and the chapter “Thieves and Robbers,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992). See also the section “Law in the Book of Mormon,” in John W. Welch and Gregory J. Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), charts 114 to 127. For an in-depth study of legal proceedings in the Book of Mormon and how they reflect ancient Near Eastern legal practices, see John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Press and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008).

kingdom source.⁶⁸ My own theory is that they were prepared during the reign of Jehoiakim (who had been installed as a puppet king by the Egyptians) for much the same reason that a later Egyptian king commissioned the Septuagint—that is, as an addition to the Egyptian royal library for purposes of both prestige and diplomacy. The shifting political situation, with Babylon deposing Jehoiakim and installing Zedekiah, interrupted the original plans for the brass plates.

Although Russell claims that “it appears that no canon of scripture existed yet in Israel in 600 B.C.” (p. 23), we have writings from preexilic prophets that did not have to be canonized in the way that later records were in order to be collected, copied, distributed, and treated as holy. The word *canon* does not appear in the Book of Mormon. Some of the Old Testament books seem to be liturgical texts tied to public festival observances. Jeremiah’s account describes the circulation of some of his own writings. Even those scholars who date the current form of the Pentateuch to the postexilic period say that the compilers and editors used older sources. For example, Richard E. Friedman bases his argument for the antiquity of original source material used in a postexilic redaction on the archaic style of the Hebrew.⁶⁹ Jeremiah 8:8 charges someone with making a lying Torah, an accusation softened in the King James translation. For the charge to make sense, there must also be a true Torah as well.

Russell says of the Old Testament writings that “once they were canonized, the process stopped. One does not tamper with a holy writing” (p. 23). Yet the state of the texts tells a story of ongoing tampering. Barker has made a good case that the present Masoretic Text was defined and edited in response to the rise of Christianity. She offers comparisons to the Greek Septuagint, the Dead Sea Scrolls Hebrew, and the Babylonian and Palestinian Targums. She provides quotations of variant texts and the charges and countercharges in early Christian

68. For comparisons of the Book of Mormon with the “E” source and northern kingdom traditions, see John L. Sorenson, “The Brass Plates and Biblical Scholarship,” in *Nephite Culture and Society* (Salt Lake City: New Sage Books, 1997), 31–39.

69. Richard E. Friedman, *The Hidden Book in the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper, 1998), appendixes 2 and 3.

writings, rabbinic writings, 1 Enoch, and Muslim writings. All of them witness the tampering, as does 1 Nephi 13.

The oldest existing Bible writing is on two silver scrolls found in Jerusalem that date to 600 BC and contain priestly blessings from the book of Numbers. That is, the oldest known Bible texts were written on metal in Jerusalem and quote from one of the books of Moses.⁷⁰ The brass plates of the Book of Mormon are in good company.

Russell further observes that “The problem of racism in the Book of Mormon is well documented. . . . The skin color racism of the Book of Mormon seems to be modern and American rather than Israelite” (p. 24). Exactly. The “skin color racism” comes from a modern, presentist way of reading the text, *conditioned by the nineteenth-century American views of race*, rather than from reading the text the way the ancient authors actually wrote it.⁷¹ Nibley has demonstrated the use of “black” and “white” in ancient Egyptian texts that directly parallels the use in the Book of Mormon as metaphors for moral behavior.⁷² For that matter, so does Lamentations 4:7–8. For a more rigorous approach to the topic, see John Tvedtnes’s detailed essay “The Charge of Racism in the Book of Mormon”⁷³ and Brant Gardner’s extended discussion in *Second Witness*.⁷⁴

“Another problem” for Russell “concerns the emerging monotheism of Israel in 600 B.C. . . . This monotheism is hard to square with the Book of Mormon’s identification of Christ with God and of Mary as the mother of God. It is hard to imagine an Israelite in 600 B.C. accepting such identification of humans with divinity” (p. 24). The appearance of Margaret Barker’s *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel’s Second God* in 1992 serendipitously dealt with these issues, and her 2005 paper on the Book of Mormon and preexilic Israel did so di-

70. See Hamblin, “Sacred Writing on Metal Plates”

71. See, for example, in *BYU Studies* 44/1 (2005) the book reviews by Stirling Adams for David M. Goldberg’s *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* and for Stephen R. Haynes’s *Noah’s Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery*.

72. Hugh Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Semester 1*, lecture 18, 286–87.

73. John A. Tvedtnes, “The Charge of ‘Racism’ in the Book of Mormon,” *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 183–97.

74. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 2:110–23.

rectly, showing the Book of Mormon to be astonishingly on the mark. For instance, she quoted the Dead Sea Scrolls version of Isaiah's Immanuel prophecy: "Ask a sign," said the prophet, "from the mother of the LORD your God. . . . Behold the Virgin shall conceive and bear a son and call his name Immanuel."⁷⁵

More recently Alyson S. Von Feldt reviewed William G. Dever's *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel*. Among her many fresh observations of the symbolism encoded on "an elaborate terra-cotta rectangular pillar from tenth-century BC Ta'anach"⁷⁶ is this:

I have suggested that the Ta'anach offering stand represents the throne of God. I have discussed its two Asherah icons and possible Yahweh symbol. I have considered that the offerings associated with this stand may have been invocation offerings rather than memorial offerings. I infer that the mencherubim wearing the Hathor wigs could be understood to be mortals who have received wisdom and been transformed into angels. So, taken all together and understood in light of the wisdom tradition, the Ta'anach stand may well be physical evidence of a theology of apotheosis. In the countryside of Israel in family shrines, ordinary men and perhaps women sought heavenly wisdom. They may have believed they could become holy ones, ascend to the throne of Yahweh, and receive cosmic knowledge. They may have understood that the power to bestow this experience was in the hands of Asherah, and their offerings of invocation were symbols of her life-giving essence. If we add a Book of Mormon text to the interpretation, we can see that the stand, like others of its kind, may also have encoded the incarnation of Yahweh. Because the Ta'anach stand is so productively interpreted by Ezekiel's

75. Barker, "Joseph Smith and Preexilic Religion," 76.

76. Alyson Skabelund Von Feldt, "Does God Have a Wife?," Review of *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel*, by William G. Dever, *FARMS Review* 19/1 (2007): 100.

vision, it is possible that apocalyptic has found new roots—in the ancient religion of the countryside.⁷⁷

Once again, the specific objections that Russell raises have been resolved in favor of the Book of Mormon. I'm impressed that so many separate issues raised by Russell find resolution in a single approach to preexilic Israel.

Also problematic for Russell is the notion of unforgivable sin appearing in 2 Nephi (p. 24). However, the closest thing to this concept that appears on the page that he cites is in 2 Nephi 31:14, which states that “after ye have repented of your sins, and witnessed unto the Father that ye are willing to keep my commandments, by the baptism of water, and have received the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost, and can speak . . . with the tongues of angels, and after this should deny me, it would have been better for you that ye had not known me.” It might help if Russell had considered 1 Enoch 38:2, where Enoch asks, “Where will be the dwelling place of the sinners, and where will be the resting place of those who have denied the Lord of Spirits?” The answer is “It would have been better for them, if they had not been born.”⁷⁸ According to the translators of my edition, the present form of the section from which the quotation comes can be dated to 40 BC. However, it is important to remember that the Enoch tradition associates itself with the first temple and that the mythos was known to Isaiah of Jerusalem.⁷⁹

Russell also complains about some anti-monarchy passages in the Book of Mormon because postexilic Jews yearned for the monarchy. “In II Nephi the Lord is quoted as saying, ‘There shall be no kings upon the land’” (p. 24). Brant Gardner has observed of 2 Nephi 10:11 that Jacob’s statement makes more sense if the comma in “‘There shall be no kings upon the land, who shall raise up unto the Gentiles’ is removed. The context is thus one of conquering Gentile kings and the

77. Von Feldt, “Does God Have a Wife?,” 109–10.

78. George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch: A New Translation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 51.

79. See, for example, Margaret Barker “The Enoch Tradition,” in *The Hidden Tradition of the Kingdom of God* (London: SPCK, 2007).

opposition that might rise up and defeat them. In other words, Jacob is prophesying that no non-Gentile kings will defeat the Gentiles, whose kings are the nursing fathers who will provide salvation to this colony of Israelites. Verses 12–13 confirm this context. In short, Jacob, in quoting this passage from Isaiah, is not saying that there will be no kings. He cannot, for his brother is the king. His point is that no other king will stand against the Nephites if they are righteous, for their true king is Yahweh, who has promised to preserve them.”⁸⁰ Russell also ignores Mosiah 29:13, where King Mosiah says, “If it were possible that you could have just men to be your kings, who would establish the laws of God, . . . if this could always be the case then it would be expedient that ye should always have kings to rule over you.”

Russell’s final complaint is that “it would be difficult to find a passage in preexilic Israelite writings that approves of” Lehi’s notion of opposition in all things in 2 Nephi 2. If it would be difficult, why bother to look? And if the concept were original to Lehi, does that make it more or less profound?

In his *Sunstone* reply, Robert Charles says that “Russell interprets ‘opposition in all things’ to mean opposing opinions on every issue. This interpretation supports his theory that ‘the ideas (of the Book of Mormon) seem to fit the 19th century America more than preexilic Israel.’ However, this interpretation is not supported by the phrase’s scriptural context. The examples Lehi gives to describe ‘opposition in all things’ are pairs of opposite abstract concepts or conditions of existence: for example, righteousness/wickedness, good/bad, life/death, corruption/incorruption, happiness/misery, sense/insensibility. What Israelite of any age would not agree that those opposites exist?”⁸¹ Demonstrating that Lehi’s notion of opposition was neither anomalous nor anachronistic, John Tvedtnes surveys several ancient Israelite texts that offer similar concepts.⁸²

Finally, note that John Sorenson’s 1984 response to Russell observed his arguments are “little more than bald assertions, or his

80. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 2:188.

81. Charles, letter in *Sunstone*, 3.

82. Tvedtnes, *Most Correct Book*, 121–23.

reasoning in support of them is truncated or obscure.”⁸³ This is particularly the case with Russell’s last few complaints.

Historicity and Community History

From the perspective of this writing, nearly three decades after Russell’s article, what lessons can we take from the subsequent events affecting the RLDS and LDS communities? Much has changed.

The most drastic social changes have come in the transformation of RLDS community life to the point of changing the organization’s name to the Community of Christ. Thomas Kuhn observed that the choice “between competing paradigms proves to be a choice between incompatible modes of community life.”⁸⁴ The former name proved to be incompatible with the new mode of community life. It has been clear that much of the change derived from the church leaders who in the early 1960s began to formally distance themselves from a belief in the historicity of the Book of Mormon, a shift that included the support of policies directed against the Foundation for Research on Ancient America (FRAA), an organization of RLDS historicists.⁸⁵ The nature of this shift in the RLDS religious community mirrors what Thomas Kuhn observed in scientific communities: “When it repudiates a paradigm, a scientific community simultaneously renounces, as a fit subject for professional scrutiny, most of the books and articles in which that paradigm had been embodied.”⁸⁶

In contrast, Latter-day Saint institutions have been undeterred in their commitment to the historicity of the Book of Mormon. Indeed, following the invitations of President Ezra Taft Benson to read and study the Book of Mormon, there has been a notable increase in the attention given to the book. While the FRAA faced resistance from RLDS leadership, Latter-day Saints have seen the rise and increas-

83. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Map*, 118.

84. Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 94.

85. See Louis Midgley, “The Radical Reformation of the Reorganization of the Restoration: Recent Changes in the RLDS Understanding of the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/2 (1993): 132–63.

86. Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 167.

ing success of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), from its beginnings in 1979 to President Gordon B. Hinckley's formal invitation for it to join Brigham Young University in 1997. More recently, the website of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has links to apologetic work by FARMS and FAIR (Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research) in addressing questions linked to the issue of historicity.

Regardless of one's current position on Book of Mormon historicity, it seems clear to me that the arguments that Russell offered in 1982 were not very good. Time has not been kind to them, either in the particulars given or in the general approach. In his "Before Adam" talk in 1980, Hugh Nibley commented that "it is sad to think how many of those telling points that turned some of our best students away from the gospel have turned out to be dead wrong!"⁸⁷

Why not just politely ignore such mistakes? After all, aren't there current controversies that deserve our attention? There are several reasons not to do so. Because Russell's arguments represent public statements linked to a group of policy makers that had a profound effect on the course taken by a religious community, his talk has been cited as influential by other scholars who have also written against the historicity of the Book of Mormon. Russell's comments were not just abstract philosophical musings disconnected from real-life consequences. They had a real impact in the institutional direction taken by the RLDS and in the lives of individuals whose decisions he affected. This effect on other people's lives was by choice and design. And remember that Russell himself called for honesty in these matters. Shouldn't he welcome new information, even if it calls for changes in his thinking?

In 1982 William Russell publicly called for Book of Mormon believers to abandon belief in its historicity. Was his lack of faith in historicity justified by the arguments he offered? I don't think so. Time and time again, his specific objections have been overturned.

87. Hugh W. Nibley, "Before Adam," accessed 1 November 2010, <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/transcripts/?id=73>. This essay is the edited version of an address given at Brigham Young University on 1 April 1980.

Where he could have seen puzzles waiting for solution, he chose to see counterinstances calling for immediate conclusion. Indeed, by ignoring Nibley and Sorenson and others, he missed many existing solutions and much that could have broadened his perspective in considering open questions. From my own perspective, I see his attempted counterinstances as now providing me with strong cause to believe in the historicity of the Book of Mormon.

From Seed to Tree via Nurturing

What lessons can we take from developments in debates about Book of Mormon historicity since Russell's talk in 1982? "But if ye neglect the tree, and take no thought for its nourishment, behold it will not get any root; and when the heat of the sun cometh and scorcheth it, because it hath no root it withers away, and ye pluck it up and cast it out" (Alma 32:38).

Russell's 1982 survey is notable for lacking any trace of nourishment for the seed of historicity. Its strict focus on the negative amounts to planting the seed on a rock where it cannot take root and then using a magnifying glass narrowly focused on particular issues to deliberately scorch it into oblivion. As a few others have done,⁸⁸ he makes some overtures towards finding something inspiring in a non-historical Book of Mormon. But he has produced nothing significant in this direction in the years since. Whereas in 1982 he suggested that we could treat the text as "an exciting, readable adventure story" (p. 26),⁸⁹ the highest degree of excitement in his recent talks comes in his insistence that Nephi should be condemned as a murderer and that the text should contain warning labels.⁹⁰

88. Mark D. Thomas's *Digging in Cumorah: Reclaiming Book of Mormon Narratives* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999) is the most visible attempt to find something inspiring in a fictional Book of Mormon. I agree with Alan Goff's assessment of the effort in *FARMS Review* 12/2 (2000): 51–82.

89. Russell is quoting Stanley B. Kimball, *Heber C. Kimball: Mormon Patriarch and Pioneer* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 16.

90. William D. Russell, "Let's Put Warning Labels on the Standard Works," *Sunstone*, July 2004, 26–30.

Under his modes of nurture, the seed has not responded well. Not surprisingly, he has cast it out. “Now, this is not because the seed was not good, neither is it because the fruit thereof would not be desirable; but it is because your ground is barren, and ye will not nourish the tree, therefore ye cannot have the fruit thereof” (Alma 32:39). In one community, the tree has been neglected by design and has consequently withered at the institutional level, if not among all members. In the Latter-day Saint community, the tree has been nourished by the hierarchy and protected from predation by a cadre of enthusiastic scholars outside the formal leadership. In the Latter-day Saint community, the tree has grown and become fruitful.

Making It Personal

What justified my own belief in the Book of Mormon before 1982? Less than a decade before Russell’s indictment of the Book of Mormon, I made my own personal decisions about the Book of Mormon with respect to its spiritual truth and historicity. In anticipation of my mission at age nineteen, I was reading the Book of Mormon through for the third time when I came upon this passage in Ether 12:39: “And then shall ye know that I have seen Jesus, and that he hath talked with me face to face, and that he told me in plain humility, even as a man telleth another in his own language, concerning these things.”

I was profoundly impressed that this event happened, almost as though I had glimpsed it. For me this meant that Jesus lived and had been resurrected and that Moroni had lived and that the record was real. The good environment that I had known throughout my life to that point had nurtured me, but this conviction became something inside of me, not derived from social nurturing. It went beyond the kinds of personal experience with God that I had enjoyed, which do not demand ties peculiar to any religious community. My sense of the reality of the stories in the Book of Mormon and about it binds me to the community. One thing a testimony should do is provide a context for valuing and exploring questions that come up. Mine has done so. Nothing in my spiritual experience told me anything about whether the translation was tight or loose, or where Zarahemla or Cumorah was, or what the

scale of the events was, or exactly who the Lamanites were. Those open questions could be approached separately, and my preconceptions were subject to change, based on new light and knowledge.

Before my mission, the only Latter-day Saint apologetic for the Book of Mormon that I had encountered amounted to things like the old *Christ in America* film and Jack H. West's 1967 cartoon book, *The Trial of the Stick of Joseph*. Frankly, they aren't that good and haven't held up under scrutiny well. But the truth is that those things never did excite my thinking and had nothing whatsoever to do with my testimony. In 1972 I read and enjoyed John W. Welch's *New Era* essay on chiasmus in the Book of Mormon.⁹¹ Even that, though, was secondary to my personal witness. Chiasmus did not make me believe, nor did it even serve to *let me believe*. Rather, I found it enlightening and mind expanding in *consequence* of my belief. The next really transforming scholarship that entered into my personal faith arrived when a member in England loaned me a copy of Hugh Nibley's 1957 priesthood manual, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*.

Reading Nibley taught me how much more could be seen in a text that I thought I knew well. The overall lesson was that answers were to be found not by deciding to merely face problems, nor to avoid them, but by constantly expanding my reading context and improving my ability to perceive as I read. After my mission, my interest in Nibley's scholarship eventually led me to Sorenson's "The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Codex,"⁹² which was the first research on the New World side that touched me. After educating myself further, and participating in FARMS almost from the beginning, I also made an effort to keep up on arguments against Book of Mormon historicity. While I've run across a few things I found puzzling for a time, and a few things I find puzzling still, I've found nothing to rival or challenge my own belief. My understanding has changed on many issues, but I experience the changes as expansion and growth rather than as the

91. John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," *New Era*, February 1972, 6–11.

92. John L. Sorenson, "The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Codex," *Newsletter and Proceedings, Society for Early Historic Archaeology* 139 (1976): 1–9.

destruction of something static and brittle. Indeed, most of the essays that I have published came about because I had come upon new information and insights that resolved my existing questions. For example, part of the reason for my essay on near-death experience research and the Book of Mormon came about because I had questions about the similarity of the stories of Paul and of Alma's conversion.⁹³ But rather than treat my questions as counterinstances, I've treated them as puzzles awaiting solution. And over time many solutions have come.

I've learned by experience that Jesus spoke truth when he said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matthew 7:7). Nowhere does he say, "Blessed are they who sit like lumps, uncritically taking it all for granted, for they shall be spoon-fed, and never caught off guard, and never, ever disappointed by anyone."

All I had to do was keep my eyes open, reexamine my assumptions now and then, and give things time. When I had questions, it never occurred to me to ask a church leader or even my own parents. Those who had wisdom with respect to scholarly issues had the best books. Hence, when I had questions beyond the basic gospel teachings, I had no illusions about whom I should ask. I never expected to get specialized academic questions answered by ecclesiastical authorities. I went directly to the bookshelves at home and then to bookstores and libraries on my own.

In a more recent publication, Russell has offered this comment:

We glory in Moroni's promise at the end of the Book of Mormon. Yet do we really think we can accept or reject a book as "true" or "false" based on a prayer in the form of a question to God? As the late Roy Cheville, longtime religion professor, often asked students at Graceland College, "Does God work like that?" If we answered yes, he would then suggest that our God is "too small." Shouldn't we instead evaluate the Book of Mormon based on our reading of it and our judgment as to

93. Kevin Christensen "'Nigh Unto Death': NDE Research and the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/1 (1993): 1–20.

whether it teaches sound moral principles? In fact, isn't that what we *really* do, despite Moroni's promise?⁹⁴

Moroni's promise applies to those who have read the Book of Mormon and other scriptures and who go on to "ponder it in your hearts" (Moroni 10:3). Alma 32, part of the text we ought to read and ponder, encourages us to experiment upon the word, to plant it in our hearts, and nurture it. This is not "despite Moroni's promise" but integral to it.

When B. H. Roberts presented his study of Book of Mormon difficulties to the First Presidency, he reported being disappointed that all the Brethren did to respond at the time was to bear their testimonies. As frustrated as Roberts was, subsequent developments have shown that the Brethren were right. They knew that they didn't have answers to Roberts's questions at that time, but because of their testimonies of the truth of the Book of Mormon they were willing to give things time. By 1985 John Welch could write a paper that comprehensively answers the questions that Roberts raised.⁹⁵ As it was with Roberts's questions in 1922, so it has been with Russell's from 1982. Those who have nurtured the seed have seen impressive growth. Those who put the seed on poor ground, or who cast it out by doubt and unbelief, or for fear of those pointing and mocking from the great and spacious consensus of a particular moment, have missed out on the harvest.

Cafeteria or Covenant?

Some who have been shaken in their faith by information that runs counter to their expectations have suggested a "cafeteria" approach to help them stay in the Latter-day Saint community. To an extent, I agree that this can be helpful for some. Alma talks about finding a particle of belief, some portion of his words to start with, even if you can no more than desire to believe. But the kind of nurturing people carry out is at least as important as what they start with. A bad seed won't grow, nor will a good seed bear fruit without nurturing.

94. Russell, "Warning Labels on the Standard Works," 29, emphasis in original.

95. John W. Welch, "Finding Answers to B. H. Roberts's Questions and 'An Unparallel,'" FARMS Paper, 1985.

Russell's 1982 article illustrates to me the dangers of a well-meaning cafeteria approach that fails to properly nurture the seed. The cafeteria can be a place to try things out, to talk to other patrons, to ask questions, to share tips. But the pick-and-choose attitude that accepts only what seems reasonable and desirable in the here and now inevitably conflicts with the demands that Jesus makes upon his disciples to offer up the sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit. The sacrifice of a broken heart involves putting at risk what we desire. The sacrifice of a contrite spirit involves putting at risk what we think, what seems reasonable. These two sacrifices correspond directly to the figures of Fear and Desire that everywhere stand as temple guardians in the ancient world. Fear is what we think. Desire is what we want. They represent the temptations of Buddha, the illusions of this world. I once studied over seventy reasons that biblical peoples gave to justify the rejection of biblical prophets. Eventually, I realized that they all boil down to people saying, "It's not what I want. It's not what I think." That is, it is not what I desire and not what I fear. If we refuse to even risk what we think and what we desire, via the experiment and nurture process, we cannot pass by our own limits and illusions and thereby enter the Real.

Some call for reading the Book of Mormon as a pious fiction. But the thing that gives fiction and myth power is correspondence with the Real. The eminent mythologist Joseph Campbell talks about how myth tells us how to live a human life.⁹⁶ However fantastic in the telling, the power in the stories comes because they point to something real. Even the Harry Potter stories draw power from a reality that they point towards. I once read an interview with J. K. Rowling in which she stated that she'd been reluctant to talk about her personal beliefs because doing so would give away the ending of the series. In the end, her fantastic fiction showed itself to be one of those texts that are the typifying of Christ.

In a cafeteria one picks and chooses according to taste. But there may be a conflict between our tastes and our real long-term nutritional needs. If the discovery of the Real comes to one of us, so also comes

96. Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988) 31.

recognition that what is Real is binding. We reach a point where we cannot progress just by picking and choosing according to human fear and desire. We recognize the limits of our reason and the snares of our desires. When we find ourselves bound to even a particle of the Real, we soon come to the issue of covenant.

Physicist and religion professor Ian G. Barbour explains that

participation in a religious tradition also demands a more total *personal involvement* than occurs in science. Religious questions are of ultimate concern, since the meaning of one's existence is at stake. Religion asks about the final objects of a person's devotion and loyalty, for which he will sacrifice other interests if necessary. Too detached an attitude may cut a person off from the very kinds of experience which are religiously most significant. Reorientation and reconciliation are transformations of life-pattern affecting all aspects of personality, not intellect alone. Religious writings use the language of actors, not the language of spectators. Religious commitment, then, is a self-involving personal response, a serious decision implicating one's whole life, a willingness to act and suffer for what one believes in.⁹⁷

Reorientation is a change in one's thinking, a change that comes only after one has offered up the sacrifice of a contrite spirit. Reconciliation is a change in one's feeling, a change that comes only after one has offered up the sacrifice of a broken heart. The changes in the intellectual landscape surrounding Book of Mormon historicity have come through and to those who feel bound to the reality of its claims. This belief does not mean that we ignore questions. It means that we have chosen to treat them as puzzles rather than as counterinstances to our belief system. In my personal experience, it has been my own awareness of open questions that has allowed me to recognize the significance of new information that has come my way. The difference, then, is not in being honest enough to face problems. The difference is in having a broader perspective against which to assess problems, and faith enough to give them the time and effort they require to bring them to resolution.

97. Ian G. Barbour, "Paradigms in Religion," in *Myths, Models, and Paradigms: A Comparative Study in Science and Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 135–36.