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THE WORDS OF GAD THE SEER: AN APPARENTLY ANCIENT TEXT WITH INTRIGUING ORIGINS AND CONTENT

Jeff Lindsay

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Meir Bar-Ilan, a prominent Jewish scholar at Israel's Meir Bar-Ilan University, named after his grandfather,¹ has published a translation of an ancient Hebrew manuscript found in India purporting to contain the words of Gad the Seer. Bar-Ilan's *Words of Gad the Seer*,

1. His grandfather is described in Wikipedia, s.v. "Meir Bar-Ilan," last modified February 9, 2022, 09:11, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meir_Bar-Ilan.

his translation of the document called “The Words of Gad the Seer,”² is a work that might be of interest to many members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Bar-Ilan believes the Hebrew document contains an authentic ancient text, but not one dating to the days of Gad the Seer as mentioned in the Old Testament. Rather, he believes it was composed around 2,000 years ago.

Gad was a prophet living at the time of David who seemed to have special status, based on 2 Samuel 24:11, which speaks of “Gad, David’s seer.” But like many prophets, Gad was not afraid to speak unpleasant things to his king (e.g., see 2 Samuel 12:1–13). One of the very few mentions of Gad occurs in 1 Chronicles 29:29, where we read that the acts of David the king were written “in the book of Gad the seer.” I have occasionally cited that verse in discussing the scriptures with others who accept the Bible to illustrate that the Bible we have might not contain all the scripture that has been written in the past. A common rejoinder is, “There may have been such a book, but if God didn’t preserve it for us in the Bible, it’s not scripture.” It would seem that there can be no such thing as lost scripture with that definition, and if it can’t be lost, it presumably can’t be found. In reply, I have asked others what they would do if a book that ancient Jews or Christians regarded and preserved as Biblical scripture became lost and then was found again?

My theoretical question perhaps became a little less theoretical with the fairly recent discovery, translation, and publication in 2016 of a long-lost manuscript that might have connections to the ancient lost book of Gad the Seer. The Hebrew document that Bar-Ilan translated has been through many human hands and may have some of the corruption common to non-canonical works such as the Apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, but Bar-Ilan, the scholar who has explored this text in the most detail and provided an important translation into English, believes it has ancient roots and is worthy of our attention.

The story of this unusual text may be relevant to our own and much more miraculous story of the finding, translation, and publication of the ancient books of scripture from ancient Hebrews and Christians that we have in the Book of Mormon. In addition to its fascinating content, an issue of particular interest is found in one of the reasons for Bar-Ilan’s

2. I will refer to the Hebrew document as “The Words of Gad the Seer” while the nearly identical title for the published translation will be in italics: *Words of Gad the Seer*.

acceptance of the Hebrew text as an ancient document, namely, its blatant “plagiarism” of the Bible.

Bar-Ilan in a peer-reviewed article for the *Journal of Biblical Literature* considers the arguments made for a medieval origin of “The Words of Gad the Seer” and refutes them in detail, and then argues the case for a more ancient origin in late antiquity. His first argument will be of interest to Book of Mormon students:

The Words of Gad the Seer incorporate three chapters from the Bible as if they were part of the whole work. Chapter 10 here is Psalm 145, chapter 11 is no other than Psalm 144, and chapter 7 is a kind of compilation of 2 Sam 24:1–21 with 1 Chr 21:1–30, a chapter that deals with the deeds of Gad the Seer. As will be demonstrated later, the Biblical text in Gad’s book is slightly different from the masoretic text, with some ‘minor’ changes that might be regarded as scribal errata, though others are extremely important. In any case, **this phenomenon of inserting whole chapters from the Bible into one’s treatise is known only from the Bible itself.** For example, David’s song in 2 Sam 22:2–51 appears as well in Psalm 18:2–50, not to speak, of course, of other parallels in Biblical literature. It does not matter where the ‘original’ position of this chapter was. Only one who lived in the ‘days of the Bible’, or thought so of himself, could have made such a plagiarism including a Biblical text in his own work. [*emphasis mine*]³

Now that’s fascinating. This is not some unschooled Latter-day Saint apologist desperately trying to argue that heavy biblical plagiarism is not a reason to reject the antiquity of an allegedly ancient document like the Book of Mormon. It is a prominent scholar of Hebrew literature writing in a respected peer-reviewed journal on biblical literature, explaining that the extensive “plagiarism” of biblical material in a disputed work is a characteristic of ancient literature that helps rule out a relatively modern origin for the text. In light of Bar-Ilan’s argument, the things Nephi and other Book of Mormon writers do with other biblical texts, such as quoting entire chapters of Isaiah or combining extensive passages of

3. Meir Bar-Ilan, “The Date of The Words of Gad the Seer,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109, no. 3 (1990): 477–93, available at <https://faculty.biu.ac.il/~barilm/articles/publications/publications0025.html>.

scripture from different books, widely condemned as blatant plagiarism by our critics, might actually be indicators of antiquity, not modernity.⁴

The Story Behind “The Words of Gad the Seer”

The coming forth of the document “The Words of Gad the Seer” is a story that involves the scattering of Israel and a Jewish colony in India and may raise interesting issues about ancient Jews not only in India but also in Yemen with possible relevance to Lehi’s Trail. This story also touches upon themes of lost and restored ancient scripture, apocalyptic literature like the Book of Enoch and our own Book of Moses, writing on metal plates, and other Latter-day Saint themes such as free agency, three main categories of outcomes in final judgment, seeing God, and even Alma’s discourse on the word as a seed in Alma 32.

There may be much food for thought as we contemplate the story behind the text and the translation published in Bar-Ilan’s very short book, *Words of Gad the Seer*. Professor Bar-Ilan has been a professor for decades at Bar-Ilan University, often abbreviated as BIU, where he teaches in both the Talmud and Jewish History departments and has an interesting list of publications,⁵ a number of which are related to “The Words of Gad the Seer.”

Unfortunately, Bar-Ilan’s English volume is a bare-bones paperback just 23 pages in length that provides the 5000+ words of the pseudepigraphal text without any explanation, background, or footnotes. With both the printed book and the Kindle edition, one can’t even determine who published it. There is a 390-page scholarly edition in Hebrew from Bar-Ilan with extensive commentary and analysis of the Hebrew text on the source document.⁶ While that tome has not been

4. On the compiling and reworking of different passages of the Old Testament, see Matthew L. Bowen, “Onomastic Wordplay on Joseph and Benjamin and Gezera Shawa in the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 18 (2016): 255–73, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/onomastic-wordplay-on-joseph-and-benjamin-and-gezera-shawa-in-the-book-of-mormon/>.

5. “Prof. Meir Bar-Ilan: Publications,” Faculty, Bar-Ilan University, <https://faculty.biu.ac.il/~barilm/english/publications.html>.

6. Meir Bar-Ilan, דברי גד החוזה (*The Words of Gad the Seer*) (Rehovot, Israel: Meir Bar-Ilan, 2015), 390 pages. A review of the Hebrew volume is provided by Rabbi Dr. Simcha Rosenberg, “Book Review: The Words of Gad the Seer,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (2017): 59–60, <https://jbqnew.jewishbible.org/uncategorized/book-review-words-gad-seer/> and https://jbqnew.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/451/jbq_451_rosenbergbookreviewGAD.pdf.

translated into English, related information can be found in a series of articles on Bar-Ilan's website. I look forward to Latter-day Saint Hebrew speakers providing future reviews of the more extension Hebrew edition.

A little more information and a slightly different translation is available in Christian Israel's independently published 2020 version, *The Words of Gad the Seer: Bible Cross-Reference Edition*, available in paperback only.⁷ The translation is slightly different than Bar-Ilan's.

The largest English volume available, as far as I know, with both Kindle and paperback editions, is Ken Johnson's *The Ancient Book of Gad the Seer: Referenced in 1 Chronicles 29:29 and alluded to in 1 Corinthians 12:12 and Galatians 4:26*.⁸ This has extensive but often questionable commentary from the author, who appears to be an evangelical seeking to strongly guide the reader toward his preferred readings, stressing favorite topics such as Messianic themes, some of which may be valid. For example, he sees the condemnation of Edom as a condemnation of Rome, even inserting "[Rome]" after Edom in the text and stating in brackets that the fall of Edom by a "terrible nation" refers to the destruction of the Byzantium Empire by the Ottoman Empire. The insertion of altered text in brackets to push his pet themes is distracting. Fortunately, Johnson has provided his translation without all the commentary and with fewer bracketed insertions in a free online file.⁹

The translations from Christian Israel and Ken Johnson may have been influenced by Bar-Ilan's earlier work but differ in many verses, so there was certainly some independent effort in these works. Johnson's translation, though, often seems remarkably close to Bar-Ilan's. For example, the wording of the last four verses of Chapter 2, beginning with Bar-Ilan's "At the end of days Michael the great prince shall stand up in war like a whirlwind against Samel the prince of the world to put him under his feet," are identical in Johnson except for changing "the world" to "this world" and spelling Samel with the more common transliteration of Samael. While Christian Israel's work offers some helpful cross-references to various verses in the Bible, the translation has some obvious problems such as typographical errors. For example, in the

7. Christian Israel, *The Words of Gad the Seer: Bible Cross-Reference Edition* (self-published, 2022).

8. Ken Johnson, *The Ancient Book of Gad the Seer: Referenced in 1 Chronicles 29:29 and alluded to in 1 Corinthians 12:12 and Galatians 4:26* (self-published, 2016).

9. The PDF for Johnson's commentary-free version of *Ancient Book of Gad* is at <https://pdf4pro.com/amp/view/ancient-book-of-gad-the-seer-biblefacts-org-1b16d1.html>.

verse about Michael mentioned above, Israel's text tells us that Michael "shall up in war," missing the verb "stand." The same verse speaks of the "breathe of the Lord" when "breath" is meant.

The translation I trust the most, of course, is that of Professor Bar-Ilan. All subsequent quotes from "The Words of Gad the Seer" will be from Bar-Ilan's translation.

First Mention: The Chronicles of the Jews of Cochin

Many discoveries are behind the story of translation of "The Words of Gad the Seer." An overview is provided on the Barnes and Noble website, which I believe is just a translation from the Hebrew description of Bar-Ilan's 2015 scholarly edition of *Words of Gad the Seer*:

Gad is a prophet most associated with King David in the Holy Bible. This book is the outcome of a prolonged study of a manuscript that was found serendipitously 34 years ago. Actually, this was a re-discovery of a text that for some reason had escaped the eyes of many. It is a story of the survival of Jews remote in place and time, and of their books, visions, angels and divine voices, combined with their belief in God and his covenant with King David and Israel. There is no other book that resembles this one.

A book by the name Words of Gad the Seer is mentioned at the end of I Chronicles, presumably one of the sources of the history of King David. Ever since the book was considered lost and it is mentioned nowhere. In the 18th century Jews from Cochin said that their ancestors have had several apocryphal books, including Words of Gad the Seer, and this statement was published first by Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1789) and translated [into modern Hebrew] by Naphtali H. Wesseley who publicized these fantastic claims (1790). Since none saw the book, it was probably considered to be an oriental legend.¹⁰

The first mention of the existence of "The Words of Gad the Seer" came from a chronicle of the Jews of Cochin, India (Kerala State on the Malabar Coast of southwest India), that was published in several languages. Bar-Ilan, in a paper for the *Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha*, gives details on the various people who discussed the *Chronicle of the Jews in Cochin* and then notes that:

10. "Words of Gad the Seer," Barnes and Noble, <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/words-of-gad-the-seer-meir-bar-ilan-phd/1125415137>.

The chronicle says:

These exiled people brought with them (to Yemen) a book of Moses' Torah, book of Joshua, book of Ruth, book of Judges, first and second books of Samuel, books of: 1 Kings, Song of Songs of Solomon, Songs of Hallel — David, Assaf, Heiman and the sons of Korah, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes of Solomon, as well as his Riddles, prophecies of Gad, Nathan, Shemaiah and Ahijah, age-old Job, Jonah, and a book of Isaiah, etc.

These books were preserved under the authority of the patriarch of the Jews, 'Shimon Rabban from the tribe of Ephraim, who was the first (patriarch) in the period of Yemen captivity who attempted to preserve the books'. The Chronicle of the Jews of Cochin continues with a description of the history of those books which, according to it, were confiscated by the king, and only after a fast and prayers were the books returned to the Jews — 10 years later. For our purposes it should be added that some 500 years later the Jews in Yemen were exiled by King Prozom.

Since the exiled people had known of the Jews in Poona and Gujarat in India, they preferred to go there, and they and their descendants lived there for some 600 or 700 years. Almost all of those Jews were forced to convert, and less than 72 families moved from Poona and Gujarat to Malabar. Those who moved were welcomed by the governor, Cherman Perumal, who gave them privileges to encourage them to stay there, as is written on copper plates, and there in Cochin, the copper plates have remained until this day. ... We can determine that this "Chronicle of the Jews of Cochin" is from the first half of the 18th century.¹¹

In the 1890s, a Hebrew manuscript containing "The Words of Gad the Seer" was noticed by Solomon Schechter in the Cambridge Library among a collection of Hebrew documents that were obtained by Claudius Buchanan.¹² Buchanan purchased the document from the "Black Jews"

11. Meir Bar-Ilan, "The Discovery of The Words of Gad The Seer," *Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha* 11 (1993): 95–107, available at <https://faculty.biu.ac.il/%7Ebarilm/articles/publications/publications0048.html>.

12. Solomon Schechter, "Notes on Hebrew MSS. in the University Library at Cambridge. VI," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 6, no. 1 (October 1893): 136–45, here

at Cochin in the state of Kerala on the Malabar Coast of India. There are two groups of Jews there, an ancient colony that has married with local peoples enough that they have the darker appearance of the local Indian population and a more recent group, the “White Jews,” that emigrated from Europe and generally avoided intermarriage.¹³ Buchanan described the Jews there and their records in his 1811 book, *Christian Researches in Asia*.¹⁴ As noted below, Schechter’s brief mention did little to motivate further investigation into the overlooked book. Over a century later, it was the work of Meir Bar-Ilan that began making this ancient work accessible to the world.

Bar-Ilan describes the short Hebrew book he translated and mentions the additional commentary:

The [Words of Gad the Seer] is 5227 words in length written in a pseudo-Biblical Hebrew intended to be a book written by the Seer of King David in the 10th century B.C.E. The text is an anthology and varies in style and character: 3 chapters are apocalyptic in nature, 2 chapters are a “mere” copy of Ps 145 and 144 (with different superscriptions and all sorts of different readings, some of them highly important); one chapter is a harmonization of 1 Sam 24 with 1 Chr 21 (that resembles ancient harmonizations of texts as found in the Samaritan Pentateuch and Qumran alike). One chapter is a kind of addendum to 2 Sam 13 (a “feminine story”), one chapter is a sermon, one chapter is a folk story, and there are more blessings, liturgies and other issues. Literary genre, scribalism and scribes’ technique are described and analyzed. The book comes with an index and a vast bibliography. The appearance of the text will add a great deal to our understanding of Jewish History and religion.

Date: The text assumed to be written either in the Land of Israel at the end of the first century or in the Middle Ages Europe.¹⁵

at 140, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1450113>.

13. Samyuktha Nair, “Did You Know About The Black Jews & White Jews in India’s Kerala?,” *ED Youth Blog*, *ED Times*, April 11, 2022, <https://edtimes.in/did-you-know-about-the-black-jews-white-jews-in-indias-kerala/>.

14. Claudius Buchanan, *Christian Researches in Asia* (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1811), 164–201, see particularly 176–85, <https://archive.org/details/christianresea01horngoog/page/n176/mode/2up>.

15. “Words of Gad the Seer,” Barnes and Noble.

Similar information on the discovery of the Hebrew manuscript is also provided in the introduction in Johnson's book.¹⁶

Connections to Explore

There is much more to the story as Bar-Ilan explores the various efforts to publish information about "The Words of Gad the Seer." While the story would seem to be of interest to many people, it's puzzling how poorly known this text is. Bar-Ilan offers a reason why this has occurred:

This intriguing story of the lost books at Cochin is near its end. It is hardly credible that books that were mentioned in three languages, and especially in so many Hebrew editions were later overlooked. The only possible reason for that, I assume, is that the fascinating stories emerging from Cochin were considered to be legendary in character, such as any modern scholar should ignore. When one of [these] 'legends' became true [discovery of the Hebrew manuscript with "The Words of Gad the Seer"], its source was already forgotten and the whole issue was misunderstood and misjudged. However, in future studies I hope to demonstrate the significance of The Words of Gad the Seer, its date, its geographical source, and much more.¹⁷

As we see in the accounts of the background story, "The Words of Gad the Seer" may have roots in scriptures brought by ancient Jews who fled to Yemen. Perhaps this happened near the time when the Ten Tribes were scattered, with some from the Ten Tribes seeking new homelands. Ancient Jewish colonies in Yemen are an important aspect of the diaspora.¹⁸ Warren Aston has suggested that a Jewish colony in the area of Nahom/Nehem in Yemen may have assisted in providing a proper Hebrew burial for Ishmael.¹⁹ Jewish burials in Yemen are attested no later than 300 BC, and since we know of later Jewish presence

16. Johnson, *Ancient Book of Gad*, 8–9.

17. Bar-Ilan, "Discovery."

18. See "Jews of Yemen — History — When Did the Jews Arrive in Yemen?," "Docuwebs," WysInfo, <https://wysinfo.com/the-jews-of-yemen-history-when-did-jews-settle-in-yemen/>; and Wikipedia, s.v. "Yemenite Jews," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yemenite_Jews#Early_history.

19. See discussion in Jeff Lindsay, "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Map: Part 1 of 2," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 19 (2016): 153–239, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/joseph-and-the-amazing-technicolor-dream-map-part-1-of-2/>.

in the Nihm tribal area, it is possible that Jews could have been there earlier and could have been able to assist in proper burials.²⁰ Aston also mentions Yemeni Jewish traditions of seven ancient Jewish migrations into Yemen. Further, there is evidence that Jewish traders and merchants were interacting with Yemen before Lehi's era.²¹ It would be fascinating to know what versions of a book from Gad the Seer might have been brought to Yemen anciently, perhaps by Jews who established colonies in Yemen and perhaps even by Lehi on his brass plates.

One aspect of the story of ancient texts among the Jews at Cochin, India, is the issue of writing on metal plates. The Jews at Cochin were said to have kept their ancient history on copper or brass plates, consistent with traditions of using copper plates in India for important legal documents going back at least to the third century BC.²² A hint about scriptures written on metal comes from one source who visited the Cochin colony several times early in the 1700s, Captain Alexander

20. See Warren P. Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia: The Old World Setting of the Book of Mormon* (self-published, 2015). See particularly the sections "Ishmael's Death," "Nahom Today," and "Were the Jews Once Part of the Tribe?" in Part 3.

21. Ibid. See the section "Religion in Arabia" in Part 1.

22. See Krishnendu Ray, "Material Melieu of a Western Indian Vaisnava Temple-Cluster: Gleanings From Sanjeli Copper Plates (AD 499–515 AD)," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 64 (2003): 254–60, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/44145467>; Richard Salomon, "New Inscriptional Evidence for the History of the Aulikaras of Mandasor," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 32, no. 1 (January 1989): 1–36, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24654606>; Sanjukta Datta, "Issuance, Engravers, and Omissions," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 78 (2017): 97–103, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26906073>; Dev Kumar Jhanjh, "Professor V.K. Thakur Memorial Prize Paper: Akṣaśālika, Akṣaśālin and Suvarṇakāra as the Engravers of Copper Plate Charters of Odisha (C. 7th–11th Centuries CE)," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 78 (2017): 117–26, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26906076>; Dániel Balogh, "Raṇasiṃha Revisited: A New Copper-plate Inscription of the Candrāvati Paramāra Dynasty," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 22, no. 1, series 3, Medieval India and the Paramara Dynasty (January 2012): 93–106, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41490376>; and H.S. Thosar, "The Abhiras in Indian History," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 51 (1990): 56–65, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44148188>. For a general overview, see Wikipedia, s.v. "Indian Copper Plate Inscriptions," last modified July 28, 2022, 4:06, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_copper_plate_inscriptions. Images of the Velvikudi copper plates, a set of 10 copper plates joined in a booklet with a metal ring, can be viewed at Wikipedia, s.v. "Velvikudi Inscription," last modified November 15, 2022, 17:17, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Velvikudi_inscription.

Hamilton²³ (a British sailor, not the US statesman). In his *A New Account of the East Indies*, he stated that they had kept their history recorded on copper plates stored in a synagogue.²⁴ He reports:

They [the Jews in Cochin, India] have a Synagogue at Couchin, not far from the King's Palace, about two Miles from the City, in which are carefully kept their Records, engraven in Copper-plates in Hebrew characters; and when any of the Characters decay, they are new cut, so that they can shew their own History from the Reign of Nebuchadnezzar to this present Time ...

They declare themselves to be of the Tribe of Manasseh.²⁵

I have previously discussed Hamilton's statement and its relationship to several Book of Mormon issues on the *Mormanity* blog (now *Arise from the Dust*), also noting the improbability of Joseph Smith being aware of the metal plates of the Jews at Cochin.²⁶

Many decades after Hamilton's various visits to Cochin, Claudius Buchanan visited the Jews there and discussed them and their records in his 1811 book, *Christian Researches in Asia*.²⁷ He describes the Jews there but he makes no mention of Jewish records on plates stored in a synagogue. Buchanan does describe ancient "tablets of brass" created by a Syrian Christian group in Malabar, India, which were deposited in the Fort of Cochin and "on which were engraved rights of nobility, and other privileges granted by a Prince of a former age."²⁸ While these were long thought to be lost, they were found and put in possession of

23. See Wikipedia, s.v. "Alexander Hamilton (sailor)," last modified June 28, 2022, 17:01, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Hamilton_\(sailor\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Hamilton_(sailor)).

24. Alexander Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies, Giving an exact and copious Description of the Situation, Product, Manufactures, Laws, Customs, Religion, Trade, &c. of all the Countries and Islands, which lie between the Cape of Good Hope, and the Island of Japon* [. . .] (London: 1744), 1:323–24, available at https://www.google.com/books/edition/A_New_Account_of_the_East_Indies/-jNagGDT-PsC?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PA323&printsec=frontcover.

25. Hamilton, *A New Account*, 1:324.

26. Jeff Lindsay, "The Jewish Copper Plates of Cochin, India and a Hint of an Ancient Jewish Tradition of Writing on Metal Plates," *Arise from the Dust* (blog), December 20, 2020, <https://www.arisefromthedust.com/the-jewish-copper-plates-of-cochin/>.

27. Buchanan, *Researches in Asia*, 176–85.

28. *Ibid.*, 113.

a British officer, Lieutenant Colonel Macaulay, who gave the following description:

The Christian Tablets are six in number. They are composed of a mixed metal. The engraving on the largest plate is thirteen inches long, by about four broad. They are closely written, four of them on both sides of the plate, making in all eleven pages.²⁹

He also quotes from the journal of Lord William Bentinek, who was governor of Madras and visited Cochin from 1806 to 1808:

On my inquiry into the antiquity of the White Jews, they first delivered to me a narrative, in the Hebrew Language, of their arrival in India, which has been handed down to them from their fathers; and then exhibited their ancient brass Plate, containing their charter and freedom of residence, given by a king of Malabar.³⁰

Bentinek does not describe the medium used for the Hebrew record, but it presumably was not on metal plates, or he would have mentioned that. The ancient brass plate mentioned is the royal charter granted to the Jews of Cochin by a king of Kerala, India, a record engraved on copper plates.³¹ The set of three plates associated with the charter have a traditional date of AD 379 but are more likely to date to around AD 1000.

But Claudius Buchanan did more than merely mention the brass plate of the Cochin Jews. He had a replica made and transported to Cambridge, but there is controversy about whether he actually kept the original and gave the replica back to the Jews at Cochin. In fact, the original owners of the royal charter may have been left with nothing. It's a messy story that may require scientific testing of the plates to resolve.³² It's a reminder of how important it is to keep precious writing on metal plates out of sight and out of the hands of others.

A reader of my blog posted a comment pointing to what may be the earliest published mention of the copper plates of the Cochin Jews:

29. Ibid., 113.

30. Ibid., 171–72.

31. See Wikipedia, s.v. "Jewish copper plates of Cochin," last modified September 19, 2022, 05:15, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_copper_plates_of_Cochin.

32. See Thoufeek Zakriya, "The Copper Plate and the Big Sahib," *Jews of Malabar* (blog), August 19, 2013, <http://jewsofmalabar.blogspot.com/2013/08/the-copper-plate-and-big-sahib.html>.

As far as I can tell, the first western account of metal plates among the Jewish and Christian communities of Cochin comes from Damião de Góis in his “Three Letters of Mar Jacob.” Mar Jacob, the Bishop of the Thomas Christians between 1543 and 1545, mentioned two copper plates with inscriptions in Pahlavi, Cushic (sic) and Hebrew script. These plates are unrelated to the chronicles of the Cochin Jews that were said to have been destroyed when the Portuguese burned down the synagogue in 1662 AD. This history was inexplicably called the *sefer ha yashar* or the Book of the Upright One or the Book of Jasher.³³

The “Three Letters of Mar Jacob” can be found in Georg Schurhammer’s *The Malabar Church and Rome during the Early Portuguese Period and Before*.³⁴ The letters are reproduced in Portuguese with an English translation. One passage says, “[W]e have a *Copperplate* sealed with his seal,”³⁵ and there is a later mention of several plates, some said to now be lost.³⁶

Returning to Alexander Hamilton’s account, did the Jews at Cochin really have more ancient records of their history on copper or brass plates, or did the story of their one small document become inflated when it was told to Hamilton, or did their copper plates become conflated with their separate historical records? Hamilton gives enough detail that it seems unlikely that he was simply confused, but was he given correct information? Did the Jews at Cochin have much more that they did not risk discussing with Buchanan? Are there records on plates still in hiding somewhere? I would be thrilled if such a thing did exist and could be brought to light. For now, we just have Hamilton’s report

33. RM Zosimus, comment on Jeff Lindsay, “The Words of Gad the Seer: Thoughts on a ‘Lost Book’ Preserved by the Jews at Cochin, India,” *Arise from the Dust* (blog), April 2, 2022, emphasis added, <https://www.arisefromthedust.com/the-words-of-gad-seer-thoughts-on-lost/#comments>.

34. Georg Schurhammer, *The Malabar Church and Rome during the Early Portuguese Period and Before* (Trichinopoly, India: F.M. Ponnuswamy, 1934), 14 and 22–23 (esp. footnote 69), https://archive.org/details/malabarchurchrom00schu_0/page/22/mode/2up. The “Three Letters of Mar Jacob” are reproduced in Portuguese early in the volume with an English translation at the side, and the mention of a copper plate in the second Portuguese letter has “do que temos hua [dua?] lamyna [lamina] de cobre asselada de sseu sselo,” with the given translation “of which we have a Copperplate sealed with his seal” (p. 14).

35. *Ibid.*, 14.

36. *Ibid.*, 22–23.

and the tradition of writing on copper plates in India that might add to the plausibility of the story. The document from the Cochin Jews bearing “The Words of Gad the Seer” was not written on metal plates.

A few more connections to explore will arise when we examine some passages from the text below.

Assessing “The Words of Gad the Seer”

So what of this strange document from Cochin, India, “The Words of Gad the Seer”? Is it just pious fiction made up by some Jews in India? The first scholarly work analyzing the Hebrew manuscript of “The Words of Gad the Seer,” an 1893 article by Solomon Schechter, declared its origins to be from the Middle Ages. Then a 1927 article by I. Abrahams accepted Schechter’s brief report and said that that “The Words of Gad the Seer” was likely written in the 13th century AD.³⁷ On the other hand, Professor Bar-Ilan, in his peer-reviewed “The Date of The Words of Gad the Seer,” has examined the text in detail and disputes the arguments of Schechter and Abrahams, arguing that it has more ancient roots.³⁸ He estimates its origins to be in the first centuries of the Christian era, in spite of some words showing medieval era influence, possibly arising in much later copying or editing of the text.

Could it be earlier? Bar-Ilan says no, for the book is written as an apocalypse, and biblical scholars generally maintain that such literature, including First Enoch, the book of Daniel, and the book of Revelation, is a literary genre generally limited to roughly 250 BC to AD 250, characterized by similarity to the book of Revelation, with divine revelation about the end of the world and the nature of heaven.³⁹ Being apocalyptic, the argument is that “The Words of Gad the Seer” cannot represent biblical literature from the time of David or otherwise much before 250 BC. Some Latter-day Saints, however, may be open to more ancient origins for some apocalyptic literature like the material on Enoch in the Book

37. See I. Abrahams, “The Words of Gad the Seer,” in *Livre d’hommage a la mémoire du Dr Samuel Poznański (1864–1921)* (Vienna: Adolphe Holzhausen, 1927), 8–12, <https://polona.pl/item/livre-d-hommage-a-la-memoire-du-dr-samuel-poznanski-1864-1921,MTA0NTI2OA/31/>.

38. Bar-Ilan, “Date.”

39. See John J. Collins, “Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 1–21. There may be exceptions to the date range for apocalyptic literature, for Collins notes a later example of Jewish apocalyptic literature, the *Sefer Hekalot* (3 Enoch), which some have dated to the fifth century AD.

of Moses or Nephi's writings in the Book of Mormon.⁴⁰ Even Isaiah has what many view as apocalyptic elements in Isaiah 24–27.

Schechter examined the Hebrew manuscript in the library at the University of Cambridge and concluded rather peremptorily that it must have come from the medieval era based on a couple of examples of phrasing and apparent familiarity with the Kabbalah.⁴¹ Unfortunately, Schechter spent only one page in his article discussing the manuscript and said nothing that would attract attention from other scholars about this long-overlooked record, which, in spite of having been discussed by several scholars and even published in Hebrew, German, and Dutch (and now English), has been largely overlooked by modern scholars. Such a situation seems hard to believe, as Bar-Ilan expresses in dismay, speculating that the cause of this dire lack of attention may be because “the fascinating stories emerging from Cochin were considered to be legendary in character, such as any modern scholar should ignore.”⁴² This is not the first case of scholarly neglect of a fascinating ancient record from scattered Hebrews that might seem somewhat “legendary.”

Bar-Ilan points out that the meat of Schechter's arguments for a middle-ages origin relies upon the presence of several Hebrew words that are said to have arisen as a result of astronomical and philosophical discussions related to Greek philosophy. Bar-Ilan points out that while the words in question themselves aren't known or used as they are in “The Words of Gad the Seer” before the Middle Ages, the concepts are much older and had been discussed using other words in Hebrew. Here Bar-Ilan notes that the Talmud shows evidence of ancient astronomers and philosophers influencing Jewish sages, such that discussions of the rotation of “heavenly spheres” (simply “spheres” in vs. 204 of his translation) and other astronomical-philosophical concepts do not necessarily point to a late date (i.e., the Middle Ages).⁴³ He also notes there was no distinction anciently between the fields of astronomy and philosophy,⁴⁴ an observation that is helpful to keep in mind in analyzing Abraham's use of astronomical concepts to indirectly teach Pharaoh

40. “Why Can Nephi's Vision Be Called an Apocalypse?,” KnoWhys, Book of Mormon Central, September 27, 2018, <https://knowwhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowwhy/why-can-nephis-vision-be-called-an-apocalypse>.

41. Schechter, “Notes on Hebrew MSS.,” 140.

42. Bar-Ilan, “Discovery.”

43. Bar-Ilan, “Date.”

44. Ibid.

about religion as we see in the Book of Abraham (Abraham 3 and Facsimile 2).⁴⁵

After considering and refuting the arguments made for a medieval origin, Bar-Ilan then argues the case for late antiquity. His first argument, already cited above, is that “this phenomenon of inserting whole chapters from the Bible into one’s treatise is known only from the Bible itself.... Only one who lived in the ‘days of the Bible’, or thought so of himself, could have made such a plagiarism including a Biblical text in his own work.”⁴⁶

His second argument is also of interest, pointing out that the way Bible content is merged and reworked in the document is also uncharacteristic of modern writings but is an indicator of antiquity.⁴⁷ That is also a characteristic of Nephi’s writings in the Book of Mormon as he combined various passages and reworks them in elegant ways, something Matthew Bowen and others have discussed.⁴⁸

His third argument involves differences in the way the Psalms are quoted, particularly the changes in superscriptions that seem authentic.

45. On the religious import of the astronomical issues raised by Abraham in Abraham 3, see John Gee, William J. Hamblin, and Daniel C. Peterson, “‘And I Saw the Stars’: The Book of Abraham and Ancient Geocentric Astronomy,” in *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*, ed. John Gee and Brian M. Hauglid (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 1–16, <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/and-i-saw-stars-book-abraham-and-ancient-geocentric-astronomy>. Also see the chapter “Abrahamic Astronomy” in John Gee, *An Introduction to the Book of Abraham* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017), 115–20, <https://rsc.byu.edu/introduction-book-abraham/abrahamic-astronomy>. Also see Jeff Lindsay, “Book of Abraham Polemics: Dan Vogel’s Broad Critique of the Defense of the Book of Abraham,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 47 (2021): 138–44, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/book-of-abraham-polemics-dan-vogels-broad-critique-of-the-defense-of-the-book-of-abraham/>. Note that the reference to (heavenly) “spheres” in *Words of Gad the Seer* need not draw upon Ptolemaic astronomy and its multiple rotating spheres dating to around AD 150 (when Ptolemy published *The Almagest*), for the concepts of the celestial sphere and multiple concentric spheres were being discussed centuries earlier by Aristotle and Eudoxus. See Wikipedia, s.v. “Celestial Sphere,” last modified November 14, 2022, 04:50, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celestial_sphere#Greek_history_on_celestial_spheres; and Wikipedia, s.v. “Eudoxus of Cnidus,” last modified October 5, 2022, 04:20, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eudoxus_of_Cnidus. More primitive related geocentric concepts such as celestial objects rotating around the earth or the sky as a sphere or dome were more ancient still.

46. Bar-Ilan, “Date.”

47. Ibid.

48. See, for example, Bowen, “Onomastic Wordplay.”

But another interesting and possibly authentic twist is the addition of the missing “Nun” verse in Psalm 145, a Psalm where each verse begins with a letter from the Hebrew alphabet forming an acrostic, with an apparent defect due to the absence of the letter “Nun” that should be between verses 13 and 14.⁴⁹ Bar-Ilan notes that no other known version of this Psalm provides the missing verse. The added verse reads, “All your enemies fell down, O Lord, and all of their might was swallowed up.” Bar-Ilan feels that “the style and content of the verse give good reason to believe that it is authentic.” But even if it were made up by a creative editor, he says “it still would be interesting, since the sages of the Talmud did not know it, and the invention of fictitious Biblical verses is not known in the Middle Ages either.”⁵⁰ The Hebrew word translated as “swallowed up” is from the root בלע, *bāla*,⁵¹ which can mean to “destroy” as well as to “swallow” or “engulf.”⁵² The added verse combines the falling of enemies and a destructive “swallowing up,” a combination also seen in the Book of Mormon in 2 Nephi 26:5, where Nephi speaks of the coming destruction of those that kill the prophets, warning that the depths of the earth “shall swallow them up” and “buildings shall fall upon them.” This is likely a random but possibly interesting parallel coming from one of the Book of Mormon writers most attuned to the Psalms.⁵³

Bar-Ilan’s fourth argument also sounds somewhat like a common defense of the Book of Mormon as he summarizes the diverse literary styles and tools in the text and mentions the highly creative visions and stories that seem unlikely to have been fabricated.

There are nine arguments in total for antiquity, followed by reviewing two recent cases where a text was deemed by experts to be relatively recent, only to have later discoveries such as a related document from Qumran proving that the document was ancient after all. There is much

49. See Wikipedia, s.v. “Psalm 145,” heading “The ‘missing verse,’” last modified September 7, 2022, 14:03, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psalm_145#The_%22missing_verse%22.

50. Bar-Ilan, “Date.”

51. Meir Bar-Ilan, personal communication to the author, September 12, 2022.

52. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 134.

53. See Jeff Lindsay, “Too Little or Too Much Like the Bible? A Novel Critique of the Book of Mormon Involving David and the Psalms,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 29 (2018): 31–64, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/too-little-or-too-much-like-the-bible-a-novel-critique-of-the-book-of-mormon-involving-david-and-the-psalms/>.

for Latter-day Saints to contemplate in reading Bar-Ilan's defense of the antiquity of the text of "The Words of Gad the Seer."

Perhaps there will be more to learn as we explore relationships between "The Words of Gad the Seer" with other overlooked or denigrated texts from the Restoration, namely, the Book of Mormon, the Book of Moses, and the Book of Abraham. For now, let's consider an overview of the text of "The Words of Gad the Seer" and look at just a few interesting passages.

Overview of the Content and Some Passages of Interest

We turn again to Professor Bar-Ilan for a summary of the chapters of *Words of Gad the Seer*:

The Words of Gad the Seer contains 14 chapters dealing with King David and his prophet Gad. The nature of each of the chapters is different than the others, so one who has already read the first chapter, for example, cannot predict any other chapter in the book. The style is Biblical, in accordance with its heroes (some of whom are not mentioned in the Bible or elsewhere). Even when the author writes his own ideas, almost every word or phrase reflects biblical verse. Now, let us consider each of the chapters, one by one.⁵⁴

Bar-Ilan's verse numbering progresses continually across all fourteen chapters. A brief summary follows, drawing in part upon Bar-Ilan's characterization of the chapters and giving his verse numbers for each.⁵⁵

Chapter 1 (vv. 1–63) describes a revelation to Gad the Seer including visions of animals, the sun, and the moon, interpreted by the Lord. The Sun descends from heaven in the form of a man wearing a crown and carrying a lamb. The lamb, "rejected and despised" in vs. 13 (cf. the Isaiah 53:3, where the Suffering Servant is "despised and rejected"), laments. A man dressed in linen puts a crown on the lamb and the lamb makes "a peace-offerings sacrifice on the altar before El Shaddai Jealous Lord of hosts" (vs. 30), though in Bar-Ilan's summary, he states that "the lamb is sacrificed on the heavenly altar,"⁵⁶ something that is not clear to me in the translation. The lamb sings a song praising the Lord and the Lord replies, "You are My son, you are My Firstborn" (vs. 47), all of which resonates well with the Book of Mormon's teachings about ancient

54. Bar-Ilan, "Date."

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

Hebrews understanding that the Lamb of God would be the Messiah, the Son of God. An allusion to Isaiah 53:5 (“wounded for our transgressions” ... “with his stripes we are healed”) may also occur in the description of the lamb in vs. 50: “And who is like unto Thee, among all creatures on earth? For in your shadow lived all these and by thy wounds they were healed!” Gad is commanded by a heavenly messenger to write the words of the vision (vs. 54).

The title “El Shaddai Jealous Lord of hosts” (vs. 30) seems to reflect a very ancient Jewish concept of God and the divine council that might point to origins much earlier than the era in late antiquity that is normally assumed for apocalyptic literature. David Biale sees “El Shaddai” as a very early Hebrew title dating to the time of King David or earlier, which then faded away (it does not occur in Deuteronomy and many other books) but regained some popularity in later books such as Ruth.⁵⁷ For a Latter-day Saint perspective on the significance of El Shaddai as an ancient title associated with important aspects of the Godhead, see Val Larsen, “First Visions and Last Sermons: Affirming Divine Sociality, Rejecting the Greater Apostasy.”⁵⁸ On the divine council and the “Lord of hosts,” see Stephen O. Smoot, “The Divine Council in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Mormon.”⁵⁹ “Shaddai” also occurs in *Words of Gad the Seer* in vv. 39 (Chapter 1), 268 (Chapter 12), and 309 (Chapter 13). “Lords of hosts” also occurs in vv. 97 and 100 (Chapter 3), 315 (Chapter 13), and 369 (Chapter 14). Other biblical titles possibly related to the divine council include “God above all Gods” (2 Chronicles 2:5) in vs. 218 (Chapter 9) and “God of gods” (Deuteronomy 10:17, Joshua 22:22, Psalm 136:2, and Daniel 2:47, 11:36) in vv. 80 and 83 (Chapter 2). While further study is needed, Chapter 1 has much that might be of interest to students of the Book of Mormon.

57. David Biale, “The God with Breasts: El Shaddai in the Bible,” *History of Religions* 21, no. 3, (February 1982): 240–56, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1062160>.

58. Val Larsen, “First Visions and Last Sermons: Affirming Divine Sociality, Rejecting the Greater Apostasy,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 36 (2020): 37–84, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/first-visions-and-last-sermons-affirming-divine-sociality-rejecting-the-greater-apostasy/>.

59. Stephen O. Smoot, “The Divine Council in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 27 (2017): 155–80, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-divine-council-in-the-hebrew-bible-and-the-book-of-mormon/>.

Chapter 2 (vv. 64–92) comprises a second revelation to Gad about the “end of days.” A battle will occur between Michael and Samael (discussed below).

Chapter 3 (vv. 93–104) tells the story of a Moabite shepherd who asks King David for permission to convert to Judaism and live among the Jews as a circumcised male, able to join in religious rites. David denies the request and cites Deuteronomy 23:3, “An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the Lord ... forever” (KJV), but the Moabite shepherd argues that the Lord’s acceptance of Ruth could justify an exception for him as well. David recognizes that a fair argument has been made and seeks counsel from the Lord. Nathan the prophet answers, explaining that only Moabite males, not females, are forbidden to “enter the assembly of the Lord.” Thus, there was no opportunity for him to participate with the Jews in temple rituals. The frustrated Moabite was appointed by David to be one of his shepherds, and the man’s daughter Sephirah later became a concubine to Solomon.

Chapter 4 (vv. 105–120) tells a story about David settling a dispute over some lost money (two talents of silver in a “pocket” or wallet) that highlights the wisdom of David. The owner writes a declaration on a city wall promising to give one talent of silver to whoever finds the pocket with the two talents. A Danite man finds the pocket and brings it to the owner, who then declares that his message on the wall had a mistake, for there were actually three talents of silver in the lost pocket and so the Danite man must have stolen a talent and demands that the Danite return the stolen talent. The dispute comes to David, who has both parties swear before the Lord to confirm their claims, and then tells the owner that since his pocket had three talents, and the Danite found a pocket with only two, it was obviously someone else’s pocket that was found, so he must give the Danite both talents. The story sounds much like the accounts of Solomon’s wisdom.

Chapter 5 (vv. 121–30) describes revelation from God to comfort David before a battle with the Philistines. That night a “fire rider” (vs. 125) with a sword descends from heaven and smites the Philistines.

Chapter 6 (vv. 131–41) reports that God sent Gad to tell David not to boast of his strength. David acknowledges that his strength comes from God, and God then decides to help the House of David forever. (Here I have to wonder if the optimism about the House of David and the lack of awareness of the fall of Judah might point to a pre-exilic origin for at least some parts of the text.)

Chapter 7 (vv. 142–77) tells the story of David’s sinful numbering of the children of Israel, apparently combining 2 Samuel 24:1–25 and 1 Chronicles 21:1–30, with some additions.

Chapter 8 (vv. 178–98) has David receiving a commandment from God that instructs him to give a majestic speech to a great assembly of his people. David builds a wooden pulpit for the occasion and urges his people to follow God’s law and love one another (discussed further below).

Chapter 9 (vv. 199–226), perhaps my favorite chapter, tells of Hiram, King of Tyre, asking David to send messengers to teach him the law of God. David answers that Hiram ought to fear the Lord and to fulfill the commandments of God to the children of Noah, while on the other hand the Jews, “sealed by the seal of Shaddai,” must keep all the law of Moses. Hiram accepts this and teaches his princes and servants to believe in the God of Israel. The Lord declares He will bless Hiram and his princes and servants, and that Hiram will be able to assist Israel in building the temple. David rejoices to see God’s mercy, for He gives reward to all who fear Him. David’s remarks to Hiram cite an interesting list of contrasting concepts, including “the substantial and the spiritual” (vs. 204), which may have some relationship to the contrast of “things which are temporal and things which are spiritual” in Moses 6:63 and the related phrase “things both temporal and spiritual” 1 Nephi 15:32 and 22:3.⁶⁰

Chapter 10 (vv. 227–49) is Psalm 145 but with a different introduction (superscription) than in the Masoretic text and, unlike any other known version, includes the missing Nun verse.

Chapter 11 (vv. 250–65) is Psalm 144 having a different superscription than in the Masoretic text.

Chapter 12 (vv. 266–85) is a speech by David to his people that he spoke before his death. This chapter strikes me as having indications of a more ancient origin than late antiquity, such as use of the name Shaddai (vs. 268) and a promise that if the people are obedient, in the future, they will see God in Jerusalem: “And there shall you see Him face to face, in the presence of a living God that is seen face to face. And you are one

60. For the possible significance of this shared phrasing in the two texts, see Jeff Lindsay and Noel B. Reynolds, “Strong Like unto Moses?: The Case for Ancient Roots in the Book of Moses Based on Book of Mormon Usage of Related Content Apparently from the Brass Plates,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 44 (2021): 1–92, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/strong-like-unto-moses-the-case-for-ancient-roots-in-the-book-of-moses-based-on-book-of-mormon-usage-of-related-content-apparently-from-the-brass-plates/>.

people, if you grow in belief you will be filled in gates of intelligence” (vs. 282). This seems more consistent with the vibrant religious world of pre-exilic prophets such as Isaiah and Lehi, as discussed by Margaret Barker and Latter-day Saint scholars, than with mainstream Judaism after the reforms of the Deuteronomists.⁶¹ The same can be said for the vision in Chapter 1 with its vision of the Lamb, the Son of God, by whose wounds we are healed.

Chapter 13 (vv. 286–353) gives a lengthy story about the heroic Tamar, King David’s daughter, related to 2 Samuel 13. When Pirshaz, one of King David’s servants seeks to rape her, Tamar seeks help from God and is able to kill Pirshaz. She flees, but later returns to Jerusalem and is praised by Solomon.

Chapter 14 (vv. 354–75) has a revelation given to Gad, who sees the day of judgment with the Lord on His throne (vs. 355). There are three books with records of human deeds. Numerous details are provided with uncertain meaning.⁶² After the judgments are rendered and Satan has departed to a waste land with his subjects, a divine messenger declares, “Happy is the people that know the joyful shout; that walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance” (vs. 368). Then Gad “heard the voice of the host of heaven dancing and saying, ‘master of justice, the Lord of hosts, the whole heaven and earth is full of His glory’” (vs. 369). This statement is similar to Isaiah 6:2, declared by seraphim in Isaiah’s great vision in which he also sees the Lord on a throne (Isaiah 6:1). Parallels to Isaiah 6 continue as one of the cherubim in Gad’s vision flies to Gad and puts in his mouth an olive leaf (vs. 371, instead of a hot coal that one of the seraphim uses to touch Isaiah’s lips in Isaiah 6:5). The cherub declares, “Lo, this hath touched thy mouth, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin expiated” (vs. 371), essentially quoting Isaiah 6:7. As with Nephi in the Book of Mormon, Gad here seems to “shamelessly

61. Kevin Christensen, “Paradigms Regained: A Survey of Margaret Barker’s Scholarship and Its Significance for Mormon Studies,” *FARMS Occasional Papers* 2 (2001): 1–94, <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/paradigms-regained-survey-margaret-barkers-scholarship-and-its-significance-mormon-studies>; Margaret Barker, “What Did King Josiah Reform?” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 526, <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/what-did-king-josiah-reform>; and Kevin Christensen, “Prophets and Kings in Lehi’s Jerusalem and Margaret Barker’s Temple Theology,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 4 (2013), <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/prophets-and-kings-in-lehis-jerusalem-and-margaret-barkers-temple-theology/#fn2-2695>.

62. Bar-Ilan, “Date.”

plagiarize” Isaiah (or could it be the other way around?) in a way, as Bar-Ilan explains, that is characteristic of writers in the era of the Bible, but not the modern era.

There is remarkable diversity in the contents of this brief document, with historical accounts, psalms, visions of God, and apocalyptic scenes. It is a document rich in visions and the ministry of angels, similar to themes in the Book of Mormon. Angels or messengers of God are often said to be dressed in linen, the material of sacred priestly robes. A number of elements resonate with the world of Lehi and Nephi and may be evidence of roots even more ancient than Bar-Ilan has determined for this text.

Here are a few more passages that seem interesting from a Latter-day Saint perspective. The titles are mine, suggesting themes that occur to me. The passages are quoted with their verse numbers.

On Michael the Great Prince and Archangel

While the name Michael is given to several mortals mentioned in genealogies or lists of people in Numbers, 1 and 2 Chronicles, and Ezra, subsequent mentions of Michael in the Bible refer to a mysterious defender, a prince and/or angel who, in both Jewish and Christian lore, has long been associated with an angelic defender of God’s people, fighting battles in heaven and on earth for the good of Israel.⁶³ He is a great prince who helps defend Israel in the book of Daniel (Daniel 10:13, 21 and 12:1), an archangel who disputed with Satan over the body of Moses (Jude 1:9), and the angel described in Revelation 12:7 who, during war in heaven, joined with his angels to fight “the dragon” and his angels. While the passages in Daniel are often applied to the persecutions of the Jews by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Christians often interpret them in terms of the end days when Christ comes again and reigns supreme. A related passage in chapter 2 of *The Words of Gad the Seer* explicitly refers to the work of Michael the great prince in putting down the evil prince of the world:

89 At the end of days Michael the great prince shall stand up
in war like a whirlwind against Samel the prince of the world
to put him under his feet, in the wind of the Lord and it shall

63. See Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 171. Also see John J. Collins, “The Son of Man and the Saints of the Most High in the Book of Daniel,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93, no. 1 (March 1974): 55–57, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3263865>.

be eaten up; for the Lord hath spoken it. 90 At the end of days the robbed will overcome the robber, and the weak the strong, truly and in righteousness.

Samel or Samael is a complex figure that does not always equate with the Christian notions of Satan, but nevertheless can be called the “prince of demons” or “chief of Satans” and can be “regarded simply as the principle of evil that brought upon Israel and Judah every misfortune that befell them.”⁶⁴ This end-days role of Michael and his armies in totally vanquishing Satan and his armies can be compared with a passage from the D&C 88 about the great battle at the end of the Millennium:

110 And so on, until the seventh angel shall sound his trump; and he shall stand forth upon the land and upon the sea, and swear in the name of him who sitteth upon the throne, that there shall be time no longer; and Satan shall be bound, that old serpent, who is called the devil, and shall not be loosed for the space of a thousand years.

111 And then he shall be loosed for a little season, that he may gather together his armies.

112 And Michael, the seventh angel, even the archangel, shall gather together his armies, even the hosts of heaven.

113 And the devil shall gather together his armies; even the hosts of hell, and shall come up to battle against Michael and his armies.

114 And then cometh the battle of the great God; and the devil and his armies shall be cast away into their own place, that they shall not have power over the saints any more at all.

115 For Michael shall fight their battles, and shall overcome him who seeketh the throne of him who sitteth upon the throne, even the Lamb.

On Purity

16 And it came to pass when the voice of the lamb was over, and, lo, a man dressed in linen came with three branches of vine and twelve palms in his hand. 17 And he took the lamb

64. Ludwig Blau, “Samael,” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Isidore Singer and Cyrus Adler (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1907), 10:665–66, <https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13082-samuel>.

from the hand of the Sun and put the crown on its head, and the vine-branches and palms on his heart. 18 And the man, dressed in linen, cried like a ram's horn, saying: 'What hast thou here, impurity, and who hast thou here, impurity, that thou hast hewed thee a place in purity, and in my covenant 19 that I have set with the vine-branches and palms'. 20 And I have heard the lamb's shepherd saying: 'There is a place for the pure, not for the impure, with me, for I am a holy God, and I do not want the impure, only the pure. 21 Though both are creations of my hands, and my eyes are equally open on both. 22 But there is an advantage to the abundance of purity over the abundance of impurity just like the advantage of a man over a shadow.

The Seal of Truth

54 And the one dressed in linen came down to me and touched me, saying: 'Write these words and seal with the seal of truth for "I am that I am" is My name, and with My name thou shalt bless all the house of Israel for they are a true seed. 55 Thou shalt go, for yet a little while, before thou art gathered quietly to thy fathers, and at the end of days thou shalt see with thy own eyes all these, not as a vision but in fact. 56 For in those days they shall not be called Jacob but Israel for in their remnant no iniquity is found for they belong entirely to the Lord.

David Standing on a Pulpit to Speak to His Assembled People

182 Then David assembled all Israel in Jerusalem, and he made to himself a pulpit of wood and he stood upon it before all the people. And he opened his mouth and said: 183 'Hear, O Israel, your God and my God is one, the only One and unique, there is no one like His individuality, hidden from all, He was and is and will be, He fills His place but His place doesn't fill Him, He sees but is not seen, He tells and knows futures, for He is God without end and there is no end to His end, Omnipotence, God of truth, whole worlds are full of His glory.

Near the end of David’s life, “in the time of his old age” (vs. 178), the Lord appeared to him and gave him words regarding God’s covenant to speak to his people (vv. 178–81). David then built a wooden pulpit and used that to stand before his people and teach them. He would speak of free agency (see below), choosing to hear the word (vv. 189–91), the need to “talk peacefully each one with another” (vs. 192) and to love one another (vv. 192–94). David then prayed to “God of the spirits of all flesh” (vs. 195) that the Lord might save and bless his people (vv. 195–96), after which the people called out, “Amen, Amen!” (vs. 197).

This scene, not found in the Bible, has several parallels to King Benjamin’s speech, also given in his old age while speaking from a tower that he had built for the occasion. Whether King Benjamin’s tower was made of stone or wood, the concept of a great assembly led by a king for a covenant-making event and/or coronation and using a platform of some kind for the event has been viewed as a significant ancient Near East element by some scholars such as Hugh Nibley.⁶⁵

David Teaches the Concept of Free Agency

184 And He gave each one free choice: if one wants to do good — he will be helped, and if one wants to do evil — a path will be opened for him. 185 For that we will worship our God our king our Lord our saviour with love and awe, for your wisdom is the fear of the Lord and your cleverness is to depart from evil. 186 Remember and obey the law of Moses, man of God, that it may be well with thee all the days.

Comparing the Law to a Seed and Faith to a Tree

187 Ask thy fathers and they will declare unto thee; thine elders, and they will tell thee. 188 Be strong and valiant to obey the law and not to hear it only. 189 For a deed is like a root, hearing it is like a seed, a belief is like a tree and the fruit

65. Hugh Nibley, “Assembly and Atonement,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech Made Simple*, ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 99–125, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120927050840/http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/books/?bookid=133&chapid=1570>. Also see John W. Welch and Terry L. Szink, “Benjamin’s Tower and Old Testament Pillars,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne, (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 100–102, <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/node/258>.

is like righteousness. 190 And what shall we do to a smelly and stinky seed if a root will not come out of it? 191 For that, hurry up! be quick and act, hear and act, for you are true seed, for you have belief and righteousness then the Lord will bless you all in peace.

This has some similarity to Alma's teaching that compares the word of God to a seed in Alma 32:28–43. That passage also uses the phrase "true seed" (vs. 28), not used elsewhere in the scriptures, but in a different sense than in *Words of Gad the Seer*, where "true seed" (here in vs. 191; see also vs. 54 above, under "The Seal of Truth") refers to the people who hear and obey the word.

On Love for Others

192 Talk peacefully each with one another, and love the deed and those created in the image of the Lord like your own souls. 193 For if you love [man] the created, it is a sign that you love the Creator. 194 And also, thou shouldest take hold of the one; yea, also from the other withdraw not thy hand; love the Lord and also man that it shall be well with thee all the days'.

Three Outcomes on the Day of Judgement

360 And, lo, a man dressed in linen brought before the glory of the Lord three books that were written about every man. 361 And he read in the first one and it was found to have the just deeds of His people, and the Lord said: 'These will live forever'. 362 And Satan said: 'Who are these guilty people?' And the man dressed in linen cried to Satan like a ram's horn, saying: 'Keep silent, for this day is holy to our master'. 363 And he read in the second book, and it was found to have inadvertent sins of His people, and the Lord said: 'Put aside this book but save it, until one third of the month elapses, to see what they will do'. 364 And he read in the third book, and it was found to have malicious deeds of His people. 365 And the Lord said to Satan: 'These are your share, take them to do with them as seemeth good to thee'. 366 And Satan took those which acted maliciously and he went with them to a waste land to destroy them there. 367 And the man dressed in linen cried like a ram's horn, saying: 368 'Happy is the people that

know the joyful shout; that walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance’.

This relates to the Jewish tradition of three books being opened on the day of judgment, as described in the Tractate Rosh Hashana from the Babylonian Talmud:

The Gemara goes back to discuss the Day of Judgment. Rabbi Kruspedai said that Rabbi Yoḥanan said: Three books are opened on Rosh HaShana before the Holy One, Blessed be He: One of wholly wicked people, and one of wholly righteous people, and one of middling people whose good and bad deeds are equally balanced. Wholly righteous people are immediately written and sealed for life; wholly wicked people are immediately written and sealed for death; and middling people are left with their judgment suspended from Rosh HaShana until Yom Kippur, their fate remaining undecided. If they merit, through the good deeds and mitzvot that they perform during this period, they are written for life; if they do not so merit, they are written for death.⁶⁶

According to the Talmud, it would seem that while there are three books and three classes of people being judged, there are really only two ultimate outcomes, life or death. But the concept of three books for three classes of mortals also seems akin to the three degrees of glory described in D&C 76 and reflected in 1 Corinthians 15:40–42.

Conclusions

Bar-Ilan’s translation, *Words of Gad the Seer*, may merit more attention in the Latter-day Saint community. While the text may not be the actual lost record of Gad mentioned in the Old Testament, it still may have genuine connections to ancient texts and traditions, even if portions were composed or edited in late antiquity or even the medieval era. The origins and content of the text are worthy of study to better appreciate ancient Jewish thought and the complex issues around the origins and evolution of ancient documents and the ideas they contain.

66. Tractate Rosh Hashanah 16b:12, Koren Noé Talmud, William Davidson Edition, Sefaria, https://www.sefaria.org/Rosh_Hashanah.16b.12?lang=bi. See also Tractate Rosh Hashana, Chapter 1, Jewish Virtual Library, The American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/tractate-rosh-hashana-chapter-1>.

There may even be implications for the Book of Mormon, which, like “The Words of Gad the Seer,” reflects an ancient Jewish religion rich in prophetic revelation, the ministry of angels, visions of God, a heavenly council led by the Lord of Hosts, and even the expectation that the righteous will one day see the face of the living God.

The peripheral issues of writing on metal, of ancient records in Yemen, and the ways in which sacred writings can be corrupted or neglected are fascinating in their own right, but there may be many gems to extract directly from the text. More treasures from Cochin may yet remain to be discovered, and certainly further work and investigation is warranted.

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