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THE BOOK OF MORMON AS A RESURRECTED BOOK AND A TYPE OF CHRIST

George L. Mitton

Abstract: *This essay emphasizes the remarkable participation of the Book of Mormon in the gospel symbolism of death and resurrection. It explains how the Book of Mormon itself may be seen as a resurrected book, witnessing Christ's resurrection in a remarkable way.*

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See George L. Mitton, "The Book of Mormon as a Resurrected Book and a Type of Christ," in *Remembrance and Return: Essays in Honor of Louis C. Midgley*, ed. Ted Vaggalis and Daniel C. Peterson (Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2021), 121–46. Further information at <https://interpreterfoundation.org/books/remembrance-and-return/>.]

Overcoming death through the Resurrection is at the heart of Christ's great achievement and promise for mankind. It is a theme that undergirds all Christian doctrine, bringing meaning and purpose to the disciple's life. We are reminded of it in the ordinances, such as in baptism by immersion, which incorporates rich symbols of Christ's burial and resurrection;¹ in the Lord's Supper, which reminds us of his death while looking forward to a promised association with him in the Resurrection; and in the rites of the temple, which help us to contemplate and prepare

1 Romans 6:3–5.

for an eventual reunion with God beyond the grave. It may even be seen in the anointing of the sick with oil, where healing by God's power may be viewed as an anticipation and assurance of the Resurrection and the Judgment, in which all things are to be set in final order.² The very ubiquity of symbols of the Resurrection suggests we should be alert to recognize many symbolic things that can bring grateful contemplation of the promised life to come.

My purpose here is to emphasize the remarkable participation of the Book of Mormon in the gospel symbolism of death and resurrection. I will explain how the Book of Mormon itself may be seen as a *resurrected book*, witnessing Christ's resurrection in a special way. In addition to providing instructive teachings on resurrection, and including a wonderful description of the resurrected Lord, I believe that the Book of Mormon has been brought about by the power of God through a miraculous procedure that causes it to exemplify the pattern set by the life and mission of Christ, including His burial and resurrection.

There are many ways in which the Book of Mormon typifies Christ. Important counterparts between the life and mission of the Lord and the book may be seen in the book's origin in heaven; its teachings in and to the world about the doctrine from above; its rejection, burial, and subsequent resurrection out of the ground; the attestation of its reality by eleven special witnesses chosen of the Lord; and with angelic assistance, the ascension to heaven of the golden plates on which the book was written, with promise of their future return. Finally, both the Lord and the Book of Mormon will be of great importance at the Final Judgment. I will discuss these and other notable counterparts below, first approaching the concept of resurrected books with some background understandings and intimations from the past. This will be followed by a more detailed consideration of the Book of Mormon as a type and symbol along with the ritual manner of its production, and brief comments on implications and purposes.

² James 5:14–16. Note the language and imagery of resurrection and judgment. Anointing and “the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up,” and sins will be forgiven [judgment]; cf. C. F. D. Moule, “The Judgment Theme in the Sacraments,” in *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology*, ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube (Cambridge: University Press, 1964), 464–481. In the Book of Mormon, see 2 Nephi 9:22 and context.

Resurrected Books—Hints and Suggestions from the Past

In 1830, soon after publication of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith restored another ancient text now known as the Book of Moses. In that book, the Lord declared that

...all things have their likeness, and all things are created and made to bear record of me, both things which are temporal, and things which are spiritual; things which are in the heavens above, and things which are on the earth, and things which are in the earth, and things which are under the earth, both above and beneath: all things bear record of me. (Moses 6:63)³

In connection with the concept of resurrected books generally—and the Book of Mormon in particular—this language is especially instructive and appropriate. I will now discuss some additional scriptures and writings that appear relevant, or that place the Book of Mormon in close relationship with the Resurrection.

A passage from Psalms states that “Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven” (Psalm 85:11). From the early days of the Church, this scripture has been considered by Latter-day Saints as a biblical prophecy about the Book of Mormon.⁴ There is also a passage with strong affinity to it in the Book of Moses which reads: “And righteousness will I send down out of heaven; and truth will I send forth out of the earth,” but to which is added a significant statement of purpose: “to bear testimony of mine Only Begotten; his resurrection from the dead; yea, and also the resurrection of all men” (Moses 7:62). This would be a basic purpose of the Book of Mormon. Considered thus, the Book of Mormon may be seen as an important witness of the Resurrection, and even more so as we recognize that the symbol of its *coming forth* from the earth is reminiscent of the Lord’s resurrection.

Ezekiel 37 is of special interest to the Latter-day Saints. It contains the familiar prophecy of the two sticks that come together in the latter days in connection with the gathering or restoration of Israel. The stick of Judah and the stick of Joseph are seen as representative of the Bible and the Book of Mormon, as well as the tribes of Israel associated with them (Ezekiel 37:16–21).⁵ An important purpose of the Book of

³ Cf. Hebrews 8:5; 1 John 5:7; 2 Nephi 11:4; Alma 30:44; D&C 77:2, 88:45–47.

⁴ E.g. Joseph Smith in *Messenger and Advocate* 2, no. 3 (December 1835):227. See also Orson Pratt, *Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon*, no. 6, part 39 (Liverpool: R. James, 1851). Available at <http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/OP-BOM.html>.

⁵ Cf. 1 Nephi 13:34–41; 2 Nephi 3:11–13, 29:8–14; D&C 27:5.

Mormon is to provide a sign of the gathering of Israel. The chapter in Ezekiel has two powerful themes—resurrection and Israel’s restoration. Notably, the chapter opens with the prophecy of the dry bones that come together: God breathes life into them, and they live again. This recalls the moment of Creation when the breath of life made Adam a living soul (Genesis 2:7).⁶ Conventional scholarship has generally considered the coming together and revival of the dry bones as entirely symbolic of Israel’s gathering and restoration, and basically holds that resurrection is primarily a New Testament concept. For example, N. T. Wright, in his notable book on the Resurrection, sees the “dry bones” prophecy as “the most obviously allegorical or metaphorical” of passages.⁷ However, in an important recent study, Harvard Professor Jon D. Levenson has shown that very much more was taught and understood about resurrection in Old Testament times than has generally been assumed.⁸ In harmony with the teaching of the Book of Mormon that there was a very substantial knowledge of resurrection among ancient prophets, the Latter-day Saints understand references to revival of the “dry bones” as allusions to a literal bodily resurrection. Viewed thus, the “dry bones” prophecy is seen both as a metaphor for Israel’s restoration and also an anticipation of a literal resurrection. In this way, the scattering and gathering of Israel may be seen as a significant symbol of death and resurrection. When related to the prophecy of Ezekiel, the Book of Mormon provides a strong corroborating witness that God will overcome death and “resurrect” both the individual body *and* the covenant nation.

In the Book of Mormon the words of Isaiah are held in great esteem.⁹ Indeed, some of Isaiah’s prophecies are interpreted as related to the Book of Mormon itself. For instance, Mormon sees Isaiah as having prophesied that those who have gone before Mormon will “cry, yea, even from the dust will they cry unto the Lord” and the knowledge about them shall

6 See also Genesis 1:2. For a discussion of how various dimensions of the Hebrew word *ruach* (breath/spirit) come together in the creation story and in Ezekiel 37, see Andrew Chester, *Messiah and Exaltation: Jewish Messianic and Visionary Traditions and New Testament Christology* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 125–127.

7 N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 119.

8 Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). Further on the Jewish roots of the Christian hope of a resurrection, see Kevin J. Madigan and Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection: The Power of God for Christians and Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

9 3 Nephi 23:1–3; Mormon 8:23.

come “out of the earth...even as if one should speak from the dead.”¹⁰ Isaiah 29 is considered of particular importance to the *coming forth* of the Book of Mormon.¹¹ It employs similar imagery, saying “thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground...and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust” (Isaiah 29:4). Like imagery alluding to the grave is found many places in the Book of Mormon, notably in 2 Nephi chapters 26 and 27, which consider Isaiah’s prophecy as anticipating the latter-day restoration of the Nephite text. In both the Book of Mormon and the Bible these expressions relate to the graves of the conscious dead and to the revival of their past thought.¹² These strong resurrection overtones relate directly to the *coming forth* of the Book of Mormon.

The Significance of Hidden Books and Records

In a very informative study, John Tvedtnes has brought together many examples from the ancient world in which books and records have been hidden away and buried with the obvious purpose and intent of allowing them to become available again at a future time.¹³ This is, of course, a conspicuous motif in the Book of Mormon.¹⁴ Throughout his study Tvedtnes compares many similarities of practice, especially involving sacred texts of the ancient Near East. His study demonstrates “that various elements of the Book of Mormon story have antecedents in the ancient world,” including “the concept of writing and hiding books in such a way that they could be discovered by future generations; the use of special containers, such as stone boxes, in which to hide records; and hiding the books in mountains.”¹⁵ As well as writings, important sacred relics were also hidden for future use, even as relics were found together with the Book of Mormon plates.¹⁶

The idea of converting thought to written form evokes the theme of durability or permanence. In regard to the concept of resurrected books, it is important to note the frequency with which sacred writings were hidden in coffins, tombs, cemeteries, or in other contexts connected with

10 See Mormon 8:22–26.

11 See Robert A. Cloward, “Isaiah 29 and the Book of Mormon,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo: FARMS, 1998): 191–247.

12 For biblical examples see Cloward, “Isaiah 29 and the Book of Mormon,” 235.

13 John A. Tvedtnes, *The Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books: “Out of Darkness unto Light”* (Provo: FARMS, 2000).

14 Ether 4:3; Mormon 8:4, 14–17.

15 Tvedtnes, *Other Hidden Books*, 5–6.

16 For examples see Tvedtnes, *Other Hidden Books*, 119–123.

burial of the dead. At these solemn occasions resurrection might readily be considered and pondered. The ancient practice of anointing with oil might be performed on the book to be hidden, as it is also performed in preparing the dead for burial. This suggests a desire for preservation and the anticipation of a future revival of the book as with the dead.¹⁷ Would those who conceived of and had hope of a resurrection not be inclined to see the revival of a sacred hidden book from its grave as emblematic of the resurrection? As Tvednes observed, “Interment of the dead and of texts in tombs is analogous to the burial of records in the ground. Just as the dead will be resurrected, so too the records will *come forth* to future generations.”¹⁸

A Surprising Account from the Renaissance

It is fitting that a writing from the Renaissance contains allusions to the concept of resurrected books. “Renaissance,” of course, *means* “re-birth,” and the name evokes a period of resurgence in learning stimulated by the revival of ancient books that had been lost. Elsewhere I have expressed my understanding that the Renaissance was a “marvelous and mysterious period that did so much to help prepare the world for what the Latter-day Saints see as the last days—for conditions that would allow the restoration and teaching of the everlasting gospel.” I added my opinion that it “may be that we should consider the possibility that the Renaissance period was not only a preparation for but also a prefiguration and a witness of what was to come,” and further that it was “perhaps even a kind of grand allegory not told as a story or parable but actually acted out in history.”¹⁹ Be that as it may, this important time saw the introduction of printing and a renewal of the biblical scriptures in a form to make them available to many more people than ever before. Establishment of a scriptural background and literacy was a necessary preparation for the *coming forth*, understanding, and acceptance of the Book of Mormon.

17 For an ancient Israelite example of anointing books for burial see “Testament of Moses 1:16–18,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 1:927. For additional discussion and references see Hugh Nibley, “Sealed Up to Come Forth in Their Purity”?, in *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 3rd ed. (v. 6 of the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*) ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 173–175.

18 Tvednes, *Other Hidden Books*, 24 (emphasis added).

19 George L. Mitton, “Concern for the Things of Eternity,” *FARMS Review* 20, no. 1 (2008): xiv.

That said, it was with astonishment that I encountered some recently discovered writings of John Dee (1527–1609), a polymath of the English Renaissance, whose vivid accounts suggested to me for the first time the concept of resurrected books and its application to the Book of Mormon. Dee was learned in many subjects and served as a respected advisor, tutor, and astrologer to Queen Elizabeth I. He assembled the largest private library in the land and was also a passionate antiquarian, doing much to further the preservation of ancient manuscripts, records, and monuments.²⁰ Importantly, among Dee’s efforts were “his strivings towards a complete restitution of the ancient wisdom” and in “laying the foundation for a restitution of the Christian faith.”²¹

In spite of his scholarly attainments, Dee became a controversial figure because he thought his knowledge would be insufficient unless it incorporated direct revelation or communication with the angels. This he diligently sought, and together with his colleague and scryer (seer) Edward Kelley (1555–1597) and the use of a “shew-stone,”²² he recorded much in the way of claimed personal revelation. Some thought Dee’s revelations were authentic; others that Dee and Kelley were deceived or deceivers; yet others saw their writings as the result of black or white magic—which caused him no end of persecution. As for myself, I believe that there may be some truth in more than one of these perspectives on Dee’s complex and challenging writings. I will also offer that my own reading of his revelations had mixed results, not only raising many serious questions but also providing some significant insights.

Fifty years after Dee’s death, many of what he termed “actions” with the angels were compiled and published by Meric Casaubon.²³ In this compilation, under the heading *Liber Resurrectionis*, appears a part of Dee’s 1586 account of the important revelatory episode

20 For biographical detail I have primarily relied on Peter J. French, *John Dee: The World of an Elizabethan Magus* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972, 1984) and the more recent Glyn Parry, *The Arch-Conjuror of England: John Dee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

21 Håkan Håkansson, *Seeing the Word: John Dee and Renaissance Occultism* (Lund, Sweden: Lunds Universitet, 2001), 237, 267.

22 Deborah E. Harkness, “Shows in the Showstone: A Theater of Alchemy and Apocalypse in the Angel Conversations of John Dee (1527–1608/9),” *Renaissance Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (1996): 707–737.

23 John Dee, *A True & Faithful Relation of What Passed for many yeers Between Dr. John Dee (A Mathematician of Great Fame in Q. Eliz. and King James their Reignes) and Some Spirits*, ed. Meric Casaubon (London: D. Maxwell for T. Garthwait, 1659). Facsimile edition (New York: Magickal Childe Publishing, 1992). Original spelling.

that I discuss here.²⁴ Unfortunately, the Casaubon account of Dee's experience was incomplete and did not contain enough detail to give a clear understanding and appreciation of what Dee said had transpired. Fortunately, a supplementary account from Dee that was lost for nearly four centuries was found and first published in 1965 under the title "An Unknown Chapter in the Life of John Dee."²⁵ I refer to this additional source also to help provide a brief summary of the events in Dee's report of greatest interest to the Latter-day Saints.

John Dee's Book of Resurrection

In approaching the accounts from John Dee and Edward Kelley, it is important to observe that they were greatly interested in alchemy, and that the incident discussed here occurred in connection with their alchemical laboratory. While the forerunner of modern chemistry, alchemy was also a spiritual discipline that employed many symbols. Much of that symbolism was impressive and persisted and was widely influential in the ritual of Freemasonry²⁶ and elsewhere. Alchemists were concerned with the transformation of matter. Such changes could be seen by them as miraculously brought about by the direct intervention of God or Christ. It was believed that the transformation of matter would symbolize and help bring about a desired transformation in the soul of the alchemist himself. Moreover, it appears that changes in matter in alchemical experiments were often conceived of as bearing a relationship to death and resurrection and to the transformation of Christ in the Resurrection.²⁷ This background of alchemical speculation provides a significant backdrop to Dee's account.

²⁴ Dee, *True & Faithful Relation*, 418–419.

²⁵ C. H. Josten, "An Unknown Chapter in the Life of John Dee," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 28 (1965): 223–257. Josten says it was a "recent accidental discovery among the manuscripts of that passionate collector of any kind of information on Dee, Elias Ashmole," 223. Cited by French, *John Dee*, 120, it led me in 1982 to find and contemplate Josten's discovery, and later to view the oil portrait of Dee in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and his interesting "shew-stone" and other relics in the British Museum, London.

²⁶ Timothy Hogan, *The Alchemical Keys to Masonic Ritual* (Privately printed, 2007).

²⁷ Consider the lecture of Betty Jo Teeter Dobbs, *Alchemical Death and Resurrection: The Significance of Alchemy in the Age of Newton* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Libraries, 1990). For Dee specifically see Deborah E. Harkness, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels: Cabala, Alchemy, and the End of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 195–214. For further discussion of Dee in relation

In beginning his narrative, Dee states that he was “enjoined by God Almighty to commit those things to writing which He communicates to us” and that “without any doubt, when the fulness of the appointed time has run its course...many of the things which we have received and understood by divine communication and in secret...will be published and known to the world in a most abundant, manifest, complete, and effective way” to the honor of God.²⁸ As to the time, from Dee’s choice of words here, I infer that he may allude to the “dispensation of the fulness of times” (Ephesians 1:10).²⁹

Dee recounts that on 10 April 1586 Kelley heard a voice requiring their attention, and that they “then repaired speedily to our oratory (the accustomed place of divine visitation)³⁰ where...we waited for the word of the Lord.”³¹ When the word came, they were surprised to be directed to gather up the books and papers containing their revelations and burn all of them in the furnace. This would be the alchemical furnace where experimental transformations were effected—“the large tiled stove next to Dee’s oratory.”³² These writings were precious to them, and Kelley was reluctant to carry out the commandment. Dee, however, encouraged him, likening the action to the test of Abraham’s faith when he was commanded to offer Isaac in the “holocaust”—a sacrificial burnt offering.³³ This “arrested sacrifice” has always been interpreted as a type of the Lord’s sacrificial death and resurrection (Genesis 22:5–13). Isaac was saved by divine intervention, but loss of him would have prevented fulfillment of solemn promises made to Abraham. Similarly, if their writings were to be lost, Dee and Kelley would also suffer the sad consequences and contradiction of unrealized promises.

to “Alchemy and the transmutation of the human soul,” see Håkansson, *Seeing the Word*, 223–230.

28 Josten, *Unknown Chapter*, 226.

29 One of Dee’s marginal notes reads: “The fulness of time has not yet come for our power to be made manifest.” Josten, *Unknown Chapter*, 244.

30 Dee’s parenthetical comment. The oratory was a reserved place for prayer and meditation in connection with the alchemical laboratory. In Kunrath’s noted drawing of such a laboratory from 1607, the oratory is a tent within the laboratory, likely reminiscent of the ancient tabernacle and based on the understanding of the temple as a place for divine communication. It is conveniently reproduced in Frances A. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), opposite p. 49. The oratory “implies that prayer was integral to the work of alchemy.” Harkness, *Conversations with Angels*, 28.

31 Josten, *Unknown Chapter*, 247.

32 Parry, *Arch-Conjuror*, 190.

33 See Josten, *Unknown Chapter*, 251 and context.

However, the Voice reassured them, although the books and papers were to be completely burned: “Do I not resuscitate the dead? Go then, and have faith.”³⁴ Stones were removed from the mouth of the furnace, and eventually all of the materials were placed in the opened furnace and burned entirely.³⁵

In a miraculous sequel, Dee says that a few days later Kelley was looking out his window and saw “the Gardiner” pruning trees, and then “on the Rock in the Garden he seemed to mount up in a great pillar of fire.”³⁶ Kelley sought Dee, and together they went into the garden to see what they could find. Dee said that “(to the prayse of God his truth and power,) there I found three of my Books lying, which were so diligently burnt...”³⁷ Dee added that “I fell on my knees with great thanks yielding to the God Almighty, and so did [Kelley] whose mind and body were mervailously affected at the sight...”³⁸ After thankful prayer by Dee and Kelley, “[s]uddenly appeared by us the self-same Gardiner like person” who directed Kelley to follow him.³⁹ The angelic figure was “apparently visible to Dee,”⁴⁰ who described “the spiritual creature,” noting that “his feet seemed not to touch the ground by a foot height.”⁴¹ Kelley is led by the spiritual being to the furnace, “the bricks now plucked away which stopped the mouth of the Furnace...”⁴² A “great light” appeared within as they recovered many more of the books and papers that had been burned, which Kelley then brought to Dee as “the Gardiner” departed once again in a “fiery cloud.”⁴³

What are we to think of Dee’s surprising account, so different than most of his other writings? I have provided here a brief review of it. So far as I have observed, writers who discuss Dee tend to be silent on this incident, or if they mention it do not appear to recognize the exceptional imagery of death and resurrection that gives it significant meaning. This symbolism ought to be the most evident thing about it, as the appearance

34 Josten, *Unknown Chapter*, 252.

35 *Ibid.*, 252–253.

36 Dee, *True & Faithful Relation*, 418. Original spelling. An allusion to Christ’s being “taken up...into heaven” in Acts 1:11. A biblical “great pillar of fire,” Parry, *Arch-Conjuror*, 191.

37 Dee, *True & Faithful Relation*, 418 (original spelling).

38 *Ibid.*, 418 (original spelling).

39 *Ibid.*, 418 (original spelling).

40 Parry, *Arch-Conjuror*, 191.

41 Dee, *True & Faithful Relation*, 419.

42 *Ibid.*, 419. Earlier, “stones” were mentioned at the furnace opening. Both bricks and the tile sides were made of hardened clay, which is a form of rock.

43 Dee, *True & Faithful Relation*, 419; cf. Acts 1:9.

of “the Gardiner” reminds us of the New Testament narrative where Mary first supposed the resurrected Christ to be the gardener (John 20:15). To this is added the concept of the holocaust or sacrificial burnt offering, “a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father” (Moses 5:7; Jacob 4:5). The essential idea is that revealed books that had perished were “resurrected” in a setting emblematic of Christ’s death and resurrection. Indeed, Dee’s own account of this incident may in a sense be considered a “resurrected book,” since it was lost and later restored.

I do not attempt to say whether Dee’s account is real or imaginary, but review it here because of its inherent interest and that it caused me to ponder how its striking idea of resurrected books might apply elsewhere. A recent biographer of Dee has commented on this incident that “[o]f all the episodes in these manuscripts, the sixteenth-century’s most remarkable account of angelic magic, this most defies historical explanation. History cannot account for what Kelley did and what Dee believed he saw. It can only describe the consequences.”⁴⁴ For my part, whatever caused the creation of these documents, the consequence was to alert me to recognize and consider a most interesting and important aspect of the Book of Mormon.

The Lord and the Book of Mormon: Illustrative Counterparts

The Book of Mormon teaches that “all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying” of Christ (2 Nephi 11:4). The Book of Mormon itself is a strong example of this principle. Seeing it as a “resurrected book” and as a similitude of the resurrected Christ recognizes a type of great import. However, the broader context should be surveyed to identify other counterparts between the book and the life and mission of the Lord. Here I list chronologically and briefly discuss twelve illustrative counterparts. Doubtless more could be adduced, but a consideration of these basic examples should make clear that the Book of Mormon may be understood as a most significant type of the Christ.

Counterpart 1: An Origin in Heaven

In the Gospel of John, the Lord spoke of himself as the “bread of life,” saying that “my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven” and that “the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth

44 Parry, *Arch-Conjuror*, 191.

life unto the world” (John 6:32–35). He then added plainly, and with allusion to the Resurrection: “I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day” (John 6:38–39). That he brought his teachings from the Father above is clear also from his intercessory prayer in which he said: “Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me” (John 17:7–8). These and related passages firmly establish the important New Testament doctrine that Christ and his mission began in Heaven and that he was sent of God the Father to accomplish His divine purposes.⁴⁵

The Book of Mormon also provides a witness of Christ’s heavenly origin, and does so in a remarkable manner. It also shows that the Book of Mormon had its origin in the same heavenly place. This is well established in the opening chapter. There we read that about 600 B.C. at Jerusalem the prophet Lehi was “carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open, and...God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God” (1 Nephi 1:8). He was shown “One descending out of the midst of heaven, and he beheld that his luster was above that of the sun at noon-day. And he also saw twelve others following him...and they came down and went forth upon the face of the earth” (1 Nephi 1:9–11). Manifestly, this refers to the commissioned Christ and the Apostles, the Greek word for *apostle* meaning literally a “sent one.” At the time it was shown Lehi in vision, this would have been a future event.

In the same heavenly vision, the Lord “gave unto [Lehi] a book, and bade him that he should read” (1 Nephi 1:11). What he learned in his visions is the basis of his teachings, that “which he had both seen and heard...and also the things which he read in the book, [which] manifested plainly of the coming of a Messiah, and also the redemption of the world.” (1 Nephi 1:18–19; cf. John 3:31–32, emphasis added). His teachings were abridged by his son Nephi and written “upon plates” (1 Nephi 1:17). This vision, which is doubtless the source of Lehi’s prophetic authority in which he became a “sent one,” is also the beginning of the Book of Mormon, which thus can be traced to its origin at the throne of God, likewise the place of Christ’s commission. The description of the

45 Cf. John 1:14, 3:13–17, 8:42, 16:28–30; Romans 8:3; Hebrews 2:9–18.

plates as gold in appearance accords with the mentioned “luster” of the Lord, the glory of God, and the light and brilliance of the celestial court above.

It should be observed that since the publication of the Book of Mormon in 1830, many visionary accounts from the ancient Near East have been discovered and studied together with biblical sources. These other examples or *apocalypses* have similar motifs, and help us to understand better the nature of Lehi’s experience when they are compared with it. Referred to as “Throne-Theophanies” or “Heavenly Ascents,” these visions are of supreme importance with respect to the calling of the prophets and to the origins of their teachings, testimony, and authority.⁴⁶

Of very important interest for the Book of Mormon is the motif of the “Heavenly Book” such as Lehi was given to read while in his vision. “The heavenly book motif...appears throughout the Judeo-Christian scriptures, but it truly comes into its own in apocalypses where it is ubiquitous.”⁴⁷ In his classic and wide-ranging study of this concept, the Swedish scholar Widengren found that “Few religious ideas in the Ancient Near East have played a more important role than the notion of the Heavenly Tablets, or the Heavenly Book...the oft-recurring thought that the Heavenly Book is handed over at the ascension in an interview with a heavenly being.”⁴⁸ He also shows how the prophets received their commission there. Thus they became a “sent one” to take the teachings of the heavenly book to be disseminated on earth.⁴⁹ With its origin in heaven, the Book of Mormon itself may be seen as a “Heavenly Book” because it is based on and transfers teachings to earth from the Book in the heavenly realm. Brent McNeely has examined basic elements of the heavenly book motif as identified by Widengren and compared them to Lehi’s vision and the events at the coming forth of the Book of Mormon,

46 For an overview, Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). For a Latter-day Saint treatment of Lehi’s vision in relation to ancient sources see Blake T. Ostler, “The Throne-Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi: A Form-Critical Analysis,” *BYU Studies* 26, no. 4 (1986): 67–95. See also Stephen O. Smoot, “The Divine Council in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter* 27 (2017): 155–180.

47 Leslie Baynes, *The Heavenly Book Motif in Judeo-Christian Apocalypses: 200 B.C.E.–200 C.E.* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2012), 23.

48 Geo Widengren, *The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book (King and Saviour III)* (Leipzig, Germany: Harrassowitz, 1950), 7.

49 Widengren, *Heavenly Book*, 28–39.

finding close agreement.⁵⁰ Jeffrey Bradshaw and David Larsen also explore this theme with respect to the heavenly record given to Enoch in the ancient book of *1 Enoch* and the latter-day Book of Moses.⁵¹

Counterpart 2: “Incarnation” of the Lord and the Book

In his vision, Lehi saw the Lord “descending out of the midst of heaven” and that He “came down and went forth upon the face of the earth” (1 Nephi 1:9–11). This is what is known as the descent and *incarnation* of Christ, notably referred to by John in the opening of his Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God”—[and] the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:1–2, 14). It is important to recall that while the Lord is called “the Word,” the Book from above is also known as the “word” of God.

Based on an interpretation of John’s statement, at times Christians have also deemed the Bible an “incarnation,” or an embodiment of the teachings from above in a form compatible on earth. This is a helpful and insightful analogy. A recent study explained the concept: “*Logos*, the Word, was the very embodiment of the Creator, revealed to Creation through the incarnation...and through the abiding physical manifestation of the gospel book that contained his teachings, itself incarnated”—it became, literally, the “Word made flesh, or rather, the Word made word.”⁵² This is not an unreasonable view, for some early Christian writers even regarded “Christ as text.”⁵³ Being so closely associated with the Heavenly Book, the Lord was seen as the personification of it, possessing and expressing the teachings from above. In this manner, just as with the biblical scriptures, the Book of Mormon, in its capacity as a “Heavenly Book,” may also be viewed as an “incarnation” in likeness to that of the Lord.

50 Brent E. McNeely, “The Book of Mormon and the Heavenly Book Motif,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 26–28.

51 Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and David J. Larsen, *In God’s Image and Likeness 2: Enoch, Noah, and the Tower of Babel* (Salt Lake City: The Interpreter Foundation, 2014), 46–48, 72–73, 97.

52 Michelle P. Brown, “The Book as Sacred Space,” in *Sacred Space: House of God, Gate of Heaven*, ed. Philip North and John North (London: Continuum, 2007), 45.

53 Baynes, *Heavenly Book Motif*, 196, see also 8, 169–171, 185–188, 190–191, 193–195, 199, 205; Cf. 2 Corinthians 3:1–3.

Counterpart 3: Christ as “Temple” and the “Temple-like” Book

The concept of the book incarnate can be related to the idea of the temple—an assigned place where god and man may meet. Whereas Christ “spake of the temple of his body” (John 2:21), the scriptural book “was itself a sacred space—a tabernacle of the Word and a place for the enshrinement and contemplation of ideals. This space could be inhabited both by the maker and the viewer.”⁵⁴ A holy book, such as the Book of Mormon, may thus be considered a temple-like place—that is a special prepared place where God and man can better communicate, or where the Lord through his Spirit can meet with prayerful readers to enhance their understanding.

LeGrand Baker has studied the temple-like characteristics of the Book of Mormon in some detail. He found that the prophet Mormon, who edited and arranged it, had to be very familiar with “all facets of ancient Israelite temple worship” and concluded that “his commentary is so precisely matched to the legitimate purpose, workings and theoretical structure of the ancient Israelite temple drama that the Book of Mormon is virtually an ancient Israelite temple in its own right.”⁵⁵

Counterpart 4: Heavenly Teachings from Christ and the Book

Having descended to earth and sent of the Father from the Heavenly Court above, Christ and the apostles who assist him are “sent ones” who disseminate the heavenly teachings of God. The Book of Mormon might also be seen figuratively as a “sent one,” its doctrines originating from God and the Heavenly Book above, and primarily brought to earth by the prophet Lehi for dissemination among the people (1 Nephi 1:19).

Counterpart 5: After Their Rejection, the Lord and the Book are Buried

John said of Christ that “He came unto his own, and his own received him not” (John 1:11). Isaiah had prophesied that the Savior, as a ‘Suffering Servant,’ would be “rejected of men,” a prediction quoted in

⁵⁴ Brown, “Book as Sacred Space,” 48.

⁵⁵ LeGrand L. Baker, *The Book of Mormon as an Ancient Israelite Temple: Nineteen Temple Characteristics of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2012), 21–22. Note the insightfulness of seeing the Book of Mormon metaphorically as temple in a study of that part of the book which relates the appearance and teaching by Christ at the temple; cf. John W. Welch, “Seeing Third Nephi as the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 19, no. 1 (2010): 36–55.

the Book of Mormon (Isaiah 53:3; Mosiah 14:3). The Crucifixion was the culmination of that rejection, after which his body was buried in the tomb by his followers. In the Book of Mormon, after the people “have all dwindled in unbelief” and “rejected the gospel of Christ,” the prophet Moroni hid the writings in the earth as he was specifically commanded by God (Ether 4:3).

A study of Christ’s discourse to the Nephites brings out the concept that the ‘Suffering Servant’ in Isaiah, which refers to Christ, may also apply to others who typify Him, and also specifically to the Book of Mormon as a *servant*, “using a literary device called personification, which applies human attributes to inanimate objects.”⁵⁶

Counterpart 6: Christ and the Book Teach the Spirits of the Dead

In a significant event known as the *Descensus*, Christ went in the spirit to teach the spirits of the dead while his body was in the tomb awaiting the Resurrection (1 Peter 3:18–20; 4:6).⁵⁷ In early times, “the Christian Faith once proclaimed more widely a tenet that was a consolation to believers as they anticipated their inevitable deaths: Christ’s descent to the dead.”⁵⁸ Revelation to the Latter-day Saints causes them to regard this event as one of great importance in beginning to provide for the instruction and salvation of the dead. We might consider that the buried Book of Mormon went “underground,” and that its teachings were made available to help teach the dead. In President Joseph F. Smith’s 1918 vision of Christ among the spirits, he saw the Lord organize the prophets of old to assist in their instruction. The revelation specifically included mention of “the prophets who dwelt among the Nephites,” the prophets of the Book of Mormon who taught of the Christ and whose teachings would have been informed by Lehi’s early doctrines as derived from the Heavenly Book (D&C 138:49).

56 Gaye Strathearn and Jacob Moody, “Christ’s Interpretation of Isaiah 52’s ‘My Servant’ in 3 Nephi,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 18, no. 1 (2009): 4–15, quotation from p. 11.

57 For a summary of New Testament and frequent Early Church teachings on the Descensus, see Martin F. Connell, “Descensus Christi ad Inferos: Christ’s Descent to the Dead,” *Theological Studies* 62, no. 2 (2001): 262–282. See also David L. Paulsen, Roger D. Cook, and Kendel J. Christensen, “The Harrowing of Hell: Salvation for the Dead in Early Christianity,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 19, no. 1 (2010): 56–77.

58 Connell, “Christ’s Descent to the Dead,” 262.

Counterpart 7: Christ and the Book “Come Forth” from the Grave

When Joseph (of Arimathea) entombed the body of Christ, it was placed in a “new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre” (Matthew 27:60). After the Resurrection of the Lord, “they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre” (Luke 24:2). The “stone was rolled away: for it was very great” (Mark 16:4). When Joseph (Smith) unearthed the golden plates of the Book of Mormon from the hillside, he found that “under a stone of considerable size, lay the plates, deposited in a stone box” (Joseph Smith—History 1:51). He explained: “Having removed the earth, I obtained a lever, which I got fixed under the edge of the stone, and with a little exertion raised it up. I looked in, and there indeed did I behold the plates” (Joseph Smith—History 1:52).

Thus, when both the Lord and the Book of Mormon plates were interred, they were each placed in a stone enclosure with the opening covered by a large stone that later had to be removed. The New Testament narratives pertaining to the Resurrection offer parallels to Joseph Smith’s experience in “resurrecting” the Book of Mormon. First of all, there was the angel dressed in white who proclaimed the resurrection,⁵⁹ and the Book of Mormon was also proclaimed by an angel (Moroni). Their celestial glory and brilliance that marked the events was reflected also in the glorious golden plates. The title page of the Book of Mormon says that it was “hid up unto the Lord [buried], to *come forth* in due time.” *Come forth* appears to be resurrection language, for in the account of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead—an account that has many parallels to the New Testament resurrection narratives—Jesus “cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, *come forth*” (John 11:43, emphasis added). Again, John says “the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall *come forth*” in the resurrection (John 5:28–29). The Book of Mormon has the very same usage.⁶⁰

There are other similarities to be considered, such as the body of Jesus being wrapped in linen clothes (John 19:40, 20:6–7). Lucy Mack Smith tells of her son Joseph taking the plates from where they were hidden, “wrapping them in his linen frock.”⁶¹ Wife Emma’s account tells

⁵⁹ Mark 16:5–7.

⁶⁰ See the Book of Mormon Title Page; 2 Nephi 27:10; Alma 40:4, 21; Mormon 5:12. cf. D&C 76:64–65; Moses 7:55–57.

⁶¹ Lavina Fielding Anderson, ed. *Lucy’s Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith’s Family Memoir* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), 385–386.

of the plates being “wrapped in a small linen table cloth, which I had given [Joseph] to fold them in.”⁶² In another and most significant parallel, there were serious restrictions on seeing and touching the risen Lord *and* the plates (John 20:17; Ether 5:1). However, later when witnesses were permitted, Jesus said “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see” (Luke 24:39). Likewise, the Eight Witnesses of the Book of Mormon testified that when they saw the golden plates they “did handle with [their] hands” the leaves that had been translated. These parallels suggest the need for further study to identify other possible relationships.

Counterpart 8: Witnesses Called of God Testify of Christ and the Book

The resurrected Christ and the resurrected Book of Mormon each have *eleven official witnesses* who were called of God to testify of their reality.⁶³ Of the Christ, Peter said, representing the apostles, “Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead” (Acts 10:40–41). In the Book of Mormon, it had been prophesied that three witnesses would be called to “behold it, by the power of God...and they shall testify to the truth of the book and the things therein...and there is none other which shall view it, save it be a few according to the will of God, to bear testimony of his word...that the words of the faithful should speak as if it were from the dead” (2 Nephi 27:12–13). The three were chosen by revelation (D&C 17:1–5). Later eight more witnesses were designated. The testimonies of these witnesses are found in the published Book of Mormon.⁶⁴ In the New Testament, Thomas was a belated witness separated from the others, as was Martin Harris with the Book of Mormon.⁶⁵

In both the New Testament and in Latter-day Saint history, some other persons were also allowed to view these sacred things. Angelic assistance was present in both the ancient and modern witness accounts.

62 *Saints' Herald* 26, no. 19 (1879): 290, as cited in Matthew B. Brown, *Plates of Gold: The Book of Mormon Comes Forth* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2003), 78.

63 Cf. Mark 16:14 and context.

64 For detail see Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981); see also M. H. McKay and G. J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith's Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 141–161.

65 John 20:24–29; Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 108–109.

In the New Testament, the Apostles saw attending angels in “white apparel,” and Joseph Smith described the attending angel Moroni as clothed in a “robe of most exquisite whiteness.”⁶⁶ It is such similarities between the two accounts that are impressive. In his biography of Joseph Smith, John Henry Evans noted the criticism that some of the Book of Mormon witnesses were close relatives, yet he observed that Joseph “would have to select them from among those who were believers; and believers at this particular time were few... Anyway, that is not really an objection, in view of the fact that the men otherwise are qualified.”⁶⁷ It should be remembered that some New Testament witnesses of the Resurrection were close relatives also.

Counterpart 9: Christ and the Book have Secret or Reserved Teachings

Jesus taught a body of secret or reserved doctrines during his forty-day ministry after the Resurrection (Acts 1:3). The Book of Mormon has a reserved portion that has been “sealed” and is currently withheld, but will yet be revealed (2 Nephi 27:6–11).

Counterpart 10: Christ and the Book Open a New Dispensation

In the latter-day restoration of the Gospel and the Church, the resurrected Lord and the resurrected Book of Mormon begin a new dispensation—“the dispensation of the fulness of times” (Ephesians 1:10). The Lord appeared directly to Joseph Smith in the First Vision and otherwise, and gave much revelation to the Prophet for doctrine and for guidance on organization and procedures. The Book also is the source of much doctrinal correction and understanding and is of very substantial assistance in matters of Church operations and administration. The “Book of Mormon had a profound formative influence on Joseph Smith’s doctrinal and institutional development during the nascent days of the nineteenth-century Mormon restoration.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Acts 1:10 and Joseph Smith–History 1:31–32.

⁶⁷ John Henry Evans, *Joseph Smith: an American Prophet* (New York: McMillan, 1946), 398.

⁶⁸ Gerald E. Smith, *Schooling the Prophet: How the Book of Mormon Influenced Joseph Smith and the Early Restoration* (Provo: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2015), 3; see also John W. Welch, “The Book of Mormon as the Keystone of Church Administration,” in *A Firm Foundation: Church Organization and Administration*, ed. David J. Whittaker and Arnold K. Garr (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 15–57.

Counterpart 11: Both Christ and the Book Ascend Back to Heaven

After the Resurrection, as Jesus prepared to depart from the Apostles, he called them to be his witnesses, and “while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9). Two attending angels in “white apparel” said “this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

Of the golden plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated, the Prophet Joseph Smith recalled that “they remained safe in my hands, until I had accomplished by them what was required at my hand. When, according to arrangements, the messenger called for them, I delivered them up to him; and he has them in his charge” (Joseph Smith—History 1:60). The messenger was the attending Angel Moroni, for both the plates and the Lord had angelic assistance at the ascent. From another account by Joseph of a visit by Moroni which describes his manner of departure, we learn that “instantly [Joseph] saw, as it were, a conduit open right up into heaven, and he ascended till he entirely disappeared” (Joseph Smith—History 1:43). It appears that the golden plates, a “Heavenly Book,” returned to heaven as did the Lord, each with angelic company. Even as the Lord shall return again, it appears that the Book of Mormon plates also will be fully restored to earth (2 Nephi 27:11; D&C 101:32–34, 121:27–28).

Counterpart 12: The Lord and the Book Are Authoritative at the Judgment

It is well established in the scriptures that Christ will be judge of mankind in the Final Judgment.⁶⁹ The “Father...hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (John 5:22). His teachings are to be found not only in the Bible, but also in the Book of Mormon as they were taught by the Lord himself and the Nephite prophets. Thus, at the end of the Book of Mormon, Moroni writes of the Judgment, *and* of resurrected words, when he declares: “ye shall see me at the bar of God; and the Lord God will say unto you: Did I not declare my words unto you, which were written by this man, like as one crying from the dead, yea, even as one speaking out of the dust?” (Moroni 10:27). The Book of Mormon is an important source for the heavenly teachings of Christ, and contains standards and commandments by which people will be judged.

⁶⁹ Matthew 25:31–46; John 5:22–27, 9:39; Acts 10:42, 17:31.

In the Book of Mormon account of the appearance of Christ to the Nephites, the Lord explained: “And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross...that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up...to stand before me, to be judged of their works” (3 Nephi 27:14). We have here the concept of a reciprocal or two-way judgment, where men first judge Christ and later are to be judged by Him accordingly.⁷⁰ How the Book of Mormon is judged is also of consequence here because it is a type of Christ and like the Bible contains many of his words and teachings.⁷¹ The Lord had said: “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48; cf. 2 Nephi 29:11).

Ritual Aspects of the Book of Mormon Translation

It is most important to recognize that many things in this study point to the fact that the Book of Mormon was produced by a *ritual* procedure. Things among the counterparts identified above appear to be of a symbolic and ritual nature. A basic chiastic pattern is likely, with the pivotal center of death and resurrection—descent from heaven/ascent to heaven. This pattern would apply to both the Lord and the Book.

In an insightful commentary, Jan Shipps has shown that many happenings in Latter-day Saint history may be seen as a “recapitulation” of things in ancient sacred history.⁷² This is true to a notable degree regarding the *coming forth* of the Book of Mormon, which she sees as beginning the recapitulation process by affording people who came to America the sacred history and teachings of a people that came before them. She even likens it to “the priests’ discovery in the recesses of the temple of a book said to have been written by Moses [that] told the people in King Josiah’s reign about those who came to Israel before them.”⁷³ Josiah’s averred recovery from the temple of what were thought to be pure writings from the past (a “resurrected book”?) provided a basis for his reformation. Generally thought to be the book of Deuteronomy, Josiah’s discovery can be understood as *coming forth* from a special mountain, for modern studies of the ancient temple have shown that temples were

70 Cf. Matthew 7:2: “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged.”

71 On the importance of heavenly books at the Judgment, see Baynes, *Heavenly Book Motif*, 197–199.

72 Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of A New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 41–65.

73 Shipps, *Mormonism*, 58. See 2 Kings 22:8–13 and 2 Chronicles 34:14–21.

considered an imitation of the sacred mountain where revelation was received by the prophets—“the mountain of the Lord’s house” (Isaiah 2:2).⁷⁴ The Book of Mormon followed a similar pattern: *coming forth* from a dedicated hillside tomb and providing teachings from the past to support a gospel restoration.

Joseph Smith lived a richly symbolic life—a ritual life, if you will.⁷⁵ If with angelic guidance he was led through a ritual procedure to enable the Book of Mormon to *come forth*, it may well help explain some of the unusual things Joseph did, experienced, or symbolized. We should use caution as we consider and interpret Joseph’s unusual actions until we better understand the symbolic or ritual things he was given to do. We have much to learn about these eternal things, and about the purpose and meaning of some things Joseph experienced.

As an example of the challenge to better understand Joseph Smith’s procedures, I suggest considering how he went about arranging things, under angelic direction,⁷⁶ to begin translating the Book of Mormon. At the time he was destitute. He was also under strict warning by the angel not to use the golden plates for gain or to show them to persons not authorized.⁷⁷ He had to use what was at hand at the little house where he stayed. During at least part of the beginning period of the translation, he reportedly had a blanket or curtain hanging between him and his scribe, “apparently used at an early point to shield the scribe from a view of the plates, spectacles, or breastplate.”⁷⁸

Martin Harris was scribe at an early time in the translation, and several reports of this setting appear to have come from him.⁷⁹ Critical writers have asserted without evidence that Joseph did this to deceive his

74 John M. Lundquist, *The Temple of Jerusalem: Past, Present and Future* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008), xiii–xvi.

75 George L. Mitton, “Moroni and the Ritual Life of Joseph Smith,” *FARMS Review* 16, no. 1 (2004): xxvi–xxix.

76 Joseph Smith received numerous instructive visitations from angelic messengers. One study compiled a list of 59 spiritual visitors and 22 known appearances to him by the angel Moroni. H. Donl Peterson, *Moroni: Ancient Prophet, Modern Messenger* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 132–134, 146–150.

77 Joseph Smith—History 1:42–46; cf. Mormon 8:14–16.

78 Richard E. Turley Jr., Robin S. Jensen and Mark Ashurst-McGee, “Joseph the Seer,” *Ensign* 45, no. 10 (October 2015): 55. Also reproduced on the same page in this article is a painting showing Joseph and his scribe at the work of translation with the curtain between them.

79 For a review of these accounts, see Roger Nicholson, “The Spectacles, the Stone, the Hat, and the Book: A Twenty-first Century Believer’s View of the Book of Mormon Translation,” *Interpreter* 5 (2013): 168–175.

scribe. One minister who had interviewed Harris about his experience claimed that “Smith concealed behind the blanket, *pretended* to look through his spectacles, or transparent stones, and would...repeat what he saw, which, when repeated aloud, was written down by Harris, who sat on the other side of the suspended blanket.”⁸⁰ This was his negative interpretation despite receiving Harris’s fervent witness. However, there is a very different way to interpret the arrangement that is edifying and enlightening. It also is more explanatory and much more to good purpose and in accord and meaningful in the surrounding events and circumstances. It is also clear that God placed His approval on this humble place and arrangement by conducting there a most important, extensive, and sacred activity.

To begin the translation, in his very humble circumstances, Joseph could have arranged the space in an intentional pattern to shield the sacred things from unauthorized view, but *also* provide the most essential symbol of the temple, with a curtain or veil separating “the inner sanctuary or Most Holy Place, the Holy of Holies,” and “where inner surfaces are said to be gilded” representing “heaven on earth.”⁸¹ With Joseph, the golden plates and other relics provided symbols of celestial light and glory at the heavenly place of God’s throne. Today, there is growing recognition of the very great importance of the ancient temple in the theology and practices of the early Christians.⁸² It is most significant that Joseph Smith’s actions draw attention to the basic importance of the temple and its symbolism at the earliest stages of his mission of restoration. What he was led to do anticipated later revelation about the temple and its reestablishment.⁸³

In the ancient Israelite temple, only the High Priest was authorized to pass beyond the veil into the Holy of Holies, commune with God, and return with any message or blessing for the people. With Joseph Smith also, access was restricted. The symbolism of the setting is clear: “Those who passed through the curtain passed from earth to heaven or from heaven to earth.”⁸⁴ With the golden plates, Joseph also had very

80 John A. Clark, *Gleanings by the Way* (Philadelphia: W.J. & J.K. Simon, 1842), 230 (emphasis added); “This was Harris’s own account of the matter to me,” 230–231.

81 Lundquist, *Temple of Jerusalem*, 17–19.

82 Margaret Barker, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Temple Symbolism in the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), ix–xii, 73–80; Margaret Barker, *Temple Themes in Christian Worship* (London: T&T Clark, 2007; John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009).

83 I am preparing an essay which will discuss these matters in more detail.

84 Barker, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 10.

special possessions of the ancient High Priest, including the Urim and Thummim and the breastplate. His presence in the designated sacred area implies access to God’s revelation. In Joseph Smith’s arrangement for the translation, we have symbolized the heavenly ascent of the prophet, and we have once again the concept of the Heavenly Book being read by the prophet while in the heavenly realm, with its words passing through the veil in its descent and “incarnation.”

Some may think this an extravagant interpretation of what Joseph did and symbolized, but we must remember this occurrence was at the birth and modest beginnings of something of uppermost importance that would grow to be of great consequence: “out of small things proceedeth that which is great” (D&C 64:33; cf. Alma 37:6–7).⁸⁵ There was simplicity in Joseph’s veil arrangement, yet it represented things most profound. Joseph Smith was very guarded in what he said about the sacred translation process, but it clearly involved an anticipatory ritual procedure that amounted to a prophecy of what was to come. What we glean from the available sources is a mere glimpse of what occurred—but what a marvelous glimpse it is, with many insights and associations. For example, the birth of the Book of Mormon bears comparison with circumstances at the birth of Christ. Each came in fulfillment of earlier Messianic prophecy,⁸⁶ and each was anticipated by angelic announcement.⁸⁷ Each occurred in the humblest of circumstances, with descent and incarnation, elements of the miraculous and angelic presence at the birth. Each came with strong recognition and representation—as by the symbolic veil and otherwise—of cosmic earth/heaven relationships: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14).

Closing Comments and Suggestions

What purpose is to be served in seeing the Book of Mormon as a type of Christ, or as a resurrected book? The Book of Mormon is a powerful witness for Christ in many ways, and this concept provides yet another impressive dimension to that witness. As a tangible type of the Resurrection it shows that the Resurrection of Christ was a literal bodily resurrection. It may also help to bring before us a constant reminder and appreciation of God’s great purpose, of which death and

⁸⁵ When Joseph Smith begins his work, “out of weakness he shall be made strong” (2 Nephi 3:13).

⁸⁶ Isaiah 7:14, 29:11–14.

⁸⁷ Luke 1:26–33; Joseph Smith—History 1:30–35.

resurrection is a vital part of the process. God has said “this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). It may also provide a warning and a more lively sense of the coming Judgment. Moreover, the calling of new witnesses to the reality of a miraculous event, emblematic of the Resurrection, can refresh and contribute added support to the New Testament witness for a skeptical world in the latter days.

We have seen how the rites and ordinances of the Gospel symbolize death and resurrection in a setting that reminds us of Christ and His atoning sacrifice. Beyond that, perhaps we should enlarge our view and see many things that God has arranged about us that may bring frequent remembrance of death and resurrection. This could include night followed by day; daily sleep and awakening; illness followed by recovery; war and peace; and winter followed by spring when many things are brought back to life. It could include religiously significant things such as sin and repentance;⁸⁸ the apostasy and restoration of the Church;⁸⁹ the scattering and gathering of Israel as discussed above; and the loss and subsequent restoration of the priesthood and of the Temple.⁹⁰ We could see the burial or loss and revival of many important writings from the past as symbolic of death and resurrection. Although the Book of Mormon is sacred and more richly symbolic, other restored books may well be considered as “resurrected.”

If the sensitive Christian is to confess the hand of God in all things (D&C 59:21), should not any good, beautiful, or helpful thing that is revived and restored from the past—“of good report or praiseworthy”⁹¹—be seen as evidence of God’s great power to restore, and thus betoken the resurrection? Should we not see God as having caused such restorations for a divine purpose? It may often be the case that an example from the past, when things were more true, faithful or righteous, could offer a powerful corrective for a wayward generation.⁹² Many of these things are important considerations for salvation. Latter-day Saints can see the Book of Mormon as a prime example of such a witness. It is a vital part of the “restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21), while resurrection is God’s great gift and promise to mankind: “And ye shall know that I am the

88 Cf. Romans 6:23, 8:13.

89 Cf. D&C 1:30. Consider the Church as the “body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:27).

90 See Christ’s body as temple in John 2:18–22, referring to the Resurrection.

91 Articles of Faith 1:13.

92 The Book of Mormon speaks of writings “sealed up to *come forth* in their purity” (1 Nephi 14:26).

Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves” (Ezekiel 37:13).

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