



Type: Journal Article

The Pleading Bar of God

Author(s): Royal Skousen

Source: *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*,
Volume 42 (2021), pp. 21-36

Published by: The Interpreter Foundation

Abstract: Royal Skousen’s essay shed light on enigmatic references in Jacob 6:13 and Moroni 10:34 to “the pleasing bar of God.” After establishing that the term “pleading bar” is an appropriate legal term, he cites both internal evidence and the likelihood of scribal errors as explanations for why “pleasing bar,” instead of the more likely “pleading bar,” appears in current editions of the Book of Mormon.

INTERPRETER



A JOURNAL OF LATTER-DAY SAINT
FAITH AND SCHOLARSHIP

Volume 42 · 2021 · Pages 21 - 36

The Pleading Bar of God

Royal Skousen

Offprint Series

© 2021 The Interpreter Foundation. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA.

ISSN 2372-1227 (print)
ISSN 2372-126X (online)

The goal of The Interpreter Foundation is to increase understanding of scripture through careful scholarly investigation and analysis of the insights provided by a wide range of ancillary disciplines, including language, history, archaeology, literature, culture, ethnohistory, art, geography, law, politics, philosophy, etc. Interpreter will also publish articles advocating the authenticity and historicity of LDS scripture and the Restoration, along with scholarly responses to critics of the LDS faith. We hope to illuminate, by study and faith, the eternal spiritual message of the scriptures—that Jesus is the Christ.

Although the Board fully supports the goals and teachings of the Church, The Interpreter Foundation is an independent entity and is neither owned, controlled by nor affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or with Brigham Young University. All research and opinions provided are the sole responsibility of their respective authors, and should not be interpreted as the opinions of the Board, nor as official statements of LDS doctrine, belief or practice.

This journal is a weekly publication of the Interpreter Foundation, a non-profit organization located at InterpreterFoundation.org. You can find other articles published in our journal at Journal.InterpreterFoundation.org. You may subscribe to this journal at InterpreterFoundation.org/annual-print-subscription.

THE PLEADING BAR OF GOD

Royal Skousen

Abstract: *Royal Skousen's essay shed light on enigmatic references in Jacob 6:13 and Moroni 10:34 to "the pleasing bar of God." After establishing that the term "pleading bar" is an appropriate legal term, he cites both internal evidence and the likelihood of scribal errors as explanations for why "pleasing bar," instead of the more likely "pleading bar," appears in current editions of the Book of Mormon.*

[**Editor's Note:** Part of our book chapter reprint series, this article is reprinted here as a service to the LDS community. Original pagination and page numbers have necessarily changed, otherwise the reprint has the same content as the original.]

See Royal Skousen, "The Pleading Bar of God," in *"To Seek the Law of the Lord": Essays in Honor of John W. Welch*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson and Daniel C. Peterson (Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation, 2017), 413–28. Further information at <https://interpreterfoundation.org/books/to-seek-the-law-of-the-lord-essays-in-honor-of-john-w-welch-2/>.]

Near the end of his life, the prophet Nephi referred to the day of judgment and declared that we, the readers of the Book of Mormon, will stand face to face with him before the bar of Christ: "and you and I shall stand face to face before his bar and ye shall know that I have been commanded of him to write these things / notwithstanding my weakness" (2 Nephi 33:11). Similarly, the standard LDS and RLDS editions state that the prophets Jacob and Moroni will also meet us when we stand before "the pleasing bar" of God to be judged:

Jacob 6:13

finally I bid you farewell
 until I shall meet you before **the pleasing bar** of God
 which bar striketh the wicked with awful dread and fear

Moroni 10:34

and now I bid unto all farewell
 I soon go to rest in the paradise of God
 until my spirit and body shall again reunite
 and I am brought forth triumphant through the air
 to meet you before **the pleasing bar** of the great Jehovah
 the Eternal Judge of both quick and dead

The problem in these two passages is that the word *pleasing* does not really work as a descriptive adjective for “the bar of God.” For the righteous, the day of judgment at the bar of God may well be pleasing, but not for the wicked, as Jacob himself says in Jacob 6:13: “which bar striketh the wicked with awful dread and fear.”

Christian Gellinek (who studied law at the University of Göttingen in Germany) has suggested that the difficult reading “the pleasing bar of God” can be readily resolved if we replace the word *pleasing* with *pleading* – that is, Jacob and Moroni will meet us before “the pleading bar of God” (personal communication, 25 September 2003). Phonetically, the words *pleading* and *pleasing* are nearly identical. Oliver Cowdery (or perhaps Joseph Smith, when he dictated these two passages to Oliver) was completely unfamiliar with the legal expression *pleading bar* and twice substituted the more familiar word *pleasing* for *pleading*, despite the difficulty of referring to the bar of God as pleasing.

Part of the argument for “the pleading bar of God” relies on the evidence from the manuscripts that at least Oliver Cowdery and maybe even Joseph Smith (as he dictated the text) tended to replace unfamiliar vocabulary with words they were familiar with, even if the resulting phraseology did not always make much sense. In every case, there is considerable phonetic similarity between the words that were mixed up:

weed (O, P) instead of *reed* (1830 and all subsequent editions)

1 Nephi 17:48

and whoso shall lay their hands upon me shall wither
 even as a dried **reed**

bosom (O, P) instead of *besom* (1830 and all subsequent editions)

2 Nephi 24:23 (Isaiah 14:23 in the King James Bible)

and I will sweep it with the **besom** of destruction

wrecked (P, all early editions, and all RLDS editions) instead of *racked* (1879 and all subsequent LDS editions)

Mosiah 27:29

my soul was **racked** with eternal torment

arrest (O, P, 1830 edition) instead of *wrest* (1837 and all subsequent editions)

Alma 13:20

behold the scriptures are before you if ye will **wrest** them
it shall be to your own destruction

Alma 41:1

for behold some have **wrested** the scriptures and have gone far astray
because of this thing

drugs (O, P) instead of *dregs* (1830 and all subsequent editions)

Alma 40:26

and they drink the **dregs** of a bitter cup

fraction (O, P) instead of *faction* (1830 and all subsequent editions)

Alma 58:36

behold we fear that there is some **faction** in the government

Some of these earliest readings will work: “wither even as a dried weed”, “my soul was wrecked”, “the drugs of a bitter cup”, and “there is some fraction in the government.” Yet in each case the phonetically similar word introduced into the printed editions works much better and more consistently with usage in the English language. Relying on Oliver Cowdery’s excessively elevated and ornate writing style in the eight letters he wrote to W. W. Phelps and published in the *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* from October 1834 through October 1835, one might deduce that Oliver would never have made such mistakes. But the evidence from the Book of Mormon manuscripts (dating from 1829, more than five years earlier) directly contradicts such an assumption. Oliver’s language ability undoubtedly improved over the years. To be sure, the 1830 typesetter exceeded Oliver’s language abilities at the time of the printing of the 1830 edition. Note that the 1830 typesetter is the one responsible for correcting most of these misinterpreted phrases, but not all: even he left unchanged “my soul was wrecked” and the two references to “arresting the scriptures.” Also note that in this last example Oliver twice accepted the same implausible phraseology, namely, “to arrest the scriptures” (in Alma 13:20 and Alma 41:1) instead of the correct “to wrest the scriptures.” In a similar way, Oliver could have twice misinterpreted the phrase “the pleading bar of God” as “the pleasing bar of God” (in Jacob 6:13 and Moroni 10:34).

And these are not the only conjectural emendations that reject a workable but strange reading in the manuscripts, as in the following

examples from 1 Nephi (all of which are extant in the original manuscript):

	earliest reading (in O)	emended reading
1 Nephi 7:1	that might raise up seed	that they they might raise up seed
1 Nephi 7:22	offer sacrifice and offer burnt offerings	offer sacrifice and burnt offerings
1 Nephi 12:1	and beheld the land / the land of promise	and beheld the land of promise
1 Nephi 17:53	but I will shock them	but I will shake them
1 Nephi 18:15	they had much swollen exceedingly	they had swollen exceedingly

(Oliver Cowdery himself made the first three of these emendations when he copied the text from O into P; I am responsible for the fourth one, while Joseph Smith made the last one in his editing for the 1837 edition.) When we compare each of these earliest readings with usage elsewhere in the Book of Mormon text as well as in the King James Bible or more generally in the English language, including Early Modern English, we discover that these earliest extant readings are probably not the original readings, even though these earliest readings will, in some sense, work. Each of these are discussed in volume 4 of the critical text, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, Brigham Young University, 2004–2009).

One could argue that “the pleasing bar of God” is perfectly fine and should be left alone. Yet this phraseology is inconsistent with respect to the many references to being judged at “the bar of God” found throughout the Book of Mormon text. I repeat them here because it is important to realize that none of these passages refer in a positive way to the day of judgment, although to be sure the judgment itself may be positive for the righteous who have truly repented of their sins:

negative

2 Nephi 33:15

for what I seal on earth shall be brought against you
at the judgment bar

Jacob 6:9

know ye not that if ye will do these things that the power of the redemption and the resurrection which is in Christ will bring you to stand with shame and awful guilt before the bar of God

Alma 5:22

how will any of you feel if ye shall stand **before the bar of God** having your garments stained with blood and all manner of filthiness

neutral

2 Nephi 33:11

and you and I shall stand face to face **before his bar**

Mosiah 16:10

even this mortal shall put on immortality and this corruption shall put on incorruption and shall be brought to stand **before the bar of God** to be judged of him according to their works whether they be good or whether they be evil

Alma 11:44

but all things shall be restored to its perfect frame as it is now or in the body and all shall be brought and be rained **before the bar of Christ the Son** and God the Father and the Holy Spirit – which is one Eternal God – to be judged according to their works whether they be good or whether they be evil

Alma 12:12

and Amulek hath spoken plainly concerning death and being raised from this mortality to a state of immortality and being brought **before the bar of God** to be judged according to our works

Mormon 9:13–14

and they shall come forth both small and great and all shall stand **before his bar** being redeemed and loosed from this eternal band of death which death is a temporal death and then cometh the judgment of the Holy One upon them and then cometh the time that he that is filthy shall be filthy still and he that is righteous shall be righteous still

Moroni 10:27

for ye shall see me **at the bar of God**

There is nothing here to suggest anything inherently pleasing about the bar of God. And this holds, as already noted, for the two cases of *pleasing bar* in the current text. One passage is negative, the other neutral:

negative

Jacob 6:13

finally I bid you farewell until I shall meet you before **the pleasing bar of God** which **bar** striketh the wicked with awful dread and fear

neutral

Moroni 10:34

and now I bid unto all farewell I soon go to rest in the paradise of God until my spirit and body shall again reunite and I am brought forth

triumphant through the air to meet you before **the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah** the Eternal Judge of both quick and dead

The first example comes after a long passage (Jacob 6:5–12) in which Jacob warns the unrepentant of God’s coming judgment.

Turning to other passages that refer to the day of judgment, often called “the last day”, whether standing before God or, more specifically, at his judgment seat, we find only neutral references to the place of judgment. If one has repented, then the day of judgment will be favorable, even glorious, for the righteous (as in 2 Nephi 9:46, cited below). But even in those passages, there is the implication of a negative judgment reserved for those who have not repented; there are no references to “the pleasing judgment seat of God.” Here is a sampling of the language from these additional passages:

1 Nephi 10:21

wherefore if ye have sought to do wickedly in the days of your probation
then ye are found unclean before the judgment seat of God

2 Nephi 9:46

prepare your souls for that glorious day when justice shall be administered
unto the righteous – even the day of judgment – that ye may not shrink
with awful fear that ye may not remember your awful guilt in perfectness

2 Nephi 28:23

yea they are grasped with death and hell and the devil and all that have
been seized therewith must stand before the throne of God and be judged
according to their works

Jacob 3:10

and also remember that ye may because of your filthiness bring your
children unto destruction and their sins be heaped upon your heads
at the last day

Mosiah 3:23–24

and now I have spoken the words which the Lord God hath commanded
me ... they shall stand as a bright testimony against this people at the
judgment day whereof they shall be judged every man according
to his works

Mosiah 27:31

yea every knee shall bow and every tongue confess before him yea even at
the last day when all men shall stand to be judged of him ... then shall they
confess who live without God in the world that the judgment of
an everlasting punishment is just upon them

Alma 5:18

or otherwise can ye imagine yourselves brought before the tribunal of God
with your souls filled with guilt and remorse having a remembrance
of all your guilt yea a perfect remembrance of all your wickedness yea a

remembrance that ye have set at defiance
the commandments of God

Alma 11:43

and we shall be brought to stand before God knowing even as we know now
and have a bright recollection of all our guilt

Alma 12:15

we must come forth and stand before him in his glory and in his power and
in his might majesty and dominion and acknowledge to their everlasting
shame that all his judgments are just

Alma 36:15

O thought I / that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and
body that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God
to be judged of my deeds

Alma 39:8

but behold ye cannot hide your crimes from God and except ye repent they
will stand as a testimony against you at the last day

Alma 41:3

and it is also requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged
according to their works and if their works were good in this life and the
desires of their hearts were good that they should also at the last day be
restored unto that which is good

Helaman 8:25

and even at this time instead of laying up for yourselves treasures in heaven
... ye are heaping up for yourselves wrath against the day
of judgment

3 Nephi 26:4

and even unto the great and last day when all people and all kindreds and all
nations and tongues shall stand before God to be judged
of their works

Mormon 7:6–7

whereby man must be raised to stand before his judgment seat ... whereby he
that is found guiltless before him at the judgment day hath it given unto
them to dwell in the presence of God in his kingdom

There is one positive example that refers to those who have charity at the
day of judgment:

Moroni 7:47

but charity is the pure love of Christ and it endureth forever and whoso is
found possessed of it at the last day it shall be well with them

Yet even here there is the question of what will happen to those who lack
this pure love of Christ.

There are a few cases that refer to an individual prophet standing
before the Lord at the day of judgment. In these cases, the prophet's work

on earth will be vindicated because he has made sure that he has warned the people as the Lord commanded him, thus cleansing himself from the people's blood (that is, guilt) at the day of judgment:

2 Nephi 9:44 [Jacob speaking]

behold I take off my garments and I shake them before you I pray
the God of my salvation that he view me with his all-searching
eye wherefore ye shall know at the last day when all men shall be
judged of their works that the God of Israel did witness that I shook
your iniquities from my soul and that I stand with brightness before
him and am rid of your blood

Jacob 1:19 [Jacob speaking]

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

Mosiah 2:27 [king Benjamin speaking]

even so I at this time have caused that ye should assemble yourselves
together that I might be found blameless and that your blood should not
come upon me when I stand to be judged of God of the things whereof he
hath commanded me concerning you

Ether 12:38

and now I Moroni bid farewell unto the Gentiles yea and also unto my
brethren whom I love until we shall meet before the judgment seat of
Christ when all men shall know that my garments are not spotted with
your blood

This language is also used by the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon (Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris):

3 witnesses statement

and we know that if we are faithful in Christ we shall rid our garments of the
blood of all men and be found spotless before the judgment seat of Christ
and shall dwell with him eternally in the heavens

Finally, there is one prophet, Enos, who has already been assured that his day of judgment will be a positive experience:

Enos 1:27

and I rejoice in the day when my mortal shall put on immortality and shall
stand before him then shall I see his face with pleasure and he will say
unto me: come unto me ye blessed there is a place prepared for you in the
mansions of my Father

Otherwise, references to the day of judgment avoid referring to it as a pleasing event, for either us or the Judge, unless we have repented.

In the Book of Mormon text, we thus have a strong and consistent image of the day of judgment as a trial before God, either at the bar of God or before his judgment seat. Nor is there any reason from the text itself to assume that these references to the bar of God or to his judgment seat are merely figurative or metaphorical. Note, in particular, the use of the legalistic word *arraign* (originally *raign* in the Book of Mormon text) in Alma 11:44: “and all shall be brought and be **arraigned** before the bar of Christ.” Also note the judicial term *tribune* in Alma 5:18: “can ye imagine yourselves brought before the **tribunal** of God.” And the legal interpretation should also be applied to the proposed “the pleading bar of God.” The term *pleading* here does not refer to making a plea for mercy. The word *pleading* refers to making one’s case in court (originally oral, now written) and neutrally refers to the arguments and evidence both for and against a person. (See the earliest definitions in the Oxford English Dictionary for the noun *pleading* as well as for the verb *plead* and the noun *plea*.)

Another legal aspect to the judgment of God is found in two separate statements in the Book of Mormon – namely, that Christ’s twelve apostles in Jerusalem and the twelve Nephite disciples or ministers will play some role in judging the house of Israel:

1 Nephi 12:8–10

and the angel spake unto me saying behold the twelve disciples of the Lamb which are chosen to minister unto thy seed and he saith unto me thou rememberest the twelve apostles of the Lamb behold they are they which shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel wherefore the twelve ministers of thy seed shall be judged of them for ye are of the house of Israel and these twelve ministers which thou beholdest shall judge thy seed

Mormon 3:18–19

yea behold I write unto all the ends of the earth yea unto you twelve tribes of Israel which shall be judged according to your works by the twelve whom Jesus chose to be his disciples in the land of Jerusalem and I write also unto the remnant of this people which shall also be judged by the twelve whom Jesus chose in this land and they shall be judged by the other twelve whom Jesus chose in the land of Jerusalem

Here the references to the twelve apostles judging the twelve Nephite ministers imply that the judgment being referred to is individual, not collective. Although the specific role of the twelve in that judgment is not

spelled out, it is clearly referred to. One should not automatically dismiss the idea that the twelve may play a role in the day of judgment.

The Book of Mormon often refers to the day of judgment as occurring before the judgment seat of God (12 times), as in “that ye may be found spotless at the judgment seat of Christ” (from the title page of the Book of Mormon). Interestingly, references to the bar of God in the Book of Mormon are restricted to the day of judgment, while the judgment seat as a place of judgment is also used to refer to secular governing (45 times), as in the statement that Kishcumen “murdered Parhoron as he sat upon the judgment seat” (Helaman 1:9). There is biblical evidence in support of being secularly judged before the judgment seat (11 times in the New Testament), as in Pilate’s judgment of Christ in Matthew 27:19: “when he was set down on the judgment seat / his wife sent unto him.” The use in the Book of Mormon of “the bar of God” seems real enough even though it may not represent an ancient system of judgment (unlike the references to the judgment seat).

Now let us turn to the question of external evidence for the phrases “the **pleasing** bar of God” and “the **pleading** bar of God.” One thing is quite clear: in judicial contexts there is irrefutable linguistic evidence for *pleading bar* but none thus far for *pleasing bar* (except in the current Book of Mormon text). To be sure, there is evidence for *pleasing bar* alone, as in “the most aesthetically pleasing bar in Wanchai” and “a visually pleasing bar at the side of the screen” (gleaned from <www.google.com>). Of course, these examples are not evidence for *pleasing bar* in judicial contexts.

There are two Internet citations that refer to a 17th-century English courtroom, now a museum, in Fordwich, England (near Canterbury). This courtroom dates from the time of Charles II. The citations clearly identify what the pleading bar is:

“Report on Fordwich Trip” in *Kent Message* “Extra”, 10 September 1999 <www.powell-pressburger.org>, accessed on 23 October 2003:

The tour ended at the town hall. Mr. Tritton said: “That was the most interesting part of the day. The people who made the film reproduced the court room back at their studio. They had the jury bench, **the pleading bar**, everything, right down to the smallest detail of King Charles II’s coat of arms.”

At the head of the stairs, Sgt. Bassett ducks under a beam inscribed ‘Love and honour the truth.’ In real life **the court’s pleading bar, where prisoners stood while on trial**, is at the head of the stairs. It does not obstruct anyone entering the room, nor bear an inscription – though the motto ‘Love and honour the truth’ is prominent under King Charles II’s Coat of Arms, displayed on the ceiling above the panelled rear wall.

The Fordwich Town Hall website (updated on 23 July 2003), <www.canterbury.gov.uk>, accessed on 23 October 2003:

On the first floor is the Court Room where all criminal cases in Fordwich were tried until 1886. **The accused would stand flanked by the Town Constables, at the “pleading bar” situated at the head of the stairs. (Hence the expression “prisoner at the bar”).** The Judge or chief magistrate was the Mayor for the time being and he sat in the chair at the north end of the room, flanked by six Jurats on each side, seated on the “bench.” The Mayor’s seat and bench together with the paneling are early Tudor in origin.

One could dismiss these citations to *pleading bar* as somehow errors, especially since they do not come from legal documents dating from the 1600s. Yet the expression *pleading bar* does exist in literary references that do date from the early 1600s (found on *Early English Books Online* <eebo.chadwick.com> and on *Literature Online* <lion.chadwyck.com>, 24 January 2014). In the first citation, there is no doubt that the whole passage refers metaphorically to a courtroom:

John Harington, *Orlando Furioso in English heroical verse* (second edition, 1607), book 27, stanza 46, lines 369–72:

If you deny my claim, here I will prove it,
 This field the court, this list **my pleading bar**,
 My plea is such, as no writ can remove it,
 My judge must be the sequel of the war.

(Here *list* specifies an area set aside for jousting or other combat.) The second citation is found in a play that was apparently written no later than 1634:

John Webster, *Appius and Virginia*, act 5, scene 1

Fortune hath lift thee to my Chair,
and thrown me headlong to **thy pleading bar**.

(In these two examples as well as the following ones, I have regularized the spelling.) Of particular interest here is the evidence that John Webster was no novice in legal matters. Scholars have argued that he was admitted to the Middle Temple (one of the English courts of law) on 1 August 1598. Moreover, he is considered the primary author of a play that deals with legal issues, *The Devil's Law Case; or, When Women go to Law, the Devil is full of Business* (published in 1623). Thus it is not surprising that there is a metaphorical reference to *pleading bar* in his play *Appius and Virginia*, first published in 1654 (after Webster's death) and attributed to Webster (the title page refers to Webster as the sole author, although he may have had collaborators, a common-enough practice even today). For further discussion of Webster's possible legal background, see Clifford Leech, *John Webster: A Critical Study* (New York: Haskell House, 1966).

Now, one may claim that the expression *pleading bar* cannot be found in the judicial records dating from Early Modern English. This may be so – although there are a lot of legal records to be checked, most of which have never been electronically transcribed. There might be a good reason why the term is missing from legal records – namely, legal records refer to the specifics of cases, not to the structure of the courtroom, neither to its furniture nor to the placement of that furniture. The claim that *pleading bar* does not exist in judicial records is meaningless unless one has already established that in general there are references in those records to the courtroom structure and its furniture. More likely, the expression *pleading bar* would appear in histories commenting on specific cases, or in literary works that use the term metaphorically, as we have seen. Here are three more examples in the later 1600s and early 1700s from historical and literary sources, but in judicial contexts, found 24 January 2014 on *Early English Books Online* <eebo.chadwyck.com> and on *Literature Online* (<lion.chadwyck.com>):

Thomas Philipot, *A Brief Historical Discourse of the Origin and Growth of Heraldry* (London, 1672), page 52

the Bridge that led to their Court of Judicature, the Septa or Pen that shut it in and enclosed it, the Diribitorium or partition, that like a **pleading Bar** separated it and

the Cista or Chest wherein the Praetor treasured up the
public Records

Henry Killigrew, *Select Epigrams of Martial Englished*
(London, 1695), epigram 20 (to Julius Martialis), page 114

We'd never know the Powerful in the State,
Within their Courts, as do their Statues, wait;
At **the vexatious Pleading-Bar** attend,
But all our Time, in Books and Converse spend

Nicholas Rowe's translation of *Lucan's Pharsalia* (London,
1718), book I, lines 497–99

While 't was allowed me, Caesar to defend,
While yet **the pleading bar** was left me free,
While I could draw uncertain Rome to thee

Stanford Carmack has also provided (8 January 2015) this plural example
from *Early English Books Online*:

Thomas May's translation of *Virgil's Georgics Englished* (1628),
page 61

The pleading bars another doth admire

I have also found an example of the expression *pleading bar* in an actual legal source dating from the 1600s. In 2006, with the kind help of Frank Kelland, a reference librarian at the Howard W. Hunter Law Library at Brigham Young University, I located such an instance of the expression *pleading bar* – namely, in the Law Notes Collection deposited in the Department of Special Collections, the Kenneth Spencer Research Library, at the University of Kansas. These 17th-century notes are written in the secretary script, a court-derived script common in the 16th and early 17th centuries; for a description of the script, see D. C. Greetham, *Textual Scholarship: An Introduction* (New York: Garland, 1994), pages 201–202, 248–49. These notes have the manuscript number MS P367 and are identified as a quire of 12 leaves containing a list of headings written in English for the most part and with notes below each heading written in “Law French.” The bibliographic citation states that “each heading is followed by a number of phrases – legal apothegms, definitions, judgements – each with a citation either to a statute or to what is apparently a page number. Crowding and blanks indicate on-the-spot compilation.” The word *apothegm* here refers to “a short, pithy,

and instructive saying or formulation” (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 11th edition, 2003). And at the top of the 8th leaf, we have a heading with the phrase “Pleading bar & trav’s.” The last word, *trav’s*, is Law French for *travers* and means ‘denial in pleading’; for that term, see J. H. Baker, *Manual of law French*, 2nd edition (Hants, England: Scolar Press, 1990), page 207. Thus the heading is equivalent to “pleading bar and denial.” On the 12th leaf, the date is given as “21 Ja. 15” (that is, 21 January 1615). The University of Kansas bibliographer states that this quire “may have been tipped into a printed book.” In other words, the quire seems to have served as an index for an unidentified law book, especially since the headings are arranged alphabetically and the reference citations were added as they were found in the book. The law book itself was probably in French.

One could argue that in this index the expression *pleading bar* is not fully nominal, but rather the word *pleading* is being used as a gerund or present participle. (In modern legal texts, there are, for instance, expressions like “pleading bar of statute of limitation”, “to raise this pleading bar”, and “the mediaeval pleading bar or defense of election of remedies.”) Even so, I have been able to find two examples of the fully nominal *pleading bar* dating from the late 1800s and early 1900s, both found (24 January 2014) on Google Search <books.google.com>. The first is from a religious book published in 1887 in Ashland, Ohio, by the Brethren Publishing House, that explicitly refers to a courtroom setting in Lewistown, Pennsylvania:

Julia A. Wood, *My Northern Travels: The Results of Faith and Prayer*, page 75:

Attended the Teachers’ Institute, held three days in the court-house at Lewistown. The floor of that building was constructed upon the inclined plane order. No obstructed views. Its ventilation, most scientifically planned, was apparently easily operated by an occasional pull of a cord hanging against the wall, adjacent to **the pleading bar**. A purifying plan, worthy of adoption.

And the second example is in a book published in 1908 in London by William Heinemann, and it comments on the Mormons by citing the phraseology of Moroni 10:34, not as “the pleasing bar” but as “the pleading bar.” Here the author appears to be citing some Mormon church leader:

Guy Theodore Wrench, *The Grammar of Life*, page 202

The Mormons maintain: ‘That we do bring this doctrine, and that it is true, is the testimony we now give, and which we will meet before **the pleading bar** of the Great Jehovah, the Eternal Judge of both quick and dead.’

Either the author realized that *pleasing bar* was an error for *pleading bar* and consciously substituted the correct reading – or he accidentally made the change, being familiar with the judicial term *pleading bar*. This relatively modern use of *pleading bar* (from about a century ago), although rare, may explain the more recent use (dating from 1999 and 2003) of the expression *pleading bar* in online reports of the centuries-old courtroom, now a museum, in Fordwich, England. Minor instances of this phraseology may have continued simply because local people have continued to remember the correct name for the bar the defendant stood before when his case was being heard.

Thus the linguistic use of *pleading bar* as a legal term is established, but that is not the relevant issue here. Rather, the issue is whether the original Book of Mormon text referred to “the **pleasing** bar of God” or to “the **pleading** bar of God.” Internal evidence from the text argues for “the pleading bar” in both Jacob 6:13 and Moroni 10:34. There is nothing especially pleasing about the final day of judgment, nor the odd reference to the “bar of God” as pleasing. Scribal errors and mistakes in understanding explain why Oliver Cowdery (and perhaps Joseph Smith) may have thought the phrase was “the pleasing bar.” Moreover, we can find infrequent but persistent references in legal contexts to “the pleading bar”, from around 1600 to the present. For me, *pleading bar* makes perfectly good sense in the Book of Mormon text; *pleasing bar* does not. The Book of Mormon critical text accepts the conjectured phraseology “the pleading bar” in both passages.

Royal Skousen has had academic appointments at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the University of Texas at Austin, and Brigham Young University. He has also been a visiting professor at the University of California at San Diego, a Fulbright scholar at the University of Tampere in Finland, and a research fellow at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen, The Netherlands. He has published three books on exemplar-based approaches to language description, including *Analogical Modeling of Language* (1989). Recent work has concentrated

on quantum computing of analogical modeling; his three most important papers on Quantum Analogical Modeling (QAM) are available on arXiv.org.

Since 1988, Skousen has been the editor of the Book of Mormon Critical Text Project. He has published 11 books thus far, including facsimile transcripts of the original and printer's manuscripts, a complete critical text analysis of the Book of Mormon (with the goal of restoring the original text), and most recently a two-volume history of the grammatical editing of the Book of Mormon. In 2009, he published with Yale University Press the definitive scholarly text of this scripture, The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text. And in 2015, the Joseph Smith Papers published a two-volume set of photographs of the printer's manuscript, along with a modified version of his facsimile transcription of the printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon, edited by him and Robin Jensen.