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Voice from the Dust:
A Literary Analysis of the Book of Mormon

Walter Krajewski

A Thesis
in
The Department of Religion

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

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ABSTRACT

Voice from the Dust: A Literary Analysis of the Book of Mormon

Walter Krajewski

The Book of Mormon is a religious text which, like the Bible, may be subjected to various methods of analysis. This thesis discusses whether literary methods of analysis are applicable to a sacred text, and suggests rules which should govern such a method of analysis.

Following these rules, the thesis provides an analysis of specific themes particular to the Book of Mormon and suggests how they are integral to the structure of the text. Then it relates the linguistic problems which the authors encountered in their transcription and translation labours, and considers the writers' self-conscious compositional efforts in relation to the moral message which the book proclaims. Two anomalies -- large sections from the Book of Isaiah and progressively intrusive editorializing -- are then examined in terms of their incorporation into the thematic and structural integrity of the text. Finally, consideration is given to the hermeneutical problem the contemporary reader encounters in reading and comprehending an ancient text.

The thesis demonstrates that there is a closely integrated relationship between the form and the content of the text, and argues that the authors' achievement of their purpose -- to preach a message to a distant, future audience -- can be considered a sophisticated linguistic and literary accomplishment.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE LITERARY ANALYSIS OF SACRED TEXTS

In 1823 the angel Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith and informed him of the existence and location of a book, written on golden plates, which told the story of the former inhabitants of America. After four years of spiritual probation, Smith was allowed to take possession of the plates and with the aid of "seers," also identified as "interpreter stones," he began his translation. It was published in 1830 as the Book of Mormon.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the religion founded upon this book. This text acknowledges the authority of the Bible, both the Hebrew Old Testament and the Christian New Testament, and claims to be another revelation of Jesus Christ. Its collective authors proclaim their words are God's word, authorized and inspired by the same God the Jews and the Christians acknowledge. Thus it establishes itself alongside the Old Testament and the New Testament. And just as Jews and Christians acknowledge, through faith and the witness of the sacred authors, the authenticity of their texts, so do the Latter-day Saints claim an inspired origin for their sacred text.

While the New Testament is almost 2,000 years old and the Hebrew Bible goes back even farther in antiquity, the Book of Mormon is dated with an age of approximately 2,600 years for its earliest section. Although sacred texts have always called for interpretation, the twentieth century has seen the rise of "scientific" methods of analysis which seek to bridge the vast abyss of time and come to some understanding of the meaning of the Bible in the context of historical and philological studies. Several different approaches have illuminated various levels of understanding while at the same time discovering their own methodological limitations. Following are the major modes of analysis.

Historical-grammatical exegesis researches the sense of the text's vocabulary at the time of the author. **Textual criticism** makes comparisons of various versions of the text and examines the relationship of different manuscripts in an attempt to render precise wording. **Historical criticism** seeks to reconstruct events which were the foundation for the narrator's account. **Source criticism** delves into the sources behind biblical texts, comparing and dating them. **Form criticism** focusses on the structure of small sections of the text, classifying various narrative types, to consider how they evolved, possibly from oral literature, and were developed and connected to create longer written texts. **Redaction criticism** studies how the author of a text employed his sources, including or omitting material as he shaped and edited the final form. **Structuralist criticism**, non-historical and atemporal, analyzes universal patterns of meaning and theorizes how texts contain meaning and communicate it. Finally, **biblical hermeneutics** considers how an ancient text can still reveal truth to a modern reader and how that reader can respond.

With respect to the Book of Mormon, however, we can see that many of these methods of analysis are inapplicable. Like the Bible, it is a collection of individual books composed by a number of writers during a one-thousand-year period of Nephite civilization. The structure of the entire book, however, is more complex, for it is not simply a collection. Halfway through the text, the reader is informed by Mormon that the entire text is his edited version of earlier texts. Mormon, who lives at the time of his race's demise, is the last in a line save one -- his own son Moroni -- who have been entrusted to keep the records. However, what he passes onto his son is not only his own record, but his edited version of all the previous records. Thus, midway through the Book of Mormon, the reader discovers that the

several previous authorial voices have actually been the editorial voice of Mormon.

As well, having received this information, the reader must now be influenced by the awareness that the subsequent books -- which precede the final books written by Mormon and Moroni -- are as much in the voice of Mormon as is his "own" book. Thus while there may seem to be a dozen authorial voices in the text, essentially one overriding editorial voice is reshaping all of the material. This editorial element, which is a major structural feature of the text, demands examination, and this study will suggest that there are hermeneutical and theological implications at work.

At his death, Mormon hands his record over to his son Moroni, who appends his own short book and also his edited and translated version of the record of another people, the Jaredites, who had perished before his own people had arrived in the same land. It is important to note that the only record we have of these two civilizations is the text of the Book of Mormon. One civilization was destroyed over 1,500 years ago, the other at some unknown date before that. There are no other texts, records and artefacts which would help us to reconstruct the world recorded in this text. (Although other texts have yet to be discovered, LDS [Latter Day Saints] archaeologists are employing all of the tools of the science to establish the existence of these ancient civilizations.)

Furthermore, we do not even possess the original ancient record. The golden plates from which Joseph Smith translated his text were retrieved by the angel Moroni. Although there were two groups of witnesses, first three, then eight, who confirmed that they had viewed the plates, no one other than Joseph Smith had translated/read them. All that we possess is a nineteenth-century English translation

of the original version. Hence, many of the traditional forms of analysis cannot be applied. But since we do have a complete text, a literary analysis may be attempted.

Although we do not possess Mormon and Moroni's sources, we can, to some degree, study their work as editors, considering how they chose to render their nation's story, how they themselves intruded at various times in the story as editorial voices, and how they also portrayed themselves as figures in their nation's history.

Father and son were not, on the one hand, historians in the modern sense of the term. As with the Bible, the history recounted here is salvation history. On the other hand, God revealed to Mormon and Moroni that their text was to be directed towards an audience of Jews and Gentiles who would, at some future date, unearth this text which they had laboriously engraved on metal plates. The plates were to be "a voice from the dust," a phrase taken from Isaiah, to which the Book of Mormon alludes several times. This voice is recorded as a complete, written text, and the large number of references to records and books in the Book of Mormon places an emphasis upon the act of reading. Furthermore, Mormon and Moroni make the reader quite conscious that they speak directly to him. The reader does not exist at the time of composition, the authors are not alive at the time when they are read, yet the two parties are in contact, transcending time. Furthermore, a foreign civilization that has ceased to exist is presented to the reader. How the authors must convey their story to a foreign and time-removed reader, so that he not only hears this voice from the dust but grasps its message and believes it, is a hermeneutical challenge for both sender and receiver of the message.

Modern biblical scholars attempt to make the ancient texts more transparent as to the truth they contain. In doing so, they have often discovered interpretations at variance with more traditional interpretations; thus they frequently raise more questions than they began with and create more problems than they have solved. This causes concern in those who feel that the sacred word is being tampered with rather than treasured.

Literary analysis, which has more recently joined the front ranks with the more traditional forms of historical and philological analyses, likewise introduces serious new issues. Like other disciplines, it must of necessity limit its field of study. It concentrates on the given text; extra-textual matters, such as the historical accuracy of the text, are not considered relevant. Instead, a literary analysis concentrates on the text as it stands and on the story it conveys. The analysis seeks to unveil the structure of the story in an attempt to hear the voice of the author as he intended it to be heard. Since biblical authors employed literary techniques to create the text, it can be argued that the literary critic is justified in employing the tools of literary analysis to study the work.

The literary analysis of sacred writings also raises the concern that if the tools employed to examine fiction are applied to the Bible, then biblical stories are reduced to the level of fiction. The answer to this criticism is to look to the text itself. The biblical authors, as Robert Alter points out, used many of the techniques of story telling but with a finesse and sense of authority that have never been surpassed. However, this aesthetic achievement was never the main purpose of the biblical writers. In order to fulfill their primary duty, which was to convey the word of God, these writers were required to forge a vehicle of expression which could bear the weight of God's utterance.

The result was a sophisticated text, which demands an equally sophisticated approach.

Certainly, to suggest that anything related to the study of fiction has application to the Bible must make the believer in the text feel uncomfortable. Paradoxically, another term certainly associated with, if not the truth, at least the recording of fact, had earlier caused great upheaval in biblical studies. We have come to understand "history," a modern discipline, as something radically different from the idea of "history" employed by earlier civilizations. Furthermore, we recognize "history" not as a bald recording of events, but rather as a discourse which continually revises itself, not only as new evidence comes to light, but as new concerns and values are established which cause us to reevaluate the past. We must, accordingly, ask what the form of discourse is which governs history-recording in the Bible. The response to this question is related to the problem of reading the biblical stories in terms of story-telling techniques. The Bible is *the* story of salvation history. It is also, within its belief system, divinely inspired. Hence the rules governing its interpretation are radically different.

In his critique of Alter's formulation of the relation of fiction to the Bible, Meir Sternberg establishes what would seem to be the ultimate ground of being for a literary critic of the Bible.

As a rule of narrative communication, inspiration amounts to omniscience exercised on history; the tale's claim to truth rests on the teller's God-given knowledge. The prophet assumes this stance (or persona) explicitly, the storyteller implicitly but none the less authoritatively. And its assumption enables him to bring to bear on his world (and his audience) what would elsewhere

count as the poetic license of invention without paying the price in truth claim. Herein lies one of the Bible's unique rules: under the aegis of ideology, convention transmutes even invention into the stuff of history, or rather obliterates the line dividing fact from fancy in communication. So every word is God's word. The product is neither fiction nor historicized fiction nor fictionalized history, but historiography pure and uncompromising. If its licenses yet open up possibilities for literary art, they are built into the fabric of the narrative by a special dispensation, a logic of writing equally alien to the world-centered anachronisms of historians and the novel-centered anachronisms of literary approaches. (Sternberg, 34-35)

Sternberg's solution to the problem of the profanation of the sacred text by secular tools is to establish the ground rule that the Bible is a truly unique work in that it is to be taken as the divinely inspired word of God. Should God then employ human writers who, as his instruments, must use human techniques to communicate to other humans, then instead of profanation we have sacralization. Just as, in Christian terms, the mystery of God taking on flesh in Christ raises mankind up, so literature is elevated to divine heights when animated by the spirit of God.

Certainly the midrash tradition has acknowledged the narrative techniques of the Bible. But the rise of historical-grammatical exegesis created the suspicion that science was attempting to undermine the authority of the Bible. However, this first scientific mode of analysis wanted to open up the world of the text and understand exactly what it had meant to its contemporaries. Likewise, the other scientific methods previously mentioned also examine various sources -- local history, the culture, the identity of the authors, the various schools of thought which influenced the authors -- in order to clarify the meaning of the text to

modern readers. These various methods Sternberg labels as source-oriented analysis. A discourse-oriented analysis has other concerns.

Discourse-oriented analysis, on the other hand, sets out to understand not the realities behind the text but the text itself as a pattern of meaning and effect. What does this piece of language -- metaphor, dialogue, tale, cycle, book -- signify in context? What are the rules governing the transaction between storyteller or poet and reader? Are the operative rules, for instance, those of prose or verse, parable or chronicle, omniscience or realistic limitation, historical or fictional writing? What image of a world does the narrative project? Why does it unfold the action in this particular order and from this particular viewpoint? What is the part played by the omissions, redundancies, ambiguities, alternations between scene and summary or elevated and colloquial language? How does the work hang together? And, in general, in what relationship does part stand to whole and form to function? (Sternberg, 15)

Despite the fact that we possess only a translated text of the Book of Mormon and not the original, written in the lost language of "reformed Egyptian," a discourse-oriented analysis, as Sternberg terms it, is still possible. Given that Mormon and Moroni quite consciously set about their task to solidify a text specifically upon demand by God for a particular audience, we do possess a finished literary product which calls for a thematic and structural analysis. Nevertheless, we should be clear as to why such a literary analysis is called for and how one would go about it.

Erich Auerbach's examination of the Abraham-Isaac sacrifice scene in his book, Mimesis, offers a fine example of the usefulness of literary analysis as a tool for opening a text to reveal its depth of significance. His comparison of

this one scene in the Bible with the classical world of Homer reveals the artful simplicity of the Biblical narrative that challenges the reader to engage it fully. In contrast to the world of gods and men in Homer, the Bible suggests a more subtle and complex relationship between human experience and divine imperative.

LDS scholars themselves have employed the techniques of literary analysis to manifest the complexity of the text of the Book of Mormon, to suggest its inspirational application to the readers' lives, and even to offer proof of its divine origin. They have also urged others to subject the text to literary analysis (Jorgensen 218, Reynolds 149).

Non-Mormon biblical scholars have also turned their attention to the Book of Mormon. They note that, like the pseudepigrapha, the Book of Mormon offers interesting comparisons and contrasts with the canonical books of the Bible. James H. Charlesworth, for instance, specifically details three particular christological elements in the Book of Mormon which are also in the pseudepigrapha (see also Quinn). More specifically, Krister Stendahl compares the portrait of Christ in the gospels with that of the Christ who is described in Third Nephi in the Book of Mormon.

Although these two studies do not question the validity of the very precise and detailed prophecies in regard to Christ in the text, this point must be considered in a complete analysis. Steven Epperson, on the other hand, makes the assumption that the final editors, Mormon and Moroni, wrote into the text their own post-resurrection beliefs. However, unlike with biblical literature, we possess no comparable comparative texts from the Nephite culture, so while Epperson's assumption seems reasonable, it is not demonstrable. The New Testament authors developed the concept of typology which biblical scholars have examined in detail.

The Book of Mormon authors, however, claim to have received a more precise form of revelation, the "plain and precious truth," which stands in contrast to Old Testament imagery. This thesis will examine both the use of typology in the Book of Mormon, and its unique manner of revelation. It will propose that the final editors, in their redaction efforts, confirmed a pattern that had been established by the first writers of the text.

The strongest call for an extensive literary analysis actually comes from the book itself, for it is extremely self-referential. Time and again the text calls attention to itself as a text, one composed specifically as a revelation for a future audience of Jews and Gentiles existing long after the race which created it has ceased to exist. Like both the New and the Old Testaments, the Book of Mormon is a set of books by different authors collected together into one book. But unlike the two testaments, the Book of Mormon was abridged and edited in a finalized format mainly by one writer, Mormon, for a very specific purpose and with a divinely inspired perception of its future audience.

Just as we know that the form of a work governs the content, so in the Mormon text we have a father-and-son set of editors consciously molding their material into a particular shape in regard to their audience. Our attention to the structure which they wrought and the imagery they employed makes us as readers conscious of the vehicle which bears their message. The communication of this message, their mission in life, succeeds only if we share with them a familiarity with the vehicle.

This literary analysis will begin in the following chapter with a short summary of the Book of Mormon. The summary will emphasize those persons, images and themes which

will be examined in detail in the succeeding chapters. Chapter Three will consider how the familiar New Testament typological approach to the Old Testament is likewise employed in the Book of Mormon. The Exodus type and the motifs of covenant, promise and inheritance are delineated in great detail. The people in question, the family of Lehi, flee Jerusalem, wander in the wilderness and then, under God's tutelage, construct a ship, cross the great waters and arrive in America. The rise and fall of this nation in the new land is the story of the Book of Mormon. Informing this story is a description of the geography of this new world and the lifetime of the new race which inhabits it. An examination of these abstract concepts of space and time in the text reveals a theological dimension, that is, God's plan of salvation as manifested in the life-and-death history of the nation and in its legacy to the future.

The more specific vocabulary of the text is the constant description of the new land as one of *promise*, *inheritance*, and *choice* or *liberty*. As the story of Lehi's seed develops, the nation of the Nephites arises, in a continuous struggle with its fraternal rival, the Lamanites. The gift of the promised land to the Nephites is based on a *covenant* with God. Their inheritance follows in the line of *father-to-son* and sparks a rivalry of *brother-against-brother*. And in the land of choice and liberty, *free will* is operative, holding people responsible for their choice of following the path of either righteousness or wickedness. This vocabulary, with its theological implications, structures recurring imagery into selected motifs. An analysis will suggest that these motifs can be seen as typological in relation to the Old Testament.

In Chapter Four, we step back from the specific imagery and vocabulary of the text to consider the linguistic problem raised by the writers and (in particular) Mormon, the final editor. This linguistic problem will be related to man's

corruption by sin and his need to receive a "plain and precious truth" for guidance. The obligation of incorporating this truth into a text necessitates a study of the structure of the text itself. This, in turn, will lead us to two major structural challenges to be examined in Chapter Five: the incorporation of large portions of Isaiah into the text and the increasing editorial intrusions of Mormon as editor. A consideration of these two "problems" extends the conclusions of the preceding chapter and will introduce the "hermeneutical problem," as it is termed, in Chapter Six. The imagery, language and structure of the text are reconsidered in light of the contemporary discipline of hermeneutics. We shall see that Paul Ricoeur's application of hermeneutics to the New Testament is also applicable to the Book of Mormon. But, further, we shall also see that the particular literary structure created by the editors of the text, in response to their mission, raises the hermeneutical issue to the foreground in relation not only to the contemporary reader's response to the text, but also to the ancient writers' awareness of their future audience.

Readers familiar with both the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon can easily distinguish the difference in style between the two texts. Literary approaches such as Robert Alter's and Meir Sternberg's to the Old Testament emphasize a psychological aspect. They examine the dialogue within a scene, including the omissions, that about which the speaker remains silent. They note how scenes alternate, and how the biblical authors can report events which they cannot have witnessed and unspoken thoughts which they cannot have been privy to. While the Book of Mormon has a variety of characters who experience dramatic events in the history of their people, the psychological level which some of the major stories of the Old Testament achieve is absent from the Book of Mormon. Instead, the text concentrates on more external structures. While some of the authors occasionally express

their anguish at the turn of events, their attention never strays from a recounting of the physical events of their history, the moral choices the people make, and the ultimate consequences which result.

The methodology of our study, then, will concentrate on what seems to be the concern of the writers. Their conscious use of typology and their stress upon certain terminology direct us to view their text as one which concentrates upon certain structural principles. Our effort will be to make more evident both the meaning of the writers' vocabulary and the organizational framework of the text. But this effort is only to manifest more openly the writers' ultimate purpose, to proclaim a religious message which they wished to convey to a distant, future audience.

CHAPTER TWO

A SUMMARY OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

The Book of Mormon

Book	Period of history recorded (approximate)	Author
First Nephi	600 B.C. to 588-570 B.C.	Nephi
Second Nephi	588-570 B.C. to 559-545 B.C.	Nephi
Jacob	544 B.C. to 421 B.C.	Jacob
Enos	544 B.C. to 421 B.C.	Enos
Jarom	420 B.C. to 361 B.C.	Jarom
Omni	323 B.C. to 130 B.C.	Omni, et. al.
Words of Mormon	385 A.D.	Mormon
Mosiah	130 B.C. to 92 B.C.	Mosiah, Alma the Younger, i.e., Alma2
Alma	91 B.C. to 53 B.C.	Alms2, his sons Helaman and Shiblon, Helaman2, son of Helaman
Helaman	52 B.C. to 2 B.C.	Helaman2
Third Nephi	1 B.C. to 35 A.D.	Nephi, son of Helaman2
Fourth Nephi	36 A.D. to 321 A.D.	Nephi2, son of Nephi, et. al.
Mormon	322 A.D. to 421 A.D.	Mormon and Moroni
Ether	undated, beginning at the time of the Tower of Babel	Ether (edited by Moroni)
Moroni	400 A.D. to 421 A.D.	Moroni

Like the Bible, the Book of Mormon is a collection of books. Its 15 volumes range in length from two pages to 160 pages. (The 1981 authorized edition is 531 pages long.) The text records the one-thousand-year history of the Nephites, from the time they left Jerusalem, around 600 B.C. (just before the Babylonian captivity), to approximately 421 A.D., when the nation was annihilated. The Nephite people originated when the prophet Lehi, father of Nephi, warned the people of Jerusalem of their iniquity and they responded by threatening his life. Forced to flee into the wilderness with his wife and four sons, Lehi sent his sons surreptitiously back to Jerusalem to procure "the record of the Jews," that is, the Pentateuch, the prophetic writings in existence at the time, and the genealogical list which traced his ancestry back to Jacob and Joseph. Uniting with another family which provided daughters for the sons, the small group returned to the wilderness, wandered about for a short period of time, and eventually came to a large body of water.

This early history is recounted by Nephi, who acknowledges his father's prophetic authority, himself receives visions from God, and assumes the leadership of the group. His brother Sam sides with him, but Laman and Lemuel, the two oldest, frequently lose faith in God, even despite divine intervention and reprimands. The family is basically divided and, after they built a boat and crossed the large body of water to land in America, their single race splits into two nations: the Nephites and the Lamanites. The two groups are frequently at war, with the Nephites, although not a perfect people by any means, usually following in the way of God. The Lamanites lose "the traditions of their fathers," as the text puts it, and are generally associated with wickedness. But, as the Nephite records which make up the Book of Mormon point out, the Lamanites could also practice virtue at times and follow the straight-and-narrow path.

Nephi, the author of the first two books, is also an editor, for he abridges his father's records of their early history and incorporates them into his own account. He explains that he has kept two sets of brass plates upon which he has recorded his people's history. The smaller set he dedicates to the ministry, the spiritual matters of his people; the larger set he dedicates to his people's history. Those who succeed him maintain this division, as they note in their individual texts, but the penultimate author, Mormon, edits and abridges Nephi's two sets of plates onto another set of engraved plates. Thus the nature of the original composition is lost and, in the text we possess, the stories of the ministry and the history seem to have infolded each other. The first six books, which presumably were engraved on the smaller plates, contain the history of the Nephite origins as well as the idea of ministry. The second set of books, from Mosiah to Fourth Nephi, would be the abridgement of the larger plates recording Nephite history, but they also contain much of spiritual matters in regard to the establishment of the church, the appearance of the risen Christ to the Nephites, and his teachings to them.

Nephi's first two books, written in "the language of the Egyptians," as are all the other books, detail the visions of his father Lehi, and his own visions, which establish him as the one among his brothers faithful to God and thus divinely chosen to lead the family. The prophetic vision shared by father and son suggests that both men are the favored of God. Lehi foresees the Babylonian captivity, the nature of the messiah as redeemer, the mystery of the Trinity and the ceremony of baptism. Nephi is privileged to know of the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection, indeed an advanced christology, as well as of the resurrection of the dead. He also learns that his descendents, the Nephites, will be visited by the resurrected Christ and will receive his teachings. Despite this, the fourth generation, because of

their wickedness, will afterwards be destroyed by the Lamanites, the nation founded by the oldest brother, who themselves will only survive as a remnant. Nephi also proclaims that other sacred writings will be composed, including, we may surmise, later books of the Old Testament (following the Babylonian Captivity), the New Testament, and even other scriptures. Included among these will be the text which he has begun, which will survive his people's demise and be resurrected in the future, "low out of the dust," for the benefit of other peoples (2 Nephi 26:16).

Due to the enmity of Laman and his offspring, Nephi is compelled to lead his people out of the original land of Lehi-Nephi to another location. Following his death, his brother Jacob continues the record, painting a rather disconsolate picture of the Nephites:

the time passed away with us, and also our lives passed away like as it were unto us a dream, we being a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers, cast out from Jerusalem, born in tribulation, in a wilderness, and hated of our brethren, which caused wars and contentions; wherefore, we did mourn out our days. (Jacob 7:26)

Nevertheless, Jacob also paints a sympathetic portrait of the Lamanites, pointing out their righteousness to the Nephites, and suggesting the cause of the Lamanites' wickedness:

Behold, their husbands love their wives, and their wives love their husbands; and their husbands and their wives love their children; and their unbelief and their hatred towards you [Nephites] is because of the iniquity of their fathers; wherefore, how much better are you than they, in the sight of your great Creator? (Jacob 3:7)

Jacob then quotes the lost prophet Zenos' allegory of the tame and wild olive trees. As Jacob interprets it, and as the idea is reiterated in later books of the Book of Mormon, the Gentiles will eventually be grafted onto Israel and both will be welcomed before the Lord and will be judged by Christ at the end of the world.

The next three books, Enos, Jarom and Omni, composed by seven descendents of Jacob, are very short, as Jarom relates, for good reason:

For what could I write more than my fathers have written? For have not they revealed the plan of salvation? I say unto you, Yea; and this sufficeth me. (Jarom 1:2)

According to the dating within the text, these first six books record Nephite history from approximately 600 B.C. (that is, just before the Babylonian Captivity) to 130 B.C. The major events described are during the first 55 years, as recorded in the two books of Nephi. And, as Jarom states, the plan of salvation has by then basically been revealed. Indeed, in Nephi's books, Isaiah has been quoted extensively, so his prophecy of the messiah in its symbolic imagery is called forth. Then Nephi, in what he calls "plain" terms, specifies what we have come to know in Christianity as the redemptive plan of God made manifest in Christ. Furthermore, Nephi details not only the origin of the Nephites but also the precise time of their total annihilation. He also receives the revelation that, although his descendents will bring their destruction upon themselves by their choosing of wickedness, the text recording their history will survive. As part of God's plan of salvation, it will speak to the Jews, the Gentiles and the remnant of Lamanites. The Gentiles will be incorporated into the house of Israel and a universal

accord in Christ will be possible if people choose righteousness over wickedness.

Before this occurs, however, there will be much turmoil. The Nephites and the Lamanites will constantly be at war, the Jews will reject the messiah, and the Gentiles, Christian in name, will be led astray by a "great and abominable church" which will corrupt the teachings contained in the New Testament (1 Nephi 13:6, 26-28).

But while the plan of salvation has been laid out, the history of the Nephite people is still in the making. Amaleki, the last of the recorders of the Book of Omni, reveals that the Nephites, under the rule of King Mosiah, followed God's command to flee to the land of Zarahemla (about 400 years earlier, Nephi had led his people into the wilderness away from the Lamanites). There they discovered another group of people who had fled Jerusalem at the time of the Babylonian Captivity, but who had not had the benefit of the records and scriptures which the Nephites possessed. They accepted the rule of King Mosiah and presented him with a large stone with strange engravings, which was an artefact from the Jaredite civilization, along with engraved plates of ore which told the story of the Jaredite people. Mosiah translated the plates, as recorded in the Book of Mosiah, and read the account to the Nephites. The reader is later presented with Moroni's edited version of these plates as the Book of Ether, the second last book of the Book of Mormon.

Amaleki closes the Book of Omni with a mention of his brother who departed with a group of Nephites to return to the original land of Nephi, and he prepares for death without knowledge of his brother's whereabouts or welfare.

Thus, as the record of the small plates seemingly comes

to a conclusion, it introduces elements that will be developed in the later books as the ongoing history of the Nephites and the story of the Jaredites.

Before the story of the large plates is given, however, the editor of the entire work, Mormon, intrudes with the brief Words of Mormon. Writing in the year 385 A.D., at the age of 75, Mormon faces not only his own death but the entire destruction of his people. He has completed his life's mission: leading his people in battle and editing the records. Mormon informs his reader that although the abridgment he presents is not even a "hundreth part" of the records, what he has chosen "pleases" him because it concerns the prophecies of the coming of Christ. In acknowledging his abridgment of the records, he is confident he has selected well for a "wise purpose," which was whispered to him "according to the workings of the Spirit of the Lord" which fills him (Words of Mormon 1:7). Much later, in his own book, he will detail and confirm Nephi's prophecy of the future for the Book of Mormon.

Mormon's editorial intrusion at this point immediately alters the reader's perception of the preceding books. The reader becomes aware that the voices of Nephi, Jacob and the successors have been appropriated by Mormon the editor. The original records have been interpreted by the last prophet, who stands at the end of his nation's history. The reader is also now aware that the succeeding books are also the edited work of Mormon. In the following books leading up to his own, Mormon's subtlety as an editor gradually disappears as he interrupts the story in the text more often, more openly and more forcefully. These editorial intrusions concomitantly make the reader aware of himself as a reader of the text, and as the addressee of the writer. (Given the relative absence of women in the text, the "ideal reader" will be designated as "he," keeping in mind that Moroni's message is directed to

both sexes.)

The books of Mosiah, Alma, Helaman and Third and Fourth Nephi proceed chronologically from 130 B.C. to 321 A.D. In the course of this time the Nephites, led by King Mosiah, flee the land of Nephi because of the threat of the Lamanites. As the Book of Omni indicates, they discover a people in the land of Zarahemla who had fled Jerusalem at the time of the Babylonian captivity. Like the Nephites, they had crossed the great waters and arrived on the new continent, but, unlike the Nephites, they had brought no records or scriptures with them. The people of Zarahemla had, however, discovered the records of the Jaredites, another people who had fled the old world much earlier (at the time of the Tower of Babel), and arrived in the new land and created a civilization; however, they had destroyed themselves as a result of their own wickedness. The Jaredite story was another stern warning to the Nephites of their future destruction if they followed the path of wickedness.

Over the course of the books of Mosiah, Alma and Helaman, smaller groups of Nephites return to the land of Nephi and then come back to Zarahemla, gradually filling out the geography of the regions known as Bountiful and Desolation. The people peacefully alter their form of government from monarchy to rule by judges, and proclaim the principles of democracy, equality and religious freedom (although some later attempt to forcibly reestablish a monarchy). The plan of salvation, as outlined in First and Second Nephi, is further filled out, with more attention to the concept of free will, and the church of Christ is established, 147 years before Christ's birth. Although the law of Moses is still followed, baptism is administered. The institution of the church and the development of its teachings come about through the ministries of various

prophets, and King Benjamin is recorded instructing his people in spiritual matters.

In the Book of Mosiah, Ammon is the first teacher mentioned. Returning to the land which the Nephites had abandoned to the Lamanites, he discovers a people in bondage to the Lamanites. The text records the story of how they had originally left the land of Zarahemla, settled in the land abandoned by the Nephites (the land of Lehi-Nephi), become subject to the Lamanites and eventually been delivered from bondage through the leadership of Ammon. The history involves the wicked King Noah, the courageous prophet Abinadi, and his disciple Alma. Alma records Abinadi's teachings and his martyrdom by fire. Alma in turn organizes the church of Christ and leads another group of people through the wilderness and back to King Mosiah. Under King Mosiah and Alma, the new church flourishes in a land which permits freedom of religious belief. Mosiah persuades the people that rule by judges is superior to rule by a king, and Alma becomes the first chief judge. The Book of Mosiah closes with the deaths of Mosiah and Alma.

The next book, the Book of Alma, is recorded by Alma², the son of Alma. As the introduction to the book informs the reader, it is a history of the rule by judges, the story of contentions among the people and the tale of the war between the Nephites and the Lamanites. This longest book in the Book of Mormon covers a period of 40 years and relates how Alma², like St. Paul, at first persecuted the church, then was struck speechless, received a visitation from an angel and was converted. He then began his preaching missions to the people outside the Nephite nation. Much like Paul's epistles, the stories of Alma's missions relate how he was incarcerated, miraculously set free, and established various churches even as he formulated his teachings. The book includes the story of Korihor the antichrist, references to

the lost prophets Zenos and Zenock, Alma's teachings to his son Helaman, and the story of the "kingmen" who wanted to undermine the democratic freedoms enjoyed by the people and reestablish rule by monarchy.

The Book of Alma not only expands upon the theology of the church, but it also details the long war between the Nephites and the Lamanites. More personal accounts, such as the letter by General Moroni (a forerunner of the son of Mormon), express the anger and exasperation of those on the field of battle who felt the government had not supported them as strongly and wisely as possible. The book closes with chief judge Helaman passing on his authority to his son of the same name.

In the Book of Helaman, recorded by Helaman² and his sons, the history of the reign of judges is continued. The history records that many Nephites were converted to the church of Christ, but also that many were wicked and abominable, while many Lamanites, who were outside the church, were righteous. Significantly, the origin of the Gadianton robbers is recorded. This group, which lived in the wilderness and preyed upon the Nephites, introduced the "secret oaths" and "secret combinations" which were traced back to Cain and attributed to Satan. The Gadianton robbers gradually grew in strength from a band to an army, which then challenged the Nephites on the battlefield. At the end of Fourth Nephi, it is recorded that these robbers eventually spread "over all the face of the land."

As in the earlier books, the Nephites are continually warned by their prophets that the consequence of their wickedness will be their utter destruction. They are reminded of the coming of Christ, and specific signs in regard to his birth and death are recorded. The book ends just before the year of Christ's nativity.

At the beginning of Third Nephi, cosmic signs signal the birth of Christ, and the Nephites record time accordingly as the first year of the Lord. Despite this, the people are still wicked, and the Gadianton robbers successfully prey upon them. Finally, on the day of Christ's death, many cities are cataclysmically destroyed either by fire, water or earthquake. For three days the earth is dark, and then Christ's voice sounds from the sky. He declares the law of Moses fulfilled as he appears to the Nephite people. Then, over the course of several days, he gives the people a summary of the teachings contained in the gospels, especially Matthew. He cures the sick, performs miracles, appoints 12 disciples as his ministers (whom he instructs privately), and institutes the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Christ reiterates that he has a special covenant with this people, that their land is a special place of inheritance, and that a New Jerusalem will be established there. A remnant of this branch of Jacob will survive, a prophet will arise in the future so that the Gentiles may know of the Nephites, the many lost tribes will return, and Israel will be gathered together.

The themes of the land of inheritance, the remnant, and the eventual unity of Jew, Gentile and the Lamanite remnant had been established in earlier books. Christ authenticates them with divine approbation once again, and then suggests that the plan of salvation, even with his death and resurrection, has not yet achieved its fulfillment.

Christ amends some verses in the Book of Helaman, expounds the scriptures to the people, and dictates to them two chapters from the Old Testament's Book of Malachi, a later prophecy, composed after they had left Jerusalem, of which they would therefore have had no knowledge.

After Christ ascends, babes and children "utter marvelous things" and "many saw and heard unspeakable things, which are not lawful to be written" (3 Nephi 26:23). Third Nephi closes with the revelation that three of the 12 Nephite disciples commissioned by Christ are not to "taste of death" until Jesus returns again at the time of the final fulfillment. Mormon, who intrudes into the text at this point, says that he has met them himself, and that they will go among the Jews and the Gentiles in the future but will not be acknowledged. Mormon is about to reveal their names when the Lord forbids him. What he can reveal is that there was "a change wrought upon their bodies," that Satan has no power over them, and that, upon judgment day, with the return of Christ, they will receive a greater change and be admitted into "the kingdom of the Father" (3 Nephi 28).

Mormon concludes Third Nephi with a reminder to the reader of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon to the Gentiles and, then, with direct address -- "Hearken, O ye Gentiles" -- closes with his supplication that they repent and receive the Holy Ghost.

The very short Fourth Nephi skims over the 170 years of bliss following the departure of Christ. The Nephites and the Lamanites live in harmony together in the church of Christ. After a time, however, the cycle of the rise and fall, which has afflicted the people so many times before, begins again. The prosperity which accompanies their virtue leads to pride, materialism and sinful ways. This time, however, there are many groups who separate from the church of Christ. The general division into those who believe in Christ -- Nephites -- and those who rebel against the gospel -- Lamanites -- reappears. And once again the poison of the secret oaths and combinations of Gadianton infests the land.

After Fourth Nephi, the "Book of Mormon" follows with nine chapters, the last two written by Moroni after his father's death. In the first seven, Mormon details how he came to inherit the records and how, at the age of 16, he led the Nephite armies against the Lamanites, a task he was to repeat at the age of 50, and again, despite an oath, at the age of 70, five years before his death. In his short book, Mormon excoriates the Nephites for their faithlessness, yet he "loved them, according to the love which was in [him]" (Mormon 3:12). With a litany of "I write," he addresses the Jews, the Gentiles, the remnant of his people and "the ends of the earth," urging repentance and preparation (Mormon 3:17-22). He records how he hides the records in the hill of Cumorah -- the hill where the Nephites will be utterly destroyed in battle and where, we learn from Moroni's account of the Jaredites, those people's two warring factions also annihilated each other.

With total belief that the records which he has written will be "hid up unto the Lord that they may come forth in his own due time," Mormon passes the torch to his son Moroni (Mormon 5:12). His final words are an expression of hope that the Lamanites will at last come to the truth, as "a people of the first covenant" and that all will be well with them in the day of judgment (Mormon 7:10).

Moroni concludes the book, recording his father's death, the destruction of the Nephites, and the ongoing war of the Lamanites now turned one against the other. With this background of Armageddon, Moroni addresses his future audience. He warns those who attack the work of the Lord, and admonishes all to repent and believe in Christ. Explaining that their records have been written in "reformed Egyptian," Moroni confesses that this language is less perfect than Hebrew, which would have more adequately expressed the truth which he and the other record writers wished to convey.

Unfortunately, the Nephites had altered their Hebrew so that the writers did not possess the purest vehicle for their message. Begging the reader to excuse this imperfection, Moroni closes with the knowledge that he speaks to his readers as though he "speaks from the dead" and rests assured that they will receive his words.

Moroni's voice immediately sounds at the beginning of the next book, the Book of Ether, as he explains his abridgement of the Jaredite plates which the people of Zarahemla had delivered to King Mosiah. As recorded in the Book of Mosiah, King Mosiah translated the text and read it to the Nephites. It is little wonder that the Nephites were awestruck by the story of the Jaredites, for it closely resembled their own history and was a vivid warning that if, like the Jaredites, they turned away from the Lord, they would be annihilated.

The Jaredites had left their land at the time of the Tower of Babel, journeyed across the sea in wondrous vessels constructed at the command of God, and arrived on the American continent. As for the Nephites, so for the Jaredites: this was their "land of promise." Nevertheless, the Jaredites strayed from the path time and time again. Their founding prophet, the unnamed "brother of Jared," had had many revelations and had even seen and touched the finger of Christ, thus possessing knowledge of the Incarnation. Their last prophet, Ether, had also seen "the days of Christ" and knew that another people, the Nephites and Lamanites, would inherit the land (Ether 11:21; 13:4-5).

Like the family of Lehi, the Jaredites were divided against themselves and were warned that they would be replaced by another people. Nevertheless, they succumbed to internal unrest and revolt, and participated in secret combinations. Eventually millions of Jaredites, including

women and children, slaughtered one another. The only survivors were Coriantumr, a Jaredite king, and Ether, the prophet who recorded the history of the Jaredites, down to the final scene. (In the Book of Omni it is recorded that Coriantumr lived among the people of Zarahemla for "the space of nine moons" (Omni 1:21)).

As Moroni points out, he has heavily edited the plates of Ether, eliminating much material that was familiar from the Book of Genesis. His purpose is to relay the essential story of the Jaredites. However, Moroni also employs the story to offer his own proclamations. He informs his readers once again that he writes under the command of the Lord and that he is to seal up these writings for the future, when they will be sent forth among the Gentiles. He reveals that Jesus has appeared and spoken to him face to face, and, in his text, Moroni's voice becomes the voice of Jesus directly addressing the Gentiles and the Jews (Ether 12:39; 4:6-19). Moroni preaches to his audience on faith, reveals that there will be three witnesses to the plates of Mormon and Moroni, and states that he is forbidden to write of all the "great and marvelous" prophecies of Ether (Ether 13:13).

Moroni's final words in his own Book of Moroni, the last book within the Book of Mormon, are cast in the form of a didache. Addressing the Lamanites as his "brethren," he hopes that in the future they will wish to know how to ordain priests, conduct prayer meetings, and administer baptism and the ceremony of bread and wine. Thus he records instructions for these ceremonies. He offers instructive epistles from his father, exhorts the Lamanites to accept Christ, and rests assured that what he has written are God's words which will cry out from the dead and speak from the dust (Moroni 10:27).

CHAPTER THREE

IMAGERY AND MOTIF

Typology

Typology in the Book of Mormon is both obvious and important, for the various authors continually identify a person or an event as a type. In general, typology illustrates the dynamic of promise and fulfillment and assumes a particular concept of historical time. Within time the plan of salvation is fulfilled. The flow of events and the actions of man combine to create salvation history.

The overriding type in the Book of Mormon is the Exodus. Lehi's journey from the land of Jerusalem across the great waters to America obviously repeats the Hebrew Exodus. The pattern involves separation, division and opposition. Lehi proclaims this in his doctrine of opposition, and his descendants' history enacts it (2 Nephi 2:11-16). They arrive in a new world which is variously labeled as the land of *promise, inheritance, and choice or liberty*.

Promise suggests a covenant between God and man, with the responsibility of duty and free will on man's part. The land of promise is not only a physical reality but a spiritual goal as well.

Inheritance suggests the imagery of father and son which is typified in the Old Testament figures of Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob and Joseph. In the Book of Mormon, we are presented with Lehi and Nephi, and Mormon and Moroni. These figures, in turn, reflect the divine scale of God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. The theological process of inheritance evokes the themes of sin, sacrifice, death and redemption.

Choice, in the context of the landscape, suggests the land's desirability. The land is designated as Bountiful, but

it is paired with the land called Desolation. Choice is also contextualized in the designation *land of liberty*. *Land of liberty* is specified in terms of freedom of religion, involving the exercise of free will (choice), which acquiesces to covenant and is lost through bondage.

Originating in the concept of type, all of these major themes are manifested in the Book of Mormon and interwoven to create a pattern of higher meaning.

The Christian art of typology, fully developed in the New Testament, is also evident in the Book of Mormon. Thus, for example, the law of Moses is fulfilled in Christ, and Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac foreshadows Christ's sacrifice of himself to the Father (Mosiah 13:31; 16:14; Jacob 4:5). (The fact that these interpretations are explicit in the Book of Mormon before the time of Christ will be examined later.) But type is also used outside of this immediate christological sense. The prophet Abinadi states that his martyrdom is a foreshadowing of the martyrdom of others by the Lamanites, and indeed, over 50 years later, this correlation is made with other martyrs (Mosiah 13:10; Alma 25:10). Likewise, object imagery is used in the poetic fashion familiar in the Old Testament. Moroni (an earlier figure, not the son of Mormon) reminds the Nephites that they are "a remnant of the seed of Joseph whose coat was rent by his brethren into many pieces." Jacob, observing that a portion of the coat had not decayed, makes a prophecy:

Even as this remnant of garment of my son hath been preserved, so shall a remnant of the seed of my son be preserved by the hand of God, and be taken unto himself, while the reminder of the seed of Joseph shall perish, even as the remnant of his garment. (Alma 46:24)

The subject matter of this imagery, the story of Joseph, evokes the image of the Exodus, which is the most prevalent type in the Book of Mormon. In the Book of Ether, that prophet employs the Joseph story and the ensuing exodus from Egypt as a type, an adumbration of the Nephites, who, at that point in time, had not yet arrived in the land of promise. Ether has the prophetic privilege of foreseeing that his people will be annihilated and that Lehi's people will inherit the land in which a New Jerusalem will arise (Ether 13:2-8). Moroni, the editor of the text of Ether, consciously included this portion of Ether's plates and emphasized the type for the reader. The many direct references to the law of Moses as a type, as well as the casual references to the law of Moses as the prescriptions in effect until Christ comes, reinforce the Exodus type as the symbolic background before which the events of Nephite history play themselves out (e.g., Mosiah 3:15; 13:31; 16:14; Alma 25:15; 33:19; Helaman 8:13-14).

The concept of type gives significance to the flow of time, allowing events to be read backwards into the past and forwards into the future in terms of promise and fulfillment. The image commonly employed to represent type -- in this instance the person, object or event which occurred first in time -- is the shadow. The fulfillment, the antitype, must be, to continue the metaphor, the substance, the reality which projected the shadow back into the past. This imagery -- as well as the interpretation of it, proceeding from a temporal, material level to an eternal, spiritual level -- is delineated within the Book of Mormon. For example, the Liahona, a form of compass, was given by God to the Nephites in order to direct them through the wilderness when they first left Jerusalem. Alma explains to his son Helaman that the Liahona is also a symbolic type:

And now, my son, I would that ye should understand that these things are not without a shadow; for as our fathers were slothful to give heed to this compass (now these things were temporal) they did not prosper; even so it is with things which are spiritual.

For behold, it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss, as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass, which would point unto them a straight course to the promised land.

And now I say, is there not a type in this thing? For just as surely as this director did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promised land, shall the words of Christ, if we follow their course, carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise. (Alma 37:43-45)

The physical space-time dimension of the vale of sorrow subsides when one arrives in the afterworld of heaven. The very real land of promise, which the Nephites attained when they came to America, is but a temporary state, a shadow of the ideal land of promise in eternity.

The explication of type in the Book of Mormon extends its description from a two-stage development to one of three stages. The wilderness-wandering must precede arrival in the land of promise which, in turn, is a shadow of the ultimate. Or, to reread the designation, the land of promise which the Nephites discover after crossing the great sea is the land that was promised, but it is also a promise of a future state of existence.

Time, when determined by the concept of type, then becomes a complex, relativistic scheme. For those alive at the time of the type, the prophet would inform them to look forward to the fulfillment of the type in the future. Those alive later, at the time of the antitype, could look back to

the past, the time of the type, and acknowledge its fulfillment. But, as revealed in Alma 37, those conscious of the complete scheme realize that there are three stages, and that its witnesses are always in the middle stage until death. One lives the fulfillment of the type, with a promise of a yet greater fulfillment after death. And this point of experience is relative. Those who lived at the time of the type -- the Nephites at the time of their wanderings, for instance -- had before them the type of the Exodus itself. Those who were the participants in the primordial event were in the first world, the beginning of time, full of wonders and miracles. It is of those wonders and miracles that Nephi reminds his brothers when he is divinely instructed to build a ship to cross the great waters and his brothers murmur against him (1 Nephi 17).

It should be noted that as Nephi invokes the scriptures to turn the hearts of his rebellious brothers, he unconsciously imitates the dynamic of type. At their present moment, the Nephites experience an exodus reenacted for them by God, and thus the time between the Exodus of Moses and their own exodus is annihilated. Their present moment, one of doubt and conflict, is resolved by becoming a reenactment of the original event, one ordained by God and now reordained.

Time

If we consider how time is used throughout the Book of Mormon, we can see that human time is viewed as a construct which has no validity from the divine perspective.

The time frame of the text is slightly more than a millennium. From Lehi's departure till the birth of Christ, 600 years pass, followed by 422 years when Moroni ceases writing. The dating system is based on the year of Lehi's departure, with major wars and the rule of kings and judges

serving as time markers. There are, however, specific predictions with regard to the birth of Christ, and the day of his birth is signalled by the cosmic event of a night that is as light as day (3 Nephi 2:8; Helaman 14:3). The records are dated accordingly, and thus the Nephites employ a Christian calendar centuries before anyone else (and possibly more accurate than the one currently employed). There are also dire prophecies that, unless the Nephites repent and live virtuously, they will be destroyed by the fourth generation after Christ (2 Nephi 26:9-10; Alma 45:11-12; Helaman 13:10). Thus, even from the time of Lehi, at the foundation of his nation, there was a concept of the lifespan of the Nephite nation.

This standard chronological dating system, however, is belied by the plan of salvation. The Nephites are governed by the law of Moses, but they know that this law will be rescinded when Christ comes (2 Nephi 25:24-25; 4 Nephi 1:12). The prophets reveal many specifics of the life of Christ, down to the name of Mary, his mother (Mosiah 3:8; Alma 7:10). In fact, while still observing the law of Moses, they also administer adult baptism, beginning with Alma about 150 years before Christ (Mosiah 18; 21:35; Alma 5:62; Helaman 5:19). Although there is no mention of specifics in regard to the law of Moses -- presumably circumcision is still administered to infant males -- baptism is prescribed for adults. (In Moroni 8, Mormon condemns infant baptism.) That the old and new laws, as mainstream Christianity would label them, can exist simultaneously, however, appears to be explained by other passages in the Book of Mormon.

For example, in one of his sermons in the Book of Mosiah, Abinadi outlines the plan of salvation. Given that it is about 150 B.C., the prophet should speak of Christ's coming in the future tense. Instead, he says that God "redeemed" his people, and writes in a conditional structure

that if Christ "had not come" and "had not risen," there could "have been no redemption." Then switching to the present tense, he states, "But there is a resurrection," and continues, "He [Christ] is the light and the life of the world" (Mosiah 15:4-8).

The past tense predicates that redemption has already been effected and the present tense suggests the timelessness of this redemptive act. This transcendence of time is explained by Alma as "the plan of redemption" ordained by God through Christ:

This high priesthood being after the order of his Son, which order was from the foundation of the world; or in other words, being without beginning of days or end of years, being prepared from eternity to all eternity, according to his foreknowledge of all things. (Alma 13:7)

Still some 75 years before Christ's birth, Alma is speaking to his son about the resurrection of the dead. There is some question as to whether all the dead, up to the time of Christ, will arise, or if they must await some future time after Christ. To Alma, the question is meaningless:

Now whether there is more than one time appointed for men to rise it mattereth not; for all do not die at once, and this mattereth not; all is as one with God, and time only is measured unto men. (Alma 40:8)

Following this, we can understand how, like baptism, the words of Christ can be bestowed upon the Nephites long before he appears. In closing his second book, Nephi declares that his words are the words of Christ, and he encourages his

people to "feast upon the words of Christ; for behold the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye shall do" (2 Nephi 33:10-11; 32:3). His people are indeed privileged not just to know of Christ to come, but also to have his teachings over five centuries in advance. This may have been startling even to the faithful, but, as Alma explains to his son, there is good reason for these revelations.

And now, my son, this was the ministry unto which ye were called, to declare these glad tidings unto this people, to prepare their minds; or rather that salvation might come unto them, that they may prepare the minds of their children to hear the word at the time of his coming.

And now I will ease your mind somewhat on this subject. Behold, you marvel why these things should be known so long beforehand. Behold, I say unto you, is not a soul at this time as precious unto God as a soul will be at the time of his coming? (Alma 39:16-17)

We see then that, like the New Testament, the Book of Mormon employs the typological process to uncover a foreshadowing of Christ in the Old Testament. However, although the major portion of the Book of Mormon is composed before the birth of Christ, the Nephite prophets offer a clear and precise christological explanation of the plan of salvation prior to Christ's appearance on earth. Hence, over 500 years before the nativity, Jacob, son of Lehi, can write: "all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him" (2 Nephi 11:4). The Nephite writers have ascended directly to eternity and beheld from above the scheme of time unfolding itself.

Space

Just as the dimension of time is transmuted in the Book of Mormon, so space, the new land which the Nephites occupy, may also be perceived beyond its physical dimensions.

When the Nephites first arrive in America, they see that it is copious with fertile land, animals and precious minerals, and so they designate it the *Land of Bountiful* (1 Nephi 18:24-25; 2 Nephi 5:15). Later we learn that there are great areas of wilderness in which wanderers may become lost or even discover other tribes or the bones of the people of a deceased civilization. The wilderness and the distant mountains may also become the hiding places of the Gadianton robbers. And in the far north there is a land so desolate that it is called *Desolation*.

We know that these lands are bordered by the great sea which the Nephites (and the Jaredites and the people of Zarahemla) have crossed, but this sea is named only once (1 Nephi 17:5), and their landing point is not commemorated in any way. The one time a migrant Nephite group takes to the sea in ships they are never heard of again (Alma 63:4-8). In the geography of the land, physical features such as mountains or rivers, with one exception, are made neither specific nor significant. Instead, the land promised to the Nephites is open and undefined. In time it is dotted by Lamanite and Nephite cities, people migrate back and forth, and later, during the great wars, the opposing armies crisscross the land, outmaneuvering each other. Despite this, the geography still remains nondescript. The only designations that stand out are the hill of Cumorah, where two civilizations are destroyed and the plates of the Book of Mormon are buried, and the Bountiful-Desolation division. This latter separation echoes the division of Lehi's family into Nephites and Lamanites, with the attendant suggestion of

positive and negative qualities. This set of opposites, human and natural, graphically illustrates Lehi's principle of opposition:

And to bring about his eternal purposes in the end of man, after he had created our first parents, and the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and in fine, all things which are created, it must needs be that there was an opposition; even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the other bitter.

And they [Adam and Eve] would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin.
(2 Nephi 2:15, 23)

This principle of polarity defines the nature of existence and is reflected in descriptions of the landscape. The point at which the two tribes finally meet to clash for the last time is a designated geographical point -- the hill of Cumorah. This same location marks the grave of both the Jaredite and, later, the Nephite nation; it is the burial mound of two nations which were destroyed because they did not maintain their covenants with God. But this hill is also the site where Mormon buried his plates, the Book of Mormon, which he and many other prophets knew by divine revelation would be a voice from the dust. This pivotal location, a flashpoint of opposites, is where life springs out of death, where the Nephites may die in the flesh but rise again in the spirit (Mormon 6:6; Ether 9:3; 15:11).

This evocative image of the voice from the dust must be examined further, in the context of the hermeneutics of the last chapter. To continue with the theme of space, we must consider the text's terminology which defines the geography

of the land in terms of concepts rather than natural features.

As we have seen, throughout the Book of Mormon the land is continually described as one of *promise*, *inheritance* and *choice* or *liberty*. Each of these terms evokes, respectively, the concepts of covenant, bondage and free will. Geography thus represents the moral landscape of the Nephites' salvation history.

Promise

We see once again the typology of the Exodus when Lehi is offered a "land of promise" upon his departure from Jerusalem. And on numerous occasions, the land which they arrive at is typified in this manner (e.g., 1 Nephi 5:5; 10:13; 17:13-14; 18:22-25; 2 Nephi 1:3, 5, 24). This land of promise is offered in terms of a covenant:

we have obtained a land of promise, a land which is choice above all other lands; a land which the Lord God hath covenanted with me [Lehi] should be a land for the inheritance of my seed. Yea, the Lord hath covenanted this land unto me, and to my children forever, and also all those who should be led out of other countries by the hand of the Lord. (2 Nephi 1:5)

This covenant continues the tradition of the covenant made by God with the Jews, who are the "fathers" of the Nephites (2 Nephi 11:5) and it is confirmed by Christ when he comes to the Nephites: "ye are the children of the prophets; and ye are of the house of Israel; and ye are of the covenant which the Father made with your fathers" (3 Nephi 20:25). The delivery of God's promise in the covenant implies that the Nephites remain faithful to God, and two time periods are

noted when the Nephites are righteous to the fullest and enjoy the benefits of peace, prosperity and happiness (Alma 50:23; 4 Nephi 1-21).

The covenantal promise, of course, is reciprocal; if the Nephites fail to keep their side of the covenant -- for example, when the Nephites "wax proud" because of their own wealth and turn aside from God -- then internal strife and social unrest result (e.g., Alma 4:6-9; 3 Nephi 6:12-18). Furthermore, the Nephites have the lesson of the Jaredites before them. They too were delivered to this very same promised land, but such a land is only "for a righteous people" (Ether 2:7; 6:12). Their destruction signalled their failure to fulfill the covenant.

The purpose of the covenant, however, is not merely to materially reward the Nephites. The material "land of promise," as we have seen, is really an adumbration of the true promised land of the afterlife (2 Nephi 9:18; Alma 5:51; 37:45). But to reach this realm the people must be redeemed from their sins. Thus the earlier covenants give way before the ultimate:

And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy without spot.
(Moroni 10:33)

The Land of Promise/Covenant figure follows the development of a type -- from a physical to a spiritual realm -- and introduces the redemption scheme. As Israel covenants with God, so the Son covenants with the Father unto the remission of sin. God's promise to free man from the bondage

of death and sin is realized in the person of Christ. This scheme is also developed with new imagery in the figure of the land of inheritance.

Inheritance

The Jaredites inherit this new land so that they may be "free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven," provided, of course, that they "serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ" (Ether 2:12). This threat of bondage to another people is very real, as the Nephites learn. At various times the Lamanites hold one or other group of people in bondage, collecting tribute from them and restricting their freedom of religion (Mosiah 7:22; Alma 43:8; 48:4; 62:5). Such bondage, of course, already has its type with the Jews in captivity to the Egyptians. But as a type, physical bondage also symbolizes spiritual bondage. The Nephites possess the land of inheritance (e.g., 2 Nephi 1:5, 9; 3:2; Jacob 3:4; Omni 1:27; 3 Nephi 16:16) but, as is made abundantly clear, the ultimate inheritance is the kingdom of Heaven which is reserved for "new creatures" who "repent" (2 Nephi 9:18; Mosiah 27:26; Alma 5:51). The "unclean," however, in bond to the devil, can only inherit the kingdom of the demon (Alma 40:26; 41:4).

Alma's recounting of his conversion makes clear this idea of the Jewish bondage in Egypt as a type of spiritual bondage. His account -- in which he begs for mercy, acknowledges his sin, and proclaims the coming atonement by Christ for the sins of the world -- both opens and closes with direct reference to the Egyptian captivity, as well as a final reference to the Nephites' (Lehi's family) delivery from Jerusalem (Alma 36; also Mosiah 27).

Physical bondage is the result of iniquity, but iniquity itself is a spiritual bondage to the devil (Mosiah 29:18;

Alma 50:22). This is caused by personal sin, but there is a greater scheme at work, one traced back to Adam's sin which initiates God's plan of salvation, culminating in Christ's atonement with the father and his release of the bonds of sin. This salvific plan is exemplified in the "inheritance" image in a complex design of imagery and structure in the Book of Mormon.

Inheritance is the passing on of power and property from father to son. It suggests the passage of time and the experience of death, but also renewal. The Book of Mormon is framed by father-son figures. In the beginning it is Lehi who founds his race, a branch of the house of Jacob, and his son Nephi, who ensures its success. At the end it is Mormon who guards and edits the records of his people, and then passes them on to his son who concludes them. Nephi inherits the leadership of the nation and his father's gift for visions; Moroni inherits the records and the responsibility for their conclusion and concealment. Lehi presents his son with a nation; Mormon delivers to his son a text. One heralds the birth of the nation; the other describes its annihilation. Both sets are aware that their history will not be buried forever, but rather will arise from the dust.

In the Old Testament, what should be the direct line of inheritance -- from father to eldest son -- is complicated by sibling rivalry and divine intervention. Thus Jacob steals his brother Esau's blessing, and the youngest son Joseph becomes the object of his father Jacob's favoritism. In both instances, God approves of the line-jumping. In the Book of Mormon, these events may be applied as a type to Nephi. Although he is the third son, Nephi assumes leadership of the family, takes possession of the sacred records, and receives God's approbation. Even though this position is the reward for his faithfulness to God, the Lamanite tradition accuses Nephi of having stolen the records (Mosiah 10:16). Laman's

anger at Nephi's ascendancy is such that he plots to kill Nephi (1 Nephi 16:37). Eventually, like Jacob, Nephi must flee the land (2 Nephi 5:3-7).

Similarities reminiscent of the story of Joseph also occur. Nephi is a visionary and, like Joseph the dream interpreter, Nephi interprets the vision of his father Lehi. Also, like the brothers of Joseph, at one point Nephi's brothers bow down before him (1 Nephi 17:20; 15:13-19; 7:20).

Throughout the text, the reader is constantly reminded that the Nephites are of "the house of Jacob" and "the seed of Joseph." To reiterate the theme, Lehi names his two youngest sons Jacob and Joseph. Thus the theme of inheritance is constantly brought to the fore.

The rivalry between brothers, played out in the Old Testament by Jacob and Joseph with their brothers, assumed racial proportions spanning a millennium with Nephi and Laman. Their rival offspring burgeoned into huge populations engaged in constant blood-letting on battlegrounds involving tens of thousands, culminating in the final Armageddon, which even included women and children. Not only did Laman plot Nephi's murder, but the Lamanites were determined to destroy the Nephites totally, almost from the beginning of their existence as a separate tribe of people (Jacob 1:14).

The Lamanites' murderous intent, beginning with Laman, lasts for the entirety of their history, a thousand years. It begins when they accuse Nephi of stealing the records, the plates of brass which record, most likely, the Pentateuch, the pre-exile prophets, and the family genealogy (1 Nephi 3:3; 13:23; Alma 37:3). Although it seems unlikely that such a long, violent history (terminating in genocidal annihilation), would be attributed to the loss of written records, various writers in the text suggest that this loss

is the sole reason for the Lamanites' failure to follow the path of righteousness. Without the records, the word of God, the Lamanites have lost the tradition of their original fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as well as the teachings of Moses and the early prophets such as Isaiah, who is quoted extensively by the Nephite authors. They can only substitute their own false traditions which are fuelled by jealousy and anger.

This power of the scriptures, their soul-saving effect, is proclaimed by Alma:

And now, it has hitherto been wisdom in God that these things [the plates of brass] should be preserved; for behold, they have enlarged the memory of this people, yea, and convinced many of the error of their ways, and brought them to the knowledge of their God unto the salvation of their souls.

Yea, I say unto you, were it not for these things that these records do contain, which are on these plates, Ammon and his brethren could not have convinced so many thousands of the Lamanites of the incorrect tradition of their fathers; yea, these records and their words brought them unto repentance; that is, they brought them to the knowledge of the Lord their God, and to rejoice in Jesus Christ their Redeemer. (Alma 37:8-9)

While the Nephites enjoy an historical tradition which ensures the lessons regarding the reward of righteousness and the punishment of wickedness, the Lamanites' traditions, their language and general world view are seriously handicapped.

For they [the people of Zarahemla] said unto us: Do ye suppose that ye can bring the Lamanites to the knowledge of the truth? Do ye suppose that ye can convince the Lamanites of the incorrectness

of the traditions of their fathers, as stiffnecked a people as they are; whose hearts delight in the shedding of blood; whose days have been spent in the grossest iniquity; whose ways have been the ways of a transgressor from the beginning? Now my brethren, ye remember that this was their language. (Alma 26:24)

The Nephites would have "suffered in ignorance" except that they can "read and understand his [God's] mysteries and have his commandments before [their] eyes" (Mosiah 1:3, 5). Lacking a sacred text, the Lamanite tradition is built upon a secularized world view which provides them with self-justification:

They [the Lamanites] were a wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people, believing in the tradition of their fathers, which is this -- Believing that they were driven out of the land of Jerusalem because of the iniquities of their fathers, and that they were wronged in the wilderness by their brethren, and they were also wronged while crossing the sea. (Mosiah 10:12)

However, this same false tradition which causes the Lamanites' descent into iniquity also excuses their ignorance, which is not the case for the Nephites, who do possess the truth.

Behold, can you [Pahoran, chief judge of Nephites] suppose that the Lord will spare you and come out in judgment against the Lamanites, when it is the tradition of their fathers that has caused their hatred, yea, and it has been redoubled by those who have dissented from us, while your iniquity is for the cause of your love of glory and the vain things of the world? (Alma 60:32)

In fact, God in his justice takes into account Lamanite ignorance and extends his mercy:

For there are many promises which are extended to the Lamanites; for it is because of the traditions of their fathers that caused them to remain in their state of ignorance; therefore the Lord will be merciful unto them and prolong their existence in the land. (Alma 9:16)

The Lamanites are held in bondage to their ignorance due to false traditions caused by a lack of sacred writings. Paradoxically they are to be freed of this bondage, albeit much later, according to the plan of salvation. As the Book of Mormon makes clear, the Nephites are annihilated at around 420 A.D. and a remnant of the Lamanites survive. The Nephite plates are buried, so the remaining Lamanites still have no source of guidance. However, as several of the Book of Mormon writers prophesy, the book will resurrect and "the remnant," that is, the remaining Lamanites, will be converted and saved by the word, the voice of their brothers arising from the dust.

This completes the theme of brotherhood. Just as Joseph, whom his brothers had thought must be dead, returned to save them, so do the Nephites return from the dead through their scripture to save their brothers, the Lamanites. Just as Joseph forgives his brothers, who had plotted to murder him, so do the Nephites forgive. Enos, son of Jacob, nephew of Nephi, tells us that the Lamanites had sworn to destroy not only the Nephite records but the Nephites themselves. Nevertheless, Enos makes a covenant with God that he would preserve the records and bring them forth "at some future day unto the Lamanites, that, they might be brought unto salvation" (Enos 1:13).

And, significantly, Moroni, writing almost a thousand years later, having borne the death of his father Mormon and the complete slaughter of his people, alone in what should be his despair, instead addresses his last words, the Book of Moroni, to his "brethren" the Lamanites. And they are not

only brethren, but "beloved brethren" (Moroni 1:4; 10:1, 18). His book in no way condemns the Lamanites, but instead offers them instruction in reinstituting the church which can bring their souls to blissful eternity.

Thus the voice that speaks from the dust is one of forgiveness, not vengeance.

Choice/Liberty

The Land of Promise is also designated as a land of choice and a land of liberty (e.g., 1 Nephi 13:30; 2 Nephi 1:5, 7; 10:19; Alma 51). Just after Lehi's family leaves Jerusalem, God informs Nephi of "a land which I [God] have prepared for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands" (1 Nephi 2:20). After their arrival in this promised land, God informs Jacob that in the distant future, "this land shall be a land of liberty unto the Gentiles, and there shall be no kings upon the land" (2 Nephi 10:11). Like the Jews, the Nephites were ruled by kings for a period. However, they were advised of the disadvantages of unrighteous kings and warned that the sins of the people were often caused by the iniquity of kings (Mosiah 23:6-7; 29:31, 35). Eventually the people elected to be ruled by judges, but there were still those who wished to overthrow the judges, topple the "free government," and establish a king (Alma 51:5). Earlier, King Benjamin had warned the people that he, their king, was not superior to his people and, like them, he was "also of the dust" (Mosiah 2:26). But not all Nephites were of the same mind:

Now those who were in favor of kings were those of high birth, and they sought to be kings; and they were supported by those who sought power and authority over the people. (Alma 51:8)

There followed a struggle between the "kingmen" and the "freemen." The freemen "had sworn or covenanted to maintain their rights and the privileges of their religion by a free government" (Alma 51:6). Both the concept and the creation of a free government ironically came forth from the righteous King Mosiah. Although as king he consulted with priests, who represented the established church, his reign was notable for both freedom for all religions and the prohibition of religious persecution. Following the thinking of his father, King Benjamin, who had suggested that as human beings his people were equal to him, King Mosiah issued a "command" that there be an "equality among all men" (Mosiah 27:1-3). And, further, "this land be a land of liberty, and every man may enjoy his rights and privileges alike" (Mosiah 29:32). The Nephites followed Mosiah's advice and, after his death, were governed by judges selected by the "voice of the people" (Mosiah 29:25).

These concepts of democracy, equality and freedom of religion were all presumed to function in a sphere in which men could exercise their free will. As we have seen, bondage, both physical and spiritual, would inhibit one's freedom of action. Adam's fall condemned man to the captivity of sin, but in Lehi's outline of human history, man enjoys the fullest expression of free will, which enjoins upon him the responsibility for his choices.

But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things.

Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.

And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the

law at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given.

Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself. (2 Nephi 2:24-27)

Although Nephi is speaking about 600 years before Christ's crucifixion, the redemption reaches back into the past (as we considered above, regarding time in the text), transcending human time, so that all men bear responsibility for their choices. Speaking some years later, after Lehi's death, his son Jacob acknowledges that life may be a "vale of tears." His family has been driven from their homeland of Jerusalem, and they have their own sins to contemplate. But he urges his people not to "hang down [their] heads" and feel "cast off" (2 Nephi 10:20):

cheer up your hearts, and remember that ye are free to act for yourselves -- to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of life. (2 Nephi 10:23)

In this chapter we have seen that the use of typology has been radically revised in the Book of Mormon, and that notions of time and space must be understood in relation to a theological and thematic development particular to this text. We must now stand back and consider the conceptual framework of this text.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

The writers of the Book of Mormon, especially its editor, Mormon, exerted a clear effort to make their reader aware of the compositional nature of the text. Mormon, as the editor, was not concerned with aesthetics, but rather with the far more important topic of theology. His purpose was not only to reveal to the reader God's plan of salvation, but also to convince the reader of the reader's own direct involvement in salvation. In this chapter, we shall consider how Mormon and the other writers approached their task.

First, a brief summary of the following chapter is in order to chart the field of study.

The Book of Mormon poses various problems for both its writers and its readers. For example, the writers' problems with the text concern the nature of language itself, including transcription and translation difficulties. The writers also face the limitations of their powers of expression. There are, in addition, problems in regard to the content of the language as well as its form. Our examination will include the ideas of what the text terms "plain and precious" truth and the "plainness" of this scripture. This "plainness" is in contrast to the allegorical and visionary imagery of the Old Testament, the corruption of the New Testament by the "abominable church," and the creation of multiple churches. These topics spring directly out of an examination of the nature of language and the act of writing in the text.

The limitations of language

At the very beginning of the Book of Mormon, Nephi informs his reader that his text is in "the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians" (1 Nephi 1:2). Four hundred and seventy years later, the author of the Book of Mosiah

suggests that this tradition continued because the three sons of King Benjamin -- Mosiah, Helorum and Helaman -- were "taught in all the language (sic) of his fathers." More specifically, King Benjamin names "the language of the Egyptians" as that used on the plates of Nephi, following the precedent of Lehi and the command of God (Mosiah 1:2, 4). At the end of the "Book of Mormon," Moroni, taking over as scribe after his deceased father, confirms that the records had been written in Egyptian, but he specifies, a "reformed Egyptian, being handed down and altered by us, according to our manner of speech." This information comes as Moroni begs his reader to forgive his imperfections, his father's, and all "those who have written before him" (Mormon 9:31-32). This scribal imperfection, he knows, has affected the records:

And if our plates had been sufficiently large we should have written in Hebrew; but the Hebrew hath been altered by us; and if we could have written in Hebrew, behold, ye would have had no imperfection in our record. (Mormon 9:33)

Several scribal issues have been raised here. First, the language has, over the course of time, changed. Indeed, we will see that the term "corrupted" would be more accurate, as the text makes references to the breakdown of language. Second, for technical reasons, which we will refer to, a more proper or perfect language of expression -- Hebrew -- could not be employed to present the truths of the record in a clearer form of expression. Third, and related to the first, this purer form of Hebrew has been altered as well, its pristine state lost. Following this, Moroni explains that since other people do not know the language of the Nephites, and since, at this point, he seems to be the sole survivor, the future audience will need to have the text translated

(Mormon 9:34). Consequently, an imperfect expression of the truth of the book will have to be translated, and thus altered, to fit into the context of another language to express the world view of a civilization foreign to the reader.

This inability of the language to contain and express the truth which the writers possess is pointed out elsewhere. Earlier Mormon, editorially intruding in Third Nephi, writes:

And I know the record which I make to be a just and a true record; nevertheless there are many things which, according to our language, we are not able to write. (3 Nephi 5:16)

And his son Moroni, editorially intruding in Ether, confirms this later:

And thou [Lord] hast made us that we could write but little, because of the awkwardness of our hands. Behold, thou hast not made us mighty in writing like unto the brother of Jared, for thou madest him that the things which he wrote were mighty even as thou art, unto the overpowering of man to read.

Thou hast also made our words powerful and great, even that we cannot write them; therefore, when we write we behold our weakness, and stumble because of the placing of our words; and I fear lest the Gentiles should mock at our words. (Ether 12:24-25)

Throughout the Book of Mormon, the implication is that reformed Egyptian is a scribal language meant only for written records, and that the vernacular language of the Nephites is a form of Hebrew which has changed over the course of time. One might speculate that the purpose of a

scribal language is two-fold. It is a learned language, presumably more precise in its manner of expression, offering more facility to the writer attempting to capture the essence of the truth experienced or sought. And it is a language presumably made resistant to change so that the reader from any era, with the proper training, can have direct access to a continuing, unaltered form of expression with assurance that the meaning of the words could be discovered.

On both accounts the speculation is weak. First, while a language that functions like an objective scientific code might be a steadfast instrument, the experience or reality it wishes to convey might best be served by a vibrant, flexible language which can more readily shape itself to thoughts never before expressed or insights never before revealed. Secondly, although the codified language may be unaltered, the different readers, over the course of time, arrive at the text from different worlds. They must still translate this "perfect" language into their own vernacular, which imperfectly mirrors their own experience and, in reflecting the "perfect" expression, must necessarily distort it.

Unfortunately, this speculation does not explain why the text has been recorded in reformed Egyptian. Although Moroni implies that the Hebrew scripture was unsuitable because of its large size, it seems unlikely that the reformed Egyptian script was somehow smaller in size than Hebrew script (and, in point of fact, Hebrew script is not large). More likely, it was a more concentrated form of expression which would make the laborious process of engraving on metal easier. Moroni does not clarify this, but instead follows immediately with the admission that the Hebrew the Nephites employed had also been "reformed" or modified in some way due to their speech, which again suggests the idea of the corruption of language.

Moroni's comments, however, do not seem to be an adequate explanation. The text is unclear concerning the records which Nephi took from Laban in Jerusalem. It seems more likely that the records which Nephi took would have been in Hebrew, thus providing a written guide to the language. Furthermore, it is recorded that Mosiah taught his sons "all the language of his fathers" (Mosiah 1:2). Would this not have included Hebrew? The issue is clouded when Nephi begins the Book of Mormon by stating that he used the "language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians" (1 Nephi 1:2). However, we should hold any attempts at explanation in abeyance until we have examined the linguistic situation in the text. The overall pattern concerning the corruption of language may hold a clue to solve this linguistic quandary.

That the writers are aware of these linguistic difficulties is quite evident in the text. For example, when Jesus appears to the Nephites after his death and resurrection in Jerusalem, he summarizes for the people many of the teachings contained in the New Testament gospels and relayed by Third Nephi. There is more, however:

And it came to pass that he went again a little way off and prayed unto the Father;

And tongue cannot speak the words which he prayed, neither can be written by man the words which he prayed.

And the multitude did hear and do bear record; and their hearts were open and they did understand in their hearts the words which he prayed.

Nevertheless, so great and marvelous were the words which he prayed that they cannot be written, neither can they be uttered by man.
(3 Nephi 19:31-34)

This quotation raises the idea of kerygma, which biblical scholars like Bultmann and Ricoeur have examined. We will return to this topic in the last chapter when we look at the experience of the reader. For now we must direct our attention to the writers' awareness of the limitations of language.

This idea of the limitations of language is linked to the language alterations which the writers recorded, but they suggest that language, more than being just a form of expression, is also a sign of the nature of mankind. The Nephites learn of the Jaredites, a people who crossed the ocean and came to America at the time of the Tower of Babel (Omni 1:22; Mosiah 28:17). In fact, the origin of the Jaredites is directly connected to that biblical incident. It was because the unnamed brother of Jared was "highly favored of the Lord," and cried unto him that the Lord had compassion and confounded neither their language nor that of their friends and their families. Instead, as he did with the Nephites, the Lord entered into a covenant with them, promising them a choice land for their inheritance, provided they remain in the Lord's ways (Ether 1:33-43). Unfortunately, they succumbed to "secret combinations," with sons plotting the murder of their fathers and oaths taken to overthrow the king. Such oaths, as taken by those greedy for power, are traced back to Cain, the first murderer, and receive their power from the devil (Ether 8, especially 15-16). The records of the Book of Helaman also trace the origin of secret oaths from Cain to the Gadianton robbers, who were attacking the Nephites and eventually caused their destruction. This powerful, negative use of language in secret oaths and combinations finds its ultimate source in the devil:

And also it is that same being who put it into the hearts of the people to build a tower sufficiently high that they might get to heaven. And it was that same being who led on the people who came from that tower into this land; who spread the works of darkness and abomination over all the face of the land, until he dragged the people down to an entire destruction, and to an everlasting hell.

Yes, it is that same being who put it into the heart of Gadianon to still carry on the work of darkness, and of secret murder; and he has brought it forth from the beginning of man even down to this time. (Helaman 6:28-29)

Earlier we saw that Moroni excused the imperfection of the text because the writers could not use Hebrew in the engraving process. But on an even more consequential level, we see that language may be corrupted and employed by the devil to bring about the downfall of man. Indeed, the evil of the secret oaths and combinations proved the undoing of the Jaredites and the Nephites. And the disaster of the confusion of languages, traced to the pride of man at the Tower of Babel, is a lesson to be learned again and again.

During one period Amulon, a "wicked priest," appointed teachers to instruct the Lamanites in the language of the Nephites. The instruction, however, was limited to the linguistic form:

neither did the brethren of Amulon teach them anything concerning the Lord their God, neither the law of Moses; nor did they teach them the words of Abinadi [the holy prophet]. (Mosiah 24:5)

Implied here is that once the Lamanites separated from the Nephites, their language was confounded. The two nations, going their separate ways, developed separate languages. But

this is not the only example of the confounding of language. When the Nephites discovered the people of Zarahemla, who had also come to the new world about the same time as Lehi's family, the two peoples could not communicate:

their language had become corrupted; and they had brought no records with them; and they denied the being of their Creator; and Mosiah, nor the people of Mosiah could understand them.

But it came to pass that Mosiah caused that they should be taught in his language. And it came to pass that after they were taught in the language of Mosiah, Zarahemla gave a genealogy of his fathers, according to his memory; and they are written, but not in these plates. (Omni 1:17-18)

These two preceding references add a new complication to the linguistic situation: the confounding of language is tied to man's separation from God. In his pride, man may turn from God, as explained in the Tower of Babel story, and enter a confusion of tongues. Separated from God, man may enter in league with the devil, and language becomes instrumentalized in secret oaths and combinations, whose origin is the devil, "who is the father of all lies; even that same liar who beguiled our first parents, even that same liar who hath caused man to commit murder from the beginning" (Ether 8:25; see also 2 Nephi 26:22).

When the brethren of Amulon taught the Lamanites the language of the Nephites, they also taught the Lamanites "that they should keep their record, and that they might write one another." Armed with the Nephite language, however, the Lamanites merely employed it to increase their material wealth, and then, being "a cunning and a wise people, as to the wisdom of the world," they then "delight[ed] in all manner of wickedness and plunder" (Mosiah 24:6-7).

The Lamanites kept records, but they failed to possess the records which could guide them to God. We see this at the very beginning of the Book of Mormon. Shortly after Lehi's family fled Jerusalem, Lehi sent his sons back to obtain surreptitiously the "records," the plates of brass which contained the teachings of Moses, the prophets, and the genealogy of the Jews. So precious were these records to them that they risked their lives and even murdered at God's command to obtain them (1 Nephi 4). It became part of Lamanite tradition that when Nephi and his people separated from Laman and his people, Nephi stole these records (Mosiah 10:11-17). Indeed, Nephi did take the records, which had been entrusted to his keeping by Lehi, because the Lamanites failed to honor their prescriptions and threatened to kill the Nephites (2 Nephi 5). Because they lacked those records, the Lamanites had no moral guidance, and created "incorrect traditions" which led them astray (Mosiah 1:5; Alma 3:8). In their moral blindness, in fact, they sought to destroy the very thing that could save them.

For at the present our [the Nephites'] strugglings were vain in restoring them [the Lamanites] to the true faith. And they swore in their wrath that, if it were possible, they would destroy our records and us, and also all the traditions of our fathers. (Enos 1:14)

The Lamanites, who lacked the records, had some degree of justification for failing to live the moral life. As the records contained in the Book of Mormon show, both the Nephites and the Jaredites, gifted with possession of the holy teachings, failed to observe them and ultimately were destroyed by their own sins. And the Nephite records, which prophesied the destruction of the Nephites as early as Lehi, ironically were promised to the Lamanites. Enos, who knew of

the Lamanite desire to destroy the Nephite records, entered into a covenant with God:

Wherefore, I knowing that the Lord God was able to preserve our records, I cried unto him continually, for he had said unto me: Whatsoever thing ye shall ask in faith, believing that ye shall receive in the name of Christ, ye shall receive it.

And I had faith, and I did cry unto God that he would preserve the records; and he covenanted with me that he would bring them forth unto the Lamanites in his own due time.

And I, Enos, knew it would be according to the covenant which he had made: wherefore my soul did rest. (Enos 1:15-17)

Later in our study, we must consider this delivery of the Nephite records, that is, the Book of Mormon, to the Lamanites in the context of a larger pattern.

For the present, to conclude this section, we have noted how the linguistic situation of the multiplication and alterations of languages is attributed to the moral failure of mankind. The moral-linguistic situation of the writers must now be examined.

The writers' limitations

As has already been suggested in preceding quotations, the writers of the Book of Mormon have spoken of their weakness, both personally as writers and more generally as human beings constrained by the limits of human nature (see 1 Nephi 19:6, 20; 2 Nephi 3:2; 33:1, 4, 11; Mormon 8:12, 17; 9:31, 33). Furthermore, there was the difficulty of the engraving process itself (Jarom 1:2, 14; Jacob 4:13; Mormon 9:33). Nevertheless, they were commanded

by God to write (3 Nephi 16:4; 26:12), and beginning with Lehi, they understood that their writings were to be preserved for a future audience (2 Nephi 3:11-12). As Nephi expressly said, he wrote to persuade others to do good, and he quoted Isaiah very frequently because the prophet delighted him so (2 Nephi 33:4; 11:2). As well, Moroni suggested that his own purpose in writing was so that evil might be done away with (Ether 8:26).

The writers were all editors to some degree because, in recording the history of the Nephites, they had to select and formulate the material they confined to the engravings. More particularly, Nephi abridged the records of his father Lehi and then enfolded this abridgment into his own history (1 Nephi 1:17). And the text of the Book of Mormon, as we have it, was in turn edited from voluminous records by Mormon (Thomasson 2).

The sermons and visions of such figures as Lehi, Jacob, King Benjamin, Abinadi, Alma and Mormon, as well as Jesus Christ, were received, recorded and then later engraved on one set of plates, then engraved on another set by Mormon and Moroni in their edited version. Interestingly, there is the suggestion in the text that an oral tradition was in effect. When Christ, in his appearance to the Nephites, pointed out an omission in a previous text, Nephi acknowledged that such a prophecy was known to be true but had not been included. The text was amended and is properly recorded in the text we possess (3 Nephi 23:7-13; Helaman 14:25, corrected). Since the particular prophecy had been made over 40 years earlier, it must have remained alive in the oral tradition, although the written version was in error.

This incident brings into focus several issues in regard to the function of the writers. Most obviously, since Nephi records this incident, he wishes to show that Christ himself

authenticated the veracity of the records being kept (and Mormon as well wishes to demonstrate this point). But we should note that this authentication occurs as Jesus is expounding the scriptures to his audience. That is to say, he is interpreting the scriptures, and we can assume that he is interpreting the Old Testament prophecies in regard to himself, just as he is recorded doing in the New Testament. As we have already seen earlier in our discussion of type, Christ is the fulfillment, the antitype of the events and imagery of the Old Testament. This means that the text must be interpreted and applied to the messiah, and we see here in Third Nephi that Christ specifically demonstrates this interpretation process. In Third Nephi 24, he commands the Nephites, presumably the scribes, to record his dictation (which is the third and fourth chapters of Malachi, an Old Testament book which was composed after the Nephites had fled Jerusalem). After the recording he again "expounded" the text, which speaks of the Lord's messenger coming again a second time (as it is traditionally interpreted) for the last days and the final judgment. "Malachi" means "messenger," and it would seem that Christ's interpretation, which is not recorded, made the Nephites aware (something the Jews would not accept) that the text applied to him. Christ then becomes the interpreter *par excellence*, as he is able to demonstrate how he perfectly fulfills the scriptures' prophecies.

But we have to consider the nature of interpretation in this particular scene. As is pointed out in other passages of the Book of Mormon, God speaks to man in human language, to satisfy human understanding (2 Nephi 31:2-3; Ether 12:39). That is, his truth must be formulated in human language, and in a language particular to a race or nation. It is recorded that Christ expounds his dictation of Malachi to the "multitude," so he must have been using their language. Thus Christ functions as an editor and translator, since he dictates only two of Malachi's four chapters and translates

them from Hebrew into the Nephite language. And when Mormon edits these into his text, he must be translating them into reformed Egyptian. The process of the multiplication of tongues, which we noted before, is once again at work, and there is thus the possibility that the text can be corrupted. Just previous to this, Christ pointed out an omission in the text. Now he orders an addition. Under his guidance, the text is being corrected, adjusted, and then interpreted. To make the point, his translation of Malachi 4:2, which is usually rendered as "sun of righteousness" becomes "Son of righteousness" (3 Nephi 25:2). In other words, he interprets the image in terms of himself as the fulfillment of the scriptures. As Nephi says at one point, all things given by God are a type of Christ, and Christ himself supports this statement (2 Nephi 11:4).

Working against the corruption within human language and the natural human weakness of the writers, however, we have divine guidance. The authors have been commanded to write, and they have been told what they are forbidden to write (1 Nephi 14:28; 3 Nephi 26:11, 16, 18; 27:23; 28:14; Ether 13:13). Their text is corrected, and they receive direct dictation from Christ, who also indicates the proper interpretation. Like the New Testament, the Book of Mormon is an interpretation of the Old Testament. But its form of interpretation is directed very specifically toward two different audiences -- the Nephites and the future readers -- for two different reasons.

The first audience -- the plain truth

Beginning in First Nephi, the description of Christ and the nature of his mission are rendered very precisely. Unlike the Jews, the Nephites, long before Christ, were aware of such events as the Trinity, the future incarnation, the redemption (through Christ's crucifixion, death and

resurrection), the second coming, and the resurrection of the body. The Book of Mormon informed the people that in the distant land of Jerusalem in the future, one named Jesus Christ would be born of Mary and baptized by John. He would be rejected by the Jews, and the scriptures would be composed about his life and teachings. As opposed to the more indirect allegorical Old Testament prophecies of the messiah -- including many by Isaiah, which were incorporated into the Book of Mormon -- the Nephite text is plain and direct. As Alma explains, the Nephites are a privileged people:

And they [God's glad tidings] are made known unto us in plain terms, that we may understand, that we cannot err; and this is because of our being wanderers in a strange land; therefore, we are thus highly favored, for we have these glad tidings declared unto us in all parts of our vineyard.

For behold, angels are declaring it unto many at this time in our land; and this is for the purpose of preparing the hearts of the children of men to receive his word at the time of his coming in his glory. (Alma 13:23-24)

The Nephites must not err and they must be prepared to receive Christ. However, they are not the same audience as the Jews. As Nephi informed his reader at the outset of his record, he himself has been taught in the learning of the Jews (1 Nephi 1:2). But this learning has not been passed on to the Nephites:

Yea, and my soul delighteth in the words of Isaiah, for I came out from Jerusalem, and mine eyes hath beheld the things of the Jews, and I know that the Jews do understand things of the prophets, and there is none other people that understand the things which were spoken unto the Jews like unto them, save it be that they are taught after the manner of the things of the Jews.

But behold, I, Nephi, have not taught my children after the manner of the Jews; but behold, I, of myself, have dwelt at Jerusalem, wherefore I know concerning the regions round about.
(2 Nephi 25:5-6)

Nephi is gifted with the ability to interpret mystical visions. Thus he explains to his brothers the vision of their father Lehi and he "rehearses," that is, interprets the words of Isaiah to them (1 Nephi 15). And to his people at large he speaks in the language which they can understand.

Wherefore, hearken, O my people, which are of the house of Israel, and give ear unto my words; for because the words of Isaiah are not plain unto you, nevertheless they are plain unto all those that are filled with the spirit of prophecy. But I give unto you a prophecy, according to the spirit which is in me; wherefore I shall prophesy according to the plainness which hath been with me from the time that I came out from Jerusalem with my father; for behold, my soul delighteth in plainness unto my people, that they may learn.
(2 Nephi 25:4)

This plainness is not at all to the detriment of the Nephites, for we learn that the Jews failed to read properly in the spirit of prophecy:

But behold, the Jews were a stiffnecked people; and they despised the words of plainness, and killed the prophets, and sought for things that they could not understand. Wherefore, because of their blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, they must needs fall; for God hath taken away his plainness from them, and delivered unto them many things which they cannot understand, because they desired it. And because they desired it God hath done it, that they may stumble.

And now I, Jacob, am led on by the Spirit unto prophesying; for I perceive by the workings of

the Spirit which is in me, that by the stumbling of the Jews they will reject the stone upon which they might build and have safe foundation.
(Jacob 4:14-15)

But even the plainness of the teaching is no guarantee that it will be accepted, and the Nephites proved to be as culpable as the Jews:

And now I, Nephi, cannot say more; the Spirit stoppeth mine utterance, and I am left to mourn because of the unbelief, and the wickedness, and the ignorance, and the stiffneckedness of men; for they will not search knowledge nor understand great knowledge, when it is given unto them in plainness, even as plain as word can be.
(2 Nephi 32:7)

Although the Nephites are addressed as "the house of Israel," they are already estranged from their roots. As the first audience, they need a text which explains matters to them in a straightforward manner. The second audience will be even further removed, not only by time but by religious confusion as well.

The second audience -- plain and precious truth

In the distant future, readers will hear the Book of Mormon like a voice from the dust. The audience consists of the Jews, who reject the messiah, and the Gentiles, who acknowledge him but have been led astray by the "great and abominable church." Nephi is told by an angel that this church, as well as other churches, will "have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and precious," as well as many covenants (1 Nephi 13:26). The angel foretells that Nephi and his seed "shall write many

things," plain and precious, which shall be hidden and later revealed to the Gentiles (1 Nephi 13:35).

It seems that after Christ's departure from earth and after the Nephites are annihilated, the gospel of Christ will arise among the Gentiles but, as with the Tower of Babel, there will be confusion and a confounding of the truth. Nephi is divinely informed that a scripture, the New Testament, as well as a Jewish Bible, will exist among Gentiles and Jews. The Jews will not be convinced of the truth of Christ and the Gentiles will not have the complete message. What would complete Christ's message and teaching, and be clear to all, will be missing. The mission of the Nephite writers is not only to complete the message, but to present it in *plainness* so that it is perfectly understood. Then men can freely choose to follow Christ or not, and be judged accordingly (1 Nephi 13:20-42; 2 Nephi 29).

Nephi illustrates the plainness deemed necessary by examples. From the records of his father Lehi, which he abridges, he includes Lehi's symbolic vision, which employs elements such as the tree of life, the river, the rod of iron and the spacious building (1 Nephi 8). Since, as he tells the reader, he is versed in the Jewish tradition, he is able to interpret Lehi's vision (2 Nephi 25:5-6). His own vision of the future, however, is not mystically symbolic. The message concerning the future church of the Lamb and the church of the devil, as well as the life of Christ, is presented in clear, simple terms (1 Nephi 13-15). When the angel asks him if he knows of the "condescension of God," Nephi replies that he does not understand. The angel's explanation is not cloaked in the imagery of Isaiah, which so delights Nephi, but rather in direct statement. The angel also interprets the vision of Lehi for Nephi, explaining simply that the "rod of iron" is "the word of God," the "living waters" is "a representation of the love of God" and the "tree of life"

"a representation of the love of God" (1 Nephi 11:16-25).

Nephi also interprets the prophecies of Isaiah in regard to the Jews and explains them to the Nephites, but for his own prophecy he chooses a mode of presentation which does not need a symbolic interpretation.

But behold I proceed with my own prophecy,
according to my plainness; in the which I know
that no man can err. (2 Nephi 25:7)

Later, Nephi's brother Jacob quotes an extensive parable of a vineyard from the lost writings of the prophet Zenos. Following the extended chapter, Jacob briefly interprets the imagery (Jacob 5, 6). This form of allegory followed by interpretation stands in sharp contrast to Christ's teachings when he appears to the Nephites. The messiah recapitulates his message which is contained in the gospels, but he does not employ parables. Instead, "he did expound all things unto them, both great and small" (3 Nephi 26:1). And he informs the Nephites that they are the "other sheep" whom the Jews misinterpreted his teaching to mean the Gentiles, despite the fact that he had said that he was "not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (3 Nephi 15:21-24; Matthew 15:24).

Although Nephi is writing before the physical existence of Christ on earth, he can already point to the messiah as the exemplar of plain teaching: "I glory in plainness; I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus" (2 Nephi 33:6). Jesus is the manifest, not the hidden, revelation of God. And so Nephi expresses himself as God himself does:

For my soul delighteth in plainness; for after this manner doth the Lord God work among the children of men. For the Lord God giveth light unto the understanding; for he speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding. (2 Nephi 31:3)

Just as Nephi understands that his own people are not educated in the manner of the Jews, and hence cannot comprehend the Old Testament imagery properly, he also knows that his future Gentile audience must be addressed in a plain, direct language which is suitable to their understanding (2 Nephi 25:5-6).

The writers' language

Considering that Nephi wishes to render the plain and precious truth, we must reconsider why he writes the records in "the language of the Egyptians" and why the entire edited and abridged text is in "reformed Egyptian," as Mormon's son Moroni reports.

We have already considered the technical difficulties of engraving and Moroni's comment, by which we presumed he meant that reformed Egyptian was more concise, and hence easier to engrave, than Hebrew. However, Moroni clouded the issue with his connecting comment on the alteration of their spoken language of Hebrew, so that only about 400 years after leaving Jerusalem, the Lamanites could not communicate with their separated brother Nephites. Likewise the "reformed" adjective tells us that the Egyptian script had been altered.

We might take another approach to this question since the writers themselves, Nephi at the very beginning and Moroni at the very end, draw the reader's attention to this point. Because the future reader of the text will undoubtedly be reading a translation, just as the Nephites heard King Mosiah's translation of the Jaredite plates, there is no

reason to raise the issue on a practical level. The issue, however, draws the reader's attention on a symbolic level since it echoes the theme of the confounding and corruption of language, which has already been considered. That the original text was written in reformed Egyptian is relevant to the reader if we consider the message which this fact conveys.

The topic of typology, which was introduced in the third chapter, is the first key. Throughout the text of the Book of Mormon, the writers remind the reader that the Nephites are of the seed of Joseph and the house of Jacob (for example: Jacob 2:25; Alma 46:23, 3 Nephi 5:21; 15:12; Mormon 7:10). This bloodline is an eternal reminder of the Exodus, which was initiated by Joseph's delivery to Egypt and his family's escape later. The "language of the Egyptians," which Nephi notes that he uses at the very beginning of his record, immediately sounds the Exodus as the controlling type for the Book of Mormon. As we have indicated earlier, the imagery evoked by the Exodus involves captivity and bondage, as well as the wandering in the wilderness and the journey to the promised land.

Just as in Judaism the feast of the Passover is an eternal reminder of the Egyptian sojourn, so for Nephites does Egypt reverberate, not only as an historical but as a symbolic reminder as well. Like the Jews, the Nephites experience a wandering in the wilderness and cross the waters to arrive in the promised land. However, as Nephite history confirms, the ultimate promised land has a spiritual rather than a geographical location (Alma 37:45). In effect, even in the new land the Nephites are still on the journey; they are still wandering in the wilderness of this world. Just as the Jews, time and again, lost faith while in the desert, so in Nephite history do Lehi's people often fail the test of

faith. Time and again, they fail to heed the message; hence prophets must continually arise to rekindle the spirit.

This repeated failure of human nature is symbolized in the corruption of language which we have already considered. Language is not stable; it struggles to hold the truth. This struggle symbolizes the efforts of the people to retain the message and live by it. But just as the text is written in a foreign language, one reminiscent of bondage, so also Nephite history recounts, time and again, their bondage to sin.

The Nephites were incapable of holding onto their original Hebrew; they were strangers to their own roots. They could not understand the language of the Jaredite plates, which may have been composed in the original language, a more innocent one, before the confounding of tongues at the Tower of Babel. They could not understand their own brothers, the Lamanites, since the languages, like the two peoples, had gone separate ways.

The language of the Book of Mormon, then, symbolizes the spiritual desert in which the Nephites were wandering. There is, however, also a positive interpretation of the situation. In their desert wanderings, the faithful always had a guide. For the Jews, it was a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. More importantly, they were spiritually guided by the ten commandments. For the Nephites, the Liahona was a compass offering geographic direction. But writing also appeared on it, changing from time to time, according to their faith (1 Nephi 16:29). Both Jews and Nephites were guided by the text, written for them by God. In the case of the Jews, it was written in stone, an unchanging absolute. Then it was expanded into a collection of books which contained the story of the people, their trials, failures and triumphs. So also for the Nephites. Their story is likewise

one of trial, failure and ultimate triumph with the resurrection of the text. This content, which includes God's sacred teachings, is borne by a linguistic vehicle of inadequate capacity. Even their own story was not theirs to control, for it was expressed in a language foreign to them, the language of their ancestors' captors. Their own Hebrew language had been lost, and in time they themselves, and their very civilization, would melt into dust. Yet despite the facts that the Nephites ultimately failed in their faith and that their story and God's message were buried, their civilization arose again. The people did not remain and persist, nor did the language. Yet the message was delivered. This suggests that all vehicles are, in the end, inadequate. Whether it is the body which must inevitably turn into dust, or the signs and words of man's civilization, all finally dies. Yet just as the soul continues to dwell in eternity, so God's message is not constrained by the language which expresses it.

Interpretation

The above idea is developed in the image of the interpreter stones, which are mentioned several times in the text. In the Book of Omni the reader is first informed that "by the gift and power of God" King Mosiah was able to "interpret" a large engraved stone from the Jaredite civilization (Omni 1:20). Later it is specified that the king had "interpreters" which he could look into to "translate all records that are of ancient date." But a warning was issued that only he whom the Lord commanded might employ them, and such a designated person was titled a "seer." Any other who attempted to use the stones would perish (Mosiah 8:13).

This divine designation of "seer" is compared to the gift of speaking in tongues and the gift of the Holy Ghost (Alma 9:21), and the writers call it the greatest gift a man

can possess, "except he should possess the power of God, which no man can" (Mosiah 8:16). Such a great power is regulated by God, and the seer is forbidden to translate, as Moroni warns, except when and what God deigns (Ether 5:1). Hence the decree of death for an unlicensed translation.

The actual interpreter stones are described as "two stones which were fastened into the two rims of a bow." Passed down from generation to generation, they were "for the purpose of interpreting language," so that the Lord "should discover to every creature who should possess the land the iniquities and abominations of his people" (Mosiah 28:13-15).

It is recorded that King Mosiah used the stones to translate the Jaredite plates, and their story exemplifies the preceding quotation. The Nephites must have been shocked to discover that a people previous to them had been promised the very same land which the Nephites inhabited. Failing to remain faithful to the Lord, and instead indulging in secret oaths and combinations, the Jaredites had been utterly destroyed by their own hand. What lived after them, at first kept secret but then translated and revealed, was a humiliating book disclosing the depths of their abominations. And it was the duty of the translator to proclaim the moral lesson:

And now, I will speak unto you concerning those twenty-four plates, that ye keep them, that the mysteries and the works of darkness, and their secret works, or the secret works of those people who have been destroyed, may be made manifest unto this people: yea, all their murders, and robbings, and their plunderings, and all their wickedness and abominations, may be made manifest unto this people; yea, and that ye preserve these interpreters. (Alma 37:21)

In this instruction to his son Helaman, Alma² warns that the secret works must be brought to light, and thus the shame of the Jaredites is exposed. It is left to the Nephites to consider whether they will live up to the covenant or likewise perish, in the knowledge that their abject failure would be published abroad in the world.

Mormon and Moroni certainly knew that their history of the Nephites would mirror that of the Jaredites. Even as they engraved their plates in the code of reformed Egyptian, a language which had to die along with the Nephites, these two editors were aware that their record would be translated by the command and aid of God. Moroni recorded in his edited text of Ether that two interpreter stones had been placed with Ether's original text, so that in translation the Jaredite story would "magnify to the eyes of men" the lessons of that sad people's failure. Equally, the story of the Nephites would be revealed if and when God deemed it to be so. The translation of the dead language into a living one was God's decision. In the case of the Nephites, they had received a warning, and it is recorded that they "rejoiced" in the knowledge of the ancient Jaredite civilization; nevertheless, they did "mourn exceedingly" for the fate of the people (Mosiah 28:18). Mormon's future reader is in the same position in regard to the story of the fallen Nephites. He must both rejoice and mourn for the proper reasons, and consider that he, like the Nephites, has inherited a promised land, a land of choice in which he is at liberty to exercise his free will and choose the path of righteousness.

According to LDS history, the angel Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith and presented him with the text of the Book of Mormon and the interpreter stones, and, with God's guidance and approbation, he translated the plates. This continued the plan of salvation as proclaimed in the Book of Mormon. However, we need not step outside the text to understand

either the symbolism of the interpreter stones in regard to translation or the significance of the reformed Egyptian language of the text. For the future reader, the acts of composition and translation themselves bear a message. In the unfolding of the plan of salvation, the Nephites were free to choose, and they even had the lesson of the Jaredites to guide them. Likewise the reader, possessing the text, knows that the plan of salvation is still in effect. He is once again offered a covenant which he is free to choose, and he has the lesson of Nephite history as a guide.

The writers as individuals

In examining the function of the writer in the Book of Mormon, we noted the technical problems raised, the human weakness cited, and the limitations inherent in language. None of these conditions, however, centered on the writers as people suffering doubts, voicing complaints or expressing personal human emotions; by and large, the writers reveal little of their interior life. We can speculate that more existed in the original writing of Lehi and that parts were edited out by Nephi; perhaps, as well, parts of Nephi's own text were later edited out by Mormon. At times, however, a small voice is heard. Nephi complains, "I have workings in the spirit, which doth weary me even that all my joints are weak," but he seems more concerned for his people: "For I pray continually for them by day, and mine eyes water my pillow by night" (1 Nephi 19:20; 2 Nephi 33:3).

Jacob described his people as lonesome, solemn wanderers, castouts born in tribulation and hated by their brethren. But his own feelings may be detected when he, like Nephi, is writing toward the end of his life: "time passed away with us, and also our lives passed away like as it were unto us a dream" (Jacob 7:26).

At the age of 16, Mormon led the Nephite army against the Lamanites, but at the age of 50 he had grown so weary of the "wretchedness and abomination" of his people that he refused to lead them in battle. He later relented because he "loved them, according to the love of God which was in me, with all my heart" (Mormon 3:1-12). This love was so strong that, even at the age of 70, he once again led the people into battle, the last time for them as well as for himself. His actions, then, rather than his words, reveal the depth of his feelings.

His son Moroni is the sole survivor of this battle, and twice in three verses he plainly and simply tells the reader that his father was killed and he "remain[s] alone" (Mormon 8:3-5). Although he only appears to be stating the facts, his repetition suggests the agony that must have been tormenting his soul.

Besides these three, other writers and prophets in the Book of Mormon had to bear the agony of preaching to the Nephites who, although blessed by God, chose time and time again to turn from him. For instance, when Alma spoke plainly to the people regarding their iniquity, he suffered their wrath even though the salvation of their souls was his only concern (Alma 14:2-3). But more than this, these men bore the burden of the terrible truth: the Nephites, despite all the warnings, would turn away from God and ultimately be annihilated by their own brethren, the Lamanites. The writers' concern, then, was that the records they kept and the book they created were ultimately addressed to a future audience of Jews, Gentiles, and a remnant of the Lamanites. Thus, whatever personal sentiments they as writers might have harbored, and whatever feelings they had in regard to their race, were irrelevant compared to the great work of God's plan of salvation. They came to accept that the failure of their race could be transformed by God into a higher good for

the benefit of all mankind. Thus we see that the different writers, at various times, address this absent but promised audience. Nephi, ending his record, addresses his expanded audience: "And now, my beloved brethren, and also Jew, and all ye end of the earth, hearken unto these words" (2 Nephi 33:10). Third Nephi addresses the Gentiles directly with "Hearken, O ye Gentiles" (3 Nephi 30:1). Speaking to the future readers of his edited text, Mormon tells them, "ye shall see" and "we shall see" (Helaman 2:13; 6:40). And Moroni informs us that "Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me;" and later, "I speak to you as though I spake from the dead" (Mormon 8:35; 9:30).

With this future audience in mind, then, the writers' mission, their covenant with God, was to strive against the limitations of language, their own human weakness and their personal feelings, in order to create the text that was part of God's plan of salvation. The audience towards which they directed their text, the audience which Moroni through the aid of Christ actually saw, shaped their text. The writers knew they had to reach across time to an audience which already possessed another set of beliefs: the Jews, who had rejected the messiah, and the Gentiles, who were guided by an abominable church. As well, the writers were aware that both audiences possessed an incomplete scripture.

We have already seen that the writers were aware of what we may term the hermeneutical problem. Their text, in a lost language, would have to be translated and then interpreted so that the reader could apply it to his own spiritual life. By the time the intended readers saw their text, those who had witnessed the events of Nephite history, and especially those who had witnessed Christ, would all be long gone. But their interpretation of the events, transformed into a text, would remain. And later readers would, in turn, interpret this text, thus interpreting an interpretation.

Before we turn our attention to this particular hermeneutical problem of the interpretation of an interpretation, however, we must consider two other compositional elements in the Book of Mormon. These are the extensive quotations from Isaiah and the progressively more frequent interruptions by Mormon as editor, both of which bear upon the hermeneutics of the text. In the next chapter, we must discuss the significance of these two elements.

CHAPTER FIVE

ISAIAH AND MORMON

Two separate matters stand out in the Book of Mormon which raise questions about the nature of the book's composition. The first is the incorporation into the text of several chapters from the Book of Isaiah. The second is the abrupt intrusion of Mormon's editorial voice, beginning partway through the text and interrupting the narrative more and more frequently as it progresses. Other than the fact that both of these matters seem to create a structural awkwardness in the text, they do not appear to share any common ground. However, a separate analysis of each will suggest that both actually do reinforce the structure of the Book of Mormon. The questions they raise cause the reader to perceive an underlying unity in the text which supports the theological message embedded in it.

Isaiah the prophet

Twenty-one entire chapters of Isaiah, as well as parts of others and paraphrases, are quoted in the Book of Mormon. These extensive quotations are rendered almost exactly the same as in the King James Version of the Bible. This inclusion has raised several questions for LDS scholars. If Joseph Smith was translating a text from reformed Egyptian into English, why did his translation appear to be a copy of King James? And, more intriguing, why did Smith's translation alter some words and phrases, sometimes adding or subtracting phrases? (Sperry, Tvedtnes)

In answer to the first question, LDS scholars argue that there was no reason for Smith not to use a translation familiar to his readers when it was adequate to the meaning of the text. One might also consider that, since Smith translated the text with the interpreter stones, his translation efforts were guided by God and hence the King James Version, along with the corrections, had received God's approbation.

In answer to the question of alterations, LDS scholars, having the benefits of modern philology, have compared the Hebrew original to both King James and the Book of Mormon. Their explanations of the problem suggest that, first, there are variant texts of Isaiah, and, second, that Smith's translation more accurately renders the meaning of Isaiah's Hebrew (Tvedtnes).

However, if we remain within the text itself, there are other questions we might raise in regard to the inclusion of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon. As we have already noted, all the writers, including Mormon as the final editor, contended with the laborious task of engraving the plates. Since the Book of Isaiah was already available to the Nephites, and since the writers were aware that future generations would possess the Bible, including the text of Isaiah, why did they still labor to copy such long sections of the Hebrew prophet? While Nephi says that he "delights" in the words of Isaiah (2 Nephi 25:5), and no less than Christ himself, as well as Moroni, instructs the reader to "search" the words of Isaiah (3 Nephi 23:1-3; Mormon 8:23), this still does not explain why the writers found it necessary to carve out an additional edited version of Isaiah.

It would seem that we, as readers, must follow this internal advice and search Isaiah as quoted in the text. As already noted, Christ himself edited and translated the Book of Malachi for the Nephites. The Nephite version emphasized the messianic prophecy in Malachi and, with the sun-son alteration, rendered a precise expression of the incarnation. Regarding the selection of the chapters of Isaiah, the reader would again note the emphasis on Isaiah's prophecy of the messiah and his call to repentance, these themes being of major importance to the Nephites. But the selected portions of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon also stress the prophet's vision of the future and the call of his voice to the Jews

and the Gentiles. This reiterates the major theme of the Book of Mormon in which the reader's attention is directed not only towards the coming of the Messiah to the world, but also towards the prophecy of the coming of the Book of Mormon to the world. This text, as we have seen, is to be a corrective to the scripture corrupted by the abominable church. Thus the textual variants of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon are understood to be the accurate translation and understanding of Isaiah.

To consider one example, let us compare Isaiah 48:1 from the King James Version with this same verse as it appears in 1 Nephi 20:1:

Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which
are called by the name of Israel, and are
come forth out of the waters of Judah,
which swear by the name of the Lord, and
make mention of the God of Israel, but not
in truth, nor in righteousness.
(Isaiah 48:1, KJV)

Hearken and hear this, O house of Jacob,
who are called by the name of Israel, and
are come forth out of the waters of Judah,
or out of the waters of baptism, who swear
by the name of the Lord, and make mention
of the God of Israel, yet they swear not
in truth nor in righteousness. (1 Nephi 20:1;
italics added).

It might also be noted that the Revised Standard Version alters "the waters of Judah" to "the loins of Judah." While the RSV may argue that it has correctly understood the Hebrew which the KJV failed to translate properly, the Book of Mormon suggests that both texts have lost the vision of Isaiah. As a prophet blessed with foreknowledge, Isaiah, the messianic prophet, understood the nature of typology and

foresaw the institution of baptism as the antitype of the waters of Judah type. Thus he could call out to the Gentiles and include them, for he understood how all were to be united with God by baptism .

Furthermore, according to the Book of Mormon, Isaiah had a vision of Jesus much as the other Nephite prophets (and the brother of Jared) had: "for he [Isaiah] verily saw my Redeemer even as I have seen him" (2 Nephi 11:2). As evidence, Nephi reproduced the sixth chapter of Isaiah which contains the classic vision of Isaiah:

In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

Above it stood the seraphim; each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

And one cried unto another, and said: Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory. (2 Nephi 16:1-3; compare Isaiah 6:1-3)

Isaiah thus joins the company of Nephi, Jacob, Mormon and Moroni, all of whom have been visited by Jesus outside of his lifetime in Israel. And like these writers, Isaiah also sends forth his voice not only to Jews but to Gentiles as well (2 Nephi 6:5-6; quoting Isaiah 49:22-23). This call to the Gentiles as well as the Jews, as we have seen, is the purpose of the Book of Mormon. And as this text points out, such a summons is contained in the Hebrew prophet: Chapter 29 of Isaiah speaks of a sealed book which, delivered to the people, opens their eyes and their ears. This could be construed as an allusion to the Book of Mormon. To emphasize

this point, Nephi renders a different version of Isaiah 29, one which contains 35 verses and not 24.

After an introductory first verse, the second verse of Nephi is the sixth verse of Isaiah. But Isaiah is interrupted four verses later. Beginning with the sixth verse of Nephi, there is a major addition which proceeds for 19 verses before the text returns to the traditional Isaiah text. We must note that the biblical Isaiah's allusion to a sealed book is radically developed in Nephi's version.

And it shall come to pass that the Lord God shall bring forth unto you the words of a book, and they shall be the words of them which have slumbered.

And behold the book shall be sealed; and in the book shall be a revelation from God, from the beginning of the world to the ending thereof.

Wherefore, because of the things which are sealed up, the things which are sealed shall not be delivered in the day of the wickedness and abominations of the people. Wherefore the book shall be kept from them.

For the book shall be delivered unto a man, and he shall deliver the words of the book, which are the words of those who have slumbered in the dust, and he shall deliver these words unto another;

But the words which are sealed he shall not deliver, neither shall he deliver the book. For the book shall be sealed by the power of God, and the revelation which was sealed shall be kept in the book until the own due time of the Lord, that they may come forth; for behold, they reveal all things from the foundation of the world unto the end thereof.

And the day cometh that the words of the book which were sealed shall be read upon the house tops; and they shall be read by the power of Christ; and all things shall be revealed

unto the children of men which ever have been among the children of men, and which ever will be even unto the end of the earth.

Wherefore, at that day when the book shall be delivered unto the man of whom I have spoken, the book shall be hid from the eyes of the world, that none shall behold it save it be that three witnesses shall behold it, by the power of God, besides him to whom the book shall be delivered; 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 unto the children of men; for the Lord God hath said that the words of the faithful should speak as if it were from the dead.

Wherefore, the Lord God will proceed to bring forth the words of the book; and in the mouth of as many witnesses as seemeth him good will he establish his word; and wo (sic) be unto him that rejecteth the word of God!

But behold, it shall come to pass that the Lord God shall say unto him to whom he shall deliver the book: Take these words which are not sealed and deliver them to another, that he may show them unto the learned, saying: Read this, I pray thee. And the learned shall say: Bring hither the book, and I will read them.

And now, because of the glory of the world and to get gain will they say this, and not for the glory of God.

And the man shall say: I cannot bring the book, for it is sealed.

Then shall the learned say: I cannot read it.

Wherefore it shall come to pass, that the Lord God will deliver again the book and the words thereof to him that is not learned; and the man that is not learned shall say: I am not learned.

Then shall the Lord God say unto him: The learned shall not read them, for they have

rejected them, and I am able to do mine own work; wherefore thou shalt read the words which I shall give unto thee.

Touch not the things which are sealed, for I will bring them forth in mine own due time; for I will show unto the children of men that I am able to do mine work.

Wherefore, when thou hast read the words which I have commanded thee, and obtained the witnesses which I have promised unto thee, then shalt thou seal up the book again, and hide it up unto me, that I may preserve the words which thou hast not read, until I shall see fit in mine own wisdom to reveal all things unto the children of men.

For behold, I am God; and I am a God of miracles; and I will show unto the world that I am the same yesterday, today, and forever; and I work not among the children of men save it be according to their faith.

And again it shall come to pass that the Lord shall say unto him that shall read the words that shall be delivered him.
(2 Nephi 27:6-24)

According to the history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, this is an extremely precise prophecy of the the events surrounding the founding of the church. If we remain solely within the text itself, however, we must consider how these verses conform to the pattern already established in the text. As we have seen, the nature of language is to sink into corruption, and even sacred scripture can be tainted. Hence Christ corrects the record of the Nephites as well as the Old Testament. And as Nephi predicts, the abominable church will corrupt the scriptures, leaving out parts, and failing to render the "plain and precious truth." Nephi, with his grasp of the learning of the Jews, and guided by the spirit of prophecy, is able to render the complete text of chapter 29 of Isaiah, fully explicating the image of the sealed book not as a symbolic allusion, but

rather as an actual prophetic identification of the Book of Mormon. Just as Jesus replaced the symbolic "sun" with "son" to reveal the plain and precious truth of Malachi, so Nephi performs the same task with Isaiah. Nephi's duty, which is to reveal, edit and interpret scripture, receives its authorization from Christ himself.

Furthermore, we see that Isaiah's prophecy of the sealed book is related to his call for the inclusion of the Gentiles, and his vision of the flowing of nations into the house of Israel. It is the Book of Mormon, delivered to the Jews and the Gentiles in the future, which will correct and complete their respective scriptures, and welcome them into the all-inclusive fold of Christ's true church. Isaiah's call, made clear and direct, is fulfilled in the "plain and precious truth" proclaimed by the Book of Mormon. The "voice from the dust," the resurrected Book of Mormon, reaches back to Isaiah and forward to the future to unite all in Christ.

Mormon as editor

This irruption of the Book of Mormon into the future world where the Old and New Testaments are established scriptures is mirrored, in a curious way, by the manner in which Mormon, as editor, interrupts the flow of his narrative with his editorial comments.

The reader is deeply embedded in the story of the Nephite civilization when the text is abruptly interrupted by the brief book, the Words of Mormon. As mentioned in the summary in Chapter Two, this short book totally refocusses the reader's apprehension of the text. At this point, the reader suddenly becomes aware that he has not been listening directly to the voices of Nephi, Jacob and the other writers. Instead, he has been subject to Mormon's interpretation of those voices in his edited version of the records. Mormon's

selection of the records available to him creates the focus of the story as he interprets it, and thus the reader realizes that his perception is being guided by Mormon.

Having abruptly startled the reader into a new awareness, Mormon's voice seems to fade out in the next book, Mosiah. At this point, however, the reader cannot help but be aware that the narrator is Mormon, even if he appears absent from the text. As if to underline this new consciousness, the Book of Mosiah, which follows the Words of Mormon, has no attributed author. This is exceptional in that the books following Mosiah -- the books of Alma, Helaman, and Third and Fourth Nephi -- are preceded by a header, an introductory paragraph which identifies the writer(s) and offers a summary of the book. As well, those books preceding the Words of Mormon also have headers, and the writers identify themselves in the text. Since the headers bracket off groups of chapters, advising the reader of the nature of that section of the particular book, we again perceive Mormon's editorial hand at work (Mackay).

What the reader should notice is that Mormon subtly reveals his hand in the Book of Mosiah with such phrases as "Now it came to pass" or "And behold." And twice in Mosiah he adds headers within the text, bracketing off a set of chapters as a narrative unit (Mosiah 9, 23). And in the books following Mosiah, we see that Mormon gradually continues to make the reader aware of his editing hand.

In the Book of Alma, for example, in addition to such phrases as quoted above in Mosiah, there are nine headers to sets of chapters. These headers introduce the chapters and prepare the reader to listen to a sermon of one of the prophets, or inform the reader that a certain number of chapters comprise a unit of preaching, for example, or a record of historical activities (e.g., Alma 5; 7; 9). Mormon

as editor also concludes chapters with notices such as, "this is all that I have written," suggesting an abridgement; or he might write, "now I, after having said this, return again to the account of" to re-establish the continuity which he interrupted (e.g., Alma 11:46; 22:35). In the Book of Helaman, he even seems to stumble. He writes, "And behold, in the end of this book ye shall see" then corrects himself by informing the reader that by "this book" he does not mean the Book of Helaman but the Book of Nephi, that is, Fourth Nephi (Helaman 2:14).

In Third Nephi, Mormon is even more intrusive, breaking the flow of the narrative to identify the origin of his name, proclaim his mission, and defend the truth of his record (3 Nephi 5:9-20). In the last three chapters of that book, he addresses the reader directly. He refers to the record from which he is taking his account, and he informs the reader that the totality of the scriptures is not available to the reader. He even notes that he has paused in his writing to inquire of the Lord directly about a particular truth of the faith. And as he ends the account of Third Nephi, he again interrupts the text to tell the reader of personal intervention by the Lord, who forbids him from revealing some information, and provides him with clarification in regard to the revelation of the resurrection of the dead (3 Nephi 28:24-40). Finally, he closes with a direct address to his future Gentile readers.

Continuing in Fourth Nephi, which is only one chapter long, Mormon still feels compelled to name himself in the text and again address the reader directly. Following immediately is his own book, in which he must, of course, speak in his own voice since he recounts his own history, including his designation as a keeper of the records and the story of how he led his people in battle against the Nephites.

This pattern, by which Mormon gradually makes the reader more and more aware of his editorial hand, seems to be a controlled literary device on Mormon's part. When Mormon begins editing First Nephi, he himself is delving into ancient history; after all, Nephi lived about a thousand years before him. The story is also sacred history, and Mormon lets Nephi's voice speak clearly and directly to the reader. It is with the ending of the small plates that Mormon feels that he may intrude and inform his reader that he has been, and will continue to be, a guide through Nephite history. But when Mormon so identifies himself, he also makes a point of establishing his identification with the reader, since both are reading the history of a bygone era. Both share the story of the fulfillment of the promise with the appearance of the resurrected Jesus to the Nephites. And both share it as readers, not witnesses alive at that moment in history.

A second relationship is established when Mormon identifies himself not only as a reader of the history, like the future reader, but as the editor of the text. While Mormon edits his text the reader sits beside him, as it were, and is made aware of the compositional nature of the book. Mormon, as editor, tells his reader that, as editor, he must select from an abundance of material, and the reader becomes aware that Mormon wishes to draw the reader to a particular set of inferences. Just as Mormon is actively constructing the story, the reader is called upon to participate actively by reconstructing it, that is, interpreting the text as Mormon wished it to be interpreted.

Finally, another level of consciousness is awakened in the reader. Mormon's is an active voice; he is alive in his moment of time, regarding the past history of his race. So, also, the reader is alive at his own moment in time, regarding the past history of the Nephites. Just as Mormon

undoubtedly meditated upon the warning and the lesson contained in Nephite history, so is the reader of the Book of Mormon thrust into the same process of reflection. Mormon is included in the history of his people not only as a living Nephite, but actively as a keeper of the records, a warrior-general, a prophet who did not refuse to fully embrace the role assigned to him in God's plan of salvation.

Nor can the reader identify his own role as one of passivity. He is not outside of the text but rather is enfolded into it. He is the ear to that voice from the dust. Jew or Gentile, he is the prophesied audience for whom the book has been written, sealed, hidden and resurrected, all according to the plan of salvation. He is not a passive observer but rather an active participant in the divine plan. As explained in Chapter Three, the reader is now at liberty to exercise his free will and choose the path of righteousness, guided by the words of the book, just as the Nephites were guided through the desert by the words which appeared on the Liahona.

The words on the Liahona "changed from time to time, according to the faith and diligence" which the Nephites crossing the desert gave it (1 Nephi 16:29). As a shadow or type, the Liahona, which led the Nephites to the promised land, also offered direction to the land of promise in the world beyond (Alma 37:43-45). The reader discovers the fulfillment of the Liahona as type in the antitype of the complete Book of Mormon. The latter adds its word to those of the Old and New Testaments, to join together Jews and Christians and lead them to the higher kingdom. Thus the Book of Mormon's rendition of Isaiah clarifies the prophet's writing and offers additions to substantiate the Book of Mormon's claim as the sacred scripture needed for a new era.

And Mormon's editorial intrusions, as a literary technique, likewise suggest that new scriptures will be revealed, even as the old ones are edited, translated and interpreted.

Thus God's plan of salvation is continual and the contemporary reader is actively involved. We must now consider the challenge the reader faces in interpreting an ancient sacred text.

CHAPTER SIX

THE HERMENEUTICAL QUESTION

Paul Ricoeur states that the proclamation of Jesus Christ comes to us through writing, that is, the scriptures, and must be restored to that living word which witnessed to the founding event of Christianity. The hermeneutical problem arises from a complex relationship between the act of writing, the word which is produced, and the event as related to the word. This original relationship, involving a primary set of interpretations, is then followed in the course of time, that is, history, by a continual series of interpretations.

Ricoeur focusses on three significant moments in history during which the hermeneutical problem arises. The first situation occurs with the examination of the relationship between the two testaments or covenants. The Christ event interprets the Old Testament in terms of allegory and type. But here, according to Ricoeur, is the first problem. Before the Christ event can itself be interpreted, we see that it itself is already an interpretation of a preceding scripture. The proclamation of the good news, the kerygma, is a rereading of the Old Testament. It is a fulfillment of a promise and a prophecy, a new covenant replacing an old one, but proving its truth value in relationship to the old. All the events of the Old Testament are recast or interpreted as type, adventing their fulfillment in the antitype of the New Testament.

The second dimension of the hermeneutical problem comes from St. Paul. The Pauline interpretation calls for the hearer to interpret and give meaning to his own existence in light of the Christ-event. With the eyes of faith, the believer now sees the entire world in terms of the Christian mystery.

The third dimension of the hermeneutical problem came to be recognized only in the modern era, following the

development and application of critical methods of analysis created by the historical and philological sciences. The source of this problem, however, originates in the original event. The kerygma, according to Ricoeur, is not the interpretation of the text but rather the announcement of a person. The word of God is not the text of scripture, but rather the Word, Jesus Christ. But this kerygma is expressed by those who witnessed it, by the stories which then were told, and by the texts which were the first confessions of faith. Today's readers of the text are not witnesses to the event, but readers who must interpret a text. Those who came immediately after the death of the first witnesses were, of course, in the same position, but their proximity to the time and their immersion in the culture meant they were far less distanced from the text than are modern readers, who live in a radically different environment. This far vaster historical distance has made the contemporary reader conscious of the hermeneutical problem. But like the witnesses and the early believing community, the modern reader, as Bultmann understands him, is also summoned to the good news of the kerygma. He must interpret the text, live his life according to the Christ-event, and regard the world through the eyes of faith (Ricoeur, Essays).

If we apply Ricoeur's analytical approach, we must reconsider the structure of the Book of Mormon and the major motifs which we have already examined. By this interpretative act we are attempting to see whether the same hermeneutical problems arise and, if so, whether they challenge the reader to discover the kerygma, the Christ-event as presented in the Book of Mormon.

Structure

The overall structure of the Book of Mormon is one of enclosure. At the very beginning of Nephite history, Nephi

receives the revelation of the destruction of his people by the Lamanites in the fourth generation after the coming of Christ. Thus he is already aware, as he writes his record, that the Nephites will have a thousand-year history and that, despite all of their opportunities, they will succumb to evil, choose wickedness, and finally be annihilated (1 Nephi 12:19-20). Nephi, with God's inspiration, sees clearly to the horizon of Nephite history and understands the shape of its rise and fall (1 Nephi 12). Furthermore, Nephi and the ultimate editor, Mormon, inform the reader of this fact. But the reader is conscious not only of the shape of the text, its temporal enclosure, but also of the fact that the text is enfolding him as well. The text directly addresses the future reader, making him aware of his position as a reader known to the writer ("Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me" [Mormon 8:35]), and as one who is to become involved in the plan of salvation. Nephite history ends with the demise of the Nephites, but salvation history continues and fulfills itself by making Nephite history relevant to the reader. The reader himself is involved in God's plan, which continues to be in effect and offers the reader the opportunity to choose to accept the truth of the new scripture being offered to him.

We can see this idea of involvement in the theme of brotherhood, which was examined earlier. Behind the history of the Nephi-Laman antagonism we have the Old Testament types of Cain and Abel, and Joseph and his brothers. As with the Cain and Abel type, the Nephites, as the antitype, were annihilated by the Lamanites. But as with the reconciliation and salvation scenario in the Joseph story, so the Nephite writers address their murderous brothers as "beloved brethren," forgive them, and promise to save that remnant which remains in the future. These terms of reconciliation and inclusion are extended beyond the Lamanites, into the future, to the Jews and the Gentiles as well. All are to be

united together in the truth, the plain and precious truth of the Book of Mormon. This complex of themes is foremost in Isaiah, whose writings are so firmly embedded in the Book of Mormon.

To summarize, Isaiah is most commonly associated with the call to repentance, the announcement of the messiah or messenger, the end of the captivity, and the promise of an ideal future. The Book of Mormon emphasizes that Isaiah's vision of that future involves a union of all nations flowing into the house of the Lord, Israel, and an embrace of the Gentiles (Isaiah 2:2-3; 49:6). The prophet speaks of the lost sheep, the remnant who are scattered across "the isles." For the Book of Mormon writers, the Nephites are but a remnant on one of the isles. But, just as they discovered the Jaredites and the people of Zarahemla, so they acknowledge that there are other remnants spread across different isles of the earth. The term "remnant" is used to refer not only to the Nephites and the Jews, but also to the Lamanites after they destroy the Nephites. The suggestion is that the human family has been rent asunder, like Joseph's coat, but that in the future the parts will be reunited. Thus the Book of Mormon echoes Isaiah in addressing those in the various isles of the sea (Isaiah 11:11; 42:4; 51:5; 2 Nephi 8:5; 10:8, 20-21; 29:7, 11).

This division of the family is reflected in the division of their scriptures. The Jews have their scripture, but have rejected the New Testament. The Gentiles have a corrupted version of the New Testament. The Nephites have only part of the Old Testament and just a summary of the gospels. And according to the Nephite writers, there are many other scriptures besides the Old and New Testaments (2 Nephi 29:10-13). The message the scriptures convey depends upon the need of the people, just as we saw that the writing on the Liahona guiding the people through the desert changed from time to

time (1 Nephi 16:26-27). As Alma explains later, the Liahona as a compass was a shadow or type of the words of Christ which guide one to the promised land beyond this vale of sorrow (Alma 37:43-45). The writing on the Liahona changed "according to the faith and diligence which [the reader] gave unto it" (1 Nephi 16:29).

Nephi foresees that there will be a rejection of new scriptures: "many of the Gentiles shall say: A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible and there cannot be any more Bible." But he counters that there are many nations upon the isles of the sea and that God brings forth his word to all of them (2 Nephi 29:3-7). And he continues:

Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written.

For I command all men, both in the east and in the west, and in the north, and in the south, and in the islands of the sea, that they shall write the words which I speak unto them; for out of the books which shall be written I will judge the world, every man according to their works, according to that which is written.

For behold, I shall speak unto the Jews and they shall write it; and I shall speak unto the Nephites and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away, and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto all nations of the earth and they shall write it.

And it shall come to pass that the Jews shall have the words of the Nephites, and the Nephites shall have the words of the Jews; and the Nephites and the Jews shall have the words of the lost tribes of Israel; and the lost tribes of Israel shall have the words of the Nephites and the Jews.
(2 Nephi 29:10-13)

Thus we see that the family broken apart must come together again and even the dead, the lost Nephite brothers, must speak. The Nephite writers' identification of their text as "a voice from the dust" originates in Isaiah:

And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust. (Isaiah 29:4)

In chapter 29 Isaiah addresses Jerusalem, which has been besieged and brought low. However, in "that day," a promising future, "the words of a book" will be heard by the deaf, and the blind will see once again (Isaiah 29:18). Isaiah's imagery of the humility of defeat and death, symbolized in the "dust," the Genesis image of mortality, is transformed by the Nephite writers. The voice of their defeated, dead race will rise out of the dust just as surely as Christ arose from the dead. And just as Christ calls out to all men ("And then I will gather them in from the four quarters of the earth" [3 Nephi 16:5]), so also the Book of Mormon calls out to the dispersed family. The imagery of brotherhood, remnant, lost tribes, lost sheep and isles of the sea, unite to transfer the tone of the Book of Mormon from that of a tragedy -- the destruction of a race -- to that of a divine comedy. The voice from the dust is a living voice promising resurrection and reconciliation.

Images

Another set of images examined earlier concerned the new world as the land of *promise, inheritance and choice* (or *liberty*). As we traced this out for the Nephites, we saw that the promised land was in covenant, inheritance involved

bondage, and choice or liberty suggested free will. Beyond the destruction of the Nephites, the land continues to stand in promise to a future generation. The new covenant was made between the Nephite writers and God. They were to write the records; God would deliver these records to the future. This gift could free the Jews, the Gentiles and the remnant of Lamanites from the bondage of ignorance caused by incomplete scriptures. And the covenant promise continued to be that the new land would remain one of liberty, free of kings and tolerant of religion. Just as Lehi had delivered to his son Nephi a people, and Mormon to his son Moroni a record, so the Nephite writers, in toto, delivered to a future age a scripture to complement other scriptures. The Lamanites had lost the record of their fathers, and hence had believed in incorrect traditions. So also the Jews and Gentiles, without the Book of Mormon, were misguided by an incomplete and incorrect tradition. With this new scripture, inherited along with the land, the choice is up to them to exercise their free will and accept the book or not. The Nephite writers' future audience, now actualized as individual readers, are confronted with the text. It bears witness, but as some of the Nephites who lived before Christ complained: "why will he [Christ] not show himself unto us as well as unto them who shall be at Jerusalem?" (Helaman 16:18). What we have in the text is the testimony of witnesses which has, in turn, been interpreted by the writers. The reader, in turn, must interpret what he reads, and then he must respond. It would seem that first he must understand, that is, interpret what he reads. But in order to interpret properly and understand the text, he must believe in what it states. The situation seems to be comparable to a Möbius strip.

In Paul Ricoeur's terminology, this is known as the hermeneutical circle. Restated by Ricoeur: "To understand, it is necessary to believe; to believe, it is necessary to understand" (Ricoeur, Essays 58). In other words, what the

reader wishes to understand is what the text states, but what the text is stating governs the act of understanding. The scriptural text contains and delivers the Christ-event, and the meaning of this has primacy over understanding. Hence Ricoeur says that it is necessary to enter the hermeneutical circle in order to grasp the object of the text:

Faith in what the text is concerned with must be deciphered in the text that speaks of it and in the confession of faith of the primitive church which is expressed in the text. This is why there is a circle: to understand the text, it is necessary to believe in what the text announces to me; but what the text announces to me is given nowhere but in the text. This is why it is necessary to understand the text in order to believe.
(Ricoeur, Essays 59)

The writers of the Book of Mormon did not underestimate the value of faith. They reported, for example, that Nephites before the time of Christ complained, "We cannot witness with our own eyes that they [the events of Christ's life] are true" (Helaman 16:20). But Alma countered such thinking with a definition of faith:

Yes, there are many who do say: If thou wilt show us a sign from heaven, then we shall know of a surety; then we shall believe.

Now I ask, is this faith?

Faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true. (Alma 32:17-18, 21)

And, much later, Moroni echoed Alma:

I would show unto the world that faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; where-

fore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith.

For it was by faith that Christ showed himself unto our fathers, after he had risen from the dead; and he showed not himself unto them until after they had faith in him; wherefore, it must needs be that some had faith in him, for he showed himself not unto the world. (Ether 12:6-7)

Moroni then lists the wonders and miracles which have occurred due to faith. Through the eyes of faith the world takes on a new dimension, and we see this faith manifested by the Nephite writers. Even though they were aware of the eventual failure of their nation, and even as Mormon and Moroni witnessed the destruction of their race, they all held fast to the belief that their labors in engraving the plates would not be in vain. Moroni, utterly alone, engraved his concluding words addressed to his father's and his race's murderers, the Lamanites, calling them his "beloved brethren" (Moroni 10:18).

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)

And the last line of the Book of Mormon, Moroni's last words, is a confession of faith:

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. Amen. (Moroni 10:34)

Thus we see that Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical challenge is directly applicable to the Book of Mormon. The issues we have discussed -- the technique of typology, the major imagery and motifs, the linguistic questions, the basic structure of the text, the inclusions and interruptions -- have all centered on the process of interpretation. However, in the case of the Book of Mormon, as opposed to the Bible, the hermeneutical issue has been especially emphasized. Its writers, in particular its final editors, Mormon and Moroni, were quite consciously concerned with the issue of interpretation. In their strenuous efforts to present "the plain and precious truth," they grappled with the difficulties inherent in conveying a message that would transcend both time and death to speak directly to their implied audience. They labored even with the knowledge that their people would imitate not only the faithlessness of the Jews in the wilderness, but also, more disastrously, the failure of the Jaredites, who ultimately destroyed themselves by sin.

The death of the Nephite nation could result in the loss of the text, the truth the writers were divinely commissioned to convey. With this in mind, Moroni, as editor of the Book of Ether -- "and the hundreth part I have not written" -- selectively chose to record the last words of Ether:

Whether the Lord will that I be translated, or that I suffer the will of the Lord in the flesh, it mattereth not, if it so be that I am saved in the kingdom of God. Amen. (Ether 15:34)

Ether's proper concern was for the eternal life of his soul, not the existence of his text. Moroni's situation, however, is more complex, and its outcome paradoxical. The translation of the text in the future by foreigners will not

only expose the shame of the Nephite failure, but also reveal the soul-saving revelation of God's plan of salvation. It falls upon the reader to interpret this paradox by which God can transform the despair wrought by the destruction of sin into the final triumph of hope. Just as "the death of Christ bringeth to pass the resurrection," so the Nephite voice rises out of the dust in the resurrected text (Mormon 9:13). The Book of Mormon itself is, finally, a type of Christ.

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